



Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2012

Inspiring Families to Embrace Children's Daily Connections with Nature

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

We believe it is important for families to understand the value of children's daily connections with nature.

(Find the complete list of

Universal Principles at

worldforumfoundation.org/nature.)

In today's world, families are bombarded with messages that tout the 'latest and greatest' gadget to buy if we want our children to grow into happy, healthy, productive adults. We are overwhelmed with information that persuades us to provide the 'right' kind of experience for our children. Even though the benefits of a childhood grounded in a love of the earth far outweigh much of these claims, the value of children's daily connections to nature has yet to become regular prime-time news. As early childhood professionals, we can support parents who are feeling overwhelmed by promoting family lifestyle choices that include frequent interactions with the wonders of nature.

We can help parents experience the great joys of spending time with their children outdoors:

- We can share stories that help families see the small, simple ways children can experience nature as part of every-day learning.
- We can communicate the foundation of environmental stewardship that is being fostered.
- We can empower families with the knowledge that learning with nature is valuable.
- We can help parents become advocates for children and nature.

Inspiring Children's Spirit of Stewardship: A Toolkit for Families

Help parents understand that the best way to protect our environment in the future is to help our children grow up with a love for the earth today. This happens when children make positive, daily connections with the natural world in all parts of their lives.

A valuable home-school connection can be fostered if families use ideas in the "Toolkit for Families" while schools implement activities with the same theme. By supplementing efforts at school, we are giving children the opportunity to deepen their understandings by 'teaching' their families what they learned.

Go to worldforumfoundation.org/nature to find the Environmental Action Kit:

- Click on the "Toolkit for Early Childhood Programs."
- Explore the *Air in Motion* activities on page 22 and 23. Have fun playing with the power of wind and air.
- Try the *Use Wind Power* idea on page 24.
- To extend the learning for children, be sure to share the corresponding pages from the "Toolkit for Families" so parents can try these at home: *Air in Motion* on pages 10 and 11, and *Use Wind Power* on page 12.
- Let families know the activities in this Toolkit (designed for ages 3-8) will suggest fun and easy 'everyday' ways for them to focus on positive actions they can take together to help the world we share become a 'greener' and healthier place.



PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY DIMENSIONS



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Personal Reflection: A Personal Passion to Make a Change — Salote's Story

Salote Rokotogalevu from Fiji is making personal and professional lifestyle changes to ensure that the children in her area have the opportunity to learn and grow with daily connections to nature. Salote is participating as a global pen pal in a World Forum Foundation Global Leaders Working Group project called Friends of the Earth. Partners share stories and photos of outdoor play experiences they have had with students. The following journal entries are a glimpse at the powerful role model Salote is for families.

February 1, 2012

Hi, Nature Lovers!

I have just opened my home in the highlands of the main island in Fiji to little kids who cannot attend the local centre due to financial hardships that parents face. This was prompted by our Friends of the Earth project. I knew that kids weren't being connected a lot to nature at the local centre so my husband and I have decided to open our home where we can integrate topics and activities on nature into their daily learning. This includes a dip in the nearby river!

April 3, 2102

Here in Fiji we have been working with plants for the first two weeks in March; the second fortnight we focused on birds. In April we will be working with water.

June 27, 2012

Updates from this corner of the world: I have named this preschool Namosi-Koro Nature Kindergarten. We now have finally secured some funds to construct our new Kindergarten with the full support of our Paramount Chief of the Province of Namosi. We have a full time K-Teacher with 16 children: A huge milestone from the one student I began with on the first day. We advocate to youths and parents every fortnight through awareness programs and now have sent three young ladies to the university to pursue their studies in Early Childhood Education. Also the university has asked me to submit some photos on Nature-based Learning at Namosi because it is the first of its kind in Fiji. I have submitted photos to be used in an upcoming conference on ECE to be held here in July. Hooray!

Personal Reflection: What Good is a Stick?

Vicki Bohling, Cindy Saarela, and Dana Miller write in their prologue to "This Never Would Have Happened Indoors":

In professionally landscaped public spaces and neatly manicured suburban lawns, a stick might be considered debris. In a school setting, a stick might be considered dangerous — a tripping hazard or possible weapon. In a child care space, a stick might be whisked away in the name of dirt and germ control. In the toy-manufacturing world, the stick might be considered . . . well, nothing at all. It makes no sound, it is drab in appearance, costs no money, and has no apparent function. The stick is inferior to brightly colored pieces made from hygienic plastic on toy retail shelves. The stick falls far short of the perfectly proportioned miniature toy replications of the adult world. It carries no gold-foil sticker stating its endorsement of educational value. It doesn't speak, flash, or even balance on its own. So really now, what good is a stick? To adults the stick may appear lowly, or even invisible, but in the hands of a child, a stick can be anything. It is graspable, portable, and plentiful. It can be a storyline prop, a construction tool, an accessory to scientific inquiry, and a music maker. It might be humble and it might be free, but to a young child, the stick is anything but simple. We know this because children have shown us — in ways that never would have happened indoors.

Reference

Bohling, V., Saarela, C., & Miller, D. (2010). This never would have happened indoors: Supporting preschool-age children's learning in a Nature Explore classroom in Minnesota. Retrieved July 23, 2012 from www.dimensionsfoundation.org/research/findings.



PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY DIMENSIONS

Personal Reflection: It Starts with a Stick

by Kim Nall

The simple joy found in a spider web, puddle, rock, or a stick always amazes me! We invited our families to join us on a nature walk during our Earth Week celebrations this year at Colusa Indian Community Council Hand-in-Hand Learning Center in Colusa, California. The families joined us while we walked through orchards and to the greenhouse where our garden seedlings grow, to the garden and through fields, to the pond and across a dry creek. The children were honored to show their families their worn paths and tell their stories about their journeys. The children often gather items along the way. The things they gather are special; they are treasures and meant to be treated as such. The teachers help children think about what the possibilities might be in the items they have collected. It all starts with a stick.

While children are in our program, they play in nature every day. They also learn every day. They learn to be confident. They learn to cooperate. They learn to be curious and they learn to communicate. These are foundational skills. We believe that for a young child, play is important work! Nature allows children to investigate and be creative in their play in a complex manner that also invites them to problem solve and strengthen foundational life skills.

Nature is a gift to the people; we are honored to have such a beautiful and bountiful gift surrounding us and our Child Development Center, children, staff, and families. We hope to honor our children by instilling in them a love of nature, and a peace within themselves they may connect with later in life because of their early experiences. It all begins with a stick.

Consider this:

- What are all of the ways that you communicate with parents to help them understand the value of children's daily connections with nature?
- How do you make the simple joys of learning visible to families?
- Can you enhance your outdoor space with more natural materials to support children's daily experiences?
- Can you plan an event that brings families to your outdoor classroom to play together in nature?

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

Personal Reflection: Time to Smell the Grass by Vicki Bohling

I'm a licensed parent educator at the Family Center at Forest Lake Area Schools in Forest Lake, Minnesota. After a very long winter, a mother was loading her two small children in the car to come to school when her three-year-old daughter stopped the flow of activity, saying, "Wait, Mom, I have to smell the grass." As hurried as this mom was, she could have easily said, "Not now. We've got to go," but she didn't. Instead, she recognized the learning opportunity at hand and paused to allow her young daughter to crouch low and breathe in what no air freshener or dryer sheet will ever really be able to capture.

This simple, but poignant story was one of 75 Nature Stories submitted by parents during our recent study of parent engagement in children's learning outdoors. These stories have revealed to us how astutely parents are observing the details in their children's outdoor play, how much they recognize the value of time outdoors, and how much fun they are having when they spend time outside with their children.

It is so important that we cheer for parents when they make time in nature a priority. Just letting parents know about the health benefits provided by nature can have a dramatic impact — as one parent in our program said, "It seems like the outdoors is a big natural medicine for a lot of stuff."

Maybe the mom who allowed her daughter to plop down and smell the grass was naturally inclined to embrace her daughter's innate connection to nature, or perhaps she did it as a result of the encouragement and information she received from teachers at our school. We'll never really know for sure, but what we do know is that in that moment, both mother and daughter were smiling.

Consider this:

- Do you have a way to collect stories from parents? Use these to help you appreciate how you are meeting families' needs.
- How can you help hurried parents enjoy nature-filled moments with their children as they come and go from your program?
- Does your environment invite parents to slow down and stay for a moment?
- In what ways can you cheer for parents who are making time in nature a priority for their families?

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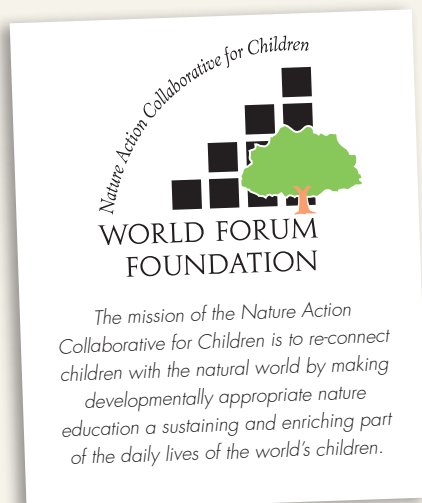


Wonder Vitals

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.



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