

Through Their Eyes



Carie Green attaches a GoPro camera to a child in the “Engaging Young Children as Active Researchers” project.

Big discoveries can come in small packages – and no one is more acutely aware of that than Carie Green. In summer 2015 Green conducted an EPSCoR-supported research project entitled “Engaging Young Children as Active Researchers,” which saw a gaggle of 3 to 7 year-olds from the University of Alaska Fairbanks Bunnell House Early Learning Lab School turn a local patch of woods into an informal laboratory.

“The idea for this whole project is that children would be the researchers, so the active participants in the process,” explained Green, an Assistant Professor of Education at UAF.

In this case, research began with equipping children with GoPro cameras and observing their interests as they roamed the small forest on the UAF campus. Based on the videos and discussion, the children picked four themes to further explore: rose bushes; “x marks the spot;” forts, castles and houses; and bugs. They then came up with ways they could document their explorations, which Green turned into “data collection centers” where they recorded their experiences via some unique research media- like paintings, models made out of rocks and sticks, and costumed role-playing.

“In research with young children, research methods look a lot different than with adults, partly because they’re not as verbally articulate, so they need multiple means to represent their understanding,” Green said. “So these are our efforts to have the kids collect the data.”

and recording their observations in this fashion, Green worked with the children to interpret their findings, which they turned into a simple book and discussed in a public presentation. “By posing them questions about what they noticed, and inviting them to describe what it means to them, we’re trying to get them to also be the interpreters of the data.”

Green said the project served several research purposes. First, it contributed data to her studies of how children develop their identity through interactions with the natural world. Second, it provided evidence of some of the ways that children’s perspectives and the ways they create culture differ sharply from those of adults. And third, they enabled Green to experiment with having children conduct active and interpretive research, a process she said is important given their unique points of view.

“What I hope to take away is that it is possible to engage children as active researchers,” She said. “It takes a lot more time, but I think it’s worth the effort because I view children as active agents of change – and that their perspective matters and makes a difference.”

After several weeks exploring the area



UAF undergrad Katrina Bishop interviews children about their paintings as part of the “Engaging Young Children as Active Researchers” project.



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