



Heart-Centered Teaching Inspired by Nature

Using nature's wisdom to bring more joy
and effectiveness to our work with children



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Art Direction by Valerie Cuppens
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ROSENOW, NANCY

Heart-Centered Teaching Inspired by Nature. Lincoln, Nebraska:
Dimensions Educational Research Foundation, 2012, 1st ed.
Printed in the United States. ISBN 978-0-9839465-3-3



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Beginning Thoughts: Lessons from a Begonia

“We need a renaissance of wonder. We need to renew, in our hearts and in our souls, the deathless dream, the eternal poetry, the perennial sense that life is miracle and magic.”

— E. Merrill Root

Inspired by Nature



I have a colorful little plant at my house I just love. It's a wax begonia my son and daughter-in-law gave me for Mother's Day years ago. I've managed to keep it alive despite the challenge of traveling often and not being around enough to give it proper care. (I push a slow-release watering stick into the soil and hope for the best.) Once after a long trip I arrived home to find my begonia in darkness. I'd forgotten to keep the shades open so the poor plant could have adequate light while I was gone. I was sure I'd killed it, but soon realized it was still alive, yet tilting oddly to the left. I was baffled at first, then noticed the shades were open just enough on the left side to allow a bit of sunlight to creep in. My little plant had done everything in its power to survive, all its leaves reaching mightily for that life-giving sliver of light.

My begonia's will to live was a lesson for me – one of those reminders from nature that are everywhere if we choose to pay attention. Now whenever I hit a rough patch, I think of that little plant's resolve and smile. I realize there's something inside me that also wants to reach for the light. It gives me courage to keep going. I hope I can provide some of that same encouragement for you in the pages ahead – a bit of inspiration and some tools to help you face the challenges I know happen daily in the field of education.

Heart-Centered Teaching

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes
but in having new eyes." — Marcel Proust

If you work with children (or on behalf of children), this book is for you. It's offered with my deepest admiration and respect. Yours is a job that takes great skill, endurance, and strength of heart to do well. Being an educator (or educational administrator) is perhaps one of the most challenging, and at the same time most rewarding ways to spend a career. I believe this because it's the way I've chosen to spend mine.

For well over 30 years I've worked with preschool and elementary children, first as a classroom teacher and later as an administrator. Recently I've been leading an educational research foundation that supports teachers in various settings across the United States in their efforts to bring more connections with nature to children's daily learning. Throughout the years I've marveled at the dedication of bright, talented folks willing to pour their hearts and souls into work that pays modestly at best, with few of the financial perks some other careers enjoy. I've also grieved as idealistic people left the profession, discouraged and (to use an all-too-common phrase) burned out. Many times I've asked myself how things could be better. This book is my attempt to help answer that question.

During the past decade, as our research foundation began focusing on the benefits for children of making deeper connections with the natural world, I, too, began to enjoy a deeper connection with nature. Doing so changed my perspective – and my life. I started to develop the “new eyes” Proust describes in the quote above. Principles I noticed in nature helped me articulate beliefs about our work. Ideas that had once seemed like vague shapes on the horizon gradually came into sharper focus. My new way of seeing helped me embark on a personal voyage of discovery to find ways of teaching that could be every bit as nurturing and supportive for adults as for children.

I'm fortunate to have been joined on that voyage by amazing companions and guides, many of whom are listed in the acknowledgments section of this book. With their encouragement I decided it was time to write about my new understandings. These ideas feel true to me in the deepest places of my heart. I hope you'll find your own truth in them as well.

Inspired by Nature

You're invited to go with me on a journey to consider ways nature's wisdom can help us see our work through new, heart-centered eyes. I'd like to picture you settling down to read this book after an exhausting yet exhilarating day with children (or supporting the adults who work with children). Perhaps you're nestled in a comfortable chair, enjoying a beverage of choice. If you have a wax begonia plant nearby, all the better! I want this book to remind you to celebrate yourself and your work every day. I hope you think of it as a safe harbor to come to whenever you feel a bit battered about by life's storms.



Voyage of discovery

Ideas that had once seemed like vague shapes on the horizon gradually came into sharper focus. My new way of seeing helped me embark on a personal voyage of discovery to find ways of teaching that could be every bit as nurturing and supportive for adults as for children.



About the Author

Nancy Rosenow is founder and Executive Director of Dimensions Educational Research Foundation/Nature Explore. She is co-author of *Learning With Nature Idea Book*, and has written numerous articles for educational and environmental publications. She is a founding member of the World Forum Foundation's Nature Action Collaborative for Children Leadership Team.