



Foundations for Learning

Growing a child is like building a house: it's all about the foundation. Four factors are critical for the healthy growth and success of a child: **movement, touch, connection, and nature**. When these underlying brain and body systems are activated, children become strong and coordinated, secure and regulated, calm and focused.

Movement

Movement promotes cardiovascular fitness and supports the motor coordination required for achieving literacy.



How? Movement activates the *proprioceptive system*, which refines gross and fine motor skills needed to attain literacy, and the *vestibular system*, which increases alertness to enhance attention and learning.

Think about classroom movement breaks and “every day is an outside day” recess.

Touch

Touch promotes emotional regulation, reduces stress, and helps children feel secure.



How? Touch activates the *tactile system* to lower adrenaline, thus reducing anxiety and panic states. Deep pressure touch, such as hugs or sustained shoulder squeezes, can be particularly effective when treating children exposed to trauma.

Think about weighted devices, cozy reading spaces, and rough and tumble play.

Connection

Connection involves building trust, responsiveness, attachment, and communication—all of which are vital for personal and academic success.



How? Human connection supports co-regulation, a secure state where children feel seen and heard. Strong attachment bonds between child and adult are life-sustaining and predict lifelong success.

Think about circle stories, group games, appreciations, celebrations, and reflections.

Nature

Nature provides a calming environment that promotes physical and mental well-being.



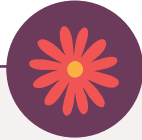
How? Nature is sensory soothing and lowers stress hormones. Green space improves attention and behavior. Children move more when they are outside, enhancing cardiovascular fitness.

Think about one class per day outside or an “in/out school” concept of holding half of the class outside and half inside with a midday switch.



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How Can We Activate the Four Factors?



NATURE CHECK-IN

Invite students to find one thing in nature that reflects how they are feeling, as a way to practice connecting nature with their emotions.



FIVE SENSE MINDFUL WALK

Guide students on a walk where they focus on what they can see, hear, smell, touch, and taste in nature. Ask them for specific details.



NATURE DRAWING

Provide students with drawing materials and ask them to identify a tree that will be “their tree.” Bring them back to sketch the tree during each of the four seasons.



OUTDOOR ART

Bring out students’ creative side by having them create artwork using natural materials like leaves, sticks, shells, and stones.



THREE-PERSON TRUST WALK

Encourage trust and communication by teaming up students and blindfolding one person in each threesome to be guided through a natural setting.



Resources

- **Moving to Learn blog:** Why screens in schools failed and what to do now to create solid foundations for literacy and learning
- **Kikori:** an app that suggests experiential activities aligned with teaching and social-emotional standards
- **Foundations for Learning Pyramid**