



My Dream for Education

Notes from Coleen O'Connell's Keynote address
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We all can recount and rant about the ways in which we are disgruntled by what is happening in the world of education... preparing our students for the global economy. (6 million google sites for 'education for the global economy'). But what we really need to be doing is preparing our children for their future by guiding them to become global citizens which entails a whole different kind of education. (18 million google sites when you type 'educating our children for the future')

Realizing that Martin Luther King Jr. inspired the seemingly impossible because he had a dream, and was urged on that fateful day in DC when Mahalia Jackson, the gospel singer on stage with him, directed him to tell his dream. The rest is history.

So he has inspired me to have my own dream for education and I will share it with you today. Please have your own dreams and then figure out a plan to act on them. Together as environmental/ecological educators we have the potential to turn education on its head.

- *Ecological Identity, as the poet Mary Oliver speaks of in her poem Wild Geese, asks us to understand "our place in the family of things". Ecological Identity is the grounded knowing of ourselves as coming from a place, a culture, an ecosystem. Children have their home watershed and foodshed as their first place of knowing – and from this context their ecological identities inform an ecological fluency of the larger world.*
- *Each child is a valued participant in their broader community – their particular gifts and talents have equal status within this community erasing the hierarchy that presently exists as valuing some talents higher than others.*
- *Children participate in intergenerational learning on a daily basis. Instead of being siloed into age groups, the daily life of children will be filled with experiences across the generations.*
- *Children are mentored to have relational skills such that conflicts that arise will be resolved in nonviolent ways.*

- *Integration of knowledge, values and skills needed for a sustainable way of life will be the foundation of children's learning. Constructing their knowledge through authentic and contextual experiences is the norm. (New standards are in order – as well as new pedagogies taught in teacher training.) Children will have the time and space to integrate and make meaning of the knowledge they need to live their lives.*
- *The Whole Child is valued – body, mind and spirit. Rites of passage celebrate each stage of the child's development honoring their evolving selves.*
- *The knowledge that arises from living in a biodiverse world and within a cosmic Universe story defines the understanding of the radical interconnections of all life.*
- *Each child learns that participation and service to their community is an essential component of our living democracy. Their role as a citizen is nurtured and honored in each stage of their development and is an essential component of their education.*
- *Systems thinking is the conceptual framework for which they will make meaning of the world. Fluency in understanding feedback loops, balance, reciprocity, nested hierarchies, synergy, and other ecological concepts creates citizens able to deal with complex problems and find enduring solutions.*
- *Always, the practice of time spent in reflection will inform all of the above practices. As the child matures, the practice will become that of critical reflection.*