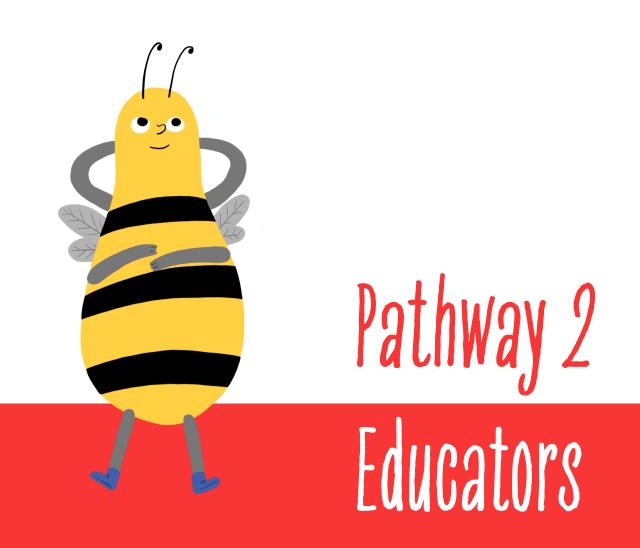


learning and support materials



Ideas and activities inspired by the animation *Learning to Thrive* to support reflection by educators for pedagogy and practice.







Lifeworlds Learning







The importance of noticing

The animation *Learning to Thrive* begins by reminding us that we live in *'an amazing place full of wonder and surprise'* but the challenges faced by our world and the busyness of everyday life can mean we fail to notice this on a regular basis. The simple act of noticing can bring considerable personal benefits and help us feel more connected to where we live and to those around us.

These reflective ideas and activities have been inspired by the animation *Learning to Thrive* and encourage more purposeful noticing of the world around us and of nature especially.

As educators, noticing can be beneficial for our own well-being, but can also lead to innovative and engaging ideas about how to support children and young people to thrive.

Noticing through time

Creating opportunities to regularly notice nature can enhance the benefits further. Repeated engagements can strengthen the

Learning to Thrive

Noticing things in nature can...

- ...improve mental wellbeing
- ...make us happier and more content
- ...make us feel part of nature
- ...make us more caring and responsible
- ...help develop a positive outlook on life

connections we make and noticing over time can help us to observe changes. The following ideas could help you to make noticing nature part of your regular routine:

- Trying to actively notice one thing in nature every day
- Revisiting the same place at regular intervals throughout the year to see how things change
- Creating a *nature notebook* to record your observations in nature
- Sharing your observations with family, friends, colleagues. Sharing them on social media may encourage others to get involved.

Noticing fully

Noticing is not just about what we see or hear. Try to notice the feelings that you experience when noticing things in nature. This wider noticing can support our social and emotional wellbeing and linking our observations with emotions can help to build stronger memories and meaning.







ACTIVITY: Sense your space

Taking time to simply notice your own space, wherever it is, can be surprising and rewarding. Go outside and take in whatever you find in your immediate environment.

- What do you notice when you start to sense your space more purposefully?
- Do new things come into view, perhaps things you'd not paid much attention to before?
- Can you hear sounds that may have just been part of the background noise before?
- What do you feel?
- Can you sense the weather through your touch?

Expand your noticing a little further, perhaps with a short walk in your immediate area or by consciously noticing on the way to work. Zooming in and zooming out can help to notice in new ways too. Do you see or hear anything new or different from how you remember it? How might active noticing in this way make you think about your local environment in a different way?

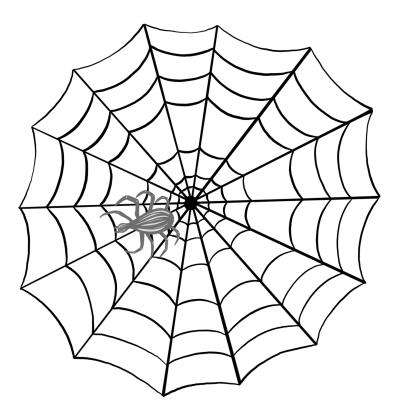
If you were to capture the highlight of your noticing with one word, or perhaps with one image, then what would this be?

How might what you notice change with the seasons, the day-to-day weather or even the time of day? Try noticing regularly and at different times to expand the ways in which you imagine and relate to your local spaces and with nature.

ACTIVITY: The joy of wildlife

Watching wildlife can be a really meaningful way of noticing the nature around us. Whether it is a spider spinning a web, a column of ants busy supplying their nest, a snail making its way slowly along a wall, birds soaring above or fidgeting in nearby bushes.

For many of us, noticing wildlife is a joyful experience but actively noticing this joy seems to bring added wellbeing and stress reduction to humans. A University of Derby study focussed on bird watching found that those who were asked to rate the feeling of joy that different birds visiting their garden brought to them had a greater reduction in anxiety than those who were simply asked to count and identify the birds. It seems that actively noticing the joy of wildlife (and nature more broadly) might be something that could benefit us all.



Next time you have the opportunity to notice nature and wildlife focus on the joy it brings into your life whether it is a particular plant or animal, a certain colour or movement, or perhaps a specific smell. Anything can bring a sense of joy, but it seems that the benefits are greatest when we actively notice this.





ACTIVITY: Sharing nature

Building on the idea above, sharing nature with others can also bring benefits as it combines both nature and social connections. Look at these ten statements that share the ways in which we might talk about and share nature with others:

"You should see how bright the moon is tonight!" "I was driving home and saw a bird of prey swoop with great speed - it was amazing" "The mist this morning on the way to school was almost magical" "The birds are so noisy today - I wonder what's got into them?" "I noticed a tiny spider making a beautiful web on the fence today" "Have you seen all the leaves are turning now - winter must be coming" "I saw two squirrels chasing each other through some trees - it looked such fun!" "A new bulb has poked up through the grass this morning" "The grasses are so tall now" "The air was full of seeds and pollen today - it was like rain"

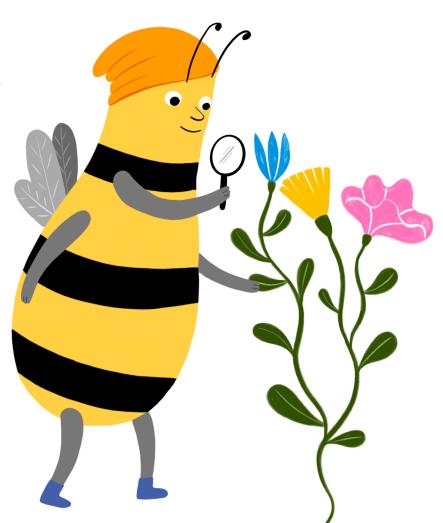
Think about a time you noticed something in nature and shared it. Who did you share it with and why did you feel you wanted to share it? When somebody tells you about their nature experience, how does it make you feel?

Sharing our nature experiences more consciously can make noticing nature normal. Try and actively share the things you notice and see where the conversations take you.

As an educator you could do this with your learners, perhaps by having a daily sharing on a board or as part of a check-in before learning.

You might model it to begin with -*"today I noticed..."* - but after a time maybe learners would contribute their own ideas too.

If you use social media you could share what you notice even more widely by turning it into a meme for posting to the world!







ACTIVITY: Appreciating nature in learning

There are some obvious times when nature intersects with learning, such as when studying lifecycles or food chains in science; on a field trip for geography; drawing flowers in art; reading a nature-based story in literacy. But what about the rest of the time?

Noticing the less obvious ways that nature shows up in learning can help to strengthen the connections that you and your learners have with nature. Even simple things like having nature-based images on displays are thought to have a calming and nurturing influence.

Reflect on how you could be pro-active by noticing opportunities where nature comes up in learning, whether it be in a story, a subject focus, or a more cross-curricula topic/theme. You could use nature-based counters when teaching maths, or nature-based images to inspire some creative writing.

One of the ways that many young learners do encounter nature is through learning about the threats or challenges that nature faces. Topics such as deforestation, endangered species, environmental pollution, and climate change, for example, frequently involve using imagery of nature in a distressing state. Whilst it is important to ensure that learners understand such issues, the use of imagery that shows only the problems can create higher levels of stress or even anxiety.



Using more positive imagery to show how humans are positively responding to these challenges (using renewable energy, planting trees, caring for wildlife and environments etc.) can be used to deliver the same learning content but support learners to feel more hopeful and aspirational that something can be done. Practice suggests that more appreciative or generative approaches such as this can lead to a greater sense of agency and can channel the energy and emotions that such issues might create into more positive and meaningful outcomes.

Appreciating nature with young people can help them to build a life-long skill of being able to connect more actively and purposefully with nature. There is evidence to suggest that where nature connectedness is strong, so too are social skills, emotional resilience and general wellbeing, but in order to do this as educators we need to be able to do this too; to take time and notice for ourselves and our own wellbeing.





Connecting

The importance of connecting

Even the most independent individual is connected in multiple ways to other people, places, even times, through their activities, consumption and day to day living. These words from Martin Luther King in 1967 share this idea powerfully:

'It boils down to this, that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in a network of inescapable mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality. Did you ever stop to think that you can't leave for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world?

'You get up in the morning and go to the bathroom and reach over for the sponge. It's handed to you by a Pacific islander. You reach for a bar of soap and that's given to you at the hands of a Frenchman. And then you go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning and that's poured into your cup by a South American.

Learning to Thrive

Positive connections can...

- ...improve critical thinking
- ...encourage creativity and curiosity
- ...make us happier and more content
- ...give us a sense of belonging
- ...make us more caring and responsible

Maybe you want tea, that's poured by a Chinese. Or maybe you're desirous of having cocoa for breakfast and that's poured by a West African. And then you reach over for your toast and that's given to you at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. And before you've finished eating breakfast in the morning, you've depended on more than half the world.

'This is the way our universe is structured, this is its interrelated quality. We aren't going to have peace on Earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of all reality.'

The next set of ideas and activities support you to reflect on your own connections, focussing on your locality and the people you share it with but extending to include less visible connections too.









REFLECTION: How am I connected?

We are connected to each other and to nature in different ways:

Some connections are links that we may be unaware of or we spend little time thinking about. For example, the food we eat is connected to people, plants and animals that are close to home and far away. Where does a banana come from? Which insects pollinated it? Who looked after it while it was growing? Who picked it? Who sold it to you? Does thinking about these connections provoke any thoughts or feelings?

Other connections are meaningful and matter a great deal to us. Who matters to you? Who do you go to when you need help or are worried? Do you have or have you had a pet that you loved? Do you love to spend time in a garden or a park? Do you belong to community groups, play sports, or enjoy arts and leisure with other people? What feelings do these connections generate?

Still others are fleeting moments of connection. They may be to a person or to something in nature and can sometimes stay with us for the rest of our lives. Have you ever watched something for the first time when you've been out on a walk - a spider weaving a web or a bee visiting a flower? Can you remember where you were the last time you noticed the stars? Have you ever met or noticed someone briefly who has made a big impression on you for something amazing they have done or said? What feelings emerge when you remember these moments?

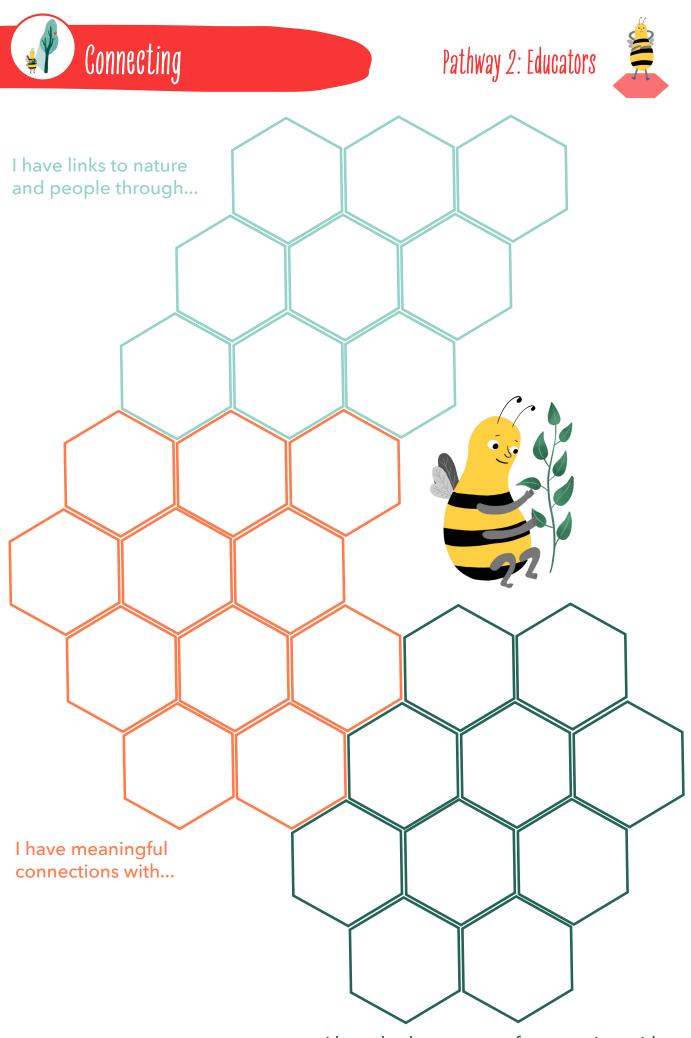
All these connections and experiences can affect how we feel inside.

We also have opportunities to connect with our own selves in different ways. Through activities that help us relax and be more mindful, we can become better tuned in to our thoughts, feelings, and our health. How do you take care of yourself? Do you make sure you get the sleep you need? Or do you practice yoga, meditation, play sport or listen to music? How are others affected when you take better care of yourself?

Our network of connections is a bit like a beehive and is constantly changing. At its best, it can provide safety, security, nourishment, a sense of belonging and comfort. Every time we leave the safety of our 'hive' and discover something new, we have an opportunity to bring it back to all those we are connected with and to reconnect with ourselves too.

You could use the template of a hive on the next page to think about how you are connected in different ways. You might prefer to draw your own hive or express your connections in another way that is meaningful for you.





I have had moments of connection with...



REFLECTION: The nature in this...

Connections with nature are increasingly recognised for the benefits they bring to humans in terms of both physical and mental health. These connections are also important for nature. It is suggested that people who feel a closer connection to nature are more likely to care for it and make choices that help to protect nature.

Look around you and try to find the nature in the things around you:

- What nature can you see from where you are?
- Can you hear nature or sense it in another way?
- What is the weather doing today and how does that connect with choices you made?
- What about the materials around you. How do they connect to nature?
- What are you wearing and how does that link you to nature?
- Are you eating or drinking something and where does nature come in?
- What are you reading (apart from this) and are you taking notes on anything?

Once you stop to think about it, nature is all around us all of the time, but we have often created divides between people and nature that hide the ways in which nature is in plain sight. As you move through your day, try to find the nature in your connections. The simple act of identifying connections can help to make us feel closer to nature and part of something bigger.

REFLECTION: Nature is me and I am nature

This builds on the previous idea but goes a little deeper to encourage reflection on not only our connections with nature but our interdependence with nature. Use the simple table below to think about different aspects of your life and how they create an interdependence between you and nature. A third column is included to encourage reflection on how we can help nature as part of this relationship. A couple of examples are given and some themes/areas to consider are also suggested.

THEME	I need nature to	Without nature I	I could help nature by
Water	provide water for my needs	would not have water to drink	conserving water, reducing pollution
Clothes	provide the raw materials for what I wear	would not have clothes to wear	buying only what I need, recycling old clothes, buying eco- friendly clothing

Other themes you could explore include travel, food, housing, work, and leisure but you could apply the idea to any theme that you wanted to explore. The idea is not to be exhaustive, but to better appreciate our connections and interdependence with nature and in doing so be better able to support others to do so too.

<u>NOTE:</u> In pathway 3 there are activity ideas that you could use with learners to support them to think about their connections in a similar way.





The importance of being playful

Play is an essential part of being human and key to our thriving, but we sometimes forget to think about play as adults, perceiving it to be something related to childhood. These ideas and activities are intended to explore wider perspectives on play and encourage reflection on how you see play in your own life. They can also be used to think about how play intersects with your role and practice as an educator.

A report from the University of Cambridge on 'The Importance of Play' emphasises the positive attributes of play, stating:

'The value of play is increasingly recognised, by researchers and within the policy arena, for adults as well as children, as the evidence mounts of its relationship with intellectual achievement and emotional well-being.'

Learning to Thrive

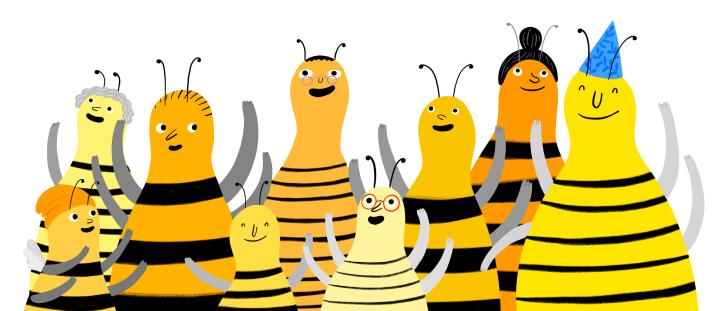
A playful outlook can...

- ...improve critical thinking
- ...encourage creativity and curiosity
- ...strengthen social skills
- ...build emotional resilience
- ...benefit mental and physical health

Nature and play

For many of us our first encounters with nature come through play. Think splashing in puddles, making mud pies, kicking fallen leaves, playing with sticks or any one of many other activities. As we age these activities might migrate to making dens, creating natural art, flying a kite, climbing trees, wild swimming, outdoor pursuits (climbing, canoeing). Nature is a great partner for play, providing us with surprises to overcome (weather, obstacles etc.) or opportunities to make the most of (resources, observations etc.).

As you move through these reflective ideas you might like to think about how you could incorporate nature into being playful, both for yourself, for your colleagues, and for your learners.





ACTIVITY: Play personalities - which are you?

The US-based National Institute for Play identifies eight distinct play personalities. They suggest that everyone has unique 'triggers' that move them into a playful state and that what is playful for one person might not be for another. Play is complex, and most people will identify with several play personalities, although perhaps one will be stronger than the others. Before looking at the play personalities it is perhaps useful to review what we mean by play:

The characteristics of play all have to do with motivation and mental attitude, not with ... the behaviour itself. Two people might be throwing a ball ... or typing words on a computer, and one might be playing while the other is not. To tell which one is playing ... you have to infer from their expressions and the details of their actions.

Dr. Peter Gray, author of Free to Learn

Consider following play personalities, adapted from the National Institute for Play, and think about which ones best suit you. What about others you relate with through your role – what do you think their play personalities are? What might they think yours were?

Collector

You find joy in the act of collecting things or experiences. This could be done on your own or in collaboration with others. It is the act of collecting that brings about a playful mindset.

Explorer

You are driven to seek things in life, whether physically (new places), emotionally (new experiences) or cognitively (new learning and perspectives).

Competitor

You find joy in winning whether against yourself (a personal best) or against others (being the best). Competition can come through direct participation but also through more passive roles such as being a supporter. It is not limited to sport, but to all walks of life.

Creator/artist

You feel most playful when making and creating things. This could be for personal pleasure or public sharing; functional or purely artistic; creating something from scratch or about repairing or reconditioning something.

Director

You find joy and playfulness in the planning and running of events or in having the power to make things happen. You enjoy the organisation and details that go into making things happen, not just for you but for others too.

Joker

You find play and joy in foolishness and laughter, whether through humorous exchanges, a love of comedy or through practical jokes.

Kinesthete (mover)

Play and enjoyment for you comes from movement. You enjoy pushing your body to be active whether through dance, sport, yoga, walking or activities around the home – anything that enables movement.

Storyteller

Your imagination is the centre of play for you whether in the form of creating stories (novels, plays, poems, cartoons) or interacting with others' stories (movies, books, theatre). Excitement and possibility are often key to finding joy through play.







Having considered your own play personality try expanding your experience of play by adopting a play personality that wouldn't normally be you. Can you find the playfulness in it? How does it make you feel?

How might others feel when we expect them to play in a way that suits our stronger play personality? How does your play personality show up in nature? How might you be able to play in and with nature?

ACTIVITY: Synonyms for play

Many people associate play with children or with being childish. It is often thought of as the opposite of work ("stop playing around and do your work!") or being serious. A report from the Psychology and Education Department at Cambridge University on the importance of play points to a very different understanding of play:

'Play in all its rich variety is one of the highest achievements of the human species, alongside language, culture and technology. Indeed, without play, none of these other achievements would be possible.'

The animation, Learning to Thrive positions a playful outlook as being central to helping children to discover and learn new skills and characteristics. It is important for adults too. The National Institute for Play reports that adults who continue to play/be playful are more likely to have stronger emotional resilience when confronted with stressful conditions.

In *Learning to Thrive* the following language is used in relation to play:

Essential	Experience	Sense
Outlook	Possibilities	Imagine
Alternative Futures	Dream	Different point of view
Thrive	Let go	Beneficial
Permission	No limits	New Ways

Which of these words/phrases most closely resonate with your own idea of play/being playful?

Think about the language that you might use in day-to-day teaching or educational settings and which of these words or phrases could be considered synonyms for play. Some examples might include:

imagine, experiment, visualise, discover, estimate, explore, design, collaborate, create

- You could make your own list of synonyms for play/being playful and continue to add to it as you • discover new ones.
- Be as playful as you like with this! Perhaps they can be organised into different forms of play or • play related to different subjects or aspects of your setting.
- What might happen if you consciously used the words 'play' and 'playful' more to encourage a life-• long positive relationship with play (in its broader sense) for your learners.

NOTE: There is an activity in pathway 3 that supports learners to re-imagine play should you wish to do this directly with children and young people.

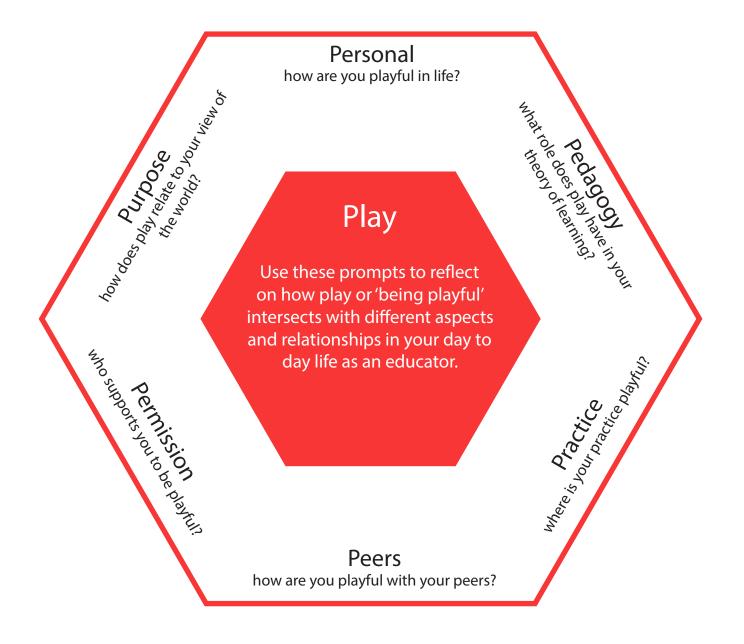




ACTIVITY: Play in my world

This activity uses a simple template prompt to support reflection on how play intersects with your world as an educator. Each side of the cell poses a different question in relation to one aspect of your world as an educator. These aspects work together to determine the relationships you have with play and playfulness but breaking them down can help to reflect on play more critically.

- Start wherever feels natural for you and work your way around the prompts in a way that is meaningful to you.
- Try to remain appreciative and generative in your responses thinking about where play and playfulness does feature (remembering the broader understanding of play from earlier activities in this element) rather than where you might feel it is missing.
- When you have considered each prompt, you might like to think about how you could make it more consciously playful in the future. Where does nature feature in your responses and what would including nature more, mean for playfulness in your world?







ACTIVITY: Play for my learners

The National Institute for Play identifies several different types of play on their website. We have summarised these below as a series of cards to be used in this reflective activity thinking about play for your learners.

1. Cut out the cards and then create a continuum (as illustrated below) with 'Rarely' at one end and 'Often' at the other.

- Often Rarely —

2. Play with arranging the cards along the continuum in response to each of the following question prompts:

How often do you think your learners engage in each type of play...

- a) ...in the classroom
- b) ...in the playground
- c) ...at home (as far as you are aware. What evidence are you drawing on?)

Are there any others you would add?

For a detailed review of play and its benefits see the 2017 report <u>'The role of play in children's</u> <u>development: a review of the evidence</u>

Body and **Movement Play Play-type cards** Actively using their (cut out and arrange along continuum) bodies and mobility. Rough and **Celebratory and Object Play** Tumble Play **Ritual Play** Relating to objects through use or Making memories and Enjoying physical (but manipulation. friendly) interaction expressing themselves through customs/ and experiences. traditions etc. Imaginative **Social Play** Storytelling and Play Narrative Play Relating with others. Using their power of Using the joy of story imagination. to engage with the world.





The importance of wellbeing

Improving our relationship with nature may bring numerous physical and mental health benefits. An important factor in this is the emphasis on quality and frequency and less on the quantity of time in/ with nature. In other words, shorter and regular quality engagements with nature appear to be at least as beneficial as isolated extended time in nature.

Experience suggests that nature can be especially beneficial in reducing stress or anxiety, and support higher levels of creative and critical thinking. In turn this can contribute to a greater sense of wellbeing and help us to thrive in uncertain times.

The ideas and activities in this element are intended to give you time for your own wellbeing as an educator to think, reflect, and ground yourself with some of the ideas raised in the animation *Learning to Thrive*.

Learning to Thrive

Nature-based wellbeing can...

- ...benefit mental and physical health
- ...build emotional resilience
- ...encourage creativity and curiosity
- ...build healthy relationships with nature









ACTIVITY: Walking our Lifeworlds

We all walk through life carrying our life experiences, culture, and identity with us. In our busy lives we may not be conscious of these worlds or aware of how they influence our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. We refer to these worlds as our 'lifeworlds' and Walking our Lifeworlds is an invitation to walk and immerse yourself in nature, with a purpose related to your own lifeworld.

"To stimulate thinking, to move reflection forward, to deepen inventiveness, the mind needs the help of an active body. "

Frédéric Gros (2015) A Philosophy of Walking

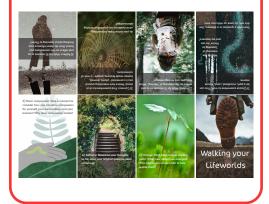
As an educator, and in the context of connecting children and young people with nature, the purpose of this walk is to take time to reflect on what 'Learning to Thrive' means for you and your learners.

People often say they spend time in nature to help regain or restore balance in their lives. If you have been immersed in the life of school, university or college, busy doing, but with little time to reflect on why you are doing what you are doing, then this walk could help you towards a place of discovery and reveal something new... a realisation, an idea, a decision.

- Download and print a copy of the <u>Learning to Thrive zine</u> onto A4 paper and use the instructions <u>here</u> on how to fold and cut it into a zine.
- Take the zine with you to a place where you can walk and give yourself time to reflect. This could be a park, a woodland, a canal, the beach, a lake, or a nature reserve.
- Your walk starts with a question and there are prompts in the zine to help you reflect on the question. You might like to take a notebook and pen/pencil with you to jot down ideas.

Using a zine

A 'zine' is a small home-made magazine. It can be used for anything (a recipe, a game, a story) but here we have used it for a series of prompts in connection with the animation *Learning to Thrive.*



- Make sure you dress appropriately for the location/weather and have supplies (water, snack etc) if you need them. Hunger can be a major distraction!
- If you take a mobile phone with you might like to consider turning it onto silent mode and packing it away to avoid your thoughts being disturbed by the outside world.







ACTIVITY: Bathing in Nature

What comes to mind when you think of the word 'bathe'? We tend to associate bathing with immersion, usually in water, perhaps in a bathtub, a lake, a river, or a hot tub and with slowing down, switching off, relaxation and cleansing.

Forest Bathing, or bathing in nature is similar. It invites us to completely immerse ourselves in the natural environment, take time to slow down, pay attention to ourselves, others, and our environment. It is about intentionally cleansing the mind, the heart, and the soul.

Not everyone has easy access to forests, but the idea of forest bathing could be transferred to anywhere that you are able to 'immerse' yourself in/with nature for a time. The idea is to give yourself time to fully encounter nature using all five senses.

The idea of immersion may not be comfortable to everyone and whilst some may be able to relax deeply in a 'wilder' environment, others may find this intimidating or scary and prefer a less wild encounter with nature.

About Forest Bathing

Forest Bathing is a well-practiced activity in Japan where it is called Shinrin-Yoku. It is prescribed by the Japanese health service (and in South Korea) for its well-being and health benefits.

The Forest Bathing Institute which explores the scientific benefits of forest bathing reports the following benefits of forest bathing based on evidence from studies in Japan:

- Reduce blood pressure
- Lower stress
- Improve cardiovascular and metabolic health
- Help you to lose weight
- Lower blood-sugar levels
- Improve concentration and memory
- Lift depression
- Increase anti-cancer protein production
- Improve pain thresholds
- Improve energy
- Boost the immune system





You should consider your own feelings and relationship with nature before exploring bathing in nature. It is intended to improve wellbeing – not be a source of anxiety or stress! If you want to try this out for yourself then you might find the following guidance adapted from other sources useful:

- Leave devices behind (or turn them off) to maximise your opportunity to relax, free from distractions, and benefit from all of your senses.
- Slow down. Move slowly and allow yourself to absorb the environment-seeing and feeling the space you are part of.
- Breathe deep and steady breaths. Exhaling at twice the length of inhaling helps the body to naturally relax.
- Pause frequently and stand, sit, or even lie down if safe to do so. What can you smell? What do you hear, and can you locate the sounds in your surroundings? How does the air taste?
- Use all your senses to take in the nature around you. Notice how you feel. What emotions do you identify with?
- Take a longer rest and silently observe your surroundings. Try to avoid thoughts of day to day and issues and remain focussed on what you observe, notice, feel in the moment.
- Notice the colours around you and notice how they soothe you. Greens and blues have been shown to be especially relaxing.
- Remain in nature for as long as you are able to but do not make yourself uncomfortable by being too long! Stay as long as you can and build it up gradually.

"A two-hour forest bathe will help you to unplug from technology and slow down. It will bring you into the present moment to de-stress and relax you. When you connect to nature through all five of your senses, you begin to draw on the vast array of benefits the natural world provides."

Dr Qing Li (2018) Shinrin-yoku: the Art and Science of Forest-Bathing





References and Credits

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Wellbeing

Walking our Lifeworlds Walking our Lifeworlds is a collaborative project between <u>Lifeworlds Learning</u> Community Interest Company and Live Well, Learn Well.

Forest Bathing The Forest Bathing Institute Science and Research

Qing Li (2018) 'Forest Bathing' Is Great for Your Health. Here's How to Do It

Credits

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