

# Engaging with Nature Play – the outdoor classroom

## Stepping off the asphalt!

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Aboriginal Education  
Department of Education Tasmania  
knowledge | learning | empowerment



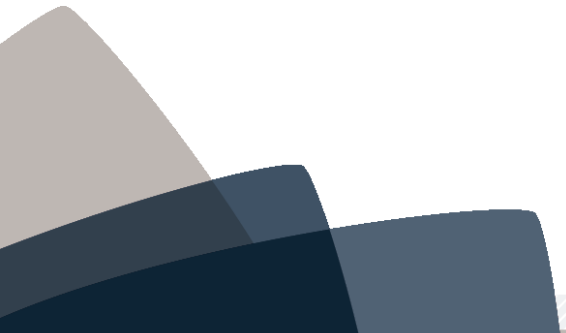








**What's  
your  
story?**





Play is the essence of learning -  
Play is the highest form of research

– Albert Einstein

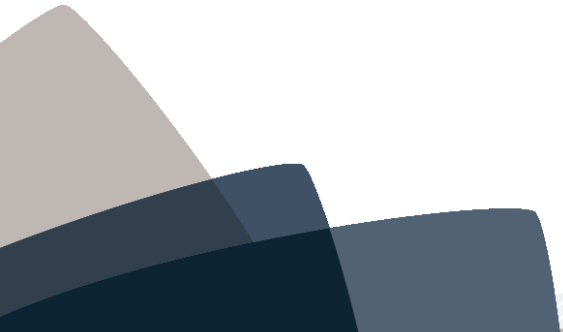
Decorative geometric shapes in the bottom left corner, consisting of overlapping triangles in shades of grey and dark blue.

Without continuous hands-on experience, it is impossible for children to acquire a deep intuitive understanding of the natural world that is the foundation of sustainable development. ....A critical aspect of the present-day crisis in education is that children are becoming separated from daily experience of the natural world, especially in larger cities.”

- Natural Learning, Creating Environments for Rediscovering Nature's Way of Teaching, Robin C. Moore and Herb H. Wong



Time in Nature is not leisure  
time, it's an essential  
investment in our children's  
health – Richard Louv







# Nature play

– unstructured **play** outdoors – is vital to a healthy childhood. ...


**Nature play** is any activity that gets children active or thinking actively outdoors, with the end goal of building skills and ability to **play** without the need for parental or adult control.

Jul 16, 2016

Nature Play in Early Years Education - Nature Play QLD

<https://www.natureplayqld.org.au/nature-play-in-early-years-education>

# Nature Play is...

- Climbing a tree,
  - exploring the bush,
  - building a cubby or searching for shells or bugs.
  - It's about being outdoors and using nature too:
  - It is unstructured play (play without rules).
  - At a park, reserve, forest, bush land area, national park, creek, river, beach or in a paddock or backyard.
- 



# Nature play and learning provides

- experiential opportunities
- allows chn to respond positively to challenges to manage risk and cope with change
- supports skills including inquiry and experimentation
- Language development
- Physical wellbeing
- Critical thinking
- Respect for nature
- Resilience
- Inspiration
- Preserving nature
- Growth mindset

Loose parts theory began in 1970's with architect **Simon Nicholson**, who believed - **loose parts** in our environment empower our creativity.

In a school, backyard, council park or a reserve **loose parts** are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, and taken apart and put back together in multiple ways.

Source: Let the Children Play

[http://www.letthechildrenplay.net/2010/06/loose-parts-  
imaginationcreativity.html](http://www.letthechildrenplay.net/2010/06/loose-parts-<br/>imaginationcreativity.html)







# Scandinavian Forest Schools





60's Reggio Emilia  
Children are  
individuals who are  
independent  
capable of doing whatever  
it is they set their mind to  
are resourceful and  
intelligent.

Documentation. ...

**The Hundred Languages**

The child is made of one **hundred**.  
The child has  
a **hundred** languages  
a **hundred** hands  
a **hundred** thoughts  
a **hundred** ways of thinking  
of playing, of speaking.

A **hundred**.  
Always a **hundred**  
ways of listening  
of marveling, of loving  
a **hundred** joys  
for singing and understanding  
a **hundred** worlds  
to discover  
a **hundred** worlds  
to invent  
a **hundred** worlds  
to dream.

The child has  
a **hundred** languages  
(and a **hundred hundred hundred** more)  
but they steal ninety-nine.  
The school and the culture  
separate the head from the body.  
They tell the child:  
to think without hands  
to do without head  
to listen and not to speak  
to understand without joy  
to love and to marvel  
only at Easter and at Christmas.  
They tell the child:  
to discover the world already there  
and of the **hundred**  
they steal ninety-nine.  
They tell the child:  
that work and play  
reality and fantasy  
science and imagination  
sky and earth  
reason and dream  
are things  
that do not belong together.  
And thus they tell the child  
that the **hundred** is not there.  
The child says:  
No way. The **hundred** is there.

-Loris Malaguzzi  
Founder of the Reggio Emilia Approach



# United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

1990's The Convention changed the way children are viewed and treated – i.e., as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of as passive objects of care and charity.

The commitment to advancing children's rights.

1990 adopted by Australia

## **2008 Melbourne Declaration : Educational Goals for all Children**

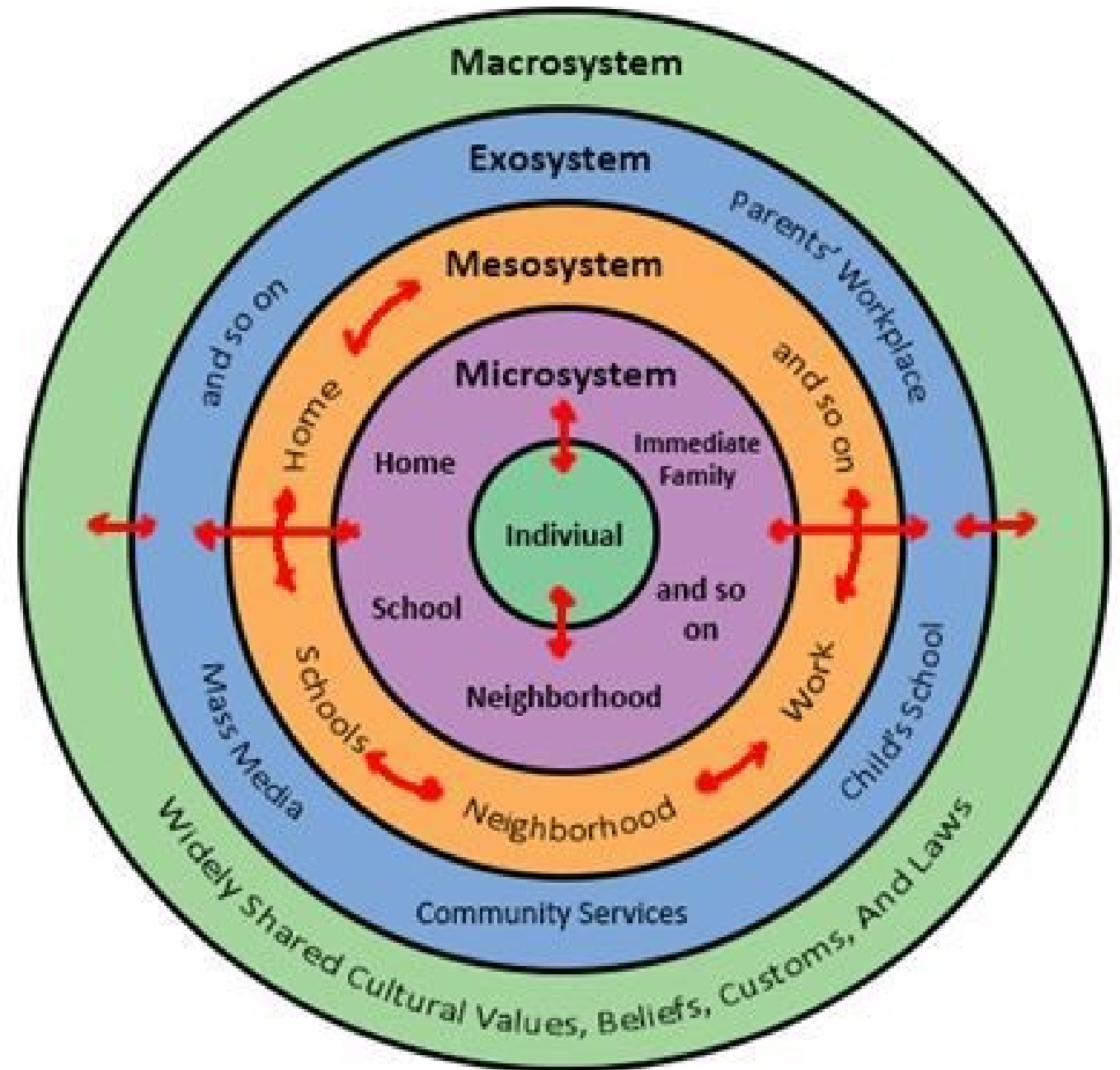
**Goal 2: All young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens**

- **have the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to establish and maintain healthy, satisfying lives**
  - **are responsible global and local citizens.**
- Strengthen early years education and partnerships
- **'close the gap' for young Indigenous Australians**



# Bronfrenbrenner's Ecological Model of the Child

Current influence  
DoE Early Years





# US: Children and Nature Movement 2005



## FREE activities with park admission!

Throughout Indiana, nature centers are hosting Nature Play Days in partnership with the Indiana Children and Nature Network. All of the listed activities are free to the public with park admission and designed to get families and children playing and exploring outdoors.



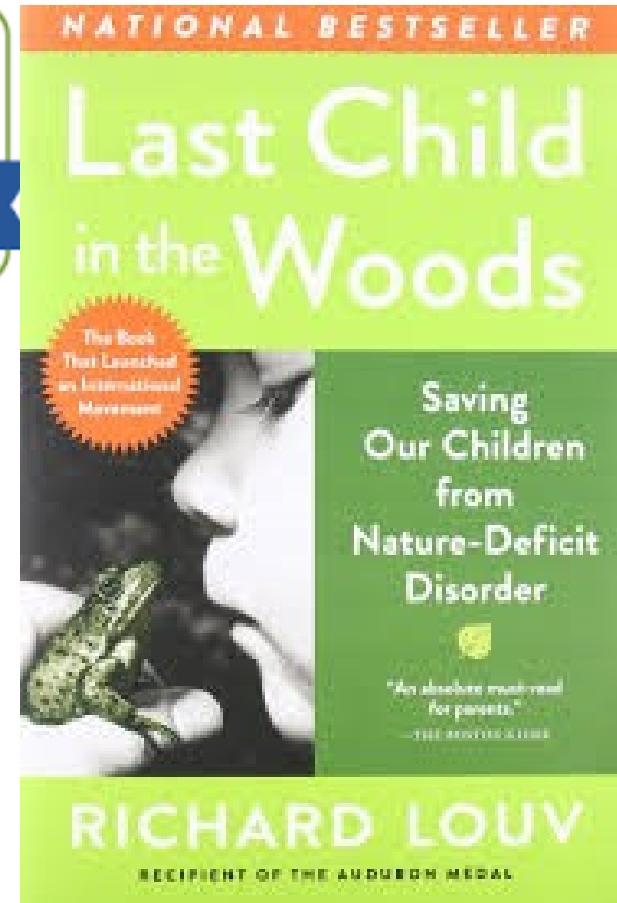
## Nature Play Days

### Earth Discovery Center

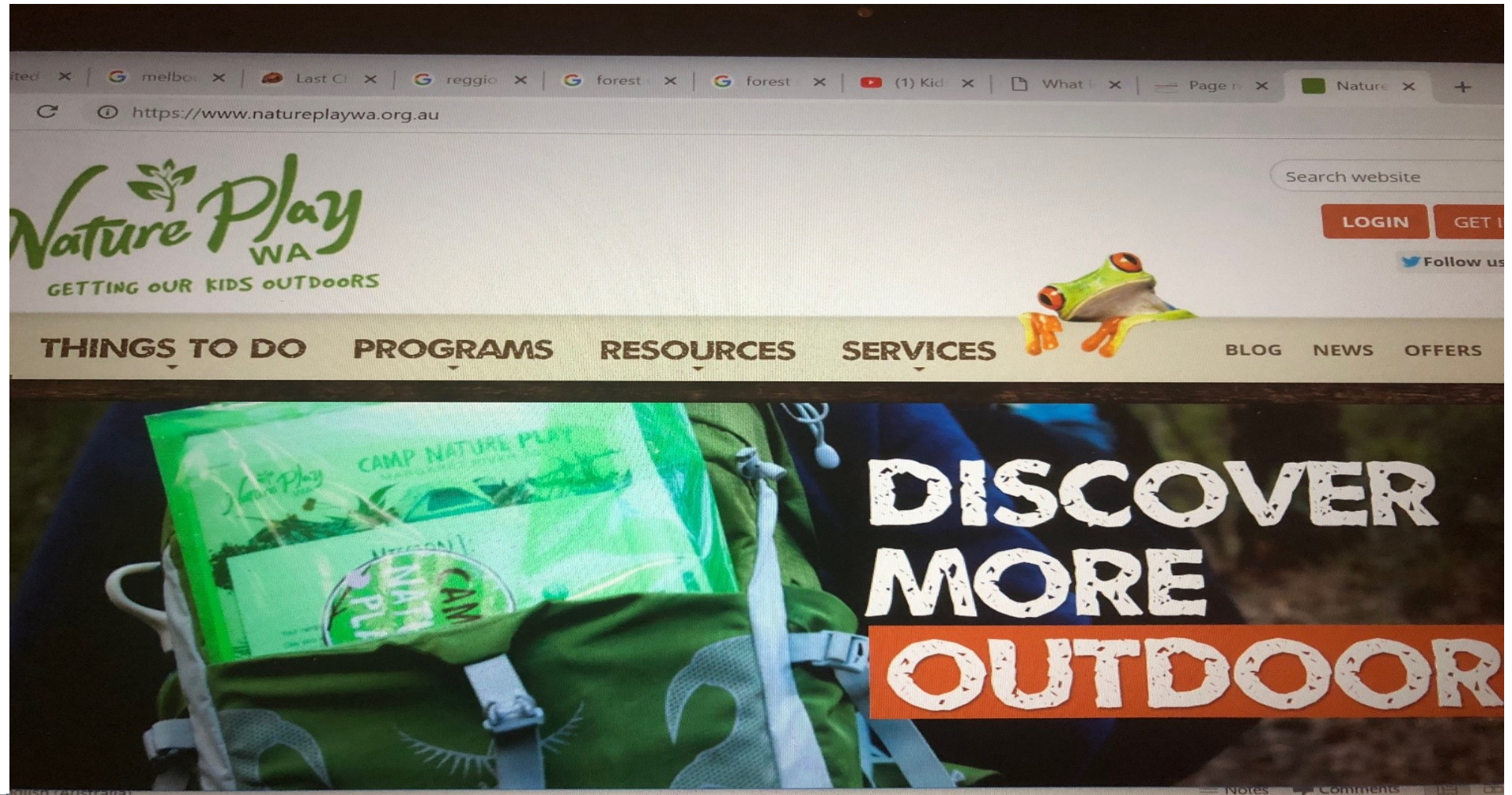
Eagle Creek Park  
5901 Delong Rd. Indianapolis, IN 46254  
317-327-7148

### Ornithology Center

Eagle Creek Park  
6515 Delong Rd. Indianapolis, IN 46254  
317-327-2473



# Australian Nature Play



# What about Risks?

Only 19% of Australian young people meet the national daily physical activity guidelines  
(1 hr per day)

Developmentally our children NEED challenge, adventure and uncertainty.

## Reasonable Risk taking:

- Builds emotional regulation skills
- Develops decision making, planning and judgement skills
- Improves self control, confidence and self esteem
- Promotes perseverance, coping skills and independent thinking.
- When a child takes a risk they aren't being reckless. They are making analytical decisions and shaping pathways in the brain for skills needed to negotiate larger stressors.



List 3 issues, challenges or concerns relating to children and families in your community?

List some ideas that can be used to initiate change? Who would it involve in your community?

List three programs, projects or strategies that have a positive impact with children and families in the community?

Is there a place for nature play strategies in your community programs or plans?



Activating Nature Play  
in your area?

What are the opportunities?  
What's happening in your  
area?

Brainstorm



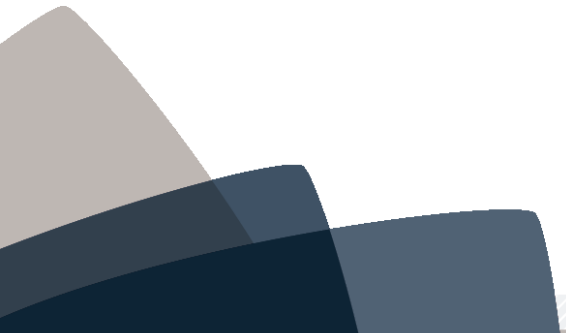
# Possible networks and events.

- Tasmanian Nature Play Networks
  - Schools
- Playgroups/Children's Services
  - Junior Landcare
- Discovery Ranger program
  - Wildcare
- Early Years Educators Professional groups
  - **Events**
- Outdoor Classroom Day   Children's Week October
- Families Week March April   Endangered Species day



I've been  
dreaming about  
coming here.

Jack aged 5



















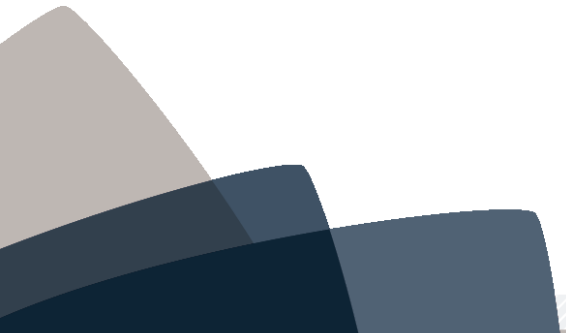






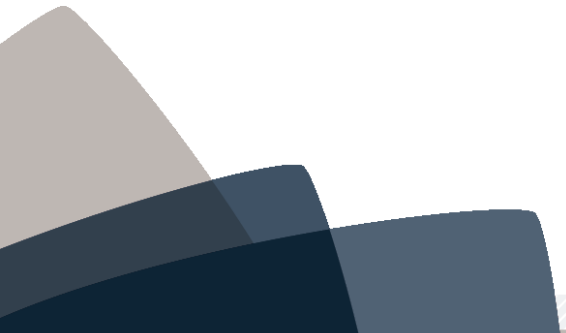
I wish every day  
was Tuesday.

Shakayla age 7



It's like having a  
drink bottle from  
the sky.

Matilda age 6





# Summary of key benefits

Children who play regularly in natural settings are sick less often. Mud, sand, water, leaves, sticks, pine cones and gum nuts can help to stimulate children's immune system as well as their imagination.

Children who spend more time outside tend to be more physically active and less likely to be overweight.

Children who play in nature have more positive feelings about each other.

Source: Children and Nature Network <https://www.childrenandnature.org/>





Adele

Emi ET





# Summary of key benefits continued

Children who play in natural settings play in more diverse, imaginative and creative ways and show improved language and collaboration skills. Single use, repetitive play equipment becomes boring quickly.

Children who play in natural settings are more resistant to stress; have lower incidence of behavioural disorders, anxiety and depression; and have a higher measure of self-worth.

Natural, irregular and challenging spaces help kids learn to recognise, assess and negotiate risk and build confidence and competence.

Source: Children and Nature Network <https://www.childrenandnature.org/>







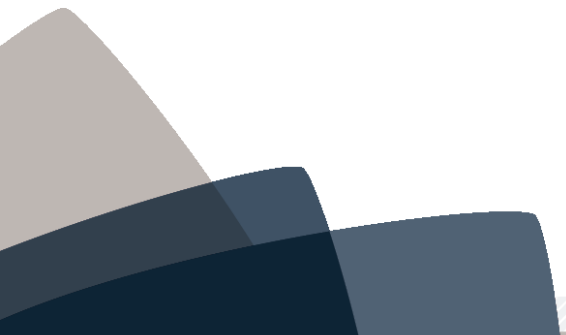


# Summary of key benefits continued

Bullying behaviour is greatly reduced where children have access to diverse nature-based play environments.

Symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder are reduced after contact with nature.

Source: Children and Nature Network <https://www.childrenandnature.org/>











# Learning in Nature provides

- **Deep learning**
  - **Language development**
  - **Physical wellbeing**
  - **Self-awareness**
  - **Critical thinking**
  - **Respect for nature**
  - **Risk benefits**
  - **Resilience**
  - **Inspiration**
  - **Preserving nature**
  - **Multi-disciplinary learning**
  - **Appreciating nature's affordances**
- 













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**“If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered,  
then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to s**

**Perhaps this is what Thoreau had in mind when he said,  
“the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the  
and I think the same is true of human beings.”**

**- David Sobel**

**Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education 1998**





Tasmanian  
Government