

OCP 2 YEAR REPORT: 2009-2010 (6-10-15)

Santa Barbara County Outdoor Classroom
Project 2009-2010 project report

an Orfalea Initiative

Preschool Food

& Healthy Habits



Transforming the Practice of Early Childhood Education Outdoors

Two Year Project Report
2009–2010



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Project Summary

The goals of the two-year Orfalea Fund Outdoor Classroom Project in Santa Barbara County approved in Fall 2008 were to:

- Increase the quantity, quality and benefit of **outdoor experience** for young children in Santa Barbara County early care and education centers.
- Provide for **increased physical activity, hands-on learning**, social skill development through peer interaction, and multifaceted approaches to cognitive development that maximize children's success.
- **Educate early care and education professionals** on the value of outdoor environments and activities, and assist them in cultivating both at their individual sites.

The primary activities of the Project have been program and site evaluation, design consultation, and teacher training. Over the two-year course of the Project, 144 (83%) of all child care centers in Santa Barbara County have participated. Project activities are implemented by Eric Nelson, Project Director, and Theresa Embry, Project Coordinator, with overall direction provided by Adrianna Foss. Through these activities, the practice of Early Care and Education outdoors in Santa Barbara County has been substantially enhanced and transformed.

The Outdoor Classroom Project is a critical quality improvement initiative that improves not only the quality of outdoor environments and programs, but the entire functioning of an ECE center. The engagement and communication skills teachers are taught, along with those of activity facilitation and support, transfer into everything that a teacher does. As a result, children's learning and skill development are improved throughout the program as well. As one administrator put it, *"When we implemented the Outdoor Classroom, the children did better both outdoors and indoors. They were more enthusiastic in their outdoor activity and when indoors were much better able to sit down and focus."*

Research emphasizes the importance of children being in an outdoor environment. The Outdoor Classroom's parent organization, the Child Educational Center in Pasadena, is participating in a national Qualitative Research Project as a certified Nature Explore Classroom. The Abstract from the report on the first year of the study (2010) concludes:

"Young children need time outdoors everyday, but that does not mean teachers sacrifice learning in order to make that happen. In fact, the outdoors can be a rich, stimulating learning environment for children. The skill development for children in the Nature Explore Classroom crosses all domains from language and literacy skills, to math and science to building relationships with peers and teachers. The role of the teacher in the outdoor classroom and

the strategies that support child-initiated learning plays a leading role in how children engage with materials, as well as with one another, and is a major factor in skill development.

The underlying structure and the characteristics of early childhood programs can enhance the quality of self-initiated experiences in the outdoor classroom. Early care and education programs must increase the opportunities for children to engage in child-initiated activities in the outdoor classroom, enhancing their experiences through a well-planned and rich environment, caring staff and a program philosophy that reflects these ideals.”



Starr King, Santa Barbara

Key Areas of Accomplishment

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COUNTY DELIVERY SYSTEM

From its initial presentation at a Santa Barbara County Child Care Planning Council meeting in February 2009, the Project has been effective in connecting with the Early Childhood community and exceeded its targets for number of centers reached.

PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Similar to the number of centers reached, the level of involvement and enthusiasm on the part of participants with the project has exceeded expectations. This has been reflected in the high number of participants, their feedback, their continued participation and the changes they have implemented.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Improvement in the design and condition of the outdoor play yards of the county's centers was the most immediate initial outcome of the Project and continues to be significant.

CENTER PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM CHANGE

As changes in yard design took hold, centers began to increase the amount of time children spent outdoors, while providing enriching outdoor activities and strengthening quality teacher practices.

ESTABLISHMENT OF QUALITY CRITERIA AND DEVELOPMENT OF A NETWORK OF MODEL CENTERS

The creation of achievement levels for a center's Outdoor Classroom provides an incentive to centers to achieve higher quality in their programs while also providing a means to evaluate the level of change. Through the achievement of Recognized and Demonstration site status for individual centers, a core group of centers providing leadership in the Outdoor Classroom Movement has been established.

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The development and implementation of the Outdoor Classroom Specialist training series (a total of 36 training hours) established a vital and effective mechanism for teachers' leadership development and a continuing on-site infrastructure in participating centers.

INVOLVEMENT WITH COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

Because of the success of the Outdoor Classroom Project, other child care efforts (such as First 5 and Green Care) have been incorporating the outdoor classroom criteria into their quality indicators and initiatives.

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM ENDURING IMPORTANCE

An important element in the Project's work has been not only the manifestation of change, but the creation of momentum that is continuing the impact of the Project's principles into 2011 and beyond.

CREATION OF A DELIVERY VEHICLE FOR INFORMATION, CONSULTATION AND TRAINING

A notable by-product of the Project has been the creation of a delivery vehicle by which other Orfalea messages such as Healthy Food Practices can be delivered.

2009–2010 Key Events

LARGE SCALE TRAININGS

Overview for Directors South and North County workshops.....	67 Attendees
Orientation Workshop for Centers South and North County.....	84 Attendees
Garden/Nutrition Workshop	78 Attendees
Specialist Series Level I Santa Barbara 2009 (three Saturdays, 18 hours total).....	89 Attendees
Demonstration/Recognition Site Directors Meeting	27 Attendees
Specialist Series Level I Santa Barbara 2010 (three weekdays, 18 hours total).....	51 Attendees
Specialist Series Level I Santa Maria 2010 (three Saturdays, 18 hours total).....	42 Attendees
Demonstration Site Network Santa Maria	13 Attendees
Demonstration Site Network Santa Barbara	27 Attendees
North County Tour of Recognized Centers	23 Attendees
SLO County Office of Education Outdoor Classroom Conference	45 Attendees
Specialist Series Level II Santa Barbara (three Saturdays, 18 hours total).....	68 Attendees
Fundraising for Your Outdoor Classroom Finance Workshop	34 Attendees

Note: *An additional 20 participants traveled to Los Angeles County Outdoor Classroom trainings to catch up with trainings they missed in Santa Barbara.*

LARGE AGENCY TRAININGS

Santa Barbara School District Child Development Leadership Workshop	23 Attendees
SBCEO State Preschools Lompoc	20 Attendees
Santa Barbara School District Child Development Teacher In-Service	88 Attendees
CAC Head Start In-service	140 Attendees
“Mud Play” Workshops for CAC Head Start Centers	120 Attendees
“Mud Play” Workshop for SBCEO	20 Attendees

ECE TEACHERS-IN-TRAINING

Allan Hancock ECE Students	20 attendees
SBCC ECE Students	29 attendees
SBCC ECE Students	30 attendees
SBCC ECE Students	25 attendees

CENTER-BASED TRAININGS – *numerous, available on request*

Project Details

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COUNTY DELIVERY SYSTEM The Outdoor Classroom Project made many effective steps in establishing itself in the community. It was introduced to ECE professionals in 2008 as the sole presenter at the annual Santa Barbara County Child Development Conference. In 2009, early meetings with First 5 Santa Barbara County and CAC Head Start paid off with early buy-in and awareness. Another step forward was made by the selection of Theresa Embry as the Project Coordinator. Theresa was well known and respected from her tenure most recently at the Orfaea Children's Center at UCSB. From its beginning, the Project has been effective in connecting with the Early Childhood community.

CULTIVATION OF PARTICIPANT INVOLVEMENT AND

ENGAGEMENT Creating enthusiasm for the subject of the Project was critical to the Project's long-term success, particularly in the beginning. The Project conducted two orientation workshops followed by two introductory workshops each delivered in North and South County. These workshops were highly effective in creating enthusiasm among the attendees for receiving on-site consultation and participating in future teacher training events. The long-term success of the Project required this enthusiasm to be sustained through a continuing stream of services and events in which participants experienced significant benefit. Moving into 2011, centers are steadily asking when the next teacher training events will be held, requesting staff training sessions be held at their site, and soliciting consulting support for play yard design.

CENTER ENVIRONMENTAL, PROGRAM AND CURRICULUM

CHANGE Positive change at the child care centers is a key objective of Project training and consulting. The first year, once the Project's services became known, the initial requests from centers focused almost exclusively on site consultations for play yard assessment and redevelopment. The Project responded to this focused interest both in terms of consulting visits and by offering its next training on an environment-related subject – gardens and gardening. During the summer, staff training workshops began to be delivered mostly to clusters of centers belonging to agencies (such as the Santa Barbara School District ECE team and the CAC Head Start ECE team) with the focus on quality staff practices. Just eight months into the Project, 120 of the 174 centers in the County had been engaged by the Project, exceeding the target of 90 for the year. In fall 2009, the Project stepped up to a new level of building the center-based infrastructure for outdoor classroom practices by initiating the Outdoor Classroom Specialist training series.

ESTABLISHMENT OF QUALITY CRITERIA / CREATION OF A NETWORK OF MODEL CENTERS

In September 2009, centers that had been identified as potential model Outdoor Classroom Demonstration Sites were brought together and presented with the process of being confirmed as Demonstration Sites. They were introduced to the Outdoor Classroom Stages of Development, the criteria by which they could evaluate their level of Outdoor Classroom development. The existence of these provides a network of models which those interested in seeing working examples can visit and emulate.

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT The Outdoor Classroom Specialist Training series was created to provide every center involved in the Project the opportunity to have a minimum of one teacher deeply trained in Outdoor Classroom philosophy, principles and practices so that this teacher could “anchor” Outdoor Classroom development serving as a leader, model and resource. Developed from a two-unit college course on the Outdoor Classroom created by Project Director, Eric Nelson, each set of three full-day Specialist trainings was delivered once per month over a three-month period. Participants who completed the full 18 course hours of training received a certificate of completion.

The trainings have two goals: 1) to strengthen the knowledge and skills of the participants, and 2) to support implementation of Outdoor Classrooms at the centers of the participants. A total of three sets of Specialist I trainings were held from Fall 2009 through Spring 2010 reaching a total of 270 unduplicated participants who represent 106 centers. As part of their monthly homework, participants evaluated an element of their center’s outdoor environment or program and made changes. Another observed benefit of the trainings was the camaraderie that developed among the participants. When participating in new initiatives, teachers can often feel isolated and unsupported when they are trying to make change. The opposite has been true of the Outdoor Classroom Project.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER COUNTY INITIATIVES Santa Barbara County has a large number of child care quality and training initiatives being conducted at this time. Because there is considerable competition for the time of teachers to participate in these activities, it is critical that they coordinate and, where possible, collaborate with one another. Theresa Embry, Project Coordinator, was recruited to serve on the County Child Care Planning Council which enabled her to better coordinate and calendar Project activities with those of others. In that capacity, she has served on the Quality Improvement Committee, which has prepared criteria that will be used to give a quality star rating to centers through the Quality Counts Network, funded by First 5 Santa Barbara County and the Orfalea Foundations. Theresa helped ensure that the Outdoor Classroom quality criteria were included in the rating criteria. The Outdoor Classroom Project is also now listed in the Santa Barbara County Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education 2006–2015 (Master Working Document) as a measure towards improving quality in early child care and education programs.

CREATION OF ENDURING INFRASTRUCTURE To permanently transform the mindsets of ECE Directors and teachers about the importance of outdoor and active play, the Outdoor Classroom Project had to prove the value of its subject matter. It had to secure involvement over a long period of time so that ECE workers would make permanent physical changes in their yards, as well as in their philosophy, principles and practices. It also had to create a core group of trained professionals capable of serving as a base of knowledge and skill that can be shared through peer mentoring far into the future.

Thus far, the Project has been very successful in these regards. Many play yards have been enhanced, sometimes even totally transformed. In many programs, the amount of time children have spent outdoors has increased significantly. Most importantly, teachers' perspectives on the outdoors have been permanently altered. A model network of Demonstration Site centers has been established. With these key elements in place, and a modest level of ongoing support as described later in this report, a quality Outdoor Classroom in every center in Santa Barbara has a good chance of becoming a reality.

CREATION OF A DELIVERY PROCESS FOR INFORMATION, CONSULTATION AND TRAINING Finding an effective way to deliver new educational content to early childhood educators is neither easy nor simple. Competition for access to teachers' available training time is fierce, and effectiveness can be spotty and fleeting. The Outdoor Classroom Project has been consistently successful over its first two years in attracting interest and repeating participation, as well as getting participants to implement the broad range of features of the Outdoor Classroom. This success has enabled staff of the Project to establish a ready-to-go delivery process for future Orfalea messages.

Evaluation

Evaluation Activities

A wide variety of evaluation methods have been used in the project. They include:

- 1** Numbers for center and staff participation at events and site visits
- 2** Achievement of Recognition and Demonstration Site status
- 3** Center play yard change
- 4** Training event evaluations
- 5** Staff observations
- 6** Center reports

Evaluation Details

1 CENTER AND STAFF PARTICIPATION AT EVENTS AND SITE VISITS

Centers served – The initial Project was the participation of 50% of the total number of centers in the county which was estimated at 190. In fact, there are closer to 174 centers in the county. At the end of the first year, 68% (120) had been reached. At the end of the second year 83% (144) had participated.

Events – Over two years, 63 events were held serving 1,982 participants. Of those events, 29 were County-wide or regional, 6 were agency-related (school district, SBCEO or CAC Head Start) and 18 were events at single center sites.

Site Visits – Over two years, 520 consulting visits were made to 130 programs and a number of agencies.



Evergreen, Goleta

2 CENTER OUTDOOR CLASSROOM DEVELOPMENT ACHIEVEMENT STATUS

The initial Project aim was that 32 of centers in the county would achieve the status of “Recognized” or “Demonstration” Site. As of late 2010, 20 centers had been confirmed as achieving “Recognized” status or higher. Another 13 Centers were actively in the pipeline of completing the process of applying and being confirmed.

3 CENTER PLAY YARD CHANGES

Changes in center play yards have been documented in four ways:

1. Through observations by Project staff
2. Through photographs taken by Project staff
3. Through photographs taken by center staff and shown to Project staff via Specialist training homework assignments
4. Verbally by center staff

Based on this information, it has been documented that significant physical yard improvements have been made at 53 centers (37%) of those involved/exposed to the Project. In addition, the other centers often made substantial program changes, such as improving teacher skills or changing the children's schedule to include more outdoor time, without significantly changing their yards.



Some of the physical changes are particularly significant. Sites where yard changes were noteworthy include: Main Collaborative Head Start, Aliso and Canalino State Preschools, and Kinderkirk Preschool (Carpinteria); Marian Children's Center (Santa Maria); Windmill Valley Preschool (Solvang);

Canalino State Preschool, Carpinteria



A Child's Village (Lompoc); De Colores, Early Steps to Learning, Los Alamos and Santa Ynez (all County Education Office State Preschools); and Isla Vista Youth Project, Evergreen Learning Center, Storyteller II, St. Vincent's Casa Alegria, Hope 4 Kids, and Coronel CAC Head Start (Santa Barbara). Allan Hancock College's Lab School became North County's first Demonstration Site and, with Eric's assistance, developed an Outdoor Classroom-driven design plan for the major renovation of its facility scheduled for 2012. Santa Barbara School District's Adams center is utilizing Outdoor Classroom input for a similar project involving their yard and has the potential to be the County's first Outdoor Classroom Demonstration Site built from scratch.

4 SPECIALIST TRAINING EVENT EVALUATIONS

Feedback from participants at trainings was outstanding. On a scale of 1 (poor) to 4 (excellent), the average rating was 3.79. Written comments for these workshops was overwhelmingly positive and reflected how the Project has supported change. For example:

“Yesterday, as we were discussing the issues children are facing in our society today and how society has changed (many of us had the “free” time to play outdoors), it was brought up how child care centers are now the “local neighborhoods” for children where they may only get “outside” time while in child care.”

“I think this was highly effective and really got each of us to “think” about how we listen and communicate and to make us more aware of the importance of clarification in our communication skills, etc.”

“I am exuberant! I know the activities we have talked about will really be enjoyed by the staff and especially the children in the Outdoor Classroom Project!”

5 STAFF OBSERVATIONS

Over the past two years, Project staff have been in a unique position to observe and hear about changes in programs. As part of their several hundred site visits, they have been able to visit center sites after changes have been made. They have listened to enthusiastic stories of change from teachers in training sessions and privately. Below, we share one of our favorites – Storyteller II in Santa Barbara.

Storyteller II (non-profit, state & federally funded) has transformed the back and side yards from unusable and bland to ones full of joy and wonder for children and teachers. Initially skeptical of the Outdoor Classroom idea for fear that it would not adequately support children’s learning, Lead Teacher Alicia Jimenez became an enthusiastic participant in the Specialist I & II trainings. As a role model and “anchor” for the Outdoor Classroom, and with full support from Director Terri Allison, Alicia led the staff to create an outdoor environment full of opportunities for discovery and learning.

Storyteller II,
Santa Barbara



The staff participated in the creative process by making drawings of what they'd like to have in the yard. A plan was developed based on the drawings and observations of the children using the yard, as well as consultations with Eric Nelson. Local community and parent resources (time and funds) implemented the plan using previously obtained funds. What was once a bleak play yard is now flourishing with a rock creek and optional running water, pathways, gardens, peaceful quiet spaces, an art & mural area and a separate trike track. The former unused side yard is now a safe place for toddlers to experience nature, art, music, literacy and push wheel toys.



Storyteller II,
Santa Barbara



6 ANECDOTAL REPORTING

Anecdotal reports come in a variety of forms, conversation, email, and as part of the Outdoor Classroom Specialist training homework assignments. These reports show the wide variety of ways that the Project has impacted programs. Here are some pictorial samples of how the Outdoor Classroom has been utilized by the participants in trainings and reported back to us.



AFTER

Cuesta Community College, Paso Robles.
Lawn space is doubled while
plastic structure is removed.

Project Evolution

The overarching intent of the Outdoor Classroom Project is to transform the way in which early care and education is implemented by fully utilizing outdoor space as a classroom.

Fostering such a paradigm shift is a broad and complex task. To our knowledge, broad change of this nature over a large region like Santa Barbara County has not been attempted before. The Project has provided an opportunity to demonstrate that such change is possible and provide an example about how it can unfold successfully.

There were several surprises during the first six months of the Project. One was the speed with which centers became involved. Fortunately, Project staff

discovered that despite the volume of requests, they were able to visit more sites than they had anticipated.

We were also surprised that most of the initial requests for support for centers were for assistance in improving their play yards. As a result of that focus, there was a minimum of staff training during that time. During the second half of 2009, while consultation to improve yards continued, more time was spent with teacher and director training including the implementation of the first Specialist I training.

While the work continued in many centers on upgrading play yards, the second year of the project focused on teacher and director training, developing the leadership skills of individual teachers and preparing centers to be Recognized or Demonstration Sites.

Despite the financial constraints imposed by the current economic climate on the ECE community, centers have made significant physical improvements to their yards, if sometimes just one step in a larger effort. However, an important facet of the overall program improvement achieved at centers has been as a result of the consistent offerings of trainings provided by the Outdoor Classroom Project. These trainings have given participants a strong knowledge base, the opportunity to network, and continuing encouragement to continue pursuing quality improvement in their centers.

Vision for Maintenance 2011

Orfalea's Santa Barbara County Outdoor Classroom Project has had a very successful and productive two-year run exceeding our initial goals. This section describes "maintenance mode."

The active project term is over, and it is time now to transition to a maintenance mode. The purpose of a maintenance mode is to avoid dropping the Project abruptly which could undo a significant portion of the momentum that has been achieved in the past two years.

Resources

With the active phase of the project behind us, we are transitioning to a maintenance mode through December 2011. In this mode, the existing infrastructure of participating centers is supported by a twice-a year convening of teachers/directors, a deepening of their skill set through a Specialist III training, and center consulting, yard design and training on an as-requested basis. The maintenance mode will be supported by \$60,000 in funding that was allocated to the Outdoor Classroom Project grant and was not spend during the active phase. This amount represents less than 20% of the annual budget for the active project period. Reports on the Outdoor Classroom Project's transition and activities will be provided to the Board through the regular President's Reports and other Board updates.

Goals

- Level of implementation is as high or higher at the end of 2011 as it is in the beginning of the year
- Continue improvements to environments, staff and programs
- Keep center activity levels at current levels or higher
- Increase number of Recognized and Demonstration sites
- Further develop individual capability and sustainability (through Specialist III training)
- Further develop collective capability and sustainability (through Specialist III training)

Objectives

1. Early childhood educators experience adequate support in their efforts to continue and expand the Outdoor Classroom at their individual centers. Centers are able to obtain consulting and training within a period of two months following their initial request.
2. Satisfaction with Outdoor Classroom Project service is 3.5 out of 4.0 or higher as measured by an end of year satisfaction survey.
3. The number of Recognized and Demonstration Site centers is equal to or greater than that reported in 2010 Year End Report to the Orfalea Board.
4. A minimum of 50% of the centers with which Outdoor Classroom Project has worked have made further progress with their Outdoor Classroom Development with either yard, program or staff enhancement.
5. Two “gathering” workshops are held in June and December to encourage and acknowledge participation.
6. A Demonstration Site Network regional steering committee is active and meets twice during the year.
7. A Specialist III series is held to deepen the commitment and skills of the teachers/directors who have already completed Specialist I and Specialist II training.

Additional Before and After Examples

BEFORE



De Colores, Lompoc

AFTER





BEFORE



AFTER

Storyteller II, Santa Barbara

Hope 4 Kids Preschool,
Santa Barbara



BEFORE



AFTER



AFTER



AFTER



BEFORE

Evergreen, Goleta



BEFORE



BEFORE



AFTER

Bright Start, Santa Barbara



Circle of Friends, Santa Barbara

