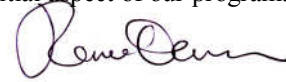




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The following article is a retelling of a workshop the faculty took in January. I tell it from my own personal perspective and internal experience to help the reader gain insight into what children are thinking and experiencing on a regular basis at Rainbow Mountain. I hope it provides a deeper sense of why mystery and myth is an essential aspect of our program.



Children of the Mystery...

The faculty has been working intensely on defining our stated curriculum, but on Friday, January 12, our faculty training workshop was a day to remember our roots. John Shackelton, previous executive director at Rainbow Mountain, lead an inspirational half-day workshop called The Children of the Mystery. What happened there brought home to me, again, what 'experiential learning' looks like, so I want to tell you about my experience and what I learned.']

The faculty always centers at the beginning of our gatherings. For this training, John lit a triple-wick candle. One flame was lit for learning as an ancient mystery (the Earth has been learning since the beginning of time). Another flame was lit for our students as children of the mystery. The third flame

was lit in dedication to teaching as sacred work.

John reminded us that in our first year of life, according developmental brain research, we learn more than in the rest of our years combined. The first year of life! If we learn more when we are pre-literal— before we can speak, read, or write— what does that say about how we learn? Humans are multi-sensory learners. We learn from experience. We learn from seeing and moving, tasting and feeling. We learn when we have a sense of wonder and our emotions light up. And we learn best when we are open— free of assumptions, expectations, or prejudice.

John read two beautiful poems he had written, and told the Moon's Story, adapted from an ancient oral myth:

...When the Earth was so young that land had not yet appeared, Moon stood in one place in the sky. She found the blue of Earth's ocean inviting, so she decided one day to take a bath there. In the exuberance of her bath, she bounced repeatedly off the ocean floor and, during one of these dancing movements, a part of her came off and was left at the bottom of the ocean. She did not notice because she was having such a good time. When her bath was over, she returned to her place in the sky.

Eons passed as Earth formed continents with rivers, lakes and ponds. The wonders of life unfolded and Earth learned to make a vast diversity of living beings. Then one day Moon saw a critter come to a river and wash in it. This reminded Moon of her joyous bath in the Earth's waters so long ago, and for the first time, she realized that she lost a part of herself while she was in Earth's vast ocean. She longed for what she lost and asked the waters of Earth to search for the lost part of herself.

The waters looked but could not find Moon's lost self. They reported to her that so much had changed since she had last visited, they could not find what she longed for. Moon wept.

Therefore, Moon decided to make her own search, and (no longer free to descend to Earth because she would hurt the living things that now reside on Earth) she started a journey around Earth, in a large circle, always looking down to find the lost part of herself.

As she journeyed, she drew the waters of the ocean along, and the waters washed many things up onto the beaches, but alas, not the lost piece. As she became discouraged her light dimmed and after four weeks of circling Earth, went completely black. Nonetheless, her hope rekindled, and after a couple of days, she decided to try again — circling the earth and pulling the waters back. Today, as her light returns each month, she begins another month's journey around Earth, always searching the waters and the beaches for the part of herself she lost.

Listening to the story was beautiful and relaxing. We discussed how the Moon's Story is not primarily a story of how the tides began and the moon's phases came to be, but a story of loss.

John divided us into four groups and assigned each group either the Moon Story, one of the poems, or the scientific version of the tides to act out. As much as I had enjoyed listening to each poem and story, I did NOT feel like moving around and dramatizing that morning! However, I knew from experience that many of life's greatest learning experiences come when we stretch outside our comfort zone. So I participated, despite my reluctance. Fortunately, we had beautiful clothes and a vast array of artifacts in the second grade, third grade, and Spanish rooms to choose from as props. Within minutes, my group was jabbering with ideas for our dramatization.

Acting the stories out with clothes and companions provided depth to my learning. It helped me understand the metaphor in the story and to *feel* its message. I decided that the great loss the Moon had experienced was her own childhood and the mystery, awe, and innocence she had left behind when she matured. I resonated with the Moon's emotions, and grieved for my own childhood.

Our group's presentation turned into a dance. It was a joy to play the part of the moon, dancing and bouncing in the ocean as a child. Ruth, with her silver hair, played "grandmother" moon – pulling the ocean with her at the end of the story. The other groups' presentations were equally beautiful and poignantly symbolic. I especially marveled at the

dramatization of the scientific version of the tide story. As the group rotated in unison, they used a wave drum to create mysterious ocean sounds. I was glad we had taken the time to *experience* the learning, rather than merely listening to the stories. It was meaningful and memorable.

We ended the workshop by reflecting upon on what we had learned from the experience. Doreen told us about John sharing this same story with her kindergarten class, except with a different ending. At the end of the story, he revealed a shiny piece of gold representing the piece of the moon that was left behind on Earth. The kids, with awe and reverence, passed that piece of gold around the circle, from one cupped little hand to another, marveling at its wonder. It's this sense of wonder, mystery, and magic children should experience every day. It's this sense of awe children at Rainbow Mountain *do* experience. Children of the mystery.

The faculty felt a sense of pride and renewed dedication to our mission. Everyone began sharing stories of wonder and magic in their classrooms. Even Omega teachers talked about how their middle school students, who have attended Rainbow throughout the years, are so open to mystery. They love picture books and oral myths, and they talk about the spirit behind events.

One of our reflection questions was, "How do children maintain a sense of mystery when they learn the scientific truth?" At Rainbow we teach, or experience, multi-faceted/three-dimensional thinking. Students are not supposed to be taught in terms of black and white; right and incorrect; true and false (linear, binary thinking). Instead, they learn that science and mystery enhance one another. The scientific version of life is as awesome as the mystical versions. Take the creation stories as an example; just because the earth might not have been formed, literally, on the back of a turtle, doesn't make that particular creation story, or any other myth, less valid. It's the Truth inside– it's the heart of the matter– that really counts.

Evening Tide

What moves there, there, there,
hidden, though I sense its silence
in the curling of the foam?
From what non-existent distant line
dividing the firmaments
does it move like angel wings dropped
from the moon
and spread abroad misty gray
in disturbing of the waters?

by John Shackelton

Childhood's Echo

Within the quiet forest of my mind
beneath dark shadows,
Something moves.
Silent, it slips from thought to thought
and hushes every word to naught
Like something longed for, long forgot.

Ah, there it moves!
But no . . . 'tis gone.
Ah, there again!
Be still, strange wisp, and let me know
What wondrous gift I lost so long ago.

by John Shackelton

Correction note:

In the last issue of *Heart of the Matter* a reference was missing at the end of the first article:

Meade, M. (2007). *Initiation and the soul the sacred and the profane*. Seattle: Mosaic.