CER Sustainability forum:

The ecological curriculum: teaching and/or learning

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An ecological education begins with personal understanding not a written curriculum. Understanding constructs relationships, which create learning. These arise through process as much as subject matter. They are the means whereby understanding is arrived at. Knowledge and understanding are different. Can understanding be taught? Is ecological understanding a responsibility of schools? If so, how do teachers work with it? Rob told me his teacher training did not prepare him for this sort of responsibility. “In the scope of everything we learned, what we call ecological literacy… we had about a week or two in the whole course. So I feel I’m not trained in finding connections… I’m not confident in doing it.” Ian told me…”the difficult think is… it’s like trying to teach meditation if you haven’t mediated before.” Ruth told me, “Well, I’m still trying to figure out how to do it… but I know… story telling is a huge part.” What is it and how is it learned? Solar panels and water tanks is much easier. A depth of engagement, for which responsibility must be taken, constructs qualitatively different learning. How do we recognize it in ourselves and facilitate it in others.
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How do we recognize it in ourselves and facilitate it in others.
Rob: “In the scope of everything we learned, what we call ecological literacy, which is what I think this is about... we had about a week or two in the whole course. So I feel I’m not trained in finding connections... I’m not confident in doing it.”
Ian: “the difficult think is... it’s like trying to teach meditation if you haven’t meditated before.”
Ruth: “Well, I’m still trying to figure out how to do it... but I know... story telling is a huge part.”
Aaron Williamson
‘the limits of language are the limits of our world’

No. The limits of language are the limits of language.
For here is the person before language, Not able, finally, To disappear, Capable of human form
Korowal School
Environmental Education Project, Maple Ridge, Vancouver
Equinox School, Toronto
Candlebark School
Kate (Maple School): ‘I think we... created this school because we want a more connected life. It seems to me that the families who have come together at this school are looking for that. They are seeking something deeper and richer for their kids to experience and for them to experience as well... in community, together.’
Kate: ‘OK, we have just finished celebrating the day of the dead. We wrote biographies of someone who had passed, one of our ancestors, and this gave the kids a chance to reflect on something that is not the here and now... and this time of the year [Halloween] becomes a broader event than just dressing up and running around... It becomes something deeper that connects them... helps them be in a state of reverence for their family, and... it sort of enlivens the whole family system. And then we relate that across curriculum to the organ systems, so they are studying the body.... And I find that is a step in a right direction. Just to connect to ourselves as beings... not just consumers... noticing characteristics in our family and honoring them.’
‘Coming up with ideas about relationships, socially, environmentally, with the self... which is the philosophy that we started off with [at this school]... is a process of discovery, especially in the city. To find ways to actually connect... so we are doing it authentically and its not just another synthesis of [theories about] what we should be connecting with, [is a challenge]. We’re actually trying to root it in the natural rhythms ... around us, of our place... We [the grade 4 class] do go out as much as possible, which is a struggle cause as you get into the higher grades there is more curriculum to cover, so there is a balance to maintain. We have to work really hard and efficiently here so that we can get out of [the classroom and] bring... [the outside] in.’
a. The discussion needs to be framed in an ecological discourse.
b. The discussion needs to work with systemic perspectives and the perspective of the participant.
c. Ecological science needs to be addressed.
d. Learning needs to be situated in relation to indigenous ways of knowing, place and ‘the local’.
e. Learning needs to draw on imaginative and creative ways of understanding and communicating.
f. ‘Mindfulness’ needs to be addressed and employed.
Maturana: Becoming aware of one’s awareness and understanding one’s understanding gives rise to a feeling of responsibility for what one is doing, for what one is creating through one’s own operations of distinction. This kind of insight has something inevitable: once this has been understood, one cannot pretend any longer to be unaware of one’s understanding if one is aware of it and also aware of this awareness… it is not understanding that entails responsibility but the knowledge of knowledge (cited in Poerksen, 2004, p. 52).