

#4 cited in: Allard, A., Cooper, M., Hildebrand, G., & Wealands, E. (1995). *Stages: Steps towards addressing gender in educational settings*. Carelton Vic, Australia: Curriculum Corporation.



#7 FROM READINGS

# OF MOUNTAINS AND OCEANS AND JUNGLES AND WHYS

Once upon a time there was a powerful fairy godmother who had four children to look after. They were Ace, Val, Dif and Soc.

One day, she visited her four charges and said, 'Children, I have something important to tell you. You see that mountain over there,' (and she pointed to a large, looming mountain in the distance which towered over them all) 'I have decided that it is time all of you climbed that mountain because only by climbing the mountain will you each gain a beautiful gold star for your forehead and be able to live happily ever after.'

All four of her charges, Ace, Val, Dif and Soc, looked with great interest at the mountain looming in the distance and then turned back to their fairy godmother, who awaited their responses.

Ace, the most outgoing, spoke first. 'Well, Fairy Godmother,' Ace said, 'I'd love to try climbing the mountain but, you see, when I've tried before, I've never managed to do it.'

'Do tell me why,' said the fairy godmother.

Ace took a deep breath. 'Well, you see, in order to climb the mountain, I need to take a course in mountain climbing. When I enrolled, I was told that they had no boots to fit me, the packs were too heavy for me to carry and the instructor didn't have the time to spend teaching me anyway. The other mountain climbers also didn't make me feel very welcome. So, while I'd love to climb the mountain, it just isn't possible.'

The fairy godmother looked outraged and, waving her godmother's wand wildly, yelled, 'Rubbish! Don't you worry about any of those things! I'll take care of that.'

So saying, she waved her wand around, conjured up the boots that fit, the right-sized pack, the instructor who agreed that, in all fairness, there was ample time to teach Ace, and (eventually) agreement from the rest of the group to be supportive and pleasant to Ace. It was a major coup for the magic wand! Ace, with new boots and pack, set off up the mountain.

The fairy godmother turned back to her remaining three charges and said, 'What are you three waiting for? Off you go!'

Val spoke up. 'What you did for Ace was wonderful, Fairy Godmother. But truly, while I would like to climb the mountain, I'm much better at deep sea diving. And while I realise that deep sea diving will never gain me the beautiful gold star for my forehead, and maybe that means I won't live happily ever after, still, it's what I prefer to do and what I do best.'

'Oh, no,' said the fairy godmother. 'This just can't be! How can I accept that you will never climb the mountain? Surely, with my wonderful powers, there is something I can do to help you?'

'Well,' said Val. 'I've actually been thinking about it. What I really like about deep sea diving is the swimming movement, the wonderful feeling of going forward, buoyed up with energy. But, you see, the group of mountain climbers that Ace joined go straight up the mountain. They jump off ledges, they leap into chasms, they sweat and they struggle and they never have the chance to look around and appreciate the beautiful scenery. To be truthful, I always enjoy the fact that when I go deep sea diving, we go in groups, we swim along and there is the chance to admire the fish, the coral, the wonderful sense of connecting with the environment. Now, if there was some way ...'

'No problems!' shouted the fairy godmother. 'I see exactly what you mean and I know just what has to be done. The point is to get you to the top of the mountain. You don't like the path that is

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usually used. So we'll just create a new way up, one that allows you to stop along the way, admire the scenery and enjoy the company of your friends, and still gets you where you want to go.'

So saying, the fairy godmother waved her magic wand and 'Voilà!' A new path up the mountain, one which was far more scenic and spectacular than the old track, appeared.

'Oh, thank you, Fairy Godmother,' said Val. 'I know I'm going to enjoy this now.' Val gathered a group of friends and set off.

'Aren't we doing well?' said Fairy Godmother as she turned back with a pleased smile to her remaining two charges. But Dif looked dismayed.

'Oh Fairy Godmother,' Dif murmured. 'I know this will be a terrible disappointment to you but, actually, there is no way that I want to get up the mountain. 'You see,' said Dif, 'even though, like Val, I really enjoy deep sea diving, the truth is I'm not interested in mountain climbing. If the truth be known, what I really like is hiking through the jungle.'

'Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear ...' murmured the fairy godmother. 'Whatever shall I do? How can I get you to the top of the mountain, get you the gold star and ensure that you will live happily ever after, if you tell me that you're not interested in mountain climbing and that what you really like to do is hike through the jungle? Oh, Dif, how can I possibly help you? Me, with my magic wand?' Fairy Godmother sank to the ground in despair.

Dif patted her gently on the back. 'You can listen to me, Fairy Godmother. You can accept that climbing the mountain is not something I want to do. You could use your magic wand to create other ways of gaining the gold star for my forehead, other ways for me to achieve the "happy ever after" goal. I could help you, Fairy Godmother, I could suggest lots of other alternatives that are just as valuable.'

'But you have been entrusted to me and I don't know how to help you,' moaned Fairy Godmother.

'Just ask me,' said Dif. 'I can tell you what is important to me. Climbing the mountain as it stands isn't.'

'I agree!' Soc, who had remained silent throughout, finally spoke. 'And I have a few questions of my own. For example, why are you so sure that climbing the mountain is the only way to earn a gold star for our forehead and live happily ever after? Who decided that climbing the mountain was worth a gold star? What else matters? What else that we do should entitle us to a gold star? I don't want a gold star. How can you be so sure, oh Fairy Godmother, that this mountain is the only way to achieve success? And what do you mean by success, anyway? If you can't answer these questions, how can you look after the children of the future? How can you go beyond your own limitations?'

The fairy godmother looked up at her remaining two charges and sighed deeply. Slowly, slowly she gathered her strength and pulled herself upright. 'Okay,' she said now, finally standing tall. 'I have a magic wand. I have been entrusted with your welfare. I know that, as things stand, climbing the mountain will gain you the gold star. You tell me that the mountain doesn't interest you. What do I do now to help you?'<sup>17</sup>

