

# Playing with Nature: Fostering Children's Creativity and Problem- solving

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*Sharing the work of Dimensions Educational Research Foundation  
and  
Outdoor Classroom Project*



# Making the case for creativity

Why creativity? The world is changing at a fantastic speed. The future requires people who can **problem-solve**, **adapt** and **communicate** in workplaces and environments that are increasingly complex.

Creativity **maximizes human potential**.

Children with high “**creative self-efficacy**” are better able to **handle stress** and are **more confident** about their futures.

~Bronson & Merryman, 2010



# Description of Study

- Qualitative study investigated how outdoor environments supported children's creativity
- Conducted at two separate natural outdoor classrooms with preschool-aged children from three to five years old
- Focused on creativity with regard to problem solving, ingenuity, and construction

# Child Educational Center | *La Cañada, CA*





# Dimensions Education Programs | *Lincoln, NE*



# Sparking Creativity

- 💧 Space
- 💧 Time
- 💧 Materials
- 💧 Adult role



# What's important in the space?

- 💧 Large scale
- 💧 Flexibility
- 💧 Predictability





# The Motorcycle













# Time

- 💧 Large blocks of time
- 💧 Choice and opportunity to revisit ideas
- 💧 Consistent use



# The Dinosaur









# Outdoors in all kinds of weather



“Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child's soul.” ~Friedrich Froebel

# Materials

- 💧 Non-standardization encourages divergent thinking
- 💧 Open-ended and natural materials both suggest ideas and allow children to bring their own ideas
- 💧 Knowing where to find materials empowers freedom of use





# Creating Ramps





# Corn Pie











# Adult Role

- 💧 Desire to support
- 💧 Access to information and practice
- 💧 Recognition of what is needed in each situation





# Planting Children



# Adult Role






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## ***Playing with Nature: Supporting Preschoolers' Creativity in Natural Outdoor Classrooms***

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# Questions?

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