We witness astounding developments in this age of information and communication. Technology has influenced all the aspects of our lives by causing inevitable changes and improvements in every field. Naturally, the world of science has greatly benefited from this change and development. In consequence, the rapid circulation of information and technology in the scientific world has increased the cooperation among scientists. This cooperation highly contributes to researches and studies in the fields of language, history, literature, education, economy, social and cultural life, politics, sports, tourism, and media and communication along with many other areas. Thus, this book contains currents trends in Preschool Education in parallel with the improvements in the world of science. It took about one year to prepare and print the book. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to our friends who contributed to this process. Finally, very special thanks go to the authors who contributed to our book with their researches. It is our greatest wish that this book will increase the cooperation among scientists to make the world a better place.

Pre-school Education



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Foreword

We witness astounding developments in this age of information and communication. Technology has influenced all the aspects of our lives by causing inevitable changes and improvements in every field. Naturally, the world of science has greatly benefited from this change and development. In consequence, the rapid circulation of information and technology in the scientific world has increased the cooperation among scientists. This cooperation highly contributes to researches and studies in the fields of language, history, literature, education, economy, social and cultural life, politics, sports, tourism, and media and communication along with many other areas.

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Kind Regards…

Editors

10. 10. 2018

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CHILDREN AND NATURE[1]

Taşkın TAŞTEPE[2], Zeliha YAZICI[3]



1. INTRODUCTION

Ever-increasing global environmental issues (Duygu, 2014; Keleş, 2013) cause nature's balance to be upset and the cycle of nature to be changed by the hand of humans leading to irreversible destruction (Keleş, Hamamcı & Çoban, 2009). These issues have a significant influence on destruction of nature. With the changing living

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conditions, today's children grow up deprived of nature/natural environments (Turner, Nakamura & Dinetti, 2004), and they almost lose their chance to experience nature. This is not a concern for the children growing up in urban environments only, but it also affects all children in places where technology is used disproportionately. As a consequence, children are forced to experience nature symbolically or representatively instead of experiencing it directly or indirectly. In other words, children try to know or understand nature by its highly symbolic and even metaphoric representations through television, internet, movies, books-pictures or depicted scenes without actual contact with the natural world. This undermines the opportunity of today's children to directly experience healthy and efficient natural systems.

When it is up to their choice, children prefer to play in unstructured natural environments (Taştepe, Başbay & Yazıcı, 2016; Titman, 1994). Today, with ever-decreasing natural playgrounds (Tovey, 2007), children face a lack of nature experience during the most important time of their life for creating awareness. This standardizes children's lives by restricting their possibility to explore and interact with the natural environment (Klassen, 2010; Louv, 2008; White & Stoecklin, 2008). Children's detachment from nature is not only accelerated by the loss of natural environments in children's lives but also by the parents who do not encourage their children to know nature (Atasoy, 2005; Louv, 2008; Taştepe et al., 2016). Children who have detached from nature spend their time in indoor environments and misuse the technological tools offered to them (Clements, 2004; Taştepe, 2012; Zaradic & Pergams, 2007). The fact that children cannot interact with the natural world as a result of spending their time in isolated environments (Louv, 2008) causes increase in health problems and occurrence of developmentally negative effects (Kellert, 1993; Wilson, 1993). However, nature provides children with fresh air and an environment in which they can act more freely (Rivkin, 1995). Furthermore, natural environments and interaction with nature allow for children to decrease their stress level, to enhance their attention span and most importantly, to support their brain development (Bohling-Philippi, 2006; Cheng, 2008; Oltman, 2002; Wells & Evans, 2003). Accordingly, children who prefer indoor environments must be

encouraged to experience outdoors and actively participate in the nature in order to support their health and development. In this context, nature itself is an important tool for supporting children to learn about nature and develop a positive attitude toward nature.

2. CHILDREN'S AWARENESS OF NATURE

Internalized awareness of environmental issues must become one of the requirements of childhood period, and nature awareness based on life experience must be provided as from the early periods (Cobb, 1998; Robertson, 2008; Wilson, 1996; Wilson & Smith, 1996; Yazıcı, Aslan & Taştepe, 2013). As from birth, children have a mental potential which they can gain rich experience by exploring the ever-changing events and cases around them. At early ages, children compare basic characteristics and behaviours of the natural environment thanks to their intrinsic curiosity. Children who find the opportunity to experience nature examine trees, birds, ants, flowers or bushes, basic geological forms. As a result of such examinations, children create mind maps of the nature and natural life by making basic cognitive operations such as naming, grouping, identification, labelling and classification even without an adult assistance (Coltman, 2008; Pringle, Hakverdi, Cronin-Jones & Johnson, 2003; Swinburne, 2008; Witt & Kimple, 2008). Since the natural symbols and images facilitate intellectual development of individuals; environmental awareness must be raised and environmental issues must be kept under control during childhood before environmental issues arise. Children who perceive themselves as a part of nature see nature as a space they can act in by themselves or under much less control (Cullen, 1993).

How can negative attitudes be developed by some children toward nature, although the natural elements are so important for children in creating awareness of nature? At this point, the concepts 'biophilia' and 'biophobia' come into prominence (Onur, 2016; Yılmaz & Olgan, 2017). While 'biophilia' is defined as children's inclination to affiliate with nature, which develops during the evolutionary process; 'biophobia' is defined as children's negative attitude to natural elements, which results from cultural learning (Ulrich, 1993). It is emphasized that activities in nature and time spent in nature have positive effects on creating awareness of nature among children

(Robertson, 2008). Children's awareness of nature is raised as they examine and interact with the real objects and cases during the time spent in nature with the sense of wonder and exploration.

Knowledge gained from nature experience helps children to establish a close bond with nature and not only to know the world, but also helps them to survive (Chawla, 2007; Myers Jr., 2012; Phenice&Griffore, 2003). According to Palmer&Birch (2005), 91% of the people who had personal experience with nature during their childhood develop an interest in the environment when they are older. In a similar study, children who are 3 to 5 joined a nature program and it has been found that these children had significantly closer bonds with nature when they reached 10-12, compared to their peers who did not join the program (Robertson, 2008). This shows that the children should know and love the environment before starting to protect it. Children who could not benefit from the offers of nature have a tendency to develop groundless fears and a sense of disgust in their relations with natural objects (White&Stoecklin, 2008; Wilson, Kilmer&Knauerhase 1996). Bixler, Carlisle, Hammitt & Floyd (1994) state that the children who have insufficient experience with the nature define snakes and insects as the most terrifying elements of the nature and half of them are afraid of plants.



Photos 1-2: Bond established by children with adults in nature and children's affinity towards nature

In their study, Cheng & Monroe (2012) point out a positive relationship between the close bond established by children with nature and experience gained in nature. In their study, Yılmaz & Olgan (2017) have concluded that the children who establish a close bond with the nature do not have the opportunity to be involved in nature activities such as playing with pine cones or tree branches, playing on the waterside or digging in the ground, but they can experience such activities if they are given chance. Therefore, children's learning experience in nature should be encouraged in order to create awareness of nature depending on their close relationship with nature.

3. A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: NATURE

The fact that the children find nature very attractive and interesting helps makes children connect with natural spaces more easily and generally like to play in natural spaces (Richardson, 2006; Titman, 1994). This is because the children see nature differently from the adults and take a more active role with their acts in nature compared to the adults (White, 2014; Wilson, 2012). Since the children have an inherent sense of wonder for investigating and exploring natural spaces (Seefeldt & Galper, 2007), they enjoy being in nature (Parker, 2008). Also, the studies have been done emphasize that children prefer natural spaces since natural spaces arouse children's curiosity and offer unstructured game opportunities (Dyment & O'Connell, 2013; Lucas & Dyment, 2010). Therefore, the children, as a part of the biological world, have every right to receive education in the open air where they can establish and develop a bond with nature (Swinburne, 2008). Children see details missed or ignored by adults and attribute a meaning to nature (Wilson, 2012). Therefore, children need participative family members to share their curiosity and happiness while they are in nature (Richardson, 2006). This kind of support for the children shows that nature has an important and main role in learning.

Children actively structure their knowledge by using their senses in nature and every knowledge obtained from nature forms a basis for constructing the new one (Essa & Young, 2003; Seefeldt & Galper, 2007). Onur (2016) also emphasized that constructivism is important in understanding the relationships of children with nature. While

they are in nature, children play with natural elements and explore the nature by self-learning experience (Taştepe et al., 2016). Children's tendency to solve problems by their own methods allows them to actively structure their own perception (Gordon&Browne, 2007). Studies also state that nature supports children in learning. Children experience outdoors thanks to the 'Kernow Woodland Learning' program organized with the participation of preschool children in the United Kingdom. With the help of this program, children overcome entertaining challenges at their own skill levels, think creatively to solve problems, and gain knowledge, insight, confidence and self-esteem by taking responsibilities for themselves and each other (Callaway, 2005). A study conducted by O'Brien & Murray (2007) allowed children to meet and become familiar with nature; thanks to the experience they gained in nature, children's academic and practical skills were supported. Studies also show that having nature experience support children's holistic developments. So, nature is a perfect means to support the development of children.

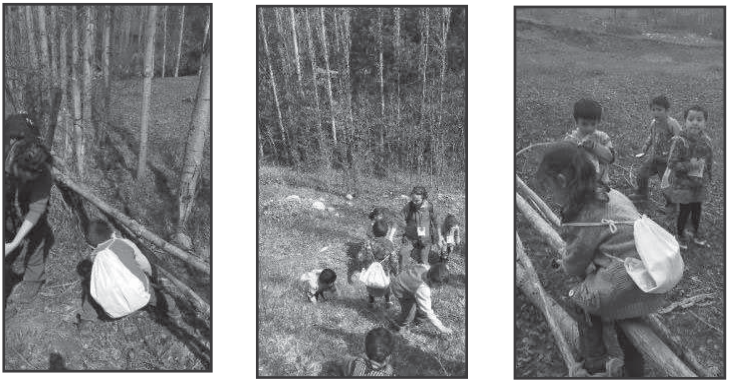




Photos 3-4: Child's natural and informal learning experience

4. NATURE'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

Nature provides children with many opportunities to support their physical development. Physical growth of children and changes in their muscle strength contribute to a significant increase in the number of motor skills (Shaffer&Kipp, 2007). While exploring nature; activities like going up and down the hill, climbing, running, rolling, crawling will support the gross motor skills of children, and activities like lifting logs, digging in the ground, playing in water will support their fine motor skills (Seefeldt & Galper, 2007; Taştepe et al., 2016). In particular, such activities will support their motor skills in terms of balance, coordination and stamina (Larimore, 2011). Moreover, outdoor experience widen the freedoms offered by indoor spaces and gives the children freedom to move in a wider space (Richardson, 2006).



Photos 5-6-7: Gross motor kills gained by children in nature

With each new motor skill, children gain ascendancy over their own bodies and the environment they are in. Such developments in the area of movement allow children to reach information about their surroundings and support their learning (Berk, 2006; Kail, 2004). Therefore, each motor skill gained in nature will be an opportunity for children to gain sensory experience. Children will gain different sensory experience while going on a sloping or flat land, walking on

a ground, grass or wetland area (Richardson, 2006). With their sensory experience gained in nature, children explore the characteristics of the world they live in (Larimore, 2011). For example, while observing features of an object such as a leaf, children make comparisons by focusing on the similarities and differences of leaf types and are able to categorize those (Charlesworth & Lind, 2007). Such activities to be conducted using natural materials such as leaf, bark, stone, mud, etc. will support scientific process skills of children. Development of a scientific understanding by use of scientific process skills allows children to think over problems, explore meaningful knowledge, accumulate these knowledge developing an understanding of scientific research and make predictions about already accumulated knowledge (Charlesworth & Lind, 2007; Martin, 2001; Martin, Sexton, Franklin & Gerlovich, 2005). When considered from this point of view, the sensory experience gained by children in nature improves in direct proportion to their cognitive development (Wilson, 2012).





Photos 8-9: Cognitive experience gained by children in nature

Nature is also necessary for emotional and social development of children. In a study conducted by Kalvaitis (2007), children define their relationships with nature as love for nature and experience in

nature. Children feel themselves good in the open air and since they explore the nature curiously, they become adventurous and cheerful thanks to the experience gained during the process (Richardson, 2006). Also, numerous sensory stimuli in nature will contribute emotional development of children by allowing them to develop an aesthetic point of view (Wilson, 2012). Children who have an aesthetic point of view find the chance to share their learning experience with other children or adults (Parker, 2008). As children explore in nature, they can share their observations with their peers or adults and convey their experience to them (Seefeldt & Galper, 2007). Children can use their own thoughts in verbal, written or symbolic forms through communication including collection, arrangement and clear presentation of information to others (Charlesworth & Lind, 2007; Martin et al., 2005). This represents a strong aspect of social development of human. Continuous updating of current knowledge with every contact established by children with nature will support sharing the excitement with others. For example, children's nature experience based on seasonal changes (leaves changing their colours, trees shedding their leaves, elevation of river water levels, etc.) or weather events (petrichor, rainbow, flying dry leaves in the wind, etc.) will have an impact upon emotional and social development as well as aesthetics.



Photos 10-11: Emotional and social skills gained in nature by children

Children should also gain direct experience with the living creatures, their life cycles and habitats (Seefeldt & Galper, 2007).

This allows children to learn not to harm plants or animals but to care for and protect all living creatures and take responsibility to preserve the environmental beauties (Martin, 2001; Richardson, 2006). The attention shown by children to the creatures living in nature will ensure that they maintain a positive attitude to humankind (Wilson, 2012). Children who care about nature will also care about their friends, which spent time together in nature, and develop social behaviors such as empathy, cooperation, sharing, etc. (Essa & Young, 2003).

5. CONCLUSION

The need for exploration of nature is an inherent feature of all children. The nature offers various materials to children in changeable and interesting environments. With this aspect, the nature creates a learning environment that supports development of children. Children can do their part only by experiencing the freedom offered by nature. Studies shows that the children who have a chance to play unstructured games freely in nature are cleverer, more sharing, happier and healthier. It should be noted that the children should comprehend that they are a part of nature. While exploring the natural world, children should have a sense of responsibility towards living/non-living things and exhibit respectful attitudes. This is the only way that children can benefit from the opportunities provided by nature without destroying it or establishing superiority over it. In this context, parents and teachers or nature training professionals around the children have an important responsibilities. Adults should prepare activities that will allow children to use their senses and make observations in nature from their early ages, and guide children in identifying the similarities and differences of the objects and events in nature. Children should also be supported to develop points of view about the behaviors and needs of living creatures and respect for living creatures. Thus, children will observe plants and animals and form an opinion about their nutrition, features and growth. So, thanks to the guidance from adults, children will be able to create their own experience on the things they find interesting in nature.

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