

live space

for anything about early childhood

A magazine for teachers and parents of young children produced and distributed by Childspace Early Childhood Institute

Issue no. 21 • Spring 2010

ISSN: 1177-1224

new **S.K.I.P**
parenting column



Rusty Keeler
Swarm build

Alison Stephenson
What do children bring to curriculum?

Lesley Ottey
Sow & Grow: gardening with children

Debi & Mike Grillo:

A Child's Touch

'A Child's Touch...' is located in the beautiful state of Colorado in the U.S. We are fortunate to have the Rocky Mountains in our backyard. Our school is located in Thornton, which is a busy city located north of Denver. The school property is surrounded by homes built in the 1950's. When we purchased the property in 1989, it was a 35-year-old church that sat on 2¼ acres. The two small church buildings and the grounds were in poor repair. Still, we were very excited about the potential of this property. We had started ACT as a faith-based ministry in 1977 and knew we had finally found a new location to call home. So began the plan to further the Lord's ministry and create an environment that would be special for children.

The school has grown over the years. Three additional buildings have joined the two old church buildings. The empty field is now home to 14 playgrounds. In addition we have five

School. May all who enter this garden remember that children are our future.' This area has a large waterfall that creates a beautiful sound that resonates throughout our natural play spaces. We will eventually have painting easels for the children to create their masterpieces as the water tumbles in the background.

Last year we converted an area into a 'loose parts playground.' The idea originated after a trip to Scotland where we had a chance to visit Claire Warden's Nature Kindergarten. It was amazing to see the children interact with nature and the special programme she has created. Although we could not duplicate Claire's backyard we did create a play space where children move rocks and logs and climb small, natural wood structures. New Zealand has driftwood from the beach and Colorado has aspen trees. We used fallen aspen trees to create bridges and moveable parts. The children work together to move large branches and create structures. Their imagination keeps



large separate buildings in our play area. The Woodworking Barn, Inventor's House, Discovery Station, General Store and Creation Station are all interactive buildings for the children. It's like having our own children's museum on site.

However, we have always been comfortable in nature and we wanted to bring that environment to the children. With this in mind, we built our first natural playground 18 years ago. It has large rocks surrounded by trees, a pond and a beautiful waterfall. There is also a small hiking trail through trees and bushes. The children can use their imaginations as they walk through our version of a forest. This area has a real log cabin with interactive displays dealing with insects, mammals and reptiles.

The second natural play space, the Columbine Memorial Park, was added in the year 2000 in memory of the Columbine High School shooting. The plaque at the entrance of the Garden reads: 'In special memory of the students and staff of Columbine High

them very busy!

The test natural playground, our Nature Outdoor Classroom (NOC), has been a work in progress for over a year. After purchasing the house next door to the school, we renovated the lower portion of the house into a staff lounge. The upper floor was completely remodeled and now has a new kitchen, offices and bedrooms. However, the most exciting part of the purchase was the old round-backyard, with two old sheds and concrete pads. We reduced the space to bare ground and began to design and build a unique new natural play space, combining nature and science. The first chore was to bring in 22 tons of soil. We wanted to create hills and not have a totally flat environment. The hills now overlook many different interactive areas. There is a large mud pit with two massive flat rocks in front for making mud pies.

Next to the mud pit is the 40-foot long water display feature. There are four different types of water gates that control

the stream flow while the water recirculates through a sump pump for continuous flow. The large planters on each side of the water feature will be planted with Virginia Creepers. These will eventually enclose the entire overhead area with a plant canopy.

The most striking feature in the NOC is the large hill that sits about 5-feet above the ground. Quite a vantage point for young

will encourage families to get outdoors and enjoy nature together in their own time.

ACT staff, along with our tractor, built the entire project. Doing the work 'in-house' saved on the cost of the project and allowed us the flexibility to change and alter the environment as it was being built. We involved our parents and staff in the project



children! It has a tower that will connect a pulley system to the tree house. Below the hill is a "cave." It is 5 feet wide and 10 feet long and built into the side of the hill. The smaller hill is home to the log roll. The children work hard to push small logs up the hill. After reaching the top the children ring the dinner bell and roll the logs down the chute.

The tree house is 14 feet tall and has two levels. Unfortunately, it has no large trees to support the structure, but we use our imagination and call it the tree house. The lower level has outdoor instruments and the upper level is where the pulley system will be connected to our large hill.

Other features include a worm box, climbing wall, tree cookie block area and a large number of tree stumps and rock formations. These are the basic foundation structures for the NOC. We hope we have created an environment that will stimulate the children's imagination yet surround them in God's beauty. Maybe this area

through a 'workday' and used their ideas and suggestions to create the Nature Outdoor Classroom. It is our hope that all the ACT nature areas help children feel comfortable in a natural setting. A place only limited by their imagination! 'A Child's Touch...' is a Christian school founded in 1977. You can find more information about the school and take a virtual tour at www.achildstouch.com



Debi & Mike Grillo started "A Child's Touch..." together in 1977 and have been married for 32 years. We live in Arvada, Colorado. We still love working at the school and creating unique spaces for children. We have two grown children and a grand-dog! We love spending time outdoors, and travelling. We also love visiting other centers and children's museums to get new ideas.

new **Childspace resources**

Face painting step-by-step

Recyclopaedia giveaway offer

