Commitment

We are grateful for the opportunity to annually renew our NatureExplore certification, as the process helps us maintain focus on continued improvement. As a campus-based demonstration and laboratory program, we have a responsibility to model best practices in our community, including connecting children with the natural world. Our efforts focus on commitment to 3 “big ideas”

- Sustainability & ecological responsibility
- Loose parts play
- Collaborations within and external to our campus

The following slides share highlights of our work in 2014-2015 on these ideas
ECDC 40th Anniversary


As part of our celebrations, during the year we hosted a 3-part film/discussion series about the value of play, focusing especially on the research about play and brain development, the importance of connecting children with nature, and the role of risk in development of judgment and decision-making.
University students participating in the National Service Day came to our program to do an experimental installation so that we could pursue our interest in vertical container gardening.
The New “Big” Garden

We partnered with our university’s Office of Sustainability to participate in Boeing Corporation’s Farm to School initiative. This grant program provided funds that transformed our existing garden space into a thoughtfully planned, multi-tier sustainable garden with both annual and perennial plantings. Not only will our children enjoy and work in it for years to come, but it will serve as a teaching garden for students and educators in our community.
The bigger and better rock pond

- As the Geology Department continues to send us boxes of rocks, we had to enlarge the rock pond to accommodate.
- The children spend many, many hours sorting them, using rocks for pretend play, painting or coloring them with chalk, and often just hauling or carrying them around.
- They have become an indispensable part of our loose parts play.
Repurposing tree cookies

We love our tree cookies, and one particular feature especially – they decompose! Besides the value of examining the very interesting funguses that grow on them, as they break apart, rather than throw them out, we let the children find other uses for them. They have become very popular as “outdoor blocks,” stepping stones, game pieces for “big checkers” and “food” in the mud kitchen.
Learning about our ecosystems

- We invited rangers from the Center for Birds of Prey, who brought adult and baby birds of prey and helped the children understand their role in our local ecosystem and the fragility of their environment.

- Scientists at the university’s Grice Marine Laboratory also again brought their “touch” tank with local salt-water animals for the children to handle.
2015 Remida Day

Remida Day is an annual family event at our center inspired by the community activities in Reggio Emilia, Italy that focus on repurposing and recycling materials in interesting and aesthetic ways. For our 5th Annual celebration, graduate students from the EDEE 613 Curriculum and Development in ECE class helped the children collect egg cartons, popsicle sticks, old CD’s, twigs and pine straw, bottle caps, and fabric scraps to make both take-home and stay-at-school “objets d’art”
The kids’ dirt-pile

The 4/5K kids dug such a big hole looking for dirt to use for mud kitchen play that we had to go get more. Our Grounds crew keeps a large sand pile in the parking lot adjacent to our playground (for sandbagging against flooding) They now allow the children to take as much as they want/need for their projects and we have observed the transporting of said sand, to be a very worthwhile activity in and of itself – it requires planning, teamwork, and a lot of effort.
2015 Boeing Service Day

The Boeing Corporation again partnered with us as part of their employee volunteer program. 20 volunteers spent a Saturday (on the hottest day of the summer) erecting a new garden storage shed, assembling two new picnic tables, painting and re-staining outdoor structures, and building us an adobe “cobb bench”
2014-15 Professional Development

In addition to hosting our 3-part film/lecture series on play, our program hosted two NatureExplore workshops as part of the 4th Annual College of Charleston Early Childhood Summit Conference, June 18-19, 2015.

We were able to bring (for the second time) Julie to stay in one of our on-campus historic guest houses, and sharing our program with her and the things we are working on while she was here.

Documenting Children's Learning with Nature workshop was presented from **1-3:45 p.m. on Thursday, June 18**. The Nature-Inspired Indoor Environments workshop took place from **1-3:45 p.m. on Friday, June 19**.

Members of our staff also attended sessions at the Association for Constructivist Teaching Conference in Charleston December 2014, MEPI (Montessori) Conference in Litchfield, SC, January 2015 and the U.S. Coalition Play Conference at Clemson University, Clemson, SC. February 2015

Our staff delivered or facilitated the following activities as part of our role as advocates for outdoor education:

- Panel discussions:
  - Jaruszewicz, C. (December 4, 2014). Co-chaired community panel discussions with Memminger Elementary School Curriculum Coordinator Katie Houser at Association for Constructivist Teaching Annual Conference on developing community partnerships.