



Head Start Body Start Outdoor Playspace Story from Blue Ridge Opportunity Commission – Sizemore Head Start Center in Ashe County, North Carolina

Submitted by: Linda Widner, Sizemore Head Start Lead Teacher, Vickie Absher, OLE Manager, and Brenda W. Roten, Head Start Director

Natural features added: Flowers, shrubs, tree, garden (with enough land to expand the garden for some years to come), covered structured for tub of dirt, wooden chair on playground, wooden picnic table for adults, small wood picnic tables for children, wooden water feature, 2-wooden stages (Literacy and Exploration Stage and Dramatic Play stage), wooden storage shed, wooden art easel, wind chimes, bird houses, bird feeders, wooden drums, wooden Akambira.

How nature is playing a role in the children's play and learning:

- It matures our children's insatiable curiosity to explore stuff in the world
- For some of our children it is therapeutic to play outdoors
- It further develops intellectual skills like observing details, sorting, classifying and pattern making
- It provides ways of working with children's interest
- It supports imagination and creativity
- It extends children's language skills

Why our program wants our children to connect with nature:

- Being outdoors helps children create a sense of wonder which they can carry over to other aspects of their life
- Being outdoors helps children to be more aware; they certainly have the opportunity to engage all of their senses
- Research has shown that offering children the opportunity to explore nature improves their attention span and learning capacity. Further research has proven that exposure to the natural outdoor environment helps to reduce if not eliminate symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorders in children
- Outdoor activity offers our children the opportunity of fresh air and exercise. Certainly important to help children keep physically fit and mentally fit
- We believe that nurturing a bond between children and nature will help to ensure that our future generation grows up to value nature

If nature and the outdoors is a part of your teaching – are you using it and/or your outdoor play space to address the new Outcomes Framework?

- Head Start is meeting outcomes in that our natural play spaces are stimulating our children's imagination, and engaging their sense of curiosity as they explore the new physical surroundings and learn in ways that goes beyond what they are experiencing indoors



