

# Bringing Art to Life

## Creative Nature Connection for Educators

Lisa Lipsett EdD

*Indigenous cultures have long used art as a way to weave humans into nature. Art that balances thought, feeling, sensation and intuition opens us to nature's wonders. Whether we see ourselves as artists or not particularly creative; drawing and painting by following where nature leads is a powerful tool for deepening this connection. In this article you will learn to draw and paint in a fresh way that will awaken you to nature through your own creativity. You will use both hands, close your eyes, change perspectives, and use different senses while you create.*

*Take CNC back to your school and watch what happens when children are invited to track the wandering trail of an ant as they draw. Or notice how engaged they become when they close their eyes to draw the texture of a pine cone. Ask them to paint with both hands while listening to a bird call, or the equally natural sound of other children in the playground, or of their own breath. Marvel at their powers of attention. The practice of CNC deepens focus, strengthens concentration, builds drawing and painting confidence, and leaves a lasting impression. It inspires reflection that invites curious questions that become the backbone for integrated nature learning/research across subject areas. This work is for anyone looking for a simple yet inspirational way to engage in nature connection through the arts. After you experience Creative Nature Connection (CNC) for yourself you can confidently share it with colleagues and students.*

### In this article....

Brief overview of theory and practice of art as a way to connect with nature  
GO SLOW and the CREATE cycle of Creative Nature Connection

An 8 day practice of experiential hands-on drawing and painting with nature

Practical considerations of going outside

How to weave CNC into an integrated curriculum

Resource list

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Blog at [www.thedrivetocreate.com](http://www.thedrivetocreate.com)



# Bringing Art to Life:

## CREATIVE NATURE CONNECTION for Educators

Lisa Lipsett EdD

The educational challenge of our time is to prepare ourselves and our students for lives that fit harmoniously with nature.

*If we want children to flourish we need to give them time to connect with nature and love the Earth, before we ask them to save it.*

-David Sobel

Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the heart in nature education

To this end, there is much to be learned from indigenous peoples many of whom still maintain a deep connection with nature through practices that strengthen relational knowing (Harvey, 2005; Narby, 1998; Barrett, 2011; Castellano, 2002; Young, Haas and McGowan, 2010). As geo-philosopher Dave Abram (2010) recounts,

*We know what the animals do, what are the needs of the beaver, the bear, the salmon and the other creatures, because long ago men married them and acquired this knowledge from their animal wives.* -Carrier Indian, BC. (p.259)



*Earth-Mind*

Lisa Lipsett 1999  
acrylic on paper  
24" x 30"

We can become animal, vegetable, wind, trees, clouds... We can learn directly *with* nature. When we connect with this intention we access a rich source of knowledge and a powerful sense of belonging. We also become better equipped to make decisions that are sustainable for ourselves and other living beings. We become heartfelt participants who open to and listen to the living world as we learn to co-create with her (van Boeckel, 2013).

Said differently we can re-develop a language of direct communication that opens us to nature's complexity and beauty in more of our daily moments. This language is creative and according to environmental writer Derrick Jensen (2000), it is "a language older by far and deeper than words. It is the language of bodies, of body on body, wind on snow, rain on trees, wave on stone. It is the language of dream, gesture, symbol, memory". Nature's language is artful, spontaneous, embodied, in the moment, engaged and nourishes a resilient fit between all members of the Earth community.

As educators how can we go about teaching this when so many of us, including myself, never had training in this area?

We begin with ourselves. We open to our birthright- our senses, intuition and hearts (Harding, 2009). We open to our embodied wisdom and animate our inherent primal human drive to connect and create.

*New visions do not come from blueprints in our heads that are shaped by past experience and old habits of thinking. They are born as we interact with our world, and receive fresh sensations and perceptions. And for that we need earth and body, the stuff out of which we are made.* -Macy, 1991:84

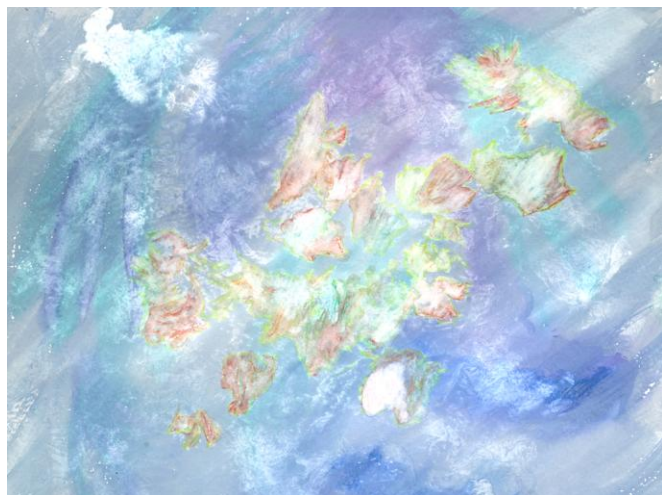


Tulip painting

This article details Creative Nature Connection (CNC)- a nature based drawing and painting practice that strengthens a sense of belonging, deepens understanding of nature, sparks curiosity and wonder about how nature works, while it heightens sensitivity to patterns, textures, and cycles of the living world. It is powerful, easy to learn and awakens us to the potency of our creativity while it builds respect for art as a way to know, and even deeper respect for the living Earth. We can learn this practice ourselves then share it with our students.

### How I came to do this work...

As an environmental educator whose classroom program was rich in nature learning and whose personal time was often spent outdoors, I longed for more depth, connection, meaning and artfulness in my day to day. For years I dabbled in drawing and watercolour painting, carefully recreating the beautiful plants and trees around me in finely wrought images, but something always felt missing. I longed for creativity to become a way of life, a way to co-create with the elements, and a practice that would help me more deeply understand myself and nature. It was not until a cool rainy morning in 1997 when I drew and painted a vase of tulips, that everything changed. The tulip painting was technically fine and the colours were beautiful but somehow both the act of painting and the resulting image didn't express the life I could sense in those flowers.



Felt tulip painting

Out of sheer frustration, I followed the impulse to paint the way the tulips felt instead of the way they looked. Until that day it had never before occurred to me to paint a resonant feeling connection with another living being. I simply set that intention, sat quietly, closed my eyes and using my hands, painted whatever came. The painting was not what I expected yet I loved it instantly. It was not only the vibrant colours and unique shapes that I loved, I also felt blissfully nourished by the process itself.

I was enchanted by the sense that something normally unseen was magically brought to light and was excited by the infinite possibilities "feeling painting" provoked. I was inspired to explore further.

I wondered what would happen if I simply began recording feelings, then painting with no plan. Each day I began with a journal entry and used that writing as a jumping off point for a painting. Over time, I developed tricks (like closing my eyes and using my non-dominant hand) to help soften my planning mind while painting so I could learn to trust what came spontaneously from my body. This slowly released the tension between what I was taught to think and do when making art, and what felt natural in the moment. Paint gave colour and form to my



felt experience, allowing me to see and more deeply feel my inner state. I watched in rapt fascination as images transformed over time. Thinking was balanced with feeling, sensing and intuiting. I learned how to attune to nature using art as a bridge. Soon I came back to life with renewed connection, creativity and gratitude.

There is magic in following a painting practice over time. As a child, I held a



Cecropia caterpillar

strong fascination with Cecropia silk moths and their stages of metamorphosis. I'd forgotten this until I began to paint. Like beings peeking out from the darkness, these same creatures spontaneously appeared in my paintings spurring me to remember a pivotal childhood memory of my first encounter (Lipsett 2009). Now these gorgeous creatures are both a creative inspiration and a personal touchstone. Every spring, I hatch cocoons and this year two pairs of moths mated producing eggs and soon after, caterpillars. Right now there are five caterpillars chomping on my apple tree. I haven't seen a Cecropia caterpillar since I was eight years old so this is very exciting. Last week I was able to draw and paint with the biggest one, enjoying its gorgeous vibrant colours, amazing sticky feet and incredible nubby body.

I have learned that setting the intention to connect then create leads to a never ending journey of self discovery and intimacy with the living world that both renews and informs.

To help others develop a practice of their own I offer the Creative by Nature Art Boost- a program of daily nature inspired activities to ignite a fresh creative habit and Creative Nature Connection- a nature based art program for professionals and schools.

## CREATIVE NATURE CONNECTION

### Strengthening a Natural Fit

*At this point I still don't understand how it works, but I accept that it does work and that it has great value for me. When I finish painting it gives me the feeling of release. I feel calm and satisfied. It is an outlet for stress, and it enables me to connect with something greater.*

University of  
Saskatchewan student,  
2012.

The life spark of a seed at the moment of germination, the undulations of a pine bough in a stiff breeze, the meandering line of an ant in the cool earth, the spontaneous play of a child and human creative expression are all part of nature's creative language which is spontaneous, embodied, in the moment, engaged, artful and nourishes a resilient fit between all members of the Earth community. Through creating we not only express our fit with nature in the moment, we also strengthen this fit as we open to nature, sense her more fully and develop a habit that nourishes for a lifetime.

The word 'fit' is related to the Germanic or Old Icelandic 'fitja' meaning junction, connection or to knit. It is also related to the Old High German 'fizzon' to surround, 'fizza' yarn, and is related to an early sense of 'fit' in English which means a meeting or a coming together with an adversary of equal power (Chambers Etymological Dictionary, 1988).

In his book *On Creativity* physicist David Bohm describes art making as a “*fitting together*” or to “*fit*”, and “*beauty*” as “*to fit in every sense*” (1998: 89-90). So by creating *with* nature and self we not only gain aesthetic satisfaction by making something we love, we speak nature’s language and feel the beauty of connection with other beings. As archetypal psychologist James Hillman (1981) says, “*beauty is not physical, it is within the act of connection, it is breathing in to our beings other life*” pg. 7.

We drop into a contemplative non-thinking state; better remember our encounters; have artefacts from the connection in the form of images that help us to clearly see change over time; we connect creative body to creative body and not only realize that we too are nature but somehow feel more *natural*, more in tune with the life around us. We awaken an ancient way to know. Art-making is a uniquely human creative response to the experience of our animal nature (Dissanayake, 1995). So the creativity envisioned here is done in the service of both humans and the more-than-human world and can also be described as “*art for life’s sake*” (Nachmanovitch, 1990: 181). We live more harmoniously with the natural laws that govern all life.

There are three stages to developing a full CNC practice. First we learn to track something we love with our senses, hands, eyes, and bodies while we express our experience through drawing and painting. We track a plant or animal in the moment and keep track of the encounter with colour and line. We take our time to feel comfortable and to get good at doing this over and over again. Then we spend time working from the inside-out exploring our inner landscape through spontaneous drawing and painting as it relates to body sensation, feelings, inquiry and intention. In the third stage we intermix outside-in creating with inside-out spontaneous creating to experience the reality of a boundless fluid dance between the two. In all stages we emphasize the following four ways to work:

### Closed Eyes

*I shut my eyes in order to see.*

-Paul Gauguin, Painter

When we create with our eyes open we can be seduced by the idea of creating something in particular so we spend time creating with our eyes closed. With eyes closed we flow and feel the sensations associated with nature connected creating. By moving away from the outward grasping habit of seeing, we open to a fresh way of relating. If we can’t see what we’re doing then judgments soften and expectations fall away. Other senses kick in and we pay more attention. We can move beyond surface details and no longer see nature as simply another pretty picture. We let go of our need to control an image and move aside as it is born before our eyes.

### Use Both Hands

*Let your hands be your eyes.*

-Ruby Elena, Grade 5 student

We open to the wholeness of ourselves when we create with both hands. Both right and left brains are invited into the creative process. So we draw and paint with both hands and paint without brushes. Materials bridge between the creator and nature when we follow where the hands spontaneously lead. Creating without brushes is often surprising and relaxing as the mind sinks into the textures and sensations of succulent coloured hands and fingertips. We learn to trust the wisdom of our bodies.

### Let nature and images speak

*Everything has its own voice. Thunder and lightning and stars and planets, flowers, birds, animals, trees...*

-Thomas Berry- Ecotheologian

When we are finished drawing and painting we often ask an image or another being if there is anything it would like to share. Then we record the answer. We also take time to reflect when we complete the sentences, “*I noticed...*” and “*I wonder...*”. We develop a new way of listening, characterized by no preconceived notions about what nature might be trying to say and how it might be trying to say it. We open to receive messages and to fully listen again to ourselves and nature.

### Express Gratitude

*If the only prayer you said in your whole life was “thank you”, that would suffice.*

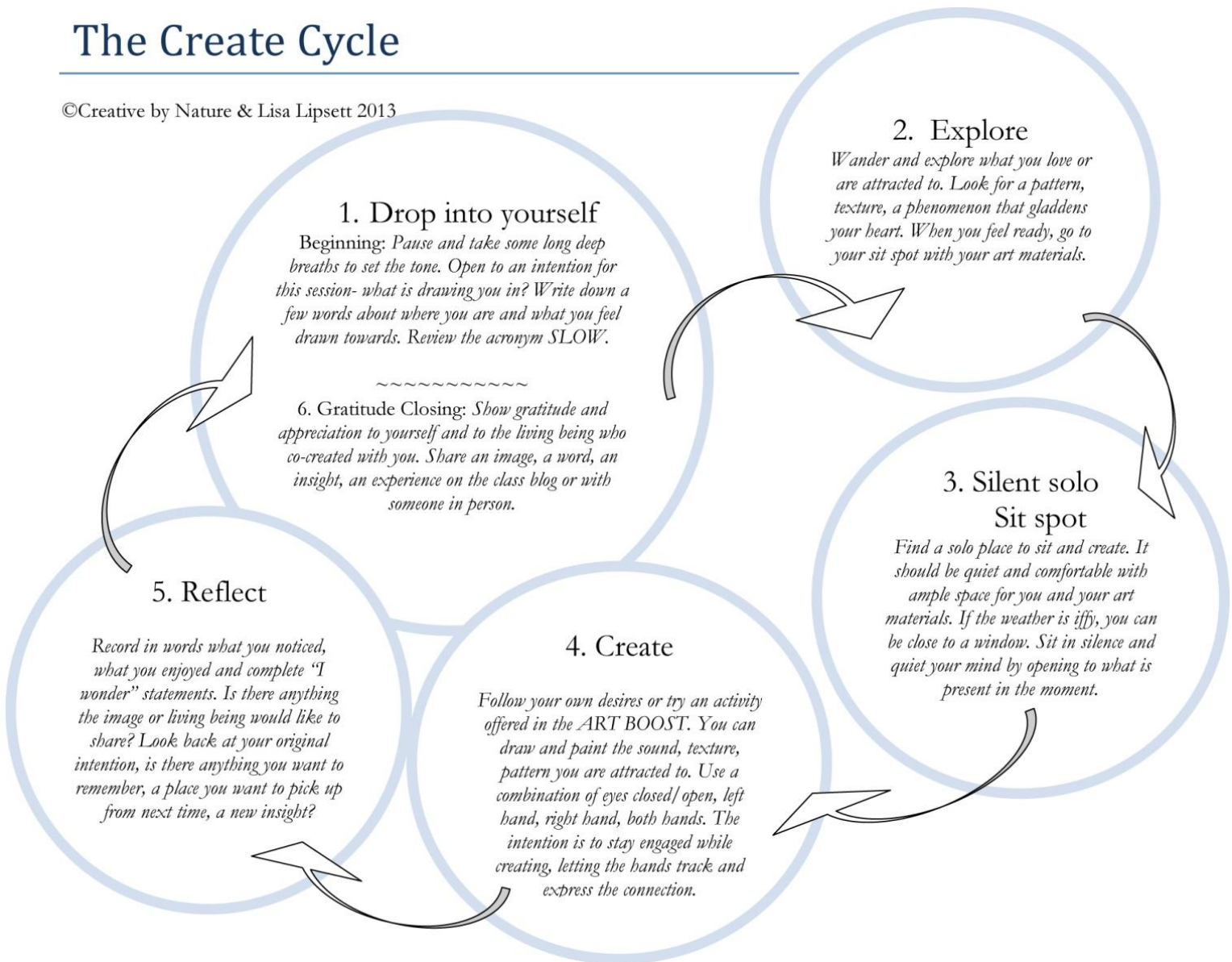
-Meister Eckhart, Philosopher

We begin and end a session with reverential mindfulness towards nature and the creative process. We ask for permission to engage and we say thank you or express our gratitude in some way when we are finished. Sometimes we may feel chosen by a plant or animal. At other times we follow what attracts. Either way we engage with nature with appreciation, wonder, humility and gratitude.

This is the CREATE Cycle we use each time.

# The Create Cycle

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## The SLOW Approach to Drawing & Painting

To better remember the key principles behind Creative Nature Connection, I teach students the following acronym **SLOW** based on the work of Abram (1996), Berry (1988), Carson (1956), Cohen (1997), Conn (2008), Edwards (1999), Harding (2006), Lipsett (2009; 2010), London (2003), Sewell (1999), Young, et. al (2010).

**S-** be **silent** at your **sit-spot**. Go **slowly** so you can remain in connection with a sound, texture, pattern or some other aspect of nature. This is **solo** personal time. Keep it **simple**, use your **senses**.



**L-** follow what you **love**. Work only with what you **love**. Be **loving** and kind to yourself and others as you create and be **loving** towards nature. When drawing and painting use one continuous **line**. Really **listen** to self and nature.

**O-** **open** to the sound, texture, pattern that you are working with.

**W-** maintain a curious state of mind. Let your senses **wander**. Use your **whole brain** by working with both hands equally, and eyes closed part of the time. What do you **wonder** about? What do you notice? **Write** these down so you'll remember later.

## Materials

Wherever I go I carry around an “art kit” comprised of a folded watercolour book, a paint box, 2 pens and a water container.



**Directions and a video on how to fold a Creative by Nature book can be found at:**

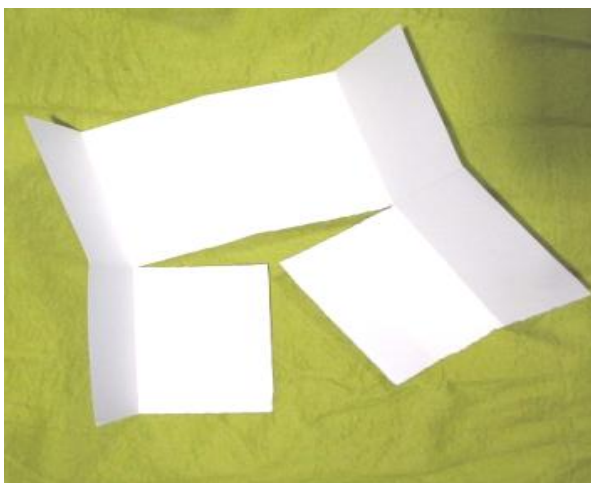
[www.creativebynature.org](http://www.creativebynature.org)

I like to work in a folded watercolour paper book called a Creative by Nature book. It easily folds out for drawing and painting but also folds back together for portability. What I find perfect to start with is one sheet of 15”x 22” watercolour paper.

- Begin with a sheet of 15” x 22” watercolour paper
- Cut the sheet in half width-wise
- Fold one of the two pages in half length-wise. Score the edge really well. You can use the side of a pen for this.
- While maintaining the fold, make two additional folds to create a page with 8 sections. Thoroughly score the folds.
- Cut into the middle halfway then cut along one section to the left and one to the right. The cut should look like the letter “T”. This can also be done after you draw and paint.
- Fold in the flaps and you have a folded book with 16 surfaces.
- Open the book out flat for drawing and painting.

**Paint** - Check a dollar store for an inexpensive set of dry palette style watercolour paints. Only non-toxic paint should go on your bare hands. Portability is the main consideration.

**Drawing Pens** -Two Sharpie ultrafine black permanent markers or similar permanent drawing pens.





- a small water container.
- moistened hand wipe.
- small ziplock bag for easy carrying.
- opened out garbage bag for sitting on.
- a clipboard or cardboard with elastic for paper support.
- a small water container.

*Not so far from my cedar grove where my sit spot is there is a spring fed pond and in winter an overflow stream appears and it is the sound of this stream that attracts me. I draw left hand (my dominant) and then my right and I am falling into the sound as I close my eyes and prepare to draw with both hands and suddenly the stream sound is gone and there is an airplane overhead reminding me. It's commuter hour from Vancouver to Victoria and the commute is over my head and I wait. There! The stream again, tinkling through the forest, tripping downhill to Fulford harbour and the breath eases and the non-seeing hands burble pale green swirly shapes onto the page. I ask the stream, stay, please stay. I am the stream and I say, stay, please stay.*

-Maggie Z., 2012

## An Introductory Eight Session Program

Follow the steps of the CNC CREATE CYCLE while varying the *create* aspect a little bit each time. Teach the acronym SLOW. Proceed with baby steps so students gradually develop confidence drawing and painting with both hands, eyes open and eyes closed, over time. These sessions can be offered weekly. The directions are written as you would say them while facilitating a session.

**Draw texture-** Explore a texture with one hand, carefully tracking contours, ridges etc using your fingertips with your eyes closed. Do this while drawing with the other hand. While one hand is slowly tracking, the other is simultaneously drawing. The two hands are in synch. Switch hands then repeat. You can explore many textures in one session or go deeply into the nuances of just one.



Draw leaf texture



Exploring fern texture

**Paint Texture-** Return to the same sit spot, open your paint kit and have a water container available. Close your eyes and rest your mind on the sensation of exploring the same texture(s) or a new one. Move your right hand fingertips very slowly as you explore. Keep your eyes closed, dip your left hand fingers in the water and run your wet fingertips

across the paint palette. Let your fingers choose a colour or multiple colours while your right hand explores the texture. Your hands will be in synchrony: your right hand exploring the texture while your left hand records the sensation with paint on the page. Then switch hands and repeat.

**Draw sound-** return to the same sit spot, close your eyes and open to sounds that attract your attention. When one really grabs you, listen carefully while drawing the sound with your right hand. Remember you are recording like a seismograph- the highs, lows, rhythms of the sound. Do the same with your left hand. Then draw with both hands using two pens simultaneously and/or both hands on one pen. Have fun



Listen and draw

with this. When your mind wanders

bring it back to the sound and draw. You can explore many sounds in one session or go deeply into the nuances and complexity of one sound.



Drawing sound with two hands



Paint with two hands

**Paint sound-** return to the same sit spot, open your paint kit and have a water container available. Close your eyes and rest your mind on a familiar sound or a fresh one. When one grabs your attention, keep your eyes closed, dip your right hand fingers in the water and run your wet fingertips across the paint palette.

Let your fingers choose a colour or multiple colours then while your ears track the sound. Let your right hand paint the sound. Work for at least 5 minutes with your right hand before you switch hands and paint with your left hand, followed by both hands together.





Draw small patterns

**Draw small pattern-** make yourself a small viewer by cutting a circle, square or irregular shape about 2 inches in diameter in a small piece of paper. This viewer will focus your eyes on the patterns in one small area. Return to the same sit spot and place the viewer close to patterns on the ground, on plants, near an insect... When you find a pattern you like, slowly track its intricacy with your eyes as you draw what you see with your right hand. Keep your eyes tracking on what you are observing and know that your hand can be trusted to accurately record what you are seeing because your hand and eyes and hands are both part of your sensing body. You don't have to boss your hand you must simply

go slowly and trust that your hand will record what your eyes are seeing as they trace the intricacy of the viewed pattern. Now draw the same way with your left hand, followed by both hands together using two pens and/or both hands on one pen.



Paint small pattern

**Paint small pattern-** return to the same sit spot and explore until you are attracted to a small pattern as seen through your small viewer. This time paint with your right hand as your eyes trace the pattern. Simply run your hand across the palette to choose your colours, then let your hand paint in synchrony with what your eyes are slowly tracing. Repeat this while painting with your left hand then use both hands simultaneously





Draw large pattern

**Draw large pattern-** return to the same sit spot and explore your surroundings with your eyes. When you find a pattern you are attracted to- maybe it's a field of grass, tree branches, or clouds, slowly track it with your eyes as you draw it with your right hand. Once again go slowly with your eyes as you follow along with your hand. You do not need to look at your drawing hand. Simply focus on the pattern and trust your hand to follow along. Switch hands and repeat. Finally draw with both hands using two pens and/or use both hands on one pen.



Paint large pattern

**Paint large pattern-** return to your sit spot and open to a pattern that attracts your attention. Maybe its a field of grass, tree branches, clouds...Run your right hand over the paints, choose your colour(s) and slowly paint in synchrony with your eyes tracing the pattern. Switch hands. Finally, paint with both hands.

There are an infinite number of ways to create with nature. This 8 step introduction gives an overview of some basic ways to engage. As you feel more comfortable you can mix things up. Try drawing and painting smells or tastes. Work with your sixth sense after you have developed a connection with a texture, sound or pattern. Use your eyes to track motion like ants wandering, leaves falling, clouds moving, branches swaying, shadows dancing. Don't feel limited by the paints and pens. Draw in the dirt with a stick, paint on snow, make colour with leaves then paint.... Nature is everywhere- indoors and

out. Draw and paint with a favourite pet, a houseplant, a spider, shadows on the wall, the spin of water exiting a tub, the veins on your hands. The possibilities are endless. The point is to take time to follow the CNC CREATE CYCLE, and engage deeply, slowly and creatively with what attracts you in the moment. Take time to reflect and end by expressing gratitude.

## Creative Nature Connection has HEART

The following is a playful look at how the letters of the word “heart” highlight the principles behind CNC.



**H-** We engage the **heart** when we connect, then create, reflect and share. We embrace a loving connection. We learn to **hear** nature as it speaks to us in this moment. We find a place in nature close to home where we feel at **home**.

**E-** **Earth** centered creativity allows us to **express** a connection, **engage** mindfully, feel **energized**, and create with the **elements**- earth, air, fire and water. Both metaphorically and literally we put our **ear** to the ground and listen to the voice of the more than human world.

**A-** When we follow what **attracts**, we follow what we love, feel **attached** and dissolve into nature. With guidance and support we soon develop ways to express **appreciation** and gratitude for our experiences. We begin to take environmental **action** from the heart. **Artmaking** is the process, the act of giving a felt connection, expressed colour and form. We track our experience and art-making helps us to focus on the connection while our mind is occupied.

We learn to impersonate the way nature creates- spontaneously and in

relationship. We develop facility with nature's pattern language. We create and share **art** in the form of stories, myths, movements, songs and images that give colour, form and life to transformative experiences with the living world. We experience nature as **alive** with an expression all its own.

**R-** We **reflect** on our creative connection both during and after a session. With the **regular routine**, of **repeated** engagement we develop a habit of creative connection



that can be accessed at anytime, anywhere. We become **resilient** in the face of change because we have a way of knowing that is supportive, sustainable, **relational**, soothing, easily accessed and wise.

**T-** We take **time** to engage and reflect. We **track** a plant or animal in the moment and **keep track** of the encounter with colour and image. We **think** to go deeper into curious questions after we have nurtured a creative connection. We focus on feeling, sensation and intuition as well as thinking. The head plans, decides, deduces, discerns, puzzles out, identifies, judges, separates, and reflects *after* a session is complete. Our thinking is informed and grounded in experience.

### CNC develops the following:

- A sense of belonging
- Deepened understanding of nature in the immediate area
- Deepened curiosity and wonder about how things work
- A practice that can be life-long
- Heightened sensitivity to nature, deepened observation skills
- A general excitement around being engaged with a fresh way to know
- creative confidence in drawing and water media painting



Circle center display of drawings, paintings and artifacts

### Student Evaluation

These questions can be used to help you get a sense of how students are faring. Don't forget to check in with yourself. How are you feeling about things? Are you energized or exhausted after these "outings"? What steps can you take to make things go more smoothly?

### Questions you might ask when thinking about individual students:

- Does the student show a commitment to completing the task?
- Is there a progression of complexity in their "I noticed" statements and "I wonder" questions?
- Are their observation skills improving as evidenced by increased detail in their artwork and in their "I noticed" statements?
- Are their personal interests being sparked and are these interests being carried into



the classroom?

- Can the student work independently?
- Can the student work productively with a partner?
- Can the student share clearly in the full group?
- Is the student having fun?
- Does the student show respect for the materials?
- Is the student feeling at ease with the art tasks?
- Is the student respectful of others' work?
- Is the student respectful to other living beings?

## Practical Advice for Teachers



-Nature-based art practices including CNC can be shared anywhere there is some “wild”. It can be an unkempt part of the school yard or near a particular tree. There is always the sky, rain, shadows and clouds.

-Ideally where you share this work is within easy walking distance to your classroom, somewhere you and the children feel safe making the trek. It’s best if it doesn’t eat up great amounts of time just getting to your site. This is especially important for children age 5-8.

-Consider the hiking stamina of your younger students when you consider a locale.

-Visit the area before you take the children there.

-Try-out each week’s focus before offering it to the children.

-Make materials easy to access- give child

their own ziplock bag of materials on-site.

-Have materials collected in a few bins for easy carrying.

-Take time for smooth transitions into and out of nature. Don’t skip gathering them in a circle to begin, or ending with a gratitude circle. --Prepare children for entry into nature and entry back to the classroom. Practice grounding techniques like listening to your breathing, pretending you are a tree with deep roots, imagining you are a bird....

-Keep every experience fun, light, open, focused, simple, friendly and familiar

-Be an observer, recorder and facilitator for the children

-Ask questions that deepen their experience like: I wonder why? How could you find out? What do you think is happening?

-Offer opportunities for the children to see their work develop over time.

-Focus primarily on the process less so on what they create.

-Allow space and time for exciting spontaneous discoveries.

-Take lots of photos of what the children are connecting to for display and future investigation.

-Record children’s questions for further research. Teach them the sentence starters Today I noticed....., I wonder why/how/when/how/what/who.....

- Develop a classroom center with space for nature finds, images, photos, children's work and on-going inspiration.
- Have a Wonder Wall with children's questions posted.
- Add unique environmental and creative components to sessions as you like. Just remember to keep things heartfelt, playful and full of wonder.
- Keep the basic routines intact so children develop a habit.
- Go slowly.
- Buddy-up younger and older children.

## Safety Considerations

- Train children to stay within your sight. Say "if you can see me, I can see you". Maybe mark off particular boundaries with rocks or pylons
- Bring a cell phone

*Fears of failure and not being good enough could not gain the slightest foothold in the context of Lisa's approach. How can a painting fail when it has been created with closed eyes? Using fingers instead of brushes created a wonderful sense of connection to the paper and a delightful sense of play. But within this play, deep work was being done. Repeated images and themes emerged. Powerful emotions were touched. I loved experiencing the interplay between the left and right hand and the eventual balance that occurred between them. I'm still a baby in exploring my relationship to the world in a visual form. Lisa's class proved to be an ideal birthing experience.*

*-C. Mauro, 2013*

- Notify your school secretary that you will be outside, establish a pattern and regular time for nature activities
- Buddy up with another class
- Invite parent helpers to join you
- Strive to have two adults on site
- Establish rules of engagement- is it ok for children to pick up sticks, play in the dirt, build things, climb? Be clear about your expectations from the beginning
- Ask children to use the washroom before heading out
- Train parents to send kids with appropriate clothing on Get Outside days
- Bring a small first aid kit with band aids and wet wipes
- Orient children and yourself to potential hazards- poisonous stinging plants/insects- try not to be scary just informative

## First Steps for teachers interested in CNC

Begin with yourself. Start from where you are personally. Take some time to explore your own relationship to nature. What are your childhood memories of being in nature? What are your fears? How does nature figure in your life now? If you are interested in supporting nature connection in your students, explore where nature is in your program now. Imagine where you would like to be in a year's time. Do the same exploration with respect to your own creativity. Do you have a personal creative practice that is nature-based? If not what would be exciting for you to pursue in parallel to mentoring your students?

Be an archaeologist of your own experience. Watch what helps you stay in the flow and what jars you out again. The more you follow your in-the-moment attractions, the less time you spend in the planning mind, and the deeper your connection. Also the more you can learn your personal "recipe" for connection, the more easily you can create that connection for yourself next time regardless of where you find yourself.

Start small and build slowly. Make room in your class schedule for one outing per week for one hour. Choose the same place each time

while varying the focus, element, creative process or natural principle somewhat each session. Be gentle on yourself and keep your expectations inspired but realistic. Know that you can't go wrong by taking your students outside to create.

### In Conclusion...

The focus of CNC is on painting and drawing, but any art form will work. This practice is powerful, fairly simple to learn and teach, and is very adaptable to many settings (Lipsett, 2010). Over time the basic sequence of Explore, Sit Spot, Create, Reflect, Gratitude can be enriched with numerous different exploratory challenges and ways to create with nature. I recommend that you keep the basic cycle the same and change only one small thing each session. Also don't be afraid to try the same creative task repeatedly over a number of sessions. In nature there is always something new happening and something new to be learned.

When we create directly with animate Earth we appreciate the expressive arts as a powerful bridge between nature and ourselves. Our hearts are opened and we are awakened to the creative language of life. The practice of Creative Nature Connection is one simple way to start. The transformation of the human-nature relationship is in our creative hands.

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Learn more about Creative Nature Connection: [www.creativenatureconnection.com](http://www.creativenatureconnection.com)

[lisa@creativebynature.org](mailto:lisa@creativebynature.org)

**Art-** [www.Lisalipsettimages.com](http://www.Lisalipsettimages.com)

**Book-** *Beauty Muse: Painting in Communion with Nature* (2009) shares how Creative Nature Connection was developed and offers resources, quotes from thinkers on Deep Ecology and Creativity, and activities you can try yourself or with your students.

**Video-** *This Little Bird: An artful nature encounter* <http://creativebynature.ning.com/video/this-little-bird>

**Blog-** *The Drive to Create* [www.thedrivetocreate.com](http://www.thedrivetocreate.com)

**Creative by Nature Center** on-line network, Creative Nature Connection and Art Boost classes, videos, [www.creativebynature.org](http://www.creativebynature.org)

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## Websites

### Creative by Nature Art

[www.creativebynature.org](http://www.creativebynature.org)

Workshops, articles videos of the Creative Nature Connection program and Art Boost classes.

### Nature Art Education

<http://www.naturearteducation.org>

A research group including Jan Van Boeckel focused on arts-based environmental education based at Aalto University, School of Art and Design, Helsinki Finland.

### Earth Art Education

[www.eartharteducation.com](http://www.eartharteducation.com)

A project conceived to support and advance environmental balance and awareness through art and education. Based out of Florida State University.

### **Art Education and Environment**

#### **- Hilary Inwood**

[www.hilaryinwood.ca](http://www.hilaryinwood.ca)

Resources, projects from OISE-UT

### **Drawing Closer to Nature**

[www.peterlondon.us](http://www.peterlondon.us)

Art Educator Peter London's work and book by the same name

### **Artful Explorations in Nature**

[www.artfulexplorationsinnature.com](http://www.artfulexplorationsinnature.com)

Taran Pappas' wonderful site of activities, monthly challenges and resources

### **Get to Know Program**

[www.get-to-know.org](http://www.get-to-know.org)

Artist Robert Bateman's program to inspire children to get outside and create.

### **Earth Artists**

[www.earthartists.org](http://www.earthartists.org)

Artists working *with* nature

### **Heather Anderson Art**

[www.heatherandersonart.com](http://www.heatherandersonart.com)

Home of the idea rich teacher's guide:  
Art Education & Eco-awareness

### **Project Nature Connect**

[www.ecopsych.com](http://www.ecopsych.com)

Michael Cohen's Global Education courses and practices for sensory awakening to Nature.

### **Child and Nature Alliance**

[www.childnature.ca](http://www.childnature.ca)

Canadian network inspired by Richard Louv's work.

### **Children and Nature Network**

[www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)

American non-profit getting the word out to the public on the importance of nature

connection in children. They are the hub of the children and nature movement in the US.

**Alliance for Wild Ethics**

[www.wildethics.org](http://www.wildethics.org)

Writers, storytellers and organizations joining to deepen our connection to animate Earth.



