NATURALLY INCLUSIVE

Engaging Children of All Abilities Outdoors

Ruth Wilson, PhD

Nature for All
Why Nature?

• Nature is our natural habitat.

• Humans have an innate affinity for the rest of the natural world. (Biophilia)

• Our multiple intelligences include a naturalistic intelligence.

• There’s a “goodness of fit“ between the affordances of nature and what children need and want.

• Nature – an exemplar of diversity and a catalyst for inclusion
1. What children like about their school experience:
   “big green trees with leaves, branches, and apples”
   “raindrops, stones, sand, & birds”
   “playing with friends” –
   “risk taking . . . coziness. . . . autonomy”

2. What is quality of life for children with ADHD; What makes life really good?
   “Outdoor activities with others”

3. What children with special needs want:
   “to feel welcomed and safe”
   “to play with other kids (not just watch)
   “to take risks like other kids”
Affordances of the Natural Environment

Sticks
Rocks
Water
Leaves
Small animals

What affordances provide: Invitations to exploratory and sensory-rich experiences (wading, splashing, digging, building, climbing, risk taking, trial & error, problem solving, cooperation, different forms of play)
Research – Benefits of Nature Engagement

- Physical development
- Social development
- Emotional development
- Joint attention
- Empathy
- Enriched play and exploration
Nature and Children with Differing Abilities

Helen Keller’s Experiences

Water at the pump

“Ecstatic mornings” wandering in the fields

“the delicate tremble of a butterfly’s wing . . . The soft petals of violets; . . . The coolness of rain . . . The velvet of a rose . . . The utterances of animals”

“Experiences with nature made the heart glad.”
Hierarchy of Needs
“The Ones We Sent Away”

Jennifer Senior, The Atlantic, September 2023
Activist spotlight: Sierra

Sierra, 13, is a student at New Mexico School for the Deaf and a leader of the Sierra Club's Grades Campaign's Global WIP Kids lead-climate-action program.

How did you get involved with Global WIP Kids? Last year, I made a presentation to the mayor and county commission on the 2015 presidential candidates and was inspired to join the campaign.

What is your role in the campaign? I am the youth leader for the campaign in New Mexico.

What are your goals for the campaign? I am working to raise awareness about climate change and to encourage local authorities to take action.

What do you think is the most important climate action for our state or country to take? We need to urgently reduce greenhouse gas emissions and transition to 100% renewable energy.

What advice do you have for others who want to get involved in climate action? Join a local group or organization and attend meetings and events to learn more about climate change and how you can help.

What message do you want to send to people? We need to take action now to protect our planet for future generations.

Global WIP update

The Global WIP Kids program has been successful. We have more than 50 clubs in the United States, and our efforts have led to significant changes in local climate policies. We are continuing our work and encouraging others to do the same.
Leaf Man used to live near me, in a pile of leaves.
RESOURCES

Children & Nature Network
Stories about Nature Smart Libraries

Connecting Children of All Abilities to Nature Play & Therapeutic Gardens

September 2023 Research Digest

https://www.childrenandnature.org/resources/research-digest-children-with-special-needs/
Kids Included Together

https://www.kit.org/
The Seattle PlayGarden

https://seattleplaygarden.org/