

Flourishing in Nature

Investigating the Impact of Nature Preschools on Young Children's Curiosity

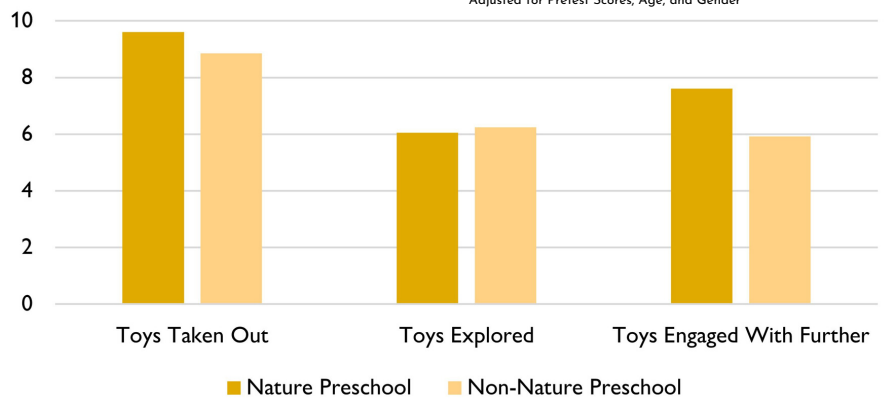
Overview. Curiosity is the desire to acquire new knowledge and experiences. It drives young children's exploration and refinement of perceptions as they gather information and learn from their environment. Engaging children's innate curiosity provides a foundation for a connection to their place. The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of nature preschools on curiosity. Curiosity assessment occurred in the fall and spring of the 2017-2018 school year, with 34 children from two nature preschools and 43 participants from two non-nature preschools participating in the Curiosity Drawer Box task. This task yields three subscores: the number of toys taken out (reflects a desire for novel stimuli); the number of toys that are explored (reflects information seeking exploratory behavior); and the number of toys the child engages with further (reflects information-seeking exploratory and/or play behavior that integrates initiative and persistence with curiosity, toward sense making and refinement of perception).



Image Credit: Hartley Nature Preschool, MN

Comparison of Posttest* Curiosity Scores of Nature and Non-Nature Preschoolers

*Adjusted for Pretest Scores, Age, and Gender



Results: There was not a significant difference between nature and non-nature preschool participants in their adjusted posttest scores for toys taken out ($p=.21$) and toys explored ($p=.83$). However, nature preschool participants had significantly higher posttest levels for toys engaged with than non-nature preschool participants ($p=.01$)

Conclusion. Results of this exploratory study suggest nature play may not have influenced children's desire for novel stimuli and information-seeking exploratory behavior beyond what might occur through non-nature play in preschool and/or cognitive maturation. However, the results suggest nature play had a significant positive effect (of a moderate effect size) on children's initiative to further act upon curiosity, persisting beyond initial information-seeking exploratory behavior toward increased sense-making and refinement of perception. The potential positive influence of nature play on children's deepened information-seeking and sense-making behavior shows great promise in terms of future contributions to sustainability, as well as to their own learning and development.

