

# Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2013

## Think Globally; Act Locally

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

*For Children: We believe that regular connections with the natural world encourage children to develop feelings of unity, peace, and well-being as global citizens.*

(Find the complete list of principles in the Environmental Action Kit at [worldforumfoundation.org/nature](http://worldforumfoundation.org/nature).) For many of us, the beginning of a new year is a time of reflection and expectation. It is a time when we contemplate our desires and make resolutions to do less of some things and more of others. We set new goals, outline our agendas, and muster our determination to make things happen. Let's also start the year by celebrating the impact we will have when we all endeavor to make a difference in the life of a child. Visualize the many ways we will support our children's sense of wonder and everyday connections to the world around them. We encourage you to include a world-wide perspective as part of your efforts. Take a moment to consider the collective impact that we will make through our heartfelt actions.

Ruth Wilson (2009) says:

*"Caring for simple things in nature — like caterpillars, flowers, and ladybugs*

*helps children develop a sense of themselves as nurturers and as people who care. This sense of self contributes to a peaceful way of living — with self, with others, and with the natural world."*

As you support children's cherished moments with nature, try out Your Beautiful Journey of the Toolkit for Educators from the Environmental Action Kit (pp.75-77) (see Resources). Encouraging children to creatively express their appreciation for beauty helps them develop a deeper appreciation for the wonders of the natural world.

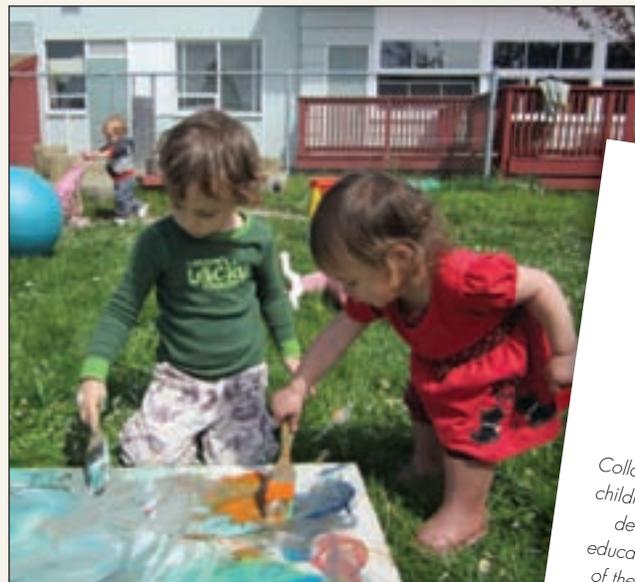
As you read the following reflections shared by Nature Action Teams (formed

at the Nature Action Forum in 2010), we invite you to consider the commitments and actions that you will make this year to 'think global and act local.'

### Colours of Nature Expressed

Artemis Options, Nature Action Team 58 (Canada)

Artemis Options is an infant/toddler centre in Victoria, British Columbia. We have a large outdoor playspace filled with beautiful plant life and natural landscapes. Our favorite time is the time we spend outside. Our daily experiences change with the weather. Be it boots and puddles, or sunshine and snow, we enjoy every gift that nature sends our way.



PHOTOGRAPH: ARTEMIS OPTIONS, VICTORIA BC

Nature Action Collaborative for Children  
  
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*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.*

## Reflection: Getting Outside in a Nature Kindergarten

by Enid Elliot, Nature Action Team 58 (Canada)

This September in British Columbia, Canada, a Nature Kindergarten was started in the Sooke School District. After a year and a half of planning and fundraising, 21 kindergartners spend all morning, each morning, outdoors in the nearby forest. Each day the children arrive in their boots, rain pants, and coats ready for an adventure in the forest — whatever the weather.

The teacher, working in partnership with an early childhood educator, takes the children down the trail for a walk of approximately one kilometer to a site where the children play, listen to stories, and learn about the trees, plants, and animals within that forest. The children have learned how to be a group: to look out for and help each other. They challenge themselves to take risks and to problem solve. The forest has been another teacher. The children learn to feel at home with each other, the weather, and the environs. The play is imaginative, deep, and rich.

Ours is a pilot program. Local universities (University of Victoria and Royal Roads University) and the local college, Camosun, are conducting research to observe children's fitness levels, motor skills, and environmental attitudes. The children's learning is being documented and articulated in order to demonstrate the considerable skills they are developing.

Consider this:

- How much time do the children you work with spend outdoors daily, and how will you encourage authentic nature connections during that time?
- What tools are you using to document the rich learning that is taking place?

## Reflection: Evansville Regional Nature Action Collaborative for Children

by Lauren Preske, Nature Action Team 74 (United States)

The Evansville Regional Nature Action Collaborative for Children (Evansville, Indiana) is a progressive model of a diverse team of professionals and organizations working collaboratively to connect children with nature across a community. The Team is made up of environmental educators, university faculty, teachers, school administrators, child care resource and referral specialists, children's center administrators and educators, hospital administrators, family advocates, and landscape architects. These advocates are touching the lives of children from different perspectives and in their own venues, such as in a child care or a public nature center setting or in consultations with landscapers. These localized efforts trickle out and overlap into the lives of children and their families wherever they live, connecting them across a community.

The team has been working on a large scale, centrally-located, public, nature-based outdoor play space that will be accessible to all children in the Evansville area, regardless of what neighborhood they live in or which school or child care they attend. There are also long-range plans to connect this central play space with other play spaces throughout the community. On a daily basis, team members take opportunities to connect children and their families to nature in their own venues.

Here are some of their perspectives:

Nature Action Team member Jane Meyer, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Southern Indiana (USI) and President of the Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children (IAEYC). Jane and



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SOOKE SCHOOL DISTRICT, BC

the Center Manager, Amanda Wheaton-Collins, supervise and teach methods for pre-service teachers at the USI Children's Learning Center. Amanda says,

"We feel that it is important to demonstrate playing in the mud, splashing in puddles, gardening, and more for pre-service teachers visiting our program. They see that connecting to nature is an essential part of curriculum for young children. By giving students this experience, we hope they will recognize that so many of the things teachers typically do not allow children to experience because of the mess are actually excellent learning activities. They realize that nature-filled learning can be easy to do, fun, and the clean-up is relatively simple. It is so important to allow children to be children and give them the freedom to explore."

Nature Action Team member Joan Scott is Director of Deaconess Hospital Children's Enrichment Center where they are transforming a large open field across the street into a naturally landscaped play yard that benefits not only the children in their center, but the neighborhood as well. Joan says,

"Since we are located within a one-mile radius of three other child care centers, one Title I elementary school, and are in an inner-city neighborhood, we're planning to offer regularly scheduled days when other children can come and play. We also plan to host adult workshops to demonstrate the development of the project, to discuss the positive impact on children, and to offer any assistance so others can replicate the concept."

As the Chair of our local Nature Action Team and the Director of Education for Wesselman Nature Society (a not-for-profit environmental education organization), I provide guidance and enhanced opportunities for outdoor play and learning in a variety of ways that serve both children and adults:

- I strive to reach children on a daily basis in public venues like the Nature Center or in schools, parks, or at community events.
- I challenge them to notice and explore the natural environments around them.
- I guide them to discover nature through natural objects I can bring to them.

I also make it a priority to reach adults through conversations and trainings to increase their awareness about the benefits of letting children play and learn with nature, and to help them provide them so that even more children can benefit in their own spaces.

The Evansville Regional Nature Action Collaborative for Children Team will diligently continue to connect children with nature from a variety of perspectives and facilitate expansion of a local community model until it overlaps with others to become global in reach.

Consider this:

- Learn more about the work being done by the Nature Action Teams at <http://worldforumfoundation.org/wf/initiatives/nature-action-collaborative-for-children/nature-action-teams/>



PHOTOGRAPH BY LAUREN PRESKE

### 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 understand their role as researchers and facilitators who observe children's interactions with nature and support the emergent curriculum.*

## Reflection: Earth Agent Day Adventures

by Kalifia Constantine, Nature Action Team 23 (Trinidad and Tobago)

Our most important mandate at the University of the West Indies Family Development and Children's Research Centre is to advocate for the rights of the child. Caribbean culture and common perceptions about learning often infringe on a child's right to play and enjoy time outside. As Team 23, one of our goals is to provide regular connections with the natural world for Primary School children while making school a friendly place. It was a difficult process to satisfy a seemingly simple task. Adult opposition came in the form of teachers, principals, and parents. However, our Earth Agent Day Adventures—a vacation day camp designed to train students to appreciate, love, and advocate for the Earth—showed us the priceless benefits of exposing children to nature. We facilitated the play of 27 children, ages 6 to 9, most with extreme social and behavioral challenges, and everyone came out a winner. After allowing our Agents the chance to run, jump, climb, build, and cook outdoors, we witnessed the magic of nature therapy.



PHOTOGRAPH BY KALIFIA CONSTANTINE

This effort was coupled with our nationwide radio broadcast spreading a similar “get outside, hug a tree” message. One-third of our schools have reached the phase of creating a bio-friendly space and painting a mural. This phase allows us to use the community to facilitate learning by partnering with oil companies, parents, and neighborhood groups. Watching the interaction, hearing the language, and feeling the spirit of the group confirms for us that nature can heal. Our group is more independent, confident, polite, cooperative, and responsible now than we were at the start. Parents and teachers attest to this transformation. To date, we have directly impacted 53,325 children. Indirectly we have reached 516,910 individuals.

How will you take action this year?

Consider this:

- **Join the Nature Action Collaborative for Children (NACC).** It's free! Anyone who is interested in re-connecting young children with nature can become a member. Join with the other 1,600+ NACC members—architects, environmentalists, engineers, health professionals, and early childhood educators—and take advantage of special benefits. <http://worldforumfoundation.org/wf/wp/initiatives/nature-action-collaborative-for-children/join-nacc/>
- **Become a NACC Affiliate group.** Any community or regional group interested in becoming officially associated with the work of the World Forum Foundation's Nature Action Collaborative for Children (NACC) may apply to become a NACC Affiliate Group. For more information go to <http://worldforumfoundation.org/wf/wp/initiatives/nature-action-collaborative-for-children/about-nacc/nacc-affiliates/forming/>

### References

Wilson, R. A. (2009). The color green: A 'go' for peace education. *Exchange*, 187(3), 40-43.

### Resources

Toolkit for Educators from the Environmental Action Kit:  
<http://worldforumfoundation.org/wf/wp/initiatives/nature-action-collaborative-for-children/environmental-action-kit/rials/educators/>

## Wonder Vitals

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.