The Greensboro Bog Garden: An Opportunity to Defy “Nature Deficit Disorder”

Tara F. Strefling & David P. Hildreth
Education Studies, Guilford College

The nature of childhood has changed. There’s not much nature in it. American childhood has moved indoors during the last two decades, taking a mental and physical toll on today’s kids. The negative impact of decreased time outdoors includes a doubling of the childhood obesity rate... as well as declining creativity, concentration and social skills— The National Wildlife Federation

Today, kids 8-16 years old devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes using entertainment media in a typical day (more than 53 hours a week). (Kaiser Family Foundation)

Introduction

- The Greensboro Bog Garden (GBG) is a seven acre site located in the Starmount Farms neighborhood of Greensboro, NC. It was established in 1987 by Greensboro Beautiful Inc., in conjunction with the City of Greensboro Parks and Recreation Dept., and is a popular outdoor venue spot for the community. The Bog Garden is supported by the City of Greensboro, Greensboro Beautiful, and many Bog Buddies and supporters.
- Even with rich opportunities such as the GBG available nation wide, current research (Loo, 2005; Burdette & Whitaker, 2005) indicates that children, in particular, are not spending outdoor, experiential learning opportunities. For example, Hofferth and Staubug (2000) report that their child age three to 12 spend one percent of their time outdoors and 27 percent of their time watching television. Loo (2005) coined this phenomenon “nature deficit disorder.”
- Given the aforementioned concern that individuals are not spending enough time in nature, we are interested in who frequents the GBG, how often, and why. In particular, we hope to discern why children visit the GBG and what it is they learned from this experience.
- This study examined who attended the Greensboro Bog Garden over a five week period, summer 2013. During this time 248 individuals were surveyed. Clear trends emerged from inspection of collected data.

Methods

Methodology:

- The survey used in this investigation was created to determine how often and why individuals visit the GBG. As to purrants to children (see ages identified below), what was learned/deemed as interesting from attending the GBG was also investigated.
- The survey targeted the following three possibilities of prospective GBG patron: 1. Adults (individuals who visited the GBG without children present) 2. Parents (individuals who visited the GBG, with children present) 3. Children (individuals who came with parents, broken into four age groups: 0-6, 7-12, 13-15, and 16-18). Note: this age delineation was meant to best model the typical age groups for elementary, middle, and high school (+) students
- A total of 248 individuals were surveyed for this study.
- Questions asked in the survey centered around 1) why one come to the GBG, 2) how often, 3) what one did as a child in their free time, and 4) for children only, what was learned from visiting the GBG?

Survey Results

Parents (N ~ 36)

- When asked what is the main reason for coming to the GBG, 31% said that they come to the GBG to bring their kids, while 22% said they come because they enjoy nature.
- When asked how often they come to the GBG, 33% said at least once a week, while 33% said it was their first time.
- When asked what did they do outside as a child, 33% indicated they were just “out in the woods” or “in nature”, 18% spoke to playing with friends and 13% specifically alluded to “using my imagination”.
- Off the parents surveyed, 65% said their own children would play outside without encouragement while 35% said they had to encourage their children to play outside.

Adults (N ~132)

- When asked what is the main reason why they come to the GBG, 31% said it was because they enjoy nature, 26% said to walk and/or for intentional exercise.
- Regarding how often they visited the GBG, 35% indicated that this was their first time, 32% said they come once or more a week.
- When asked what did they do outside as a child, 27% responded that they were always outside in the woods and playing in nature, 21% specifically affirmed to riding their bikes outside with friends.

Children (N ~ 88)

- 54% of the children indicated that they wanted to come to the GBG to experience/interact with the animals.
- For the children surveyed, 83% stated that the coolest/most engaging thing they saw while visiting the GBG were the animals.
- 60% of the parents indicated they learned something new about nature from attending the GBG.

Results

Survey Results

Parents (N ~ 36)

- When asked what is the main reason for coming to the GBG, 31% said that they come to the GBG to bring their kids, while 22% said they come because they enjoy nature.
- When asked how often they come to the GBG, 33% said at least once a week, while 33% said it was their first time.
- When asked what did they do outside as a child, 33% indicated they were just “out in the woods” or “in nature”, 18% spoke to playing with friends and 13% specifically alluded to “using my imagination”.
- Off the parents surveyed, 65% said their own children would play outside without encouragement while 35% said they had to encourage their children to play outside.

Adults (N ~132)

- When asked what is the main reason why they come to the GBG, 31% said it was because they enjoy nature, 26% said to walk and/or for intentional exercise.
- Regarding how often they visited the GBG, 35% indicated that this was their first time, 32% said they come once or more a week.
- When asked what did they do outside as a child, 27% responded that they were always outside in the woods and playing in nature, 21% specifically affirmed to riding their bikes outside with friends.

Children (N ~ 88)

- 54% of the children indicated that they wanted to come to the GBG to experience/interact with the animals.
- For the children surveyed, 83% stated that the coolest/most engaging thing they saw while visiting the GBG were the animals.
- 60% of the children surveyed said they learned something new about nature from attending the GBG.

Conclusions/ Implications for Further Research

- For children, experiencing/interacting with the animals at the GBG is a highlight. In fact, there was a 30% gain in the children’s excitement about the animals after visiting the GBG.
- 60% of children indicated that they did learn something new from their experiences at the GBG.
- For parents, 31% said the GBG to encourage their children to nature.
- 92% of the parents/adults surveyed indicated that they valued outdoor time and spent a majority of their time watching television. Loo (2005) coined this phenomena “nature deficit disorder.”
- Given the aforementioned concern that individuals are not spending enough time in nature, we are interested in who frequents the GBG, how often, and why. In particular, we hope to discern why children visit the GBG and what it is they learned from this experience.
- This study examined who attended the Greensboro Bog Garden over a five week period, summer 2013. During this time 248 individuals were surveyed. Clear trends emerged from inspection of collected data.

Methodology:

- The survey used in this investigation was created to determine how often and why individuals visit the GBG. As to purrants to children (see ages identified below), what was learned/deemed as interesting from attending the GBG was also investigated.
- The survey targeted the following three possibilities of prospective GBG patron: 1. Adults (individuals who visited the GBG without children present) 2. Parents (individuals who visited the GBG, with children present) 3. Children (individuals who came with parents, broken into four age groups: 0-6, 7-12, 13-15, and 16-18). Note: this age delineation was meant to best model the typical age groups for elementary, middle, and high school (+) students
- A total of 248 individuals were surveyed for this study.
- Questions asked in the survey centered around 1) why one come to the GBG, 2) how often, 3) what one did as a child in their free time, and 4) for children only, what was learned from visiting the GBG?

Survey Results

Parents (N ~ 36)

- When asked what is the main reason for coming to the GBG, 31% said that they come to the GBG to bring their kids, while 22% said they come because they enjoy nature.
- When asked how often they come to the GBG, 33% said at least once a week, while 33% said it was their first time.
- When asked what did they do outside as a child, 33% indicated they were just “out in the woods” or “in nature”. 18% spoke to playing with friends and 13% specifically alluded to “using my imagination”.
- Off the parents surveyed, 65% said their own children would play outside without encouragement while 35% said they had to encourage their children to play outside.

Adults (N ~132)

- When asked what is the main reason why they come to the GBG, 31% said it was because they enjoy nature, 26% said to walk and/or for intentional exercise.
- Regarding how often they visited the GBG, 35% indicated that this was their first time, 32% said they come once or more a week.
- When asked what did they do outside as a child, 27% responded that they were always outside in the woods and playing in nature, 21% specifically affirmed to riding their bikes outside with friends.

Children (N ~ 88)

- 54% of the children indicated that they wanted to come to the GBG to experience/interact with the animals.
- For the children surveyed, 83% stated that the coolest/most engaging thing they saw while visiting the GBG were the animals.
- 60% of the children surveyed said they learned something new about nature from attending the GBG.

Literature Cited/ Acknowledgements


Special Thanks: We would like to thank everyone associated with the Greensboro Bog Garden and Greensboro Beautiful, especially Jen Brooks. For all the patrons to the GBG who volunteered to be interviewed, we are appreciative of your time and insights. Finally, we would like to recognize Guilford College, the Office of UU Research, and the CPPS for supporting this investigation.

Figure 1: Child interview with T. Strefling.