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SESSION III — CONCLUSION

David BRAMWELL

It has been a very interesting and stimulating session.

We started off with Julia showing us what is going on throughout the world, what people are doing. She made a couple of very relevant points. We do need more people, more education officers, more resources in environmental education in botanical gardens, but with the cautionary note that we do need more education officers and more people but without diluting the quality, and I think that's a very very important point. She also made the point that we need to work on improving our public relations for education. We need more information content, science in botanical gardens, make the garden more relevant to visitors. Also she mentioned the importance of computers of organizing tours and so on within the gardens as a means of taking advantage of what the garden offers for environmental education. Like all the speakers, in fact, she emphasized the need for teacher training within the gardens as an effective way of reaching more children, and of improving the way that we educate school children on environment.

Monsieur Gingins gave us a very interesting series of definitions of environmental education and he gave us quite an important insight into the philosophy and objectives of environmental education and what we can call civic education. I think we've had a superbe example of civic education with the last speaker, Terry, but we can come back to that later. He did make one very very important point and that is the usual problem that I think all of us have even in a forward-looking and advanced country like Switzerland that it's difficult to get environmental education incorporated into the school curriculum. This is something I think we all really need to think very hard about, and do our best as individual gardens. Perhaps even it's something we can take up as a network, to lobby for the inclusion of environmental education as a major subject in school curriculum. The final point that he made was the value of practical work, of excursions, of a direct hands-on approach through contact with nature. Obviously he showed us how it's done in his own center. I wonder at some stage if that sort of approach may not add an additional educational pressure on the environment. I'm not sure how you would respond and cope with that situation. But I think it's important that we do have this direct contact with nature part of education programmes. He also emphasized the need to teach teachers. Also he mentioned the value of networks, of the exchange

of ideas and exchange of programmes to avoid as he said “reinventing the wheel“ and I think that was also one of the very very important points that was made. That of course is what networks and exchanges and conferences and so on are all about.

Gale Bromley talked to us about public relations and marketing in education as a means of changing people’s attitudes. She also made the very important point of the need to integrate knowledgeable garden staff into education programmes and to make sure that if they do integrate into education programmes, that the role they play is acknowledged by other members of staff, by directors and by the people who are actually using education facilities. She said that we need to teach teachers to reach more children. I think this was one of the main points that came out, that perhaps teachers training in botanical gardens is one of the things that we really should be looking at very seriously. Gale also mentioned that she’s been successful, and it’s very nice to see somebody who’s being successful, in the generation of income for her education programmes, and the use of volunteers to support the programmes. She also too pointed out some of the pitfalls of using volunteers. Again, I think all these things are question of good management, and I think obviously, from what we’ve seen, at Kew, Gale has got the good management right.

The final speaker was Terry Keller, and as I said at the end of her lecture: “What do you say?“ I think Terry has achieved something that very few of us have done and that is to change from this sort of middle-class irrelevant botanical type of education to something which in her particular area especially, is a socially relevant programme which acts within and changes the local community. How many of us can say that we’ve actually changed the local community on the basis of what we’ve done for a botanical garden? Terry can. That’s one of the really great achievements of botanical gardens, what Terry has achieved in New York. She has worked on the local human environment, the everyday environment of people. She’s made them aware of their environment and how to improve it. I think, like Mike Fay, we should all feel inspired by that sort of work and try to reach the same levels.

I think I just like to say, as a conclusion, from my own point of view, that environmental education should, as I said right at the beginning, be seen as a flagship activity in botanical gardens.

