

A Field Guide

What can you expect at Mill Bay Nature School ?



Reflections on our first year of walking together - 2018-2019

Mill Bay Nature School



Please don't judge
A book by its cover

#transformation
#process #patience

We acknowledge that for thousands of years the Malahat, Lake Cowichan, Quw'utsun, Halalt, Penelakut, Stz'uminus, and Lyackson Peoples have walked gently on the unceded territories where we now live, work, learn, and play. *We seek a new relationship with the first peoples here, one based in honour and respect, and we thank them for their hospitality.*



Anticipating our first year
of co-creation and growth

There is a teaching in every part of creation.
It is our task to find it, learn it, and apply it.

K. Goodwin

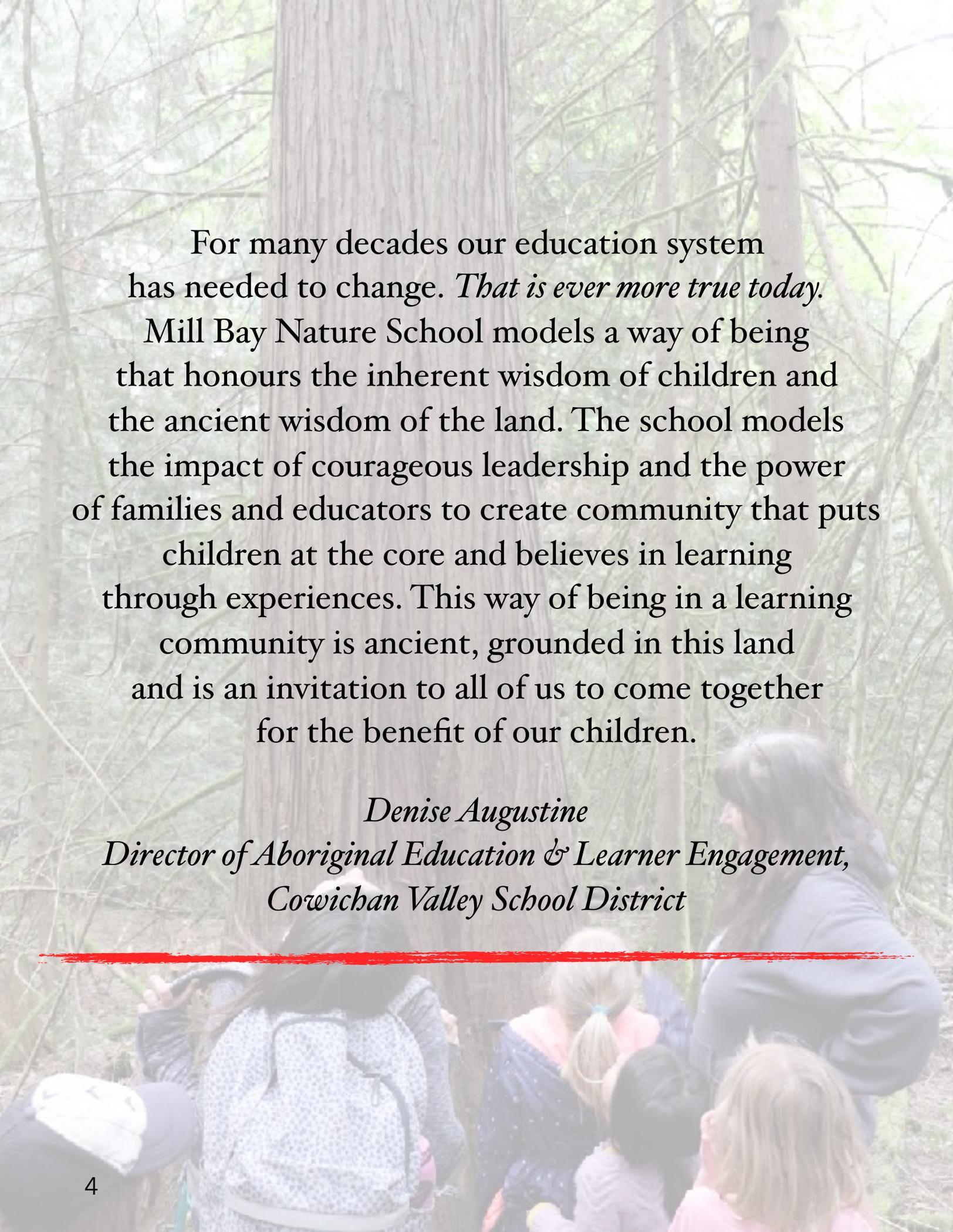


And reflecting upon this first year
of walking together - Q'shinful

created - "Standing on the shoulders of giants" - by Kim Ondrik
Head Learner, Mill Bay Nature School,
Cowichan Valley, the Warm Land
June 2018

And revised - through inquiry & dialogue -
Through a curated survey - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/C27N73R>
as we Q'shinful - "walk together"
April 2019

Thank you to everyone who contributed their voices to this document.



For many decades our education system has needed to change. *That is ever more true today.*

Mill Bay Nature School models a way of being that honours the inherent wisdom of children and the ancient wisdom of the land. The school models the impact of courageous leadership and the power of families and educators to create community that puts children at the core and believes in learning through experiences. This way of being in a learning community is ancient, grounded in this land and is an invitation to all of us to come together for the benefit of our children.

Denise Augustine

*Director of Aboriginal Education & Learner Engagement,
Cowichan Valley School District*

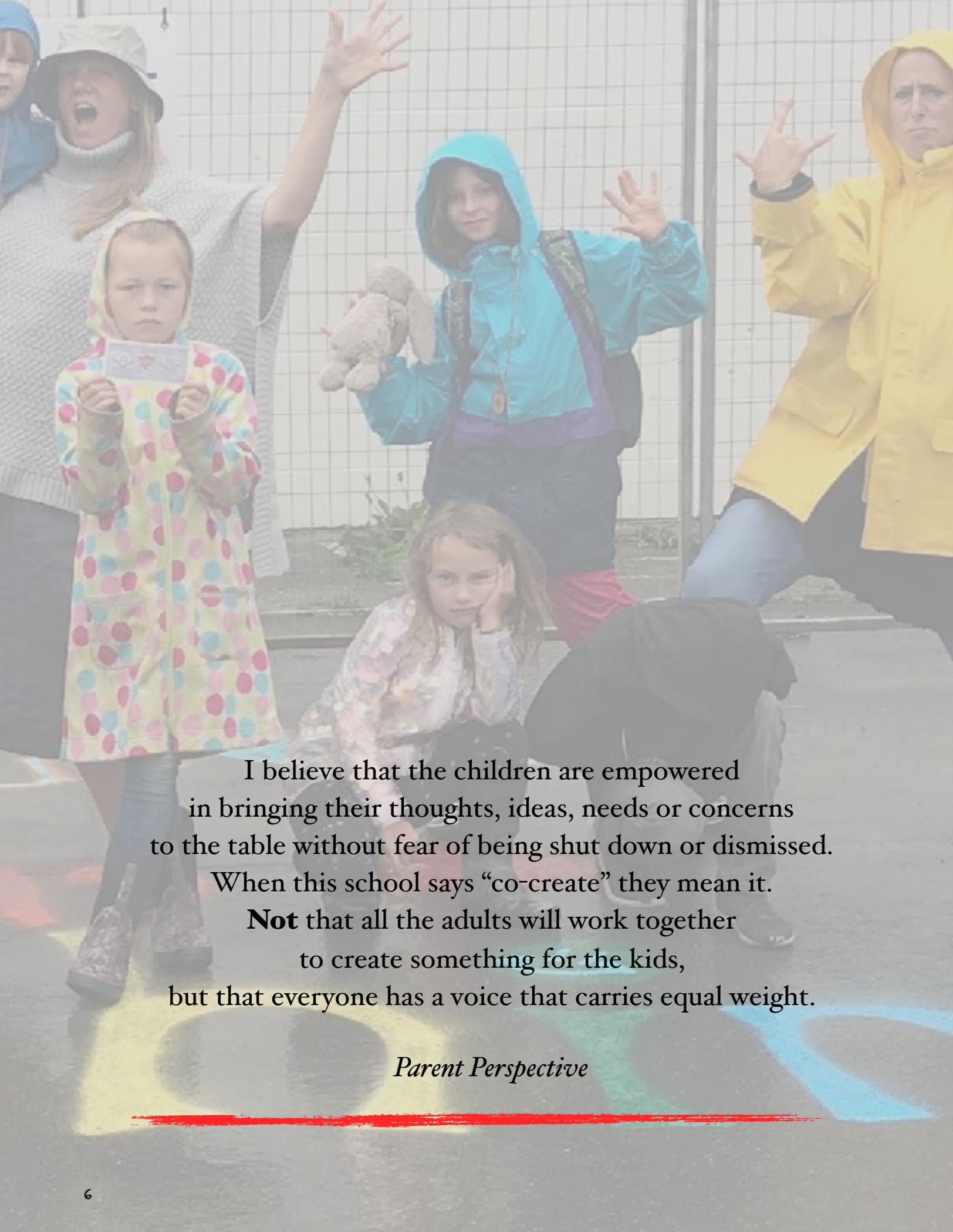


We are co-creating
from the ground up
a new learning & teaching
community.

In any ecology, there is soil from which all living things emerge.

This **Field Guide** speaks of the humus
in which our school finds its origins and nourishment.

At Mill Bay Nature School you will see children, parents, and community members taking up active and participatory roles that allows them to interact and work collaboratively with educators. This is the spirit of co-creation. You will hear children proposing new and different ideas for today's rhythm - "I think it would be best if we ate earlier today because we want to have time to walk to the pond in the afternoon." You will hear parents suggesting why a deer fence may solve the mystery of the missing plants - "Does anyone want to learn about how to build one?" You will hear community members with particular skills offering their gifts and talents - "I would like to work once a week with anyone interested in learning how to make soup." **Co-creation also acknowledges that each one in the community has different expertise and experience to share in order to develop a rich ecology of learning and growth: *teachers* bring years of study and practice in supporting human growth and development; *parents* bring both a deep understanding of their children as well as their vocational interests and passions - like *community members* do. *Children* bring their curiosity and questions, and willingness to take chances, make mistakes, and get messy - which inspires us all.**



I believe that the children are empowered
in bringing their thoughts, ideas, needs or concerns
to the table without fear of being shut down or dismissed.
When this school says “co-create” they mean it.
Not that all the adults will work together
to create something for the kids,
but that everyone has a voice that carries equal weight.

Parent Perspective

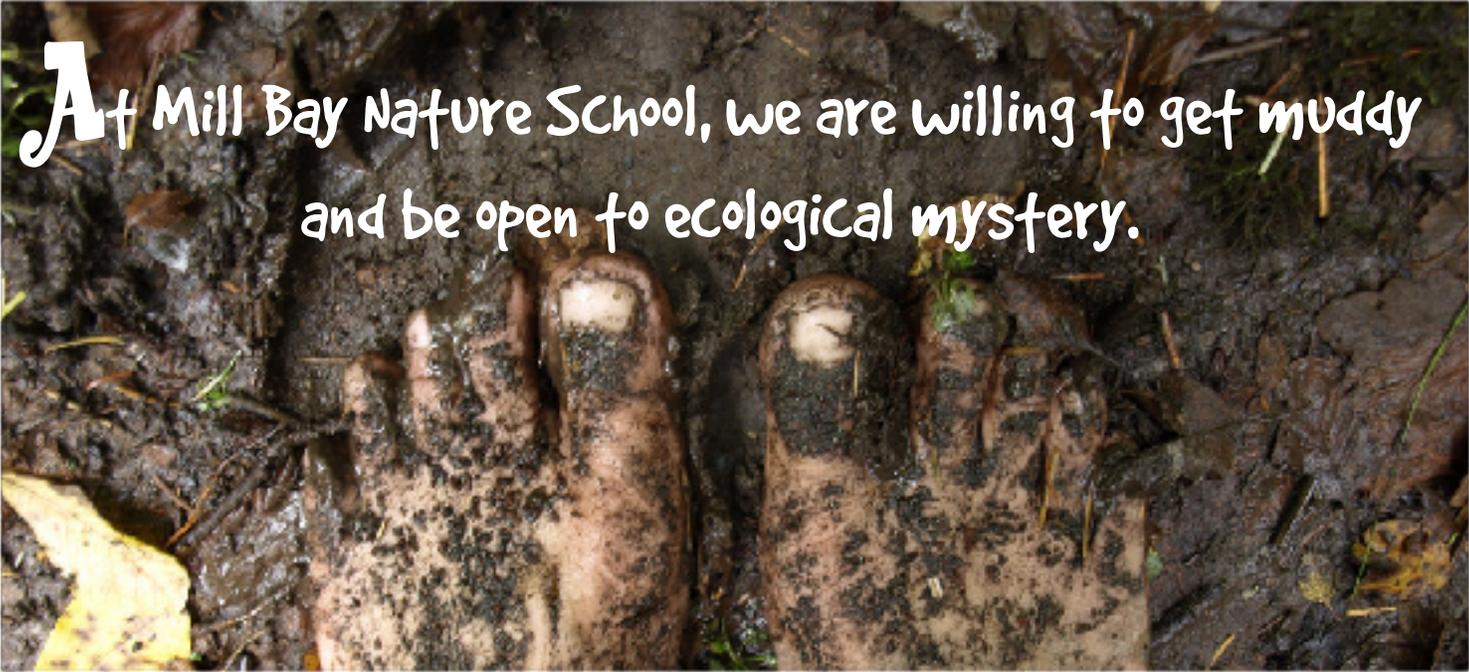


When I arrived in the Cowichan Valley it was early May 2018. I knew from my past experiences of starting up unique schools that we would require many materials that were far beyond any standard school budget, as well as creating resource libraries (such as books) that are in abundance at established schools. Resultantly, I shared a list of desired loose parts with the parent and greater community. The donations of objects have been generous and ongoing; recently I put out a call for sails to cover our outdoor circle and received two in a week. This has become our normal. It's invigorating and inspiring for teachers and children who dream. As well as loose parts, we have also had a responsive and engaged community of parents and community partners who step up when asked or offer when noting a need - *What we have missed most when we moved to Cobble Hill was the sense of community that we left behind at our kids' school. At MBNS we are invited to be involved in every imaginable way. Our family has been able to help with grant writing, promoting the school on-line and in the community, creating and supporting events, donating materials and furniture as well as time (parent).* They have moved tires or display cases; donated plants and animals; offered field study opportunities; led Clubs; co-written grants; donated antlers, bones, taxidermy; mentored reading; participated in daily circles; made small wooden boxes for lost teeth; organized the lost and found; made cushions; donated trees and the rounds of trees; and being faithful and present in the makings of the school - *"Fighting to remain open to a new way of doing things, because the old way is failing so many, my older two included. I will tell anyone who will listen, I doubt the school daily, and isn't there beauty in that. I tell them I recognize it is different from any other school in the valley, that it goes against everything I know and am comfortable with. But don't you have to get uncomfortable to grow and learn. It has offered great lessons for my son and for myself. But don't you have to get uncomfortable to grow and learn. It has offered great lessons for my son and for myself"* (parent). Staff, too, have had to bring their whole-hearts and minds to this school and its development. It is most certainly a different way of *being as teacher* - more personal, more vulnerable, more risky - stepping into uncharted territory. Ironically, most teachers dream of their 'ideal school' but being invited to embody their dreams is different - *I bring my love of teaching and learning and a strong image of the child as curious and capable. I bring experiences working in traditional school environments and those that differ from the norm, which gives me perspective and makes me feel grateful. I bring a collaborative teaching teaching mindset and belief that working together can incredibly enhance the experience of the children we work with. I bring experience with some structures and routines that cultivate cultures of inquiry and the knowledge that whatever structures/routines we try, we need to make them ours. I feel like my voice is valued and that is refreshing and motivating (teacher).*



Nothing prepared me for the challenges the first year at Mill Bay Nature School have thrown at me - co-creating a school from the ground up. The collaborative process with both colleagues, students and the wider community has been both richly rewarding and utterly exhausting - but the joy I find in my own developing practices and the excitement at the learning of the children is a daily blessing that steals my resolve to be courageous and press ahead with this wonderful, if extra-ordinary, endeavor.

Teacher Perspective



At Mill Bay Nature School, we are willing to get muddy
and be open to ecological mystery.

Nature is important to children's development in every major way: intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and physically. Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and intellectual development. (Keller†)

<http://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/FSC-Guide-1.pdf>

At Mill Bay Nature School you will find the children and teachers outside. The natural world becomes our site for experience, provocation, and observation, and where the seeds for growing awareness and further inquiry are sown. There is no need to design classroom spaces to provoke the child's mind - instead all the local ecosystems - the field, the forest, the pond, the beach - provide the objects, the relationships, the interactions, the questions. **The thoughtful & intentionally designed inside ecology will stimulate a variety of responses to the outside.** In the rhythm of our days, you will see a natural flow between inhaling and exhaling; exploring and documenting; questioning and searching *and* re-searching; absorbing and expressing; busyness and quiet. You will hear children asking questions, sharing theories, problem solving, being creative with new ideas. **Nature also refers to the natural needs of a human being. Like all living organisms, from microscopic fungi to the majestic Humpback whale, children have inherent needs.** Children need to be cared for; feel safe; have a strong sense of belonging and know they are loved; be recognized and respected; and have the opportunity to pursue their strengths, talents, gifts, interests in diverse, creative, and fluid ways with high support and high expectations. Adults need to see children as the future, as responsibility-bearers - those who will make decisions and care for the future world that they will not see.



When I first stepped on the field at Mill Bay Nature School, I observed tall, uncut grass, a prolific growth of Ox-Eye daisies, and a clear cut five acres surrounded by a stand of tall beautiful fir and cedar. Apart from two backstops and two goal posts, there was nothing there. *Nothing*. I tried to imagine what seventy-five children would find to do come fall **AND** we were called a nature school. It was very helpful that I have always loved a challenge - *The early exploration*

looked much like our own childhoods raised in rural spaces with mud and sticks and true imagination (parent). We had been gifted with a large grant for a new playground from the Ministry of Education, but it had to be put up for tender - *a long process*. AND THEN ... the children arrived - *I noticed the creativity with materials/spaces and the negotiation that had to take place to share the materials/spaces (teacher)* - AND backstops became climbing apparati - *Previous school play was confined to height limits, rules, and guidelines (parent)*; goal posts supported ropes for swinging; long grass became places for hide and seek; grasshoppers became friends and objects of study; sticks and blankets became forts and castles and hideouts and quiet spots; old tables were transformed into a mud or chocolate kitchen - *We have always spent a ton of time outside before school happened, so keeping the outdoor options helped the transition into school (parent)*; a generous neighbour's forest became spy zones and dragon lairs and places to build lean-to's; a pile of sand and a pile of soil became places of digging and climbing and sliding and flattening - *Well, a dirt pile is always the best (parent)* - *My mom heart cringed a little when we went through our third pair of shoes in half a school year and when he came home telling me stories of eating worms! But his heart is full and his love of school is fully*



reengaged (parent). Eventually the piles eroded by the imaginations and muscles of children became the Ganges River where lotuses floated and dreams were released. One day, as a child sought to balance upon a 2x4 across the two mud kitchen tables a circus was born! This became an exciting performing opportunity every day at 'Freeplay.' Wheels also became a popular physical activity of choice - *Are we allowed to bring our scooters to school? What about bikes? Is that allowed? Is it okay? (6 year old child)* - as well as a stash of underground clay unearthed during a geological study of soil strata. I have never seen so many clay pots in my life, and dirty children up to their knees in mud! Still, the play was often confined to limited, popular spaces and I spent the fall months continuously problem solving conflict between

children - *The kids were more chaotic or in turmoil. They engaged less positively towards each other (parent).* Was this a result of the play options, the newness of relationships, or the need to develop competencies? Probably bits of all three - depending upon the child, depending upon the weather, both internally and externally.

Visions for our new playground were provided by several construction companies in late fall. We asked that our children were provided the opportunity to offer ideas and imaginings and frustrations with the companies. It was an exciting day; the children had no shortage of suggestions. The adults had a variety of responses to the children - most were concerned about risk management and liability. The children were concerned about risk and challenge

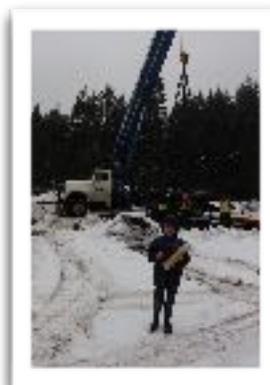
- *Because we already have a draft concept as a starting place, we are ready to meet to get feedback from the school and are excited to flex the design with the school administrator and the Raven Clan (older students at the school) (KINSOL PLAY).* We selected

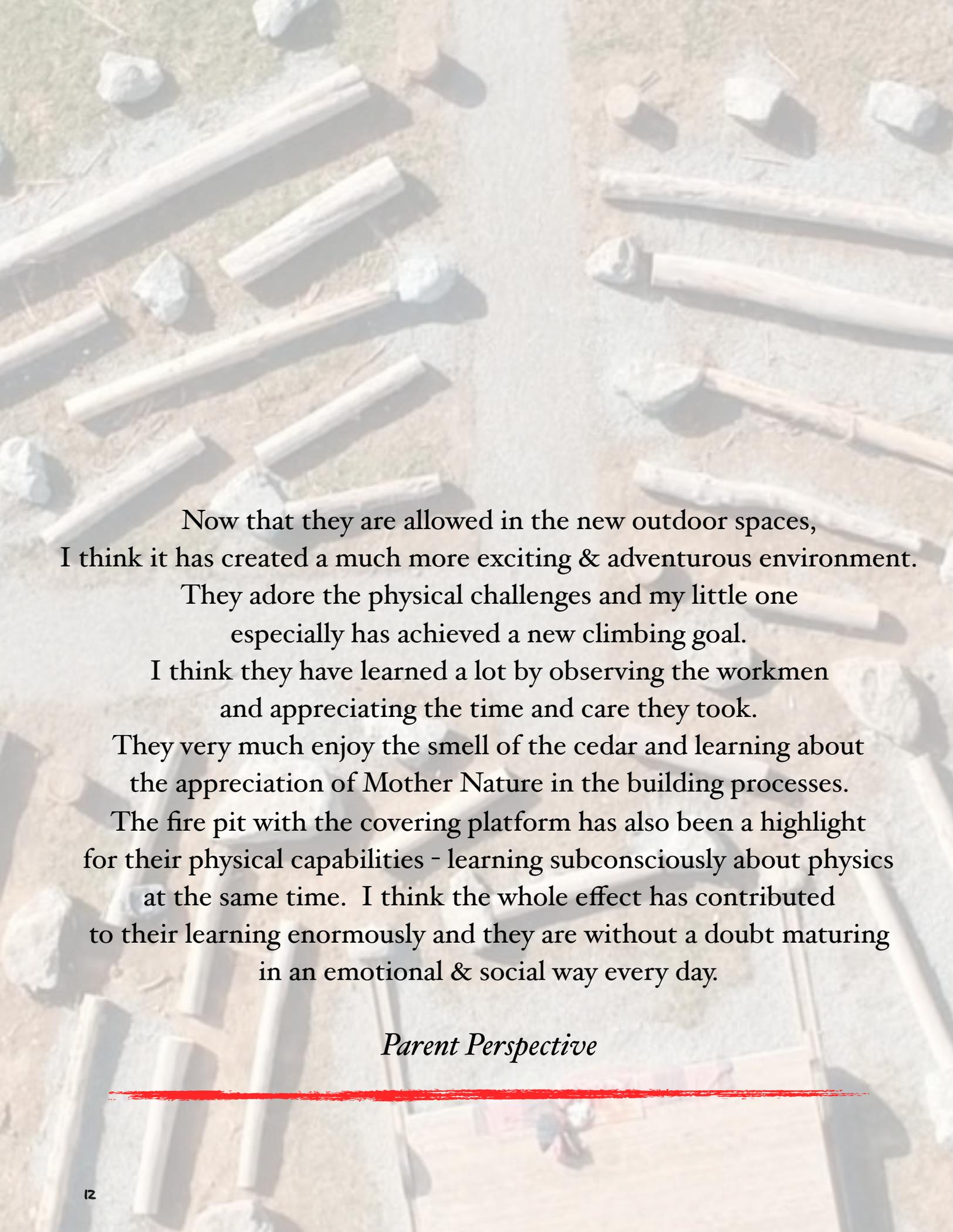
KINSOL because they best met the criteria we were seeking: play structures of natural materials that would engage 200 children - ages four to twelve - to play simultaneously - *With the exception of very few items, we have sought to utilize natural, organic, local, and salvaged material in every single play and learning element in the proposed design. This includes all of the many loose parts, which are made up of cut woodenshapes, salvaged tree branches, various sized rounds sawn from logs, and assorted sizes of locally-quarried stone (KINSOL PLAY).* We also requested a rolling stage, fire pit, and circular seating space to move our daily gatherings from inside the gym to outside - *“Our proposal includes a massive steel fire ring (9’ in diameter!) surrounded by stone, stump, and log seating suitable for 200 students and 20 adults. Early concepts for the moveable stage, considering that it is likely to be quite heavy, is to add wooden wheels to its four corners and add tow ropes to both ends to permit rolling onto and off of the fire pit” (KINSOL PLAY).*



The process of watching the play areas come to life was both exciting and frustrating; instead of constructing a rigid fence, older children became the safety patrol - keeping the younger children safe and reminding them of potential hazards. Snow became a joy and a distraction *for a while*. The KINSOL workers were highly relational and interactive, knowing the children on a first name basis and allowing them time and space to ask questions and make suggestions - *The children were always so engaged in various outdoor play environments prior to the new outdoor play spaces. With the new outdoor play spaces the children got to witness the build from ground up and were so excited to play after spring break! (parent) - I did receive voiced frustrations at not being allowed in the forest or on the*

new structures as they were being built, or really in that area during construction. My children started taking their scooters to school and soon found an alternative way to entertain themselves. Nonetheless, they also didn't want to leave school to go on the field trips, so I don't think it upset them too much (parent).





Now that they are allowed in the new outdoor spaces, I think it has created a much more exciting & adventurous environment. They adore the physical challenges and my little one especially has achieved a new climbing goal. I think they have learned a lot by observing the workmen and appreciating the time and care they took. They very much enjoy the smell of the cedar and learning about the appreciation of Mother Nature in the building processes. The fire pit with the covering platform has also been a highlight for their physical capabilities - learning subconsciously about physics at the same time. I think the whole effect has contributed to their learning enormously and they are without a doubt maturing in an emotional & social way every day.

Parent Perspective

We now have a series of magical and creative spaces lining the perimeter of our once vacant field: candelabra trees for climbing; loose parts for building; log climber for scampering; rolling hills (aka dirt piles) for doing whatever you do on rolling hills; mud kitchen for concocting magical recipes and potions - *Please stop destroying the felts to get the innards for dyes (teacher)*; a log flume with a water pump and dams for experimenting with water flow and physics



and all things wet - including tree frogs; finally, it's anchored by a rolling stage and firepit with a circular seating area composed of boulders and logs and rounds - *The outdoor play space that is spread out around the property is very helpful with decision making, expressing boundaries and having room to move elsewhere if the current play is not meeting a child's needs. Particularly helpful are the "Loose Parts" areas where a child can play alone and build what's on their mind, or they can invite others and work cooperatively to create something. The freedom to use tools and dig and move dirt and sand really encourages responsibility and thoughtfulness in the moment (parent).*

The children immediately noticed possible dangers and problems and conflicts inherent in the new structures and outdoor studios; committees were formed, conversations emerged, and the Town Hall Meeting became the site of dialogue and voting on guidelines and rules - *My son is part of a tribe of barefooted mud warrior/builders at MBNS. He immediately shed items of clothing deemed unnecessary to himself and got busy climbing, running, digging, fort building and bike*



riding. He came home filthy and happy. The new outdoor play spaces clearly foster creative free play and free expression. I loved that important safety rules were thought up and voted on by the children (i.e., no pushing or shoving ... respect peoples forts) and appear to be regulated by the kids too as they have taken ownership of the spaces and care for them (Parent).

What I notice, beautifully and surprisingly, is that the children are engaged and happy most of the time; conflict is low; problem solving is frequent; children self-organize; and there is no end to the imaginative play that emerges - even with the structured KINSOL play spaces that have partially filled the once-bare campus - *We joined after the new structure was open to the students and I witnessed an incredible excitement. It sounds like Falcon class used to go on walks daily before the playground was open and now with the expanded space they are staying on school grounds as there seems to be enough space now to meet the movement needs of the children. It was beautiful to visit the school and see the interaction between the students and the builders. They sure melted my husband's heart as he was one of the builders. So much in fact he insisted on sending our kids there :) It has been such a great decision (parent).* Our Free Play supervisor has commented that there are few problems to help solve over a forty-five minute span of time with seventy-five children aged five to ten - *It's amazing and surprising. I wonder if it happens in other places? (supervisor).* I wasn't sure it wise to spread the play structures/studios all around the perimeter of the five acre campus; would I be able to keep the children safely supervised? Yes. The answer is yes, and I'm glad, so very glad, that I leaned in this direction. Every child has space to be and explore and move and socialize with those they choose in ways they choose depending upon their mood, their ideas, their energy - *This has been fantastic. The imagination invoked is inspiring. My child loves the mud and digging in it; loves the elements and being out in them. It has broadened her confidence. We've learned the value of having a number of pairs of wind/rain pants and gloves though - you can only wash the same pair so many times (parent).*





Clothing is an important part of an outdoor school - particularly as weather patterns shift with the changing seasons. A child that is consistently warm and dry throughout the day will be much happier and more likely to fully enjoy the benefits of learning in an outdoor environment than a child that consistently comes unprepared for the day's weather and is often cold and wet. Remember too that each child is different and has an individual tolerance for wet/dry and cold/warm conditions, and depending upon their interests or personality, may naturally engage in activities that challenge the limits of their clothing constantly requiring multiple changes a day (*think* mud puddles ...) **Mill Bay Nature School will have two mudrooms for children to stow their outdoor clothing - labelling clothes will help the community stay organized. Thank you !**

You don't have to invest in new and costly items to keep your child warm. Thrift stores and online used clothing sites (facebook) are great places to look for children's clothing at affordable prices. As our children grow, we will seek ways to facilitate clothing swaps.

Basically, your child will need layers of clothing and footwear to match the changing seasons.

Here are some excellent guidelines on layers *borrowed* from TÍR NA NÓG Forest School :

<http://www.tirnanogforestschoo.ca/clothing-at-forest-school/>

The items you will want to spend more money on are the outer layers of clothing which is your child's first line of defense against the elements. Middle and base layers are where you can save money by shopping for these items exclusively at thrift stores. Here is a breakdown of outer, mid and base layers:

Base-Layer: Natural fabrics such as wool or cotton work well as an inner layer, as well as fleece. The key for this layer is to wick moisture away from the skin and insulate the skin with a breathable layer to keep them dry.

Mid-Layer: This is another insulation layer that creates 'dead-air space' between your child's skin and the elements. This airspace helps in keeping your child warm. Wool sweaters (Merino wool is exceptionally warm and soft on sensitive skin) and fleece tend to work well.

Outer -Layer: Water-proof and wind-proof, as well as breathable.



Footwear

Children will need both outdoor and indoor footwear that they can independently put on & take off

Outdoor Footwear: sneakers or hiking boots, as well as neoprene or other waterproof boots rated for the cold. Look for one piece molded, pull-on footwear with insulated lining, or thick neoprene boots. **For your information:** boots labeled “water resistant” are not waterproof; nor are boots with laces, buckles, velcro, zippers, etc. Change of socks for wet and snowy weather would also be very helpful.

Indoor Footwear: slippers, slipper socks, or slip-on running shoes - *anything easy to pull-on or take off*

other

- **Sunscreen** for sunny fall and spring days
- **Rain hat** (*not* umbrellas), **winter hats & mitts** (with an extra dry set)
- **Small backpack** to carry water, snacks, journals, etc. outside



We are excited to engage with children (and adults) from diverse backgrounds, gifts, talents, strengths, and challenges.

All children are fully included and seen as rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent, connected to adults, other children, and a unique, fluid environment.

(Malaguzzi)

https://dspace.library.uvic.ca/bitstream/handle/1828/8015/Slipp_Kari_MEd_2017.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

At Mill Bay Nature School the children we greet each day are unique and original, as much as they are diverse and interdependent. Each comes from a unique family culture woven from generational strands. Each child also carries a unique genetic makeup deep within that determines potential capacities and vulnerabilities, which at the same time is significantly impacted by the variety of ecologies one has been planted in. Each child is a mysterious and sacred being. Mill Bay Nature School acknowledges that a multiplicity of expectations, desires, concerns, perspectives, and experience exist within a typical classroom community. **This is our starting point.** A socially just school is a safe place for each child and adult to talk about his unique life, her whole life, and in sharing these experiences, provoke and inspire others in the community to think and feel and *reconsider*. There is no one standard of humanness - no one way to be human. **Mill Bay Nature School is rooted in the notion that there is no right technique, no right organization, no right way to teach when one takes up a living curriculum - the challenge of honouring, including and stimulating the growth of *each* human.**



Reflections ...

It was as the heat of the summer waned and we began our morning gathering circles that I felt led to express to the children “Raven’s Rules”. I became Raven as a character - disrupting assumptions of what it means to be a principal - representing how I imagined leading to be - trickster, transformer, mistake-maker. These rules emanated from my three decades of: teaching & learning; parenting & learning; reading & learning; dialoguing & learning; mistake-making & learning. I hadn’t planned anything for that morning; intuitively, I sensed it was time. It was necessary as we moved forward - walking together - co-creating a new culture - *Raven’s Rules are: Be yourself. Your whole-self. All of you is welcome here. When you’re yourself you will make mistakes - accidentally often - because most people are different than you. They may not find funny what you find funny. They may be offended by you without you even knowing why. And this is normal. This is human. This is what it means to live in community. So, the next rule is make mistakes, and in making mistakes know that you do not need to feel ashamed.*



It’s normal to make mistakes. We all do it - the adults and the children. And we do it for our whole lives. So, we need to learn how to problem solve. Raven will give you some tools for this. Raven will always be available to help you problem solve. Never feel embarrassed to ask for my help. In the process of solving problems we will understand each other better. We will build stronger relationships. And we will build a community - a place where we can live together and walk together in respectful ways. I noticed right away that the young children who had not yet been a part of school structure asked for help constantly. They listened and it made sense. I also noticed

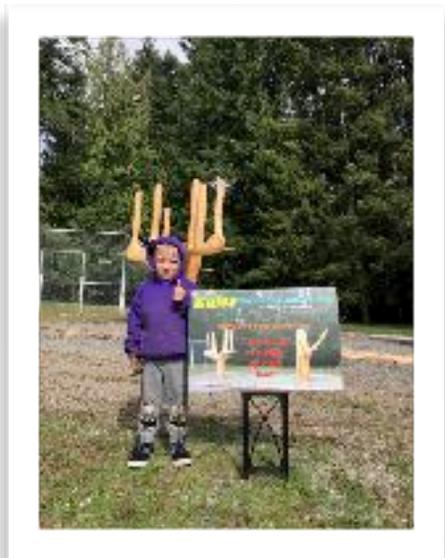
that the children who had experienced school settings were harder to convince. They interpreted asking for help as tattling. They interpreted mistaking making as something to hide, or to find someone else to blame. *He is mean. She is mean* - was the constant reverbing judgement. Intentional, incessant, and patient problem solving using the “friendship bridge tool” was my full time job in the fall and winter.



Over time, slowly, *sometimes very slowly*, an understanding, appreciation, and honouring of diversity has emerged - *In terms of diverse strengths and challenges I have been very impressed by the language my son brings home regarding conflict resolution and problem solving. He is learning how to take a step back and evaluate conflicts and is given space to reflect with Kim about how to honour his own feelings while being respectful of others (parent).*

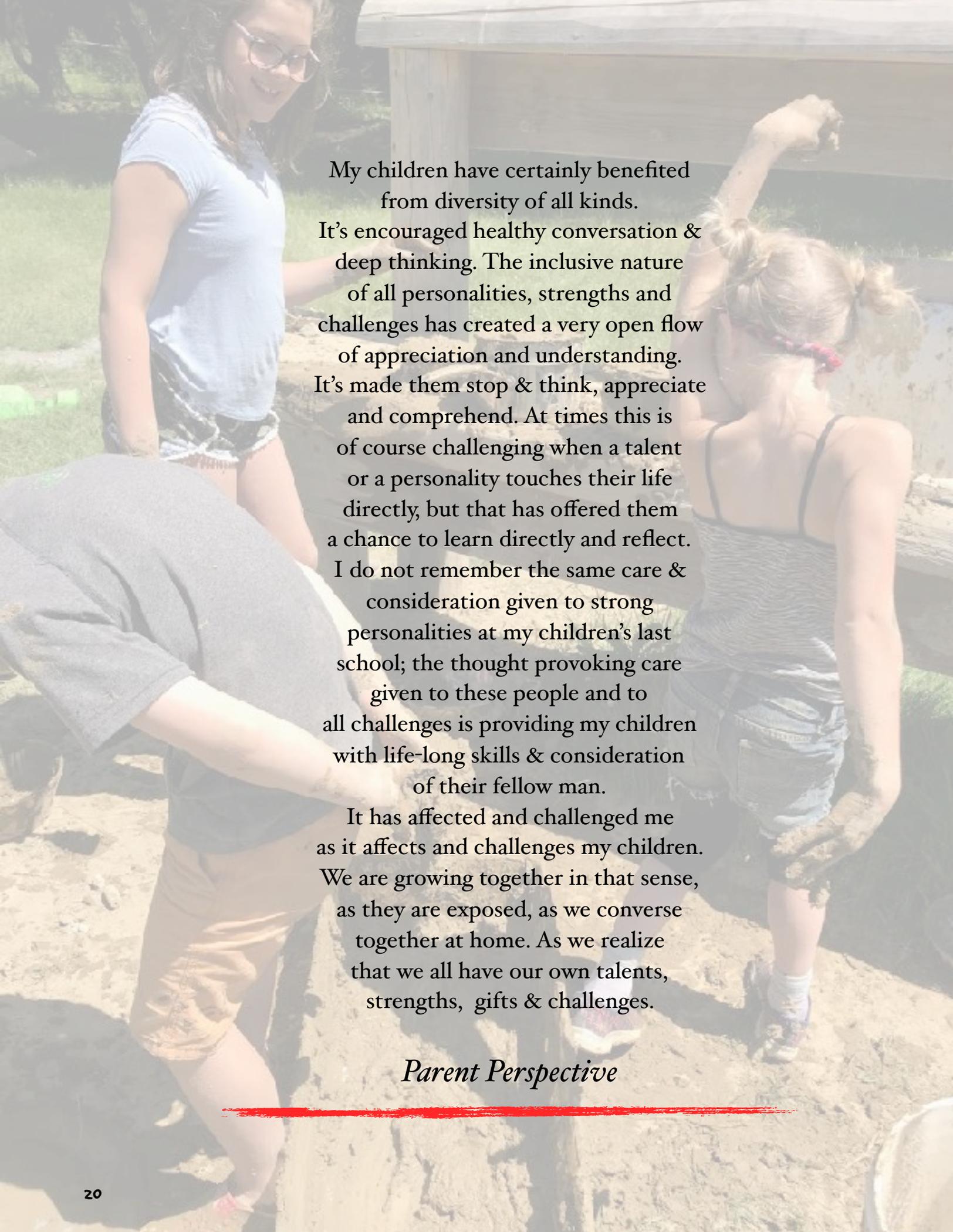
It seems that the children needed many iterations of problem solving to believe that problem solving is a normal part of living and does not mean that anyone (themselves!) was broken. As we have walked together, we have learned to forgive ourselves and others, as well as appreciate ourselves and others - *My child has benefited by seeing themselves in others, by seeing how others handle challenge and adversity (parent).* You'll notice a very strong community of respectful people at Mill Bay Nature School - *It has truly made my heart feel so full to watch as all learners are celebrated for the gifts they bring. By sharing our differences and gifts openly we empower our children to have greater empathy towards each other and to be peers who are patient and kind, willing to teach others how to do the same. All in all, one little heart at a time making our community and world a better place (parent).*

Perhaps because there is no one standard of humanness - no one way to be human. Mill Bay Nature School is rooted in the notion that there is no right technique, no right organization, no right way to teach when one takes up a living curriculum - the challenge of honouring, including and stimulating the growth of *each* human - *I think both my children and I are going to have greater compassion and understanding for people from different cultures and abilities (parent).* And so, children are attended to and offered learning opportunities that appeal and challenge; solutions are sought when children are not thriving - deep connections have formed amongst staff, parents, and the community. Moreover, teaching is always subordinated to learning. Adult needs subordinated to children's. The staff at Mill Bay Nature School have been very open and caring - *I am challenged everyday by the children, this keeps me on my toes and learning and growing myself. I'm always wondering - How can I support _? or What is this behaviour telling me? (teacher).*



We notice that active, kinesthetic children have found a home - *Our son is a bit of a wiggler and likes to be in contact with others. This was a problem at his more traditional school, but not at MBNS. Here, due to the active environment he is asking for more 'learning time' instead of itching for escape and he is rarely if ever in trouble for his need to move (parent) - My son is a very active boy - his peers and teachers have also recognized this . He loves to run and so the older boys recognized this and created a running club for him. He also loves to ride his scooter. The teachers acknowledged this and allowed scooters at school (parent).* We notice that children with exceptional needs have found a home - *My son with Down Syndrome has benefited greatly. As parents we have gained even more, as our strengths and needs/beliefs around our child's needs are respected. The school also understands and supports my son's twin's special needs. It's great (parent) - With a child on the Autism spectrum, we have felt so welcomed and honoured. She feels safer at Quintsul than she did at her previous school. She feels almost relieved that she can be herself. I've already witnessed the school dealing with situations around conflict resolution and have been incredibly impressed by their ability to teach problem solving skills and model wonderful communication skills (parent).*





My children have certainly benefited from diversity of all kinds. It's encouraged healthy conversation & deep thinking. The inclusive nature of all personalities, strengths and challenges has created a very open flow of appreciation and understanding. It's made them stop & think, appreciate and comprehend. At times this is of course challenging when a talent or a personality touches their life directly, but that has offered them a chance to learn directly and reflect. I do not remember the same care & consideration given to strong personalities at my children's last school; the thought provoking care given to these people and to all challenges is providing my children with life-long skills & consideration of their fellow man.

It has affected and challenged me as it affects and challenges my children. We are growing together in that sense, as they are exposed, as we converse together at home. As we realize that we all have our own talents, strengths, gifts & challenges.

Parent Perspective



BC's schools assist in developing educated citizens who: are thoughtful, able to learn & think critically, and can communicate; are creative, flexible, & self-motivated; have a positive self-image; are capable of making independent decisions; are skilled & able to contribute to society; are productive, gain satisfaction through achievement; strive for physical well-being; are cooperative, principled, & respectful of others; and aware of the rights and responsibilities of the individual within the family, the community, Canada, and the world.

(BC Ministry of Education)

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum-updates>

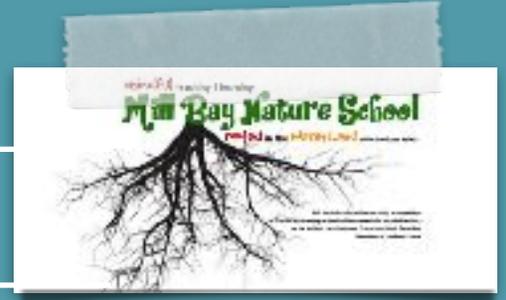
We are excited to engage with children from diverse backgrounds, gifts, talents, strengths, and challenges - growing the educated citizens outlined by the BC Ministry of Education (above). **We recognize that there are many different ways to develop these capacities - many different journeys - no one-size-fits-all.** In response to this challenge, at Mill Bay Nature School every child will have a personalized Learning Map*. These Maps will guide the teaching staff as they tailor expectations and support, learning opportunities and challenges for individual children - to inspire, to provoke, to nurture all aspects of the BC curriculum. The Maps will be co-created by parents, teachers, and the child at the beginning of each school year, reflected upon throughout the year, and then re-visited each spring. **Parents will be invited to reflect on the following questions which make up the Learning Map in the fall and spring at Mill Bay Nature School (see following page):**

Learning Map for _____

Created by _____

Date _____

Reviewed _____



What is your child's personal history?

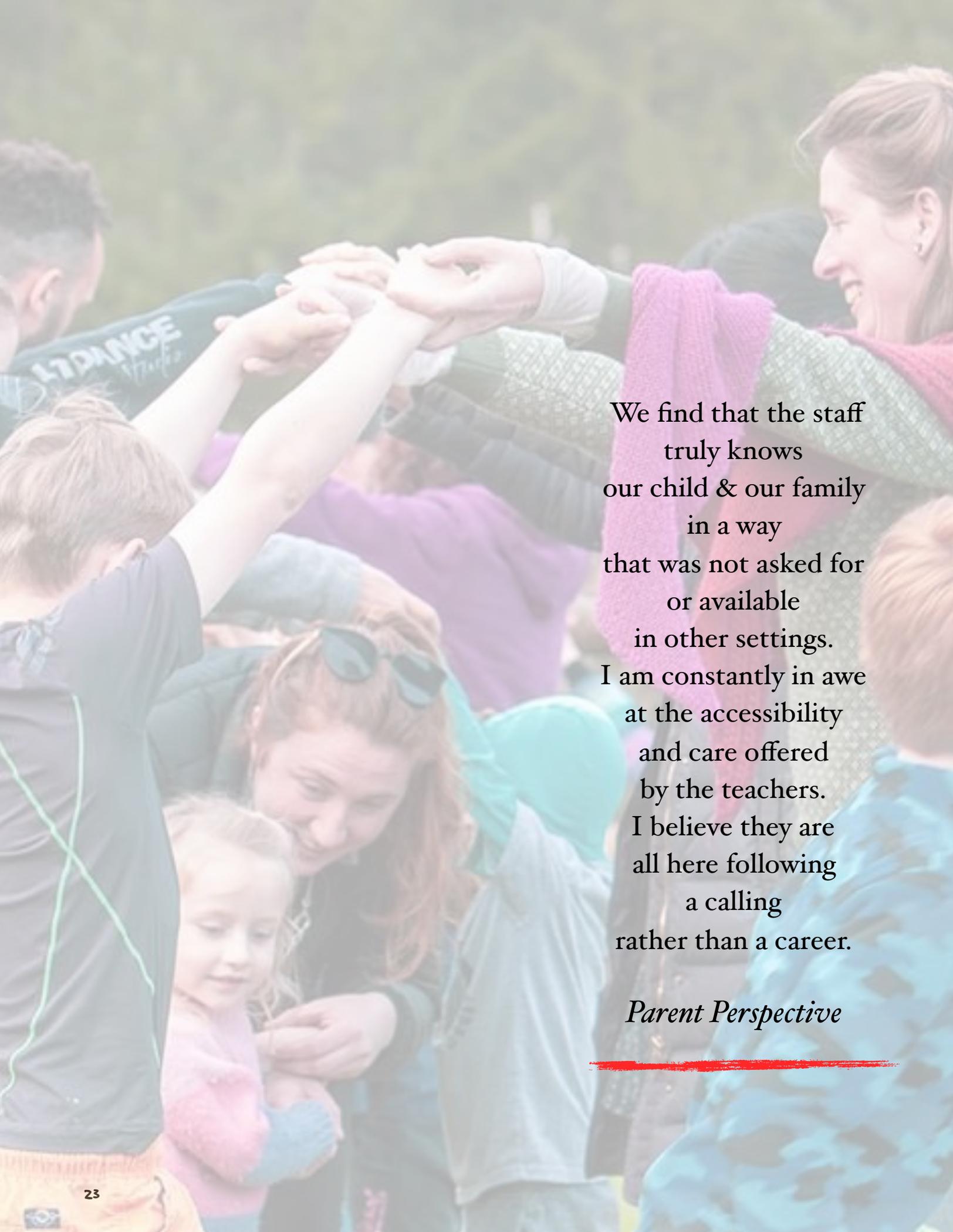
Start with birth ... early years ... family relationships ... places you've lived ... experiences, etc.

What are your child's dreams? What are your dreams/plans for your child?

What are your child's worries/concerns? What are your concerns/worries/nightmares for your child?

What are your child's strengths, passions, gifts?

What are your child's needs? Think about life in your family, community, school, friends, etc. **Please circle the 2/3 most important to you.**



We find that the staff truly knows our child & our family in a way that was not asked for or available in other settings. I am constantly in awe at the accessibility and care offered by the teachers. I believe they are all here following a calling rather than a career.

Parent Perspective



Reflections ...



Without a doubt, this is one area that we would very much like to develop next year, and in the years to follow - designing and co-creating Learning Maps with students, parents, staff, and maybe even community mentors. The intention was to have a parent meeting in September where we introduced the renewed B.C. curriculum, and then moved onto the Maps process. After over an hour of discussing *what is going well at the school for your child, for yourself*, and a short presentation about the curriculum, there was little time to discuss the Learning Maps. Lesson learned. Resultantly, the work was done by parents alone. This is not ideal; it was still very useful for many parents however - *I really like the learning map. I think it's a great idea to inform a child's teacher on your child's past (parent)*. As a response to our emerging understanding of the value of ongoing dialogue with parents, the staff collaboratively decided upon a soft start each morning (15 mins) to free up time for parents to speak informally with teachers as the children played. Again, this was not ideal. The struggle new relationships require, and the limited play spaces, distracted from rich conversations. It was, however, a beginning. From parent feedback (below), it appears that the process of designing a Learning Map is helpful, even nourishing - *The learning map was eye opening to myself and my husband, as you don't always stop to reflect on where you have come from. The challenges and triumphs that make your little person who they are, that shapes their personality and their learning styles (parent)*.

We have decided to provide Clan Leaders with time this spring in order to meet with parents one-on-one for 15 minutes (again, not ideal) to review the Learning Plans, and adjust, change, edit - *The learning map was helpful but it needs to have the loop closed. Yes, it would be beneficial to reflect on the fall one and create a new one (parent) - It was helpful in thinking about what was really important for learning and what I wanted for my child in his future. It would be interesting to read it again and maybe make adjustments based on how my child has developed (parent)*. These are not traditional "parent-teacher interviews;" instead, they are a time for parents to talk and teachers to listen deeply, ask questions, and scribe - *My voice is heard and my insight into my child was deeply appreciated and reflected on (parent)*. Learning Maps will then be reviewed in the fall. We will continue to look for creative and innovative ways to release teachers so parents can choose a more intimate setting to share their thoughts about their children. Others may continue to find informal chats sufficient. Again, there is no one-size-fits-all - *It was good to really focus in on what his abilities and challenges are, since it's not something we do regularly or in such depth, and yes it would be appropriate to do a reflection and make necessary changes with a new one (parent)*.



My child has benefited from having to face his part in relationships - to hear how his actions affect others, and is learning that life really is better when feelings are expressed and dealt with.

Parent Perspective

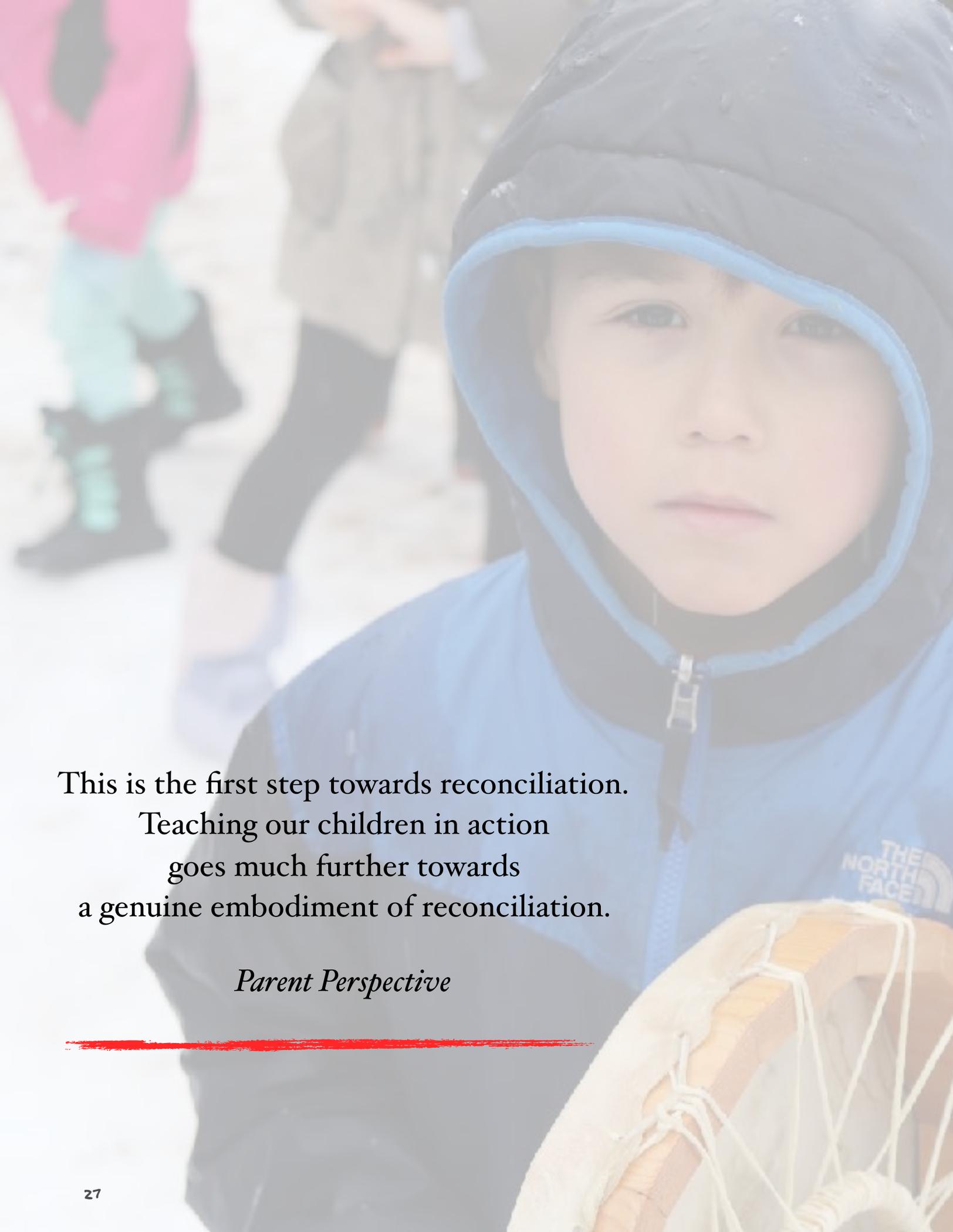
We are committed to practicing relational and indigenous pedagogies.



Learning is a process of construction, in which each individual constructs for himself the reasons, the 'whys', the meanings of things, others, nature, events, reality and life. The learning process is certainly individual, but because the reasons, explanations, interpretations, and meanings of others are critical for our knowledge building, it is also a process of relations - a process of social construction. (Riñaldi)

<http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/PUB-LFP-POSTER-Principles-of-Learning-First-Peoples-poster-11x17.pdf>

Since time immemorial, the Cowichan and Malahat Peoples have lived on the land that Mill Bay Nature School sits on. It is considered 'unceded' land as it was not formally surrendered; it was absorbed by settlers. Taking up the challenge of reconciliation, at Mill Bay Nature School you will see the children enter by the North-East doors (by the gym) - towards the East where the sun rises - starting the day in a circle. You will see everyone in the circle introducing themselves counterclockwise by saying their name and providing some information about their family and what land they are originally from. At times, visitors may also participate in a gratitude circle, or the passing down of knowledge from generation to generation through story, song, and observation. The First Peoples Principles of Learning (see link above) reflect the culture that emerged from this land more than 4,000 years ago, and continue to value the people, the land, and their relationships to each other. **Creating a culture at Mill Bay Nature School where the Cowichan and Malahat cultures are deeply respected, will be a focus supported by Elders-in Residence and aboriginal educators. Mill Bay Nature School seeks to practice these principles as they are natural to the life found in this place.**

A young child in a blue and black hooded jacket is the central focus, looking directly at the camera. The child is holding a drum with a wooden frame and white drumhead. In the background, other children are visible, including one in a pink jacket and another in a grey jacket, all in a snowy or sandy outdoor setting.

This is the first step towards reconciliation.
Teaching our children in action
goes much further towards
a genuine embodiment of reconciliation.

Parent Perspective



Reflections on Relationships ...

I notice in the Field Guide that this notion of relational pedagogy was connected to indigenous pedagogy; in fact, they are distinct although interrelated. Both need consideration. Both are significant. Both are core to Mill Bay Nature School. So, how have we benefited from the emphasis on relationships in this place - *My child seems to be building lots of new friendships every week compared to the struggles he had earlier with other kids (parent)*. First of all, what do we mean by *the emphasis on relationships*? We conceptualize this mysterious work called teaching and learning as seeds, roots, growth, decay, pruning, seasons, diversity, interconnectedness. This organic, ecological metaphor acknowledges that to promote growth and development in every learner (child and adult), we must see the unique living being of each; considering the unique growing conditions needed - rooted in both nature and nurture. What are their personalities, gifts, limits, fears, insecurities, experience, passions? What is her heart is calling her to become? What are the relations he needs to develop more fully? Moreover, the process of self-definition is delicate and intricate and as teachers we need to respect this unveiling - as difficult as it is at times. Like the complexity of ecology then, we become absorbed in relationships that cannot be reduced to a set of applied rules. How do we, as

teachers, remain mindful of the creation of a learning culture ever-in-the-making that encourages risk taking so each may begin to expose his fragile, authentic, emerging self to the world? These processes of teaching and learning are fundamentally non-rational and intuitive, not easily explained with words alone. Nel Noddings has written - *As the teacher receives the child and works with him on cooperatively designed projects, as she resists the temptation—or the mandate—to manipulate the child, to squeeze him into some mold, she establishes a climate of receptivity*. Time and time again, children have taught us that teaching requires the preeminence of relational attunement - a patience and wisdom to watch, wonder, and wait. When we do so, learning becomes incomparably more productive.



There are structures and protocols that enhance this process; some we began with, others have emerged and will continue to emerge. We have had a morning circle since our first day in September where all members of the community (including parents, siblings, and 'friends') gather and sing, share stories, share concerns, honour each other, and make plans - *I feel like the children are open to forming new relationships. When I arrived, they welcomed me with open arms. I have learned about the importance of witnessing and of the power of honouring (teacher).* From fall to spring we met in our transformed gym space - *the watering hole* - with huge tree rounds and church pews and big comfy chairs, and carpet squares. We are learning to pay attention, to listen, to wonder and express those wonders; the discipline to do these things has grown slowly over time. We were not seeking a compliant, passive audience; instead, we encouraged the children to engage fully even when it was difficult or disruptive or messy, and then we made daily adjustments to enhance the learning experience. We moved outside in spring - when our outdoor learning spaces were completed - and immediately noticed - *the first circle* - the difference in attention. Being outside, away from the reverberations of a huge gym space, calmed many children who had found the excessive sensory input agitating. It felt like magic - a beautiful, unexpected outcome. Morning circle feels like home now. We can't miss it.



We also live honesty and decency through problem solving, and encourage ongoing conflict resolution through mediation - surfacing the deeper feelings and thoughts of children and adults. Children are taught to approach adults and ask if they can help them solve a problem. The movement away from blame and judgement - particularly from the children who had already had experiences in school - was slow and deliberate. The fall was full of - "(s)he is mean!"

The patience and energy required was exhausting at times; the fruit, however, is now substantial. Rarely do children express judgement; instead they are more likely to express - *I am confused by what (s)he did to me. Can you help me find out why.* This is a structure that is highly valued by our parent community as well - *The emphasis on relationships has helped my child problem solve and trust his teachers (parent).* I have been asked several times to document the process we use so parents can practice it at home.



(The attached diagram is an attempt to document a complex process.)

Conflict occurs... an opportunity for learning emerges

How do you know there's a conflict?

Heard
(by self)

Seen
(by self)

Reported
by another
observer
(child)

Reported
by one
involved
(child or adult)

Fall-out/residue
sensed
(child)

You hear a scream.

A child is standing with a stick and another child is crying.

"I saw _____ hit _____ with a stick."

"_____ hit me with a stick."

"I think something has happened between _____ & _____"

How is the conflict communicated?

What are the assumptions that may be made & we need to be aware of?
(in adults & children)

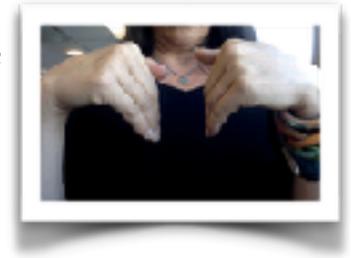
What feelings might be aroused?
(in children, in adults)

- Someone is hurt
- Someone is victimized
- "Oh, he's/she's at it again ..."
- "Oh, poor _____ ..."
- Frustration
- Anger
- Agitation
- Pity
- Disappointed
- Overwhelm



Next steps -

1. **Gently, but insistently invite both children to sit down with you** (*sometimes privately, sometimes where you are at - requires discernment & an understanding of/relationship with the children*)
2. **Remind & reassure the children that the purpose of the conversation is to restore their broken friendship bridge and not to blame anyone.** (*It's often very useful to remind the children to listen deeply when each other speaks and not judge - rather to be prepared that their stories may be different and that is normal.*)
3. **Invite the child who made you aware of the conflict speak first. Ask them to share their story/perspective beginning with "I feel"** (*remind the other child that they will share their story next and their job is to listen deeply to understand the other*).
4. **Your role is to paraphrase what the child says, as well as ask clarifying questions** (*particularly seeking to have the children communicate the language of their heart rather than their head*).
5. **And then, invite the other child to share their story/perspective**
6. **"Now that you have heard each other's stories/perspectives and understand them, do you think you could have done better ?** (*Sometimes, I will remind the children that they could have done worse.*)
7. **"Is there anything you need to own ? What is it ?"**
8. **"Now, to restore the friendship bridge, what do you feel sorry about/feel sorry for/regret doing ?"** (*Hold up your hands and model one side of the bridge being restored after the child owns their part.*)
9. **"Now, one side of the bridge is up. To bring the other side up, we forgive the other."** (*Hold up your hands and model the other side of the bridge being restored. Encourage the children to also do this with their hands as well.*)
10. **Now, it's time to blow the conflict/problem away and start fresh with each other** (*Place the 'conflict/problem in your hands and invite the children to blow it away. Smiles and laughing encourage the restoration of the relationship.*)





Creating a culture at Mill Bay Nature School where the Cowichan and Malahat cultures are deeply respected, will be a focus - supported by Elders-in Residence and indigenous educators. Mill Bay Nature School seeks to practice these principles as they are natural to the life found in this place.

Reflections ...

In early December, I met with Tousilum and Deb George sharing stories of our school, the children, our developing community at Mill Bay Nature School. We had come a long way - these Cowichan elders and me, a newcomer to the Valley. *I wish to share this story with you.*

Tousilum had been very saddened by what he experienced and saw in the collection of people who would be forming Mill Bay Nature School at a picnic in late summer. He was ignored. This hurt. Afterwards, he called me to take a very serious and whole-hearted approach to creating a healthy, functioning, caring community of children and adults - if we wanted to truly embody First Peoples Principles and build something special at Mill Bay in the spirit of reconciliation and the educated citizen. I was very moved by Tousilum's raw observations and his honest reflections. I took this to heart, to mind, to spirit, and so did the staff. Each morning when we begin our day, an acknowledgement of this traditional territory is recited by our children, and Tousilum is brought to mind as a living embodiment of the people who walked gently on this land, caring for these deer, these grasshoppers, and those stunning cedars lining our back field.

In ways such as these, we worked to build community amongst and between our children, our staff, our families, and the greater community.

This became our primary focus - *community* - the pulsing heart of our learning, work, and growing together as we followed the path of the B.C. curriculum. Tousilum visited us many times in the fall. We shared meals together. We listened deeply to each other. It was rigorous and sweet work requiring trust, patience, and a willingness to see ourselves as interconnected. In early December, then, Tousilum, Deb George and I discussed how Mill Bay Nature School was not particularly descriptive of what was happening in our school. We wondered if there could be a more fitting



name? We talked about the emerging community we were now experiencing - amongst our children, between children and staff, amongst the parent community, and amongst children, families and staff. We talked about the trusting relationships, the respectful learning opportunities, the significant restorative problem solving that children were practicing not only at school, but at home as well. It seemed like more than just being outside alot.

Tousilum contacted me about a week later. "I have a name for you. My wife and I have talked to others and we believe this is good." I invited Tousilum and Deb to visit the children and share it with them. "Let's see how they respond. What they say," I suggested. And so they did. And it was an amazing morning. The children sat rapt in attention as Tousilum spoke - "Q'shintul" - walking together - is what you are doing here. You matter to each other and to Mother Earth." Yes, we *are* walking together. Q'shintul reflects the philosophy and pedagogy of our school. Q'shintul embodies the way in which we are co-creating and will continue to co-create the learning experiences for children. We are truly walking together as a staff, with our children, and with their families. We listen deeply; we form relationships amongst and between the children, the staff, and their families; we navigate the learning experiences together based on emergent noticings. Q'shintul calls us to continue this work. Q'shintul says that we must wait and be patient in order to walk together - that we must communicate to find the same direction, perhaps, at times, the right, the fitting direction. As an idea, Q'shintul will require us to pay attention to community - even as we become more developed as a community. It's a process, a journey, without a destination or ending. It's so fitting to our vision.



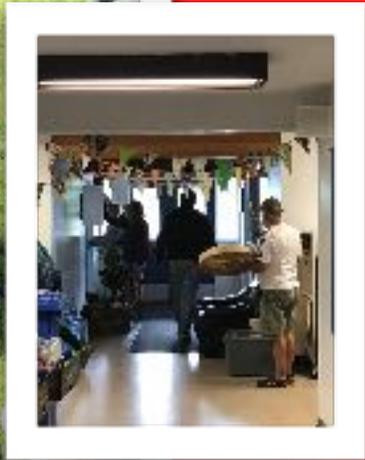
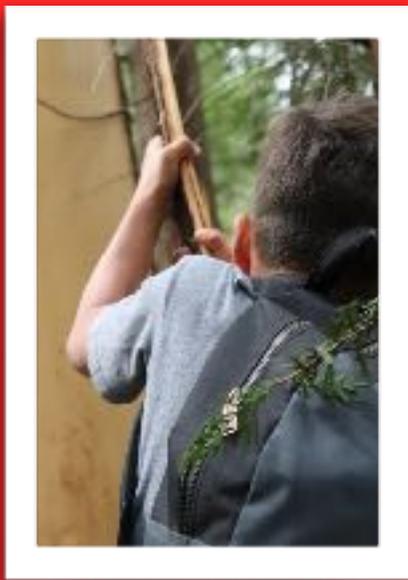
Excuse me.

I know you said that our school grounds is our land
and that the dandelions & daisies belong to us,
but that is not true.

Have you forgotten ?
The land belongs to the Coast Salish people.

Child Perspective (6 years old)





Reflections ...

Parent Voice: What have you learned about Coast Salish peoples, culture, and protocol this year ?

I can't think of anything in particular that I have learned, information wise; but I have developed a greater appreciation for the Coast Salish people, and am happy in knowing that my son is being raised with a greater influence as it wasn't that way when I grew up.

I believe the morning circle is a helpful format for gathering and sharing information, learning respect for speakers and practicing public speaking. I am grateful that we have had access to a first nations elder for council, drumming and ceremonial purposes, it creates familiarity, leads to inquiry, and provides access to information that is not readily available in most schools.

This is very valuable and I see my child being very aware of the culture and the land that has been here long before European settlement. The ongoing relationship with the elder has been an amazing gift.

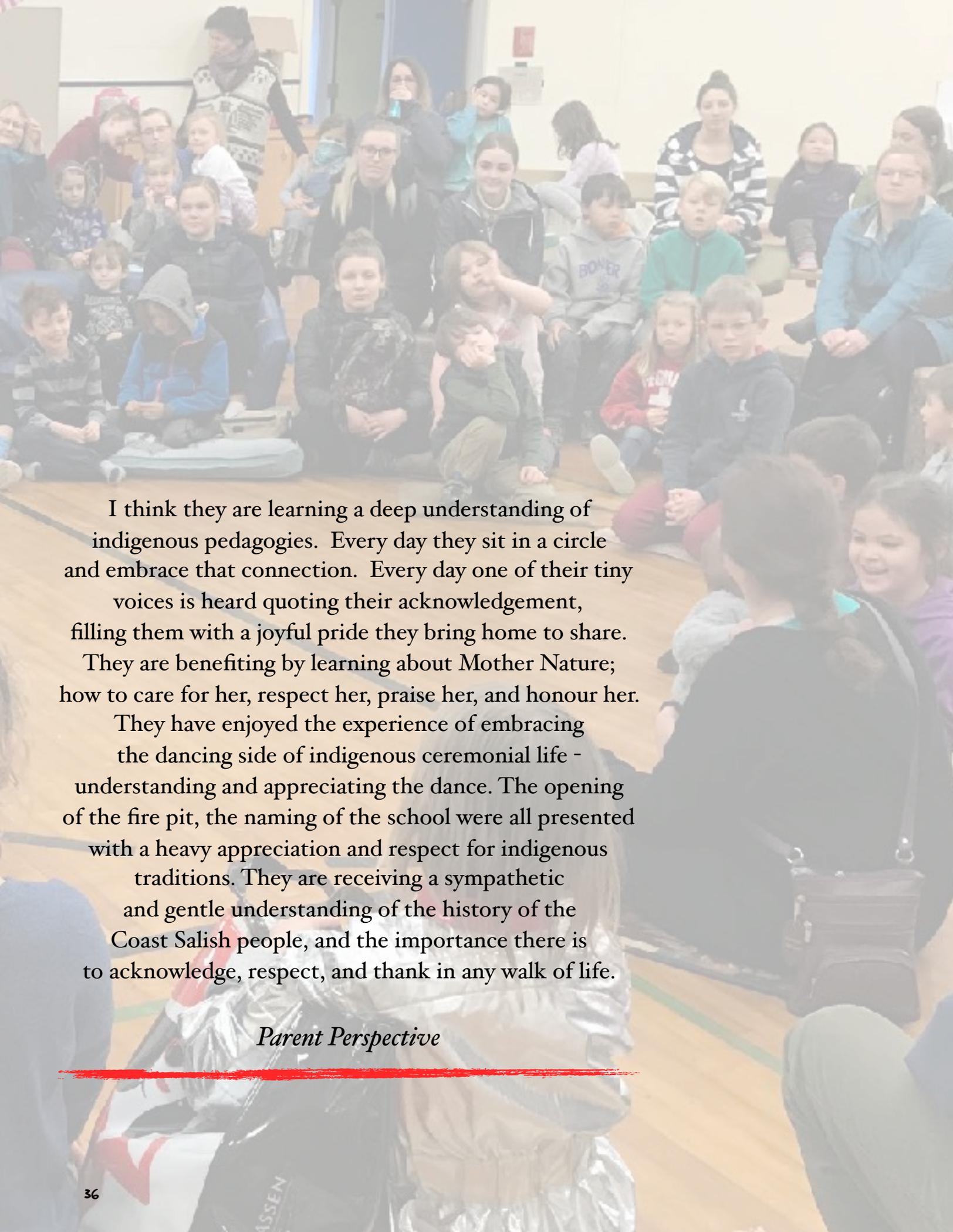
My child has taught us all her morning acknowledgement. She seems to carry a new reverence for the indigenous cultures as per the example that is being given at school.

My daughter always acknowledges that she is learning on the land of the Coast Salish people. She sees First Nations adults as valuable teachers in her school.

This is the first time I have heard and seen Aboriginal principles discussed so regularly. As it is very new, we are constantly processing what this means and will mean for our son and for the true reconciliation and understanding of native peoples.

With our lines coming from the Chilliwack Skwah band, including elders in our gatherings, and having the chance to share with my child singing and drumming, is something that connects our feet to the ground, and to our ancestors. It is powerful for everyone, regardless of their ancestry.

My eldest son loves the carving club! I think that Raven Clan has taught them to be leaders and demonstrate respect for everyone/ everything as well as allowing them to be leaders and teach this to the younger students.

A group of children and adults are sitting in a circle on a wooden floor, engaged in a community activity. The children are of various ages, some sitting on the floor and others on a low wooden bench. They are dressed in casual clothing, including jackets and hoodies. The adults are also sitting around the circle, some looking towards the children. The background shows a simple room with a white wall and a door.

I think they are learning a deep understanding of indigenous pedagogies. Every day they sit in a circle and embrace that connection. Every day one of their tiny voices is heard quoting their acknowledgement, filling them with a joyful pride they bring home to share. They are benefiting by learning about Mother Nature; how to care for her, respect her, praise her, and honour her. They have enjoyed the experience of embracing the dancing side of indigenous ceremonial life - understanding and appreciating the dance. The opening of the fire pit, the naming of the school were all presented with a heavy appreciation and respect for indigenous traditions. They are receiving a sympathetic and gentle understanding of the history of the Coast Salish people, and the importance there is to acknowledge, respect, and thank in any walk of life.

Parent Perspective

Six year old Child:

Of course he knows all about cedars and harvesting,
he's been doing it since he was a little boy.

Seven year old Child:

No. That's not true. He was stuck in a school
where he couldn't do anything that he wanted.

overheard in the forest





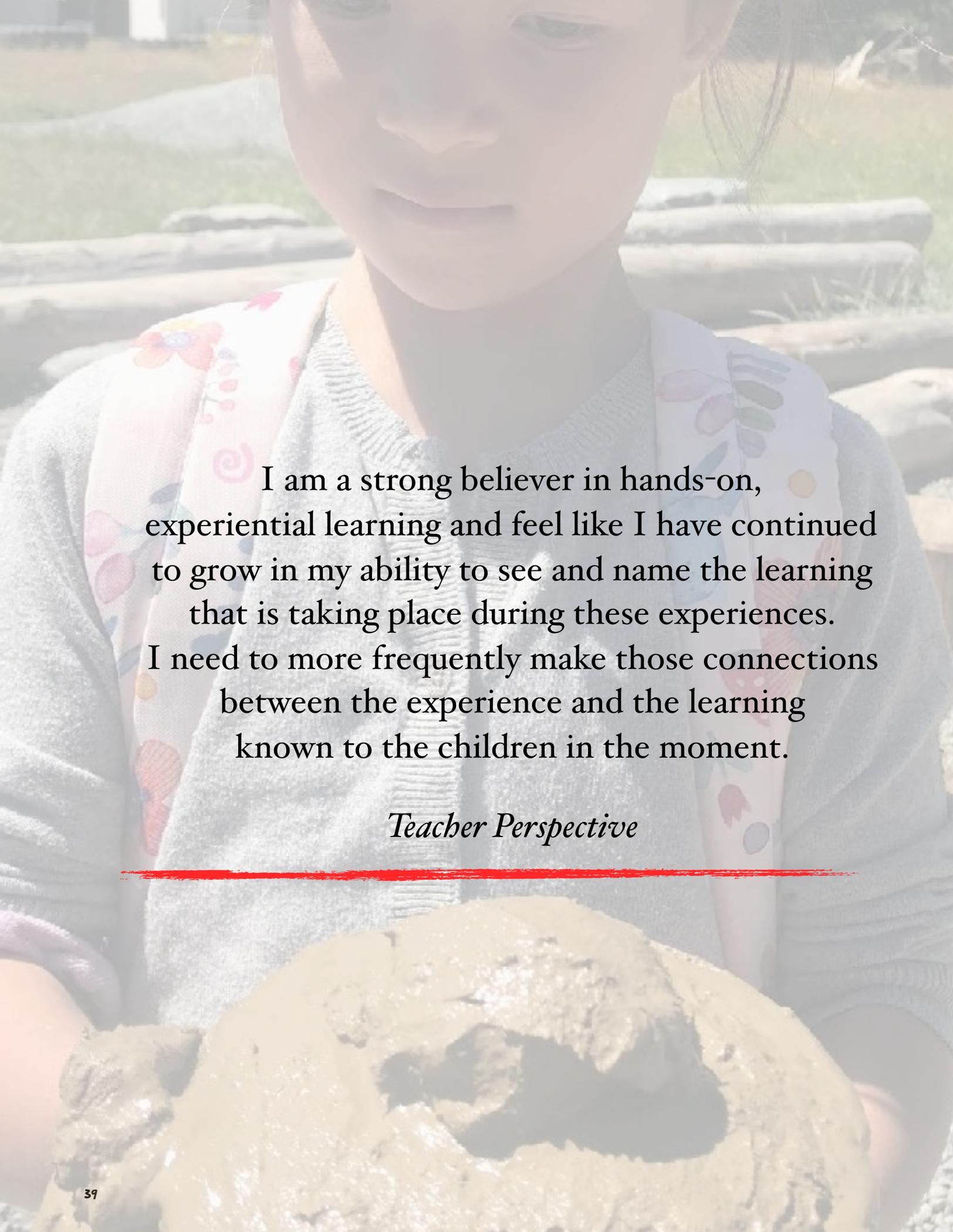
We deeply value hands-on, experiential learning emerging from childrens' play, curiosities, and questions.

The role of the adult is not as a transmitter but as a creator of relationships - relationships not only between people but also between things, between thoughts with the environment.

(Malaguzzi)

https://books.google.ca/books?id=NBXL2B40F9gC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

At Mill Bay Nature School you may see children attentively exploring the dirt noticing the new shoot that was there yesterday now missing. You may hear them wondering - "What happened?" "Where did the shoot go?" You may hear another child respond "deer!" Another may suggest "beavers?" Still another shouts "a T-Rex!" You may notice an adult nearby - a teacher - smile and hold, waiting to see what happens next - displaying the confidence and patience to allow children to follow their noses and hunches. They may take a photograph or record a note - reminding them of this small moment in time. Finally, in the fullness of the pause, an older child emerges from the forest beside the garden "We really need to build a deer fence if we don't want to feed the deer." "Why would we do that?" asks the one who noticed the missing growth. "What would the deer eat instead?" And so becomes a dialogue rich in wonder and compassion and understanding - between peers as thoughtful and ecologically accurate as any biologist could be - the interrelationship between deer and people and gardens. **The older child becomes a source of wisdom and knowledge; the younger, a fount of curiosity and wonder. The adult, a documentor of this small, but stunning moment; reciprocal respect found in this place of encounter and connection, interaction and dialogue, among citizens, younger and older, living and learning together - knowing that tomorrow holds more promise.**



I am a strong believer in hands-on, experiential learning and feel like I have continued to grow in my ability to see and name the learning that is taking place during these experiences. I need to more frequently make those connections between the experience and the learning known to the children in the moment.

Teacher Perspective



***Parent Voice: How has your child benefited from hands-on, experiential learning?
What challenges your thinking?***

Oh yes, it's the best. Learning on the trot, getting down and messy with the learning. The learning is happening and they don't even realize it. Stealth learning. And to top it off, they are giggling and joyful about it the whole time. They are benefitting because it makes learning fun, the journey of discovery is a real adventure, they touch, eat it, live it. It permeates into everything they say and do. The only challenges I have is when I've forgotten what's it all about. Sometimes you doubt that they are learning concrete facts and achieving old fashioned how-we-learnt at school knowledge. And then I must remember that the world is different and they are being educated for the future, not my past.

So much hands on, fully engaged and immersed. I have never seen a worksheet at MBNS which makes my heart so very happy. I am concerned occasionally that the learning is less academic and wonder about the transition to more colonial teaching models later. I still would choose this again and again. I am hopeful the academics will broaden and deepen as the kids progress into later years and get closer to transition into secondary.

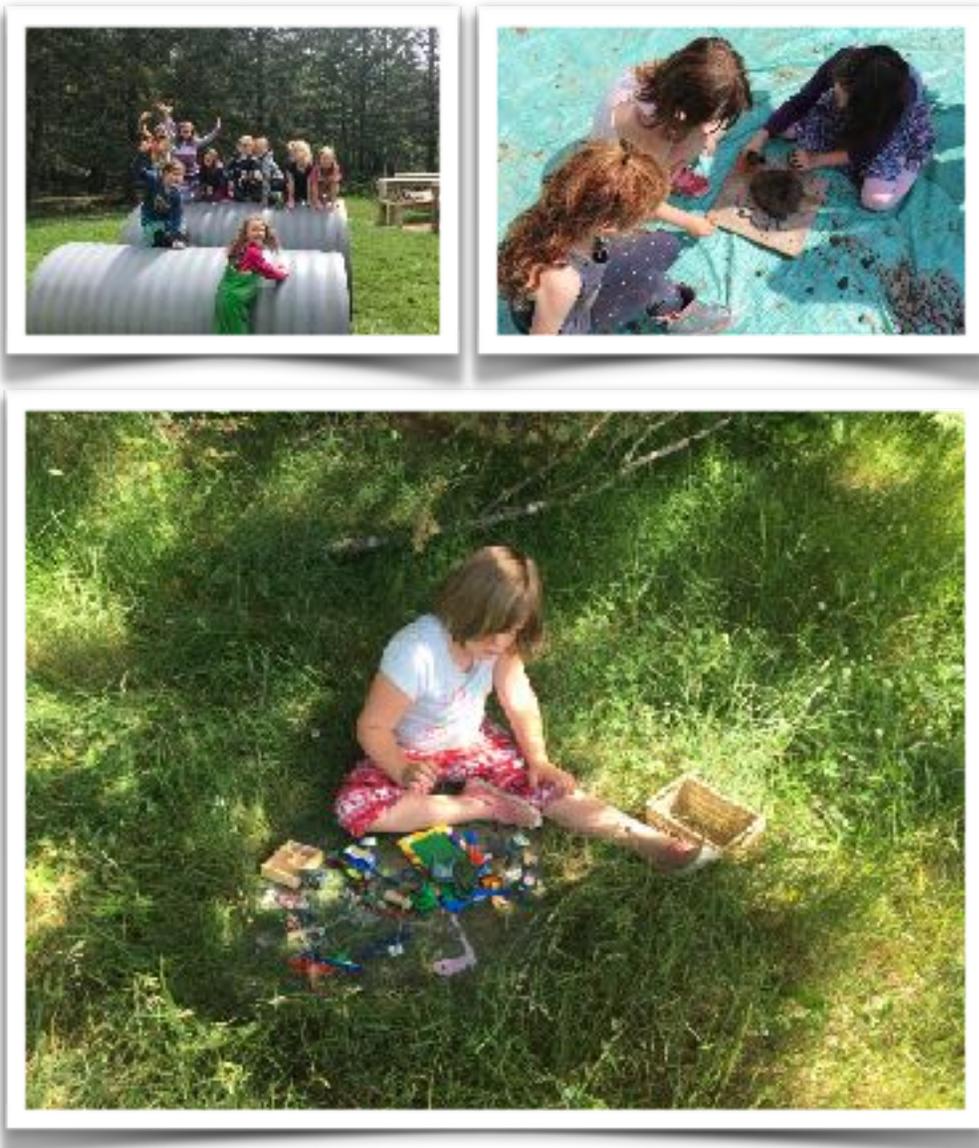
My child loves hands on learning and for him it is probably the best way to help him on his learning journey. He responds best to an environment where he has made a bond and respects an adult/teacher and will fully engage with learning. He found it difficult to concentrate in a traditional school environment and he was beginning to feel a lack of confidence towards school. At MBNS he is celebrated for his grit, determination and resilience and energy. He is able to express himself as he feels natural (barefoot, muddy, busy, industrious, climber, builder) and is given lots of time and space to do so.

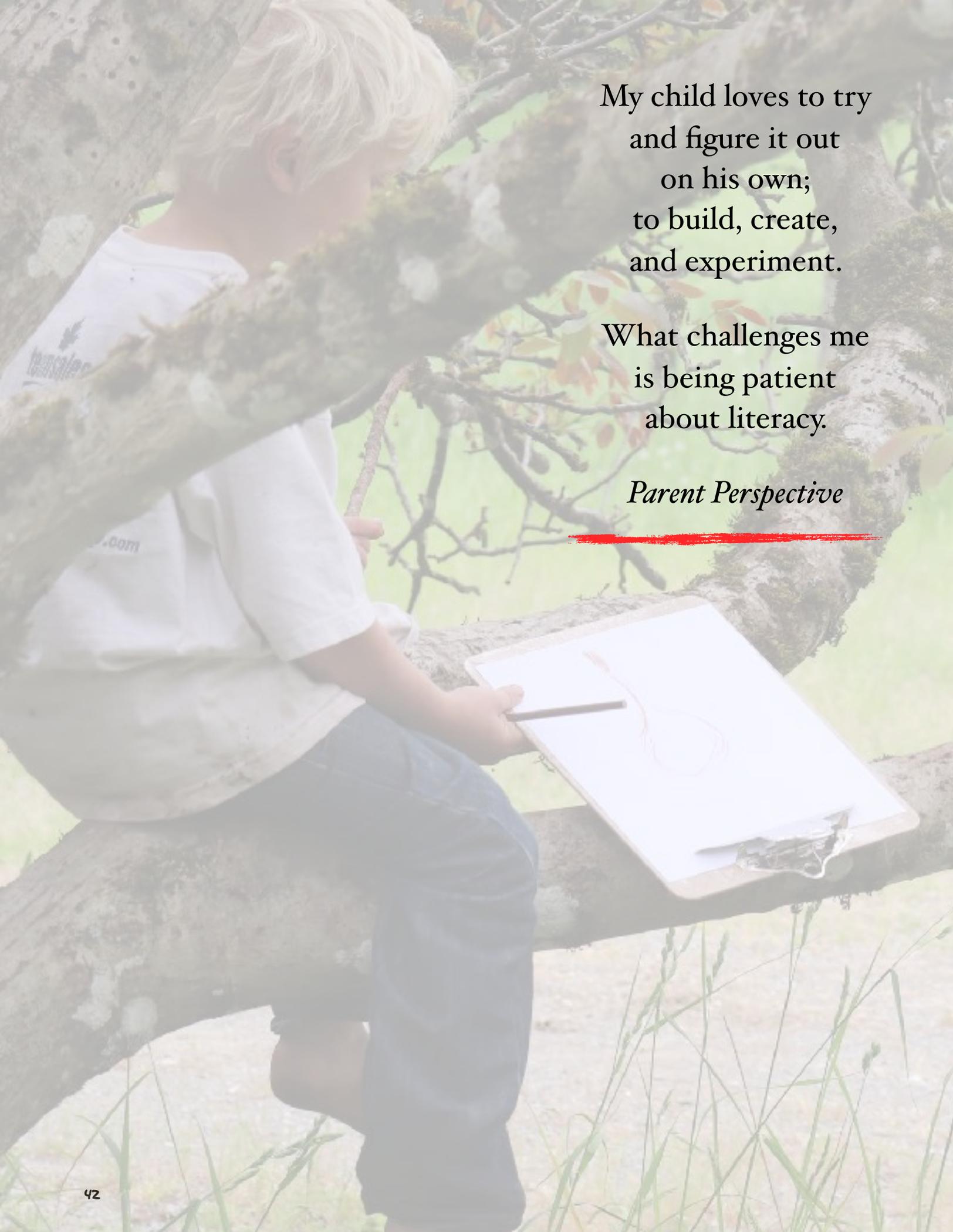


Yes, she has benefited. Learning how things work by having her hands on them, learning core competencies in different ways has reinforced the learning she has had. She understands things on a deeper, more kinaesthetic level.

I feel challenges with this style of learning only in that when he is faced with choices in his day to take on activities involving art or reading or music he will invariably choose the activity he likes and feels comfortable or 'good' at (biking, building, digging) and I would like to see him learn about every subject and to learn that doing things that are harder for him are important too to become a well rounded and respectful human.

I believe that my child has benefited a great deal from active learning that includes the body and the mind, and from being able to "play" with a great variety of materials in order to realize/create his ideas. What challenges me is that the whole school is running on a very high frequency almost all the time and there is not much in place for the "downtime" that lots of children need. There are teaching opportunities lost due to an often loud, chaotic environment that easily distracts children who might otherwise be content, and indeed thrive, with quiet, sit down learning.



A young child with blonde hair is sitting on a thick tree branch. The child is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. They are holding a clipboard with a white sheet of paper and a pencil. On the paper, there is a simple drawing of a circle with a line extending from it. The background is a soft-focus green landscape with more tree branches.

My child loves to try
and figure it out
on his own;
to build, create,
and experiment.

What challenges me
is being patient
about literacy.

Parent Perspective



We are committed to following children's lead in learning and to take up pedagogical documentation as a daily practice noticing what is emerging in the child's development - capturing moments through photography, video, dialogue, field notes - to share with others, to gain their point of view, and to better understand the child.

The key is abandoning the idea that one is teaching the curriculum. Instead, what the teacher should be doing is creating experiences for students that will result in the outcomes we want. Those experiences will produce unexpected corners for both teacher and student. The teacher has to be prepared to say, "I don't know. Let's find out." (R. Allen)

<https://mobile.edweek.org/c.jsp?cid=25920011&item=http%3A%2F%2Fapi.edweek.org%2Fv1%2Fblog%2F115%2Findex.html%3Fuuid%3D76784>

At Mill Bay Nature School, we imagine our work called teaching and learning as connected to the images of seeds, growth, decay, pruning, seasons, diversity, interconnectedness. This organic, ecological metaphor acknowledges that to promote growth and development in every learner, we must see the unique living being of each; considering the unique growing conditions needed - rooted in both nature and nurture. What are their personalities, gifts, limits, fears, insecurities, experiences, passions. What is her heart to become? What is the knowledge he needs to develop more fully? Moreover, this process of self-awareness is delicate and intricate, and as teachers we need to respect this unveiling - as difficult as it is at times. Like the complexity of ecology then, we become absorbed in interactions that cannot be reduced to a set of rules. How do we, as teachers, remain mindful of the creation of a learning culture ever-in-the-making that encourages risk taking so each may begin to expose his fragile, authentic, emerging self to the world? **Time and time again, children have taught us that teaching requires the preeminence of relational attunement - a patience and wisdom to watch, wonder, and wait. When we do so, learning becomes incomparably more productive.**



With our focus being on creating a new school - *new children, new parents, new place, new rhythms, limited outdoor learning opportunities, limited materials, etc.* - we found keeping up with documentation very challenging. Each one of us was deeply tired from relating and observing and responding to emergent issues, themes, considerations moment to moment each day, and so although we were committed to using Fresh Grade as a tool for communicating student learning - in particular, core competencies - our posts were few. This is a goal for next year - *How do we embed time for documentation in our days **before** we are too tired?* We have created a lead teacher position to help us take up this challenge:

A Pedagogical Narration Lead (i.o) - to take the lead in supporting the teaching team's understanding and practice of Pedagogical narration, and its relationship to assessment and reporting – *“Pedagogical narration is the process of noticing and collecting moments from daily practice and sharing these with colleagues, children, and families to make children’s learning processes and inquiries as well as educators’ pedagogical choices visible and open to interpretation and reflection. Central to working with pedagogical narration are critical reflection and a pedagogy of listening”* (p. 30, *Early Learning Framework, B.C. Ministry of Education*). **Experience with pedagogical narration and documentation is essential.**

Parents have expressed the inside look to Mill Bay Nature School life that Fresh Grade provides is helpful and leads to further learning at home - *Fresh grade gives me a view of his day, when I can't be there. It's helpful to see him at the front of the group, always engaged, and appearing to listen attentively. And whatever they are saying must be interesting to hold his attention (parent)*. Moreover, parents have also noticed the limited information provided this year and their desire for more which certainly nudges our development in this area - *I enjoyed seeing my child engaged in school activities through pictures on fresh grade but the tool has not used consistently or often enough. Would like areas of strength, areas where growth has been shown, and areas that requires further development with concrete examples so that I can share those examples with my child (parent)*.

Some parents and staff were disappointed with how our structure of formally communicating student learning (report card) did not fit the learning that was actually happening at Mill Bay Nature School - *I would love to see on the report cards where his mental and emotional maturity or progress is at, as well as his academics. Although I am trying to embrace the "he will learn these things when he's ready" I also need to keep an eye to make sure if he is never ready, how do we support learning from that point (parent)*. We also had two new staff in January who did not know the children very well for the end of January formal report. (Teachers did write “Initial Reflection” anecdotal reports in December



We are always in the process of co-creating collaborative teaching and learning environments with flexible groupings of learners (children, youth & adult).

We need to think of the school as a living organism. Learners (children, youth & adult) have to feel that the world is inside the school and moves and thinks and works and reflects on everything that goes on. Of course not all people are the same - each person brings a part of something that's different into the school. (Malaguzzi)

<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/nov2015/emergent-curriculum>

At Mill Bay Nature School you will see teachers working with communities or small groupings of children. These groups are not set or fixed, based upon year of birth, however, and will change depending upon the focus, the theme, the project of the day, the week, the month, and how each appeals to the diverse population of learners there. Like the world outside the school walls, as humans we are attracted to what interests us; what asks things of us that are appealing; what challenges us or frustrates us or stumps us. These cannot be predicted, and children need the opportunity to make choices - choices that may be wise or frustrating or incorrect - and in this way learn more about themselves and the world in which they live. This requires nimble adults; adults who are willing to try new things, new groupings, new challenges. At Mill Bay Nature School, teachers are willing to engage confidently as learners themselves - acknowledging they do not know everything or every process or every ecosystem or every possibility. Instead, they engage confidently in process - processes that provide children with high support and high expectations - the ideal conditions for human growth. **As days end and students are reunited with their families, you will see the staff at Mill Bay Nature School meeting and debriefing the day's processes - the celebrations, the frustrations, the challenges - *asking* What's next? What needs to change? What needs to remain and wrestle with? What is going well? *Always in the process of making and re-making this place.***



This is one of the strongest features of our school - this making and re-making - the courage to step back and reflect - asking questions, interrogating practices, providing reciprocal feedback. Although very tiring and disrupting to what we are used to, through these processes a powerful team has emerged - supportive, curious, humble, vulnerable, and stronger for realizing that *a cord of three strands is not easily broken* - or *six strands* in our case. With our lead teacher approach, teachers are encouraged to live out their passions and strengths rather than hide their weaknesses. We walk together - *Q-shintul* - rather than alone. We are a community of learners in symmetry with our younger co-journeymen. From the perspective of some parents, however, the fluidity of our rhythms and the movement of children into different Clans - sometimes three times since September - was very challenging. The contrast to 'the normal' - one teacher all year in traditional elementary programs - was a tough pattern to shake. Trust was broken until we found rhythms by February that were nourishing and productive for almost all. It was quite striking too that the children seemed to adapt to the changes, and most, it seems, developed stronger relationships with more adults - leading to a growth of choices during Playful Inquiries (led by the teachers and the head learner) - *My son feels comfortable and safe with all of the teachers (parent)*. **Below are some parent voices reflecting the diversity of opinions:**

The changes were very challenging. Moving to a new grouping - while important to have similar learning abilities together - was disrupting enough without all the changes in the teachers. It took a toll on our child's health. However, the relationships with different adults is very helpful - there are studies that say a child needs meaningful contact and relationships with at least 5 adults who aren't their parents in order to travel through childhood and adolescence in a healthy way, and this definitely has been helpful in this. Different teachers bring different abilities and ways of imparting information and skills. This has been helpful.

The changes were hard, but predictable. I do love that the entire staff knows my child including the amazing secretary. I have seen so much disruption in every year since starting school for our son, so there is some disappointment as teachers take extra time away or leave the school mid-year.

"I don't think my children were particularly impacted by clan changes in the fall. They seemed to be quite cooperative. One was very pleased to get April, the other sad to lose April but because they have a relationship with all clan leaders and adults in the school, it was not too much of a deal switching clan leaders. Knowing the various adults in the school has definitely made my children feel more secure and happy to be themselves. It is not just one adult who has a connection with my child but all of them through shared communal activities. This allows my child an opportunity to find the right adult to share and trust their problems with. Or indeed to approach the nearest adult with a challenging moment or help."

It allows the children to connect with a variety of people with different interests, knowledge, and ways of being in the world.



We have a passion for building meaningful connections between home and school - grounded in trusting interconnections between all adults that care for and share the same child.

We use the words “funds of knowledge” to refer to historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for family or individual well-being - to survive or thrive. (Greenberg; Tapia; Velez-Ibañez)

<https://rylak.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/moll-et-al-1992.pdf>

Children are already deeply rooted in communities before they step onto the field at Mill Bay Nature School and become part of its ecology. They are not blank slates.

They have been loved, supported, and influenced by families, friends, neighbours, daycare providers, babysitters, coaches, teachers, media, television, etc. Children have already learned so much from these ecologies - long before they begin formal schooling. Families, in particular, offer rich repositories of accumulated knowledge - household histories and practices - that need to be acknowledged, appreciated, and honoured at school. At Mill Bay Nature School we welcome family members, neighbours, community members to become a part of our community, and we hope they will share their gifts, strengths, passions, and interests with us; maybe pitching possibilities and ideas to the children during our morning circles. You may hear things such as: “I really enjoy knitting. Would you like to learn?” “I make things with wood. Is anyone interested in building a bird house this afternoon?” “Have you ever done yoga before?” “I used to live in Mexico. Would you like to discover how to speak Spanish?” “I study ukelele at Frances Kelsey. Would you like to learn how to play?” “I love to read. Would anyone like to listen to me read amazing stories once a week?” **The possibilities to mentor are endless; the trust, reciprocal relationships, and competencies that naturally emerge from them are magic.**



Reflections ...

This has emerged as another strong feature of our school - *I am always welcome to come and participate. My presence is never a burden, or uncomfortable. And I appreciate that so much (parent) - My relationship with the school has been meaningful and positive and I feel supported with caring for my son and his education. I feel he is a respected individual in the school community and is treated as a whole person (parent).* Inviting parents, extended family, and community members into our school community to walk together with us - Q'shintul - has invigorated the guests, the children, and the staff - *Being able to reach out to any adult at the school when issues arise, is amazing. Even touching base with the secretary, she is engaged and invested in your child. It's not a hands off, pass it along type school. If there's an issue, all parties seem to be on board to find a solution, or a way forward. Bravo (parent).* We enjoyed CLUB days in the fall led by parents and community members, have an open door policy in Clanrooms, welcome reading mentors in the spring, and a collection of eco-conscious experts throughout the year. Our PAC is called the Eagle Clan and has a very engaged group of parents. Each person brings their unique style, personality, ways of being in the world, interests, opinions, ideas, ways of expressing their emotions, passions; children are delighted to see themselves reflected in another - particularly a grown-up - and the staff grows in learning new things from experts, as well as being supported by a developing network; each Clan now has a Clan Parent.

I visited over thirty families for home visits as questions or concerns emerged throughout the year - an opportunity for thoughtful discourse; understanding deepened - *Kim visits homes and constantly makes herself available to kids and families. She is the true root of the connectedness of this school. She is leading by example and I believe and hope this practice will spread (parent).* This practice will continue to be an important part of our school: building understanding and confidence in parents of our compassionate disruption of education coupled with thoughtful, considered research-based educational practices, leading to emotional safety and resultantly the learning & growth of children *and adults - I have felt tremendously supported by the staff, and I find it incredibly valuable to my son's well-being as well as my own (parent).*



A group of people, including a woman with glasses and a woman with sunglasses, are smiling and looking towards the camera. They appear to be in a car, with the interior visible. The image is slightly faded to allow text to be overlaid.

Knowing that the adults who are caring for my little darlings - are fully committed to the success of my children is massive. I have had several chats with Clan Leaders where I realized they knew my child better than I did in some areas. It places huge confidence in me because I know they know my children inside-out. They take the time to understanding the back stories, the side stories, and the daily stories.

They are acting in true loco parentis. I treasure this belief that the school encourages, and I truly feel my children understand this commitment as much as I do. They feel it everyday. What better way to form trust and to provide a safe environment is there?

Parent Perspective

The staff is committed to the philosophy embedded in the renewed B.C. Curriculum.



They are open to inquiring about their own practice - reflect, adapt, change - and willing to delve into deep, transformative conversations - seeking feedback, understanding, and growth.

Becoming aware is strenuous and hidden work involving honesty, vulnerability, personal sacrifice and the decomposition of self-interest so that students in our care are provided what they need to grow and learn.

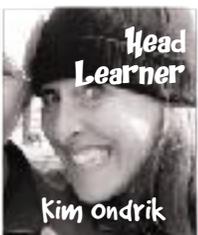
oñdrik

<https://vernoncommunityschool.wordpress.com/ondrik-research-study/what-is-the-lived-curriculum-we-have-co-created-at-our-community-school/>

Introducing some of the Teaching Staff for 2018-2019



My family roots reach back all the way to the Reformation twisted and turned over the centuries by challenges and opportunities. These opposing forces pushed my parents and grandparents to escape persecution in the former Soviet Union and pulled them to create a new life in Paraguay. Early life in Paraguay was hard, much like homesteading in Canada, but my incredible brothers and I had a marvelous childhood filled with games of tag in orange groves and spider fishing. We were blessed to be nurtured by parents who were always our advocates and cheerleaders. When I was 7 my family immigrated to Canada making me a grateful first generation Canadian. My passions are learning, exploring, and creating. I am curious about our world and the people in it. Luckily my husband, who is my rock, shares my curiosities. We enjoy spending time exploring through hiking, eating, reading, and traveling. Our home in Cowichan is where we kick off our shoes, ground ourselves, and joyfully host visits from our families. I adore my work as an educator. One of the best parts of teaching is seeing a child's eyes open wide when they discover something new.



My great, great, great + grandparents emigrated from Buck Country, England in the 1600's; one particularly brave woman travelled across the Atlantic in a freighter with 5 children and one in her belly at the turn of the 20th century as her husband was already coal mining in the Nicola Valley of British Columbia; and two of my grandparents came from Ireland and Denmark as young adults in the 1930's. I was born and raised in Tsawwassen by parents who cared deeply about their children - me and my two amazing and vibrant brothers - with grandmothers who nourished my inner artist and inner free spirit. My passions are: social justice, dancing, creativity, becoming wiser through listening and reading, and relationships. I deeply value sacred moments and unique clothing and boots. I am blessed with a gentle giant of a bee-keeping husband, 4 sons (16-25 years) who are full of life, and a vocational life spanning 3 decades now. Mill Bay Nature School is a beautiful dream come true - a place for my passion and vision, energy, and deep love for children and community building - and close to the ocean where my inner mermaid loves to explore the depths.

A photograph of two women sitting at a table in a brightly lit room, likely a cafe or restaurant. They are both looking towards the right side of the frame, appearing to be in conversation. The woman on the left is wearing a dark, sleeveless top with a small white pattern. The woman on the right is wearing a dark, sleeveless top. A window with wooden frames is visible in the background, showing greenery outside. The overall atmosphere is warm and natural.

This is truly lived out.
The school has been a place
of challenge and struggle
and yet we have always felt
that we could bring
our concerns, hopes & ideas
into meaningful dialogue.

Teacher Perspective



Parent Voice: Do you perceive a connectedness between staff openness and honesty, and your child's learning & growth ?

I have had many open and supportive conversations with the teachers and I know I can count on them if I need to discuss my children without judgement or shame and that is a powerful feeling to have in regards to my kids' education.

Yes. The culture of "problem solving" is full of valuable teaching in a very approachable way that is easily applied to all ages and easily understood by all ages. I am so very happy to hear adults at Mill Bay Nature School be genuine and authentic by expressing real feelings and to see my child learning a critical life skill by witnessing this and learning that it is healthy and safe to do so himself.

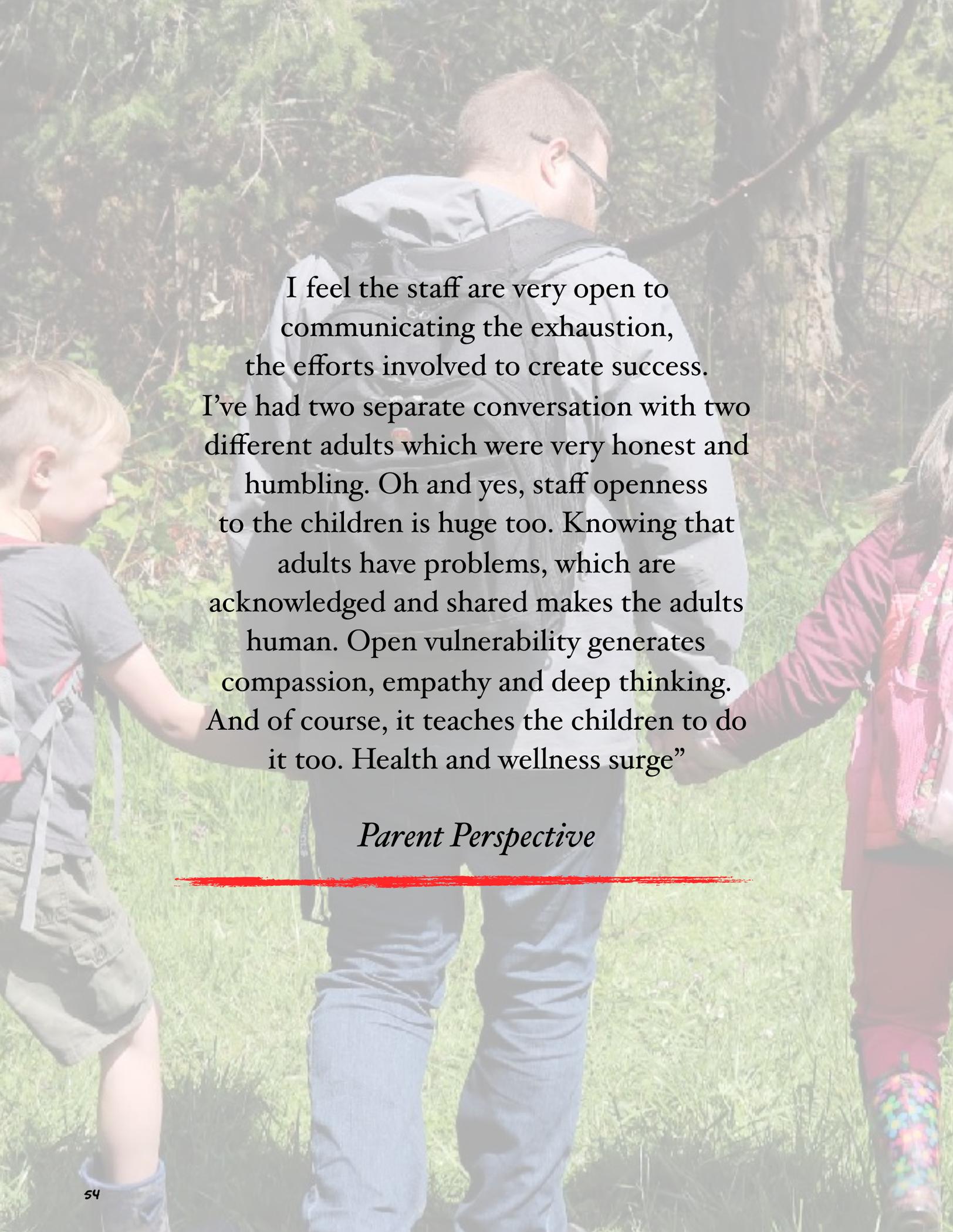
Yes, I am always in awe of Kim's recognizing when a child has been away from school and her honouring of that child. Also her ability to speak to almost every parent she comes in contact with about their child and an interaction she has had with 'said' child. She has taken the time to share stories with me about how some challenging moments have been dealt with. This all feels very honest and open. Thank you.

Seeing the important adults as "human" with failings, learning from mistakes and their own struggles has been very important. It reinforces respect for these adults in our child as she sees you as people with experience and integrity, not just people with power to just be obeyed "because I said so".

Staff Voice: Describe your journey this year

While I am often physically and intellectually exhausted at the end of the day, my heart is full remembering the joy and growth of the day. I am so glad to be part of this crazy, beautiful adventure.

The challenges of being an assistant in education involve being the conduit of co-creation. This experience has helped me develop faith that we can all ride through the ups and downs related to the ever changing nature of collaboration that works best when everyone's contribution is equally valued and when this happens the most amazing positive changes occur for all involved.

A man with glasses and a backpack is walking through a forest, holding hands with two children. The man is in the center, wearing a grey jacket and blue pants. To his left is a young boy in a grey t-shirt and shorts, and to his right is a girl in a red jacket and colorful boots. They are all walking on a grassy path surrounded by trees and foliage.

I feel the staff are very open to communicating the exhaustion, the efforts involved to create success. I've had two separate conversation with two different adults which were very honest and humbling. Oh and yes, staff openness to the children is huge too. Knowing that adults have problems, which are acknowledged and shared makes the adults human. Open vulnerability generates compassion, empathy and deep thinking. And of course, it teaches the children to do it too. Health and wellness surge”

Parent Perspective
