

1990

Editor's Corner - Responsible Actions

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Responsible Actions

In these times of expressed concern about our environment, the ancient truth, "Actions speak louder than words," is worth serious thought. Most newspapers and news magazines carry a few columns of words about the environment. This journal is no exception.

Talking and writing about environmental issues is helpful in attaining the lower, but basic, goal levels of environmental education. Words play an important part in developing awareness of environmental issues, analyzing the values, beliefs and positions of the players in environmental issues, and understanding the entwined ecological concepts. However, our highest environmental goal level requires more than words; it requires action. Words may be used to persuade others to action, to move legislators to action or to involve groups to purchase environmentally-friendly products, but the goal must always involve some action.

As teachers, words come relatively easily. Actions come with some greater difficulty, and responsible actions (similar to well-chosen words) are the greater challenge! Given a bit of effort, most of us can arouse our students to plant a tree, collect some plastic or write a letter to their congressman. For us to teach our students so that *they* generate responsible action demands much more of us. Successful teaching is evidenced by action generated by the students, not the teacher. Responsible action requires understanding and choice of action based on the students' own beliefs and values. We can rise to the challenge. Students need to be carefully taught that it is our values that determine what we believe and what we do about issues. Through extended teaching of ecological concepts, the careful analysis of environmental issues and training in action skills, we can succeed. The action we teachers take as role models speaks to our students.

The effort required for this instruction, although rewarding, is surely demanding. Fortunately, we do have an instructional model and a growing body of research which is most helpful. If you take the action to locate the March 1990 issue of *The Science Teacher*, you will find words by Ramsey, Hungerford and Volk which will provide assistance. You may also wish to take action to become a participant in one of the Environmental Issue Instruction Workshops described in "Science Notes" in this issue. The words of this editorial may make you aware, but your values and beliefs will determine if you take the action to locate the article or sign up for the workshop.

--C.W.B.