



NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016

What Does Every Child Need?

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

We believe nature-based spaces should be accessible to all abilities.

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to live and play in environments that stimulate their healthy development and fullest potential. Many people believe that nature is an essential aspect of these environments for children.

Environmental psychologist Louise Chawla has written extensively about childhood, nature, and ecstatic memory. Encounters with the natural world that foster a sense of wonder, Chawla found,

constituted multiple dimensions of freedom and imagination. Freedom is evident both physically and as a state of mind. Of the problems facing our planet and the chaos of our own busy lives, it might seem naïve to place ‘cultivate wonder’ at the top of a list of priorities. Yet the power of beauty and the awe nature inspires is essential in everyone’s lives.

Read the following reflections and ask yourself, “What do you think children have a right to?”



Photo by Niesha-Brown



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

Future Issues of *Wonder*

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

Tara Hild: tarah@natureexplore.org

Why Not Nature?

Olivia Wilmot, Jamaica

I chose to host the “NaTuRe is the Best Teacher Summer Kamp” because I’ve had profound life-changing experiences of the healing and beauty of nature, of seeking true self, and doing massive personal re-evaluations. All of that has had an effect on my teaching as well. As an early childhood teacher who homeschools, it has allowed me to really see and know children for the extraordinary beings they are and to have the courage to honor that. This summer camp is significant because, even though we live in a tropical paradise, most children from the age of three experience school and learning as an indoor space for teacher-led activities. Add to that the social and economic pressures, the weight of standardized testing, the predetermined curriculum content — you name it — and learning through discovery, child-led and social-emotional learning tend to suffer.

The experience offered by the camp is significant because it speaks to a strong emergent need for spaces where nature, play, and the child’s intellect are honored; where children can become stronger, more thoughtful and more confident without pressure.

The entire camp was held outdoors. We practiced integrated Ancient Egyptian yoga and we went to the beach every day. In the sea air, under the beautiful sun, as children charged away at the current of the sea, invented new ways to dive, and built pools, tunnels, and castles of all shapes and sizes, they developed their physical health and strength. They experienced the organic formation of social groups, problem solving, collaborating, and becoming acquainted firsthand with scientific concepts. They experienced the exhilaration of accomplishment. They put their faces in the water and conquered fear. As children searched for shells, collected beautiful stones, experienced the underwater world, and pulled sticks through the sand, they considered all kinds of questions with their friends and teacher. They shared their thoughts and journaled daily. As children sat at the edge of the ocean or laid down on their sun-warmed towels, they became still and experienced relaxation, the therapy of nature, and the peace of a clear mind.

Everything was connected naturally and in the midst of all these activities, time in nature pulled everything together because it presented itself to each child as whatever it is they needed it to be in order to grow and/or heal.

I witnessed the evolving play, got excited about their marvelous questions, and smiled at the topics they journaled about. I saw children fearful of drowning take an extra step towards the waves; children who held back, choose to share; children who had challenges gauging their communication become more considerate; children who needed to melt down did so in a safe and beautiful space and then recovered. The parents told me how happy their children were. They were noticing more of the world and even showing their families how to chant. It’s only a start, but I think this camp was successful.

Olivia Wilmot is a Global Leader Alumnus, World Forum Foundation National Representative, early childhood teacher/homeschooler (mother to three), teacher and practitioner of Ancient Egyptian yoga with a focus on classes for children, as well as a musician, writer, and student of life. This article was written with reference to the “NaTuRe is the Best Teacher Yoga Summer Kamp 2016” liveducate.tumblr.com.

Consider this:

- How does your outdoor environment empower every child to connect with nature?
- Are there ways you can adapt your space even more to support children’s physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development?
- How does your nature-based space incorporate nature to promote stillness and relaxation?

Photos by Olivia Wilmot



Photo by Ishak Wilmot



The Pedagogy of Design

Gillian McAuliffe, Australia

A large part of a child's life takes place in educational settings. Often, one location is the major learning environment during the important foundational years. This has implications that require more attention to the pedagogy of design than currently occurs.

Jerome Bruner reflected that "a good teacher creates possibilities." It follows that learning landscapes that are engaged as the 'third teacher' should strive to present possibilities for the child to engage with their world as they create and test theories about what they experience.

In an educational setting, learning landscapes need to be secretive and subversive. They need to reveal their secrets slowly and allow an opportunity for magic to happen; connecting the child to important learning, which will be the frame through which they interpret the world. In addition to physical and fantasy realms, outdoor classrooms need to be science labs, workshops, and creative domains. They need to be challenging, engaging, and balanced.

Over the past 12 months, I have had the privilege of consulting on educational design in the development of a new learning environment in Bali, Indonesia. Our team of educators, builders, and landscapers considered nature and Reggio-inspired pedagogy when developing key concepts of the outdoor environment design, the building and curriculum design.

We considered six main elements:

- Sensory
- Nature
- Educational philosophy
- The 'voice of the child'
- Relationships
- Possibilities

As a result, the environment presented to the children and educators is a canvas that, together, they will transform and develop many times over the course of a year.

Here are a few highlights of the space:

- A flowing river through vegetation
- A climbing wall and tunnel
- Opportunities to gather
- Play space with tires and other loose parts
- Pathways for the journey
- Quiet, reflective spaces
- A Hobbit house to support fantasy and imagination

Currently, they are busily creating a kitchen garden and animal habitat. Loose parts are being gathered and new challenges added. Over time, the environment will evolve and change because it is designed to listen to the children who 'live' there. Learning landscapes designed through the lens of pedagogy will always be dynamic and open to the many possibilities that our world can offer.

It is rare that as early childhood practitioners we are invited to be protagonists in the design of our learning landscapes, and yet our knowledge of how children learn and the way they will use the spaces is a fundamental element of successful environmental design. It is vital that we evaluate any learning landscape through a lens of possibilities.

Gillian McAuliffe is the founder of Bold Park Community School in Perth, Western Australia. BPCS is a progressive school that has embraced social constructivist and nature-based learning for the past 22 years. Starting as a small school with one classroom, it has grown to pioneer educational landscapes for the whole child from 3- to 18-years-old. In 2016 Gillian stepped aside from BPCS and has engaged with schools, early learning centers, and organizations in Australia and internationally to develop learning landscapes and address culture change through translation of theory into practice. Gillian has been a member of the Nature Action Collaborative since 2007 and co-founded International Mud Day after listening to the voices of the children at BPCS.

Consider this:

- How does your outdoor learning landscape allow for multiple possibilities?
- How does it allow each child to transform, build theories, explore, create, research, communicate, and go on a journey?
- How will it challenge, connect, engage, grow, change?
- Does it provide spaces for small groups, large groups, and to be alone?



Nature is Nature in Any Language

James McLauchlan, Thailand

I've been teaching English in a rural area of northern Thailand for two and a half years. I travel around my district teaching at two different schools every day. This is farm country, in spite of being in the heart of the rainforest mountains. Many of my students are Karen Hill Tribe children who live in small villages nestled in the mountains. This is beautiful country. These children have grown up with nature on their doorstep.

When your small village or house is surrounded by the forest, you learn at a young age about poisonous snakes, scorpions, and other animals and insects that need to be avoided. The children also learn to identify the many edible plants growing in the wild. I think most of the children in my district grow up with a keen understanding about what nature means to them and their families. Growing up in an environment where many of the native plants put food on the table gives these children a perspective not easily acquired by children living in a typical 'sterile' American subdivision. The appreciation these children have for the beauty of the natural surroundings is inherent in their beings.

Although these children live in the rainforest, they still need safe, secure areas in which to experience the natural world. Many of my schools have gardens the children help maintain. All of the schools have extensive landscaped areas, which provide a safe place to observe butterflies, birds, and many types of insects.

Nature has helped me bridge the gap between our two distinct languages. Nature is nature, in any language. Gazing in wonder at a butterfly or honeybee floating from flower to flower transcends any language barriers. I have been able to use nature as a way to bond with my students. I can't speak a lot of Thai, but I know my nature words. The children relate to that and it has helped me earn their respect. We especially enjoy "Nature word walks." I write a word on my clipboard and they write the word in English and Thai. I collect samples of what I can: leaf, soil, sand, grass, rock, stick, flower. After we review our words in class, I have them collect some 'nature' by gathering the above-mentioned items. The children are always quite proud of their simple collections.

James McLauchlan became a follower of the Nature Explore program many years ago after attending a landscaping conference at Lied Lodge in Nebraska City, Nebraska. He attend many Nature Explore workshops in hopes of someday helping to promote the program. His life has led him to Thailand to teach English where nature is, and always will be, an important part of his life.

Consider this:

- How has nature helped a child to connect with you, classmates, or your community?
- How does accessibility to (regular time in) your nature-based space help children overcome any 'barriers' they experience?

Have an Adventure!

Here's a great activity from the Environmental Action Kit: Toolkit for Educators, to do with children on a regular basis. Children will experience it differently depending on weather, mood, and location.

- Breathing with a Tree, p. 16-17, <https://connect.worldforumfoundation.org/environmental-action-kit/toolkits-2/>
Helping children tune-in to how their bodies are feeling is a foundational part of this activity and something people of all ages can benefit from. With heightened awareness comes appreciation for and curiosity about the air that surrounds us.



Photos by James McLauchlan