

Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

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Malaysian and Belizean preschoolers connect

by Wil Maheia

Malaysia is a beautiful country halfway across the planet; and Belize is a small, also beautiful, country in the Caribbean. At the 2007 World Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, I was surprised to see many faces that looked like those from Forest Home Village, Belize. A little research revealed that many Indians from India had at one time settled in Malaysia and the same was true for Belize. Many of the traditions that the Indians brought to Belize have now been forgotten. As a result, a large part of the culture has been lost, and our children have lost their cultural ties and traditions of old.

When Anne Sivanathan and I met again at the World Forum in Belfast, Northern Ireland, last June, we spoke about the work she was doing. We agreed that it would be a good idea to connect these children, and maybe some of the culture that has been lost in Belize could be recaptured in an photograph exchange.

Anne spoke with Avril, of Bright Star Preschool in Forest Home. The idea was to have the children of Malaysia send some pictures of their favourite fruits to the children of Bright Star. In exchange, they would do the same. The Malay Apple is one of the favourite fruits in Forest Home and one that the children

cherish. With a name like Malay Apple it's not difficult to figure out where this fruit originated. Since Malay Apple is a favourite, we even planted a Malay Apple tree and spoke about where it originated. We considered how many miles the seeds of this tree must have travelled to arrive in Belize and who might have brought the seeds to Belize originally.

Once the children exchanged pictures of the Malay Apple tree, they considered what to explore next. Maybe there is another fruit or a favourite dish

that they both enjoy? They are also exchanging pictures of each other's classrooms and playgrounds to see what they can learn from each other. In addition, they are thinking about popular games that can be connected to their schoolwork.

In Anne's work with Avril and Bright Star Preschool, the preschoolers are connecting with one another. There is such wonder at the journey of our people who have ventured to various parts of the world and the impact this has on all our lives.



PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR



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
for la

*Stay tuned for a report
from this event in upcoming
issues of Exchange!*

www.worldforumfoundation.org

PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT BILSTAD

Nature Action Collaborative for Children

**WORLD FORUM
FOUNDATION**

*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.

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.

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Hadijah Nandyose, Kampala, Uganda
Sebastian Chuwa, Moshi, Tanzania

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

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Gillian McAuliffe, Floreat, Australia
Fiona Robbe, Arcadia, Australia

EUROPE

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SOUTH AMERICA

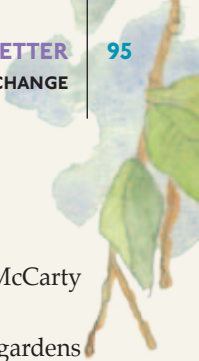
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The nature of school gardens

Improved learning beyond the walls of the indoor classroom by Jeanne McCarty

The other day I watched as my one-year-old son pressed his small face against the window pane of our back door and shouted, "Bird! Bird!" The fervor behind his actions told me that he did not merely want to go outdoors; he needed to be outdoors, to watch the birds, feel the sun, and explore everything possible. Children need nature — for learning, growing, and thriving. School gardens can help ensure that they get it.

By installing gardens in the places children spend their days, we can bring nature and its myriad positive effects, to children on a daily basis. Child care centers around the world can nurture healthier, happier, and smarter children by giving them an early connection to nature. Likewise, dynamic outdoor classrooms, accompanied by educator training on how to integrate the garden into the core curriculum, enable schools to give children access to nature without detracting from their academic learning. In fact, school gardens do much to enhance academic learning.

Well-designed school gardens (outdoor classrooms) are three-dimensional textbooks that reinforce, extend, and bring to life what children are learning indoors. Nature provides real-world connections to all academic subject areas and offers particularly powerful hands-on applications in math and science. For example, in a school garden, a kindergartner may practice the alphabet by spelling out labels for tomato plants, or a fifth grader may learn 3-digit-by-2-digit multiplication by studying the regular formation of grass seed heads. School gardens are also beautiful places that spark the creativity and imaginations of children, inspiring them in ways that transcend indoor learning.

At REAL School Gardens, we work specifically with elementary school partners

to design, install, and sustain school gardens that connect children with nature. Currently, we serve 66 schools in northern Texas, providing 43,000 students with daily access to school gardens. When we began our programming in 2003 in an urban school district in North Texas, students' science scores at our partner schools were at the district average; today, those same students are scoring eight to 12 percentage points higher than the district average. In addition, attendance rates are 1.5 points higher than the district average. These strides were made in spite of the fact that 84% of the student population across these schools is identified as 'economically disadvantaged,' which is also several percentage points above the district average.

Students are not the only ones whose performance is enhanced by regular access to nature through a school garden. Educators express renewed enthusiasm for teaching when they have new and effective teaching methods at their disposal. Hundreds of teachers take advantage of REAL School Gardens' regular professional development opportunities and model-teaching sessions. At our organization's networking events, educators come together to share ideas and cement their commitment to outdoor learning.

The positive effects of school gardens on academic learning create compelling arguments for schools and other centers of learning to give children daily access to outdoor classrooms. Few people dispute the power of school gardens to promote nutrition and healthy lifestyles, to offer a sanctuary of holistic healing, and to cultivate respect for the environment. However, with the current focus on raising test scores in the United States,

some critics claim that school gardens rob students of valuable class time and compete with a critical need for focus on the three R's. Data on improved academic achievement resulting from curriculum-integrated school gardens give school administrators firm ground to stand on when seeking buy-in from school boards and community constituents.

The school garden movement is gaining momentum in the United States and around the world. United States' First Lady Michelle Obama has added her voice to the cause, hosting youth events in the White House vegetable garden. Amid the growing interest, we at REAL School Gardens continue working steadily toward our mission of connecting children with nature through school gardens. With a seven-year track record of success, we have shown leadership in developing and implementing a multi-faceted program that includes not only ongoing garden support, but also regular teacher training and cooperative community networking — a unique combination, which we believe is key to the efficacy and sustainability of school gardens.

Through our garden programs and many others around the world, children are getting the nature they need. Join us in the garden:

Learn more about REAL School Gardens at www.realschoolgardens.org

Share your stories at www.realschoolgardens.org/realstories.aspx

Support our efforts at www.realschoolgardens.org/donate.aspx

Jeanne McCarty is Executive Director of REAL School Gardens.