

# The Nature Effect

*Personal, professional &  
community development  
connecting people to  
their earth*



## Early Years Projects: Playing with the elements

*Our other pamphlets include:*  
Overview 2011-13  
Personal Development  
Community Development  
Professional Development  
Schools Projects



[www.TheNatureEffect.co.uk](http://www.TheNatureEffect.co.uk)



# Playing with the Elements

## *A Project for Early Years*

The Nature Effect is working with teachers and early years practitioners to consider latest research and create collaborative projects that enquire deeply into the place of nature and outdoor learning within the current context of educational policy and practice. Director Annie Davy is an associate of the national charity **Learning through Landscapes** ([www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)) and sits on the Steering Group of the National **Early Childhood Forum** as well as speaking and writing about these issues in various parts of the UK.

Our projects developing leadership and ecological literacy in the last two years have included:

- Leadership development for early years professionals, using action learning, peer group coaching and mentoring;
- Digging Deeper courses on Ecological Literacy;
- Workshops and talks at conferences and events;
- Residential workshop for the Centre for Research in Early Childhood Masters programme in outdoor learning and early years;



*"If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him (or her) the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in"*

Rachel Carsons, *A sense of Wonder*



- Workshop at Playwork Conference, Eastbourne;
- Curating children's area at Uncivilization Festival, Hampshire;
- Workshop at Wood Festival, Oxfordshire;
- Workshop at Beauty of Play Conference, Staffordshire;

- Keynote talks at Nature Play conference, Edinburgh
- Learning through Landscapes conferences, in Northern Ireland and Wales.



**We explain our work in these pamphlets:**

### **Overview**

Introducing The Nature Effect

### **Personal development**

Wellbeing, Creativity and Transformation

### **Community Development**

Creativity, Collaboration and Connection

### **Professional Development**

Action Learning, Peer Group Enquiry and Mentoring

### **Early Years Projects**

Playing with the Elements

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### **Schools Projects**

Bread, Butter & Soup

All downloadable from [TheNatureEffect.org.uk](http://TheNatureEffect.org.uk)



## Our Aim

Our aim is to help to transform education, so that children's sense of place in the ecological system is central to all other learning. In early childhood this is experienced initially through everyday outdoor play and learning and being given opportunities to develop skills and feel comfortable outdoors in their community. Through exploring wilder things on their doorstep, they become independent and able to assess and manage risks for themselves.

The new technologies of our electronic digitized era have generated amazing new teaching, learning and communication possibilities. However, as yet there is insufficient research into how rapid changes in lifestyle and environment are affecting children's development, learning and resilience.

Globally, children are having less first hand experience than their parents or grandparents of the wider ecological world – of mud, plants, fire, water, wind, animals, growing food and making things.

Evidence shows loss of knowledge and understanding in children about the sources of our survival – of growing food and building shelters. Reduced physical activity is leading to higher childhood obesity and related health problems. There are lots of reasons people don't necessarily find Nature a good thing: it can be cold, wet, full of risks, unpredictability and discomfort. However there is a strong tradition of outdoor learning in the UK. We want to ensure that learning about the natural world through experience is mainstream and core to every child's learning and development from birth. We have been fortunate to work with two outstanding Nursery Schools and Children's Centres, Grandpont and Slade, where staff share our values and whilst embracing new technologies also provide real life play and learning in nature and the outdoors. We are hopeful about our part in a growing international movement for ecological literacy and outdoor learning and related research and action.



## Fire

*(working with Grandpont Nursery School)*

Stuart Turner has been part of The Nature Effect team offering outdoor experiences to children, parents and teachers in the Oxford area over the last couple of years, in a range of education settings and through inservice training.

*He says: "Some of the most enduringly inspirational activities I have been part of with children and families have been around the fire. Human beings share a basic evolutionary relationship with fire, and children learn that when treated with respect, fire becomes not only an ally essential to survival but also a way to connect us to each other and the rest of nature."*

*"Once the perceived risks and challenges are overcome, fire provides the potential to develop numeracy, literacy and communication skills, confidence building, learning about nature, risk management and a range of core physical skills."*



*“Collecting and counting fuel items and safely lighting and maintaining the fire can offer meaningful ways to practice language and numeracy skills and scientific enquiry, often initiated by children’s questions: ‘Why does the smoke move in different directions? What does a fire need to keep it burning? Why does wood go black when it burns?’*

*“The fire circle is a great way to capture the attention of children and a great place for telling stories. Children can become ‘wise elders’ if trusted with responsibility to maintain the fire and look after the group. There can be barriers in the initial stages of including fire as part of the educational provision in schools or settings, especially in those settings that find the outdoors a challenging environment in the first place. The Nature Effect has worked with staff and children to provide extra support until all are fully confident with the risk assessments, set up, care and supervision of the fire.*

*“At Grandpont the staff were keen to try more ambitious fire-related activities such as making charcoal, tin can popcorn, soups and bread. The children’s centre staff were also keen to use the fireplace in their Saturday sessions, and found that fire is a great way to connect with different ages and cultural groups.”*

## **Ecological Literacy and characteristics of effective learning**

Nature Effect Associate Emma Hood took part in our early Ecoliteracy enquiry and helped to run training and collaborative project work at Grandpont and Slade nursery schools along with a team of four colleagues. Since then she continues to develop outdoor learning work at the Primary School where she teaches. She says: *“The Action Learning format of the Ecoliteracy Enquiry Group gave the participating teachers the space to speak openly to the group about an aspect of their work they required help with, and invite advice and support. I was deeply reassured to realize that challenges I have faced in my work are widely shared, and I came away with a sense of permission to let the natural world do the work!”*



*“To see a world in a grain of sand, And a heaven in a wild flower, Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, And eternity in an hour.”*

William Blake

*“During the teacher training I learned to allow the children more time to simply observe a fire, water, mud, snails, trees, plants, insects and articulate their response at their own pace. My conditioned instinct as a classroom teacher is to hurry and prompt the children, putting them under the same pressure I feel myself to get them to speak in beautiful articulate sentences! Working with likeminded colleagues I gained confidence to let the process unfold naturally.*

*“My own enquiry has been into how children can develop a sense of ‘belonging’ through their relationship with the natural world. This is reflected in children’s emotional sense of well-being and the effect this has on their learning. Giving the children more time and space has had rich rewards, allowing them to communicate their own learning needs. For example a dry day following a wet period led to all the slugs and snails in the nursery school garden having disappeared. The question ‘where do snails go when it’s dry?’ became a child-led enquiry covering science, maths, geography, literacy and art. The deep level learning that had developed as a result was clear to see.”*

***For further info on our work please visit our website: [www.TheNatureEffect.co.uk](http://www.TheNatureEffect.co.uk) or email: [TheNatureEffect@gmail.com](mailto:TheNatureEffect@gmail.com)***