

A Note on Teaching the Earth Charter to Youth

by April Ambrose

Teachers. They have such a wonderful creative career as educators of the young. They take fresh souls and give them the tools and the concepts with which to carve and mold their way along Earth's crust. Teachers have the opportunity to assess our current situation and foresee the possibilities of the future, and arm their students with the knowledge and skills needed to bridge that gap.

This bridging task is indeed a very difficult one with many pitfalls such as ego, politics, personal affiliations and preferences. It requires some organizing theme that can tie together past, present, and future in a meaningful way and bring ideas down to the everyday actions of our lives. It also requires an understanding of community.

At present we have some odd paradoxes when we look at the state of our human community and our Earth community. On the human side, we have more social relations than ever, yet rather than bringing unity and support, we seem more fragmented than ever and life in society has become a struggle for survival. Thus, teachers teach survival skills—ego, social and economic survival skills.

On the Earth side, similarly we interact with nature more than ever, yet this does not lead to unity either. Nature is not seen as an organism of which we are a part, rather it is seen as a set of resources to be taken, divided, and used fully with no thought to the future. For many people, there is now no need to teach about our natural environment, as it holds no real influence in most of our lives. Instead, the human-built environment supercedes all others. Teachers are forced, by way of standards, to teach about the context and history of these human constructs, rather than the future of human lives. They must teach students how to be a part of the human community, but not the community of life.

So, the message to students too often becomes no one is really bound to anybody or anything else, and thus no one is responsible. This sense of



irresponsibility, however, fragments the entire Earth community, and will, if continued, lead to certain devastation. If humans and life as we know it, are to survive, there must be something that binds us together. We need both a vision that ensures the continuation of our species and a clear path to executing that vision. Otherwise we may continue upon the dreadful path we are currently traveling.

The Earth Charter expresses such a vision. This is truly an amazing document, the roots of which lie deep in the rich diversity of human lives across the world and whose healing branches reach far into the future of life on Earth. It offers a stunning vision. What it does not make clear, however, is how to forge the path from where we are now to attaining that glorious vision.

Choosing the Vision and Acting Spontaneously

Here is my belief about the path—in the simple choosing of this vision the path appears immediately like the yellow brick road leading us into the Ecozoic Era. Each person that has personally accepted the Earth Charter has accepted it based on his or her own sense of truth. This is their truth sense of what is right and wrong for them. These are their instincts that help them recognize what is healthy or unhealthy for them and their body and for our community. Healthy instincts guided by a clearly articulated vision allow one to act with a conviction as if in a Primal state where one just knows or feels when something is right.

The term, “Primalism,” is used quite loosely here as a state of being. This is a state in which a person acts from the felt truth within and very simply does what feels right, a state of being in which wants are whittled down to needs. Primalism involves the most basic feelings and thoughts about survival. The action that comes from these feelings and thoughts arises instantaneously and spontaneously. Primalism is accessing creative powers by acting out of a vision without intellectual and social restraint. In Primalism, thinking, feeling, and acting are all done simultaneously in a fluid extension of time. Primalism is being creative, rather than reactive.

Primalism is doing what feels right to you regardless of how that action may appear to other people. Though initially this seems like a foolish idea, one must only look at the world around us to see that it is not. Everywhere

people are lying to themselves and others. We play an infinite number of games of deceit for powers and purposes we claim are out of our control. Then there are people who would punish us for not following some of these lies. For example, not long ago people in the State of California were prohibited from advocating any form of health treatment other than radiation, chemotherapy, or surgery, or face the consequences, namely jail time. However, the application of punishment for acting on one's personal idea of truth is not limited to government. Big businesses can use its "big money" to lobby and pass laws punishing anybody believing against them. An example here is the health food industry vs. the drug industry. Primalism says that we want control of our own lives again, and we will reclaim them by reclaiming truth.

The Truth a Child Sees

This may sound confusing at first. How does one recognize truth and not simply desire? How can we all have the same truth? How can children know what is right if we do not teach them? To adults this notion is preposterous, not worth a second thought. To a child, this is not a notion, but the way things are. Children can still hear the ringing bell of truth. They are still sad when they see the smallest of creatures suffering. They can see pain or joy on anybody's face. To children these things are still real, until we teach them otherwise. We teach them to ignore the homeless because they have chosen to be without shelter. We teach them to wear clothing that fits their socioeconomic standing. We teach them that dirty is wrong and clean is right. We teach them to ignore their bodies and the sensations it produces.





We don't, however, discourage these thoughts and feelings as much with our words as with our actions. Children are great observers. They see everything. For example, if a child's parents are fighting, they will see this and it will hurt them to see people that they love in pain. But then they will learn over time that fighting is okay because their parents do it. Children can see right through who you think that you are to the being you are displaying according to your actions.

We are constantly telling ourselves lies and expecting others to go along with them. Children do not accept these things unless we push them to do so. This is why children are our hope. We don't have to teach them what is right, we only have to show them that we accept what is right and reject what is wrong. This is why children can easily understand and accept a document like the Earth Charter because it lays out everything that we believe to be right and everything we will not stand for. It rings the bell of truth loud and clear. This is why the Earth Charter should be a primary teaching tool in our schools.

So, how do we teach the Earth Charter to our children? Easy, present it to them in a clear, concise form where your honest emotions and actions are worn on your shirtsleeve. Children want to believe what is true and they want approval of the things they are already thinking and feeling. They don't want to believe stories that end in pain and suffering. They want one that progresses in beauty and fun and that has room for their own creative input.

As we get older, we lose this truth sense. We begin to live our lives more for other people than ourselves. We lose sight of who we are inside. Adolescence definitely contributes to this. These are the awkward years of figuring out what place you want to occupy in the world, what truths you want to stand up for, what wrongs you will not stand for. The problem with adolescence is that an adolescent feels her or she must justify everything for his or her peers. Suddenly truth sense is not enough. They begin to hear truth in a different way. They hear it only in contradiction and hypocrisy. In other words, truth becomes harder to recognize in its own right and easier to hear only in relationship to someone else.

At around the teenage years, youths choose what truths they will commit to, and which lies they will commit to. This changes over the course of their life, of course, but it becomes more difficult to change over time.

Thus adolescence and some of the teenage years are the most pivotal times in a person's life. This is where the Earth Charter can be extraordinarily useful.

During these teenage years, youths need to become actively involved with the Earth Charter in whatever ways they can. They should be involved in service projects and activities that form youths into tight communities. Their activities should be non-competitive, non-hierarchical, group activities. They should also spend a lot of time alone. They should be constantly writing about their experiences, likes and dislikes. They should receive praise and support at every turn. They should also have very honest and open role models and teachers. They need to feel important, useful, and right. They need their lives to be validated in numerous ways. They need help seeing through some of society's lies. For example, they need to know why they are being taught what they are at school. They need to know why some people see war and violence as necessary. They need to understand what causes homelessness and poverty.

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Educating for Truth and Hope

The education of the present is already the education of the past. Youths around the world are beginning to take traditional education less and less seriously as it does not teach them what they need to know about how to survive in this life. Current education is not based on truth for all. For example, it is becoming much more widely known that our history classes teach about a minority of the population in any given time. Even some of our science classes refuse to accept current knowledge of global warming trends. Classes are contained within buildings that never allow students to even learn what trees are in their schoolyard, much less what a forest looks, feels, and sounds like. Schools have become much less involved with teaching about life and survival, and more involved in producing better employees of society.

The saddest thing about all of this is that our youths know that the world is in a bad spot right now. They also know that they are our future, that we look to them for answers and solutions. Yet, when they finally emerge from school into the crazy world that has been created, they almost instantly become extraordinarily frustrated. Why? Because school did not teach them



about this—about life. School did not teach them how to enter into the rat race and yet still maintain a sense of what is right. Most of all school did not teach them how to make things better.

Most of these youth have become disillusioned. They have accepted pain and suffering and lies as what they must be. Some of these people, however, are trying to drop out of the race. Some of these people are working to make their corner of the universe better. These people are called the counterculture. These are the people who refuse to recognize society as it is and whom society refuses to recognize. These are the people who are trying to get back in touch with their primal nature—with what feels good and right. These are the people who are trying to reclaim truth by acting out their visions. But it is hard, for society allows them few resources. By the time most of them gain these resources, they have forgotten their dreams or deemed them impossible. They become realistic like society instead of idealistic like the Earth Charter.

Society is only as healthy as its young people. Our society is very unhealthy and our youth are crying for help. They don't want to shoot each other. They don't want to feel pain. They are not ready for war. We need to help them by listening to their cries. We cannot ignore them anymore. They are our future—literally. They will choose what from their lives and our present age to take into the future with them and what they will create.

Will they take war or will they take peace? Will they choose the lies and the superficial cares or will they take truth and each other? Will they live in fear or will they live in joy? That choice is more up to us than we think. For we are their teachers, and we are their students. We must guide them and let them lead us, simultaneously and fluidly, into a better world.

