



Staying the Course

As I reflect on the years I have served on the Board of GICEL since its inception in 2003, the phrase that comes to mind is “staying the course.” We cannot claim to have taught large numbers of students, but we have been there year after year, offering a steadily expanding volume of activity in our summer programs of ecological learning for children, and experimenting with other programs for families and adults.

We have seen children return year after year and recommend the program for their friends. Indeed, some of the first students are now returning as assistants and teachers. We know that there are parents and grandparents (myself included) who are waiting for their children to come of age to participate in a GICEL program. Though the numbers may not be extraordinary in light of the need for this kind of learning in the wider world, we should never underestimate the impact that any one of our graduates might have as a leader in the future. This is why it is important for us “to stay the course.”

The last months of 2008 saw the economies of industrialized nations go into free fall for a variety of reasons that I need not go into in

detail here, and that development has once again deflected political attention from the pressing concerns of global warming and environmental degradation worldwide. But this time there is a difference, because hovering in the background now, even for politicians notoriously unfriendly to environmental concerns, is awareness that the public now knows that it can't be business as usual, not only in consumptive capitalism, but also in the economic discounting of the environment. Awareness is now emerging that the economy and the environment are inextricably linked, and if we want to bring the industrialized world back to economic health, it will require fundamental change in how we live in and with the natural world.

So that is why the ecological learning programs of GICEL and other like-minded agencies are so important. That is why the Memorandum of Understanding signed this year between GICEL and the Gulf Islands School District is such a timely development. It anchors the work we do in the foundational structure of formal education. Children going through the schools today will be the citizens and leaders of tomorrow who will have no choice but to re-invent the way humanity lives on the planet.

GICEL in its partnership with the Gulf Islands School District and the Saturna Ecological Education Centre is one of the good news stories that the world so badly needs. If we ever despair of our inability to achieve as much as we would like, we must remember that we have a valuable contribution to make to a future that is seeking to emerge. The most important thing for us to do is to “stay the course” and help build the platform of ecological learning on which that future surely depends.

Desmond Berghofer, Chair

Report from Board Chair

For Year January 1, 2008 – December 31, 2008

In 2008 the Board continued to oversee the offering of GICEL's summer programs and other activities. The major new development was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Gulf Islands School District #64. Details of this Agreement and other Board activities appear below.

Board Membership

During the year the Board received with regret the resignation of Murray Ducette as Secretary Treasurer and welcomed Russ Searle as a new Board member. At year end the Board of Directors was as follows: Desmond Berghofer (Chair), Mike Hoebel, (Vice-Chair), Jeff Hopkins (Recording Secretary), Michael Dunn (Programs), Steve Dunsmuir, Shelly Johnson, Cate McEwen and Russ Searle.

Board Meetings

The Board held regular meetings on March 14, June 27, and October 3. The AGM was held on March 14.

Memorandum of Understanding

On June 27 Desmond Berghofer on behalf of the Board signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Gulf Islands School District #64. Special thanks are due to Mike Hoebel for working on the draft of this Agreement.

Under the terms of the MOU the District and GICEL acknowledge their common objective in developing ecologically literate and responsible citizens who are committed to lifelong learning. In view of this common objective the District and GICEL agree to collaborate in several ways. Areas of collaboration include, but are not limited to:

1. **Saturna Ecological Education Centre (SEEC).** In general GICEL will participate in the planning of the SEEC residential facility and deliver programs at the SEEC facility for families and adult groups on weekends and during the summer months.
2. **Summer Ecological Exploration Program (SEEP).** GICEL will offer children's summer programs at Fulford Community School (Salt Spring), Pender School, Mayne School and Saturna School. The District will designate SEEP as a District summer program, will promote the program, and will provide administrative oversight and ensure SEEP receives coverage under the District's insurance plan.
3. **District Literacy Plan.** GICEL will support the District Literacy Plan by developing programs for high school age youth and adults that provide experiential learning about ecological principles and local ecosystems as a focus for developing communication skills.
4. **School programs offered by local conservancies.** GICEL will facilitate information sharing among conservancy organizations on Salt Spring, Galiano, and Mayne that are providing school programs on their respective islands. GICEL will prepare an overview report for the District about these different locally delivered school programs and will provide annual updates to the District.





Under the MOU the District and GICEL agree to maintain regular communication about matters related to their common objective. The District Superintendent, or his/her designate, and Principal of the Saturna Island School, or his/her designate, will serve on the GICEL Board of Directors, and the District may name other designates to represent the District on the GICEL Board. The District and GICEL will acknowledge each other in various forms of publicity including links on their respective websites.

The Board is pleased to have established this formal MOU with the District and looks forward to ongoing collaboration

Grant Proposal (Letter of Intent)

In July, Michael Dunn and Desmond Berghofer worked on the development of a Letter of Intent to apply for a grant to the Vancouver Foundation in the amount of \$10,750 to develop teaching and resource manuals that would consolidate the experience and teaching materials developed by GICEL teachers over the years. The Vancouver

Foundation advised that it was not able to consider the application further in the current cycle of funding due to overwhelming volume in applications in its environment and education categories. The GICEL Board is considering other avenues for submitting grant proposals to support its developmental work.

Website

Led by Michael Dunn, the Board worked to upgrade the GICEL website using the services of John Cameron provided by the School District. A new graphic and site plan were developed. Further development will continue in 2009.

Contact with the Get to Know Program

Through communication with Robert Bateman GICEL established contact with the Get to Know Program which undertakes a variety of activities to promote ecological learning. The possibility for collaboration will be pursued in 2009.

These were the major activities of the GICEL Board in 2008.



The Saturna Ecological Education Centre

The Saturna Ecological Education Centre is a busy place these days, as our students are actively engaged in the design and development of our new outdoor learning and living centre at Haggis Farm on Saturna Island. Phase one involves the creation of a wilderness campsite featuring forest trails, scenic base camp sites, interesting field studies spots, group challenges and a beautiful pond where eagles, beavers, frogs and mergansers reside.

Phase two will involve the construction of unique student residences that will provide comfortable and cooperative group housing for our visiting learners from throughout the Gulf Islands and beyond! Students will

be closely involved with the design of sustainable living systems and ultimately responsible for their own creature comforts, as they'll share in the cooking, cleaning and maintenance of their shared living space.

Seven groups have signed up for Eco-Adventures at SEEC so far this spring. These groups may come for day or overnight programs and will be the first to try out our new Haggis Farm site. Our own students will serve as "Environmentors", being trained to lead visiting learners through a series of exciting and enlightening outdoor activities. Most of our visiting groups come from the Gulf Islands, though one class will make the journey all the way from Salmon Arm!

SEEC's High School Environmental Leadership program, and new Middle Years program, are currently accepting registration for the 2009-2010 school year. We are SEECing students from across the Gulf Islands, Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. These place-based & experiential programs run for three days each week and provide full credits towards graduation. Space is limited and interest is heating up as spring leaves begin to bud.

Our school was recently featured as part of a documentary series entitled "Evolving Education". This production highlighted three schools across Canada that are changing the way we approach high school learning, and SEEC is one of them! Our segment, entitled "Creating Community", can be viewed on SCN (Bell 266 or Star Choice 352) on May 4, May 8, June 8 and June 12 at 9:30 pm. We will also have a number of copies of the DVD available in our school district during the coming months for those who wish to view this production.



From the Perspective of a New Board Member

I grew up in a Canada that was very different from the current one. Potable water was not scarce, mining slag heaps were an invisible cost of doing business, pollution control was generally unheard of, and the rest of the world was something we learned about after the news had been filtered through a newspaper. I never thought about ecology.

A burgeoning world population, scarcity of clean water, and instant access to world news has changed my perceptions. Mankind's stewardship of the planet has been less than stellar, and will only improve if we individually recognize that we can each make a difference.

GICEL assists in this by educating us, and more importantly our children, about the world we inhabit, and how we can each make daily contributions to improve our place of habitation. I'm proud to be a member of GICEL—an organization that makes a positive difference one person at a time.

Russ Searle

Family Retreat

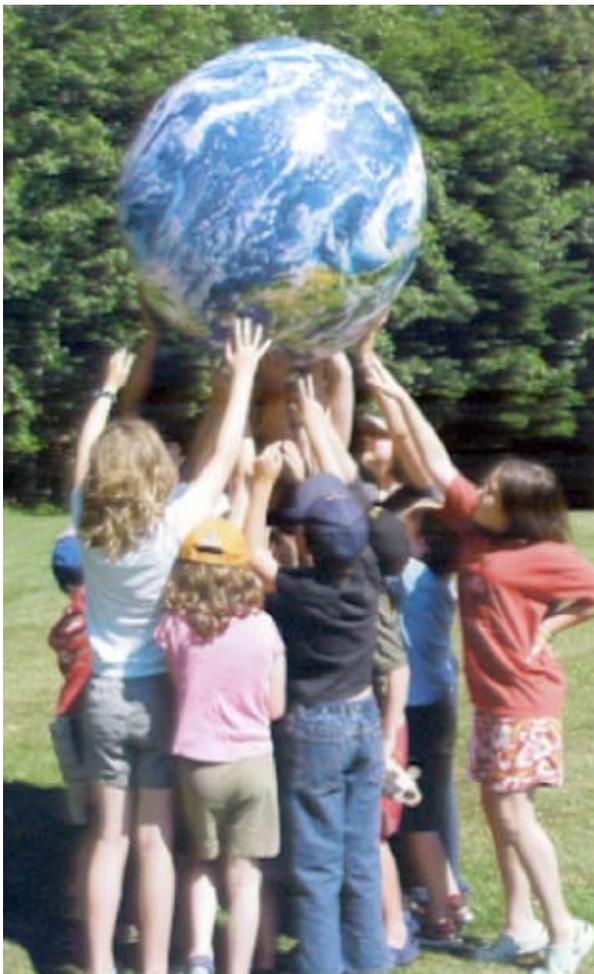
For the first time GICEL hosted a Spring Break family retreat on Mayne Island in March 2008. This was a joint program of Ecoliteracy Canada and Royal Roads University Continuing Studies. The theme was to explore the real world wide web of nature. Five families participated and explored the marine and forested ecosystems, did night activities on the beach, searched for bats and learned about organic farming methods. Feedback received from participants was overwhelmingly positive about their experiences and the quality of the activities that they undertook. A family retreat for the 2009 spring break period was subsequently planned, but as of this writing it was cancelled due to insufficient enrollment.



Our Summer Earth Education Programs (SEEP)

Our 2008 summer programs were held on 4 of the Gulf Islands again this year. Collectively, this represents 6 weeks of programs offered with a total attendance of 137 participants, the highest summer enrolment we have recorded since our first program in 2001. With this year's numbers, we are approaching 800 total participants since our beginning, a very good trend.

As in previous years GICEL summer staff provided varied and exciting nature-based activities that included development of a bug wall made of drawings of insects discovered



while exploring a forest, nature photography, birds and in one instance, a drumming session. Participants also had time for free explorations, games and nature crafting.

Again this year with the generous support of our community sponsors on each of the islands, we were able to provide a substantial level of bursaries to families wishing to send their children to our summer programs. This year the bursaries amounted to over \$4,000. In this we thank our local funding partners for their continuing and generous support of our work.

Home Schoolers

In June, GICEL staff hosted a group of home schoolers from the Prince George area. Nineteen mixed aged children and their parents were immersed in an exploration of Burgoyne Bay's intertidal and nearshore ecosystems and organisms. This was a day program that included detailed studies of an eelgrass ecosystem and rocky intertidal ecosystems. A beach seine was also employed as was the use of an aquarium to build our own marine ecosystem for close study.



Children in Nature Alliance

Over the year, Program Director Michael Dunn has been involved with the development of the notion of a province-wide Children in Nature Alliance. This work culminated in the second gathering of nature-based learning organizations, academics, government officials and youth at Royal Roads University for the Get Outside! It's in our Nature conference. This gathering's purpose was to further the galvanizing of a Canadian network dedicated to encouraging more opportunities for engaging children and their families in nature. This is in response to the US based Children and Nature Network that has evolved since the release of the landmark *Last Child in the Woods* book by Richard Louv in 2007. Over 200 participants attended and collectively have committed to what is called the Hatley Park Declaration.

By signing on to this Declaration, GICEL is now an active partner in the creation of the Alliance particularly in the realization of its stated objectives and actions. Please check out www.childnature.ca for the full text of the Declaration and updates of the progress of the Alliance.

2009 Memberships are now due

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

- Family/individual \$25/year
- Organisation \$50/year
- Charter Membership \$1000
(includes life membership)

I would like to renew my GICEL membership and continue to support its vision of providing ecological education in the Gulf Islands

Amount enclosed: _____

Signature _____

Please mail your cheque or money order to
GICEL P.O. Box 496
Salt Spring Island, BC
V8K 2W1