Nature Maker Spaces: Engaging with Outdoor Loose Parts
Association of Children’s Museums—Interactivity 2016

Session Presenters
Sheri Cifaldi-Morrill, Stepping Stones Museum for Children (moderator)
Tobey Eugenio, Independent Consultant
Jeremiah Sazdanoff, Portland Children’s Museum
Amanda Wilkening, Hands On Children’s Museum, Olympia
Christina Chappell, EcoTarium
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Tobey Eugenio
Independent Consultant
What is a nature makerspace?
Authentic outdoor experiences for all ages.
Lots of large and small loose parts...
Complete mix of activity areas to activate all parts of the brain and body.
Opportunity to “tinker, wonder, and investigate” as a curious and engaged learner.
Reach Advisors: Level of Engagement
“If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it.”

David Sobel
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Jeremiah Sazdanoff
Director of Museum Experience
Portland Children’s Museum
Outdoor Adventure

Portland Children’s Museum
Comprised of the Children’s Museum, Opal School, and the Museum Center for Learning

- 300,000 in annual attendance
- 7,500 member families
- 21,674 sq. ft of total exhibit space
- 1.3 acres in Outdoor Adventure
Outdoor Adventure transformed more than 1.3 acres of previously inaccessible land around the Museum into a remarkable outdoor play space. Outdoor Adventure opened on Earth Day 2014 and instantly became one of our most beloved exhibits!
Designed by a team of education experts, based on their extensive observations of kids at their best, Outdoor Adventure welcomes the whole child—mind, body, and spirit—to embrace a world of exploration and discovery.
Four Major Catalysts to Build Outdoor Adventure:

1) Strong belief that all children need to get outside and play
2) Realized there were limited opportunities for large gross motor movement within the Museum.
3) Wanted to disrupt some of the parental hovering we saw inside the Museum and provide more opportunities for safe risk-taking
4) Wanted to give patrons a “sunny day” reason to come to the Museum
Outdoor Adventure FAQ’s:

• Took 5 years to design and 6 months to complete construction

• Total Cost $2.46 M

• Certified as a Gold Backyard Habitat by the Audubon Society

Thank you!
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Amanda Wilkening
Art Studio & Visitor Engagement Manager
Hands On Children’s Museum
Hands On Children’s Museum
Olympia WA

- Olympia population 49,000; Thurston County 263,000
- 299,000 visitors annually; 100,000 visitors served through Free & Reduced Programs
• Downtown Olympia on the waterfront of Budd Bay Inlet, the southernmost tip of Puget Sound
• Eastern edge of the temperate rainforest
• Public plaza with reclaimed water stream
• 28,000 square feet indoors, half acre outdoors
• Emphasis on life in the Pacific Northwest, natural materials and lots of light
Free Play
Driftwood Forts, Beach, Dig Pit, Water Play
Staffed Activities
Children’s Garden, Mudpie
Mondays, Naturalist Cabin
Tinkering Tenets

- Merge Science, Art & Technology (with the Outdoors!)
- Reinvent old technologies (and discover new ones)
- Use familiar materials in unfamiliar ways
- Embrace your tools
- Seek real world examples everywhere
- Create rather than consume
- Put yourself in messy, noisy & sometimes dangerous situations

From The Art of Tinkering by Karen Wilkenson & Mike Petrich
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Christina Chappell
Manager of Education
EcoTarium
EcoTarium Snapshot
A science and nature museum with interactive exhibits, 55 acre property, natural history collection, live animal collection & planetarium in Worcester, MA

- 60,000 square foot museum
- 40,000 square foot Nature Explore® Outdoor Exhibit
- 145,000 yearly visitors
- 2,100-2,200 members
Opened
August 20, 2014

12 Interactive Play Areas:
Building, Climbing and Crawling, Dirt Digging, Eagle Nest, Fox Den, Gathering Area, Messy Materials, Music and Movement, Nature Art, Sand Digging, Open Area, Water Play
Opportunities

- Transformed Playground Area
- Popular with Guests
- New Funding Opportunities
- Flexible Outdoor Program/Event Space
Challenges

- Water management
- Staffing
- Consumables
- Chaperoning of older children and groups
- Guest Preparedness
- Program Promotion
What We’re Learning...
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Time to Play!
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Questions?
Comments?
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