

Accessibility to Infant and Toddler Programming at a Nature-Based Zoo Preschool

by

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PROJECT SUMMARY

When children consistently experience and engage in nature-based learning, they become stronger, healthier, happier, and more empathetic (Duncan et al., 2022). As Powers and Williams-Ridge (2019) shared in their book, nature experiences can still allow for programs to meet standards, prepare for future learning, and meet curriculum expectations. The purpose of this project was to provide an answer to my research question: *How can an infant/toddler program designed to explore the benefits of nature-based learning reach San Antonio, TX families when created by a nature-based zoo preschool?* This project establishes the foundations of an infant/toddler program, titled *Nature Niños*, at a nature-based zoo preschool through the use of a guidebook. The project creates a program design that includes the participants' schedule and activities plan. This guidebook provides information on the components of an infant/toddler program that introduces families to nature-based learning.

The project is presented in a guidebook format to provide a detailed structure of the program design. At the beginning of the guidebook, a survey is introduced. The survey is suggested for participating families to complete to see how their thoughts on nature-based education shift through the completion of the program. The survey allows me to identify how the program has impacted the family. By comparing the survey from the first day to the last day, I can identify the success of how many families were able to access the nature-based program. I am also able to identify if families have a better understanding of the benefits and importance of nature-based education.

After the survey, the guidebook breaks down the sessions of the program. The program is conducted in multiple four-week sessions within the zoo preschool's semester.

In the program, a class consists of infants and toddlers with one family member. It is conducted in the manner of a half-day program that follows a schedule. During the program, family members are taught the benefits of nature-based learning while engaging with their child(ren) through the use of activities.

Each class is set for a specific theme around nature exploration. Classes have themes such as water-play, mud-play, sand-play, and loose parts. Each theme highlights its benefit to infant and toddler engagement. During the water-play lessons, families identify ways to work with water appropriate for their child's age. The lesson on mud-play invites family members to get muddy with the child. The sand-play lessons provide family members with the opportunity to identify ways for their child to stay engaged. Loose parts play is a lesson in which family members can learn how materials can be utilized in the outdoor setting to promote learning and play. The infants and toddlers engage in the space with varying activities based on the class theme. The family members observe their children and are encouraged to engage with their child and nature to promote the best learning environment.

The world of education is consistently changing and improving with new techniques and materials. By creating a project like this program, I am adding to the growth of knowledge on infant and toddler nature-based learning opportunities for any individual or facility. It is my goal that this project encourages families to consider and participate in nature-based programs when starting their child's educational journey.

THE PROJECT

[View the full guide.](#)



Nature Niños

An Infant/Toddler
Nature-Based Program



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REFERENCES

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