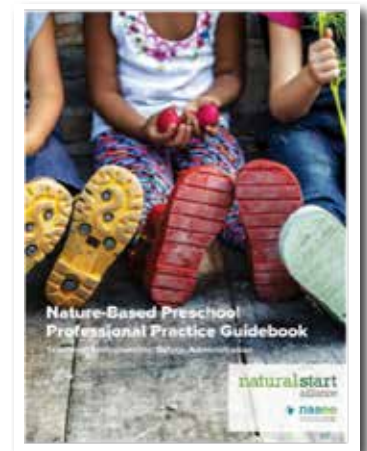# *Trees & Me* Correlations to the Natural Start Alliance

NATURE–BASED PRESCHOOL PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE GUIDEBOOK

Project Learning Tree is committed to supporting educators in providing learning experiences that help to meet education standards. This document identifies correlations between *Trees & Me* and the Natural Start Alliance Nature-Based Preschool Professional Practice Guidebook. This guidebook recognizes and describes professional practices that are important in a nature-based program where children spend a significant amount of time engaged in nature-based, outdoor play and learning. The chart below identifies relevant professional practices and how *Trees & Me* supports educators in each.

Visit plt.org/treesandme for additional *Trees & Me* content correlations.

natural start alliance

FOCUS AREA	PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE	TREES & ME: EVIDENCE OF PRACTICE
TEACHING		
Goals of the Curriculum	1. The curriculum is guided by best practices in early childhood education and environmental education.	• *Trees & Me* meets many best practices standards for early childhood curriculum set by National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Head Start, and the North American Association for Environmental Education. See plt.org/academic-standards for these and other correlations. • PLT provides professional development to support educators in using its materials, including information about and practice applying appropriate research and learning theory. See plt.org/training for more information.
Role of Nature in the Curriculum	1. Teachers familiarize children with the plants, animals, and natural features and phenomena in their surroundings.	• Each activity explores an environmental theme related to trees and forests. • All of the activities invite children to explore organisms, features, and phenomena in their surroundings, particularly in the Exploring the Neighborhood, Outdoor Play, and Take It Outside! subsections, and in those experiences marked with an icon that identifies that they can be done outside.
	2. Teachers support and encourage children's play and investigations with natural materials.	• All of the activities encourage children to investigate and play with natural materials. In particular, the Free Exploration experiences (Art, Outdoor Play, Discovery Table, Math and Manipulatives, Dramatic Play, and Woodworking) suggest ways to incorporate natural materials in the learning. • Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning and Appendix H: Bringing Nature Inside offer suggesting for incorporating natural materials into investigations and play.
	3. Classroom activities cross boundaries between indoor and outdoor learning environments, and between different types of outdoor environments.	• All of the activities use an icon to identify which experiences can be done outside, and also all include a Take It Outside! suggestion.
	4. Teachers promote learning from season to season, supporting children's understanding of patterns and changes through the seasons.	• The four activities in Section 2: Experiencing Trees Through Seasons focus specifically on different seasons and the changes children may observe with seasons.
	6. Human communities are considered part of, and dependent upon, the natural environment.	• Activity 11: Community Explorers and Activity 12: Three Cheers for Trees! explore the ways that human communities both depend on and are a part of the natural environment. • Many of the other activities include experiences that highlight the connections between people and the natural environment.

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Focus on Outdoor Learning	1. Outdoor learning is a central feature of the program, with frequent, regular opportunities for outdoor play and learning in natural spaces.	• All of the activities incorporate a variety of outdoor experiences, indicated with an icon. • Each activity features a Take It Outside! experience for exploring the activity theme outdoors.
	2. Teachers and children are dressed appropriately for the weather, and teachers demonstrate positive attitudes about experiencing various weather conditions.	• Activity 6: Evergreens in Winter includes tips on embracing outdoor teaching in cooler climes. • Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning includes "Dress for Success" suggestions.
Emergent, Play-Based Curriculum	3. Children's inquiry is used to encourage higher-order thinking, and the inquiry process is allowed to continue for as long as children's interest remains.	• All of the activities include a variety of child-directed and inquiry-based experiences, including Outdoor Play and Dramatic Play experiences. • All of the activities involve a range of STEM skills, identified with an icon. • Several of the activities include an engineering challenge that invite learners to use problem-solving skills to design a solution. • Appendix A emphasizes the importance of play and unstructured discovery. • Appendix D defines 10 STEM skills for everyone, many of which support, promote, and practice higher-order thinking skills.
Community of Capable Learners	4. Teachers provide opportunities for child-child interactions to promote collaboration and conflict resolution.	• All of the activities include Group Experiences, which enable children to develop positive relationships as they work with and alongside others in the group
	5. Teachers provide an environment that values diversity and sustains children's cultural identities.	• Appendix B: Diverse Learners, Diverse Needs and Appendix E: Traditional Knowledge and Gratitude Walk identify approaches to incorporate and accommodate students with different cultural traditions and backgrounds. • Appendix J provides American Sign Language cards for key words.
	6. Teachers modify the curriculum and environment to individualize learning opportunities and scaffold learning for all children.	• Appendix B: Diverse Learners, Diverse Needs identifies approaches to accommodate students with different needs to help individualize and scaffold learning.
Documentation and Assessment	1. Children's progress in both standard early childhood developmental domains and domains that relate to the development of environmental literacy are included in assessment measures.	• All of the activities provide suggestions for assessing the experiences, including both early childhood development domains (such as vocabulary and questioning skills) and environmental concept development.
	2. Teachers document and assess children's learning through observation and artifacts so as not to interfere with children's learning experiences.	• All of the activities provide suggestions for assessing the experiences through observation and artifacts.

FOCUS AREA	PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE	TREES & ME: EVIDENCE OF PRACTICE
ENVIRONMENTS		
Universal Elements	2. Environments are designed to accommodate the flexible and changing nature of the nature-based curriculum.	• Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning and Appendix H: Bringing Nature Inside offer suggestions for setting up the learning environment and accommodating the changing nature of nature-based learning, both outdoors and indoors.
	4. Activity centers provide predictable spaces that promote learning in all developmental domains through interactions with natural materials, other children, and teachers.	• All of the activities offer Group Experiences (social activities and exercises) and Free Exploration (independent learning and play). All Free Exploration experiences can be set up as learning centers, with options that include Art, Discovery Table, Math and Manipulatives, Dramatic Play, and Woodworking. See also Appendix I: Woodworking for Everyone.
Indoor Environments	2. Classrooms are arranged and decorated in ways that promote nature and the role of the child in the curriculum.	• Appendix H: Bringing Nature Inside offers suggestions for arranging and decorating the classroom so that it promotes nature-based learning.
	3. Classroom materials encourage and support exploration of the natural world.	• All of the activities use a variety of teaching methods and strategies. • Activities include indoor and outdoor explorations, snacks, music and movement, math, woodworking, and read-aloud books.
SAFETY		
Pre-Program Planning	1. Regular site assessments of outdoor environments identify hazards and plan for the removal or mitigation of hazards in the environment.	• Where appropriate, activities point out safety considerations (indicated with an icon) to help adults maintain a safe learning environment. • Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning includes information on "Keeping It Safe."
	6. Children and teachers are equipped with clothing that is appropriate to the activity and weather conditions.	• Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning offers "Dress for Success" suggestions for appropriate clothing.
ADMINISTRATION		
Equity and Inclusion	1. Programs maintain an inclusion policy that commits to meeting the needs of all young children.	• Appendix B: Diverse Learners, Diverse Needs offers suggestions for meeting the needs of all learners.
	4. Programs are culturally inclusive and responsive, emphasizing the value of diversity and working to promote equity.	• Activity 12: Three Cheers for Trees provides information about how trees and nature are celebrated by different cultures all over the world, and Appendix F: Traditional Knowledge and Gratitude Walk embraces non-western ways of seeing and experiencing nature. • All of the activities invite children to express themselves through art and language.
Community Engagement	1. Programs employ a community-based approach that connects the school community to the wider natural and cultural community.	• All of the activities offer a supporting Family & Friends page, which suggest ways that families and friends can enhance their child's learning experiences in the activity. Each page includes a "Do Your Part" suggestion for actions they can take together to make a difference in their community.
	2. The program develops positive relationships and communication with parents and caregivers.	• All of the activities offer a supporting Family & Friends page, which suggest can be used to enhance communication with parents and caregivers and to enhance learning.