

Using Nature to Nurture A Forest Based Emotional Support Intervention

Jay Schoenfield
Department of Social Work
Cal Poly Humboldt
Class of 2023

Community Need Statement

My community partner is the principal of Grant Elementary in the Eureka City School district, Rachel Brakeman. The need that my project addresses was established through discussions had between Rachel, myself and Grant Elementary's school social worker, Katie Allen.

It was established that Grant Elementary's nature trail, which is located on school grounds, was being underutilized in regards to the emotional regulatory techniques that were being implemented. The need for alternative spaces and techniques to assist students in regulating their emotions is prevalent, given that children and students are all unique in regards to what strategies and interventions are effective in assisting them throughout their school day.

Using nature as a support intervention creates opportunities for individuals to experience techniques that are rarely found in the dominant majority of westernized mental health interventions used in school settings.

This projects aims to support students who have not found success with the current emotional regulation techniques being implimented.

Acknowledgements

Rachel Brakeman, Katie Allen, Joshua Kieselhorst, Tanya Hunt, Pam Bowers, Grant Elementary Staff & Administration, Eureka City Schools, Justin Legge, Phoebe Celitti.

Nature Trail Images



Credibility Statement

Historically marginalized groups have faced years of biased ideologies that white privilege and colonial expansion has created. This is exemplified in the relationship between public school institutions and the assimilation of western culture. Acknowledging my own privilege in society is essential so that it does not interfere with my service delivery. Taking what I know about the benefits of nature and building upon that by learning from the student's interactions with the forest has helped guide this community project.

Method

- I created a guide sheet grounded in mindfulness through reviewing literature pertaining to forest bathing and the effects of nature exposure.
- Through discussions had with campus staff I formulated activities that would best support differing behavior and personality types.
- Began implementing the guide sheet with small groups of students on the nature trail.
- April 6th - Staff training on the nature trail guide sheet and associated activities.
- Guide sheet will be laminated and available to staff to use while on the nature trail.

Deliverable/Results

- Student Quotes:
 - "Going on the nature trail makes me think of good memories, like when I'm at my grandma's house."
 - "My fair fort looks like shreks house."
 - "That was fun, I always feel better after going on the nature trail."

QR Code for Guide Sheet



Theoretical Issues/Literature

- Children's cognitive performance, social skills, academic performance, self-efficacy, resilience and behaviors were significantly enhanced from immersive nature experiences.
- Human beings' physiological functions have been best adapted to natural settings.
 - Forest therapy decreased the levels of salivary cortisol, decreased the pulse rate and decreased blood pressure in individuals who were exposed to forest environments for 15 minutes.
- In response to elopement, identifying functionally-equivalent replacement behaviors (FERB) outside of the classroom is naturally reinforcing because they allow the student to leave an aversive situation in the classroom to be able to access a preferred experience.

References

- Merle, J. L., Cook, C. R., & Thayer, A. J. (2019). Flipping the script: Examining the feasibility and effectiveness of a school-based intervention protocol to address elopement behaviors in general education classrooms. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 64(2), 142–154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988x.2019.1700480>
- Mygind, L., Kjeldsted, E., Hartmeyer, R., Mygind, E., Bølling, M., & Bentsen, P. (2019). Mental, physical and social health benefits of immersive nature-experience for children and adolescents: A systematic review and quality assessment of the evidence. *Health & Place*, 58, 102136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.05.014>
- Song, C., Ikei, H., & Miyazaki, Y. (2016). Physiological Effects of Nature Therapy: A Review of the Research in Japan. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 13(8), 781. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph13080781>