



Children Twig To Nature In The Digital Age

By Natasha Milne



I grew up in suburban Melbourne where climbing trees barefoot was a rite of passage, angry birds were swooping magpies in nesting season and blackberries were things you picked off a bush. Today, only [one in four children in Australia has climbed a tree](#), Angry Birds is an app game and blackberries are smartphones. While we might spend hours debating the why and how, the fact is that [inmates in maximum-security prisons now spend more time outside than 87% of Aussie kids](#).

Technology is often cited as a major contributor to our

increasing disconnection from nature. Research has shown that as we further distance ourselves from nature, we are re-wiring the brain with losses in areas associated with memory, empathy and concentration. Connection to nature is directly linked to physical and mental wellbeing and greater engagement with family and community. So, how do we take that technology, which is partly to blame for this "[Nature-Deficit Disorder](#)," and use it to reconnect children to nature?

As a photographer, this is something I wanted to explore. So, I created a pilot project with

Photo Credit: All images by students participating in TWIG2 Nature Project

five Sydney schools. Armed with smartphones, digital cameras and iPads, students in various grades produced photo essays based around ways of viewing their natural world.

Since it could be used across every subject and grade, the teachers were enthusiastic to participate and what they found was that students really benefited from the photo essays. By paying attention to things like composition, critical thinking around aspects of nature and ways of showing what they

connected to, students could produce simple works to be shared with others through [Instagram](#) and school exhibitions or fundraisers.

Students also got the opportunity to answer some questions about the project. Of those who completed the survey, 65% of students said that their feelings for nature had changed because of the project and 58% said they were spending or want to spend more time in nature.

When asked what they liked about nature, almost all said they found nature calming, beautiful and peaceful. All of the students said that they either enjoyed or loved the project, with reasons ranging from not having to sit in class, to being able to express themselves more. All said they would like to do more projects like this because they are "fun" and get them out in nature.

In answering what they felt was the most important thing affecting nature - 65% of students said "litter and pollution," while other students said "cutting things down," "eating animals" and one student responded "most of the things we make ends up with nature dying." In answering why they thought nature is important - most students cited the necessity of nature for life, one student said "because it gets rid of all the stress that the city or town gives you"; and another said "we are born to the nature".

Of course it would be wonderful

to see more children out in nature without a smartphone. But since technology is not going away, perhaps schools can encourage students to use this technology in positive ways; ways that help them reconnect with nature whilst expressing themselves creatively.

Resources

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