

MindStretched By Claire Warden by Liz Hicks and Eryn Wolstenholme.

You too can have your mindstretched by Claire Warden by attending the June 7 & 8, 2013 NS Child Care Conference, Connecting...Connexions...

"If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in." ~Rachel Carson

If children need an adult as a companion to share the wonder of nature, then adults need Claire Warden as a companion to help us share nature with children! ~Liz&Eryn

So why Claire Warden?

The authors of this article had no idea who Claire was until they went to the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership Conference 'Leadership Connections' in May of 2012. Claire presented workshops with such interesting titles as - *The Potential of a Puddle* and *Nurturing Through Nature*. Eryn went to the latter because she was interested in outdoor programing and considers it important for children. Claire Warden blew her away! Eryn was so enthused that she skipped the next workshop she had registered for and went to the *The Potential of a Puddle* instead! Many other participants did the same.

Eryn said of Claire's presentations: *"Well, Claire is funny as well as so real. I went to both workshops because she was really interesting, interspersing her talk with lots of anecdotes, ideas, and great photographs that made the ideas and topics live. Claire is a very accessible presenter who answers any and all questions. She is encouraging, inspiring and best of all practical."*

Liz had been involved in a different track at the conference but was very intrigued by Eryn's enthusiasm for Claire. Liz tracked down Claire at her Mindstretchers' booth in the trade show. (Claire is the founder of Mindstretchers) After a thirty minute conversation with Claire, Liz became a fan also. Claire was approachable, enthusiastic about the world and people, and knew a lot about Canada and Nova Scotia!

Nature Kindergartens:

Claire advocates for educators to spend as much time outdoors as indoors with children.

"...imagine a place where the carpet change every day, the ceiling is a myriad of different colours, light, shadow and movement. The feelings and movement completely surround you, sometimes breezy, sometimes cold, others warm. Unexpected wonders fly by, sometimes full of colour and sometimes full of noise and movement. If we really want children to thrive we need to let their connection to nature nurture them."

~ Nurture Through Nature, Claire Warden 2007

Such is the environment in the nature-based preschools that she began - Whistlebrae Nature Kindergarten and Auchlone Nature Kindergarten in Perth and Kinross, Scotland UK. Mindstretchers opened the first outdoor Nature Kindergartens in Scotland in 2006 and 2008 with the underlying philosophy of Claire Warden as defined in her book Nature Kindergartens. These Kindergartens were run under the direction

and management of Claire Warden and Niki Buchan both who have had a huge amount of experience as teachers, consultants and nursery managers, and a great love of nature and the outdoors. Children from the age of 2 years spend about 80% of the day outdoors in all weather. They have access to the very naturalistic garden and to the wilder woods attached to the Kindergartens where they use tools to build dens, cook on fire and explore nature.

She encourages us to take time in nature – not rush things, savour the moment, revisit time and time again, each and every season.

"Adopt the pace of nature; her secret is patience"
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson.

A few of the ideas she shares are:

- Find a leaf and peep through it – make a tube or hole
- Can you take a dead stick apart and put it back together?
- How many times can you wrap up a stone or a stick?
- Go for a walk and collect stones. Then go back and try to remember where they were picked up.

Risk Taking Benefits:

Claire encourages children to think critically by presenting a certain amount of risk taking activities. She believes that there should be a healthy dose of challenge and risk within a framework of security in all children's environments. The children can be seen climbing trees, shimmying under roots, balancing on rocks, stepping on stones over rivers, whittling with knives, and baking bread on sticks in camp fires.

Claire strongly believes that children should be consulted throughout the planning process. She tells a story about a Centre that had a small lake in the back yard. The licensor came and wanted a fence erected around the lake because of it being a safety hazard. The licensor was encouraged to talk with the children and get their opinion. The children were asked what **they** considered the risks to be and how could these be managed. After these discussions and the realization that these children knew the risks and better still knew how to manage the risks with the teachers, the licensor allowed the lake to stay without the fence!

"It comes down to voices enabling choice." ~Warden

She emphasizes that teachers are key to making a nature curriculum and risk taking environment work. They have to work in collaboration **with** the children, consulting with them about risk taking activities, and participating designing their environment. Teachers are "present" with the children. Together with the children, they are attentive, observant and listen with all senses. They are aware and engaged in what the children are doing and what they are curious about.



CONNECTIONS
1200 Tower Rd
Suite 100
Halifax, NS
B3H 4K6

902-423-8199
www.ccnns.org
info@ccnns.org

Teachers are expected to collaborate with each other in exploring their own values, and work together to understand what is learned in a nature based environment. Nature is appreciated by experiencing it. They explore its benefits and their roles in risk taking and providing learning opportunities. She points out that this collaboration may not be easy, even risky – not everyone wants to understand the rewards of being outdoors, or are even to be curious enough to try.

Nature Through Nature:

Claire offers many workshops where educators experience the delights of the great outdoors – including making stick bread, handling fires, whittling, and making dens. Best of all, teachers become aware of the ‘unexpected wonders’ – rain, sun, wind, snow, ice, shadows

“The miracle is not to fly in the air, or to walk on the water, but to ‘really’ walk on the earth” ~Chinese Proverb

She points out that children do not need commercial equipment to work out their gross motor muscles - logs, rocks, boulders, stumps, hills, streams and sticks provide ample gross motor exercise. All children’s developmental domains can be covered in the outdoors. In a study of 41 playgrounds in North Carolina, Hestenes, Shim, & DeBord (2007) found that on playgrounds with more natural elements, children displayed less functional or repetitive behavior and more constructive play.

Another major message that nature gives is an understanding that death is a natural process. Encountering death in nature is a much more ordinary way of understanding and discussing this inevitable part of life without traumatizing children.

Mindstretchers

Claire is the founder of **Mindstretchers**, a company that consults on natural kindergartens and coordinates professional development. Mindstretchers also designs and produces a range of resources to motivate and inspire children and adults to learn. They are also based on fair trade and environmentally friendly ethics.

Claire has traveled to present keynotes and workshops, and visit other nature based centres throughout the world – the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Scandinavian countries.

National Vision and Values for the United Kingdom to encourage a consistent approach towards outdoor experiences:

Claire was involved in the creation of this document. Her practical and philosophical approach is woven throughout. Its vision and values state:

The vision for all young children:

- All children have the right to experience and enjoy the essential and special nature of being outdoors
- Young children thrive and their minds and bodies develop best when they have free access to stimulating outdoor environments for learning through play and real experiences.
- Knowledgeable and enthusiastic adults are crucial to unlocking the potential of outdoors.

Core Values for high quality outdoor experiences for young children

1. Young children should be outdoors as much as indoors and need a well designed, well organised, integrated indoor-outdoor environment, preferably with indoors and outdoors available simultaneously.
2. Play is the most important activity for children outside.
3. Outdoor provision can, and must, offer young children experiences which have a lot of meaning to them and are led by the child.
4. Young children need all the adults around them to understand why outdoor play provision is essential for them and adults who are committed and able to make its potential available to them.
5. The outdoor space and curriculum must harness the special nature of the outdoors, to offer children what the indoors cannot. This should be the focus for outdoor provision, complementing and extending provisions indoors.
6. Outdoors should be dynamic, flexible and versatile place where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play environment.
7. Young children must have a rich outdoor environment full of irresistible stimuli, contexts for play, exploration and talk, plenty of real experiences and contact with the natural world and with the community.
8. Young children should have long periods of time outside. They need to know that they can be outside every day, when they want to and that they can develop their ideas for play over time.
9. Young children need challenge and risk within a framework of security and safety. The outdoor environment lends itself to offering challenge helping children learn how to be safe and to be aware of others.
10. Outdoor provision must support inclusion and meet the needs of individuals, offering a diverse range of play-based experiences. Young children should participate in decisions and actions affecting their outdoor play.

Claire begins many of her books and presentations talking about ‘joy’- *“.. to introduce you to an emotion that summarizes the way I see young children ‘feel’ when they are involved with nature. They are ‘chuffed’! In a state of ‘chuffedness’, for the sheer joy of it all.”* Claire encourages us to experience, share and promote this joy in her books and presentations.

Claire Warden will inspire you and give you practical, useful suggestions for how you see children and their environments. She will encourage and motivate you to expand your comfort level and incorporate risk into your programming. Her presentations and work will give you joy. She will give you something you can take back to the children in your care, then take them outside and be the *“...companion ...who can share it, rediscovering [together] ... the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.”*
~ Rachel Carson

About Claire Warden:

Further information on Claire Warden from her web page:

Claire Warden. B.ED Hons, Dip Drama, CEO
Mindstretchers Ltd is an educational consultant who has developed her approach to experiential learning through a variety of experiences.

- The web page goes on to describe the many 'pathways' that brought her to her present position:
 - Lecturer in Primary Education at Strathclyde University
 - Created a charity called 'Living Classrooms' which works to connect children, families and community in the outdoor environment
 - Set up Whistlebrae Nature Kindergarten and Auchlone Nature Kindergarten in Perth and Kinross, Scotland UK
 - Created 'Mindstretchers' as a training consultancy in 1996
 - An author of many books and materials relating to early years methodology. These include
 - *The Potential of a Puddle* that details the national vision and values for outdoor play;
 - *Talking and Thinking Floorbooks* which presents the planning methodology that supports consultation and democracy in early education;
 - *The Right to be Me* which explores the rights of young children to high quality provision;
 - *Nurture Through Nature* which explores working with children under three outside;
 - *Nature Kindergartens* explores children's connection to nature and naturalistic spaces such as Forest Schools, Forest Kindergartens, Woodland camps and Nature Kindergartens.
 - She is one of a leadership group of consultants who make up the World Nature Collaborative. The purpose of the group is to develop a cohesive network and approach to experiential learning in outdoor spaces in a variety of climates. The nature collaborative brings together educators, landscape architects, environmentalists and health workers to support a multidisciplinary approach to outdoor educational provision. Claire is the European education co-ordinator.
- Some useful web resources:
 - <http://www.claire-warden.com/index.cfm>
 - <http://www.mindstretchers.co.uk/>
 - <http://www.whitehutchinson.com/children/articles/outdoor.shtml>
 - <http://www.naturalplaygrounds.com/research.php>
 - http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/cfeoutdoorlearningfinal_tcm4-596061.pdf
 - <http://earthplay.net/>
 - <http://www.saultstar.com/2012/04/28/puddles-offer-so-much-potential>

References:

(Many of Claire Warden's publications will be available for sale at the conference, and through preordering with your registration)

- Learning Pathways Book* by Claire Warden, Mindstretchers Ltd., ISBN: 9781906116057
- Nature Kindergartens and Forest Schools* (Second Edition), Claire Warden, Mindstretchers Ltd., ISBN-13: 978-1906116095
- Nurture Through Nature*, Claire Warden, Mindstretchers Ltd., ISBN-13: 978-1906116163
- Fascination of Fire (Charcoal)*, Claire Warden, Mindstretchers Ltd., ISBN-13: 978-1906116118
- Fascination of Earth (Wood Whittling)* by Claire Warden, Mindstretchers Ltd., ISBN-13: 978-1906116125
- Fascination of Water (Puddles)*, Claire Warden, Mindstretchers Ltd.
- Potential of a Puddle: Creating Vision and Values for Outdoor Learning*, Claire Warden, Mindstretchers Ltd., ISBN-13: 978-1906116156
- 'THE RIGHT TO BE "ME"'* by Claire Warden, Mindstretchers Ltd., ISBN-13: 978-0954488338
- The Sense of Wonder*, Rachel Carson (Author), Nick Kelsh (Photographer) ISBN-13: 978-0067575208
- Nature*, Ralph Waldo Emerson, ISBN-13: 978-1468114348

Connecting...Connexions..., the 24th annual Child Care Conference and Trade Show is thrilled to have **Claire Warden** as its featured presenter!

Claire will present on Friday, June 7, 2013:

- **Risk it! & Consultative Management, an all day professional development day for administrators.** This day will demonstrate how educators can support children to be self-risk assessors who are resilient and thoughtful about their own personal safety, and who can make choices about what risks to take and to explore how a consultative management approach can create team ownership.

And on Saturday, June 8, 2013 she will present:

- A Keynote: **Fascination... Puddles** and
 - **The Potential of a Puddle-** a 2 hour workshop for all conference participants, to explore the vision and values of outdoor learning and discuss how to overcome the barriers that prevent us from going outside.
 - **Conference Registration package is enclosed!** A number of Claire's publications will be available for purchase by conference participants.
-

CONNECTIONS RESOURCE LIBRARY www.cccns.org/library.html

Canadian Child Care Federation (2003)

Outdoor play in early childhood education and care programs. Ottawa: CCCF. CCC-NS No. G-092-CCCF.

Elliot, Enid and Blanchet-Cohen, Natasha (2009) "Pollinating our passion for the outdoors: Working in the community of researchers, educators and children for natural landscapes," *Interaction*, 23(2): 28-30. CCC-NS No. A-080-Eli/Int.

Haugen, K. (2003) "Beyond ramps: Outdoor environments to welcome all children," *Child Care Information Exchange*, 150: 55-57. CCC-NS No. A-080-Hau/CCIE.

Johnson, Marlene Power (2009) "Forest preschools: ECE in the natural world - Learning through experience, play and environmental stewardship," *Interaction*, 23, (1): 35-37. CCC-NS No. A-080-Joh/Int.

Keeler, Rusty (2008) *Natural Playscapes: Creating outdoor play environments for the soul.* Redmond, Washington: Exchange Press. CCC-NS No. A-080-Kee.

Nelson, Eric (2006) "The Outdoor Classroom: No Child Left Outside," *Exchange*, 171: 40-43. CCC-NS No. A-080-Nel/CCIE.

Osborn, H.A. (2003) "Outdoor Magic for Family Child Care Providers," *Child Care Information Exchange*, 150: 52-53. CCC-NS No. G-130-Osb/CCIE.

Power, Marelene (2012) "Forest Preschool Chronicles," *Interaction*, 26, (1): 12-15. CCC-NS No. A-080-Pow/Int.

Vogels, Peter (2009) "Healing the wound: reconnecting children with nature," *Interaction*, 23(1): 28-30. CCC-NS No. A-080-Vog/Int.

Warden, Claire (2010) "Risk It!" *Exchange*, 192: 61-64. CCC-NS No. G-090-War/CCIE.

Warden, Claire (2010) "Children as designers of their own space," *Exchange*, 192: 103-104. CCC-NS No. A-080-War/CCIE.

Warden, Claire (2007) *Learning Pathways: A framework for activity based learning.* Perthshire, Scotland: Mindstretchers Ltd. CCC-NS No. A-080-War

Warden, Claire (2012) *Fascination of Fire: Charcoal.* Perthshire, Scotland: Mindstretchers Ltd. CCC-NS No.

Warden, Claire (2012) *Fascination of Earth: Wood Whittling.* Perthshire, Scotland: Mindstretchers Ltd. CCC-NS No.

Wike, James (2006) "Why Outdoor Spaces for Children Matter So Much," *Exchange*, 171: 44-48. CCC-NS No. A-080-Wik/CCIE.

Williams, Alyson E. (2008) "Exploring the natural world with infants and toddlers in an urban setting," *Young Children*, 63 (1): 22-25. CCC-NS No. H-090-Wil/YC.

Wilson, Lynn and Winder, Connie (2012) "Natural environments and emotional well-being," *Interaction*, 26 (1): 16-22. CCC-NS No. A-080-Wil/Int.

Connections Journal 16.2
March 2013

This is the last edition of Connections.

Connections, the mini journal of Child Care Connections, was published two to three times each year. The publishers neither endorse nor oppose opinions expressed in this publication and the enclosed newsletter, and do not vouch for any claims in published advertisements. We reserve the right to refuse ads or submissions that are contrary to the aims and objectives of Child Care Connections. Contributions from writers should be discussed with the publications editor prior to submission, a style sheet is available. Advertising rates are available on request. Advertising space may be limited to allow priority to editorial content. Child Care Connections reserves the right to refuse advertisements.

ISSN:0843-6304

Mailed under Canada Post
Publications Mail Sales Agreement #
40052845

Editor: E. Elaine Ferguson
Child Care Connections
100-1200 Tower Road,
Halifax, NS B3H 4K6
(902) 423-8199
1-800-565-8199 (Atlantic)
(902) 492-8106 (fax)
info@cccns.org
www.cccns.org

Child Care Connection Nova Scotia wants to thank all the wonderful colleagues, friends, and supporters who have worked with us to achieve our goals from 1988 to 2013.

"Investments in children will be maximized through recognizing, valuing and supporting the development of an effective, quality early childhood community in Nova Scotia.

- ♦ *There will be a comprehensive, coordinated early childhood community that maximizes resources.*
- ♦ *Early childhood practitioners in Nova Scotia will be self confident, skilled and professional*
- ♦ *There will be a favourable public image of early childhood practice.*"

We hope that you will join us in celebrating our legacy at a party in November 2013. There will be storytelling, gift giving, an auction of our office art work & other articles and perhaps some special guest speakers.

Email us if you are interested, info@cccns.org