

Exploring Niagara's Naturalized Playgrounds

Early Childhood Community Development Centre Executive Director, Lorrey Ariel Bonilla, and Early Learning and Child Care Program Consultant, Natalie Lane, along with 29 participants embarked on a *Journey of Dreaming, Designing and Delightful Mud Kitchens*.

The bus tour included several inspirational playgrounds of early learning and child care programs across Niagara Region. All the outdoor spaces have unfolded through an exciting project developed through a partnership with Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds and the Early Childhood Community Development Centre, funded through Niagara Region Children's Services.



And they're off... This beautiful tour started at the Early Childhood Community Development Centre where participants are shown above with "swag bag" in hand.



Fort Erie Regional Child Care Centre

Pictured above: Participants of the bus tour marveled at this invitation to explore art in a natural setting with authentic materials displayed. This is a perfect example of how "Children use the language of art to construct meaning and understanding." Pelo (2017)

The children of Fort Erie Regional Child Care Centre took an interest in incorporating the element of fire in their imaginative play through conversations related to camping trips and roasted marshmallows.

A Child's World- Woodlawn Early Learning Program



As shown in the photos above, A Child's World – Woodlawn has found many ways to enjoy the beauty of nature present in their naturalized playgrounds. From Wacky posts with string used for obstacle courses and testing agility to a well used inverted tree for challenging boundaries and engaging in conversation, there are many opportunities for exploring nature's wonders.

Fun fact: Being outdoors can be very beneficial to normalizing sleep schedules, improving blood pressure, and boosting serotonin levels.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Exposure to the outdoors has a positive effect on mood and reduces feelings of anger and anxiety. – Juster et al. (2004), Burdette & Whittaker (2005), Kuo & Sullivan (2001)
- Nature-based play, rich in stimuli, allows children to rely on their senses to make sense of the world around them. – Forest and Nature Schools Canada (2014)

- Once children develop the concepts and skills of working with fire they develop long term attitudes that stay with them for life. – Claire Warden (2013)
- Nature Literacy is the ability to learn from and respond to direct experiences of nature – Sobel 2013

Rosalind Blauer Centre for Child Care

As shown to the right, creativity was inspired and shared to provide an enlightening experience.

Rosalind Blauer Centre for Child Care were kind enough to host the participants of the bus tour for a beautiful lunch while surrounded by nature.

This sparked conversation about our time outdoors and many ways to embrace it.

The centre has found ways to provide new experiences to children by setting up invitations to play and provocations for learning within their playgrounds. Participants were given the opportunity to explore them while touring the breathtaking spaces.



A Child's World- Glenridge Hill Child Care Centre

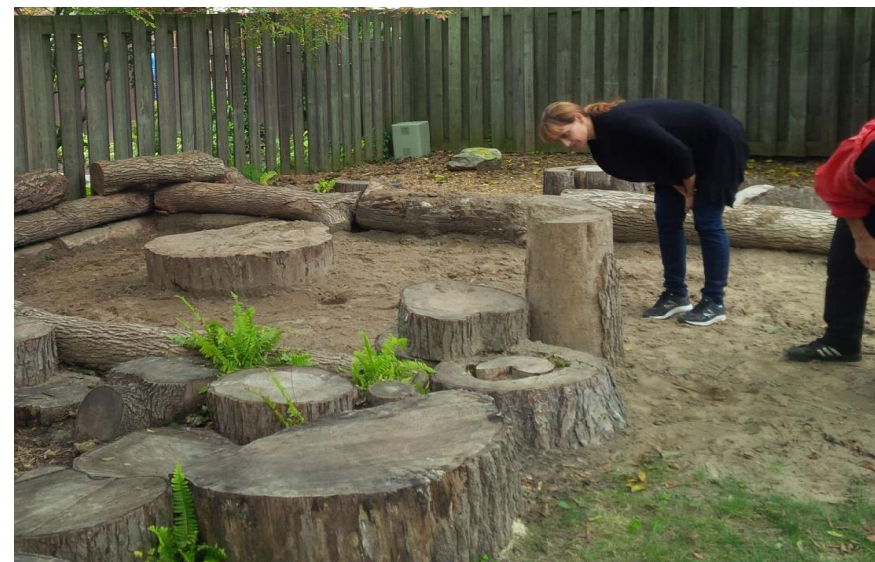
Natural loose parts prove to be very valuable in play at A Child's World- Glenridge Hill where many were displayed and explored using all five senses. From bark and twigs to tree fruit and nuts, there's no telling the adventures that await in their new naturalized playground!



"Loose parts offer almost numberless variables, prompting children to create their own stories. In their study of loose parts on the playground, Jim Dempsey and Eric Strickland assert that loose parts encourage children to manipulate their environment (1993)" – Loose Parts Inspiring Play in Young Children (2015)

North End Co-Operative Preschool

The tour ended at North-End Co-Operative Preschool where observation and inquiry led the way to a beautiful and intriguing playground. Although the program only runs half a day, the preschool chose to naturalize their playground



highlighting it as an important part of the children's day. The pictures shown highlight a community effort and distinctive touch to a wonderful playground.

Thank you...

Adrienne Jugley, Commissioner of Community Services, and Darlene Edgar, Director of Niagara Region Children's Services, were both in attendance showing their support for the Naturalized Playgrounds and all their uniqueness. We thank Niagara Region for funding this innovative project.

