

## Smart By Nature Interview

### What do you see as the primary message of this campaign?

Michael — Part of our goal in writing the book was to look at how many different ways change gets initiated. Sometimes it begins with a parent, sometimes with a teacher, it may be top down, and sometimes it starts with students who raise an issue. We're trying to show that there are a lot of different ways to get started and we want folks to know that other people have done it. It can be done.

Lisa — What this book is doing is documenting this moment in education in a way that hasn't happened before. People are independently recognizing that this is a need and that it serves to address issues surrounding current environmental crises as well as improving education. It is in that regard a natural movement; it has a life of its own.

### What are some of the biggest barriers to moving towards schooling for sustainability?

Michael — The most difficult part of doing this is not getting a green campus or switching to healthy lunches, but is the process of integrating sustainability into the curriculum. Some schools have found that when they built their curriculum around sustainability questions, they came up with core questions that they could ask over and over again in different classes. The teachers found that it was helping their teaching because things were tying together; it wasn't a series of fragmented lessons.

### So for the kids they could see the connection from class to class...

...from class to class and also from year to year. Burlington schools here in Oakland did an audit of their curriculum and said, 'how can we bring sustainability in with ongoing questions that we're asking' rather than 'now we're going to do sustainability' and 'now we're going to do something else' because it's really more of a perspective, it's a lens for looking at things.

Another thing we keep hearing over and over again is that it is hard to do it alone. When people ask 'what do I do', I ask 'who else is there'. Are there other parents, is it the school nurse, is it local business people, because there is often a group of people who are concerned about the school and want to do something.

### In terms of the schools featured in this book, in terms of geography, do you find that they tend to be found along the coasts or do you find that they are spread evenly throughout the country?

Michael — We spent a couple of months doing research, asking 'where are the schools'. There are not as many in the South, there are a lot on the west coast, some in the southwest, some in Iowa and Utah. I think the momentum is building everywhere.

### How were the schools chosen to be part of this book project?

Michael — We tried to be responsible with our own money on this project, so one of the ways schools became a part of the book was that we made sure to find several schools that were in one area in order to cut down on the amount of trips. So I traveled to New York, Vermont, Massachusetts and New Jersey all in one trip. Then I went to Minnesota, Illinois and Arkansas, and so, partly that helped determine the schools.

### Does the Center for Ecoliteracy actually help schools create these 'green' curriculums for sustainability to be used in schools?

Lisa — It's not so much that we produce a formal binder of curriculum resources, but work with individual schools based on what they're already doing. We see what the opportunities are to take it further and help facilitate that work based on where they are. And the second thing would be that we produce guides like the 'Big Ideas' guide, which can be used as a curriculum framework to spur ideas and activities and discussion questions – that sort of thing.

Michael — The pressures that make some of this hard for teachers to take on, as we were saying before, is that it's just one more thing. So for this guide we looked at the science standards from the American Association of the Advancement of Science to see what things kids are supposed to know by each grade level and then assessed how you could teach those using food. In this case it was food, but we're also producing one on waste and one on consumption among other things. This is try to help teachers make that connection, to see how they can take what they're teaching and fuse it with this perspective of sustainability, while also fulfilling the things that they're required to teach, whether it's to meet no child left behind standards, or science standards.

**Is there one single piece of advice you have for people wanting to begin integrating this idea of schooling for sustainability into their school?**

Michael — Is there one thing? I think the biggest thing is for people to figure out what their passions are. Some things are easier to achieve than others, but it all takes a concerted effort. People need to figure out what they care enough about that they're going to be willing to stick with it.

Lisa — I would underscore that idea of passion as being the most important starting place. One story I found very interesting was a school that started by having a series of book groups for the faculty to help identify what things stirred something up. They asked “what are the things that we as a collective faculty care most about?” – is it food, is it consumerism, energy use – what exactly is it? So they got together and read these books and discussed them, and in the process it helped them articulate for themselves what they really cared about and where they wanted to direct their energies.