

About observation and the discovery of the senses



Using the outdoors to practice the discipline of stilling the mind allows all physical senses to open, receive and retain information. Still sitting is a skill featuring qualities of focus and attentiveness, memory retention, observation, developing thoughtfulness. There are many positives in the urbanized world as it becomes busier with increasing distractions. Children are growing up in increasingly dynamic and stimulating intellectual environments.

To balance the stress of 'busyness', the discipline of stilling the mind develops ability to focus at will, to centre attention and deeply engage in an experience to the benefit of the growing intellect. Repetition at an early age will provide a foundation upon which to build this lifelong practice. Extended/Scientific observation - Children take a clipboard and pencil, drawing paper, collection containers or data sheets to record or collect specific information/items of study.

The Art of Still Sitting

Still sitting is an activity for developing a quiet mind and a prelude to developing behaviours that actively respect the need for quiet observation in bushland, riparian and all natural environments. This exercise is extensively used in [Up the Creek and Down the Drain](#) developed by [Pullenvale EEC QLD](#) and partnered with [Healthy Waterways](#)

Notes for the classroom teacher ([learning to observe](#) discuss and record nature)

Checklist for getting outside the classroom:

- Conduct a pre-visit of the site locating shade spaces that maintain visibility. Organize teaching schedule for opportunities to practice still sitting regularly.
- Set ground rules based on solo sitting - no talking, use respectful behaviour towards self, place and others.
- Maintain sun safety practices and wear shoes, weather appropriate clothing, take insect bite/allergy/first aid kit.
- Each child to take a sitting mat (square of black plastic x total number of students and helpers to be kept in a roll in the classroom for that purpose). This encourages relaxed participation (helps with concerns about dirt, damp, ant phobia's etc.)
- Begin practicing still sitting in the classroom. Start with small steps – 1 minute, 2 minutes, 3 minutes, 4 minutes building to 5 minutes which is enough for young children. Noticing how breathing slows is a good test of readiness for still sitting outdoors.
- When students have understood how to still sit, move to outdoor still sitting practice using several phases of guided focus. Where possible, organize for a reduced size of groups leaving the classroom (group accompanied by trained parent /aide/community volunteer)
- **Phase 1** - Participants do not speak. They stand very still, facing outwards in a circle and prepare to listen as group leader verbally guides them to fix their sight on a distant tree/bush or natural feature. Observation begins with making a mental note of the differences they observe - shades of colour & shadow, movement, wildlife, insect or bird movement, height, shape, leaf shape etc. This can take one to three minutes.
- Leader quietly initiates **Phase 2**, returning the attention of the group towards a short discussion about their observations.
- **Phase 3** guides participants to extend those still sitting behaviours as they find their own still sitting place (within view of teacher/supervisor), practice still sitting for a designated time, returning very quietly to engage in the next phase of the exercise.
- **Phase 4** **Literacy link* , bringing something back from the still sitting experience – this could be one word; one sentence, one thought; one thing heard; one thing seen; one thing smelt; one thing felt; one drawing. A scribe (adult) writes everyone's contributions to a list which becomes a class poem or art when read out/viewed at the end of the session (thanks Pullenvale EEC)