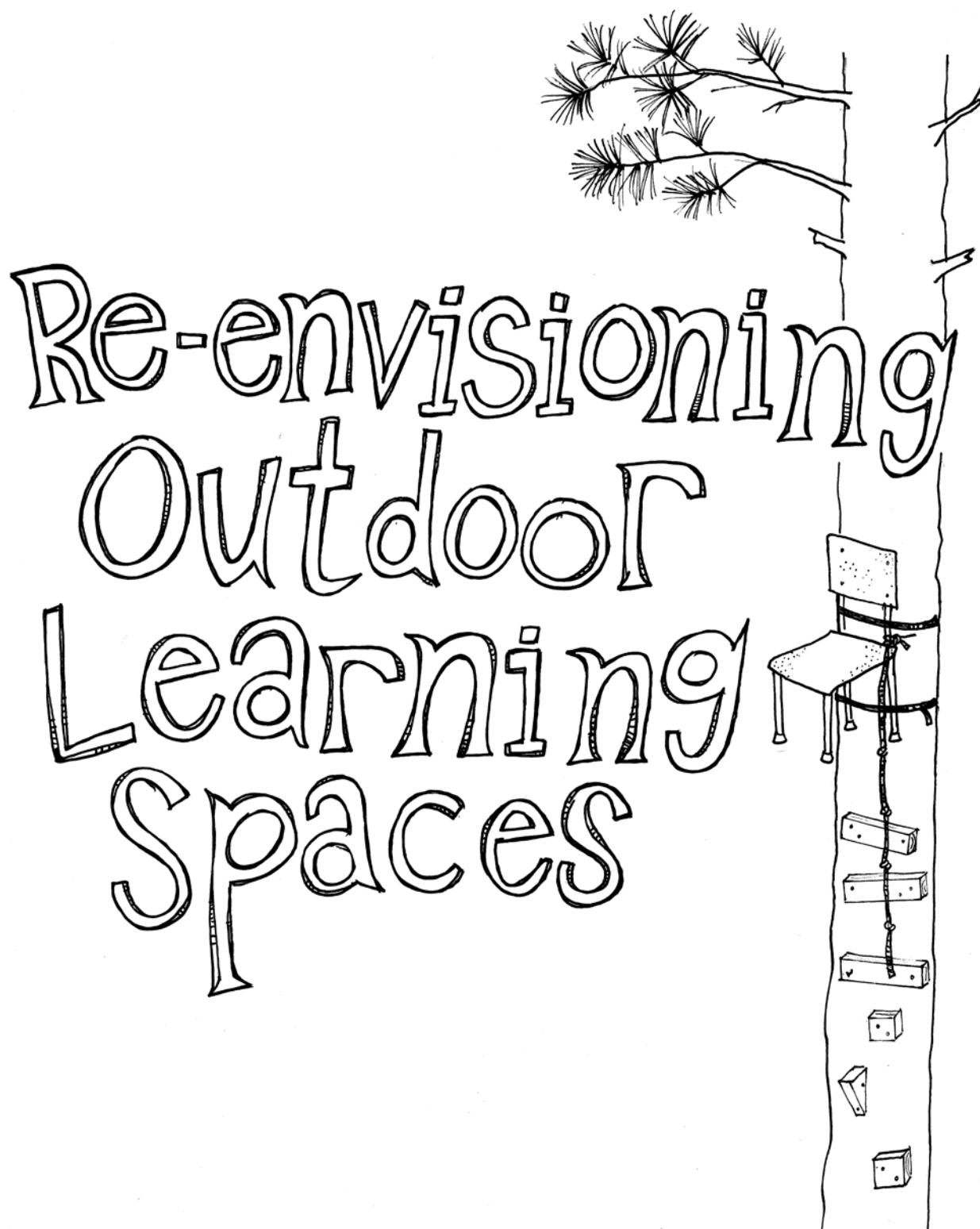
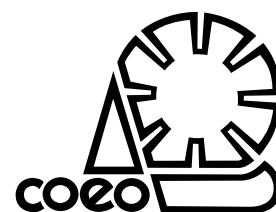


Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION
Summer 2013, 25(4)



Pathways

COEO

Formed in 1972, the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) is a non-profit, volunteer-based organization that promotes safe, quality outdoor education experiences for people of all ages. We achieve this by publishing the *Pathways* journal, running an annual conference and regional workshops, maintaining a website, and working with kindred organizations as well as government agencies. Members of COEO receive a subscription to *Pathways*, as well as admittance to workshops, courses and conferences. A membership application form is included on the inside back cover of this issue of *Pathways*.

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Pathways

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Pathways is always looking for contributions. Please contact the Interim Chair for submission guidelines.

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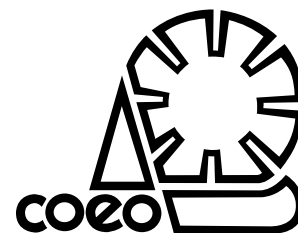
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Connie Kavanagh

Summer is in full swing and the strawberries in my front garden are ripe for the picking, but before I get to the garden, I am happy to share this special issue of *Pathways*, Re-envisioning Outdoor Learning Spaces.

I have had a special interest in learning environments for some time. I have witnessed how our environments affect us, in my capacity as an outdoor educator, a public school science and English teacher, a teacher at a place-based residential literature program and as a researcher in my graduate work exploring architecture and education.

As a teacher I find that the design of learning spaces affects the relationships I am able to have with my students, as well as the learning that occurs within these spaces. Sometimes even simple elements we might take for granted have an impact. For example, if there are windows in my classroom, perhaps especially if they look out onto a naturalized space, I am able to incorporate what is immediately visible in the “real world” into my lessons. This lends an added immediacy and relevancy to my teaching. Such immediacy and relevancy connects me to my students’ daily lives outside of school and strengthens our relationship. As a researcher I found that students felt more free and happy when there were elements of the outdoors inside. In more fortunate circumstances, directly experiencing nature has profoundly positive impacts on the lives of students.

The articles gathered between these covers are eclectic and rich. It is hoped this writing is a part of a longer conversation about the spaces in which we learn, how they work now, and how we can help to create spaces infused with wildness and wonder.

Submissions for this issue seemed to fit into two connected yet distinct categories. The first section, “Re-envisioning,” includes articles that challenge the status quo, encourage action and offer a new way of seeing. J.D. Piper points towards the impacts of gardening with children at home while Greg Lowan-Trudeau challenges us to look deeper at a famed American wilderness advocate. “Learning Spaces” features articles that discuss design more specifically—whether it be sharing a thoughtfully built education and retreat centre, children’s garden or outdoor classroom.

Jessica Kalnevicus offers inspiration and tips for outdoor classrooms, Ben Blakely shares a collaborative outdoor literacy activity and Connie Kavanagh gives us a breath of fresh air in “Wild Words.”

If you wish to contribute to the fall issue of *Pathways* please contact Erin Cameron at emcarte1@lakeheadu.ca. We look forward to seeing you at the fall conference.

Indira Dutt

Sketch Pad

Thank you to the many individuals who generously provided artwork for this issue of *Pathways*:

- Erin Cameron – pages 3, 13, 16 and 19.
- Kyle Clarke – cover and pages 4–10 and 12.
- Indira Dutt – page 11.
- Calvin Fennell – page 35 (“With Respects to Cornelius Krieghoff”).
- Claire Grady-Smith – pages 21 (“Wintergreen Studios”) and 22 (“Kids on the Path”).
- Ferruccio Sardella – pages 28 and 29.
- Katie Sweet – pages 35 and 36 (COEO conference poster).
- Student drawings from Indira Dutt’s Master’s thesis – pages 25 and 26.

For COEO to remain relevant and continue to meet the needs of its members, it is important that we as an organization occasionally take a step back and look at where we are, where we have been and where we are going. It is critical that we periodically review our organizational goals and current functioning as well as consider any possible changes that might need to occur. This sort of exercise is a necessary step, which must be taken before developing any plans for the future. While our Annual General Meeting affords us the important opportunity to review the past year's happenings and to outline a plan for the next 12 months, it doesn't provide us with the amount of time required to fully engage in any substantive goal setting or strategic long-term planning.

As COEO has done in the past, I would like to propose that the board of directors organize a one- or two-day retreat so that a committee of COEO members can meet to conduct a strategic review and planning session. The last time COEO did this was in the winter of 2007, when a small group of members met for a productive day at the Norval Outdoor School and was led by expert facilitator, Brian Lisson. The hope would be to repeat this experience, once again bringing together a diverse and knowledgeable group of COEO members to share different perspectives, discuss new ideas, and develop a plan for moving forward. If you would like to be part of this process and are willing to commit your time to this initiative, please contact me or any other member of the board to express your interest.

Just as important as having a plan is having a strong group of leaders to carry out that plan. This autumn the COEO Board of Directors will change significantly, as many long time contributors to the board will step aside to offer leadership opportunities to other members. For those members considering joining the board, 2013-2014 will be an exciting time to do so and I would encourage anyone with an interest to get involved. As this is my third and final term as President, I now look forward to

supporting the incoming President and new board members in the role of Past President. Having served on the board for the past eight years, I have nothing but good things to say about this experience. Through my involvement in COEO and specifically the Board of Directors I have had the opportunity to make many great friends, gain valuable leadership experience and promote outdoor education across Ontario and beyond.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to once again remind members of our upcoming fall conference and the annual presentation of the COEO awards. A highlight of each year's conference, the COEO awards presentation can only happen if members take the time to nominate deserving groups or individuals. Please consider nominating a coworker, classmate or leader in our community so that we can applaud their efforts and acknowledge their achievements in this special way. Nomination forms can be downloaded from the COEO website and, once completed, can be forwarded to Zabe MacEachren, COEO Past President at maceache@queensu.ca.

Kyle Clarke



Safety vs. Danger: What Are We Teaching Our Kids?

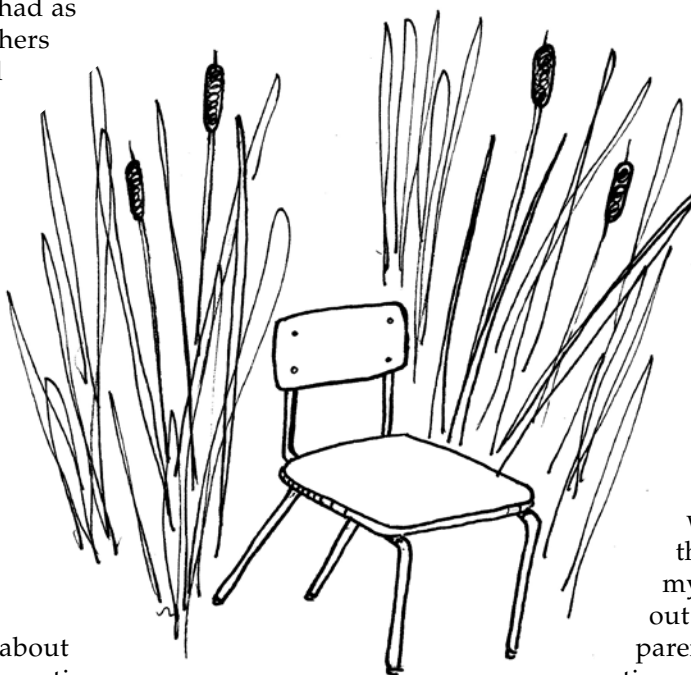
By Stephen Biggs

I am a 46-year-old single father. I live in Toronto and have two girls 7 and 10. They live with me every other week, and go to R.H. McGregor Elementary, a great school run by the Toronto District School Board. Overall, I would say they are having a much better grade school experience than I had as a child. Their teachers are more involved and interested than mine ever were, at least from Kindergarten to Grade 4. Their school has a really active home and school association, and parents are generally well involved in school life.

Recent statistics indicate there are about 700 students, representing about 30 different language groups, from JK to Grade 5. While the school is not in the heart of the city, it is an urban school, albeit with a large schoolyard, including a playing field.

The building itself is relatively modern, built in 1972 (anything younger than I am might qualify as modern). It was completed the year I began attending Kindergarten, at a small primary school in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, not far from the Vermont border. Butler Elementary was built in 1936 and up until 1969 served kids from Kindergarten to Grade 11. By the time I attended in 1972, Grades 7 to 11 were being bused to a large newly built regional

high school that brought in kids from an area covering about 4,000 square kilometers. While some children grew up in town, the vast majority of us were bused in from the dairy, poultry and pig farms that dotted the surrounding countryside.



When I was my daughters' age, I had a much different relationship with the natural world than my girls have today. I can remember spending long hours by myself roaming about in the woods and fields that surrounded my home, often well out of sight of my parents. And at school, time outside during recess had a similar quality. There was a

large creek that ran behind our school, and I can remember as a child no older than ten playing in and near the open water catching crayfish and minnows. It's hard to imagine now that many grade schools in Ontario would allow children to do the same.

Whereas my schoolyard bordered the wilderness, my children's playing field serves double duty as the roof of an underground parking lot for the hospital where I work across the street. It's also surrounded by a fence—in some places a very high fence. There is even a smaller fenced in area for the daycare children that

share the facility. It looks more like a cage frankly, but I hear it was constructed for reasons of safety. Recently a buzzer system was installed at the main entrance of the building, again for reasons of safety. I'm not sure that cages and buzzers are the answer. Don't get me wrong: I don't want to see children hurt any more than anyone else. However, I also don't want fear for their safety to get in the way of my children's opportunity to learn how to be safe.

It might seem like I'm conflating two issues, but I think my schoolyard without a fence afforded me certain opportunities that my children don't have. Certainly my children have the benefit of being raised and educated in a culturally rich and diverse community, but what they are missing is equally important. For me, there is something critical about kids having a chance to interact with nature, with wildness, with danger. A child that learns how to use a knife is less likely to cut themselves, no?

In recent years some people have been making noises about the degree to which our fear gets in the way of raising healthy independent children—that is, children who are not without fears of their own, but who have grown up with an understanding of danger and risk that is founded in something real. These days it feels like we spend a lot of time worried about the horrors that might be visited upon us. But if you look at the actual numbers, for children living in the industrialized nations of the world childhood has perhaps never been safer. I invite people to read Lenore Skanazy's (2009) *Free Range Kids* in this regard.

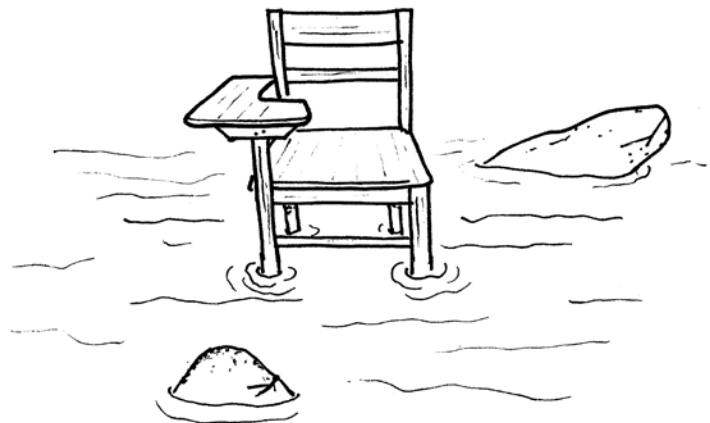
I think having the chance to move their bodies through the natural world, climbing rocks and trees and wading in creeks, allows children to learn their abilities and limits in ways that can't be accomplished on fenced in grassy roofs of underground parking lots. If you read my kids' "what I did on my summer vacation" essays you'd learn that we went home to Quebec to visit my

family. One day my girls and their cousin went down to the creek behind my sister's house, and, just out of eyeshot, dangerously spent the morning catching crayfish and minnows. As the end of school approaches, they can't stop asking me, "When are we going back?"

Reference

Skenazy, Lenore (2009). *Free range kids: How to raise safe, self-reliant children (without going nuts with worry)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Stephen Biggs is a single father who lives in Toronto. An overeducated urban professional with farm boy roots, he struggles not to give in to the over protective urges of our age.

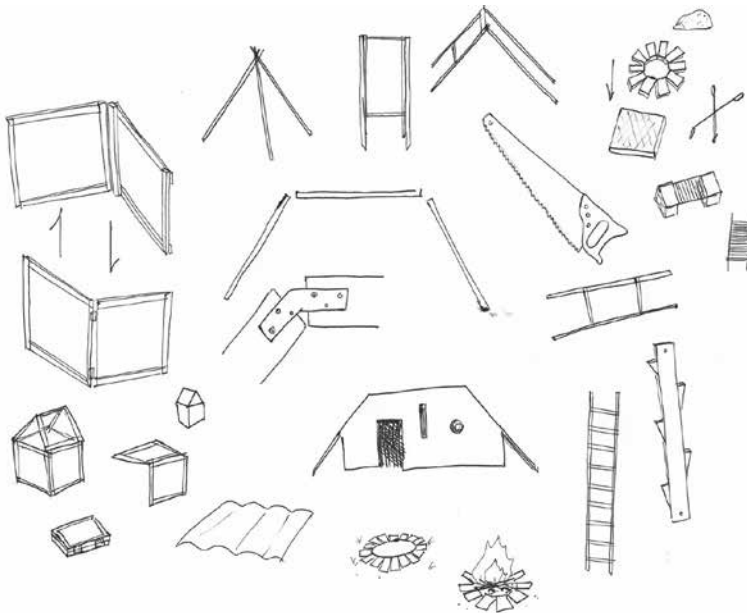


Guerilla Fort Construction: Activism for Outdoor Play

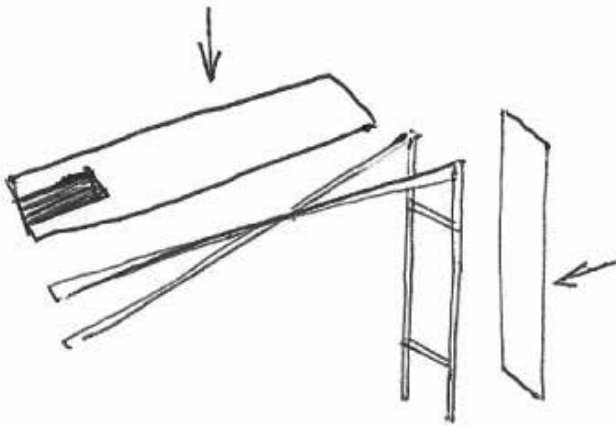
I spent the majority of each summer of my childhood playing in the forest behind my house. My friends and I were lucky, as we were allowed the freedom to independently visit any of the nearby public parks, schoolyards or playgrounds in our suburban community. Although we enjoyed using the climbers, swing sets and open fields located within these recreational spaces, nothing was ever quite as captivating as the play we experienced in the forests and ravines that both bordered and intersected our neighbourhood.

The building of forts was a significant activity. Each summer the process began by assembling a crew of trusted friends, scouting potential build sites, gathering construction materials and acquiring all the necessary tools. With this endeavour being part real estate procurement, location was obviously an important consideration—the site needed to be close to both a trail and natural building materials. It required a specific geography, either a high point or gully behind a knoll, something that would help it remain unnoticed and unseen by passersby. Throughout the summer we would modify, change and expand our fort as required, all the while being cognizant of any physical signs indicating that spies had spotted or trespassed onto the site. The secret location of a fort was to be respected by all members of the group and if at any point we became aware that outsiders knew of our fort's position, immediately the contents of the fort were collected, along with any prime building materials, and the site quickly abandoned.

For my friends and me, the act of constructing forts in cooperative groups was a powerful learning experience. Partly, it could be seen as a challenging social activity that assisted in the development of a variety of interpersonal skills. To succeed in the fort-building project we were required to collaborate intensely and, for the first time, do so without the facilitation or guidance of teachers and parents. Group members had to develop the ability to negotiate with one another, consider multiple ideas and points of view, and form a consensus before moving forward with each aspect of the project. When confronted with disagreements or fights amongst



group members, we always felt pressed to quickly find workable, real solutions to our problems—these issues had to be resolved for the activity of fort construction to continue. Our desire to proceed with the activity always outweighed any conflicts taking place within the group and so our ability to navigate such relational



impediments improved as a result.

Building forts is learning by doing—experiential, self-directed and active. This specific kind of free play activity required us to be creative, experimental and resourceful. We worked with the site, materials and tools we had on hand, adapting construction plans based on our available resources. A sort of vernacular architecture, I recall one year we waterproofed the roof using an old Twister mat that someone had found and then the following summer we topped the fort with a lattice of green bamboo garden stakes and hemlock boughs. Our forts were always composed of a mash-up of natural, found and repurposed materials. The process demanded that we be innovative and think flexibly; these behaviours were then reinforced with each new idea we successfully applied. Our level of engagement and motivation grew as the fort increasingly neared completion; once finished a fresh set of play activities took over. The fort then became a dynamic hub for a new variety of imaginative activities, rituals and happenings. I was recently reminded of these childhood play experiences while on an afternoon walk with my father

last summer. Strolling through a nearby wooded area, I thought aloud: “How come there aren’t any kids here? You know, running around or building forts?” My dad responded by suggesting, “Children aren’t allowed to do those things anymore,” adding “Their parents are probably worried they’ll touch poison ivy or catch West Nile virus or Lyme disease. You never know what could happen: A child could be playing in the stream, looking for crayfish, and all of a sudden discover a latent shellfish allergy—one minute they’re here, the next minute poof!” Although my father was being facetious, he was tugging at a common belief; the idea that childhood is not what it once was, that in North America, parental fears and societal pressures combined with access to a myriad of organized and “safe” activities have made free unsupervised play a thing of the past. And so I wondered, was this actually the case?

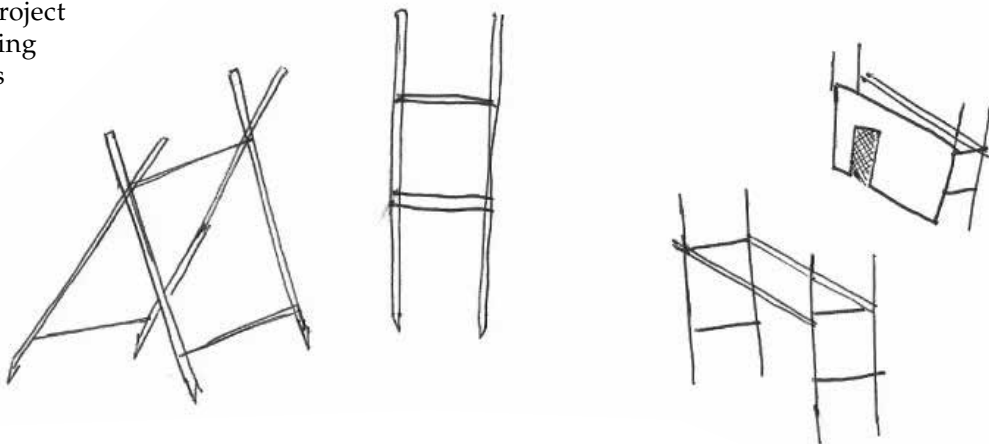
Disclaimer: The idea expressed in the following paragraphs is that of the author and does not necessarily reflect any official policy or position of the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario. The project described within these paragraphs is just an idea and should not be attempted in your local community—or should it?

Many authors writing within the field of child studies and outdoor education have raised concern around the apparent lack of spontaneous outdoor play exhibited by children today (Frost, 2010; Gill, 2007; Louv, 2005; McKinney, 2012; Sobel, 2002). Some broad assertions claim these types of free play experiences are simply no longer being afforded to children. After reviewing this literature and reading many similar perspectives, I began to think about the community in which I now live and wondered how I might investigate and collect evidence to demonstrate whether this type of free play was still occurring—specifically, was the fort building experience of my childhood still as common an experience for children today and, if not,

then what could I do to change that? In order to collect information about forts or what author David Sobel (2002) has described as *children's special places* (i.e., forts, shelters and tree houses—the private and group hideouts of childhood), I have decided to develop a play intervention to be carried out in my local community. My use of the term intervention is intentional here, as I would like to use this project to respond experimentally to current concerns around the decrease in children's access to unsupervised outdoor play. I am hoping this project will serve two purposes: first, to determine whether children are still regularly accessing urban green spaces (i.e., local forested areas, parks and ravines) for free play; and, second, to test the viability of *guerilla fort construction* as a means of encouraging and facilitating children's creative outdoor play. This intervention will utilize seeded forts as sources of inspiration, learning and adventure for children. Taking inspiration from both the Adventure Playground and Guerilla Art movements, the project will involve planting building materials and tools, along with partially constructed forts in urban green spaces (i.e., much in the same way that guerilla artists leave artwork anonymously in public places, I will to leave the beginnings of a fort behind). Fort sections or loose parts consisting of "A" and "H" shaped panels constructed from wood will be placed in five selected "study sites" along with a variety of tools, other building materials and associated artifacts. The hope is that children will find these sites, continue on with the activity of constructing these forts and incorporate these outdoor spaces into their daily summer play routines.

As I intend to set up these forts on public

lands and without the permission of my local municipality, this project will need to be highly covert in nature. Working stealthily and under the cover of darkness, my first step will be to transport the pre-constructed loose part forts to various locations throughout my community. The set-up of each individual site will involve placing the fort panels against each other in an A-Frame type formation or simply leaning them against trees. Additional building materials will also be left at each site along with a variety of hand tools. Following this set-up process, the fort sites will then be documented with an initial series of photographs. The goal is to return to the sites on a regular basis throughout the summer (and during the early morning to avoid encounters with children) to photograph and detail the evolution of each site over time. And so, it is not actual children or their play behaviours that I intend to observe, but instead the transformation of the physical site itself.



The images that I collect throughout the summer will, it is hoped, provide a unique visual account of the play experienced at each individual site. By utilizing a simple time-lapse photography technique, I will be able to highlight all of the physical changes that transpire. The resulting sets of images should reveal information about the state of outdoor play at each site. If through a series of photos I were to discover that no physical change had occurred to a fort site, it would be a strong indication that

children were not accessing this particular green space for play. In contrast, images showing a site with obvious physical signs of use would provide evidence that play had indeed taken place. Despite how simple and straightforward this procedure sounds, I believe the process of analyzing these images to extract any deeper meaning will provide a great challenge (i.e., finding a balance between taking the contents of the images at face value and utilizing a pre-existing theory or construct as a deductive tool). Although I am not yet sure how I will eventually share the photographs with others, my hope is that the images will mostly “speak for themselves” and that those who see them will provide the necessary analysis and interpretation.

Activism for Outdoor Play

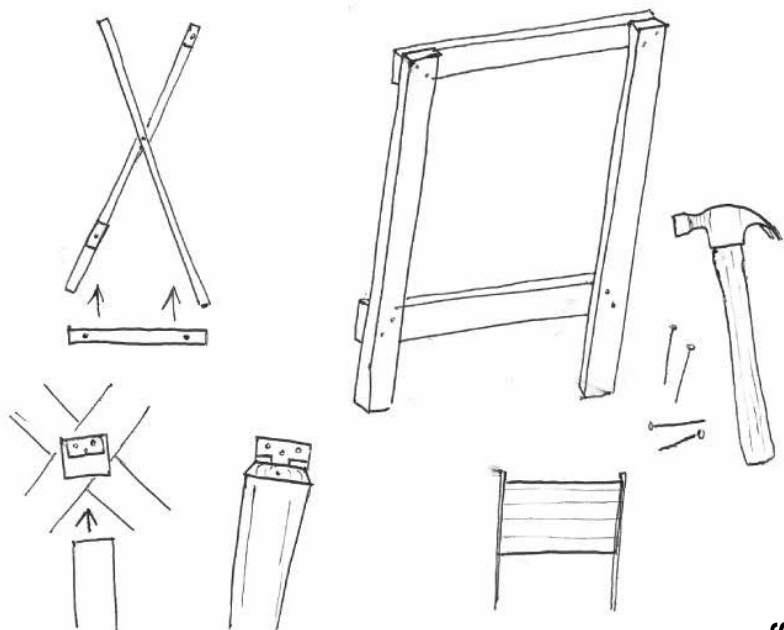
Does a project like this have the potential to change the way we currently think about childhood and outdoor play? Would hearing of this project help reduce or contribute to parental fears and apprehension?

I am approaching this project as a citizen-activist with the goal of bringing awareness to the current state of outdoor play in our cities. Although many of today’s parents share similar childhood play experiences to my own, they now struggle with the idea of unsupervised play and often decide it is unsafe to allow their own eight- or nine-year-old child the freedom to roam and play beyond the watchful eyes of an adult. So what has changed? Why does the apparent need to ensure the absolute safety and protection of children now trump access to a multitude of rich and joyful play experiences? Where has the balance gone? I believe this project is an interesting way of talking back to current ideas of what play should look like, where it should occur and who should oversee it.

The fort is a universal childhood play experience and one that adults often look back on with great nostalgia and fondness, and so it makes an ideal subject for discussion. I will be interested to learn how parents and community members

interpret this project and how they respond after hearing that a *fort bomber* has been at work in their neighbourhood—will it be outrage over “junk” being dumped in their municipal parks or concern about a stranger leaving “dangerous” hand tools around for children to discover? It is hoped that at least one or two individuals recognize the statement I am attempting to make and choose to add their voices to the discussion as well.

Admittedly, the idea of an adult male visiting your local park at 5:00 am to leave hacksaws and two-by-fours behind trees for children to find may sound a little creepy (in an Easter Bunny meets Boo Radley sort of way), but my hope is that this project will complicate discussions around child supervision and outdoor play; inspire others to take up a similar project in their own community; and ultimately attract children to nearby outdoor play spaces and encourage them to create, discover and explore.



Conclusion

Building a fort can be a powerful learning experience for a child. It is an activity that promotes creativity, cooperation and resilience. Children engaged in this activity learn to negotiate risks and solve real problems. Through the construction of play forts, children are able to connect with natural spaces, develop a sense of place and become intimately aware of how their actions impact the environment. Given these potential outcomes, perhaps an intervention is exactly what is needed for parents to see past perceived risks to the benefits of free unsupervised outdoor play for children.

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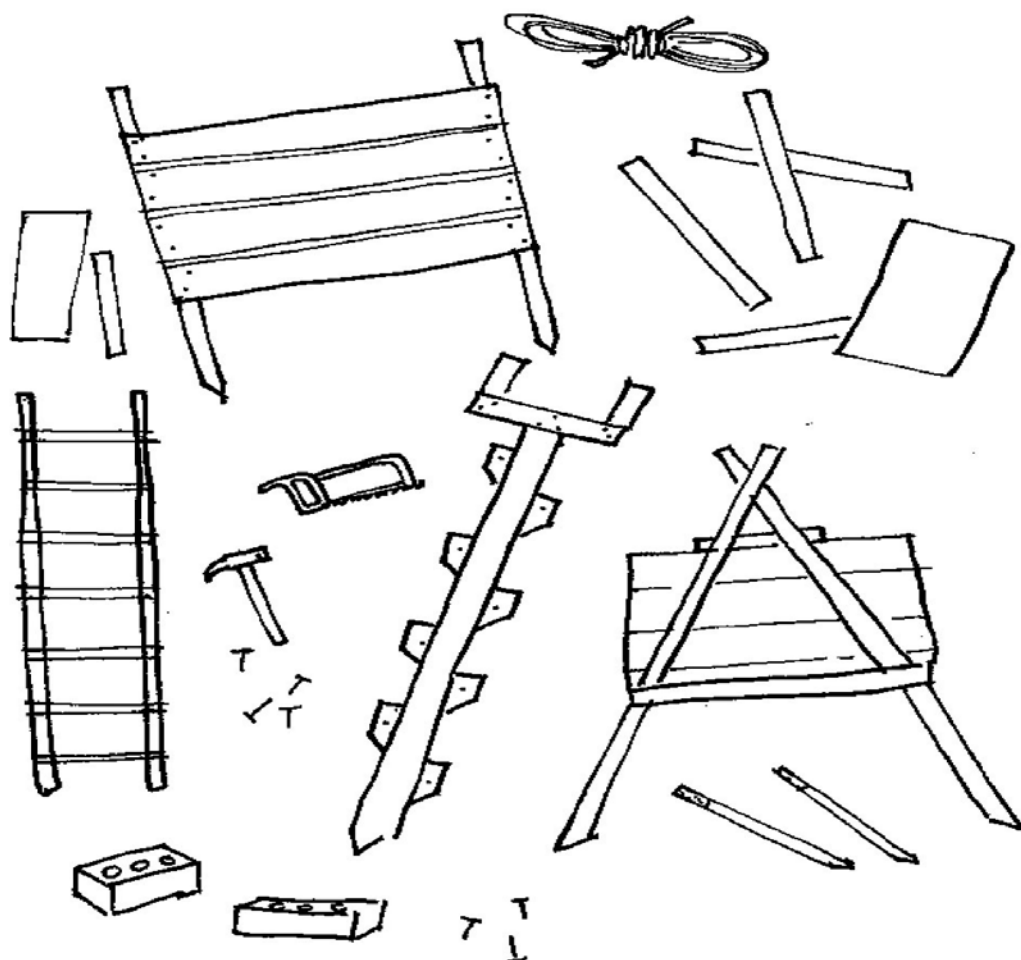
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Kyle Clarke is a graduate student in the School of Kinesiology and Health Studies at Queen's University.



He Ate a Worm

By J.D. Piper

Is it shocking or callow to categorically state in the civilized educated nation of Canada that the way we learn—as children, as adults—is antithetical to what we often say are our values? And that the way we learn is deeper—more lasting, more instructive, more believable—than what we learn—the content that is passed to us by teachers, professors, managers, experts of all sorts? In other words, the way we learn is what we learn. Despite the billions of dollars given to formal education, despite the esteem granted to those with invested authority in the classroom, despite all our talk about individuality and freedom, we have raised and are raising a standardized kind of human who has largely lost the ability to think contextually about the world.

In this sense, of course, I even object to this article I'm writing, for it can't help but have didactic, abstracted elements that contravene what I presume to advocate.

In the summer of 2012, in one of Toronto's most dynamic urban villages, over 30 children and adults took to the land and began developing a relationship with the earth in the city. We began gardening. Some of us didn't know what we were doing while others were aficionados of the soil and its proud, cruel, generous and wily ways.

The Bain Co-op is one of Canada's oldest and largest co-operative social housing complexes. It is located in Riverdale, an upscale, established, NDP-devout neighbourhood located a 15-minute bike ride from King and Bay Streets. Celebrating the centennial of its buildings this year, the co-op was designed by Eden Smith, a leader in the Arts and Crafts movement, with the aim to integrate urban architecture and green spaces in functional

and aesthetically pleasing ways. The Bain, as we call it (well aware of the pun, reflecting the challenges of living in close quarters with almost 500 people in 260 units on five acres), achieves such symbiosis: many of its residents are attracted to it because its three-storey, green-roofed buildings are centered around living courtyards and lush walkways—the kind of urban community that Jane Jacobs extols in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*—safe because people are known and seen, vibrant because heterogeneous and

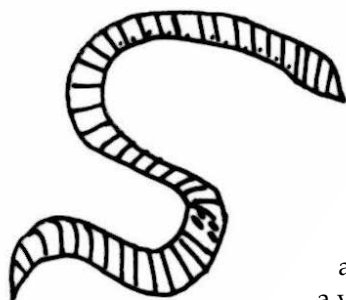
always changing, enchanting and disturbingly relevant, and challenging because the people who live in the community do the planning and managing, as opposed to the planners and managers being in City Hall, Queen's Park, Parliament Hill or some remote office somewhere.

There have always been amazing gardeners at the Bain—a walk-around in the summer reveals a vibrant and exciting array of vegetables, fruit, flowers and sculptures, perambulated together in a kind of

anarchic order that is somehow indicative of Bain culture itself. Last spring, through no particular plan, five adults in five different courtyards, with the help of a start-up fund from the Bain's Board, began, with varying levels of randomness and knowledge, working with kids of whatever ages, planting food.

I was probably the least experienced adult, far more able to talk about gender issues in Orlando and Hamlet or the transference of soteriological expectations from religion to technology than about how to plant zucchinis. I told the kids this (that I didn't know anything about gardening) and, being kids, they didn't care. Some told me what they knew about vegetables, some played with the water hose, some sat on the recently planted tomatoes and looked for worms. Many just wanted to dig holes and sit in them.

an earthworm



These kids, many of whom were pre-school or in the early grades, were imaginative, playful, mischievous, exploratory and communicative. They will be prepared for the adult world over a span of 20+ years, a world oriented to very particular and frequently overwhelming ways of constructing our relationships with each other, money, animals, the earth, technology and work—ways that become reified as mature, necessary and good. Most will be quickly enculturated into rows and didactic learning, avalanches of deadlines that often lead to a driven life that seems inevitable, whose rhythms bear far more resemblance to missiles and highways than trees and rivers. But here, on the wall-less earth, learning takes a different form.

Colin, a perfect munchkin of a three-year-old, meanders happily, talking, across the recently planted soil, plunks himself down on a tomato plant and digs for worms.

JD, Colin says.

Yes, I say.

I found a worm.

One of my sons ate seven worms when he was in grade one.

No he didn't.

Yes he did. He came home from school and told me ...

No he didn't.

Yes he did.

Colin paused and pondered the possible horrors of existence.

Will you eat a worm? he asked.

Well, I'm sort of a vegetarian. On the other hand, I'm more of a flexitarian.

What's that?

Fine, but we have to wash it first.

A few comments about the way we worked and learned—

- Optimal learning is through doing; education is most effective when embodied.
- A sense of communal ownership: seeds and seedlings came from various sources, harvests were shared.
- Activities were shifting and shared, determined by a participant's interest, the planting and harvesting cycle, and random surprises.

- Non-regimented, kids as co-creators and participants with adults: all teachers, learners, students.
- Influence on activities from all participants rather than an agenda controlled by adults.
- Learning about what is hidden—caring for the seen and unseen.
- Freedom by giving oneself over to a task, losing oneself in it, rather than by asserting one's will over others.



In *The Four Quartets*, T.S. Eliot writes, "The river is within us, the sea is all about us"

But how do we find, let alone explore, the inner river, that strong brown god, when the sea and river are no longer visible, when they're unknown, when one has to search for the river in the rush of the clock, feel the sea in the storm of money, the emptiness of time?

Have we erected the walls of the classroom to protect us from the knowledge of the earth, to pretend—through adult fantasies of degrees, fame, wealth—that human knowledge is superior and apart, as opposed to a part of the earth's knowledge?

The earth ... is it tired of the human bulk on its face, the toing-and-froing, the planes that buzz but don't pollinate, the cars that tunnel but don't aerate? Is it weary of our vanity, our erect and committed systems? Our robes of knowledge? Our labyrinths of intelligence? Our strutting of awards? Is it impressed? Do fire and water gather over dark pints in the

bars of night and discuss us? Do they laugh? I had to decide whether to swallow the worm whole, chew it ... turn it into a drama, the worm pleading for its life, some mythopoeic struggle between nature and human desire. Instead I talked about how insects are eaten around the world, sometimes in addition to chickens and pigs, sometimes to replace them. All Colin wanted, though, was to see me eat the worm.

In this age, when the U.S. military has invented electronic insects that can potentially pollinate, when the worms we urbanites know are more virtual than real, when animals are killed and their meat processed far from consumer eyes and ears, when carnage in the West is primarily hidden or virtualized ... what does it mean to eat a living worm?

Shouldn't, in a sense, all education be outdoors, and knowledge stretched to the distance between the earth and sky?

For in the classroom of the earth you don't see walls.
In the classroom of the earth there are worms.

In the classroom of the earth, the earth is the teacher, dean, principal and superintendent, the earth sets the curriculum.

In the classroom of the earth, planning is a constant dialogue among the elements (air, earth, water, seed) and the human element (the capacity, through incarnated consciousness, to alter the elements).

In the classroom of the earth, causation and synthesis are aspects of a larger whole, including other equally valid aspects such as randomness and contradiction.

But why say classroom of the earth? Why not earthroom? This wormy womb we humans—tentative, curious, murky—find ourselves learning in, for a time.

At the end of the summer, we had a parade, going from garden to garden, using makeshift instruments, dressing in costumes in one courtyard, gathering food and making a salad

from our produce when our parade finished. Later, in the winter, I think I see Colin occasionally from a distance, in the cold, bundled like a bear. When, finally, we Bainers crawl from the stupor of the Toronto winter into the happy outdoor bath of spring, Colin reappears in the garden, as if we hadn't just survived six months of darkness, and says,

JD.

Colin, I say. Good to see you. How was your winter?

You ate a worm, he says.

One day, of course, the worms will eat me.

JD Piper lives in Toronto. After planting and harvesting numerous children's gardens across the Bain, the community migrated into its new commercial kitchen in the winter and ran a "Kids in the Kitchen" program, where participants learned to cook everything from empanaditas to flognardes.



Food Security in Fort Albany

By Joan Metatawabin and Gigi Veeraraghavan

The phone rings again. “Can I order a food box?” Mary asks. “Sure, I’ll put your name on the list,” I assure her. “You can pick it up around 5:00 pm at the gym.” That makes 36 boxes so far that we will be selling at the market on Friday, boxes that will have apples, bananas, kiwis, strawberries, potatoes, lettuce, peppers and more—all fresh, affordable produce that has become very popular in this small, isolated James Bay community.

Traditionally, the people of James Bay were mostly meat eaters, consuming moose, goose, rabbit and beaver. They have been meat eaters for thousands of years and the natural environment is critical to their health—emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually. But the change from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled, community life has included a change in diet. Most people now prefer to include a variety of vegetables and fruit along with wild meat. They are aware of the benefits to the health of their families of including such food. The farmers’ markets, held every two weeks, help them do this.

The first farmers’ market was organized six years ago by volunteers who realized that the accessibility, quality and affordability of nutritious food in the community needed to improve. Since then, the logistics of running farmers’ markets has been very challenging but the partnerships established with organizations like Food Share Toronto and True North Coop in Thunder Bay, Ontario, have slowly helped us grow stronger. Another program that helps cut our costs is the Nutrition North Canada Program, which we access through True North Coop. This offers us a freight subsidy on all the healthy food we ship up here.

Food Share, a non-profit organization offering various nutrition programs in the Toronto area, orders our food from the Toronto Food Terminal and stores it in their facility over the weekend. A trucking

company then picks it up and delivers it to the Ontario Northland Railway station in Cochrane, Ontario, 800 km away, where it is then loaded into a refrigerated car. The next day, after a five-hour train ride to Moosonee, a small plane flies the food 160 km north along the James Bay coast to Fort Albany. We have trucks waiting at the airport to take the food to the school gym where volunteers unload and organize the food onto tables for the 5:00 pm market. Usually, by the time the food is unloaded to the gym, it takes eight or nine volunteers working quickly to weigh, bag, price and pack the 40 pre-sold Good Food boxes before the doors open for business.

A lineup always starts outside about 4:30 pm, with everyone anxiously holding their bags, ready to rush in and fill them with their favourite fruits and vegetables. Finally, the door opens and those who ordered boxes quickly pick them up, while others head to the tables to choose their food. Some people, who missed ordering a food box, put their name on the waiting list in case one of the food boxes is not picked up. Within about 20 minutes most of the food is gone and the two lineups of shoppers are slowly being checked out. “Are there any more potatoes?” “Keep the change.” “Can you order more berries next time?” “Thank you, Joan.” “Thank you, Gigi.” These are the comments we hear as the people leave with their bags of food, ready to cook or just eat as is. And always they ask, “When is the next market?”

Some of the food from each market goes to the Student Nutrition Program, which offers all 180 students breakfast each morning and a healthy snack each afternoon. This program was started over 20 years ago in the old St. Ann’s school when very little fresh or affordable food was available in the community. It was almost impossible for parents to provide their children with nutritious food back then, so a snack program helped fill that gap. We immediately saw the benefits of the program as it helped to improve the students’

attendance, behaviour and motivation. Even though our budget at that time only allowed each student half an apple each day or a piece of toast and jam, it was something for the students to look forward to when coming to school.

Then in 2001, with the construction of a new school, Peetabeck Academy, and a state-of-the-art kitchen, cafeteria and home economics room, we were finally able to expand the program to include a real breakfast. An afternoon snack was added a few years later and food literacy became a focus in the school. High school students are able to take the Food and Nutrition course and elementary students have access to all cooking facilities. Most students have learned to read recipes, bake muffins and become knowledgeable about cooking equipment in their years at Peetabeck.

They have also been introduced to unfamiliar foods through the Nutrition Program; kiwis, melons, peppers, whole-wheat flour and healthier cereals have all been offered to the students. They appreciate the program and love to help prepare and deliver the snacks to each classroom. Other food activities under the Nutrition Program include snacks for after-school activities, special treats for monthly award winners, and numerous other activities that run throughout the year.

As an extension of the Nutrition Program, the school added a greenhouse for students to learn how to grow their own food. As the greenhouse construction was happening outside the school, the students would come and watch and ask questions about the greenhouse. One little girl, after watching the construction for many days, finally asked, "When is it going to be green?" The fear of many people that the greenhouse would not last long has been unfounded. Today, five years after it was first erected, it stands undamaged. The students plant seedlings each year for the greenhouse and are able to watch them grow through the summer months. We introduced composting to the students and have a worm farm in the high school science room that adds rich soil to the planting beds in the greenhouse.

Many community members are now planting their own gardens outside their houses. We are all learning how to make soil healthier for growing, when to plant seeds and how best to improve growing conditions. The children in the community are learning about plants at school and at home. It is hoped they will be our future gardeners.

Another food program that just started in the community serves one meal a week to the elders in a Meals-on-Wheels program. The food is prepared in the school kitchen, usually soup and bannock, and delivered to each of the 20–25 elders by home care workers. It has only been operating for a few weeks but the feedback is very positive and the elders eagerly await each Wednesday for their delivery. They are very appreciative of our efforts so we hope to be able to deliver meals twice a week once more funding is secured.

Food security is a much thought-about and talked-about topic in our community, especially when businesses from outside the community that people rely on for food close down. This happened twice this year, leaving people feeling insecure about how to feed their families. That is why the programs we operate are so important. But more can be done. Along with the already successful nutrition programs operating in the community, we can promote more gardening, offer cooking classes and begin a recycling program; all of these programs are currently in the planning stage. Each of these projects will help us increase food security for everyone and teach our children how to live healthy, sustainable lives.

Joan Metatawabin was raised in the small rural community of Wilberforce, Ontario and moved to Fort Albany to teach school in the 1970s. After meeting and marrying her husband, Edmond, they raised their three children first in Fort Albany and then in various other cities in Canada as they worked and attended university. After settling back in Albany in the early 1990s, they built their dream loghouse on the Albany River. Here Edmond served as chief of the community and Joan began a nutrition program in the school

where she taught. The resourcefulness needed to raise her own family in this small community has given her the knowledge and passion to continually implement many food security programs in her community.

Gigi Veeraraghavan works as the Healthy Babies Healthy Children Coordinator for Peetabeck

Health Services, and is also a member of Nishnawbe Aski Nation's Food Sovereignty. Addressing access to affordable food, learning and sharing in food production and harvesting, and identifying and building on existing community strengths has been an inspiring and rewarding way to support her community's path towards wellness.



Against the Current with Henry Thoreau: An Archetype Revisited

By Greg Lowan-Trudeau

Famed American wilderness advocate, writer, poet and general rabble-rouser, Edward Abbey once wrote a book chapter entitled “Down the River with Henry Thoreau” (1984). In this piece, Abbey fondly reflected on Henry David Thoreau’s influence on his own writing and life philosophy, sharing favourite quotes and quips, while recounting a river journey he once took accompanied by a well-worn collection of Thoreau’s works. I recently had the opportunity to revisit the works of Thoreau myself and came away with a distinctly different impression than did Abbey.

Mitch Thomashow (1996) suggests that Thoreau, along with other famous philosophers such as John Muir and Rachel Carson, is an archetypal figure of environmental philosophy in North America. Thomashow encourages us to reflect upon the legacy of these archetypes in order “to understand where [we] fit in the broad spectrum of environmental thought” (p. 29). Following Thomashow’s advice, I set out in the early stages of my recent doctoral work to fully familiarize myself with the various streams of environmental philosophy, attempting to clarify exactly where I fit on the spectrum. I began by revisiting the work of Thoreau.

I had heard and read many of Thoreau’s famous quotes and passages in the past and felt fondly familiar with the general tone of his work as coming from a founding figure of environmental philosophy in North America. However, upon further investigation, I was somewhat surprised to discover that, while I appreciated some of his observations and philosophies on nature and Western society, I was also distracted by other aspects of his beliefs. Indeed, applying a socio-critical and decolonizing lens to the works of Thoreau reveals a degree of Euro-American ethnocentrism that even his most ardent admirers may find unsettling.

Can we simply dismiss this as representative of general societal beliefs of the 19th and early 20th centuries and focus on the other more admirable aspects of his beliefs? Or should we deeply consider the fundamental contradictions present in the beliefs of a man who, on one hand, criticized North American society from an environmental and social standpoint while simultaneously presenting culturally superior and offensive attitudes towards non-Euro-American people? Others might have a different experience but, as a Métis Canadian, I concluded my review of Thoreau’s work with much less admiration than when I began, struggling against the current of his writings, rather than blissfully floating downstream. I explore this tension in the following.

An Introspective Naturalist

Thoreau is famous for casting-off the complications of town-life in Concord, Massachusetts to live in a one-room cabin on Walden Pond. A classically educated man, Thoreau set out to prove that he could live a simple yet fulfilling life without the trappings of modern society. As he says himself in *Walden* (Thoreau, 1854/ 2006, p. 97):

I went into the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

Thoreau built a one-room cabin, planted a large garden, and caught fish in Walden Pond to feed himself (Thoreau 1854/ 2006). He would routinely venture into nearby Concord, only two miles away, for basic supplies, but for the most part created a self-sufficient life that he maintained for two years. *Walden* remains an inspiration for those wishing to go “back to the land” to a more simple existence, Thoreau’s quotes abound, and his criticisms of modernity and industrialization remain relevant even today.

His sense of humour and reflective nature are revealed in quotes such as the following:

Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain (Thoreau, 1854/ 2006, p. 98)

When I set out to acquaint myself with Thoreau's work, I was familiar with his popularly celebrated persona as presented above. As I made my through the opening chapters of *Walden* (1854/ 2006), I was not overly surprised by its content. However, I soon came upon a disconcerting passage where Thoreau describes a Canadian acquaintance whom he condescendingly describes as follows:

A Canadian, a woodchopper and post-maker ... who made his last supper on a woodchuck which his dog caught. He too, has heard of Homer, and, "if it were not for books," would "not know what to do rainy days," though perhaps he has not read one wholly through for many rainy seasons To him Homer was a great writer, though what his writing was about he did not know. A more simple and natural man it would be hard to find. (p. 156)

He later provides a further denigrating description of the Canadian:

He was cast in the coarsest mould; a stout but sluggish body, yet gracefully carried, with a thick sunburnt neck, dark bushy hair, and dull sleepy blue eyes, which were occasionally lit up with expression He interested me because he was so quiet and solitary and happy withal; a well of good humor and contentment ... overflowed his eyes In him the animal man chiefly was developed But the intellectual and what is called the spiritual man in him were slumbering as in an infant. He was so genuine and unsophisticated that no introduction would serve to introduce him, more than if you introduced a woodchuck to your neighbour. (p. 157–159)

Thoreau concludes:

His thinking was so primitive and immersed in his animal life, that, though more promising than a merely learned man's, it rarely ripened to any thing which can be reported. He suggested that there might be men of genius in the lowest grades of life ... who are as bottomless even as Walden Pond ... though they may be dark and muddy. (p. 163)

I found myself offended by Thoreau's condescending and patronizing description of his Canadian acquaintance. While Thoreau seems to view him with a certain fondness, he is most certainly disrespectful in his portrayal of the Canadian as a jolly simpleton who lives close to Nature¹ but is largely illiterate and incapable of carrying out a simple neighbourly conversation. I also found it interesting that, despite being a passionate advocate for Nature, Thoreau certainly seems to view himself as superior to the Canadian whom he portrays as animal-like in a derogatory fashion. However, it was difficult to discern if Thoreau was merely describing this one man or presenting a stereotype of Canadians in general; further investigation clarified these concerns as presented below.

There were further passages in *Walden* that made me uncomfortable. For example, Thoreau commonly refers to Aboriginal people as "savages" and at one point lists them along with animals as counterexamples to "civilized society." Following an arguably complimentary passage describing Aboriginal shelter-building techniques, Thoreau states:

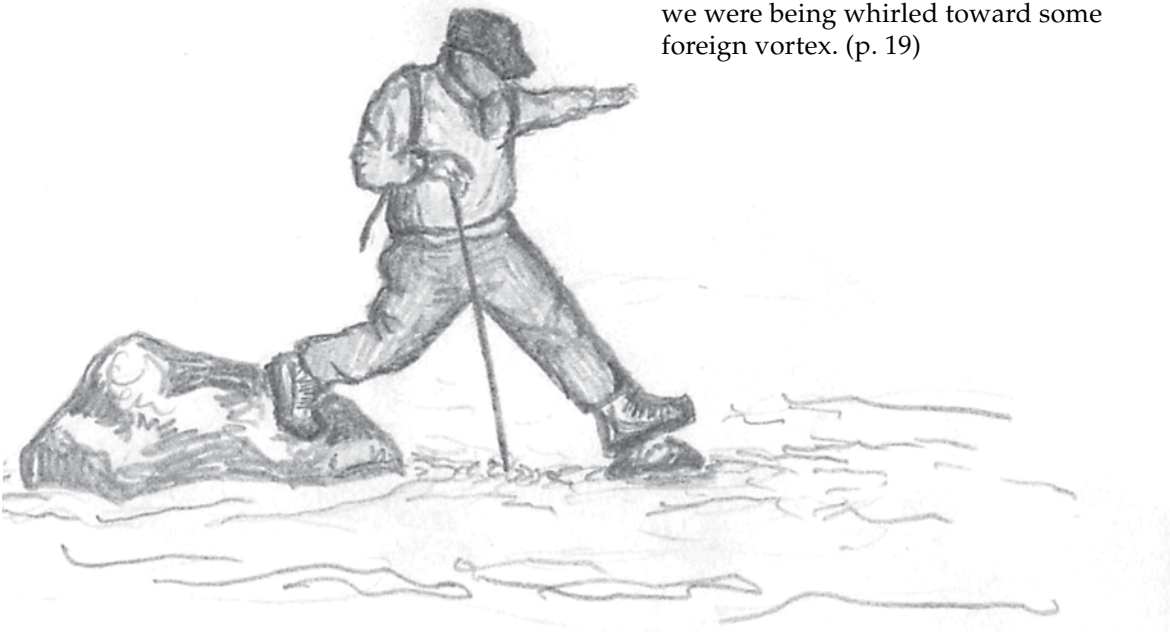
I think that I speak without bounds when I say that, though the birds of the air have their nests, and the foxes their holes, and the savages their wigwams, in modern civilized society not more than one half the families own a shelter. (p. 31)

Yet again, I found myself perplexed by the contradictory nature of Thoreau's reflections. On one hand, he seems to be complimenting Aboriginal peoples on the ingenuity of their

shelters, yet on the other he concludes his thoughts from an unmistakably ethnocentric perspective that negates any genuine admiration (somewhat patronizing in itself) that he may have expressed.

he soon begins to express his discomfort with the changing cultural and linguistic environment during the train journey north. Despite being of French descent himself, Thoreau forebodingly comments:

The number of French-Canadian gentlemen and ladies among the passengers, and the sound of the French language, advertised us by this time, that we were being whirled toward some foreign vortex. (p. 19)



A Yankee in Canada

One of Thoreau's short travel memoirs, *A Yankee in Canada* (1961), later confirmed my misgivings and questions about his opinions of Canadians and Aboriginal peoples. Much less popular than some of his other works, and, I'm assuming, little known in Canadian circles, *A Yankee in Canada* (1961) describes a brief journey that Thoreau undertook by train from Concord, Massachusetts to Québec in 1850. *A Yankee in Canada* contains a mixture of Thoreau's relatively favourable reflections on Canada's physical landscape juxtaposed with condescending observations of Canadian people, European and Aboriginal alike.

Thoreau (1961, p. 13) begins his observations somewhat humourously by stating, "I fear that I have not got much to say about Canada, not having seen much; what I got by going to Canada was a cold." However

Upon arriving at a train station just across the Canadian border, Thoreau (1961) observes with disdain:

Two or three pale-faced, black-eyed, loquacious Canadian-French gentlemen ... shrugging their shoulders; pitted, as if they had all had the small pox ... a rather poor looking race clad in grey homespun, which gave them the appearance of being covered with dust. (p. 20-21)

Further on Thoreau expresses admiration for the architecture and solemnity of Notre Dame cathedral in Montreal. However, he also observes of the parishioners:

Presently came in a troop of Canadians, in their homespun, who had come to the city in the boat with us, and one and all kneeled down in the aisle before the

high altar to their devotions, somewhat awkwardly, as cattle prepare to lie down, and there we left them ... It is as if an ox had strayed into a church and were trying to bethink himself. (p. 23)

Similar to his earlier comments in *Walden*, where he patronizingly compares his Canadian acquaintance to animals, Thoreau, despite being a passionate defender of Nature, reveals a superior attitude towards animals, the ox in this instance, when he uses them to create a condescending metaphor. He concludes his observations of Notre Dame by commenting:

I was impressed by the quiet religious atmosphere of the place. It was a great cave in the midst of a city; and what were the altars and the tinsel but the sparkling stalactites, into which you entered in a moment, and where the still atmosphere and the sombre light disposed to serious and profitable thought. Such a cave at hand, which you can enter any day, is worth a thousand of our churches which are open only on Sundays ... [However,] in Concord, to be sure, we do not need such. Our forests are such a church, far grander and more sacred. (p. 24)

While I agree with Thoreau that forests are wonderful places to spiritually commune with the natural world, I found myself overly distracted by the harsh and condescending nature of so many of his other comments to appreciate such wisdom.

Thoreau's prose and poetry relate pastoral examples of simple living, patient natural observation, and peripatetic wandering. They have endeared him to many and earned him archetypal status in North American environmental circles (Thomashow, 1996). However, as a Métis Canadian, I find it personally challenging to align myself with Thoreau based on the inconsistency of his attitudes towards people different from himself, most specifically French Canadians and Aboriginal peoples.

Revisiting the work of Thoreau and others (such as John Muir and Rachel Carson)

deepened my understanding of the origins and streams of environmentalism in North America; as noted above, while I don't agree with Thoreau completely, I can relate to certain aspects of his philosophies. However, due to the explicitly and implicitly racist and ethnocentric attitudes related by Thoreau, I find myself troubled by his archetypal status as a founder of environmental philosophy in North America (Thomashow, 1996) and will not be drawing on his work in future teaching and research without critical contextualization. I encourage others to revisit the work of early figures like Thoreau with a critical eye, pausing to consider the implications of continuing to celebrate their legacy in our field without also acknowledging their sociocultural prejudices. I understand that some readers might object to my perspective and conclusions in this article and welcome responses through private or public channels.

Note

¹ Terms such as Nature, Land, Indigenous, Aboriginal, and Western are intentionally capitalized in this article to demonstrate and emphasize respect.

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Remote Location, Close Community: A Day at Wintergreen Studios

By Claire Grady-Smith

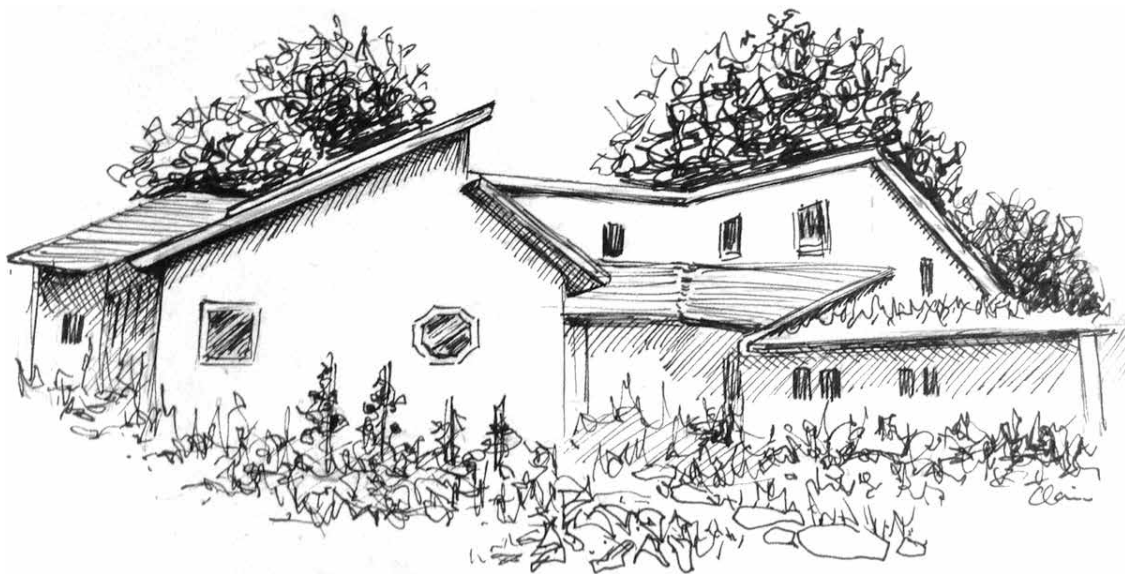
Closing my eyes to the sun, I lean back onto the rock beside the lake. My bare arms rest on the lichen-covered granite, and the dappled light that plays across my face is filtered by the tall pine that arches high above me. The names of these plants and minerals are a part of my experience now, just as much as the warmth of the rock and the calls of the birds. I learned these names by reading the laminated cards that were handed to me as I left the main lodge, charmingly attached by a metal ring and placed in a leather satchel for interested hikers.

I have worked for Wintergreen Studios as Marketing and Communications Director for half a year now, but this is my first time out on “the property” as Rena Upitis, my supervisor, refers to it. From December to March the property is fairly inaccessible. Sometimes Rena has to hike out from the main road, itself irregularly plowed, to check on the boilers, roof, cabins and, I imagine, the “soul” of Wintergreen Studios.

“It’s a lot of work,” she sighs at board meetings, when we meet to discuss upcoming workshops, concerts and conferences that comprise our 2013 season. Her eyes belie her true feelings, however. This land has claimed her, as it is currently claiming me.

I grew up on the Rideau Canal system where you could constantly hear motorboats on the lake, cars passing on the road, and the occasional tourist boat party

slowly making its way toward the dock, narrowly missing the scowling paddlers and kayakers too tired to portage to the next lake. I smile to think of my childhood, and to imagine what it would be like to have access to a landscape as remote as this. I concentrate. All I can hear are finches



and nuthatches chirping invisibly in the woods, the wind in the trees and suddenly a pileated woodpecker’s rapid-fire beak-work. Or maybe a downy? I crane my head to locate the sound and then check my laminated cards. Pileated, definitely. You can tell from the crest on its head and mostly black body.

Getting hungry, I jump up and jog back to the lodge. Dinner is being prepared and it smells delicious. In 2011 we published a cookbook, *A Taste of Wintergreen*, and now almost all our meals are taken from it. Tonight it’s “Fettuccine Lindy,” and the contrast between spending the afternoon out in the rustic woods and then entering to the smells of lemon, capers and fresh parmesan leads to almost instant mouth watering. Rena and I sit and chat about the



upcoming season of events as we await the dinner bell.

"This place is amazing," I finally blurt out. "We need to get more people out here!"

"Yes," Rena nods. "The issue is kind of a catch-22. To immerse yourself in nature, and to experience the full benefits of a retreat from urban living, you need to be in a remote location. We are not that far from Kingston, or Toronto for that matter, but we

are just far enough that it requires an extra effort to remind urbanites that we exist."

I gaze around the lodge for a moment. The late-afternoon sunlight is streaming in through the large windows, sending bars of light into the open-concept commercial kitchen. I'm sitting at a table in the dining area, and behind me is a small window looking ironically into the inside of the walls. This is a "truth" window, where you can see proof that this entire construction

is made of straw bales. The lights that will soon be lit behind me are powered by solar panels, as is the refrigerator in the kitchen. A woodstove may be lit to give added heat to the dining room, but it's often not needed. I smile as I remember Rena's story about the "blasted" boiler that heats the lodge in the winter, how it kept breaking down last March while the water heater would flood the equipment room.

Wintergreen Studios, with its high ceilings, sustainable buildings, open spaces and numerous windows, is just such an alternative space for our many workshops and educational retreats.

Running a business is not without its difficulties, but I can as easily envision Rena in her rubber boots, wielding a wrench, as I can see her accepting an award as Supervisor of the Year from the Faculty of Education. My boss is an inspiration. She started Wintergreen Studios Press when she decided she wanted to publish *Raising a School* her own way. Rena is a visionary, and it made sense that she wanted to design her own book with images, tables and drawings just as she wanted to design this lodge her way, using her knowledge of SketchUp, architecture and engineering. *Raising a School* is an accessibly written account of how school architecture needs to provide the kind of environment that stimulates a student's imagination and spirit, and Wintergreen Studios, with its high ceilings, sustainable buildings, open spaces and numerous windows, is just such an alternative space for our many workshops and educational retreats.

In addition to the self-guided walking tours that students and others can take on the property, we also invite students to construct actual buildings on our property. They learn all kinds of skills when they help with cabin building: framing, cordwood and straw bale construction, roofing and

flooring. In every case our instructors talk about the importance of sustainable building practices that use chemical-free and locally sourced materials. In 2012, based on a series of visioning meetings that took place at Wintergreen, the Wintergreen Renewable Energy Co-op was incorporated; soon we will provide sustainability workshops that include discussions about wind and other renewable energy sources, and the broader implications of these initiatives for Canada and the world. We also have writing, visual art and pottery workshops at Wintergreen. For the first time we are fundraising to subsidize the tuition, accommodation and travel fees for six talented young people (under 30 years of age) to attend a writing workshop with either Lawrence Hill (*The Book of Negroes*) or Helen Humphreys (*Leaving Earth and Coventry*). We've had some inquisitive looks greet us when we describe our triple focus of education, the environment and culture, but when you see this building, this land and these people in action, the symbiotic relationship between our three areas of interest becomes perfectly clear.

I know this place will not sell itself, and that I have a difficult task ahead of me. But the smells from the kitchen, the sun, the new knowledge I have gained, and the building around me are lulling me into a feeling of optimism and comfort. Once we bring people out here, I think, this community will build itself.

Claire Grady-Smith has a Master of Arts degree in Cultural Studies (2012) from Queen's University, and works part-time as the Marketing Director of Wintergreen Studios. She is also a freelance writer and artist who lives in Kingston, Ontario.



Turning the Classroom Inside Out: Students' Lived Experience

By Indira Dutt

As a child at school I remember sitting in a stuffy portable looking out the window to the field and houses beyond. I felt constrained: my seat was attached to the desk, the classroom was just barely big enough to fit all of us, the windows were small, and the air was stale. I also remember the playground outside. I played hide and seek in the small stand of trees beside the field; I helped friends pile up the leaves in the fall and we all jumped in; I imagined an extraordinary museum of found objects--we made displays of the natural oddities that intrigued us and told stories about each treasure.

A school occupant's experience of being inside their school building extends beyond the physical boundaries of the structure.

The two sides of the portable wall felt inexorably different and though I did well in school I was often *wrangy* in the classroom, wanting a little more of the freedom I felt when I was outside. Funny then that I should chose a career that keeps bringing me back into classrooms.

As a teacher I notice that, when the outside and inside feel completely separate, there is a problem. My teaching needs to be both connected and applicable to the everyday lives of my students and they need to feel free enough to be creative and capacious in their thinking so they can meaningfully participate in their education.

The literal and metaphorical notions of the outdoors are vital for me and so I work to soften the edge between inside and out. One way I can do this is by creating and embellishing meaningful indoor-outdoor

relationships. Connections between indoor spaces and outdoor areas are important "so that the outdoors becomes a natural extension of indoor learning" (Nair, Fielding & Lackney, 2009, p.111). This area of school design is sometimes overlooked or minimized by architects and educators, and this negatively influences students' relationships to the natural world (Taylor, Aldrich & Vlastos, 1988).

Indoor-outdoor interfaces facilitate indoor-outdoor relationships. These interfaces are points, areas or surfaces that serve as a juncture between the inside and outside of a building. They include features that provide connection to the outdoors such as windows, skylights, natural building materials, aquariums, plants, interior living walls and porches. Even multimedia devices connected to the outside world via the Internet can bridge the gap between interior and exterior.

In 2009 I conducted a qualitative study that explored how intermediate students' experience of the natural world was mediated by the design of their school building. My study site was the Bowen Island Community School (BICS) located on Bowen Island, a 20-minute commute by ferry from West Vancouver. The school was built on public land, parceled out of west coast rainforest. There are numerous large cedars and Douglas firs surrounding the property. I worked with grade six and seven students at BICS and collected data from two focus groups, semi-structured interviews, photographs and field notes.

One of the major findings of this study was that a school occupant's experience of being inside their school building extends beyond the physical boundaries of the structure. When I asked students about their experience *inside* the school, they repeatedly spoke about the school grounds. From a child's perspective the *whole* school site as well as the school's immediate

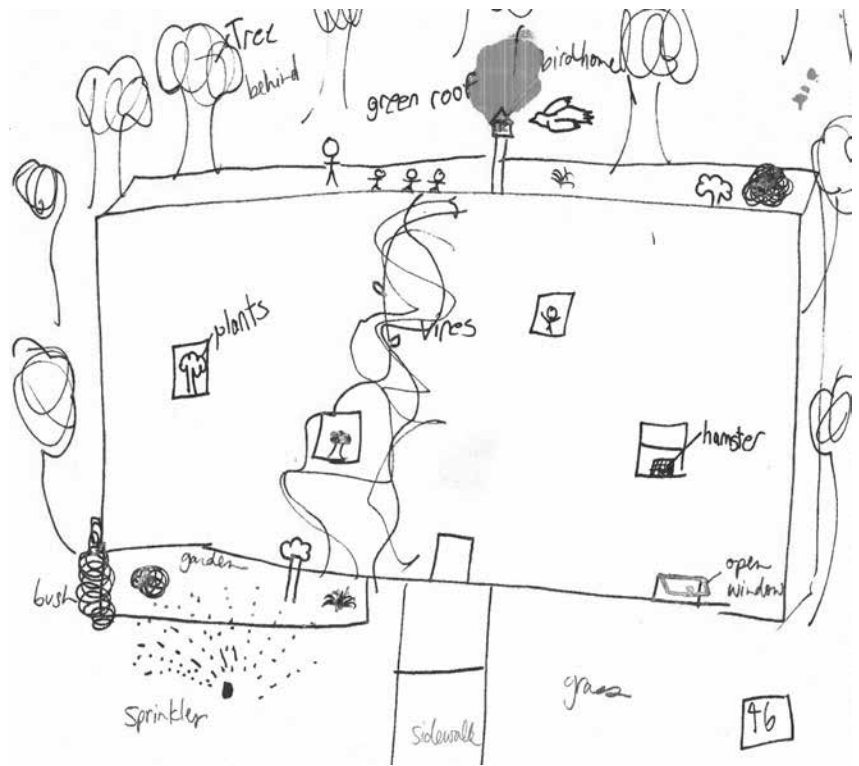
surroundings is a substantive part of their school experience. As well as being drawn to the outside, students expressed the significance of their sense of freedom, joy and beauty. Despite a focus on the fixed structure of the school building and school grounds, the student interviews were saturated with instances in which students reflected that indoor-outdoor connections deepened their freedom of movement, solitude, expression and imagination as well as the freedom to take mini-breaks from work. At BICS these instances of freedom were always associated with their connection to the exterior of the building. Students also recounted joy and places of beauty as critical in their learning.

I believe that my experience as a child varies little from students today. It is no surprise to any of us who have spent time in the classroom with children (of any age) that students' attention is often drawn away from the topic or task at hand. I think that as teachers we get caught up in expending energy on refocusing, directing and corralling our students into the confines of the classroom, when instead we could find ways to capitalize on students' desire to move outside. At times this movement is literal, but students' imaginations can and do take them out in a figurative sense as well.

At BICS, teachers work with the imaginative drive and thirst for freedom that children have. The teachers at BICS incorporate the indoor-outdoor interfaces into the teaching process; they use the view from their classroom windows to highlight relevant elements of curriculum and they bring the children out into the hallway to stand or sit under the skylight and talk about the clouds outside. There is an active engagement with the outdoors from within the structure of the school.

While BICS is situated in what some might consider an idyllic teaching environment, certain aspects of the BICS students' experience can be generalized to any location, rural or urban. If we can acknowledge the importance of freedom

in the life of our students we can start to embrace and incorporate the interfaces to which we have access instead of thinking of classroom windows as distractions and covering them up using blinds or construction paper.



As a part of my research, I asked 55 grade six and seven students to draw an ideal school building, one that they thought would foster their connection with the natural world. I asked them to label important features they included. The most dominant features of these drawings were plants and animals. During my study I found that students expressed great joy witnessing the complete life cycle of plants. At BICS students could see the garden from their large classroom window. One student

exclaimed, "It's fun to watch everything [in the garden] because you go in the beginning of the year and there are little sprouts and then you go later and there are big shoots and stuff." At a more urban school in Toronto each class grows a different kind of seed (grade one grows peppers while grade two grows tomatoes) and later in the spring they transplant their seedlings into

the garden. In both these examples students develop relationships with food they eat in addition to having an indoor–outdoor connection.

When resources permit, adding indoor–outdoor interfaces by creating a “living things zone” (Nair, Fielding & Lackney, 2009) can delight students and inspire observation and investigation. I noticed students would consistently gather around a seaquarium in the foyer at BICS and watch the sea creatures inside. One student exclaimed with joy, “You don’t see a seaquarium everyday. It’s my favourite. Sea cucumbers, yeah, they spit out their guts for protection.” Students used their excitement about sea creatures and ability to watch them for long periods of time to write daily observations and creative stories in their journals.

easy version of a living thing zone has a profound effect on students.

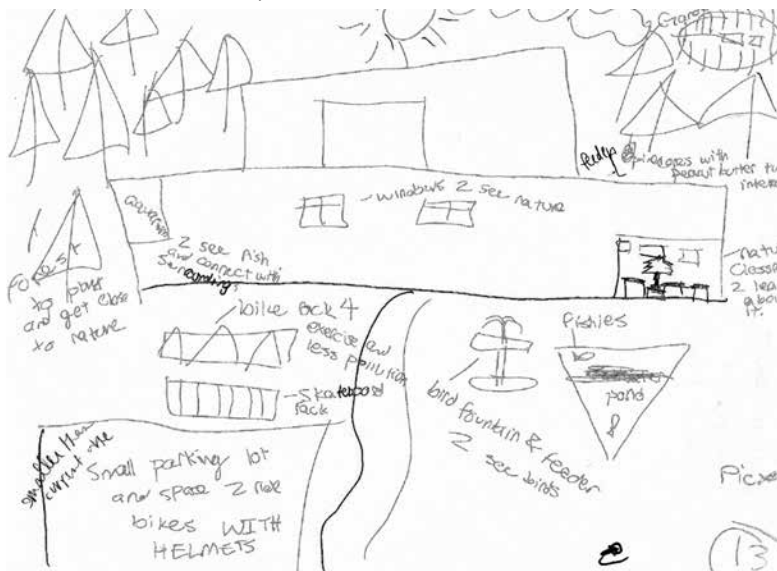
If we take a broader view of nature, and humans’ place within it, we might even conceive that the very busy urban street below a school window has natural lessons waiting to be learned. Rich conversations result when we explore what is happening beyond the walls of the classroom regardless of where our school is situated.

With our students’ best interests in mind we can utilize existing indoor–outdoor interfaces to enhance curriculum. While I feel a particular affinity for green spaces and places where dirt and water and clean air are easily accessed, in reality many schools occupy sites with precious little green or naturalized space. We can find ways to incorporate the nature outside, be it the trees or the bustle of humanity on city streets, in our classrooms to create an expanded sense of freedom and joy in our students.

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Living things zones can include elements such as plants, sprouts, a window farm, living walls, an aquarium and small animals. In some Waldorf classes, one daily routine (first and last thing of day) consists of each child retrieving their potted plant from a table top, bringing it to their desk for the day and then putting their plant back on the tabletop at the end of the day, watering it when need be. Each child sees their plant change over time, while having something small for which they are responsible, and they always have a living thing close at hand. Even this very small and relatively

The Children's Garden at Evergreen Brick Works: A New Culture of Play

By Heidi Campbell, Cam Collyer, Ferruccio Sardella and Amal Musa

Evergreen is a national environmental charity that has been engaging hundreds of thousands of Canadians in creating and sustaining dynamic outdoor spaces—on school grounds and in community plots, on balconies and in backyards, in public parks and forgotten spaces.

In recent years, Evergreen has transformed the former Don Valley Brick Works from a collection of deteriorating heritage buildings into a year-round showcase for urban sustainability, green design and environmental education. It is Canada's first large-scale community environmental centre and represents a striking new model for the future—a heritage destination where nature meets innovation in the heart of an urban centre. People from all walks of life visit the site to share ideas and learn to integrate experiences into their daily lives while building a culture of caring for nature and our communities. In the heart of this unique destination sits the Children's Garden.

Evergreen's Children's Garden is, by design, a microcosm of Toronto's extraordinary ravine geography that reaches out into the surrounding neighbourhoods where thousands of children live and go to school. There are 60 elementary schools within a four kilometre radius of Evergreen Brick Works. Almost every school is within 500 metres of a ravine, and every ravine leads to the Don River. Evergreen Brick Works rests on a flood plain at the confluence of several ravines and the Don River, and sits at the axis of Toronto's extensive trail system. The Children's Garden is a gateway into the environment for Toronto's inner city children.

The garden is a natural oasis for children. It is a place that is simultaneously calming and energizing while serving to elevate a child's senses and their curiosity. Firsthand experience and multi-sensory exploration is the priority. The goal is to nurture an interest in, attachment to, knowledge of and

a relationship with nature. Ultimately, we hope the Children's Garden supports the development of ecologically literate and conscious young people.

The site is characterized by gently undulating terrain, and an edible landscape of trees, shrubs and native plant, organic vegetable, edible flower and herb gardens with small gathering areas and nooks—all punctuated by an historic 200-foot chimney, a water tower with manual water play features, a greenhouse, a small cob house and a wood burning oven. The site changes and evolves with the seasons, the stages of growth of the plants, and the activities of the visitors.

The design team has done considerable research, including visits to children's play and learning sites in Germany, England, Denmark, Norway and the U.S. In addition, the Toyota Evergreen Learning Grounds Program has generated primary research on a diverse population of students and teachers while designing, building and animating schools grounds across Canada for over 16 years. This research has affirmed the key Evergreen tenant that children must be active participants in the learning experience, and that direct, playful, hands-on engagement with the Earth's primary materials—plants, wood, water, rock, sand, mud, clay—connects children to their environment and sets the stage for them to become better stewards of our planet.

The primary themes guiding the design and activities of the court are food, water and handwork. The design of the site supports activity centered on these themes in the following ways:

Food

Activities: Sprouting, growing, stewarding, harvesting, cooking, preserving, serving, celebrating

Elements: raised vegetable gardens, fruit trees, berry bushes, a greenhouse, a fire pit, a bake oven and indoor and outdoor kitchens.



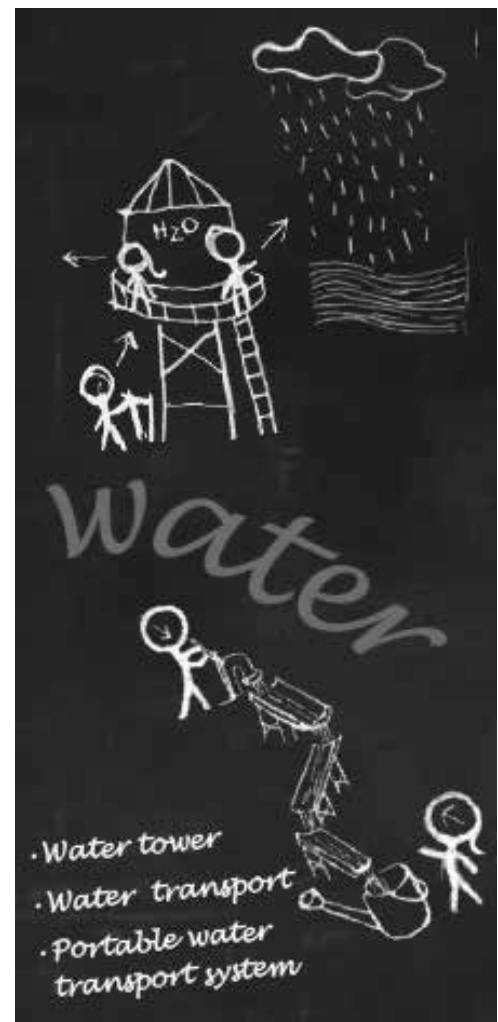
The edible landscape feels like a miniature version of an urban farm. There is an emphasis on a variety of innovative growing mediums and spaces such as vertical gardens, raised garden beds, fruit and veggie hedges and fences. There are heirloom vegetables and flowers. Children are involved in the planning, building and stewarding of the gardens. Children plant and tend to the plants through watering, weeding and harvesting throughout the growing seasons. The aesthetic considers the children's expression, which is embedded in the planning and design of this space. For example, sitting spaces and natural play structures are at a scale that is adequate for younger children.

Water Please

Activities: Storing, transporting, channeling, watering

Elements: Large water tower, cisterns, manual water pumps, an Archimedean screw, buckets and ladles, two mini-water towers and portable aqueducts

In the garden children learn about water firsthand. By carrying watering cans and feeling water's true weight, visitors begin to appreciate how much energy it takes to move water around a thirsty city. Watering a garden opens the door to the underworld of plants and the chemistry of soil. Cisterns tell the story of rainfall, the hydrological cycle and the merits of water collection and reuse. A large water tower fed by rainfall, manual water pumps and portable aqueducts assembled by children divert rainwater to multiple gardens. In winter, ice reveals the miracle of water and affords new opportunities for play and learning.



Handwork

Activities: Building, mixing, digging, weaving, stacking, tying, bundling



Elements: Sand play area, construction area, loose parts, clay pit

Children love to create miniature worlds wherein they can imagine things on a manageable scale. They learn how big things work by experimenting with smaller versions of those things. Through play, the world becomes knowable.

A substantial part of the Children's Garden is a stage for a constantly evolving series of hands-on projects. Using a diversity of natural materials such as sand, wood, mulch and clay children

become the primary architects and builders of creative and traditional structures and objects. In this setting, an abundance of natural and recovered materials provides the opportunity for children to engage in large, collective construction projects. Working with natural materials and using sophisticated, age-old building techniques like weaving, knot-tying, stacking and free-standing design, children have the rare opportunity to be designers and builders while gaining new, exciting skills.

Programming in the Children's Garden spans the continuum from free play to highly structured activities. The site is host to assorted school programs, workshops, camps, special events and untold adventure. Staff are key; they enhance learning, maintain a safe setting, lead activities and share skills. They also facilitate the

development of a creative narrative—ongoing story-making with children—that simultaneously delight and inspire visitors while drawing out their creative selves. By involving school children in the story of our relationship with nature, we open the doors of our program to families, and the community at large. Going forward, the Children's Garden offers an approach and practice that has a place in every community: cultivating a knowledge of nature while inviting participants into the creation of a unique sense of place.

Heidi Campbell is the Senior Designer for Evergreen Learning Grounds. She has a Master's degree in Landscape Architecture from the University of Guelph and a Bachelor of Education from the University of Toronto. Her current focus is co-designing and managing the programming and construction of the Children's Garden at Evergreen Brick Works and the social enterprise consulting services program.

Cam Collyer has directed Evergreen's award-winning Toyota Evergreen Learning Grounds program since 1997. At Evergreen Cam has overseen the establishment of a national network of school ground design professionals, the creation of a large suite of print and web-based publications, and the establishment of pioneering partnerships with schools boards across Canada.

Ferruccio Sardella was artist-in-residence for the Evergreen Brick Works project and an embedded member of the design team for the redevelopment of the site. In this position, he performed a variety of roles—from architectural design team member and interpretive planner to exhibit designer and producer of public artworks. He sees his work as a contribution to a culture and movement that is striving to create healthy and more liveable communities.

Amal Musa is the Children and Nature Program Coordinator at Evergreen. She supports the Toyota Evergreen Learning Grounds Program, with a focus on the National Associates Program and the social enterprise consulting services program. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Ryerson University.

A Classroom Comes Alive!

By Kelly Mathews

In a collaborative effort to offer students, staff and the community at large a teaching and learning venue fit for Mother Nature herself, Seneca College, King Campus in King City, Ontario opened the doors to a “new kind of classroom” in the summer of 2012 at the Seneca Outdoor Education Centre. But herein lies some irony—as this classroom has no doors! Trees, grass and blue sky are the walls, ceiling and floor of the new facility.

Under the leadership of Kevin French (former Program Coordinator at the Seneca Outdoor Education Centre) and Brian Speers, Coordinator of the Environmental Landscape Management (ELM) Program, the ELM students spent approximately 12 weeks helping to design and build the outdoor classroom structure as part of their Landscape Construction Course. Tina Disomone, King Campus Principal and Dean, said, “It was great to watch students work on the project and get entrenched over long hours of this very hands-on endeavour.” (King Township Sentinel, 2012). The collaborative project included stone work, wood work, grading, concrete work and plantings. Solar power supplies the electricity to the main platform, which can be used between May and October.

The outdoor classroom features carefully selected plants and trees, ideal for a tranquil learning environment. Beautifully crafted benches and Muskoka chairs can comfortably accommodate a class of 20–25 students. The outdoor classroom is used regularly by an array of students from varying academic programs who are looking to venture away from a traditional classroom setting.

The main lecture platform is an open-air arbour. It provides shelter and blends in with the scenery without blocking it. The natural podium is composed of concrete, stone and, most-wonderfully, wooden beams recycled from a former barn on the property.

I have had the pleasure of watching Seneca faculty and students enjoy the new classroom and learning environment over the past year. The venue has been a successful bridge between technology (wi-fi available) and the natural environment. A further example of the link between technology and the environment is that the outdoor classroom is also solar powered to support an LCD projector and sound system.

It’s a pleasure to sit silent and still at the outdoor classroom for the classroom is never silent or still. With the clouds rolling by overhead, the trees billowing all around, and the wind rustling through the strategically placed tall grasses and branches, one might consider it the most active and engaging of classrooms.

Referring to the outdoor classroom, Seneca College President David Agnew said, “This reminds me of ancient Roman teaching places used by the likes of Socrates. In the current age dominated by technology it’s great to see a simple gathering place for learning. The cross-departmental collaboration that took place throughout the project speaks volumes about the philosophy at the campus” (King Township Sentinel, 2012). I couldn’t agree more. I’ve been with Seneca College for a year now and have been so impressed by the culture and spirit of partnership and student engagement demonstrated best through college projects and initiatives created by the student, for the student. Experience just might be the best teacher.

The Seneca Outdoor Classroom is available for outside group rentals to enjoy! For more information please visit www.senecaoutdoorcentre.com or call (416) 491-5050 Ext. 55042.

Kelly Mathews works for Seneca College as the Manager of Community Recreation, Camps & Outdoor Centre.

Take Learning to the Outdoor Classroom

By Jessica Kaknevicus

Beyond the classroom, the outdoors presents a whole new learning opportunity for any age or subject. The benefits of connecting with nature have become well known over the years, highly profiled by Richard Louv, the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, and supported by numerous studies. While some teachers may feel that taking learning outside is an easy task, many are intimidated by the thought of taking their class outdoors. The outdoor classroom is a relatively easy way to bridge the gap of learning outside of the traditional outdoor subject areas.

An outdoor classroom is simply any space that takes learning outdoors. The design and complexity vary and no standard template is required. The most unique thing about an outdoor classroom is that you can design and create it to fit with what your school has, wants and needs. A basic outdoor classroom provides a group seating area for structured learning. Beyond this, the world is your oyster. You can include fitness elements, musical instruments and gardens. When possible, focus on including natural elements as this heightens the nature connection.

Before you put your shovels in the ground and start the creation of the space, it is important that this type of project is adopted by the entire school community—including students, teachers, school board and administration, maintenance staff, parents and the community at large. The project should become integrated into the school community before it really begins. In this sense we focus on the idea of sustainability, in that we want the classroom to last beyond the tenure of any one teacher or administrator.

Before you begin

So where do you begin? You may be a teacher, a group or a passionate parent who wants an outdoor space included in their schoolyard. First things first, you need to talk to the right people to see if

there is interest as a whole. If your school is not rallying behind you, then the project will not be a success. Secondly, you need to determine whether such a project is permitted. It does you no good to put in substantial work to find that your school board will not allow the project. Get interest and get permission, then get on your way!

The project should become integrated into the school community before it really begins.

Getting your community on board with your project can have many benefits, especially when it comes to reducing the overall cost of your project. Outdoor classrooms can range in price, and these costs can be significantly reduced through in-kind labour and materials, special discounts or sponsorships. Look to your community for support. While the outdoor classroom may be located on school property it is open to the use of any community member and family. Reach out to parents and local businesses—your school is a great network.

Taking on the task of developing an outdoor classroom will take work, therefore getting more people involved will lessen the workload. Schools commonly state that the amount of time needed to realize the project is beyond what they expected. From forming a committee, holding meetings and developing a landscape plan to fundraising, promoting and building—it all adds up. A classroom committee can help to divide up these tasks and engages the whole school community. The committee should include teachers, parents, community members and school administration or board representation. Consider breaking the project elements into several key sub-committees including fundraising, design and implementation, community engagement and usage.

Making your space

How you decide to design your space will be dependent on the needs of your existing school grounds. Reach out to students and teachers to find out what elements they would like to see and would use. “Growing Knowledge Outdoors” is a lesson plan that was created by Focus on Forests, in partnership with MAJESTA—accessible at www.focusonforests.ca. This activity brings together teachers and students to brainstorm ideas for their outdoor learning space. Incorporating elements that are important to students of all ages and teachers of any curriculum will encourage use of the space.

It is best to consider approaching small projects at first. Reinventing your whole schoolyard will take a large amount of time in planning, fundraising and building. Start small and build the project, and you are likely to establish a successful and sustainable project. A sustainable project ensures that all elements are considered and that the funding is in place to establish the project and maintain it for years to come.

Do not overlook maintenance of your outdoor space. Summer vacation means that schoolyards and outdoor spaces do not receive the same attention that they may throughout the year. In fact this period of the year is the most important, as it is also the main growing season for plants and trees in Ontario. Therefore it is important to engage with your school community to ensure that these spaces are cared for throughout the seasons. Include maintenance staff in the project and engage community volunteers to help water and weed throughout the hot summer months. Living elements of any outdoor space need care year round. Make maintenance a part of the curriculum during the school year by bringing classes outdoors to care for the plants.

Using your space

You have the classroom created. Now what? Use your outdoor space! Using the space and having the school adopt it will ensure

its longevity. If your school has one or two teachers who are well versed in using the space, consider asking them to engage in a “Teach the Teacher” workshop to break down the barriers felt by other teachers. One of the biggest misconceptions about outdoor learning is that it has limitations on curriculum. Outdoor learning goes beyond the science or environmental curriculum; history, math, art and language all have a place in your outdoor space. Encourage all teachers to get outside to learn, because the mere fact of being outdoors improves well-being and the health of youth.

Above all, taking learning outdoors does not require an outdoor classroom. While this type of project may lead to increased use of outdoor spaces by teachers, there are many ways to get outdoors at no cost but with huge benefits. Explore local trails or use the trees in the schoolyard to learn more about trees and forests.

If you are looking for activities that taking learning outdoors, visit Focus on Forests at www.focusonforests.ca. Focus on Forests has been providing resources for teachers for over 30 years. The program first launched in the 1980s and has grown from a book of lesson plans to an online resource of lesson plans, activities, fact sheets, videos and a discussion forum. New resources are constantly being added, with a growing focus on taking learning outdoors.

For more information about creating your outdoor classroom and what you need to consider, download *Building Outdoor Classrooms: A Guide for Successful Fundraising* developed by Focus on Forests with support from TD Friends of the Environment Foundation found at www.focusonforests.ca/TDoutdoor

Jessica Kaknevicus is the Program Development Manager for the Ontario Forestry Association where she focuses on creating and promoting educational resources that encourage learning in the natural environment. She holds a Master of Forest Conservation degree from the University of Toronto.

Collaborative Outdoor Literacy Activity: Novel in an Hour

By Ben Blakey

This past April I enrolled in a four-day training certification for TRIBES, a program that seeks to create collaborative learning group approaches to education. After having spent many years in summer camps and outdoor education programs, I found the ideas behind TRIBES refreshing and invigorating. For more information on TRIBES go to www.tribes.com.

Our TRIBES group instructor and OISE professor Judy Blaney is a firm believer in getting students outdoors, so we voted to have the last day of training outdoors in High Park in Toronto. One activity we did was based upon the TRIBES “Novel in an Hour” (Gibbs, 2006); it is an activity that I believe has a lot to offer educators in terms of possibilities for getting students outdoors and immersed in natural elements.

Supplies: Five to ten copies of the same book depending on the size of the group (three to four students per group), outdoor space with malleable objects (rocks, branches, and so on) for props. The novel we used as an example was *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen, which would be perfect for intermediate grades, although you could use any grade-appropriate novel in which the majority of the story takes place outdoors. Optional: video recording software.

Preparation: Try to break the book down into relatively manageable segments, so that all the groups can cover the majority of the book. You can fill in any gaps if needed by briefly summarizing certain chapters or providing an introduction to the class. For example, as *Hatchet* has 19 chapters and we had four groups, each group worked with three to four chapters and Judy filled in a couple segments.

Lesson: Introduce the book to students, either by reading a brief synopsis or the first chapter if it is short. Give each group a segment of the book to work with, and enough time to read it through, along with some time for planning a creative reinterpretation of the text. Set

aside some time at the end of the lesson, or use another class to allow the groups to show everyone their interpretations of the text chronologically so that the whole class retells the story.

In Conclusion: With an emergence in research focusing on “nature deficit disorder” (Louv, 2005) as well as advances in scientific studies of the benefits of contact with nature (Selhub & Logan, 2012), many educators are seeing the value in moving classes and school programs outdoors. Possible curriculum links for this activity include English and drama, social studies through historical fiction, science through science fiction, and other language curriculums such as French. This activity is relatively student-centered, caters to a diverse set of learners (as students choose their own ways to interpret the text), and allows for many modalities of learning including visual, auditory and kinesthetic.

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Ben Blakey is in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Having been a summer camp counselor in a variety of capacities, his research focus now is on ecopsychology, environmental education and outdoor education.

Friluftsliv: A Breath of Fresh Air

By Connie Kavanagh

So here's the dilemma: How do you take a single word from another culture, from across the ocean, which may embody an entire philosophy and way of life, and effectively translate it into Canadian culture—which itself is actually a mosaic of

cultures? I may have just answered my own question. Because Canada is so diverse, in everything from its geography and peoples to languages and cultures, considering and adopting words and ideas from afar is a simple way to add to the richness of our



natural heritage and everyday life. Adding to our mosaic places another piece of the puzzle into our still-developing identity. Friluftsliv comes to us from Norway, and its literal translation is “free air life” or “open-air life.” From what I can gather, it is a way of life based on a long cultural history of spending time outdoors, and it is intricately tied to the landscape in which it developed. In a part of the world where daylight hours are rare in winter and extensive in summer, friluftsliv is a way of life that takes full advantage of the physical landscape in which it developed. This way of life is the evolution of time spent exploring the natural world, cross-country skiing across snowy fields as a primary means of transportation, and equating the natural environment with “home.”

Friluftsliv comes to us from Norway, and its literal translation is “free air life” or “open-air life.”

Although outdoor educators may read this and say, “Of course!” to the idea that nature equals home, some “civilized” views have taught that nature is something to be feared, or denied, or conquered. We have been taught that a basic plot line for a good story is “man vs. nature.” Gender issues aside for the moment, we need to continue to counter the idea that nature is something to conquer by replacing it with the idea that nature is something to respect, that we are a part of nature and not entirely above it, and that we belong in the natural world of which we are a part.

In their book *Nature First: Outdoor Life the Friluftsliv Way*, Bob Henderson and Nils Vikander describe the friluftsliv life and consider the benefits and difficulties of attempting to translate this Norwegian reality into other countries and cultures. There are several concerns, not the least of which is the fact that friluftsliv has had to be adapted even within Norway due to urbanization and the loss, for many, of a

traditional way of life. Yet the authors note there are parallels to friluftsliv in other places as well, including in the Cree culture of northern Canada, who have a similarly complex expression for a similar way of life (perhaps to be explored in a future Wild Words column).

As we think about how we educate our children and how physical place affects their learning, we would be wise to consider the traditional ways of people like the Norwegians or the Cree, whose lives have historically been intricately tied to the land and the outdoors. We can design schools that bring the outdoors in, and schoolyards that allow for the wonder and exploration of nature. We can design lessons that tie to the natural world, using real examples from real people and places. We can balance the sterility of the institutionalization of our children by introducing them to the natural world, by showing them wild places on Earth that still exist, by finding nearby wild places to take them. We can take students outside in the rain, let them experience the cold rain on their faces, let them learn how to deal with wet socks and cold feet. We can teach them wild words, like friluftsliv, and encourage them to explore on their own—to develop their own sense of place in the physical world in which they live, so that they too may come to equate the natural world with “home.”

Connie Kavanagh enjoys combining her creative writing and outdoor education careers. She is currently based in Hamilton, Ontario.





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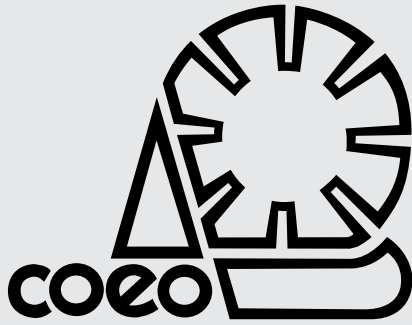
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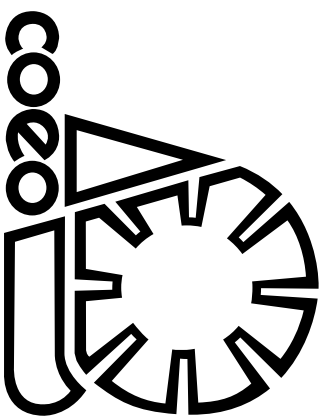
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