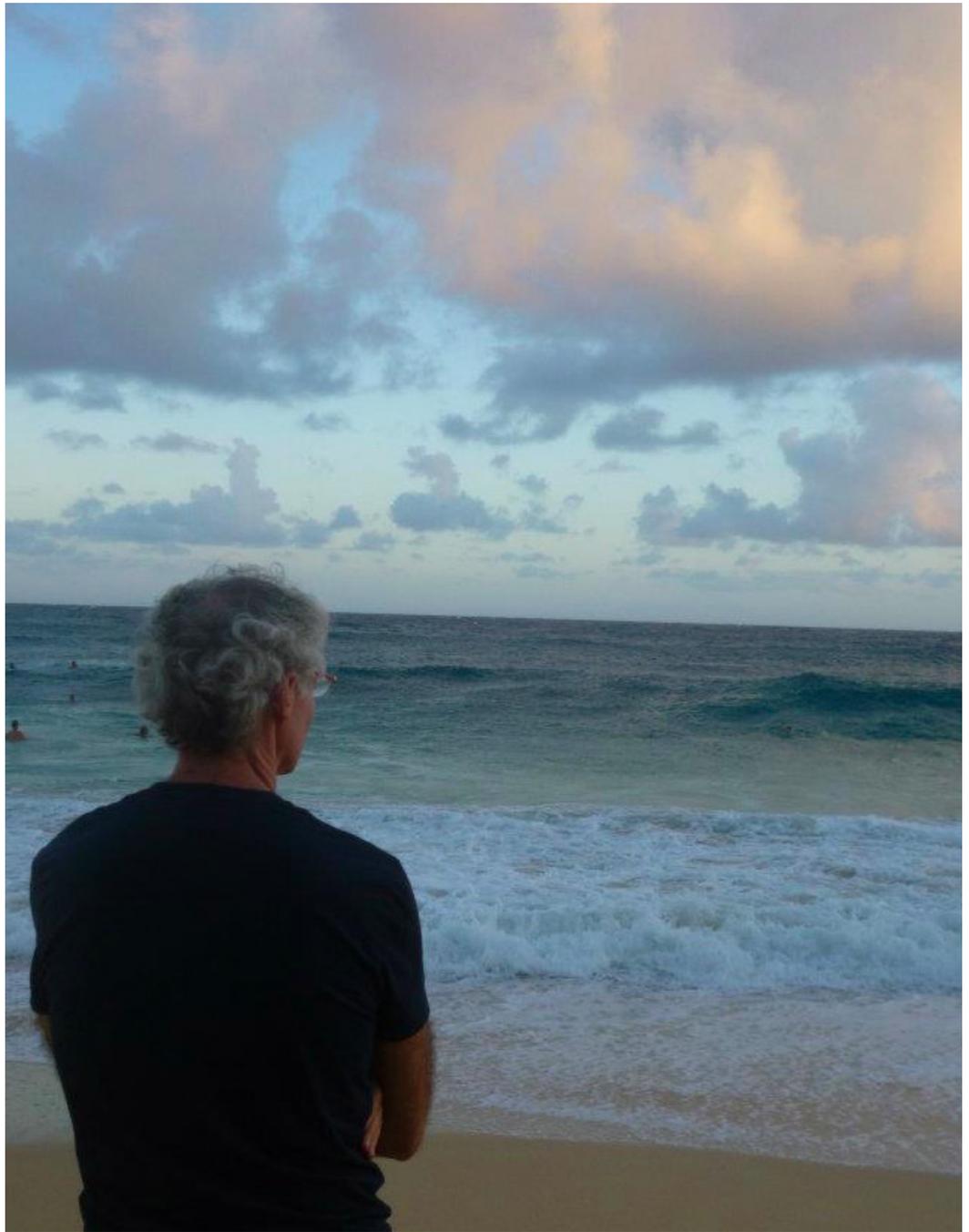


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# Perspectives on Environmental Education

## Curriculum, Instructor Guide, and Materials

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# Overview

**This packet is designed as a starting point for educators to think about their role in the field of environmental educators (EE), and to appreciate the many views and perspectives on EE held by their colleagues. The results of a research study conducted as part of the EECapacity project revealed five ways of thinking about EE (see the separate summary), and will be the basis for the class activity. The students will review these perspectives on EE to examine their own beliefs in relation to prevailing ones in the field. Instructors can choose to use the handout with the research results to have students situate themselves within the EE field or discuss the perspectives that the study highlighted.**

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## Perspectives on EE

# Card Sorting Exercise & Lesson Plan

### Instructor Guide

- Audience** Professionals working in the field of environmental education (EE) attending classes for professional development
- Purpose** To facilitate EE professionals' understanding of how they conceptualize and think about EE and to help them appreciate the various perspectives on EE. Through this classroom exercise, students will:
1. Review critically different perspectives on the field of EE
  2. Compare the perspectives with their own
  3. Acknowledge and value the multiple perspectives on EE
- Activity** Students will participate in a card sorting activity. Similar techniques have been used in social science research to examine people's opinions about topics on which there are multiple, competing perspectives. Specifically, it is possible to identify commonalities and themes in the ways people think about a topic, for example beliefs about dolphins (Sickler, Fraser, Webler, Reiss, Boyle, Lyn, Lemcke, & Gruber, 2004). Similarly, considering the range of environmental educators' background experiences and work settings, environmental education can have strikingly different connotations. The card sorting activity can thus be a powerful tool to identify overlapping views on EE, a field with many, often disparate perspectives.
- An additional value of the card sorting exercise is that it allows the sorter to examine in depth, his/her beliefs on the topic. As a class activity, environmental educators will get the opportunity to rethink, reevaluate, and clarify their thinking about the field of EE. They will read a set of 35 statements (each on a separate card) about EE and compare it with their own beliefs. These statements were obtained through an intensive process of reviewing the literature on three distinct perspectives prevalent in EE – traditional, contemporary urban, and community focused. Students will critically examine the statements and identify those that are most like how they think of EE, those that are least like how they think of EE, and those about which they are neutral.
- \*To facilitate students' learning through this activity, it is recommended that the instructor do the card sorting activity before introducing it to students.\**
- Outcomes** By completing the activity, students will be able to:
1. Articulate their insight on EE in written form (essays)
  2. Discuss diverse perspectives on EE in class (after completing the card sorting activity)
- Class Deliverables** Students will hand in the following:
1. Summary sheet (recording their views on EE)
  2. Two essays elaborating and discussing:
    - i. The statements they think most like
    - ii. The statements they think least like

(Continued)

## Grading

Students will be graded on the following basis:

1. Essays

Each of the two essays will be assessed on the extent to which students critically reviewed and compared the respective statements with their own. Participants should also be able to explain why they think most and least like the statements in each essay.

2. Classroom discussion about the multiple perspectives on EE

Students' involvement and participation in the class discussion will be evaluated on the level of acceptance of competing perspectives in EE. Specifically it is expected that they will be able to acknowledge and respect multiple, conflicting ways of conceptualizing EE, even if they believe differently. Their participation is expected to indicate that they value and appreciate the various ways peers think about the field.

## Materials

Students will need the following:

1. *Instructions* – Detailed step-by-step guide to the card sorting activity
2. *Statements* – 3 pages with 35 statements about environmental education
3. *Summary sheet* – Containing a table for students to record how they sorted their statements.
4. *Reflection* – Students will write two essays (each 500 words maximum) to share with their teacher and other students.

## Research scope

This class activity is designed as a starting point for environmental educators to think about their role in the field of EE, and to appreciate the many views and perspectives on EE held by their colleagues in the field. The results of a research study conducted as part of EECapacity project, revealed five ways of thinking about EE, and will be the basis for the class activity. The students will review these perspectives on EE to examine their own beliefs in relation to other prevailing ones in the field. Instructors can choose to use the handout with the research results to have students situate themselves within the EE field or discuss the perspectives that the study highlighted.

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## Perspectives on EE

### EE Perspectives Exercise

#### Instructions

One person working alone in one session should complete the first part of this activity. The goal is to explore your personal views on environmental education (EE), and to accurately capture how you think about working in the field. Students should allow 15 minutes to do the sorting activity, and then enough time to write two short personal essays after they have completed the sorting task. After completing the sorting activity and the essays, students will be invited to share their results and engage in a discussion about what they learned.

#### Materials Needed

- *Statements sheet*
- *Pre-printed summary table*
- *Reflection sheet*
- *A spacious flat surface, like a tabletop*

**\*At the end of the sorting activity, you will have organized all the statements in a pyramid format to match the summary table diagram.\***

#### Instructions

1. Print out the statements sheet (one-sided) and the summary. You may wish to print out the pre-formatted reflection sheets, or keep them on a computer.
2. Cut each statement out of the paper following the lines so each numbered statement is on a separate card. The card number is below the statement.
3. Put all the statements into a pile and hold them like a deck of cards.
4. Sort the cards into two piles:
  - The first, with statements that are more like how you think about EE
  - The second, with statements that are less like how you think about EE
5. Place the first pile on the table as if they are on the rightmost column of the sorting table (MOST LIKE HOW I THINK), and the second as if they are on the leftmost column (LEAST LIKE HOW I THINK).
6. Starting with the right pile, sort the cards into more piles, so that the 2 statements that are most like how you think are on the rightmost column and the rest are arranged in descending columns reflecting the degree to which they are slightly less appropriate to how you think about EE.

*(Continued)*

- Instructions (cont.)**
7. Do the same with the left pile, so that the 2 statements that are least like how you think are on the leftmost column and the rest arrange toward the right in degrees that are more like how you think, until they meet up with the other set of cards in the bell-curved table.
  8. You can now rearrange the cards in the columns so they reflect whether they are more or less how you think about EE until you are happy with the arrangement.
  9. The cards in the center column should be the ones you feel are most neutral.
  10. *\*Be sure that each rectangle in the table has only one card representing it. The order of the cards in each column does not matter.\**
  11. When you have one card representing each space in the summary table, examine your order carefully and consider what this organization might mean. Think about the statements and ask yourself how accurately the placed cards reflect your views on environmental education?
  12. If you feel your opinion hasn't been captured properly, please go ahead and rearrange the cards until you are satisfied that they reflect your views accurately.
  13. Once finalized, write the number of each card into the table on the summary sheet to share with others.
  14. Once you have completed transcribing the numbers into the table, take a few minutes to respond to the essay questions in the reflection sheet.
  15. You can now share your summary and reflections with your instructor.

Following completion of this task, students will be asked to read one another's essays. We will have a discussion about how students' views may be different and how we understand what Environmental Education can be.

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Perspectives on EE – Statements (page 1 of 3)

<p><i>Cut cards into individual statements along the thick lines so each card has both a statement and a number. Then refer to sorting instructions.</i></p>	<p>You can only learn about nature by seeing it change over time in your neighborhood</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Outdoor learning helps build healthy families</p> <p>26</p>	<p>It's using nature to reconnect people to their spiritual center</p> <p>7</p>
<p>Nature learning teaches basic life skills</p> <p>34</p>	<p>Helps people with little or no access to nature become free thinkers</p> <p>19</p>	<p>Learning about nature creates more positive, nurturing, emotionally healthy communities</p> <p>16</p>	<p>Promotes the understanding that everything is connected to everything in nature</p> <p>9</p>
<p>Nature helps bring all of society together to solve the problems we share</p> <p>17</p>	<p>Putting students into challenging environments like the woods or mountains helps them develop good problem solving skills</p> <p>35</p>	<p>Getting our children to be the next environmental stewards</p> <p>28</p>	<p>Promotes active citizenry, motivating people to solve complex environmental problems</p> <p>21</p>



Perspectives on EE – Statements (page 2 of 3)

<p>Nature teaches us to love and respect one another like a good family</p> <p>18</p>	<p>Primarily to teach people how to live sustainably</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Learning to protect the parts of the environment that nurture us as people</p> <p>25</p>	<p>Once you know how the natural world works, you understand systems better</p> <p>11</p>
<p>It's the best way to teach about how the scientific process works</p> <p>13</p>	<p>It's getting kids outside to discover nature at their doorstep</p> <p>6</p>	<p>Motivating people to take local actions to solve global problems</p> <p>30</p>	<p>Nature education is the path to help us appreciate God through his work</p> <p>10</p>
<p>We can use nature experiences to help people from cities tackle their environmental problems</p> <p>29</p>	<p>Nature teaches that we're all in it together, geographically, socially, and financially</p> <p>20</p>	<p>It's teaching good clean, healthy recreation</p> <p>24</p>	<p>Teaching that nature has the same rights as people</p> <p>8</p>



Perspectives on EE – Statements (page 3 of 3)

<p>Restoring nature is the best way to bring communities together</p> <p>15</p>	<p>Exposing students to the outdoors so they don't fear nature</p> <p>23</p>	<p>Nature learning is the best way to teach about protection of wild things, even if they aren't cute</p> <p>31</p>	<p>It's the only way we're going to fix the problems created by people</p> <p>27</p>
<p>It's more important to save endangered wildlife than to worry about a few more people</p> <p>3</p>	<p>Primarily to teach people they must protect ecosystems</p> <p>2</p>	<p>The best way to produce a scientifically-literate society</p> <p>12</p>	<p>It's about helping develop good thinking skills</p> <p>14</p>
<p>Nature is the best way to teach leadership</p> <p>33</p>	<p>Motivating people to fight for their rights to clean and healthy places to live</p> <p>22</p>	<p>Making school curriculum relevant by connecting to where youth live</p> <p>4</p>	<p>Fostering the commitment to solve environmental problems</p> <p>32</p>







**Reflection Sheet 1**

**MOST LIKE HOW I THINK**

1) Please write out the number and full statement of the two statements that are MOST LIKE how you think:

a)  \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b)  \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2) Write an essay in the space below (500 words max) on the two statements that are MOST LIKE how you think about EE. Elaborate and explain the reasons you chose these statements.

**Reflection Sheet 2**

**LEAST LIKE HOW I THINK**

1) Please write out the number and full statement of the two statements that are LEAST LIKE how you think:

a)  \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b)  \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2) Write an essay in the space below (500 words max) on the two statements that are LEAST LIKE how you think about EE. Elaborate and explain the reasons you chose these statements.





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