

Forest nurseries – the ideal place to learn about sustainability in the present and the future

BNE (*Bildung für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung*) is the German equivalent of 'Education for Sustainable Development'. Through the media, advertising material, courses and competitions etc., this campaign is currently promoting sustainability education in the state of Baden Württemberg, for example with programmes such as “Climate protection in schools and educational institutions.”

The National Action Plan for Education for Sustainable Development in Germany defines the following principles:

- Education for sustainable development concerns **everyone**
- Education for sustainable development is an **ongoing**, continuous **process** which contributes to society's acceptance of the processes of change
- Education for sustainable development is a task which traverses **all walks of life** and leads to better social integration
- Education for sustainable development aims to improve the world in which we human beings live - our *lebenswelt* or **life-world**
- Education for sustainable development **creates opportunities** for individuals, society and the economy
- Education for sustainable development promotes **global responsibility**

We can only change our life-world if we see ourselves as part of it, that means developing awareness of not just the world 'around' us but the world we are part of. It is not mankind with all his needs who is at the centre of all thought and action, but the environment together with mankind as part of it. However, various, interwoven life-worlds have to compete against each other – the flora and fauna are also a part of them and must not be forgotten. Ultimately, our life-world can only be preserved/improved if we recognise and take into consideration the needs of all of those who share it.

Why can the foundation be laid for this type of networked thinking in forest and outdoor nurseries?

- Spending every day, ideally for a period of three years, in the world of nature raises children's awareness of the processes, mechanisms and needs of the life-worlds of forests, fields, meadows, streams etc.
- Experiencing the seasonally-related processes of the growth first insights into cycles, contingencies and the ways in which mankind can affect them
- The way pre-schoolers see the world is strongly influenced by magic and animism (in accordance with Piaget) and this benefits the affective connection of the child to his surroundings in the natural world
- Affective education lays a solid foundation for taking responsibility for one's action and inaction. In *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint-Exupery summarises it in one sentence: “You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed...”
- In forest nurseries, children can gain their original experiences of nature in its holistic context (e.g. ladybirds seen in their natural environment)
- Global responsibility begins on a small-scale in line with the Agenda 21 principle 'act local, think global'
- Learning about nature at pre-school age breeds a curiosity which continues into adulthood

Forest nurseries are the most energy-saving childcare establishments:

- low fuel consumption (usually wood, therefore CO₂ neutral) due to smaller premises and less time spent inside
- no landscaping or outdoor facilities requiring maintenance – and therefore energy consumption – such as lawn-mowing, tree-cutting, watering etc.
- very low water consumption (usually 5-7 litres per day per group), only for washing hands; no water consumption for cleaning rooms, washing-up etc.
- no sealed ground
- no resources required for the maintenance and replacement of inventory
- less resources needed for the few small pieces of furniture
- no resources wasted on industrially manufactured toys