
Appendix 6
Yukon “Act Locally”
Module



YUKON “ACT LOCALLY” MODULE

Prepared by Tore van der Leij

“Environmentalism must grow out of a life world. To this end, individuals must experience grass, rain, and mountains. A holistic life world and a visual architectonic rhetoric, then, may be some of the basic elements for correcting mistaken impressions of the environmental movement and for regaining co-opted power.”

Michael Bruner and Max Oelschlager

“I think it is a truism that as the ethical frontier advances from the individual to the community, the intellectual content increases.”

Aldo Leopold

BACKGROUND

Bringing a Message for Environmental Reform to the Public

The answer we give to the question: “Why exactly do we do things like curtail pollution, develop sustainable agriculture, preserve endangered species and wilderness, etc.?” will determine to a great extent:

1. the overall direction of environmental reform
2. the amount of human sacrifice required
3. the level of public enthusiasm for environmental reform.

This “public enthusiasm” is, of course, very much dependent on the way in which the message for environmental reform is brought to us.

Nature as Object, as Self, or as Miracle?

A prominent Canadian environmental thinker Neil Evernden says, social values strongly affect people’s ideas about proper behavior towards nature. Evernden explores three metaphors for perceiving nature. The view of “*nature as object*” results in values which recognize the exploitation of nature. This might imply that a high biodiversity is not valued as a priority. The view of “*nature as self*” allows thinking about environmental ethics and rights of nature. According to this view a high biodiversity in the local community will be valued. The perception of “*nature as miracle*” emphasizes nature’s uncanny and unpredictable characteristics. He suggests that this view may be an essential element in the process of changing the human relationship with nature. This might include a fundamental change in valuing the biodiversity of our community.



The importance of addressing values

Some people think the greatest problem with environmental education is the belief that information is enough that once people understand the issues and know the facts, they will come to “ethical” conclusions and alter their behaviour accordingly. Perhaps efforts to address value systems, attitude change, and skills and information on how to institute a change, have far better results. This is our challenge.

The United Nations Environment Program stresses the importance of environmental ethics: “Supporting students to take responsible action requires an examination of values.” This module stresses the importance as well.

The use of expressive language to make an environmental change

It is possible to use expressive language to make an environmental change in our local community. If we understand how values change according to the biodiversity in our local community, we might be able to foster the evolution of more environmental sustainable values.

We can use these so-called rhetorics to:

1. Have students find out how values towards biodiversity in our local community are established and maintained, and what their own values are.
2. Give the students the opportunity to use rhetoric to communicate about biodiversity to their local community.

Good communication is important!

It is important to communicate to our community. This communication will open up closed conversations about the (preferred) biodiversity of our community. A way of opening up these conversations is by using media and making alternative posters, slogans, commercials, symbols, etc. The challenge is to give an alternative message that will be influential in a deep sense. We should not use “doom and gloom” rhetoric, nor “rhetoric of sacrifice” since this is not effective.

Communicating to our community should be fundamentally different from the current way of communicating: a message of how the biodiversity in our community should preferably be. The result might be that people change their fundamental way of thinking about our community’s biodiversity. Students should find out what is being communicated about biodiversity at the moment. This reflects, in a large sense, what the actual values towards biodiversity are. They should also find out what their own values are, and they might find ways to change the way of communicating to our community in which they reflect their values about their preferred biodiversity in our community.

Key points

1. Public enthusiasm for environmental reform is very much dependent on the way in which the message for this reform is brought to the public.
2. Social values strongly affect people’s ideas about proper behavior toward nature and its biodiversity. Different metaphors for perceiving nature can be used, i.e. nature as “object”, nature as “self”, nature as “miracle”.
3. It is stated that efforts in environmental education curriculum to address value systems, attitude change, skills, and information on how to institute a change have far better results than former, earlier approaches.
4. It is possible to use expressive language to make an environmental change in our local community. The art of this expressive language is called “rhetoric”.
5. It is necessary to find a different way of communicating to the public; to find a different way of bringing a message of how the biodiversity of our local community should preferably be.
6. The students might use rhetoric to grasp how values towards biodiversity in our local community are established and maintained. They might also find out what their own values are.
7. The use of rhetoric gives students the opportunity to communicate to their community.



A WORD TO THE TEACHER

Public enthusiasm is very much dependent on the way in which the message for environmental reform is brought to the public. One of the pressing needs in the environmental movement today is to help students fuel alternate visions for the future.

Focus on student experience

1. Explore how attitudes, and values according to environmental issues and the biodiversity in your local community are established.
2. Discover what the student' values and attitudes are.
3. Find ways to examine and evaluate values in your community.
4. Find ways to share your values with the public in an alternative way. **Be creative!**

Suggested Activities

1. TAKE A WALK

This can be in a forest or a nearby garden or park. Before you go out, ask them to think about: What signs of human interference do they see? How has this affected the area? During the walk let the students, individually, and in silence, experience the area. Let them see, hear, feel, smell, and touch the area. Allow 30-60 minutes.

Back in the classroom discuss: What were their experiences? What did they find striking? What did they feel? How did they feel when they touched a tree, the water? Allow 30-60 minutes.

To create an awareness of their attitudes and perceptions of nature, prepare small groups and have students discuss the following questions:

- What would it take to live in harmony with nature?
- How would you feel if the area you just visited was being replaced by houses or a big mall?
- Do you think we can use everything from the earth (oil, trees, water, gas, animals, flowers, insects) or should we be careful in what we are doing?
- What do you think is happening at the moment – in the world? In your local community?
- Do you think there is something wrong? Can you give some examples?

Summarize and review on the blackboard.



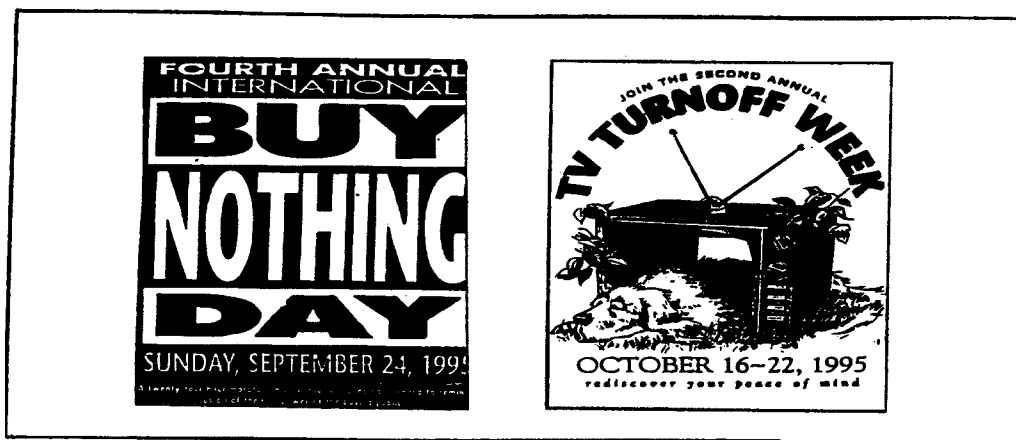
2. DRAW YOUR COMMUNITY

What will it look like 50 years from now? What does the natural environment look like? In small groups of 3-5 students, discuss the drawings. Ask them to explain what they have drawn and how they feel about the future (optimistic/pessimistic). Have each group present their drawings and different perspectives to the class. (You could also do this activity as a group, making one large mural including images of everyone's views.)

Ask questions such as:

- Is this what you prefer it to be or hope not to be?
- What do you hope for the future of your community?
- What kind of obstacles are there to reach your preferred future?
- What role does the media play now and in the future? Is it important in influencing people to change their habits?
- How would you communicate to the public if you worked for the media and wanted to write an ad or give a message?
- Have your ideas & values changed in the last 5 years? Will they be different in the future?

3. EXPLORE THE MEDIA



Some examples from the magazine "Adbusters" in which a message is brought to the public in an alternative way.

Introduce students to the role of different media and the role they play in shaping attitudes. Bring examples from local media as well as alternative messages and advertisements from newspapers and magazines. Also have students bring their own samples from local newspapers, TV and radio.

Prepare small group discussions in which students will discuss:

- What they know about different media? Do they watch, listen to or read them a lot?
- What are the main messages? What is the aim of the ads?
- What values and attitudes towards nature do these media represent? How do they know?
- What kind of effect does this have on them? Would they follow up/buy/listen to what the message says?

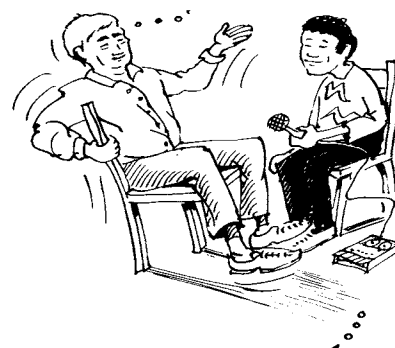
An Interview with Local People

Aim...

To find out how attitudes and values are established and changed in relation to biodiversity and the preservation of biodiversity in your community.

Ready...

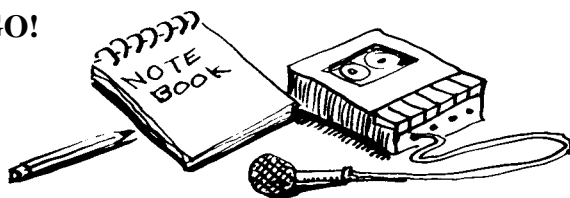
How do different people, with different occupations in our community, feel about our community, its biodiversity, and our community's future? Let's ask them!



Set...

Invite two local people with different occupations to your classroom, e.g. a forester and an environmentalist. Let the students interview them and record the answers on a tape recorder. Each student should prepare a few questions. Have the class brainstorm about biodiversity (see also Module 2: Connections: The Basics of Biodiversity).

GO!



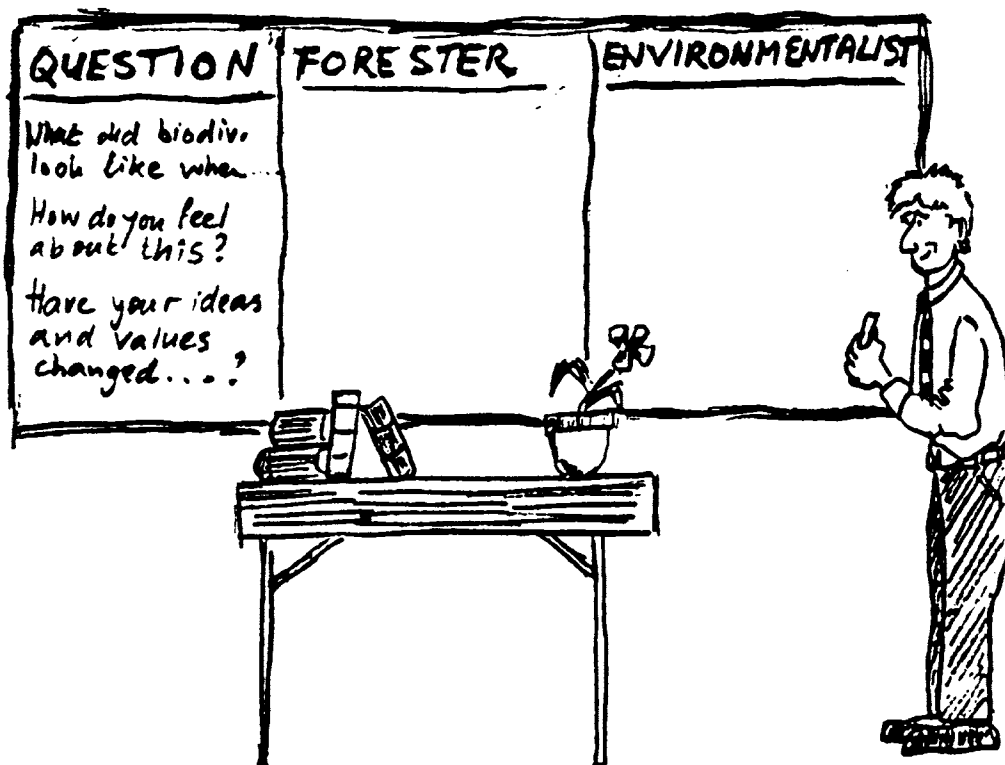
*Note:
Make sure you have
the person's permission
to record them.*

Some important questions to ask are:

- What age group do you consider yourself to be in?
- How long have you lived in our community?
- What is your occupation? Why did you choose this occupation?
- In what way is your work important to our community?
- In what way does your occupation influence the future of our local community?
- What did our community look like when you were young(er)?
- What do you think the community will look like in 50 years?
- What did the biodiversity of our community look like when you were young(er)?
- In what way will biodiversity be different from the present?
- How do you feel about this?
- Have your ideas and values towards biodiversity changed with relation to 20-30 years ago or when you were our age?

* Record the interview on tape recorder or have some students take notes.

* Analyse and summarize by comparing the two viewpoints in a chart (such as the one in the figure below).



Follow-up

When the guests are gone, ask the class the following questions:

1. What are some similarities and differences between the two guests?
2. How did they look at the future of our community and its biodiversity? Are there differences?
3. Do you think the guests will still be living in our community in 50 years?
4. What do you think about the biodiversity in our community and how it will look in 50 years? How do you feel about this?

Students can also interview their parents, neighbours, grandparents etc.

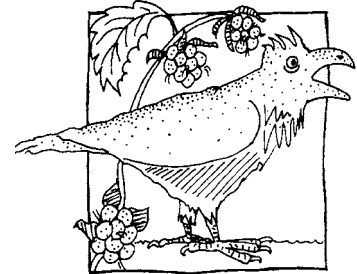
Disney World In Your Community: Fun or Disaster?

Aim...

To have students reflect on their attitudes about environmental changes in their community, and how these changes might affect the local biodiversity of the area.

Ready...

How would you feel if a big theme park like Disney World was built in your local community? How would this affect the future of your community?



Set....

Hold small group discussions (3-4 students) about this hypothetical issue. Try to elicit views and values which are prevalent in the group and encourage comparison, reflection and listening by asking open-ended questions. The groups report their outcomes to the class. Summarize and review the questions and their answers on the blackboard.

GO!

The following questions are discussed in small groups, and for each question the group gives a brief summary of their ideas:

- What people or groups are involved in creating a fun park? What advantages do they gain from creating the park in the first place?
- Will any people or groups suffer from the creation of a fun park?
- Are there any other living things (animals, plants, ecosystems) that will be affected by the park? How will they be affected?
- What might be some consequences for your community?
- Will there be more people living in your community because of the park? How do you feel about that?
- How might the park affect traffic in your community? Will there have to be more roads?
- Where will park visitors sleep?
- Where do you think hotels, motels, campgrounds etc. be built?
- How often would you like to visit the park?
- How much money do you think it would cost you to enter the park?
- How often do you think you could go? (use your teacher as a reference: how expensive is it?)
- How will this change our community overall?
- How will it affect the biodiversity of our community?

"Sigh"
✖

Communicate With Your Community



Aim...

Students send a message to their community concerning the preservation of biodiversity in their area, using their own choice of media.

Ready...

In this activity we will try to find a way of communicating a message about biodiversity. One way to do this is to create an acronym which could be presented in a poster, on a video/audio tape, or in a letter.

Set...

Explain the term acronym and give examples, e.g. UNESCO, UNEP, PLO, NATO... what other acronyms can the students think of?

Ask students to make their own acronym in which they demonstrate the preferred future of their community's biodiversity. For example, ROBE (Respecting Our Beautiful Earth), PRIDE (People Respecting Individual Differences Everywhere), CAKE (Caring and Kindness Everywhere), HUMANE (Hopeful, Understanding, Multiracial, Aware, Nonviolent, Ecological).

GO!

1. Working individually, students devise a snappy, attractive-sounding acronym of four to ten letters which reflects their preferred vision of the future of the community and its biodiversity.
2. When students are ready, have them form into groups of four to five to share and explain their acronyms. One by one, they will read their acronym to each other and explain the thinking behind their choice.
3. Ask students to make a new acronym reflecting the shared visions of their preferred future of their community and its biodiversity.
4. Students could create a poster displaying their acronym - be creative!
5. Have groups display their poster and share their ideas with the rest of the class.

We kindly acknowledge David Selby (Director of the Centre for Global Education, University of Toronto) for providing us with the basic idea for this activity.

