



Outdoor play. It is at the crux of our school's philosophy, particularly in the Oak Class, where we have the pleasure of spending every Friday exploring and playing in the Great Outdoors. I'm proud that we offer this as a part of our curriculum, especially since it seems that as children age they have less time to spend outside and more time to spend inside doing school assignments or looking at screens. We are aware that after these preschool years, children may not have as much access to nature as we may like, which is why we want to put so much focus on Nature Connection now, when they're young, so that they can carry that



connection with them throughout their school years.

It's somewhat ironic, then, that the term kindergarten actually stemmed from the idea that the role of the garden and the importance of nature in development should be emphasized. The term was phrased by German scholar Friedrich Froebel, who recognized the uniqueness of childhood, and believed that humans and nature are connected at a spiritual level, therefore outdoor games were a crucial component of early childhood development.

So why has so much of our educational system strayed so far from this idea? How did kindergartens, in essence, become just another grade?

In the early 20th century, American kindergartens moved from their own separate facilities into the school systems. This began the conflict that we see today: should kindergartens focus on social development or academic preparation? In the 1960's and 70's, references to academic instruction in kindergarten became more



common. Pilot projects were taking place that taught students to read at least 100 site words, and there was an increasing amount of experimentation in early childhood education through the federal Head Start program. In the mid-90s, state leaders changed course, driven by worries about illiteracy among California students. The Kindergarten Association continued to promote a developmental focus, but by the early 2000s it was communicating with members about how to live with the growing emphasis on academics.



So what next? How can we ensure that once children leave here, they are provided enough free outdoor play and nature connection to meet their

developmental needs? The good news is, lots of new research has come out on the importance of free outdoor play, which in turn is causing many schools (especially more progressive ones) to reassess their access to nature. I also encourage all of you, as you begin to think about your child's next steps in their schooling, to do some research on what your child's school has on offer. Perhaps they don't have as much outdoor time available during the day, in which case you may want to look into extended programs which offer some additional outdoor play.

Whatever the case may be, we know that the evidence is clear: children need ample time outdoors in order to stay happy and healthy. Not only does the physical movement and Vitamin D support their physical well-being, but being outdoors also improves executive functioning, socialization, and connection to our land. There is so much beauty surrounding us here, and children are innately drawn to it. Let's make sure we're seeking out ways to continue their love for the natural world.



Activities

Bead Making

Pumpkin Painting

Pouring

Small Building

Materials

Clay

Watercolor

Water, jars, funnels

Kappa blocks