The Significance of Outdoor Environments for Dual Sensory Impaired Children

For many individuals, experiencing nature, whether it is through gardening or a nature walk, elicits a calming or centering experience (Marcus & Barnes). This human response to nature can be observed in the very young to the very old and can even be experienced by those with sensory impairment (Rodiek & Schwarz, 2003). Therefore, it is the goal of this paper to examine the significance of outdoor environments for dual sensory impaired children. A brief history examines findings of various research studies that show physical, emotional and spiritual healing qualities have been found when experiencing nature (Tyson, 1998) and the value of human centered design (Day, 1990). The importance of access-to-nature, even through views of nature, is examined (Ulrich, 1984) as well as the implication that natural light can have in creating a healthy living environment (Hobday, 2006). It is suggested that various outdoor environments have therapeutic effects on dual sensory impaired children. A key focus is the development of gardens to provide a canvas for a horticulture therapy program (Perkins School for the Blind, 1998). Additional outdoor environments for dual sensory impaired children are proposed including a play ground, activity pergola, nature trail, water features, open grassy lawns, private contemplative areas, a swing, sand box, fire pit, flow forms, social gathering areas, picnic bench, hammock, rock garden, and bird baths and feeders (Messervy, 1995; Dannenmaier, 2008). Implications of impaired occupants are addressed by discussing issues of accessibility, organization and communication throughout the design of the outdoor environments (Perkins School for the Blind, 1998; Imrie, 2006). Successful outcomes of the application of outdoor environments for dual sensory impaired children are presented which include skills such as sensory training, way finding, impulse and stress management (Mattson, 1992; Marcus & Barnes). Through the design of appropriate outdoor environments, dual sensory impaired children can have access-to-nature and receive the numerous healing benefits that have been found to be associated with nature interaction.
REFERENCES


