

A Thousand Rivers

Editor's Pick. Written by Carol Black.

One day I watched a nine-year-old boy as he led a group of children scrambling over Vasquez Rocks, a great sandstone formation that slants up out of the California desert. He was one of those magnetic, electrical, radiant boys; kind to the younger ones, strong, quick, inquisitive, sharp as a tack, his eyes throwing sparks in the clear air. It was a joy just to watch him, I said to the friend standing beside me. She told me he had just been diagnosed with ADHD.

When you see children who do not learn well in school, they will often display characteristics that would be valued and admired if they lived in any number of traditional societies around the world. They are physically energetic; they are independent; they are sociable; they are funny. They like to do things with their hands. They crave real play, play that is exuberant, that tests their strength and skill and daring and endurance; they crave real work, work that is important, that is concrete, that makes a valued contribution. They dislike abstraction; they dislike being sedentary; they dislike authoritarian control. They like to focus on the things that interest them, that spark their curiosity, that drive them to tinker and explore.

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