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Tracy Hayes, Lecturer & Researcher

First-hand Experience of Nature: Dancing on the Palm of a Hand

Swish, swoop! I am scooped up quickly yet gently and lifted out of the water. Opening my eyes, I look up into the human's face. She is smiling and quietly explaining to the smaller human next to her that I am a newt. Not just 'any old newt', I am special, a Crested Newt, I am Great. Because of this I am protected and they must have special permission (I think she said a license?) to handle me. She lays the net against her hand so that I can see out, and the small human can get a closer look.

"Look at his little feet, dancing on the palm of my hand. See his tiny toes, splayed out. And notice the stripe down his tail, what colour is it?"

The smaller one replies, *"It's silvery-blueish-white, and his belly is a yellowy-orange."* *"That's right,"* says the first one, *"Would you like to hold him?"* The small one steps back, hands behind her, *"Will it bite me?"* *"No."* *"Will its feet scratch me?"* *"No."* The bigger human encourages the smaller one to place her hand below hers, then slowly removes her hand so that the net now rests on the small human's hand. My feet feel the skin of her palm - it prickles, making my feet move.

"Ooh, it's dancing! That's so tickly!" The small one laughs, *"Come and look at this Grandma, I'm holding a newt"*.

A third human approaches, as big as the first one, although greyer in colour and slower moving. *"Can I hold him?"* she asks. Repeating the movements of earlier, the first human makes sure I am carefully transferred to the third hand. The voice it belongs to whispers, *"Thank you, you've taken me back to my childhood. I used to catch these in the village pond, and bring them home in a jar. Such a shame they didn't survive."* I shudder, I'm not ready to die, I close my eyes... then swish I'm back in the pond.

The first voice floats towards me, *"There he's safely back where he should be, for the springtime pond party. Thank you Mr. Newt, what a lovely dancer you are. And look, now you're back in the water we can see your marvellous crest. What a handsome little newt."* With a flash of my tail, I retreat to the bottom of the pond.

What a story I have to share with the other newts.

Discussion Point
Educational play in informal settings

Discussion Point
Encouraging & supporting play across the lifespan

Discussion Point
Changing cultural and parental attitudes to play

Discussion Point
Need for a careful, kind approach to nature

Further information

My poster exemplifies how a simple story can:

- Provide a useful way of exploring a diverse range of inter-generational perspectives on an activity.
- Be used to interpret first-hand experience of nature from the non-human perspective – in this example, a newt captured as part of a community-based learning initiative.

Keywords: Experiential; Inter-generational; Playfulness; Creativeness; Creative Writing; Kindness; Story; Nature; Outdoor Learning.

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