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Grant, Tim

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Educating for the Environment: Guidelines & Activities Presentation notes¹

Tim Grant

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

(1) *Education should emphasize our interdependence with other peoples, with other species and with the planet as a whole.*

More than anything else, education should explore the connections between peoples, between people and other species, and between people and the planet. When we appreciate how dependent we are on having a healthy global environment, we will want to take steps to preserve biodiversity, reduce global inequalities, and promote cross-cultural understanding with others.

(2) *Education should help students move from awareness to knowledge to action.*

Knowing about the environment doesn't necessarily lead to action. We must have opportunities to *act* on that knowledge. It is only when we try to solve environmental problems that we can fully understand them. We discover then that these issues are not black and white, and begin to appreciate why these problems have not been solved already. This provides us with opportunities to develop the critical thinking skills needed to develop solutions.

(3) *In the richer countries of the world, we should reduce our consumption of the world's resources.*

It's estimated that the 20% of the world's population in the richer countries consume 80% of the world's resources. Does our planet have enough resources for everyone to have the same living standards as this 20%? Besides asking others to consider this question, we can challenge them to think of ways their homes and workplaces can save energy and can use less water, paper and other resources.

(4) *Students must have opportunities to develop a personal connection with nature.*

It is impossible to save the environment if you don't know it. Yet, most people live in cities where it's difficult to develop an emotional bond with

nature. Environmental education can help people recognize that there is more nature in cities than we realize.

(5) *Education should be future-oriented.*

Traditionally, we have studied history in order to understand the present. But to solve environmental problems, we need to think about the future. As British educator David Hicks says, "the future is that part of history that we can change." One way is to ask ourselves what kind of future we want to leave our children. Native peoples in North America based their decisions on what would be best for those people born seven generations after them. Another method is to develop alternative views of the future. We can consider where our current path of development is taking us, then consider environmentally-friendly alternatives. This allows students to consider what future they prefer, and how we might get there from here.

(6) *We must relearn "old wisdoms" from native peoples to re-connect to the planet.*

In all our communities, there are grandparents and other elders who can tell us what life was like before the consumer society began in the 1950s. It is important for young people to realize that the consumer society is a very recent development in human history and that many people enjoyed happy, satisfying lives before this period. In North America, many educators invite aboriginal elders from native peoples (Indians, Inuit) to share their perspectives.

(7) *Media literacy should be incorporated into everything that we do.*

In North America, young people encounter almost 2,000 advertisements each day-on TV and radio, on outdoor ads and on consumer products. These advertisements help form the self-image of boys and girls, and promote materialism as a goal in itself. We need to remember that our "mental" environment can get as polluted as the natural environment.

(8) *We should be facilitators and co-learners.*

We don't need to be experts to teach about the environment. As we study environmental problems with our students, we can learn about these problems at the same time. One role is to provide opportunities for learning-we don't need to tell students what conclusions should be reached.

Endnote

1. The notes are based on a presentation, "Educating for the Environment," given at the American Library Association Annual Conference in Toronto, Ontario, on June 23, 2003 where the ALA/SRRT Task Force on the Environment sponsored the session, "Clear the air and water-Environmental selections for children, public, and academic libraries".

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Tim Grant tim@greenteacher.com, Co-editor of *Green Teacher Magazine*
<http://www.greenteacher.com/>

95 Robert Street, P.O. Box 452, Toronto, ON M5S 2K5, Niagara Falls, NY
14304 PHON: 416- 960-1244, FAX: 416-925-3474.