

The Four Streams of Multicultural Environmental Education

by Running-Grass



Photo of Running-Grass and children from California Perspectives: An Anthology from California Tomorrow, Fall 1994, Vol. 4.

You are holding a powerful tool in your hands. It's a vehicle for voices, a link in a chain, a counter-narrative, an exposé, a source of inspiration and therefore of hope; it is also a continuing sign of the birth of new perspectives and values and a new field of theory and practice within environmental education: *multicultural environmental education*.

Multicultural environmental education is not merely environmental education with multicultural populations or "audiences" nor is it "urban environmental education with multicultural populations." It is rather a very new kind of environmental education, where content is influenced by and taught from multiple cultural perspectives. It is conscious of its own cultural perspectives and of the function that it has in the world and in the lives of diverse students and communities. As the nation's schoolrooms and communities become more diverse and value their diversity, environmental education must evolve as it encounters new cultural realities in specific community contexts.

FOUR STREAMS OF MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION:

In a sense, *multicultural* environmental education is a broad and diverse valley into which flow ideas and influences from four great mountain ranges: environmental education, multicultural education, critical pedagogy and environmental justice. The meeting of these ideas and influences is creating an environmental education for a culturally diverse and interdependent planet — a *multicultural* environmental education.

On perhaps its most basic level, this new field draws from a contemporary social movement, environmental justice, and three educational fields — multicultural education, environmental education and critical pedagogy. Multicultural education was heavily influenced by the Civil Rights movement and is a field committed to educate and prepare all students successfully for

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an increasingly diverse — and frequently conflict-filled — world. Environmental education, strongly influenced at its inception by the environmental movement, contains the powerful insight that we all need the information and values which help us take responsibility through our actions for the one and only planet we share.

The environmental justice movement is the continuation of a number of powerful social movements and the articulation and political practice of a "people of color environmental agenda." Specifically, even as it supersedes categories of ethnicity and class, it approaches a visionary reformulation of what environmentalism and environmental quality is and can be. It likewise challenges us to reformulate what we think environmental education is and can be. It is in communities of color around the country struggling for environmental justice, that new and innovative forms of multicultural environmental education are developing and making a positive difference for environmental quality.

Critical pedagogy contributes a powerful analysis which locates the process of education and teaching in the context of social structures and the forces which restrict or release the human capacity for democratic freedom. Environmental educators need it for the analytical context it provides and the power of teacher introspection which it informs.

This joint issue of *Race, Poverty and Environment* and the *Journal of Culture, Ecology and Community* captures some of this reformulation and challenge to the traditional, or mainstream, discourse on environmental education. Environmental justice activists may find this issue unusual in that political organizing is not highlighted to the extent which they may be

accustomed. In fact, some references to environmental justice may seem elementary. But activists will appreciate the variety of innovations and depth of thinking which educators are giving to ideas from activists and the contact with diverse children from disproportionately impacted communities.

Educators, for their part, will find themselves challenged, at times uncom-

fortably so, but heartened and excited at the potential of our work to make a difference not only for the individual student in the classroom but for the citizen-student in the community.

There are many themes and sub-themes running through this issue: the emerging dialogue between environmental education and environmental justice; the experimental attempts of environmental educators to authentically work at the community level; and others. But one of the most significant themes is the integrative dynamic of culture, ecology and community that is evident in each article. This dynamic is the foundation for a new paradigm for environmental education. Educators and activists at the grassroots level in communities around the country are creating it. Here are some of their feelings, fears, hopes, struggles, successes and stories.

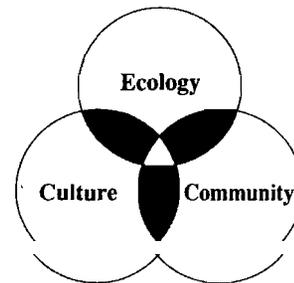
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This Journal can be used in a number of ways. Environmental studies programs can use it for course readers. Environmental education programs can use it for training purposes by having staff read and discuss articles. Classroom teachers can use it for practical ideas for their students. Activists can use it for networking purposes. Make it a part of your work and let us know of its usefulness and meaning to you.

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Profile of Three Circles Center for Multicultural Environmental Education



Three Circles Center is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to introduce, encourage and cultivate multicultural and environmental justice perspectives and values in environmental and outdoor education, recreation and interpretation. We are dedicated to assisting environmental educators and their programs in making a successful transition to a multicultural society based on social justice and sustainability.

Within the environmental justice movement, Three Circles Center assists grassroots organizations in utilizing environmental education to further the conditions of environmental justice. To these ends, we are involved in numerous multicultural and environmental justice curriculum projects and consult with programs, schools and community groups on intercultural communication, staff development, program design, evaluation and community outreach and liaison. Three Circles Center conducts workshops nationally to environmental educators and teachers and publishes the *Journal of Culture, Ecology and Community, An Environmental Education Review*.

For further information about our programs, consulting, Journal and/or memberships, please contact us at 415/561-6580, or e-mail us at: circlecenter@igc.apc.org. Three Circles Center is located in the Thoreau Center for Sustainability in the Presidio in San Francisco. Our mailing address is Three Circles Center, P.O. Box 1946, Sausalito, CA 94965. 01996.

Making Multicultural Environmental Education a

REALITY

by Dorceta E. Taylor

The ultimate goal of environmental education should be to draw on the experiences, perceptions, cultural backgrounds, and interests of students to create a nurturing learning environment. One of the first steps in any attempt to teach environmental education should be to identify and work with what is familiar to the students, to stimulate curiosity and provide a foundation on which they can explore less familiar or more complicated issues, themes and settings. Any attempt to teach environmental education without incorporating the students' experiences will fail to be interesting or relevant to many of them. Learning occurs when students make connections between what is taught in the classroom and what happens in their daily lives outside of school. A multicultural approach to environmental education can bridge the gap between classroom and out-of-school learning. Students learn a great deal from their immediate environments; consequently, an educational program that forces them to disconnect themselves from that environment will fail. Environmental education should be taught by starting with the students' experiences, interests and the cultural and environmental references they have around them, then later investigating other types of environments and experiences.

DEFINING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Environmental education has been consistently defined in a way that stresses responsible environmental behavior as a major goal. Such behavior has been defined as individual or group behavior which is aimed at understanding environmental issues and seeking solutions to environmental problems.' Wals, Beringer and Stapp posit a multicultural, action-oriented environmental education approach that encourages students and teachers to participate more fully in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational activities aimed at resolving environmental issues *identified by the learners*.² What is considered to be an "environmental issue" is dependent on the perceptions and experiences of the learner as well as on the context in which education occurs. Given that the educational activities are aimed at resolving environmental issues, students and teachers actively seek to improve the local biophysical and/or social environment while engaged in an interdisciplinary learning process.

Some have been critical of the way in which environmental education has been defined, approached and taught. For instance, Cantrill and Hungerford and Volk found the thrust of environmental education messages to be primarily ecological.³ Cantrill argues that environ-

mental education must include a social and political dimension. It is the expansion of the ecological message, inclusion of students' perceptions and experiences, and inclusion of the social, economic and political dimensions of the education in a multicultural setting that helps students to learn.

THE EVOLUTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Arising from the apolitical practice of nature study, environmental education has been taught from a very limited perspective. It was the formulation, voice and vision of the white middle-class packaged and transmitted to other races and social classes. More often than not, other cultures and perspectives have been excluded, or played marginal or insignificant roles. This being the case, students of color or poor students wanting to learn about the environment have had to divorce themselves from their surroundings and familiar experiences to do so. This model, like other models of cultural adaptation and learning, is ethnocentric and assimilationist.⁴ Students must either adapt to it or fall by the wayside.

This culturally imperialist, assimilationist model is very limited. It works well to get many white, middle-class students interested in environmental issues, but it fails to attract other students.

The root of the problem lies in the way in which "environment" has been defined. The definition of environment is still heavily influenced by the transcendentalism and Romanticism of the mid to late 1800s. Through the writings, politics and experiences of such well-known environmentalists and outdoor enthusiasts as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, environment came to mean the wild and rugged outdoors, wild animals, places of unusual beauty, designated wilderness parks and forests and the ecosystems that sustain them. Environment and environmentalism was defined as the antithesis to urban life, the answer, the antidote for that was wrong with civilization, industrialization, urbanization, resource exploitation, and environmental degradation.⁵

As conceptualized, there was no consideration of race, class, gender, social inequality, or social justice in the environmental debates or in attempts to educate people about the environment. Until recently, such ideas were nonexistent or played a limited role in discussions of environment or in environmental education. However, one aspect of race and social class received attention in academic and environmental circles — research on racial and class differences in perception and support for the environment. Interestingly, this body of research helped to propagate the notion

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that poor people, African Americans and other people of color were less concerned about the environment and less likely to mobilize around environmental issues than middle and upper-class whites. Concern for the environment was linked with participation in environmental organizations, events, education programs, and subscriptions to environmental magazines.⁶ There was little serious discussion of the fact that the poor can't afford to join these clubs, can't afford the cost of visiting faraway, wild places, but are aware that the urban and poor rural areas where they live receive scant attention in environmental debates. There was also very little discussion of the way in which interest, concern or knowledge is measured and what biases faulty measurement can add to the results.

One consequence of those one-sided theoretical discussions was that the actions of the well-to-do who joined hunting, fishing, hiking, mountaineering, bird watching and other environmental clubs and societies, were legitimized. Environmentalists were willing to believe that if the environmental movement (and its workforce) and environmental education classes are predominantly white and if environmental conditions are worse in communities of color, its because people of color are not interested in or concerned about the environment. There was little critical self-analysis to identify and understand the root causes of patterns and problems.

Issues of racial and social inequality did not become a part of the environmental dialogue or environmental education process until scholars and grassroots activists of color pushed to make these issues part of the research, policy, and activist agenda. This activism has helped to fuel the growth of the environmental justice movement and has led to the questioning of traditional definitions of environment, environmental issues, and environmental education. This work has also challenged the narrow framework of mainstream environmental discourse. Environmental justice activists have inserted issues of power, domination, racism, discrimination, distribution of

risks and benefits, inequality and justice into the debate, agenda and education process.

The increased activism and scholarship of people of color around environmental justice issues coincided with a marked increase in the number of people calling for multicultural environmental education. These people felt it was time for environmental education cumcula that would attempt to teach a greater number of students from a wider range of backgrounds. Despite this call for multicultural environmental education, many environmental educators have refrained from making critical analyses of the role of race, social class, social

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and political inequality, unequal environmental outcomes, quality of life, opportunities, life experiences and the effect these have on the environmental movement and environmentalism.

REDEFINING THE ENVIRONMENT

The environmental movement, environmentalism, and the teaching and conceptualization of environmental education are at a critical crossroads. Although the mainstream environmental movement and environmental educators have been slow to accept the expanded definition of the environment and the issues that people of color deem pertinent, people of color have managed to change the way in which the environment is conceptualized, the way problems are identified and solved, and the content and approach to environmental education. This has occurred because people of color insist that they, like other human beings, should be considered a part of the environment. People of color also insist that their communities be included — be they reservations, agricultural fields, urban

centers, or the rural hinterlands.

This means more than merely mentioning urban rural poor environments. It means including with the problems that exist in these environments as part of the environmental agenda. It means finding ways of reducing the disproportionate risks and hazards that people of color face in these communities, fighting the environmental racism, discrimination, and job blackmail to win environmental equity and justice. It means examining the politics of siting noxious facilities or hazardous wastes in communities perceived to be poor and powerless. It means halting the degradation of the urban environment and ameliorating other problems like homelessness, unemployment, drugs and crime. It means increasing access to parks, playgrounds, clean air, water, and reducing health problems arising from chronic exposures to toxins.

Students of color, even when they are unfamiliar with the environmental justice movement and with environmental activists of color, define the environment in the broader way espoused by environmental justice activists. Wals, Beringer and Stapp found that the definitions and perceptions of African American Detroit eighth-graders were broader than the traditional conception of environment.⁷ As one student wrote:

Our topic is vacant houses. Because vacant houses can be used for rape, arson, molesting of children, drug dealers, etc. The burned houses should be tom down, built new. They make the neighborhoods look bad. The neighbors can get roaches, and rats. We plan to go to construction places and the police station. And ask people to tribute money to tear down the house.

As the above discussion indicates, many people brought up with traditional definitions and boundaries of environment and environmentalism are not comfortable with the linkages of racism, classism, sexism and environmentalism. Some deny the existence of environmental racism, preferring to categorize issues of homelessness, job blackmail, disproportionate cancers and other

illnesses, as housing, occupational and labor issues, respectively, rather than environmental issues. Full acceptance of this broader perspective will be reflected in a reorientation of the agenda, policies, strategies, actions, and in the written materials from mainstream environmental organizations, and by the incorporation of these issues in environmental curricula.

MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Multicultural environmental education has to go beyond past attempts which interpreted "multicultural" to mean the inclusion of a few children from different racial and ethnic groups and marginal changes in the curricula, while for the most part continuing the dominant discourse and continuing to represent primarily the viewpoints of a limited sector of the population. For education to be multicultural, it has to include a wide variety of students and perspectives in all phases of planning, development, teaching and learning. Consequently, one has to deal with the question of access. Even in the best case, access to environmental education programs (especially at the pre-college level) is limited for some students. Students of color and poor students have even less access. Any program that attempts to make environmental education multicultural has to have as a major thrust increased access. That means one has to look at the quality of existing programs in an effort to improve and expand their focus and the number of people they reach.

One has to be concerned with other kinds of access too. There is the social-psychological access discussed above. If students do not understand or relate to the materials being taught, they are not engaged by it and can become alienated. Another very important kind of access is access to jobs in the field, career advancement possibilities and research opportunities. Students of color face a bleak employment and career advancement future in the environmental field. It is important for these students to meet people of similar backgrounds and experiences in various positions during

various stages in their careers.

To have truly multicultural environmental education, one has to expand the venues and locations where environmental education is taught. Right now there are probably more people of color being educated about environmental issues in informal and non-institutionalized settings than in school rooms, universities and environmental education or nature centers. While the traditional environmental education program has failed to reach people of color either because relevant messages are not delivered or because people have no physical or financial access to the sites, alternative environmental education

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programs flourish. These programs taught in community centers, homes, churches, union halls and the offices of environmental justice organizations serve to educate environmental justice activists and others about environmental issues, challenges and problems.

The success of environmental justice activists in reaching people not usually touched by the traditional environmental teaching offers an important message to environmental educators. For environmental education to be successful in reaching a wider variety of people (in terms of age, gender, race, and social class), it must be extended beyond the formal institutionalized settings that characterize the venues for most of these programs. That is, the content of the message and the location of the message has to be expanded to meet the needs of people. Therefore, if some can only make the church hall, community center or a friend's basement, then an effort should be made to educate in those settings too. The key challenge is to build flexibility

into the content, location, mode of delivery and target audiences of environmental education programs.

A crucial step in developing an appropriate definition of environment in a multicultural environmental setting is to adopt a definition that includes the life experience and sphere of reference of the students being taught. Start with what's familiar to the student then branch out to the less familiar. Lessons about wildlife should bear in mind that many students from the inner city are more familiar with mice, raccoons, squirrels and common birds like pigeons than other animals. Similarly, for many urban students, the biggest loss of habitat they encounter is homelessness and the most common form of ecological succession they see is abandoned lots being reclaimed by nature. Environmental educators may have to deal with the connection some students make between wildlife and pests. They also need to explain why so much money and time is spent on wildlife habitat loss and so little on homelessness. Such problems cannot be explained away by purely scientific reasoning; social, political, economic, and moral factors need to be included in the explanation.

As the above discussion has shown, poverty, gender, and race act independently and have significant outcomes worthy of serious discussion. The full understanding of environmental problems, and workable solutions cannot be sought without an understanding of these dimensions at the local, regional, national, and international levels. This is a call to reevaluate the definition of environment, the content of environmental education curricula, and the types of environmental education activities in which students and teachers engage. Students of all backgrounds can become interested in this field if they are introduced to it in a way that is sensitive to the environments from which they come. This is also a call to add variables that have been excluded from environmental education discussions in the past. It is a call to provide a meaningful framework with which students can analyze the systems they encounter and understand

how biophysical factors are linked to social, economic, and political factors.

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⁷Wals, et al.

Environment: Where We Live, Work, Play and

LEARN

by Charles Lee

Environmental justice is an interactive process where people speak for themselves through community organizing. In 1991, during the organizing for the historic People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, DC, Jeanne Gauna of the Southwest Organizing Project defined the environment as "the place where we live, where we work, and where we play." This has naturally evolved into the environmental justice movement's definition of the environment.

For the past five years, the life experience of many community groups and individuals related to environmental justice has created a wealth of knowledge and experience. In 1987, the term "environmental racism" did not exist. Now, within people of color and low income communities, there is vibrant activism around environmental issues. The second edition of Robert Bullard's *Directory of People of Color Environmental Organizations* lists 306 organizations, 91 environmental justice resource organizations, 34 legal resource groups, 49 people of color organizations in Canada, and 38 organizations in Mexico.

These organizations are based around activities such as community organizing, research, education, information sharing, lobbying, service provision, voter registration and education, direct action, networking, community health surveys and monitoring, technical assistance, legal action, solidarity, financial development, and government-to-government relationships.

More important, many of these organizations have achieved significant victories and successes, including the following:

- Relocation of an Exxon tank farm by People Organized in Defense of Earth and Its Resources (PODER) and the East Austin Strategy Team (EAST) in Austin, Texas;
- Winning a \$1.1 million legal settlement for the establishment of an "environmental benefits" trust by West Harlem Environmental Action (WHE ACT) in the case of the North River Sewage Treatment Plant;
- Advocacy efforts persuading the Chicago Housing Authority Board of Education to remove asbestos from homes and schools in Altgeld Gardens in Chicago's South Side;
- Historic settlement by Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (AIWA) with Jessica McClintock over sweatshop work conditions in San Francisco, California;
- Establishment of a clinic by Tucsonians for a Clean Environment and securing an \$84.5 million settlement at the Tucson International Airport/Hughes Air Force Missile Plant #44 Superfund Site in Tucson, Arizona;
- Development by the Kwethluk Joint Group Council of a

community designed water and sewage plant in the Yup'ik Eskimo community of Kwethluk, Alaska; and

• The recent victory by Citizens Against Toxic Exposure in securing a decision by the EPA to relocate all

358 families in the African American community next to the Escambia Superfund Site in Pensacola, Florida.

Educators and researchers have much to learn from the remarkable wealth of knowledge and experience which exists in communities.

The many successes and victories of grassroots communities did not come easy; they were the product of individual and collective learning. This shared learning process has produced a tremendous body of knowledge, knowledge that makes us see our ecosystem as being composed of four interrelated environments; natural, built, social, and cultural/spiritual. Grassroots organizations have made tremendous contributions to

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understanding the profound value of public participation and accountability in formulating public policy and environmental decisions.

The interrelated goals of leadership development, access to information, and the development of technical expertise, have become common elements of all community empowerment efforts. When most communities first discovered toxic pollution and environmental degradation within their neighborhoods, they also discovered that very little capacity existed within government agencies, academic institutions, and health care providers to address their concerns. As a result, local groups began to develop educational programs to promote community empowerment and to address environmental justice issues.

For example, the SALTA Promotoras program in San Diego's Barrio Logan includes the following principles:

(a) **Bilingual/Culturally Appropriateness:** All materials are in English and Spanish and the sessions are designed to minimize the need for reading skills.

(b) **Mentoring:** Great difficulty exists in motivating people to action in the absence of an emergency. Through life experience and stories, a sense of urgency will be built.

(c) **Emphasis on Change:** Being a community toxic organizer poses

particular challenges because it takes women outside the accepted role as caretaker. Thus, household materials will be used as a starting point to introduce concepts of risk, toxic use reduction, and pollution prevention.

(d) **Hands-On Experience:** Training including involvement in the planning and participation of community hearings and other events.

Training and education are key factors in increasing the capability to address environmental health problems. Future and present health care providers need more training in the area of environmental and occupational health. Ideally, these programs will adopt broader definitions of training and education. This would include more training in toxicology, as well as participatory research methodologies and participatory prevention/intervention strategies that would make use of legitimate community-based knowledge.

The importance of training is that it leads to empowerment. Therefore, resources and energy should also be devoted to the training of community residents. In fact, every research intervention effort should be viewed as an opportunity to provide training and empowerment. This needs to be incorporated into protocols and to be an important criteria during peer review.

One particular group which stands out in this process is youth. Young people provide great energy, creativity and a sense of fresh vision, and are beginning to demand that they be involved in public dialogues as well as the decision making process. Angela Brown, winner of the 1995 Reebok Human Rights Youth Award states:

One of the young people who works with us, a brother, often says that the solutions of today end up being the problems of tomorrow. If young people are not sitting in on the process, are not involved in the dialogue, I can understand how the solutions for today will end up being the problems of tomorrow.

This understanding leads to the need to examine the link between environmental justice and educational reform.

Many students reject schools because they fail to deal with the issues relevant to the places where they live, work, and play. Schools do not offer opportunities for students to conduct meaningful dialogues about serious social issues. A critical examination of this connection is needed if we are to reform our educational institutions. Such reform would ensure that future generations have the knowledge necessary to achieve healthy

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and sustainable communities.

In conclusion, environmental justice is a living process, therefore, it must be a learning process. To achieve truly healthy and sustainable communities, we would do well to heed indigenous teachings about the "circle of life." Only through a process of learning and passing on knowledge and wisdom can we complete that "circle of life." That is why environmental justice defines the environment as the place where we live, where we work, where we play, and where we *learn*.

Charles Lee is Director of the Environmental Justice for the United Church of Christ, Commission for Racial Justice and serves on the National Environmental Justice Advisory Commission.

Instrumental Values of Destruction: The Need for Environmental Education*

by Bunyan Bryant

As we continue to wreak destruction upon the Earth and upon each other, we are reaching a point where our actions are having dire consequences.

We have embarked upon a market system that not only ravishes the Earth, but it diminishes the value of the lives of Earth's people. It is an out of control market system — a market system that extends into and shapes our personal lives, our consciousness, and the way in which we relate to one another. In our most intimate relations we often perceive one another as having *instrumental* value. That is, we view our friends in terms of what they can do for us—not what we can do for them or what both parties gain from the friendship.

Often we view the world from the shaky perch of the all-important "me": "What can I get for myself, regardless of the pain it might inflict upon others." Society is dominated by such "me-ism," a viewpoint worse even than anthropocentrism. While the latter views humans as the very center of the universe, the former has a tendency to view *me* — not the community or the village — as being primary in the universe. This translates as a formula for unprecedented greed, avarice, and disconnectedness.

Out of control market forces determine our world view; they frame our relations with one another and with nature. Environmentalists do not seem to understand that before we can protect the environment and give authentic reverence to it and to the wonders of nature, a set of core values must be deeply seated to guide our relations with one another. Our instrumental approach to one another and to nature disrupts the connectedness and usurps the responsibility for human and nonhuman life. This disconnection is the basis of the crisis of spirituality we experience today.

Some environmentalists overlook people of color to build a relationship with nature; some have ignored the habitat of homeless people to protect the habitat of the spotted owl. As they diligently work to guarantee the rights of trees and endangered animals, they blindly neglect assigning similar rights to people of color. Although environmentalists claim to champion biodiversity, in practice that concept often seems to stop at the border line of our urban centers.

WHAT CAN EDUCATORS DO?

Environmental education must play a major role in rectifying this shortsighted and separatist view of humanity and nature. By making students more aware of the adverse effects

of an out-of-control market system, environmental education can help students understand market forces and their impact on our personal lives. Environmental education can help us to understand the need to be spiritually connected with each other, as well as with nonhuman life forms. Along with this connectedness comes a reverence for all life forms. The teaching of environmental education helps us move away from *me-ism*, which represents the extreme form of anthropocentrism, toward biocentrism and an understanding that humans are subject to the same laws of nature as other living things.

Environmental education must help us understand that humans are a part of a complex web of life and that our survival as a species depends upon other life forms, even those much smaller than ourselves. To understand our predicament of inhumanity we must not only understand the destructive power of market forces, but we must be willing and able to control such forces. To control such forces will require a new system of relating to one another, a new value system that will extend across multicultural lines, embracing a new or renewed reverence for nature.

Environmental education must help students to search for truth and meaning in their own lives and practices. They must learn the importance of cherishing and extending life-affirming connectedness. To save the global community from wanton destruction, it is important that truth, meaning, and advocacy interface to rekindle our spiritual and life-affirming "connectedness" to the land, to other life forms, and to the world in which we live.

Although environmentalists claim to champion biodiversity, in practice that concept often seems to stop at the border line of our urban centers.

Environmental education can help students to recognize a larger self, one that recognizes the importance of biocentricity and one that believes that the destruction of life at any one place on life's continuum has the potential to significantly alter or destroy all life forms. Truth and meaning represent more than just a cognitive exercise.

When used as integral elements of the participatory research process, students and teachers learn together about the connectedness of all life forms. It also forms the basis for personal empowerment and the ultimate realization that *each of us* can make a difference in the world in which we live.

HOW CAN WE BE EFFECTIVE?

Before all else, we as teachers must free ourselves to be more than technicians constrained by the limited themes and materials covered in textbooks — textbooks that are often

published by distant companies. We must be participatory researchers — not detached from students, but integrally involved with them in the teaching and learning process. To be effective

environmental educators may require us to write curriculum materials based upon the students' environment. Producing a curriculum that validates the student's own life situation invites the student to engage in problem solving activities. Such activities include defining the problem, collecting information, weighing alternative solutions, and recommending the most appropriate solution. Below are key issues or themes that should be included in any environmental education curriculum in order to help put the market system in its proper perspective:

1) Cultural and Racial Awareness and Nature. In order to connect with one another across cultural and racial boundaries, we must deconstruct race as a social construct; we must demonstrate the instrumental value of race and how racial differences are used for social, economic, and political gain. Questions to be entertained by students might

include: In what ways do instrumental values affect your

personal life? What can you do about controlling these values in your life? If you had to be born again of a different

color, what color would that be? How would your life be different now than what it was before?

Also, white cultural hegemony must be challenged and critiqued by making it

grounds from interacting with and accepting one another? What are the barriers that keep people from interacting with and understanding nature? If you had to be born again but as a different

animal, what animal would that be? What is unique about that animal? What are its contributions to the ecosystem?

2) Environmental Justice. Environmental education must make students aware that environmental justice is broader in scope than environmental equity. EJ refers to those cultural norms and values, rules, regulations, behaviors, policies, and decisions to support sustainable communities, where people can interact with confidence that their environment is safe, nurturing, and productive. Environmental justice is served when people can realize their highest potential, without experiencing the "isms." Environmental justice is supported by decent-paying and safe jobs; quality schools and recreation; decent housing and adequate health care; democratic decision-making and personal empowerment; and communities free of violence, drugs, and poverty. These are communities where both

cultural and biological diversity are respected and highly revered and

where distributive justice prevails. Students of environmental education must know not only the definition of EJ



"This is My Life" is excerpted from Just Us, a collection of written work by Natural Guard youth and the Earth Service Corps. Natural Guard is an environmental education and social justice organization for youth, in New Haven. Photo by Tanya Zeno, age 12, of the Ernest Fingle Boys and Girls Club, Son Francisco.

possible for multicultures to be cherished and celebrated. What are the barriers that keep people of different cultural back-

grounded? What can you do about controlling these values in your life? If you had to be born again of a different

but they must also understand the symbiotic connection between sustainability and justice. It's this symbiotic connection that is the driving force of environmental education.

3) Participatory Research. Participatory research allows both students and teachers to engage in a process of discovery and reflection. Students are integrally and actively involved in the planning, action, observation, and reflection until understanding or a solution is reached. The research process should help students liberate themselves from the shackles of oppression by actively engaging them. To be an effective research team, both teachers and students must develop problem-solving and group process skills.

Here is one example of participatory research. A high school environmental educator works with students to prepare them for water testing. The teacher then takes the class to the local river to collect water samples and through laboratory testing the students find a high level of coliform bacteria and a large number of water-soluble salts and toxic metals. Some of the questions to be asked are: Who was responsible for the pollution? What is the role of the market system in creating these conditions? What impact is the pollution having upon human and nonhuman life? Are people of color and low-income people differentially impacted? What regulatory agencies are responsible for its cleanup? To solve the problems, student may need to draw upon chemistry, civics, math, computer science, and biology. They may decide to brainstorm strategies for getting the appropriate agency or corporation to engage in cleanup efforts. Ideally, participatory research empowers students by allowing them a chance, often rare in the educational experience, to become actively engaged in education in the roles of both *learner* and *teacher*.

4) Pollution Prevention vs. Pollution Control. Environmental education curricula should tackle the goals of pollution prevention *and* pollution control. If we can reduce fugitive emissions by 90 percent, then why can't we reduce them by 100 percent? The reason is that it may not be cost effective. Controlling emissions completely

would increase the cost exponentially, thus cutting into profits. But while a 90 percent reduction might be good enough for some chemicals, it is not an acceptable limit for others, particularly for those chemicals that are fat soluble and persistent in the food chain. Because some chemicals bioaccumulate, amplifying themselves hundreds or even millions of times as they move up the food chain from lower animal to higher animal to humans, they can become a problem of major proportions. Any environmental education curriculum should include the

Students of environmental education must know not only the definition of Environmental Justice, they must understand the symbiotic connection between sustainability and justice.

importance of recycling, reducing, and reusing as prevention strategies. At the same time, however, the most important pollution prevention strategy is to refrain from using toxic chemicals in the production cycle.

5) Deep Ecology. Deep ecology maintains that to be detached from nature robs people of their unique and spiritual and biological personhood; no one can be saved on planet Earth unless we save *everyone*, including the grizzly bears, the rain forests, ecosystems, mountains and rivers, and the tiniest microbes in the soil. Some basic tenets of deep ecology consist of bioregionalism, biodiversity, and biocentrism as opposed to anthropocentrism. It contends that if people harm nature, they harm themselves. Everything is intricately related; no one has the right to destroy other living things without good reason. Although the supporters of deep ecology do not advocate going back to the Stone Age, they do advocate reverence for the land, for primal people, and for communal societies, based on mutual aid and a bonding with nature.

The question students must wrestle with is: how deep or how shallow can we

become and still be able to survive on planet Earth? While some environmentalists take deep ecology to the extreme, most of them do not. Yet the more shallow we become, the more we perceive nature as having instrumental value; the more shallow we become, the less value we place upon human and nonhuman life. The question again is how deep should we go? How shallow can we be without becoming disconnected?

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Professor Bryant writings include: Environmental Advocacy: Concepts, Issues and Dilemmas, and Social and Environmental Change: A Manual for Community Organizing and Action. He and Professor Paul Mohai edited Race and the Incidence of Environmental Hazards: A Time for Discourse. In 1995 Mr. Bryant edited Environmental Justice: Issues, Policies, and Solutions for Island Press.

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Youth Spirit Rising: Urban Environmental Activists

by Deborah Leta Habib

Young people in cities face the complex social issues of their urban environments as they simultaneously develop their sense of self. They must negotiate their transition from adolescence to adulthood while bombarded with a popular culture rampant with images of violence, greed and sex. To add to this assault on their emerging identities, they are often portrayed as uncaring, apathetic and menaces to society. Rarely does popular media or social research focus on youth who are concerned about their communities and the planet they will inherit.

These youth exist. They are of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and are emerging as educators and activists in their communities. There are many in urban areas, aware of and actively involved in the environmental and social health of their communities and the world.

My recent research with urban youth environmental activists connected me to many young people actively involved in redefining environmental problems and relating them to social issues familiar to their own lives. Through their diverse voices, I learned what led to their interest in environmental issues and how they translated their concerns into action. I met Charlene at a Boston area conference on urban environmental issues. She described learning about the struggle of the Cree people battling plans for the Hydro-Quebec dam that would result in their cultural and geographic displacement, and how this initiated her involvement in the movement at her school to divest from Hydro-Quebec. Charlene explained that the scenario of exploiting land and people for economic reasons resonated with her experiences as a Black Haitian female immigrant. She explained: "It hit home. Like, environment was not those crazy granolas, it was [about] race, class, you know, power. So that's me, and I got directly involved."

Fatima and James are African American high school students who live in Baltimore. They worked as counselors at a summer day camp for children run by the parks and recreation department. They described taking a group of children on a hike to see an old mining site. Abandoned for 20 years, it is now, as James described, a "big green pool of water with a lamp post sticking up out of it" where kids sometimes "get up on the side of [an old mining machine] and dive off into the water." Fatima's voice was passionate and alarmed when she described finding the site. "When we first saw it we were like, What is this doing sitting in this *neighborhood*?" They decided to call the head of public works, who told them he had not known that the site existed. Fatima described how they planned to turn their investigation into a series of activities for the children at the camp:

We're gonna start letter writing on Monday, and we're gonna call the senator and ask him if he knows about

that site and also write him. We want [the senator, public works people and district planners] to all come down one day and see this place. It angers me, 'cause I said to myself: in upper class neighborhoods, you have the industrial parks, and they tell you that it's polluted. But then you have this thing sitting here. We don't know if it's polluted or not. There's no monitoring, and there's no way of telling whether this stuff can be toxic.

Stories such as these describe youth making connections between environmental issues and people's lives and communities. The energy, wisdom and commitment evidenced by these and other young people are essential to social and environmental change movements. In addition to adding important perspectives, their stories counter the negative stereotypes of youth and urban environments embossed on the American mindset, which perpetuate negativity, fear, and despair. The actions of these racially and culturally diverse young people serve as models of awareness, hope, leadership and community building for other youth and for educators.

Some of my research findings and its implications are described below. It is my hope that they will inform the development of school and community-based curricula to bridge social justice issues and ecological understandings.

Assumptions that environmental issues are of no concern to youth are irrelevant to city dwellers must be challenged.

Although I did not find that an intimate connection with nature precipitated environmental awareness and activism among these youth, some noted "nature contact" experiences such as tree plantings or camping trips as meaningful. These experiences were not, however, essential to their ability to develop and articulate their current understandings of the concept of environment. All of the youth in this research made reference to interpretations of the word 'environment' that focused on the natural world. However, they did not automatically assume these. Rather, they assigned a meaning to the term that was relevant to their own lives. In fact, several of the youth pointed out that environment is not limited to, as Jessica says, "earth and woods and stuff." Kenya describes her interpretation:

Usually when I think of environment I think of big forests . . . But then I look around. I guess there's two definitions for myself. There's the stuff that I can't really do directly, like going out to the forest up north or whatever, and planting trees, or cleaning up. And then there's the community which would be like the incinerator and the area around.

Rather than defining environmentalism from a white, middle-class adult perspective, and expecting those who do

not fit this social configuration to participate, this research implies the need to redefine "environment" as a socially constructed concept, one that reflects a dynamic interplay among the social, natural and built world. In this study, those defining the concept of environment and exploring environmental activism were a group of culturally diverse urban young people. Their responses to the task of defining environment demonstrated that they were able to comfortably use vocabulary and articulate their thinking in a way that would make them informed contributors in any of the arenas where adults are currently rethinking and redefining 'environment' as a dynamic, socially constructed concept created and transformed by those who give it meaning.

When environmental problems were seen as relevant to their lives, communities, and cultural experiences, interest in environmental issues intensified.

Eva spoke extensively about how an asbestos problem that delayed the opening of her school initiated a unit on asbestos followed by another on lead poisoning. Kenya's participation in a community protest of a planned incinerator alerted her to the implications of this siting in her neighborhood. Frankie's realization that the storm drains in his neighborhood emptied into the Chesapeake Bay strengthened his interest in water testing research.

Family experiences and interactions with the environment, both positive and negative, affect young people in powerful ways. Kiet believes his father's previous work as a logger in Vietnam contributed to his interest in deforestation. Eva's mother is a factory seamstress in Chinatown, which sharpens her understanding of the complexity of environmental issues in a way that those without such experience may overlook.

I understand, I mean like factories, they pollute, but I mean if you close down the factories, like where are they going to work? 'Cause my mom, like, she works in a factory, but

if you close it down or whatever, then people will lose their jobs. That's why it's kind of difficult, I think, to solve many environmental problems.

Environmental pollution and destruction threatens human health and ultimately our existence. For those without information and resources, this often happens directly and subversively in the form of toxins in and under homes and neighborhoods. Educators and activists must locate the keys that help students recognize the existence of environmental problems in their communities and beyond and how these are connected to their lives. In order to engage more students in environmentalism, educators must be willing to shape programs that reflect the interests, cultures and languages of the youth, rather than fit them into existing models which may not represent their experiences.

More youth from a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds may become environmentally active if they see environmental issues as pertaining to their own lives and communities, and have a voice and a venue. This implies a need for increased outreach and environmental education to urban communities and school systems. Environmentally active youth and adults from within these communities may be ideally suited to shape and implement such educational efforts.

Many of the research participants were drawn to environmentalism as they sought community.

If youth are looking for community, they will inevitably find it. However, some forms of community may not be healthy, constructive or personally satisfying. There are certainly youth who, for a multitude of complex reasons, will consistently participate in self-destructive actions, individually and in groups, regardless of how many seemingly positive options there are. However, the youth that participated in this research are only a fragment of those seeking involvement in collective, life-positive endeavors.

Being a member of a group noted for accomplishment can promote

increased self-esteem, and the experience of being an integral member of an organization can lead to a sense of belonging and efficacy. Jason describes his role in the formation of a neighborhood youth group that remains very active in the community. When he showed me the mural that includes his own image, he was proud and exhibited a sense of involvement and ownership over this visual and public expression of the presence and power of youth in the community.

Many organizations with environmental, community empowerment and justice-oriented agendas are uniquely suited to promote healing and positive action, not only through the work they do, but in their structure. It is crucial to critique and construct these organizations so that they truly embody multicultural, anti-racist practices which engage youth in positive, collective action and leadership.

Young environmental activists can knowledgeably contribute to environmental curriculum development and program design.

With the exception of the two who attend a magnet high school whose entire curricular focus is on environmental studies, most students did not identify school classes as significant to initiating their environmental activism. However, some described school-based extracurricular activities as instrumental to inspiring their environmental involvement. Others clearly stated that their environmental interest and activism was stimulated in contexts completely separate from their school day, and in fact were able to use these significant learning experiences to recognize the ways in which their schools had *not* promoted their environmental awareness or activism.

One result of their involvement in environmental activism is that these youth were capable of envisioning and articulating, without hesitation, what and how they would like to learn in school. Their ideas included classes, workshops and forums where they can gain knowledge, engage in dialogue and participate in school and community based actions.

Across ethnic backgrounds, gender and socioeconomic levels, I heard over and over again the desire to be challenged by teachers whom they respected and who respected them. While experiential learning may not work for all students, depending on personal and cultural learning styles and how educators frame such experiences, these youth all suggested that participatory activities that involve inquiry, dialogue, field research and presentation are of great interest to them.

Youth such as those in this study are in an ideal position to participate in dialogues regarding what young people need and would like to learn. Serving as advisors and **working** on committees in schools and organizations may validate knowledge and promote leadership skills among already active youth.

Alliances between youth and adults, and schools and community organizations, can lead to mutually beneficial learning experiences and promote links between environmental activism and community service.

In this research, familial and non-familial adults emerged as extremely significant to involvement in environmentalism. Each community has adult resources that are under-tapped as educators. Elders and retirees, business people, politicians, craftspeople, religious leaders, artists and those active in science and environmental fields and community organizations can serve as mentors to young people. Mentor relationships are a real-life way to teach youth specific skills as well as providing them with a non-familial adult for personal guidance and support.

Experiences that promote values of respect and caring may be particularly appealing to youth whose lives and values reflect these qualities, and evoke such values in those youth who have not known loving, caring relationships in their own lives. Many of the youth in this study maintained involvement in environmentalism because it supported caring values and a service orientation.

Forms of activism such as community service learning are appealing and popular among youth and educators in this era. However, approaches to

activism in the nineties cover a wide spectrum, ranging from those that nonviolently promote justice and civil rights to those that employ racist, classist, sexist and anti-Semitic practices or incorporate violence as a tool to draw attention to their cause. Educators can introduce, and with their students critique, multiple approaches to activism in order to support students in making well informed, conscientious decisions about issues and actions.

Links between environmental activism and community service may be key to activism, leadership and constructive community involvement. A significant lesson of this research is that such alliances need to be strengthened. We must ask how service learning projects can be structured to include a social and political critique as well as ongoing reflection, so that service-based actions are not construed solely as individual acts of kindness, but as interconnected efforts that are part of a youth movement for social and environmental change.

Socio-ecological literacy grows from education that encourages investigation, reflection, dialogue and making the connection between social and environmental issues.

While it is crucial to involve more youth of color in the environmental movement as professionals, access to learning opportunities that promote socio-ecological literacy should not be exclusively for those interested in environmental careers. All students must have opportunities to examine how social and environmental concerns in their communities impact the health of humanity and nature. Thus they can knowledgeably participate in dialogue and actions that challenge potential and existing violations.

Phrases such as "environmental literacy" and "cultural diversity" have been popping up with increasing frequency in curricular frameworks, albeit almost always under separate categories of study. While the inclusion of this language is important, it is not enough to effectively support educators in translating these words into creative and transformative action. Pedagogy

that supports the development of a socio-ecological consciousness and engages students in examining connections and contradictions among personal, historical, cultural and global perspectives on environmental issues, can foster critical **thinking**, and involve youth in community building, research and activism.

As with most processes of language acquisition, becoming literate about social and environmental issues involves learning basic words, principles and grammatical rules, personalizing and integrating this new information, and practicing with others in an authentic context. These processes can occur through in-school courses, internships or involvement in organizations whose agendas focus on social and/or environmental concerns. Content and pedagogy are equally important to expand knowledge as well as foster research, communication and leadership skills.

The youth who participated in this research, and many others that I have not yet had the honor of meeting, are paving the road to an environmentalism laden with right-of-ways and roadblocks. A metaphor that conjures images of asphalt is appropriate to the lives and experiences of youth coming of age in urban environments. Their path to environmentalism has not generally been through towering trees in silent forests, but of through masses of humanity squeezing into rush-hour subways. Their footsteps have landed on tar more often than pine needles. They hear the chirping of car alarms more than warblers. Like each of us on this planet, cultural and environmental influences continue to shape who these youth are and how they perceive themselves, others, and the places they live. As educators and activists, we can learn from them as we develop curricula and programs that bridge multicultural and environmental education. We can believe in their wisdom and leadership.

Deborah Leta Habib is an educator and activist living in western Massachusetts. She works with the Hampshire Youth 2000 Alliance and is a Field Associate for the National Helpers Network.

First Person: Antonia Darder



Interview by Cristina Valdez

Antonia Darder, an assistant professor of education at Claremont Graduate School, is a registered nurse, licensed therapist, writer, poet, artist, and community activist. She has taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cal Poly Pomona, and Pacific Oaks College where she established the first graduate program in bicultural studies. The majority of her work has

centered on issues related to the social and academic development of children of color, and addresses questions of racism, cultural subordination, and language domination as they surface within the classroom.

I grew up facing many of the painful conditions and realities of poverty. As a consequence, school provided the possibility for a little comfort and escape from the raw edges that living at the fringe of American society brings. From very young, I came to see education as one way to a better life for me and my family. And to a certain extent, this has proven to be so. Yet, in many other ways, the education I received brought a new form of shame and suffering – it reinforced the notion that I, as a poor Puerto Rican child, was somehow less valuable and less intelligent, and therefore, less capable than white students. So public schools were, without question, a mixed blessing in my life. I was constantly burdened with the sense that my education was never good enough. School left me with the feeling that no matter how hard I tried, I was inferior because Latinos were inferior. I can't tell you exactly how I came to learn and believe this, but I did. I resisted this notion by struggling to excel. My painful memories of this struggle and the struggles of others in my community are at the heart of my involvement in the field of education.

I've been formally and informally involved in the field of education for almost twenty years. I came to my current work in critical pedagogy, bicultural development, and cultural studies from many different paths. Unlike many people in the field, I did not begin my work as a teacher or academician. Instead, I began through my work as a peer counselor, school nurse, and psychotherapist. Over the years, I spent a great deal of time and energy looking for ways to positively impact the lives of children and their families. Because of my own childhood, I was very concerned with the social and educational well-being of Latino children in public schools. I was also very interested in ways to strengthen community participa-

tion in schools. The more I worked within the community, the more I realized just how important culture is to the well-being of children. In the early days, there was very little talk about multiculturalism in mental health work; and even in education, discussions were superficial and had very little real impact on the classroom and the lives of Latino students.

Over the years, I learned so much from the different kinds of work I did in schools and communities. At one point, I was a community counselor working with students at elementary schools. I conducted "rap groups" with Spanish-speaking 5th and 6th graders. When I observed these students in the classroom, I noticed the difficulty they were experiencing in responding to English-speaking teachers. But when they were working in small groups in Spanish, it was as if a light bulb went on. It was so clear to me that there were many ways in which these students could not express the complexities and nuances of their being in the foreign language (English) of the classroom. I also recognized just how much this kind of cultural dissonance negatively affected the students' academic development – not because they didn't have the capacity, but because they were being forced to learn and perform in a language and culture that was still unfamiliar and unmastered.

Subsequently, I began working as a community advocate with a variety of grass-roots organizations on issues which focused on multiculturalism and education. Through both professional and advocacy efforts, I worked with others to develop and provide information and referral services, educational programs, and social services for Spanish-speaking families in Pasadena and East Los Angeles. Much of the work focused on education programs for children and their families, including focus on development of true bilingual proficiency.

In 1986, I became a faculty member at Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena. The emphasis of my work was primarily on bicultural development which led me to create the first graduate program in the nation that explored human development issues from a predominantly bicultural perspective. The mission of the curriculum was to place the voices and scholarship of people of color and the histories of bicultural communities at the center of the educational discourse, rather than continuing to utilize Eurocentric frameworks, theories, research, and practices to define what it means to be a person of color in the United States. Through such efforts both teachers of color and white teachers, as well as other human services workers, could engage significant personal and social issues that would help them develop the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively serve communities of color.

My work in the field was later expanded and refined during my doctoral studies in education and philosophy at Claremont Graduate School. In addition, I explored the potential of critical pedagogy as a viable educational approach for the education of bicultural students. This work resulted in the writing of *Culture and Power in the Classroom*. In the last five years, my work has been directed toward expanding our knowledge of cultural democracy and its implications in the classroom, particularly in the development of student voices and their participation in schools and community.

Through my work with students and teachers of color, I've

learned that working in the field of multicultural education requires a willingness to deal with issues of power and social injustice. An educator who claims to be knowledgeable in the field must be cognizant of the social, political, economic, and historical realities of people of color. There must be a full understanding of the conditions faced by those who occupy a subordinate cultural position in the United States. It also requires that one be conscious of the institutional mechanisms by which social oppression and injustice are perpetuated in our schools. Such an educator must understand how to examine curricular materials or texts and analyze them for the cultural and social ideological values which inform their production.

I would also argue that a person in this field must hold a concept of culture as an enacted phenomenon. This is to say that it is dynamic and occurs only within the process of human interaction, within the context of community and relationships. How culture develops and evolves is deeply related to the manner in which people survive the historical conditions they face together. Cultural is experienced and cultural knowledge or the process of enculturation begins from the moment we are born. This socially enacted characteristic of culture also suggests that culture cannot be separated from social power. For this reason, educators in the field of multicultural education must recognize how this link between culture and power is at work in the production and legitimation of knowledge in our schools. It is this recognition that can help us to better understand the process of biculturalization experienced by people of color as members of subordinate cultural groups.

From birth, students of color must deal with societal forces shaped by prevailing attitudes and practices of mainstream institutions which perpetuate the subordination of those perceived outside of the anglocentric norm. Yet it is important to note that not all students of color survive the social tensions and the dynamics of subordination they experience in exactly the same way. This is to say that students have

different ways in which they respond. Some students accept the culturally oppressive views of their teachers as legitimate, while other students adamantly resist their cultural subordination. Often students resist forms of cultural invasion and domination in the classroom by refusing to participate seriously in school work or activities that they perceive as meaningless and purposeless to their lives. As a consequence, this creates academic difficulties for them and interferes with their ability and willingness to stay in school.

Given this, we must focus on educational principles that empower students through assisting them in the production of meaningful and purpose-

I've learned that working in the field of multicultural education requires a willingness to deal with issues of power and social injustice.

ful knowledge so that they may come to discover themselves as active agents of their world, with a growing awareness that they can make a difference in their own lives and communities. We must create the conditions in the classroom so that our students come to realize that they are always involved in producing knowledge and the act of learning, even if it is not the kind of knowledge or learning that traditional institutions consider legitimate or worthy. To accomplish this, we must understand the classroom as the real world. For the more we engage with the histories and lived experiences of our students, the more we are able to assist them in using what they know in order to expand and extend their knowledge of those things which are unfamiliar to them. For me, this is essential to an environment where real learning can take place and where student creativity can flourish.

After more than 30 years of educational research in the field, there still remains an unwillingness on the part of many traditional educators to suspend their disbelief that the curriculum is

deficient for meeting the academic needs of most students of color. They refuse to acknowledge the Eurocentric nature of most curricular materials from all disciplines. My experience has been that unless there is some pretty aggressive, assertive, and preserving leadership in communities and schools – leadership that specifically focuses on addressing educational policies and practices related to culture, social power, and the curriculum – transformative input from people of color is seldom sought or integrated into the culture of schools. What is missing are forums for truly democratic participation by communities of color where school issues that affect our children each day can be adequately addressed. Over the years, there have been advocacy groups that have formed in an effort to struggle with the problems our students face in public schools, but usually these efforts have resulted from the community's initiative. It has been a long struggle to bring changes to public schools in the area of multiculturalism. Teachers are frustrated, parents are frustrated, and communities are frustrated with the way in which institutionalized school practices and the curriculum, even when shown to be ineffective, are so difficult to change.

But despite the difficulties we face, there are some hopeful things happening. For example, the California Association of Bilingual Educators has made an effort to support educational transformation through the sponsoring of several critical pedagogy institutes over the last five years. These have been designed to expose bilingual teachers to an emancipatory pedagogy which reinforces the involvement of community and emphasizes the importance of beginning classroom learning from the standpoint of students' lives. The purpose here is to help students build an understanding of their own histories and to see how the conditions they face each day are significant to their own production of knowledge and to the experiences they bring into the classroom. Over the years, I have observed that students, who experience classroom opportunities to develop their voices and participate more fully in

their learning, take what they learn and use it in their participation within other school and community settings. Also, when such opportunities are available for students, teachers, and parents to develop curriculum together, there is no end to the possibilities that can emerge in the re-creation of classroom curriculum — curriculum that can speak to the history, culture, and community struggles of students of color.

There are also some good things in the area of multicultural education and curriculum happening in higher education. Many multicultural efforts in the field of education focus on the restructuring of public schools and the transformation of educational practice. Some graduate education programs are actually *working* with communities, rather than doing for communities. But unfortunately, such programs are few and far between and many good opportunities for collaborative work are still missed because there are too few conversations taking place between schools of education and ethnic studies departments.

It is important that we, as critical educators and community advocates, push for the transformation of teacher education programs in this country. Student teachers must gain the skills and knowledge to name social oppression for what it is, to engage it with courage, and to develop the critical knowledge and skills that will enable them to create the conditions for cultural democracy in their classrooms. Unfortunately, many traditional teacher education programs take a very applied approach to curriculum, so there's a lot of focus on the "how to" curriculum: "how to" teach social studies; "how to" teach math. Essentially, it's a practice of teaching that results from a recipe approach — devoid of the philosophical and theoretical principles that inform the curricular recipes used. Unfortunately, this kind of professional formation prevents teachers from utilizing more creative approaches that could be generated in collaboration with their students, rather than simply for them. All this is to say that we must provide student teachers the opportunities to recognize themselves as intellec-

tuals and to view curriculum as a classroom tool that must function both in the development of student knowledge and in the interest of democratic schooling.

This notion of democratic schooling must be central to our work in multicultural classrooms. But students don't learn the process of democratic life just by reading about it. They must have the opportunities to experience and practice democracy within the culture of the school. What I'm trying to highlight here is that all education must be understood as a living experience where a variety of expected and unexpected situations can surface daily. The problem with many state educational frameworks is that they continue to operate along scientific notions of predictability and control — as if somehow educators could predict how all students, irrespective of their different cultures and histories, will respond and react to particular classroom situations. Much of state mandated curriculum is developed with the notion of being teacher-proof: if a teacher uses the curriculum, students should be able to learn, irrespective of pedagogy or the quality of teaching. This notion is very objectifying and dehumanizing to the teacher and the students. Rather than teachers functioning as active agents and subjects of their classroom practice and examples of critical thinkers, they are reduced to passive agents, as are their students.

Just as disturbing is the fact that a large percentage of the teaching workforce lacks knowledge of the critical principles which might inform a culturally democratic learning environment. As schools become more and more culturally diverse, what we need in this country is a major re-education effort and professional development process that will prepare teachers to engage with any form of imposed educational requirements and curriculum in a critically conscious manner, rather than simply acquiescing to requirements that are senseless and harmful to the intellectual and social development of our children.

Unfortunately, teachers don't have the luxury of time to sit down and put their ideas on paper. They seldom have

the time to participate in comprehensive professional development programs focused on multicultural educational issues and curriculum. What little they have is spent on one-time seminars or a couple of days of classes. Generally speaking, it is very superficial preparation. Teachers need educational opportunities to explore their own cultural identities and histories, for understanding and recognizing oneself as both a cultural and historical being is very significant knowledge for teachers who are *working* with students of color. It is important that teachers become conscious of their own biases and prejudices — which are often unconscious and which are often projected and perpetuated in their relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. Yet, this kind of educational development is seldom available to teachers.

Learning to teach within a multicultural society takes time. It requires that all teachers be involved in ongoing dialogues with other teachers, students, and parents. There must be real institutional support for teachers to converse together and reflect upon their classroom practice, to talk about their struggles and successes, to consider with each other new possible ways of teaching, to consider together new actions they might take, and then to come back regularly to evaluate their actions. This requires real structural changes in schools, changes in how we define teacher work and the teaching day. Teachers need more time and more resources to meet the needs of diverse students. But often our struggle to improve the conditions of teachers is also accompanied with much talk about the professionalization of teachers. I believe we must be cautious about supporting this notion, for many times it only serves to mask the disempowerment that many teachers face — *disempowerment* that they, inadvertently, pass on to their students.

Christina Valdez is director of *XCEL*, the Cross Cultural Environmental Leadership Program. Reprinted with permission from *California Perspectives: An Anthology from California Tomorrow*, Fall 1994, Vol. 4.

Understanding Culture, Humanities and Environmental Justice

by Carl Anthony

First, we must recognize that much of the environmental debate has been conducted as if the human community were uniform, without great differences in culture and experience, without differences in power and access to material influence. The perception of humanity as a unified whole has had the value of allowing us to see nature and humanity in a biological context, to trace the manifold connections among people and other organisms so that an integrated understanding of new relationships can be seen. But this perspective is limited. It discourages us from looking at conflicts within communities along lines of race, class and gender. It discourages us from looking at differences within and between groups of people. It discourages us from seeing that not all members of a society or ecosystem agree on its ends, or bear responsibility for or benefit from ecological destruction.

Second, in order to develop constructive strategies and assign responsibilities to our institutions for dealing with environmental problems, we have to learn a lot more about the environmental history and cultural heritage of communities, which has been invisible to us. A culture is the totality of socially transmitted behavioral patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work typical of a given population or community at a given time. It is a pattern of basic assumptions — invented, discovered, or developed by a given group of people as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration — that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members of the community as the correct way to perceive, think and feel. To understand relationships of communities of color to their environments, we should examine each community as a distinct culture evolving out of a specific history in a unique geographic configuration.

- Ever since the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492, Native American communities have been fighting for environmental justice. Control of the land and the resources within it has been an essential source of conflict for over 500 years. Some of the environmental issues central to the Native American experience include the decimation of large populations from disease, genocide, destruction of sacred lands and abridgement of sovereignty rights.

- The Latino population has a long history in the American Southwest, predating by 200 years the arrival of Anglo populations. After the 1848 Treaty of Hidalgo, many Hispanic and Pueblo Indian communities were stripped of their land base and water rights, leaving a legacy of bitterness and poverty. Today, the environmental justice movement in the Southwest provides a national model, with campaigns around border issues, high-tech industries, farm worker rights, and urban environmental struggles.

- We need an environmental history of the southern

plantation system that adequately explores the roles of slaves and masters and poor whites, latter sharecroppers, and industrial agriculture, in reshaping the regional landscape of the South. An understanding of relationships between people, social institutions and the land from the early 17th century would shed a great deal of light on today's questions of social diversity, class and race dynamics, and the environment.

- The long history of exclusion acts has shaped the demographic composition of generations of Japanese and Chinese communities in the United States and their relationships to the land and neighborhoods. Asian farm workers have long been subject to hazardous working conditions. New-comer neighborhoods have high density housing, high incidences of repository illness, and lack adequate open space.

Ultimately, the adequate construction of such environmental histories depends upon the acknowledgment of the full humanity of communities of color in contemporary society — a step which academics in particular, and society in general, has been reluctant to take. Recognition of this humanity carries with it implications for environmental studies — that every community has both its own aspirations and its unique environmental history, and that the study of such history may cast important light on the understanding of our environmental problems.

Third, we are beginning to understand that the way we live in cities has enormous impact on our global environment. For example, William Cronon in his masterful book about Chicago showed how the development of that city from the Civil War to the turn of the century basically restructured the ecological hinterland from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, transforming the forests to prairie, the wild grasses to wheat, and the buffalo to cattle. The way we live in cities is destroying rural communities and replacing small scale farming with agribusiness. Spill-over effects and externalities are undermining the health and self-reliance of land based communities

Think of Los Angeles today. The South Coast Air Quality Management District estimates that one percent of global warming comes from the Los Angeles County basin. Sixteen thousand people a year in LA die from respiratory illness directly related to air quality, most of them people of color who live near industry and smoggy freeways. The garbage from urban consumption ends up in incinerator plants, garbage dumps and land fills, sited overwhelmingly in urban and rural communities of color. We need to explore social and environmental landscapes in which power and difference express themselves — highways, inner cities, suburban tract developments, factories, hospitals, corporations, dumps, reservoirs, sewage disposal facilities, military installations — all the many places that give shape to the modern world.

We have developed the habit of thinking of stewardship of natural resources as being a separate and wholly unrelated

responsibility from stewardship of human resources. But we are wasting both human and natural resources in our cities. The environmental movement has taught us that we are throwing away bottles, newspapers and cans that should be recycled. But in Detroit and Chicago, Los Angeles and Philadelphia, and Baltimore and Oakland, we are also throwing away streets and houses, schools, fire houses, and factories. Indeed, we are throwing away whole communities of men, women, and children, who are invisible to us, because they live in other neighborhoods, their skin is dark, or their hair is woolly. But the children in these communities are real. They are hungry when they are not fed, and they bleed when they are wounded.

They are not part of our problem, they are part of our solution. We can no longer afford to view joblessness — which affects young people, particularly

young people from racially oppressed communities — as a separate issue from the protection and restoration of natural resources. Our goal should be to put these young people to work, restoring the environment and making our cities safe.

Finally, we must come to terms with the pattern of scientific specialization which makes it difficult for communities to understand and use information made available by our system of professions. "Even now, with the problem only beginning to come in focus," suggests Professor Edward Wilson, speaking about the challenges of protecting biodiversity on a global scale suggests, "there is little doubt about what needs to be done."

The solution will require cooperation among professions long separated by academic and practical tradition. Biology, anthropology, economics, agriculture, government and law will

have to find a common voice. Their conjunction has already given rise to a new discipline — biodiversity studies — defined as the systematic study of the full array of organic diversity, together with the methods by which it can be maintained and used for the benefit of humanity. The scope of our current environmental malaise, however, and the realization that causes are woven into the fabric of our modern enterprise, inevitably lead us to the recognition that effective solutions require consideration of socioeconomic and cultural forces as well as professional ones.

Carl Anthony is the founder of the Urban Habitat Program, president of Earth Island Institute and Co-editor of Race, Poverty and the Environment. He writes and speaks extensively on environmental justice, land use and ecopsychology.

Essential Reading: Reviewed by Carl Anthony

The Racial Economy of Science, Toward a Democratic Future

Edited by Sandra Hardiig. Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1993

In *The Racial Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*, Sandra Harding shows how Western scientific definitions and practices legitimize culturally approved definitions of race difference, racism, imperialism, and racially destructive applications of science and technology in health and reproduction, environment and development. She points to the dependence of communities of color around the world on scientific research agendas which give priority to the requirements of a global industrial elite.

"Western sciences," she writes in her introduction to this valuable collection of 33 essays, "clearly have been and continue to be complicit with racist, colonial, and imperial projects. Not surprisingly, Westerners fail to situate their understandings of both nature and the sciences within maximally realistic and objective world histories."

Harding documents a wide variety of resources for understanding these phenomena, including new social

movements challenging the imposition of Western values and standards on non-Western people, social studies of science and technology, natural scientists seeking to situate themselves and their work in more objective understandings of local and international politics, new audiences addressing diversity in US educational institutions, advocates of humanities in science education, and those involved in current attempts to figure out desirable social relations for the world community.

Her commentary provides a framework of six elements useful for constructing less culturally biased tools of science: 1) reviewing early non-Western scientific traditions; 2) examining the role of science in the construction of modern racism; 3) surveying who gets to do and direct science; 4) examining bias in the applications of science and technologies; 5) questioning objectivity, values and methods of science; and 6) looking critically at visions of the future based on science and technology.

She provides a selection of essays on each of these topics and suggests their wide ranging consequences for scientific theory

and practice. First, Western science supports hierarchies of race, class and gender as a matrix of privilege to benefit those who identify themselves as "raceless economic men," who are, after all, a tiny minority of the world's people. Second, all science is culturally situated; there is no such thing as "pure science" that can be usefully distinguished from its social origins, meanings, institutions, practices, technologies and uses. Third, despite its Western bias, science is a contested zone, a terrain on which inherited social beliefs may be rigorously challenged and visions for the future debated. Finally, a critique of science which raises questions about the selection of problems to pursue in the first place, and gives priority to perspectives of least advantaged groups, would likely lead to greater objectivity in scientific methods and research results.

This book is essential reading for educators and advocates of sustainability and environmental justice.

Environmental Justice Activism Triumphs

Segregation Challenged in EPA Sponsored Environmental Education Program

by Running-Grass and Max Weintraub

EXPANDING THE REACH OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

On October 15 and 16 of 1996, a Small Working Group composed of representatives of environmental education programs, the EPA Environmental Education Division (EED), and members of the environmental justice movement met in Washington, D.C. to negotiate an accountable process by which to select one or two new partners for the second year of the Environmental Education and Training Partnership (EETAP).

Representing the multicultural and environmental justice side were Running-Grass, (representing the Coalition for Justice in Environmental Education), Joanne Henry of Alternatives for Community and Environment in Boston, and Cynthia Mendy of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice in New Orleans. Dorceta Taylor and Theresa Cordova, both well known in environmental justice circles, are also environmental justice representatives to the Small Working Group but were not able to attend the Washington meeting. They were both consulted closely during the weeks prior to and after the negotiations.

The negotiations of the Small Working Group resulted in a process to open up the EETAP program to organizations of color and those which are implementing environmental education in environmental justice contexts. Such organizations and programs were not included in the original formation of EETAP, resulting in both a lack of representation of our issues and concerns and a lack of funding to advance environmental education in communities of color.

The EETAP Program, now entering its second year, is a three year \$7.2 million cooperative agreement, established by the National Environmental Education Act of 1990 to advance environmental education in the United States. The current Cooperative Agreement is based upon a proposal submitted by

the North American Association for Environmental Education, (NAAEE) and its partners and chosen by the Environmental Education Division of EPA. According to an NAAEE briefing paper, it is to:

[P]rovide training and related support to education professionals. Through this training, EETAP's ultimate goal is to increase the public's ability to make responsible environmental decisions by developing awareness and knowledge about environmental issues, and promoting critical thinking and other skills needed to make sound environmental decisions. EETAP will accomplish this goal by:

- Increasing and enhancing existing training efforts—especially those that are innovative and emphasize education reform—for educators (K-12 and nonformal).
- Identifying, evaluating and disseminating information on superior educational materials, teaching methods, and programs through the development of a Resource Library.
- Strengthening and expanding existing (environmental education) partnerships and networks.

The goals of EETAP also recognize that there are "substantial numbers of educators who are not well served by the existing environmental education structure." These include teachers of color and white teachers who teach in multicultural settings.

Now that the door to the Partner level is open, environmental justice and organizations of color might develop program concepts which generally reflect the goals stated above such as preparing all teachers to teach about environmental justice issues in multicultural public school settings or identifying, evaluating and disseminating environmental education teaching materials which include multicultural perspective and address environmental justice issues.

March 5, 1996

To the National Environmental Justice Advisory Commission

Robert Bullard, Richard Moore, and Peggy Saika
Co-Chairs, National Environmental Justice
Advisory Commission
Office of Environmental Justice -U.S. EPA
Washington, DC

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of NEJAC,

Because people of color communities are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation, we in the environmental justice movement nationally have recognized the importance of political action and dialogue as means to mitigate and correct these conditions. We have also, over the last several years, come to recognize that environmental education is a central element in strategies for environmental justice. In the Principles of Environmental Justice we sought to infuse that recognition with the core concerns of our movement:

Principle 16: Environmental Justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

In diverse communities of color around the country, political action is being combined with innovative educational strategies based on Principle #16, to educate and mobilize residents to effect social change and positively impact environmental quality. These communities are the primary force and context for the development of *multicultural* approaches to environmental education, innovations for which mainstream organizations and individuals increasingly wish to take credit.

Mainstream environmental education, as an educational field of practice, has yet to grasp the opportunities inherent in embracing diversity and incorporating environmental justice principles into its activities; and has yet, politically, to respond to the movement as an equal partner in the development of environmental literacy in communities of color.

This failure to include environmental justice concerns can be seen most recently in the actions of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), the national professional organization for environmental education. NAAEE recently won a grant of nearly \$2 million, (for year one of a three year

Continued on page 21.

Next steps over the coming months will be to participate in and monitor the agreed upon process and successfully guide a consortium of environmental justice groups doing significant educational work, into the EETAF' program as fully funded partners.

THE CAMPAIGN

Nearly a year ago, a group of educational and environmental justice activists, with the leadership of Three Circles Center began monitoring the formation and implementation of EETAF' and noticed that not one of the 18 funded partners were organizations of color, environmental justice organizations or environmental education organizations with a consistent history of successfully addressing environmental justice issues or effectively outreaching and allying with people of color in the community context. As we explored the program, further using materials published by NAAEE as well as phone interviews with a number of people close to the project, we found other important environmental justice issues. (See our letter of March 5th to the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council. See also the Principles of Environmental Justice reprinted in this issue of our Journal.)

INVOLVING THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Because of the importance of the issues in EETAP, we decided that the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC) should be informed and their assistance enlisted. NEJAC is a federal advisory council created by and formed to meet the intent of Executive Order 12898 which requires federal agencies to examine whether their activities result in environmental discrimination.

Prior to the May NEJAC meeting, the organizers of the campaign continued to collect signatures on the March 5 letter and formed the Coalition for Justice in Environmental Education.

After a number of calls to environmental justice leaders around the country, we were successful in getting on the agenda of the NEJAC meeting

scheduled in May of 1996. We strongly urged EETAP and the Environmental Education Division to attend and give testimony as well, which they did. (Summary of that testimony is available from the Office of Environmental Justice of the EPA in Washington, DC.)

After EED and EETAP responded to the concerns of the Coalition as presented by Michael Dorsey, now a Ph.D. student at Johns Hopkins University, Running-Grass, Executive Director of Three Circles Center and Max Weintraub of the National Lead Information Center, NEJAC formed a Task Force on Environmental Education that included NEJAC members and members of the Coalition for Justice in Environmental Education. NEJAC also asked EED to report back at the next NEJAC meeting in December about progress made in the following areas:

- 1) develop criteria that ensure people of color and low income people are involved in environmental education activities;
- 2) that such activities address the needs of people of color and low income communities;
- 3) that EED develop the means to evaluate the success of such efforts; and
- 4) that EED work with the Coalition to discourage the further exclusion of people of color, low income communities and their environmental justice issues.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT

The fundamental conclusion of our analysis of the program, was that the lack of organizations of color with environmental justice experience in the EETAP partner group, and other program deficiencies, effectively reduced the access to culturally appropriate environmental education resources and educational opportunities for children and teachers of color in their community context. In as much as access to such resources is essential to immunize these disproportionately impacted people to environmental threats in their community settings, restricted access to environmental information and lack of acknowledgment of their indigenous environmental

leadership is, in fact, environmental racism.

The success of this campaign has benefited the environmental justice movement, established that communities engaged in environmental justice struggles are formulating innovative community based approaches to environmental education, opened up those programs to Federal support through EETAP, and successfully engaged "mainstream" environmental education and the EPA in a compelling learning process about environmental justice. This campaign has also increased the visibility of environmental education within the environmental justice movement resulting in the formation of a NEJAC task force and **networking** among community groups engaged in significant educational efforts in their localities.

The selection of appropriate partners and projects will ensure that children of color (who are at special risk of environmental harm) and their teachers in both formal and nonformal settings will have access to the tools, materials and experiences necessary to support their environmental justice efforts at the community level.

Many people contributed to the success of this campaign: the members of NEJAC and the NEJAC Environmental Education Task Force; the National Office for Environmental Justice; Anne Simon of the Environmental Law Community Clinic; the signatories of the March 5th letter; the Coalition for Justice in Environmental Education; the staff of the EPA Environmental Justice Office in Washington; the environmental justice representatives to the EETAP Small Working Group; the Bay Area People of Color in Environmental Education (an informal group of educators and activists); and the dozens of people who responded promptly with advice and often with funds to bring this issue to a conclusion which benefits the environmental justice movement and our communities.

Running Grass is Executive Director of Three Circles Center. Max Weintraub works at the National Lead Information Center in Washington, D.C.

Letter continued

project not including contributions of partners), from the EPA to develop environmental education throughout the country. The grant has established the Environmental Education and Training Partners (EETAP) to implement the program. We believe that EETAP and the grant itself represent significant opportunities for environmental education, with great potential to move environmental education forward and to innovate in the field. EETAP also has significant potential to benefit communities of color around the country. Such potential could be realized if there were authentic participation of communities of color, nationally recognized leaders of color in environmental education, and regional environmental justice networks.

Unfortunately, as EETAP takes steps to implement the grant significant omissions are evident. We offer the following concerns as examples.

- Their published list of partners and network partners does not include any environmental justice organizations with expertise and interest in environmental education. In fact, there are no people of color organizations or multicultural organizations in their list of partners and network partners.

No proposals for projects which might be funded through their grant have been solicited from environmental justice organizations nor from people of color, community based organizations or nationally recognized leaders of color in environmental education.

- Proposals that have been solicited and reviewed for funding, and that propose to do urban and multicultural work, have come from mainstream white environmental education programs which have shown limited capacity for authentically reaching teachers of color, children of color or their communities. Historically, these programs have not addressed environmental justice issues in their work.

- No discussions have taken place, nor have any requirements been issued to the partners making them accountable for involving children, teachers and communities of color in all aspects of their work.

- NAAEE has widely solicited information of a conceptual nature on urban environmental education with multicultural populations from a number of programs and people of color around the country, but few, if any, have been informed of or involved in the recently received grant. NAAEE continues to rely on the expert advice of people of color, and even their volunteer work, in formulating and reviewing drafts, to position them as an innovative leader in working with multicultural populations in urban settings. Yet, these people and their grassroots programs are conspicuously absent from the partner list and are therefore not eligible for significant funding from EETAP.

- In sum, we are concerned that there may be discriminatory impacts in the implementation of EETAP. The President's Executive Order on Environmental Justice and the EPA Implementation Strategy are

designed to prevent just such impacts. In a recent phone conversation with the Director of the EETAP, he stated that he was not familiar with the Executive Order or the Implementation Strategy.

Over the course of the last six or seven years, as the environmental justice movement has developed, we have come to expect certain kinds of communication and cooperation by mainstream environmentalists and their organizations. These include such points as:

- Environmental justice groups and people of color with a community orientation are at the decision making table, and are included at the inception of major initiatives which impact and involve our communities.

- Resources are shared with people of color organizations which directly serve our communities and articulate and define our interests.

- Existing leadership within our communities locally and nationally are recognized and engaged in projects which impact our interests.

- The principles of environmental justice be acknowledged as central organizing and conceptual elements in projects which impact our communities and as essential for resolution of all environmental issues.

- The spirit and letter of the President's Executive Order and the EPA's Agency Strategy for the implementation of the order be taken seriously and be fully documented and publicly accessible.

We believe there is a need to initiate a conversation with NAAEE and EETAP on these points. Such a conversation should result in a more clear understanding of the points above by NAAEE and make a more cooperative and equal relationship possible.

We are therefore writing the Council to alert them to our concerns regarding EETAP, its implications for our movement and communities, and to inform the Council that we are engaged in a process of inquiry to gather all the facts related to steps now being taken for the planning and implementation of the grant. We trust that this process will lead to and ensure that our perspectives and organizations will be included in this very important and beneficial project. In that regard, we have sent a letter of inquiry to each partner in EETAP to determine the extent to which they have historically made efforts to reach and involve low income and people of color communities, teachers of color and diverse, low income schools.

We welcome your cooperation in obtaining and evaluating information on the implementation of EETAP. In particular, we would like to the Council to request the following documents from the EPA:

- The proposal submitted to the EPA by NAAEE for funding. Having access to and reviewing the winning proposal will allow us to ascertain to what extent NAAEE utilized the work of people of color organizations and individuals in presenting their urban and multicultural work.

- The budget of the Project funded by EPA.

- The EPA approved Project workplan.
- The cooperative agreement EPA has

with NAAEE and EETAP. Reviewing the contract will allow us to understand the extent to which the EPA Implementation Strategy is being fulfilled.

- The criteria and narratives documenting the selection of NAAEE by the EPA as the recipient of the grant.

- The criteria and narratives by which the EETAP selected its partners.

- The contracts EETAP has with the Partners it has funded. We are looking for specific references to requirements that the partners actively and accountably involve people of color at all levels of program implementation.

Running-Grass, Executive Director, Three Circles Center for Multicultural Environmental Education (Organizer) with Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Oakland CA

Kishi Animashaun, Community Organizer, Atlanta GA

Lisa Maria Bertholdi, Antioch New England Environmental Justice Working Group

Loudovic Blain, Environmental Justice Advocate, New York City

Karen Brown, Public Health Educator, New York City

*Bunyan Bryant, University of Michigan
Gina Blyther, Educator, Philadelphia PA
Rona Carter, Greenpeace USA, Washington DC*

Steve Chase, Antioch University Environmental Justice Working Group

Michael Dorsey, Environmental Justice Advocate, Yale University

Eric Edgerly, Castlemont H.S., Oakland CA

Allen Edson, African American Development Association, Oakland CA

Jean Frederickson, Consultant in Bilingual, Multicultural and Environmental Education, Running Springs CA

Tom Goldtooth, Indigeneous Environmental Network, Bemidji, MN

Deb Habib, Educator, Amherst MA

Thomas Lee, Asian Community Environmental Educator, San Francisco

Carlos Melendrez, Executive Director,

Alliance of Ethnic and Environmental Organizations, San Francisco

Henry Moses, Environmental Justice Initiative, Washington DC

Muhammed Nehru, San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners (SLUG)

Pacific Energy and Resources Center, Sausalito CA

Janet Phoenix, M.D., National Safety Council, Washington DC

Lynn Pinder, Executive Director, Youth Warriors, Baltimore MD

Elizabeth Tan, Educator/Community Organizer, Berkeley CA

Connie Tucker, Southern Network for Economic & Social Justice, Atlanta GA

Tahnit Sakakeeny, Environmental Educator/Filmmaker, Boston MA

Marc Spencer, Graduate Student in Multicultural Education, San Francisco

Urban Habitat Program, San Francisco CA

Jeanney Wang, Environmental Educator, Berkeley CA

Max Weintraub, Instructor, USDA Graduate School, Washington DC

Place and Diverse Communities: The Search for a Perfect Fit

by *Tahnit Sakakeeny*

A SENSE OF PLACE

Over the last four years, I've been designing and implementing urban environmental education programs for a New England-based, non-profit, recreation and conservation organization called the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). In the past, we've struggled not only to find the most appropriate participant group for our programs, but more importantly, to find the right setting, or "base," from which to conduct our work. For example, should our programs focus on one particular Boston-area park, or should they incorporate parks across the city? Should we work with one neighborhood in particular, or should we work with community centers city-wide? We've been struggling to define and establish a sense of *place* for our programs within the culturally diverse urban arena.

As perceptions of the "urban environment" have evolved and expanded, so have urban environmental educational programs. Once we believed that the urban environment simply meant green-spaces within the city. Our education offerings mirrored that view. Today we see our program's base and future as resting in what is called "community conservation work." In fact, environmental education and conservation organizations nation-wide are also terming their programs, "community conservation work." Currently, many of these "community conservation" initiatives are struggling through their own attempts to establish a sense of place. Just as definitions and perceptions of the urban environment have evolved, so have the definitions and perceptions of what makes community and what makes for community conservation work.

AMC has a strong history of running outdoor education workshops in the White Mountains of Northern New Hampshire and Maine. The organization has been promoting the protection and responsible use of this region for more than one hundred years. We have overnight facilities and trails in the mountains which give us an actual, physical stake in the region. We have a constituency of members that supports our conservation and research efforts. We also have a strong vision for the future of our programs in the area. Our organization's history, physical connection to the land, supportive members, and a vision for the future have created the solid sense of place from which our North Country education programs can develop and flourish. This sense of place can give any development program the direction it needs to push past obstacles and succeed.

For over 25 years, AMC had been successfully running the Youth Opportunities Program (YOP), designed to train youth workers in outdoor leadership skills so they, in turn, would be qualified to lead their kids on hiking and camping trips through

the mountains. YOP remains a fantastic program. However, its coordinators see in it one significant short-coming: kids have a great time in the woods, but the reality is that most of them live in the city. How can we involve and engage them where they live? The answer: The Urban Trails Program, the program which I coordinate.

INNER-CITY YOUTH AND EMPOWERMENT

It seems as though with each new funding cycle there is a certain key word or phrase that comes into vogue. During the year Urban Trails was conceived, there were two phrases, "inner-city youth" and "empowerment." Thus, Urban Trails was drafted as a program that would help to empower inner-city youth by paying them an hourly stipend to build and maintain parks in and around Boston. On its best days, youth participating in Urban Trails would set stone steps, create water bars and clear trails. These projects worked - when they could be found.

In designing Urban Trails, we were not able to establish a sense of urban place comparable to the sense of North Country place that helped YOP grow. In the mountains, there was always trail work to be done. It was accomplished by a combination of professional trail crews, supervised volunteer trail crews and many committed volunteers who worked on their own. We rather naively assumed that in city parks there would also always be plenty of trail projects at hand, and that the land maintenance agencies would generally be competent and helpful in using the aid of inner-city youth. These assumptions didn't hold. The program depended upon the existence of substantial work projects that challenged youth and taught them new skills. However, in city parks there are not many trails to blaze and bridges to build. In search of new work projects, I was constantly moving from one land maintenance agency to another, continuously reestablishing myself and the program. The program was headed towards failure. This was mainly because we did not begin with a good sense of place. We had no history nor firm understanding of the physical and bureaucratic nature of city parks. We did not have any physical stake in one particular urban area; and with no history or clear fit for this program within our organization, it was a struggle to push beyond obstacles.

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF OWNERSHIP

At the end of my first summer with Urban Trails, we knew that for the next funding season we would have to focus on the idea of "ownership" for our organization to proceed. What we needed was one particular urban green space. This way, we as an organization could take ownership of the space, along with the young people who worked on the land. Questions arose:

After all, every community has its own sense of place.

For Chelsea it was one of distinct ethnic neighborhoods and a turbulent history.

Which green space should we choose? What neighborhood would it be in? Can you just decide to take ownership of an area? Or is ownership something that takes to you?

AMC is a New England conservation organization but because we're headquartered in Boston, we felt an obligation and a commitment to better our city environment. If, for instance, we had been a YMCA located in one particular pocket of the city, then it would have made sense for us to have adopted the nearest park. But we're not located in a small, urban neighborhood; we're located in the center of the city, in its wealthiest, best manicured and most "coalitioned" neighborhood. So I began to look to the surrounding neighborhoods for "ownership" opportunities. We developed a handful of successful projects, such as clearing side lots and planting seeds near our youth centers. Although neighborhood-lot work engaged the youth, it really didn't make sense for AMC as an organization. There were already other city organizations that specialized in turning lots into playgrounds or gardens. They had successful histories and clearly stated mission statements that established them in the urban environment. They had *place*. In addition, vacant lots really didn't fit with AMC's profile. Our mission states that we are committed to the "protection, enjoyment and wise use of the mountains, rivers and trails of the Northeast." Of course we supported efforts to revitalize urban lots; but direct involvement in the process seemed to be outside of our mission.

We needed to take ownership of a place that made sense for our organization. I located an urban riverway, envisioning neighborhood kids building and caring for trails along their river. This is when I received my first real lesson in urban environmental politics. A representative from the local land maintenance agency had been taking me on site visits to the river and helping me sketch plans for trail construction. There was definitely a need for a *greenway* that could connect neighborhoods and alleviate some of the traffic from other over-used riverways. I had assumed that if no work was being done

on the area, we could just jump in and take ownership. I was completely naive as to the amount of time required to secure construction permits (even for trails), and build neighborhood constituencies. Apparently, a major Boston urban environmental organization had already been working on the above. It had just appeared as though nothing was being done along the river. At the same time the representative from the maintenance agency was taking me on tour, he was also negotiating with the other group. When I finally learned of their advanced stage of involvement, we backed off from the riverway. Although I felt discouraged after this experience, I held an underlying belief that when we finally found the right programming place, it would truly be ours.

One person on my community conservation committee asked revealingly, "How do we get them to do what we want?"

Diversity

That season ended by our doing a series of large clean-up and trail building events on Boston's harbor islands. We built these events around the popular concept of "diversity." The trail work days became celebrations with barbecues, games and free T-shirts. Rather than have youth groups work alone as the "janitors" of the city, these events involved people of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of physical and mental ability in discovering and caring for the islands together. This model successfully carried the program through several years. By concentrating our work on the islands, we were no longer moving among various locations and land maintenance agencies. The islands were common ground, belonging to not just one Boston area neighborhood, but all the local neighborhoods.

Despite the growing number of participants at each of these island trail-work events, I still felt as though something was missing. I was sure that if volunteers were working on project

sites that were close to them, places they could revisit on their own, we could accomplish so much more. I was still struck by that word "ownership." I wanted a work project with a connection to one particular community.

CHELSEA

This time I did a little more homework and found another urban riverway in the city of Chelsea, where no other Boston-area environmental organization seemed to be doing any work. However, after struggling for several years to find a programming place, I was cautious about myself. Communities such as Chelsea have been burnt by the unfulfilled promises of zealous outsiders. They have also grown frustrated by the half-hearted attempts these zealots have made to understand the nature and needs of the community before developing their own agendas. After all, every community has its own sense of place. For Chelsea, it was one of distinct ethnic neighborhoods and a turbulent history.

Chelsea had recently come out of receivership. For the past decade, everyone from state officials to presidents of universities had been trying to tell the community how to right itself. The city had some major economic, social and environmental challenges ahead. However, it also had a new government, some committed citizens, and a determination to make changes on its own.

I began by meeting with people in the various Chelsea government offices including the Department of Planning and Development and Health and Human Services. I met with school teachers and a prominent citizen action group. I just wanted to listen to the community's needs. Had I come in peddling my *program's* wares and offering our service and advice, I believe my actions would have been aptly interpreted as arrogant. Instead, I demonstrated my sense of respect for Chelsea. I felt privileged that they allowed me to sit in on their meetings. I kept quiet and learned from them; after all, they were inviting me into their home.

I am a woman of color who grew up

in a very urban, blue-collar Boston neighborhood. For this reason, from the start of my work in Chelsea, I never felt superior to my surroundings. Instead, I viewed the city as a place of potential for partnerships and learning. I do not yet believe that all community workers must "match" their surroundings. However, it may be more initially challenging for various racial, ethnic or class groups to set aside certain ingrained missionary sentiments and proceed at a true level of "simpatico." Likewise, it may be initially more difficult for the community to trust the motives of an outsider who does not have any apparent connections to the community.

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION WORK AND COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION

Shortly after I had begun familiarizing myself with Chelsea, the next key phrase was canonized: "community conservation work." I was invited to join community conservation committees, talk at community conservation workshops and take part in community conservation charettes. I had no idea what "charette" meant, and I was beginning to question my definition of community. The earlier Chelsea meetings had been with people I believed comprised the community — residents, as well as school and city officials. But at these charettes, the residents and local officials were seldom present. Instead, there were non-profit environmentalists (like myself), and public officials, usually from state government. One charette focused on exploring the community conservation needs and opportunities within a largely Latino and southeast Asian city. However, no representatives from these ethnic groups were present. In another community conservation committee meeting, participants had already begun drafting long-term plans for the community's river and **greenway** before any member of that community had even been notified of the committee's existence.

At the community conservation charette, I asked why there were no Latino or Asian representatives present. Some of the representatives from the

community's minority white population said that it was too difficult to get people from those groups to participate. I will admit that it is often difficult to involve recent immigrants in community activities; however, there were Latinos and Asians in this city who were not recent immigrants. The charette organizers could have at least printed outreach flyers in Spanish, Vietnamese or Cambodian. In general, unless a representative from each of the community's population groups is present, plans for community conservation work should not even begin to be drafted. To be successful, the community at hand must "buy-in."

The issue of "buy-in" raises another

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important question: agendas. Whose projects are really getting done? Whose agendas are really being met? If a community conservation initiative has to work so hard to get a community to "buy-in" to the projects, are those projects really community-based? I admit that at times, communities can lack the needed momentum and clear direction to solve problems. But at what point is the stereotype of "unorganized, uninformed," urban communities challenged? I have participated in community conservation initiatives where outsiders, including myself, have itemized the community's primary environmental concerns. We have then developed, and sometimes begun, rudimentary action plans designed to address these concerns. We should have spent at least as much time thoroughly investigating the community's list of concerns as we did developing our gilded action plans.

Sometimes such initiatives are invited into the community by public officials who provide their own panel of community representatives. As the "specialists," we should have the wherewithal to make sure this panel is comprehensive and truly reflective of

the community. The belief that outside community conservation workers (public agencies and environmental non-profits) can determine the needs and objectives of a community without first consulting with its members is patronizing at best, and fundamentally racist or classist at worst. I have never heard of outside organizations developing environmental agendas for a wealthy and primarily white suburb.

What if there are environmental concerns within a community that are not being addressed? If the community does not recognize them, are they still concerns? As an outsider, there is a fine line between calling a community's attention to what you believe should be an environmental concern, and being presumptuous or overstepping your place. Community conservation workers are currently struggling to define this obscure line. If a public official has been commissioned to address an environmental concern within a community, but the community has other environmental objectives, to what extent is this official willing to risk her career by challenging the bureaucratic order and altering her agenda? To what extent is a non-profit willing to bend the parameters of their funding? Or is community conservation work just a facade under which an appointed official or a crusading environmentalist can enter a community and fulfill her objectives? One person on my community conservation committee asked revealingly, "How do we get them (the community) to do what we want?"

Because the island trailwork events and several other projects were on-going, I had the luxury of being able to listen to the Chelsea community without any specific programming agenda or task I needed to accomplish. They told me that they wanted opportunities for their children, an environmental career training program. Their request had created a programming need and base. Finally, I could adjust my program to fit the **place**, rather than continue to look for a place that fit my program.

To be wanted by a community is the ideal scenario. Eventually, it should be the goal of every community conserva-