



With Justice For All Beings: Educating As If Nature Matters

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Editors' Note:

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Persons outraged about the underprivileged rights of all species and the unhealthy state of Planet Earth estimate that over 90% of our federal budget is spent repairing the damage that modern civilization imposes on people, species and places. Despite this, things appear to be getting worse simply because much of what we call civilization has uncivilized repercussions.

Have you ever recognized that our excessively animal exploiting, polluted, violent, stressed, toxified, divorced, criminal, diseased, greenhouse affected, alcoholic, drug infiltrated, child molested, soil eroding, prejudiced, crime waved, competitive, food and water poisoned, illiterate,



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materialistic, mentally ill, species extingting, overpopulated, habitat destroying, famined, social classed, war waging, acid rained, corrupt lifeways are caused by modern civilization, *not* by the natural world, a civilization other than our own?

Like a General Sherman tank driven by drunks, modern society is dangerously out of control. It wars with Nature as it bombs with pesticides, herbicides and nukes; annihilates forests; slaughters natural communities, species and indigenous peoples; ravages habitats; sieges wilderness; tortures animals to obtain Nature's secrets; imprisons the "uncivilized" in zoos or ghettos; toxifies the land, air and water and propagandizes against us feeling badly about our destructive ways by labeling such feelings as unproven subjective, immature, obstructionist sentimentality.

Most alarming is that we war against Nature because we are *educated* to do so. From the moment we first start learning, society teaches us to fight Nature within and without. That war has trashed three continents, our peace of mind and our sense of reality.

We must *re-educate* ourselves to recognize and confront the shortsightedness of our juggernauting nature-destructive conquests. Only by pervasively meeting overpowering resistance will our greed be tempered.

Atrociously, the average American spends over 95% of his or her time indoors, away from contact with natural systems, yet studies always show that most environmentally responsible people learned to love Nature by *spending quality time in natural settings*. It is outdoors, not in the classroom, that the natural world educates us to its values. Other studies, that are affirmed by our unquenchable use of harmful substances, show little correlation between what a person *academically knows* and their behavior. Unrealistic education generates Earth's environmental problem and to change course we desperately need the following scenario:

By October 18, 1989 our school system was in such chaos that schools were closed for weeks of meetings between administrators, faculty, parents and students.

The trouble started when 6th grader Tom Jefferson accused his Math teacher of being a Nazi propagandist who was teaching lies and brainwashing him against the natural world. 87 other students in different elementary and secondary grades similarly disrupted their History, Biology, Physics, English, Social Studies and Earth Science teachers. Students rioted in the cafeteria until it stopped using styrofoam cups. They refused to kill animals or participate in dissecting them. Still others screamed to a Civil Liberties Union representative that school was actually like being drafted into the military at the age of six, and trained as anti-Nature infantry.

Some parents entered a class action lawsuit demanding students' equal time in humane, natural settings in order to integrate the natural world into their childrens' education; the cessation of teaching anti-Nature prejudice; and daily school debriefing from defamatory, misguided anti-Nature curricula.

Many families took the time to visit Washington D.C. and speak to their representatives about entering a bill in Congress that officially declared war on Nature and officially denied other species their rights to life so that the existing state of our war against the natural world would no longer be hidden. They also advocated subsidies and incentives for those who holistically taught and lived in environmentally and ethically sound, self-sustaining ways.

Groups of students refused to attend school, choosing instead to visit local humane societies, wilderness areas, nature centers and environmental organizations in order to obtain more information about how Nature works, their Earth kinship, and socially and environmentally responsible living. Students demanded the legalization of truancy from school so that they and others would not receive punishment for the out-of-school experiences they found so beneficial; indeed, they demanded full credit for their off-campus endeavors.

Citizens withheld school tax payments. Activists increased the costs of anti-Nature education with bold, disruptive actions in all quarters, making each school day like Halloween or an education in civil disobedience. *E.T.* became a symbol for Earth and its life-sustaining

Today, we desperately
need to teach as if
Nature mattered, for societies
that embrace the global life
community enjoy its balance. But
we will only stop Mainstream's
inhumane war with Nature when
concerned people make the
educational field the battlefield,
catch educators in the crossfire
and involve them in building
permanent peace.

powers; his image appeared everywhere; so did a picture on book covers of a club-carrying Lorax encaptioned "Welcome Back."

People from all walks of life sieged the school system until its curriculum experientially taught the causes, effects and long-term solutions to our war with Nature. For many persons, the explosive conflict brought to light Education's contribution to polluting the environment and them; it was an education in itself. Memberships in environmental and animal rights organizations increased by 728% within a month.

Overly stressed teachers and administrators participated in the protests. They recognized that

to their discomfort the educational system conquered their inner nature in its quest to conquer the natural world. Because Nature-negative education had fueled our war with the natural world, humane, ecologically positive learning became the new frontier. Seniors signed pledges not to take inhumane or ecologically unsound jobs and to protest such practices. The few individuals who could effectively teach nature-connect-edness outdoors became extremely desirable demi-gods who could name their own salary but rarely did.

Pickets in front of schools carried petitions saying:

Because schooling is a powerful sub-culture which molds a child forever, in compliance with the laws of Nature, ethics and humanity, we demand:

Mandating equal time for outdoor Nature activities and studies including required internships in humane, ecologically positive settings and identifying positive-ecology subject areas and competencies to replace traditional Nature-destructive propaganda. A school must operate in humane, ecologically sound ways or close.

All information taught in school, including the three R's, be accompanied by full disclosure of the historic and potential negative effects on natural systems from the application of this information.

A listing of the 30 most prevalently taught facts that are actually destructive falsehoods with respect to the global life community, this list to be required learning for all students, faculty and administrators.¹

The establishment of daily school re-education, debriefing and demilitarizing classes to offset the anti-Nature bias of mainstream media.

Designing the governance of schools through the practice of Nature-emulating consensus, instead of hurtful competition.

Interdisciplinary teaching of an Earth kinship ecology that equivocates people and Nature on thought, feeling and action levels and that recognizes Planet Earth as a global life community which embodies and envelopes people.

All proposed changes be financed by federal and state funds thus beginning a national economy based upon achieving peace by stopping modern society's war with the natural world.

By these means we learned to care for the life of the natural world just as we cared for the life of those three grey whales caught in the ice off Barrow Alaska in the fall of 1988. In the same way that those whales' predicament made diametrically opposing factions of our society cooperatively rescue them, Earth kinship made the sad plight of the global life community draw people together to rescue Earth and themselves.



Radical disease often necessitates radical surgery. History shows that without this scenario, the educational community will not in fifty years, if ever, refute its role in our self-defeating war with Nature, not meet its responsibilities for animal rights and global peace. As Mainstream's pawn, education in our homes, schools and counseling centers rarely teaches civilized balance with the natural world. This allows us to condone brutality to animals.

Don't waste the death of the 16,000 trees cut weekly to publish *Time Magazine*. Read *Time's* "Planet of the Year" issue (1/3/89) and listen to the wisdom of caring people. In a world that is rapidly deteriorating, all of education must teach social and environmental responsibility by creating it.

Notes

¹This list is available from the author upon request accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Address: Mike Cohen, Northeast Audubon Center, Sharon CT 06069. Also available are 46 ecologically sound, self empowering educational tools in the author's 31-page booklet *Connecting with Nature: The Earth Kinship Trail Guide* (\$4.00).

"The Meat"

Each day I see in my meat the beast that
died
that I may stand and pump my blood.
Each bud of sweetness in his branch of
pain;
my praise of taste and life
the singing blossoms strung
along his strength which went down
under the club,
wondering, struck, which hung aston-
ished, lashed
with anguish, conscious, chained, head
down.

Each hour I walk, I think of flesh in mine
like wine bursting a grape-skin, poured
into me
by bleeding which was innocence, by
terror amazed,
by crazed awareness that the ones
most trusted were betraying, the feeders
opening
the throat they've fed.

Remembering this, my morning joy turns
cold.
That crowd of deep, warm, singing cor-
puscles I feel
once healed and gladdened and made
calm the beast.
He yielded them to me.
Now they accuse and question my good.

"O head-down, dying animal!" I pray.
"O may we all be worth
that death in you; may our blood burn
with mad
sacrifice and godly-tall ideals
because you fell!"

George Abbe