

Niagara Nature Alliance Network

Thursday February 25, 2016 • 5:30 to 7:30 pm

Early Childhood Community Development Centre

3340 Schmon Parkway, Thorold • Community Boardroom

Present: Lorrey Arial Bonilla (Facilitator), Debra Harwood (Featured Presentation), Bill Kilburn (Featured Presentation), Ginette Wilson (minutes), Lindsay Brennan, Kristin Cuthbert, Tara Darling, Natasha Douglas, Treina Gautreau, Chelsea Leystra, Andrea Lillico, Lisa Mayer, Margaret Moffatt, Sherry Pepin, Susanne Robitaille, Ashley Swalm, Juanita Vibert, Doreen Waugh

Regrets: Robin Cotton, Jill Donaldson, Natasha Freitas, Carrissa Gracey, Nikki Haight, Ann Hamm, Elisabeth Han, Trudy Hill, Danielle Longboat, Julie Mann-Harrison, Donna Mills, Deanna Pitts, Stephanie Rebbetoy Rozon, Jen Smith, Adrienne Smoke, Marlena Sokolowski

1. Welcome and Introductions

Participants were welcomed by Lorrey Arial Bonilla; all participants introduced themselves and shared their hopes for the Nature Alliance.

2. Acceptance of Agenda

The agenda was accepted with no amendments.

3. Video - *Toddler's First Time in the Rain* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=4mPEHKdfPuU)

4. Review of Wordle Created at the Launch and Goals of the Nature Alliance



5. Feature Presentations

Bill Kilburn, Program Manager with the Back2Nature Network

- Bill introduced himself to the group and gave an overview of his background as an educator and Biologist as well as an overview of the work of the Back2Nature Network.
- Bill led participants outdoors to play a collaborative game in order for the group to get to know one another in nature.
- Participants were asked to observe an environment with assorted large outdoor Loose Parts and relate what they could see, followed by a video of a child explaining what he had created. The photo ended up being a “place space” that the child had created with much thought, intentionality and detail. Bill highlighted that it is essential to listen to children and connect them and their families with nature rather than to nature.
- Bill circulated “*Into Nature*” a Guide to Teaching in Nearby Nature and ‘*Ready...Set...Wonder*’: Nature Prompts for the Early Learning and Care Educator - a tool connecting parents/caregivers, administration, students and educators with the outdoors. These publications can be found at: <http://www.back2nature.ca/resources-research/>. There are also copies available in the ECCDC resource lending library for borrowing.
- *Bill’s presentation is included in this document*

Debra Harwood, Professor, Brock University Bachelor of Early Childhood Education

- Debra introduced herself to the group. She is an associate research professor with the faculty of Graduate and Undergraduate studies in Education at Brock University. During her recent sabbatical she traveled to British Columbia to study Forest School programs in the Province. She studied them in relation to the ‘Play Space Pedagogy’ model of context of setting. The four Forest School programs followed the Forest School program but utilized slightly different models.

Model 1: ECO Program of the municipality of Saanich, British Columbia - a half-day program for 3 and 4 year old children at two locations: Swan Lake Sanctuary and Elk Lake Beaver Lake. The program is underpinned by the British Columbia Early Learning Framework, which is similar to Ontario’s ELECT document and maintained a 1:8 adults to children ratio. Licensing was an issue as they were based outside and had no building to license. Children were encouraged to take risks, explore, test theories, and to be environmental stewards.

Model 2: Sangster School (District 62) – this half-day Nature Kindergarten program is in its third year of operation. It was started by parents, the school board Superintendent, and educators, and is being evaluated by Enid Elliott. The evaluation includes two control groups; one which participates in Forest Schools and the other which does not. There are 22 children with a teacher and a support assistant. The day starts with all the children inside during which a morning meeting takes place, and then the children go outside and explore in one of two groups. The children eat in the woods and follow their own inquiries with educators providing ‘provocations for learning’. Debra shared an ant inquiry which the children took part in; they made signs, engaged in dramatic play, and co-created stories. The morning session ends with all the children gathering together. In the afternoon the children are inside.

Model 3: Victoria Nature School is a preschool in Victoria, BC and is located in a local park. Initially the program was trialed with toddlers; however, there were limitations identified so currently it serves only preschool children. This is a half-day program with the option of children being bussed to a local daycare in the afternoon. A designated location is identified in the park for the program which has access to washrooms. A ratio of 1:8 adults to children is maintained. The program is not licensed as there is no indoor space. The program is focused on delivering curriculum in the woods and encourages children to take risks. The children are involved in the risk assessment process. Wind is the program’s biggest concern; it’s cancelled if it is too windy. The program has three years of data and in that time they have had three bee stings.

Model 4: Stomping in the mud is a private preschool program located in a home and takes place in the backyard, which backs onto a wooded area. Debra highlighted that this is a great use of a small space and mentioned that the program used 'dog-spots' on hosepipes. When the children are using the wooded area sawdust is used to designate the boundary line. Debra suggested that hydro flags can also be used to designate boundary lines, which is what Rosalind Blauer Centre for Child Care uses. Rosalind Blauer Centre for Child Care is located on the Brock University Campus and has a two morning a week Forest School program. If you would like to find out more about this local program, they will be sharing their stories on Saturday May 14, 2016. For more information, the flyer is included in this document below.

- Debra made mention of sustainability and effectiveness of being in nature
- *Debra's presentation is included in this document*

6. Reviewing Feedback from Launch of Nature Alliance

- The group had a conversation regarding organizations that would be beneficial in attending the Niagara Nature Alliance Network meetings. Participants were asked to bring interested colleagues from the various sectors to the next session.
- Follow up meeting will explore the suggested topics for the coming network year in further detail with a plan to prioritize.

7. Video Reflection: *This Is Me: Article 31 and a Child's Right to Play* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tjRPWPhfA)

8. Next meeting: April/May 2016 (Date to be determined)



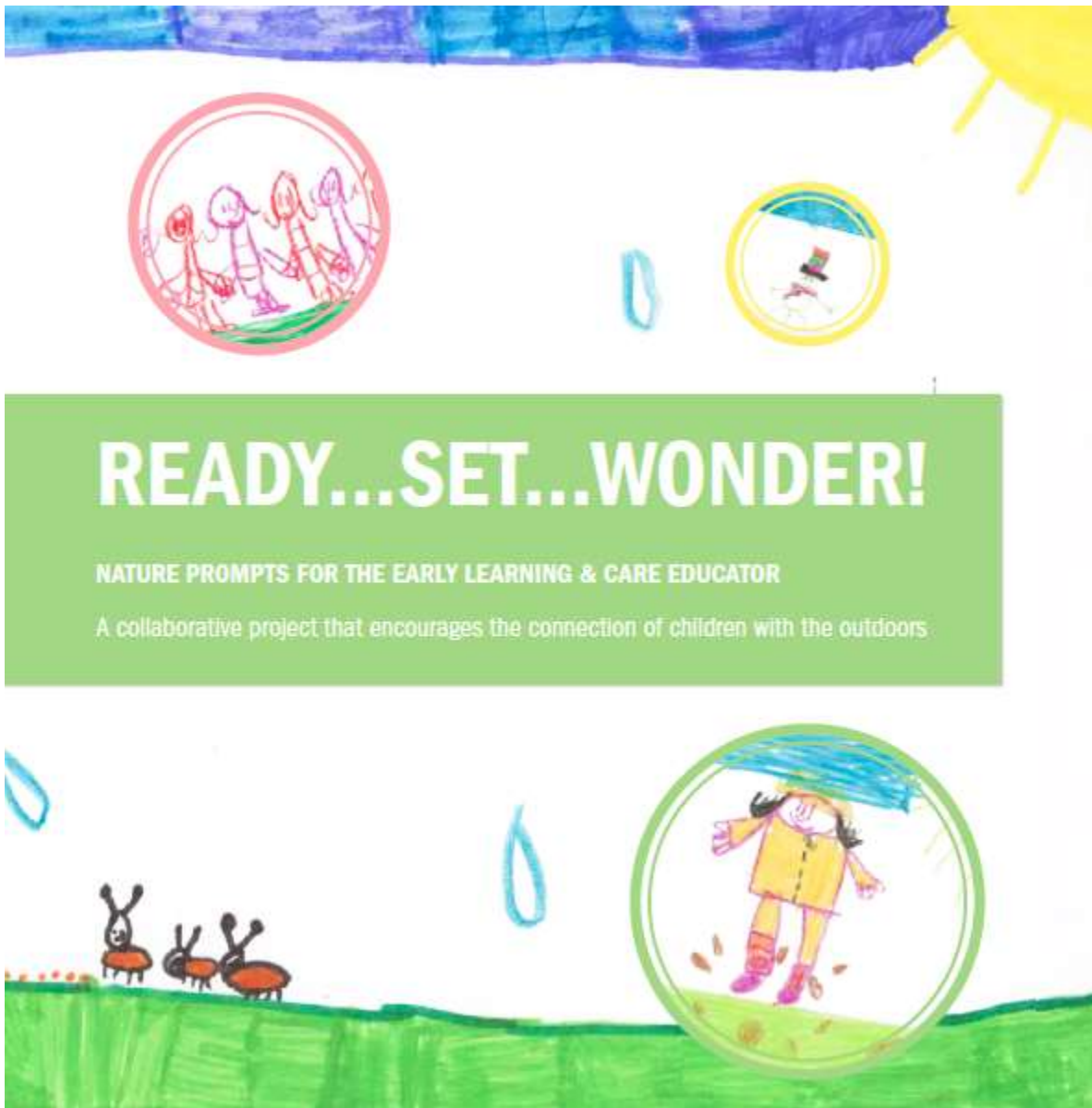
Connecting
children
& families
with nature



“Nature and books...” & Ontario’s Back to Nature Network

Niagara Nature Alliance
February 25, 2016

Bill Kilburn
Network Manager
Back to Nature Network
bkilburn@rbg.ca



READY...SET...WONDER!

NATURE PROMPTS FOR THE EARLY LEARNING & CARE EDUCATOR

A collaborative project that encourages the connection of children with the outdoors.

BACK TO
Nature
NETWORK

Connecting children & families with nature

RÉSEAU
RETOUR À
la nature



Connecting children & families with nature



Provoke



Connecting children & families with nature



Listen



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Align



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NATIONAL BESTSELLER

Last Child *in the* Woods

SAVING OUR CHILDREN FROM
NATURE-DEFICIT DISORDER

UPDATED
AND
EXPANDED



RICHARD LOUV

RECIPIENT OF THE 2008 AUDUBON MEDAL



Connecting children & families with nature



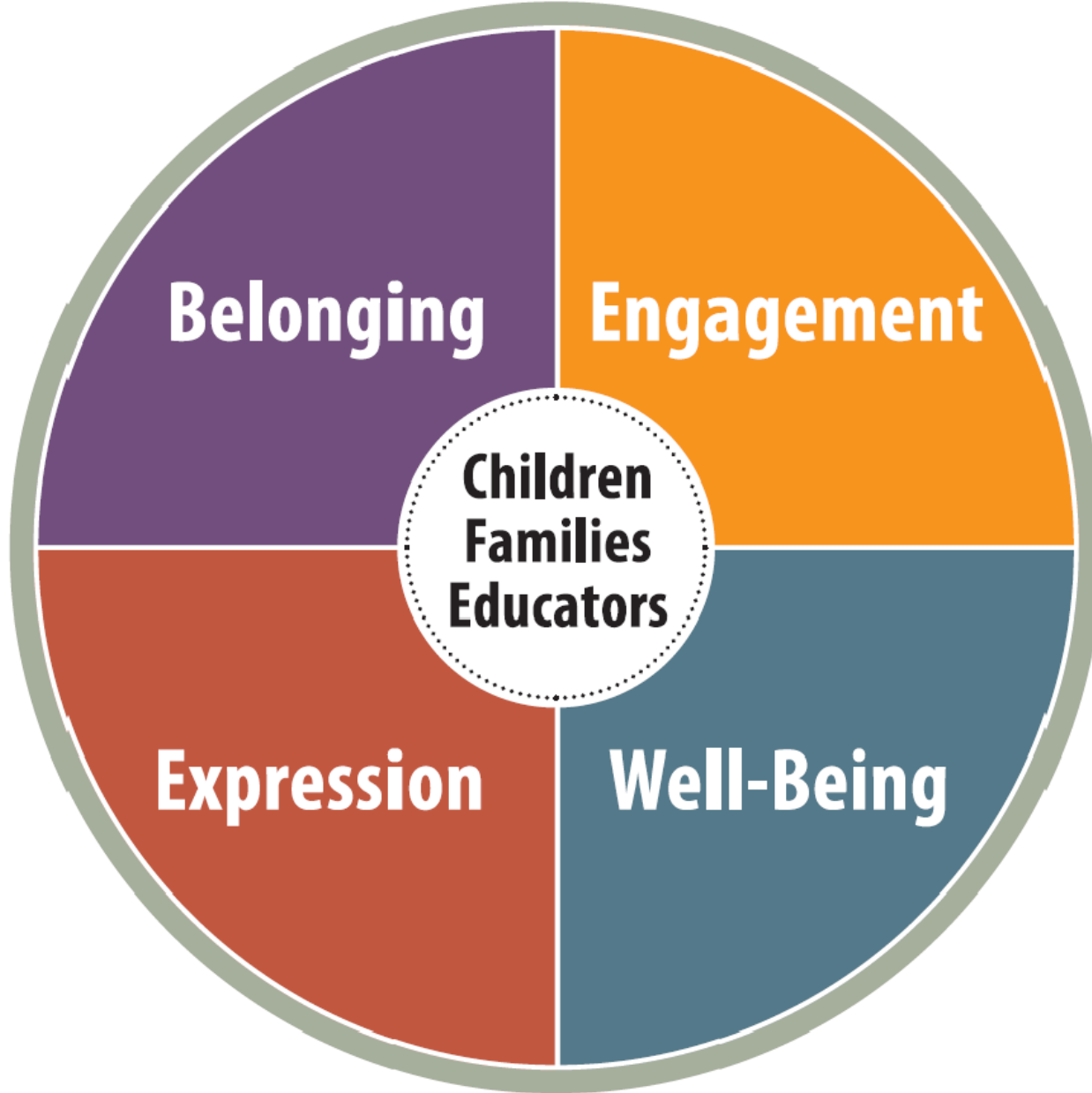
Nature *Deficit*

“I like to play indoors
better ‘cause that’s
where all the electrical
outlets are.”

Fourth Grader in
San Diego

(from “Last Child in the Woods”)









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Yield



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**TD Friends of the
Environment
Foundation**



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Into Nature

A Guide to
Teaching in
Nearby Nature



Connecting children & families with nature



Path of the Presentation

1. Summary of peer-reviewed research on impacts of human connection with nature on physical and mental health
2. Summary of barriers to outdoor activity
3. Recommendations for clinical practice including best practices
4. Examples of current initiatives that support connection of people and nature



PLAY Outdoors to Learn: quick inquiry in four steps

Provoke

Design/plan an activity

Listen

Record what students share

Analyze

Align opportunities & curriculum

Yield

Facilitate & guide student-centred learning



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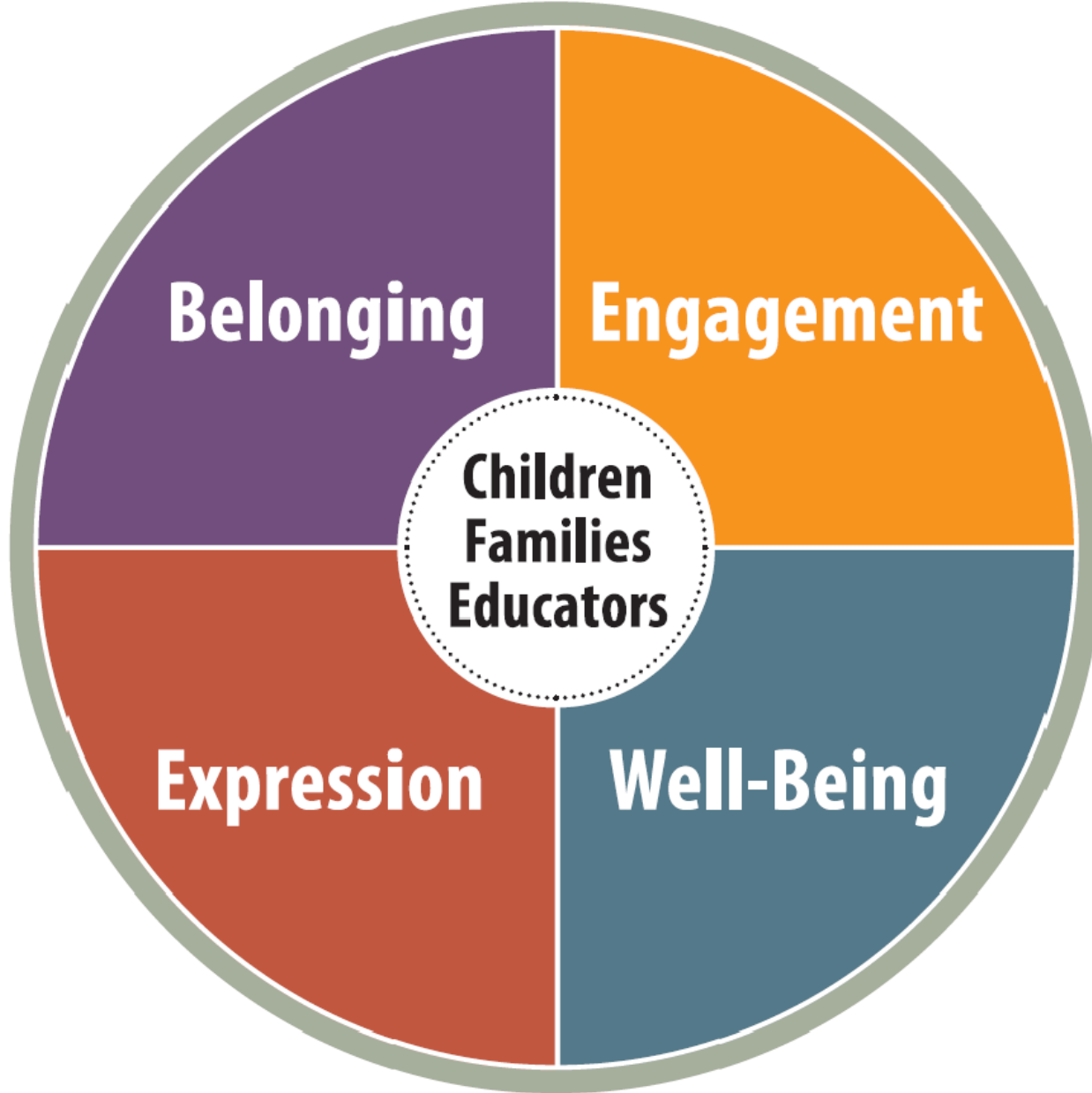


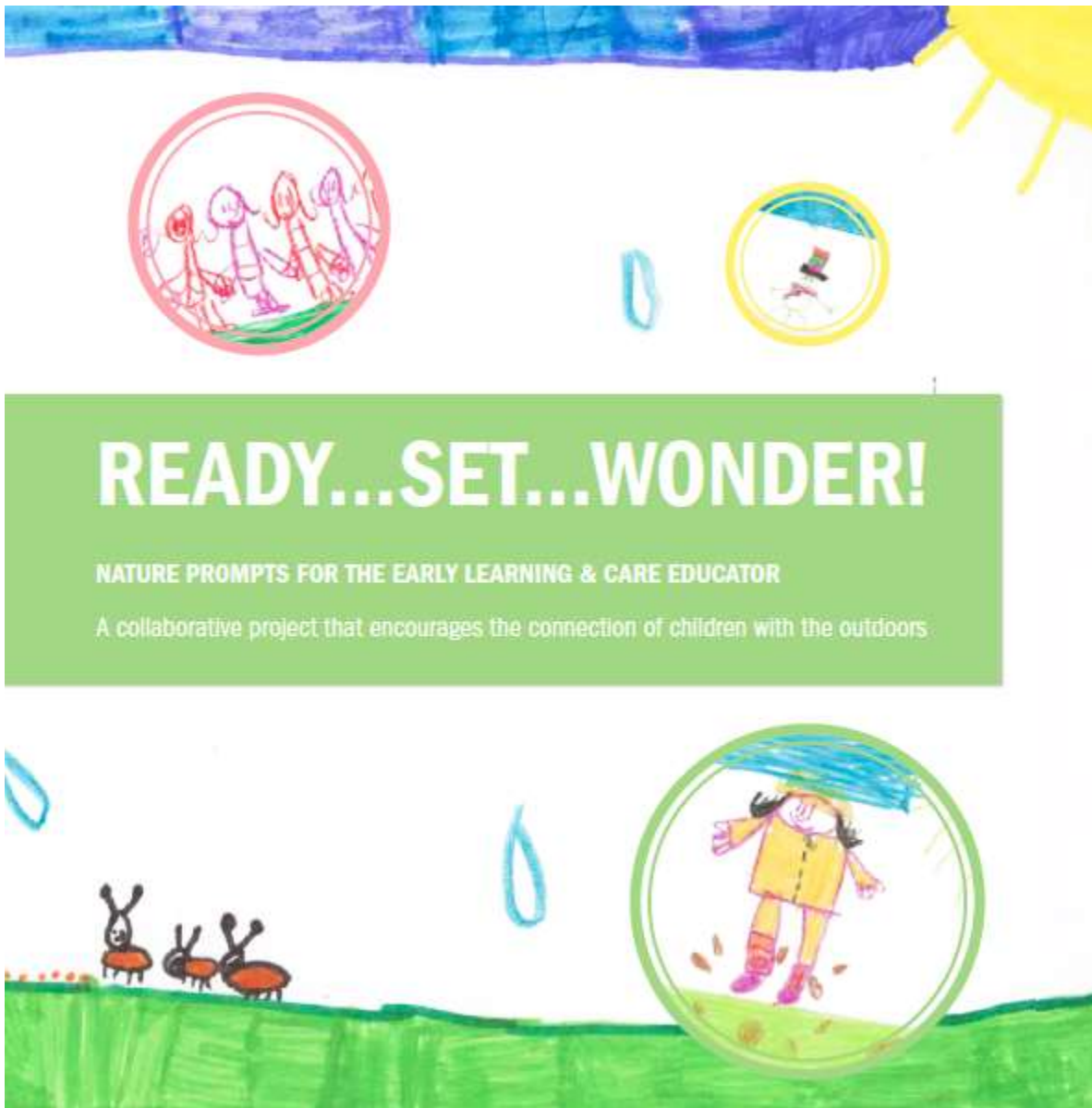
FOUNDATIONS	GOALS FOR CHILDREN	EXPECTATIONS FOR PROGRAMS
Belonging	Every child has a sense of belonging when he or she is connected to others and contributes to their world.	Early childhood programs cultivate authentic, caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging among and between children, adults, and the world around them.
Well-Being	Every child is developing a sense of self, health, and well-being.	Early childhood programs nurture children's healthy development and support their growing sense of self.
Engagement	Every child is an active and engaged learner who explores the world with body, mind, and senses.	Early childhood programs provide environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry.
Expression	Every child is a capable communicator who expresses himself or herself in many ways.	Early childhood programs foster communication and expression in all forms.



Connecting children & families with nature







READY...SET...WONDER!

NATURE PROMPTS FOR THE EARLY LEARNING & CARE EDUCATOR

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RETOUR À
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EXPLORING VARIED MODELS

FOREST SCHOOLS/NATURE BASED PROGRAMS

FS principles (do vary)

Many of the models I visited could be said to be following an Archimedes Forest Schools Model which is based on

- Respect of Self, Respect for others and Respect for the Environment
- Love and Compassion
- Collaboration
- Excellence and Integrity
- Inclusion and Diversity

Principles of FS

Holistic Development

Increased self awareness, self regulation, self motivation, empathy and social skills including self-confidence and self-worth, resilience and respectfulness

Rooted compassion towards self, others and the environment

Capable Learner

Development of the capacity to know how to learn, the resources to learn effectively, the ability to set goals, and be motivated to achieve them.

Development of the desire to be excellent, to strive for the potential of learning and self fulfilment and happiness

Personal Sustainability (environmental sustainability is also an ethos in BC)

Know self and how to function successfully in the family, educational world, community, society and the world

The development of a positive environmental identity & responsibility.

Understand the 5 essential elements of wellbeing:- Connect | Be Active | Take Notice | Keep Learning | Give

<https://www.forestschoools.com/bush-schools-new-zealand/>

E.C.O. Programs of the Municipality Saanich, BC

- * Educating Children
Outdoors-2nd year of
operation
- * programs for 3 & 4 year olds
run 1/2 day at 2 locales—
Swan Lake Sanctuary & Elk
Lake Beaver Lake
- * new orientation program
being offered for 2 year olds

E.C.O. program highlights

- * non licensed programs
- * Run by the Municipality in collaboration with the 'Friends of the Sanctuary' and the CRD
- * 2 unionized ECEs at each site (1:8 ratio)
- * Qualified ECEs experienced and trained- Forest School practitioners course (1 lead ECE and 1 Assistant ECE)
- * programs align with BC's Early Learning Framework
- * programs support community plan of the Municipality & the Department of Park & Recreation's key goals

E.C.O. Highlights

- * 1/2 day program (9-12 a.m.)
- * full enrolment with waitlist
- * 'Nature Buddy' program with local elementary school
- * indoor space available (but unused)

Equipment & Resources

- * portable wagon
- * tarp
- * individual child backpacks
- * digging & exploring tools
- * portable toilet
- * 2 warm water bladders & collapsable sink (hand washing)
- * first aid kit
- * drawing & art materials
- * clipboards & writing journals
- * resource book (animals, plants, etc.)
- * camera
- * one's imagination

Sangster School (District 62) Nature K Program Highlights

- * fully endorsed program by the school board
- * 3rd year of operation
- * 1 certified teacher & 1 ECE
- * Evaluation of the project being conducted by several scholars from Uvic, Royal Roads, and Camosun

Basic elements of Nature K

- * daily morning program in the Royal Roads park that backs onto school yard-for approximately 22 children
- * 1 child with special needs & dedicated EA
- * afternoon program in classroom
- * children begin the day indoors with a short meeting & greeting-a reminder of the 3 key expectations (respect for yourself, others & environment)
- * Children are divided into 2 groups and each heads to woods with 1 educator (or 1 educator & EA)

Curriculum highlights observed...

- * forage into the forest for 10-20 minutes after revisiting some ant colonies the children have been monitoring
- * information & ideas about ants persist on the walk with stories, dramatizations, sharing of facts, labelling of ant roles (forager, queen, etc.)
- * midway to meeting place we stopped on the path and the teacher and children co-created a story about the ant colony (teacher labelled parts of the story children created-characters, plot, rising action, conclusion)

**CHILDREN CREATED SIGNS TO NOTIFY OTHERS &
PROTECT THE COLONY**

Observed highlights...

- * children have one more meeting before gathering in the 'quiet area'
- * educator foretells of expectations (write about ants, draw & tell, etc.)
- * each child chooses a quiet space and works independently as educators circulate & support individualized learning (each child has a nature detective kit & learning kit in a backpack with several tools & writing tools)
- * gathering circle to debrief on learning & snack (& washroom break behind a tree)

Delivering curriculum in the woods

- * snack is followed by child-led play
- * here children go off to explore, investigate, climb, etc. for 10-15 minutes in self-directed play
- * 1 group of children search for slugs, bugs, etc.
- * several are claiming trees or using tree limbs as teeters or balance beams, some are building & constructing
- * children are called together (owl sounds) for a large gathering and story *The Littlest Owl* by Caroline Pitcher

Delivering curriculum in the woods...

- * after the story is read educator explains 3 stations that are available 1) acting & retelling the story 2) retelling the story through book writing 3) painting
- * children self select & educators each position themselves at a station and scaffold children's retelling
- * children gather one more time to debrief about their morning's learning & give thanks (Aboriginal thanks) to the forest

Key Research Highlights attached to the program

- * 43 children assessed in 2012-2013 (45 children in a control group)
- * 45 children in 2014-2015
- * assessments of children continued into grade 1 (n=16 & 14 from control group*)

* **participant numbers were impacted by a teachers' strike*

Key Research Measures

- * **Quantitative Measures**

- * locomotor skills & object control measures
- * physical activity levels
- * physical competence beliefs
- * nature related preferences for play
- * environmentally responsible behaviour
- * focused attention
- * working memory
- * spatial cognition
- * social skills rating scale-teacher version
- * parent questionnaires—SES info, activity levels, nature relatedness & environmental attitudes, assessment of children's social skills & internalizing/externalizing behaviours

Qualitative Measures

- * Ethnographic methods
- * Documentation & pedagogical narration tools
- * Site visit each Friday morning - approximately 2 years worth of data

Major Highlights

- * NK children made significantly larger gains in comparison to the control group in
 - * locomotor skills
 - * assertiveness (teacher)
 - * self-control (teacher)
 - * cooperation (teacher)
- * NK children made significantly larger declines in internalizing & externalizing behaviours than control group

VICTORIA NATURE SCHOOL

- * 2 licensed* programs currently operating (2-3 year olds & 3-5 year olds)
- * ECE and ECE-A within each program (ratio 1:8)
- * Director—Forest School practitioner course qualified (train the trainer model used for staff)
- * 1/2 day program with option for full day for 3-5 year olds*
- * if full day—afternoon children take public transport to a local community centre where a classroom space is rented
- * *licensing rules currently only apply to a physical indoor space so although the PS is licensed as a whole, inspections do not occur in the outdoor space as licensing has no capacity or policy around outdoor spaces

Other elements

- * public space—negotiation/education ongoing with ‘Friends of Mount Doug’
- * required to stay either ‘on trails’ or in designated space within the park
- * rotate between ‘wooded’ area and beach
- * ethos of sustainability (no removal of living items, no cutting of trees, no permanent structures)
- * awareness of environmental impact & monitoring of that impact conducted by PS
- * risk assessment & policy is fundamental
- * public washroom & other methods used
- * warming stations for 0 degree weather (e.g., warm water bottles act as warming station)
- * supply staff is a challenge because of lack of outdoor trained educators (2x toddler program cancelled)
- * extreme weather policy related to high winds & lightening (program is cancelled in those events)

Stomping in the mud

- * private home & access to public 'wooded'/park area
- * non licensed
- * serves preschool children
 - * group of under 3's
 - * group of 3-5 year olds
 - * 2 retired ECEs

UNIQUE FEATURES

1st of its kind

private space-backs onto public park with access to the Coloquitz river (salmon)

100% play based

Acts as demonstration site for ECE students from Camosun

Play Spaces

mud kitchen



bamboo 'forest'

other spaces include covered snack area, sand, water, ramps, pulleys, & the park

Interesting resources



spray all natural sanitizer



**Equipment in each pocket & holder is tied to tree-
collapsible pails**



**Each child has MEC
backpack with nature
detective kit, snack, water
bottle, small first aid kit**



BROCK FOREST SCHOOL RESEARCH INITIATIVE

SEP 2015-JUNE 2016

More information on these programs & the Coastal Kindergarten

- * <http://www.saanich.ca/parkrec/recreation/e-c-o-program.html?ref=shortURL>
- * <http://naturekindergarten.sd62.bc.ca>
- * <http://www.victorianatureschool.com>
- * <https://www.smore.com/yk20-coastal-kindergarten>
- * <http://stompinginthemud.blogspot.ca/2011/09/victorias-first-outdoor-play-group-for.html>

Other Schools enacting a FS or outdoor curriculum

- * Davis Elementary <http://dbeweb.sd46.bc.ca>
- * Maple Ridge Environmental School (for K to 7—all outdoors) <http://es.sd42.ca>
- * see Maple Ridge Videos 'Found in the Forest' (program operating for 5 years in a school district)<http://es.sd42.ca/2014/01/Found-in-the-forest/>

Registration

Professional Development Session:

“Sharing stories of our Forest School Journey”



May 14th, 2016 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Please join us for a morning of sharing stories and experiences from the Rosalind Blauer Forest School program. Our research collaborator, Dr. Debra Harwood of Brock University, will share insights and information on the philosophy of outdoor learning/teaching, benefits for children, risks and challenges. We will round out the morning with a trip into the forest to share our experiences and key learnings (rain or shine). Registration will be limited to 30 attendees &

the cost to participate is \$25 (+ GST-includes a continental breakfast & parking pass).

What: Forest School Experiences

When: May 14th, 2016

Where: Brock University Campus Forest

Contact: dharwood@brocku.ca

Full Details & To Register use the link:

[Register-Stories of FS Journey](#)