



Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2014

Space Speaks to Each of Us

Through his work Jim Greenman reminds us,

“Space speaks to each of us. Long corridors whisper ‘run’ to a child; picket fences invite us to trail our hands along the slats. Physical objects have emotional messages of warmth, pleasure, solemnity, fear; action messages of *come close, touch me, stay away*; or identity messages of *I’m strong, or I’m fragile.*”

If you sat quietly in the outdoor space where children in your care spend the majority of their time, what would the space say to you and what do you think it says to children? What does it say when you observe children at play within the space?

- Does it tell the special story of the plants and animals that live in your region?

- Does it reminisce about the traditions and celebrations of the generations of families in your children’s histories?
- Does it invite the children to examine and wonder about the natural world that they call home?

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

We believe that nature-based spaces should respect and celebrate the site’s natural assets, local culture, climate, and history.

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

The reflections shared in this issue help us think about our spaces in different ways. They inspire us to be thoughtful

when choosing materials, to honor local lifestyles, and to incorporate our mission into design planning. When we combine these aspects, our care for the Earth and our care for children manifest in beautiful and significant ways.

Here’s an idea you might try:

Finding ways to incorporate more native plants into the outdoor spaces where children play is one way to focus on this principle. The Environmental Action Kit offers an activity that relates native plants to water conservation and environmental stewardship in a way that is appropriate and meaningful to young children. You can access “Use Native Plants” on page 36 in the Toolkit for Early Childhood Programs portion: www.worldforumfoundation.org/eak.

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):

We believe it is important that children be respected as competent, powerful learners and risk-takers who have a voice in what they create and learn through nature.

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Reflection: Education Under the Sea

from Damir Masovic and Danilo Lekovic, Nature Action Team 27, Montenegro

Few nations in the world, if any, experience ecology as a general constitutional value. That is reality though for the 650,000 inhabitants of the small Mediterranean island of Montenegro. We have the chance to shape our lives with the permanent principles of respect and protection of the environment. Fortunately 100,000 Montenegrin preschool and school children spend their weeks in the deepest connection with nature, whose protection is incorporated into the curricula and educational practices. New opportunities will soon provide most of the school children with connections to the small, yet very diverse and rich Montenegrin coast.

In close cooperation with our Adriatic neighbors, Italian Ministry of Land and Sea, Montenegrin and foreign experts in the field of sustainable development and education examined an area of the Montenegrin seabed located in the municipalities of Bar and Budva. In addition to

the planned creation of the first marine nature reserve, authorities will establish a center for education and visitors, to be located in the town of Petrovac. This center will become a unique area for learning in a natural reserve and a major step forward in bringing the children the rich, yet mostly inaccessible, seabed of the Adriatic.

This center will have a unique education center for children where they will be introduced to how the underwater ecosystem functions, in order to learn about life in it and the benefits of preserving it. Because it can be difficult to see what happens under the water's surface, real-size models of parts of the protected area, usually inaccessible to children, will be created for educational purposes. This center and the area in which it is located will be unique spaces where children from the Montenegrin towns far from the coast will have the opportunity to learn firsthand about the Adriatic sea and the waters of their country and to see the work of environmentalists who protect them.

Consider this:

- This team of people reached out to find government and policy partners to collaborate with and create new opportunities for children in their part of the world. Who could you work with to do that?
- What are some interesting ways you could help children explore new aspects of nature where you live?



PHOTOGRAPH BY WWW.SXC.HU/PROFILE/INAAA

Wonder, the newsletter of the NACC, welcomes submissions from all NACC members. Please join us at: 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.

Reflection: Honoring the Earth

from Tom Carlson, United States

In designing facilities, we have always sought to *respect and celebrate the natural assets, local culture, climate, and history* of the places where we work. Jones & Jones Architects + Landscape Architects + Planners of Seattle, Washington, was founded in 1970 to honor the Earth, to be a beneficial partner to nature, and to respect Indigenous and local cultures. Throughout our history we have been in the business of creating nature- and culture-based learning places — whether they be zoological and botanical gardens, nature centers, playgrounds, or outdoor classrooms. Here are a few recent examples.

At the Mercer Slough Nature Park, a 320-acre wetland preserve in the heart of the Seattle Metro area, we designed a LEED-Gold certified environmental education center high on a forested steep slope overlooking the wetland. This allows young learners to be elevated within the upland tree canopy, putting them eye-to-eye with the likes of Pileated Woodpeckers, blue jays, and hummingbirds. An interactive wet lab offers hands-on contact with wetland critters.

The Cedar River Watershed Education Center is located on the edge of a 90,000-acre protected forest 30-miles east of Seattle. It educates young people and their parents about the source of their drinking water, indigenous flora and fauna, and the people who called this landscape home for 10,000 years. The design leverages the site's natural and cultural assets, climate, and topography to illustrate how a healthy forest is critical to supplying clean water to city residents. Native plants and natural materials — timber and stone — are dominant. A rocky streambed weaves through the dense fern understory of the central courtyard where 21 copper drums pulse to the rhythms of the intermittent rains. Centuries-old items left by Native Americans within Cedar River basin highlight their long relationship with this land.

Most recently we collaborated with Nature Explore in designing a nature-based outdoor classroom with the Puyallup Tribe at their Grandview Early Learning Center near Tacoma, Washington. The design is made up of a series of 'rooms' and trails that will physically and culturally reconnect children and adults to nature through child- and teacher-led activities. These rooms include a fish camp with cedar longhouse, a tree house with water activities, a canoe-carving area, and a storytelling amphitheater. Tribal elders will have a place to tell stories or they can harvest craft materials from the native plants to be placed throughout the property for teaching traditional crafts to children.

Consider this:

- What people, animals, or insects lived in your outdoor space before you did? How can you help children recognize and celebrate that through the design of your space, choice of materials, and the children's experiences?
- How does the design and structure of your space encourage children to have hands-on interactions with nature? What will you do to create even more opportunities?



MERCER SLOUGH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER



CEDAR RIVER WATERSHED EDUCATION CENTER



RAIN DRUM COURTYARD AT CEDAR RIVER WATERSHED EDUCATION CENTER

PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY TOM CARLSON

Reflection: Our Local Lifestyle

from Martha Ptasnik, United States

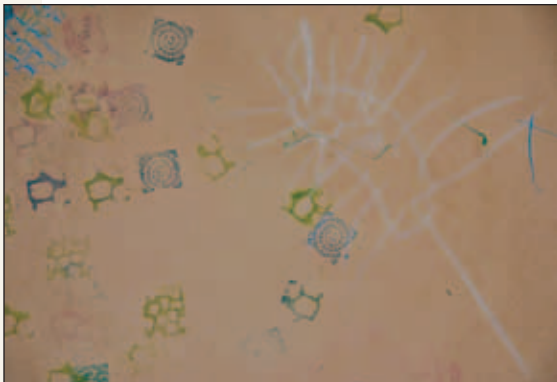
Pinedale, Wyoming, is a small rural town in western Wyoming, 90 miles south of Yellowstone National Park. At 7,100 feet, it sits at the base of the majestic Wind River Range. It is here that you will find a little school called Children's Learning Center, which has been serving young children and their families for over 30 years. With 80% of the county being public land, outdoor activities such as camping, fishing, skiing, hiking, and boating are common. It only makes sense that this school would build an outdoor space that reflects the natural beauty of the area, where the children have opportunities to participate in activities that reflect the local lifestyle.

The children in this community grow up participating in most of these outdoor activities and the teachers make efforts to reflect these interests in their weekly planning with the children. This past year local artists visited the school and worked with the children to create sculptures that reflect the local area and outdoor activities.

One project resulted in the creation of a cairn (a pile of stones set on a hill or mountain to mark a spot for walkers and climbers to find their way in the mountains). The children spent days stacking rocks and tree cookies before eventually collaborating to create a cairn that now permanently sits in the outdoor classroom. Rocks gathered from the local area sit in the building area so that children can continue to experiment with balancing rocks and also to create their own nature trails marked with cairns as they pretend to find the hiking trail.



PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY MARTHA PTASNIK



PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY MARTHA PTASNIK

A second project resulted in a permanent sculpture located in front of the school called "School of Fish." Trout fishing is a regular pastime of many families in this area and it is not uncommon to find teachers and children fishing in the pond and creek located across the street from the school. The children participated in a week-long residency with an art professor from the University of Wyoming exploring trout, trout habitat, and, of course, creating their own images of trout. The sculpture is made up of three metal panels of trout images. As one looks closer, the negative spaces between the schools of fish reveal the children's images of fish.

By exposing our children to these local traditions and activities, it is our hope that they will learn to appreciate the natural beauty of the area and eventually become stewards of this special area.

Consider this:

- Does your outdoor space feel unique? What plants and materials can you add that are native to your area so that children gain a 'sense of place' when spending time in it?
- What local resources or artists might you have nearby that you could invite to your center to work with?
- What nature-related activities do children in your community frequently participate in and how could you recreate and extend similar opportunities for them in your outdoor space?

Reference

Greenman, J. (2007). *Caring spaces, Learning places*. Redmond, WA: Exchange Press.

