

A Field Guide

What can you expect at Mill Bay Nature School?



Mill Bay Nature School respectfully acknowledges that we are learning on the tradition, ancestral & unceded territory of the Malahat, Lake Cowichan, Quw'utsun, Halalt, Penelakut, S'iz'uminus, & Lyackson People.





Anticipating our fifth 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

created -"Standing on the shoulders of giants"- by Kim Ondrik
Head Learner, Mill Bay Nature School,
Cowichan Valley, the Warm Land
Edited by Pam Taylor, Maker Lead, Mill Bay Nature School for
the Forest and Nature School Practitioner course

Original Document, June 2018
Edited August 2023



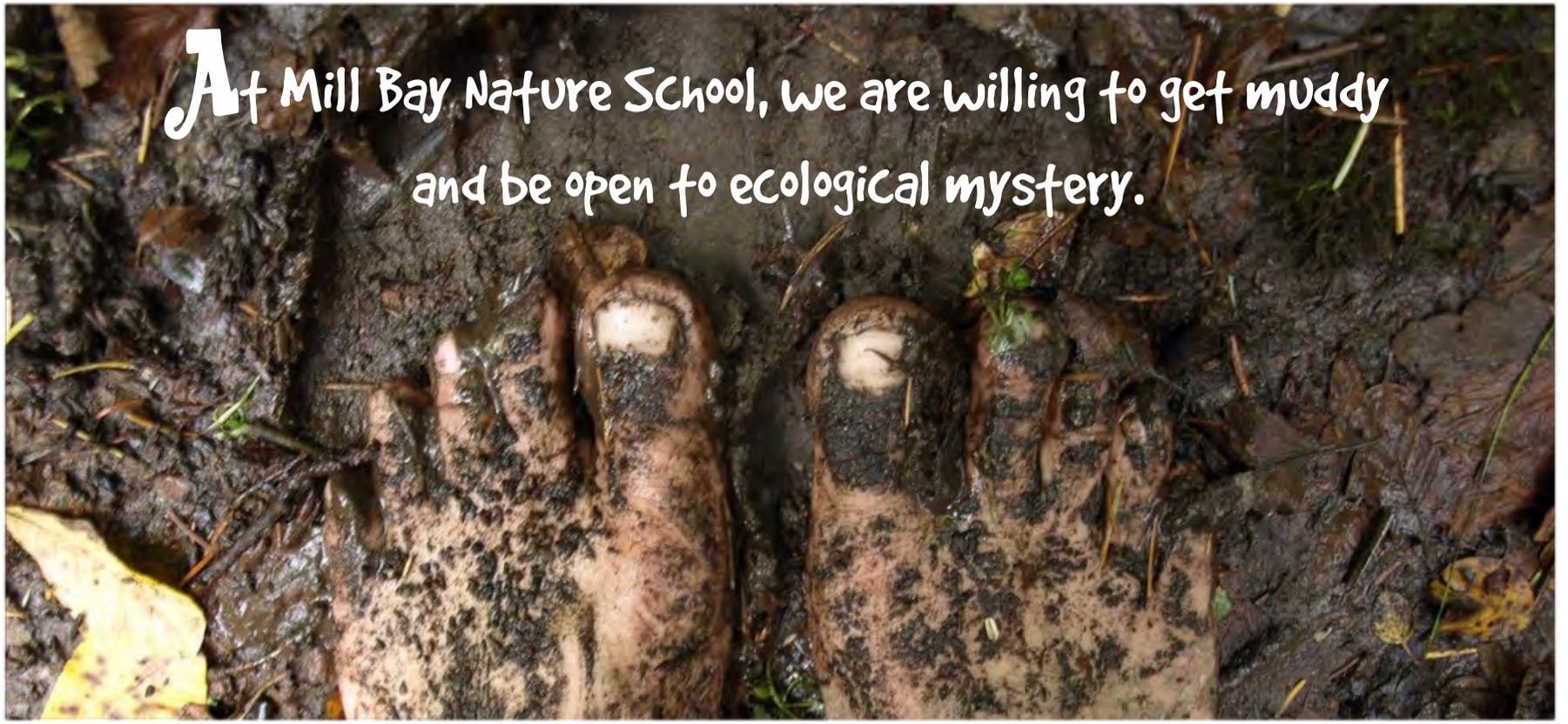
We are co-creating
from the ground up
a learning & teaching
community.

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.**

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, 2005

<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.



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 has clan 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 and 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.

A 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)
- **Backpack** to carry water, snacks, lunch kits, journals, etc. outside

We are excited to engage
with children 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, 1994

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.**

Learning Maps



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>

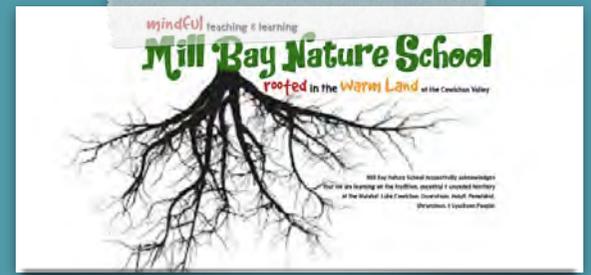
We are excited to engage with children from diverse backgrounds, gifts, talents, strengths, and challenges - growing the educated citizens outlined by the BC Ministry of Education (above). **We recognize that there are many different ways to develop these capacities - many different journeys - no one-size-fits-all.** 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 and also re-visited throughout the year. **Parents will be invited to reflect on the following questions which make up the Learning Map during evening gatherings in the fall and spring at Mill Bay Nature School (see following page):**

*The Maps meeting was designed by Forest & Pearpoint, 1992 at McGill University. It is a process to better understand the diverse and unique needs of students and is designed to help individuals & families move into the future effectively and creatively.

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.

Blank area for writing the child's personal history.

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

Blank area for writing the child's dreams and plans.

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

Blank area for writing the child's worries and concerns.

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

Blank area for writing the child's strengths and 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.

Blank area for writing the child's needs.

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 the Lelum (Hall/Longhouse) by the North-East doors (by the gym) - towards the East where the sun rises for . Clans gather together each week for Q'Shintul Lelum (Walking Together Hall) to bring up and discuss items that the children have deemed important for the school to witness. Students who are called to give the Land Acknowledgement, drum or speak for their clan are encouraged to do so. 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.**



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, 1994

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.**



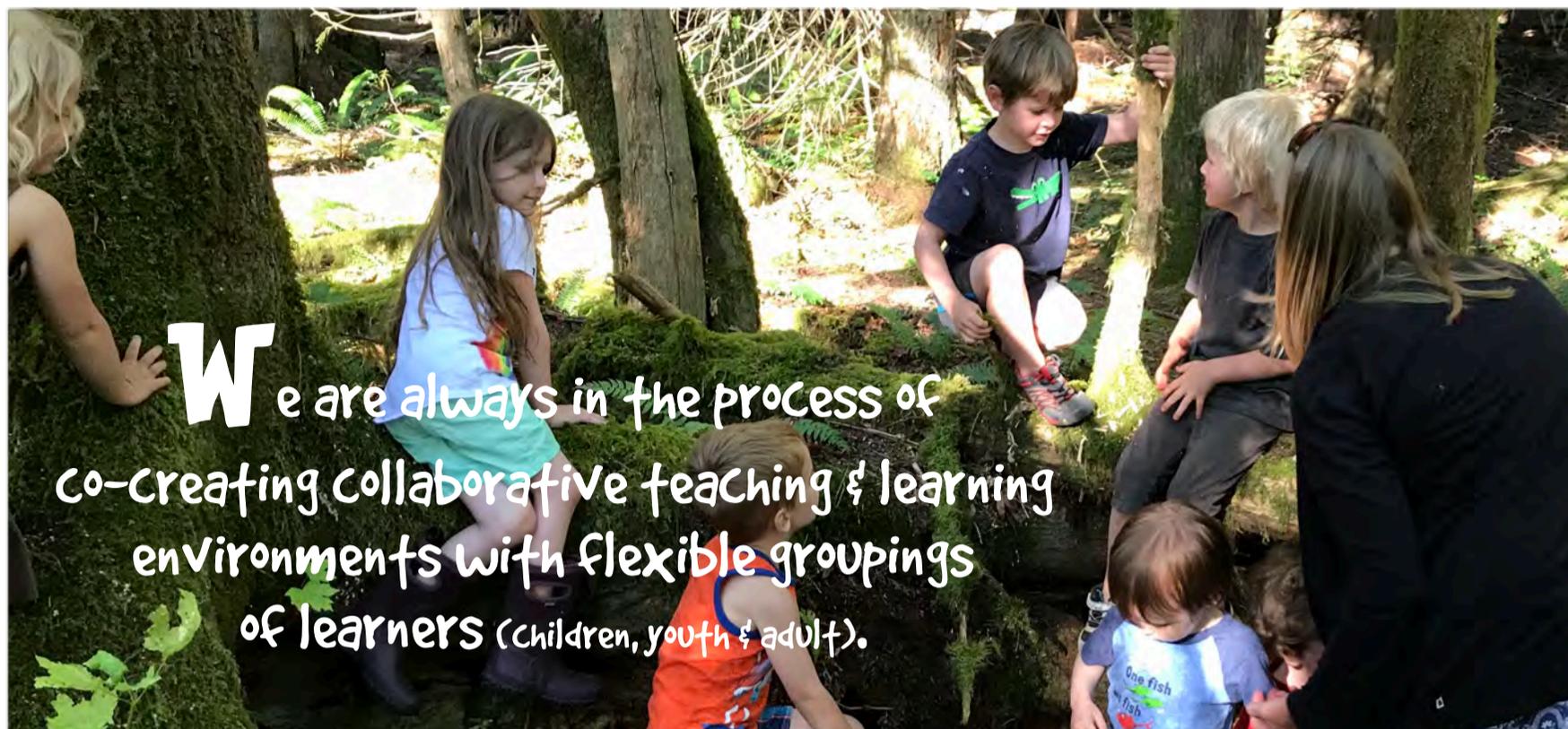
We are committed to following children's lead in learning and to take up pedagogical documentation as a daily practice noticing what is emerging in the child's development - capturing moments through photography, video, dialogue, field notes - to share with others to gain their point of view and to better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

Rod Allen, 2018

<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.**



We are always in the process of co-creating collaborative teaching & 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, 1994

<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? We are always in the process of making and re-making this place.**



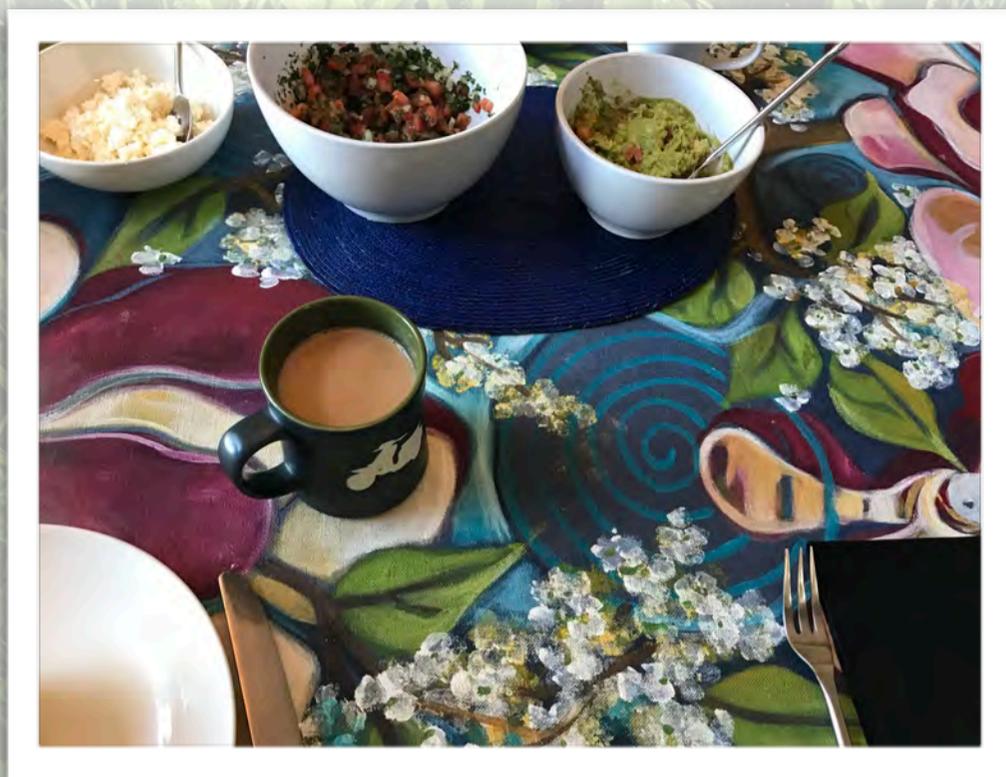
We have a passion for building meaningful connections between home and school - grounded in trusting interconnections between all adults that care for and share the same child

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, 1989; Tapia, 1991; Velez-Ibañez, 1988

<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.** <http://differentlensblog.blogspot.com/2018/02/involving-mentors.html>



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, 2016

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

The Teaching Staff of Mill Bay Nature School - 2023/2024

- Alison Leslie, Head Learner
 - *Erin Ritchie, Playful Inquiry Lead, Cedar Pod teacher
 - Anne Leslie, Dramatic Arts Lead, Cedar Pod teacher
 - *Pam Taylor, Visual Arts Lead, Maple Clan teacher
 - Chris Miller, Emotional Support Lead, Arbutus Clan teacher
 - *Cayla Hoefsloot, Indigenous Lead, Arbutus Pod teacher
 - Linda Crockett, Resource Teacher
 - Rebecca Ollinger, Educational Assistant
 - John Oldnall, Educational Assistant
 - Tara McLeod, Educational Assistant
- *first aid certified

Risky Play

"Play is biologically based and provides an evolutionary contribution to human development and changes."

Hyun, E. Culture and Development in Children's Play.



At Mill Bay Nature School, risky play and free play are an important part of our school rhythms and pedagogy. Risky play is explained as “giving children the freedom to decide how high to climb, to explore the woods, get dirty, play hide 'n seek, wander in their neighbourhoods, balance, tumble and rough-house, especially outdoors, so they can be active, build confidence, autonomy and resilience, develop skills, solve problems and learn their own limits.” <http://childnature.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/B.-EN-Active-Outdoor-Play-Position-Statement-FINAL-DESIGN.pdf>

Children are given the opportunities to explore, create games, build shelters, play in the mud kitchen, roll on the tubes and climb on the wooden candelabra trees or the log climber multiples times a day. The Cedar pod (ages 5 to 7) spend a significant time outside in the mornings, exploring the community garden, the mud kitchen and the Mill By Nature School campus. The Maple and Fir clans (ages 6 to 10) are often on field studies to the local water reservoir to look for wildlife, plant changes and the growth of trees - from the top looking down. The Arbutus clan (ages 9+) engage in community service around the campus which involves stripping deer hide of its fur, building structures and helping in the garden. All of these opportunities are examples of risky play.

Six types of risky play, as defined by Dr. Ellen Sandseter, are as follows:

- Great Heights—climbing, jumping, balancing, etc. with a risk of falling
- High Speed—uncontrolled speed and pace while running, biking, etc. with a risk of collision or injury
- Dangerous Tools—knife, axe, saw, etc. with a risk of injury
- Dangerous Elements—fire pits, cliffs, open bodies of water, etc. with a risk of falling or injury
- Rough & Tumble—wrestling with other children, roughhousing, fencing with sticks, snow ball fights, etc. with a risk of injury
- Unsupervised play—exploring alone with a risk of getting lost

You may see all of these types of risky play at Mill Bay Nature School during free play or when in clan.

Why is Risky Play and Free Play Important?



Risk-taking in play helps children to:

- test their physical limits
- develop their perceptual-motor capacity
- learn to avoid and adjust to dangerous environments and activities.

Children will try things out when they are unsure of the outcome. There is a thrill for children to learn something new, learn how the world works, how their body works, and how it feels to find something they enjoy doing. By engaging in risky play and free play, children can develop their abilities to plan, manage and develop their social skills, build stamina, and promote self-esteem.

Free play (engaging in open ended, unstructured play by themselves or with other children) has many benefits for children of all ages.

- Brain Development - new connections and pathways are formed in the brain
- Creativity
- Social Skills - collaboration, negotiation, following rules, solving conflicts
- Planning Skills - thinking ahead to what is needed to engage in the play
- Motor Development - large motor (climbing, jumping, running) and small motor (Lego, sculpting)
- Problem Solving - changing the rules to make games fair for everyone, solving conflicts
- Language Development - learning new vocabulary
- Independence - finding things that they like to do and practicing them
- Visual Perception - visual memory, depth perception
- Auditory Perception - listening skills, auditory memory
- Spatial Perception - body awareness
- Healthy Expression - making sense of the world

At Mill Bay Nature School, children engage in free play and risky play with adults (teachers, EAs, head learners, Elders) supervising and guiding as problems arise. When problems are presented to adults, questions are asked. **"Did you give feedback to _____? Did they give you feedback?" "What would you like to happen next?" "Have you considered how _____ would feel about this?" "Do you need some time to calm your body and your mind before we talk to _____?"** Adults at Mill Bay Nature School have knowledge and training in Restorative Justice Problem Solving. Adults help without judgment and consider all parties involved when helping children to share their thoughts and feelings.

"Play has been described as the work of children which helps them develop intrinsic interests, learn how to make decisions, problem-solve, exert self-control, follow rules, regulate emotions, and develop and maintain peer relationships."

Pellegrini, A.D. Play: What is It? In The role of Play in Human Development; Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 2009;