

Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016

Becoming One with Mud!

This edition of *Wonder* celebrates the many ways International Mud Day 2016 impacted children, families, educators, community members, and policy makers. As you read, take a moment to reflect how each story depicts the Nature Action Collaborative for Children Universal Principle:

We believe that regular connections with the natural world encourage children to develop respect for local cultures and climates and for themselves as part of nature.



**Mark your calendar now —
when will you start planning for
International Mud Day 2017?**

JUNE 29



Photo by Corinne Garr



Photo by Bishnu Bhattacha



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.

www.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

Songs of Gratitude

Bishnu Bhatta, Nepal, co-founder of International Mud Day, PSD Nepal

Sixth International Mud Day June 29, 2016 • Paanchkhal, Kavre

On this auspicious day, with the goal to link children with their life-living nature, PSD Nepal at Paanchkhal organized the Mud Day celebration program with the children of the orphanage. Sixty students from the Gram Sudhar Lower Secondary School Baluwa, Kathmandu, 25 students from the orphanages, and the students from the various schools nearby actively participated in the different activities conducted in the mud, accompanied by the staffs of the orphanages, teachers of different schools, and PSD staffs.

The swampy field was prepared for rice planting, but first the children were invited to take part in a variety of competitive sporting activities including football, handball, and tug-of-war. A teacher from the nearby school shared that he hadn't seen the children in such a happy mood as when they played with the mud. He also shared that children have been searching for ways to be near Mother Nature and found that connection at the Mud Day celebration.

A special highlight of the day was singing a mud song, which was sent by a teacher from Bold Park School. With their lovely words the children showed their gratitude to Bold Park School and Gillian McAuliffe, who is one of the founders of Mud Day. They also thanked the children, teachers, and parents of Bold Park School for the support to organize this program.

Sixth International Mud Day and Planting Celebration 2016 • Champanagar, Chitwan

PSD Nepal involved ten different schools in coordination with DEST Nepal, a local community-based organization, to organize the sixth Mud Day and planting celebration in Champanagar, Chitwan. Although planting has been a part of Nepalese culture amongst all the castes and creeds and mud is an inevitable component to planting the rice, PSD Nepal has been successful in including the children in profound ways.

As this organization is trying to link the rice planting celebration with children and nature, the Government District Education Officer was invited as the chief guest. A women's group, media, and two elephants added charm, music, and excitement to the event.

The opening session took place at a temple close to the field where the mud play was going to take place. Krishna Pd Dhital, a renowned farmer, delivered a welcome speech followed by a presentation by the guest of honor, Mr. Aryal, who inaugurated the program by lighting an oil lamp and reading a proclamation banner. He stated, "I would like to praise PSD Nepal and Bishnu Bhatta for spreading farming culture worldwide and connecting it with children's educational learning tools. I can see the small enthusiastic children, who are rightly given a chance to learn the miracles of nature through mud games. Their environment eventually can be a milestone in the long run to sketch the future path of agriculture of Nepali people."

Then the elephants entered the well-prepared mud field carrying the guests and the children. The chief guest jumped off the elephant and started planting the rice seedlings, surrounded by cheers and applause as music filled the tranquil countryside atmosphere. It was time for the Mud Day football competition to begin!

Now in its sixth year, the program has had a positive impact, both on farmers and children. Everyone feels that it has not only strengthened the self-respect and dignity of farmers, but also motivated children towards nature and nature beings.

Consider this:

- What are some ways that you can collaborate or share experiences in nature with other community groups in your area, or across the globe?



Photos by Bishnu Bhatta

Yoga in the Mud

Swati Popat Vats, India

Mud is fun for kids. Indeed, a child does not need any invitation to play 'with mud' or 'in mud'! So when we started celebrating International Mud Day at our kindergartens, Podar Jumbo Kids in India, we found that very few parents would participate or send their kids for Mud Day celebrations. They were aware about the benefits (as we had sent out handouts, blogs, and tweets!), but were still hesitant to take the 'dirt risk.'

We knew the solution was to immerse them in loving the activity; only then would they get a sense of belonging that would lead to complete acceptance and involvement. To make it more interesting for parents, we linked International Yoga Day and International Mud Day celebrations together as both are in the month of June. We had kids playing in the mud on one side and parents doing yoga on the other side.

Soon hearing the squeals and shouts and giggles of the kids, parents could not resist and started to venture on to the mud side and slowly we encouraged them to do Yoga in the Mud. The result was remarkable. We had mothers sliding, slipping, balancing, squealing, and shrieking with delight and fathers having a contest of who was the muddiest!

Problem solved. Entire families were in the mud doing yoga. Yoga is an ancient traditional form of exercise and meditation that is practiced in India and it helps reconnect and rejuvenate the mind, body, and soul. Mud is earth and very central to the practice of yoga and when we combined both activities, we essentially helped parents and their children reconnect their minds, bodies, and souls to nature. The sheer joy of having pure mud all over the body was nothing less than being in a mud spa. They enjoyed the pleasure of being together with the family, without a structured agenda. And being able to experience the peace that comes with yoga was indeed a unique 'nature cocktail.'

We need to feel nature on our feet, hands, and in our hair to truly understand the meaning of being one with nature. As rightly said by Khalil Gibran: "Forget not that the Earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair." I can truly say that the Earth was indeed delighted the day we did Yoga in the Mud.

Swati Popat Vats is a Nature Action Collaborative for Children (NACC) leader for Asia and can be reached at: swatipopat@podar.org

Consider this:

- How can you add experiences with nature to annual celebrations or other special events that already take place at your site?
- What are some ways you might try to get parents even more engaged in planning and participating in activities that bring hands-on experiences with nature to the whole family?



Photo by Corinne Carr



An Exuberant Connection with Mother Earth

Corinne Carr, United States

One of my greatest passions is connecting children with nature and the natural world around them. I have fond memories of making mud pies, snapping beans, and making dirt roads for my cars when I was young. Most vivid of all is my memory of sitting and playing under the lilac bushes, and taking in the smell of lilacs. Lilacs are still one of my favorite scents. I provide children in my care with multiple experiences that engage them with nature, whether looking for bugs, making mud pies, learning self-help skills, laying in the grass watching and talking about the clouds, or encouraging them to run to the garden to see if a strawberry is ripe to eat. Children are inquisitive about the world around them, learning each day. I provide children in my

The Best Laid Plans...

Michelle Rupiper, United States

My favorite day of the year is June 29 — International Mud Day. I have conducted numerous workshops on the importance of mud play, written articles on the topic, and in general have championed the subject to anyone and everyone. So, of course it goes without saying, that I presumed my own 2½-year-old grandson would enjoy mud play. I couldn't wait for him to participate in the various Mud Day activities planned at the laboratory school on campus where I teach early childhood education. But as everyone knows, the best laid plans don't always transpire into what we expect.

For days leading up to Mud Day, I told Tristan about the mud activities that would take place and how he could play in the mud and get as dirty as he liked. He and I both seemed equally excited about the prospect. As I buckled him into his car seat that morning he happily told me, "I get to play in the mud! It's gonna be *perfect!*" Reaching the outdoor classroom Tristan jumped up and down chanting, "I wanna play in the mud! I wanna play in the mud!" I eagerly led him to the mud pit area where he quickly changed his mind. He absolutely refused to touch the mud! When I tried to pick him up and set him in the mud, he clung to me with all of his might, pleading "Nooo!" as forcefully as he could. No amount of coaxing, modeling, or pleading was going to get him in the mud. I was totally disappointed. Mud Day was a bust.

Knowing that I needed to meet Tristan where he was, I decided to plan some less intimidating activities for him. If he was going to engage in mud play in the future, we were going to have to work up to it. I decided to add a dirt digging area to my backyard to provide him the chance to become familiar with dirt play. Knowing that cars are his toy of choice, I knew I could lure him into the dirt if I provided a variety of vehicles. At first he stood outside the dirt area, leaning in to push the trucks in the soil. But soon he was sitting in the dirt, scooping dirt into the dump trucks, and creating roadways and hills for his vehicles. After a few more dirt experiences I'll add water to the play, letting Tristan decide when and where to make the dirt wet. Before he knows it, he'll be enjoying mud play!

Michelle Rupiper is a professor of practice at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln where she teaches early childhood education courses and works to prepare our next generation of teachers to connect children to nature.

Consider this:

- How can you add or adapt natural play activities to help every child get involved in his own way that is just right for him?



Photo by Michelle Rupiper

care with multiple experiences that engage them with nature. Children excel and have a sense of calm when given nature experiences and opportunities. They learn empathy, gain problem-solving skills, and so much more.

Since 2012 we have celebrated International Mud Day at Special Blessing's Child Care. I am passionate about the story of how International Mud Day started, and eager to celebrate every year. International Mud Day 2016 was exuberant with giggles, squeals, and much laughter. Children connected with Mother Earth with mud squishing in between the toes, on their faces, legs, and arms. Some children were a little hesitant, some took longer to experience the wonder, and others had mud from the get-go from head to toe. Children become one with nature when they are indulged with experiences and opportunities involving nature and the world around them.

Corinne Carr is the owner of a licensed, Nationally Accredited Family Child Care (NAFCC) business, "Special Blessings Child Care."

Consider this:

- How are you helping children celebrate that they are one with nature?