Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Education in Educational Practice

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Nature-based Learning Inspires Joy and Curiosity in K-2 Students in St. Louis as School Nature Leaders and Environmental Partners Work Together

Date: July 7, 2022
Time: 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Place: Remote

Abstract
This study focused on what values teachers saw in nature-based learning, what outcomes they saw for their students, and what factors have enabled them to do nature-based learning. This explanatory sequential mixed-methods study looked at nature-based learning in St. Louis elementary schools with kindergarten through second-grade students. We used purposive sampling to choose six schools to examine further through case studies. We then conducted interviews with 8 teachers on qualities of nature-based learning captured in 12 words. We identified five themes from our interviews and observations: Every School Needs a Nature Champion, Community Bridges in Nature-Based Learning, The Magic in the Green Spaces, How Do You Get Kids Outside, and What Happens When Kids Get Outside? We propose a pyramid of nature-based learning derived from these teacher interviews that illustrate key aspects of student outcomes. In addition, we used a map that showed the amount of green space surrounding each school and we examined the role that available green space plays in schools offering nature-based learning. We also examined the relationship between green space surrounding a school and the economic make-up of the students in the school, as to identify inequities in opportunities for nature-based learning in the St. Louis area. We found a significant but very small negative relationship between free and reduced lunch percentages of these schools and their available green space. The idea of a school nature leader was a particularly important and fairly new finding in the research on nature-based learning. That school nature leader also needs to be able to leverage community partnerships to assist their efforts. Young elementary school students benefit in many ways from nature-based learning, and those benefits need to be touted to those in decision-making positions for schools and celebrated by all of us.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
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