Tool 2.4

Giving nature time

CLARITY Competence Area:

Nurturing connection to oneself, others and nature

GreenComp Competence Area:

Embracing Complexity in Sustainability

Why use this tool?

The "Give Nature Time" tool is designed to encourage individuals and groups to deepen their connection with the natural world through immersive and mindful experiences. This tool is an invitation to slow down, reconnect, and appreciate the profound impact that nature can have on our lives. By integrating activities like " Nature Adventures," participants engage in unstructured outdoor play, reflection, and exploration, allowing them to experience the myriad benefits of nature firsthand.

Activity 2.4.1

Slow walk in nature

Overview

This activity invites learners to walk slowly and mindfully through a natural space, focusing on their breath and sensory awareness. By moving at a gentle pace and tuning into their surroundings, participants can cultivate presence and self-awareness while deepening their connection to nature. The simplicity of the exercise makes it adaptable to a variety of settings and group sizes, offering a grounding experience that supports emotional wellbeing and complements practices aimed at building inner resilience.

Curriculum linkage

Physical Education & Health.

When taking breaks between classes or activities.

Competences built

Self-reflection, presence, self-awareness.

Prep Work

Practice mindful walking, including following the guidance given in activity 1.3.3.

BASIC INFO

Age range:

6+

Duration:

5-20 minutes

Group size:

Flexible

Level of difficulty:

Basic

Materials/space required:

None

Location:

Outdoors

Engagement of external stakeholders:

None

Steps in the activity

1. Experience
2. Reflect

Step 1: Experience

1. Bring the group to a quiet place in nature, where there is a path, or a clearing where it is possible to walk.

2. Invite the learners to take a few deep breaths together, and encourage them to keep breathing deeply through the exercise.
3. Invite the learners to walk as slowly as possible in nature while continuing to take deep breaths. Allow them to find the rhythm between breathing and walking that works best for them while modelling a very slow walk.
4. Invite the learners to go in the direction or on the path that they feel called to take. The focus should be on the walk and the breathing, while leaving learners sufficient time to explore the natural location in which they are. Depending on the ages of your learners, you may want to suggest that the learners should remain in areas where they can see and be seen by the teacher.

While exploring the Jane Goodall Trail in Budapest, we conducted the "Slow Walk in nature" activity.

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest.

Step 2: Reflect

1. At the end of the exercise, invite the learners who are open to it to share how it was to do this exercise in nature. You can invite the learners to share whether they noticed any noise, smell, color or texture in nature around them. You can invite them to reflect on elements that they had not become aware of before.
2. Invite the learners to practice the slow walk in nature regularly as a way to enhance their connection to themselves and nature.

Dos and don'ts

Do:

- Encourage learners to walk very slowly
- Model slow walking as the learners are engaging in the activity

Don't:

Don't expect the activity to be carried out perfectly from the start. Allow learners time to engage with the activity regularly.

Adaptations:

If learners cannot walk, they should be encouraged to breathe deeply in nature.

This activity can be carried out regularly to help foster wellbeing in children and youth, and can complement all activities undertaken under competence area 1: Taking care of climate emotions and trauma.

We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how you want to be treated, but how they want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

References

Inspired by Thich Nhat Hanh's mindful walking practice:

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Kuo, M., Barnes, M., & Jordan, C. (2019). Do experiences with nature promote learning? converging evidence of a Cause-and-Effect relationship. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305 (Shows that time in nature improves attention, learning, and creativity)

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Activity 2.4.2

Sit spot practice

Overview

The Sit Spot practice is a powerful tool for fostering connection to nature in learners. It involves spending quiet, intentional time in nature, observing the environment, and reflecting on the experience both individually in a journal and together in a group.

Curriculum linkage

Science, Arts and Language & Literature.

Competences built

Systems thinking, empathy, interconnectedness thinking, presence, and self-awareness.

Prep

- Try out the practice first
- Bring journals for learners

Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

None

BASIC INFO

Age range:

6+

Duration:

10-20 minutes

Group size:

Flexible

Level of difficulty:

Basic

Materials/space required:

Journal, pencil, colors

Location:

Outdoors

Engagement of external stakeholders:

None

Steps in the activity

1. Introduction
2. Selecting the Sit-Spot
3. Sit-spot practice
4. Sharing and closing

Step 1: Introduction

1. Decide on the duration for the Sit Spot practice. Typically, 10-20 minutes is a good starting point. Adjust based on the age and attention span of the learners
2. Begin by explaining the purpose of the Sit Spot practice to learners. Emphasize that it's about building a deeper connection with nature, enhancing observation skills, and fostering a sense of calm and mindfulness.
3. Engage learners in a conversation about why spending time in nature can be beneficial, especially in the context of climate resilience. Discuss how being in nature can help us understand and appreciate the environment better.
4. Establish rules for the Sit Spot time, such as:
    a. Remain quiet and avoid distractions (no talking, phones, or other devices).
    b. Stay in one place: movement should be minimal.
    c. Observe with 4 senses—sight, sound, smell, and touch.

Step 2: Selecting the Sit-Spot

1. Guide learners in choosing a Sit Spot. It should be a safe, comfortable place in nature where they can sit quietly and undisturbed. It could be a spot in a school garden, a park, forest, or even a quiet corner with some plants or trees.
2. Encourage learners to choose a spot they can return to regularly. The goal is to visit the same spot repeatedly to observe changes and build a connection with the space.
3. Before learners head out to their Sit Spot, guide them to center their attention through a brief mindfulness exercise. This could include deep breathing or focusing on the sounds around them. Remind them to move slowly and quietly, respecting the natural environment.

Step 3: Sit-spot practice

1. Once at their Sit Spot, invite learners to begin by simply observing their surroundings. Encourage them to notice small details: the colors of leaves, the sound of wind, the feel of the ground beneath them.
2. After a few minutes, provide prompts to help guide the learners' thoughts. Examples include:
    a. What is the most interesting thing you notice?
    b. How does the environment around you change over time?
    c. What feelings or thoughts arise as you sit here?

   d. What natural elements can you touch in your spot?
3. Encourage learners to record their observations in a notebook or journal. They can write, sketch, or even create poems or stories based on their experiences. Allow space for creativity, as learners might want to draw, write stories, or compose a short nature-inspired piece based on their Sit Spot observations.

Step 4: Sharing and closing

After the Sit Spot time, gather the group to share their experiences. This can be a brief sharing circle where learners describe what they observed, how they felt, and any insights gained.

Dos and don'ts

Do:

- Encourage all learners to find a spot. Some may need assistance in choosing or focusing on their spot. Offer extra support to these learners. Others might naturally be drawn to a particular place and enjoy the experience from the beginning.
- Promote positive engagement. Acknowledge and validate the different ways learners connect with their Sit Spot—whether through sketching, journaling, or simply sitting quietly.

Don't:

- Don't force participation. If a learner is not interested or cannot follow the activity, avoid insisting. Instead, gently guide them out of the group to minimize distractions for others.
- But also, don't ignore disengagement! If a learner seems disconnected, initiate a one-on-one conversation to explore ways to make the activity more meaningful or accessible for them.

Adaptations:

For younger learners or those who might struggle with sitting still, consider a play-based approach. Start with a simple game like hide and seek in nature, then allow some solo time at their chosen hiding spot. This can serve as an introduction to the Sit Spot practice in a more playful and engaging manner.

We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how you want to be treated, but how they want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

References

Louv, R. (2008). Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder. https://richardlouv.com/books/last-child/ (Highlights the benefits of unstructured play in nature for cognitive and emotional development)

Gray, P. (2011). The Decline of Play and the Rise of Psychopathology in Children and Adolescents. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ985541.pdf (Emphasizes the importance of free play in natural settings for mental health and resilience)

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Activity 2.4.3

Nature adventures

Overview

"Nature Adventures" is a flexible outdoor activity that invites learners to explore, observe, and connect with nature through various guided or self-directed experiences. Whether it is a hike through the woods, canoeing on a calm lake, camping under the stars, or engaging in free play in a natural setting, "Nature Adventures" encourages a deeper connection to oneself, others, and the natural world. The activity is designed to enhance a sense of wonder and awe by immersing learners in diverse natural environments while building resilience by overcoming challenges that they face in nature. By emphasizing flexibility, exploration, and reflection, educators can provide meaningful experiences that cater to the diverse needs and interests of learners. Each adventure becomes a unique opportunity for growth, learning, and connection.

Curriculum linkage

Physical Education & Health, Fieldtrips and excursions, Science and Geography.

Competences built

Self-reflection, interconnectedness thinking, nature connectedness, adaptability and emotional literacy and regulation.

BASIC INFO

Age range:

6+

Duration:

60 minutes or more (can be extended or shortened as needed)

Group size:

Flexible, depending on the location and number of facilitators

Level of difficulty:

Basic

Materials/space required:

Comfortable clothing and shoes for outdoor exploration.

Notebooks, pens, and optionally, nature guides or field books.

First aid kit

Location:

Outdoors

Engagement of external stakeholders:

Depends on the adventure

Prep

Make sure you know the location in advance. It is critical to pre-visit the place and have a risk-assessment for the activity.

Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

You may need to have previous experience in the different activities or a local guide or expert with you.

Learners setting up their tents to spend a night camping under the stars

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest

Steps in the activity

1. Before you go
2. In nature

Whether it's a hike through the woods, canoeing on a calm lake, camping under the stars, or engaging in free play in a natural setting, there is a series of steps that can help you to get started:

Step 1: Before you go

1. Set the intention. Define the purpose and intention of the nature adventure. Are you promoting mindfulness, fostering teamwork and problem solving or nature connection? Clarifying the goal helps tailor the experience to the needs and interests of the group, whether they are children, adults, or a mixed group.
2. Choose the right environment. Select an environment that suits your intention and the group's needs. This could be a forest, beach, park, river, or even an urban green space. The setting will shape the type of activities possible, like hiking in a forest, canoeing on a lake, or free play in a meadow.
3. Create a safe and inclusive atmosphere. This involves preparing for challenges like weather, terrain, and group dynamics.
4. Consider offering varied engagement opportunities. Not every learner will engage with nature in the same way. Some may prefer active movement like hiking or canoeing, while others may find joy in stillness, like meditating under a tree or sketching a landscape. Offer different types of activities to cater to diverse interests and comfort levels, and let learners choose what feels right for them.

5. Prepare to adapt the activity based on the group's energy, weather conditions, or unexpected discoveries. Flexibility allows for spontaneous learning moments—such as encountering wildlife or observing a unique natural phenomenon—that can lead to deeper engagement and learning.

Pictures of a nature adventure in which the group embarked on a canoe expedition along the Danube

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest

Step 2: In nature

1. Communicate safety guidelines and establish boundaries, such as designated areas for exploration and behavior expectations to protect learners and the environment.
2. Encourage learners to explore and discover at their own pace. Encourage curiosity and let learners choose their path—whether it's following a trail, wading into a stream, climbing a hill, or simply sitting quietly and observing. The emphasis is on direct experience with nature, fostering a sense of wonder and personal connection.
3. Encourage learners to experience nature with a sense of playfulness, whether it is through building a shelter, playing nature-based games, or creating art with found objects. Joy and play are powerful tools for connection and learning.
4. Lead with Curiosity. Ask open-ended questions and encourage learners to ask their own. "What do you notice here? What surprises you? How does this place make you feel?"
5. After exploration, bring the group together for reflection and sharing. This could be through group discussions, storytelling, journaling, or creative expression like drawing or poetry. Encourage learners to reflect on what they noticed, how they felt, and what they learned about themselves, others, and the natural world.

Dos and don'ts

Adaptations:

We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how you want to be treated, but how they want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

References

This activity was created by REAL School Budapest.

Louv, R. (2008). *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. https://richardlouv.com/books/last-child/ (Highlights the benefits of unstructured play in nature for cognitive and emotional development)

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Activity 2.4.4

Flying kites

Overview

Make a sustainable kite as a way to explore sustainable materials, incorporate movement and fun, reflect on how wind patterns are impacted by climate change, and learn practical skills involving mathematics.

Curriculum linkage

Science, Civic and social studies, Mathematics, Arts and Practice & Vocational.

Competences built

Systems thinking, interconnectedness thinking and empathy.

Prep

Decide on what materials will be used for the kite and how to collect the materials.

Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

It would be helpful to make a kite for yourself before doing it with the learners.

Steps in the activity

1. Move with the wind
2. Make kites
3. Fly kites

BASIC INFO

Age range:

9+

Duration:

2-3 hours

Group size:

Max 30

Level of difficulty:

Basic to advanced, depending on the materials chosen for the kite

Materials/space required:

See below

Location:

Indoors (step 1 and 2), Outdoors (step 2 and 3)

Engagement of external stakeholders:

No

Materials/space required:

Up-cycled paper kite

- paper from magazine or newspaper
- light, straight wooden stick
- light, bendable metal stick
- glue
- tape
- scissors
- rope

Up-cycled plastic kite

- plastic bag
- light, straight wooden sticks or straws
- decorations for the tail (feathers, glitter paper/fabric etc.)
- tape
- scissors
- rope
- knife

Leaf kite

- dried leaves
- rope
- natural sticks (straight and light)
- needle and thread

Step 1: Move like the wind

1. Introduce the movement game “Move like the wind” where the learners pretend to be wind and grass/straw moved by the wind.
2. Ask learners to form pairs with one learner being the wind and one being grass/straw. The Grass will start standing upright, with their arms relaxed at their sides. The Wind will then, using only one hand, gently move the Grass’s body. The Grass will follow along with the gentle pressure, and as soon as the Wind releases, the Grass will softly return to its upright, relaxed position.
3. Show how the game works with a volunteer. For example: the Wind might gently lift the Grass’ arm; push the side of one shoulder, making the body bend sidewards; push in the hollow of the knee; push on a hip from the front or from the back; or push at different points along the spine. Experiment (gently) with speed, level of pressure, how quickly you release the pressure, etc.
4. Establish the rules of the game and share them with learners. The rules are the following:
   a. No talking
   b. The Grass cannot move its feet (just like plants cannot move their roots). The Wind is free to move around.

   c. The Wind doesn't push if they encounter resistance, and they don't touch the head, or any other body parts that are off-limits or where the Grass does not want to be touched.
   d. Both Wind and Grass are free to walk away/stop the exercise at any point if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Remind the learners to take responsibility for their own body and boundaries.
5. After around 30-60 seconds you ask the learners to switch roles, and they get another 30-60 seconds to play with the movement.

Step 2: Make kites

1. Start by asking the learners how they think they can make a kite out of sustainable materials. Use this opportunity to highlight that there are many ways to be sustainable and to make a kite. Examples of different ways to make a kite out of sustainable materials:
   a. Basic: Up-cycled paper Kite
   b. Intermediate: Up-cycled plastic kite
   c. Advanced: Leaf kite
2. Decide on what kind of materials to use. The easy option is for the teacher to decide on the materials and have everyone make their kites the same way. The advanced and more creative option is to let the learners work in groups and have the groups choose what materials they want to use. This requires more sessions, time and preparation.
3. Ask the learners what skills are needed to make a kite. You could mention patience, commitment and precision, if those are not mentioned.

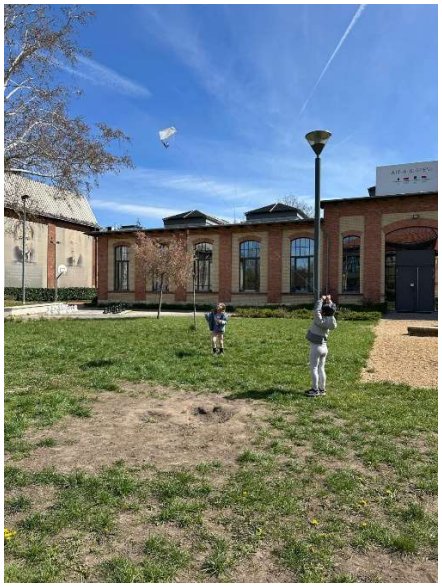

In the making! Learners using recycled plastic and wooden sticks to create their kites.

Photo by Sierra de Lew, REAL School Budapest

4. Hand out or ask the learners to collect their materials, depending on what type of kite you decided upon. If they are collecting their own material at home (up-cycling) or in nature (leaves, sticks), you need to make time for this and plan to make the kite later on.
5. Making the kite will look different depending on the way of making kites that you chose. See tutorial videos above to learn more. One way to incorporate math is to talk about the shape of the kite (diamond, square) and give learners precise measurements to use when making the kite.
6. Ask the learners what type of weather they think their kite needs to fly well. A small leaf or paper kite will probably do well in less wind than a larger plastic bag kite made with sticks, for example.

Step 3: Fly kites

1. Go to a suitable place and fly the kites when the weather is optimal.
2. Ask the learners to reflect on the experience of flying kites. Prompts:
3. How did it feel to fly the kite?
    a. What does the kite mean/resemble to you?
    b. What does it mean historically/to others? (ex: peace)
    c. How is it possible for the kite to fly?
    d. How will the winds change with climate change? (ex: more extreme weather and storms)



With their kites ready, learners enjoyed flying them on a perfect windy day.

Photo by Sierra de Lew, REAL School Budapest

Dos and don'ts

Do:

If your learners are easily stressed or frustrated at the moment, you can choose more solid materials to avoid frustration over repeatedly broken/teared materials.

Adaptations:

If touch/pushing is not suitable for your group of learners, you can instead use this movement activity:

- Instead of the learners using their bodies/hands to be the wind and touching others, they will stand a little more separated and just act out the wind blowing in specific directions and how the grass will respond to the wind.

We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how you want to be treated, but how they want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

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This activity was designed by Climate Creativity.

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Tool 2.4

Giving nature time

CLARITY Competence Area:

Nurturing connection to oneself, others and nature

GreenComp Competence Area:

Embracing Complexity in Sustainability

Why use this tool?

The "Give Nature Time" tool is designed to encourage individuals and groups to deepen their connection with the natural world through immersive and mindful experiences. This tool is an invitation to slow down, reconnect, and appreciate the profound impact that nature can have on our lives. By integrating activities like " Nature Adventures," participants engage in unstructured outdoor play, reflection, and exploration, allowing them to experience the myriad benefits of nature firsthand.

Activity 2.4.5

Nature-based art

Overview

This activity focuses on using natural material and landscapes as mediums for artistic expression, connecting people with the environment through creative endeavors. Examples of nature-based art include creating a nature-based mandala, or a clay face on a tree. Creating a mandala made of collected twigs, stones, flowers and leaves helps develop a contemplative relationship with nature, while helping foster collaboration. It is also meant to be transient/temporary and helps reflect on our relationship to time, including the cyclical nature of life. Creating clay faces on trees can help introduce the topic of communication between plants, as well as reflections on animism.

Curriculum linkage

Arts and Natural Science

Competences built

Systems thinking, interconnectedness thinking, empathy

Prep

Learn more about land art, and/or mandalas.

BASIC INFO

Age range:

6+

Duration:

45-60 minutes

Group size:

Flexible

Level of difficulty:

Basic

Materials/space required:

It depends on the artform you choose

Location:

Outdoors

Engagement of external stakeholders:

Not necessarily. A local land artist would be an asset.

Steps in the activity

1. Harvest
2. Creation
3. Reflection

Step 1: Harvest

1. Bring the learners to a place in nature where they are allowed to gather natural material and have space to create sculptures, assemblages and installations.
2. Allow the learners to explore the space and take note of possible material for their art, as well as of locations where they could create together. The material for their artworks should primarily be fallen leaves, twigs, or flowers that are no longer growing, as well as small stones and other minerals that can easily be displaced and brought back to where they were. Harvesting material should not damage the local ecosystem.
3. Create small groups of 5-6 learners and give them some time to gather material for their nature-based art either individually or as a group.

Learners creating and giving shape to a tree face with natural clay.

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest.

Learners collaborating to design and build their own piece of land art.

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest.

Step 2: Creation

1. Invite the learners to create an ephemeral artwork out of the material they have gathered. The learners could be invited to create a mandala out of the natural material gathered. They could also be given a prompt or an assignment focusing on their representation of the ecological crisis and/or of a regenerative future.

Step 3: Reflection

1. Once the artworks are finalized, invite learners to have a look at the artworks of the other learners. This can be a good opportunity to reflect on the materials gathered and used by the learners (e.g.

2. which species were used, which role does that species play in the ecosystem), and to introduce learners to the different plant species present in their environment.
3. Invite learners to share what they wished to represent and how engaging in this activity collectively felt for them. You can also invite learners to reflect on the new perspectives they may have gained in relation to the ecological crisis and/or to regeneration. You may also reflect on the mandala-making practice, if this was the practice you chose, to highlight what actual mandala-making entails in the Buddhist tradition. This will help foster a sense of humility with regard to their creations.
4. Once the activity has been carried out, invite learners to dismantle their artworks and bring the material back to where they grabbed it. This can be an opportunity to highlight the role of healthy soil, fed by organic material, in the health of the local ecosystem.

Learners sharing their nature-based mandala with their peers.

Photo by Carmelo Zamora, REAL School Budapest.

Dos and don'ts

Do:

- Look for the location carefully
- Consider this activity at the end of the summer or in the fall, so as to take advantage of the variety of leaves and fallen fruits available.

Don't:

- Don't damage plants while doing the exercise
- Don't choose a very small location where the presence of a large number of learners could damage the plants growing in the soil.

Adaptations:

If some learners are not comfortable being outdoors and picking up leaves or other plants, encourage them to gather material together, rather than individually.

If a learner cannot easily move in the space or pick up material, assign a small group to work with them and get them the material they would like to have access to.

This activity can be carried out regularly to help foster wellbeing in children and youth, and can complement all activities undertaken under competence area 1 "Taking care of climate emotions and trauma".

We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how you want to be treated, but how they want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

Resources

Some pictures of nature-based mandalas:

- https://www.discoveringanew.com/blog-4/nature-mandalas-nature-activity-for-kids

Artists using natural material for art:

- https://www.shonawilson.com/artwork/2011/
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