

# “10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

Proceedings of the February 25 2017 workshop

Compiled by Dr. Richard Kool, Royal Roads University, Victoria BC



## Program

- 0900 - 0915 **Introduction to the conference:** Bob Peart, Sierra Club of BC
- 0915 - 0945 **Keynote:** Rich Louv, author and co-founder of the *Children & Nature Network*
- 0945 - 1030 **Panel 1: Nature connections in urban spaces**  
Cam Collyer (*Evergreen Foundation*)  
Marlene Power (*Child Nature Alliance Canada*)  
Nick Stanger (*Western Washington University*)
- 1030 - 1045 Refreshment break
- 1050 - 1130 **Panel 2: Nature Preschool / K-5 programs**  
Enid Elliot (*Camosun College*)  
Lenny Ross (*retired teacher, Victoria School Board*)  
Frances Krusekopf (*Principal, Colwood Elementary School*)
- 1130 - 1200 Lieutenant Governor of BC, The Honourable Judith Guichon, comments and discussion
- 1200 - 1300 Lunch and conversation
- 1300 - 1350 **Panel 3: Government and NGO Initiatives**  
Kristine Webber (*NatureKids BC*)  
Peter Ord (*Robert Bateman Centre*)  
Kerrie Morton (*WildBC, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund*)  
Eva Riccius (*Saanich Parks*)
- 1350 - 1400 **Introduction to back-casting,** Richard Kool, Royal Roads University
- 1400 - 1515 **Thinking about the future we want to see** (World Cafe)
- 1515 - 1615 **Group presentations and discussion**
- 1615 - 1630 **Conference wrap-up**

## Preface

In February 2007, The Kesho Trust, Mountain Equipment Co-op, the University of Victoria and Royal Roads University hosted a community conference called a **Dialogue on Children, Families and Nature**. We were interested in the implications of the then-current book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* and invited its author Richard Louv to attend. This gathering, as well as a similar gatherings in 2009 and 2011, led to the formation of the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada and other critical initiatives related to getting children and families outside to experience and enjoy the many benefits of connecting with nature.

In February 2017, a tenth anniversary workshop, hosted by **The Sierra Club of BC** and **Royal Roads University's MA Program in Environmental Education and Communication**, examined where this movement has come in the past ten years, imagined where it might go in the next ten years, and more importantly, discussed what it needs to do to get to that desired destination.

This document is a summary of that meeting, and provides additional resources and readings for the meeting participants, and was prepared by Dr. Richard Kool, Head, MA program in Environmental Education and Communication

## Bob Peart

### Welcome

Thank you and welcome... Today is for celebrating the good work we have done... and to explore where we might be in 10 years.

Before I make some opening remarks ---- I want to acknowledge Rick Kool and the hard work he put into organizing this forum.

I also want to thank Her Honour Judy Guichon for attending; we are looking forward to your remarks as we know this topic is a passion of yours and has been one of the cornerstones of your term as LG.

Also before proceeding I want to acknowledge that we are in the unceded territory of the Songhees and Esquimalt people – traditional Lekwungen territory – the people of the herring. I want to stop for a second here and ensure that this acknowledgement has been heard and taken in. There has not and still is no prior and informed consent for most of the developments throughout the province and they are infringing on aboriginal title and rights. It is important that we acknowledge where we stand and where we live and we must find a way to recognize indigenous justice in our society in a respectful and honest manner that honours the need for reconciliation.

I am pleased when I attend events where indigenous rights are acknowledged and yet we need to ensure that these acknowledgements (such as I have just made) don't become in themselves a statement of tokenism, as that would be unfortunate.

We are here to celebrate and look forward to the child and nature movement in Canada. 10 years ago, uVic, RRU and The Kesho Trust called a meeting 'for those who want to

get kids outside' and 50 people came. We gathered down in the Mews to launch what was to become the *Child and Nature Alliance of Canada*...

At the conclusion of the 2007 gathering we agreed to a 6 goal action plan – it is interesting to see how we did....

- Become an active part of the North American child and nature network
- Develop and child/families-nature vision and action plan to facilitate partners and raising money
- Host a major gathering on 'nature deficit disorder' in Victoria within 2 years
- All of which led to the formation of the CNA in 2009
- 'Naturalize' pre-school play spaces.
- Launch a BC Parks – Youth strategy
- Help facilitate the establishment of the Bateman Gallery and Museum at RRU (Now we have the Bateman Foundation in Victoria)

It seems that we did very well – perhaps the only unsuccessful one was the establishment of a BC Parks youth strategy; however it morphed into a strong 'healthy by nature' initiative within the provincial government and it was largely BC Parks that led the very successful *Healthy by Nature* forum in Vancouver in 2011 and to this end I want to acknowledge Dr. Trevor Hancock and Eva Riccius.

Also in looking back, I ask that you have a look at the Hatley Park Declaration on the back of your program. This declaration was developed and signed at the 2009 forum, which many of you also attended. It is interesting to review this declaration eight years later and realize how timely it is today..

I also want to remind people that in 2011 *The Vancouver Healthy by Nature Charter* was agreed to, and it

“10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

could also serve as a model for the future: <http://healthybynature.ca/downloads/HealthybyNature-charter-web.pdf>

So 2007 led to two other gathering in 2009, 2011 and now in 2017.

In wrapping up I want to refer to some points that were made in the op-ed in today's Times Colonist<sup>1</sup>.

I believe strongly that I am who I am – a biologist, birdwatcher, hiker, kayaker and amateur gardener; and most importantly an advocate for protecting nature – because of those formative years being and playing outside.

I know of no other factor (except addressing climate change) that is of such profound importance to the future of our health, wildlife, the oceans and the natural systems we depend on than being a strong advocate for nature. That advocacy, that voice comes from the understanding one gets by being outside and experiencing the sights, sounds and smells of the web-of-life.

It is important to emphasize the positive success of our work and the child-nature movement. It is often discouraging to be part of today's world, as it seems there is little progress on the critical environmental and social issues we face. Ten years ago, the importance of being outside and the value of playing in nature for children and their families was barely on the public's radar. Now, one can hardly go to a party, read a newspaper or listen to the news without seeing or hearing references to nature kindergartens, the need for more green spaces in cities, or the connection between spending time outside and a child's health and their physical and emotional development. The child-nature movement has had great success bringing these issues to the forefront,

and the momentum we are building should help address the need for greater access to and time in nature, even urban 'nearby nature', for all of us.

For me that provides hope, and we need more hope!

In closing, looking around the room there aren't many children and youth... and we need to acknowledge that. There is some really important work being done throughout the province that is youth led – Natural Leaders, NatureKids – and some great education programs being provided by such organizations as Wildsight, CPAWS and the Sierra Club.

Rick and I talked about how to involve youth in today's gathering and we decided to go with the program you have in front of you. We acknowledge its shortcomings and we recognize that this work to re-engage with nature is critical work... and most importantly it is work for youth with our support. We need to be intentional and ensure that as we move forward there is a strong family-child and a strong intergenerational aspect to our movement – by intergenerational, that could be youth-child or teacher-student... or perhaps more importantly getting conversations going between seniors and youth as they share each other's experiences and viewpoints on the world.

As I say in the op-ed in this morning's paper, remember it isn't what kind of world we are leaving for our children, but perhaps more importantly, what kind of children are we leaving for the world.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.timescolonist.com/opinion/columnists/comment-how-about-taking-a-big-dose-of-vitamin-n-1.10394811>

## Rich Louv

### Notes taken from the opening presentation

“Scientists won’t have a constituency for nature protection if they don’t work now to build an interest in young people...”

“Conservation of conservationists” has to be on all of our minds. We have to maintain a sense of hope that goes beyond logic [RK: what might be called ‘radical hope’<sup>2</sup>] and goes beyond despair.

Rich acknowledged what has been going on in Canada and BC in the last 10 years, and spoke of a “cultural change” he sees in Canada around the nature/child relationship. The number of nature-based schools and preschools in the US and Canada continues to increase, and he’s also seen whole school change with the schools focusing on engagement of children coming from teacher initiatives, and not necessarily from the ‘typical’ outdoor/environmental educator, but from math teachers, English teachers etc.

The interest in academia was also noted. At the time of *Last Child in the Woods*, he could find only 20 research articles that looked at the child/nature relationship: there

now are 500+ research studies. What is surprising about the research is that it all points at the same thing: that having both children and adults in “green” settings is related with all sorts of positive benefits. Longitudinal studies are now being done<sup>3</sup>, and in another few years there may be more powerful statistical evidence about the benefits.

The benefits of having children spend time outdoors in natural settings seems to provide the greatest benefits to those who actually need all the help they can get—“at-risk” kids—and time in urban parks can help ADHD kids as much as doses of pharmaceuticals<sup>4</sup>.

An interesting observation was that urban parks with the best benefits for kids are those with the highest measured biodiversity. He noted that “we’re a lonely species... we need to not be alone in the universe.”

...The environmental problems in China are pushing people, especially in urban areas, to want their children to have access to green nature, and they are also attracted by the work on the cognitive benefits.

Rich feels that there is a cultural change happening as people of all cultural and political backgrounds are hearing the conversation, and credits people like those here today for keeping the idea alive and in the realm of public discourse.

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<sup>2</sup> Lear, J. (2008). *Radical hope: Ethics in the face of cultural devastation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. [http://environment.yale.edu/newconsciousness/wp-content/uploads/.../jonathan\\_lear.pdf](http://environment.yale.edu/newconsciousness/wp-content/uploads/.../jonathan_lear.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Wu, C. D., McNeely, E., Cedeno-Laurent, J. G., Pan, W. C., Adamkiewicz, G., Dominici, F., . . . Spengler, J. D. (2014). Linking student performance in Massachusetts elementary schools with the "greenness" of school surroundings using remote sensing. *PLoS One*, 9(10), e108548. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25310542>

<sup>4</sup> Collado, S., & Staats, H. (2016). Contact with nature and children's restorative experiences: An eye to the future. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1885. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27965616>

## “10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

He brought up a number of issues in response to questions from the audience. For example, he noted the efforts that the Obama administration put into providing access (funding for buses etc. through governmental as well as corporate contributions) to inner city fourth graders to get out to National Parks.

We need a better understanding of policy initiatives and laws that might actually get in the way of encouraging more children to be outside; e.g., there are places in the US where children cannot build forts on their families property. There are laws that penalize parents for letting their children be unattended outdoors. These are cultural issues of risk-acceptance, and the difficult reality of “magnification of risk” by media and politicians. He feels we need to do more work looking at the relation between law and policy and the issue of connecting children to nature. “The risk is not from strangers, but from strange lawyers.”

## Nature Connection in Urban Spaces

### Marlene Power

Marlene noted that over the past ten years, “the questions have changed”... ten years ago, the question was “is it safe?” Now, there is a growing awareness of the need for nature engagement for young children, and this

awareness is truly wide-ranging, from international to municipal; for example

- the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has a [#Nature for all](#) initiative<sup>5</sup>
- City of Calgary Outdoor play charter<sup>6</sup> will be attempting to break down barriers for helping get urban children outside into more natural play spaces
- School boards are putting nature schools on their agenda
- Parks for all<sup>7</sup> is an initiative of a number of Canadian park and recreation agencies
- ParticipAction released a position statement on Active Outdoor Play<sup>8</sup>: “Access to active play in nature and outdoors—with its risks—is essential for healthy child development. We recommend increasing children’s opportunities for self-directed play outdoors in all settings—at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature.”



<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iucn.org/commissions/commission-education-and-communication/our-work/nature-all>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Parks/Pages/Locations/Natural-Play-Spaces.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> <http://lin.ca/canadian-parks-summit/parks-for-all>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.participaction.com/sites/default/files/downloads/Participaction-PositionStatement-ActiveOutdoorPlay\\_0.pdf](https://www.participaction.com/sites/default/files/downloads/Participaction-PositionStatement-ActiveOutdoorPlay_0.pdf)

“10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

Marlene talked about the increase in funding availability for projects working to engage young children with nature spaces, including that the **Lawson Foundation**<sup>9</sup> has committed to funding a ten year initiative through their *Outdoor Play Strategy*.

She concluded with the call for a commitment to change, and noted that there are many “demanding that play spaces that includes nature”, and that cities can no longer leave children behind, and not being able to have connections to natural settings.

## Cam Collyer

Ten years ago, there were already great projects being undertaken, but the programs a decade ago were “fairly exotic”, “strange partners trying to work with school boards.” He notes that it is “remarkable how much has changed.”

We can now institutionalize the child/nature initiatives, especially getting school boards to take this stuff seriously; this includes seeing design guidelines, policies, research, implementation guidelines etc. This movement is no longer sitting on the margins. There is now a more universal approach to these initiatives, and **The Evergreen Foundation** is now receiving calls from schools/school boards to deal with the issue of nature engagement for children at a more systemic level.

A good understanding of what has happened is to see what is going on at the Evergreen **Brick Works**<sup>10</sup> in Toronto. The nature-based programs for kids are flourishing,



and their “summer camps fill up in 20 minutes!” Cities and schools want more of this, and Evergreen is working with places like Kitchener ON to develop placemaking systems<sup>11</sup>. There are all sorts of new partnerships

being made as a range of groups reach out across more traditional lines resulting in an increased diversity of approaches and increased diversity of those involved. For example, they are working more closely with the school facilities departments and helping those people, often excluded from decision making, to buy-in to the school/nature connection by helping them tell their own stories.

<sup>9</sup> <http://lawson.ca/our-approach/impact-areas/healthy-active-children/outdoor-play-strategy/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.evergreen.ca/get-involved/evergreen-brick-works/>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.wearecities.ca/kitchener\\_waterloo](http://www.wearecities.ca/kitchener_waterloo)

## “10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

Interestingly, The Evergreen Foundation has changed their focus and orientation from their idea of bringing nature into the city, to “creating flourishing cities”<sup>12</sup>: “We believe that flourishing cities are created through the alchemy of placemaking—holistically improving the intersections and interdependencies between people + natural + built worlds.”

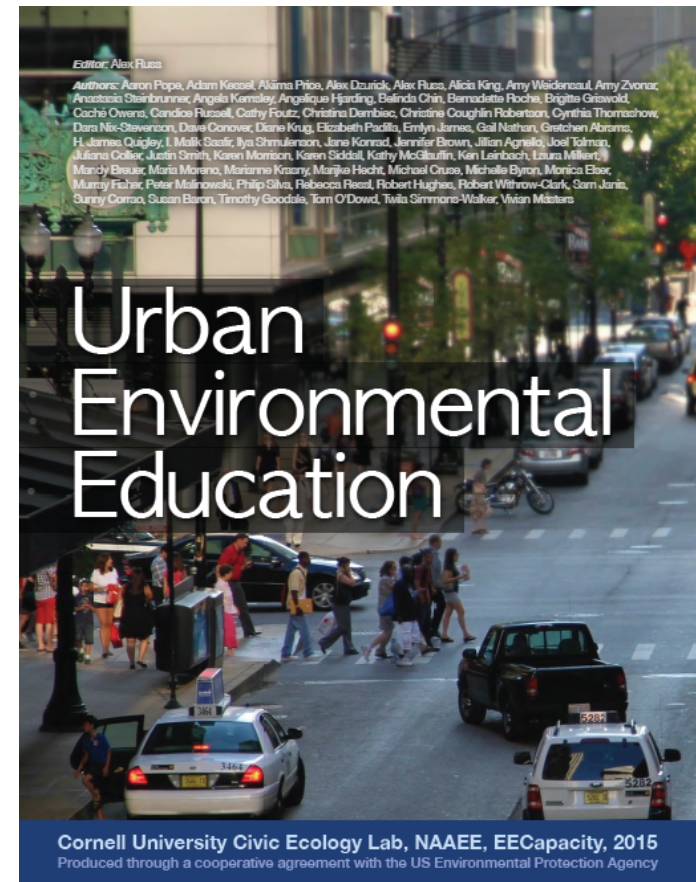
### Nick Stanger

Nick noted the relative absence of research done around urban issues in environmental education. He gave kudos to the geographers amongst us for bringing forward the issue of children, nature and the urban environment. There is a recent edited volume produced by the **North American Association for Environmental Education** (NAAEE) that would be a good place to look for current information about urban EE<sup>13</sup>. Russ and Krasny, in that volume, note five trends in urban environmental education:

1. **City as Classroom** - focus on science, ecology and the environment using urban outdoor or indoor settings
2. **Problem Solving** - address environmental and social problems
3. **Environmental Stewardship** - foster community-based management of urban ecosystems and natural resources
4. **Youth and Community Development** - Contribute positive youth development, asset-based

community development, community organizing, and social capital

5. **City as Socio-ecological system** - Develop an understanding of cities as social-ecological systems, re-imagine how to manage cities to achieve desired environment and social outcomes



<sup>12</sup> <https://www.evergreen.ca/about/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://naaee.org/eepr/resources/urban-environmental-education>



## “10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

Nick also noted that there is current work that those interested in the child/nature connection should be aware of<sup>14</sup>, including:

Derby, M. W., Piersol, L., & Blenkinsop, S. (2015). Refusing to settle for pigeons and parks: Urban environmental education in the age of neoliberalism. *Environmental Education Research*, 21(3), 378-389.

Robertson, M. E., & Burston, M. A. (2015). Adolescents, new urban spaces and understanding spatial isolation: Can geography educators lead educational reforms? *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 24(4), 325-337.

Weissman, E. (2015). Entrepreneurial endeavors: (re)producing neoliberalization through urban agriculture youth programming in Brooklyn, New York. *Environmental Education Research*, 21(3), 351-364.

Wolsink, M. (2016). Environmental education excursions and proximity to urban green space--densification in a “compact city”. *Environmental Education Research*, 22(7), 1049-1071.

Nick concluded with things that might be missing from the list developed by Russ and Krasny, including:

- social and environmental justice discussions
- how can we add complexity to these discussions to engage more equity and inclusion as a focus?

- gender and queer theory
- decolonization, truth, and reconciliation
- immigrant and refugee realities
- challenging the notions of environment
- interiority, ethnography, and corporeality
- oppression, white fragility, power & privilege



## Nature Preschool / K-5 Education

### Lenny Ross

Lenny talked about the potential of the new **BC Science curriculum** as opening up an importance space

<sup>14</sup> Those without access to an academic library system can look up these articles, find the email of the authors and simply email them and ask for a pdf of the article.

for place-based education. “The Science curriculum takes a place-based approach<sup>15</sup> to science learning... Students will develop place-based knowledge about the area in which they live, learning about and building on Aboriginal knowledge and other traditional knowledge of the area. This provides a basis for an intuitive relationship with and respect for the natural world; connections to their ecosystem and community; and a sense of relatedness that encourages lifelong harmony with nature”.<sup>16</sup>

The new document has a section, **The environment and science learning**, which cites David Sobel (2004): “Place-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organization, and environmental resources in the life of the school.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> [http://promiseofplace.org/what\\_is\\_pbe](http://promiseofplace.org/what_is_pbe)

<sup>16</sup> <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/goals-rationale/science> [and excuse the terrible colour layout of this page! Yuck! Low-bid contract designers!]

<sup>17</sup> Sobel, D. (2004). *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities*. Northampton, MA: Orion Society. [http://www.uccs.edu/Documents/coga/Place-Based\\_Education.pdf](http://www.uccs.edu/Documents/coga/Place-Based_Education.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/introduction\\_s.pdf](https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/introduction_s.pdf)

In the introduction to this new curriculum, the Ministry states: “Science and scientific literacy play a key role in educating citizens of today for the world Tomorrow. Critical to succeeding in this endeavour are the core competencies that provide students with the ability to... *exercise an awareness of their role as an ecologically literate citizenry, engaged and competent in meeting the responsibilities of caring for living things and the planet* [italics added].”<sup>18</sup>

But beyond simple science, Lenny notes that the kindergarten curriculum, for example, has the outcome “demonstrate curiosity and a sense of wonder about the world”, and “demonstrate curiosity about the natural world”, all invitations to get young children outside and into nature. He is hopeful about the new curriculum and hopes that teachers will use it to engage their schools to make stronger connections to nature and to make greater use of natural settings. At last, “there is a strong case for using nature centred, place-based education programming in the curriculum.”

Lenny noted that there is a cultural shift under way where, to quote from Dr. Chris Fuller, “the outdoors is our classroom”. The new model is about “bringing nature in and taking kids out”.

## Enid Elliot

Enid had a prepared presentation and I have included it in its entirety in Appendix 2.

## Frances Krusekopf

Frances also had a prepared presentation and I have included it in its entirety in Appendix 3.

## The Lieutenant Governor of BC, The Honourable Judith Guichon

The LG opened her comments saying “I am blown away by what I am hearing this morning”, and she noted that the audience members have clearly been “instruments of change”. She spoke about the need for us to “create a vision of the future for our young people that is more than simply *sustainable*”, but that offers a rich range of possibilities.

She spoke about her own children’s experience of growing up in a rural area in the Nicola Valley, having the chance to build their own ‘forts’ next to a creek. Concerned that we are worrying too much about the risk to children playing unsupervised in natural settings, she noted that her

children didn’t really want to drown so they too care of themselves as they played near the water.

One of her goals this year is to visit 150 schools in honour of Canada’s 150th anniversary, and she has been seeing an amazing variety of school environment projects connected with her program *Stewards of the Future*<sup>19</sup>. If teachers have great projects to show off, they should contact her at Government House!

The LG is particularly interested in the issue of educating and offering experiences in nature for those young people who live in urban environments, which in Canada is about 85% of our total population. And she finished talking about the power that one person can have in effecting change<sup>20</sup>, and encouraged the audience to continue to make change.

An abridged version of Her Honours comments are included in Appendix 1.

## Non-Governmental and Governmental Organizations

### Kristine Webber

Kristine spoke about the organization of the NatureKids network<sup>21</sup>, growing out of the work of Daphne Solecki and the Federation of BC Naturalist’s Young

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ltgov.bc.ca/lg/priority-programs/stewards/default.html>

<sup>20</sup> While the LG didn't mention this, I was reminded of *The Man Who Planted Trees*, a Oscar-winning National Film Board short film based on Jean Giono’s novel. The book can be downloaded at [www.idph.net/conteudos/ebooks/the\\_man\\_who\\_planted\\_trees.pdf](http://www.idph.net/conteudos/ebooks/the_man_who_planted_trees.pdf), and the film can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTvYh8ar3tc>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.naturekidsbc.ca/>

Naturalist program. NatureKids has grown in the last few years from 15 to 45 clubs scattered around the province. The work of the NatureKids head office is to do the organizational and administrative work that allows the volunteer leaders to really focus their efforts on the work of engaging and inspiring young children and their families to have a deeper experience with our natural world.



## Peter Ord

Peter spoke to Robert Bateman prior to our conference, and Robert sent his greetings,: “Please extend my congratulations to Rick and Bob for following up with another event on kids in nature a full decade after the original. And, I would like to remind the participants that

<sup>22</sup> <https://batemancentre.org/>



while getting kids into nature is very important, it is not enough to just have them play in nature, it also important that they notice nature fully and understand the small intricacies and tiny details that one can see in the wild, like veins in a leaf, for example.” Peter’s comments, about Bob not wanting kids to be just throwing sticks at creatures in the wild were also very apt!

The Robert Bateman Centre<sup>22</sup> is focused on engaging young people and their families with nature, but with a particular emphasis on the relationship between art and nature. What they’ve learned is that they can present the concept that “nature is magic” to kids, and that nature doesn’t need to be ‘wild’, but that nearby nature can hold many treasures



and lots to see and observe. They are also developing their ability to deliver **ASK** programs; **Art** — **Science** — (traditional) **K**nowledge programs.

They also have with a *Junior Nature Sketch Club*, which has a “focus on observing wildlife in unique environments and using our sketchbooks and pencils to record habitat observations.”

## Kerrie Morton

Since the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund “left” government, they have been able to really support educators get their students outdoors through their GO grants<sup>23</sup>, which can be used for “transportation, project materials and program fees that support outdoor, hands-on learning in and about nature.”

Among the curricular supports that WILD BC offers teachers and outdoor leaders, they have a new document and workshop called **Get Outdoors**<sup>24</sup>, which “supports teachers in getting their students outside and engaged in experiencing the outdoor classroom...This guide includes “baby steps” for taking students outdoors ...[and] also contains Teacher Tip Sheets and checklists covering group management, materials, field trip planners and the importance of the ‘100-Metre Field Trip’.”



<sup>23</sup> <https://hctfeducation.ca/go-grants/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://hctfeducation.ca/product/get-outdoors/>

She noted that over the past decade, we have increased public awareness of the importance of nature engagement, have been able to increase budgets dedicated to encouraging young people to spend time in nature, and through her work with the Ministry of Education, has been able to bring nature back into K-7 education. This work really sets a strong framework for moving the initiative forward over the next decade. Kerrie’s active engagement with the Ministry of Education, along with Lennie’s contribution, is very important for the advancement of nature engagement in the/outside of the classroom over the next ten years.

## Eva Riccius

For Eva, who came to her position with Saanich (BC) Parks through both the NGO world as well as BC Parks, it is “all about the land.” At this time, Saanich Parks has a significant number of volunteers who remove invasive plants and replant with native vegetation: this group, last year, contributed 15,000 hours of work and removed the equivalent to 6 Olympic swimming pools worth of vegetation.



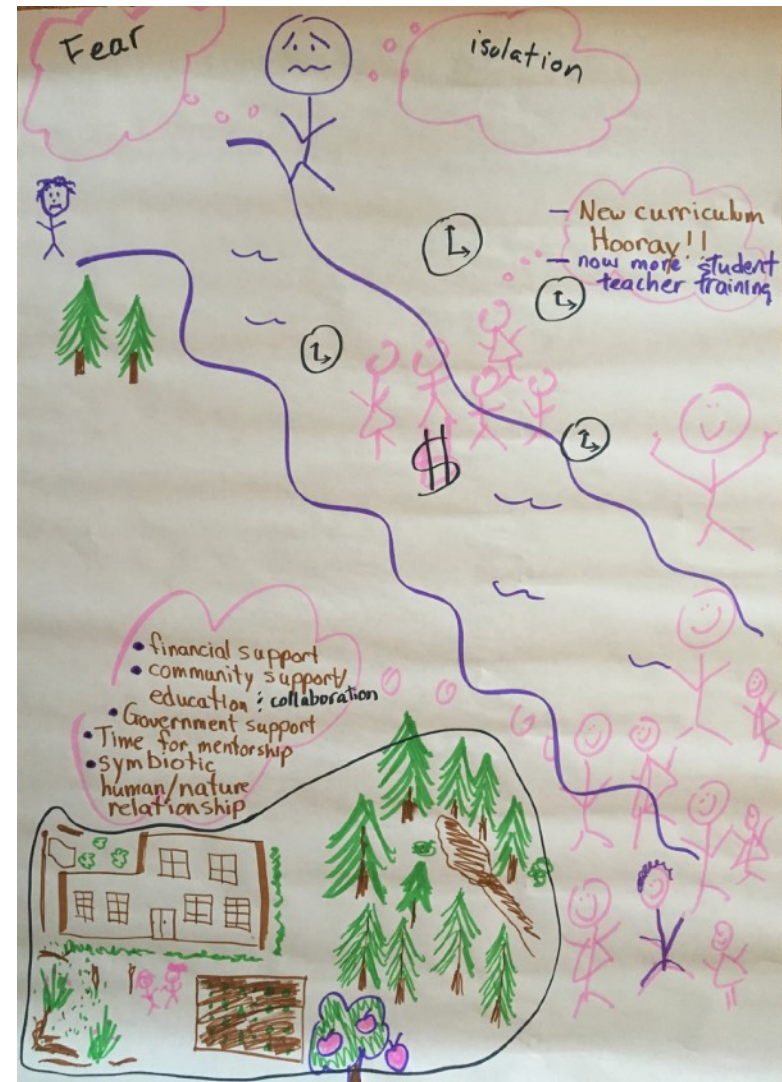
Her interest in expanding the possible utilization of Saanich Parks leads her to open these spaces up for proposals for use by daycares, schools and others. She doesn't expect one the next decade that they will solve all the problems of nature-access for children, but they are looking to “grow the tent” with more and more partners, increasing the collective impact of what they can do and are doing.

## Thinking about the future we want to see

The last part of the day was spent doing an exercise involving an examination of the current state of the movement to re-connect and re-engage children and families to nature, and then to engage in a back-casting exercise that imagined where we might desire to be in 2027 and what might be some steps that would help us get from “here” to “there”. Given that we had less than two hours to do this, we could not expect a deep analysis of the situation, nor a complete and well-constructed plan on how to move forward. Nonetheless, the conference participants jumped into the exercise with great enthusiasm and, on top of just the obvious enjoyment of engaging in meaningful discussion with friends and colleagues, generated a range of great ideas.

### Present: 2017

Attendees understood the strengths and weaknesses of our current reality ten years after we began this movement in BC. As one participant wrote, “Compared to other cities, we're better than some but still have a long way to go.”



The “**nature movement [is] becoming popular again**” was noted, as there is a “growing awareness of our ‘nature connection’” and that “there is momentum - hopeful

at present”. Attendees also noted that there are “different definitions of ‘nature’... we need to get away from some views are ‘wrong’” and that we must “recognize that we all have our own idea of what it means to be in nature.” In particular, we need to recognize “nature in an urban context”. “Nature is us... We don’t think that we’re a part of nature (which is a desired future)”.

Regarding the audience for the messages of the new nature movement, the question was asked “**is this only for the privileged?**” It was made clear that “we [those in attendance at RRU] are not our audience”, and that there are “not enough voices speaking/advocating about nature in cities/urban centres and conservation in general.” There is a “lack of diversity in the nature connection movement in urban settings” according to the participants.

A number of tables noted that there is still a “**lack of province-wide connection and communication**” for letting groups and individuals know how they can better connect to others and to the natural world. “Lack of knowledge of the local services/ programs/ initiatives”.

There were many reasons mentioned for our **lack of accessibility to natural spaces**, including that in urban environments, where perhaps 85% of Canadians now live, there simply is a “lack of green spaces”. Some of these reasons included:

- “mobility issues” and “transportation” (if you don’t own a car, it is hard to get out to more natural settings)
- “Financial constraints”, as low-income families have a hard time budgeting for nature-based activities
- “expectations of parents”, as free play in nature for children may be seen as a lesser priority than soccer or other activities

On the other hand, attendees did note that there is **more and more interest in “staying local”, more local “nature playgrounds” and more interest in “bringing nature into classrooms”** than ten years ago. Attendees also noted that there is increased “interest by parks to host programs” and increasing interest in “municipal natural spaces and park.” Yet increasing park visitation poses its own challenges as attendees noted that “increasing interest in getting [people] into parks... may be unsustainable” and we might become “victims of our own success”. If we are successful in getting more children and families to spend time outdoors in natural settings, we are going to have to figure out “how to deal with the impact on the land and care for the land- tension there!” and be able to consider the “restoration of land/ancestral land management”.

Attendees noted that while there are more and more partnerships between schools, community groups and ENGOs and “lots of things are happening at the same time”, they also repeatedly noted the “**lack of collaboration, and instead [organizations were] working in parallel**”, and how ENGOs are often “competing for same money and audience”. Because of this lack of collaboration, there is also a “lack of capacity” broadly in the community, “with new organizations repeating (disjointed, competition versus collaboration) what is done elsewhere.”

At present, there are **a range of motivations for engaging children and families with nature**, including some that are “fear-driven motivation, e.g., get out for your mental and physical health”. Attendees noted the amount of fear associated with engaging with nature, both the fear of the potential negative consequences of not having time in natural settings as well as the fear of children being injured

“10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

during outdoor play. One team noted that “we’re pushing people into ‘nature’ that they hate.”

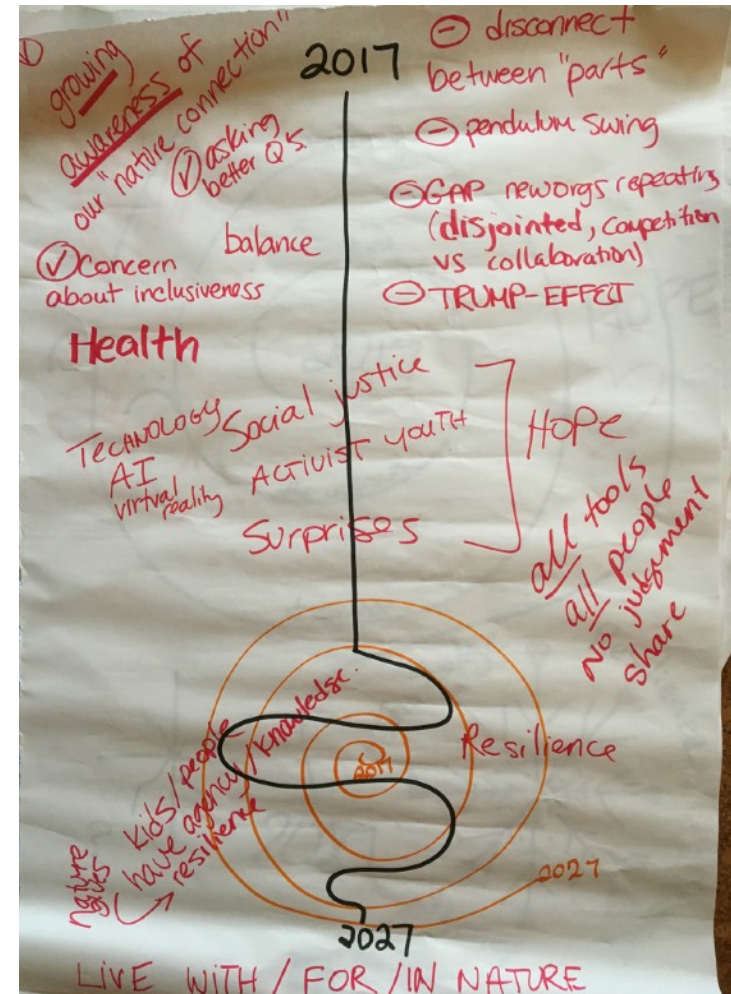
Attendees noted the **possibilities for K-12 education** contained in the new BC curriculum; “public school has possibility for accessibility”, that “pathways of education opening; BC curriculum opening up”, and that the “new BC curriculum has support for environmental education.” It was clear that “teachers are key players”, But it was also noted that while the “new curriculum is awesome, ... programs are isolated.” And it was noted that there is questionable amounts of “administrative support, and support of facilities and custodians” in having more nature-based education.”

**Future: 2027**

Images of the future imagined by the attendees noted the **changed relationship between “settler” Canadians and First Nations**, including “stronger relationship with First Nations”, “increase indigenous knowledge and cross-cultural wisdom” and a broader appreciation and knowledge of “traditional knowledges (*sic*).” There was a sense that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s work will have a transformative impact on Canada.

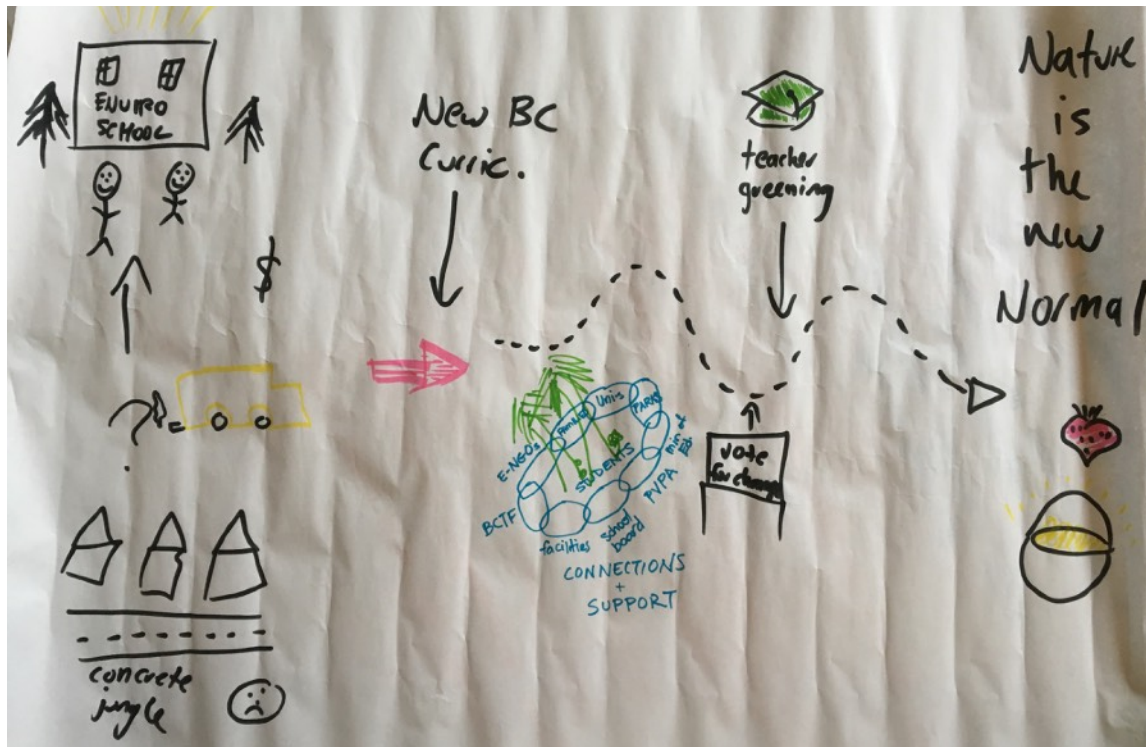
The major focus of this image of the future was the changes that had happened to the public school systems. “**Nature is the new norm** (all schools are like Strawberry Vale and all teachers are like Lenny Ross!).” Nature education and enhancing the opportunity for young people to have immersive experiences in nature as part of school were prominent in the future scenario. The “Ministry [of Education will] support for nature education (priority funding).” **Nature education would be a “priority** at

schools/districts” with “nature-based learning across the nation/province” and “support from school administrations”; there would be supported staff “... and funded nature programs at all schools”. “Trained teachers choose to use natural spaces as a normal part of learning” and most school





“10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature



**Pre-service “teacher education** [would be] based in nature as the norm, not the alternative.” There would be opportunity for “training upcoming educators and ProD for existing teachers.” Many groups noted the value and importance of “**mentorship** to support teachers with ‘extras’ and grants”. Schools would also have a “flexible structure to allow for more parent/volunteer involvement” in the nature-based education of their children. Early Childhood Educators would have “training in nature-based play/learning” “Cultural and community connections” were seen as important ingredients, in 2027, for children’s engagement with nature. In 2027, there would be a “strong unified voice for protecting nature”, with attendees imagining places

grounds would be ‘naturalized’, with “green school yards and less fear of nature”, “more nature places at schools for play and fun”, all resulting in “students feel[ing] a connection to the land.”

Future schools would “recognize systems thinking” and “**Ecological literacy**” as fundamental to a healthy child’s education: “Ecological literacy for all”. “Nature is one of the many languages we know how to understand.” There would be a “strong nature vocabulary and connection to place” as well as a strong “connection to community” and to the children’s “naturehood.” “Schools [will] partner with local parks to run programs [such as] adopt a park’.”

for children that are “clean water / air / dirt-rich” and that would help develop in children a “sense of place and responsibility” so that children would “view [them]selves as being part of nature.” Community activities would be “**inclusive and diverse...**” reflecting a value of “language, cultural and ecological diversity.” Children would “... be empowered at a young age to be outspoken leaders in their community”, where they can be involved in “municipal meetings and have a voice” and where they can be “seen... as caretakers with adults and the public.”

Working with children, families and communities, we would move “**from a sense of ownership to**

**stewardship**”, developing a “deep understanding of local places (stewardship)” and orienting ourselves towards a non-possessive caring relationship with nature, be it nearby or wilderness. Canada is an immigrant country, and in 2027, we will be “**welcoming and educating new Canadians** to dispel fears” about engaging in nature-based activities. “People [will be] going outside because it makes them feel better.” Communities will “partner with cities and communities [to see] what opportunities can be afforded parents and children at no cost.”

Families and communities will have a “**more nuanced language about risk**”, with “parents trained to teach children about risk, ... not afraid of natural risks and prepared to manage risk”, willing to “accept healthy risk-taking ...” and will “allow kids to be involved in things that are risky”. There will be a “diminished risk avoidance” broadly as communities “reclaim activities of childhood.” Of particular note is that it is anticipated that in 2027, there will be much more “support for children with special needs to succeed outside.” Indeed, “children’s desire to be outside will influence parents and vice versa” with a recognition that “nature gives resilience” to children, families and communities.

In 2027, ENGO’s will be engaged in “**collaboration rather than competition**”, “exploring collaborative partnerships” which would see “lots of services possible” and an awareness “...of strengths/services/resources”. A number of groups brought up things like “opportunities [for] partnerships between parks and aquariums and zoos.”

**Government plays an important and necessary role** in furthering the nature connection agenda in 2027 as there is a “recognition of responsibility of all governments”. Governments will have “established standards (urban planning), e.g., green space, biodiversity, blue space, white space” as well as having developed “strategy to deal with intensive use of spaces: urban biodiversity, access to wilderness.” Government will have taken the lead in providing “more access to green public spaces in cities” and the creation of “green spaces in urban settings (city planners)” allowing children to “walk... from home to school”. It will be up governmental agencies to allow a range of land to be “accessible to all, [providing] more education benefits to kids/people.”

### **Actions to get from here to there**

The leadership scholar John Kotter<sup>25</sup> wrote, regarding the first step in creating a change process, that a leader must “Create a sense of urgency so that people start telling each other ‘Let’s go, we need to change things!’” This point, “**emphasize urgency**”, came up often.

**Communication** is going to be an important leverage spot to mobilize action. Attendees noted that we need to “build a platform/administrative structure to connect/showcase what is being done/who are the actors and roles”. They felt that there was a need for “data sharing platforms/centralized user-friendly free platform (like library)” that “focus on the positive.” Attendees felt that helping to foster a “connection to community [can help] to

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<sup>25</sup> Kotter, J. P., & Cohen, D. S. (2002). The heart of change: Real-life stories of how people change their organizations. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.

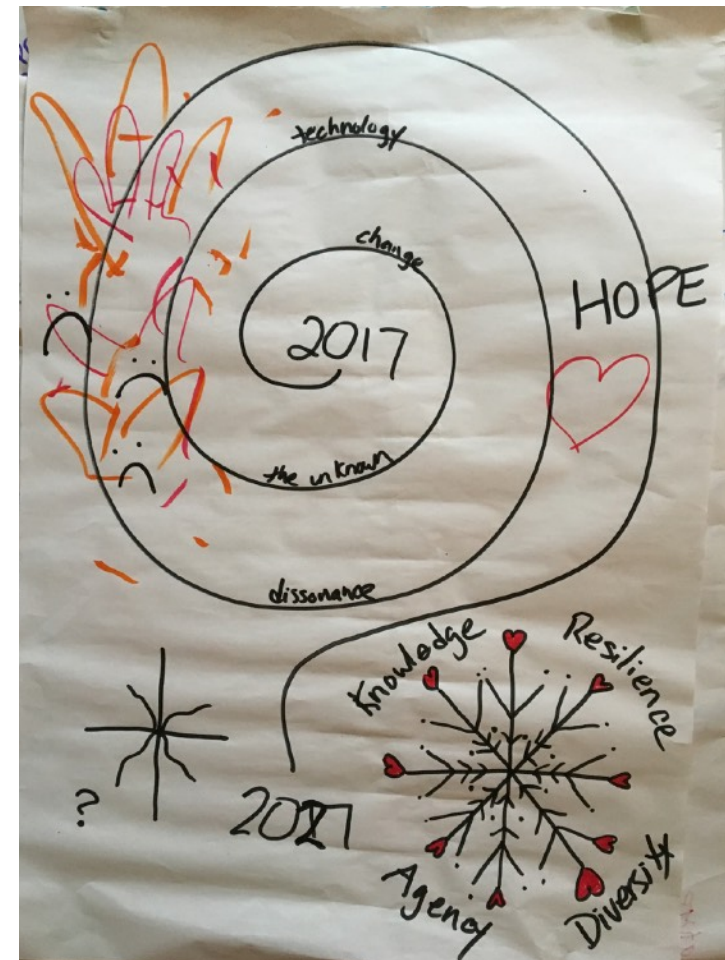
“10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

avoid despair.” We will need to see more “inter-community outreach / more workshops”. And we will have to recognize that “urban isn’t just a location; [non-engaged] parent’s expectations are also true of rural communities.”

The important **role of governments**, and in particular the Ministry of Education and local School Boards, dominated the recommendations as to how we will need to make the transition from today to tomorrow. However, other levels of government will be needed to “remove financial barriers to access to nature.” It was noted that there will need to be a “bottom up/top down [approach] ... government to more effectively give the means/resources for local action to level- build on the consensus of the community”. Governments will have to engage in thoughtful community planning, and “develop corridors for human movement through urban areas and to natural places which reduces need for auto-transport, increase bicycle and walking transportation.”

Very important to the attendees was the need to **provide positive messages/ communications** to decision-makers and others “focusing on positive benefits of outdoor ed experiences” and the utility of “exposure to the value of outdoor ed” and to do this, a range of citizens and parents need to “get involved with [school] district planning” and in particular “lobby Government for education funding.” To do these kinds of things, attendees said that we need to “vote: talk to your MLA” as well as “join a committee to advise those in charge.”

Attendees noted that if we want to make change, we are going to have to “educate trustees, school boards, principals, superintendents etc.” as well as “empower and include facilities staff and custodians.”



To get to a desired future, attendees felt that “**environmental education [should be] in every subject**”, that “age-appropriate teaching” and “accessible curriculum resources” would help to “democratize education”. To achieve our desired future, the point was repeatedly made that students have to be able to develop a

“10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

sense of “critical thinking” though the furthering of “systems thinking education”. “Students should expect to go outside K-12” and to get to this desired future, there will have to be a “change of school culture—through champions, events, money, passionate leadership—to make EE a priority for all classrooms”, and “embed EE in every subject”. Classroom teachers will need to be “reminded ... of the supports available (ecolearning hive).” School structures will have to facilitate “Support amongst teachers” so that they can “share knowledge” and gain “support from organizations (who need to reach out to teachers)” while investigating the “new curriculum with flexibility.”

As well, parents and teachers will have to “train children to assess **risk** in the natural world so they can take reasonable risk in their play and exploration” while there will be a need to “Help parents understand that children have a need for risk to develop.”

**Teacher education** also needs to have a stronger orientation towards a connection to nature and outdoor education. To achieve our goals, there will need to be “Strong environmental advocate/politics to demand nature ed at universities.” As well, “University and ministry decide on inclusion of nature education for all teachers.”

A group also noted the need for more **research**, where scholars and practitioners can generate “data to support success and value of programs.” One group discussed the need to “Try, try, try: fail more often and faster”, and learn from the failures!

As attendees noted that at present, the audience for the new nature movement messages is somewhat narrow, in order to achieve our desired futures we will have to **broaden our audiences**. We should seek “diversity with child in nature movement (social groups, political groups

etc.)” and “use today’s technology to help engage populations that are not part of this conversation.” We will need to have a “much broader intentional conversation” and be able to engage in “communication with difficult people/ organizations; find commonalities”, perhaps through developing “workshops with people way outside of the group” while also “expanding / mainstreaming multiple points of entry (ex. Nurses, psych students).”

It was clear to attendees that we all are going to have to do far more **collaborating**, and financial support has to be wisely distributed to those groups that are engaged in collaborative activities.

## Appendix 1

### Lieutenant Governor of BC, The Honourable Judith Guichon

... Thank you for this invitation to join you today for this important conversation, an opportunity to take stock 10 years after the *Dialogue on Children, Families and Nature* that took place at Government House in February 2007 with Her Honour Iona Campagnolo presiding.

I would like to begin by acknowledging with respect the long history, the wisdom and culture of the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations on whose traditional territory we are privileged to gather today.

At that dinner in 2007 Her Honour said the organizers : “...reminds us of an obligation demanding strategies of access to nature that are safe, yet still undiminished, that are real and not contrived, and that can add to our sense of compassionate humanity rather than de-humanize our ancient instincts of wonder.”...

This year as we celebrate our sesquicentennial I have taken on a challenge to visit 150 schools. We have completed our first 50 since January 16<sup>th</sup> so we are well on the way. It is a tremendous project and it never ceases to amaze me how very diverse, creative and energetic the school communities, the students, their teachers and leaders are...

We... visited a high school [on Saltspring Island]<sup>26</sup> where the community could purchase solar panels for the school roof and the savings on their electricity bill now is put into the scholarship fund. How creative. We have seen gardens, wonderful woodworking and art studios as well as performance studios in many of our schools. No end of creativity and industriousness. But only on Haida Gwaii have I encounter a school where every morning the children took a walk in the moss-covered woods *before* they settled down to reading, writing and arithmetic...

I know there are more garden projects and recycling at some schools. And at Government House we have a wonderful friend, one of our more than 450 Friends [of government House], who has developed a program called **Growing Young Farmers**<sup>27</sup> which teaches students to produce wonderful healthy food. Dave Friend, known as Mr. Organic to the students, teaches them about Natural Raised Beds, Lasagna Gardens, Hugelkultur and Food Forests... these grade 2-3 students who walk up to Government House from local schools definitely get their hands dirty.

Another program that I was introduced to in Sydney BC was the **NatureHood project**.<sup>28</sup> Bob [Peart] and I were both present in October of 2015 for *All Buffleheads Day*, the 298<sup>th</sup> day every year when the Buffleheads return to the bay near Sydney for their winter stay. A gentleman from Nature Canada in Ottawa at that event, spoke of nature, or rather NatureHoods, which I am assuming is a combination of Nature in my Hood? ..that truly brings nature right back to

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<sup>26</sup> <http://saltspringcommunityenergy.com/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.growingyoungfarmers.ca/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://naturecanada.ca/what-we-do/naturehood/>

## “10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

where it should be, not somewhere OUT THERE in a remote reserve or on a farm or over the hill, but right here where we live daily and breathe daily and eat daily and where the children are active and play. So if my space, my yard, my school is part of nature, than I, Me, We should take care of this spot right here right now! Again a wonderful way to engage children in on the ground stewardship.

These are very positive opportunities for children to be engaged in nature, but is that the norm and has there been real change for the majority of young people? I still find it surprising to realize how inconsistent environmental advances are. If our young people are spending time in nature and learning to appreciate our natural environment, how is it that they have not developed greater respect for and desire to care for their naturehood?...

In her Honour Iona's comments of Feb. 2007 I read “Most of us who have been ‘labouring in the environmental vineyards’ over many years now, are very conscious of the sudden upsurge in public attention to broad topics that are related to ecological and environmental sustainability.” She goes on to comment that “However most of us are somewhat surprised, although pleased to see a seeming sudden public consciousness of the reality of Global Warming and Climate Change.

Ten years and yes I think that there has been gradual grudging acceptance of the science but not a great deal of change. We, I believe are now faced with not only getting children back into nature but also with educating them as to what a natural world looks like and how to adapt to the new reality we are experiencing. For many children in the world, reality looks like a refugee camp, or a desert where weather patterns and political disruptions have decimated any topsoil that may have remained, or where slash and burn

logging have removed the once great forests, or where pine beetles have removed an aging forest which is now being replaced by a young vigorously growing new forest.

The continued urbanization of the world has seen rural populations in Australia shrink to less than 10% with Canada not far behind at about 15%. And so it is the majority of children in the world today for whom we have to create both the time and the spaces for them to explore bugs, discover the variety and quality of dirt in all its various diverse colours and conditions and yes, even swallow the odd bit from time to time.

## Appendix 2

### Ten years later...

#### Dr. Enid Elliot

Camosun College  
Victoria BC

I had been working with early childhood education (ECE) programs, thinking about their outside spaces and how to bring in natural elements to what is often a flattened, fenced-in, rubberized area with metal apparatuses—places that did not allow for much diversity of play or engagement with our living world—when the first conference happened in 2007. At that first conference I met Natasha Blanchet-Cohen (Concordia University) and we began a little research project with preschool children, asking them what they liked about their play spaces outside<sup>29</sup>. We discovered they loved playing outside and their favourite places were the trees, bushes, rocks—the natural elements of their play spaces (wherever they could find them).

While engaged with this project, I was reading about the forest kindergartens/*Waldkindergartens* and nature schools in Scandinavia and Northern Europe. They sounded like a good idea to me and I tried to encourage ECE programs to think about such programs. Then I met Frances Krusekopf (Sooke School District) who was interested in

*Waldkindergartens* and we put out a call to whomever was interested in the community to join us in thinking about a Nature Kindergarten (NK) in the Sooke School District. The first Sooke NK<sup>30</sup> was started over five years ago and now another kindergarten will open in Sooke, and there are other programs across our province started by intrepid founders.

For the first four years of the Sooke NK, I was outside once a week with the children and educators. What a lot I learned! I could see that the children benefitted from their experiences, and those experiences are different from ones that they would have found in a classroom because outside, the living breathing world reaches out to them and invites them to know what Thomas Berry<sup>31</sup> calls “the larger community”—“the comprehensive Earth community.”

I have seen how the children first formed communities of safety where they trusted the teachers, as well as their classmates, to care for them physically and emotionally. They formed a community of learners where they learned as much or more from each other as from their teachers. “I will meet you at the cedar tree”; “careful, that’s Daphne, it is an invasive species”; “I am going to make an old age home for my worm, she is old and pregnant.” They have learned what trees the local First Nations might choose for a canoe and why.

The children learned about paradox, like, when is my stick also your stick? I was once walking down the trail with

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<sup>29</sup> Blanchet-Cohen, N., & Elliot, E. (2011). *Young Children and Educators Engagement and Learning Outdoors: A Basis for Rights-Based Programming*. *Early Education and Development*, 22(5), 757-777.

<sup>30</sup> <http://naturekindergarten.sd62.bc.ca/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://thomasberry.org/life-and-thought/about-thomas-berry/introduction>

four children, and three have sticks and are comparing their stick characteristics. The fourth child complains she does not have a stick, and without missing a beat the child beside her breaks his stick over his knee and gives her half and says, “now you do.” They learn metaphor and poetry. A break in the clouds and a bit of blue sky and a child says, “the sky is waving at us.” In a downpour of rain a large rock is emerging in the middle of the path and a child comments that it is “growing”. They explore social justice when the anthills the children have been exploring all year are being covered with sticks and stones by other walkers in the forest, and even some of the other classes at the school. Upset by the injustice to the ants’ homes, the children make signs and post them by the anthills and visit the other classes to explain that the ants’ homes must be respected.

The NK is a place of possibility and of invitations, as well as uncertainty. Outside of the four walls, opportunities were multiple for children to engage with the life, the materials they found there, the challenges found there and the relationships that rocks, trees, and owls offered them. One never knew what would present itself. Children were usually ready to see and seize the opportunities and the adults had to learn to do the same.<sup>32</sup>

Over the past four years we have had an opportunity to explore the educational possibilities of moving beyond the physical classroom. It is a challenge to move beyond the walls of the classroom and the walls/mental maps that are constructed in our minds. Together with the teacher (Lisa) and the early childhood educator (Erin), we set about developing a pedagogy that supported the children’s

interests and connections to the land, air, and water in which we are all embedded.

Focusing on the children’s inquiries became Lisa and Erin’s goal. They used narrations, children’s questions and theories, their own observations and discussions with the children, to see where to build their own teaching/learning. Working together carefully, they thought about what children seemed to be exploring and where their questions lay; they took notes of children’s ideas and decided which ideas they might follow. Working as a team, they were able to question each other when it seemed one might be settling for an ‘easy answer’ to the children’s explorations. Was it really birds the children were focused on, or was it woodpeckers or nests as homes? What was the entry point of children’s interests? Place—the very fabric of the forest and land that they walked on, sat on and lay on—enticed children to explore.

Being outside with children meant the teachers had to be ready for anything and willing to not know. There is so much to wonder about when in the forest. A dead owl may be in the path, worms may be everywhere as the rain pours down, mushrooms and other bright red fungi might have sprouted overnight. There are multiple stories to share—why worms come out in the rain, why is cedar a powerful ally, the history of immigrants—plants and people; which one is relevant, and when?

Moments abound for asking ethical questions. For example, while the children are wading in Bee Creek, a dead shrimp floats to the surface. One boy is particularly upset about the dead shrimp and wonders if their wading might

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<sup>32</sup> Elliot, E., Eycke, K. T., Chan, S., & Müller, U. (2014). Taking Kindergartners Outdoors: Documenting Their Explorations and Assessing the Impact on Their Ecological Awareness. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 24(2), 102-122.



have caused it. The next morning before heading out the children discuss this dilemma and what they should do. “Perhaps we should not go in”, or “maybe we should step really lightly”, or “maybe we should only wade on the very edges.” All good thoughts, but once the creek is in sight they forget their resolutions and run to experience the water. But they had the discussion and had thought about it. We all need practice in thinking ethically and then perhaps acting ethically can follow. David Abrams reminds us that we need to practice right relations with our immediate world.

Tensions have to be negotiated. What is safe? How to decide? Cougars and bears live in the forest and are part of our larger community; how should we include them in our thinking when a bear is killed on the children’s playground the first week of school. A dead bird raises questions about death and loss. How are these issues shared, discussed and thought about? Settler stories and Indigenous stories may present different and difficult visions of the world to children; histories are not always easy to explain and can raise uncomfortable questions.

Teaching outside is an opportunity to think differently about education, potentially developing a pedagogy that embraces complexity, uncertainty, and the place that children will grow into. For a truly Canadian program, including the stories that belong to the particular piece of land we work on are important to include. A pedagogy of place is embedded within a particular place. Each place will ask its own questions and offer different answers.

I think that moving forward, we will further develop our ideas of what it means to take young children outside in Canadian contexts. What education and what skills do teachers and early childhood educators need? How can we prepare our teachers to embrace taking children into a

natural setting for every morning or one morning a week or even for an hour. Safety is important and so is a level of comfort in being outdoors in all types of weather. But more importantly, I think, is that we will consider what our philosophy and our values will be; is it about dominating the natural world? Seeing the trees as material for our consumption, or as living breathing creatures who share the world with us? How do we live in relationship with the living breathing world and with all our complex relationships? We are at the beginning of this current movement to get children out on the land and listen to its stories. This is a Canadian story now and it is different from the stories of NKs in Norway or England or Australia.

Over time, we should become more comfortable with the organic nature of the unfolding stories within place, comfortable with the uncertainty of teaching this way, comfortable with the children’s abilities to notice, question, listen, share and participate in their own learning. As we think beyond the walls of the classroom, beyond the walls of our current educational system we must continue to ask questions, teach/learn with humility and listen to children; and with luck, we can engage in a pedagogy that will have teachers and students venture more and more outside the walls.

## Appendix 3

### Frances Krusekopf

Principal, Colwood Elementary School  
Sooke School Board, BC

I was not a participant in your dialogue in 2007, but I recall having a related conversation, around the same time. About a decade ago, as a board member of the Victoria German School, I attended a professional learning weekend in Toronto. I remember talking with a recent German immigrant who was affiliated with the German School in Winnipeg. When I asked what the mother of three young boys missed about Germany, she responded with intriguing stories about the *Waldkindergarten* her sons had attended, expressing her disappointment that such programs did not exist in Canada. That brief exchange led me to seek out a forest preschool program for our son while our family was on sabbatical in Munich, Germany in spring 2010<sup>33</sup>.

As many of you know, it was my son's *Waldkindergarten* experience that inspired the Nature Kindergarten (NK) pilot program in the Sooke School District. I was a District Principal of Curriculum and Programs at that time and well-positioned to champion a program like this with a committed group of individuals from the school district, post-secondary institutions and the community. Six years later what have we learned? I'd like to briefly explore three thoughts to answer that question.

#### To develop slowly

We spent about 18 months learning how to transplant a successful forest preschool concept from northern Europe to southern Vancouver Island. Initially this seemed like a long time, even too much time; however, as we approached our first day of NK in September 2012, I was grateful to have taken the time. While I personally had experienced a forest preschool program first hand, most members of our committee had not; although there were books to read on the topic, there were no direct local models to follow in 2011. There were so many angles and details to consider! My relationships with our school district's stakeholder groups and my understanding of how things worked made it possible to develop job descriptions, create MOU's for use of land and create risk management plans, to name a few of the many administrative tasks related to starting a program of this kind. Then there was the time spent on the creative aspects of the program; developing guiding principles, thinking about the pedagogy, and determining a plan for what a day, a week or a term in NK might look like.

#### To continue to grow and evolve

With intention, we set aside a budget for continued professional learning for the NK educators and created a structure for regular support, particularly in the early stages of the pilot. Using Skype, we had weekly steering committee meetings that included the two NK educators, the school principal, Enid Elliot and myself. At start, these conversations were focused on the day-to-day program logistics; however as confidence grew, routines established

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<sup>33</sup> Frances spoke at the 2015 TEDx I Victoria, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MONGsiy67YY>

themselves and our dialogue moved to discussing pedagogical approaches. We took advantage of professional development days to learn from others engaged in similar work; our sages included Claire Warden<sup>34</sup>, Anne Pelo<sup>35</sup>, Louise Chawla<sup>36</sup>, David Sobel; they visited the program, observed us, stretched our thinking and moved our practice forward. Academics researched various aspects of the program and their conclusions provided additional guidance. In short, we met often, reflected deeply, and were committed to continuing to improve, to explore new ideas and different ways of delivering the program.

### **To support the ripple effect**

The interest in Sooke’s Nature Kindergarten far exceeded our expectations. Not long after the pilot started, we recognized a need to shield the educators and students from regular visitors to allow them to focus on their own learning. So, we developed complementary continuing studies courses through RRU which were offered several times over the course of two years. Our support to others interested in developing similar programs ranged from phone call consults to workshops or presentations to courses that Enid taught at the post-secondary level. It has been thrilling to be at the front end of the wave of this movement, but I have also learned the risks involved in

promoting a popular idea. How does one ensure the integrity of the concept? the pedagogical depth? the readiness of a district or community to embrace the idea? the development of a sustainability plan?

As I look forward, I am cautiously optimistic. We recently learned of the Victoria School District’s decision to discontinue their two Coastal Kindergarten programs<sup>37</sup>. At about the same time, the Sooke School District announced a second Nature Kindergarten program in the town of Sooke. I am confident that the Nature Kindergarten program that we developed is model worthy of replication, but this needs to happen carefully and only if the plan for sustainability is clear. New programs need to develop thoughtfully to recognize and respond to their local context; continue to grow and evolve through support and professional development; and stay connected with others engaged in similar work to benefit from collaboration.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.claire-warden.com/>

<sup>35</sup> [https://www.rethinkingschools.org/restrict.asp?path=archive/23\\_04/peda234.shtml](https://www.rethinkingschools.org/restrict.asp?path=archive/23_04/peda234.shtml)

<sup>36</sup> Chawla, L. (2015). *Benefits of nature contact for children*. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 30(4), 433-452. doi: 10.1177/0885412215595441

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/no-more-nature-kindergarten-classes-in-victoria-district-1.7235697>

## Appendix 4

### Seairra Courtemanche

#### Reflective Summary Draft: An Outdoor ELC

#### Facilitator’s Perspective

**Seairra** is an “Early Learning Nature Guide - Storyteller/Artist - Interactive Art Facilitator- Seed Carrier- Planter & Gatherer- Circle Facilitator” and offered her notes of the day’s work for inclusion here.

At the end of the day I went out to the field by Hatley Castle and intentionally played a yellow cedar flute that was gifted to me a few years back, with deep gratitude to an Elder European Tree & Elder Native Tree. The experience of the day was sent through the flute as a way to connect with the trees and share words of the day and ask for their guidance and perspective in this conversation. From this unique heart-centered space I offer this reflection.

**Richard Louv** said in his skype call: “It’s a cultural issue.”

I asked a participant next to me who is working in Hope BC what the above comment means to him. He said often the 3rd world adopts perceived values of the 1st world, values such as:

- Being connected with nature = Poverty
- Progress = Monetary Wealth
  
- How does the above values translate into accepted and valued behaviours & education?
- How do these values affect relationships in outdoor learning?

- How do these values affect children’s participation in land management?

Reflecting that Canada is made up of displaced transplanted people who either have participated in inflicting war and oppression, are victims of war and oppression, both or are survivors of the intergenerational effects of traumas inflicted by war with varying capacities of resiliency. In this story We all have different ancestral roots (Indigenous Roots that connect us to specific land and waters = place). Some of us know where our ancestral roots are from, others don’t. How has this reality affected the watershed, living classroom, where we are facilitating outdoor learning?

Being able to acknowledge our own ancestral lineage and family roles in context to the history of this land and the historic context to relationships with ancestral peoples of the land where we are doing outdoor learning on is important. This work calls for a deep cultural sensitivity and I have found that quality to be a rare foundational skill needed continually in this work.

**Marlene Powers** “There is a symbiotic relationship between connection and conservation”.

From this acknowledgement & understanding the following questions arise:

“What role does tribal land management & conservation have in outdoor learning & TRC?” “How do they connect together?”

**Nick Stanger** reminded us outdoor learning connects one to larger complex socio- ecological justice

## “10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

issues that affects many foundational systems such as food systems.

- What defines “Culture?”
- What is cultural safety and cultural sensitivity?
- How does one learn this concept, fine tune skills and create space for cultural safety/sensitivity?
  - Where does responsibility to TRC fit into the conversation of culture in outdoor learning?
  - UN Declaration of Indigenous Human Rights - UN Declaration of Human Rights (Differences, Similarities , Why is there separation? )
  - What role does outdoor education play in TRC?

A vision seeded in this heart: A Vision of

Reconciliation:

- Outdoor Education Planting Trees of Reconciliation
  - Outdoor Ed programs called raise appropriate trees for ecosystems.
  - Collective planting days within outdoor learning initiatives across the nations
  - Declaration signed by land managers to protect this tree & space declaring it is the living classroom - a place of learning for children & families.
  - The death of the tree is included in the plan to become a nurse log to feed the next generation of learners - to continue the health and well being of the foundational soils.
  - Declaration signed between nations & municipalities applicable to place. That municipality is committed to building cultural sensitive relationships based on mutual respect and create space for tribal land management in that location as an action of TRC.

- Plant a Tree - TRC & Early Childhood Education/ Early Learning and Care (ECE/ELC) - In Community

**Judith Guichon** “We need to learn how to care for nature”. She reminds us...

- Humans have accepted the science of climate change; but, not changing actions
  - To deal with Carbon issues will depend on our ability to protect soil.
  - Soil professor mentioned the collapse of civilizations boiled down to soil destruction.

Reminding us importance of understanding and caring for soil. What does this look like in outdoor learning/ECE/ ELC ?

- Humanure systems
- Composting systems
- Soil protection
- Creating space in child development theories on the importance of children’s glimpse of time when they eat soil, a milestone in child development.
- Bioremediation of soil - mushroom growing

**Enid Elliot:** “We are Nature” -“Each place creates its own questions & its own answers”

Participating in soil creation and protection is one way to create understanding of what many indigenous peoples have known for centuries and what Enid has reminded us in her comment “ We are Nature”.

Confirms importance for Land Stewardship & Management as part of Outdoor learning

Swan Lake Rep: (Biologists & Naturalists) Raised concern where children’s play year-round, there is extreme land degradation.

“10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

**Frances Krusekopf** said the Sooke NK uses five different sites and rotates them.

The degradation of sites are a real issue and concern I've experienced and witnessed in many outdoor program sites. A way to deal with this issue in a program is to utilize different locations as well as creating a land restoration plan map. This includes connection with municipal and/or ancestral land managers. The children and youth participate in the creation of the map, protecting and caring for the lands. This is shared intergenerational involvement in managing the lands. The children & youth & families documentation of the land is presented in local land management meetings.

Participating in managing the lands; this is one place where we create a space for children's and families voices to be heard in communities.

Inspired thoughts listening to **Lenny Ross**, retired teacher.

He referred to Ministry Core Competencies and identify how year-round early learning outdoor education creates space to develop these competencies within the children.

Monique Gray Smith<sup>38</sup> spoke at the recent *Aboriginal Success by Six ECE/ELC* gathering and reflected on the TRC. Grey mentioned core competencies taken away in residential school such as Love and Trust. It is appropriate we recognize these competencies within the core curriculum as skills to nurture within the daily curriculum.

Language Theme Emerged = Relationship with the land. Need:

- Ecoliteracy
- Youth languages
- Remember Chinook (trade language & point of communication between nations)
- Indigenous Languages

The message to have accessible inclusive gatherings with intentional diversity present - including minorities was a common theme.

There was also a need expressed to expand opportunities for communication between all the human resources & organizations. The idea came forward for a website with data, blogs, updated community event board, mentorship resource training etc

The theme of the need for gov't, NGO agencies to listen to the people they serve came forward strongly as well.

Note\*

Hul'q'umi'num' has the same ending sound in the words used for saying people of the land and soil/earth. This is one example of how traditional knowledge is interwoven in languages and the importance for creating space for diverse languages.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.littledrum.com/consulting/index.html>

## Appendix 5

### Attendees and email

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“10 years back, 10 years forward”: Children, families and nature

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Proceedings of the February 25 2017 workshop