



Nature Child *Reunion*

a summary of
***The Dialogue on
Children, Families & Nature***

which took place February 20–22, 2007

in Victoria, British Columbia

part of Nature Child Reunion,
an initiative of The Kesho Trust

www.naturechildreunion.org

notes drafted by Bob Peart (draft 1, 12 March 2007)

info@naturechildreunion.org



The photograph above shows the participants gathered at Government House.

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BACKGROUND

Richard Louv's groundbreaking book Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder served as the critical reference. The initiative to hold this dialogue stemmed from Bob Peart reading the book, contacting the author and then approaching the other three sponsors for support to hold a gathering with the author to discuss the application of the themes of his book to British Columbia.

In his book Richard Louv pulls together a remarkable set of data telling us that we may be misdirecting the activities of our young and thus determining a future that few of us would want our children to live in. Louv links the lack of nature in the lives of today's wired generation – he calls it nature-deficit disorder – to some of the most disturbing childhood trends such as obesity, depression and the high prescription rate of drugs, especially anti-depressants. Louv believes that the solution is just outside, often right in your own backyard or neighbourhood park. Louv's book makes many important points, including:

- The downward trend and support for environment-related education by schools and government.
- The lack of knowledge of basic facts of nature by today's younger generation.
- Exposure to nature seems to be essential for early childhood development and can improve problem solving, critical thinking and decision-making.
- The criminalization of nature and media exploitation that keeps children indoors and leads to parents being over-protective.
- More and more homework for students, as well as a heavy program of structured activities.
- Less and less access to natural areas.
- The human costs of alienation from nature at the child, family and community level.

Clearly we need to look at what we are doing to and with our children in terms of their ability and willingness to connect with and appreciate nature. Applying the themes of this book to British Columbia leads to the need: i) to evaluate the current state of environmental and outdoor education curriculum in our schools (or lack of it), ii) to determine a better use of park systems to get children outside, and iii) for private land organizations to determine how their lands can better facilitate the opportunity for families to enjoy nature.

On the basis of the above it was decided to invite a number of practitioners from a wide range of education/conservation backgrounds to gather at Royal Roads University to begin the process of building a set of BC initiatives for re-engaging children with nature.

The Dialogue on Children, Families and Nature was subsequently designed to facilitate a mobilization of efforts, some already underway and some resulting from the synergies that will emerge from the meeting, leading to the necessary re-engagement of our young, and through them our broader communities, with the natural world. These summary notes are a brief record of this Dialogue. The agenda is attached as Appendix One.

The following people attended³:

Ed Andrusiak, Greater Vancouver Regional Parks, Vancouver
Eric Baron, Parks Canada, Vancouver
Sarah Bateman, Saltspring Island
Paul Bell, Wildsight, Cranbrook

³ The following people were invited and unable to attend: Peter Campbell, Gumboot Productions, Victoria; Eva Cheung Robinson, Vancouver Foundation, Vancouver; Fraser Basin Council youth representative; Brian Keating, Calgary Zoo, Calgary; J.W. McConnell Family Foundation representative, Montreal; Tim Turner, Sea to Sky Outdoor School, Gibsons; John Woods, Biologist, Revelstoke.

Dr. Natasha Blanchet-Cohen, University of Victoria, Victoria
Shannon Bradley, Environment Canada, Vancouver
Dr. Colin Campbell, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Victoria
Ric Careless, WildED, Gibsons
Dr. Ray Chipiniak, University of British Columbia, Smithers
Cam Collyer, Evergreen Foundation, Toronto
Bruce Downie, The Kesho Trust, Whitehorse
Ron Duffell, ActNow British Columbia, Victoria
Michael Dunn, Gulf Islands Centre for Environmental Learning, Mayne Island
Victor Elderton, North Vancouver Outdoor School, Brackendale
Dr. Enid Elliot, University of Victoria, Victoria
Dr. Jenny Feick, Ministry of Environment, Victoria
Caterino Geuer, Royal Roads University, Victoria
Jeff Gibbs, World Wildlife Fund, Vancouver
Mary Ellen Grant, BC Wildlife Federation, Vancouver
Sandra Hamilton, Silkens' Active Kids Movement, Victoria
Sue Hemphill, Scout Island Nature Centre, Williams Lake
Dr. Eric Higgs, University of Victoria, Victoria
Vicky Husband, Environmentalist, Victoria
Dr. Rick Kool, Royal Road University, Victoria
Mary Krupa, Morningstar Enterprises, Kelowna
Kristine Lampa, Earthwise Design, Vancouver
Silken Laumann, Silkens' Active Kids Movement, Victoria
Hillary Leighton, Royal Roads University, Victoria
Colleen Long, Capital Region Parks, Victoria
Zanita Lukezich, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Victoria
Lori Marcantino, Nature Canada, Ottawa
Dr. Milt McClaren, Simon Fraser University/Royal Roads University, Kelowna
Emrys Miller, Rocketday Arts, Victoria
Kerrie Morton, WildBC, Victoria
Bob Peart, The Kesho Trust, Victoria
Dr. Briony Penn, The Land Conservancy, Saltspring Island
Patrick Robertson, Environmental Education Provincial Specialists Association, Vancouver
Peter Robinson, Mountain Equipment Co-op, Vancouver
Gail Ross, Ministry of Environment, Prince George
Lenny Ross, Strawberry Vale Elementary School, Victoria
Rick Searle, Ecos TV, Victoria
Dr. Gloria Snively, University of Victoria, Victoria
Daphne Solecki, Young Naturalists Clubs of BC, Vancouver
Theresa Southam, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society-BC Chapter, Nelson
Dr. Sydney Sparling, Physician, Victoria
Dr. Duncan Taylor, University of Victoria, Victoria
Sharleen Thompson, Anglican Church, Victoria
Bill Turner, The Land Conservancy, Victoria
Bill Weaver, Weaver Films, Victoria
Dr. Paul Whitfield, Scouts Canada, Vancouver
JB Williams, Tsawout First Nation, Saanich
Nikki Wright, SeaChange Marine Conservation Society, Victoria
Dr. David Zandvliet, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby

DAY ONE: Tuesday, February 20, 2007

Richard Louv's public talk was successful, with ~300 people in attendance. The audience consisted of a cross-section of youth, families and individuals. A number of employees of the provincial government came to listen, which was encouraging – including two provincial Ministers (Honourable Barry Penner, Minister of Environment; and the Honourable Gordon Hogg, Minister of State for ActNow BC). Louv's talk outlined a number of the key points made in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, in particular:⁴

- Even if raised in the inner city, the sense of attachment to a place is very strong. We want that sense of place to be associated with a natural setting.
- Attendance is dropping in parks. If this trend continues who will be the constituency advocating for the need for parks? We must ensure that future generations will support the need for protected areas.
- Why is there this trend to spend less time playing in the out-of-doors? It is too easy to blame electronics and busyness; even though these are both factors the key reason is fear, what Louv terms 'stranger danger'. While the fear is real Louv feels the cause is not, as the majority of harm to children comes from family members, not strangers. Louv mentioned that the problem stems largely 'from his profession of journalism' as there is a tendency for the media to profile any incidents involving young children, while statistically the harm to children is flat or going down since the 70's. This fear has permeated society and neighbourhoods and led to parents being overly cautious.
- Not going outside is a risk to a child's psychological health, a risk to their sense of confidence, a risk to their sense of wonder and a risk to their physical health (e.g., diabetes, obesity).
- The solution is not more gyms and organized sports but getting kids outside to play, having fun and exploring. In nature we invent games, learn to cooperate and develop leadership skills.
- There is an increasing research literature that shows that nature is good for child development and brain architecture. Nature as therapy and stress reduction!
- Urban/regional parks need to emphasize that they are a haven/sanctuary where it is safe. We need to build nature centres and have programs that families can attend in which parents feel their children are protected. What Louv calls 'nearby nature' are being local areas, even in the middle of large urban areas, where kids can play and see something of the natural world. In the United States ranches/farms are becoming the new safe place for teaching and taking children to enjoy being outside.
- Do we need to set up a system of 'nature buddies' – parallel to Big Brothers/Big Sisters?
- Far more effort needs to be made to link with new immigrants and people coming here from other cultures. We also need to make a particularly strong connection with our aboriginal neighbours. Engaging children with nature will be difficult to achieve if we don't work with people with a broad range of backgrounds.

Louv summarized by saying that 'it will never be the way it was' and therefore society must be intentional about ensuring that children have non-directed choices in nature. We need to 'paint a world of nature that citizens will want to go to'. There are so many benefits to children and society by being more closely associated with nature, including just the sense of awe, wonder and sense of majesty. Louv's challenge to the audience was to ensure that today's generation is not the last generation to go outside and play. In particular he urged grandparents to spend time with their grandchildren 'to give that gift of nature' and to pass on 'that generational memory' of the importance and value of honoring nature.

⁴ For further reading refer to an article by Richard Louv in Orion magazine:
<http://www.orionmagazine.org/pages/om/07-2om/Louv.html>

DAY TWO: Wednesday, February 21, 2007

If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life.

If a child is to keep alive [his] inborn sense of wonder, [he] needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with [him] the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in. (Rachel Carson, from A Sense of Wonder)

Upon reconvening at Royal Roads University Richard Louv welcomed everyone and presented a summary of the points that he made in his previous evening's talk. In particular he stressed that he doesn't want his generation, and the generation of many of the workshop participants, to be the last where playing in the out-of-doors is natural. He feels that he is witnessing the virtual disappearance of playing in nature, with the resultant effects of deteriorating physical health, spiritual health and the health of the earth. We must better engage children and families in nature so there is a true nature companionship in our society.

In addition he stressed the growing international Children and Nature Network movement focusing around this issue of children and nature and that Canada had a considerable role to play. He hoped that some sort of regional movement would get started in British Columbia and then be built up across Canada⁵. He invited us to engage in that process.

After Louv's opening Dr. Elin Kelsey, the Dialogue's facilitator, was introduced. She outlined to participants the principles of the Open Space Technology and what the expectations were of those in attendance for the remainder of the meeting. Briefly, Open Space is a way of coming together about a particular topic or concern – but rather than following a preset agenda the meeting's structure is flexible and inviting. Open Space is based on an approach in which participants' own interests and areas of expertise drive the meeting to address a question of common concern that those present are passionate about and willing to take responsibility for⁶.

The Open Space question for this particular Dialogue was "how do we better engage children with nature?" In response the participants self-formed the following initial discussion groups:

- Families are the unit of change; the focus is not solely children.
- The importance of continuing conversations after this meeting.
- Increasing the number of children engaged in outdoor stewardship activities.
- Making it 'cool' to be green.
- Connecting children with nature in cities.
- Connecting children to nature through scout/guides.
- Early childhood education – the importance of an early connection to nature.
- Using environmental education centres as 'the base' for regional programming.
- Convening a national/international conference on nature/children/health in 2008.
- Making strong links between formal school and the community
- Increasing interpretation in provincial parks.
- Mentoring – how do we do it?
- The creation of a 'parklands' cooperative.

⁵ For more detail refer to www.cnaturenet.org

⁶ For those interested in more information about Open Space refer to www.openspaceworld.org

- Engaging diversity – cultures and kids.
- Empowering children through a connection to nature.
- Merging nature education and human development.
- Better use of media to spread our message.

Discussion points that emerged⁷:

- In order to engage children we must **include the family**. Family means the extended family, and grandparents need to increase their involvement. 'Intergenerational environmental amnesia' is a term to describe the fact that each successive generation has a different baseline as to what is normal or natural in their environment. Grandparents can help avoid this creeping amnesia. The family unit is critical for reaching other cultures and aboriginal people.
- **Urban/regional parks** are critical to addressing the child-nature issue. How can we use Official Community Plans to institute a culture of nature and wild spaces? There needs to be ease of access.
- We need **natural play spaces** for children to play and explore. A need exists for more spaces and opportunities for teachers, students, teachers and community members to connect with each other and to connect with nature.
- **Nature interpretation** in all our parks is crucial. BC Parks must re-institute interpretation.
- The **coordination between schools and community** must be developed, nurtured and sustained. Beyond funding and capacity, the difficulty is that there are so few opportunities for teachers to become experienced about outdoor teaching. Many teachers want to pursue this but are isolated and need support.
- **Scouting and Guiding** already deals with co-ed and the multicultural fabric of Canada effectively, and is perfectly aligned with nature education. If well done there is continuity of message from age 5 to late teens.
- **Outdoor stewardship** work needs to involve children more, whether restoration or broader ecosystem/watershed work. We need to be aware that respect for nature also includes the need for natural resource extraction.
- **New Canadians, ethnic communities and aboriginal people** aren't engaged in this conversation and generally don't have the same view of science that we do. The family experience of many new Canadians doesn't include experiences nature. How can we better 'gate keep' with these cultures, is it a different method or just being smarter about our current approaches?
- Where is the positive place for **media**? Often media/journalists lead the disinformation that is out there – how can we better use media technology/people to our benefit? How can we use the power of media to 'spring board the kids into the out-of-doors'?
- The majority of voters are in urban areas, so **urban youth** need to be engaged if there is to be a future for nature.
- Our environmental education programs must convey a positive sense of the future and **provide hope – not despair**. Caring for nature needs to become the norm. Learning about natural systems is more than just play but survival and adaptability to change. Some evidence that children who aren't connected with nature aren't as fully grounded once older.
- The connection with another adult who loves nature can be very influential as a mentor. **Mentoring** is about youth with its energy and age with its wisdom.

⁷ Detailed notes for the Open Space discussions were previously circulated to participants and are available upon request

Potential actions steps that emerged from these discussions:

- Design material and information to be '**family targeted**', not just children and teachers. Don't treat parents/grandparents separately. Information needs to **promote networking** and show meaning and how to make a difference.
- Coordinate, targeted **core funding**; it is critical as so many of our stewardship/education groups are voluntary. In-kind is an effective way to involve business. Support funding for field trips.
- Stress the importance of '**near nature**' to help children create a bond with place. Not just urban/regional parks but 'pocket nature' as well. Involve developers to include nature with housing and urban growth. Organize a forum for planners/urban decision-makers on how to increase 'nearby nature' in urban areas. Real Estate Foundation might contribute funding.
- Work more closely with **non-traditional partners** – health agencies, churches, etc.
- Conduct **more research** to examine the barriers to nature enjoyment – particularly fear, as well as better understand the associated benefits. Need evidence of the connection between nature and early childhood development. If there is positive evidence of the impact decision-makers and funders will be more committed.
- Find the **role models and champions** and use them to promote the value of kids-nature.
- **Create a network** that develops mentors.
- **Embrace new media** – e.g., YouTube, Flickr, on line programming, etc.
- Share and promote **success stories** where community partnerships for connecting kids with nature are working.
- Create **community based environmental education centres** at critical neighbourhood junctures in urban areas.

Near the end of the afternoon the participants adjourned for supper at Government House by invitation of British Columbia's Lieutenant Governor, Her Honour - Iona Compagnola. Although certain protocol was required because of the setting the evening was informal and a good opportunity for the participants to chat with each other and touch base on the day's proceedings. There were two brief addresses – Her Honour's⁸ and Bob Peart's.

Her Honour's remarks centred on her childhood when “as a child, I had unrestricted access to the great Skeena River ecosystem of Mountain, Forest, River, Wildlife, Fresh and Salt Water-life, coupled with a privileged interaction with some of the most ancient cultures on this Continent. These experiences coupled with creation tales, legends and stories of neighbouring First Nations filled my childhood's creative imagination as nothing else could and even today, my consciousness often ranges back along the banks of that great river, and is refreshed and inspired by the experience.” She commented on how “today, the equivalent of our ancient ‘fight or flight’ reaction is found in video and computer games where enemies are ‘liquidated’ without conscience or consequence....” Her conclusion “reminded 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.”

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is a symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of the birds, the ebb and flow of the tides, the folded bud ready for the spring. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter” (Rachel Carson)

⁸ A copy of Her Honour's speech and a couple photographs taken at the event are available at: http://www.ltgov.bc.ca/whatsnew/sp/sp_feb21_1_2007.htm

Bob Peart expressed his respect for those in attendance and thanked everyone for attending the Dialogue. After outlining how his idea for this Dialogue emerged upon reading Richard Louv's book, Bob talked about the importance of hope. Bob commented that knowing the truth about the state of the environment can be painful, and that this existential bleakness can too easily pervade our spirit and lead to a message of despair (hopelessness) when we communicate with society – when what everyone really needs is hope. Bob acknowledged Richard Louv and thanked him for writing his book, as his book has given us all hope – a future of kids playing in nature can't help but be hopeful.

"There are legitimate grounds for hope in hard times, but not one speck of ground for wishful thinking of any kind. We aren't going to be rescued by more research, hypertechnology or some 'new machine'. There is no anonymous 'they' who are going to figure things out. There will be no cavalry riding over the crest of the hill to rescue our wagon train. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. Optimism cannot be commanded. However hope can be nurtured by good work, openness to life and rising above our lesser selves. Hope, real hope, comes from doing the things before us that need to be done in the spirit of thankfulness and celebration." (David Orr)

DAY THREE: Thursday, February 22, 2007

The Open Space process resumed throughout Thursday morning with the focus remaining on the question: "How do we better engage children with nature?" Given the spirit of Open Space as a way of coming together about a particular concern that those present are passionate about and willing to take responsibility for – the participants once again formed into self-directed discussion groups. These were:

- How could the **Ministry of Environment and Parks Canada** cooperate better together to foster the connection between children and nature?
- To find the time to engage kids and their families with nature we are going to have to **stop being so busy** ... what are we going to stop doing?
- So what? Yesterday was a good day – **what now?** The importance of continuing network conversations after this meeting is over.
- Natural spaces in **early childhood education** – taking action.
- What we can do to better engage kids with **diverse cultural backgrounds?**

General discussion points that emerged:

- The need to document and build on the inherent value to society of having **neighbourhood parks**, or nature centres nearby.
- The facilitative roles with NGO's, business and government that the Ministry of Environment and Parks Canada can play to build a **community-based kids/nature model** – such as a list serve, a Directory of individuals and facilities and help explore access to funding.
- Continuing the conversation about how we can improve **our programming to address cultural diversity** and the cultural change that is taking place in British Columbia. This won't just happen – there need to be programs specifically designed to reach out to these groups – including aboriginal people.
- Spending time with your children in nature needs to become valued in society – in the same ways we value and reward being busy and making money. There is a need to create societal support that **encourages parents to spend time outside with their children**.
- It is important to **work more closely with childcare programs** to have them create natural spaces, gardens, native plants, etc. Also the need to encourage early childhood teachers to develop outdoor strategies.

The Honourable Gordon Hogg, Minister of State for ActNow BC was the luncheon guest speaker. After outlining the purpose of ActNow⁹ and its relevancy to this gathering, Mr. Hogg made the following points:

- He grew up playing in nature with his dog Rusty. Reading Richard Louv's book Last Child in the Woods helped him 'connect the dots' regarding the importance of children being outside.
- Kids are 'bored with nothing to do' because family motivation is now largely extrinsic; when he was a child the motivation was more intrinsic, within you. How do we get that back?
- Physical health and mental health are both critical – and mental health is linked to being outside and having free time to play.
- What have we done to children and our relationship with them, and their relationship with nature? How can we inspire and motivate the public to engage in this nature-child movement as they have with drinking and driving, seatbelts and tobacco.
- Particularly difficult as public engagement with society has dropped. People aren't very aware of the political process (public opinion melding with informed opinion to drive political will) and how to partner with government to shape success for a movement such as this.
- We need to try to bring outside play back so it is the norm, not the exception.

⁹ Reference www.actnowbc.gov.bc.ca

In closing, Mr. Hogg said that he wanted to be kept informed, he wanted to see progress made on this topic and he wanted to work with us as a partner. He encouraged us to work with his staff to prepare a concept paper on 'the geography of nature-child reunion' and then he would help us share that paper with Cabinet and his MLA colleagues.

Mr. Hogg's comments were enthusiastically received. He was graciously thanked by Silken Laumann¹⁰.

As the Open Space process progressed throughout Wednesday afternoon, Thursday morning and into early Thursday afternoon a number of the initial discussion groups merged into collective, multi-disciplinary conversations focusing on 'what is next' with 'action components'. A number of these groups developed quite detailed plan outlines, which will serve as good background at follow-up meetings. The following action initiatives emerged from the workshop. (Please note that the names accompanying each line item indicate potential leaders who expressed passion and responsibility for the initiative during the workshop. Many other participants were engaged in these initiatives and anyone who is willing to step up and move these tasks forward is welcome to do so.)

- > An Environmental Education Centre at the Royal Roads Boat House (Lenny Ross, Nicki Wright, Gloria Snively)
- > The Robert Bateman Centre and Continuing Studies at Royal Roads University (Cat Geuer, Hillary Leighton, Sarah Bateman)
- > Hosting a major academic-led research conference on Nature Deficit Disorder at Royal Roads University in 2008 (Rick Kool, Natasha Blanchet-Cohen, David Zandvliet)
- > The Kesho Trust website *naturechildreunion* (Emrys Miller, Bruce Downie)
- > The essential role of electronic networking and media (Emrys Miller, Rick Searle, Eric Baron)
- > Developing an action plan to describe and direct this network/movement, including the possible writing of a Declaration Statement. The Evaluation Logic Model¹¹ was discussed as a possible method for developing such an action plan. (Colin Campbell, Ron Duffell, Ric Careless, Victor Elderton, Bob Peart, Sharleen Thompson)
- > Proactively engaging with the Children and Nature Network, first as a BC pilot and then across Canada (Bob Peart, Rick Kool)
- > The greening of schools, schoolyards and child care centres (Enid Elliot, Lenny Ross, Michael Dunn, Ray Chipeniuk, Patrick Robertson)
- > Informal Learning/Young Naturalists – including scouting and guiding. (Paul Whitfield, Paul Bell, Theresa Southam, Daphne Solecki)
- > Partnership/work with the BC government, particularly ActNow to better deliver on this movement. Linking nature to health was fundamental. Important to advance this conversation with the Education, Advanced Education, Tourism and Health ministries, beyond the traditional supporters of Environment and BC Parks. (Bob Peart, Ric Careless, Ron Duffell)

¹⁰ Silken Laumann's book *Child's Play: Rediscovering the Joy of Play in our Families and Communities* speaks to the themes of this Dialogue. To learn more about Silken Laumann's excellent work refer to www.SilkensActiveKids.ca

¹¹ The Evaluation Logic Model is an interesting approach for setting strategic goals. For more information on the Logic Model refer to www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodel.html

- > Integrating 'nature-children' into existing work and work place
(Ed Andrusiak, Jenny Feick, Eric Higgs, Sue Hemphill, Zanita Lukezich, Paul Bell)
- > The fundamental role of urban/regional/provincial/national parks
(Colin Campbell, Bill Turner, Gail Ross, Colleen Long)
- > Cultural Diversity/Cultural Change
(Eric Baron, JB Williams, Ed Andrusiak, Christine Lampa)
- > Multigenerational Mentorship
(Hillary Leighton, Briony Penn, Milt McClaren, Bruce Downie)

CLOSING AND REFLECTION

As the Open Space process came to a close Dr. Elin Kelsey was thanked for her facilitation. She encouraged everyone to keep the informal strategic conversations and actions moving beyond this initial workshop. She stressed how important the multi-disciplinary nature of this Dialogue has been for encouraging society to get children more engaged with the natural world. Elin reflected that networking at the community level and working collaboratively was, in her experience, crucial for success.

As one of the Dialogue organizers Bob Peart was encouraged to offer his thoughts/ideas about 'next steps'. Bob stressed that he entered this process without any preconceived solutions, except the need for a website – thus the proactive work on *naturechildreunion* by The Kesho Trust. Bob felt the following points were important to emphasize:

- The link with the Children and Nature Network.
- The development of an Action Plan, Statement of Purpose, Vision, etc to facilitate networking, partnering with government and raising money.
- Encouragement to keep the conversations started here moving. There is a network forming here, but a caution that we can't force it or organize it into existence. Some patience as this conversation evolves is important. And also to be respectful to the fact that many of these programs already exist – our goal is to build on what is happening now and make it better. We don't need a new organization; we need to network with the existing ones.
- We need to return to work and deliver our programs differently. Take this conversation back to your work places and family situations and be ambassadors for kids and nature. Implement these themes in your organizations and take these principles to your various boards so that the themes we have discussed here become part of your day-to-day work and thinking.
- The need for more physical neighbourhood 'close to home' spaces to take kids that are safe so they can just play – this includes urban, regional, provincial and national parks. We need to use existing spaces more communally and efficiently, and where they don't exist we need to provide encouragement to get them built.
- We mustn't forget other cultures – we need to experiment and find approaches that work. Find a few champions and grow out from that base.
- Our success is going to be dependant on the 'virtual world', and we must find a way to develop this web system. We want to become 'the E-Bay of nature'.
- Our success is dependent on linking with such partners as health, churches and parks agencies.
- Research is essential and Royal Roads University is to follow-up with their academic and practioners conference in 2008.
- The connection with ActNow BC is critical and there will be follow-up meetings with Ron Duffell. This conversation is about more than fitness and our goal is to influence the content and delivery of ActNow programs.

Five participants were asked for their reflections on the meeting:

- Briony Penn drew the ecosystem of our meeting and discussed the network and how important it was that we worked together to overcome 'ecological illiteracy'¹².
- Natasha Blanchet-Cohen discussed the range of people, backgrounds and the various skill sets they bring to a gathering such as this Dialogue, and how hopeful she was that a 'strategic piece' would come from this meeting; and that gave her renewed hope.

¹² This drawing is available as a series of digital pictures.

- Cam Collyer stressed how childhood health was based on being outside playing in nature and positive food/nutrition habits and that we were 'killing our kids with caution'. We must have access to nature nearby and at places that diverse cultures will feel comfortable and safe.
- Ed Andrusiak mentioned that he was looking forward to sitting down with his vision and goals and seeing how he could 'virus them' with the energy and ideas that he got from this room, even as far as putting a 'safe place for kids screen' on future land purchases. He is looking forward to a new 'kids based focus as a way of better utilizing our parks systems' – hoping that this will lead to more interpreters, nature centres and partnerships with unusual champions.
- JB Williams was proud to have attended the meeting as an aboriginal person; he enjoyed the conversations on cultural diversity, enjoyed meeting everyone and really encouraged people to 'entrench aboriginal people into their programming'. He also invited participants to engage with their local First Nation as they move forward in their activities.

Milt McClaren served as the Dialogue's rapporteur. He stressed that we don't want today's generation to be the last generation to go outside and play. He was very worried about the 'extinction of experience'. We must get away from the culture of fear so that children and families are free to play and be enriched by the wonder, joy and excitement of the web of life. He encouraged mentorship and stressed the point about generational memory and that the role of grandparents can't be stressed enough. He thanked the participants for attending, was looking forward to development of this newfound network and closed with a quote from Ishmael¹³:

"...that is, all sorts of creatures on this planet appear to be on the verge of attaining that self-awareness and intelligence. So it's definitely not just humans that the Gods are after. We were never meant to be the only players on this stage. Apparently, the gods intend this planet to be a garden filled with creatures that are self-aware and intelligent.

So it would appear. And if this is so, then man's destiny would seem to be plain.

Yes. Amazingly enough it is plain--because man is the first of all these. He's the trailblazer, the pathfinder. His destiny is to be the first to learn that creatures like man have a choice: they can try to thwart the gods and perish in the attempt--or they can stand aside and make room for all the rest. But it's more than that. His destiny is to be the father of them all--I don't mean by direct descent. By giving all the rest their chance--the whales and the dolphins and the chimps and the raccoons--he becomes in some sense their progenitor...

...just think. In a billion years, whatever is around then, whoever is around then, says: "Man? Oh yes man! What a wonderful creature he was! It was within his grasp to destroy the entire world and to trample all our futures into the dust---but he saw the light before it was too late and pulled back. He pulled back and gave the rest of us our chance. He showed us all how it had to be done if the world was to go on being a garden forever. Man was a role model for us all!"

Not a shabby destiny.

Not a shabby destiny by any means."

¹³ Ishmael. Daniel Quinn. Bantam-Turner, 1993

APPENDIX ONE

Agenda – Dialogue on Children, Families and Nature

20 February 2007: University of Victoria

7:30pm	Richard Louv: Public Talk and Book Signing
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21 February 2007: Royal Roads University

8:30am	Arrival and Introductions
9:00	Sponsoring Organizations: Welcome
9:10	Richard Louv: Context of the Children and Nature Network
9:30	Dr. Elin Kelsey: Open Space Technology - Introduction and process
12:00	Informal Lunch
4:15	Closing Circle
6:00pm	Government House: Dinner with Her Excellency, The Honourable Iona Campagnola, Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia

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8:30am	Dr. Elin Kelsey: Open Space Technology (cont'd)
12:00	Lunch Bob Skene, A/President, RRU: Welcome Hon. Gordon Hogg, Act Now-BC: Keynote address Silken Laumann: Thank you to Minister Hogg
2:30	Open Space Concludes
3:00	Reflection: Ed Andrusiak, Dr. Natasha Blanchet-Cohen, Cam Collyer, Dr. Briony Penn, JB Williams
4:00pm	Dr. Milt McClaren: rapporteur and closing