Diapers In the Forest: Fostering Learning Skills For Success Beginning In the Early Years

Raintree School: St. Louis, MO
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Forest Schools For Toddlers as A Fertile Ground For Developing Learning Skills Such As Grit, Curiosity, and Self-Regulation.
Learning Outcomes

* Understand the correlation between toddler brain development research and noncognitive skill acquisition.
* Learn specific forest school practices to foster noncognitive skills in toddlers.
* Brainstorm collaborative toolkit to increase nature access for toddlers.
World Cafe Discussion

What are the barriers or fears that may prevent toddlers from having access to the outdoors or Forest School?
A Little Bit About Us...

Genevieve Ploch

Jenn Thrasher
Raintree School

- Reggio-Inspired Forest School located in St. Louis, MO
- Eleven Acre Campus
Current Educational Climate

- Kindergarten Readiness
- Indoor Classrooms
- Worksheets
Is My Two-Year-Old Ready For Kindergarten?
Early Brain Development

- Two-year-old synaptic density 200% of its adult level
- Increased cognitive flexibility
- Early life experiences greatly impact cognitive development
Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember instructions, and juggle multiple tasks successfully.
Executive Function Skills begin developing after birth.

- Rapid growth between the ages of 3-5.
Critical Factors For Developing Executive Function Skills

* Relationships: Positive and Supportive
* Activities: Strengthen Social Connection and Challenge
* Places: Allow for Creativity, Exploration, and Exercise
Benefits of Executive Function Skills and Self-Regulation

- School Achievement
- Positive Behaviors
- Good Health
- Successful Work
James J. Heckman and Tim Kautz discuss in their research paper *Hard Evidence On Soft Skills*...

Alfred Binet, the creator of the first IQ test (the Stanford-Binet test), noted that:

“[Success in school]...admits of other things than intelligence; to succeed in his studies, one must have qualities which depend on attention, will, and character; for example a certain docility, a regularity of habits, and especially continuity of effort. A child, even if intelligent, will learn little in class if he never listens, if he spends his time in playing tricks, in giggling, in playing truant.”

-(Binet and Simon, 1916, p. 254)
Forest School and Wild Play
Develop Noncognitive Skills
Noncognitive Skills For Success

* Grit
* Curiosity
* Self-Regulation
In the Beginning...
Grit

Hard Things
Grit

Climbing the Hill
Grit

Brave Belt
Grit

“I made it.”
Supporting Each Other
Curiosity:
Sensory Nature Exploration

Mini-beasties
Mud Balls
Creek Splashing
Getting Dirty

Curiosity
Curiosity

Playful Log
Building A Campfire For Roasting Marshmallows
Self-Regulation

Forest Promises
Self-Regulation

Deer Ears
Self-Regulation

Nature Ninjas
Singing Goodbye

Self-Regulation
How To Take Action: Tips

∗ Increase time outdoors
∗ Explore natural materials and nearby nature
∗ Prepare a backpack with tools and supplies needed
∗ Go on outdoor exploratory adventure
∗ Attend regional/national workshops or training
∗ NOLS Wilderness First Aid Training
Resources

* Raintree School ParkLAND Project
* Mindstretchers UK
* Harvard University: Center On the Developing Child
* The Urban Child Institute
* Nature Preschool and Forest Kindergartens: The Handbook for Outdoor Learning by David Sobel
* How Children Succeed by Paul Tough
* Barefoot and Balanced by Angela Hanscom
Q and A

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References

* http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-executive-function/
* Labour Econ. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2013 Aug 1. Published in final edited form as: Labour Econ. 2012 Aug 1; 19(4): 451–464.