

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2017

# Wonder

## Reflections from 2017 World Forum

The World Forum on Early Care and Education, held in Auckland held last May, inspired participants interested in connecting children with nature. Read on to discover the reflections from just a few of the participants and how their experiences inspired and motivated them. During the opening sessions, representatives from the Nature Action Collaborative for Children and OnDesign Working Group presented "Principles for Creating Environments that Support Joy and Resilience." Claire Warden from Scotland issued this call to action for all of us who are working on behalf of children and their connections to nature:

"There is an uncertainty in the time we are in for young children. We need to think about the strength of our hearts and how we can help those children find some form of harmony, some sense of inner resilience. We need to think about our ideas, hopes, dreams, budgets, circumstances, and cultures and work together to start to believe in what is possible for young children. As adults, I feel our souls rejoice when we are in the natural world. It's a place of beauty, it's a place of challenge, it's a place of connection to something bigger than us. I believe that's also true for young children."

### Caroline Hudicourt, Haiti

The World Forum Foundation keeps me connected to values that are not always celebrated in our world. Bringing children closer to nature and nurturing environmental stewardship is one of them. I slowly integrate these values in my everyday context at school. Soon after I returned to Haiti (from the 2017 World Forum in Auckland, New Zealand), I took my children on field trips. We took the preschoolers and kindergarteners to an ecological farm. I will never forget their joy as they connected with the elements. The World Forum sets the stage for us to grow as educators with the children in nature. Their immediate connection can help us revive our forgotten sense of awe and a taste for what is essential to life.

*Caroline Hudicourt is a Haitian school director living in Haiti and the mother of children (now 19 and 20); she holds a master's degree in education. She manages a policy-influencing NGO that provides an exchange platform to the largest private organizations working in education in Haiti where 85 percent of the children attend private schools. Contact Caroline: [carolinehudicourt@yahoo.fr](mailto:carolinehudicourt@yahoo.fr).*

### Sharon Ward and Bernadette King-Turner, Dubai

Our connecting with nature story goes back to our attending the 2014 World Forum in Puerto Rico. Meeting with fabulous nature advocates on this journey lit a fire within us. We returned from the World Forum with intentions to break down the barriers that potentially restricted our access to nature and the natural world. The children within our four nurseries, the teachers, families, and



*The mission of the Nature Action Collaborative for Children is to re-connect children with the natural world by making developmentally appropriate nature education a sustaining and enriching part of the daily lives of the world's children.*

[WorldForumFoundation.org/nature](http://WorldForumFoundation.org/nature)

### Future issues of *Wonder*

Our individual endeavors are strengthened through new collaborations, networking, and a global exchange of ideas.

Let us know about your efforts.

We invite you to email your ideas, stories, and photos that relate to children's connections with nature to:

Tara Schroder: [taras@natureexplore.org](mailto:taras@natureexplore.org)

communities are faced with challenges unlike many others... we live in a desert. Dubai is our home! Our lifestyles are fast paced, saturated by man-made dazzle and glitz and we are surrounded by sand and heat. We decided not to let this be our reason not to connect children with nature and so our journey began.

Over the last few years we have developed our once simple vegetable gardens into organic vegetable producing machines. Children have complete ownership of these and our parent garden committee encourages parent and community participation. We have drastically reduced the plastic in our classrooms, looking at innovative ways of incorporating natural resources. Simple items such as cinnamon, corn husks, and feathers — to name just a few — have become regular fixtures in our classes. We have built “tree huts” inside the classrooms and created magical natural spaces outdoors where children have the opportunity to be inspired, explore, and to discover the beauty of what the world has to offer. Further to this...

- We offer outdoor mud kitchens and cooking stations.
- We schedule observation and documentation walks around our neighbourhoods.
- We encourage climbing trees.
- We have a passion for teepees, which offer opportunities to incorporate nature.
- We incorporate wooden recycled pallets for creating climbing equipment.
- We planted bamboo “growing walls” that line many of our nursery boundary walls, which were inspired by Childspace in New Zealand.
- We built an indoor sandpit (now a favorite place) under an indoor tree house!

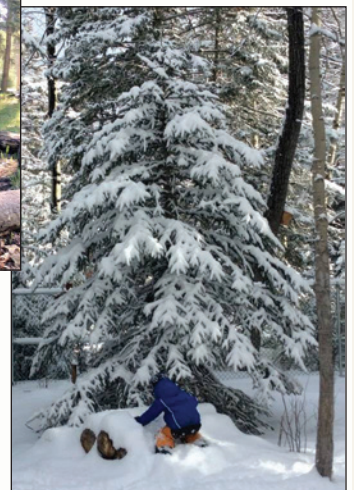
We have new ideas following the 2017 World Forum in Auckland, New Zealand. While our passion and commitment to connecting children with nature continues to grow, we have new endeavours that we wish to explore, for example providing exciting and dynamic STEAM (STEM) inspired environments. Our current project is developing our Community Vegetable Gardens; it will be interesting to see how our teams bring these ideas together.

*Sharon Ward and Bernadette King-Turner, Beautiful Minds Nurseries, Dubai, were presenters for connecting children with nature at the 2017 World Forum, May 2017. Visit: [www.BeautifulMindsNurseries.com](http://www.BeautifulMindsNurseries.com)*

### **Karen Foster-Jorgensen, Banff National Park, Canada**

Having the opportunity to present at the 2017 World Forum with four incredible educators from three continents (plus attending several other presentations on Connecting Children with Nature) offered so much insight into the broad range of possibilities for bringing children to nature and nature to children. We titled our presentation “Nature for Everyone Everywhere,” and focused on the commonality that all early childhood programs can connect children with nature. While the connections take on unique forms in various landscapes and cultures, all children can have valuable nature learning experiences and all educators can make magic happen.

Since returning from the World Forum, I’ve written a successful grant to bring “Forest School” to a wonderful local early education program. The Forest School experience has been so meaningful with groups of children ages one to five. Watching each age group develop teamwork, exploratory discovery, and the experience of a quiet reflective moment in the woods has been an incredible experience, not only for children, but for their teachers and parents, with whom we have shared the photos and portfolio pages so artfully prepared by the forest school facilitator.



In my portion of our World Forum presentation, I focused on community collaborations that make possible many of the wonderful connections we have been able to forge between children and nature. The Forest School is one more example of the ways in which community foundation funds can be brought together with a local resource person to bring exceptional experiences to young children!

*Karen Foster-Jorgensen is an innovator, consultant, and trainer partnering throughout North America with early childhood businesses to build quality, creativity, and organizational success. She welcomes ideas at [karenfj@optimire.com](mailto:karenfj@optimire.com)*



### Kathryn Owen, United States

Following the 2014 World Forum in Puerto Rico, I realized that the strength of a child's preschool experience was not dependent on fancy buildings or bright play structures, but rather on relationships with their caregivers, peers, and their connection with the world around them. This empowered me to work with a design team on a relatively small outdoor area with a focus on natural experiences, and to be able to explain why we included a myriad of boulders, sheep tanks, and an outdoor water station! Since opening in August of last year, the children have used this space in ways we least expected and made it their own. The boulders are frequently painted and are used constantly for dramatic play experiences like picnics. The children enjoy the garden, but primarily they love to water the plants that grow naturally through the rocks. In the absence of a play structure, the children are constantly attracted to the hill where they have a feeling of freedom from a heightened perspective. It is not unusual to see children chatting together on the bridge, or singing in the potting shed while they decorate it with chalk. We have a very diverse population and it has also given the children an opportunity to participate in fun and meaningful play, such as taking a Community Playthings wheelbarrow and using it as a rickshaw. The focal point is the combination of sand and water, and even the two-year-olds enjoy being able to use their feet to operate the water station on their own.



Photo by Bernadette King-Turner

Since the 2017 World Forum, I have had the opportunity to share many inspiring stories from around the world with my staff at the university, and our local early childhood community in San Diego County. I have also felt inspired to share that when I think of the preschool experience for a child, I now look at it through the lens of freedom and resilience. For a young child, this might be the one time in her life when she is protected from fear and feels completely safe. It might be the one time that she is able to have some autonomy and experience what it feels like and looks like to be free. When we thoughtfully create spaces for children through this lens, we give each child the opportunity to truly experience delight, joyfulness, and a sense of purpose.

*Kathryn J. Owen, MS, EC-SEBRIS, is director, early care and education, University of California, San Diego. Contact Kathryn: [kjowen@ucsd.edu](mailto:kjowen@ucsd.edu)*



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### Chris Kiewra, United States

I had the joy and privilege of supporting the nature-focused breakout sessions at the World Forum and found the presenters and discussions quite electrifying! It was gratifying to hear all the ways that folks are enhancing opportunities for children by not only creating nature-rich environments but also by embracing challenge and risk, re-introducing families to nature, and including practices such as mindfulness and meditation. I was struck by how far we have come in our understanding of the value of connecting children with nature, as well as the ways we implement that value in our various programs.

"When two human beings share a mutual interest, the spark and excitement surrounding exploring this interest is electrifying."

Ellen Veselack and I shared this quotation from Frances Hawkins to close our portion of the "Research, Creativity, and Quality Practice in Early Childhood" session. Participants' comments throughout the sessions helped me set the intention to further research the unique role nature can play in supporting young children's executive function and emotional wellbeing. Since the Forum, I am celebrating the ability to enhance working relationships with colleagues I met there. In fact, as I write this, Kumara Ward is traveling from Australia to Nebraska to plan a study tour for her students next year that might include a stop here at Dimensions! Let's keep using this Wonder newsletter to spark each other and keep the energy flowing!

*Chris Kiewra, World Forum Program Planning Team Member, was a presenter for "Research, Creativity, and Quality Practice in Early Childhood," 2017 World Forum in Auckland.*



Photo by Bernadette King-Turner