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Lectures
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I. Lectures

A. Place-based Education: Making School More Like a Farmer's Market

The landscape of schooling has begun to look like the sprawl of America. Generic textbooks designed for the big markets of California and Texas provide the same homogenized, unhealthy diet as all those fast food places on the strip. Educational biodiversity falls prey to the bulldozers of standardization. What is nearby has become parochial and insignificant.

Place-based education is a response to the alienation of schools from community, and the decoupling of schools from historic sites, local landscapes, and farms. Instead, we need schools organized around the principles of the farmers' market, drawing on the resources and variety of the local community.

Alternative Version:

Place-based Education: A Visual Field Trip across North America. A talk illustrated with short, provocative video examples of place-based education in K-12 settings in rural and urban sites across the country.

B. Place-based Education: Test Scores and More Than Test Scores

A decade ago, the Moore Foundation decided to not fund environmental education because there were no good data to support that it was effective. Now, due to a concerted evaluation and research effort, there's a solid foundation of data to suggest that environmental and place-based education can improve test scores, change teacher behavior, improve school climate, increase stewardship behavior and yes, even improve environmental quality.

PLACE-BASED EDUCATION
TEST SCORES AND BEYOND TEST SCORES

C. Will My Child Be Ready for Kindergarten or First Grade: A Review of Ten Years of Research on Nature-based Early Childhood Programs

In conjunction with researchers in Michigan and Minnesota, David has collaborated on research comparing the impacts on children in nature-based early childhood programs vs. children in traditional high quality early childhood programs. Research has focused on early literacy development, numeracy development, STEM learning, motivation, resilience, executive functioning and more. It has been conducted in private nature preschools, publicly funded Headstart programs, university lab schools and public preschool programs. In the spirit of "slow and steady wins the race," an interesting story has emerged about the benefits of nature-based programs. Spoiler Alert: The answer to the question, "Will My Child Be Ready?" is: a definitive "Yes!"

D. Wild Play: Parenting Adventures in the Great Outdoors

When David Sobel's children, Tara and Eli, were toddlers, he set out to integrate a wide range of nature experiences into their family life, play, and storytelling. Blending his passion as a parent with his professional expertise, he created adventures tailored to their developmental stages: cultivating empathy with animals in early childhood, exploring the woods in middle childhood, and devising rites of passage in adolescence. Sobel weaves together parenting experiences, stories he told his children and developmental theory to present a model of healthy parenting in concert with the natural world.

Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* identified the urgent problem of "nature deficit" in today's children, sounding the alarm for parents, educators, and policymakers. *Wild Play* is a hopeful response.
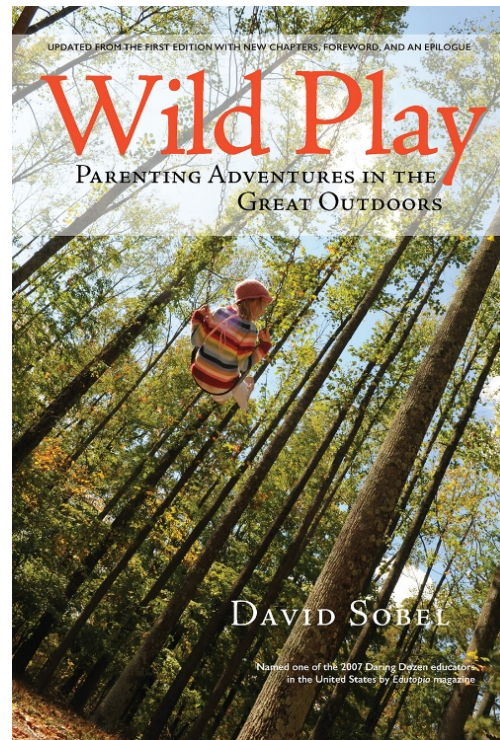
E. Cultivating the Wonder of Nature in Childhood

William Wordsworth suggested that the natural world is *"appareled with celestial light"* in childhood. By this he means that nature is perceived differently by children than by adults. Furthermore, I believe that there is a critical period in middle childhood when children are biologically programmed to bond with the natural world. If this bonding occurs, it sets the individual on a path of environmental values and commitment. Therefore, parents and educators should take advantage of this openness in childhood and provide frequent opportunities for children to adventurously be at-one in nature.

A bit of provocative research, a dash of theory, lots of personal parenting stories and a look at how the parent/child/nature relationship changes from early childhood to middle childhood to adolescence to early adulthood.

F. Global Climate Change Meets Ecophobia

What happens when we lay the weight of the world's burdensome environmental problems on the shoulders of young children? We overwhelm them, scare them and alienate them from the natural world.   Using a variety of short videos and public service announcements, we'll examine the messages about rain forest destruction and global warming that children are awash in every day. We'll consider why this approach, of scaring children into appropriate environmental behavior, is flawed.
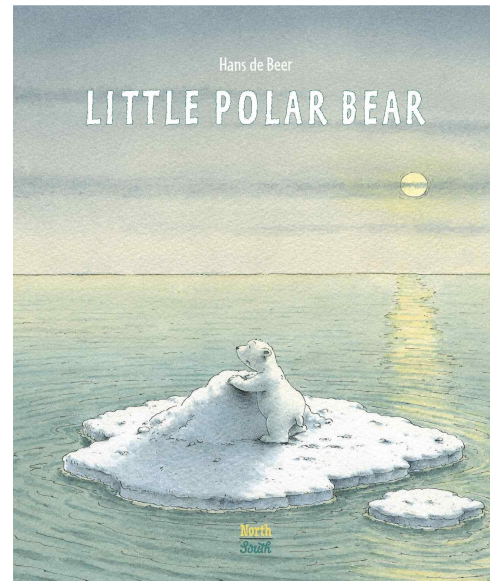
Finally, we'll look at positive examples of educational approaches that connect children to nature, engage them constructive activities, and provide the foundations for responsible environmental behavior. It is possible to cultivate ecological ethics and behaviors if we can avoid a fear-based approach.

G. Childhood and Nature: Design Principles for Educators

When children have access to free play in natural areas, they do the same things, around the country and around the world. They make special places, go on adventures, develop fantasy games, go hunting and gathering, craft small worlds. These recurrent play patterns can be used as design principles to help structure compelling outdoor activities with children. And these engagements can lead to environmental values and behaviors in adulthood.

We'll recollect significant experiences from childhood, examine images of children at play, and gain insight into how parents and teachers can both bond children with the natural world while making learning more intriguing.
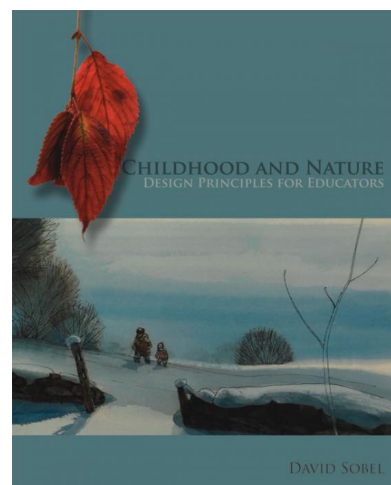
H. Designing Natural Play Areas

A growing number of studies show that children engage in more creative forms of play in green areas, as opposed to manufactured play areas. Research shows that children playing on traditional play structures tend to establish social hierarchy through physical competence, while children playing in natural areas use more fantasy play. When playing in natural areas, a child's social standing becomes less based on physical abilities and more on language skills, creativity, and inventiveness. Further studies show that time spent in natural settings can relieve symptoms of attention-deficit disorders, and leave children better able to focus and concentrate.

Natural Play Areas encourage more frequent, longer, and richer outdoor play experiences in safe, natural settings. They expose children to a greater range of play choices, and can provide opportunities for deeper and stronger relationships with other children and the natural world. Through design principals tested and reviewed, you will learn the history and benefits of these areas, and how to begin designing one at your park, school, or child care facility.

I. Look, Don't Touch: The Problem with Environmental Education

Somewhere along the way, much of environmental education lost its magic, its *"wildly, gladly rejoicing together."* Instead, it's become didactic and staid, restrictive and rule bound. A creeping focus on cognition has replaced the goal of exhilaration that once motivated educators to take children outside.

Much of environmental education today has taken on a museum mentality, where nature is a composed exhibit on the other side of the glass. Children can

look at it and study it, but they can't do anything with it. The message is: *Nature is fragile. Look. but don't touch.* What does research indicate about the most effective ways to help children become adults who behave in environmentally responsible ways. And how can environmental education be shaped to honor these findings?
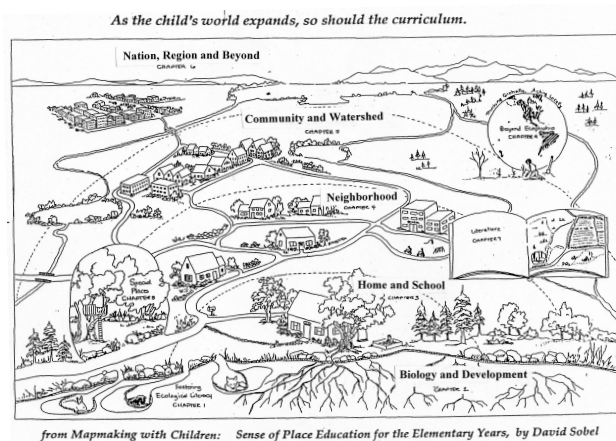
J. Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens

The original kindergarten — the children's garden —conceived by German educator Friedrich Froebel in the19th century, was a place where children learned through play, often in nature. That idea is fast eroding. Children aren't playing in the garden anymore; instead they're filling in bubbles on worksheets. The new movement of nature-based early childhood education can reverse that trend. There are thousands of forest kindergartens throughout Europe and new programs opening every month in North America. Let's examine the promise of this healthy approach towards living and learning outdoors with young children.
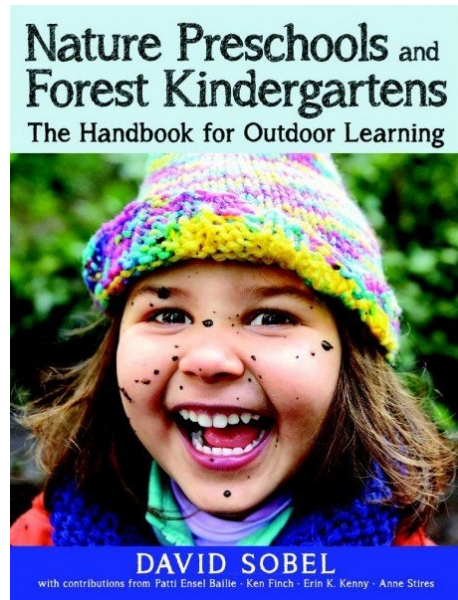
K. The Universe of the Child

Bring a Russian nesting doll into your mind's eye. In the center is the smallest one, a tiny infant. It nests snugly within even larger dolls, five or six layers in all. The universe of the child expands similarly. Each doll represents and incremental, outward expansion of the significant world of the child, from the close-in world of the mother in infancy to the whole wide world by the end of adolescence.

As the child's world expands, so should the curriculum.

from *Mapmaking with Children: Sense of Place Education for the Elementary Years, by David Sobel*

Understanding these worlds, and developing curriculum appropriate for each world, or stage, leads us to developmental geography.   We'll look at how the children's worlds change and appropriate geography and social studies curricula for each stage.

L. Education for Sustainability

If we're going to have a planet with an intact ecosystem that preserves climate, sustains people and keeps fauna and flora alive, then we need an educational system that cultivates environmentally responsible behavior and teaches systems thinking. All forms of environmentally responsible adult behavior can be linked back to a healthy dose of nature in childhood. Therefore, we'll explore the relationship between childhood nature experience and how we foster that relationship in green schools, environmental charter schools, and schools with a commitment to place-based education.

M. Why 21st Century Children Need Nature

Children spend eight hours a day engaged with screens and one half hour a day outside in the natural world.   This leads to children's lives are becoming more indoor-ified and digitalized.   As a result, children are more socially isolated, more depressed, less physically active, less healthy and less connected to the natural world.   Not a good thing!

We'll review some of the research on why nature is good for children and then we'll look at examples of how families, schools and communities are re-introducing children to the nature world.