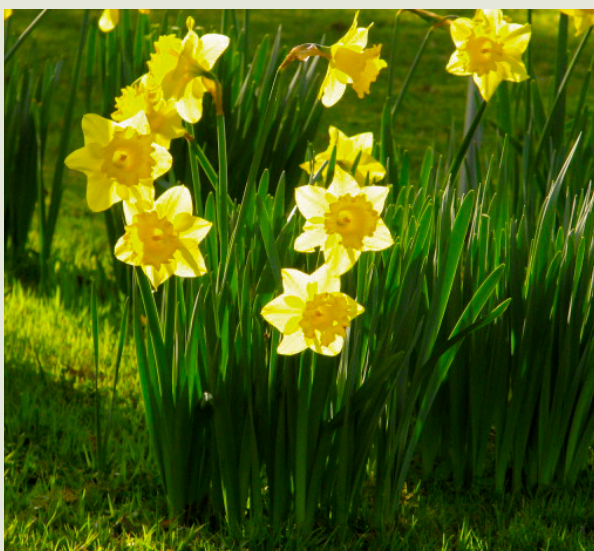


The Wonder of Spring

How will your children notice the changing seasons in a way that will give them real, authentic knowledge of the way Life unfolds in the place where they live and play?

Most of us 'did Spring' somewhere in our education. We were given the templates of skipping lambs to draw around, cut out and stick cotton wool on. They gave us yellow paper and a model we could copy, and if ours was good enough, we could put our 'daffodil' onto the class freize of daffodils. We might even have been given pink crepe paper or pink tissues and shown how to make paper blossoms to tie onto a bare branch and hang from the ceiling. It is true, many of us enjoyed these busy-work activities, but the activities themselves carry absolutely no knowledge of the season called Spring.



Early Childhood centres and schools that planted bulbs in February will have real daffodils now. Some Early Childhood centres have been told to dig out their bulbs by Ministry of Education Officials who are fearful of children eating the bulbs. But children do not dig bulbs out of the lawn and eat them, instead they enjoy the flowers. Every school serves the children well when there is a focus on flower gardens, food gardens, fruiting trees, shrubs and vines. You don't have to be an official eco-school to teach ecoliteracy; you just have to get out there.

If we don't stop to think about real learning and authenticity, we too could pull these old ideas out and think we had 'done' Spring, and yet another generation will have little idea of the magic of Spring. They would have no idea about what transformations are happening at 'their place'. It is the transformations taking place that constitute the real stuff of Spring, so our task is how to become aware of the unfolding in a way that is not forced. Fortunately, that has got easier as technology has got smarter. So here is one way:

Recipe

- a camera - nearly every centre/school has a camera (or the teacher has a phone with camera) and most modern cameras have a good zoom function
- at least one deciduous tree - or many deciduous trees, the more the better
- at least one evergreen tree - or many evergreen trees, the more the better
- at least one fruit tree - the more the better
- at least one blossom tree - the more the better
- a patch of grass or weeds that is just starting to flourish after the winter - you can dig up a clump and put it in a planter box
- the herbs and veges in your vege garden
- some curious children who notice even the smallest thing
- at least one curious adult who notices even the smallest thing
- a good dose of Wonder

In a centre/school where the teachers, owners and managers are ecoliterate and understand Belonging - Mana Whenua, there will be at least one plant from each category growing in the centre grounds. If your place is bereft of plants, you will have to use the plants nearby in the street; or you can bring branches in with you and keep them alive by feeding them with sugar in the water, and keeping the water clean. For the long term, wait until Autumn and plant for ecoliteracy and

Belonging. If you know nothing about trees, ask around in your community - tree lovers will be only too pleased to advise you.

Method

- Start by looking at what you can see, and DON'T teach, not even the name. You just notice and wonder together - and take a close up picture.
- Print the picture out and stick it on the beginning a long freize
- Come back the every day if it is in your centre - or in a few days' time if you have to go out of your centre, you keep an eye on it and you judge.
- You WILL NOT TEACH, you all just wonder and notice - and take another picture.
- Print it out and stick it on the long freize.
- Repeat as often as is required.

Along the way the children will ask all the questions that need to be asked for them to build their body of knowledge, to grow in ecoliteracy. When they ask, you will NOT TELL them. You will wonder alongside them:

Child: "What is it?"

You: "Not sure yet, shall we wait and see what happens?"

We could make a guess though?"

Child: "What is it for?"

You: "Good question. We might have to see what it is first and then we see if we can work that out. But look at

that neat red bit there. I reckon you could guess what it is doing there."

Falling in Love with Life

When you and the children have fallen totally in love with the miracle of Life unfolding, when you have it documented with marvellous photos - write it up and put it in your newsletter to remind parents what a stunning little planet we live on. Send it to 'The First Year's Journal' or to the 'Space' magazine to inspire other teachers who are working out how to offer authentic opportunities in our quest to Belong.



Every acorn was once a flower that looked like this. Look for the flowers and then follow them with your wonder and your camera until the autumn.

PS: I don't know whether to give you a preview, or let you discover for yourself, but sometimes, when we have no idea what we are looking for, we can miss it even when it is staring us straight in the face. So here are a few hints:

- Every tree will flower - the flowers will look different from 'garden flowers', but they do the same job - the flowers make seeds of Life.
- Every plant (except ferns and moss - they have a different plan) will flower to make seeds for the Cycle of Life to keep going on and on and on...
- Every animal makes new Life to keep the Circle of Life turning.

Pennie Brownlee, August 2013



When you watch a pussy willow over time it becomes obvious what 'that neat little red bit' was doing earlier. Children can discover this themselves, and you can add your bit to bring richness to the tapestry children are weaving in their hearts about Spring.