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Each day outdoor play! Exchange-early childhood leaders

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Each Day Outdoor Play! by Shelina Bhamani, Consultant, ECD, Pakistan

Children who have nurturing and stimulating play experiences throughout childhood have better academic outcomes. Play outdoors where children connect with nature supports curriculum and holistic well-being. Nature helps teachers incorporate hands-on experiences with sensory stimulation (seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, etc). Acquiring new information in this way is effective for children's new learning and for building on familiar concepts. For instance, if an educator is teaching about 'Birds' in Grade 1, she can take students outside to observe the birds and record their observations. When this happens frequently, children's experiences develop their internal understanding of the way the world works. It is also one of the best teaching strategies!

Consider this:

- What elements of nature can children closely observe in your setting? (Ants, worms, spiders, and squirrels can all spark interesting ideas and questions. What else?)
- What tools could you provide to help children with their observations? (A magnifying glass or binoculars can help children focus. What else?)
- How can children record their observations? (Clipboards and paper for field notes, cameras, and specimen jars encourage children to work like scientists. What else?)



A picture from remote area of Pakistan of children experiencing independent outdoor play.

Lessons from Mother Nature by Deepak Prasad Aryal, Shree Himalaya Higher S.S., Nepal

The class teacher of Grade 3 thought it would be nice to take the children on a field trip, bringing them a bit closer to nature. I was asked to accompany the group and take photographs. Our group looked like they were about to embark on a great march, their heads buzzing with ideas and their faces full of excitement.



In this photo we see how spending time with nature is part of family life in this community in Pakistan. When adults listen closely, students share with us what they know and understand about their world in authentic ways. A field trip to a garden becomes an extraordinary celebration of their everyday work with soil.



We were fortunate to witness some of Mother Nature's beauty as we saw the sun rise above the fog. The birds had already begun to stretch their wings and were hovering over the treetops (probably in search of worms) and chirping away quite musically. Despite the sunlight, it was still quite brisk and we could see the local farmers returning from the dairy after selling milk.

We reached the garden full of winter vegetables. Most of the children were familiar with the winter plants in the garden, rattling off their names. One boy said, "It's cauliflower. My mother has also planted some! She planted it in September or October and it will be ready in three months." This child has little need to be taught basic agriculture as he has already learned so much from his experiences at home. Another student excitedly pointed out a radish and went on to share all in one breath,

"You eat the root, the part that is under the ground, you can cook it as curry, make pickle, or eat it without cooking as salad!"

Consider this:

- How can you support children's care-taking of plants in your program?
- How do special events and field trips celebrate nature and children's home lives?
- What do you know about plants native to your region of the world? Can you incorporate some of these into your program's outdoor space?
- How can you use the photos and stories in this edition of *Wonder* to spark a conversation about the kinds of things children grow and eat in different parts of the world?