Environmental Awareness: Supporting a Path Towards Action

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Session Agenda

- Introduction

- Opening discussion(s)

- Presentation on Sobel’s Stages of Environmental Awareness

- Engage in an investigation

- Reflection/ discussion
University of Virginia’s Blandy Experimental Farm & The State Arboretum of Virginia

- Field ecological research station
- The State Arboretum of Virginia
Blandy’s Mission: To increase understanding of the natural environment through research and education
Education Outreach

- Hands-on, outdoor, experiential field investigations
- ~7000 PK-12 students per year
- Inquiry, Science Process and Skills focused programs
- Correlated to state and national standards
- Field-based STEM Learning
- Teacher professional development
What is *environmental awareness*?
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Understanding the importance of protecting the earth and making choices that benefit the environment
What does the following quote mean to you?

“If we want children to flourish, we need to give them time to connect to nature and love the earth before we ask them to save it.”

– David Sobel
Who is David Sobel?

David Sobel is a teacher and author. He advocates for nature-based early childhood education and has been recognized as further developing the place-based education movement through his writing and lectures.
Sobel’s Stages of Environmental Awareness

- Empathy Stage (~ ages 4-7)
- Exploration Stage (~ ages 8-11)
- Social Action Stage (~ ages 12-15)
Empathy Stage (~ ages 4-7)

- Encourage a sense of connectedness with plants and animals and focus on familiar organisms.
- Suggested activities include: Stories, songs, moving like animals, celebrating seasons
- Anthropomorphizing animals is encouraged!
Exploration Stage (~ ages 8-11)

- Explore the local environment and encourage students to develop a sense of place.
- Suggested activities include: exploring the landscape, map-making, gardening, taking care of animals, and stream studies.
- First focus on the immediate surroundings of the home and school, then branch out to the neighborhood and beyond.
Social Action Stage (~ ages 12-15)

- Encourage students to develop a sense of connectedness to society. They want to engage in action projects that allow them to make positive changes to the environment.

- Suggested activities include: managing school recycling programs, organizing stream clean-ups, writing to legislation, and planting riparian buffers
Jean Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Approximate Age Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| Sensorimotor         | Birth – 2 years        | - Infants and toddlers understand the world in terms of physical actions on the environment.  
                        |                        | - Infants move from simple reflexes to an organized set of behaviors. |
| Preoperational       | 2 – 7 years            | - Young children concentrate on constructing a world of permanent objects.  
                        |                        | - Preschool children can use mental symbols to represent objects and events.  
                        |                        | - Language is developing rapidly through dramatic play.  
                        |                        | - Social games and games with rules emerge as children become increasingly involved in social play with peers. |
| Concrete Operational | 7 – 11 years           | - Children’s reasoning skills become more logical.  
                        |                        | - Thinking becomes decentered, dynamic and reversible.  
                        |                        | - Children can organize objects into hierarchies of classes.  
                        |                        | - Children have developed a theory of mind, although they may still have difficulties taking on the perspective of another person.  
                        |                        | - Children are beginning to take intentions into account in their moral judgments. |
| Formal Operational   | 11 years on            | - Adolescents can think systematically, can reason about abstract concepts, and can understand ethics and scientific reasoning.  
                        |                        | - Adolescents can generate hypotheses.  
                        |                        | - Moral reasoning has evolved to understand that rules are a result of mutual agreement |

How do Piaget’s stages compare to Sobel’s stages?

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How do Piaget’s stages compare to Sobel’s stages?

- **Empathy** - Students develop a connectedness with animals and plants through pretend play
- **Exploration** - Students develop a sense of place by exploring their local environment.
- **Social Action** - Students feel a connectedness with society and want to engage in action projects.

Circle of Life

Exploration Stage (~ ages 8-11)
Circle of Life

How can this lesson be adapted to other stages?

Empathy

Exploration

Social Action
Thank you!

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Stare at a Stick

Exploration Stage (~ ages 8-11)
Stare at a Stick

How can this lesson be adapted to other stages?

Exploration

Empathy

Social Action
Thank you!

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References:

