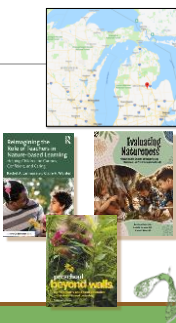




1

A bit about me...

- o Nature-based early childhood education consultant (Founder of Samara Early Learning)
- o 25+ years in education; ~10 of those as a nature-based preschool director
- o Author of *Establishing a Nature-based Preschool, Preschool Beyond Walls, & Evaluating Natureness*
- o Live in Michigan; Grew up on a vegetable farm in Central Illinois



2

Today's Agenda

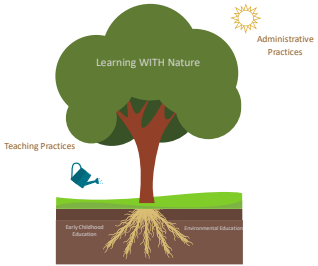
1. Nature-based Pedagogy
2. Trail Map for Change
3. Another view of Inside, Outside, & Beyond
4. Exploration of character traits in our work
5. Growth through Inside work



3

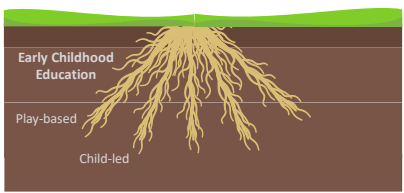
an educational approach where experiences learning WITH nature are core to the teaching & learning

Nature-Based Early Childhood Education (NbECE)



4

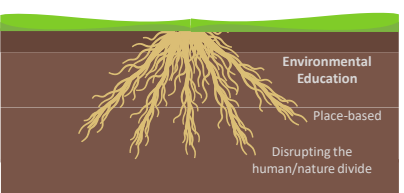
Roots in Early Childhood Education for Whole Child Development



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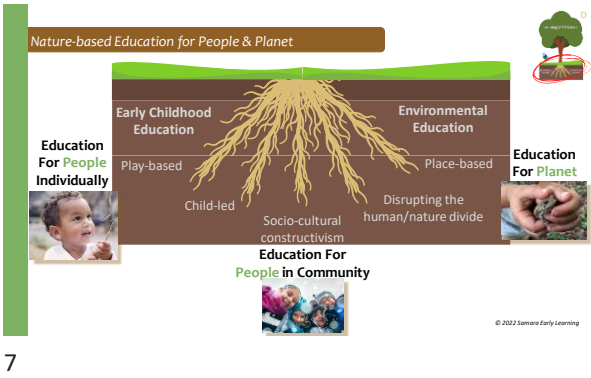
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Roots in Environmental Education for Environmental Sustainability



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6

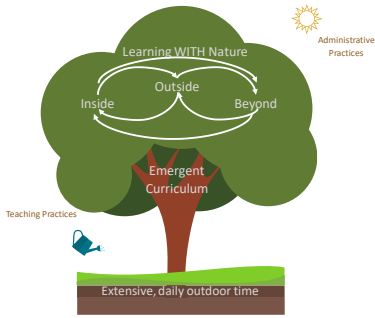


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8

Nature-based Pedagogy



9



Nurturing Nature-based Early Childhood Education

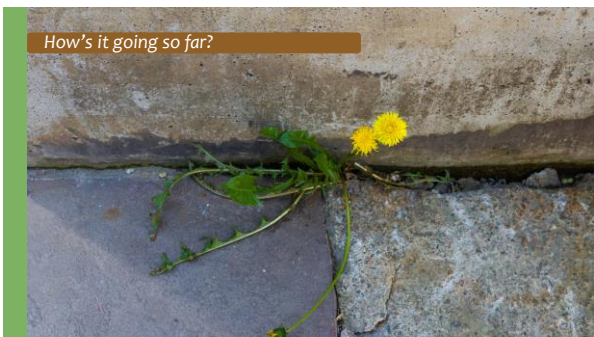
- Administrative Practices**
 - 🌱 Policies & procedures to support pedagogy (e.g., site assessments, risky play)
 - 👥 Staff support (e.g., professional learning for teachers, team planning time)
 - 👪 Family involvement & support (e.g., newsletters, education, social events)
 - 📦 Logistical support (e.g., extra clothing)
 - 💰 Financial support (e.g., budget management, fundraising)
 - 🔧 Ongoing maintenance (e.g., hazard removal)
 - 🗣️ Clearly communicated philosophy (to current & potential stakeholders)
- Teaching Practices**
 - 🏠 **Program Structure**
 - 👦 Prioritize child-led activities (i.e., more free play than teacher-led activities)
 - 🌳 Prioritize outdoor time (e.g., all weather, beginning of the day)
 - 🏡 **Physical Environment**
 - 🌿 Authentic, place-based integration of nature in all spaces
 - 🔩 Prevalence of loose parts
 - 📍 Three learning spaces (i.e., Inside, Outside, Beyond)
 - 👩 **Teacher-child Interactions**
 - 👦 Primarily child-led activities
 - 👩 Teacher-led activities connect learning I/O/B
 - 👦 Co-learners with children
 - 👦 Support of beneficial risky play

10

The Trail Map for Change to Nature-based Pedagogy

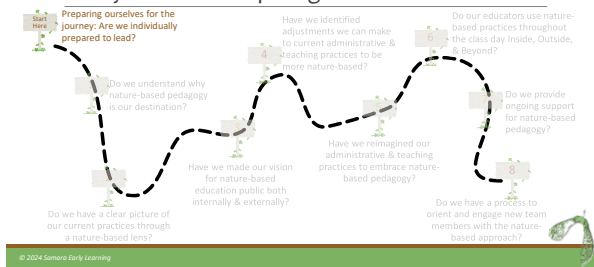


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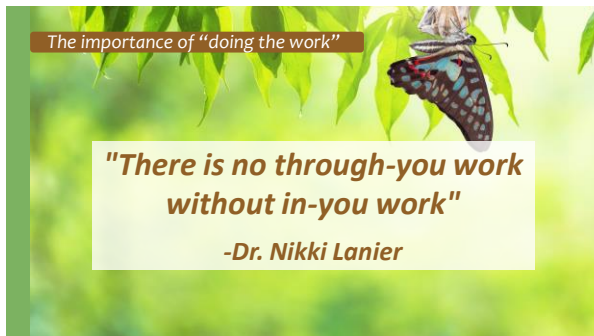


12

Today's Focus—Preparing Ourselves to Lead



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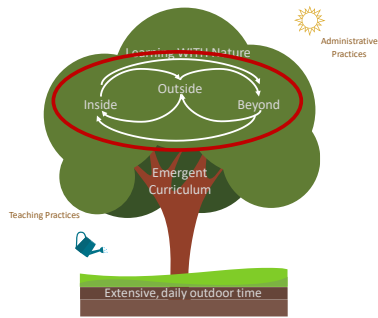
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Today's Agenda

1. Nature-based Pedagogy
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4. Exploration of character traits in our work
5. Growth through Inside work



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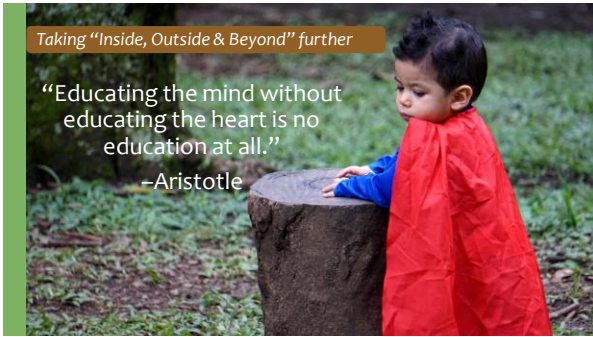
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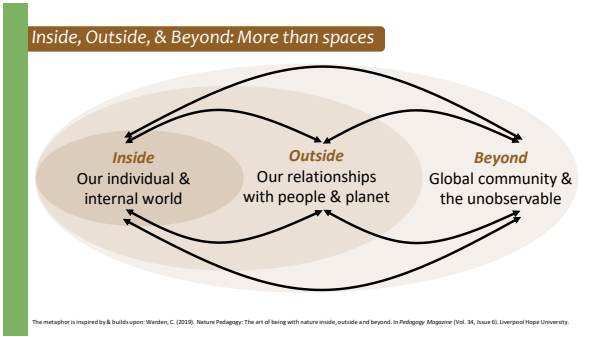
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Inside, Outside, & Beyond: Child perspective



Inside

- Physical health (balance, coordination, etc.)
- Joy
- Identity & self-esteem
- Curiosities & interests



Outside

- Problem-solving
- Compassion
- Empathy
- Curiosity
- Sense-making (regarding others & the planet)



Beyond

- Awe
- Wonder
- Surprise
- Connection to something bigger than themselves

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Inside, Outside, & Beyond: Leaders



Inside

- What is my WHY for NbECE?
- What about leadership brings me joy?
- What about leadership frustrates me?
- What makes me "me"?
- What kind of leader am I?



Outside

- How do I connect with children & families?
- How do I relate with my team? Community?
- What in the world intrigues me?
- What is my relationship with nature?



Beyond

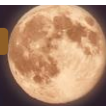
- When do I experience awe & wonder? Of nature? Of other programs?
- How am I influencing the field of ECE?

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All of this work requires self-awareness

“What you create is a result of the relationship between yourself, your co-workers, and the children with whom you work.”

-Rachel Larimore & Claire Warden, *Reimagining the Role of Teachers in Nature-based Learning*, October 2024



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Two aspects of leadership...

Administrative leadership
supporting the operation of the organization



Pedagogical leadership
supporting teaching & learning



...all dependent on the human element!

26

Our character traits impact our work

A few character traits to consider:

- Growth mindset
- Humility
- Control
- Authenticity
- Knowledge
- Playfulness
- Wonderment
- Inclusivity



27

Growth mindset

Growth mindset



I can learn anything I want to

Fixed mindset



I'm either good at it or I'm not

- Belief that we can always learn & grow (Dweck & Leggett, 1988)
- Performance is based on effort not intelligence
- Opportunities for challenges & learning

28

Growth mindset in practice

- 🌱 "Thanks for the feedback"
- 🌱 "Hmm. I wonder if there's a better way to run staff meetings"
- 🌱 "That's cool new research on brain development. I wonder if our approach to problem-solving still aligns?"
- 🚫 "There's nothing you can teach us we don't already know"



Leadership perspective

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Humility

Confident humility... "gives us enough doubt to reexamine our old knowledge and enough confidence to pursue new insights."

- Adam Grant in Think Again

- Openness to learning alongside an accurate assessment of our contributions
- Acceptance of our strengths & human imperfections
- Recognition that we can grow

30

Humility in practice

- ✔ "Oh, I was wrong..."
- ✔ "Welp, that family event wasn't as popular as I thought it would be."
- ✔ "Hmm, I wonder if that parent has a point."
- ✘ "That staff member doesn't have a clue."
- ✘ "That's not in my job description."



Leadership perspective

31

Control



- To maintain influence or authority over
- Letting go of control means being willing to step back
- Frequently emerges regarding schedules & behaviors

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Control & letting go in practice

- ✘ "I need to see your lesson plans every morning."
- ✔ "Sure, you can try mixing up your daily class schedule"
- ✔ "No, I don't need to review your parent newsletter before you send it out."
- ✔ *What needs to be true for me to say 'yes'*



Leadership perspective

33

Authenticity



- The connection between what you say, how you say it, & what you believe
- Being genuine & sincere
- This is the root of trusting relationships

34

Authenticity in practice

- 🌿 "I value you & your thinking"
- 🌿 "I'm not a fan of snakes, but I'm working on it"... "Ope, there's a snake. It's your turn to take over."
- 🌿 "Our teachers are professionals."



🌿 *Supports teacher in adventuring to the Beyond*

🚫 *You must get the speaker to sign your attendance form at PD.*

Leadership perspective

35

Knowledge



- Facts, information, & skills acquired through experience or education
- Can increase adult's confidence in talking with staff
- To prepare for where inquiry might take us

⚠️ Can lead to an urge to "tell"

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Knowledge in practice

- 🌱 *Knows children learn best through play* "How much of your day is teacher-led?"
- 🌱 *Knows behavior is communication* "Hmm, I wonder what need isn't being met at that time of day?"
- 🚫 *Unprompted* "Let me tell you all about child development..."



Leadership perspective

37

Playfulness



- Giving or expressing pleasure & amusement; lighthearted
- Our playful hearts impact the joy in play & learning

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Playfulness in practice

- 🌱 *Goes out to join children in free play occasionally*
- 🌱 *Starts the staff meeting by everyone sharing the newest kid joke they learned*
- 🌱 *Allows staff to tease them*
- 🌱 *Smiles*



Leadership perspective

39

Wonderment

“Wonder, the mental state of openness, questioning, curiosity, and embracing mystery, arises out of experiences of awe.”

“Awe is the feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends your current understanding of the world.”

-Dacher Keltner in Awe (2023)

- Finding wonder & awe in the world
- Brings luster to life
- Requires mindfulness & gratitude

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Wonderment in practice

- “The northern lights last night were incredible!”
- “I read an article about a program what sounded incredible”
- “Wow! I love how you followed children’s ideas like that!”



Leadership perspective

41

Inclusivity



- To receive gladly into one’s presence—even those with different experiences & perspectives than our own
- Creates a sense of belonging for co-workers, children, & families

42

Inclusivity in practice

- 🌱 *Lists the pay rate in the job description*
- 🌱 “Absolutely you can bring your baby to the staff meeting. We’d love to have you both.”
- 🌱 “I know starting a new job is stressful. I’m happy to help if you have any questions about anything”



Leadership perspective

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Our character traits impact our work

A few character traits to consider:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| Growth mindset | Knowledge |
| Humility | Playfulness |
| Control | Wonderment |
| Authenticity | Inclusivity |

What other traits would you add to this list?



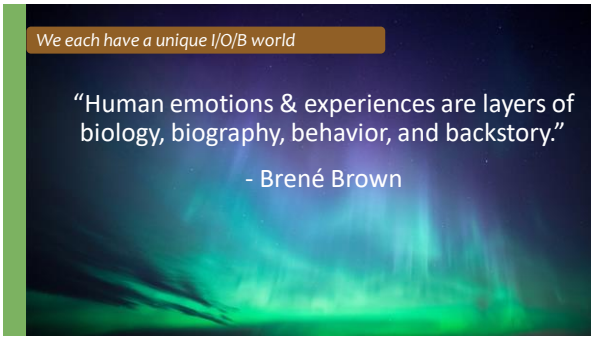
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Staying in our prefrontal cortex takes work

- Feelings aren't facts
- It takes work to remind our brain of that...
- ... to calm our nervous system & return to our prefrontal cortex (*just like children!*)

47

87 Human Emotions & Experiences

Based on the research of Oliver Sacks in 'The Mind's Eye'

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| <p>Feels like an ocean Things Aren't Quite What They Seem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disorientation Confusion Loneliness Isolation Alienation Disconnection Disorientation Disorientation Disorientation Disorientation | <p>Feels like an ocean We Compare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparison Admiration Envy Jealousy Resentment Disappointment Disappointment Disappointment | <p>Feels like an ocean Things Don't Go As Planned</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disappointment Disappointment Disappointment Disappointment Disappointment Disappointment Disappointment Disappointment | <p>Feels like an ocean It's Beyond Us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helplessness Powerlessness Helplessness Helplessness Helplessness Helplessness Helplessness Helplessness | <p>Feels like an ocean Things Aren't What They Seem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disorientation Disorientation Disorientation Disorientation Disorientation Disorientation Disorientation Disorientation |
| <p>Feels like an ocean We're Drowning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm | <p>Feels like an ocean With Others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Isolation Isolation Isolation Isolation Isolation Isolation Isolation Isolation | <p>Feels like an ocean It's Full Throat</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm | <p>Feels like an ocean We Search for Evidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm | <p>Feels like an ocean The Heart Is Open</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm |
| <p>Feels like an ocean It's In Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm | <p>Feels like an ocean We Don't Recognize</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm | <p>Feels like an ocean It's Half Access</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm Overwhelm | | |

48

| ANGRY | DEPRESSED | CONFUSED | HELPLESS | INDIFFERENT | AFRAID | HURT | SAD | JUDGMENTAL |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| enraged | mad | suicidal | paranoid | lost | paralyzed | cold | terrified | insecure |
| malicious | crisis | directionless | disoriented | disheartened | dejected | lifeless | panicked | wary |
| infuriated | reluctant | empty | dejected | disheartened | dejected | uncaring | panicked | resented |
| violent | overbearing | desperate | cheerless | frustrated | dejected | unconcerned | frustrated | upright |
| victorious | incensed | in hell | resistant | incoherent | numb | apathetic | dejected | agitated |
| furious | spit | alienated | crabby | incoherent | numb | apathetic | dejected | agitated |
| rebellious | irritated | alienated | crabby | incoherent | numb | apathetic | dejected | agitated |
| seething | controlling | miserable | punishing | incoherent | numb | apathetic | dejected | agitated |
| scornful | agitated | miserable | punishing | incoherent | numb | apathetic | dejected | agitated |
| hitting | arguing | depreciable | crabby | incoherent | numb | apathetic | dejected | agitated |
| reprimanding | self-hating | depreciable | crabby | incoherent | numb | apathetic | dejected | agitated |
| revengeful | envious | self-critical | burdened | incoherent | numb | apathetic | dejected | agitated |
| hate | about | deprecating | closed | argumentative | vulnerable | slow | envious | unbending |
| insulting | questioning | blame | closed | argumentative | vulnerable | slow | envious | unbending |
| assailing | questioning | blame | closed | argumentative | vulnerable | slow | envious | unbending |
| condemning | stubborn | ashamed | light | condescending | irascible | blame | draining | inhibits |
| offense | rebellious | exhausted | blockad | entombed | out of | blank | draining | inhibits |
| aggressive | insulting | exasperated | loopy | hesitant | trapped | weak | draining | inhibits |
| tearful | corrosive | dejected | no energy | disillusioned | sick | scared | self- | infringed |
| passionate | disappointed | dejected | no energy | disillusioned | sick | scared | self- | infringed |
| frustrated | unpleasant | down | loopy | comparing | figery | frustrated | conscious | frustrated |
| resentful | disappointed | down | loopy | comparing | figery | frustrated | conscious | frustrated |
| critical | dictional | discouraged | drawn | demanding | craving | shaky | bulbous | grinning |
| snobbish | snapping | hopeless | slouching | slouching | slouching | slouching | secretive | form |
| jealous | jealous | guffy | self- | conflicted | compulsive | self- | self- | self- |
| stern | tempered | bad | switched | switched | switched | switched | switched | switched |
| | | burned out | | | | | | |

From Byron Katie; TheWork.com

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| OPEN | LOVING | HAPPY | INTERESTED | ALIVE | POSITIVE | PEACEFUL | STRONG | RELAXED |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|
| free | devoted | blissful | fascinated | playful | impassioned | calm | hardy | glowing |
| interested | passionate | joyous | integrated | courageous | enthusiastic | content | secure | radiant |
| receptive | compassionate | delighted | amazed | energetic | bold | quiet | stable | looming |
| accepting | affectionate | overjoyed | amazed | enthusiastic | bold | certain | honest | reflective |
| kind | benign | gleeful | curious | excited | strong | reassured | reliable | smiling |
| harmonious | loving | elated | inquisitive | optimistic | hopeful | serene | sure | grounded |
| empathetic | attracted | thrilled | curious | frisky | moderate | good | certain | unfazed |
| tolerant | admiring | euphoric | involved | animated | in the zone | at ease | dynamic | open-minded |
| understanding | warm | thrilled | amused | spirited | eager | confident | tenacious | efficient |
| easy | loving | elated | amused | thrilled | keen | pleased | composed | non-controlling |
| connected | close | ecstatic | amused | wonderful | earnest | encouraged | self-affirming | unassuming |
| sympathetic | loved | satisfied | thoughtful | funny | upbeat | surprised | trustful | trusting |
| friendly | sweet | glee | courteous | great | creative | bright | supportive | supported |
| agreeable | gentle | glee | inert | strong | constructive | blissed | excellent | light |
| outgoing | compassionate | sunny | focused | sharing | helpful | assured | perseverant | spontaneous |
| flexible | allowing | fun-loving | equal | intelligent | helpful | clear | responsible | aware |
| welcoming | nond judgmental | enjoying | equal | intelligent | helpful | clear | responsible | aware |
| listening | respectful | enjoying | equal | intelligent | helpful | clear | responsible | aware |
| embracing | humble | happily-go-lucky | active | conscientious | approving | adequate | solid | wasting |
| | gracious | innocent | youngful | innocent | vigilant | praiseworthy | authentic | lovingly |
| | patient | innocent | youngful | innocent | vigilant | praiseworthy | authentic | lovingly |
| | honoring | gratified | gratified | gratified | gratified | gratified | gratified | gratified |
| | expansive | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful |
| | kindly | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful |
| | tempered | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful | grateful |

From Byron Katie; TheWork.com

50

Doing the work

What your triggers are trying to tell you...

- If you often feel triggered by...
- The fear of someone leaving
 - The fear that you will be rejected
 - Receiving feedback or criticism
 - Not feeling worthy or good enough
 - Authority figures
 - Being told what to do
 - Conflict
 - Hypersensitivity
 - Feeling ignored and dismissed
 - Feeling and repressing emotions
 - Fear of being a burden
- you might need to heal (even...)
- Emotional or Physical Abuse/Abandonment
 - Not being accepted for who you were as a child
 - Excessive or harsh criticism from caregivers/teachers
 - Low self-esteem
 - Feeling helpless or powerless
 - Being controlled as a child
 - Fear of anger or confrontation
 - Drum up in an unsafe or unpredictable environment
 - Being neglected and invalidated as a child
 - Observed and galled for feeling emotions
 - Being told you were too much
- © ENPHOLOG SEARCH

- Awareness of the feeling & the trigger
- Reflection on why that trigger
- Doing intentional work to be free from the trigger or respond in a more helpful/helpful way

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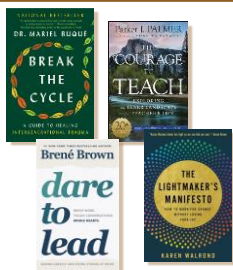
Ongoing self-reflection is part of the work



- How did my attitudes & fears affect my interactions with the team today?
- Was I fully present in interactions with co-workers this week?
- How do I view children? Co-workers? Families?
- Did I smile today?
- And so much more...

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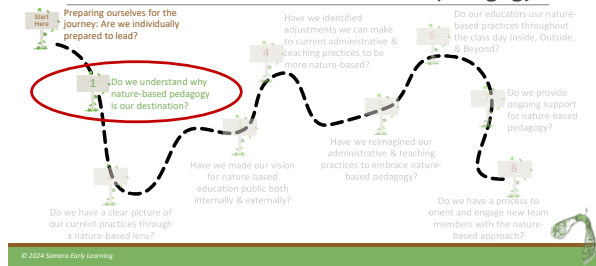
Doing the work



- Books
- Podcasts
- Personality tests*
- Therapy (no crisis needed for therapy!)
- Coaches

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More inside work: WHY nature-based pedagogy



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Nature is Necessary for Healthy Development

- **Physically**—balance; coordination; active; illness recovery; myopia prevention
- **Cognitively**—engaging all of the senses; creative thinking; better concentration
- **Socially & Emotionally**—problem solving; interacting with peers; ability to handle stress
- **Spiritually**—connecting to something bigger than themselves
- **Building lifelong stewards!**



Visit Children & Nature Network's Resource Hub for more research!

55

Exploring WHY

"I want to teach with nature so that _____."

Reflection questions:

- Of all the benefits, what rises to the top for me?
- What about nature-based education excites me the most? The least?
- What about being outside with kids brings me the greatest joys? Greatest stress?
- If I was explaining to my best friend why I was excited about this new direction at work, I would say...



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Where we've been today...

1. Nature-based Pedagogy
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First Things First on the Nature Journey



58

Pause to reflect...



- How might you use the language of Inside, Outside, & Beyond differently?
- Have you fully explored your I/O/B perspectives & how that relates to your work as a leader?
- How might you initiate (or continue) conversations with your team about the social aspects of I/O/B?

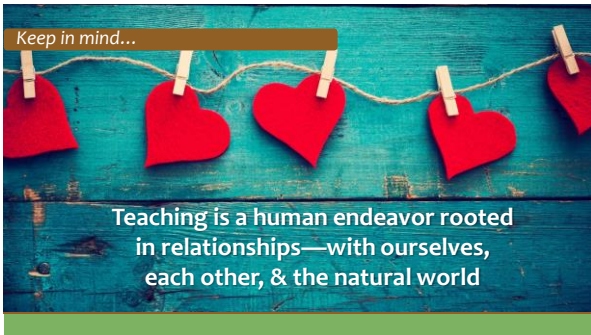
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It's a nature journey!

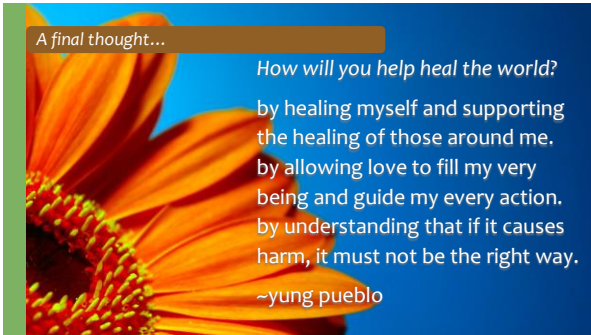
- Start from where you are
- We won't all end up in the same place
- But we're all headed in a similar direction



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Thank you!

Scan to take the Nature Journey quiz & get your custom Toolkit!

Samara
Early Learning
Helping nature-based education take flight

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