**The Creation of the**

**Connecting Children with Nature**

**Environmental Action Kit**

 “The Story”

Planet Earth is vulnerable to environmental threats of monumental proportions. Finding solutions to environmental challenges will require the best minds and best efforts of this and future generations. It is vital that we help today’s young children develop positive emotional connections with nature so that they will want to take action on behalf of the environment as adults. IBM has shown valuable leadership in this area by sponsoring the creation of this **Connecting Children with Nature Environmental Action Kit.**  (From now on, we will refer to this as simply the **Kit).**

The World Forum Foundation has made a commitment to the Clinton Global Initiative to connect two million young children with nature in the next two years. In order to attain this goal, the World Forum Foundation worked, with the support of IBM, and collaboratively with the Nature Action Collaborative for Children (NACC) Leadership Team and the Dimensions Foundation Nature Explore staff to create this Kit. It is the goal of everyone involved in this project that this Kit will serve as a helpful and important resource to people all over the world who wish to re-connect our children with the wonders of nature.

**Developing Sections of this Kit**

The project of compiling and creating the Kit began with a comprehensive review of current environmental education materials intended for use in early childhood (children age three through eight). The review process involved contacting respected professionals and leading agencies from the fields of early childhood education, environmental education, and the design community to solicit recommendations for materials to consider. Some of the groups responding included World Forum Foundation NACC Leaders, Alliance Members, Global Leaders, past Working Forum on Nature Education attendees, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), International Step by Step Association (ISSA), International Child Resource Institute (ICRI), National Association of Early Childhood Care and Education Malaysia (NAECCEM), High Scope, The International Society of Landscape Architects (ISLA) and the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), The Consultative Group, and many more.

Materials suggested for consideration were then collected and reviewed by a number of professionals. The goal was to find the highest quality on-line resources that would be of use to an international audience. Environmental impact in the production and distribution of the materials, international accessibility and applicability, developmental appropriateness for young children, and expertise required by the user were all considerations in the selection process. The materials receiving the high ratings are listed in the section labeled, “**Resources.”**

During the review process, a gap in the availability of materials that could help young children address environmental issues in a universal way became evident. As identified by a number of the agencies listed above, there is a great need for developmentally appropriate, hands-on activities and materials that can be used in homes and early education programs worldwide. A “Toolkit for Educators” and “A Toolkit for Families” were created in an attempt to provide universal activities that children throughout the world could enjoy. The goal of these materials is to help all children understand that certain environmental topics are universal (caring for plants or conserving water, for example). Activities were developed in such a way that any educator or family could use them without having to buy expensive equipment or supplies (as much as possible).

By culling the suggested materials for themes, topics, and activities and relying heavily on multi-sensory teaching strategies field-tested by Dimensions Foundation, these two Toolkits were created over the course of 2009-2010. These materials were then reviewed by selected professionals in each of the key areas, and produced in English, with activities translated in Arabic and Spanish. These activities are now in the “Materials for Educators and Families” section of the Kit. One more aspect to this section was added: An Eco-Friendly Guide for Early Child Programs. This Guide attempts to make sense of the mountains of information on how to help a program “go green.” It offers simple, common sense steps for getting started on this effort, and also provides guidance for those designing or re-designing a new child care center facility.

After these materials were created, the need for more sections of the Kit became apparent. Participating organizations noted the need for a way to make sense of the vast amounts of research on children and nature, so a section with executive summaries of key pieces of research related to this topic was developed. A few selected links to other web sites containing helpful research are also included. These can all be found in the section labeled, appropriately enough, **“Research.”**

Another section of the Kit was created to tell the story of why collaborations between educators, environmentalists and design professionals can strengthen efforts to re-connect children with nature. International leaders in these three professions contributed short essays on this topic. They are found in the **“Professional Collaborations”** part of the Kit. In that section, there are also brief summaries of the “guiding principles” of each of the three collaborating professions.

Another section of the Kit, called **“Tools for Advocacy,”** includes: A DVD based on recommendations written by the NACC Leadership Team called “Universal Principles for Connecting the World’s Children with Nature.” Featuring wonderful photos from around the world, the DVD uses words, pictures and music to send powerful messages to educators, designers and families. Also included in the Advocacy section is a power point presentation that anyone is free to show to groups, administrators or funders.

The **“Tools for NACC Groups”** section was created to help anyone, anywhere who would like to create a local or regional Nature Action Collaborative for Children group.

The **“Recommendations”** section of the Kit is meant to invite submissions of new or existing resources for possible inclusion in the kit. An international review committee will review recommendations on a quarterly basis.