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Final Reflective Essay

Journal excerpt:

Part of every aspect of life on earth is human interaction. We need it to develop into adults, to trade, to have families, to learn and to be balanced. Sometimes I think the environment gets looked at as separate from these relationships. I think the environmentalist attitude has approached earth ethics as being separate from human development. I am not sure if this is from religion or rather a complex evolution of which we are just being made conscious.

I believe our tremulous relationship with the earth is because we have a poor relationship with ourselves and each other. When we aren't allowed to go through our several stages of development, we can't see past ourselves and our personal issues. How can we care for the earth when we have families, communities and entire countries in turmoil?

I think healing the human spirit is essential if we wish to heal the earth. The wonderful thing is the earth can help heal us. Just like all of life, we are interconnected in such a way that any action of love benefits the whole.

I am drawn to the image of a lower middle class family in the central USA. Perhaps the father is working at a factory and the mother is staying home with their three kids. They go to the grocery store and only have \$50 for their week of groceries. The mother has a choice between sustainably farmed fish and organic carrots or two loafs of bread and bologna for a week of school lunches. She chooses the latter, thinking practically about her family's needs. In this scenario, the family is focused on meeting their basic needs and cannot afford to focus on any larger issue. It doesn't matter the impact of their choices because they are focused on meeting basic requirements for survival in our society.

This can be applied to a larger picture like mentally ill people. If a person is diagnosed with Alzheimer's and needs medication to regulate their condition, their needs become focused on getting medicine and not on advocating for something like recycling. They simply do not have the capacity to focus on anything beyond themselves.

I see many people in the United States focusing on getting by. I see many people with self esteem problems, broken families due to drug abuse, and children with little personal security. How can people focus on issues like pollution, urban sprawl, or sustainable agriculture when they are socially insecure? In this ignorance, imbalance thrives with no eyes to regulate it.

Thinking of environmental problems from this standpoint could be disheartening to some but I see it as empowering. I think environmentalism can often be depressing because the issues seem so big and our power feels so small, but we are *not* small. We are in control of ourselves and are in constant interaction with each other. We have the power to support and heal each other and in turn heal the earth. Any simple act of love and attentiveness can have rippling effects in our interconnected society. We have the power of awareness. We have the power to validate each other.

As environmental educators, I think our job is to point out this connection to people. It is our job to use our education as a tool in bringing people together. I can see why much environmental education is geared toward youth, because they are vulnerable and developing in a way that the environment can assist them greatly. We are all still developing and any person at any stage of development can benefit from environmental education.

When I think about environmentalism from this standpoint, I am empowered. I am no longer depressed by the state of the world but understand the power of the individual, the group and the earth. We need to keep acting out of love, keep validating each other, keep standing true to our values and the condition of the world will improve. It's logic.