PATTERNS

ASCD Systems Thinking and Chaos Theory Network Newsletter: American Society for Cybernetics Newsletter March/April 2004

From the Editor:

This morning I awoke acutely aware of the springtime pattern of death and resurrection experienced in nature and human spiritual understandings. Not only did I feel the pattern of moving from nocturnal sleep to daytime awareness but in the broader perspective, I realized that this issue of PATTERNS reflects the same sense of moving from dying bureaucratic systems to living innovative systems of education.

As a part of our socio-political world, I am inundated with the awareness of this pattern of the waste of deadening bureaucratic systems maintaining old patterns of belief and action which no longer work, and the awakening of a people with the creative/destructive energy to keep the life cycle going.

It is tempting to wrap life's complexity in the neat packaging of the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics but it does give me a sense of the energy that springs from the tension created in the opposing movement toward super-order, the deadening control of a centralized power which seeks to homogenize the planet, and the creative/destructive disorder that maintains the living diversity of design options.

Designing new systems within this tensional relationship is the challenge of our time. **Kathleen Forsythe** and **Brent Cameron** demonstrate this creative energy in our lead article.

Reading this article, I am reminded of the oft-quoted statement of Victor Hugo.

There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world, and that is an idea whose time has come.

(continued on page 8.)

SelfDesign Learning Community: Nurturing Lifelong Learning

by Kathleen Forsythe

For the past two years Kathleen Forsythe has been involved with the operation of the SelfDesign Learning Community in British Columbia, Canada. SDLC is a pilot project of Wondertree Foundation for Natural Learning under the aegis of the BC Ministry of Education, Independent School Branch and is a pilot program to demonstrate an approach to Distributed Electronic Learning. Prior to this she was Chairperson of the Board of Directors of Wondertree Foundation for 10 years.

"Wondertree's SelfDesign process ... applies to both the nurturing of our children and to lifelong learning relationships. The solution arises not as a quantitative answer but a qualitative one. SelfDesign does not expect children to do more, to learn more or to learn more efficiently as a measure of their success. The real solution does not exist using the kind of thinking that is creating the problem in the first place. The solution to having to deal with too much information is not to increase the speed at which we assimilate ideas, nor does the solution come from spending more time at our studies or starting at a younger age. The solution comes when we shift to a new paradigm, when we shift from quantity to quality, from "out there" to "in here", and from constant stimulation and change to stillness. The new paradigm emerges when we work in harmony with the natural learning ability of each child."

Brent Cameron, author of SelfDesign: The Wondertree Story,

About Wondertree Foundation for Natural Learning

The mission of the Wondertree Foundation for Natural Learning[1] is to become an organization that is known world-wide for its support of children and their right to learn naturally. Our goal is to work with people in creating the world as a happier, friendlier, safer and healthier place for us all to live. To achieve a more ecological world through meaningful relationships, we intend to increase awareness of the need of children to be listened to, to be known and to be respected. Our work is to participate in the creation of sustainable learning communities around the world. Our new paradigm of learning is a comprehensive science and art of respect, of SelfDesign and global ecology, and a fundamental acknowledgment of every individual's ability and their right to fulfillment.

Wondertree was founded in 1983 as a non-profit society. It is an independent research and development project that has pioneered a new methodology for learning in contemporary society. Wondertree has developed an innovative model that has inspired hundreds of people to trust the ability of children to learn naturally, and further to gain insights into their own natural learning strategies. Wondertree advocates the

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Who are the Learners?

It would be impossible to profile the extraordinary achievements of the children and youth who are selfdesigners. One lives on a remote ranch where there is no electricity or phone, although there is a satellite uplink with a generator. She writes great short stories and is practicing to go to the North American Rodeo championships. She's 16. Another learner who is 15 has already completed three university courses and is traveling in New Zealand playing rugby. Another, at ten has already acted in three Shakespearean plays. Others at 12 are just deciding they want to learn to read, although they are already highly literate from having been read to for hours a day for years. Others are differently abled and achieve amazing learning in ways that might never be noticed in a classroom setting.

Learning at Home

SDLC is considered a "school" and not home learning, which is why it receives half of the public school funding per student. SDLC also has to conform to certain protocols of the Ministry of Education, which have been translated so as not to unduly impinge on the natural way of learning. For example, 'attendance' becomes tracking of learning, 'report cards' are replaced by Learning Plan Reviews, 'curriculum' is replaced by detailed learning plans, and 'evaluation and assessment' becomes observing for learning. Most importantly, however, is the generation of spaces for conversation that extend among the homes of families for whom home learning has been an active choice and who finally are receiving some level of support for their efforts.

Of the $2650 that SDLC receives for each child, $1000 is invested in the Learner's Plan and goes to the family for the necessary resources and community mentors. The remainder pays for the part-time Learning Consultants and project coordination and technological infrastructure. Everyone involved works from their own home via computer, and all school administrative requirements are handled electronically. Wondertree uses only public funds for the project and receives no other support.

For further information see:
www.wondertree.org
www.selfdesign.org

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rights of all people, regardless of age, to choose and direct their own learning curriculum, a curriculum that is an expression of their own enthusiasm and sense of fulfillment. In the democratic learning community, the core philosophy supports each individual to discover how to optimally "SelfDesign" his/her life.

The Wondertree program has achieved award-winning results, significant media attention and, most important, the enthusiastic support from children, parents and educators who have participated in the program over its initial 20 years of development.

SelfDesign represents a unique methodology founded by a small child learning to talk and her father who designed a learning environment around the process of innate intelligence and the "unfolding of the infinite interior"[3]. The Wondertree learning community has grown around its ongoing ability to enfranchise children to learn naturally. Unlike most educational models that are variations on the theme of classroom instruction, Wondertree emerged from the unimpeded curiosity of children.

The SelfDesign Learning Community[4] – A Distributed Electronic Learning Project

The SelfDesign Learning Community is a new learning option in British Columbia. Although technically a Class 1 school under the Independent Schools Act, SDLC refuses to be called a school. Although all our learners live and learn in their own homes, SDLC is also not home schooling. SDLC is a network of families and learning consultants that support children learning in their homes and in their community in a manner determined by the child and family. SDLC is a learning community because it is through our support for each other, both parents and children that we create a learning community that is synergistic and much more the sum of our parts. From September, 2002- until the present SDLC has enrolled 100 students aged 5-18 and their parents as part of a pilot program on distributed electronic learning funded by the Ministry of Education, Independent Schools Branch.

> *SelfDesign is a program that focuses on the natural learning ability of each individual. We assume that children are naturally and equally intelligent and curious to understand how the world works and are fully engaged in a developmental process of achieving ever more comprehensive relationships with others and the world. We understand that children's right to determine and direct their own learning process is fundamental and when respected empowers the individual with a sense of integrity and well being. We assume that human beings are essentially equal and that the respectful inclusion and consultation of each child in their learning process is essential to the comprehensive unfolding of their intelligence. In the fostering of mutual respect and appropriate development of an individual in a culture, we encourage children to understand their role with others, their parents and mentors and society at large.*

The SelfDesign Learning Community Program

The SelfDesign Program involves supporting learning that arises rather than teaching a curriculum. We support children and their families to nurture natural learning and to conserve the disposition of wonder within a space of love. We do this for children and youth ages 5 – 18 who live throughout the province of British Columbia, in cities and in remote rural ranches, where learning takes place primarily in the home and the community as an integrated aspect of daily living.

The Structure of the SelfDesign Learning Community

The structure of the SelfDesign Learning Community (SDLC) is designed to facilitate the conversations of learners, parents, and Learning Consultants (LC). The main organizing framework of the SDLC technological delivery platform is based on the proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child". Using FirstClass Client software platform the online Village of Conversations has a graphical village design where all may choose to enter conversations on many different topics.

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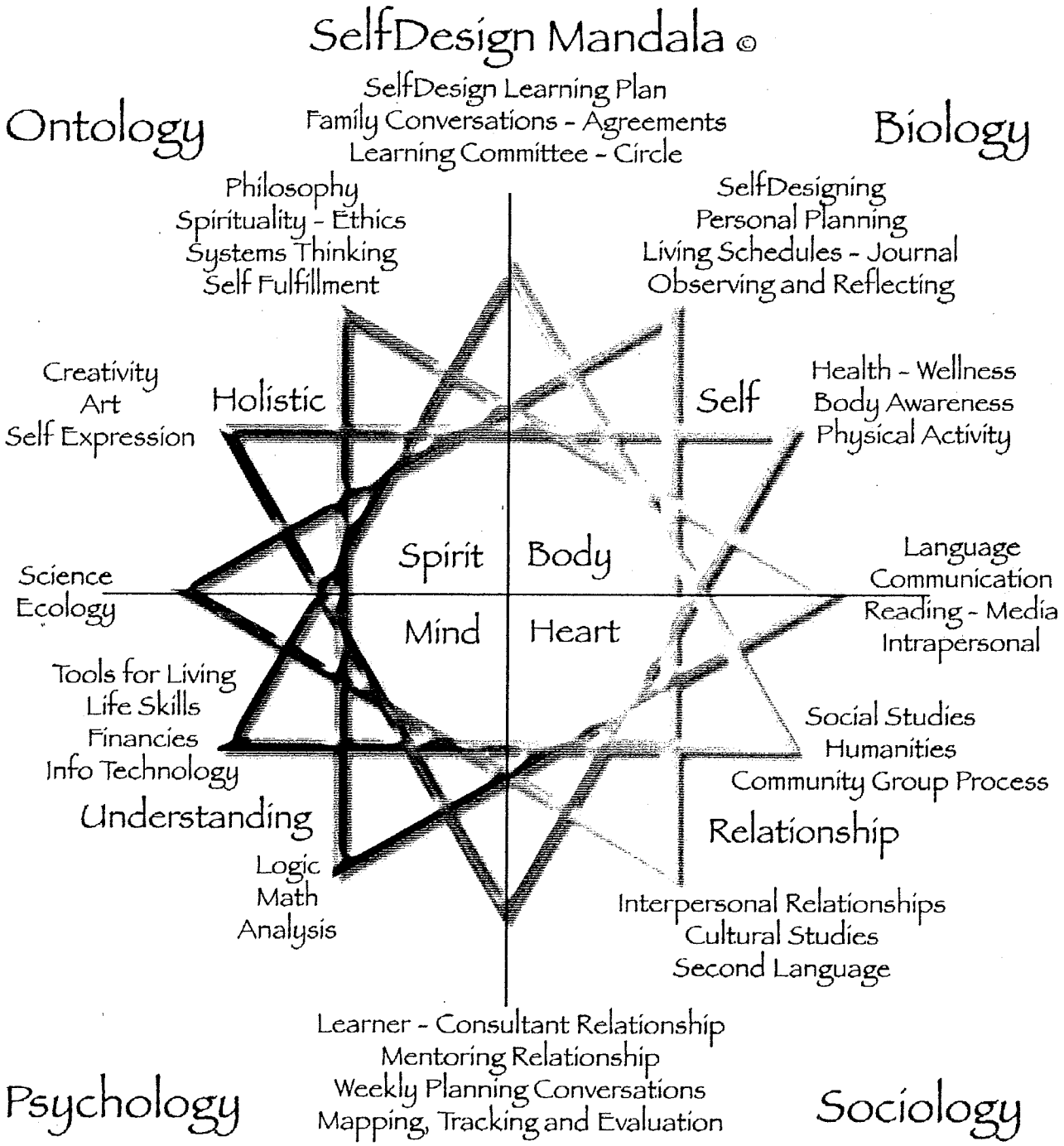
The SelfDesign Learning Mandala provides a framework that learners and parents can use to develop an annual learning plan. The SelfDesign Learning Mandala reflects a more holistic approach to human development and includes wellness, relationships, ecology and systemic thinking. The quadrants of the curriculum map also include 4 key areas that the Ministry of Education expects will be addressed through the Learning Plan: language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.



The learning mandala pattern reflects the shift in thinking that SelfDesign Learning Community supports. The curriculum of SelfDesign emerges from the interests and passions of the child. The mandala provides a frame of reference for the child and family to expand their conversations. Electronic forms of the mandala can be used to track learning each week. Over time it can show the development of the different domains of the mandala. .

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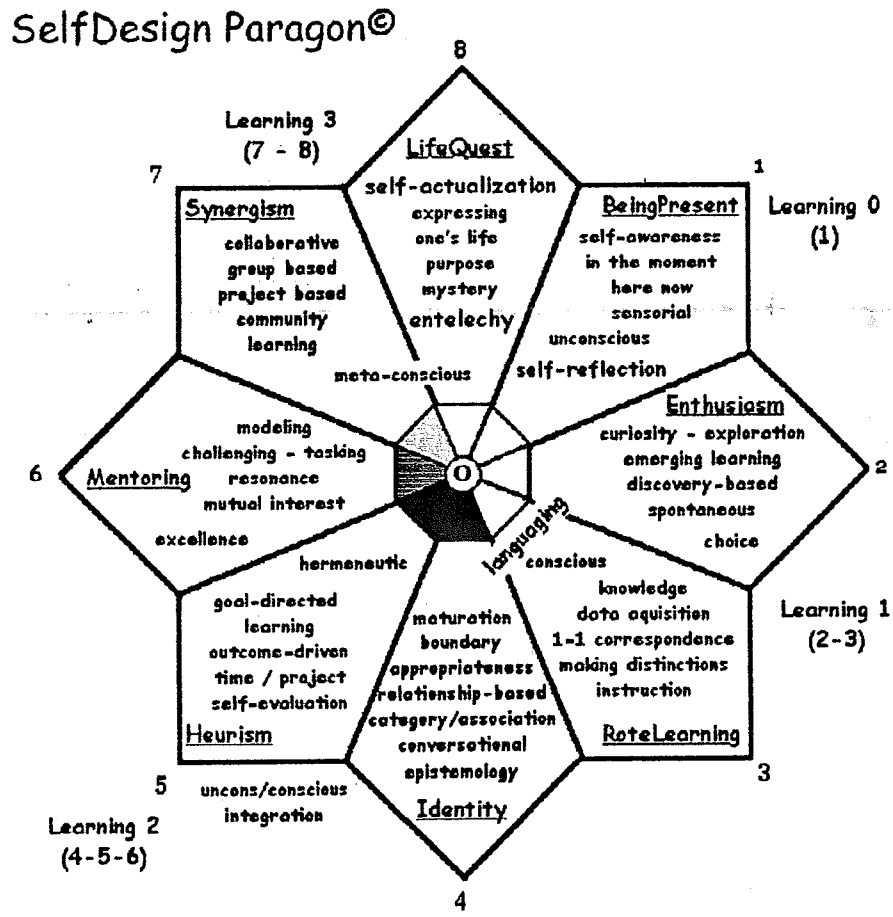
Planning for SelfDesign Learning

SelfDesign is about what the learner wants to learn when the learner wants to learn. In conversation with parents, mentors and the Learning Consultant a holistic Learning Plan is developed at the beginning of the year which provides a map that is revisited, reflected upon and revised periodically over the year as the learner achieves milestones, develops new interests, and uncovers new learning opportunities. The SelfDesign Learning Plan uses the SelfDesign mandala to chart the many possible direction that a child's learning may take.

The SelfDesign Plan for young children may be quite general. However as learners develop awareness of their own learning ability and the choices they have for learning, it is anticipated that the Self Design Learning Plan will more and more become the construction of the learner with the parents, mentors and Learning Consultants' assistance.

SelfDesign supports many approaches to learning in the home and community. SelfDesign supports and encourages involving mentors where an expert's skills may be what is needed by the learner at a particular time. Some learners create daily schedules and study courses and subjects, others practice wshat is called 'unschooling' and some are in the process of 'deschooling'.



Cultivating a Vision for Learning

We encourage each learner and family to develop a vision for learning that will serve to orient family life. Each SelfDesign vision must be individually felt, and continuously created through reflection. As long as the person who creates the vision is clear, the vision arises spontaneously. As long as the vision is seen, the person that holds the vision will influence family learning. ***For children it is important that they imagine the vision of the world that they desire and that this vision continues to co-inspire in the adventure of daily learning even as their interests shift and change.***

Role of the Parent

SDLC recognizes that parents are the primary supporters of their child's learning and that the decisions made about learning reside in the home with the learner and the assisting parent. The parent is required to track at least 25 hours of learning activity every week and to provide detailed observing of learning as it arises.

Role of the Learning Consultant

Each learner will be assigned a BC certified teacher called a Learning Consultant who will work with families to enable the child to develop and achieve his or her SelfDesign learning plan. The Learning Consultant's role is to work in cooperation and collaboration with the learner and family to support and account for the learning.

The Learning Consultant monitors the tracking of learning and enters into a weekly interactive dialogue with the family based on the observings of learning. Most of this activity takes place electronically mediated through the Village of Conversations, using customized forms for the process. Where possible, the Learning Consultant will meet with the family at least once during the year and will be available on-line and by telephone.

Learning Consultants do not "teach" a curriculum. The SDLC program is about nurturing and monitoring the natural learning of children. Through the extensive interactions and reporting of learning, we can demonstrate, at the end of the year, that many of the learning outcomes have been achieved by the open curiosity of children following their natural way of learning.

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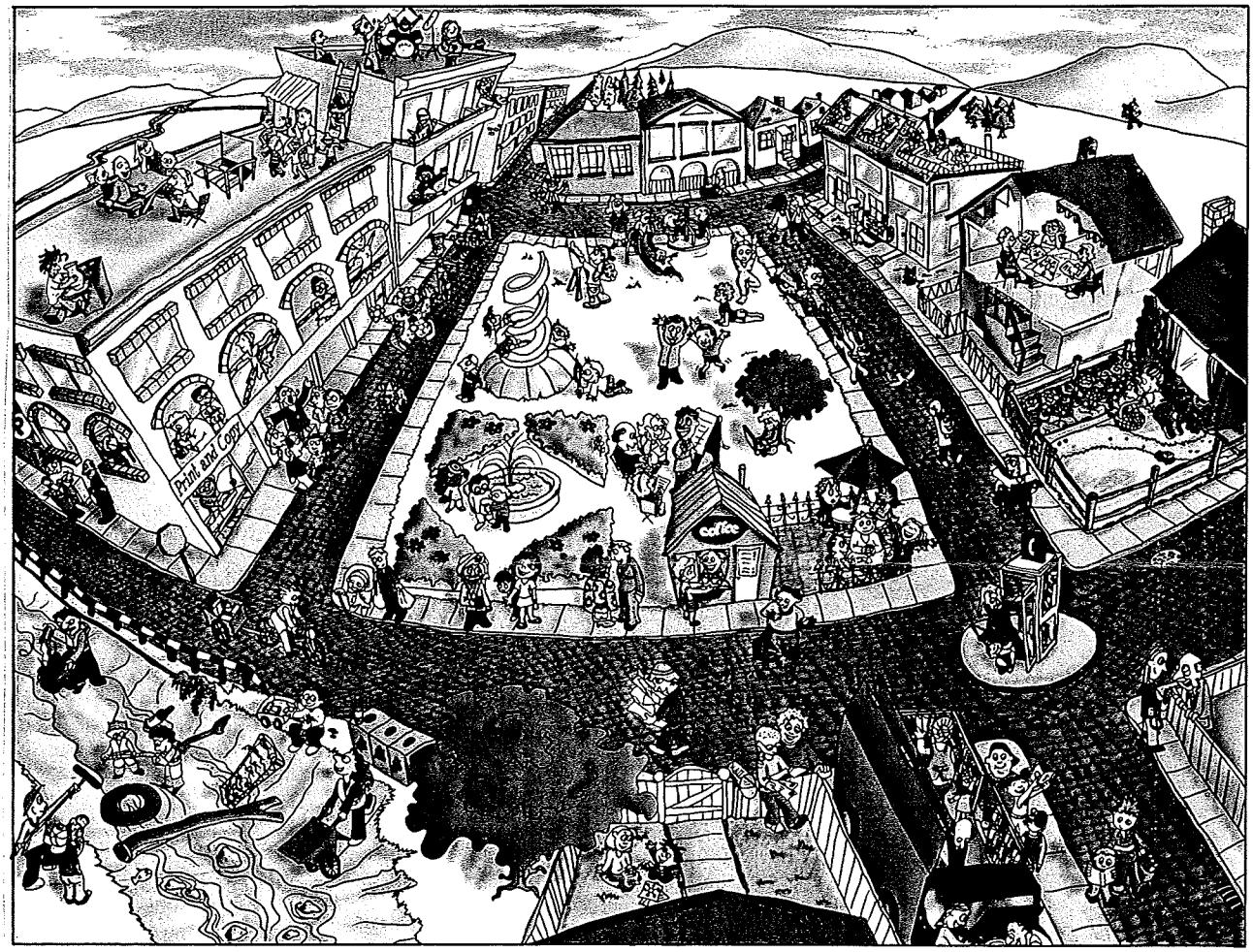
The SelfDesign Village - A Village of Conversations

The Village of Conversations is the organizing framework for the online learning community of families and children. This Village of Conversations has email and chat capacity as well as the ability to post interesting materials and websites. It has been graphically designed to reflect a learning Village and its internal architecture models the SelfDesign mandala. There are four additional layers of the Village oriented to the four ordinal directions, NW, SW, NE, SE.

There is a Village Hub, which provides a meeting ground for news and on-going commentary.

The Village is designed to provide an exciting opportunity for learners, parents and LC's to engage in meaningful conversations. It IS the main support for the Learning Community that makes the SDLC program unique and is not an optional or add on activity.

It is the place where the core of the learning community program arises.



All children and parents have their own private email accounts. In addition each child has a Learners Planner accessible only to the child's family and the Learning Consultant where all of the on-going dialogue and observing for learning records are kept. These are equivalent to the student's school record.

The Learning Consultants also have a conference in which to discuss their professional practice and share best practices, concerns and successes.

Over the course of the two-year pilot, the Village has shifted and changed from its original conception. Most users like to congregate in a few conferences. In addition, in order to share the wisdom of the group, the concept of the Chatauqua has been introduced. A Chatauqua was an event held in small towns across the midwest for over 100 years ending with radio and television in the 1950's. When the tent was set up near the edge of town isolated town folk came to hear ideas from over the horizon. SDLC re-invented the Chatauqua, not to bring ideas in from outside, but to bring forth the genius within our community. ***We believe that the village is as interesting as those who use it and as interesting as they can create it by sharing stories, ideas and dreams together.***

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SelfDesign Chatauqua

There has been a Fall and a Spring Chatauqua this year. All Village members are invited to offer a talkshop during a weeklong Chatauqua.

Some of the topics that were hosted as "talkshops" from March 6-12, 2004 included:

- "Reading...How and When"- dealing with the ages children read and the processes they used when they are not coerced,
- "Love Expands Intelligence" – providing background on Maturana's Biology of Love and his work in Latin America for teachers and parents,
- "How to make your own Homepage",
- "How to make transistors",
- "Science Mentor", which answers children's wonder questions.

All this by clicking on a tent icon.

Over one week, there were several hundreds of thoughtful, insightful, and intimate postings among adults and children around areas that interested them.

In addition, a Teen conference open only to the 15 and up has been introduced, and a 4-day intensive camp is planned for May for the teens.

Footnotes *pp. 1&2*

1. Dr. Pille Bunnell, immediate Past President of the ASC is also a member of the Board of Directors of Wondertree Foundation.

2. Natural Learning, as an expression, has been influenced in part by the contributions I have made of my understandings of both Conversation Theory and the Biology of Cognition. It is best explicated by me in Journeys to the Lands of New: An Introduction to the Natural Way of Learning, unpublished MSS, 1994.(see PATTERNS September 1998) Briefly the natural way of learning of our species is the life-affirming gift of conscious self-creation, that ability we have through language to bring forth a world together through our disposition for wonder. The basis of this is love.

3. Author note: The expression "unfolding the infinite interior" is ascribed to Dr. Gordon Pask from one of his many talks given to the American Society for Cybernetics in the 1980's and used extensively by myself.

4. SelfDesign Learning Community is a 2-year pilot program funded by of the B.C. Ministry of Education as part of the introduction of Distributed Electronic Learning in Independent Schools. It is anticipated that the program will cease to be a pilot and will become a regular program option to families in BC in September 2004.

The Cybernetic Influence: Observing for Learning

by Kathleen Forsythe

Observing for Learning first arose as an educational praxis from work done by myself at the Greater Victoria School Districts' Learner Profile Project between 1988 and 1991[1]. It was based on the essay by Humberto Maturana- *Everything is Said by an Observer*[2], which details the concept of adequate conduct as that conduct is observed by the observer that is deemed consensually adequate to say that a person knows.

From this insight and the shift in orientation to seeing that if the world and ourselves arise together –structurally coupled, then learning is something that is a commentary of the observer about adequate conduct, whether the observer is the parent or educator or the learners themselves.

Observing for learning is a powerful concept that provides a framework for understanding how to nurture natural learning and conserve a child's disposition for wonder. We are each observers of our own inner and outer worlds as they arise. Observing in this context is taken to mean all of our perceptions, not only our visual ability to see the other.

The manner in which children are introduced to formal educational structures can cause fragmentation from the natural complex world of imagination and language in which the child lives. The approaches taken can diminish the child's natural disposition for wonder through ignorance or insensitivity to the intrinsically coherent nature of child-thought.

Enthusiasm and passion for learning are natural in children, and such emotions must not be laundered in the name of compliance or obedient behaviour. They are the characteristics of the natural way of learning. Everyone has unique experiences which cannot be truly known by another. Our ability to work in language has enabled us to share our private experiences through bringing them forth in language within our conversational interactions.

In supporting our children, we constantly observe them, make assessments, and act on our inferences about what we think is transpiring in the inner world of the child. Are we aware of our observing for learning? How do we know what the child really wants to learn? All parents will remember what it felt like when they realized that they had to interpret their baby's action in order to understand what their baby wanted. Parents have been observing for learning ever since. ***What the Self Design Program intends to do is to help children and parents become aware of observing for learning and, through reflection, to deepen their understanding of the natural way of learning.***

Observing for learning is based on the premise that to be in loving relationship with a child you must see the child as he or she is, and not how you may want or expect the child to be. It is also based on the belief that love is the only emotion that expands intelligence. Thus what the parent and the Learning Consultant are observing for are indicators of what the child thinks and sees, what the child can do - and from the reports of this observing for learning, we can infer what learning the child is doing. In addition, where possible artifacts of the child's work is shared electronically which provides further evidence of the nature of a child's current learning profile.

Observing for learning involves identification of what is significant in learning from both the learner's and the parents' perspectives. The premise of SelfDesign is support for the learner's own autonomy and choice in his or her learning. SDLC encourages older learners to be involved in tracking their own learning and to observe their own learning in order to eventually report their own reflections and choices in selfdesigning their life.

Because the observing for learning is in the context of the learning plan and occurs on a weekly basis, there is ample opportunity over time to see patterns of development of ideas, concepts and skills. Observing for learning, the Learning Consultant's reflections on the observing, the child's reflections on learning and the interaction and conversations about these form the primary basis of the SelfDesign Learning Community's education program.

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Footnotes:

[1] *Kathleen Forsythe- Designing a Learner Profile System that Teachers Would Want to Use- Proceedings of the XII International Conference on Education and Technology, Brussels, 1990*

[2] *Humberto Maturana- Everything is Said by an Observer, IN* ***Gaia: A Way of Knowing,*** *William Irwin Thompson (ed.) Lindisfarne Press, New York 1987*

The following is provided to parents as part of the orientation to observing for learning when they join the SelfDesign Learning Community.

- **We observe for learning in order to see the child and open a space of love.**
  To see the child, we must observe what the child is doing and not what we think he or she should be doing or what we want to see.
- **We observe for learning in order to listen to what the child is saying, wondering about, and asking.**
  To hear the child, we must listen to what the child is saying and not what we want to hear or to our own response.
- **We observe for learning in order to understand what is right for the child in this moment.**
  To understand the child, we must observe the child's emotions and not what we think the child should feel in the current situation.
- **We observe for learning in order to encourage the child to unfold the emotional disposition for wonder.**
  To encourage wonder in a child, we must observe what teases the child's imagination, peaks interest and sustains attention.
- **We observe for learning in order to understand the child's questions.**
  To acknowledge the child's questions, we must not always provide the answers but probe further with our own questioning. The knowledge we offer children may provide answers to questions that they have not asked. This may stop the questioning.
- **We observe for learning in order to assist the child in becoming aware of his or her own actions.**
  To encourage awareness in a child, we must observe how the child con nects to his or her experiences and to other people, and what it is that makes these relationships significant and meaningful for the child.
- **We observe for learning to help the child generate significance and meaning from daily experience.**
  To help a child develop a history of significant learning and experience, we must observe what the child cares about and help create a context for caring.
- **We observe for learning in order to correct what the child is learning.**
  To correct a child's learning, we ensure that we are not correcting the being of the child. We may be attracted to the child's emotional state – whether it is excitement, curiosity, wonder, frustration, anger, and dis appointment. These emotional dispositions must be accepted as legiti mate before any intervention to help the child change an action or un derstanding.
- **We observe for learning in order to learn from children the world they want to co-inspire and co-create with us.**
  If we are to learn from the children we must observe how we participate in bringing forth a world together. We will live and learn together in mutual respect and support.

SelfDesign:
Conserving a Structure of Freedom

The SelfDesign process has been extensively researched and practically developed over the past twenty years by **Brent Cameron** in particular, and all those who have worked with him in collaboration and co-inspiration, including myself. Brent has recently completed the book, **SelfDesign:The Wondertree Story**, (Beyond Words, Publishing.) It provides a substantive overview of his work and will be in bookstores next spring.

Brent has been influenced by a number of cybernetic works, including the work of **Gregory Bateson** and that of **Humberto Maturana**, who delivered a workshop titled, ***"Love Expands Intelligence,"*** for Wondertree in 1996.

The word "SelfDesign" itself is reminiscent of "autopoiesis" and indeed, the natural way of learning is about the poiesis of experience as we learn through our awareness of our experiences in the moment of our arising.

Brent's vision has inspired the work of the SelfDesign Learning Community. His insights into how to build an electronic structure and an educational program that would, on the one hand, conserve a space of freedom for those who choose to learn at home and who have rejected the institutional structure of schooling and, on the other, satisfy the requirements of the Ministry of Education, have been remarkable. Let him have the last word:

"SelfDesign is not just one more theory about educational change. It is a simple but profound message from a small group of children, parents and mentors who have played under the Wondertree. Long ago a little girl realized that if she got off her swing and went into her school building, she would lose control of her life. She was right. She convinced me to support her happiness and her innate sensibilities. Let us begin to trust, empower and enfranchise our children. We must start by empowering ourselves, because ultimately we are the only ones who can.

Enfranchise yourself. Set yourself free from the limits of self-prejudice and self-sabotage. Only when we become free can we commit to joining with nature's design, participating in the love that holds this world together."

From the Editor *(continued)*

The year 2005 marks the centennial of the life of **Gregory Bateson**, "a thinker so far ahead of his time it takes your breath away" writes **Charles Hampden-Turner,** author of *Charting the Corporate Mind,* Cambridge University. He quotes from one of Gregory's favourite poems;

But meet we shall
And meet and meet again
Where dead men meet
On lips of living men.

And how true it is of his influence! See this page for announcement of one of many celebrations of his extraordinary life.

An experiment in living democracy and national dialogue, the self-organizing **Let's Talk America** is a joint project of the NationalCoalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, the Utne Institute, Conversation Café and the World Café. If you subscribe to Utne Magazine, take a look at the current March/April issue: There is a 2-page ad (p. 48-49) that encourages people to participate in this "new nationwide movement to revitalize our democracy." And on pages 60-61, a great article by **Leif Utne** provides background and info on how to get involved. This election-year initiative is designed to bring people with opposing views together in generative dialogue. Check out:

www.thataway.org/news/index.html

Among the pioneers in the new science, **C. West Churchman**, an influential philosopher and teacher who helped create the concept of corporate responsibility with his groundbreaking studies on sociological systems, has died at the age of 90. Professor Churchman was a longtime professor at UC Berkeley, a Nobel Prize nominee who dedicated his life to the application of philosophy and ethical values to daily life, including the corporate world.

An author of 12 books, he applied his unique philosophy of how systems operate to everything from wildlife to the search for life on Mars.

Multiple Versions of the World

100 Years of Gregory Bateson's Influence

"What is the pattern which connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose, and all of them to me and me to you?" —Gregory Bateson

November 20, 2004
9:00 AM to 5:00 PM
a special event convened at
Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, California
The Center for Performing Arts Recital Hall
Hosted by SCU's Center for Science Technology and Society

Sponsored by:

*Institute for Intercultural Studies http://www.interculturalstudies.org
*Gateway Pacific Foundation http://www.EarthTrain.org
*"YES! Magazine" http://YESMagazine.org
*Positive Futures Network http://YESMagazine.org/aboutPFN.html
*Urban Age Institute http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/urban/urbanage.htm
*"Urban Age" Magazine" http://www.worldbank.org/html/fpd/urban/urb_age/fall99/fall99.htm __and many others.

Confirmed Speakers:

Mary Catherine Bateson: Institute for Intercultural Studies
Jerry Brown: Mayor of Oakland, former Governor of California
James Koch: Director, SCU Center on Science, Technology and Society
Nathan Gray: Co-founder OXFAM America; founder, EarthTrain
Tim Campbell: World Bank Institute
Jay Ogilvy: Co-founder, Global Business Network
Carol Wilder: Assoc. Dean and Chair, Dept. of Communication, New School University
Peter Harries-Jones: Prof. of Anthropology (Emeritus), York University, Ontario
Kenny Ausubel: Founder & President, Collective Heritage Institute (and the Bioneers Conference)
Jean Houston: author The Possible Human
Stephen Nachmanovitch: author Free Play: Improvisation in Life & Art
Jaimie P. Cloud: President, The Sustainability Education Center (NY)
Terrence Deacon: Professor, Dept. of Anthropology and Helen Wills Neuroscience Institute, UC Berkeley
Tyler Volk: Associate Professor, NYU
Wendel Ray: Director of the Mental Research Institute, Professor of Marriage & Family Therapy, University of Louisiana

Special Feature: The world premiere of Nora Bateson's film tribute to Gregory Bateson, *That Reminds Me of a Story*

Conference Organized by Gordon Feller,
phone +1-415-491-4233
email:GordonF20@comcast.net
To Register by Phone:
within the USA: 866-462-2838
outside the USA:+1-415-374-8222

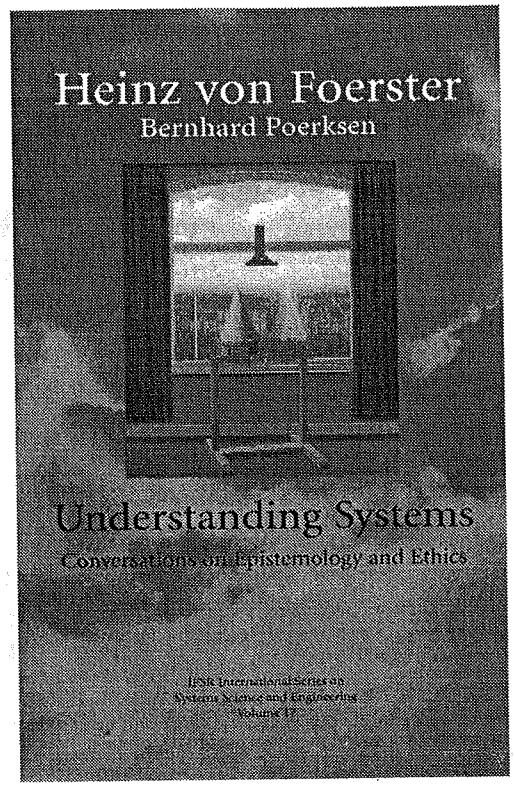
Friday, November 12, 2004
Evening reception at the University's deSaisset Museum:
On-stage discussion by 3 prominent/public personalities.

Saturday, November 13, 2004
Day-long conference program timed to coincide with the American Anthropological Association's 103rd Annual Meeting.

Heinz von Foerster/Bernhard Poerksen

Understanding Systems

Conversations on Epistemology and Ethics



Heinz von Foerster/Bernhard Poerksen
→ Understanding Systems
Conversations on Epistemology
and Ethics
161 Pages, Hardcover, 2002
€ 25,50/sFr 44,–
ISBN 3-89670-234-3

How real is reality? Are our images of the world mere inventions, or does an external reality correspond to them? Is it possible to know truth?

These are the questions that physicist and philosopher Heinz von Foerster and journalist Bernhard Poerksen debate about in their conversations. Together, they explore the borders of our capacity for knowledge. They discuss the seeming objectivity of our sensual perception, the consequences of "truth terrorism" and the connections between knowledge and ethics, sight and insight.

"This book is rich with insights, full of inspiring expression and also filled with wisdom so that you really want to distribute it like a leaflet."
Book Review German Radio

Heinz von Foerster, *born in 1911, was known as the "Socrates of cybernetic thought". After studying physics in Vienna, he was employed by various research laboratories in Germany and Austria. Von Foerster emigrated to the U.S. in 1949. There he was welcomed into a circle of scientists who came together regularly at the invitation of the Macy Foundation during the 1950s (Norbert Wiener, John von Neumann, Gregory Bateson, Margaret Mead, Warren McCulloch). Here cybernetic thought was given its shape. In 1957 Heinz von Foerster established the Biological Computer Laboratory (BCL) at the University of Illinois, where he had a professorship until his retirement in 1976. He died in 2002.*

Bernhard Poerksen *studied German language and literature, journalism and biology at the University of Hamburg and Pennsylvania State University. He works as a journalist for numerous newspapers and teaches media and communication studies at the University of Hamburg. Poerksen is the author of a study on the language of Neonazis entitled "The Construction of the Images of the Enemy". His recent publications include the book "The Certainty of Uncertainty – Dialogs on Constructivism" and "From Being to Doing" , written together with Humberto Maturana.*

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☐ Heinz von Foerster/
Bernhard Poerksen
→ Understanding Systems
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Heinz von Foerster/ Bernhard Poerksen

Understanding Systems

From the Book

"... my doctrine is not to have a doctrine. Of course that is a paradox, but it is a very dynamic one. During one of my lectures I once said, "Ladies and gentlemen, please, don't believe a word of what I am about to tell you!" Everyone laughed and apparently believed that they shouldn't believe what I had said. But I meant what I had said."

"I have never quite been able to figure out what the advocates of the postulate of objectivity even think they can observe when they forbid a person to have his or her personal view of things. What is an observer supposed to perceive when he or she is required to be deaf, dumb, and blind and is forbidden to use his or her language, which in fact is what the definition of objectivity would require? What can the observer communicate to us and how can he or she communicate in the first place? It seems to me that it is always an observer who does the observation. He or she is the crucial element of the observation."

"Second order cybernetics or cybernetics of cybernetics is itself circular. You learn to understand yourself as a part of the world that you wish to observe. The entire observational situation ends up in another area in which you suddenly have to take responsibility for your own observations."

About the Book

"Understanding Systems presents in a nutshell a truly revolutionary view of human beings, their thinking, and the world they live in. It outlines a new way of thinking wiht the promise of the possibility of providing a new orientation and a new stategy for life in a highly complex, highly dynamic, and highly uncertain world such as ours at the beginning of the 3rd Millenium."

Bernd R. Hornung
Philipps-Universität Marburg

"I recommend this book not only to the cybernetics and systems community, but to anyone. In fact, if I could think of someone I would not recommend it to, I'd be certain to recommend it to them – and, then, to me."

Ranulph Glanville
Cybernetics And Human Knowing

„This book is rich with insights, full of inspiring expression and also filled with wisdom so that you really want to distribute it like a leaflet."

Book Review German Radio

The Well-Being of Systems

ASC Conference Announcement - 2004

Co-sponsored by the Department of Image Arts at Ryerson University

122 Bond Street in Downtown Toronto

August 4 to August 8, 2004

Please join us to explore how we increase the well-being of our systems and ourselves, as we are systems embedded in numerous other systems. The daily news gives us examples every day that the frameworks and the means currently in use do not have requisite variety to deal with the complexity of our circumstances. But we may not be discouraged by the challenge.

How may we meet this challenge? Through our thoughts and thinking about our thoughts; our commitments and their implications; our perspectives and those of others who construct their realities according to different patterns; and finally through our conversations through which we come to know ourselves and others.

Please send us your ideas for papers, presentations, workshops, playshops, performances and panels. We are fortunate to be able to announce that Humberto Maturana will join us and that we may also look forward to keynotes by Ranulph Glanville and Pille Bunnell.

Students are invited to make submissions for the **ASC Student Prize** which includes a year's membership and registration for the Conference.

Because Toronto is home to many who work to achieve the well-being of systems, proposals are especially welcome for panels that would involve ASC Members and people from the community who may or may not regard themselves as cyberneticians.

The Department of Image Arts has a small gallery in which art and design work from Conference participants may be displayed.

Registration:

Members $US 150 or Canadian equivalent
Students/unwaged $US 35
Non-members: registration plus applicable membership fees.

Accommodation:

Ryerson has two residences: Pitman Hall at 160 Mutual Street is a basic dormitory with single beds and shared bathrooms. Costs are in the low $50's 416-979-5296 and <reserv@ryerson.ca>. The University International Conference Centre at 240 Jarvis Street offers hotel accomodation with prices in the$70's 416-979-5301 and 416-979-5241/fax <illc@acs.ryerson.ca>. Toronto has a large selection of hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation. ***We have reserved a block of rooms with the University for the Conference in each residence. Participants will be responsible for making their own reservations.***

Food:

There are a wide variety of restaurants near the University from coffee shops to fine dining in a number of different cuisines. Many are within five to ten minutes walk.

Travel:

Toronto's Pearson International Airport is a major hub airport with many flights from Canada, the United States, Europe and the rest of the world. The nearest US airport is Buffalo. There is a 2 1/2 hour coach bus from Buffalo downtown to the Toronto Bus Terminal and sporadic service from the airport to downtown. Ryerson University is about four blocks from the main intercity bus terminal.

Toronto's Caribana Festival takes place the week before the conference, ending with a big parade on July 31st and more music on Sunday. There are many museums, and other sights and happenings in and around Toronto, including Niagara Falls which is a two hour drive.

Toronto has had no new cases of SARS since late last spring so no one need feel any more at risk here than anywhere else.

Contact: **www.asc-cybernetics.org/organization/events.htm**
or Allenna@sympatico.ca

Book Announcements

From **Charles S. Jakiela, Holistic Education Press** comes a letter introducing **Lynn Stoddard's book, Education for Human Greatness.** He writes; Last spring almost sixty parents, teachers, and ordinary citizens responded to an invitation from our local elementary school board to explore the values they wanted emphasized in our school. As the moderator of the meeting, I expected that most of the participants would demand higher test scores, a more rigorous curriculum, and even more homework.

I couldn't have been more wrong, for what emerged was a clear consensus that they wanted the school to focus on three basic things:

- They wanted the school to cultivate a passion for learning and curiosity and creativity among its students.
- They wanted it to develop their kids' individual talents as worthwhile human beings.
- And they wanted them to learn how to get along with others and cultivate their powers of expression and communication.

We didn't know it at the time but we were echoing what parents elsewhere have also been saying. We were also summarizing Lynn Stoddard's new book, *Educating for Human Greatness!*

Lynn Stoddard, a veteran public school teacher and principal, argues that we all know far better than the politicians and bureaucrats what is best for our children. He clearly shows that the current mandate to standardize subject matter and, ultimately, students actually subverts real learning that lasts a lifetime. And, more important, he shows what you can do about it.

It would seem that this book is a companion to **Brent Cameron's** forthcomingbook, **SelfDesign: The Wondertree Story.** Stoddard's book is designed to help refocus public schools on what is really important: passion for learning, respect for individual talent, and getting along with others. He shows how it can become a reality in your school, not just a slogan in the annual yearbook.

(continued on next page)

Book Announcements

(continued from p.9)

Stoddard offers guidelines and numerous examples of schools that are intent on developing human greatness which prompts **Bill Crain, Editor of Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice,** to say this about the book; *"Drawing on his rich experience as a teacher and administrator, Lynn Stoddard has given us an insightful, readable, and wise book on how the standards movement has led us astray and how education might accomplish its true purpose__to nurture children's full potentials."*

You can order a copy at $18.95 plus shipping by phoning 1-800-639-4122 or by mail from the Holistic Education Press, P.O. Box 329, Brandon, VT 05733 with a money back guarantee if not satisfied.

A Systems Approach to Social and Organizational Planning: Cure for the Mess in Health Care?

by Gerrit Van Wyk

(ISBN 1-4120-1390-9).

The book is available at www.trafford.com/robots/03-1768.html and at Amazon.com.

It is an introduction to systems thinking and specifically the work of C. West Churchman with an application in health care that questions some of the basic assumptions that prevent the world wide mess from being solved and offers a model that may assist in doing so.

Contact: Gerrit Van Wyk
550 Main Street, Moose Jaw, SK S6H 3K3, Canada
Email: gvw@sasktel.net

"Removing the faults in a stage-coach may produce a perfect stage-coach, but it is unlikely to produce the first motor car."

- Edward de Bono

The Forty-Eighth Meeting of The International Society For The Systems Sciences

Asilomar Conference Center, Asilomar
Pacific Grove (Monterey), California
July 4 - 9, 2004

Registration Fees: Regular: $365
Retired or Developing-country: $275
Student: $215
Add $30. for each additional paper being submitted.

Fees include attendance, proceedings, 2005 membership and a one-year subscription to Systems Research and Behavioral Science, (including ISSS Yearbook)

We look forward to your participation, and to making Asilomar 2004 a great meeting

Arne Collen,
Vice President for Membership and Conferences
Acollen@saybrook.edu

Kenneth D. Bailey,
President, ISSS
Kbailey@soc.ucla.edu

For Registration Form, Housing Registration, and Application for Membership.

Please Contact: http://isss.org/2004mtg/2004meeting.htm

The International Systems Institute
and the Asilomar Design Conversation Community
invite you to the annual Asilomar Conversation Conference .

November 14-19, 2004

Asilomar Conference Center, Asilomar
Pacific Grove (Monterey), California

This is a chance to take a concentrated break to join with other "systems thinkers" in conversation around such concerns as;

Ongoing ISI Design <doug@networkeddemocracy.com>, Evolutionary Development <alexander @syntonyquest.org>, Co-operated Roundtables for Schools, Workplaces, and Other Organizations and Communities <sgabriele@gemslerning.com>, It's a SmallWorldIdeabook Team: Board Game development <KHB15476@nifty.ne.jp>
OR create your own inquiry project.

Doug Walton, President, writes; *Not only are there many dangeous currents that threaten our sustainability as a planet and society, but simultaneously we are beset by multiple, almost overwhelming distractions. It becomes difficult to stay focused on the truly meaningful pursuits in life. We must regularly take time to evaluate how our precious efforts are being directed.*

The Asilomar Center provides food and lodging on the beach of the Monterey Bay at reasonable rates. Single rate is $787.50 total for 6 days. Double rate is $491.25 total. Contact: Peggy Gill, Conference Facilitator and Coordinator <pgill@mail.uttyl.edu>

Commentary on the Bateson Centennial

This conference will be the long awaited opportunity to explore the significance of Gregory Bateson's life and work for the new century. The goal is to span the different fields in which Bateson's work is used and move toward a deeper and unified understanding of the ecology of mind.
— Mary Catherine Bateson

Not often will we have such an opportunity as this one: to convene so many who've been inspired by Gregory Bateson and his illuminating insights into "the pattern which connects." MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF THE WORLD promises to be a breakthrough conference.
— Jay Ogilvy

"I have taught various branches of behavioral biology and cultural anthropology to American students ranging from college freshmen to psychiatric residents, in various schools and teaching hospitals, and I have encountered a very strange gap in their thinking that springs from a lack of certain tools of thought. This lack is rather equally distributed at all levels of education, among students of both sexes and among humanists as well as scientists. Specifically, it is a lack of knowledge of the presuppositions not only of science but of everyday life." (Gregory Bateson in Mind and Nature, p. 23)

You are invited to join the

Systems Thinking and Chaos Theory Network
and the American Society for Cybernetics

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