

Conclusion: Seeding the Future

Humans and nature construct one another.

- Alexander Wilson, "The Culture of Nature", 1992

Outdoor and environmental education programs offer some initial materials and possibilities for widespread rejuvenation of sustainable living experiments. Early outdoor education programs operated in an extended hippy period, idolizing nature or competing with nature. Then commercialism got hold of outdoor education programming and we have a glut of irreverent, shallow outdoor programs. But there are many grains of gold and speckles of jewels within outdoor education programs – examples, experiments, research findings, and inspirational people. From these beginnings we stand a chance of creating a curriculum for a revolution in sustainable living. After all, the next phase of human history will have to be one of human adaptation and only nature can teach us how to adapt.

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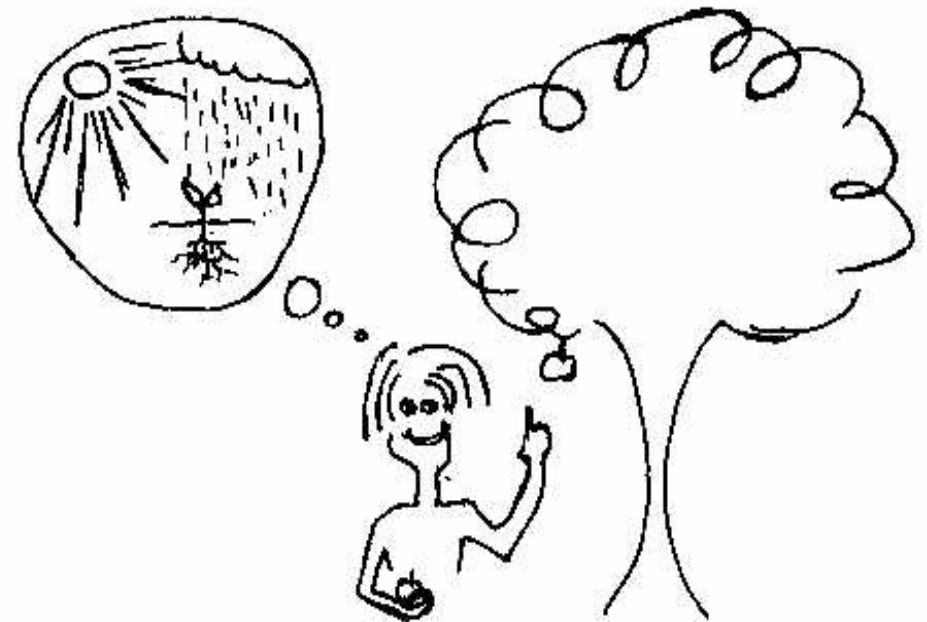
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Old Nature, New Nature

Environmental Activities
for Growing People & Planets



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*A society grows great when old men plant trees
whose shade they know they shall never sit in.*
- Greek Proverb

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Camping in the Backyard

Why do we spend all the time, fuel, energy, etc. going on outdoor camping trips? Most of the benefits of camping (plus some extra ones) could be obtained by families sleeping in their backyards. (If you don't have a backyard, try the balcony, roof or a friend's or neighbor's place).

Sleep in your backyard for at least a week each year. Cook on a fire (or a stove if fires aren't permitted), eat home-grown vegetables, don't watch TV or use power or the telephone. Stay on your property, but don't use the house. Really *live* in your backyard and get to know and care for it. It might change your life forever – and will cost less than your everyday life.

World Meal

Cook a meal consisting of a limited amount of rice and beans - and eat it. That's the average meal for the average person on the planet. Then invite a group of people and cook a World Meal to share with them. Encourage these people, in turn, to cook a World Meal for others. Do this until you activate the critical mass for a snowball effect. If you want exact proportions, here's some starting figures:

- UN recommends 2350 calories per day.
- Low income countries ~2100 calories per day.
- Middle income countries ~2700 calories per day.
- US, UK, Europe, etc. ~3700 calories per day.

Can education be good for the planet?

A big hope for this small volume is to inspire education that is good for planet. Currently, the “ecological footprint” of most Western educational activities is negative - even for so-called outdoor and environmental education activities.

This may seem like a sweeping statement, but the reality is that modern day Western educational systems (like most modern day human systems) involve human consumption far beyond the rate at which natural resources are replaced either immediately or in the future.

The significant educational challenge we face is how to achieve large-scale engagement of human society in “eco-psychological” activities which leave the natural environment healthier and human beings better equipped to live sustainably.

Old Nature: Some answers can be found in “old nature” and “old human ways in nature”. Profound transformations in thinking and behavior can occur when people “rediscover their indigenous heart” (Ellis-Smith, 2003). Much can be discovered alone or with small groups in nature, but ideally it helps to get some form of indigenous guidance and training.

New Nature: Some answers can be found in the “new nature”. Contrary to the stereotype of wholesale environmental destruction by humans, nature is very resilient and has been constantly adapting and even in some cases thriving in response to even the most urbanized human activity (Low, 2003). The new nature starts right outside our front and back doors. The new nature is very responsive and willing for us cooperate.

Sensual Awareness Inventory

In each column, write as many examples as you can of ways you like to receive pleasure, comfort or enjoyment through each sense.

Touch	Taste	Smell	Sight	Sound

Notes:

- o How many of your listed items are related to nature?
- o To boost your well-being, commit to giving yourself at least one source of sensual pleasure for each sense each day
- o This exercise is adapted from Burns (1998)

Quotes from “Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution”

“Humankind has inherited a 3.8 billion-year store of natural capital. At present rates of use and degradation, there will be little left by the end of the next century [i.e., by 2100]”
- Hawken, et al, 1999, p.3

“In sum, Americans waste or cause to be wasted nearly 1 million pounds of materials per person per year.”
- Hawken, et al, 1999, p. 52

“Oberlin Professor David Orr, the leading spokesperson for integrating the environment and education...believes that changing the procurement, design, and investments made by our educational systems represents a “hidden curriculum” that can teach, as “powerfully as any overt curriculum, a more comprehensive way of seeing the world that is the foundation for a radically different curriculum than that presently offered virtually anywhere. In every respect this is a challenge of how we think which makes it a challenge for those institutions purporting to improve thinking. Much of the change in outlook and perspective called for will not happen in the time available unless schools, colleges & education get it.””
- Hawken, et al, 1999, p. 315

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Night Eyes

Go for a night walk without a light. At first, sit in one place and let your eyes adjust (10-15 minutes). You might be amazed how much you can see. As you walk, scan ahead using peripheral vision. If walking through dark forest/bush, use hands out in front for protection.

Observing the Micro-Universe

Peg out a 1 meter x 1 meter (3ft x 3ft) square in a patch of nature. Sit in the square for an hour, focusing only on what is inside the square. Observe the terrain and the myriad of natural dramas unfolding on a micro-scale.

Star Therapy

Lay down under the night sky and watch the stars (or clouds in the daytime). An age-old, effective way of calming anxiety and dealing with depression.

Council of All Beings

A role-playing workshop. Participants each choose to represent and speak for a part of the natural environment during a "council of all beings" (at which no humans are present). Beforehand, participants each make a mask to represent their aspect of nature.

Favorite Place in Nature

Where is your favorite place in nature? Write a description, draw or picture or describe the place to someone else. What makes it special?

What Has Changed in 150 Years?

What has changed in the last 150 years? Brainstorm as many as things that have changed as you can. This is ideal for small groups – run it as a brainstorming competition. Ask groups to read their lists out to the whole group. Discuss the main themes, the surprises, etc.

Nature Scavenger Hunt

One way to run a nature scavenger hunt is to hand out an egg carton and a list of 12 items to collect - e.g., natural items which are: soft, spiky, blue, strong, beautiful, old, fragile, yummy, sharp, smooth, closed, open, wet, dry, from an animal, dead, etc. (be creative).

Leaf Rainbow

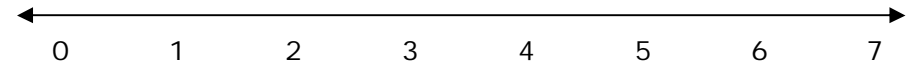
A nature art exercise: In small groups, students search for leaves of different shades and colors and create a "leaf rainbow".

7th Generation Decision Making

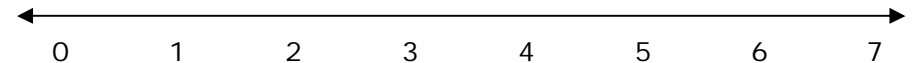
We are looking ahead, as is one of the first mandates given to us as chiefs, to make sure [that] every decision we make relates to the welfare and well-being of the seventh generation to come, and that is the basis by which we make decisions in council. We consider: Will this be to the benefit of the seventh generation. This is a guideline.

- an Iroquois chief quoted by Jeremy Rifkin in Time Wars

How many generations ahead *do you consider* when making decisions?



How many generations ahead *would you ideally like to consider* when making decisions?



Ancestral Visualization

Imagine this:

All your direct ancestors standing on your left, in a line, starting with your father (or mother), your grandfather, your great-grandfather, etc.

All your future direct descendants standing on your right, starting with your son (or daughter), grandson, etc. These two lines stretch out over the horizon.

Imagine being able to send messages "Chinese whisper" style up and down the line.

What would you say? What would you ask?

Active Environmental Awareness

Here are 10 self-evaluation statements for measuring "active environmental awareness", which is:

The extent to which a person values and actively engages in understanding, preventing and solving environmental problems.

1. I think humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs. [-ve]
2. I believe humans must live in harmony with nature in order to survive.
3. I think conserving natural resources is necessary.
4. I believe humans have a responsibility to solve environmental problems.
5. I have in-depth knowledge about the local environment and ecosystem.
6. I am actively concerned and engaged with improving my local ecosystem.
7. One of my main goals in life is to live close to nature.
8. I am constantly aware of the environmental impact of my behaviors.
9. I actively minimize my consumption of natural resources.
10. I could be happy without electricity.

These statements could be used to measure the impacts of environmental education. For more information visit: <http://www.wilderdom.com/leq/>

Little & Big Ways of Engaging Nature

From little things, big things grow

- Paul Kelly

Little ways: Find little ways to learn about nature, explore them regularly, then gradually introduce more involved activities. Little ways can gradually become profound, for example:

- ◇ find a special spot in nature, near your house, and visit it each day
- ◇ care for the place little by little, taking actions to facilitate the natural ecosystem
- ◇ gradually remove barriers between your life and nature (e.g., open the windows more often, spend more time outside, use less electricity)
- ◇ eat more fresh food
- ◇ grow your own vegetables
- ◇ calculate your personal ecological footprint - if the average American consumes 1 million pounds of materials per year (Hawken, et al, 1999), how much do you consume?

Big ways: As your sensitivity to nature develops, explore more indepth interactions, for example:

- ◇ nature meditations and visualizations
- ◇ creating an organic or permaculture garden system
- ◇ spend time with an indigenous or environmental "elder"
- ◇ create your own vision quest or solo
- ◇ get off the grid and switch to solar power
- ◇ build a simple dwelling from recycled materials