

Flourishing in Nature

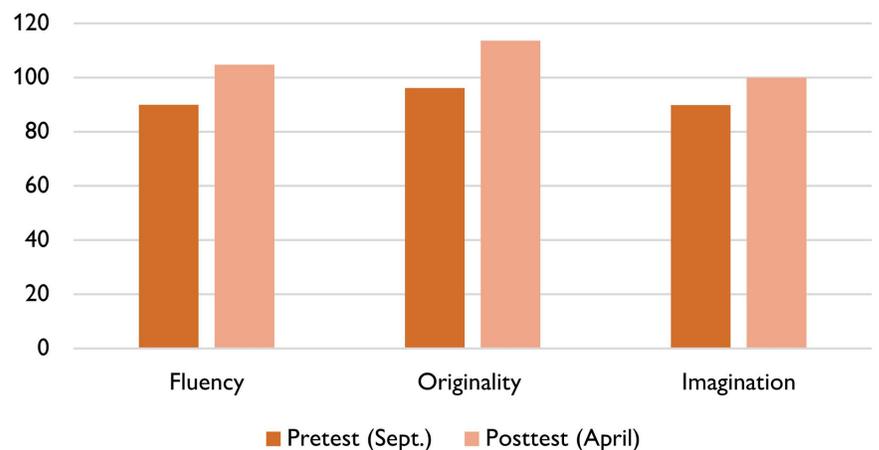
Investigating the Impact of Nature Preschools on Young Children's Creative Thinking

Overview. Creative thinkers are active learners who recognize patterns, solve problems, combine information in new ways, challenge assumptions, make decisions and seek new ideas. Creative thinking is valuable and necessary in society today and in the development of solutions to environmental issues. However, there is growing concern that early childhood settings are being pressured to narrowly focus on academic skills, thus limiting opportunities for young children to develop creative thinking. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of nature preschools on the development of creative thinking in young children. Eighty-six children participated in this study during the 2016-2017 school year (75 from four nature preschools and 11 from a non-nature preschool, which served as the baseline). Three dimensions of creative thinking were assessed using the Thinking Creatively in Action and Movement (TCAM) test.



Image Credit: Wind Ridge Schoolhouse, MN

Creativity Growth in Nature Preschoolers



Results. The results of the t-tests indicate significant growth ($p < 0.001$) in all three dimensions of creative thinking for the nature preschool participants. In contrast, there was not a significant growth in fluency, originality, and imagination for the non-nature preschool participants.

Conclusion. Results of this exploratory study suggest nature play may be positively influencing young children's creative thinking, beyond what might occur through attending a non-nature, play-based preschool. These results help demonstrate that nature preschools and nature play can play a significant role in the development of valuable skills in young children and toward the development of citizens who are prepared to creatively address environmental and sustainability issues.



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