

Connecting Kids: Exploring Diversity Together

Speaker: Dr. Linda Hill, Registered Psychologist

Linda Hill, PhD, is a psychologist, educator, child care worker, step-parent and brand new grandparent who has spent more than thirty years exploring diversity in Canada and internationally. Her books, presentation, workshops and participatory research projects clearly communicate the power of shared laughter and mutual learning in building bridges between people from different backgrounds.

Linda is one of the founders and co-facilitators of "*Inclusive Leadership Adventures*". This non-profit diversity education project brings children, youth, families, and adults who care about children, youth and families together to explore, share and celebrate differences. Together we are building bridges to a safer and more respectful world of equality, choice and shared laughter. Check our website to learn more about how you can participate in an Inclusive Leadership Adventure.

This workshop for LLLInternational is based on the book:

Title: Connecting Kids: Exploring Diversity Together

Linda D. Hill

Foreword by Rick Scott

Co Published by New Society Publishers and Building Bridges Consulting

ISBN 0-86571-431-2

Copyright ©2001 by Linda D. Hill

All rights reserved.

The cost is \$19.95 (US)

To order directly from either publisher, please add \$4.00 shipping to the price of the first copy, and \$1.00 for each additional copy (plus GST in Canada).

1.

New Society Publishers, P.O. Box 189, Gabriola Island, B.C., V0R 1X0, Canada

New Society Publishers aims to publish books for fundamental social change through nonviolent action. We focus especially on sustainable living, progressive leadership, and educational and parenting resources. Our full list of books can be browsed on the worldwide web at:

Website: www.newsociety.com

2.

Building Bridges Consulting, P.O. Box 156, Duncan, B.C., V9L 3X3, Canada

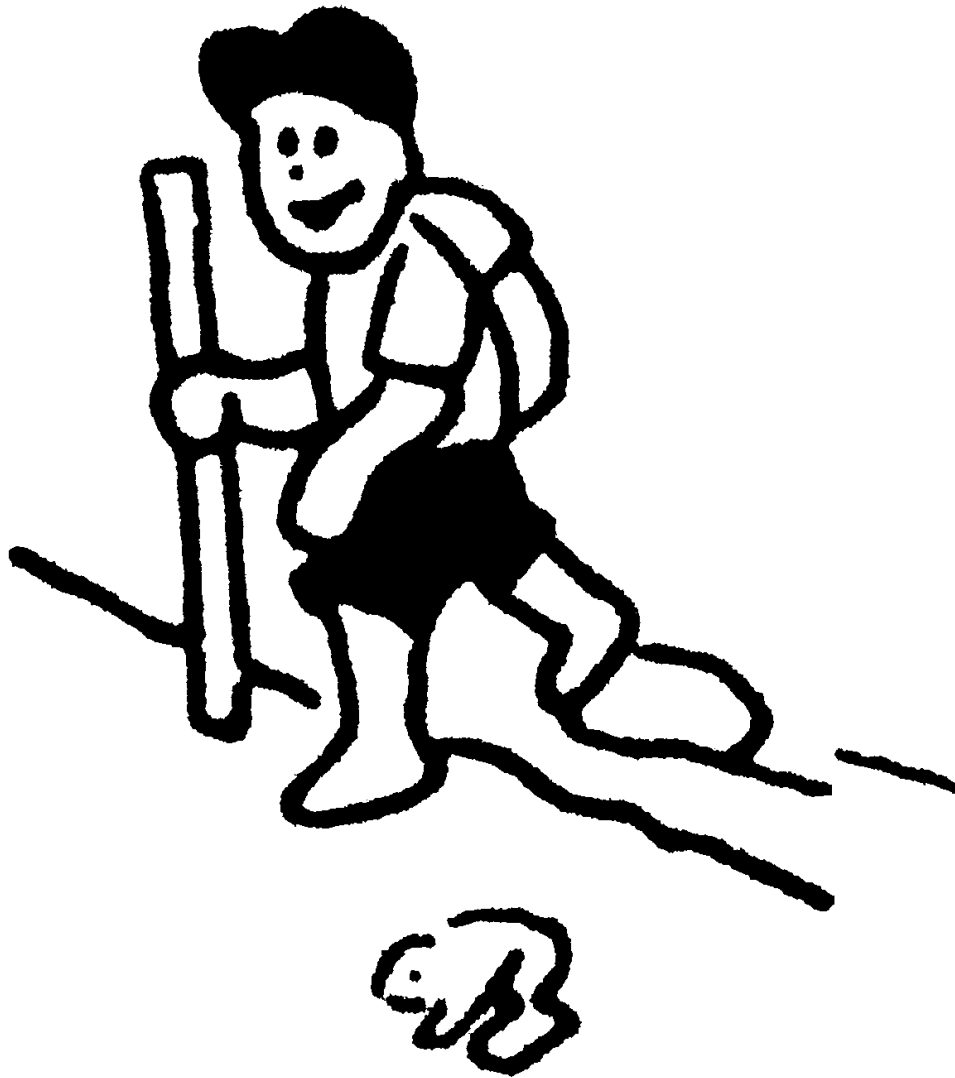
We bring people together to share our rights and responsibilities to care for each other and for the Earth.

Website: www.bridges.island.net/~bridges/

Welcome everyone. Wonderful to be at a conference where our connections with our children are so highly valued and where infants and children are so welcomed to be part of things. It is

also wonderful to be part of a conference where breast feeding is being honored. For the past two years, the community of Duncan, British Columbia, Canada where I am from has tried to break the world record for numbers of women breastfeeding with their children at the same time and place. Although we haven't succeeded yet, the challenge of bringing hundreds of women and infants together to breastfeed has been a great tool for promoting the joy of and importance of breast feeding not only for nutrition but for building safe, nurturing relationships between mothers and children.

This workshop is focused on two more natural tools that are very important for connecting positively with children in our increasingly diverse communities and on building the skills we need to be able to guide children to connect positively with each other's differences.



Two essential tools
for inclusive travel guides to carry in our backpacks:

1. Cooperative play
2. Shared laughter

These two powerful tools that all inclusive travel guides need to carry in our backpacks are cooperative play and shared laughter.

We are facing an urgent need for children, youth and adults to learn how to explore, share and celebrate diversity together:

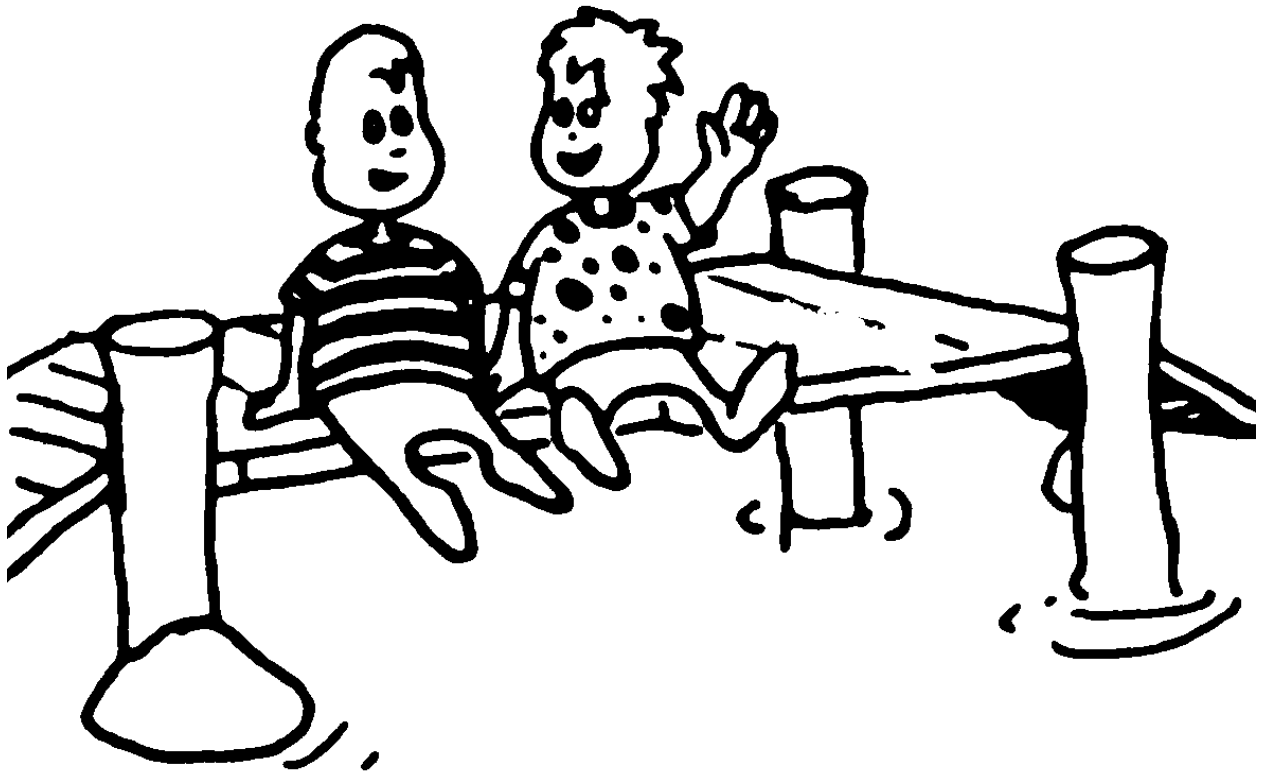
"At the dawn of the new millennium we are living during the first period of time in the history of the world when dealing with diversity has become part of our daily lives. Children, youth and adults of different abilities, cultures, languages, lifestyles and other backgrounds have more opportunities to interact than ever before. Throughout the twentieth century, these opportunities to interact, connect and build positive relationships have energized individuals, families, groups, communities, and entire societies to shift away from excluding and devaluing people because of their differences toward including and valuing people from different backgrounds. But this process of becoming interdependent is still very new and the steps we are taking are on new and fragile territory, The way forward is filled with peril as well as with promise." (Earth Charter, 2001)

For more information on the Earth Charter see www.earthcharter.org

Inclusive travel guides are parents and other people who have learned skills for thinking globally and acting locally. We guide Inclusive Leadership Adventures. We have picked up our backpacks and shouldered our shared responsibilities for guiding children to make healthy and welcoming connections with each other as they explore, share and celebrate differences.

Differences such as race, culture, ability, economic circumstances, life-style, point of view, and other backgrounds.

We apply the tools of play and shared laughter as we build bridges toward inclusive (or welcoming) ways of being together. We have learned to guide children, youth and adults to cross these bridges in ways that are safe, respectful and that lead toward choice and fun.



Our differences are
gifts that enrich our communities.

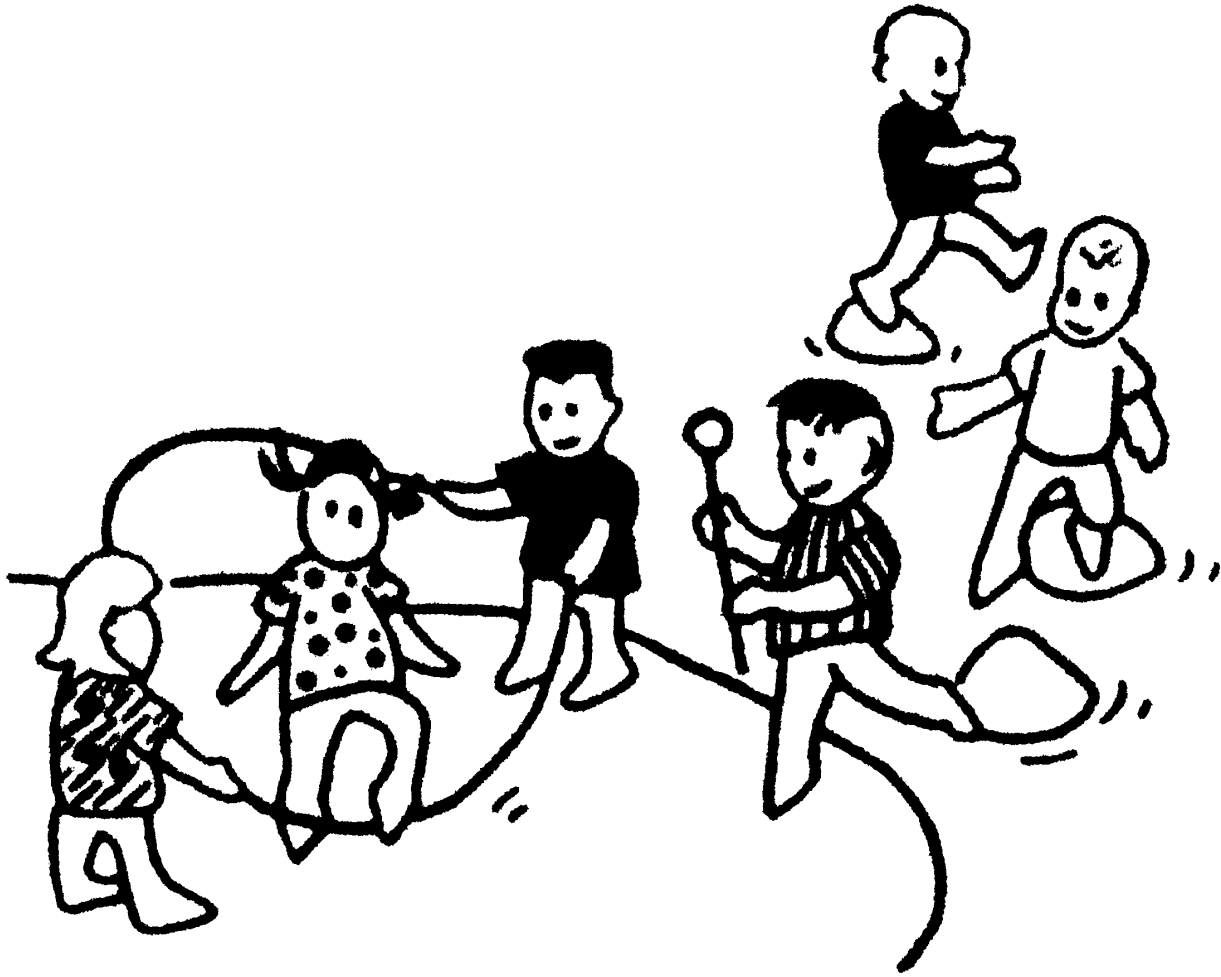
All along these bridges there are viewpoints showing our differences as gifts that enrich our communities.

The first video is an example of an Inclusive Leadership Adventure a group of us guided last spring on Vancouver Island where I live. This project for bringing children, youth and families together to explore diversity is sponsored by Cowichan Valley Intercultural and Immigrant Aid Society and Canadian Mental Health Association. Cowichan Valley.

This video shows a diverse group of youth, parents and other adults who care about youth sharing and celebrating diversity through activity-based learning (drama, art, dance, yoga etc.).

Inclusive Travel Guides share leadership as we guide Inclusive Leadership Adventures. Together we can meet the challenges of educating children and youth about our rights to live in a world that values differences and to give our children skills for respecting these rights to be free from discrimination.

How many of you watch Star Trek, the New Generation? This is a television series about a space ship exploring the universe. The Captain of the Star Ship Enterprise is a very distinguished man named Jean Luc Picard. Whenever he wants anything to happen, Jean Luc Picard, the captain of the Enterprise says "Make it so." I wish exploring diversity could happen as easily. However, this shift from exclusion to inclusion cannot happen just by saying "Make it so" There is nothing automatic or magical about exploring diversity in inclusive ways. Children, youth and adults all need guidance and skill development in order to learn how to travel outside our familiar circles to get to know others from different backgrounds. It is only with guidance from inclusive role models that children, youth and adults can learn how to replace age-old instincts of fear and dislike of differences with skills for connecting across differences.



**Connecting skills =
Inclusive Leadership**

I call these skills for being socially responsible leaders "connecting skills" or "inclusive leadership skills". These are skills for exploring, sharing and celebrating differences and building relationship bridges that are safe, respectful, and filled with choice and laughter.

The notion that children are born without prejudice is actually a myth that has been repeatedly disproved through research by Frances Aboud and others. The roots of prejudice are actually neurological. Our brains have two competing nervous systems. When the relaxed nervous system (parasympathetic branch) is turned on learning can take place. When the emergency nervous system (sympathetic branch) is turned on the organism is in fight/flight mode and cannot learn anything new. When a child encounters new experiences such as differences, the emergency nervous system tends to instinctively turn on and the child instinctively tries to get safe - either through aggression (fight) or passive reactions (flight). Inclusive travel guides know how to guide children (and youth and adults) to relax about differences and - while the child's relaxed nervous system is turned on, teach skills for welcoming differences. In this way, instincts to fight or escape are replaced with skills for welcoming and approaching differences.

Unless we learn skills for connecting with others these instinctive fight/flight reactions will continue to fuel the fires of exclusion, intolerance, bullying and other forms of violence against each other's differences.

When I travel to schools and ask children and youth "Who gets put down or excluded or bullied in your school? The instinctive or unthinking answer is always: "the kids who are different." - the kids who look different, act different, wear different clothes, don't have as much money, aren't athletic enough, funny enough, smart enough, thin enough, cool enough, this enough or that enough. With so many children reacting with instinctive fight/flight reactions to differences, the lives of far too many children and youth who come from different backgrounds are being unraveled by cycles of exclusion and intolerance in our increasingly diverse communities.

In 1889, in the midst of very troubled times, Jose Marti, the poet laureate of Cuba published "The Golden Age", a classic book of peaceful stories for adults to read with their children, Marti asked us all to "work for children because children are the ones who know what is needed, because children are the hope of the world." In today's troubled times there is an urgent need for peace-loving adults to shoulder the responsibilities we all share to guide children and youth to put a stop to discrimination (flight) and violence (fight) against differences.

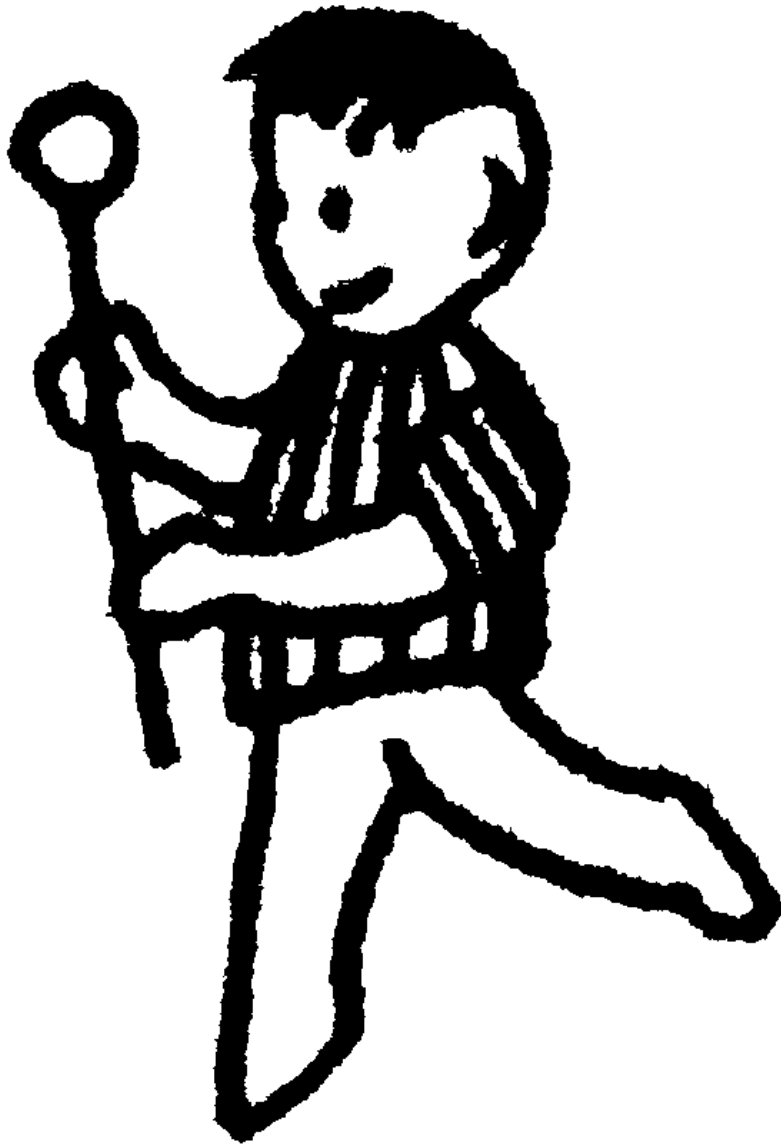
We need skilled and experienced inclusive travel guides who enjoy exploring, sharing and celebrating differences. Together we can build bridges to a safer and more respectful world full of equality, choice and laughter. Together we can cross these bridges to discover viewpoints showing differences as treasures that enrich our communities. Always keeping our needs to be safe, equally respected and to have choice and fun in mind, we can turn every day life into an adventure as exciting and life changing as traveling to different countries around the world.

Inclusive travel guides are needed everywhere in our increasingly diverse communities. I'm hoping that this workshop will encourage you to recognize yourselves as inclusive travel guides or to explore your own potential to become an inclusive travel guide.

The second video shows two parents being inclusive travel guides as they explore, share and celebrate racial and cultural differences with their son who has ability differences. (Scenes of a

young boy who has mild cerebral palsy and is deaf being guided by his parents to participate in multicultural dancing and cooperative games in an intergenerational setting.)

To help you think about being an Inclusive Travel Guide I've handed out pipe cleaners and I have a riddle that like all inclusive riddles has a number of correct answers.



How are inclusive leaders like pipe cleaners?

Q: How is an inclusive travel guide like a pipe cleaner?

A: There are many correct answers such as strong, flexible, warm and fuzzy, very creative, multi-coloured, make beautiful things when lots of us come together, and we can make a point when we need to.

So the riddle has started us in a playful direction, lets keep going by playing Inclusive leadership seesaw. I'm going to read out a list of inclusive travel guides from the beginning of my book Connecting Kids. You stand up if what I call out applies to you and sit down if what I say doesn't apply. You can stand up and sit down as many times as you like - like a see saw.

This next section is from page 3 of Connecting Kids: Exploring Diversity Together

"Inclusive Travel Guides Needed Now

"Children growing up during the beginning of this brand new millennium are living in the first generation in the history of the world when exploring our differences has become part of everyday life. Children of all ages, and from all sorts of cultures, countries, languages, heritages, religions, abilities, economic circumstances, lifestyles and other backgrounds are meeting each other in the places we live, learn, work, play and worship. Opportunities for adventures as life-changing as traveling to different countries around the world are now close at hand, just around the corner in every community.

"Children need guidance to learn how to travel outside their familiar circles to get to know others from different backgrounds. Skilled and experienced explorers can help children discover new viewpoints showing how differences enrich our communities. Inclusive travel guides are needed everywhere in our increasingly diverse world:

- at home and in the neighborhood
- schools, community centers, drop in programs, and after-school day care
- camps, recreation programs, and outdoor education centers
- sports teams, children's clubs and youth groups
- churches, temples, centers, and other places where we worship
- health centers, hospitals, group homes, and other places children go for help and kind treatment

"Everyone who is good with children and interested in people's differences has the potential to become an inclusive travel guide. Inclusive travel guides could be:

- relatives, friends, and neighbors
- leaders of children's groups, coaches of sports teams, and camp counselors
- early childhood educators, day care supervisors, and baby-sitters
- teachers, teaching assistants, playground supervisors, peer counselors, and other people who help children at school
- child and youth care workers, support workers, counselors, therapists, and other people who help children who are going through difficult times
- ecologists, biologists, zoologists, naturalists and everyone who loves nature
- writers, story tellers, singers, magicians, dulcimer players, and other entertainers
- people of all cultures, ages, abilities, and life-styles who live in cities, towns, villages, farms, camps, cabins and any other kind of community

"Imagine what an enjoyable voyage of discovery life can become when children feel safe enough to share their unique gifts, choose how to be, and communicate together through the universal language of fun!"

So, the approach to diversity education you will find in Connecting Kids is all about replacing instinctive reflexes to avoid or defend against differences with a set of learned attitudes and skills for exploring, sharing and celebrating differences.

A Story from Connecting Kids:

This story illustrates the skill of bringing on the reinforcements.

Crystal used to be known by the other students as "the girl who reads at lunch hour" because she tried to deal with her loneliness by sitting on the school steps and reading books. When James tried to deal with his loneliness by chasing after her, she gave up being a book worm and refused to go to school at all. This is when her Mom and teachers asked me to bring in the reinforcements. I helped her make a list of classmates she would like to get along with. Her list included several girls she wanted to play with and several boys - including James - she wanted to stop being so rough. We then invited these students to form a 'Building Friendly Bridges Club' and they all signed up. At the end of only six lunch hours of learning through play, Crystal was bubbling about how things had turned around on the playground. "Building bridges is lots and lots of fun! I'm not playing by myself anymore, because people are letting people play with them now. Like, if somebody doesn't have someone to play with them, they just ask somebody! Building friendly bridges helps all of us to play along." James also learned a lot over six weeks, but gave the credit to everyone else. "I think building bridges is good because people are more civilized, not like a bunch of monkeys. Some kids have been acting a lot better than they usually do. I noticed a couple of kids can maybe play better and maybe play with me sometimes. If you go through these social skills often enough they can be put into practice and used. I think that everybody knows them - some more than others - it's putting them into action that a lot of people need to work on."

The more time we can each take out of our busy lives to build these bridges and guide children teach inclusive leadership skills to children, youth and families the more quickly we will put a stop to cycles of prejudice, discrimination, bullying and other forms of violence against differences.

Inclusive travel guides are continually developing our own skills for connecting across differences and passing these skills on to the children, youth and adults in our lives. Children, youth and adults learn these social skills as easily as learning to read, play a musical instrument, help out with household chores, play sports, paint a picture or build a fort: We watch, listen, practice, and get feedback.

The natural way children relax and open up to learning these skills is by playing. Play is children's work. Children learn by chasing, hiding, running, guessing, imitating, drawing, painting, singing, dancing, acting, experimenting, exploring and other ways of playing.

The world becomes simple when children have unlimited opportunities to play the same game, tell the same story, draw the same picture or build the same fort over and over again in a relaxed and reinforcing environment. The rules are clear. The patterns are beautiful. The challenges are possible and a few new skills are learned at a time.

There are hundreds of inclusive leadership skills. We will be focusing on the 20 skills in Connecting Kids for the rest of the workshop.

Here is a video which is a collage of scenes showing each of the skills in Connecting Kids. A few of the scenes are from videos I have made. Others are scenes from Harriet the Spy, and National Film Board Films including: Playing Fair, A Kids View of Canada, and several clips from videos about inclusion of children who have disabilities.

The video illustrates the following skills from Connecting Kids as summarized on page 12 and 13.

"Connecting Skills for Inclusive Travel Guides to develop and pass on to others

1. **Joining the Circle** involves gathering in a group, welcoming each other, following directions, and paying attention to each other so that we can do things together. Turn to page 19 for circle games and activities.

2. **Modeling** is whatever we are doing while people who admire us and want to be like us are watching. We teach and learn almost everything by modeling and copying. Turn to page 25 for modeling games and activities.

3. **Breaking the Ice** means warming the atmosphere in ways that release tension, energize the group, build trust, and open up everyone's creativity. Turn to page 31 for some great icebreakers.

4. **Participatory Pacing** is when you set an active pace while making smooth transitions and individual adjustments to keep everyone involved. Paying close attention to feedback from participants is the key. Turn to page 31 whenever you want to pick up the pace.

5. **I'll Be Your Partner!** involves doing things with different people instead of always sticking with the same partner. All games and activities can be adapted in ways that children can play in partners or small groups. Games and activities that encourage children to find different partners begin on page 47

6. **Give and Take** means offering a contribution, accepting what is being offered back, and then offering another contribution. Playing catch or having a conversation are both examples of give and take. Turn to page 53 for games and activities where the give and take goes back and forth.

7. **Touch Control and Other Safety Skills** are acquired through respecting each other's physical boundaries, even in crowded places and even when playing fast-paced games. Turn to page 61 for games and activities that help children develop touch control.

8. **Daring to be Different** means building pride in our own unique gifts, talents, special qualities, cultural backgrounds, abilities, and disabilities that make the world a more interesting place. Turn to page 67 for games and activities that dare children to enjoy their differences.

9 **Following the Leaders Behind You** involves seeking out contributions from the people on the outskirts. The leaders in the back of a group can see things from different angles and they can view things in completely new ways. Turn to page 73 for games and activities that bring out the

leaders in the background.

10. **Understanding in Any Language** is acquiring the ability to listen carefully with your heart, eyes and ears to many different kinds of communication. Relax, repeat back what you understand and accept support from the interpreters when needed. Turn to page 79 for games and activities that encourage many different kinds of communication.

11. **Tuning In** means putting yourself into another person's place by joining your ears, eyes, and hearts in harmony with the other person's feelings, ideas and experiences. When children are in tune, they can all be heard. Games and activities that help everyone get in tune with each other begin on page 85

12. **Bringing in the Reinforcements** means strengthening each other's abilities and confidence by getting involved in activities and interactions that immediately lead to enjoyable results and positive feedback. Turn to page 91 for games and activities that encourage children to build each other up instead of putting each other down.

13. **Giving a Hand** is offering to help in ways that guide others to safety, or to more choice, more power, and more fun. Sharing, doing something for someone, hand-over-hand guidance, showing, and comforting are all ways of giving a hand. Games and activities that encourage children to reach out to each other begin on page 97

14. **Off Stage Prompting** is when you give cues through words, pictures or actions that help others figure out what to do or say next. Prompting without coming across as nagging is a real balancing act. Turn to page 103 for games and activities that involve responding to prompts from behind the scenes.

15. **Leaving Out Losing** involves adapting games and activities so that no one gets left out or eliminated. Everyone has more fun when children play with each other instead of against each other. Turn to page 109 for games and activities that leave out losing.

16. **Keeping Cool When Things Get Hot** means staying calm and remembering to encourage others even when you are under pressure. Children can learn to keep cool by participating in activities that are difficult but not impossible. Games and activities that challenge children to keep their cool begin on page 115

17. **Practicing Tolerance** involves steadfastly ignoring something that bothers you while simultaneously searching for positive aspects of the person or the situation to support and strengthen. Games and activities that help us search for positives begin on page 121

18. **No-Go-Tell** means standing up for safety by saying "No" to dangerous or potentially dangerous situations, going away, helping others to get away and telling someone who can help you. Games and activities that help children practice the survival skills involved in "No-Go-Tell" begin on page 127

19. **Challenge By Choice** means taking realistic risks within a safety net of trust, mutual caring and confidence. Daring to stretch and try leads to growth and turns life into an exciting adventure. Turn to page 133 whenever the kids are ready to challenge themselves to have fun.

20. Inventing New Possibilities involves solving problems and overcoming barriers by sharing ideas, trying experiments and coming up with new ways of doing things. Begin your search for many new possibilities by turning to page 139

The final video clip shows young moms learning the skill of Inventing new possibilities and passing it on to their children during a course called "Playful Parenting". The course uses *Connecting Kids* as the textbook. We spend two hours per week together. The first hour is spent guiding young parents to develop one of these twenty skills. They spend the second hour passing these skills on to their children.

(Scenes of young mothers making sock puppets and then guiding their children to play with the puppets. Viewers see children developing language and playing imaginatively with their mothers.)

In conclusion, children are desperately searching for simple answers to very difficult questions. The answers they need cannot be found in technology or lectures or even videos such as I've been showing. The lessons children need to learn about life remain where they have always been and are learned easily by participating in cooperative and creative childhood pastimes from around the world. From learning to adapt these activities in ways that leave out losing and keep in the excitement. From learning to tell and tune into each other's different stories with mind, heart and spirit.

Pass these lessons on to your children from infancy onwards. As your children grow, you can be the travel guide who gathers your child, their classmates, and other kids in the neighbourhood to play your favourite childhood games. Playing those endless variations of tag, skip, hide and seek, hopscotch, dress up, guessing and ball games is the best medicine for melting icy knots of anxiety and taking away headaches and stomach-aches. Playing and laughing together in an atmosphere of safety, respect and fun is the natural way children heal their hearts and learn skills for connecting with each other and their communities in healthy ways.

The more we can step out of our adult-centred lives to play with and listen fully to our children, the more opportunities we will have to rethink and relearn our priorities. In 1988 Unitarian Minister Robert Fulgham told us that everything we need to know is learned in kindergarten. "Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some . . . When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands and stick together." Our children are the hope of the world and they do know what is needed. They need us.

Now I would like you to apply your inclusive skills of participatory pacing, modeling, give and take, daring to be different, giving a hand, leaving out losing and challenge by choice while I close with a song by one of my many mentors, Rick Scott who wrote the forward to *Connecting Kids*.

Rick is folk singer, family entertainer and extraordinarily skilled inclusive travel guide. All of his songs speak to me of exploring diversity within a resilient safety net of respect, choice, and above all fun. To learn more about Rick and to order his CDs and Tapes go to his website: www.rick-scott.com

My family is a fast moving action song that I will sign in one of my second languages. I would like you to help me with the chorus.

Oh, oh what do you see (Act out searching)

Look out world (Open arms and then sign 'world')

Its my family (Sign 'my' and sign 'family')

My Family
by Rick Scott

O-oh, now what do you see?
Look out world it's my family
O-oh, now what can it be?
Look out world it's my family.

I've got sisters
Brothers and mothers
Fathers, uncles and aunts
I've got relatives
I've got enemies
They'd be my friend if they'd give me a chance

There are black ones
White ones and red ones
Brown ones and yellow ones too
So many colors in my family
I wonder if any of them are blue?

There are Taoists, Buddhists, Hindus
Christians, Muslims and Jews
I know someone who doesn't believe anything
I saw them once on the six o'clock news

O-oh, now what do you see?
Look out world it's my family
O-oh, now what can it be?
Look out world it's my family.

Lyrics from "My Family" by Rick Scott: Rick Around the Rock (1992)
(used by permission in Connecting Kids)

Thank you everyone for taking part in this brief overview of how Inclusive Travel Guides explore diversity with children. I hope most of you have realized that you are already Inclusive Travel Guides. You can learn more about Inclusive Travel Guiding from my book: Connecting Kids: Exploring diversity together and by participating in an Inclusive Leadership Adventure. I hope to see some of you at our week of Advanced Training in Inclusive Leadership planned for Spring 2004. Email me at bridges@island.net to get on our email list or check out our website:

www.bridges.island.net/~bridges/