

# Nature Play

THE EDUCATION WAY

*An online nature play magazine for education sites part of the Nature Play SA Collective.*



**IT'S TIME TO DO MORE  
IT'S TIME TO BE BRAVE**

ISSUE 1 // SPRING 2017

# NO WAY. THE HUNDRED IS THERE.

The child  
is made of one hundred.  
the child has  
a hundred languages  
a hundred hands  
a hundred thoughts  
a hundred ways of thinking  
of playing, of speaking.

A hundred always a hundred  
ways of listening  
of marveling, of loving  
a hundred joys  
for singing and understanding  
a hundred worlds  
to discover  
a hundred worlds  
to invent  
a hundred worlds  
to dream.

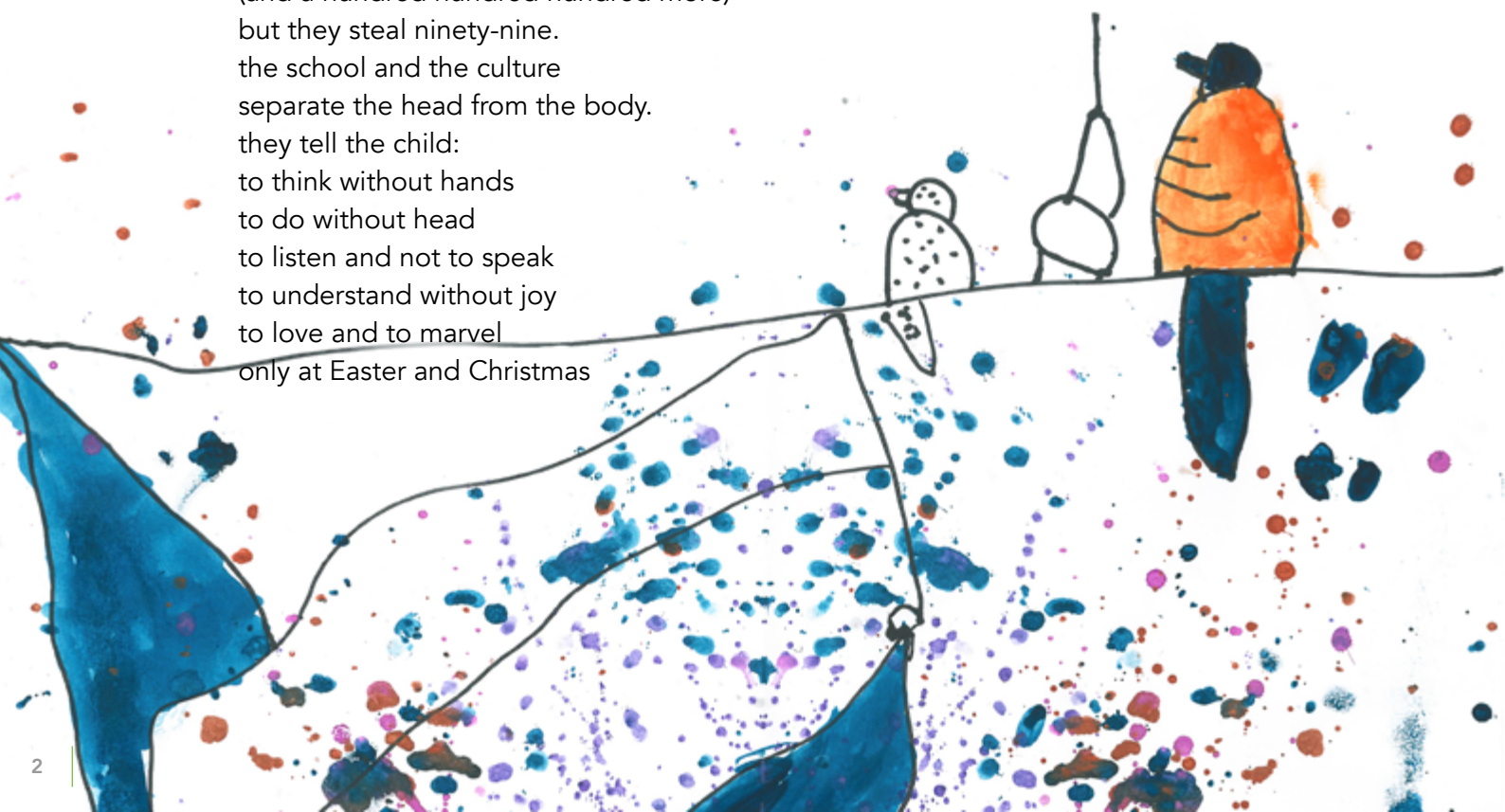
The child has  
a hundred languages  
(and a hundred hundred hundred more)  
but they steal ninety-nine.  
the school and the culture  
separate the head from the body.  
they tell the child:  
to think without hands  
to do without head  
to listen and not to speak  
to understand without joy  
to love and to marvel  
only at Easter and Christmas

They tell the child:  
to discover the world already there  
and of the hundred  
they steal ninety-nine.

They tell the child:  
that work and play  
reality and fantasy  
science and imagination  
sky and earth  
season and dream  
are things  
that do not belong together.

And thus they tell the child  
that the hundred is not there.  
The child says:  
No way. The hundred is there.

~ [LORIS MALAGUZZI](#) (1996)



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# IT'S TIME TO DO MORE. IT'S TIME TO BE BRAVE.

SARAH SUTTER, CEO NATURE PLAY SA

A warm welcome to the first edition of Nature Play SA's online magazine: *Nature Play the Education Way*. Firstly I would like to say thank you for your support and for the work you are doing for our children. As a not-for-profit organisation, Nature Play SA has been working closely with educators over the last 3 years by running educator workshops across South Australia, coordinating an annual national conference with international speakers and local experts, developing online resources, running professional development in schools for educators and parents, and offering unique incursions and excursions. We are seeing positive change and growth as well as evidence that this commitment is making a real difference. Now we are proud to offer an Educators' Membership as part of our Nature Play SA Collective. The membership aims to empower educators to take their learning outside and to recognise and embrace the benefits of doing so to children's learning and wellbeing.

This year I have embraced the notion of being **brave** which is reflected in my passionate team, my public speaking engagements, in our advocacy and challenging of government, political leaders, councils, parents, educators and schools to do more for our children. What is bravery? I believe it is **the mental strength needed to face challenge. In other words, taking on a fundamental belief without necessarily knowing what the outcome may be.** That's bravery!

We know things are not right as they are. Research tells us our children are not spending enough time outside in nature; they are less physically active and consequently are more engaged in sedentary behaviours, resulting in higher rates of obesity than ever, with mental illness presenting in 1 in 7 children and myopia and diabetes diagnoses occurring at an increasingly rapid rate.

If I'm honest with you, it saddens me that I need to lead an organisation that exists to get kids back outside and re-connected to nature.

Isn't that what childhood is all about anyway?  
Where did it all go so wrong?

Whatever the answer, we find ourselves confronted with statistics that indicate a need for action. Yes, we face an enormous challenge, but we are also presented with an opportunity so great that the future of our children's wellbeing depends on it. And this opportunity requires bravery. Quite simply, our message is: it's time to do more.

So I challenge you to be brave.

I challenge **educators** to change their thinking, reflect on their practice, and create and utilise outdoor learning environments that will foster creativity, imagination and problem solving, and will enhance children's overall wellbeing and development.

I challenge **parents** to remember how they played when they were children, the adventures they pursued and risks they took – and, more importantly, to consider how they can provide their children with these experiences in order to help shape, define and develop them and prepare them for adulthood.

I challenge **children** to do what they have always done: climb trees, get dirty, build cubbies, take risks, invent games, venture to creeks in

pursuit of tadpoles and curiously observe their different life forms as they develop into frogs, and find the type of play that makes them feel free.

And finally, I challenge **government** and the political arena to develop more proactive policies and make commitments that support childhood development in outdoor settings.

Remember bravery is taking something on without knowing the outcome. But what if I confidently tell you I know what the outcome of our actions might be?

Research is telling us that when children have the opportunity to connect with nature it has a positive impact on them socially, physically, mentally and spiritually. We also know that they are learning life lessons in the natural world. Nature and the outdoors are crucial for their development.

I know that in the current education climate there is growing pressure on educators, but just as Nature Play SA is embracing bravery, we urge you to do the same. By supporting us through your membership, you've taken the first step. As a member you'll be equipped with a growing collection of tools, ideas, motivation and support to link the Australian Curriculum and Early Years Framework to your practice and pedagogy. Tools and opportunities include our online portal, full of new and existing resources, first opportunities and discounts on all of our professional development opportunities including our annual National Conference, other member-specific benefits, and this online magazine where you'll hear from experts, leaders and practitioners in the field of childhood development.

In this first edition we have contributions from paediatric occupational therapist Angela Hanscom on the role of outdoor environments for children's development, leading pedagogical consultant Lisa Burman on growth and change, educator and researcher Paul Johnson on the need for change in our school settings to accommodate greater learning outcomes, director of Climbing Tree Consultancy Simon Hutchinson on the importance of loose parts in education settings, as well as a range of contributions from other early years and primary school educators and leaders. We are excited to have your support and, in return, you have ours.

If we are all brave together, can you imagine the opportunities and experiences we can provide for children of today and into the future?

**It's time to do more. It's time to be brave.**



Childhood has always  
been about climbing trees,  
getting dirty, walking across  
wobbly logs,  
and venturing into  
imaginary worlds.

We need to nurture this childhood.

we need to take risks

and be

**brave**

# // RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE

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# [ RESEARCH OVERVIEW ]

## LEARNING FROM TREES

### Life lessons for future generations



PLANET ARK STUDY 2017, JULIE SLAGHEKKE, NATURE PLAY SA

*Schooling is a fundamental part of childhood and preparing this generation of children for adulthood and the challenges of the future is critical. This study, commissioned by Planet Ark and assessed here by Nature Play SA Operations Manager **Julie Slaghekke**, looks at the importance of outdoor learning for developing essential life skills that will help children prepare for their future.*

A key resource for parents, teachers and the wider community, Planet Ark's study examines how prepared the next generation is to tackle the challenges facing humanity, the skills our students will need and the role outdoor learning and time spent in nature has in nurturing these attributes.

According to the [United Nations](#), future global challenges include threats to food security, increasing numbers of refugees, diminished access to clean water, population increase and climate change. The tackling of these challenges will require people who can think outside the square, can persevere and persist, and can communicate and work well with others. But how well prepared are our students today?

A total of 100 primary and 100 secondary teachers were surveyed for the Planet Ark study and were asked to rank crucial skills and attributes required by students to tackle the global challenges ahead. These included **STEM, problem solving and critical thinking, creativity and innovation, compassion, "grit"** (determination, resilience, perseverance), **emotional intelligence and trade skills**. 60% of surveyed teachers chose problem solving and critical thinking, grit and emotional intelligence as the most important skills; yet 60% also ranked these skills as their students' weakest. Only 4% of Australian teachers considered STEM in the top 3 most needed skills.

Research in this report shows how children can develop these key skills by learning outdoors, both during and outside of school hours.

**Grit** – research shows a correlation between connection to nature and psychological resilience. Outdoor environments provide greater challenges and when children have adequate supervision, permission, and can assess and take managed risks, they develop skills specific to their lives, interests and tasks, and do so with greater enjoyment and proficiency.

**Critical thinking and problem solving** – studies from around the world indicate a direct link between time spent outdoors and the development of cognitive ability, which translates not only to academic performance but to students' sense of wellbeing, memory retention, interest and engagement in lessons.

**Emotional intelligence** – this was identified in the survey as the third most important skill required. Outdoor learning encourages collaboration, co-operation, negotiation and opportunities to socialise together.

In 2015 the [Outdoor Learning Connection](#) was added to the Australian Curriculum. However, only 34% of teachers surveyed by Planet Ark taught outdoors for 15 minutes or more in the first term of 2017, while 1 in 3 teachers spent no time teaching outside at all. Teachers blamed insufficient infrastructure, time pressures, conflicting demands and weather as the main barriers to getting outside, even though many understood and appreciated the benefits.

Australian [research](#) by Dr Amanda Lloyd, Director of Outdoor Connections and outdoor learning expert, states that students who take part in outdoor learning programs continue to perform well academically but also learn problem solving, emotional intelligence, inter-personal skills and resilience. Further research states that 77% of teachers reported improvement in standardised test results as a result of outdoor learning programs and that exposure to natural environments reduces stress, enhances concentration and creativity and increases productivity.

In many western countries, learning outdoors is no longer considered a peripheral activity, due to its widely accepted benefits. In Finland children spend 15 minutes of every hour outdoors. Researchers identify outdoor learning as an important element of Finland's successful development of the best primary school system in the world.

Research referred to in this report shows that more time in nature, and less time indoors on digital devices, not only improves mental and physical health but also helps nurture the many interrelated soft skills that will become increasingly important in the future.

Planet Ark's far reaching, evidence-based study identifies a need for more support for educators and a need to raise awareness of the benefits of outdoor learning for children. This research supports Nature Play SA's vision and reminds us that there is still much work to be done, and we encourage educators to share their stories with us, whether they be starting or continuing their nature play journey. ★

## [ ABOUT JULIE ]

As Operations Manager for Nature Play SA, Julie coordinates the NPSA annual conference, regional and Adelaide-based workshops, and liaises with our Board and Member organisations.

## [ FURTHER RESOURCES ]

- » Previous Planet Ark [Research Reports](#)
- » [Lesson plan ideas](#)
- » [Lesson Plan Unit: Anything but a stick](#)
- » [Lesson Plan Unit: A community in nature sticks together](#)

[ FEATURE ]

# DOING IT THE RIGHT WAY

A summary of the DECD Outdoor Learning Environment Standard

JULIE SLAGHEKKE, NATURE PLAY SA



*Did you know there is a DECD Outdoor Learning Environment Standard? As we launch our educators' magazine Nature Play the Education Way, we are pleased to showcase the Department's recognition of the invaluable role played by natural environments in the emotional, physical and intellectual development of children and young people.*

The [DECD Outdoor Learning Environment Standard](#), is designed to provide guidance and direction for site leaders and facility managers of DECD schools and preschools, detailing the minimum and required processes necessary for the development of new, or maintenance of existing, outdoor learning environments (OLEs).

There are also [Design Standards](#) outlining the mandatory requirements for all works and projects at DECD facilities that should be read in conjunction with the Outdoor Learning Environment Standard. Whilst developed by DECD, these provide relevant information for all educational sectors to consider when creating or maintaining an OLE.

DECD acknowledges that outdoor play is fundamental to childhood and supports the development of OLEs across South Australia. An OLE includes nature play spaces, outdoor classrooms and fixed play equipment. The Standard recognises that OLEs are important for encouraging healthy behaviours and improving the physical, educational and mental wellbeing of children and young people. It also states that OLEs connect children and young people to the natural world, allowing them to experience nature play for all its benefits: fostering interaction, autonomy, exploration and curiosity, and creating a sense of responsibility for the environment.

The benefits of unstructured free play in nature are well documented in international and national research, so the OLE Standard places a strong focus on ensuring children and young people are provided with optimal

learning opportunities that build a connection with and inspire respect for the environment while allowing them to develop risk-taking skills, improving their confidence, health and wellbeing.

Risk-benefit assessments are endorsed throughout the planning and use of Outdoor Learning Environments as a mechanism to ensure a balanced and appropriate approach is taken.

*"It is natural for children to take risks, make mistakes, have everyday adventures and test themselves and their boundaries."*

TIM GILL

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## WHAT IS RISK-BENEFIT?

The development of the Outdoor Learning Environment Standard aims to provide a consistent framework that will assist DECD sites understand their responsibilities and requirements for OLEs. The resource is divided into sections to cover all aspects:

**Design & Planning** – includes the design principles to incorporate, ensuring accessibility and participation for all, and considerations such as location, drainage, shade, plants and trees.

**Design Standards** – covers fall heights and the use of impact-absorbing materials, how to cater for sand environments, rocks and boulders, water courses and ponds, grass, slopes and mounds, loose materials, kitchen gardens and vegetable patches, artificial wetlands, firepits, and CCA timber.

**Playground Equipment** – includes the relevant Australian Standard references and requirements for new movable parts or modifications to existing playground equipment.

**Planning & Approval** – covers funding and the approval process.

**Commissioning** – sets out the guidelines for ensuring compliance by a qualified auditor with relevant experience.

**Maintenance & Management** – highlights the importance of establishing an OLE register, following inspection schedules and the process for decommissions, dismantling and disposal of unwanted equipment.

**Roles & Responsibilities** – sets out the responsibilities for site leaders, facility managers and for corporate services.

The DECD's Outdoor Learning Environment Standard demonstrates strong support by the Department for outdoor learning environments with an emphasis on a risk-benefit approach. What better endorsement could advocates of nature play in schools ask for? ★

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## [ ABOUT JULIE ]

As Operations Manager for Nature Play SA, Julie coordinates the NPSA annual conference, regional and Adelaide-based workshops, and liaises with our Board and Member organisations.



[ INTERNATIONAL EXPERT ]

# OUTDOOR PLAY

Why it matters even more than you realise

MICHELLE TYNDALL



## [ ABOUT ANGELA ]

Angela J. Hanscom is a paediatric occupational therapist and the founder of TimberNook – an award winning developmental and nature-based program that has gained international popularity. As part of her recent Australian tour, she presented to over 170 parents and educators at our workshops. We wish to extend a sincere thank you to Angela for her time during her visit, including her sit down to discuss some of the bigger issues and concerns with us – her input, knowledge and unique perspective is invaluable to this publication and our overall mission.

This article has been adapted from her book, *Balanced and Barefoot*, and personal conversation / interview with Nature Play SA.

*There has been a shift in childhood experience so subtle and so pervasive that many are wondering how we got to a point where you're more likely to find a child in front of a screen than up a tree. Others are yet to notice. But whichever camp you fall in, ask yourself this question: "How much time do our children spend outside?" Chances are, it's not enough. Here, paediatric occupational therapist **Angela Hanscom** explains the consequences of our modern lifestyles, and why we should all be prioritising free play outside.*

There's no question, we're raising children in a different era to that of our parents. It's a time marked by hectic schedules, structured activities, rules, regulations and constantly evolving technology. And as a result, children are spending less time outside than ever before.

When children aren't afforded the necessary opportunities to engage in free play outside, their development is compromised, with our shift to scheduled activities and indoor entertainment seeing an ever-growing number of children treated for conditions uncharacteristic of their age. From poor balance and coordination to challenges paying attention, an inability to play independently, difficulty processing frustration and rising anxiety, our increasingly sedentary and indoor lifestyles have a lot to answer for.

In order to understand why our shift to indoor lifestyles is linked to a rise in underdeveloped motor and sensory skills in children, we first need to appreciate the basic principles of childhood development. According to Hanscom, children thrive by challenging their bodies. To develop essential skills of the mind and body, they need to practise them daily – ideally through meaningful play activities.

“When children’s bodies aren’t challenged, they fall behind in their development,” says Hanscom. “There’s a common thread that runs through the development of healthy motor, sensory, social-emotional and cognitive skills, and anytime there’s a kink in that thread, your child is at risk for a range of problems.”

These “kinks” are often the result of not spending enough time exercising these skills. Hanscom explains that by the time a child has reached two years of age, they’ve mastered a range of gross motor skills, such as standing, walking and running, as well as the ability to walk up and down stairs, climb on and off objects, and even stand on one foot. But these skills form only the very foundation of gross motor skill development. In order for them to become precise and accurate, they need to be built upon – all the way up to adulthood.

“Throughout the day, every day, children need to practise activating their large muscle groups through a variety of movement and sensory experiences. Weak gross motor skills in children can lead to difficulty sitting upright in school, poor endurance in physical education class, inefficient body coordination and even injury,” says Hanscom.

To keep gross motor skills in optimal condition, Hanscom stresses the importance of ensuring children aged less than two get to move throughout the day – ideally four hours or more of unrestricted, active movement. And older children need at least three hours *plus* other rigorous activities – think cartwheels, running, skateboarding, carrying heavy objects, jumping off of things and climbing trees.

Unfortunately, instead of these necessities being met, what we’re seeing is more restrictions on children’s movement than ever before. “I can empathise with the parental fear that habitually gets in the way of childhood risk taking,” says Hanscom. “Our instincts often take over, and we shout, ‘Be careful!’ or, ‘Slow down!’ as we watch a child climb on top of boulders or speed across uneven terrain. But as a paediatric occupational therapist who spends countless hours observing children playing in a natural environment, I also know that restricting children’s movement and limiting their ability to play outdoors can cause more harm than good.”

But why does it have to be outside? Perhaps you’re thinking, “Our children have ample opportunity for free play – what’s wrong with it being inside?”

While children may enjoy their indoor playtime, the environment presents challenges for development, particularly when it comes to finding the

## ENCOURAGING

# independent

## FREE PLAY IN AN EDUCATION SETTING

### ***Bring the classroom outdoors***

Just looking at nature can calm children and improve their mood. Adding plants or, better yet, having children grow and nurture plants in the classroom, can be valuable to their wellbeing. Design your classroom with nature in mind – think stick mobiles, baskets of pine cones or a nature-weaving wall. One step further is to take the classroom outside. Make use of picnic tables or a comfortable area of lawn. Learning outside provides greater opportunities for problem solving, effective teamwork, creativity and sensory experiences.

### ***Think beyond the chair***

Children don’t need to be sitting to learn; in fact, it’s unnatural for children to sit, confined, for extended periods of time. Think creatively about new approaches. For example, writing can be completed on the floor, allowing children to work in a way that is comfortable for them. Art projects can be done standing up, and maths can be learned through movement games, like hopscotch.

### ***Reconsider break time***

Recess and lunch breaks present ideal opportunities for children to move and engage in free play. While today’s lunch break may not be the beneficial hour of years past, any break for children is advantageous. Consider extending break times to increase the benefits for not only healthy development but also academic success. Sufficient movement throughout the day has been shown to support attention and engagement in the classroom, while also helping to regulate emotions.

## CONTINUED

right balance of stimulation. Inside, it's easy for children to become overstimulated by their surroundings and, conversely, understimulated. The same isn't true for the great outdoors. Hanscom explains that nature offers just the right amount of stimuli, as well as limitless possibilities for play experiences and sensory exploration.

In her book, *Balanced and Barefoot*, she describes the humble act of walking barefoot on grass and listening to the birds in the trees. While it may sound like a relatively innocuous activity, for a developing child it offers the perfect opportunity for all of their senses to naturally integrate, forming an accurate picture of the world around them.

"My key message," says Hanscom, "is that the ideal state for sensory organisation is outdoors in nature. Without having that time outdoors, children are not experiencing all the stimuli nature has to offer and are therefore developing sensory issues."

"When you start recognising that children's sensory and motor skills are actually changing because we are restricting their movement and restricting them from outdoor spaces, that's when people are really motivated to create some change."

Daily exposure to the outdoor environment stimulates children's brains in ways the indoor environment is unable to. It's the – increasingly necessary – antidote to spending hours inside and staring at screens. In nature, children learn to take risks, overcome fears, make new friends, regulate emotions and create imaginary worlds. Why? Because the natural environment is entirely open ended.

"Childhood was never intended to be indoors or spent sitting for hours at a time," says Hanscom. "It's intended for children to challenge, stimulate and develop their senses. From an occupational therapy perspective, it's far more meaningful for children to be outside exploring and playing than to be set up with protocols and exercise plans.

"If we want our children to be safe, capable and healthy, we need to allow them the space and time to play outside every day. And it needs to be a conscious decision. We need to encourage free and independent play so children can test themselves, learn about their bodies, take risks, persist, and use their imagination to its full potential." \*

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### [ ABOUT MICHELLE ]

Michelle is a writer, mum and passionate nature play supporter.

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### [ MORE IDEAS ]

- » Visit [natureplaysa.org.au](http://natureplaysa.org.au)
- » Read more in Angela Hanscom's book, *Balanced and Barefoot*, available for purchase through Nature Play SA's [online shop](#).





Active free play outdoors  
is the kind of play  
that promotes healthy sensory  
and motor development in children.  
The outdoors awakens  
and rejuvenates the mind  
and engages all the senses at once.

ANGELA HANSCOM

## [ EXPERT OPINION ]

# SCHOOL GROUNDS

## Enhancing the nature and purpose of learning

PAUL JOHNSON, ARBURY PARK OUTDOOR SCHOOL



### [ ABOUT PAUL ]

Paul's thirty-year career spans early childhood to tertiary education contexts in rural and urban areas. From 2007 Paul taught and researched at Galilee Catholic Learning Community where he played a formative role shaping and growing the school's learning environments. His Ph.D. thesis *Grounds for Learning: Schoolyard activities as provocations, scaffolds and mediators for childhood learning* presents a synthesis of social constructivism and ecological psychology to describe how schoolyard activities influence learning. Paul has presented, written and consulted on schoolyard design and professional learning. He is currently curriculum coordinator at DECD's Arbury Park Outdoor School.

*It has long been an accepted truth that classrooms need to be stimulating, nurturing learning environments. Now there is a growing body of research calling for reaffirmation that school playgrounds are important learning environments in their own right. In this expert opinion article, Paul Johnson explores the potential of enriching, child-led, inquiry-based learning through school-based nature play that improves achievement in and beyond the classroom.*

None of us comes into the world able to sing, or draw, or read. It is only through personal experience that we learn to use meaningful sounds and symbols: learn, because although many of us have been taught, each makes sense for themselves. A young child, for example, notices that her sounds attract others' attention. Soon she discovers that different sounds bring forth consistent responses. Insistent crying may bring food or a clean nappy. Soft cooing may bring a smile. Later, in English-speaking homes, "Ma" or "Da" sounds might captivate her most important carers. Thus, through experience, the child learns that the social environment responds predictably to her sounds, and language emerges. More generally, the

example of early language acquisition shows that certain types of person–environment interactions can be engines of learning and development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006).

Educators realise, of course, that language use requires an appreciation of both vocabulary (content) and grammar (rules) and so we can deduce that early learning is multi-level. This realisation also presents us with a challenge: it suggests the possibility that, while we are teaching content, the learning environment (of which we are part) can communicate information about how things may or may not be done. Seating students at rows of tables that

may suggest that learning is a collective and constructive process.

School grounds have always been intended to teach children. One hundred years ago the aim was to mould ideal males who were strong, heroic and prepared for war (Johnson 1912 quoted in Gagen 2000). The aims of education have changed over time, but the legacy of last century's school grounds remains and now constitutes a hidden curriculum (Titman 1994) that is fundamentally at odds with contemporary education's aim of developing students' capacity and confidence to engage in lifelong learning (Carr & Claxton 2002).

*Children who are allowed to play freely in natural settings are likely to experience frequent periods of noticing, meaning-making and reflection that they can activate as psychological tools during lifelong learning.*

face in the same direction, for example, might reinforce the impression that learning is about passively acquiring knowledge from a teacher. Conversely, arranging environments so that experts and learners can interact as a group

Compelling research making the case for greening school grounds has been summarised elsewhere (e.g. Johnson 2007) and an increasing number of schools have been developing nature play spaces. Whilst there is a general understanding of the basic benefits of engaging with nature, Barbara Rogoff (1998, p.691) points out that objects potentially inspire an "infinite" range of associations so there can be no guarantee that experiencing natural materials or environments will inspire specific content learning. For example, students may use a log 1) as a see-saw, 2) to make a cubby, or 3) as a pole, but their experiences will not automatically help them construct an understanding of gravity's influence on their



*Ought school playgrounds to differentiate learning experiences? Traditional playground equipment such as slides or climbing frames typically offer limited opportunities for exploration or innovation.*



*Within natural and social constraints, non-prescriptive loose parts invite children's attention, exploration, manipulation and elaboration.*



activity (Johnson 2015). Of course, educators could never be certain that two individuals who share one environment would construct understandings of content in the same way. This reality demonstrates an important aspect of play in and with nature: that is, whilst educators cannot guarantee what content individuals may learn through experience, like neuroscientists (e.g. Lakoff 2012) we can be sure that experiences themselves make a difference to how individuals think. Students who are allowed to play freely in natural settings, for example, are likely to frequently experience periods of noticing, meaning-making and reflection that they can then activate as psychological tools during lifelong learning.

For nature play to achieve contemporary educational aims, both the content of school playgrounds and the rules governing the use of them will have to change so that both invite children's attention, exploration, manipulation and elaboration. The conjoining will ensure that *what* school grounds offer will encourage learners to imagine and create their own experiences and meanings. In other words, when school grounds encourage students to create rather than be subject to experiences,

they will communicate *how* to learn. Ultimately learner interactions with the *what* and *how* of their learning environments will embrace the *why* of education - enhancing students' capacity and confidence to engage in lifelong learning. The real challenge for educators, then, is to avoid engineering school grounds for children and instead reposition play as learner-initiated and learner-led processes of inquiry that continually reinvent physical, social and conceptual environments. ★

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In nature,  
a child finds freedom,  
fantasy, and privacy:  
a place distant from  
the adult world,  
a separate place.

RICHARD LOUV

# [ CONVERSATION ]

## EMBRACING GROWTH AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY

### A paradigm shift explored

A CONVERSATION WITH LISA BURMAN, DIRECTOR OF LISA BURMAN CONSULTANTS



#### [ ABOUT LISA ]

Director and Principal Consultant at Lisa Burman Consultants, Lisa sees herself as an “every-day researcher”, fascinated with childhood and learning. After a number of years teaching in and leading primary schools in Australia, she consulted in and around New York for ten years. Her highly regarded consultancy business is now based in Adelaide. Lisa’s interests include early childhood education and care, embedding the principles of the Reggio Emilia educational project within learning environments, play, literacy learning, inquiry learning and strengthening children’s connections to nature. She is passionate about pedagogies that see children as capable and competent learners who are skilled in researching life and making connections. Her favourite work is side-by-side with children and educators in their learning settings.

Lisa is a regular keynote speaker, presenter and workshop facilitator at regional, national and international conferences. She has launched two online courses and is currently working on a third. Her first book, *Are You Listening? Fostering Conversations that Help Young Children Learn*, is published by Redleaf Press.

*To embrace nature play meaningfully at any educational site, we need to look beyond the physical changes in our spaces. We need to look at the cultural shift needed at a pedagogical level and consequently the importance of embracing change and growth within our learning communities. As experienced teacher, school leader and pedagogical consultant **Lisa Burman** explains in this conversation, pedagogical change requires embracing growth as fundamental to a cultural shift of any type.*

***Lisa, we talk about growth a lot, particularly in the sense of growth mindsets. Can you elaborate on what you mean by growth and explain why it is such an important component for a site making a pedagogical shift toward a more nature-based approach?***

I’m using the word “growth” here to describe the process of learning and change that can take place within individuals and within organisations... and I guess the potential is there for society to grow also. For me, “growth” talks of the process of continually striving to improve. Too often, school improvement is couched in deficit terms – starting from what isn’t happening, or what the teachers aren’t doing or don’t know. I find this to be not only inaccurate (no one starts learning from being empty), but disrespectful to the complexity of the human experience. We all have the power and potential to grow as educators, no matter where we might begin and what our prior knowledge and experience might be. Every organisation has the potential to grow, no matter how much experience and knowledge about nature pedagogy already exists.

***In a professional context, language plays an important role in the way we perceive challenges, opportunities and ideas. What’s your perspective on the use of language when embracing growth?***

I prefer to think of “professional learning” rather than “training & development” as this shifts the focus to an internal locus of control. With this mindset, I engage in my own professional learning; I am not going to a workshop and being “trained”. Professional learning is a lot more like children’s learning than we sometimes think – the principles are the same. It doesn’t start with a deficit – where the teachers don’t know anything – but is an ongoing deepening of personal theories and new connections. That’s why I have changed the byline of my business from “Consulting in Pedagogical Change” to “Consulting in Pedagogical Growth”. I’m trying to say to teachers: we’re constantly growing as educators; it doesn’t mean you “don’t know” and have to change everything you’re doing.

***Relationships are fundamental to a site’s success at any venture. For whole-site change and growth, what needs to be in place?***

From a leadership perspective, it is part of the responsibility of school leaders to create the conditions for ongoing pedagogical growth. However, I think this is also the responsibility of every individual educator. The conditions for pedagogical growth begin with relationships of respect and trust. This takes time – a lot more than we often think! As leaders, we need to intentionally model respect for and trust in educators and children.

We can also create structures that enable relationships to flourish. These might be ensuring that part-time educators are included in staff meetings, and that staff meetings aren’t all about administration but provide time for dialogue. It might be ensuring that all year-level teachers have NIT together and are encouraged to collaborate during this time. It’s a balance between providing direction on the one hand and stepping back and giving time for people to talk about ideas on the other.

One of the things that concerns me when I visit sites is how much the potential of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is wasted because

of the amount of administration given to teachers to do during this time. In my view, if a PLC includes administration tasks (especially when directed by leadership to be completed), then they can't be called PLCs. There isn't much professional learning happening there.

***Community is important to all education sites. Where should the emphasis be when working with community on a pedagogical shift?***

Growth as a community has to include all of the community – not just teaching staff but all of the ancillary staff, families and children. It won't happen without planning, for example ensuring admin staff are part of the dialogue about values, vision and growth. It is also vital your governing council has time to discuss the big ideas you're exploring as an educational team. Similarly, it is important to involve parents and carers: invite them to some of the professional learning your team engages in, or create conversation groups of parents to really give them a voice.

For example, last year Penola Primary began a parent discussion group. This began because the school was looking for ways to help families understand the playful and nature-play pedagogies they were embracing. Rather than go the traditional route of parent workshops, they invited a group of parents to meet once or twice a term to discuss different educational issues. The facilitator, Olivia (both teacher and parent), doesn't prepare much more than a focus topic (generated by the parents) and perhaps a short video or article to spark conversation. The parents feel they have a voice and are listened to. They are part of the process of growing as an organisation – it's not something the educators experience and then simply tell the parents about. It's time to find different ways of collaborating with families, ways that include them much earlier in the process, and value all voices: the child's, the family's and the educator's.

***Cultural change takes time and it can be challenging to keep focused as a site. What's your perspective on the time needed and on how to confront challenges?***

Cultural growth and change take a lot longer than the text books say! If you're serious about wanting nature pedagogy as part of the fabric of your way of being at your site, then it's important to accept that it will take time. Don't rush it if you want deep thinking; be careful not to hurry those opportunities to discuss and think together. Provide opportunities for educators and families to talk without feeling time-pressured; allow them to ponder over topics rather than feel they have a check-list to get through.

I think it's also wise to be cautious about changing tack too often in terms of professional learning focus. For cultural growth, you'll need at least a 5-year vision. My experience has always been that you'll see some "runs on the board" by year 2 or 3 but the change is not solidly embedded across a community until year 4 or 5. Too often, I hear the frustration of teachers who feel that they are just "getting their teeth" into something when the site announces a new focus for their professional learning. This only reinforces superficial thinking and a sense of "covering" the topics (it sounds a lot like what we do to children too!) My advice to leaders is: be clear in your vision, but so rigid that you can't listen to others in your community.



***Are there any structures and strategies that you've seen work particularly well within education sites that are embracing change and fostering growth?***

There are a number of really effective strategies that I have observed at different sites. These include group activities such as parent discussion groups and book clubs or reading groups – just like normal book clubs but ones that specifically focus on publications of pedagogical interest.

Inter-site and intra-site visits (in other words, visiting other sites as a team and visiting different learning spaces within your own site) for educators and parents are also great ways to encourage the cross-fertilisation of ideas that is so important for growth. The use of a professional article board in the staffroom for the sharing of interesting articles and quick jottings on post-it notes also works well to encourage engagement in and reflection on the process of change.

Another effective strategy is allowing time for shared online learning for staff. Recognising that dialogue is essential for change is really important too, not only by making time for dialogue but also by budgeting for it – in other words ensure that all team members, including part-time staff, are paid to be there as part of the dialogue.

It has been truly inspiring to see effective leadership bringing about growth and change through the recognition of the need for strategies like these, and exciting to help other sites embark upon this journey. \*

# [ CONVERSATION ]

## NATURE'S BUILDING BLOCKS

### Exploring the potential of loose parts

INTERVIEW WITH SIMON HUTCHINSON, DIRECTOR OF CLIMBING TREE CONSULTANCY



#### [ ABOUT SIMON ]

Simon is a qualified teacher, the father of three nature-play-loving children, a Level 3 playground auditor, and Director of Climbing Tree where he is a designer and consultant known for his nature-inspired designs that offer appropriate risk taking and encourage free active play with loose parts. He also tours regularly with Nature Play SA to deliver workshops across the state.

<http://climbingtree.com.au/about-us/>

*Loose parts should be a feature of all children's play spaces – according to **Simon Hutchinson**, outdoor education teacher and natural play space designer. A father of three who as Director of Climbing Tree Consultancy has designed over 120 natural play spaces, Simon has a pretty good idea about what children want and need in their play spaces.*

#### **Simon, can you tell us where your nature play journey began?**

I guess you could say it all started for me in childhood. I grew up on a farm property having to invent my own fun and being creative playing with my brother. We got up to all sorts of things. We would play in fallen trees, build cubbies, play in the scrub, invent games, build BMX tracks, explore old ruins... and at one point we invented our own outdoor circus.

From a professional perspective, it began after I came back from England in 2008. I had spent quite a bit of time in inner-city London where I had seen first-hand the impact that confined spaces, limited opportunities for free play and no contact with nature can have on children. The children were really unhappy, angry, socially and emotionally challenged. When I returned to Australia I could see that we were on a similar trajectory with how free play was disappearing. And really we are the land of the great outdoors!

From my perspective, school and parental restrictions were the greatest barriers to free play. As a qualified teacher, I wanted to challenge these notions in my classroom, school and wider community.

Through my classroom role, I started to incorporate more outdoor teaching to engage the children in different ways and to stimulate their creativity and open their minds to the types of things they could do outside – often outdoor teaching can lead to more diverse types of play in the schoolyard. Questions were raised at the time, and I had to explain the benefits of outdoor education as well as the importance of wellbeing and its relevance to learning outcomes.

A short time later, I took on a different role that enabled me to introduce activities such as cubby building and fire. For example, I went through a process of evaluating sticks for play using a risk-benefit approach and modelled appropriate behaviour and use with sticks to staff and students. I then developed a common language with staff to educate children around the use of sticks. As we communicated the benefits clearly to our parent community, positive parent feedback rose dramatically. I realised we were doing the right thing. This experience developed into a passion that saw me present around the state with Nature Play SA and start my own business. Anyone who wants to learn more about what we do at Climbing Tree can do so by visiting <http://climbingtree.com.au/about-us/>.

#### **You are a strong advocate for loose parts in education settings. Can you tell us a little bit about what loose parts are?**

Loose parts are anything that is not designed for play. They are open-ended, movable materials that I believe are the single most important element in any play space. I categorise them into two types:

Natural loose parts: these consist of sticks, twigs, seed pods, pine cones, log rounds, rocks and other things derived from nature. I find natural loose parts encourage quiet, creative, imaginative, sensory and sustained play.

Junk loose parts: these consist of larger, man-made objects such as timber planks, milk crates, tyres, pvc offcuts, cable reels and other items that can't be easily broken. I find that due to their size the resultant play is more adventurous and develops gross motor skills. It also enables children to create appropriate challenges for themselves and experience both success and failure, as well as an overwhelming sense of accomplishment when they navigate an appropriate risk. Junk loose parts may require a space for storage as the perception is that they are messy and junk-like.

#### **You have a strong belief that loose parts are one of the most important elements of a child's play space. Can you tell us more about this?**

As I said earlier, they are the most important element. Loose parts make a space dynamic and responsive. Regardless of what you do to your physical space, if you don't have movable parts in the space you won't get

the outcomes – outcomes such as sustained play, greater collaboration between different ages and genders, more meaningful direction in play, more critical and creative thinking, problem solving, and assessing risk and challenge.

In a school context, a nature play space with loose parts allows all children to engage in something meaningful. Traditional playground settings are designed for gross motor play and games with rules, which can be limiting for some children. A space with a balanced approach to play will see a higher level of engagement, greater social interaction and, according to research, a potential reduction in [bullying](#).

***Often educators (and parents, for that matter) associate a level of risk with children playing with sticks and stones, and therefore loose parts don't feature within their play spaces. What is your perspective on these types of concerns?***

For me a stick is exactly the same as a cricket bat – a serious injury can be caused with any item that isn't used the way it is intended to be used. But we see the benefit in cricket bats, and we need to do the same with sticks and other loose parts. In fact, the only significant difference between the two is that a cricket bat can only be used to play cricket whereas a stick affords endless opportunities for play.

A great way to put risk into perspective is conducting a risk–benefit assessment – for example, assessing whether sticks are an appropriate risk. For educators this is a really important tool. Traditionally a risk assessment measures the likelihood of a negative event; however, a risk–benefit assessment puts the activities into perspective by considering the benefits in comparison to the likelihood of a negative event. More often than not, the benefit outweighs the risks. Without the risk there is no benefit.

I also often ask parents and educators what their play looked like as kids. The conversation from there opens up their minds to the benefits of risk – or, in most cases, perceived risk.

***From a practical perspective, what does a "loose parts" area look like and where can loose parts be sourced?***

I suggest schools start with a small, unused corner – out-of-bounds areas often work well – and have conversations with the children and school community about how they will be used. For junk play you would need a small storage shed but for natural loose parts it is less important to have a central storage point. With large sticks, simply leaning them up against a fence is a good way of storing them.

In terms of collection, a call-out to your parent community is a good start. Distribute pictures and descriptions to families about the type of things you are looking for, such as log rounds, pine cones, seed pods, smooth rocks and sticks as natural loose parts or, for junk loose part play, items such as tyres, pallets, crates and safe offcuts from building sites.



***What issues can be encountered with introducing loose parts and what advice do you have for educators to approach these issues?***

A common problem can be ownership and hoarding behaviour whereby some children withhold or secure all their materials, not allowing other students to use them. This can be managed by packing up and resetting at the end of the session or establishing a set time for loose part play such as every Friday. As the expectations get established, it is the hope that these can stay out for longer and longer periods, resulting in deeper play as children add and develop the village over time. This, along with discussion with the students, will help manage the behaviour. However, it is also important to recognise that some conflict can actually result in strong learning outcomes and can encourage emotional regulation.

Parental perception is sometimes a challenge, but educating parents and carers on the reasons why is crucial. If parents understand the benefits of natural play to their children's learning, they are more likely to accept it and even embrace it within their home environment. You can do this through videos, photos, podcasts, parent information sessions and snippets of information within parent correspondence.

***What would be the one thing you want to convey to educators?***

Children are very capable and competent. They are able to make amazing decisions about their own lives, and sometimes we need to step back and let them do that. \*

#### [ MORE INFO ]

- [Loose Parts = Creativity + Discovery + Imagination Fact Sheet – \[Nature Play SA\]](#)
- [Natural things \[Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges NRM Board\]](#)

## [CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS]

# NATURE PLAY THE CURRICULUM WAY

## Outdoor learning in the Australian Curriculum

MARIA TAYLOR



*In this, the first issue of Nature Play the Education Way we are shining a light on the Australian Curriculum's Outdoor Learning Connection, which sits within the resource section of the Australian Curriculum website. Read this guide by experienced educator **Maria Taylor** to get a clearer understanding of the Outdoor Learning Connection and how it can enrich delivery of the Curriculum across the board, and to see some suggested lesson ideas.*

Classrooms of the 21st century are becoming more responsive to and reflective of the many ways children learn. For learners and teachers alike, this includes the many opportunities associated with outdoor learning. Taking children outside can open up new and exciting ways to achieve learning outcomes.

The Outdoor Learning Connection (OLC) is a tool that sits within the overall structure of the Australian Curriculum, providing a powerful message for educators around Australia: outdoor learning is an important part of a child's schooling experience and has a place in every educational setting.

### **To begin with, what is outdoor learning?**

As defined by Outdoor Education Australia: "Outdoor learning is experiential. It involves guided, integrated learning in natural environments and is intrinsically cross-curricular. It uses the natural environment to develop physical skills; increase understanding of self, others and the environment; and learn about subject-specific content across the curriculum."

Most of our students exist in a world that is predominantly humanly controlled and managed. Venturing into an outdoor learning environment means venturing into a space that is, at times, ungovernable and ever changing; therefore the thinking and learning in this space will reflect that.

Interestingly, in the outdoors the process of learning is often simplified for students yet the outcomes and metacognition is amplified. Outdoor learning experiences require students to engage and respond to the world (literally) at their feet. Resources are basic and interaction between students and their environment is key to success.

The ACARA-endorsed Outdoor Learning Connection provides synergy between traditional modes of delivery and outdoor learning and "is delivered as a teaching methodology learning in, about and for the outdoors, drawing on content from a range of learning areas." (ACARA)

Outdoor learning within the Australian Curriculum does not advocate for the addition of new content or skills to be developed; it simply offers a suggestion and framework for a pedagogical approach to take learning outdoors.

### **[ABOUT MARIA]**

Maria has 20 years teaching experience and a Master's in Education. She has worked in a range of local and international educational settings within Early Learning and Primary education. Her teaching career has seen her travel the globe to explore ways educators from all walks of life inspire and connect with students. Maria is passionate about educational research and sharing evidence of great practice in education, inspiring and supporting others to connect with nature, and facilitating authentic outdoor learning opportunities for all students.

## EXPLANATION OF THE CURRICULUM CONNECTION

*“Developed in consultation with Outdoor Education Australia (OEA), the outdoor learning connection engages students in practical and active learning experiences in environments beyond the classroom, increases their understanding and appreciation of the environment and promotes the value of sustainable use and life-long outdoor recreation for enjoyment, health and wellbeing.” (ACARA)*

The OLC resource provides a link between content descriptors that have connections with outdoor learning, and also offers guidance as to where the General Capabilities and Cross Curriculum Priorities are best developed through outdoor learning experiences. Outdoor learning is, by its very nature, cross curricular and interconnected, and encompasses all three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum.

*“Outdoor learning not only addresses content across several learning areas, it is also uniquely placed to address general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities of the Australian Curriculum. In particular, these are Personal and Social Capability, Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethical Understanding, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, and Sustainability.” (ACARA)*

The Outdoor Learning Connection has a detailed rationale which provides educators with an overview of “the unique and specific benefits that outdoor learning can contribute to a student’s education” (ACARA), outlining them as follows:

- » providing direct personal contact with nature (the outdoors) in ways that promote enjoyment of outdoor activity and the natural world. Such enjoyment can be the basis for ongoing outdoor recreation and nature experiences, supporting personal health and wellbeing and providing the foundations for ecological literacy.
- » enabling perspectives on contemporary living and human-to-nature relationships. Through the provision of outdoor experiences, students have opportunities to reflect on healthy alternatives for everyday living and lay vital foundations for sustainability and stewardship into the future.
- » developing competence and safety management in the Australian outdoors. This includes how outdoor learning can teach students to assess risk and make judgements about their management of it.
- » enhancing wellbeing through guided reflection on involvement in group and individual activities that are challenging and adventurous.
- » developing essential personal and social capabilities such as communication, resilience, self-confidence, leadership, teamwork, goal setting, personal autonomy and initiative.



## OUTDOOR LEARNING - EXAMPLES OF THE CONNECTIONS

*“The Outdoor Learning Connection provides a framework for students to experience guided, integrated learning across the curriculum in natural environments. Students have the opportunity to gain unique and specific benefits from outdoor learning. They develop skills and understandings while valuing a positive relationship with natural environments and promoting the sustainable use of these environments.” (ACARA)*

The framework of the Outdoor Learning Connection consists of four dimensions. These are:

- » Skills and knowledge
- » Human–nature relationships
- » Conservation and sustainability
- » Health and wellbeing

In each of these, educators are provided with clear links as to where outdoor learning naturally “fits” across all three dimensions of the curriculum: that is, within learning areas, in the development of general capabilities and through the cross curriculum priorities.

To showcase (or shine a light) on the four dimensions of outdoor learning, we are focusing on just a few ways students can learn in, with and about nature, with clear links to the Outdoor Learning Connection, via our first feature in education, “the humble stick”.

## IDEAS FOR USING STICKS WITHIN THE OUTDOOR LEARNING CONNECTION FRAMEWORK

Sticks are open-ended items that encourage children to be creative, imaginative, and exist in worlds where they have full control. They can be an inventor, creator, director, engineer or scientist. Sticks offer infinite opportunities for open-ended learning, creating, role playing, hypothesising, critiquing and imagining in many teaching contexts. What does a child imagine when they have a stick in their hands and what stories will they create if we allow them?

These short lesson ideas will provide some confidence for educators to engage their children in learning through using sticks – and although they are lesson-based with structure, they can open the minds of children to the affordances of a stick, therefore developing schema and creating opportunities for future student-led investigations.



## FINAL WORD

Outdoor learning environments provide a natural platform for meaningful differentiation, authentic inquiry and diverse learning styles. The Australian Curriculum Outdoor Learning Connection supports the practical application of cross-curricular concepts, thus suggesting that sometimes the very best way to consolidate learning is to leave the classroom and take learning outside.

## LESSON IDEA: BUILD A CUBBY COMMUNITY



### **DIMENSION 1: SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE**

The Skills and knowledge dimension draws on the need for students to work together in an active and safe way. This dimension specifically addresses the following skills:

- » investigating environments in a safe way
- » planning and preparing
- » being organised
- » working together

### **WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD A SHELTER AND A COMMUNITY?**

**WHAT YOU NEED:** Long sticks suitable for a cubby, hessian/material, rope, branches and other natural things

**INTRODUCTION:** Investigate “shelter” as a basic human need. What is shelter and what does this look like? How does this differ across nations and cultures worldwide? Discuss the challenges that come with building using little or no resources. Explore the concept of building for sustainability and building to reflect culture and identity. Explore the similarities and differences between these concepts through the process of building a shelter to house a family comfortably with only the materials gathered.

**HOW TO:** Allow time for planning and discussion and ask students to consider a number of different variables such as light, aspect, shelter, warmth, and the integrity of their structure (encouraging critical thinking). Give children the opportunity to plan, discuss, create, and spend unstructured time in their cubbies.

#### **OUTDOOR LEARNING CURRICULUM**

**CONNECTIONS:** This activity provides children with the opportunity to do the following: understand themselves as learners; become confident, resilient and adaptable; appreciate diverse perspectives; understand relationships; communicate effectively; work collaboratively; make decisions; and develop leadership skills (Personal and social capability continuum).

*“Students learn to foster their adventurous spirit while engaging in healthy, non-competitive, lifelong physical activities.”*

(ACARA)

**EXTENSION:** As an extension, consider asking the children to: write about the process; attach a narrative or reflective piece; write a poem; draw a scientific diagram; or paint a depiction of what they created.

## LESSON IDEA: JOURNEY STICK



### **DIMENSION 2: HUMAN–NATURE RELATIONSHIPS**

The Human-nature relationships dimension highlights how “an individual’s experience in natural environments enhances human–nature relationships.” (ACARA). It focuses on how repeated time spent in nature allows students to:

- » develop multiple ways of knowing
- » create strong connections to natural environments

### **GO ON A JOURNEY AND TELL A STORY WITH YOUR STICKS OR WRITE A NARRATIVE.**

**WHAT YOU NEED:** One stick per student, twine, string, rubber bands

**INTRODUCTION:** Take some time to wander with the intention of collecting a single stick that will be your “wandering stick”.

**HOW TO:** Using natural twine, string, or colourful rubber bands to wrap one third of your stick. Wander and gather things you encounter such as feathers, flowers, and grass to hang on or attach to your stick. Let the children invent games and play.

Following their experience, consider asking them to: write about the process; attach a narrative or reflective piece to their game; write a poem; draw a diagram of the elements of their wandering stick.

#### **OUTDOOR LEARNING**

##### **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:**

Social awareness: Identify the various communities to which they belong and what they can do to make a difference (Personal and Social Capability). HASS Year 6: The effects that people’s connections with, and proximity to, places throughout the world have on shaping their awareness and opinion of those places (ACHGK036).

*“With repeated visits and multiple ways of engaging with natural environments, students learn to appreciate nature as a health-giving resource rather than a danger.”*

(ACARA)

**EXTENSION:** paint a depiction of what they created and how they used it.what they created.

# LESSON IDEA: BUILD A NEST



## **DIMENSION 3: CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY**

The Conservation and sustainability dimension reminds educators that “ecological, cultural and personal knowledge of and experiences in nature enhance decision-making about conservation and sustainability.”

The synopsis of this dimension emphasises that “a foundation for the critical analysis of human interaction with the natural world” is fostered through time spent learning about:

- » Scientific knowledge
- » western cultural knowledge
- » Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge
- » Economic knowledge
- » recreational and aesthetic knowledge

## **SURVEY YOUR ENVIRONMENT TO LOCATE AN AREA TO BENEFIT FROM THE CREATION OF A HABITAT FOR A SMALL CREATURE. MAKE THIS FOR THEM!**

**WHAT YOU NEED:** sticks, dry grass, mud

**INTRODUCTION:** A bird's habitat has been damaged and they have lost their nest (potential to research species of birds).

**HOW TO:** Collect materials needed by a bird to construct a nest such as sticks, dry grass, mud, and other natural things. Consider the different shapes of bird nests and what requirements they have. Creations can be guided by imagination and include research into local bird species. For example: magpies have large nests constructed from sticks, twigs and grass; willie wagtails have a much smaller, cup-shaped nest gently woven with grass, hair, fur, and covered with a fine layer of spider web; and swallows have nests made mostly from mud with feathers and fur.

### **OUTDOOR LEARNING**

#### **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:**

Science Year 2: Earth's resources are used in a variety of ways (ACSSU032). Science Year 4: Living things depend on each other and the environment to survive (ACSSU073). Geography Year 5: Work in groups to generate responses to issues and challenges (ACHASS102).

**EXTENSION:** Looking at habitat diversity through birds – a learning sequence by NRM Education (Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges NRM Board).

*“Students investigate strategies to reduce the local and global impact of human activity on natural environments and engage in actions that positively contribute to conservation and sustainable living.”*

(ACARA)

# LESSON IDEA: DESIGN A GAME THEN BUILD IT



## **DIMENSION 4: HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

This dimension highlights the benefits to personal growth and development, health and wellbeing to be gained from experiences in natural environments.

When learning in the outdoors students experience and gain an understanding of the following:

- » the deep, personal impact of time in nature
- » the balance to modern, technologically intense living provided by time spent in nature
- » the support to physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing that results from immersion in natural environments

## **CREATE A GAME THAT CAN BE PLAYED OUTDOORS USING NATURAL MATERIALS.**

**WHAT YOU NEED:** Collection of small sticks, small pebbles and string

**INTRODUCTION:** Use a bundle of sticks to play an outdoor version of pick-up sticks and naughts and crosses. Consider other games that could be played outside. Design a game that can be played outdoors and adapted for a range of ages.

**HOW TO:** Write down the rules of this game and share this with peers and teachers alike. What safety guidelines do you need to write into your rules? Can you make an outdoor classroom Olympics using all of the games developed? What scoring scheme can you use that rewards a growth mindset and a positive approach to learning as well as achievement?

### **OUTDOOR LEARNING CURRICULUM**

**CONNECTIONS:** Health Year 3 and 4: Explore how success, challenge and failure strengthen identities (ACPPS033). Investigate how emotional responses vary in depth and strength (ACPPS038). Describe strategies to make the classroom and playground healthy, safe and active spaces (ACPPS040). Participate in outdoor games and activities to examine how participation promotes a connection between the community, natural and built environments and health and wellbeing (ACPPS041).

*“Students are given unique opportunities to reflect on their own and with others about themselves, their relationship with others and their place in the world.”*

(ACARA)

**EXTENSION:** Collate the game as a procedure and turn this into an outdoor learning games guide for other classes to use and explore.

### **[ ACCESS MORE ]**

For more examples of how you might venture into the world of outdoor learning with a few sticks and twigs to guide the way view our [lesson plans here](#).

## [ TALKING POINT ]

# THE LEARNING POTENTIAL OF A STICK

JASON TYNDALL, NATURE PLAY SA

*Nature Play SA's manager Jason Tyndall presents regularly to educators, students and parents on the benefits of nature play and how to incorporate it in to everyday life at school and at home. In this "Talking Point" article, Jason explores the perceived issues surrounding stick play and celebrates the wealth of learning potential this humble item has to offer.*

Working with education sites at various points on their nature play journey, I often encounter challenges involving children using sticks as part of their play. Usually it is a matter of the way a stick is perceived.

For example, I have encountered situations where sticks are perceived as dangerous and therefore children are instructed not to pick them up or use them in any way. However, we could perhaps consider inappropriate behaviour (the way a stick is used) as the potentially dangerous factor, not necessarily the stick itself. If we were to put measures in place to minimise negative behaviours, we could then pave the way for observing and embracing the learning potential of a stick.

Let's say a site has a conversation with its students about using sticks safely, for example dragging large ones along the ground and not throwing them, and as a result the educators and students form a joint agreement on how sticks should be used. Would the perceived risk be sufficiently minimised for the benefits of stick play to be considered instead?

A scenario-based line of inquiry I often use in my presentations is this:

"If you are a child with a stick, what are you?" (Common responses include a wizard, fisherman, conductor, magician, pirate, and anything they want to be.)

"If you are a fisherman, what are you talking about?" (Common responses include fishing rods, bait, the ocean, sharks, the one that got away.)

"If you are a pirate, what are you talking about?" (Common responses include walking the plank, ships, treasure, parrots, eye patches, maps etc.)

"If you are indeed a pirate, how are you talking?" (There is one common sound that you can probably recall – arrrgh!)

So what we have in this example is not only a demonstration of the potential of a child's imagination and creativity associated with an open-ended item such as a stick, but also evidence of language development (through the inventiveness of the narrative) and speech development (through the articulation of their characters' sounds and accents). We are seeing the learning potential of a stick.

When talking about sticks with parents (or with staff who are tentative about the concept of children using sticks), there are some important points to consider:

### **1. Understand the benefits before communicating with parents**

If your team of educators is familiar with the benefits of open-ended, natural items such as sticks, you will be well equipped with the knowledge

needed to confidently convey the "why". You will also be prepared to document the learning potential that you observe (and later share it).

### **2. Frame sticks as a key learning tool rather than a mode of play**

If you simply say to your parent community that you are going to allow children to play with sticks, you are neither conveying the benefits of stick play nor providing positive dialogue around the "why". How much more effective to say something along the lines of: "This term our site is going to explore creativity and imagination through open-ended items that have been known improve language and speech development. Open-ended items are objects that have no specific use such as twigs, sticks, flowers and bark." You can also begin to distribute ongoing information about the benefits of nature play and loose parts in particular.

### **3. Document and celebrate your observations**

Documentation enables strong reflective practice about the way children engage in play and is a vital tool for conveying benefits to the parent community. Visual stories in particular are a powerful means to bring learning to life – especially when you are seeing outcomes associated with open-ended objects. Documentation can also lead to further professional development opportunities such as floor books and a desire to understand and incorporate nature pedagogy into your site's culture.

Incorporating sticks and other open-ended natural items into children's play is an important step towards embracing their learning potential whilst fostering creativity, inventiveness and the imagination that is fast developing within their minds. It is also important to recognise that trusting children with sticks is to see them as capable and confident learners. \*

## [ ABOUT JASON ]

Jason Tyndall is manager of Nature Play SA. He coordinates the Nature Play SA Collective membership initiatives, presents regularly at workshops and conferences, and delivers tailored professional development for educators and parent groups on the benefits of nature play and how to incorporate it into school and home life.

Nature Play SA also offers a range of services for educator such as AGM keynotes, parent information sessions and workshops for educators (discounted rates for members).

## [ FURTHER RESOURCES ]

**For parents:** [The Humble Stick](#), [Loose Parts = Creativity + Discovery + Imagination](#)

**For educators:** 50 things to do with a stick [Early Years / Primary Years Learning through nature at Upper Sturt Primary School](#)

# // IDEAS AND INSPIRATION

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## **NATURE PLAY PRINCIPLES**

Guidelines for creating a meaningful natural play space

*Nature Play SA Team*

## **SOWING THE SEED**

The value of edible school gardens and practical ways to involve children

*Monina Gilbey*

## **THE CHRYSALIS OF LEARNING**

Igniting curiosity by attracting butterflies to your site

*Jeremy Gramp*

# NATURE PLAY PRINCIPLES

## GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A MEANINGFUL NATURAL PLAY SPACE

NATURE PLAY SA TEAM

*Natural play spaces are areas designed for children to play in in free, open-ended ways. They should offer rich and diverse experiences that enable children to guide and master their own play experiences, play how they want to play, test their cognitive and physical capabilities, stimulate their senses, provide social interactions and independent play, and teach them about living things and how to care for them.*

In conjunction with play space design experts, Nature Play SA has devised a series of Natural Play Space Principles to provide educators with guidance for developing spaces that support the diversity of play needs for children. The checklist below is adapted from the [Nature Play SA principles](#).

### Listen to children's' voices

Expression is a powerful form of communication for children and manifests in a diversity of ways. Learning to observe and interpret children's expression can help identify their needs in a play space. We can also ask children what they like to do when they play rather than what would they like to see in their play space.

Listening to children can help create an environment that reflects their perspectives on the world and provide ownership and a sense of belonging.

### Engage your school community

Engaging your community is an important component to considering the design and use of natural play spaces. From educating and consulting with parents, educators and staff, to seeking expertise, donations and people power for working bees, or distributing information to raise awareness, there are many forms of meaningful engagement.

It's important to recognise that whilst engagement can take a lot of time, it can also be a key factor in establishing strong values aligned with outdoor learning outcomes and nature pedagogy.

### Capture a sense of place and identity

Natural play spaces should tell stories that define your site and local area, celebrate cultural diversity within your school community, and represent your values and heritage. Understanding what a sense of place means to you personally and as a collective is a good starting point, as it will provide a different perspective throughout the design phase.

### Stimulate the senses

Children experience the diversity and beauty of the world through their senses. Creating a space with opportunities to engage all five senses encourages children to tune in and recognise seasonal patterns and rhythms of the natural world.

🌿 **Touch** includes different textures for walking on, both in shoes and barefoot; plants that are rough, smooth, prickly, soft, furry and sticky; different types of rocks and logs; soil, sand and water that can mixed with bare hands.

🌿 **Sight** includes the wide range of natural colours; ways to vary the intensity of light; different shapes, heights, and forms through the use of vegetation; art; sculptures; bird baths; insect hotels; and flowering plants to attract birds and butterflies.

🌿 **Smell** includes herbs, bushes and trees with scented leaves, and flowers that can be crushed and used in potions and other natural creations.

🌿 **Taste** includes accessible vegetable gardens, fruit trees, and other edible plants.

🌿 **Sound** includes music walls; soundscapes featuring running water; bird-attracting flowers; trees for wind to blow through and sticks for experimenting with sound.



## Use natural elements

Natural materials provide rich opportunities for creative, imaginative, social and sensory play. In addition, they can provide greater diversity in speech and language development as their use is often associated with more imaginative play, prompting unique dialogue.

For example:

🌿 Water provides opportunities to touch, listen, and experiment. Creating dry or shallow ponds with water pumps for mixing with dirt/sand can offer a range of learning opportunities.

🌿 Sand and dirt allow children to dig, explore, create and, when integrated with water, offer a textural and creative experience.

🌿 Plants and trees provide shade, places to hide, different smells, textures and tastes; climbing structures, loose parts, habitats for birds, butterflies and other insects; and seasonal changes.

🌿 Changing topography can provide diversity and interest in your play space and can take the form of hills, mounds, creeks, and swales whilst encouraging climbing, running, rolling, sliding, balancing and jumping.

🌿 Wood, stones and boulders can be used to construct pathways, bridges, borders, fences, climbing structures, and seating, and to provide opportunities for construction, gathering and building.

## Create seamless connections

Connections between spaces can help children form relationships and familiarity with their surroundings. Good integration between areas provides continuity and helps build confidence, independence and invitations to explore. Providing seamless integration between the indoor and outdoor spaces and between different outdoor areas will also allow children to move freely between areas, providing a sense of place and identity.

Using winding pathways, tactile paths, boardwalks, tunnels, bridges, stepping-stones/logs and plants to connect spaces can encourage imaginative and open-ended play.

## Incorporate a range of play spaces

Diverse play opportunities provide an inclusive environment for all children. Offering a range of spaces will encourage all areas of a child's development – social, cognitive, physical, and emotional – whilst providing space for appropriate risk taking and challenge. Some elements to encourage include:



*"Creating secret forts, dens, hideouts and playhouses isn't just any random kind of play. It's a universal drive that's rooted in kids' healthy development."*

DAVID SOBEL

🌿 **Fantasy and imagination** – this can be encouraged through winding paths, hidden places, provocations throughout the space, stepping stones, amphitheatres, archways, loose parts, performance areas, music opportunities and space to build small worlds and life-size cubbies from sticks and other natural materials.

🌿 **Gathering** – this can be encouraged by providing a diversity of loose parts such as seedpods, leaves, sticks, and rocks to find, collect and use in different ways. Providing baskets and identifying what plants can be picked and used can invite children to explore play in different ways.

🌿 **Adventure** – this can be encouraged by having high structures (that meet Australian Playground Standards), uneven surfaces, paths, ropes, different-sized boulders and logs to challenge and evaluate risk.

🌿 **Special places** – these can be encouraged in a variety of ways: using plants as screens; having small, enclosed or hidden niches with seating or gathering areas; supplying hessian and rope to enclose cubbies or other spaces that children can call their own. Special places should also be considered important areas where children can slow down, find their centre, and compose themselves during stressful periods.

## Include loose parts

Loose parts include natural materials that have no specific use and vary in form, texture and size. These include tree stumps, bark pieces, log rounds, long and short sticks, shells, seedpods, leaves, flowers and rocks. They provide open-ended and creative play, allowing children freedom and space to invent, create, dismantle, move, carry, and build whatever they want.

## Model sustainable practice

When designing a play space, utilising local, sustainable, reusable, and ethically sourced materials should be considered and provides a springboard for discussing sustainability with children. In addition, incorporating sustainable elements within the play experience can help foster a greater connection to the natural environment.

For example, limited water supply can demonstrate the need to ration water resources. Using local suppliers, contractors, and artists where possible can further complement a commitment to a play space rich in environmental sustainability. ★

## [ ACCESS MORE ]

- » [Nature play principles](#)
- » [Getting started](#)
- » [Loose parts handout](#)
- » [NRM natural things resource](#)



# SOWING THE SEED

## The value of edible school gardens and practical ways to involve children

MONINA GILBEY



*Primary school kitchen garden specialist **Monina Gilbey** has witnessed first hand the extraordinary benefits to students and whole school communities of edible gardens. In this article Monina shares her experiences of watching the seed of curiosity take hold in students' minds and grow into awareness and engagement with far-reaching benefits.*

There are times working with kids when they say something about what they are doing or experiencing with such honesty and conviction that you know they really mean what they say. I had one of these moments working at Little Sprouts at the Adelaide Botanic Garden. A little visitor put her hand on her heart and said, "I can't believe we're here. I love everything."

A lot of work goes into creating such a beautiful, engaging outdoor space. Little Sprouts was designed by a landscape architect, has a full-time curator and the plants are propagated at the Mount Lofty Botanic Garden with the help of numerous volunteers. Is it possible to create a similarly inviting and attractive productive space at your site? Can it be done without a big budget? Will you be able to make food from the produce without a fully equipped kitchen? Is it possible to create engaged learners in the garden? The answer to all those questions is a resounding "yes".

The benefits of a kitchen garden are far broader than just a beautiful garden space. Children working in the garden learn where their food comes from, develop a sense of responsibility and move actively outdoors. A study into the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program, which encourages learning through pleasurable outdoor education, found

that "attributes of the program valued most highly by study participants included increased student engagement and confidence, opportunities for experiential and integrated learning, teamwork, building social skills, and connections and links between schools and their communities" (Block, et al 2012).

### START SMALL

Small spaces can be surprisingly productive. You can start your productive garden with herbs in pots. You may have tried pots with limited success, but in fact the answer is simple: soil in pots needs to be replenished with organic matter such as compost or worm castings to help with nutrition and water retention.

Anything that can hold soil can be used for planting: old washing machine tubs, broken wheelbarrows, even gumboots. Use a pond liner if you are using any materials that may rust. Fibreglass pipe offcuts can also be used for your garden. The offcuts need to be sealed and painted as the fibres are loose at the cut ends.

Place your pots or garden beds in full sun as productive plants need four to six hours of sun a day. And remember that regular, deep watering and a thick layer of mulch are musts in summer.

### PLANT

Herbs and edible flowers are a quick, easy way to start your garden. Parsley is one of the easiest herbs to grow, especially from seed. Herbs that don't require a lot of attention include rosemary, oregano, sage and thyme. Pineapple sage is also an easy-care plant that offers great sensory learning: kids can suck the nectar from the white ends of the flowers, helping them understand the connection between flowers and pollinators.

Violas, calendulas and nasturtiums are some of my favourite edible plants – but be careful of nasturtiums which can turn into garden escapees. Use edible flowers to decorate salads or desserts. Calendula and nasturtium leaves, which can be a bit peppery, can also be added in salads. As a bonus, calendulas have perfect landing platforms for insects, so you will have lots of insect visitors for the children to observe.

Try to plan your garden to avoid a glut of produce in the holidays – although you can freeze some of your summer harvest for use later in the year. You might want to try miniature vegetables for a quicker harvest, such as Lebanese mini muncher cucumbers, Jack B Little pumpkins, cherry tomatoes and Lebanese eggplant.

### [ REFERENCES ]

- » Block, K., Gibbs, L., Staiger, P., Gold, L., Johnson, B., Macfarlane, S., Long, C. & Townsend, M. (2012). Growing Community: The Impact of the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Program on the Social and Learning Environment in Primary Schools, *Health Education and Behavior*, Vol. 39, Issue 4, pp.419-432.
- » Gibbs, L., Staiger, P., Johnson, B., Block, K., Macfarlane, S., Gold, L., Kulas, J., Townsend, M., Long, C. & Ukoumunne, O. (2013). Expanding Children's Food Experiences: The Impact of a School-Based Kitchen Garden Program, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Vol. 45, Issue 2, March-April 2013, pp.137-146.

## LEARN

An edible garden is a great space for learning, particularly for children who are more hands-on. Having worked in a Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden for many years, I've seen kids who are disruptive in the classroom thrive outdoors and relish the opportunity to work hard and get dirty in the garden.

Gardens can connect to the classroom and curriculum in many ways, through activities such as exploring where vegetables originate, calculating the amount of mulch or soil needed for an area, watching insect life cycles, examining plant parts and studying the relationship between flowers and pollinators.

Create a living laboratory in your garden by letting your parsley flower. Any flowers from the parsley family (celery, dill, coriander, carrots) will attract insects to your garden – especially ladybirds. Your students will be able to observe the full life cycle of the ladybirds on the flowers: from ladybirds to eggs, to larvae, to pupae and to ladybirds again.

## EAT

One of the best ways to engage children in the garden is for them to eat its produce. With just a few ingredients, for example, kids can make pesto. Pesto can be created using any edible leaves: I have made it with children using a combination of thyme, rosemary, pineapple sage, dill, parsley, calendula leaves, silver beet, rocket, celery and oregano.

Showing children how to grow and cook their own food is an important life skill. If they can cook from the food they grow, you are enabling them to make better food choices and have control over the food they eat. Exposing children to different foods as part of experiential learning can increase their willingness to try new foods and encourages them to appreciate the freshness of garden produce compared to store bought (Gibbs et al 2013).

Once you start children on their edible garden journey, there's no telling where it will end. I can't guarantee that your students will love everything about it, but I'm sure they'll love something. That one thing may be the seed that helps them spend more active time outdoors, make better food choices and retain their food gardening interest for a lifetime. ✨



## EASY *summer* PLANTS FROM SEED

Basil	Lettuce	Pumpkin
Calendulas	Marigolds	Radish
Cucumber	Parsley	Watermelon
Dill	Potatoes	

## NUT-FREE PESTO

Half a cup of various edible leaves	1 pinch of salt
3 teaspoons of grated parmesan cheese	1 teaspoon of olive oil
2 teaspoons of sunflower seeds	

Add ingredients to the mortar and pestle. Mash until smooth. Serve with crudité's.  
To make this dairy free, add miso paste, nutritional yeast, or dairy-free cheese.

## [ ABOUT MONINA ]

Monina is an award-winning garden designer and, with eight years' experience in school kitchen gardens, continues to be energised by seeing children draw inspiration from nature. Monina's experience includes running a Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden, coordinating the Little Sprouts Kitchen Garden Program at the Adelaide Botanic Gardens and designing school, community and council gardens. Through her business, Monina runs garden craft workshops for kids as well as educational workshops for adults. In her spare time, Monina enjoys travelling with her partner, photography and working in her own, often neglected, garden.

# THE CHRYSALIS OF LEARNING

Igniting curiosity by attracting butterflies to your site

JEREMY GRAMP, NRM EDUCATION



*Connecting with the creatures that live amongst us is a special moment for budding minds, developing empathy and an understanding of what it means to nurture, respect and look after living things. Caterpillars are one of those things that children can encounter regularly, and as they transform into delicate winged creatures they provide an even greater sense of wonder. Unknown to many, says **Jeremy Gramp** of NRM Education, there are several caterpillars that you won't see unless you have the right plants for them to eat.*

Developing a butterfly garden with children is an authentic and rewarding experience. From learning about the process of creating and designing to planting seedlings and observing changes, children's curiosity is provoked as the garden grows and attracts its first caterpillars and butterflies. From a skills and subject-specific perspective, a butterfly garden can provide a host of opportunities associated with the Australian Curriculum and [Early Years Framework](#).

## REASONS FOR DEVELOPING A BUTTERFLY GARDEN

### **Providing a unique learning space**

Like all gardens designed with, by or for children, there is a variety of developmental and learning benefits. Firstly butterfly-attracting native plants are colourful and textured, and many are scented, providing sensory opportunities to engage at different levels. If children have developed the space, and use it, it can also provide a sense of ownership and place. In addition it can facilitate a connection to the natural world.

### **Learning about the ecological importance and processes of butterflies**

Butterfly gardens can provide opportunities to learn about adaptations, life cycles, classification, patterns, symmetry, pollination, food webs and other ecological marvels. They also provide an opportunity to discuss declining wildlife as butterflies within the Adelaide region are, sadly, in [decline](#). Furthermore, children can be empowered to make a difference, no matter how small, through planting just a handful of butterfly-attracting native plants.

While it can be said that understanding the butterfly life cycle goes hand-in-hand with childhood, to actually see a butterfly emerge from its chrysalis can be a moment of magic for a child.

### **Healthier children and healthier environment**

Creating garden spaces has a range of health and wellbeing benefits for children and the environment. For children gardens can be places to reflect in times of stress and offer a calming effect. In addition they provide children with an opportunity to be curious and exercise their minds.

Planting a butterfly garden also provides a benefit to other native animals. The native plants provide habitat and food for animals such as birds, native bees, hover flies, beetles, and other insects. Butterflies and caterpillars are also a food source for animals including birds, lizards and invertebrates, enabling a number of other points for discussion and learning.

Adelaide in particular has very few natural environments left, with only a small percentage of the original native vegetation remaining. As a result the number of butterflies has declined over the years.

## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Whether it be subject specific or a cross-curricular unit of inquiry, a butterfly garden presents a wealth of opportunities for authentic, student-led engagement encompassing all three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum, from the cross-curriculum priorities of Sustainability and Indigenous Perspectives to developing knowledge, skills and understanding within Science, Maths, Geography, Technology and the Arts, as well as developing skills in many of the general capabilities.

**Sustainability:** This cross-curriculum priority is an obvious link for a butterfly garden, and underpins all the learning opportunities outlined below.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures:** This can also be woven into butterfly garden learning through activities such as asking students to research local indigenous perspectives and the uses of the plants in your butterfly garden, and to consider if the plants are used for medicinal purposes, food, or other cultural uses.

Potential experiences and connected curriculum links that can be woven through your outdoor learning experience include:

### ENGLISH

- » Write a variety of text types connected with the experience. Reports, narratives, recounts, procedures, explanations and expositions could all be linked to the butterfly garden learning experience.
- » Research, design and create interpretive signage for the garden to engage and inspire the local community to create butterfly gardens in their home gardens.
- » Share learning in an authentic way with research and articles written for the school newsletter.

### SCIENCE

- » Explore food webs
- » Research and discover the inter-relationships of all the living things in the butterfly garden,

including that of the fungi and soil micro-organisms.

- » Learn about life cycles, including metamorphosis by way of a chrysalis.
- » Learn about plant adaptations and diversity. Consider leaf shape, colour and texture. Why are the plants like this?
- » Use the NRM Education [butterfly ID](#) chart to identify the butterflies in your garden. What adaptations do each of the butterflies have? Why have they named and classified in the way that they have been?

CURRICULUM LINKS: YEAR 1 [ACSSU211](#), [ACSHE021](#), [ACSHE022](#); YEAR 2 [ACSSU030](#), [ACSHE035](#); YEAR 3 [ACSSU044](#); YEAR 4 [ACSSU073](#), [ACSHE062](#)

### THE ARTS

- » Include some outdoor art installations to complement the butterfly garden. Paint butterfly and caterpillar murals on fences or adjacent buildings, make totem poles or *papier maché* butterflies or caterpillars to place around the garden.
- » Make butterfly wings or masks to wear, construct caterpillars with tissue paper, create paintings of caterpillars or learn about symmetry with folded paintings.
- » Share and reflect on learning by making a video about the development of the butterfly garden and the butterflies that it attracts. This allows others to learn from what the students did and makes it easier for them to create their own butterfly gardens. Creating the video involves a variety of roles for students, including script writing, story boarding, narration, presenting to camera, filming and video editing.

### MATHS

- » Involve students in the design and creation of the garden. The design involves measuring, calculating distances and volumes, working with scale and shape.
- » Data collection will be useful to reflect various aspects of the butterfly garden. Graphs could then be used to showcase this information. Numerical skills including counting and tallying will also be developed.

## BUTTERFLY FACTS

- » Adult butterflies aren't as fussy about food as their caterpillars. Caterpillars need specific plants to chew whereas butterflies can sip nectar from a range of different plants.
- » Butterflies taste with their feet – that's how they determine where to lay their eggs.
- » Differences between butterflies and moths include: butterfly antennae are usually clubbed whereas moths' are often feathered; butterflies rest with their wings folded together above their body whereas moths rest with them flat; and moths have a silk cocoon whilst butterflies have a chrysalis.

CURRICULUM LINKS: YEAR 1 [ACMNA013](#); [ACMSP262](#), [ACMSP263](#); YEAR 2 [ACMSP050](#); YEAR 3 [ACMSP068](#); YEAR 4 [ACMSP096](#)

### GEOGRAPHY

- » Research appropriate native plants; research what our environment looked like pre-European settlement, what plants and animals were here, were they important and who were they important to?

CURRICULUM LINKS: YEAR 1 [ACHASSI019](#), [ACHASSI027](#); YEAR 2 [ACHASSI035](#), [ACHASSI043](#); YEAR 3 [ACHASSI053](#), [ACHASSI061](#); YEAR 4 [ACHASSI074](#), [ACHASSI082](#)



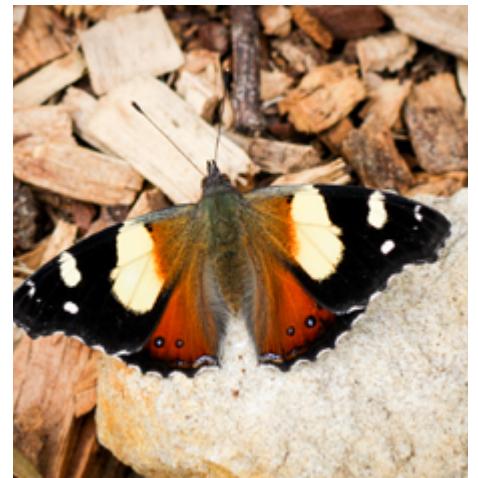
## [ ABOUT JEREMY ]

Jeremy Gramp is an Education Officer with the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Natural Resources Management Board and is part of a large team of educators who offer support to education sites to improve their environmental sustainability. A key part of their endeavours is empowering school communities to improve and engage with their natural environment.

## A GUIDE TO STARTING A BUTTERFLY GARDEN (ADAPTED FROM NRM RESOURCE)

- 1 Gather support within the school: are there any other people who would be interested in helping you? It could be the grounds person, parents or other teachers. Form a working group.
- 2 Seek approval from school leadership.
- 3 Select a spot for your garden that considers existing plants, shelter, sun, availability of water and surrounding use.
- 4 Seek input from students: what features of the garden would they like to see – for example a place to sit quietly, meeting circles, spaces to include butterfly art, interpretive signage, pathways, etc.
- 5 Design your garden using a including with features; identify materials needed such as irrigation, paths, rocks, etc.
- 6 Research the local native plants for your site that are butterfly- and caterpillar-attracting. Look at what butterflies these plants will attract. For Adelaide residents, you can use the tool developed by [Butterfly Conservation SA](#). Include a few other local native plants to help attract other insects and birds.
- 7 Identify funding opportunities such as fundraising and grants.
- 8 Plan your garden with timelines, identify potential community contributions/donations and talk to the grounds person about maintenance requirements to ensure the garden can be maintained well into the future (also let them know that caterpillars will eat some of the plants – and that that’s the plan!)

- 9 Prepare the site and build your garden infrastructure including pathways, rock placement, seating, etc. Then plant out your plants. Invite parents to contribute.
- 10 Officially open your garden and celebrate with your school community. You might like to name your garden.
- 11 With the staff identify ways to continue to use the garden as a learning resource and as a place for children to interact with nature in a free and open-ended way. ★



## [ FURTHER INFORMATION ]

- » [How to create a butterfly garden by Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges NRM Board](#)
- » [Butterfly Identification Chart by Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges NRM Board](#)
- » [Banksia Park R-7 Case Study: Student design and construct habitat for butterflies](#)
- » [O'Halloran Hill Kindergarten Case Study: Families taking the lead on butterfly garden](#)
- » [Waite Campus Children's Centre Case Study: Learning through Pilyalyangga](#)
- » [Butterfly Conservation Society website](#)
- » [Attracting Butterflies to your Garden: What to grow and conserve in the Adelaide Region Book – purchase from Nature Play SA's online shop](#)



A child,  
more than anyone else,  
is a spontaneous observer  
of nature

MARIA MONTESSORI

# // STORIES AND EXAMPLES

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## **THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS**

A journey of ornithological and artistic discovery

*Marie Hage - Tanunda Lutheran ELC*

## **A HANDFUL OF ROCKS**

Walking the nature play talk

*Maria Taylor - St Peter's Woodlands Grammar School*

## **WORTH A SECOND LOOK**

A celebration of loose parts

*Josh Anderson - Clarendon PS*

## **FROM LITTLE THINGS BIG THINGS GROW**

Engaging with the environment and influencing others

*Julian Rebellato - St Anthony's Catholic PS, Millicent*

## **MUD, GLORIOUS MUD**

A whole-school celebration

*Kate Nolan - Mount Barker South PS*

## **INTO THE FOREST**

Stepping into the "beyond"

*Mel Anderson - Cumberland Kindergarten*

## **BRINGING THE OUTSIDE INSIDE**

Butterfly life cycles in natural materials

*Monina Gilbey and Samantha Sunners - Flaxmill School*

# THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS

## A JOURNEY OF ORNITHOLOGICAL AND ARTISTIC DISCOVERY

MARIE HAGE

*Blessed with an enviable adjoining 2-hectare bush block bordered by the North Para River, the Tanunda Lutheran Early Learning Centre could be forgiven for resting on its nature play laurels. However, influenced by the Reggio Emilia pedagogical philosophy and inspired by the 2011 "Hundred Languages of Childhood" exhibition in Canberra, the ELC educators and children have taken themselves on an enriching artistic journey of discovery using nature and ornithology as their guide.*

We are lucky at the Tanunda Lutheran ELC: our 2-hectare bush block offers boundless potential. Ironically, the challenge we face is how not to waste such a gift. Given that our ELC program is influenced by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, founded on the conviction that we learn through making connections between things, concepts and experiences, and do so by interacting with other people and our surrounding environment, we know the importance of letting children make their own journey of discovery. What better place, then, to begin this journey than the bush block?

In 2016 children and educators at the Tanunda Lutheran ELC became ornithologists. Our interest in birds began in January 2016 when we observed many more bird species in the bush block. Was the increase in the numbers and species of birds a direct result of the ELC's 2013 bush block re-vegetation project?

It was decided with the children that we would look closely at the birds in the bush block and record the species we had sighted. A provocation box containing photos of birds in the bush block, facts about birds, websites related to ornithology which could be referred to with the children, and figures of different species of birds was created.

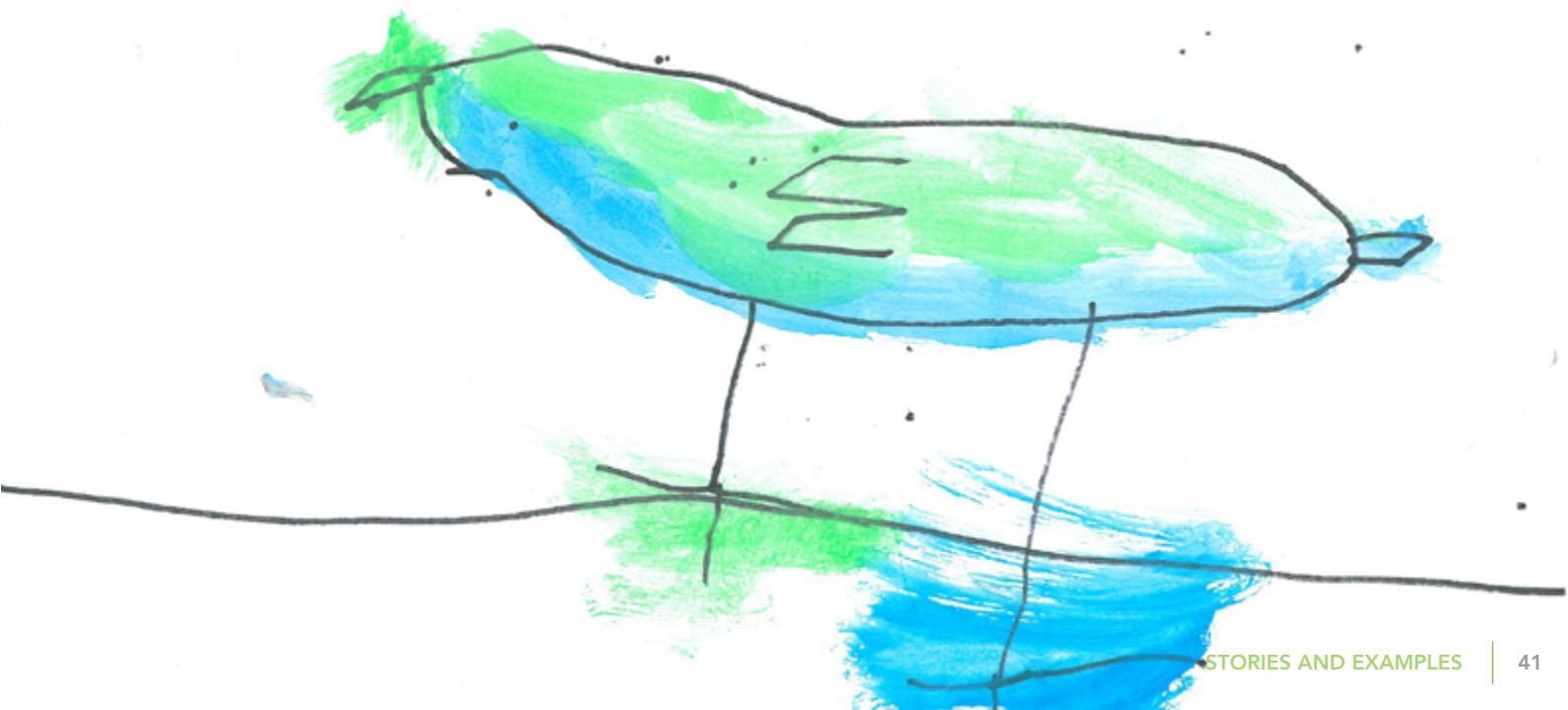
Although many more birds were found in the bush block, we realised that the vegetation catered for birds that live high up in trees and there was little vegetation suitable for birds which live in low bushes and eat grasses. After researching which plants and grasses would attract different local species to the bush block, Easter 2016 saw ELC families donate and plant over forty bird-attracting local species of shrubs, low-growing trees and grasses in the bush block and in the ELC garden.

*"If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, let us first allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it."*

DAVID SOBEL

Throughout 2016 the children made their learning about birds visible through some of the "Hundred Languages" of children – conversations, dance, songs, yoga, photography, paintings, drawings, clay, storytelling, videos, collage, mosaics, wood constructions – and the list goes on. Each language allowed the children to explore and express their thoughts and observations in different ways, as is explained on the adjoining pages.

As Reggio educators, we view children as strong, competent, resourceful and the co-constructors of their own knowledge, citizens of the world from birth. The project inspired by bird watching in our bush block was so fruitful and enriching that the children's artwork became an exhibition, entitled "The Language of Birds", at the Barossa Regional Gallery. We wonder where nature play and our ornithology journey will lead us next?





## THE LANGUAGE OF COLLAGE

Finding our voice through collage was initiated through the photographs taken by the children in the bush block. Along with prints of their photographs, we provided the children with open-ended materials that could be cut, torn, squashed, layered, painted and pasted to create a unique story, offering a range of possibilities. We also added a dimension to our work on sustainability. The children had been looking at what materials can be recycled, and for what purpose. Using our study of birds as our inspiration, we created works of art using recycled materials, providing a voice for children to express their understanding of our project as well as their connection to the world around them.



## THE LANGUAGE OF PRINT-MAKING

Through print-making, children receive direct sensory input which helps them feel connected to their art piece and to their environment. The main inspiration for our print-making was a feather. To create an interesting print, the children carefully studied the features of a feather, discussing with each other and with educators what they could see, and then transferred these features onto a piece of foam. Some children revelled in the repetitiveness of printing, others in its randomness.

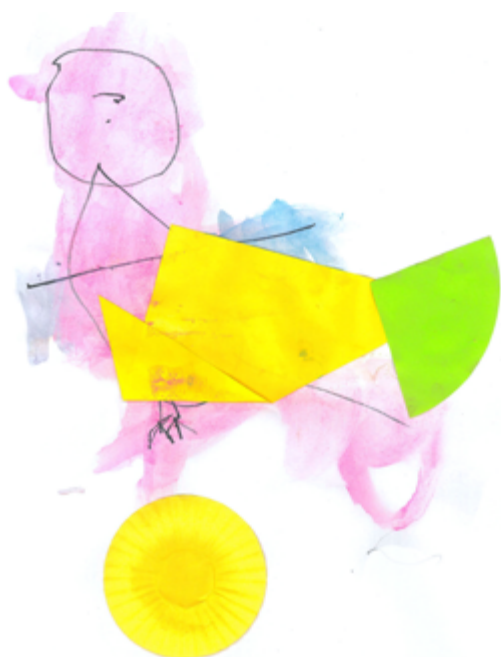
*"They're not leaves anymore, they are feathers for my messy bird."*

## THE LANGUAGE OF DRAWING

The children's drawings for the project were inspired by their observations of birds, feathers, nests and habitats, and the stories and discussions which arose between the children themselves and their educators and families. Drawing from observation "always involves interaction between seeing and reasoning, feeling and memory. Each person 'sees' differently, each chooses different parts to draw." (Kolbe, 2006).

## THE LANGUAGE OF MOSAIC

Our provocation for the children's mosaic work was baskets of tiles, pictures of mosaic work, simple line drawings and photographs of birds from our bush block. Inspired by our time in the bush block, the mosaic work touched on a wide range of skills from across the curriculum: numeracy skills through sorting, counting, patterning, ordering, identifying shapes, working with area and perimeter, and spatial awareness; fine motor skills and manual dexterity; hand-eye coordination; problem solving and decision making. All the while, a creative language was being unearthed and journeys of self-discovery, expression and pride were evolving. Working on our mosaics provided opportunities for children to discuss what they were doing, enhance their understandings about birds and the world around them, nurture an interest in the creative arts, as well as pursue their interest in particular birds through research, design, creating and reflection.



## THE LANGUAGE OF CLAY

Exploration of clay allowed the children to understand the 3D world of shape, form and perspective, all of which are early geometry understandings. It encouraged critical thinking and problem solving, story telling and creative expression, and also gave opportunities for rich conversations and the communication of ideas. The use of natural loose parts to embellish their clay creations further connected the natural world to their learning.

## THE LANGUAGE OF WEAVING

Weaving and sewing was an ideal medium for our ornithology project, as the children discovered through the process of weaving their own nests that birds are, of course, expert weavers – as are spiders and beavers. Through collaboration, discussion, sharing, turn taking, problem solving, concentration and creativity, the children reframed their perception of a nest. The value of the nest project lay not in the correctness of the weave and the neatness of our stitches but rather in our collective endeavours: without being bound together, each thread would remain a fragile, fluttering whisp of potential; once woven together, the threads become a structure strong enough to nurture and provide shelter – a metaphor, perhaps for the power of collaboration.





## THE LANGUAGE OF YOGA AND DANCE

The names of many yoga poses are derived from birds, making yoga a perfectly suited language for our project. Children used their knowledge of pre-existing yoga poses, gathered during ELC relaxation times, to develop their own poses based on their understandings about birds. In small groups we explored concepts of stillness compared to movement, poses compared to dancing. We researched the movements of the birds we had learned about in yoga, discovering new vocabulary, new ideas, new birds and new ways of moving: we began to see how our bodies could soar, fly, flap, swoop, bob, pivot, spin, sway, shake, hop, bounce and glide.

Dance and movement in aboriginal culture became an integral part of our learning as we watched how people closely observed the movements of birds and then imitated these using their bodies. We discovered new kinds of music through aboriginal dance and explored how our bodies can respond to rhythm, melody and sound. Learning about yoga, music and dance taught us about diversity and other ways of "being".

## THE LANGUAGE OF PAINTING

Involvement in the expressive arts allows children to revisit subjects of interest over and over again through many different media to gain multiple perspectives and a higher level of understanding. As part of our ornithology project, the children used paint to create vibrant portraits of the birds they had observed and learned about. Children's painting often displays less detail than their drawings and this is partly because using a wider brush is a very different experience to using a pen, and Kolbe suggests it involves a different way of thinking (2006).

*"My favourite pose is the pigeon because you can do this [demonstrates pose] and my arms become like the wings. My hands are like the bird's crest!"*



## THE LANGUAGE OF BUILDING

Inspired by her work with Scottish educational consultant and outdoor learning advocate Claire Warden, ELC educator Nicole guided the children to make light cubbies out of sticks. Harnessing the children's interest in collecting sticks, leaves and feathers, Nicole encouraged them to discover ways of making 3D structures that would form the "cubbies". The children collected, sawed, measured, glued, tied and worked together to create structures that we could then use to explore the properties of light, shadow and perception by attaching natural and synthetic materials to the "windows". We used our collections of leaves and feathers, along with collage materials, to create images and designs with a central bird theme that connected us to our ornithology project work.

## [ ABOUT MARIE ]

Marie is a qualified early childhood educator with thirty five years experience in pre-schools. She is the founding Director of the Tanunda Lutheran Early Learning Centre which opened in 2011.

# A HANDFUL OF ROCKS

## WALKING THE NATURE PLAY TALK

MARIA TAYLOR



*Outdoor learning can represent some challenges to those who don't incorporate it into their daily teaching and pedagogy. However, this simple yet powerful example from **Maria Taylor**, educator at St Peter's Woodlands Grammar School in Glenelg, demonstrates how a short walk outside with nothing but rocks and imagination can achieve a high level of engagement with students and rich learning outcomes.*

I recently had a class of Year 6 students for a relief lesson and decided to incorporate some outdoor learning. I wasn't entirely sure how it would go but wanted to get them outside and engaged in some problem solving and creative thinking.

We went to our native garden where I asked the students to collect a handful of small rocks and say "hello" to their new rock family. Their task was to build a home for their rock family out of anything natural they could gather from the area. They were encouraged to think about how they might include some natural light, insulation, consideration of prevailing winds, aesthetics and structural integrity in their design, linking learning presented through a STEM "lens" with a focus on developing a disposition for critical and creative thinking.

After a frantic start of scurrying around, collecting leaf litter, transporting pebbles, searching for twigs and each student marking out their own "territory", a wonderful thing happened. A sense of calm overcame the space. I looked around and every student was on task, engaged, settled and content.

Thirty minutes went by and their level of engagement was still high and very purposeful. Some students wanted to create gardens; others wanted

to build a community. Some developed shared urban spaces and one unashamedly commanded that he must "fortify his home", while others found ways to connect to each other's creations.

All the students wanted a photo taken of their space, feeling a sense of pride, ownership and a desire to share with one another. To have such joy associated with a lesson was such a positive feeling for me as an educator. In fact, that's how I feel every time I spend time in the "outdoor classroom".

A few months passed and I again took a lesson with the same Year 6 class. The first thing they asked me as I walked in the door was, "Can we go outside again today?" What an engaging experience it was for them, and it all stemmed from a walk outside with a handful of rocks ✨

### [ ABOUT MARIA ]

Maria has 20 years teaching experience and a Master's in Education. She has worked in a range of local and international educational settings within Early Learning and Primary education. Her teaching career has seen her travel the globe to explore ways educators from all walks of life inspire and connect with students. Maria is passionate about educational research and sharing evidence of great practice in education, inspiring and supporting others to connect with nature, and facilitating authentic outdoor learning opportunities for all students.

# WORTH A SECOND LOOK

## A CELEBRATION OF LOOSE PARTS

JOSH ANDERSON

*One man's trash is another man's treasure, or so the saying goes. Clarendon Primary School educator **Josh Anderson** describes how loose parts both natural and salvaged are inspiring creativity, confidence and collaboration in the schoolyard.*

At first glance, it might resemble a random collection of household miscellany left on the kerbside on hard rubbish night and subsequently rummaged through by trash and treasure hunters. But upon closer inspection, the randomness of the "junk" gives way to subtle suggestions of deliberate and intentional arrangement, the innovative and creative re-use of seemingly unconnected items and delicate artefacts of deep play.

Such is the case at Clarendon Primary School in an area of the playground known as The Village. This play space, first developed in 2016, is an evolving and engaging area of the yard, designed around the philosophy and maxim that "it takes a village to raise a child". Our Village celebrates the fact that children need a range of different play experiences to foster healthy development, and provides for this in the multi-faceted ways in which children can play there. One of these play modes is, of course, cubby building, and the loose parts on display are the materials that facilitate it.

In our Village, building materials for cubbies include sticks, milled timber, sawn branches, pallets, tarpaulins, ropes, leaves, painting drop sheets and old bed linen. Such materials are ephemeral in nature and require a level of competence and participation from their users to make them work for building and construction. As loose parts they demand more of the end user, as opposed to purpose-built, fitted, pre-fabricated or controlled materials that deny the user the chance to interpret them and determine their purpose and mode of use according to their own will and thinking.

At Clarendon, we actively monitor how these items are used and deliberately provide tools or new materials as provocations for play. We also regularly curate the building materials available for children in the yard and remove hazardous items that may be broken or when their risks outweigh the benefits.

When observed carefully, our cubbies often show many signs of life. Pots and pans are storing water, soup, flowers, gumnuts, precious rocks and powders. Areas are designated for sleeping, eating and cooking. Campfires are encircled with rocks and piled with kindling, and pathways are swept and manicured. The domesticity of the play is both intriguing and enchanting, reminding us that the core human needs of shelter, food, families and social interactions are ever present in the innate ways that children play.

Not surprisingly, there are many cubbies built that are seldom played in or inhabited in the long term, but this simply reflects the joy children take in the process of building, rather than in the product itself. The loose



IMAGE: Josh Anderson

parts of our playground facilitate this process approach and respect the competencies, ideas and creativity of the children themselves by having no pre-determined purpose or role in the play beyond what the children themselves bring to it. Sometimes, things are worth a second glance... ✦

### [ ABOUT JOSH ]

Josh is the principal of Clarendon Primary School, a small community school in the Adelaide Hills.

# FROM LITTLE THINGS BIG THINGS GROW

## ENGAGING WITH THE ENVIRONMENT AND INFLUENCING OTHERS

JULIAN REBELLATO

*Like a child learning to walk, the process of integrating nature play into the culture of a school is a journey to be taken a step at a time. In this case study, **Julian Rebellato**, teacher at St Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Millicent, shares the story of his school's nature play journey.*

When admiring a great tree it can be very easy to forget that the structure that stands before us started from a small and humble seed. Starting small has been the emphasis of our school's nature play development. As a result of much discussion at a leadership level and with the students, our school was tasked with extending our philosophies, concepts, experiences and pedagogy associated with a form of play largely missing from our school environment – nature play. It could be easy to be overwhelmed, or rush into such a project when enthusiasm and support is present; however, for long-term sustainability and authentic enrichment, slow and steady wins the race.

Our nature play journey started with our students. Four years ago, we established an environment group called the Tree Shepherds. This group, open to students from Reception to Year 7, came together each week and participated in a range of activities designed to engage students and connect them with the natural world. Being part of the Tree Shepherds gave the students access to parts of the school that were "out of bounds" during play time such as garden beds and the vegetable garden.

We provided the Tree Shepherds with a series of "missions" inspired by Nature Play SA such as bird watching, creature house construction, mini critter investigations and boat building (to be tested in the frog pond). The students delighted in the activities. Whereas play hitherto had been a relatively structured and limited experience of oval or court sports or a playground, these missions allowed for imagination, creativity and gave access to materials and spaces not traditionally available to the children. Also, being the only students who had access to these spaces and some of the materials gave them a sense of ownership and responsibility.

Naturally, as the success and enthusiasm of the Tree Shepherds grew, so did the level of interest from other children around the school. One of the great successes of the activities was how they drew in and engaged not only other students but also the staff. Over the course of the program students who were originally not part of the group started to join in the activities or were inspired to create their own spaces and play.

The success, inspiration and creativity that these activities offered were the perfect beginning to a discussion and path towards developing our own dedicated nature play space. At staff meetings we were able to look at the ways in which we allowed students to engage with nature and changed rules to encourage more of this. With regard to the students, we listened to their voice and gave them the opportunity to contribute to the designs and features that would become part of our new play space, thus encouraging ownership and engagement.

As educators, we have learnt so much about the students, our school and what we want to offer our students. Like with all learning, there are elements of the process that we would change a second time round, but with our new space now under construction and the eagerness of the students to be part of it continuing to grow, we know that taking it slowly, engaging the students and careful planning will offer our school something truly wonderful. ★

### [ ABOUT JULIAN ]

Julian Rebellato currently teaches science from Reception to Year 7 and holds the role of Environmental Sustainability Coordinator at St Anthony's Catholic Primary School, Millicent. He is passionate about incorporating the living and natural world into the curriculum and fostering an appreciation of and respect for all of our shared resources.



IMAGE: Julian Rebellato

# MUD, GLORIOUS MUD

## A WHOLE-SCHOOL CELEBRATION

KATE NOLAN

*Nature play can be messy – but the rewards are worth it for all members of a school community. In this case study, educator and school events organiser **Kate Nolan** describes the nature play journey of Mount Barker South Primary School and encourages other educators to jump in and get muddy, metaphorically and literally.*

In Term 2 2017 we celebrated mud week at Mount Barker South with a school-wide afternoon of mud, water, sticks, rocks, branches and fire. This was a new initiative, built on a similar but smaller event in 2016 which only involved 3 classes. This time we decided, ambitiously, to include the whole school: 9 classes, 14 staff, and just over 200 students.

One would be justified in being daunted – as we were – at the prospect of so many students running around playing with dirt, creating mud and, ultimately, a mess. However, the risk paid off and we were rewarded with an overwhelming success on many levels.

Given the large number of children involved, a clearly structured, rotational system was needed to guide them through the various activities. Students moved around the stations in their peer support groups – vertically grouped cohorts of students from Reception to Year 7, including those in our two special classes. As a result, our afternoon of mud became a genuinely whole-school activity: organising the students in their peer support groups allowed staff to focus on running activities and gave older students the responsibility and satisfaction of helping the younger ones to play safely and, most importantly, have fun.

Activities on offer included making a camp fire and cooking marshmallows, cubby building, a mud pie competition, escaping the spider web, mud fights, mud painting and bulb planting. Each group was given 20 minutes at each station before moving on to the next. We are fortunate to have a large nature play garden with diverse areas for

play as well as two large ovals to make plenty of mess on – and one very understanding groundsman!

At Mount Barker we pride ourselves on promoting 100% inclusivity. As a result it was a joy to see the engagement of our special class students playing alongside the other children in activities which offered something for everyone. We also have students with learning disabilities, autism, ADHD, sensory needs and other cognitive developments throughout the mainstream classes, and while many of these children can at times be over-sensitive to certain activities, noise, dirt, and sensory stimulation, on this occasion they loved it.

One of the most interesting aspects of the day for me as a Year 6/7 teacher was observing the reactions of the older students. Many of them were hesitant about becoming involved, thinking that playing in mud was too childish for them. However, once they started the activities, they ended up becoming the dirtiest ones.

To any school thinking of undertaking a similar event, I say: go for it. I admit that, as school events organiser, I usually like things clean and with limited mess, but I knew that one has to embrace these events and allow children to be children. I am so glad we did – the result was a richly rewarding experience for children and staff alike. Highlights for me included reflections from students at the end of the day on how much they had enjoyed it and from staff on how wonderful it was to see students from both mainstream and special classes so involved in this whole-school activity. In fact, it was such a success that we have already locked in a date for 2018. ★

### [ ABOUT KATE ]

Kate Nolan is a Year 6/7 teacher at Mount Barker South Primary School. She is also events organiser for the school.



# CUMBERLAND KINDERGARTEN

## INTO THE FOREST

### STEPPING INTO THE "BEYOND"

MEL ANDERSON



IMAGE: Mel Anderson

*For the past five years Cumberland Kindy has ventured into the "beyond" every term. One of those outings has consistently been Kuitpo Forest – 48kms from the kindy and a 2-hour round trip. It may seem a long way to travel and a lot of organisation but, as Director of Cumberland Kindy **Mel Anderson** explains, it's actually a very small cost given the significant benefits the children gain from the experience.*

There's something magical about a forest. Time and again, children's literature conveys a sense about what a forest is to children – a place of mystery and adventure at times, both inviting

and daunting, and of peace and tranquillity at others. Research tells us how important it is to provide children with opportunities to go into the "beyond", meaning a natural space beyond their local area. I have always had a personal connection with the Kuitpo and feel a level of confidence being in the forest, which of course is an important first step in getting children into these types of areas.

At Cumberland Kindy, we are well aware of the statistics about children not getting enough time outside in nature, and this drives us. As a director I have also been inspired by study tours to New Zealand and the UK based on outdoor learning environments and pedagogy.

We head to the forest every May once the fire ban has been lifted and before the rough weather sets in. By Term 2 we understand our

children better: we get to know them, their abilities and what boundaries they have – and how to stretch them. We also extend invitations to parents to come to the forest with us. This gives us an opportunity to demonstrate the "how" and the "why"; we want families to return to the "beyond" in their own time.

The place we visit has a drop toilet, walking tracks, creeks, native scrub, tall eucalypt forests and old pine trees, as well plenty of opportunities to see wildlife such as kangaroos, koalas, kookaburras, minibeasts and ladybirds. It has something for all the children. It has adventure and the feeling of wildness that is ideal for unstructured free play.

Inevitably, we do get some reluctant parents from time to time, but we work hard to encourage them to see the benefits of the forest



IMAGE: Mel Anderson



trip through targeted written parent information on what we will be doing in the forest and what we have put in place from a safety perspective. We make sure that parents and the children feel prepared by telling them what to bring, planning and discussing the day with them, and showing them photos and videos of what to expect.

In order to get the most out of the trip to the forest, it is important that we recognise and value the children's independence, their ability to take responsibility for their own possessions and their willingness to try new things. If we see children as capable and therefore encourage them to try new things and take appropriate risks, it is amazing how they rise to the challenge. We find when the children are in the forest, they slow down and have a more mindful approach, and they also develop a respect for the natural environment.

For many sites, going beyond their own grounds can present a series of challenges, but these don't have to be insurmountable. For us it is a 45km trip (1 hour drive) to Kuitpo Forest, so transport does cost more due to the distance. However, there no entry fee for the forest and we don't consider it to be an unreasonable time for children (and parents) to be on the bus. It's a matter of perspective: we always make sure the driver takes the easiest and quickest routes.

Careful preparation is obviously essential. Before we go we spend time preparing the children, planning with them and painting a clear picture.

We do a risk-benefit assessment with them – firstly we look at all the great things we are going to do in the forest, then we consider the associated risks and talk them through. We also practise building a fire to demonstrate fire safety using fire bowls.

Some of the things we take with us on the day itself include: safety items such as a whistle, high-vis vests and First Aid supplies; resources for cooking damper, wood for fire and fire starters; tarps; drinking water; hot chocolate and a hot-drink alternative for the children along with comfort sustenance for the adults, such as decent coffee bags, and a billy to put on the fire; changes of clothes and gumboots (remember to advise parents that children will need to dress for winter in plenty of layers of clothing) and food (again, remind parents that their children will need extra food due to being so active); supporting learning materials (a top tip is to draw on relevant children's literature such as *The Gruffalo* and *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*; and finally the risk-benefit assessment for the trip and other relevant documentation.

In order to maximise the learning potential of the day, we encourage the children and ourselves to reflect on our experiences. Each group has a camera to record the day and we also provide a range of other mediums for them to express their thoughts and feelings through. As educators we use learning journals to record the learning outcomes of our experiences and each child creates his or her own reflective piece.

A typical Cumberland Kindy day in the forest looks like this:

- » One of our staff gets to the site early to set up before the children arrive (we visit the site prior to the day to assess its conditions so that we are already familiar with the site).
- » We always welcome our children and their families to the site by doing a welcome-to-country acknowledgement, set up expectations on safety etc., and have a snack.
- » We break up into groups and begin our loosely planned activities around cooking damper and marshmallows, going on an exploratory walk, and having free time to wander (it's important to have some structure to guide and support children). We always give the children time to explore, freedom to go at "child pace" and follow whatever they are interested in; time to go slow and notice, to find a walking stick or explore a puddle.
- » Other activities we do include the following: a slack line between trees (a great physical challenge); encouraging children to explore logs and climb other natural structures (developing gross motor skills); and setting up ribbons on trees so children find their way through the scrub to find the "big stick house" (a giant teepee structure in the middle of the forest).
- » One of the other activities we do is based on *The Gruffalo* text, which we focus on during our preparations, as it provides a level of familiarity for the children: it engages with their



imagination and in the forest they can explore world of the Gruffalo in a real-world context.

» For lunch we spend time around a fire and at the end of the day we share warm hot chocolate and reflect on the day.

A trip to the forest really is a beautiful experience. The joy and benefits we see in the children far outweigh the preparation, and I would encourage all sites to take their own children into the wild to experience it for themselves.

My advice is not to see the risks as a barrier but to talk them through, and always to start with the benefits of the experience. You can't plan for everything, but you can be as prepared and ready as you know how to be. If you feel you are not ready for Kuitpo, then start with small steps instead. Be prepared to learn from mistakes and to reflect and celebrate as a team. Before you know it, those small steps will lead you into the forest, and beyond. ★

## [ ABOUT MEL ]

Mel is Director of Cumberland Preschool Kindergarten, a DECD site with up to 66 children located 8km km south of Adelaide in a predominately residential suburb.



IMAGE: Mel Anderson

## MEL'S *reminder* LIST

- » It's never too hard.
- » We have the responsibility to give children these experiences .
- » From dipping your toe in the water build up gradually to full scale...
- » Start local and achievable – it's important to just make it happen.
- » Prepare staff show photos/clips and do a site visit with the whole team prior to the trip to assess conditions.
- » Weather – always have a backup plan.
- » Check for events at the site you intend on going.
- » Expose families to the benefits and ideas around sensory play, risk taking, mud play, etc. – the "beyond" is the next step.

# BRINGING THE OUTSIDE INSIDE

## BUTTERFLY LIFE CYCLES IN NATURAL MATERIALS

MONINA GILBEY AND SAMANTHA SUNNERS



*Taking learning outside can engage children in meaningful, authentic learning experiences. In this case study **Monina Gilbey** and **Samantha Sunners** describe how Flaxmill School did just that by utilising natural elements to explore the butterfly life cycle.*

Flaxmill Primary is a Category 2 school with 350 students, located in a low socio-economic area. Our learning environment promotes creativity, discovery and risk-taking through nature education. Our garden specialist, Monina, facilitates engagement and connection between the individual, the class and the natural school environment.

The cross-curriculum priority of sustainability and the Australian Curriculum Proficiencies of understanding, problem solving and reasoning aim to develop in students the knowledge, skills and values necessary to enable them to embrace stewardship and ownership of their own school environment. This stewardship empowers the individual to know, care, understand and belong, then to act in ways that contribute to more sustainable living within their own domains.

Flaxmill Primary received an [Action Grant from the Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges Natural Resource Management Board](#) to build a butterfly garden – a three-dimensional representation of the butterfly life cycle, with a covered teepee to hide in (like a larvae in an egg), a giant mosaic caterpillar seat, a hiding frame for a cocoon and a butterfly musical wall.

On a cold, rainy, winter's day, unable to head outdoors, we took the outside inside. Monina and some enthusiastic Year 1 students ran through

the rain to collect flowers from the kitchen garden: edibles (calendulas and nasturtiums) from the food garden, as well as eucalyptus buds, mirror bush, ferns and geraniums.

Students had previously completed the Primary Connections Science module "Schoolyard Safari", and during literacy and numeracy had explored Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. This cohort of students is often fatigued and disengaged in the afternoon, and finds normal classroom behavioural expectations challenging. Afternoon nature activities therefore suit them as they can participate in non-threatening, self-directed, authentic learning tasks and apply familiar ideas in a new context. Thus, as the rain continued outside, students watched a videoed reading of this classic text and then discussed their understandings of animal and insect life cycles.

Students' learning is enhanced through modelling, understanding the thinking processes behind the design, and then seeing the completed end product, giving them the confidence and ability to transfer existing ideas into their own unique designs. The lesson continued with students observing and analysing an art piece depicting the Very Hungry Caterpillar made from leaves. Students discussed and planned how they would create their own caterpillar and butterfly from the collected leaves and flowers.

We observed children focus entirely on the task. There were some who had such a clear idea of how they wanted their caterpillar and butterfly to look that they would not accept any adult help or suggestions from their peers. One behaviourally challenged, disengaged student from a traumatic background, who previously had been very off-task,

emotionally heightened and stressed, surprised all teaching staff with fifteen minutes of completely zen-like concentration as each piece of material was strategically placed on his sheet of paper. We were all excited by his achievement and celebrated his success, and he proudly walked to the front office to show off his artwork.

The design of individual hungry caterpillars supported children to:

- » develop rich vocabulary and spelling linked to plants;
- » have space and time for self-reflection and self-awareness as they worked individually to create their artwork;
- » visualise how they wanted their craft to look and work out how to achieve it;
- » represent concepts in different ways;
- » identify, label and investigate segmentation of caterpillar bodies and symmetry of butterfly wings;
- » develop information reports on caterpillars, butterflies, invertebrates and insects;
- » reflect on their own designs, then conduct a strengths and weaknesses analysis.

The use of natural materials promotes a calm, tranquil, engaging experience that is not as evident when using manufactured craft items. Even when it is rainy, the outside can come inside to provide an irresistible, fun invitation to explore learning, engage with natural habitats and empower individuals to understand, care for and celebrate the diversity of nature. ★

## [ ABOUT MONINA AND SAMANTHA ]

Monina Gilbey (Dip GD) and Samantha Sunners (BEnvMgmt, MEd; JP,P) are both educators at Flaxmill School, Monina as the school's Garden Specialist and Samantha as a Year 1 classroom teacher.



# UP AND COMING OPPORTUNITIES



## A NEW RESOURCE – OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: RISKS & BENEFITS

A brand new resource is about to be launched that will inspire and encourage educators using outdoor learning environments and promotes the adoption of a risk-benefit approach for learning and play experiences in early years settings and primary schools. Using SA case study sites, the resource showcases what others have done and how they have challenged risk-averse ideals, and demonstrates the results and benefits they have observed. The resource has been developed with cross-sector input and will be freely available for educators in any sector from the Nature Play SA website. It will provide tools, references, evidence and inspiration to help educators take their own steps to embrace teaching in an OLE where risk-taking opportunities are encouraged and supported.

## ANNUAL NATURE PLAY CONFERENCE 2018

Each year Nature Play SA runs a national conference that sees international, national, and local experts come together to deliver inspiring keynotes and practical workshops around nature pedagogy, natural play space design, childhood development and case study exploration. Our 2018 conference will be announced early in the new year. [Register your interest here](#). As a member, your site will receive 10% off tickets and an opportunity to purchase pre-sale tickets.

## ADELAIDE NATURE PLAY WORKSHOP SERIES 2018

Each year we run a series of workshops aimed to inspire and empower educators to integrate nature play into their outdoor learning environments, learning frameworks and pedagogy. These workshops are interactive and engaging. All participants are issued with Professional Development Certificates. Our 2018 workshop series will be announced early in the new year. [Register your interest here](#). As a member, your site will receive 10% off tickets and an opportunity to purchase pre-sale tickets.



## 2018 INCURSIONS AND EXCURSIONS OPEN FOR BOOKINGS

Our incursions and excursions provide educators with an opportunity to experience nature play through creative and practical nature-based activities that complement the Australian Curriculum, Early Years Framework, and nature pedagogy. We are currently taking bookings for 2018. For more about these popular programs head to our [website](#). As a member, your site will receive 10% off all our incursions and excursions.

## STAFF AND PARENT PRESENTATIONS 2018

We currently offer tailored professional development sessions ranging from 30 minutes to an hour for staff that can cover a range of elements including: understanding the value of nature play in an education setting; ideas and examples for expanding or developing a natural play space at your site; understanding benefit-risk assessment and how it translates to your site; nature pedagogy and how learning outcomes that meet the objectives of the Australian Curriculum and Early Years Framework can be derived from outdoor learning environments. We also offer parent sessions that cover a diversity of topics relevant to home and connecting with your site's values. As a member your site will receive 10% off any of these sessions. For more information on bookings head to our [website](#).

## SA REGIONAL WORKSHOPS EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST OPEN

Each year we visit regional centres throughout the state to provide workshops and training. Our visits are influenced by a region's interest, funding, and our availability. We have travelled to regions such as the Yorke Peninsula, the Eyre Peninsula, Mt Gambier, and the Riverland. These are often in partnership with local governments and/or NRM Boards who have active school programs. We are open to chat about the possibilities and other ways we can support regional South Australia. If you are interested or would like to put in an expression of interest, [email us](#).



- 1 Balanced and Barefoot
- 2 2018 calendar
- 3 Whittling knife, peeler, and sharpener
- 4 Mortal and pestle (small and medium)
- 5 Hand spade and trowel
- 6 Butterflies of Adelaide
- 7 Play the Forest School Way
- 8 Last Child in the Woods
- 9 Waterproof Onesie

## NATURE PLAY SA ONLINE SHOP

In our online shop you'll find a growing collection of books, tools and other bits'n'bobs to build your site's knowledge of and confidence within your outdoor learning environments. For our full range of products available, visit our [online shop](#).



## A HEARTFELT *thank you* TO ALL OF OUR CONTRIBUTORS:

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## TO THE TEAM BEHIND THE MAGAZINE:

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## SUBMISSIONS

To inquire about submitting articles, stories, a collection of student art works, or any other ideas we would love to hear from you - [email us here](#).

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Our task,  
regarding creativity,  
is to help children  
climb their own mountains,  
as high as possible.  
No one can do more.

LORIS MALAGUZZI



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Nature Play SA is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to increasing the amount of time children spend playing outdoors.

@natureplaysa  