

## Essential Activities - Skills of Ecosocial Leadership Reading Time: 7-9 minutes

In advocating for [ecosocial literacy](#) as a foundational organizing principle in classrooms, schools, homes and institutions, we aim to broaden and deepen the principles, practices and mindsets, and importantly, the possibilities, that educators and facilitators can draw upon to become active participants in manifesting a more peaceful, harmonious, just and sustainable world and mentoring an entire generation of ecosocially literate humans. Every educator, parent and mentor has their own unique situation, yet within those situations, each of us can find small steps we can take in alignment with our vision of a more eco-socially just and harmonious world.

In “Foundations of Ecosocial Literacy” we briefly discussed the four foundational ideas or thoughts summarized as follows:

- ▶ Adopt an *enriched view of human beings*
- ▶ Recognize that outer change begins with *inner transformation*
- ▶ Develop our *non-cognitive ways of knowing*
- ▶ Incorporate and honor our *contemplative and reflective lineages*

Keeping in mind these four foundational thoughts, we draw upon eight essential activities or mindsets that we aspire to include in our everyday language, lessons, curricula and conversations. At all times, we’re looking for ways to engage activities that will illuminate and explore these following eight ideas.

### **Eight Essential Activities**

9. The Importance of Language & Human Stories
10. Reverence (Pointing to a Universal Set of Values)
11. Self-Reflection, Introspection, Inquiry (Contemplative Education)
12. Disorienting Dilemmas (Exposure to Different Worldviews)
13. Practice Mentality (Small Consistent Steps with Intention)
14. Appreciative Inquiry as a Method of Non-force Based Change
15. Creativity and Creative Recovery Practices
16. Cultivating the Eight Intrinsic Attributes of Ecosocial Leadership

These eight activities or mindsets are not separate; rather, they are interconnected at many different levels. Often, to engage one means to engage others. But each one points to a particular facet of our orientation and world view that we manifest in different ways and in different circumstances.

### **The Intrinsic Attributes of Ecosocial Leadership**

As we align our values, content and pedagogy with the four foundational thoughts and support student learners by regularly emphasizing these interdisciplinary essential activities, certain leadership qualities begin to emerge. The [eight intrinsic attributes](#) of ecosocial literacy and leadership are gradually activated. While this tends to happen naturally as a result of the various activities, we can always remain open to creating specific lessons,

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methods and experiences, for directly nurturing the following eight attributes of ecosocial leadership.<sup>[1]</sup>

**1 Vitality** (Joyful, Fully Alive) - We're happy as human beings. While life has its ups and downs, we generally find ourselves upbeat and joyful. We find it easy to enjoy others, our connections and our communities. We generally feel good about ourselves and we're joyfully discovering and developing our creativity, passions and gifts. We most often find ourselves in a state of gratitude, abundance and self-kindness. We have an abundance of electricity or energy in our body. It is usually very easy for us to find things for which we're genuinely grateful.

**2 Empathy** (Heart Connections) - We have genuine empathy, with expanding circles of concern outward. We actively cultivate ever-deepening, caring connections with ourselves and others, expanding outward to include all things, both living and so-called "non-living". This kind of empathic connection is a precursor to genuine reverence, which arises naturally when one fully grasps the bewildering complexity of life on Earth and our place in the family of things. This is also a precursor to genuine humility.

**3 Gratitude** - We find it easy to embody genuine gratitude for an ever-expanding circle of connections that sustains our lives and brings us joy. The element of gratitude extends forward and backward in time, inward and outward in place, and constantly reminds us of our sacred place in the family of things. Gratitude is one of the root qualities (precursors) of being "heart centered" and also of being "vital, fully alive". It is also another precursor of reverence - it can show up as a sense of reverence or having a reverent attitude (because we see the sacredness and interconnectedness of all things). Empathy (heart connections) and gratitude together give rise to humility - the kind of humility that arises when one truly understands their dependence upon others (and all things in the biosphere) and the kind of humility one feels in the presence of the sacred.

**4 Listening** (Non-judgmentally, Unconditionally) - this quality carries with it so many important things: the elements of respect, creating a sense of welcoming and safety for others, patience and active presence. We cultivate the ability, the commitment and the capacity to listen to other's stories and ideas with curiosity; without interrupting or projecting our thoughts onto them. In other words, we actually listen to each other, and with curiosity! When we genuinely listen to others, we offer them a great gift: the opportunity to make connections for themselves. This open, present listening is the heart of creative dialogue, mentoring and non-force based change. We trust in the divine nature of every other being.

**5 Heart-Centered** - We have a loving, giving, compassionate heart that is rooted in the heart quality of gratitude. We can easily understand the multitude of connections we have with other humans, non-humans and the so-called "inanimate" world. It is easy for us to embody genuine gratitude for all these connections we have, for the multitude of gifts that we've been given, and especially for life itself and all those beings and things that share this

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earth with us. This is related to reverence and can often appear that way also. We recognize we're mortal beings and we won't be here forever, so we'll be as happy, healthy and loving as we possibly can. "I will give my all (heart) to everything I do."

**6 Service** - "Generosity is the virtue that produces peace." When we have genuine empathy (deepening heart connections with others), then we will naturally have an innate, unstoppable desire to make a difference for future generations. "I want to help others." When we are able to act authentically, in alignment with our deepest values in a committed way in service of those heart connections and future generations, we are natural leaders. Part of our propensity to serve includes our natural human inclination towards generosity, which is a heart-centered quality that grows exponentially from our families to our groups and communities and into our societies.

**7 Authenticity** - We are self-aware of our deepest values and the gifts and aptitudes we bring to the world (our strengths). We are willing to stand up for our values by being ourselves and acting in alignment with them in all situations. We're willing to pursue our aspirations, dreams and goals and develop our proclivities and gifts, even if others doubt us. In the world, we act in alignment with these values and gifts in our interactions with others. We also honor these same things in others and encourage and support others to develop their own authenticity.

**8 Quiet Mind** - We're relaxed, patient and present. We can find calm in our minds and hearts, in most every circumstance. We can find humor in most situations. We can embody quiet, receptive presence for extended periods. We have the ability to be fully present (in the here and now) and offer the gift of our attention to the people we interact with and the projects we are a part of. We don't feel a strong need to distract ourselves from our lives. We generally don't react strongly to the over-stimulus of the modern, digital, polarized, attention-seeking world. We can choose how and where we place our awareness and attention and can consciously give our energy to those situations that are in alignment with our deepest values.

### Notes

[1] The Origin of the Eight Attributes — Through the years of teaching in alignment with the principles of ecosocial literacy, the attributes have emerged and evolved. Originally, eight qualities were written to guide student learners in their participation towards specific "outcomes". While some attributes have remained from the beginning (listening, gratitude and authenticity, for example), the current set of eight have also been influenced by the qualities of "nature connected" people around the world as identified by Jon Young and his [512 Project](#), [Wilderness Awareness School](#), [Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature](#), and his many years of research with indigenous, nature connected cultures around the planet.

As it turns out, cultures who are strongly nature connected (such as the San people in the Kalahari, or the Haudenosaunee in North America) tend to develop in their children many of these same qualities we're identifying in teaching ecosocial literacy and leadership. Probably the two most ubiquitous qualities of leadership (and nature connected people) are the ability to listen unconditionally

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and a sense of gratitude. When even just these two are practiced consistently in a group, many of the other qualities will begin to emerge quite spontaneously. As human beings, we have evolved to develop these eight attributes. Our nervous systems are wired for it. We are all capable of discovering, developing and manifesting these qualities of leadership when given the right environment. Part of mentoring ecosocial literacy is to help create and foster that environment.