



Media Release

Embargoed until 5 July

The three skills kids need most in the age of climate change

Their future is in our nature

A new report from Planet Ark examines how prepared the next generation is to tackle the biggest future challenges facing humanity. These challenges have been defined by the United Nationsⁱ and include food security, refugees, access to clean water, population increase, and climate change the most concerning overall.

The report, *Learning from Trees: Life Lessons for Future Generations*ⁱⁱ, which is sponsored by Toyota Australia and released ahead of National Tree Day (30 July), asked 200 Australian teachers to identify the crucial skills students will need most to tackle global challenges, such as climate change, in the future.

Teachers (100 primary and 100 secondary) ranked the following skills and attributes in order of importance: STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics); problem solving and critical thinking; creativity and innovation; compassion; 'grit' (determination, resilience, perseverance); emotional intelligence and trade skills.

The results show 60% of surveyed teachers chose critical thinking and problem solving, grit and emotional intelligence as the most important skills. Interestingly 60% also ranked these skills as their students' weakest, with grit the weakest overall. Only 4% of Australian teachers considered STEM in the top three most needed skills.

Research cited in the report shows how children can develop these key skills by learning outdoors, both during and outside of school hours, so providing opportunities for outdoor learning is a critical priority for parents, teachers and the wider community.

This is a significant challenge because children have lost touch with nature in a way that has never been experienced before. Planet Ark researchⁱⁱⁱ shows 3 out of 4 adults played outdoors more often than indoors when they were young, compared to 1 in 10 children today; toddlers are using digital devices; parents are working long hours; and heightened fears of child safety and pressure to engage in extracurricular activities all limit the amount of time children spend in nature.

Outdoor learning was added to the Australian Curriculum in 2015, however just 34% of teachers surveyed taught outdoors for 15 minutes or more in the first term of 2017, and 1 in 3 respondents spent no time teaching outside at all. Teachers cited insufficient infrastructure, time pressures, conflicting demands and weather as the main barriers to getting outside. Only 4% of teachers surveyed considered outdoor learning as most important for fostering inspiration, creativity and problem solving.

Kirrilie Smout, clinical psychologist and Director of Developing Minds Psychology and Education, who has worked with kids and teens for 20 years, agrees the key skills identified by teachers are vital.

"Future generations will need to persist through hardships and set-backs, and successful problem solving requires concentration and grit. We will need to work together and establish positive relationships, so emotional intelligence and communication skills will be key. This is the job of parents and carers, schools and teachers, and society as a whole. Children with these skills (problem solving, grit and emotional intelligence) will be happier, healthier and more successful," Smout said.





Australian research conducted by Dr. Amanda Lloyd, Director of Outdoor Connections and a leader in the field of outdoor learning, shows students who take part in outdoor learning programs continue to perform well academically, but they also learn problem solving, emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills and resilience. Further research says 77% of teachers reported improvement in standardised test results, and exposure to natural environments reduces stress, enhances concentration and creativity and increases productivity^v.

“The recent inclusion of outdoor learning in the Australian Curriculum is a leap forward for future nature-based experiences within the school day. For most children, the majority of time at school is spent inside a classroom sitting at a desk. It doesn’t have to be this way. All it takes is to think outside the box — no walls needed,” Dr. Lloyd said.

In many western countries, learning outdoors is no longer considered a peripheral activity because of its widely accepted benefits. In Finland, primary school children must spend 15 minutes every hour outdoors, whatever the weather. Researchers identify outdoor learning as an important element in Finland’s successful development of the best primary school system in the world, as rated by international benchmarks.^{vii}

National Tree Day manager, Debbie Agnew, says there are many ways parents, teachers and carers can imbed nature time in a child’s life.

“Simple activities like riding bikes, going for a bushwalk, taking homework or meal time outside, or joining organised community activities, like Guides or Scouts and National Tree Day, can have a significant and long-standing impact on a child’s connection to nature. We have also worked with Cool Australia to develop 150 curriculum-aligned lessons for Tree Day and outdoor learning especially for teachers during July,” Agnew said.

For more information and to find your nearest Tree Day site, please visit treeday.planetark.org or call the National Tree Day Hotline on 1300 88 5000.

- ENDS -

ⁱ *Learning from Trees: Life Lessons for Future Generations* report is based on an independent survey commissioned by Planet Ark, and sponsored by Toyota Australia, in April 2017. It was conducted by research company Kimberlin Education. The report also reviews Australian and international studies that examine the influence of nature on academic performance and the development of the key skills identified by surveyed teachers. The sample was selected from a randomly generated national list of teachers who have opted to receive the opportunity to participate in market research initiatives relating to schools. All teachers are current, practicing teachers in Australia. To view the full report, key findings and previous Planet Ark research: <http://treeday.planetark.org/research/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/global-issues-overview/>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Needing Trees: The Nature of Happiness* report, Planet Ark, 2015

^v *Adding Trees: A Prescription for Health, Happiness and Fulfilment*, Planet Ark, 2015

^{vii} Klaus Schwab, *The Global Competitiveness Report 2016-17*, World Economic Forum, Geneva, 2016

About Planet Ark

Planet Ark Environmental Foundation is an Australian not-for-profit organisation with a vision of a world where people live in balance with nature. Established in 1992, we are one of Australia’s leading environmental behaviour change organisations with a focus on working collaboratively and positively. We help people, governments and businesses reduce their impact on the environment in three key areas: sustainable resource use; low carbon lifestyles; and connecting people with nature. We promote and create simple, positive environmental actions – for everyone.

About Toyota Australia





Toyota Australia – now in its 15th straight year as the best-selling automotive brand in Australia – has a long tradition of supporting the community through sponsorship at both local and national levels. In 2017, Toyota will celebrate its 18th year supporting Planet Ark’s National Tree Day. These longstanding partnerships are characterised by a shared passion for people, activities and organisations that benefit the community.

For all enquiries about this research and National Tree Day please contact:

Carol Warwick carol@planetark.org
P: 02 8484 7205 | M: 0410 784 549

Josh Cole josh@planetark.org
P: 02 8484 7202

