

# Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2013

## Nature's Diversity at Their Fingertips

This edition of *Wonder* explores the following Universal Principle for Connecting the World's Children with Nature:

*We believe it is important that children have daily access to nature-based outdoor and indoor environments in their early childhood programs and schools.*

(Find the complete list of principles in the Environmental Action Kit at [worldforumfoundation.org/nature](http://worldforumfoundation.org/nature).)

Before you read about global educators' creative ideas for supporting children's daily connections with nature, we urge you to try an activity to help you remember how nature can both comfort and inspire. Find five minutes and hold some bit of nature in your hands. Learn about it with all of your senses. Look for the tiniest details. Five minutes might seem like too long to really focus on one small item, but stick with it. You might be surprised by what you discover. See how many different ways there are to explore and experience it.

- What do you notice about that bit of nature now that you hadn't before?
- What do you wonder about it?
- What would you like to do with it next?
- How does it feel to be 'in the moment' for just five minutes?

### Now, What About the Children in Your Life?

Sometime this week, take a closer look at the spaces where the children in your care are living life 'in the moment.' Celebrate all the ways you have intentionally created nature-filled spaces, both indoors and outdoors, for children to experience the natural world. Or, think about ways you could begin adding more natural items indoors and out. Read the reflections on the following pages for some great ideas from around the world.

### Ideas from Around the World

The world is a diverse place full of plants, animals, and ecosystems with both subtle and immense variety. Discovering what daily time connecting with nature for children and teachers looks like across the globe is fascinating. In this issue's reflections from global educators, you'll learn how New Zealand's river rocks delight children, how clay and bamboo become creative tools for children in Bangladesh, and how the mountain behind a child care center becomes a learning lab for

Hawaiian children to explore. We hope you'll be inspired to encourage the children in your care to connect with the local wonder available at their fingertips.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY NATURE EXPLORE

### Future Issues of *Wonder*

We invite you to email your personal reflections and ideas related to the following *Universal Principle for Connecting Children with Nature* to Tara ([tarah@natureexplore.org](mailto:tarah@natureexplore.org)):

*We believe it is important for educators to provide children with opportunities for silence and contemplation in natural settings.*

*Wonder* is made possible in part by a grant from the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund. We are very grateful for this support.





## Reflection: The Child in Nature — A Sacred Partnership

from Anja Geelen, Nature Action Team 17, New Zealand

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Children and nature go hand in hand, a natural and sacred partnership. Being in nature is a child's birthright, but unfortunately, today the child in nature is endangered at both home and at school. We educators can change that.

A natural environment gives the child real-life, authentic experiences they cannot access in an early childhood centre or school full of plastic, steel, rubber, and concrete, which unfortunately is all too common. Children make sense of their world with the real, multi-sensory opportunities that materials in a natural environment provides. Rich experiences lead to a richness of imagination and feed the child's hands, mind, heart, and spirit.

At Little Earth Montessori in Wellington-Aotearoa/New Zealand, our children explore outdoor nooks and crannies with many opportunities for new discoveries and unfolding miracles. Shrubs, trees, trunks, stumps,

dirt, grass, rocks, puddles, and a garden full of herbs, flowers, and vegetables surround them. They marvel at the cycle of the butterfly and the frog, from egg to adult. They touch the soft downy feathers of the baby chick, they sow seeds in spring and harvest in autumn. These hands-on experiences nurture a sense of wonder and make children more aware of their immediate world, while at the same time fostering respect and a sense of belonging. Taking responsibility, being respectful, showing compassion and taking care are heart-centered qualities that unfold naturally when children immerse themselves in nature.

Ecoliteracy is the most important literacy for a sustainable future, and is fostered when the adults involved in early childhood education have a passion for keeping the child-nature connection intact. There is no need for a complete forest or early childhood teachers with science degrees, for impactful daily nature experiences to occur. Little Earth and Tawa Montessori Preschool are living proof that small centres in urban areas can successfully introduce children to nature. Introducing natural resources from nearby, such as river rocks, driftwood logs, and native plants provides many opportunities. A tree is a treasure trove for exploration and inspiration. Fallen leaves create piles to jump in, a trunk is great for hiding behind, and the bark can be explored for insects.

Teachers can be an ally, rather than an obstacle, for a child's connection with nature by sharing in the sense of wonder. The teacher doesn't need all the answers, but must provide the emotional safety for children to ask their questions. Focused awareness on the child, and her need for nature fosters another special partnership — that between the adult and the child. Being together in nature, marveling with delight, and sharing observations create special opportunities for closeness. It is bonding at its best!

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANJA GEELEN

### Consider this:

- How can you support children and families who live in dense urban areas and apartments in getting daily time in nature? In what ways are you bringing nature indoors?
- How does the time you spend in nature with the children in your care support the bonds you make with them?
- What natural resources do you have nearby, such as the river rock or driftwood Anja spoke of, that you could collect and make available to children, both indoors and out?



## Reflection: Nature Connections in Preschool

from Manjusree Mitra, Nature Action Team 3, Bangladesh

Learning from nature is an indigenous practice in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is full of natural beauty, diversity, and natural heritage. In one popular Bengali poem: "People learn patience from the earth and trees, motion from the current of rivers and wind, and openness from the sky." Raising awareness of nature among children will help to increase our natural beauty in the future. Knowledge of nature will enable children to grow into adults who protect the environment from degradation, develop positive attitudes toward natural heritage, and protect biodiversity by saving the indigenous varieties of plants and animals.

Increased attraction and awareness among people towards nature will encourage children to be more creative and inquisitive. In the rural areas of our country, children are more involved in nature, but in urban areas they have little access to nature. They sometimes visit the village homes during festivals and visit natural sites. In our preschool program we have introduced nature action in the new curriculum for both indoor and outdoor activities. Children learn names and functions of various plants and animals from their surroundings.

Children:

- learn different colours from leaves, flowers, fruits, birds, and insects.
- prepare colours using leaves, petals of flowers, and soil.
- draw more paintings on nature with colours extracted from the leaves, flowers, turmeric, clay, and charcoal.
- use bean seeds or seeds of fruits, stone, bamboo sticks, and leaves of various plants to learn counting and various math concepts like shapes, size, comparison, similarities, and dissimilarities. Schools use wooden blocks, alphabets made with clay and wood, and make an abacus with bamboo. They also use leaves as currency and learn measurement using water, sand, and soil.
- design rattles from the dry fruits of some trees.
- do practical experiments on seed germination, plantation, and photosynthesis.
- use materials from nature in their imaginative play to make food items, and make pots and toys with clay.
- use jute mats, mats made with date leaves, and use wooden logs as seats; go on field trips to learn about ecology and become familiar with their surroundings.
- learn about nature through books selected by their teachers.
- use palm leaves as hand fans where there is no electricity; during rains, use large sizes of leaves as umbrellas.

Our natural diversity itself teaches the children to cope with various natural environments. Children are more familiar with their own natural sites. For example, in the hill areas children know Jhum cultivation, waterfall, and tracking on the hills. In both hill and plains lands children climb trees for playing and picking fruits. In Char areas (the river banks), children learn how to adapt with floods, river erosion, water logging, and struggle with the natural disasters. In the dry season people have to walk long distances and in the monsoon the only transport is various types of boats. In these areas children learn swimming, diving, fishing, and sailing local boats from a very early age. So learning from nature is more sustainable than year-long learning from any other source.

Consider this:

- How can local resources in your indoor and outdoor spaces help children develop a sense of place or familiarity with nature that surrounds them?
- What natural items are plentiful in your area that can be brought inside your classroom to be used as small manipulatives? Consider using interesting natural materials in creating art, as Manjusree describes.

Wonder, the newsletter of the NACC, welcomes submissions from all NACC members. Please join us at:  
[www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature](http://www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature).

The NACC Leadership Team is a core group of early childhood educators, designers, and landscape architects who came together in 2006 with a dream to change the world for young children. They represent six continents across the globe, and serve as key contact points for others around the world who have a desire to improve the lives of young children.

The Leadership Team meets periodically to discuss strategies for increasing NACC's outreach and membership, and to find new ways for all of us to work together to further our common mission.



*The mission of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children is to re-connect children with the natural world by making developmentally appropriate nature education a sustaining and enriching part of the daily lives of the world's children.*

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## Reflection: Providing a Backyard

from Leilani Au, Nature Action Team I04, United States

At the University of Hawaii, Manoa Children's Center, we are fortunate to have ample outdoor time in a beautiful place and are, therefore, quite inspired to incorporate nature-based education in our environments and daily experiences. We believe children need to actively explore and participate in creating their own unique experiences and learning opportunities. Half of each day is spent outdoors and all of our classes regularly go on walking trips in our neighborhood. Children help care for the gardens: pick fruit, vegetables, and herbs for cooking projects; feed compost to the worms; walk to a farmer's market; and have plenty of time to run, climb, make mud, and grow into stewards of the land. We realize that for many families who live in apartments and have busy lives, we are providing them a backyard.



PHOTO: CHILDREN NEED NATURE-BASED PLAYGROUNDS, WHICH PROVIDE A CONNECTION TO THE PLACE IN WHICH THEY LIVE. PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY LEILANI AU



PHOTO — LEARNING TRIP: PARENTS, STAFF, AND CHILDREN TAKE A SCENIC BREAK ON MAKIHI HIKE. PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY LEILANI AU

Our curriculum provides opportunities for place-based science and arts-based play opportunities. Teachers and children wonder about the plants and animals and the geographic features of our islands, so they go out together to explore. For instance, children learn about the Native Hawaiian land division system of *Ahupua'a* (from mountain top to ocean), through a series of trips to the mountain behind our center, walking along the stream, growing native plants, and visiting the beach. We also include families. Our Family Nature Club sponsors child-friendly hikes regularly on weekends.

*Consider this:*

- How is your daily schedule arranged? How do you balance daily outdoor and indoor time? Are there opportunities to interact with natural materials indoors?
- How could you use the new World Forum platform (coming soon) to connect with other early childhood professionals to learn more about how their nature experiences with children are different and similar to yours? What ideas might you share with others?



PHOTO: PRACTICING THE NATIVE HAWAIIAN VALUE, *MALAMA KA AINA*: CARING FOR THE LAND. PHOTO BY LEILANI AU



PHOTO: EATING LOCAL THROUGH OUR GARDENING, TRIPS TO FARMER'S MARKETS, AND COOKING PROJECTS (MAKING PINEAPPLE JAM). PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY LEILANI AU

### Now, What Might You Do to Advocate for More Natural Connections for Children?

Sometime this month think deeply about the ways you might advocate for children's daily access to nature. The Environmental Action Kit has an Advocacy Tools resource section to support your efforts. You'll find multimedia resources, including a beautiful video of the "Universal Principles for Connecting Children with Nature." There's an "Advocacy PowerPoint" that can be shown to a variety of audiences, and customizable kits to help you in your efforts to raise funds for projects or campaigns. There's even a section to support your efforts at securing volunteers to assist with your projects. Access at:

[www.worldforumfoundation.org/eak](http://www.worldforumfoundation.org/eak)