

The Head-Royce School The Principles of Ecological Literacy

Education for sustainability requires, in addition to environmental knowledge, the acquisition of particular skills, values, and vision needed to put that knowledge into practice. Education for sustainable living cultivates competencies of head, heart, hands, and spirit to enable children to develop toward becoming citizens capable of designing and maintaining sustainable societies. A few of these competencies include:

Head

- The knowledge of ecology, the “language” of nature, and key concepts such as networks, interdependence, diversity, cycles, and dynamic balance
- The ability to think systemically about the world in terms of relationships, connectedness and context
- The ability to think critically, to solve problems creatively, and to apply environmental ethics to new situations
- The ability to assess the impact of human technologies and actions and to envision the long-term consequences of decisions.

Heart

- A deeply felt concern for the well-being of the Earth and of all living things
- Empathy and the ability to see from and appreciate multiple perspectives
- A commitment to equity, justice, inclusivity, and respect for all people
- Skills in building, governing, and sustaining communities.

Hands

- The ability to apply ecological knowledge to the practice of ecological design
- Practical skills to create and use tools, objects, and procedures required by sustainable communities
- The ability to assess and make adjustments to uses of energy and resources
- The capacity to convert convictions into practical and effective action.

Spirit

- A sense of wonder
- A capacity for reverence
- A deep appreciation of place
- A feeling of kinship with the natural world, and the ability to invoke that feeling in others.

Adapted with permission from the Center for Ecoliteracy, Berkeley, CA and Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World (SF: Sierra Club Books, 2005) (November 26, 2006)