

2007

Biographical Information on Running-Grass and Three Circles Center

Running-Grass is a professional outdoor and environmental educator with more than 25 years experience. He is widely published and nationally recognized for his expertise in multicultural environmental education and Environmental Justice. He is a West Coast correspondent for Orion Magazine. Running-Grass was one of the 300 delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1992, which launched the Environmental Justice movement onto the national stage. Since the late 1990's he has worked on Environmental Justice issues at various levels of government including federal, state and local with a focus of identifying and addressing these issues at the community level.

In the 1980's he worked intensively with low income urban and rural schools, teachers and communities in 9 Bay Area counties. During this time he began to see how conventional environmental education frequently missed the critical contradictions between the cultural backgrounds of students and the richness of their families and home communities on the one hand, and the backgrounds of environmental educators and traditional environmental concerns on the other.

Further exploration of these themes led to an understanding that environmental educators were generally unprepared to teach successfully in an increasingly multicultural society. To prepare environmental educators for the complexities of teaching effectively in multicultural contexts they would have to become competent multicultural educators also--steeped in "cultural-environmental" knowledge and sensitive to the political histories and aspirations of the broad array of American ethnic groups from which their students are drawn.

The launching of the national Environmental Justice movement in the late 1980's highlighted how a narrowly constructed environmental education supported a circumscribed environmental politics--one that rarely reflected the issues of low income, ethnic and people of color communities or acknowledged their indigenous cultural perspectives—their lived histories—about, and in, "place". Further, conventional approaches to environmental education reproduced limited and inaccurate views of the environment that were frequently at odds with the perspectives of multicultural communities and were consequently limited in their effectiveness as educational strategies.

In 1989, Running-Grass led a group of educators and activists in creating *Three Circles Center for Multicultural Environmental Education* to address these issues. The term "multicultural environmental education," widely in use today, is derived from this work.

Three Circles Center

Three Circles Center is an international network pioneering innovative multicultural and community based approaches to environmental education. Initially, a nonprofit, membership organization, Three Circles Center currently consults with environmental organizations, programs and communities on issues of multicultural communication, staff development and diversity, curriculum, program design and evaluation, and authentic multicultural community involvement in environmental programs. Three Circles Center publishes the occasional Journal of Culture, Ecology and Community©, the name of which reflects our guiding paradigm--the systemic interdependence of cultures, ecologies and communities.

Mission and Philosophy

The purpose of Three Circles Center is to introduce, encourage and cultivate multicultural perspectives and values in environmental and outdoor education, recreation and interpretation. Three Circles Center is dedicated to assisting environmental and outdoor educators and interpreters in making a successful transition to teaching in a multicultural society based on the principles of environmental sustainability and social justice. Necessary for this task are multicultural leadership, a vision of a common future grounded in diversity, innovative skills and strategies for community, organizational, personal change, and the support of a network of progressive environmental professionals and community based organizations. Three Circles Center is dedicated to providing these necessary components of social change through services to organizations, educators, youth and communities.

"Your visit here meant a great deal to us, adding perspective and inspiration to our work and helping us to understand our convictions in a new way" Oliver Barton, Director, New Haven Ecology Project, New Haven, Connecticut.

"Your recent presentation at New College was uniformly praised by my students—many of them K-12 teachers—as inspiring and provocative. We are still talking about it." Carol Silverman, New College of California, San Francisco, CA

"...Our profound thanks for the seeds you have planted here at Evergreen, Tacoma campus and throughout the region....You've raised some important issues for both students to consider in the immediate sense and faculty to consider in the larger sense. It is what you uncovered that might have more lasting impact than what you covered. You've stimulated some real reexamination for us..." Jean MacGregor, Evergreen State College, Olympia WA.

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