

# Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

JULY/AUGUST 2010

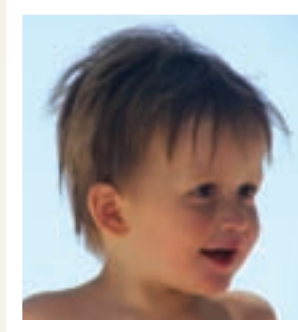
## Wonder wisdom by Berta MacGregor

Our newsletter has such a wonderful and far-reaching name! By definition, 'wonder' is a state of mind in which you want to learn more about something, a desire to know, a lust for learning, a thirst for knowledge. It is feeling aroused by something strange and surprising. It also means to question, to place in doubt, to express doubtful speculation, to meditate, to ponder, to think over, contemplate, muse, and reflect. What a word! More than a word! A state of mind! Remember this definition because it has all the elements we need in a new learning model for this new millennium. Children have it. They are born with it. It is in their nature. So, where and when did we lose this state of mind, this sense of wonder? When did our thinking become so narrow-minded, passive, and isolated?

It all started with the factory-based education model of the past, textbook-driven, confined to four walls, teacher-centered, with passive learning and little to no student freedom. This model turned its back to the innate thirst for knowledge, the desire to learn, the passion, the questions, the meditation and contemplation, the wonder and imagination in every child. In spite of its lack of diversity, its obsolete and fragmented curriculum, where print is the primary vehicle of learning, it continues to be the model followed by the majority of school systems in the world. It is the education we adults received and young people are still receiving. This is how we were educated and how we think about education. And herein lies the problem.

If we want to reconnect children to nature, we need to go one step further and change our way of thinking about education and what it means. We need a systemic education revolution towards a 21st Century Learning System. The future of learning is today, and it requires a dynamic model that gives new meaning to the concept of knowledge and a new definition of the 'educated' person. Based on creativity, imagination, experience, perception, and the state-of-mind called 'wonder,' this project-based learning model must be structured to include a curriculum for life, taking advantage of information and emerging technologies.

The world has changed; in fact it is changing continuously and more rapidly than ever. Unfortunately, education systems in the world have remained static, and are therefore obsolete. We need dramatic and innovative change. This transition is the responsibility and challenge of today's adults: world leaders, governments, legislators, teachers, and parents must work together to change the current system of information delivery to one of 'inquiry-based knowledge generation.' There are, of course, some local movements, World Forums, regional meetings where this issue comes up. But the deeper and fundamental changes necessary are just not happening. Maybe we adults should stop for a moment and observe our children and their capacity to wonder and learn, despite the system. They have much to teach us.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

This is Bernardo. He is only two years old, but with the twinkle of wisdom in his eyes. This photo was taken during a whale-watching trip off the coast of Baja California, México.

To everyone's surprise, Bernardo was not really interested in the magnificent creatures. His attention was directed to the small bubbles being produced by the interaction between the boat and the waves. For a brief moment, Bernardo became a science learner and teacher making connections, transmitting his sense of awe and wonder to other learners: the adults in the boat. And it was all happening in the outside world, not in a lab, not inside a classroom with a fixed subject schedule, following instructions of a teacher in front of the class. Bernardo understands it perfectly, but we adults do not.

Lorenzo is three years old. He was on a hiking trip to the valley of Santiago, the valley of the seven volcano craters. In spite of the spectacular landscape, Lorenzo spent his time picking, choosing,



and classifying mineral stones and pebbles he discovered on the different paths taken. He was aroused by strange and surprising things. He wanted to learn more about them. Lorenzo was experiencing the same sense of wonder as Bernardo. Their experiences were similar: they were happening outside the classroom, without a teacher or a textbook, and both were powerful. These children were self-motivated by wonder. And, because of their ages, Bernardo and Lorenzo are

still free of a system that kills creativity and wonder.

Any moment, any place is a learning experience. Why can't the current system understand and evolve towards this concept? Why the resistance to change, to innovate? Why can't we accept that the current school model is obsolete and needs to change at its foundation? What needs to happen to provoke an eye-opening in our education leaders and authorities? Let us hope the change

is soon to come. We, as humanity, cannot wait any longer. The future is now.

*Berta MacGregor is currently leading the design, development, and start-up of Papalote Museo del Niño (Children's Museum), a new large-scale museum in Ciudad Juarez on the Mexican American Border. Berta is on the Nature Action Collaborative for Children Leadership Team representing North America. She is also an active member of a special task force: Civil Council for the Quality of Education in México.*



## Connecting Children with Nature Action Forum

October 17-20, 2010

Arbor Day Farm • Nebraska City, Nebraska

Multi-disciplinary Nature Action Teams from around the world have been invited to come together to learn strategies and secure tools for launching campaigns to connect children with nature.

*Attendance by application only.*

Address queries to:

[info@worldforumfoundation.org](mailto:info@worldforumfoundation.org)



*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.*

## Wonder Vitals

*Wonder*, the newsletter of the NACC, welcomes submissions from all NACC members. Please join us at: [www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature](http://www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature).

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 Popat, Mumbai, India  
Raed Abu Hayyaneh, Amman, Jordan

### NORTH AMERICA

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

### OCEANIA

Toni Christie, Wellington, New Zealand  
Gillian McAuliffe, Floreat, 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, Redmond, Washington, United States  
Nancy and John Rosenow, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States  
Tara Hild, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States

### PRODUCTION:

Scott Bilstad, Seattle, Washington  
Carole White, Lopez Island, Washington



# We all need connections by Jim Wike

If you know anything about the Nature Action Collaborative for Children, you know that those involved care a lot about helping to connect children with nature. You'll read this phrase on the web site, in articles, and hear it (often!) in conversations NACC members have with each other at World Forum gatherings. And, indeed, this is the connection that motivates each of us in the jobs we do individually, as well as through the Collaborative.

In my own individual work, I've come to realize that another kind of connection is also vitally important if we're going to be able to support the next generation of environmental stewards. I believe that we all need to step outside the comfort zones that keep us focused narrowly on our individual professions (landscape architect, environmental advocate, early childhood educator, health care professional, etc.) and begin learning more about each other's professional frames of reference. In my case, as I've begun to understand a great deal more about what excellent early childhood education is all about, that new knowledge has pushed me to a higher level as a landscape architect. And, my colleagues who are educators have told me that as they learn more from me about the importance of design, they are gaining a richer perspective of what we mean when we say that the environment is a child's third teacher.

The delightful work I get to do each day takes me to early childhood programs, elementary schools, parks, zoos, military base child care centers, and many other settings where children spend significant portions of their lives. I have the great fun of helping folks develop plans for nature-based outside spaces for children (that we refer to as Nature Explore Classrooms). I do this in collaboration with my educator colleagues who are well-grounded in the research that provides a foundation for all of our work. I also get to collaborate with the parents, community leaders, teachers, school administrators, environmental advocates, health care professionals, and children in each program. Something

magical happens when people come together to share ideas and really mean it when they say they want to learn from each other.

Okay, let's be honest. It's easy to talk about collaborating and connecting, but a lot harder to do it. When lots of ideas are bandied about, more often than not someone will say something that gives us pause and makes us think in a new, unfamiliar way. And, speaking for myself at least, that's not always as much fun as we let on. In fact, sometimes it's downright disheartening to have your ideas challenged. But, I'm used to that. Let me explain.

My work as a designer began to evolve after learning more about foundational principles for designing children's outdoor spaces that came directly from observations of children. Wow! Imagine that. Learning from children. It was a new way of seeing and working. It made me re-think a lot of what I'd done in the past. But, as I began to incorporate these new ideas, I began to more fully understand that this way of working made all kinds of sense. And, each time I worked collaboratively with folks in new settings, my discoveries, understandings, and insights grew.

As I began focusing on this new work in earnest, my educator colleagues and I started having in-depth conversations about both landscape architecture and early childhood education. We talked about what we believed, sometimes challenged each other's thinking, and often arrived at new ways of looking at issues. And, each time I met with a new group, I learned from them, and I'd like to think they learned a thing or two from me. Add to that the gatherings of the World Forum Foundation, where I explored ideas from people from all over that world, and pretty soon my head was full of great ideas.

So, I'd like to challenge each of us who cares about helping children connect more with the wonders of nature to think a bit outside our comfort zones. If you're an early childhood or environmental educator:

- Perhaps think a little more deeply about the importance of design and how environments affect children.
- Maybe read a book about design such as *A Pattern Language* by Christopher Alexander (1977).
- Read about the significance of the intersection of nature and culture (summarized by designers as the notion of context, so well described in Potteiger and Purinton's *Landscape Narratives*, 1998).

If you're a landscape architect or other design professional:

- Maybe read something about early childhood education. Ask your educator colleagues for recommendations. They will have great suggestions.
- If you're not already a subscriber to *Exchange* magazine, that would be a good place to begin. (And that's true for environmental advocates, also.)
- If you haven't read much about environmental education, visit the North American Association for Environmental Education website ([naaee.org](http://naaee.org)) to learn what you can from this group that actually works all over the world.

Of course, we all continue to learn from children.

Hopefully my list has whet your appetite. The more we all connect with each other, the better equipped we'll be to help those nature-child connections happen everywhere!

## References

Alexander, C. (1977). *A pattern language: Towns, buildings, construction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

North American Association for Environmental Education web site: [www.naaee.org](http://www.naaee.org)

Potteiger, M., & Purinton, J. (1998). *Landscape narratives: Design practices for telling stories*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

*Jim Wike is an NACC Leadership Team member.*

# Nature therapy for conflict by Bishnu H. Bhatta

For the first time in Nepal's history, the ministers' council meeting was held at the highest peak of the Earth, also commonly named the Third Pole. The meeting delivered a small, but beautiful message to the world about the melting ice and snow of the Himalayan region. However, many critics and common Nepalese didn't find any reason to justify this meeting when they came to know about the 6.5 million Nepali Rupees spent for this single event.

After one week, a small media report cited that Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal understands that if he acquires the tranquility of Kalapatthar (5542mt.), he can solve all of the complex issues faced by the country. Similarly, Prachanda, Chairperson of UCPN Maoist, said that he can solve problems if he gets a chance to sit with other leaders on a peaceful mountain. These expressions from Maoist Chairperson Prachanda and Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal may be a coincidence. A take-home message for us is that nature can heal negative vibes through its calm natural therapy and neutrality.

The Prime Minister of Nepal is currently facing Maoist protest against the recent move of the president. They have called for a three-day national civil strike. Many people suspect that if this cannot be stopped, a wide range of violence may erupt at any moment. Both Maoists and the Government have expressed that a place like Kalapatthar would help solve issues within hours. One wants to go to Kalapatthar and another wants to go to the hilltops. Both have one common reality: they want to heal themselves with nature and think the serenity and tranquility of nature may

help them to make wise decisions. Peaceful locations can take one's mind to a positive place, making oneself calm where thinking is broadened and aggressiveness is minimized. This allows opposition parties to come to a common understanding.

I don't know the extent of tranquility that Himalaya can give, but it certainly can bring healing to your mind, body, and your eternity. The crumbling of snow into small musical springs and the chime of pine trees are able to heal the trauma you experience during conflict. Put a small child along the riverside or seashore and she will start healing herself and try to talk with the flow of the river or the sea. Catching starfish and collecting small pebbles or watching butterflies dance around a flower can both be great sources of healing through nature. We can follow the example of a small child enjoying our parks and zoos, and playing with animals. Taking enjoyment from nature helps us to relax and refresh our minds.

There are many oriental practices where people have been treated with natural elements, especially clay treatments. Clay treatment practices still exist in many parts of the world, especially those with Ayurveda practices. The Sun is regarded as a god in many parts of the world. We have two days of celebration — Chhatha Puja in the Terai (plains) — to thank the sun for healing us with its rays. Children give offerings to the sun for its warmth. Nature itself has all the components that are required and essential for its inhabitants. Mahatma Gandhi, the great saint and leader of the nonviolence movement, said, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed."

We still do not know the capacity of the Earth. And we are becoming more irrational in our daily lives. If we can recognize and realize the capacity of nature and use it with respect — without greed — nature will always serve us with its loving capacity.

We have made mistakes in using natural resources haphazardly, and these have brought changes in the climatic variables. One of the major problems we have seen is the melting of the Himalaya, which has made mountain communities vulnerable to disasters like landslides and explosions of the glacier lake outburst. Learning from these occurrences, we should teach future generations about the proper utilization of natural products and the importance of preserving nature itself.

Should we help children realize this by giving them opportunities to interact directly with nature? And should we make every effort to help children understand the healing benefits of nature therapy that is readily available in front of them? No one should be the age of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal or Prachanda before realizing that the serenity and tranquility of nature empowers people to do more positive things in their lives. There is no more suitable time than right now to begin.

In times of conflict, our shock and lack of coping skills force us to develop survival skills. We can do this naturally or with the support of others. We can help children affected by conflicts today to develop their own coping strategies by teaching them about the healing powers of nature.

*Bishnu H. Bhatta is an NACC Leadership Team member.*