

N.E. Miles ECDC College of Charleston

2016 RECERTIFICATION APPLICATION

NATURE EXPLORE



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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 2015-2016 on these ideas

New Equipment/Features



▶ We replaced three old child benches with teak – expensive, but particularly sturdy in our subtropical climate, so they will last forever and they are really beautiful and compatible with our environment! We have a local vendor who works with us on these and we are working out an agreement with him for wood turnings, scraps, etc. to use in our outdoor art area!

New Equipment/Features

We had a local vendor build a new outdoor art easel for us and we relocated/replaced our metal balance beam with the Nature Explore cedar version (it is awaiting permanent installation). We were happy to take advantage of a slight slope to be able to order the “crooked” one.

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New Equipment/Features

We finally gave up trying to grow anything in the 'sitting wall' area, because of sandy soil, super-dry conditions in summer and winter, and heavy kid traffic. So we "caved" and installed artificial turf to this area, as it is very popular with the children.



New Equipment/Features: Mini Mud-Kitchen

Our original mud kitchen (pictured here) primarily serves the 4/5K children, but after experimenting with mud activities during summer session, we realized the 2/3 year old classes really wanted one too. It is currently "under construction" but will be essentially a smaller version of the one we already have and should be done by the time school starts again in the fall 2016.

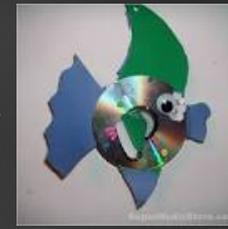


Learning about our ecosystems

Scientists at the university's Grice Marine Laboratory bring their "touch" tank to our outdoor space every spring with local salt-water animals for the children to talk about and handle



2016 Remida/Play 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. This year we revisited favorite activities, including "urban street art" – (rumors persist that the infamous artist Banksy made a visit to Charleston not too long ago) and our kids LOVE painting the fence.

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“Red Clay” Play

South Carolina has distinct eco-regions with very different soil structures in each. One of our teachers is from what we call the “upstate,” where a deep red clay soil is common there, but not something our children are familiar with here in the LowCountry. So periodically, we provide this unique soil to children, talk about where it comes from and then they “process” it in the mud kitchen – sifting, sieving, making slurry, etc.



Routines

We've realized that routines are as important to outdoor life as in the classroom. Our kids love to sweep the sidewalks, clear water from the play structures after a rain, help with raking and weeding. They especially love watering all our plantings.



Pods & Loose Parts



Our kids play all the time with organic materials, this year “pods” of all kinds were particularly popular and a regular feature of mud kitchen and loose parts play



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The Garden

The garden continues to be a focal point of outdoor life at ECDC. It has turned out to be a place for quiet conferencing with friends, a place to be alone when you need some quiet time, and very productive – especially winter crops this year and early summer blueberries!



2015-16 Professional Development

Our lead staff delivered or participated in the following conferences to continue developing our role as advocates for outdoor education

- ▶ White, M. & Gates, P. (April, 2016). Loose Parts: Re-imagining Outdoor Play Spaces from a Constructivist Perspective. U.S. Coalition on Play Annual Conference, Clemson University.
- ▶ Attendance at:
 - ▶ Annual NAEYC conference Orlando, FL November, 2015
 - ▶ Annual N4C Conference (National Coalition of Campus Children's Centers) Hilton Head, SC March, 2016
 - ▶ Annual MEPI (Montessori) Conference, January, 2016
 - ▶ 5th Early Childhood Summit @ College of Charleston, June 2016