

International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education
Copyright © North American Association for Environmental Education
ISSN: 2331-0464 (online)



Bit by Bit: How One Preschool Increased Its Natureness

Sunny Crandell
Santa Barbara City College, USA

Submitted December 26, 2018; accepted as an editorial-reviewed article June 12, 2019

ABSTRACT

Preschool teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of nature connection during early childhood, including the development of healthy bodies, social-emotional competency and eventual academic success (Sobel, 2015; Warden, 2012). However, for many preschools located in urban settings, the question isn't whether nature connection is important for young children – the question is how to enable it? This article lays out an incremental approach to achieving nature connection for urban preschool teachers by telling the story of how one preschool – the one I direct – has approached the problem. The approach we took can be used in almost any preschool setting to increase nature connectedness. It is incremental, and takes time, but its impact can be transformative and lasting.

Time in nature is important for us all, yet we are living in an era when screen-time and indoor time is increasing, and time outdoors is on the wane, with disturbing results (Twengy, 2017). Florence Williams (2016) in her recent book, *Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier, and More Creative*, reviews extensive research extolling the positive effects that nature has on our brains, bodies and psyche, at all ages. So, it is no surprise that among preschool teachers, there is a growing awareness of the important benefits of nature connection during early years, as it supports the development of healthy bodies, social-emotional competency and eventual academic success (Sobel, 2015; Warden, 2013).

For many preschools located in urban settings, however, the question isn't whether nature connection is important for young children; rather, the question is how do we enable it? With increasing urbanization, this goal will continue to become more and more challenging for teachers. I have been grappling with this issue myself for the last nine years while directing a cooperative preschool in an urban setting, and I have formulated an approach that I believe can be used in almost any preschool setting to increase nature connectedness. The approach is incremental, and takes time, but its impact can be transformative and lasting.



Figure 1. Child is studying the newly unfurling leaves of a California sycamore tree.

Those who have read to young children may remember this conversation from *The Velveteen Rabbit* (2007; pg. 4):

*"Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you."
'Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,' he asked, 'or bit by bit?'
'It doesn't happen all at once,' said the Skin Horse. 'You become. It takes a long time.'"*

This article is the story of our multi-year efforts to become a *Real* Nature-Based Early Childhood Education Program at The Oaks Parent-Child Workshop in Santa Barbara, California. It's the story of how, within the limits of our location, budget and governance constraints, we have increased our *natureness* at The Oaks, as Patti Bailie of the University of Maine calls it. And finally, it is the story of how we worked to help children learn with nature "inside, outside, and beyond" as Claire Warden and others have noted. As with the Velveteen Rabbit becoming real, it feels like this story didn't happen all at once, but rather developed over a long time, bit by bit. And, we still have much more work to do. But it's a story I believe any school can learn from and incorporate into its daily routine.

Our journey culminated in the creation of our Nature-Based Program at Fairview Gardens, a cooperative farm/garden in Santa Barbara, scheduled during the summer when our preschool is typically closed. It was the first program of its kind for The Oaks, and in this article I will document our planning process, our goals, our rationale in selecting our location, our commitment to play and exploration, reflections on the curriculum, and finally our reflections and observations of our week on the farm. I hope that sharing our experience will help others who want to increase nature connections within their own urban preschool programs, and that others following a similar journey will inform us of their efforts so that we can continue to grow our own early childhood environmental education program.

One point I'd like to highlight: during our planning, I often referred to the *NAAEE Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* (2016) because it provided us with a useful framework to guide our efforts (see Appendix A). This free resource can be downloaded from the NAAEE website.

Background

The Oaks Parent-Child Workshop is a cooperative preschool program affiliated with the Santa Barbara City College serving an average of 50 - 60 families each year. It was founded over 70 years ago and has been in its current location for over 60 years. What once may have felt like a quiet neighborhood, now is a busy medical hub for the city of Santa Barbara. While there is a city park across the street, it also is a park that sadly sometimes has a homeless encampment. Daily ambient noises include ambulances, helicopters and the local freeway traffic. Also, the school property itself is small, and when it rains, we are really cramped. Though I'm sure there are more challenging locations that preschools currently occupy, it's clear that many, many schools fall on a spectrum of various degrees of urbanness that present significant challenges for nature education.

During my first five years at the Oaks we made great strides in improving the curriculum and school environment, both inside and outside, in order to increase opportunities for parents and children to connect with nature. We removed asphalt and replaced it with a bike path landscaped with tufty grasses, willow and animal tracks. We replaced a chain link fence and planted native grapes (*Vitis californica*). We also planted edible fruit trees, and installed raised beds seeded with edible greens and herbs, a source of food for our bunnies and children.

Once we completed these new outdoor improvements, we faced some challenges. Children were pulling young plants out of the garden boxes and monarch caterpillars were being plucked off the *Asclepias*/Milkweed, their only food source. We decided we needed to help cultivate a culture of responsibility for living things among the preschoolers. We called a school-wide meeting, and offered the children a chance for them to become protectors of plants and caterpillars by taking a pledge:

"I promise to be a plant protector; gently harvest with two hands so the roots can remain in the soil, and only harvest what I will eat or feed to the bunnies."

or:

"I promise to be a caterpillar protector. I will study them with my eyes and allow them to grow strong on their host plants."

When a child decided to take the pledge, they would tell the director, take the pledge, and bind it by shaking hands. Once the pledge was made, a small stamp sized "plant protector" or "caterpillar protector" was ceremonially taped to the child's name tag.

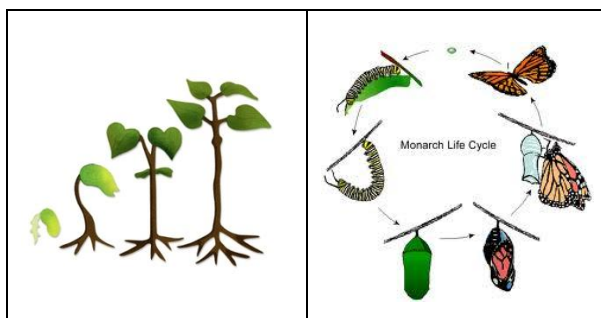


Figure 2: Plant Protector, Caterpillar Protector 'stickers'

Within the classroom we set up a Nature Corner to display natural history artifacts and visiting insects. We subscribed to the Santa Barbara Natural History Museum - Nature Connection Membership, a program that allows educators to borrow museum quality educational displays for their classrooms. We borrowed taxidermy mounts of animals, bird nests and eggs, animal skeletons, bones and skin – all in order to expand on emerging children's interests, seasonal changes, and relevant to our local coastal, chaparral, and woodland environments. We invested in additional field guides and added the topic of nature pedagogy to our weekly evening parent education classes. We collaborated with the local city Creeks Division to install more native plants along our property line that runs adjacent to Mission Creek and we reduced our waste by joining the city of Santa Barbara's Food Scrap Composting program.

We also started Nature Notes – based around a Nature Journal made from an 11" X 14" artist's pad. It became a home for Nature Discoveries made at school and at home. For Nature Notes, teachers and families bring or send in pictures and stories of nature discoveries they have made at home or at school. For example: teacher Laura photographed the Great Horned Owls bathing in her backyard; Anton brought in pictures of his family hunting for Chanterelle mushrooms; Grandpa Steve shared a picture of ant lions' sand traps located near the school parking lot; and Fin and his mother brought in a photo of a centipede next to her eggs. The Nature Notes journal is always out for children and adults to look through and add to. It has become a lovely transitional activity for some children first thing in the morning.

Though we had made progress inside and out with these initial efforts, I felt there was more we could do. It was time to provide access to places and spaces that would deepen our nature-connections in the beyond. With this goal in mind, I went to the parent board requesting approval for an off-site nature-based program during the summer when the school is typically closed. The board unanimously approved the proposal, with the understanding that the program would: 1) serve currently enrolled Oaks families; 2) be self-sufficient; and 3) be covered by our insurance. Many of the details would need to be worked out – including location, budget, and curriculum. But, with the board approval we could begin to plan in earnest.

Getting Started

During the planning stage, I asked Rebecca Borgioli, a local credentialed elementary school teacher with a graduate degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE), and a former Oaks parent, as well as regular substitute teacher at our own program, to co-teach. She agreed, though with some hesitation. Having taught in Italy at a Reggio Emilia School, as well as in Elementary Schools in our area, Rebecca has a strong skill set with regard to developmentally

appropriate curriculum planning and the arts. But she did not feel as confident with environmental education (EE). And, to be honest, the same was true for me. I had worked previously as a school psychologist, and now was a parent education instructor & director of a cooperative nursery school, but I too had not been directly engaged with EE for some time. This pilot program provided us both with an opportunity to take some risks, practice place-based environmental education, and connect deeply with a dozen children within a more natural setting. Patti Bailie, of the University of Maine, says that it is not unusual to have either the ECE competencies or EE competencies – but a marriage of both is an unusual skill set.

During this initial phase, we scheduled planning sessions, gathered materials, and read articles. We discussed David Sobel's *Nature Preschools and Forest Kindergartens: The Handbook for Outdoor Learning* (2015), specifically chapter 5: "The Sticks and Stones of Curriculum Planning" and Chapter 10: "Best Practices in Nature-Based Early Childhood Education". We also discussed NAAEE's *Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* (2016). These resources provided us with a shared framework to build upon based on research and theory.

Given our graduate level of training in ECE, we felt we were well equipped to support learning that considered the whole child, and was developmentally appropriate, child-directed, and inquiry-based. Also, while I hadn't been working with EE for some time, I felt I could draw upon previous experiences including installing and maintaining a school garden program, leading local family nature-based adventures, and Master Gardener training at the local Botanic Garden.

Selecting a Place and Space

During the planning phase, we deliberated long and hard on choosing a location. Across the street from our school there is an urban park. That would certainly have been a convenient place to run the program. We walked the length of the park from east to west more than once, as we considered whether this would be the right location. The park had a creek restoration zone that looked promising, with picnic tables, native plants and ample shade, rocks and sticks. However, each time I walked to the east end of the park, I encountered an entrenched homeless community. I tried to imagine sharing this space with these homeless folks. And, I wondered how it would look through the eyes of my young children, and their parents. I conferred with colleagues. And, I spoke to a father considering enrolling his daughter in our program. He said he didn't think the park was a good idea. As an ambulance driver and paramedic, he had been on a number of calls to this area, responding to the needs of the homeless encampment. In the end, we decided to keep looking.

After investigating several other options, we discovered Fairview Gardens. Fairview Gardens is an urban farm about fifteen minutes' drive from our school. Although it was minimally planted due to an ongoing drought, it provided us with an ideal location for our summer nature-based program because it afforded us an abundance of opportunities to connect with nature and with each other. The facility has bathrooms – an obvious plus – and we would get to work with Fairview Gardens interns who were well-versed in EE and ready to share their knowledge of farming and nature with the children.

The farm was replete with natural components – trees to climb; loose parts to repurpose; chickens and a chicken coop; a children's garden to harvest from; sunflower teepees; food crops, and so much more. When it was hot, "Sister Mulberry", an ancient fruiting mulberry tree, provided an expansive shady canopy to retreat to. The farm also had tables for activities and pathways to explore. Environmental sustainability was a focus. Children watered the garden with water they washed their hands in, and they composted their lunch leftovers. We felt that the Farm met all the guidelines the NAAEE laid out for location.

Planning and Implementing Nature-Based Education

Parents attended a planning session before the school year ended. Some parents later reported they hadn't known what to expect. Perhaps they had been harboring concerns about safety and questions about what the program would be like for their children. Then, the first day of our Nature-Based Program finally arrived. Families walked up

the hill from the parking lot of the public library, through the orchard and past the children's playground to meet us at Sister Mulberry Tree and we all met to start the day under branches that created an accessible canopy for our nascent tree climbers.

Rebecca and I agreed that we would need to build in plenty of time for discovery and exploration. We also wanted to incorporate many of the authentic experiences that our outdoor environment afforded us. A half hour after our first morning began, once parents had departed, we gathered for our first morning circle. Rebecca read the story *Sunflower House* by E. Bunting (1996), allowing us to deepen our connections with the abundant 6 to 7-foot sunflowers growing throughout the farm. We had displayed drying sunflowers on the picnic table ready for seed harvesting. Small field magnifiers and tweezers were also available. As lovely as this curriculum activity was, though, it was not a draw for our children on their first day. We made note of this in our journals.

During our first morning circle time we discussed with the children their options at the farm. The children reached consensus – they wanted to play follow-the-leader with our farm intern, Arianna, around the farm. Each child was offered a small basket to take on their tour, to support foraging. Arianna lead us through the children's garden filled with rock-ringed planters of flowers, herbs and edibles, past the magnificent sunflower stalks that rose high above our heads. We walked underneath the grape bower, beyond the tire slide and the fava bean field, to the far southwestern corner of the farm and 'the tunnel.' The tunnel, a culvert 5-feet in diameter, became the source of great imaginative story telling over the week and a growth opportunity for many children, as children were able to confront their fears of the dark by walking more deeply into the tunnel with every visit, increasing their confidence with each attempt. Indeed, "the tunnel" became one of the children's favorite destinations. One of the children explained how he loved going into "the deep, dark, darkest, dark-like-the-night tunnel." And, after visiting the tunnel, children began to talk to each other about what might live in the tunnel – maybe even bears.

When we did return to Sister Mulberry Tree our first day, children were HUNGRY. Indeed, it was almost lunch time as we had missed our morning snack. Arianna reported that the tour took much longer than she thought it would. This was reassuring to me, since Arianna's observation indicated that we were making time for connecting conversations with children, and that we had slipped into 'kids' time.'



Each morning after that first day opened with a circle time – which allowed us a chance to greet each other, sing our good morning song, and plan our day. Each afternoon we ended with a closing circle, which allowed us a chance to reflect on the morning adventures and sing favorite songs. Children also used this end-of-the-day circle time to make suggestions for the next day. The days that followed found their own rhythm. There was plenty of time to climb trees, look for chicken eggs, explore the asparagus forest, re-enter into the tunnel, and harvest elderberries. Some activities were serendipitous – the staff at Fairview Gardens offered us fava beans to shuck, herbs for tea, and a fig tree to plant. I had also found an Anise Swallowtail Caterpillar that was ready to change into a chrysalis. Children had found loose parts that they could repurpose into their self-directed play – tires, a wheel hub on an axle, sticks and rocks. And, on our last day at the farm, Arianna stoked a fire in a cob stove, so we could make pizzas to share with parents.

Each morning we posted a daily curriculum guide (see Appendix B). We planned for each day, but also remained open to let the day follow the direction and interests of the children.

Gratitude

Early in the week, we established a practice familiar to our children - the practice of gratitude. By the end of the week, Rebecca and I had made notes of what children appreciated. Parents also checked in with us, either by email or in conversation, offering us feedback and thanks. These statements of gratitude suggested that our weeklong program had been a success.

Children's appreciations follow:

- "My favorite thing is you [Rebecca]. I like the tree in back of 'Sister Mulberry', the one with the ponytails (i.e., a Banana Tree)."
- "My other favorite thing besides climbing Sister Mulberry and the dark tunnel is Sunny and you [Rebecca]."
- "I like the tire slide, the dark cave and the rat tunnel."
- "I like the deep, dark, darkest, dark-like-the-night tunnel; pretending I am a bad guy and I am going to jail; and playing with the wheelbarrow with the wooden blocks [painted branch blocks]."
- "I like Sister Mulberry Tree. And, when I took off my shoes it was tickly on my feet!"
- "I like climbing and climbing because we just have a Cherimoya [tree at home]. Our Cherimoya doesn't have that many roots."
- "I like the chickens!"

These heartfelt appreciations reflected that nurturing relationships were in place, a necessary foundation for learning and growing.

During the week, Rebecca and I found a balance between being prepared (teacher-directed thematic curriculum planning) and going with children's emerging themes (child-directed curriculum planning). We found our sweet spot: pre-planned, developmentally appropriate activities allowed us to have resources easily on-hand when children wanted them (e.g., water colors and journals). We also came to realize that children have a great capacity for self-directed engagement in this beautiful natural setting.



Figure 3: Journaling under the bean teepee.

What Did We Learn?

The *NAAEE Guidelines* state that, “Early childhood environmental education programs ensure opportunities for nature-based play and exploration, both indoors and outdoors” – something we wholeheartedly agree with. However, for our summer program we decided to provide an outdoor-only experience in order to more fully explore the benefits of the location we had arranged at the Fairview Gardens. We were not disappointed. We looked forward to using natural materials and loose parts that came directly from our surroundings. We also looked forward to providing some new activities like tree climbing that balanced risks with benefits and were not readily available at our licensed facility. We knew that what we had to offer would be enriched due to the partnership we had forged with Fairview Gardens Educational staff. This also worked out quite well, because the interns had familiarity with the farm property and EE than we did not. The partnership allowed for us to take advantage of the farm fully.



Figure 4: Tree climbing: an opportunity to practice risk assessment and build confidence

Social and emotional growth is also a key NAAEE guideline for nature education, and something Rebecca and I felt we already did well. I am a credentialed school psychologist who has made social emotional competency the focus of much of my life’s work. Rebecca’s gentle style of interaction with children helped create an environment that further supported the development and practice of empathy, communication, cooperation, and self-regulation.

Rebecca and I both were comfortable with the notion of having a planned curriculum, taking advantage of the many affordances the farm had to offer, and deviating from the plan if children’s interests or serendipity pulled us in other directions. What was in bloom? What could be harvested? What could we shuck? What was there for us to discover?

We organized the schedule so children had ample opportunities to observe, discuss, investigate, and ask questions. The environment provided us with endless possibilities – the drainage culvert became the bear cave; the asparagus field became a jungle; the prolific elderberry shrubs became a source of dye and berries. Fairview Gardens also has a chicken coop. This provided us with an opportunity to support the development of empathy and self-regulation for some of the children as they learned that chickens don’t like to be chased.

While the EE component of our program was undoubtedly enriched by the participation of permaculture interns, we also learned that skilled ECE teachers with a passion and comfort in the outdoors can serve children quite well in outdoor learning environments.

This summer marks the fourth consecutive year we have offered this program at the farm. At the end of each session, I ask the teaching staff what they noticed about teaching outdoors at the farm in contrast to teaching at school. Their responses at first astonished me (they shouldn't have, but they did). They reported that our nature-based week at Fairview Gardens resulted in:

- Fewer conflicts
- Simpler clean-up
- Less need to entertain
- Children were more engaged
- Children were more hands-on
- Children were better listeners
- Children were more reflective
- There were more appropriate risk-taking opportunities/ and children took full advantage of these opportunities
- Children worked more cooperatively and as a group

It is exciting to note that our teachers' responses resonate with other research investigating the benefits of outdoor programs in early childhood, like the PEER study on Forests Days in Vermont Kindergartens (Powers, 2017). The kindergarten teacher at Ludlow Elementary in Vermont, reported (pg. 11):

"We see minimal conflict in the forest. We try to model solving your own problems, and we focus on how to negotiate, how to do a self-evaluation. We teach them about the difference between a safety hazard and a risk, and frankly this all happens with minimal prompting in the forest."



Figure 5: End-of-day circle time provides an opportunity to connect and reflect

What's to come?

Bit by bit we increased the 'natureness' of our traditional parent cooperative preschool, with gratifying results. We have included opportunities for our children, parents and staff to connect with nature, inside, outside and beyond.

In the last year, staff and families collaborated in the launching of **Saturday Family Adventures**. These monthly outings get families out into the beyond – exploring our local beaches at low-tide, visiting a local preserve managed by the Land Trust of Santa Barbara County, and taking hikes on our local trails.

This year, we have begun taking rain walks. We needed to make changes to our environment in order to accommodate rain coats and boots. Last spring, we installed outdoor pegs and a flagstone area underneath, so children had a place to store their gear. This fall, children come to school on rainy days eager and ready for time outdoors.

The governing board has also recently agreed to assemble a 'steering committee' to help us plan for the future. Hopefully, a commitment to increasing our 'natureness' will be core to the future work we do. Meanwhile, I am filled with hope for future possibilities!

References

- Bianco, M. W. (2007). The velveteen rabbit: Or, how toys become real. In, R. Mason (Ed.). *The Children's Classical Library* (Pp. 2-13). Retrieved from <http://booksforlearning.com.au/classics/books/velveteen/VelveteenRabbit.pdf>
- Bunting, E. (1996). *Sunflower house*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace & Co.
- Guidelines for excellence: Early childhood environmental education programs (2016). Washington DC: North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). Retrieved on June 2019 from: <https://naaee.org/eeepro/publication/early-childhood-environmental-education-programs-guidelines-excellence>
- National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2004). *Young Children Develop in an Environment of Relationships: Working Paper No. 1*. Retrieved on June 2019 from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.
- PEER Associates, Powers, A.L. (2017). Forest Days Case Studies: Hartland Elementary, VT; Ludlow Elementary, VT; Mount Lebanon Elementary, NH. Retrieved on June 2019 from www.peerassociates.net.
- Sobel, D. (2015). *Nature preschools and forest kindergartens: the handbook for outdoor learning*. St Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.
- Twengy, J. (2017). *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and, Completely Unprepared for Adulthood – and What That Means for the Rest of Us*. New York, NY: Atria Books.
- Warden, C. (2012). *Nature kindergartens and forest schools (2 ed.)*. Perthshire, Scotland: Mindstretchers.
- Williams, F. (2016). *Nature fix: Why nature makes us happier, healthier, and more creative*. New York, NY: Norton & Co.

Appendix A

KEY CHARACTERISTIC 1: PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY, PURPOSE, AND DEVELOPMENT

- Guideline 1.1—Focus on nature and the environment
- Guideline 1.2—Focus on education of young children
- Guideline 1.3—Culturally appropriate goals, objectives, and practices
- Guideline 1.4—Environmental literacy: board, staff, and providers
- Guideline 1.5—Health and safety
- Guideline 1.6—Ongoing evaluation and assessment
- Guideline 1.7—Partnerships
- Guideline 1.8—Interpersonal and intergenerational relationships

KEY CHARACTERISTIC 2: DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES

- Guideline 2.1—Based on research and theory
- Guideline 2.2—Authentic experiences
- Guideline 2.3—Child-directed and inquiry-based
- Guideline 2.4—The whole child

KEY CHARACTERISTIC 3: PLAY AND EXPLORATION

- Guideline 3.1—Use of the natural world and natural materials
- Guideline 3.2—Play and the role of adults

KEY CHARACTERISTIC 4: CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING

- Guideline 4.1—Social and emotional growth
- Guideline 4.2—Curiosity and questioning
- Guideline 4.3—Development of environmental understandings
- Guideline 4.4—Skills for understanding the environment
- Guideline 4.5—A personal sense of responsibility and caring
- Guideline 4.6—Physical health and development

KEY CHARACTERISTIC 5: PLACES AND SPACES

- Guideline 5.1—Spaces and places to enhance development
- Guideline 5.2—Natural components
- Guideline 5.3—Comfortable for both children and adults
- Guideline 5.4—Maintenance and usability
- Guideline 5.5—Health, safety, and risk
- Guideline 5.6—Environmental sustainability

KEY CHARACTERISTIC 6: EDUCATOR PREPARATION

- Guideline 6.1—Foundations of early childhood environmental education
- Guideline 6.2—Professional responsibilities of the educator
- Guideline 6.3—Environmental literacy
- Guideline 6.4—Planning and implementing environmental education
- Guideline 6.5—Fostering learning
- Guideline 6.6—Assessment and evaluation

Appendix B

Circle Time Songs at Nature Camp

May We Be Happy

May I be happy, may I be well
May I be safe and sound
May I be peaceful, may I be at ease
With love in my heart and all around

May you be happy, may you be well
May you be safe and sound
May you be peaceful, may you be at ease
With love in your heart and all around

May we be happy, may you be well
May we be safe and sound
May we be peaceful, may you be at ease
With love in our hearts and all around

My Roots Go Down

My roots go down, down to the earth.
My roots go down, down to the earth.
My roots go down, down to the earth.
My roots go down.
Many new verses have been created:
* I am a pine tree on a mountainside.
* I am a willow swaying in a storm.
* I am a waterfall skipping over rocks.
* I am a sunflower growing towards the sun.
* I am a mountain tall and strong.

Good Morning Song (Traditional Waldorf)

Good Morning Dear Earth (hands as if holding earth on abdomen)
Good Morning Dear Sun (stretch arms above head in a circular arc)
Good Morning Dear Trees (stretch arms to side, like tree branches)
And the Flowers Everywhere (hands holding flowers on ground)
Good Morning Dear Beasts (hands as if petting a dog, etc..)
And the Birds in the Trees (hands "fly" away like birds flying away)
Good Morning Dear You and Good Morning Dear Me. (hands reaching to each other, then hands cross over our chest)

The Garden Song

Inch by inch, row by row
Gonna make this garden grow
All you need is a rake and hoe
And a piece of fertile ground.

Inch by inch, row by row,
Please bless these seeds I sow,
Keep them warm and safe below

'Til the rains come tumbling down.

Pulling weeds, removing stones, we are made of dreams and bones,
Need a place to call my own upon the earth so grand.
Grain from grain, sun and rain, find my way through nature's chain,
Tune my body and my brain to the music of the land.

Inch by inch, row by row
Gonna make this garden grow
All you need is a rake and hoe
And a piece of fertile ground.

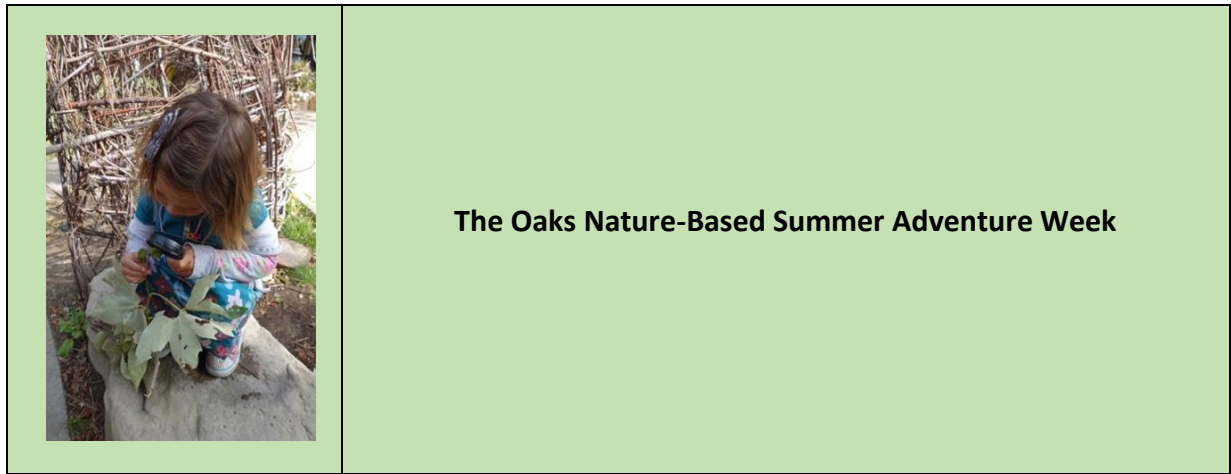
Inch by inch, row by row,
Please bless these seeds I sow,
Keep them warm and safe below
'Til the rains come tumbling down.

Blessing on the Blossoms

Blessings on the blossoms
Blessings on the roots
Blessings on the leaves and stems
And blessings on the fruit

Appendix C

Parent Flyer



Summer Program:

This summer, we are providing a week-long outdoor nature-based program for 4 & 5 year-olds, currently enrolled at The Oaks PCW program. This program is suitable for children who are at ease with new experiences and who can follow directions (director's approval is required). The summer program will be located at Fairview Gardens. The summer program will be play-based, with opportunities to explore, discover, create and have fun. Children will have an opportunity to experience the following: field plans (activities in nature) and field guides (discovering and researching local flora and fauna); creative art projects and nature journaling. While daily activities may differ – we will begin and end each day with a circle time.

Philosophy:

Our summer program reflects the values and philosophy of the Oaks PCW program. Learning will be play-based and child-directed. We will emphasize the process of learning over content. We will provide children with the space and environment to explore, reflect, represent and connect with each other, within an outdoor setting. We will make time and space for childhood wonder and delight.

Preparations:

Children must come prepared for a busy half-day, outdoors. Please be prepared, by doing the following:

- Arrive at the designated location on time.
- Have your child use the toilet before drop-off.
- Have your child's bag or backpack, packed with the following:
 - Change of clothes, water, sack snack/ lunch
- Have your child dressed appropriately, including:
 - Appropriate shoes - Wear shoes that protect feet and that are comfortable for walking (no rain boots, sandals, crocs or cowboy boots, please); consider a hat.
- Apply sunscreen before drop-off.

Orientation: Wednesday, June 1, 6:45 – 7:15 pm, before our evening class.

Cost: \$160/ 4-day week. To be paid by the end of the school year (June 10th)

Our Daily Routine

Drop-Off and Pick-Up: Please park in the back parking lot of the Christian Science Church, at 480 N. Fairview. Follow the signs, visible from the north-east corner of the parking lot, to Fairview Farm. We will gather at Sister Mulberry Tree.

9:00 am: Arrival & Morning Circle Time —Will we gather in the morning at Sister Mulberry Tree. During our morning circle time, we will check in and have each child contribute their ideas for the day. Activity options will be discussed. Free play, self-directed work and creative activities will follow. There will be opportunity for individual check-ins and small group activities as the morning unfolds.

10:30 am: Morning Snack - Children will break for a morning snack, provided by the parent. Filtered water is available at Fairview Gardens.

11:15 am – noon: Continued Activity Time until lunch.

Noon: Picnic Lunch - We will eat our sack lunches under Sister Mulberry tree, unless otherwise specified.

12:45 pm: End-of-the-day Circle Time — We will reflect on our adventures. Sing some songs, share and document our experiences.

1:00 pm: Goodbye—Children depart. Once again, please park in the back of the Christian Science Church parking lot and follow the trail to Fairview Farm.

Appendix D

Plant Protector and Caterpillar protector Pledges

An intervention was needed. Young plants were being pulled out of the garden boxes and monarch caterpillars were being plucked off the Asclepias/ Milkweed, Monarch's only food source. After calling a school-wide meeting, children decided they would be protectors of plants and caterpillars. When children felt they were ready for this commitment, they would ask Sunny, the director, if they could take one of the following pledges.

"I promise to be a plant protector; gently harvest with two hands so the roots can remain in the soil, and only harvest what I will eat or feed to the bunnies" or "I promise to be a caterpillar protector. I will study them with my eyes and allow them to grow strong on their host plants."

Once the pledge was made, a small stamp sized "plant protector" or "caterpillar protector" was ceremonially taped to the child's name tag (see Figure 2). Children would shake hands to bind their pledge. While this practice was initially suggested by the writer, it actually is maintained and perpetuated by the children. These are commitments they are proud of.

Sunny Crandell is director and parent educator at the Oaks Parent-Child Workshop, Santa Barbara City College, California. She can be reached at director@theoakspcw.org.