

Week 15: Mentor Program Meeting

I. Highlights

A. The mentor program is worth looking into: www.ecementor.org

II. Homework

A. Oral final exam next week at 7:00 PM in our classroom. Some individual questions, some group discussion, review the textbooks. Good luck!

III. Meeting

A. WVC Child Development Center

1. 2 rooms: Acorn Room is younger 2s, Oak Room is 3-5s, shared yard, about 64 kids total (mix of full-time and part-time)
2. Recently certified as an official Outdoor Classroom Project Demonstration Site

B. The Outdoor Classroom

1. Outdoor Classroom = started by Eric Nelson and his wife in LA, funded originally by First5
2. Several demo sites in southern CA. One in Marin, but we're the first in Santa Clara County and the second in northern CA.
3. Flexible routines. Generally children spend most of the day outside except eating and sleeping. Fundamental underlying philosophy is that children learn all the time, and anything you do inside can be done outside, so the outside environment should be considered a classroom.
4. Main indoor activities = blocks and dress-up, but also have those outside. Do art, language, circle time, music, etc. outside.

5. Explore topics of nature, science, weather, water, etc. No “theme of the week” on circus/zoo/other topics not related to what kids can observe first-hand.
 6. Blessed to have this property with 200-year-old trees, creek behind us, birds and a wild bunny, room to garden, opportunity to go for walks or “trike hikes” around campus.
 7. Boy Scouts putting in a new trike path on the side yard. Parents help with a lot of the work too.
 8. Regularly fight with the insurance people. (Or fire marshall or licensing.) Had to take down some cool things, such as rope monkey bars between the trees because of insurance rules. Sometimes worth arguing with these people: sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, doesn’t hurt to ask.
- C. Discussion of spending more time outside in ECE
1. Something more of us are thinking about
 2. Can set up tours of the WVC center or staff inservice training anytime (talk to Shelley)
 3. Think back to your own childhood. Remember playing outside? (Terry once got a grant by asking the board to think about their own childhood memories of playing outside, instead of just talking about the project blueprints.)
 4. Current trend is more technology + indoor schoolwork/losing elementary school recess.
 5. What about rainy days?
 - a) Talked a lot with Norwegian professors at Queen Maude College, looked at how they handle weather. “There is no bad weather. Only bad clothing. Rain doesn’t hurt anybody.” Only Californians ask about this; most of the rest of the planet just plays in the rain unless it’s a total downpour.
 - b) Make it part of the curriculum. Don’t avoid it.

- c) Talk about it with parents, but they won't all agree with you no matter what you do. Children WILL NOT get sick from getting a little wet, and the learning from being in the rain is worth it. Have those conversations, but there will be parents who never agree. Accommodate them by having indoor options.
6. Is a year-round program, so can rotate the garden accordingly. Plant perennials, grow things to eat. Have to include enough for the birds and bunnies and gophers as well as the kids.
 7. What about the heat?
 - a) It's just like the rain. Deal with it. Don't be on the asphalt at high noon when it's crazy hot.
 - b) If it's over 90 degrees, licensing asks us to do things differently. Change the routine to be inside more or in the shade more, less physically active (running, etc.) mid-day. Make sure children are hydrated.
 - c) Spare the Air days = more inside time in the afternoons because of the pollution + the heat. There's nothing wrong with being inside. It just shouldn't be 100% of the time. It's about balance.
 8. Why aren't we outside more in other programs?
 - a) Staffing/coverage when we only have two teachers, one inside + one outside
 - b) Parents complain/worry about weather (silly because it's maybe 12 days/year that California weather is really bad)
 - c) Scheduling when different classes share one yard
 - d) Classroom routine/schedule is too tight, built with small blocks of time. Makes an amazing difference to rework things to have long chunks of time so we can go outside and let them have long free play to get deeply into their activities outside.

- e) Teachers don't want to be out that long. Maybe we need to relax our playground rules so there are adult benches, opportunities for teachers to play with kids.
 - f) Habit. We think of it as "recess," even though we're very different from elementary school. Outside doesn't have to be an extra thing unrelated to our curriculum work. It can be a special thing unto itself. Learning isn't just indoors.
 - g) Our yards are boring and overly safe. Maybe one small water table + one climber and asphalt. Really need 1.5 activities per child at any given time (formula) to have enough to do.
 - h) Building isn't built for shade or rain coverage. It's all open.
 - i) Fear of children getting hurt (fear from us or from parents), fear of being sued. Forcing to wear shoes all the time. Have to rethink our center rules around this.
 - j) Our kids aren't used to walking on unlevel ground, touching grass with bare feet, etc. Some children have poor balance, get hurt more because they've never done this before.
9. Regardless of all these excuses, we know outdoor activity builds the whole child, which fits current research about helping the brain grow. It's important to redo our rules and thinking to better serve our children by being outside more. It's so much more than gross motor.
- a) Put out heavy, challenging materials such as hollow blocks and wheelbarrows.
 - b) Burning calories outside helps fight childhood obesity.
 - c) Even within our existing yards and schedules, what can we be doing to enrich our outdoor curriculum?

- d) As professionals, we have a responsibility to look at what children need developmentally. That has to come first. We're good at doing this indoors; we have to meet the whole child's needs outside too.
- e) Outdoors is where children really develop the 6th and 7th children: proprioceptive and vestibular. Weight-bearing and other gross motor exercise outside helps build all senses. When we make things too easy and too safe, it cuts down on their sensory input, which hurts the children with special needs who have sensory issues already.
- f) Simple ideas: attach ropes to tires to pull them around the yard. Attach ropes to the top of the slide to let kids "mountain climb" up.

10. Norwegian research on human needs

- a) Opportunities to go high / climb up (climbing trees, rocks, etc.)
- b) Opportunities to go fast
- c) Opportunities to have privacy (forts or huts, kids can at least feel unsupervised, separate from the group auditorily and visually, even though they're not actually out of our supervision ever)
- d) Opportunities to use tools (woodworking, etc. under direct adult supervision, learning to make real things)
- e) (Two more)
- f) How can we allow more of this, incorporate more challenge, within licensing regulations and reasonable safety.

11. Letting children have easy access to water play is important in current research.

D. Jamie Smith is recruiting for the mentor program

- 1. Need teachers and directors, especially in south county
- 2. Jamie is mobile, consulting or First5, can come to our classroom or office
- 3. May be getting email from her soon