

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

MARCH/APRIL 2017

## It's All about Life

Ellen Galinsky, author of *Mind in the Making*, writes, "Life today can be all of these things: complex, distracting, fast moving, 24/7, and stressful. It is also joyful and full of exciting possibilities. We know that if it is this way for us, it is only going to be more so for our children. We all want the best for our children, but how do we help them not only survive but thrive, today and in the future?"

Research suggests that any child can learn the kinds of skills that will prepare them for the pressures of modern life if the skills are intentionally taught and fostered. Galinsky has grouped this research into seven critical areas that children need most:

- Focus and Self-control
- Perspective Taking
- Communicating
- Making Connections
- Critical Thinking
- Taking on Challenges
- Self-directed, Engaged Learning

The reflections shared in this edition broadly reflect the Nature Action Collaborative for Children Universal Principle:

*We believe it is important that children be supported in developing life skills through holistic nature-based learning.*



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Perhaps the following stories will inspire you to reflect on your own teaching practices and environments. How is a connection to nature helping children lay the important foundation for these skills during their early years? How is it providing them the experiences they need for who they are right now? How is nature-based learning helping to enrich your interactions with each other? How do you think your answers compare to folks in other regions across the globe?

### Future issues of *Wonder*

We invite you to email your ideas, stories, and photos that relate to children's connections with nature to:

Tara Schroder: [taras@natureexplore.org](mailto:taras@natureexplore.org)



*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.*

[WorldForumFoundation.org/nature](http://WorldForumFoundation.org/nature)

## Life Skills through Holistic Nature-based Experiences

Niki Buchan, Australia

In Australia, the Aboriginal culture has always been nature-based, as have Indigenous cultures throughout Africa and the United States. Fortunately, there is growing awareness that all humans need that connection to nature too. Internationally, adults are working together to ensure that nature features in the lives of children. Bush schools, forest schools, nature kindergartens, and other models are bringing wild nature experiences to children as they spend every day or part of the day in nature. These children have a better chance to develop a nature identity, discover their place in nature, and grow to love and protect nature. I believe nature is a teacher, and children are supported in developing life skills through holistic nature-based learning.

Here are some ideas and examples from my work:

Through holistic nature-based experiences, children develop life skills in the most natural way. For example, a little boy who stomped on bugs was fascinated by the appearance of a snail, saved from his boot, in a glass jar. He admired the eyes, movement, and shape; he grew to love and protect it; he developed an empathy with 'his' snail, which extended to other bugs. He also developed empathy towards his peers, by being able to put himself in their positions.

Young children show a natural awe and wonder in nature. Through their fascination and awareness of minutia they explore diversity; they notice small differences and similarities between leaves, flowers, and beetles. For example, I have seen children sort seashells using complex sorting criteria, valuing each one for the shell it is.

A desire for independence combined with perseverance and resilience are life skill traits highly valued in society. I see increases in these skills developing when children freely explore in nature. Recently for example, one three-year-old girl was determined to climb a huge native Moreton Bay Fig tree without adult help. After every unsuccessful attempt, she stopped, thought about it, and tried a different way. She did not give up or request adult help. After half an hour, she celebrated her achievement as she sat about one meter off the ground with a loud cheer, "I did it!"

Children become astute self-risk assessors in nature, another important life skill. Nature is often perceived as being dangerous. In reality, children and educators are more alert, more cautious, and more skilled at dynamically assessing risk, and consequently serious accidents are highly unlikely.

*Niki Buchan is an educational consultant with Natural Learning Early Childhood Consultancy. She has a biomedical background, is originally from South Africa, lived in Scotland for many years, and has been calling Australia home since 2011. After 38 years, she is considered a leading voice in promoting nature-based pedagogy internationally, is the author of Children in Wild Nature in Australia, A Practical Approach to Nature-Based Practice in United Kingdom, and is now working on a book for the United States. She is an adventurer and keen photographer.*

Consider this:

- How have you seen children take the perspective of others such as a snail or a friend when they are in nature?
- What are some natural materials readily available near your center or school that might encourage critical thinking and complex sorting?
- How do you support yourself in taking risks? How do you help children who are hesitant to take on challenges?



Photograph from Niki Buchan



Photograph from Niki Buchan

## **Stonework Play** Diana Suskind, United States

Several years ago, I was invited to HEMS School in Kathmandu, Nepal, as an early childhood consultant. With limited resources (the children had only a pencil and pamphlet to copy lessons), I was asked to craft developmentally appropriate, hands-on activities for these youngsters. One day, I found myself gazing at stones on the ground. I realized that as movable natural objects, stones would be a perfect medium to inspire children's creativity. In this way, I could provide HEMS children and staff with a much-needed opportunity for self-expression. *Stonework Play* was born! [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC-U32QeRZQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC-U32QeRZQ)

*Stonework Play* is an open-ended response to the invitation to work and play with stones, providing a distinctive opportunity for teachers and parents to engage with children in an authentic, creative, natural activity. It is a medium to promote interaction with nature, harnessing nature's power to enrich the imagination. *Stonework Play* provides children with opportunities for silence and contemplation in natural settings. Silence is well-known to be inspired by nature and natural settings. It encourages children's development through a sense of wonder and environmental stewardship. "Tarry Time" is a phrase I coined that refers to the amount of silence between interactions: verbal and/or non-verbal. This silent space is fertile ground for creativity, which *Stonework Play* categorically facilitates.

*Stonework Play* encourages:

- making use of an unlimited, freely accessible, and natural resource: stones.
- self-directed learning.
- creating a one-of-a-kind experience and personal enrichment.
- an opportunity for self-expression, problem-solving, and flexible thinking skills.
- teachers and parents to enjoy this activity with their students and children.
- team building.

**Steps for *Stonework Play*:**

**Step I: Gathering** — First, you need stones! Collect your stones of interest and hold, feel, and sort them. Find a flat surface to work on. Additional stones may be needed in this unhurried process...

**Step II: Constructing** — From a multitude of stones of different shapes, weights, colors, and markings comes an endless array of stories. Every story will be unique, just like yourself. Remain quiet throughout, working at your own pace.

**Step III: Rendering** — Rendering means drawing a picture that represents your stone construction. Shading shows which stones are darker; it also helps make the picture look more real. You might almost think it was taken by a camera! Using paper and pencil, render your stonework creation. Copy exactly what you see. Please remember to take your time.

**Step IV: Narrating** — It is time to narrate. That means to give your work a title, and write or dictate a story about your stones.

**Step V: Sharing** — In a line, we all walk around the setting of *Stonework Play* silently, looking at each other's work. You may be surprised at what you find. It all began with a gaze upon stones, but look what we did with them! It is very important to be respectful during sharing as the stories are about to be told. Gather silently to listen as each participant shares his or her story.

*Consider this:*

- How could you use the ideas from *Stonework Play* to help balance the demands for more formal instruction?
- How do people find beauty in natural objects such as stones? How might that fuel the imagination?

*Diana Suskind, Ed.D and RIE Associate, is an international early childhood consultant and artist. She is a former professor of education at Fitchburg State University.*



Photograph from Diana Suskind

## Have an Adventure!

“Children can learn many different things about natural environments. They can learn about nature as a ‘resource’ to be used; they can learn that air, water, and sunlight are important to living things; and they can learn that elements of the natural world can be grouped into different categories, such as living and nonliving. But the most important things that young children can learn about the earth are that it is full of beauty and wonder. It is a sense of wonder that will serve as the strongest incentive to save Planet Earth. It is also a sense of wonder that will add immeasurably to their enjoyment and appreciation of life.” — Ruth Wilson, *Nature and Young Children*

Use “Your Beautiful Journey” activities in the Environmental Action Kit (Toolkit for Early Childhood Programs, pp. 7–80) to support children’s discovery of their beautiful world. Here are a few ideas to get started:

- Help children be thoughtful about what they consider ‘beautiful.’ Discuss together the many different ways people experience beauty.
- Encourage children to express their appreciation for beauty through movement, dance, drawing, or painting. This will help them develop a deeper appreciation for the wonders of the natural world.

Find the complete activity at: <http://connect.worldforumfoundation.org/environmental-action-kit/toolkits-2/>

## Meet NACC Leadership at the 2017 World Forum on Early Care and Education in Auckland, New Zealand

Through the World Forum, we have a regional representative structure in place to support the global scope of NACC. Up to three regional leaders for each of the six regions of the world are selected to provide diverse representation for each of the three disciplines: environmentalists, designers, and landscape designers. The next opportunity for this group to convene is coming soon. If you’re planning to attend the World Forum on Early Care and Education in Auckland, New Zealand May 9–12, 2017, please be sure to connect with us. We’re excited to learn about your experiences!

### Asia

Bishnu Bhatta, Nepal  
Swati Popat, India  
Raed Abu Hayyaneh, Jordan

### Europe

Helle Nebelong, Denmark  
Marc Veekamp, Netherlands  
Claire Warden, Scotland

### Oceania

Toni Christie, New Zealand  
Gillian McAuliffe, Australia  
Fiona Robbe, Australia

### Africa

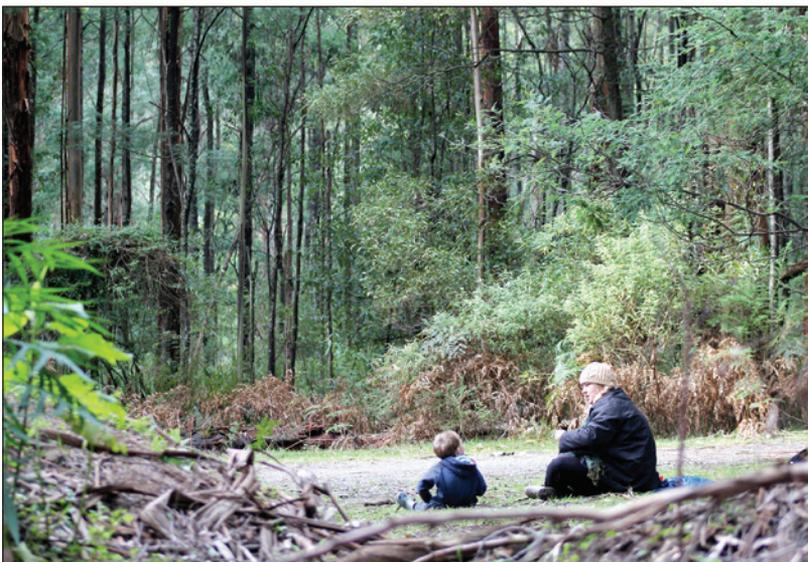
Irma Allen, Swaziland  
Hadijah Nandyose, Uganda

### North America

Ron Blatz, Canada  
Berta MacGregor, México  
Christy Merrick, United States  
Jim Wike, United States

### South America

Martha Cecilia Fajardo, Colombia  
Caroline Hudicourt, Haiti  
Wil Maheia, Belize



Photograph from Niki Buchan

### Consider this:

- Perhaps you would like to get involved and share your stories about your work connecting children and nature. Please join us and let us know about your work. Contact Tara Schroder: [taras@natureexplore.org](mailto:taras@natureexplore.org) to submit ideas for the *Wonder* newsletter.
- Contact the NACC leader for your region to find out about regional NACC affiliates in your part of the world.

