

7. Summer 2008: Are We Ready to Ride the New Environmental Wave?

This issue of EETAP's cultural diversity series presents views, challenges, questions, and assessment tools for examining environmental educators' readiness to connect with the culturally diverse populations that are showing a growing interest in the environment.

- Assessment, Summer 2008: Do Environmentalists know how to connect with culturally diverse populations that are showing a growing interest in the environment?
- Articles of Interest, Summer 2008: The Whiteness of Green, author Sharmeen Khan
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- Success Stories, Summer 2008: Great tips and resources from a great site.

Assessment, Summer 2008

Do Environmentalists know how to connect with culturally diverse populations that are showing a growing interest in the environment?

True or False

- Numerous polls and surveys show that people of color support environmental issues, in many cases, at a higher level than the general public.
- In a study examining diversity in 158 environmental institutions, the Minority Environmental Leadership Development Initiative found that 33 percent of mainstream environmental organizations and 22 percent of government agencies had no people of color on staff.
- An exit poll for a 2002 California \$2.6 billion bond issue for water quality enhancement and open space protection revealed 77 percent of Blacks, 74 percent of Latinos, and 60 percent of Asians (as opposed to 56 percent of Whites) voted "yes".

All of these statements are true.

Although environmental educators are unhappy about the environmental problems we face, no one is likely to complain about the newfound interest in EE. But do we have the skills to tap into this diverse interest?

These trends and strategies and how to use them positively and effectively are spelled out in *Diversifying the American Environmental Movement* by Marcelo Bonta, Director, Center for Diversity and the Environment, and Charles Jordan, Chairman, Board of Directors, The Conservation Fund.

Another great resource is *Diversity and the Future of the US Environmental Movement*, edited by Emily Enderle, Master of Environmental Management '07, Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. Here is an excerpt:

It is an exciting time to be a member of the environmental movement in the United States. Large events and organizations, including the Super Bowl, the Oscars and Yahoo, are becoming carbon neutral. The

largest global retailer, Wal-Mart, is currently going green. Mainstream magazines, including Sports Illustrated and Vanity Fair, are featuring environmentally-focused cover stories and editions. Beyond the financial incentives and the celebrity glamour associated with being green, many previously unengaged segments of the population, including religious communities, people of color and people from different socio-economic classes, are becoming increasingly interested in participating in the movement's efforts.

Currently, however, there is a lack of diversity and inclusivity in environmental institutions and our movement. This is a systemic problem. Diversity is about strengthening the movement we are dedicated to by making it resilient and capable of adapting, regardless of what we face in the future. Widespread understanding of the values that diversity can provide is essential to enhancing our collective effort and the world, yet such understanding is still absent in far too many places.

Articles of Interest, Summer 2008

The Whiteness of Green, author Sharmeen Khan

In the article, The Whiteness of Green, author Sharmeen Khan, poses some very difficult questions about the environmentalists' capacity or willingness to see connections with other movements and offers some important linkages to bring groups together. (Note: Use of adult language.)

Vignette, Summer 2008

A dilemma to interpret

Your board is about to have a retreat to review and update the organization's 5-year strategic plan. Your group has been successful in the past by staying in its comfort zone programmatically, demographically, and structurally, but you realize that major changes are taking place and the organization may be left behind. What do you do?

- a) Stay with the tried and true;
- b) Commit to looking at inclusiveness strategies, but don't insert anything radically different;
- c) Bring in some non-board, non-voting community representatives to diversify the discussion;
- d) Add a day to the retreat and bring in facilitator that can help the group explore what it means to be inclusive including making firm commitments in that area;

Reflection Questions

- What are the prerequisites to being ready to become more inclusive?
- How much time and resources is your organization willing and able to devote? What does that answer imply?
- Will your interpretation of your mission change if you add inclusiveness objectives in your strategic plan? What does that answer imply?

- Does your organization have all the qualities and skills needed to become more inclusive?
- Does your organization have all the qualities and skills needed to become more inclusive? The classic Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats or SWOT Analysis can help you answer that question. Consider some of the questions under each area and remember every weakness can become a strength; and every threat, an opportunity.

Answer the question below by responding in the appropriate column. Add comments if needed.

Strength Weakness

- Is becoming more inclusive a top priority for your organization?
- Do you have a diverse board or staff?
- Do you have short and long term experiences partnering with organizations that represent other world views or demographics than yourselves?
- Is your organization having any serious problems like staff turnover or financial issues?
- Are personnel, board members or others supportive of becoming more inclusive?
- Do you have time and resources to become inclusive?

Answer the question below by responding in the appropriate column. Add comments if needed.

Opportunity Threat

- Do organizations that represent other worldviews or demographics different from yourselves live in your community? Are there ways for you to find out more about them?
- Can you find any overlap in the overall missions of your two groups?
- Is there an “ambassador” that might help you make some more connections with these populations?

Success Stories, Summer 2008

Great tips and resources from a great site.

Center for Diversity & the Environment provides strategic direction on diversifying the environmental movement. This website provides information about efforts, organizations, people, research and strategies that are diversifying the environmental movement.