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by Jerry Jinks

One of the most exciting developments occurring on today's educational scene is the increasing interest shown to environmental education. A phenomenal amount of curriculum materials have been produced during recent years and there is hardly a school which does not boast of some type of ecologic education.

Even though interest in the area is on the up-swing, many teachers seem to feel that environmental education is the exclusive property of the sciences or that extensive training and specially designed materials are necessary for non-science teachers to deal effectively with it. It is my opinion that neither of these positions is entirely true. Of course the sciences have a unique contribution to make to environmental education but that contribution is no more unique than the contribution of any of the other basic disciplines.

The training and specially designed materials issue tends to be one more of personal orientation than anything else. A major objective of environmental education can be reached if the teacher motivates students to, first of all, observe environments, and secondly, to reflect upon what they observe.

This is a laudable objective which may not be easy to achieve, and obviously does not constitute a complete environmental education program. It is, however, a very appropriate beginning and constitutes the basic student attribute to be developed by *any* environmental education program. It also is an objective which can be honestly incorporated into any grade level and any subject matter area.

This objective does not require additional materials; observable environments are all around us; the trick is to look at them, thoughtfully; and as I have already indicated this is a function of orientation rather than actual training.

The orientation that is necessary is one of focusing student attention upon the "environmentalness" of the material that they are learning. This entails consideration of influences. For example, arithmetic teachers often have children measure the dimensions of various objects in the classroom; i.e., the size of the furniture, the length of the room, etc. This activity can become "environmentalized" if the children are asked to not only determine the size of various objects but are also asked to consider why the objects are that particular size. The environmental answer to this question revolves about the influence issue.

A classroom is an environmental system in which a considerable amount of influencing (interactions) are occurring and the interaction between child and chair needs to be one of balanced influence. So that a chair which is too small results in an imbalanced influence and environmental disorder results. The size of furniture then becomes an issue of optimum dimensions for the child resulting in a harmonious or balanced interaction.

These considerations are examples of fundamental environmental concepts. The beginning of understanding rests in examination of one's surroundings from the standpoint of how the influence—counter influence system functions.

A somewhat more sophisticated example might be seen in the area of communications. Not only can students deal with the techniques of communication but they can also focus upon the interactions or influence—counter influence system occurring during a conversation. Perhaps an example might be the construction of a hypothetical discussion representing diverse viewpoints with consideration given to the interaction occurring between the conversationists, i.e., how does what one person say influence what the other person says and what is the final product resulting from the debate. As we might guess, the probabilities are that a compromise will occur. Environmentally, we would say that the various influences have resulted in the evolution of a system which is balanced within the parameters of those influences.

From these somewhat simplistic examples we can see that the fundamental concept of environment, i.e., influence—counter influence resulting in order, can be demonstrated within the framework of any learning activity typically found occurring in the schools. To make it happen is as simple (and as difficult) as recognizing and calling attention to the environment around us.

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