

# Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2015

## Oh, What Nature Does for Me

This edition of *Wonder* is focused on the Nature Action Collaborative for Children Universal Principle:

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

The following reflections resonate with an underlying message of resilience and hope. As you read, take some time to reflect on your own situation. Think about the ways you intentionally support the well-being of your children through daily connections to nature.

- Have you had the privilege of witnessing a life-changing experience?
- How have you conveyed the importance of that moment to parents and colleagues?
- Do you have a story that will inspire others? Share it with us!



Photo provided by Joyce Jones

### A Mud Song

from co-founder of Mud Day,  
Gillian McAuliffe, Australia

With over 100,000 joining us around the world, our sixth Mud Day was launched at Bold Park Community School by our Four Year Olds class. This year with the terrible tragedy in Nepal, we hope that Mud Day provided a special celebration of life for the children of Nepal. As part of our celebration, staff and students wrote a Mud Day Song. You can find the lyrics and an audio of the children singing it here:

[www.boldpark.com/mud-day-finally/](http://www.boldpark.com/mud-day-finally/)

Read more about Mud Day at  
[WorldForumFoundation.org/mudday](http://WorldForumFoundation.org/mudday)

### Mud Song

(An acapella song in three parts to be sung in the mud or around the fire)

*Easy rhythm:*

Splat! Splat! (clap clap)  
Mud Mud

*Challenging rhythm:*

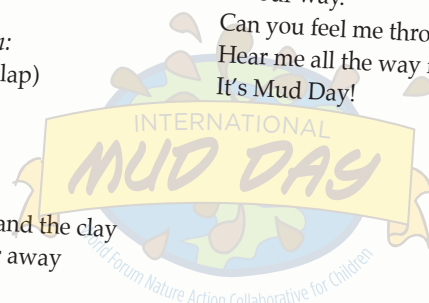
Splat! Splat! (clap clap)  
Jump in together  
Everybody clap!

*Verse*

Through the water and the clay  
They connect us, far away  
It's Mud Day!

Paint your face and squelch your toes  
Get it all over your clothes  
It's our way.

Can you feel me through the Earth?  
Hear me all the way from Perth?  
It's Mud Day!



## Reflection: Gardens of Eve — Nature as an Antidote Against Violence in Palestine

from Margaret Kernan, Joint Dutch/Palestinian Initiative

*Picture this:*

Ten Palestinian villages in the rolling countryside of the West Bank, each with its own preschools or children's centres. The preschool environments are welcoming and colorful but are dominated by concrete walls, small windows, flat tarmac play spaces, and metal or plastic playground equipment. The surrounding nature — olive and almond trees, vines, growing fruit and vegetables — is "out there," and not in reach of the children in their daily lives. The situation in the Shu'fat Refugee camp is worse. The camp has all the city slums' characteristics, nature has disappeared almost totally, and the view of a green surrounding doesn't exist. The children and adults breathe polluted air. The environment is particularly harsh: high walls, barbed wire, burned-out abandoned cars, and cramped conditions.



photo provided by Margaret Kernan

This was one of the strong, first impressions of the play and learning environments of young children the staff of International Child Development Initiatives ([www.icdi.nl](http://www.icdi.nl)) got when they began working with the Early Childhood and Family Development Trust in the West Bank on the project "Foundation for the Future," funded by the European Commission. Together, we began to explore the possibility of bringing children in closer contact with nature in their daily lives at preschool and school, to support the healthy development of children growing up in what can only be characterized as violent circumstances. In doing so we wanted children, their families, and teachers to be able to experience nature as fun, beautiful, and a resource for learning about indigenous herbs, plants, and their care. We wanted to do this in a sustainable way: conserving water, recycling materials, using found items from nature as play materials.

A big plus for us in realizing the plan was that in each of the villages, as well as in Shu'fat Refugee camp, Early Childhood Education and Care Committees are already in place. Members include parents, preschool teachers, community leaders, social workers, shop owners, and the like, each with their own skills and focus. All are motivated to work together to improve young children's lives in their villages.

### What has been achieved so far

Children, older sisters and brothers, teachers, parents, and volunteers from the ECEC committees have joined forces to create garden spaces in the preschools, which are called "Gardens of Eve." Special attention is given to having young boys and girls involved in the process. This has been an invigorating and inspiring experience for all. For example, in one of the preschools a committee member, an enthusiastic carpenter, took on the job of making a beautiful, multicolored wooden fence for one of the gardens.

- Natural shelters and canopies are being grown and built to create shelter.
- Children are active in watering plants and harvesting produce.
- Nature has also been brought indoors and children are creating art using local natural materials.
- Inspired by their children's interest in gardening and planting, parents have begun to create gardens at home.
- In Shu'fat, the arrival of flowerpots on the entrance steps of the preschool inspired a clean-up of the street where the preschool is, and transformed an abandoned car wreck into a colorful planting zone.

Realizing that the garden project is going on and feeling excited about new possibilities for playing and learning in and with nature, teachers, children, parents, and ECEC committee members are busy making plans for the coming school year. The Arabic translation of the NACC Universal Principles and Educator's Toolkit has also been a great resource.

*The Trust of Programs for Early Childhood, Jerusalem and International Child Development Initiatives, the Netherlands.*

*Consider this:*

- Take some time to review and try an activity from the Environmental Toolkit for Educators  
[www.worldforumfoundation.org/working-groups/nature/environmental-action-kit/materials/educators/](http://www.worldforumfoundation.org/working-groups/nature/environmental-action-kit/materials/educators/)



## Reflection: Preparing an Environment Rich in Possibilities

from Joyce L. Jones, Director of St. Paul's Preschool in Tustin, California, United States and a consultant for The Outdoor Classroom Project

Over the past 15 years our staff has studied various early childhood theorists and philosophies. We dissected, discussed, and finally rested upon the Reggio Emilia approach as one that resonated with our belief system. We began with the Image of the Child where the child is viewed as competent, capable, and deserving of respect. Applying just this one principle transformed our teaching practices. We agreed to begin making one small change at a time and doing it to the best of our ability. Our motto became "Be present."

We questioned what was important and why in our classrooms and throughout our school program. Building relationships (with colleagues, children, families, and community) was paramount to this paradigm shift. Through the process of collaboration, we focused first on our environments. Our goal was to create places where children felt valued, supported, and challenged.

Thoughtful intentions became critical in providing an aesthetically-pleasing indoor and outdoor environment coupled with the best open-ended materials (i.e. loose parts). Using beautiful, natural materials children began to negotiate with everything the environment brings to them. These natural materials provided children with a sense of calm and order in the midst of busy and hectic family schedules. The beauty of working with these materials is that they can adapt and change as children's ideas change and new knowledge emerges.

Our indoor environments have a variety of materials that are placed so children can develop self-reliance and mastery without excessive adult supervision or support. Gone are the brightly-colored bins, area rugs, center signs, and commercial bulletin board aids. Instead, you will see baskets, photographs of the children and their families, natural light, natural wood tables and chairs, and living plants. Most importantly, the ongoing project work the children are actively engaged in is the centerpiece of the room. Provocations using still-life materials (flowers, rocks) are visible throughout, both inside and outside.

We agreed that our outdoor classroom space should be an extension of the inside environment and should also support the children's learning and development:

- Thoughtfully-planned zones provide ways for the child to work cooperatively, work in small groups or alone, and have a variety of large motor and fine motor activities.
- We plan for an easy flow between the two environments and the layout of all of the physical spaces throughout the school encourages encounters, communication, and relationships.
- The arrangement of structures, materials, and activities encourages children and allows for making choices, problem solving, and risk taking.
- A large children's garden, adjacent to our outdoor classroom space, is where students not only plant and harvest vegetables, they then donate their produce weekly to a soup kitchen that the church supports.
- A garden — whether large or small — as well as the creatures that come with it, piques the child's curiosity while supporting their scientific hypothesizing, perseverance, risk taking, and reverence for the earth.

We are mindful to limit transitions, as well as to provide longer uninterrupted time, which impacts the way a child navigates both the indoor and outdoor classroom environments. It is vital that all of our environments foster the art of discovery, wonder, and offer "aha" moments in a child's life every day. As our children deepen their relationship with nature, they make connections that last a lifetime.

Consider this:

- What are some strategies and tools that can help your families deeply understand the value of children's daily connections with nature?
- How are you using connections to nature to support and enhance your curriculum?

**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](mailto:tarah@natureexplore.org).

***We believe it is important that children have daily access to nature-based outdoor and indoor environments in their early childhood programs and schools.***

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## A Message from Bishnu Hari Bhatta of Nepal

co-founder of International Mud Day, PSD Nepal (written May 2015)



Dear Friends,

Namaste. As you may know, the April 25 earthquake and its subsequent aftershocks have hit Nepal's educational infrastructure particularly hard due to the age and poor construction of many school buildings. Thousands of classrooms were badly damaged, and although schools technically reopened on May 29, many students have not been able to attend classes because there is no school to go back to. While schools remain closed, the children fall farther behind in their education. More importantly, they miss out on the healing that comes from a return to their normal school routine of going to classes and seeing their friends.

To help get the children back in school, Partnership for Sustainable Development (PSD) is working to rebuild schools in hard-hit rural communities. Our first project is in Harmi, Gorkha, where we will replace a school building that housed 479 students in grades 1 through 10. While construction is underway, we will support the children with temporary classrooms, extracurricular activities, and counseling services.

Thank you!

(Updated message written July 2015)

In order to promote the culture (being an agricultural country, mud and planting rice are crucial to every Nepalese person irrespective of caste and creed), as well as help children recover from the trauma experienced during the quake and its aftershocks, PSD-Nepal celebrated a fifth International Mud Day Celebration! As in years past, celebrations were organized in two places. There were about 130 participants from two orphanages and one school at Panchakhal. Similarly, in Chitwan the number of participants was unexpectedly high; about 200 students from eight different schools and about 5,000 local people attended the event. It was a happy day of games, nature connections, and enjoying the moment to the fullest.

**Mud Football** — The water was supplied by tube this year because of insufficient monsoon rain to make the field soft and sticky enough with mud-like curd. Playing football in the mud was not easy, but the children were ready for the challenge. Applause and cheers from the local audience added to the excitement. One of the participants, named Bipin Nagarkoti, said:

"I had a lot of fun with my friends and I also got a chance to make new friends. We learned many things about the importance of agriculture in our country and I really want to thank PSD Nepal for helping us to get relief from the aftershocks trauma and to refresh our minds."

**Tug of War** — A game of Tug of War not only provided a fun activity, but also taught the importance of teamwork and coordination to achieve a goal. Anusha Shrestha, with happy heart, shared her feelings:

"It was very nice and really helpful for me to forget about the earthquake and its aftershocks. To add, the games were the best part of this event and I am thankful to PSD for providing us this memorable event."

At the end of the event, winning teams were awarded footballs, cups, and stationery as prizes. All the children were given soap for their participation and had a thorough bath. They were served the typical snack of the day: a mixture of beaten rice, curd, and sugar.

The program's lasting message to people is this, "In the lap of nature, everyone is equal." Experience proved that the fear among students for their teachers and children for their parents was automatically driven away by the equal treatment of nature. The adults, at least for a moment, got the chance to get back to the worry-free play of their childhood.

Participants of Mud Day proved that nothing is impossible if you are firmly determined to do something.



Photo Provided by Bishnu Bhatta

