

**WEAVING DREAMS
INTO THE CLASSROOM**

WEAVING DREAMS INTO THE CLASSROOM

**Practical Ideas for Teaching about
Dreams and Dreaming at Every Grade
Level, Including Adult Education**

Edited by

**CURTISS HOFFMAN
JACQUIE E. LEWIS**



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*Weaving Dreams into the Classroom: Practical Ideas for Teaching about
Dreams and Dreaming at Every Grade Level, Including Adult Education*

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I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

DREAMS AND EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Curtiss Hoffman & Jacquie Lewis

Weaving Dreams into the Classroom is an extraordinary anthology that combines the seasoned experience of ten educators at all educational levels to provide the reader with practical, hands-on models for bringing the subject of dreams and dreaming to students. It also includes the perspectives of four graduate students and a teenage student who has been embedded in a dream-centered education program since early childhood. The authors come from diverse backgrounds, including academic and clinical psychology, anthropology, and religious studies. Their home institutions range from small private colleges and institutes to large research universities, both in the United States and Great Britain.

This book evolved out of a symposium on dreams and education presented at the 27th Annual Conference of the International Association for the Study of Dreams in Asheville, NC in 2010. Both of the editors, along with two other participants, presented papers on their recent classroom experiences with students learning about dreams. The symposium was very well received, and this led us to consider enlarging it into a text. Accordingly, starting at that conference and for the year following, we sent out invitations to dream educators we knew inviting them to submit chapters.

What emerged very clearly from the submissions we reviewed is that there is a real need for dream education at all levels and also a growing acceptance of this topic in academic institutions. However, it is certainly not without hurdles, as many of our authors, including ourselves, have experienced. But we feel quite strongly that a dedicated educator with an interest in dreams can overcome these obstacles, if presented with the right tools to do so. Few books cover this topic. It is for this reason that we have produced this volume. Our diversity of approaches offers practical skills to educators at all levels of education.

We anticipate that the primary audience for this book will be instructors at all levels of education, not only in the United States but also in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, East Asia, Africa, and Australia and New Zealand. Many of the authors are prominent members of the International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD), which hosts the annual conference mentioned above. As well, there are small-scale experiments in group dreamwork springing up literally all over the world, both within and outside of academia, whose members could benefit from learning some of the methods of presentation we have assembled here.

It seemed natural to organize the book by level of instruction, starting with elementary and secondary education, undergraduate education, graduate education, and adult education. The individual chapters fall into these four main sections, as follows. The abstracts are the authors' own. Each chapter is accompanied by its own list of references cited.

Elementary and Secondary Education

Children's Dreams in the Classroom, by Kate Adams

Research into children's dreams has demonstrated that many children find meaning in them. The notion of *dream tending* has been advocated to help children manage responses to nightmares and to encourage them to share their dreams, particularly at home with their families. The nurturing of children's interest in, and understanding of, dreams in formal educational settings has also been advocated. However, in practice, this nurturing can be constrained by curriculum requirements and wider cultural forces that negate the value of dreams. This chapter explores how dreams have the potential to appear in children's formal educational settings. It deconstructs some of the reasons why teachers are reluctant to discuss dreams with children and poses two ways for their inclusion in the classroom. Firstly, it considers the use of research interviews with children in schools and includes data from one study, which asked children with whom they shared their dreams. It was found that children did not share their dreams with teachers. Secondly, it advocates the incorporation of dreams into curricula already covered with young children such as art, creative writing, reading, science, and, in countries and schools where curricula permit, religious studies.

Early Education: Dreaming Every Day of Your Life, by Hezekiah Condron

Weaving dreams into the classroom begins before birth. When Hezekiah Condron was born, elders from several traditions told his parents he is “all about communication” and “his message will reach the world.” At age fifteen, Hezekiah Condron became the youngest person to present at an International Association for the Study of Dreams conference when he premiered his film *The Dream Mystery: An American Teen’s Search for Dream Elders*. In this essay on “Early Education,” Kie takes us into his life to reveal many ways children can be taught from birth to adulthood to value their dreams. Stage One focuses on the child’s first teachers, the parents. Stage Two suggests dream study fundamentals for supporting and enhancing communication development from birth and up. Stage Three provides examples for involving students in dreamwork, and Stage Four presents a way to define the value of dreaming. By sharing his own varied experiences, Kie provides an insightful and practical approach for keeping the door open to the inner worlds in our dreams

Undergraduate Education

Dreaming Transformation: Experiences Teaching Dreams and World Mythology in the College Classroom, by Stephen Potthoff

Dreams and World Mythology, a course offered in the Religion and Philosophy department at Wilmington College, a small Quaker school in southwest Ohio, attracts numerous students from a wide variety of majors. Building on the general foundation offered by Robert Van de Castle’s book *Our Dreaming Mind*, the course moves on to consider the Jungian and related approaches to dream analysis and the phenomenon of near-death experiences, concluding with a cross-cultural study of the role of dream and visionary experience in Native American cultures of the Great Plains. The course also incorporates major experiential components. Dream journaling, combined with dream discussion groups and a creative dream project at the end of the course, catalyze a remarkable, synergistic learning process in (and outside) the classroom. Students not only find ways to relate their own dream experience to wider themes in mythology and human cultures throughout history but also forge bonds and relationships with each other in a unique and transformative process of communal self-exploration.

WEAVING DREAMS INTO THE CLASSROOM

Culture and Consciousness: An Undergraduate Seminar Incorporating Dreamwork, by Curtiss Hoffman

Since 1997, the author has offered an anthropology course for upper level undergraduate students (mostly Anthropology and Psychology majors) entitled *Culture and Consciousness*. This course is offered once every two years and is an experiment in the study of how consciousness, and particularly the idea of the unconscious, is construed and constructed in various cultural contexts. This chapter demonstrates how the class members work towards an understanding of consciousness in cultural context as a means of understanding cultures at their deepest levels, including our own. An important component of the course is a series of six in-class dreamwork sharing sessions, using a variety of techniques, including the Ullman method, dream amplification, dream art, embodied dreamwork, dream theatre, and shamanic dream-tending.

Creating a Dream Studies Program, by Fariba Bogzaran

This chapter addresses how to develop a dream studies program at higher educational institutions. Research shows that dream studies programs can be transformative, promote holistic learning and help to build community. Based on the author's experience in developing an interdisciplinary program on dreams at JFK University, the chapter addresses the impact of dream education on students and faculty and how students apply their dream education as an agent for social change. Obstacles and challenges, as well as a cohesive curriculum, will be presented with an emphasis on developing an interdisciplinary dream studies program.

Graduate Education

Teaching Dreamwork in Clinical Courses, by Jacquie Lewis

M.A., Psy.D., and Ph.D. students learn basic skills for working with their clients' dreams by engaging in the Ullman method of dreamwork. Students in traditional classroom settings obtain hands-on experience by working with their own dreams in the classroom.

Training Graduate Students to Teach Dreamwork, by Dr. Roger Knudson, Rebecca N. Ezechukwu, Raven E. Cuellar, Jeffrey R. Schweitzer, and Kathryn A. Conaway

This chapter focuses on introducing Ph.D. students in clinical psychology to working with dreams. Roger's approach is training graduate students to lead dream groups in the context of an undergraduate course on dreams. Each graduate student is assigned a group of five undergraduates who meet in an experiential dream group once a week for one semester. The initial model for the group is the Ullman method, but later in the semester ideas are introduced from other approaches, such as Gestalt, Aizenstat's *dream tending*, and Bosnak's *embodied imagination*. After a brief description of the undergraduate dream seminar and the role of the dream groups in that course, the chapter describes the role of the graduate students in facilitating these groups. The heart of the chapter is a discussion by the author and four graduate students, who each recently led a group. Each student discusses the ways facilitating the undergraduate group has influenced his/her understanding of dreams, the use of dreams in therapy, the use of the therapist's own dreams, and so on. In the final section of the chapter, the author discusses the decline of training in dreamwork in clinical psychology in the context of the long cultural antagonism toward imagination. He argues for renewed attention to dreams in the helping professions broadly.

Continuing Education

How to Propose a Course on Dreams for Adult Education, by Laurel Clark

This chapter outlines some of the basics for proposing such courses, where to find potential institutions to offer continuing education, and how to propose *guest lecture* dream studies for traditional education. The process is fairly simple, involving these six steps: determining the course content; establishing course objectives; researching potential institutions to offer the course; writing a course description; providing references and credentials; and approaching the institution with a proposal. This chapter offers ways to introduce dreams into already-existing curricula or to create new kinds of dream study programs. It aids teachers in providing the kind of education needed for people to grow and develop in consciousness.

WEAVING DREAMS INTO THE CLASSROOM

Teaching Dreams in Continuing Education Courses, by Robert Hoss

Continuing education (CE) courses are typically offered at colleges or universities but are also often offered at private institutes. CE credit-granting courses are accredited by either the institution or another agency—for example, the American Psychological Association. Students are typically enrolled part-time, and the courses are often offered through a division or school of continuing education, sometimes known as the university extension or school of extended education. From his extensive experience, the author offers guidelines to prospective instructors on how to structure a variable-length course in dream education for a continuing education setting.

No Dream Deferred, by Tzivia Gover

This final chapter shows how, by encouraging facilitated classroom discussions of dreams and offering dream-related writing prompts, a teacher can encourage shy or blocked students to create texts from their own imaginations, to experiment with narrative, structure and style by working on their own dream poems and stories. The author will illustrate how using dreams as texts in these settings offers a unique way to introduce the fundamentals of reading and writing and to introduce concepts such as symbolism, metaphor, description, form and content. Dream texts are also accessible avenues for exploring sophisticated ideas such as literal versus figurative language. These skills and ideas can then be transferred to the reading of poems, novels and essays. Presented thoughtfully, dreams also provoke lively conversations about cultural beliefs, differences, and similarities, in a non-threatening, imaginatively rich and creative classroom environment. Having thoroughly introduced and examined the many uses of dreams and literacy in adult basic education settings, this chapter concludes with suggestions for teachers who are interested in employing these methods in any educational setting, from elementary to higher education.

The editors hope that you will enjoy reading about these pioneering experiments in teaching dreams and that you will apply the methods creatively to your own teaching.

Ashland, MA and Santa Fe, NM
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II
ELEMENTARY AND
SECONDARY EDUCATION

CHAPTER 2

CHILDREN'S DREAMS IN THE CLASSROOM

Kate Adams

The dream lives of children are vibrant, filled with familiar faces and places, thoughts and worries alongside the occasional scary monster or fear of separation from loved ones. Their dreams occupy significant periods of time in their young lives, proportionately more so than adults (Flanagan, 2000). All of us were once children, and our most remembered dreams often occurred during the early years of our lives, with some making an impact that would last a lifetime (Bulkeley, Broughton, Sanchez, & Stiller, 2005). Yet children's dreams often go unnoticed, hidden from the view of adults who are too busy to notice, are inclined to dismiss them, or are more focused on understanding their own dreams than those of the young people around them.

The contemporary focus on dreams, whether in research, books or in other media is primarily adult-centric. However, any discussion of teaching about dreams in university, college, or secondary/high school cannot take place without consideration of dreams being explored in the primary/elementary school. It is at this level of the education system where teachers can set foundations to inspire and stimulate children's learning, where their imaginations are captured and seeds of interest are sown. If dreams have not been discussed at a young age, it can be potentially difficult for many adolescents and young adults suddenly to be expected to talk about them in a classroom situation. Societal taboos, which can push the topic out of sight from daily discourse, further compound the issue; it is in the first years of formal schooling where educators can create a supportive and respectful ethos which facilitates the discussion of taboo topics that might not otherwise be freely discussed beyond the school gates.

This chapter explores the potential place of dreams in the foundations of the compulsory school system, in the education of 5-

11 year olds. Following a brief contextual overview of the nature of children's dreams and a discussion of advocates of dream tending in the home, the chapter moves on to consider the needs of children who do not have adults in their personal lives who are responsive to their experience of and questions about dreams. The argument is made that the curriculum has the potential to allow children to be educated about dreams. However, it acknowledges that there are many barriers to weaving dreams into the primary/elementary curriculum, and deconstructs some of the reasons why teachers are reluctant to discuss dreams with children. Two ways forward for their inclusion in the classroom are proposed. Firstly, the chapter advocates the incorporation of dreams into curriculum areas already covered with young children such as art, creative writing, reading, science and (in countries and schools where curricula permit) religious studies. Secondly, it reflects the use of research interviews with children in schools and the impact they can make.

The Dream Life of Children

The dream life of children can be mundane, fun, puzzling, frightening and occasionally spiritually enlightening. Unsurprisingly, the content of children's dreams bears similarities to that of adults, with much imagery drawn from daily life, as researchers who explore the content of children's dreams have demonstrated (see Foulkes, 1982). Strauch and Lederbogen (1999) observed that the settings in dreams of children aged 9-15 were primarily outdoors with an equal combination of familiar and unfamiliar places. School was the most common setting in the dreams of children aged 8-10 years in Resnick's study, with home and vehicles also being frequent settings. Family members regularly appear in children's dreams (Resnick, Stickgold, Rittenhouse, & Hobson, 1994; Punamäki, 1999).

The most notable difference between reports of adults' and children's dreams is that wild animals appear more regularly in children's dreams and usually decrease in frequency with age (Foulkes, 1999; Resnick et al., 1994; Saline, 1999; Strauch & Lederbogen, 1999; Van de Castle, 1994). A recurring characteristic of the animal is that it is usually the perpetrator of aggression toward the child in the dream (Hartmann, 1996; Siegel & Bulkeley, 1998).

However, dreams of ordinary daily events are not the only salient feature of children's sleeping lives. Some dreams appear to predict the future whilst others bring deceased loved ones back to talk to or sit with the child in their dream world. Other key types that have

been identified by researchers include nightmares and *big dreams*. Nightmares are a typical feature of childhood, particularly frequent between the ages of 4 and 6 (Hartmann, 1996; Siegel & Bulkeley, 1998). Siegel and Bulkeley (1998) emphasized that they are a normal occurrence, often playing a role in coping with changes in life, such as beginning school, moving, or a parent's divorce. Children and their parents/care-givers alike are often anxious about nightmares. By their very nature they cause fear and are unsettling, sometimes leading children to be afraid of what monster might be hiding in their closet or to try to avoid bedtime for fear that the dark characters of their nightmares may revisit.

Another important, but perhaps less recognized, aspect of children's dream lives are what Carl Jung (1935/1972) referred to as big dreams—those that are characterized by having left an intuitive feeling of significance in the dreamer and which may stay in the memory for a lifetime. Some of these big dreams can be spiritual in nature, a term which Siegel and Bulkeley (1998,) use to refer to dreams which have a “felt power” (p. 162)—that is, an “experiential intensity and vividness.” Such dreams may have a religious connection in terms of either an appearance of a sacred figure or a perceived connection to the transcendent. These divine dreams have been reported by children in studies in the UK and in South Africa, where approximately one fifth of children up to age 11 recalled such a dream (see Adams 2008; Potgieter, van der Walt & Wolhuter, 2009). However, a big or spiritual dream need not bear any relation to religion. It might, for example, be a dream that appears to predict the future. These are not uncommon amongst children and young adolescents and can inevitably raise important questions for the dreamer as to how this might be possible. Further, they can cause fear if children dream about a negative event, such as a death, and live in trepidation of it happening in waking life.

Dreaming at Home

Children need to make sense of their dreams and nightmares. The content and experience of a dream in itself raises questions for children: what is happening while I am asleep? Why do I see pictures and hear people talking when I am asleep? Where do dreams come from? In their quest to understand their experiences and the world around them, children will automatically seek their own explanations, drawing together information from a variety of sources, often unrelated.

Nurturing attention to dreams in the home, where children have opportunities to share and explore their dreams, has been advocated by a range of authors (see Adams, 2010; Beaudet, 2008; Garfield, 2003; Mallon, 2002; Siegel & Bulkeley 1998). The opportunities for dream sharing in the home arise naturally, particularly when children awake with a dream clearly in their mind, eager to talk about it. A conversation around the breakfast table may be all a child needs. Some parents/care-givers may wish to help children create a dream journal. Beaudet (2008) suggested that these can begin with the adult scribing for the child until they are able to write and/or draw independently. She proposed that such a venture enables parents/care-givers to watch their children change and grow in a novel way, simultaneously creating a record of nightly ventures to keep.

On occasion children might just want to share their enjoyment of a fun dream in which they travelled to another planet, played with their pet dog on the beach, or met their favourite cartoon character. These types of dreams are light-hearted and ideal for conversation over breakfast if time and culture afford such a luxury.

Other types of dreams may require closer attention, particularly when the content is unusual, has touched them in some way, intrigued or unsettled them. Sometimes children will seek a discussion as they ask for an explanation and attempt to understand their experience. They may ask why they dreamed about a giant monster chasing them or why they dreamed about Grandma, who recently died.

Children thus have a range of needs to share and/or to discuss various aspects of their nightly lives, which occupy so much of their time – quite literally given that children tend to sleep for longer than adults. Some may be occasional, fleeting needs in which they simply want to share their fun dreams but others may be more demanding of the adult, requiring help in understanding more anxiety-ridden dream experiences.

When There is No One to Share With: Dreams in the Classroom

Educators cannot assume that children have an adult at home with whom they can share their dreams and dream-related worries, no matter how loving and caring their care-givers may be. Wider societal forces can negate the importance of dreams and these can have a direct impact on adults' willingness to listen, irrespective of whether or not the family finds time to sit and talk. Some adults do not possess the necessary understanding of how and why dreams occur.

Some children, regrettably, live in neglect and have no one at home to confide in about any personal matter. Further complications arise if the experiences relate to nightmares, which can be equally disconcerting for children and their worried parents/care-givers alike, particularly when the latter do not know how to respond to their children's fears. Spiritual dreams in particular, which can be life shaping and life changing, can be out of an adult's comfort zone and also subject to the wider social discourse, which can negate the spiritual (Adams, 2010).

The Educational Context

The school offers an important and potentially safe haven for dreams to be explored in an informed way. Secondary/high schools may provide sessions or units on dreams in appropriate subjects such as psychology or anthropology. The potential for the inclusion of dreams in the primary/elementary school is relatively wide but is often overlooked, particularly when dreams are not mentioned in a rigid curriculum. Herein lies a major challenge for primary educators.

Many education systems and thinkers recognise and value the concept of educating the *whole child*: addressing the needs of children, which go beyond academic skills and knowledge. However, aims to embed this concept can be hindered by wider political agendas. For example, in the U.S., the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) emphasized schools' needs to demonstrate measurable outcomes in children's achievement and progress via standardised testing. Many authors, including Garrett (2006) and Malone (2008), remain concerned that such a strong focus on standardised testing in the United States is at the expense of children's wider social skills and needs. In the UK, where a national curriculum was introduced in the Education Reform Act of 1988, the whole child agenda was effectively embodied in legislation, albeit overshadowed by a highly prescriptive curriculum. At that time, a legal requirement was placed on schools to promote aspects of children's development including the spiritual, moral, and cultural. A new coalition government elected in 2010 quickly acknowledged that high quality personal, social, health, and economic education, which had previously been non-statutory but widespread, was vital for children and made a commitment to enabling schools to provide it (DfE, 2010). Yet, as in the United States, the UK curriculum has become focussed on testing, learning objectives, evidence and accountability (Turner-Bisset, 2007), arguably to the detriment of an holistic education.

However, it is precisely in those areas of the personal, emotional and spiritual that the experience and sharing of dreams lies.

Dreams in the Curriculum

The topic of dreams is unlikely to appear on many countries' prescribed curricula for primary/elementary schools, but to suggest that dreams are never mentioned would be too simplistic. Dreams are not absent from every classroom. Indeed, a cursory glance at any bookshelf in a school library will undoubtedly find fictional books for children of all ages. Books on children's or animals' journeys into dream worlds; poems about dreams that may be read to children in language/literature lessons; artists' depictions of dreams; or books on role play for drama lessons, which can be used to enact dreams. By using books as learning tools or prompts, children may spontaneously volunteer information about one of their dreams or nightmares. Yet when such instances occur, it can often be by chance or because they offer a vehicle for teaching something else rather than educating children directly about dreams. Take, for example, Mark, who teaches eight year olds in an inner city school in Manchester, England. He was teaching a series of lessons on the genre of fiction for the English curriculum. The children were developing their fictional writing skills and were asked to write a story which was based on entering a dream.

"Why did you choose dreams as a theme for the children?" I asked.

"Dreams are an excellent way of stimulating the children's imaginations," he replied. "Anything can happen in dreams! And we had been reading a classic story book, *Marianne Dreams*, by Catherine Storr. The children were fascinated by the plot about a girl who drew pictures of a garden and a house with a boy in the window. Then at night in her dreams she travelled into the pictures."

Mark used the theme of dreams very effectively, and built on the children's fascination with them and with the theme of the novel. Essentially, however, he was using dreams as a vehicle to teach about imagination in fictional writing, and therein lies a common situation: dreams capture children's interest precisely because they are relevant to their own experience, which some teachers like Mark recognise. Teachers then apply that interest to aspects of the curriculum to which it is appropriate, but not necessarily with any scientific understanding of dreams. There is thus a distinction between using dreams in the classroom as a vehicle to teach about something else

and using dreams in the classroom to teach about dreams. The distinction is not a problematic one *per se* but of course if teachers are not fully informed about the research findings and latest theoretical developments about dreams and dreaming, then they may not be sufficiently prepared to respond to children's questions. This aspect of lack of education about dreams negatively impacts on teachers' confidence and ability to address them in school.

Weaving Dreams into the Curriculum

Workload issues and high levels of stress amongst teachers are consequences of performance, outcome-based education systems where teachers become disaffected as a result of constant new initiatives and proposals to introduce new topic matter. Yet bringing dreams into a primary/elementary school curriculum is not necessarily about introducing whole new schemes of work. It is, rather, a question of identifying where the curriculum offers natural places for dreams to be explored so that they can be woven into the classroom.

The areas of English language and literature are examples of subjects in which dreams, as noted above, are often used as a vehicle for exploring how authors use dream scenes in their writing or use their own dreams to inspire their creative works.

Art is another subject that naturally lends itself to exploring dreams. Indeed, in an early version of England and Wales' National Curriculum (QCA, 2000), a topic on dreams for pupils aged 7-8 titled "Viewpoints" was included. Here, children explored how to convey a dream in art form, giving attention to the atmosphere and narrative of the dream. The project involved children discussing their own dreams as well as discussing the works of artists who use dream themes in their work. Whilst this project was removed from subsequent versions of the curriculum, which slimmed the curriculum down, the newer versions are sufficiently flexible to enable teachers to run similar sessions.

Religious Education (RE) is a legal requirement of some education systems, such as those in England and Wales and in other countries with a faith-based foundation. In England and Wales where state-funded schools are without a faith-based foundation, the aims of RE are twofold. The first aim is to educate pupils about different world religions and the second is to enable them to reflect on what they have learnt in order to learn from religion. Dreams have strong connections to many religions and, as Bulkeley (2008)

stated, “dreaming has always been regarded as a religious phenomenon” (p. 3).

Elsewhere I have argued that the teaching of dreams has a place in the RE syllabi of primary/elementary schools (Adams, 2008). My argument builds on those from earlier authors such as Jones (1987) and Grimmitt, Grove, Hull, and Spencer (1991), who have maintained that the embodiment of dreams in religions makes them an ideal topic for exploration in RE. Given that all children dream (and assuming that most possess some dream recall), the topic has immediate relevance to children’s lives. Further, and more specifically, the idea of dreams as a carrier of messages from the divine is enshrined in scripture of world religions including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Cross-curricular models of teaching similarly provide opportunities for a rich weaving of different aspects of dreams. A topic on dreams enables the synthesis of a wide range of subjects from science through art. Further, dreams can also be used to develop knowledge and understanding of skills and concepts such as symbolism. Children need to learn what symbolism is in order to understand aspects of art, literature, and religion amongst other school subjects. Given that much of the language of dreams is conveyed in symbols, dreams that appear in literature, for example, offer an excellent vehicle for understanding how an object can represent something quite different.

Research in the Classroom – Positive Research Findings Can Catch a Teacher’s Attention

Anne, aged “about ten and a half,” told me of her dream. The dream had no setting but began with Anne hearing her friends’ voices telling her to look in a particular direction. The voices faded and a light appeared:

It was kind of, it was kind of white in the centre and then it got yellow, and then it got orange, then it got red as if it was getting darker at the edges....It took up practically the whole of the dream, the whole space of the dream. (Adams, 2004)

The content of the dream was intriguing in itself, but it was the ensuing conversation that revealed a fascinating narrative. Anne explained that this light was a symbol of Christianity, which she linked to her recent attendance at a Sunday school. She did not come

from a particularly religious family but had enjoyed going to the Sunday classes and wanted to help her Sunday school teacher, who had asked the children to mention the classes to their friends. So how did Anne think this related to her dream? It transpired that she believed that it was a recurring dream, from God, who was giving her “courage to tell other people” about the Sunday school. I wondered what was preventing Anne from simply inviting her friends to the Sunday school, and why she needed a dream to support her doing so. Her reply was succinct: “The fact that it’s not really a topic of conversation, you don’t go up to people and say “hey I’m a Christian, come to my church!”

Just as talking about religion was not deemed socially acceptable by Anne’s peers in her community, neither was talking about dreams, particularly dreams with a perceived divine link. However, Anne felt comfortable sharing her dream with me, a stranger and a researcher, because she knew from the outset that I was interested in divine dreams. Until our conversation, she had reflected on her dream privately and had drawn inspiration from it to be bolder in her attempts to encourage friends to join the Sunday school.

Research with children who record their thoughts and reflections highlights the often sophisticated way in which they think and come to understand their dreams. Jean Piaget (1929/1971), a psychologist whose works are part of many teacher training programs, conducted studies on where children thought dreams originated, where the dreams were located, which part of the body they dreamt with, and why children thought they dreamt of the subject matter that they did. He claimed that children move through three distinct stages in understanding dreams: the first at an average age of 5–6 years, when they tend to believe that the dream has an external source, such as God or the night; the second stage at approximately 7–8 years, when children believe the origin to be their head; and the final stage at the age of 9–10 when they state that the dream is created by thought. Piaget has been thoroughly critiqued over time for underestimating children’s cognitive abilities (see Sutherland, 1982), a criticism which could be applied to Anne’s response to her dream. For Piaget, Anne would fall into the category of a 5-6 year old for assigning an external origin to her dream of the light—a category that would significantly underestimate her sophistication of thinking.

Educators are very receptive to hearing children’s thoughts, both directly and indirectly through research findings. Researchers have the capacity to give children a voice about their dreams, which