

A belief in the power of community

The founding and future of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children

BY BONNIE NEUGEBAUER
and ROGER NEUGEBAUER

One person can do amazing things. But there is no limit to what a community of people can set in motion. This belief in the power of people is the seed that germinated into the Nature Action Collaborative for Children (NACC).

When environmentalists, landscape architects, and early childhood professionals from around the world gathered for the first Working Forum on Nature Education for Young Children in October 2006, we just knew that we wanted to do *something* -- and what we decided to do was save the Earth, and to save childhood for all the Earth's children.

Dream big, act small. We weren't afraid of our ambitious ideas, but we were clear that those ideas would be built from the actions of each individual. So everyone was challenged to do something, and most everybody did. Some of the actions were small, like planting a garden; and some of the ideas were big, like transforming a city.

Everybody was charged to do something, and all those somethings have added up. Together



we have launched the Nature Action Collaborative for Children — an advocacy group, a community, an action tank, an ever-growing bunch of people who are committed to change, change for children.

This initiative of the World Forum Foundation is empowered by the ideas and spirit of people from around the world, and from many professional groups.

Our ideas and experiences are diverse, which strengthens our knowledge-base, our creativity, and our outreach. We believe that together we can achieve so much

more than any of us acting alone.

Everyone is welcome. Everyone is needed. Let's stir things up, let's get our hands muddy and let's explore and play with the children around us. Let's strategize and advocate for the children we've yet to meet. We believe that together, with you, we can indeed save the Earth and all childhoods.

What's to stop us?

Bonnie and Roger Neugebauer are founders of the World Forum Foundation, the parent organization for many global projects including the Nature Action Collaboration for Children.

~The mission of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children is to re-connect children with the natural world by making developmentally appropriate nature education a sustaining and enriching part of the daily lives of the world's children.~

Working Forum '08 defines wonder

BY IRMA ALLEN

For those of us who had participated in the Working Forum on Nature Education in 2006, there was a special excitement about participating in the Working Forum this year. There was anticipation about reuniting with friends we had made there before, and curiosity about what had we been able to do in the last two years. There was also a genuine desire to enjoy again the beauty and warm atmosphere of Arbor Farm and Lied Lodge.

The Working Forum on Nature Education was held at Arbor Day Farm in Nebraska City from July 21-23. They were three very special days, characterized by a wide range of activities and outcomes. For me, what I most value and remember about the Forum are the following:

Seeing old friends and colleagues in nature education for children

Gone was the shyness felt in 2006, when entering a room full of strangers. This year, we smiled and hugged our friends, and took some time settling into our Leadership Team Meeting. The same happened on the evening of the opening ceremonies. We missed those who could not make it this year, but also had the opportunity to make new friends.

Sharing our various experiences in reconnecting the world's children to nature

On the first evening, a DVD of transformation stories since the last Working Forum

in 2006 amazed us and filled us with pride at the progress and impact that many of us are making in different parts of the world. During the forum, a lot of networking took place. Cards and materials were exchanged, and new links were made.

Receiving inspiration to continue our work and to rise to higher levels

Also on the first evening, Larry Selzer, of the United States Conservation Fund, spoke to us on "Why this Work Matters so Much for Our World." His talk, along with the transformation stories which continued throughout the three days, helped to inspire all of us who were there. At the end of the program, when there was a new call for action, the response was immediate and positive.

Connecting ourselves to nature

From the moment we arrived at Arbor Day Farm, we began to appreciate the beauty of the scenery, the lushness of the trees and other vegetation, the sounds of the birds, the wind, the water, and the serenity of the site. Those of us who went on a guided nature walk (expertly facilitated by staff from Arbor Day Farm and Dimensions Foundation) really had an experience we will never forget. In addition, the Leadership Team picnic, under a beautiful big oak tree, provided a perfect setting and inspiration for making plans for this newsletter, and trying to find a name for it.

Learning about new strategies for reconnecting children with nature

The program was arranged around differ-

ent themes, including "New Tools: Emerging Ideas for Connecting the World's Children with Nature" and "Tools for Advocacy for Reaching Wide Audiences." During sessions such as these, there were very interesting presentations and discussions which gave us the opportunity to learn new concepts, tools and strategies. Experiences with practical hands-on activities -- Instrument-Making, Nature Photography, and "Art Inspired by Nature" -- were available and useful.

Enjoying ourselves

Throughout the Forum, there were special activities planned just for enjoyment.

"Music Inspired by Nature," rendered by William Eaton and Claudia Tulip, was very unique and beautiful. The delicious barbecue, with fabulous singing by Miguel Angel Aguilar was definitely another highlight. Certainly the wonderful food throughout the Forum was an important source of enjoyment.

Throughout the Working Forum, Bonnie and Roger Neugebauer and John and Nancy Rosenow, along with a fantastic team of helpers, actively promoted the goals of the Nature Action Coalition for Children and ensuring the success of the Working Forum.

Is it any wonder then, that the Working Forum turned out to be such a Wonder? □

Irma Allen is an internationally-recognized education specialist and environmentalist; she lives in Swaziland and has experience across Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.

The NACC Leadership Team: Who We Are

The NACC Leadership Team is a core group of early childhood educators, designers and landscape architects who came together in 2006 with a dream to change the world for young children. They represent six continents across the globe, and serve as key contact points for others around the world who have a desire to improve the lives of young children.

The Leadership Team meets periodically to discuss strategies for increasing NACC's outreach and membership, and to find new ways for all of us to work together to further our common mission.

AFRICA

Irma Allen, Mbabane, Swaziland
Hadijah Nandyose, Kampala, Uganda
Sebastian Chuwa, Moshi, Tanzania

ASIA

Bishnu Hari Bhatta, Kathmandu, Nepal
Swati Papat, Mumbai, India
Raed Abu Hayyaneh, Amman, Jordan

NORTH AMERICA

Linda Esterling, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States
Berta MacGregor, Mexico City, Mexico
Jeanne McCarty, Fort Worth, Texas, United States
James Wike, Memphis, Tennessee, United States

OCEANIA

Toni Christie, Wellington, New Zealand
Koodah Cornwall, Perth, Australia
Fiona Robbe, Arcadia, Australia

EUROPE

Helle Nebelong, Gentofte, Denmark
Claire Warden, Perth, Scotland
Marc Veekamp, Apeldoorn, Netherlands

SOUTH AMERICA

Martha Cecilia Fajardo, Bogota, Colombia
Caroline Hudicourt, Petion-Ville, Haiti
Wil Maheia, Punta Gorda Town, Belize

SUPPORT TEAM:

Bonnie and Roger Neugebauer, Seattle, Washington, United States; Nancy and John Rosenow, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States; Tara Hild, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States.

Edited by Chuck Lippstreu, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States

'WONDER,' THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NACC, IS PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY AND WELCOMES SUBMISSIONS FROM ALL NACC MEMBERS.

TO JOIN NACC, VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT:

WWW.WORLDFORUMFOUNDATION.ORG/NATURE

QUESTIONS/SUBMISSIONS CAN BE DIRECTED TO CHUCK LIPPSTREU: CLIPPSTREU@ARBORDAY.ORG.

© 2008 WORLD FORUM FOUNDATION

'So fortunate'

Reflecting on the results of the 2006 creation of the NACC in Nebraska City, United States

BY TONI CHRISTIE

The first-ever meeting of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children was in Nebraska City in 2006.

Along with my husband, Robin, I was so fortunate to have attended this stunning event. People from 25 different countries and several different professional disciplines were invited to contribute and attend this working forum. Landscape architects were invited along with nature enthusiasts and environmentalists of all kinds. There were even musicians and artists involved in every aspect of the forum.

As with any conference, the biggest highlight was the company of so many new and old friends and colleagues.

The setting for this forum was absolutely stunning! Arbor Day Farm encompasses miles of woodlands as well as 140 different kinds

of apple trees, amazing built structures including tree houses and bridges over its waterways, and a conference centre. We were absolutely blown away by a very special area designed for young children, delightfully labelled a "Nature Explore Classroom." This stunning outdoor classroom features a huge marimba, water feature, stage, seating, building and climbing, along with all kinds of natural stimulating and educational opportunities for natural play.

The conference was an inspiration with great discussions, thoughts provoked and, we think, everyone went away with a greater appreciation of the natural world around us and ways in which we might re-connect the world's children with our natural world. □

Toni Christie is the Principal of Child-space Early Learning Centres in Wellington, New Zealand. Together with her husband, Robin, Toni has written two books on the subject of environment design for early childhood settings.

KEY POINTS AT THE 2006 WORKING FORUM ON NATURE EDUCATION

In their final report, conference "synthesisers" listed the following advantages of nature education for young children identified by Forum participants:

- By exposing children to nature, we're giving them a gift of a faithful, life-long friend.
- It provides life-changing, shaping memories
- It offers a sense of peace and re-connection to nature
- Nature has a therapeutic quality – it is calming
- The natural world supports the development of caring, pro-social behaviour.
- How we relate to nature gives us lessons about how we relate to each other.
- It can serve as a force for change, for peace.
- It fosters self-regulation and learning
- Nature develops understanding of oneself.
- It brings out the best in children.
- Nature helps children with disabilities, particularly those with sensory integrations deficit.
- Children's pretend play outdoors in natural settings tends to be more complex / therapeutic than indoors.
- Play and interaction with the natural environment and materials helps develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills.
- Nature is crucial for total development of the whole child, regardless of stage or ability
- Nature education is crucial for preserving of culture, community, learning, healthy being, and world habitat.

Compiled by Toni Christie

WHAT'S COMING UP?

Looking forward to the future, the next international NACC gathering:

□ THE 2009 WORLD FORUM ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Join us in Belfast, Northern Ireland, from June 16-19, 2009 – the NACC meeting will only be a part of the fun as early childhood educators from around the world gather for the 10th Anniversary of the World Forum Foundation. The World Forum in Belfast will be a memorable experience which will not only expose you to international perspectives on a wide range of early childhood issues, but will also provide you with first hand look at the history of the "troubles" and how early childhood education is now bringing communities together.

'Where have all the earthworms gone?'

THE AGE OF SYNTHETIC TURF, THE END OF GRASS, AND THE IMPACT ON CHILDRENS' NATURE EDUCATION

BY HELLE NEBELONG

An English company writes proudly in their brochure that they have installed more than 1.5 million square metres of rubber surfaces worldwide. The product is made from rubber granules from among others' old car tyres. It lasts long and requires little maintenance. It has already been a trend for many years to plaster playgrounds with large amoeba-shaped, brightly coloured, three-dimensional formations covered with rubber surface.

Another artificial product that increasingly is used here and there, and practically everywhere, is synthetic grass.

In April I visited Malmö in Sweden to look at different kind of applications. I went to a school that had a playing field made of artificial grass surrounded by barrier. That seemed to be quite reasonable -- I mean, there is so much wear and tear on a grassy playing field and it restricts the game when the face of the earth is full of holes and naked spots.

I also encountered short cut synthetic turf on a crazy golf course. Two ducks came strutting exactly while I stood there, trying to decide my attitude to this kind of "grass." Apparently, they did not care whether it was synthetic.

We passed on to a busy highway in Malmö. The median strip was covered with artificial turf. At intervals of 5 metres there were beds covered with soil, trees and flowering daffodils. I thought that it looked like artificial, synthetic grass -- which it was!



Finally, we visited one of Malmö's public playgrounds with a hilly landscape covered with rubber and synthetic grass respectively. It wasn't the fact that they hadn't found a way to get the hexagonal shaped bits of grass to bind together that bothered me -- it was the sight of young children romping about this synthetic landscape.

At this point, I opted out. Where is it going to stop? Will we accept artificial trees, bushes and flowers in the urban spaces so that we can get rid of weeding and watering and escape contact with nature that needs maintenance and some times complicated caring?

How should children who grow up in densely built-up cities be connected with nature and get good relations to nature if they don't have access to real lawns with daisies, ants and earthworms?

In my family, there is this nice little story about my sister who, one spring when the door to the garden was opened up, ran out on the lawn shouting with joy:

"Graaaaass!!! Graaaaass!!!"

I really hope that we avoid covering more and more areas with artificial and imitated surfaces.

Again, recently, I visited a Danish school where little boys were playing football on synthetic grass without shoes as if they were playing indoor on a carpet.

The risk of having dirty children back home is now eliminated!

And I wonder: What does this mean to the earthworms? Has anybody thought about what it is like to these little dumb creatures to bump into impenetrable surfaces again and again -- how it hinders their performing the function as they are made to? Will they die if they are not able to get up to the earth's surface in between?

I would really like to know. The synthetic grass agent I spoke to hadn't thought about it, and couldn't answer my extremely relevant question. □

Helle Nebelong lives in Copenhagen, Denmark, where she practices as a Landscape Architect.

...together, we can change their world.

JOIN THE NACC TODAY

VISIT OUR WEB SITE FOR MORE INFORMATION AT:

www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature

...and become a part of this growing community, working for children.