

By Melissa Nelson  
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It's all about the kids.

The little people of the world are at the heart of a new anthology of essays co-edited by Raffi Cavoukian -- creator of the enduring children's song Baby Beluga.

The singer/songwriter-turned-philosopher will be at the University of Victoria next week for the Canadian launch of *Child Honouring: How to Turn This World Around* and a discussion of the concept behind it, which he calls child honouring.

"It's a book about an original philosophy I've developed over the last few years," said Cavoukian. "It's a children-first approach to restoring community and ecosystems. Sometimes I refer to it as the next ecological paradigm, with the child as the missing link in ecology."

Cavoukian has been working on the concept since 1997.

This is his first book on the subject, and it contains contributions by an eclectic collection of heavy-weight thinkers, writers and educators including the Dalai Lama and Lloyd Axworthy.

The veteran children's performer, who started recording in 1976, proposes that making kids' well-being the primary consideration in every decision made in every society is the key to eliminating all of the world's ills, from environmental degradation to cultural disintegration. For example, if children's needs were always put first, people might redesign the education system so more children could succeed. We might redraft the charters of incorporation for companies so they were required to reduce harmful pollution, thereby protecting children's health.

"I think the child is the key to making this world a more livable one for the entire human species," said Cavoukian. "Imagine if society's prime directive was to take care of its young. Right now we pay far too much attention to maximizing capital, often in conflict with human health and ecosystem health."

Putting the concept into practice entails signing a covenant that consists of nine principles, from non-violence to ethical consumption. Cavoukian said the spirit of child honouring is invitational, and that those who are drawn to his vision will lay the groundwork to making the world a better place.

But what about those who don't?

"You always go where the resonance is, and then it ripples out from there." said Cavoukian. "I think that's true in all of our endeavours. We go through the doors that open. Everyone may find something in this, because they love their children too."

Cavoukian acknowledged that what he's proposing may seem far-fetched to some given the state of the world, but said "we can't afford the luxury of pessimism" and that the endorsements and support he's received so far give him hope. The UVic faculty of education has incorporated the covenant and principles into its teacher training for the past few years, and schools in the Gordon Head area are also working with it. Along with the Dalai Lama, his celebrity endorsers include Robert Kennedy Jr., Roy Romanow and Stephen Lewis.

"I think it's important to keep the big picture in mind as we all do the small things that make up the greater whole," he said. "If you want to redesign your living space, you don't just vacuum the corner. It helps to have the overall goal in mind."

Cavoukian and co-editor Sharna Olfman will speak at UVic's David Lam Auditorium on Thursday, June 15 at 7 p.m. Admission is free but registration is required in advance. Visit [www.alumni.uvic.ca/events](http://www.alumni.uvic.ca/events) or call 721-7766.