

WONDER

The Nature Action Collaborative for Children Global Newsletter

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Coordinated by Kirsten Haugen

Learning from Our Challenges: Growing Connections through a Pandemic

“We believe it’s important for children to be supported in developing life skills through holistic nature-based learning.”

—NACC’s Universal Principles for Connecting Children with Nature, worldforumfoundation.org/nacc-up

“We believe this moment calls for focus on equitable access to safe, nurturing environments and flexible pathways to enrollment and participation that are responsive to the cultural, economic, medical and emotional contexts families experience.”

—The Inside Out Advisory Group, insideoutside.org

As the COVID pandemic closed classrooms and limited children’s in-person connections with their teachers, caregivers, and friends, none of us were untouched

by the challenges. Through it all, we have clearly learned that early educators are not a frail bunch. We respond with heart-driven persistence and creativity. The following two stories—from the Wisconsin Nature Action Collaborative, United States, and from the Ministry of Education in Bhutan—perfectly illustrate how, together with children, we can choose to let challenges inspire us to adapt and grow, just as plants do, and how in growing gardens, children themselves experience wonderful opportunities to grow and learn.

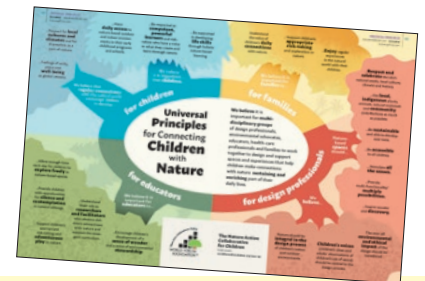
Growing in gratitude,



Kirsten Haugen

Universal Principles for Connecting Children with Nature

Have you seen our beautiful new visualization of NACC’s “Universal Principles for Connecting Children with Nature?” This colorful guide is easily pulled from the center of the January/February 2021 issue of *Exchange*, or you can download it for free at worldforumfoundation.org/nacc-up.



Nature Action Collaborative for Children

The mission of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children (NACC) 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

Write for WONDER!

Send your “Wonder-filled” story about connecting children with the natural world to kirstenh@dimensionsfoundation.org

Supporting Bhutanese Children to Learn at Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic

by Karma Gayleg, ECCD Specialist
Ministry of Education, Bhutan

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended lives across the world and impacted the well-being of children and families. Particularly worrying is the unprecedented disruption of learning for all children, including preschool children, due to school and early child care development centre closures. In Bhutan, ECCD centres have been closed since March 2020, and this has impacted approximately 9,400 children aged 3-5, from 495 ECCD centres. During this period, even as centres remain closed, ECCD facilitators rose to the challenge and supported children and families through distance learning platforms and support for parents. Wherever feasible, home visits were carried out to monitor children's progress as well as to provide hands-on support to caregivers/parents.

In the absence of ECCD attendance and socialization in group settings, children came together in their own neighbourhoods and engaged in play activities guided by parents and on their own. Among the many activities, playing with natural materials and chores such as gardening and attending to plants were the most stimulating. Many young children across the country engaged in nature play activities.



From Sri Lanka to Scotland: Join our new Facebook Community

Would you like to connect with educators around the world who are passionate about children and nature? Do you have questions, stories or ideas about reconnecting children - and yourself - with the natural world? We can't wait to add your voice to our global community!

In a recent post to our group, NACC leader Claire Warden, Scotland, shared her team's free resources inspired by the need to adapt to new circumstances and challenges. Visit mindstretchers.academy to find *Inquiries*, guides on planning for and with children, and *Nature Play Diaries* "perfect for practitioners and families to provide inspiration for playing with children in the early years."

We were also recently treated to a video interview shared by Herath Mudiyansele Wasantha Herath of Sri Lanka.



To become part of our Facebook community, visit facebook.com/groups/wfnature. Be sure to answer a few brief membership questions to join!

Who Would Have Thought? Gardening via Zoom during a Pandemic

by Gerry Slater,

Wisconsin Nature Action Collaborative for Children

This year in midst of the pandemic, early childhood centers wishing to retain staff and provide professional development opportunities asked Wisconsin Nature Action Collaborative for Children to provide a workshop on gardening. We looked to board member Jodi Fitzgerald, who has been providing wonderful gardening experiences for children at her center, The Climbing Tree. We then reached out to other organizations for additional resources and guidance, and found ourselves in an energizing collaboration with the Wisconsin School Garden Network/Rooted and Green Bay Botanical Garden.

As we met virtually, a strong cooperative venture sprouted. What had initially looked like one or two sessions for the few centers that made the original request became a series of five sessions over four months. With only two weeks to advertise, we hoped we might get 15 participants. Incredibly, 55 signed on, with 30 completing the full five-session series. Spanning the sessions across four months enabled participants to share challenges and successes through most of the gardening season, and to ask questions related to their gardening experiences. In addition to answering questions, Stefanie Bugash Scopoline of the Wisconsin School Garden Network/Rooted, and Linda Gustke of Green Bay Botanical Garden provided a tremendous variety of documents and videos to guide participants and their colleagues. An introductory session and discussions throughout helped everyone to retain a focus on children's learning amidst all of gardening how-tos.

Many participating teachers had never gardened themselves or with children; some had been gardening with children; and some had a great deal of gardening experience, but not with children. Participants came from all around the state of Wisconsin, from both small communities and large cities, representing small family centers and large early childhood group centers. The diversity of programs and participants greatly enriched the learning experience for everyone. Challenges, experiences and ideas were shared during sessions and at a final session highlighting photographs from everyone. Many participants plan to expand their gardens next year and to incorporate ideas from others.

Rich, wonderful stories brought everyone together and warmed our hearts—the excitement and engagement of children excitedly bringing parents to the garden and talking about it at home, neighbors and bus drivers helping and advising, building owners offering additional space, community businesses donating materials, and fellow teachers who previously expressed no interest announcing that they would like garden space next year. Photos and stories demonstrated the pride felt by participating teachers and children.



Take-aways to Consider

In addition to all the many benefits of gardening with children, we learned:

- Virtual gatherings enable early childhood educators with major limitations on time and money to learn together across considerable geographic distances, community and program differences and ethnic and racial differences.
- Early childhood educators tend to be courageous, committed, resilient learners and learning guides.
- It is possible to build a community of learners relatively quickly through virtual gatherings.
- Collaboration can provide powerful synergy and be fun.
- There is a great deal of interest in gardening with children and integrating gardening into programs.
- Gardening provides a welcoming and attractive gateway to the natural world for educators, children and families.
- Outdoor spaces are typically too small to support all of the wonderful learning that can happen there.
- Even those with very small spaces or spaces not as conducive to gardening will be courageous and inventive when working with the support of a community.