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Students for Environmental Awareness (S.E.A.): A New Concept

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We live in a world which consists of many different ideas, cultures and institutions. This array of differences, although stimulating, should not be construed as being completely represented in the product, education.

Education is a single component in a system of many others, and these components are continuously interacting with each other. Different forms of governments, different languages and different ways of life continue to modify education. Education is a reflector for the type of society in which we find ourselves. Moreover, the type of society we live in is dependent upon the extent to which the educational output serves as a modulation instrument for that society.

The nature of man and the results of his existence are constantly being challenged, modified and remolded by the omnipresent instruments around him—other components in his environment. Although man and his world are being changed, the danger lies not necessarily with the change but with the lack of representative instrumentation. Somehow, man must amalgamate the effective instruments and cast out those that have proven ineffective. Further, he needs to develop a penetrating vision which will enable him to look beyond the curtain that seemingly blinds him, and therefore prevents him from viewing other pathways leading to the domain of alternatives. He must somehow look beyond this curtain which is, however porous, a barrier. He must take great strides in pursuing other avenues in this domain which may provide an environment whereby alternatives and new directions can be explored.

The development of "Students for Environmental Awareness" groups is one pathway. It is hoped that, with continued assessment of our ever-accumulating experiences with environmental problems, we will be placing ourselves at a strategic vantage point which may serve as an elevating factor, and, therefore, facilitating our looking beyond the limits of our own ideas, cultures and institutions. To embark on this course of action will require maximum patience, courage and perseverance. However, overcoming the difficult task before us is imperative.

We must venture down these roads in the search for a better way to deal

with ourselves and with our planet. We must organize the forces against those who are, knowingly or unknowingly, desecrating our environment. We need bulwarks to slow the process of environmental deterioration. Just the other day I read a brief article which appeared in the *Daily Iowan*, the University paper, entitled, "The Vanishing Species." The text of that article was,

Man's come a long way since he came down out of the trees. Back then his efforts didn't amount to much. Sure, he could kill a few animals, cut down a few trees, and maybe even pollute a stream or two, but nature had the upper hand. Things have really changed though. Now man has the upper hand, and nature is finally on the run. Yes, the battle has been long and hard, but the end is in sight. Just a few more years and it could all be over. Just a few obstacles stand in man's way. Wouldn't you like to be one of them?

The establishment of environmental studies groups provides obstacles for the advancing environmental enemies.

There are numerous signals that would indicate a need for doing something, and these signals are exemplified in practically every conceivable aspect of our daily lives. We hear the distant echoes of youth warning against our over-indulgence and gluttony in the material world. We hear the ever-increasing screams of automation and technology. We see the once-blue skies and once-clear rivers darkened with the refuse of the industrial complex. We see the sprawling misery of the man-made world taking its toll in human suffering and despair. The time has come to take a stand!

We must include in our educational experience components that will, hopefully, provide the information and strategy for dealing with our problems.

The roles that S.E.A. groups would assume could take many forms, depending upon their location. However, the primary function would be to make the home, school and community environments better places in which to live and learn. Having had experience in organizing and advising an S.E.A. group, I will briefly describe some of the activities that S.E.A. became involved in and was able to accomplish in its first year.

In their home environment, S.E.A. students had a tremendous impact on their parents. Discussions during dinner regarding environmental problems led to questioning the types of products that were being used around the home, such as D.D.T. and various detergents. Turning off the lights and the intelligent use of water became a part of the daily lives of students and parents alike. Some parents became so enthusiastic about some of the activities that the group was engaged in, they assisted with many of the projects.

In the school environment, S.E.A. was quite active in organizing various environmental programs, such as panel discussions and clean-up campaigns. The more significant of these was that of articulating Earth Day activities on April 22 within the school and assisting others with the development of their Earth Day programs.

In the local community, S.E.A.'s members took part in various commercial radio and television shows which focused on some of the S.E.A. projects that were underway. The "pet community project" was that of acquiring a small strip of land from the city government and establishing a "vest pocket park" in a black neighborhood. Other community projects included studies to determine the quality and availability of local recreation facilities, government, black-white relations, education and city planning.

The S.E.A. group was "action-oriented." Its actions were based on the research data obtained from the environmental problem studied, whether it was studied in or out of school. S.E.A. leaders need training in four basic areas in order to facilitate the implementation and articulation of S.E.A. organizations: the *awareness domain*, *survey of problem areas*, *organization for action* and *presentations*.

Awareness Domain

Training in this area would enable prospective S.E.A. leaders to gain a broad perspective of communication problems that are apparent in our society. This perspective would be acquired by providing the prospective leader with experiences through communication games, role playing and simulation games. Needless to say, knowing environmental problems exist is one thing, but doing something constructive about them is another. Therefore, providing experiences whereby people can effectively communicate with one another will facilitate the measures to be taken that will, hopefully, eradicate some of these problems.

Survey of Problem Areas

What are some of the environmental problems that confront us? Through the use of various films, fieldtrips, literature and discussions, students will become acquainted with some of the problems, their nature and possible ways for dealing with them.

Organization for Action

When the students have been provided the necessary experiences in communication and determining what the problems are, the time has come for doing something about the problem(s). Students will organize themselves into study groups and pursue the necessary avenues to select, define, research and treat the problem they have chosen. They will solicit the aid of school and community resource personnel, who have expertise in the problem area and will *cooperatively* establish the research design. The group will now proceed to study the problem.

Presentation

Knowing that a problem exists is one thing, but it does no good if the other

people in the environment know nothing about it. This is why the phase of presenting the problem is important. After all of the data have been obtained, and if, indeed, there appears to be a real problem, the students will begin to report the problem and its nature to various concerned groups in and out of the school. Perhaps the sociology or history class would be interested in hearing about a local population problem? Maybe the local city government would want to know the results of a study in the area of recreation facilities in the local community? There are numerous groups that would, perhaps, be interested in knowing about the research. Finally, after determining whether or not the problem warrants further study, the group will then proceed to contact the necessary people and/or agencies in order that solutions to the problems can be formulated.

The implementation of Students for Environmental Awareness groups in the high schools is a much-needed innovative component for our educational complex for several reasons. First, there are numerous extracurricular organizations present in our schools today, such as student councils, glee clubs, honor clubs and athletic clubs. However, none of these have, as their primary function, the role of assisting with determining the quality and availability of their local environment. Secondly, we hear and read so often of, "the generation gap," the "alienation of youth" and "the turned-off generation," but do we wonder why we have such labels? If one would critically analyze some of the causes that have given birth to such descriptive labels, he would find the underlying cause to be the lack of young people's voice in affairs that affect their lives, hence, the conditions of their environment and decisions being made about it.

Finally, we desperately need input from these young people. There is no question that the present generation is more highly educated than any previous one, simply because there is more to learn and more ways of learning it. Advancements in technology have expanded the perspective of each one of us in many ways and, as a result, have altered the way we think. However, the basic difference between the perspective of the "new" generation and that of the "old" is simply that the new generation is "futuristically-oriented" whereas the old generation's view is complicated with events from the past; hence its view is more "now-oriented."

As much as no one would deny that we need to reexamine what we have done in the past, we need also to look at what it is our young people see as part of the future. We must somehow amalgamate both views and, by so doing, make the world of today and, most certainly, of tomorrow, a better place in which to live—for all mankind.

ECOSOURCES BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography is compiled on a monthly basis and is primarily intended for teachers teaching environmental topics. Copies are free and may be obtained

by sending a *stamped, self-addressed* envelope to: Janet Woerner, Science Department, Freeland High School, 710 Powley Drive, Freeland, Michigan 48623.