

A Humane-Inspired Approach

Combine humane education and environmental education to encourage students to take action and make real-world connections



Detroit Zoological Society

By **Brian Ogle**

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION encourages students to be change makers while increasing their scientific understanding of the natural processes that surround us. Humane education is a natural fit within the themes and goals of this type of learning. Both fields strive to enhance critical thinking skills, increase positive actions, and generate an understanding of critical issues to create more informed consumers. At the very core, humane education believes that all living things are interconnected and helps to develop empathy towards all living beings through understanding. According to the Association of Professional Humane Educators, a humane educator

“is anyone who teaches and promotes humane attitudes toward people, animals and the environment. This includes, but is not limited to, anyone who teaches animal welfare, animal rights, animal behavior, environmental concerns, character education, cultural studies and any combination of the above.”

Beyond traditional scientific knowledge of the environment, Canada’s Framework for Environmental Learning and Sustainability, for example, places a heavy emphasis on

strategies that enhance knowledge in the areas of justice, equity, peace, ethics, and quality of life. In addition, the Framework notes the importance of creating a call to action in environmental education programs.

Many leading education professionals have called for a re-examination of educational models and their ability to inspire action. The “knowledge leads to caring leads to action” model has been called into question and proven to not be as effective as once believed. It is now believed that action leads to caring which leads to increased knowledge. Thus, the focus needs to be placed on creating student action in order to promote awareness and understanding of the information.

This reshaping of our instruction and curriculum design to include a larger emphasis on humane education requires a conscious interconnection between the material and the learning goals. By altering our learning objectives, we are able to support development outside of the traditional realm of most standards. Pedagogy centered in the development and application of critical thinking skills is essential in both humane education and environmental education lessons. Engaging students in open conversations allows for the exchange of ideas, and for existing ideas to be called into question in a constructive manner. To further student

engagement, allow for student choice on the topic or issue they wish to explore.

There are many different strategies for incorporating humane education into existing curriculum. The best way to modify your curriculum to support humane education is to start with a central, essential question. This question needs to allow for critical thinking or process skills so students can gain a greater understanding of the content. Once the central question has been constructed, focus on cross-cutting concepts within disciplinary ideas. The material should connect the information to real-world application of the content. It is important that the material aligns itself to implementing student-centered learning approaches.

This article will explore four unique action centered programs. Each program blends humane education and environmental action together while supporting student action, critical thinking, and solving real-world dilemmas. While each of the featured organizations have varying missions, geographical locations, and program purpose, each of these programs offer examples that can be easily replicated in your organization. In addition to outlining each program, two sample lessons have been provided. These lesson plans have been provided on behalf of the *Humane Education Quarterly*, a publication of the Association of Professional Humane Educators, and the Wisconsin Humane Society. Each lesson follows a model of combining humane education with environmental education to inspire action while exploring a central question.

The Berman Academy for Humane Education at the Detroit Zoological Society is a prime example of how humane and environmental education can seamlessly overlap. This is the lens through which all of their learning initiatives are developed. The Academy strives to foster a sense of understanding and appreciation of our shared environment, as well as our responsibility to care for all of its inhabitants in a humane manner. Their educational programs center around the core beliefs that all life is connected, everyone needs a home and the natural world is at threat. In addition to creating an understanding of nature through scientific exploration, their programs are intentionally designed to build empathy and, ultimately, inspire positive behavioral change as it relates to animals and the planet. For example, for more than seven years the Academy has led a gardening program with a local juvenile detention facility that helps to instill reverence and respect for wildlife and wild places with the 12-17-year-old boys residing there. In addition to studying environmentally and wildlife-friendly horticulture and successfully yielding fruits, vegetables and flowers from the garden, all activities strive to enhance the connection and understanding of nature while building social skills and empathy towards living beings.

The Yukon Department of Environment offers classroom programs that focus on connecting youth to the environment through active participation and increased understanding of local issues. The *Wildlife and You* program strives to connect 4th graders to local issues related to biodiversity and the community's role in conservation. Reflective of their mission to create exceptional environmental stewards, their programs offer a blend of traditional biological information with creating personal connections to the local environment.



Beacon College

In a similar fashion, the Wisconsin Humane Society combines community service with classroom learning to enhance elementary school students' understanding of local wildlife in their Wildlife Detectives program. Local classroom teachers use this program to teach about common species receiving care at the Wisconsin Humane Society's Wildlife Rehabilitation Center by actively helping to sponsor a species. Students may choose to raise money or organize a donation drive for items on the Center's wish list. As a reward students are able to visit the center and learn from wildlife rehabilitation professionals.

Creating a partnership with local agencies allows for authentic learning experiences in multiple fields, including business project management, teamwork, and science. This action-first program helps to inspire students to engage in learning and aims to develop a lasting connection with the content. Action first programs when combined with service learning opportunities allow educators to hit multiple standards in a single lesson. Application of understanding becomes the focus of the project. Lessons incorporating action to solve a real-world problem spark student interest, thus increasing student engagement. The Wisconsin Humane Society also promotes Bird Safe Classrooms by inspiring students to take action while learning about local wildlife.

Beacon College of Leesburg, Florida currently offers a course for non-science majors to fulfill graduation requirements. Throughout this semester long course, students are asked to explore diverse issues associated with human-wildlife conflict, habitat loss, and environmental degradation. Instruction of the course centers on employing modern adult education tactics with commonly used techniques from the humane and environmental education fields.

A majority of this course is taught outdoors, which allows students to challenge misconceptions and fears about the outdoors. Following the "action first" model, students participate in data collection for regional, national, and global citizen science projects. These projects represent a variety of conservation focused projects, including *eBird* from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and monitoring non-native Applesnails for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Throughout the course, the students are called upon to act first, and then learn about the action through lessons, independent practice, and group learning. As a result of this model, it has been demonstrated through empirical data that students not only increase knowledge about the environment, but also develop a respect and reverence towards the environment. Many students have continued to create action in their local communities upon the completion of the course. These actions include teaching others, volunteering, and developing additional projects on campus focused on protecting local wildlife and habitats.

Humane and environmental education share many similarities with each other, including themes in curriculum and the instructional choices made to implement lessons. Placing an emphasis on action allows students to engage in critical thinking, utilize interdisciplinary skills, and make connections to the material and the world they live in.

The world around us is shifting in unforeseen ways. Our society is connected on a global scale and requires empathy and an interdisciplinary understanding of one another as well as the environment. The combining of different educational themes with action will help educators reach those

imposing goals of knowledge transfer and the inspiring of students to make the world a better place.

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Web Resources

Detroit Zoological Society <http://detroitzoo.org/education/humane-education/>

Yukon Department of Environment www.env.gov.yk.ca/

Wisconsin Humane Society www.wihumane.org/

Bird Safe Classrooms <http://wisconsinhumanesociety.blob.core.windows.net/production/Kids/Migration-Information.pdf>

Beacon College www.beaconcollege.edu/

Science at Beacon College <https://youtu.be/bQnA6C1R5gA>

The Gryphon Press www.thegryphonpress.com/pages/catalog.html

Read for Their Lives sample lesson

Adapted with permission from De Lisle, S. (2014). Humane Education Quarterly, Fall 2014(110), 1-3.

Recommended Age: Grades K-6 (adaptable to any level)

Learning Objective/s: Students will be able to:

- Find, evaluate, and communicate information
- Communicate effectively using oral and written skills
- Apply learning to solve real-world problems
- Understand social and civic responsibilities, human rights, and sustainability

Before the Lesson

Secure a local business related to the theme of your activity to sponsor your class. For example, if you are focusing on birds you may wish to contact a local garden store. Sponsorship may range from a guest speaker, money towards a special project, or a class field trip. Points or dollar value should be established; these can be earned for each book read by a student, action completed, or person they talk to about the problem. For example, students may choose to make posters to be hung up around the school or community instead of reading books.

Anticipatory Set

Prepare a dedicated bulletin board that will serve as the focal point for the entire length of the lesson. Disguise the bulletin so you may have a dramatic revealing at the start of the lesson. Upon showing students the bulletin board, mention how it relates to what students are studying or mention a commemorative month/day/week to which it relates (Shelter Dog Month, Wildlife Week, etc.).

Instructional Process

1. Ask students to read the bulletin board and ask questions to gauge current knowledge on the topic, field trip site, or activity.
2. After unveiling the bulletin board, describe the lesson to the students. Provide an overview of the goals and the target to



Wisconsin Humane Society

reach (guest speaker, field trip, etc.). Provide detailed instructions on how the students will be able to achieve this goal. For younger students, create an action plan to reach the goal.

3. Read a related book or news article to the students. For humane-themed children's picture books, visit The Gryphon Press online. Engage the students in a discussion to highlight major ideas presented in the reading. Ask them how they are directly connected to this topic? How does this relate to their community?
4. After the reading, ask students to create a list of ways they are directly connected to the issue at hand and ways they can help.
5. You may choose to create folders marked with sub-themes related to the lesson. Have students complete a form related to each action they complete and place into the appropriate sub-theme.

Guided Practice

Ask the students to complete the tasks related to achieving the goal. For older students, you may opt to include independent research activities so they may learn more about the topic at hand.

Check Understanding

On a regular basis, ask each student to share one thing they have learned. This may come from their readings or from doing independent research on their own.

Closure

Celebrate the hard work completed to achieve their goal. Engage the class in a group discussion upon the final selected activity. Encourage conversation related to the individual's feelings towards the actions they have taken during the lesson. How can they continue to take actions on their own? Why is it important for everyone to continue to take action?

Independent Practice

Provide students with materials that encourage them to continue green and/or humane behaviors. Select materials based on the list they created at the start of the lesson.

Wildlife Detectives sample lesson

Sample provided from the Wildlife Detectives program of the Wisconsin Humane Society

Recommended Age: Grades 4-6

Learning Objective/s: Students will be able to:

- Find, evaluate, and communicate information
- Identify common signs wildlife may demonstrate when in need of help
- Understand what to do when spotting injured wildlife
- Explain why it is important to observe wildlife from a distance and not directly interact with wild animals

Before the Lesson

Identify a local organization that supports wildlife; this can be rehabilitation, rescue, or placement. Develop a partnership that is mutually beneficial for each organization. Partnership may include sponsoring a species commonly assisted in return for a field trip or guest speaker.

Anticipatory Set

Explain to the students the value of helping local wildlife. The importance of saving wildlife should be stressed in the beginning. Provide students with an overview of the project by allowing them to select as a class which species they wish to sponsor.

Instructional Process

Exercise 1 – Theory: Why We Should Help Wildlife

1. Discuss what does the term 'wild' truly mean. What are 'wild' animals?
 - Have students develop a list of items that do not make wild animals appropriate pets.
 - Have students develop a list of items that make domestic animals appropriate pets.
 - Compare and contrast the two lists.
2. As a class, brainstorm different ways animals and humans interact. For older students, label these interactions as positive or negative. Labels may be for humans, wildlife, or both.
3. Provide each student with a picture of a commonly seen wild animal in your area, domestic species, and common exotic pets. These may be necklaces with a picture, a laminated sheet, etc.
4. Have the class determine if the animal is a wild, domestic, or exotic pet. Does this species make an appropriate pet? Why or why not?

Exercise 2 – Prevention: How to Keep Wildlife Safe Before They Get Hurt

Older students: Split students into groups. Provide each group with an item to help or manage wildlife. Provide each group with information about the item. Ask students to identify how and why this item would be used. Ask the group to present their item to the class. At the end, have a class discussion about wildlife management and rehabilitation.

Younger students: Go through a narrative pantomime of the life of an injured, or captured, wild animal. Emphasize how the animal may feel in the situation. Encourage students to imagine the animal's perception of the situation.¹

Guided Practice

Participate in a service project to help your selected partner organization. This may include monetary donations or purchasing of items from their wish list. Encourage students to take ownership of the service project. For older students, have them plan and design the service project.

Students should do research on the species selected to sponsor. Classroom projects may include interdisciplinary lessons focusing on the human interactions with the species. Instructors may also choose to do smaller scale projects on the selected animal.

Check Understanding

Use a rubric to grade classroom projects. Monitor classroom discussions.

Closure

End the lesson with a field trip to or guest speaker from your partner organization. Debrief the session by discussing key topics identified by the partner organization. Include a class discussion about the importance of helping wildlife and your community.

Independent Practice

Provide students with materials that encourage them to continue green and/or humane behaviors. Select materials based on the list they created at the start of the lesson.

1. For supplemental materials, including an example narrative pantomime, contact the Wisconsin Humane Society's Education Department



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