

Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

JULY/AUGUST 2013

International Mud Day: Mud Day is the Best Day in the World!

PHOTO PROVIDED BY BISHNU BHATTA

Did you join in celebrating International Mud Day this year by playing in the messy, slippery, cool, and luxurious mud? Infant, toddler, preschool, and school-aged children played, explored, and created in the mud. Places around the globe had children, parents, teachers, administrators, and even politicians join in: mud sliding, mud angels, mud sculptures, and creations of all sorts of handmade mud 'goodies.' At one early childhood program in Nebraska, United States, a four-year-old was swaying in fabric draped from a tall pine and was overheard exclaiming, "Mud Day is the best day in the world!"

Read the inspiring reflections shared in this issue to help you plan for one of your best days yet to come.

Reflection: The Mud Day Connection

from the originator of Mud Day: Bishnu Bhatta, Nepal

Mud Day has been celebrated at the Panchkhal Orphanage every year since 2009. Mud Day is an opportunity for Nepalis to celebrate the productivity of the land, to appreciate nature, and to celebrate with family and friends. Mud Day connects children with nature in a personal, educational, and fun way. In addition to seeing the land as a resource that supplies their livelihood, Mud Day

encourages children to see the land as something they can love and enjoy, just for its own sake.

At times, the lives of orphans and children living in Nepal can be difficult, and extracurricular activities and organized events are not common. Mud Day gives children the opportunity to enjoy and express themselves, and, quite simply, to have fun. Mud Day allows these children, as well as children from all around Nepal, to do something outside the ordinary grind of everyday life.

In Nepal, wealthier families generally avoid getting dirty because of its association with low-income work. Mud Day brings all people together, regardless of social class. People of all castes and ethnicities, and children and political leaders alike, can play in the mud together. In the eyes of Mother Nature, every person is the same. Nature does not discriminate; we all, as human beings, belong to it.



Consider this:

- Who will you invite to your Mud Day celebration next year?
- What connections will you foster?
- How will your celebration encourage children to love and enjoy the land?

Reflection: Making a Mud Kitchen – Just do it!

from Jan White, United Kingdom

What better way to prepare for Mud Day, this wonderful celebration of childhood and nature, than to create a mud kitchen with the children in your home or center setting? Having contemplated children's fascination with mud play for many years, I have come to the understanding that everything is there — elemental materials, inquiry, fascination, transformation, alchemy, fantasy, agency, and self-discovery. It seems to me that mud play is one of the most valuable and vital experiences we can provide for children — and it certainly should be a core offering outdoors in all early years settings. Children's mud play is worthy of attentive observation and focused research by early childhood professionals and parents — and I'd love to see it seriously researched at the master's or doctoral level.

There is little more important in our physical world than earth and water; these are truly intriguing things, especially when they interact. Mixing soil, water, and a range of other natural materials has a foundational role in early childhood, which has deep importance, and endless possibilities for well-being, development, and learning. The breadth and depth of what these experiences offer young children is truly remarkable.

Young children are endlessly interested in — and biologically programmed to explore — the stuff of the earth: how materials behave and what they do. Making connections through discovering and investigating cause and effect is the stuff of brain development and scientific process. Curiosity, fascination, and the pleasure of finding things out are fundamentally important to the human state, of being human.

An even more powerful level of experience for the explorers is that they are the ones making things happen — giving feelings of control and power, and over time, building children who have a strong sense of agency (which itself is key to well-being and mental health). The processes of making 'concoctions' bring the worlds of science and art together through possibility thinking. The growth of imagination and creativity happens through building on concrete cause-and-effect experience to posing and predicting 'What if...?' Good scientists do this all the time, as do artists and all other innovators. Even better, the experience of making concoctions brings the child into the realms of magic and fantasy — reminding us of the ancient fascinations of alchemy.

Consider these tips for making a mud kitchen:

- Mud kitchens provide something quite different to a soil digging patch, whilst also being much more easily managed. A mud kitchen includes elements of the much-loved domestic corner and cooking from indoor play, which are then hugely enriched through the special nature of being outside. Mud kitchens work well all year round, and need to be seen as a core element of continuous provision outside.
- Mud kitchens do not need to be fancy and certainly do not need to cost much. There is nothing to beat the simplicity and character of creating your own unique kitchen from scrounged, begged, and discovered items. And remember, the best mud kitchens are made in collaboration with the children who will be using them.
- The best mud kitchens, and those that have the most atmosphere and character, are made from found, gathered, and donated items — especially when these come from the children's own families. It's important not to spend much money; what matters to children is that these things come from the real human world, to combine with the stuff of the real physical world.

Learn more and download the mud kitchen booklet by visiting Jan's blog, janwhitenaturalplay.wordpress.com. Well over 10,000 booklets have been shared as a free resource in the United Kingdom (funded and published by Muddy Faces). The booklet has inspired mud kitchens all over the UK, including Northern Ireland and Eire, and also in the Netherlands and Portugal. It has been translated into Portuguese and is currently being translated into Dutch and French.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY VANESSA LLOYD/JAN WHITE

Reflection: Holland goes Muddy!

from Marc Veekamp, The Netherlands

PHOTO PROVIDED BY MARC VEEKAMP



Since Veldwerk, Nederland launched Mud Day (ModderDag) in The Netherlands as a very good, powerful initiative, we are overwhelmed by all the positive reactions. Now we have 320 different organizations and about 50,000 children participating. Very different types of organizations have become involved, including primary schools, nature education centers, vocational schools, but most are day care centers and after-school groups.

For this year, Veldwerk decided to introduce the Dutch Mud Day on Friday, June 28, as Saturday seemed to be less convenient. Though International Mud Day was on June 29, a lot of the Dutch “Mud Actors” feel connected to the worldwide initiative. We promote Mud Day in a way that fits well to our

country and linking it to the idea of a global activity.

We made a special Mud Day Poster, which was distributed throughout the country. To inspire others, Veldwerk, Nederland worked on a special ModderWijzer, a mud manual that informs about all relevant aspects around Mud Day: organizing, planning, activities, materials, and involving parents. The manual is free via download. We also created a special Facebook account, ModderDag, which is really nice, and though in Dutch, worth having a glimpse at: www.facebook.com/ModderDag or <https://twitter.com/ModderDag>

Consider these activities for your “Mud Monsters”:

- Who can slide the furthest?
- Who can build the highest mud tower?
- Try building and digging with cranes or your bare hands.
- Try mud baths; babies and toddlers love to feel shallow mud.
- Make mud prints with your hands, fingers, and feet on mud, cement, and paper.
- Make mud soup. Provide children with bowls and pails to collect natural ingredients for their soup!
- Take a barefoot walk through hoops, each filled with a type of natural material. To enhance the sense of touch, try it with a blindfold.
- Hunt for treasures of nature hidden in buckets filled with muddy water — reach in and discover!
- Make mud pies. No Mud Day would be complete without these!



During International Mud Day children and adults discover what mud is, how you can play with it, and what it does for the earth and for our daily lives.

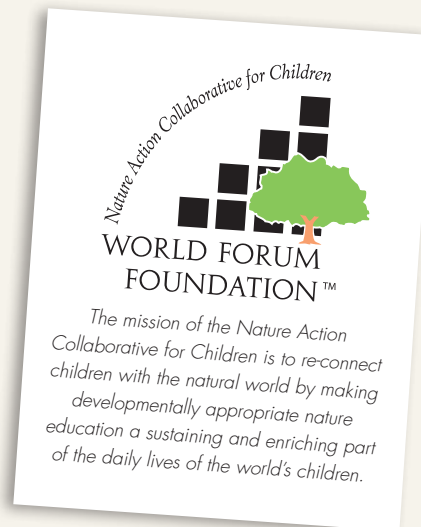
To find out more about Mud Day and The Environmental Action Kit, a resource developed to support Nature Action Collaborative for Children’s mission to help you nurture children’s love for the world around them, visit: www.worldforumfoundation.org.

We invite you to email your personal reflections, photos, and ideas about Mud Day to be included on the World Forum Foundation webpage. Please send to Tara: tarah@natureexplore.org.

Future Issues of *Wonder*

We invite you to email your personal reflections and ideas related to the following *Universal Principle for Connecting Children with Nature* to Tara (tarah@natureexplore.org):

We believe it is important for families to enjoy regular experiences in the natural world with their children.



Wonder Vitals

Wonder, the newsletter of the NACC, welcomes submissions from all NACC members. Please join us at: www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature.

The NACC Leadership Team is a core group of early childhood educators, designers, and landscape architects who came together in 2006 with a dream to change the world for young children. They represent six continents across the globe, and serve as key contact points for others around the world who have a desire to improve the lives of young children.

The Leadership Team meets periodically to discuss strategies for increasing NACC's outreach and membership, and to find new ways for all of us to work together to further our common mission.

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Book Suggestion from Nature Action Collaborative for Children

“Any child is a reminder that the rivers of our senses once ran clear. As we grow older, the rivers may be dammed, diked, silted up, or diverted, but so long as we live they still run, bearing news inward through ears and eyes and nose and mouth and skin. Beneath our grown-up disguises, beneath a crust of duties and abstractions . . . we are still curious and marveling animals. No matter how much we camouflage or medicate them, our bodies remain wild, bright sparks from the great encompassing wildness, perfectly made for savoring and exploring this sensuous planet; and that is another source of hope. Just as we can help endangered animals and planets to recover and help wounded lands to heal, so we can clean up the rivers that flow into us. And if we restore our senses, they in turn will replenish us.”

From **Hunting for Hope**, by Scott Russell Sanders, described as a book where the author “sets out to gather his own reasons for facing the future with hope, finding powers of healing in nature, in culture, in community, in spirit, and within each of us.”

