

## Research Summary

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***My research explores the relationship between early experiences of children (ages 0–5) with nature and their later connections with the environment as adults.***

The project seeks to study the extent to which various early childhood experiences before the age of five, such as nature preschools, outdoor free play, family outings, etc., correlate with later interest in or active stewardship of the environment.

By compiling a base of research from educational learning theory, the experience of early childhood educators in both formal and informal settings, and recent developments in the fields of developmental psychology and neuroscience, I seek to compile a framework of best practices that:

- builds a case for the impact of early experiences with nature and encourages youth-serving organizations to increase their focus on environmental programs for children 0–5 and their families
- provides suggestions and links to resources to help schools, museums, and other youth-serving organizations deliver the greatest impact for their nature programs.

The project will include research on:

- theories of early education, as they relate to how children develop attitudes about nature and the environment as a result of early experiences (Piaget, Montessori, and others)
- recent research in developmental psychology, neuroscience, and how specific activities at certain ages promote or hinder connectedness to the environment
- practical knowledge on how to provide positive early learning experiences with the environment, from teachers who have experimented with alternative approaches

The goal of this work is to investigate the impact of early experiences with nature. Assuming a positive correlation, I seek to support youth-serving organizations with resources and documentation that allows them to help more children develop *early* and *deep* connections with nature and the environment, so that these children will later become effective agents of change as adults.

- *Early* connections, because it's easier to develop strong, positive habits early in life. Changing a person's preferences during the teen years and beyond is both more difficult and less probable.
- *Deep* connections, because the broad societal responses needed to address our global environmental challenges require long-term action by deeply committed individuals.