Environmental Literacy as an Indicator for Urban Sustainability
Abstract

For sustainability initiatives to be successful, citizens must have the knowledge, action skills, and motivation to support and participate in these initiatives. In other words, Urban Sustainability will not be successful unless our citizens are environmentally literate. The responsibility for creating this “environmentally literate” citizenry should fall in large part to educators, both in the formal and non-formal sectors. Therefore, these educators need a clear understanding of the specific knowledge and action skills that our citizens need. In this session, we will explore the competencies that citizens need to engage in sustainability practices in Nevada, and how educators can incorporate these competencies into their curricula and programs.
There are 45 million Americans that think that the ocean is a source of fresh water.
FACT OR FICTION

The leading problem with landfills are disposable diapers.
The main cause of wildlife entanglement is discarded six pack rings.
FACT OR FICTION

Only 12% of Americans can pass a basic quiz on energy awareness
Most of Las Vegas’ electricity comes from Hoover Dam
Most Americans believe they know more about the environment than they actually do, regardless of
• Gender
• Socioeconomic background
• Educational background
The Importance of Environmental Literacy

- Drought and water use
- Invasive species
- Air quality
- Destruction of natural and cultural resources
- Urban sustainability
- Global climate change
95% of Americans think that Environmental Education should be taught in schools.
No Child Left Behind

Paradoxically:

– NCLB emphasizes reading and math
– NCLB emphasizes accountability

Implications for urban sustainability
No Child Left Inside
Legislation will prioritize EE in schools

- Environmental Literacy Plan for each state
- Funding for training, student programs, sustainability

Learn more: nclicoalition.org Home
The Response

EE is evident in NV State Science Standards
- Content level
- Context of Life Science

What can be strengthened
- Relevancy and deeper connections
- Integration across subject lines
- Use the environment as the integrating context
Environmental Literacy

*Is the capacity to perceive and interpret the relative health of environmental systems and to take appropriate action to maintain, restore, or improve the health of those systems (Roth 1992)*

Includes environmental awareness, knowledge, skills, personal investment and responsibility, and active involvement.
Levels of Environmental Literacy

**LEVEL 1:** Awareness and Understanding

- Formal Education
- Measured through testing and other assessments
Levels of Environmental Literacy

LEVEL 2: Action (personal conduct)
- Partnership between Formal and Informal Education
- Measured through systematic evaluation
Levels of Environmental Literacy

LEVEL 3: True Environmental Literacy

- Driven by the learner
- Takes time and a variety of experiences
- Measured by the level of urban sustainability embraced by a community
Nevada’s GreenPrint Plan

- Identify Needs
- Create Framework (Formal and Informal)
- Identify competencies
- Measure success
- Develop common language and understanding
Get Involved:
• Our Places Tell Stories Conference
• GreenPrint Working Group
• Enviroedexchange.org
• www.nvliteracyproject.wetpaint.com

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