

Michelle Lebaron – Keynote Address

Exemplary Leadership: How Dispute Resolution Professionals Change Cultures

CADRE's Fifth National Symposium on Dispute Resolution in Special Education

October 26-28, 2011 – Eugene, OR

MICHELLE LEBARON: Good morning. Are you apprehensive or excited about the prospect of dancing this early in the morning? I would say, without doubt, that that is the most beautiful introduction I've ever been given. Thank you, it was beautiful and deeply appreciated. And your presence here deeply appreciated as well. People from 44 states, I understand, and the Virgin Islands and Guam. That is fabulous and the energy here and the work that you're all doing is, to me, one of the most exciting aspects of the work of dispute resolution and the work in the field of education that exists today. So it is a deep privilege to be here and to have the opportunity to speak with you and to be in dialogue with you for a brief time. The topic that I chose for today is leadership. Now some of you are in positions of leadership, and you know that and your business card says so. And even if you feel limited in your capacity to create change, you have those anchors that say, "No, really, you are a leader." And there are many others who don't necessarily have that formal title, working in different ways in various systems, who might be advocates, who might be working as facilitators or mediators, who might be working in schools in capacities that vary, who also are leaders. And what I'm going to do today is to invite you to explore with me why it is that each of us has a huge responsibility as a leader, and that actually if we look at ourselves as leaders, it opens up a lot of different important questions and possibilities in terms of the way work is done in relation to special education. So that's the general theme. That said, I'm going to ask you to do some of the work along the way and see what we can generate in terms of alchemy because I am really interested in alchemy. Alchemy, of course, was a kind of preoccupation of people back in medieval times. They tried to turn lead into gold. And I think in the work that people in this room are doing, that's exactly also what you're trying to do. You're trying to take what is leaden, what is heavy, what is difficult, what requires real creativity and turn it into gold, turn it into something precious, turn it into something valued, turn it into something that works. And so that's the conversation I invite you into with me today. And in doing that, we will look at the four elements because, of course, the four elements, air, water, earth, fire, they're always part of alchemy. Alchemy means combining things in interesting ways. So that's the trip I invite you to take with me this morning. And I want to begin by telling you about my time in northern Virginia. I lived there ten years,

and I had with me that whole time my four children. And it happened that on my eldest son's 16th birthday, our next door neighbors had a child. They had a little boy, and it was very special to us because he was born on Justin's 16th birthday. And Nathan became very precious to our family, the neighbor's son. Indeed, my youngest son, who at that time was not even ten, became Nathan's closest friend. And they spend a lot of time together. And when Nathan crawled and he walked and he talked, Daniel, my youngest, was just as excited as Nathan's parents. And as Nathan got to be older and go to preschool and to kindergarten and to grade one, some problems started to happen. And it happened, during the course of that time, that Nathan was diagnosed with autism. And Daniel was deeply confused. A lot of things started to happen, a lot of visits to professionals, a lot of diagnoses, a lot of different consultations, and these kept taking Nathan away from playtime and away from home. And Daniel said to me, "Mom, what is this? And how can we help?" And I think in your work, you're dealing always with questions that have relevance to what is this and how can we help? And I would like to suggest that one of the ways you can help most effectively is through thinking of yourself as a leader. So that's the starting point for me, to think about how any individual child in all of the school systems with which you're affiliated and in which you work and about which you're concerned, any individual child has their own story. They grew up, of course, in a neighborhood. They grew up with people loving them and people caring for them who had never labeled them. And in that process of labeling, of course, many things come in that are not necessarily anticipated or even wanted, and yet are important in terms of designing appropriate services. So I invite you to keep in mind the Nathans in your world and also your convictions and your connection to this work because one of the things I really noticed yesterday in various conversations with people is the incredible conviction people bring to this work. You're doing work which is actually deeply important and has a lot of effects on individual children's and families' lives. And that is really exciting. Well, I'd like to ask you why it might be important to think about yourselves as leaders and I'd like to propose four reasons that I think it's important to think of yourselves as leaders, whether your work is management or policy work or advocacy work or some sort of facilitation or mediation work. All of those roles have a lot of leadership involved in them. The first reason is because people perceive you as a leader. You know, I do a lot of work with mediators and with facilitators who say, "Oh, no, no, I'm not a leader. The process belongs to the parties. It belongs to the parties and they will craft it and come up with a unique and creative outcome, and I'm just there to try to make sure everything works effectively." And the problem with that discourse is that that person saying that doesn't acknowledge the extent to

which they are powerful in the process. When you come into a process as a facilitator or as a mediator or as an advocate or as a manager, you are powerful. You carry with you the power of experience, the power of insight, the power of your passion and your convictions. And if we don't realize that we actually have that power, then we don't realize all the choices we have about how we exercise it. So that's reason one. Leadership is important for us to think about because we are leaders. Reason number two is that we have, at least in the aspect of some of your work, which we would call dispute resolution, a kind of discourse of neutrality. This idea that I'm just there to try to make sure everything happens in a fair way, and we would, of course, be in favor of everything happening in a fair way, but I would argue we're never neutral. We can't be fully neutral. Indeed, when you work in special education related processes, you're not neutral at all. You care about the integrity of those processes. You care about the quality of the services that are going to be provided. You care about strengthening relations between parents and schools and making sure that those can be functional in the future. And those very convictions are those things which will animate the processes you're involved in and, at the same time, mean that you're actually not neutral. You're pro-good relations between families and young people and schools. You are in favor of partiality in terms of services being tailored to the needs of particular children in specific situations. So I think sometimes that discourse of neutrality takes us a little bit away from the ways that we are partial, those positive ways that we are partial. Of course, there's a bigger discourse about this. If you look now at new research about neuroscience and about the ways that our minds actually mirror, our minds and hearts actually mirror what's going on with others in the room, we know that actually neutrality is more and more mythical, but we'll leave that provocative dimension aside for now. The third reason that I think it's important for us to think about ourselves as leaders has to do with cultural fluency. As Phil told you, I've cared for a long time about cultural dimensions of conflicts and resolving conflicts. And if you think about cultural dimensions, you begin to ask questions about who is involved in various processes, who feels at home, who feels estranged, who feels included, who feels excluded, who feels cared about, who feels cast to the side. Cultural fluency, of course, means that we need to think about processes in ways that ask and answer those kinds of questions, and that's one of the things I'd like to explore with you today. And finally, we need to think about ourselves as leaders because, as Bernie Mayer was saying yesterday, when we are in conflict, our perceptions tend to narrow. Our communication tends to become more rigid. In short, we are least able to be creative when we are really in the grip of conflict than any other time. And therefore, those of you who are in some way involved with trying to help resolve disputes

related to special education or to create systems in which those disputes can be handled well and effectively need to bring that creativity to the table, need to bring that creativity to process design, and there again it's a function of leadership. I've been kind of curious because, actually, if you go to a business school, you hear people talk about leadership all the time. But when we get involved in work relating to dispute resolution, people tend not to talk about leadership as much, and I think it is because we're afraid to actually say, "Oh yes, we're a leader," because it is too contrasting with some of our other ideas about neutrality and about the way that parties own the process. And I'm very happy for parties to feel that they can meaningfully participate in processes and, at the same time, I want us to think about what are the implications of thinking about ourselves as leaders. So that's the adventure I invite you into today. And if we don't dance, we will at least find some ways to look at things from some different perspectives. So each of those four things: the fact that we are leaders, which I relate to commitment and therefore the element of earth; the fact that we are never neutral, which I would relate to collaboration and to thinking in a number of ways about how we collaborate, which I would relate to the element of air; the fact that cultural fluency is very important to our work, working in diverse settings as almost all of us do, I would relate to the element of water which, after all, finds its way around all of the rocks in the stream; and finally, the fact that creativity is important to our leadership and to our work I would relate to the element of fire and to the passion that we bring to our work and that creativity. So we'll work with those four elements a bit this morning in what I hope will be an interactive and interesting kind of exploration for you and for me because, as we discussed last night in the small group where I was in the reception, we don't want to do anything unless it's fun. Let's see if we can't have fun this morning for a few minutes. So we'll think about those four dimensions. And we begin, then, before we work with those four elements and four dimensions of leadership, if we might, with words from our sponsor. Actually, with words from one of my mentors, whose name was Jim Laue. And you may or may not know about Jim Laue because Jim sadly passed away at age 56 before he had had a chance to write a lot of things. He was very busy doing things in the world. He worked with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King and he did a lot of wonderful work on public policy dispute resolution and would have cared a lot about issues that you care about. And he said something that I think is so important as a kind of anchor for this work. He said, "No process of conflict resolution should happen without asking how it will affect those without voice or power." He said, "Justice is the ultimate social good." And again, this relates to the topic of leadership because if we are not asking about those without voice or social power, then we are part of a system which is not

as just as it might be. So I want to invoke also Jim's memory in thinking about questions of justice and linking them to leadership. Well, let's begin with the element of earth, the question of commitment, and the question of how we exercise leadership. And in order to do that, I'd like to share with you a poem and then I'd like to ask you a question that perhaps you'll talk about with people at your table. The poem is written by David White, a poet from the UK who now lives in the Northwest, and it's called, "The Opening of Eyes." "That day, I saw beneath dark clouds the passing light over the water, and I heard the voice of the world call out. I knew then, as I had before, life is no passing memory of what has been nor the remaining pages of a great book waiting to be read. It is the opening of eyes long closed. It is the vision of far off things seen for the silence they hold. It is the heart, after years of silent conversing, speaking out loud in the clear air. It is Moses in the desert, fallen to his knees before the lit bush. It is the man throwing away his shoes as if to enter heaven, finding himself astonished, opened at last fallen in love with solid ground." David White. Your work is about helping people fall in love with the solid ground of resolutions that work, that work in the moment, that work over time, that are flexible and adaptable and tailored to individual needs. And that is so exciting. In fact, I would say that in the field of special education, there is huge leadership for the rest of the field. I have a fantasy. I wish I could take everyone in this room to some of the other dispute resolution conferences that happen in the field and have you talk with people there about how to tailor processes to individual situations, about how to introduce flexibility and adaptability into systems, because I hear that people here think a lot about that, and that's very exciting. And it's an important counterpoint to the kind of institutionalization and rigidity that we see as dispute resolution processes are becoming more and more institutionalized and accepted. You know, the movement, after all, the dispute resolution movement started from people who were unhappy with the justice system in many ways and who felt more flexibility was needed. And of course, as we've seen the development of the field, there's been paradoxically less and less flexibility. So I see this as an island, actually, in which you know some things that are very important for other people who might see their work as dispute resolution in all sorts of different sectors, to understand. Well, I'm going to ask you, then, if you would do something at your tables for a moment, and here is the question. Thinking about yourselves as leaders, thinking about your work and helping open eyes of everyone involved in a process to what might be the most fitting and most constructive and most creative process ongoing for an individual child, I'd like you to consider what metaphor, what image, what picture you have of yourself in your work. Whether you are an advocate or a manager or a third-party facilitator, mediator,

or a parent or someone in other ways working in the system, what is your image of yourself in your work? Do you see yourself as an orchestra conductor who tells various aspects of the orchestra when to play and when to mute and when to amplify and when to speed up and when to slow down? Or do you see yourself as someone who is like a Swiss watchmaker, working with the minutiae and making small and important adjustments as you go along and therefore you're paying attention to precision and to getting it just right? You can see from those two examples, the orchestra conductor or the Swiss watchmaker, that there's a lot of variation possible in how each of us thinks about our roles. When you began the work that you do now, you probably got a job description. You probably got training, but I'll bet no one asked you, "What metaphor do you plan to hold for yourself in your work?" But I'd like to ask you that now, and I would invite you to talk with a couple of people at your table and see what metaphors or what pictures you hold for yourself in your work. And let me assure you a couple of things. First of all, there's no wrong answer. Second of all, we will not ask each person to share theirs. So if yours is particularly edgy, we'll invite you to share it if you'd like to, but you won't be compelled. So take a couple of minutes, if you would, and talk with people about your image of yourself in your work. I can hear that these conversations about metaphor have gone a lot of different directions, some of which you may share and some of which you may choose not to share, and that's quite all right. It's an interesting question, though, isn't it? What different images are informing the way I do my work? Because an orchestra conductor thinks to do different things than a watchmaker, pays attention in different ways than a watchmaker. And I heard lots of different metaphors as I walked briefly around the room. Let's just hear a few of them from you. Who would share one of their metaphors for the work that they do? And we promise not to psychoanalyze you if you do. Okay, oh, we have someone being volunteered by her colleague. Yes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So I see -- my metaphor is a dragonfly, which for people who don't know about dragonflies, they lead the way to fresh water and they eat 100 times their body weight in mosquitoes every day, and so I'm not going to say more about that. I can eat more than 100 times my body weight in unpleasant things every day that make it easier for other people and help people find water.

MICHELLE LEBARON: Thank you. Could everyone hear that? Yes? Okay. No? No, so let me just summarize, if I can, no doubt inadequately because she was very, very eloquent. But she said a dragonfly because dragonflies lead the way to fresh water and eat 100 times their body weight in mosquitoes every day. And she said that you could figure out what those analogies relate to. Thank

you. Excellent, let's hear a couple more. Let's have someone way back -- yeah, good.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'll report on our table.

MICHELLE LEBARON: Oh, excellent.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Go around on our table here. We had two people that, you know, the metaphor that they used was when you buy maybe a charm or a bracelet or a necklace and you maybe like your charm, but pretty soon the necklace ends up in your drawer, some place in the back. Well, you find it occasionally and it's all crinkled up and all -- and these two folks, what they really like to do is to straighten them out and smooth them out and bring it back to the original, you know, kind of luster and the original shape of the necklace. And that's kind of how they -- and they found this out by each other just recently [inaudible].

MICHELLE LEBARON: Fantastic.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We got a couple conductors, which I thought were somebody who really likes to organize people and solve problems and say, "Okay, here's how we can do it," and then the emphasis on the we. And we got a multitasker that I think goes along with that metaphor on orchestration. And then we've got Monique. What was -- sorry, take charge. Somebody that sees what needs to be done and gets folks moving down the path constructively. And I myself like to herd cats. And so my whole thing is that you get all these different folks in meetings sometimes that think they all know where they're going, but it all seems to be going in different directions. And I enjoy like trying to get an umbrella or trying to get a framework that helps folks to kind of get focused and get moving on a solution.

MICHELLE LEBARON: Excellent, thank you. Now I hope because our colleague stood up, everyone could hear him. Is that true? Because that would really be hard to summarize, but thank you. And we hear, again, very different ways of thinking about leadership and yet all important and all constructive. Thank you, yeah. Let's hear one more just to have a bit of a kind of flavor of some of the diversity in the group. Yeah?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Somebody at our table thought about ex-lax. We get the process moving.

MICHELLE LEBARON: Thank you. I think we could hear all that. And as you can see just from the few we've heard, the possibilities are endless. Sorry, no pun intended. When you start to think about this, it opens up choices about leadership because I'm also quite sure that different people in this room use different metaphors at different times. And that, indeed, is one of the things we need to be able to do,

to not only have one metaphor, one idea of who we are informing our work all the time. This is why some of the work I've done has to do with the metaphor of trickster because I think we need to shape shift or shift shape in a number of different ways in our work, even sometimes, within the same hour. And that's part of the flexibility that we cultivate within ourselves. In preparing for this opportunity to talk with you, I did a bit of work on reading some comments people have made who have participated in special education processes, IEP processes in particular. And I found, as you will not be surprised to hear, a big variety of kinds of comments that people made. Some people said, "Thank heaven, the process changed everything and things went a long much more smoothly afterward." And some people had mixed experiences in the process, and I wanted to share this one particular quote with you where the person said, post-IEP process they were really unhappy because, quote, "I wasn't involved in the implementation of the monitoring plan, which I was supposed to be. It said right in the mediation papers, you know, I was supposed to be involved with the stuff that was collected. I was supposed to be involved with what was going on. It was right in the mediation." What I take from that is, for that particular person, they're ascribing a lot of leadership to the mediator and to the mediation process but feeling that, at least in terms of ongoing implementation, that leadership was missing. And so I think we have to ask ourselves about our roles not only in process, but in setting up effective, ongoing connection among those parties who are involved with implementation of any agreement. Very important, then, when we think of the element of earth to ask how can we make sure, as people walk along on the ground post process, that things continue to work, that things continue to stay intact, and that people continue to feel that they can have a functional way of working together even when relations between, for example, a family and a school have broken down and are not very constructive. Then the question is still, what forms of communication can be used and what can be used in order to support the child going forward? So there we have the element of earth, and that's the first element in the brew that we're making, the alchemical brew. And the second one, of course, as we said, is the element of air. It is about collaboration. Now I'm going to talk about the element of air in a way which might surprise you. Indeed, it surprised me. I thought to myself, "Really? Is that what I -- what comes up for me in relation to the element of air?" But it was, and so I share it with you this morning. And what came up for me when I thought about air and about the way we collaborate with others in our work, and all of you are in collaborative roles of some sort, is the question of beauty. Why beauty? Well, if you think about air, of course, air is this ineffable thing that we all need but none of us can touch, and beauty is kind of like that. And I was thinking about how, in conflict, we

tend to narrow down, we tend to get in corners and say, "I can't see a way out of here," which is true when we're in the corner. And one of the things that we miss is something that I believe is really essential to us in our lives, and that's beauty. Think about finding a new place to live. You find an apartment or you find a house. You find a place to live and then you need to find furniture. Do you go into the furniture store and buy the most rundown full of holes kind of sofa that you can find? The one that is the ugliest and the least attractive? I don't think so. Not even when a student do we do that. We look for beauty. We look for beauty and, similarly, people who are involved in very difficult kinds of conflicts and situations in their lives need beauty perhaps more than ever. And so I want to ask you, if you would for a moment, to talk with one person at your table, or indeed you can jump tables and go talk to one person at another table about this question. I'd like you to relate to that person in just one or two minutes a moment of beauty in your work. Think about your work in whatever role and tell that person about one moment that comes to mind for you right now. Don't analyze it intensely. Just see what it is, one moment of beauty in your work because there's great beauty in the possibilities that each of us have to play roles that we think are meaningful and to bring people together in various ways. One moment of beauty in your work, just with one other person if you would. Moments of beauty in your work. If you were able to find one moment of beauty in your work to talk about with someone sitting near you, would you please stand up? If you found one moment of beauty to talk about with your neighbor, please stand up. And so we have a whole room of people attuned to beauty. Thank you. Please sit down. When I think about this question, beauty in our work, I think it's really important. Think about how we do small things to try to create beauty in the places where we live, the places where we work, and think about the smaller subtle ways that you may think about the aesthetic or beautiful dimension in your work and find ways to amplify those. When I think about this question, I think about a time when I had some participants in a workshop, young people, probably early 20s, doing a human sculpture. They were supposed to sculpt a situation of conflict in the world. And what they ended up doing was they had some people in their sculpture who were downtrodden and really cast down and without power and in desperate situations, and others who were living the dream and had the house with the picket fence and the dog and the right number of children and the right car. And then they had in their sculpture one young man who was in the middle. He had one hand and kind of part of his gaze looking back at the downtrodden and another stretching out toward the people who had the dream. And he was frozen in that place of not knowing in which direction to go in his career, in his life. And so I asked him, I said, "You can take one step. What will you do?" And

the whole room took a deep breath and I think we all held our breath for quite a long time, it seemed like a very long time. We wondered, would he choose the kind of stable, more predictable life to the extent any of us really have stable and predictable lives, or would he choose this life of service that he also felt called to? And none of us would have blamed him for any choice or evaluated him, but we were with him in that moment. And then he finally took a step back. He took a step to that place where he felt really called even though it was hard. And to me, that was a moment of exquisite beauty because it was a moment of clarity for him, a moment of shift for him. And I think often in our processes and in our work, when there is a moment of shift where people have a sudden aha, they have a sudden coming together, they have a new insight, they see the other as not only evil, bad, and misguided, but perhaps having some redeeming quality, those moments are beautiful moments. I had a teacher, very fortunate to have a teacher named John O'Donohue who was an Irish poet and philosopher. And John wrote a whole book about beauty and he said, "Beauty has a profound and ancient autonomy. Ultimately, beauty is the stirring of the invisible in visible form. And in order to receive it, we need to cultivate a new style of approaching the world." So I ask you to think in your work going forward from this day, how can you cultivate a style of approaching the world that invites the invisible into visible form in the very small and big decisions that you make in the course of your work? The element of air. Well, we have two more elements, water and fire. These are my two favorites, actually, so I saved the best for last. And water, of course, is connected to cultural fluency. This question of how do we navigate the very difficult and turbulent waters of difference? We begin, of course, with ourselves and we ask the question, "Through which lenses am I looking?" Because whether or not we wear glasses or contact lenses, we are always looking through lenses. We always see the world shaped by our own understandings and our own assumptions, and that's one of the reasons we ask the question about metaphor, "Through which lens am I looking?" So we ask that question. And I think in America, in Canada, we particularly need to ask the question about social class. Through which lenses relating to privilege am I looking? And how will others differently privileged relate to me and to the work that I'm doing? Most of us in this room have more or less secure income, more or less secure situations, and many of those who may be involved in processes are not in that situation. What does it mean? I remember years ago being asked to help design a child protection mediation process, and the idea was that young people, especially if they were teens, and parents and then the state authorities would come in and mediate child protection matters. And the room itself was so interesting. It had those kind of government issue sofas and a picture of mountains,

you know, that looked like it had been reproduced one too many times and a kind of very conservative looking lamp. And I really wondered, you know, if you want teens to come in and feel comfortable as part of the child protection program process, you know, can they relate to the lamp? Can they relate to the mountains? I was never so sure about that. So we ask, again, that question of beauty because it's the air all around us, comes back into thinking about cultural fluency too. But we ask the question, "How can people feel at home in our processes?" What can we do to be aware of our own privilege and what makes sense to us? We say, "Oh, it's just common sense. We do it this way because it's just common sense." Of course, complying with the regulations, but we also bring our common sense, but the problem is it's not always common. And so thinking about the element of water and how water flows and how strong water is over time, we think about cultural fluency. One of the matters that I heard about that was the most difficult for one of the facilitator mediators who I talked with about special education work was the case of a Korean family. In this Korean family, there was a young child who had been diagnosed with autism. The family didn't like the diagnosis. They had told not one person in their extended family about this. They didn't want special services necessarily for their child because they didn't want everything that came with it. The stigma, the idea that their child was differently-abled and, in their view, disadvantaged in terms of his entire future life by what was going along with that. And I began to wonder, how can you be culturally fluent in a situation like that, where the values of the people with whom you are working may be very much at odd not only with the values of the system, the laws and regulations, but the values you hold also. How can you be culturally fluent in that situation? These are the real tests. It's easy to be culturally fluent when you're working with people who are more or less like you. That's quite simple, but in the work that people in this room are involved in, you're working often with people whose values are not like yours, people whose values may not be reflected in the laws and the regulations which govern the work that you do. And then what? And of course, this is a tension in our larger society. How can we be culturally sensitive and, at the same time, have fairness and have rules which work for everyone? But you're there actually being the river between the two banks, helping people navigate exactly that tension. And it's an ongoing question. I think it calls for us to develop ongoing suppleness of mind, ongoing openness of heart, and ongoing curiosity about how the very real cultural traditions people may bring with them can be articulated with these systems as they are constructed in the interest of the children themselves. Cultural fluency and the element of water. Because, of course, and this is a quote from a researcher named Trainor in the field. "We don't want to promulgate a system where one provides a

set of services or standard of quality education opportunities for youth with disabilities whose parents are effective advocates and another for those who are not." So I know you're all alive to that question and, for me, it's a question of water. It's a question of flow, how we flow amongst these different and sometimes competing ideas. Well, finally we get to the element of fire. Fire, of course, all about passion. It's all about how our work ignites in ways which are positive and spreads like a wild fire in ways that people get caught up and are part of a positive momentum for bettering the lives of youth and children. That's exciting. One of my most favorite writers and thinkers in the last century was called M. C. Richards, Mary Catherine Richards. Some of you may have heard of her. She was an American potter, an artist, and she wrote a book that got very famous kind of in the '60s or '70s called *Centering* in which she talked about how the clay was a metaphor for so many other things in life. Well, she passed away about ten years ago, and before she did, she was asked to write a chapter in a book about conflict. And she agreed immediately. She had lived in a communal housing setting for a number of years and she said, "I know about conflict." So she said absolutely, she would do it. And she set out to do it, and she said that she found herself surrounded by crumpled paper because every time she started writing, she'd go, "No, that's not it," and she'd throw that down. And then she'd start again, "No, that's not it." Because what she could not find a way to convey is this, and I think this is so vital for any of us working in this area, what she could not find a way to convey was her own capacity for destruction, for wishing ill toward others, for actually holding shadow within herself as we all do. We all have those shadow bits that we don't really acknowledge so much and especially those of us who feel we're doing good work in the world, we just go toward the light, and then sometimes we're so surprised when one of our colleagues in the light does something really nasty. We get surprised by shadow because we don't acknowledge it. And she wanted to write about that. And as you can imagine, it was difficult. And so one night, she had a dream. This is M. C. Richards' dream. She dreamed that she was in her house in Berkeley, California, and she looked over on the horizon and she saw a big fire, out of control, burning toward her house. And she was terrified and deeply upset because all of her pots were on shelves in one room in her house. And if her house were to burn down, then her life's work would be lost. Imagine that. Something you had spent decades creating possibly going to be lost in an hour. So she was very, very upset, but she had to evacuate, and so she got everything ready, she got ready to leave the house, and her neighbor came over and they were about to jump in the car and leave together. And as she turned around for one last look at her pots, there was a man she knew, a kind of acquaintance, and he was standing there next to the pots as

though it were the most ordinary day in the world. And she said to him, "Haven't you heard? There's a fire! You have to get out! You have to leave right now! Let's go! You can come in the car with us." And he just stood there and he didn't say anything at all. Well, she and the neighbor left, of course, and they went away and they weren't allowed to come back for two days. Finally, they came back. They came to the neighborhood. The fire had gone through the neighborhood, had caused great destruction. And there, as she went through the shards and the remains of her house, she came to the room where the pots had been and she was astonished because the pots on all of their metal shelves were still there, but there was a change. They were more beautiful than they had been before because they had been in the fire. And there was this man who had been there before she had left, and he was still standing there like it was an ordinary day. And she said to him, "What's happened?" And he said, "Only the colors have deepened. If you can stand in the fire, only the colors will deepen." And from this, she understood how to write the chapter that actually we bring our shadow and our light selves, and the shadow and the light aspects of the systems in which we work and of everyone else involved in the system, and we stand in the fire. And so the question that the element of fire brings to us is, how can we be creative in the midst of that fire? How can we recognize that it does have the capacity to deepen our colors if we could stand in its midst? And we talked yesterday, those of you who were in the afternoon session with Bernie Mayer, about intensity. Conflict is intense. We mustn't ever forget that. I've talked with far too many mediators who say, "Oh yeah, I'm a great mediator. I have an excellent success rate, but I wouldn't participate in mediation as a party myself." Uh-huh, because they aren't quite willing to be that vulnerable. We mustn't ever forget the vulnerability of people who are working with special education issues and whose lives will be directly affected for a long, long time about what happens in the processes that you're involved in. We mustn't forget that creativity at that time is counterintuitive. It's the very last thing that's possible because we know, in terms of our physical selves, we have little scope for creativity when we're in a kind of fight-or-flight state, which, by the way, can be sustained for a long time if you are in the midst of an ongoing difficult series of conflicts. And so the element of fire poses that question to us. How can we bring leadership which sparks creativity? How can we bring leadership which demonstrates and welcomes cultural fluency among everyone involved in our work? How can we bring leadership which is alive to beauty? And how can we bring leadership which is also practical and in touch with the solid ground of what is possible and what is workable and what will be able to last over a long period of time? I found a poem on a website about autism that I'd like to close with and then invite you into dialogue and

conversation about any aspects of what we've talked about. And it is simply written by someone named Nicole from the UK. It doesn't have Nicole's surname. And the title is I Do Not Cry For Who You Are. "I do not cry for who you are nor what can never be. I cry because they look at you but never really see. They don't see how the differences could make the world complete. They can't all live on rainbows. It's just not meant to be. You are not responsible for all that we've been through. I would not change you for the world, I would change the world for you." Back in 1918, Mary Parker Follett. How many of you have heard of Mary Parker Follett? Quite a few of you. In any event, she was a very kind of visionary writer, philosopher, social theorist, and she wrote something that I thought was very, very moving. She said, if I can find it, "Instead of shutting out what is different, we should welcome it because it is different. And it is through difference that we will make a richer life. Every difference that is spread into a bigger conception feeds and enriches society. Every difference which is ignored feeds on society and eventually corrupts it." And so it is my hope and invitation that the alchemy of earth, air, water, and fire in your work in the forms of commitment and collaboration and beauty and creativity will flourish. Thank you.