



Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

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International Mud Day 2014: Making Lifelong Memories

International Mud Day began in 2009 at a World Forum event. Gillian McAuliffe from Australia and Bishnu Bhatta from Nepal joined in conversation to share their hopes and concerns for young children. The collaboration that followed has inspired educators, children, and families across the globe to celebrate International Mud Day together each year on June 29, using a simple tub of mud as the unifying element.

Over the last several years, your reflections on mud day have related a fascinating transformation that takes place: children from all parts of the world have the same hesitation during their first experience of Mud Day. Many approach

the mud cautiously, solemnly studying the changes in their surroundings, wondering what will happen next, wide eyes looking over their shoulders to the adults waiting nearby, wordlessly asking, "Are you serious? You're telling me I can play in THAT?" Tentative explorations begin with single fingers poked into soggy soil or sticks dipped into gooey muck and then . . . finally . . . a splatter is made, a giggle erupts, and before long gleeful squeals of pure delight ensue as the players (both children and adults) let go of their trepidations and literally jump in with both feet!

Your stories also speak of deeper messages that convey the lasting impact Mud Day



PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN AT FRIENDLY AVENUE CHRISTIAN PRESCHOOL,
GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA BY SANDY JOHNSON

will have: messages of freedom, creativity, exuberant play, community advocacy, and the importance of our world's children connecting to the Earth and with each other. Here are a few highlights shared from this year's International Mud Day celebrations.

A New Concept in Tanzania

from Pamela Bhanji

Hi, everyone! Here in Tanzania we celebrated World Mud Day on the 26th of June. This was a new concept to parents, but one to which they gave their total support. Fortunately we have beautiful weather and mud in plentiful supply! As with all children, ours loved getting all mucky — and their teachers, too! We were surprised at the different mud creations. The next day when the creations were dry, the kids painted them to take home and a few decorate our school as a memory of a lovely warm and sunny day. We recognized the most enthusiastic mud players with badges. Thank you World Forum for this innovative idea!

Consider this:

- If Mud Day is a new idea for you, what do you need to know to get ready for the celebration in 2015? Who can you collaborate with to help you gather information and plan an event?
- Join the Nature Action Collaborative for Children. Share your perspectives and experiences with others to make meaningful connections with nature experiences in children's lives.

To join: www.WorldForumFoundation.org/nacc



It's Mud Day in Nepal!

excerpt from International Mud Day report 2014, PSD-Nepal
 Bishnu Bhatta, Director

PSD-Nepal again organized a Mud Day celebration in Kavre, Nepal, this year. It is the one afternoon when the children can play in mud and get dirty without worrying about their clothes or how to get clean afterwards. Similar to the years before, a rice paddy was cleaned and flooded in order to provide a great muddy field to play in.

The children are often taught that mud is dirty and that they should stay away from it, so it took some time to convince them otherwise. It was some of the young boys, together with one volunteer from Hong Kong, who eventually started running into the mud field and soon more and more of their friends followed. After a few minutes the field was full of people of all ages, enjoying the mud together. A football was thrown into the field so that various games could be played.

While the children enjoyed the mud, more and more guests arrived: 50 children from the HEMS Schools, together with five teachers joined the celebration, as well as 30 children and five staff members from the Gram Sudhar Lower Secondary School in Kathmandu and 14 volunteers from the City University of Hong Kong who are currently doing a placement in several villages in the Kathmandu and the Kavre District.

Mud Day is not only celebrated for fun, it also connects children with nature. In Nepali government schools, nature-based education is theoretical rather than practical and many students do not have the opportunity to explore nature. PSD uses Mud Day to help children learn about the importance of nature. Mud helps children learn about soil and water and rice planting in their country. PSD considers it important to connect children with their natural surroundings, because as Bishnu states: "It's nature; you have to BE in it!" Mud Day is about hands-based learning elements even though children playing in the mud don't think of it as 'learning.'

To share stories, visit: www.WorldForumFoundation.org ■ www.WoFoNet.org

A Place to Play

from website Bold Park Community School, Perth, Australia — www.bpcs.squarespace.com

(Gillian McAuliffe, Founder of Bold Park Community School began the Mud Day collaboration with Bishnu Bhatta from Nepal)

The leadership at Bold Park Community School (BPCS) has been working to provide innovative learning environments for their students for a number of years. Teaching teams provide numerous opportunities for children to learn through nature and build a love for the natural world: a nature playground, kitchen garden, and the natural surroundings in the local community. The fun activities that the students plan and organize for Mud Day are part of the ongoing investigation and learning that is integrated into the curriculum.

To create these environments BPCS staff join with others to think deeply about how as adults we interfere with the growth and development of our children, particularly the way we design our play spaces and allow children to interact with their world. We asked students in middle school and college how they felt about the role adults play in their lives. You can view "Getting Past the Grownups," BPCS 2013 <http://vimeo.com/70754554> to hear their perspectives.

Consider this:

- Visit www.worldforumfoundation.org to read more about the collaboration that inspired International Mud Day and all of the annual Mud Day reports from Bishnu in Nepal.
- What are some ways that you can use Mud Day as a focal point to explore the local environment or landscape of your area with the children in your care?
- Who can you collaborate with in your celebration of International Mud Day 2015? Is there another site in your neighborhood or city that you can reach out to? Perhaps you would like to find a partner across the globe. WoFoNet, also found on the World Forum Foundation web page, is a great place to connect with others from all over the world.
- What strategies can you use to give your children a voice in planning, organizing, and evaluating your next Mud Day celebration?

Mini-Mud Run

from Sandy Johnson, United States

Each year we try to do something different for Mud Day at Friendly Avenue Christian Preschool in Greensboro, North Carolina. This year children ages 14 months-4th grade participated in our 4th Annual Mud Day Celebration with a Mini-Mud Run. Staff and volunteers set up an obstacle course and added 800 pounds of dirt and some water to make a muddy fun day! Children ran through an arched tunnel, over hay bales into muddy pools, crawled (or walked) under the cargo net through a giant mud pit, transferred containers of mud from one location to the next, threw mud balls at the bull's eye target, navigated through a tunnel with mud, worked their way through a rope maze mud pit, walked the muddy plank, and dug in a pool of mud for a gold coin before crossing the finish line.

Our infants (8 weeks-14 months) enjoyed their own version of mud fun. We layered mud on bubble wrap and encouraged them to stomp in the mud and pop the bubbles. They played in mud tubs and did mud painting with their hands and feet.



PHOTOGRAPH FROM NATURE EXPLORE, LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

An Experience to Remember

from Paula Beckerman, United States

As the grand finale of our week-long Mud Day celebration at Paula's Preschool and Kindergarten in Arlington, Texas, I offered three levels of muddy commitment, so everyone could choose where they were most comfortable:

1. There was the table with dry dirt and plastic trucks and scoops, for the children who really didn't want to get muddy, or wanted a break from the mud.
2. There was a 'mud pie' station, with mud, water, pie pans, cups, scoops; a mid-level muddy choice. Almost all the children chose to play at this station at least part of the time.
3. Finally, for the adventurous, we had a plastic play pool full of mud, to wallow in!

The children started off cautiously, mostly walking in the mud, or splashing their legs a little. But once a few of them braved a full-body mud bath, others joined on in!

Did I get muddy? Are you kidding? This is a lot of fun! About halfway through the mud play I handed my camera to a parent, and joined in. I don't know that I was the muddiest, but it was close!

When we had had enough, and the parents were ready to take their children home, we scooped up the mud, and took it to the vegetable garden. Yes, everyone had to rinse off a lot in the sprinkler before the children could go home. No, none of the parents got muddy, and yes, they had to put down towels to keep their cars clean. And, yes, there was more bathing of muddy children once they got home. More importantly, children and parents left smiling from a day that will become a long-time happy memory. This is an experience I hope the children never forget, and will pass along to their own children. Happy International Mud Day!

Future Issues of *Wonder*

We invite you to email your ideas, stories and photos that relate to the following *Universal Principle for Connecting Children with Nature* to Tara Hild (tarah@natureexplore.org):

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

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