Interested in designing a children’s playscape? A community’s story
Presenters

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Our journey...

- Mission of Pine Jog Environmental Education Center (FAU)
- Slide show expressing our vision and anticipated outcomes
- Defining “nature playscape”
- Benefits/goals of Pine Jog Nature Playscape
- Steps to development/implementation
- Outcomes achieved
- Movie highlighting development/implementation and outcomes achieved
Our mission:

Pine Jog is dedicated to developing, researching and disseminating educational programs and services that cultivate environmentally literate and engaged citizens.
Overview of Pine Jog Nature Playscape

Vision
To engage children and families in the out of outdoors to interact directly with nature in unstructured play through Imagination, Experiences and Exploration.

*Play is the highest form of research.* -Albert Einstein
What is a Nature Playscape?

A Nature Playscape is a natural, free-play area where children interact with nature through sensory learning experiences by engaging with and manipulating diverse natural elements and materials.

~Natural Learning Initiative
Pine Jog’s Goal

To build a nature playscape within our pine forest with the purpose to:

- Promote all types of play
- Foster environmental stewardship
- Inspire a sense of wonder
- Create connections: Family, Personal, and Community
- Be comfortable in nature
Play helps children to:

- Develop confidence and emotional strength to face the world,
- Strengthen decision-making skills,
- Promote healthy development of minds and bodies,
- Overcome fears,
- Work cooperatively with others

Practice play, Socio-dramatic play, Independent play, Parallel play, Pretend play, Cooperative play, Unoccupied play, Physical play, Competitive play, Constructive play.
Nature is the perfect medium to engage in all types of play.
There is simply no substitute for hands on exploration, and the multifaceted setting of nature is the perfect vehicle to:

- Reconnect to the “real world”
- Encourage the development of critical thinking skills, understanding, and compassion.
- Encourage social interaction or provide some solitary solace
- Engage children in all types of PLAY
Benefits of Nature

Mental Health
Regular experiences in nature:
• Reduces stress
• Reduces levels of depression and anxiety
• Increases resilience
• Improves self-esteem
• Improves concentration
• Improves recovery/healing

Physical Health
Spending time with nature:
• *Gets us moving*
• Prevents obesity
• Raises levels of Vitamin D
• Comparisons involving green exercising and using indoor machines showed that those exercising outdoors made even more health benefits
Benefits of Nature

Child Development

*Children who play regularly in natural environments:*
- Demonstrate advanced motor fitness, including coordination, balance and agility
- Are sick less often
- Have improved cognitive development: deeper reasoning, awareness and observation skills
- Demonstrate increased creativity and a greater imagination

*Children who have regular experiences with nature:*
- Are provided a platform for meaningful social interactions and development
- Develop their Naturalist Intelligence linked to many areas of child development
- Develop a sense of wonder
Creating connections: Family, Personal, and Community

“Nature can be co-experienced by parent and child in ways that Chuck E. Cheese’s just can’t.”

—Ron Swaisgood, biologist and co-founder of Family Adventures in Nature
Designed and Built by the Community for the Community

IMAGINE
PHASE ONE:
Community build
“If you can imagine it you can achieve it, if you can Dream it you can become it”

- William Arthur Ward

EXPERIENCE
Why a Community Build?

We decided to do a community build for several reasons:

- To engage the community and foster a sense of pride and ownership from the community
  
  *When people are personally vested, they tend to value things more.*

- To get input from the end users – the kids!

  *The children drove the design process*

- To stretch our fundraising $"/

  *Using volunteer labor is much cheaper than buying a pre-made playground – so we could get more play elements for the money*

Community build playgrounds build communities – like an old fashioned barn raising – members of the community come together to provide time, talent or treasure.
Steps in development and implementation
Form the Team

- Be sure to include representatives from all types of stakeholders – parents, community members, experts in the field, educators (formal and informal)

- Assign responsibilities or committees – Fundraising, Design, Volunteer coordinator, Materials and Tools, Publicity, Hospitality, etc.

- Designate a Program Coordinator – one person to make sure things are on track and moving forward in the desired direction, and to coordinate all details of the project.

Many Hands Make Light Work!
Our Team

- **Anne Henderson** – Director of Education, Pine Jog Environmental Education Center (PJEEC) and parent
- **Kristi Moyer** – Land and Facilities Manager and parent
- **Luisa Gomez** – Program Coordinator PJEEC and parent
- **Yash Bhagwanji**, Ph.D., Associate Professor Department of Curriculum, Culture, and Educational Inquiry (CCEI) – FAU and parent
- **Suzanna Musalin** - Pine Jog Elementary School Teacher
- **Jeannie Fernsworth** – Program Director & Horticulturist - Delray Children’s Garden
- **Nikki Julien** – Consultant – Nature Play Learning
Define Your Dream

- Who will be the user? What ages are you building for?
- What are your objectives for this playground?
- What educational motifs do you hope to include?

We chose to go with David Sobel’s 7 Play Motif’s – Adventure, Fantasy and Imagination, Animal Allies, Maps and Paths, Special Places, Small Worlds and Hunting and Gathering.

Pick the Site

- Where will the playground go? (Define the area)
- What natural elements are already there that you can make use of (trees, changes in elevation, etc)?
- What sun/shade is available at different times of the day?
- Are public restrooms available? Is there easy access?
We wanted to involve the community as much as possible, so we held a **design charrette** and invited the families from the community to share their vision for their playground. We also asked the students and teachers at the local elementary school.

We then took their renderings (drawings, models, etc.) and added a dash of reality (but not too much) and created a **conceptual design** that could be used for fundraising.

Lastly, we engaged a landscape architect (donated!) to help create the **schematic design** and **construction documents**.
Our Conceptual Design

A. Main Entry
- Arbor
- Signage

B. Embankment Slide (photo)
- 3-4 foot hill height, 25% slope
- Native groundcover

C. Secret Room (photo, existing)
- Gathering area
- Under cocophum canopy
- Child-sized exit to the North

D. Music Area
- 3 panel music wall (photo, existing)
- 2 rain tumblers
- 5 steel mushroom drums (photo)

E. Living Tunnel
- Native vines growing over arch structure (photo)
- Adult-sized entrance to the South
- Child-sized entrance to the East
- Den encloses North end
- Rainbow-colored arches, free-standing for weaving

F. Parent Pavilion
- Step entrance and ramp entrance to the South
- Bench seating

G. Obstacle Course (photo)
- Stump stepping forms in undulating heights
- Balance beams
- Climbing log

H. Sand Play
- Stump edging provides seating and sand enclosure (photo)
- Chickie Hut to the East provides shade (photo)

I. Spring Creek
- Hand pump on small hill
- Water channeled to rock-lined creek bed, sloping at 1:12
- Bridge crossing over pathway
- Drains to sandy basin

J. Mud Kitchen
- Simple play kitchen counter with storage for utensils and bowls
- Space for digging
- Water accessible via hand pump or hose quick connect

K. Planting Area
- L-shaped planting table shared with Mud Kitchen
- Garden Wall partially obscures greenhouse to the West
- Space for planting programs

L. Art Area
- Spool tables with seating
- Art Wall strung between existing pines for drying projects and displaying artwork

M. Magnifying posts (photo)
- 4 magnifying posts for science exploration

N. Secondary entrance
- Accessible from ELC classrooms to the South

Florida Atlantic University, Pine Jog Environmental Education Center, West Palm Beach, Florida
**Fundraising (done throughout)**

○ We were lucky that a local organization chose us as their community service project for phase one – and did the fundraising and plus organized labor for the first community build!

**Other ideas include:**

○ Crowdsourcing (like Go-Fund-Me)

○ Grassroots projects – bake sales, selling pickets or pavers

○ Corporate Sponsorship

○ Community organizations with like-minded missions

○ Grants

○ Special events

○ Remember to think about not only fundraising $ for the project – but solicit in-kind donations from local businesses to further engage the community.
Building Phase

Community Builds - As funding is available we will hold several community events for volunteers to build some of the playground elements.
- Community organizations
- Scout groups
- Other mission-related non-profits
- Educational groups
- High School Students (who need service hours)
- Corporate volunteer groups

Contractor Build – some of the elements require a contractor because of complexity or structure and safety (such as climbing elements, water feature)
Outcomes

Children’s Perspective:

- Joy
- Social interaction
- Creativity
- Play
- Direct sensory experiences
- Freedom of choice
- Conquer fear
- Cooperation

“I like the Cocoplums!” Maddison

“I like the nature playscape because I can walk in the forest area” Treyson

“It’s fun, its big, its nice. People can play, kids are happy which makes me happy.”
Outcomes

- Teachers’ perspective
  - Increased social interaction
  - New teaching opportunities
  - Skill development
  - Increase in more engaged play
  - Increased creative role play
  - Increased socio-dramatic play

“The students play together in "make believe" settings much better than just running around the playgrounds at school. They worked together to find water to keep their "cakes" together. Those students that struggled to get along with others on the playground, found friends and were able to create games to play or make believe settings to play in.” - Pine Jog Elementary, Kindergarten teacher
Outcomes

- Family Perspectives
  - Meet other families
  - Socialization
  - Learning together
  - Meaningful time with children—fully present
  - Safe place
  - New parenting skills
  - Intergenerational connections
Outcomes

- Pine Jog team’s perspectives
- Research opportunities
- Serve as a model
- Building community
- Serving a community need
We hope you have benefitted from our presentation!

Please contact any one of us with comments, ideas, and questions.

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