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Creating an Ecology of Hope: Nature-Based Training to Increase Compassion and Collaboration in Building Sustainable Communities

Charlotte Herz
SIT Graduate Institute

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CREATING AN ECOLOGY OF HOPE: NATURE BASED TRAINING TO
INCREASE COMPASSION AND COLLABORATION IN BUILDING
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Charlotte N. Herz

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Student Name: Charlotte N. Herz
Date: May 12, 2018

When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.

-John Muir

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly technological world, the human connection with nature is falling behind. Acts of violence are more prevalent in media and mainstream news reports. Environmental concerns and issues are in the forefront of today's policy debates. Yet, professional development opportunities that are being provided to a quickly changing work force are becoming stagnate. If technology is constantly improving why would teaching methods remain stagnate? I was drawn to the connection of nature's inherent adaptability and the human's desire to maintain the status quo. I chose to explore this idea through a training CLC so that I may apply the theories of experiential learning and social change to a field that is indirectly aiding in maintaining the status quo. This study takes a deeper look into the collaborative efforts of a statewide organization in Texas, USA. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is the home organization for the Texas Children in Nature (TCiN) Network, which acts as a facilitator and coalition builder for individuals and organizations in the state of Texas that want to be a part of the Children in Nature movement. This study identifies strategies that work in building collaboration as well as ways in which the network can improve their capacity to collaborate. Professionals from a wide range of fields in the state of Texas were surveyed and observed throughout the process. The results of this study led me to identify and examine my own capabilities as a trainer and agent of social change. I was able to apply theories and frameworks to the work she was completing in the state of Texas.

Keywords: Collaboration, Compassion, Collective Impact, Sustainable

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout United States history, the Native cultures of the land are often overlooked or underrepresented. However, the richness of their language and culture can give us new perspectives on the world we live in. For example, there is a term the Navajo people use to describe themselves, "dine" (Pronounced Di-neh) which means, "the people" (National Park Service, 2012). This term was first explained to me by a Dine (Navajo) woman, who told me that they historically called themselves the "five-fingered people" meaning "everyone is related". I found this concept to be the driving force behind my research. Which led me to questions that began to influence my personal development. The question I asked myself, were "How is it we are all related?" and "What is it that connects us?" I was given a new world perspective after learning about this term and its history. I began to explore the concept of difference and connectedness within humanity. I took this research further when I discovered another Native American term, "Hunkapi" meaning "we are all related" (Hunkapi Farms, 2018). I was constantly coming across this idea that all humans are connected. I began to wonder, "what is it that connects us all?" Through my personal experiences and research on the benefits of nature connection I came to the conclusion that it was nature that was the link between all humans. Therefore, in this paper I will be putting forth the idea, as others have before me that the environment is our common ground. However, I will take this idea on step further and recommend that nature is not just what connects us, it is the path towards a more sustainable future. The research I conducted has been driven by the Native American idea that "we are all

related". I took this concept and applied it to the natural world and that is when I began to research Ecology.

Ecology is defined in the Merriam Webster Dictionary (2018) as, "a branch of science concerned with the interrelationship of organisms and their environments." For the purpose of this paper, hope will be referred to in its verb form, which is defined as "to desire with expectation of obtainment or fulfillment" (Merriam Webster, 2018). Trainer and author Cheryl Charles, who is a lead instructor at the Nature-Based Leadership Institute at Antioch University (2011) writes about ecology as such: "the parts interact dynamically, and no one part stands alone. As poets and naturalists through time have observed, everything is connected to everything else". Therefore, if we believe that hope is not a singular concept and that it has a role in all parts of life, that it is not just for the environment but for humans as well, then that is our ecology of hope.

A TRAINER'S CONNECTION WITH NATURE

My connection with nature began at a young age. Between exploring the forest behind my house, playing sports in all kinds of New England weather and digging in the dirt of my mother's garden, I constantly found myself immersed in my environment. I was a nature kid through and through, however; it was not until my years in high school that I realized the intense emotional connection I had with nature. Nature brought me solace and provided me with a broader and more diverse view of the world. Nature gave me the opportunity to see that I was one piece of a larger system. As a teenager I lived in a home that was surrounded by trees. The backyard I played in was a forest of pine trees, with trails of leaves and dirt. My favorite moments were after it snowed, where I bundled up to the point where my movements were stiff. I sat outside in the snow, letting the silence that always follows a snowstorm envelop me. I would lay back in the drifts of snow

and feel at peace. It was in these moments, when I could sit among the snow and trees, that I could pay attention to every detail and know how important nature was to me. I knew then, that we were all connected however subconsciously. Experiences such as the ones I had in the forest and among the snow have influenced almost every decision that I have made. Nature has always been a factor in my decision-making process. It was a deciding factor in what activities I chose to participate in during high school, which college I chose to go to, and how I taught my students. The university I attended was surrounded by the ocean and interwoven with walking trails, during my spare time I volunteered at farms where individuals with disabilities participated in nature-based activities to improve their cognitive, emotional, and physical capabilities. As I began teaching I realized that my students were not aware that the opportunities I had out in nature were also a possibility for them thus I began to incorporate lessons from nature in our everyday curriculum, looking at the weather, the trees, and the wildlife that sat right outside our windows. As often as I could, I would lead students to a grassy area right outside the school building with paper, pencils and clipboards in tow.

I began my undergraduate education as an English Literature major and not shortly after beginning my freshman year I decided to enroll in the Secondary Education program as a second major. I knew that I wanted to be an educator, however; what I discovered through my studies and internships was that if I chose to continue into the public school system I would not have the flexibility to incorporate nature into my daily lessons. I also realized that it was not just the kids I wanted to work with. I saw a need for educating the family as a whole. Involving families in natural systems was just as important as getting kids outside. During my junior year of college, I began to see my perspective shifting but what made the need for a change obvious was the short amount of time I spent on the Navajo Reservation in Tuba City, AZ during the Spring of 2014. On the

reservation I learned about the importance of human connection to nature. From learning the language, to participating in a sweat lodge ceremony, to sitting on the edge of Coal Mine Canyon, I had gotten just a sampling of what it could be like to learn and teach in nature. When I returned to campus at Roger Williams University in the Fall of 2014 I shifted the focus of my studies from traditional teaching practices to indigenous knowledge and ways of learning. I began an independent study on non-formal teaching practices and focused my research on indigenous ways of learning in the U.S and Canada. I was heavily influenced by my experience on the Navajo Reservation. When I began to search for graduate programs, I focused on three key factors: experiential learning, practical experiences, and transformative thought processes. Needless to say, that one week on the reservation transitioned my trajectory from formal education to experiential training at SIT.

THE ROAD TO TRAINING AND SIT

I arrived at SIT eager to learn and challenge my thinking. The experience I had on the Navajo reservation ultimately led me to this program where I planned to focus on a field that would put me on a path to develop change and foster compassion in my own community. I had been disheartened by my time in the public school system, which furthered my desire to study a different form of education and to figure out how I could encourage others to widen their horizons when it came to learning and teaching.

I began my journey at SIT in the Sustainable Development program. I thought that I was already an educator so I should widen the breadth of my knowledge by studying a new field in order to gain a wider skill set and knowledge base. It was not until I took the course Training and Design for Experiential Learning (TDEL) that I realized I had only scratched the surface of what it truly meant to be an educator. Training became more than being a teacher. It became a process

of self-reflection, and a way to examine the world through multiple lenses in order to become adaptable and flexible in the way that I interact with others. Training was a field where transformation began and ended. Transformation is a cyclical process much like writing. TDEL led me to experience training as a process of constant improvement. Though transformation took place there could always be the chance for regression for progress to be erased, unless we were to create sustainable perspective shifts. My goal through my time at SIT and this practicum experience was to figure out how we can instill change that lasts. In my current position as an AmeriCorps VISTA working with the Texas Children in Nature Network under the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department being a trainer meant empowering our partners by modeling best practices that are based on sound research, which I have discovered is a sound way to encourage a shift in action and thought for adults that is sustainable for years to come.

INFLUENCING THEORIES AND QUESTIONS

As a reflective practitioner in the field of community development and environmental education, I have learned an immense amount about myself, in terms of how I currently interact with the field and how I hope to interact with the field in the future, as well as how I interact with the local community that I am working in. Questions that I have been exploring throughout the process of being a trainer with the Texas Children in Nature Project in Austin, Texas have been, "How do I situate myself in the lives of others who have different experiences than my own?", "How do I work on attitudinal change when individuals do not necessarily see the need for such change?" and "How do we translate a statewide movement to a global movement?". The goal of this practicum experience was to explore these questions and hopefully begin to develop the answers as they apply to myself and the larger world of training in order to create sustainable communities.

During my time as an AmeriCorps VISTA, along with modeling best practices based on sound research on nature and its health benefits, I also applied lessons I learned from the training courses at SIT in order to dive deeper into the concepts I questioned above. Joanna Macy, Fran Peavey, and Ivan Illich were among my most important influences as I developed my own trainer lens. Macy showed me that a shift of thought is like a hinge, that "can swing us from pain to power because it is anchored in their common source: our inter-existence within the web of life" (p. 114) and that as a trainer/ guide, my role is to name what is happening, validate what is happening and help the group turn a corner (p. 115). Throughout the Training for Social Action course I found statements such as these to be imperative because of their focus on self-reflection and personal growth. I began to realize through these readings that as a trainer I must be continuously developing my own sense of self in order to work with participants who are also trying to do the same. I must have a common ground on which to stand with those that I am working to serve. As a trainer, I take the similar stance that Illich does in that, if I am to be a part of the Texas Children in Nature movement, I must have a compassionate heart for the circumstances of others, not with the intention of simply "doing good" but with the intention of creating sustainable change.

Through the Training courses at SIT (Training in Design for Experiential Learning and Training for Social Action) I began to shape and reshape my worldview. I saw the correlation between being a trainer and being a writer. After studying Literature during my undergraduate education I knew that writing was a recursive process, constantly circling back to be reshaped or improved. Kurt Lewin, who is considered to be the father of social psychology, introduces a similar idea in his theory of movement, which was originally used in the field of nursing. He addresses movement in three steps "unfreezing, changing and refreezing" (Cummings,

Bridgman, and Brown, 2016) which has come to define what I believe to be the purpose of training. Lewin, "was primarily interested in resolving social conflict through behavioral change" (Burnes, 2004) which requires an individual to allow new perspectives to enter their line of vision by unfreezing. This thought process of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing is what ultimately led me to focus on nature-based training due to nature's recursive qualities. We know that life begins and ends and begins again, continuously improving itself. It is the natural systems of the world that keep us thriving in a world that is filled with humans that are prone to self-destruct. Nature has a plethora of lessons to teach us and if we could harness the power of these lessons from nature in our professional development opportunities then we could potentially be more successful in maintaining our humanity by increasing hope, compassion and progress.

AN ECOLOGY OF HOPE

"Hope is an action verb with its sleeves rolled up." I was introduced to this phrase at the Texas Children in Nature Summit of 2017. Cheryl Charles, was the keynote speaker at the Texas Children in Nature Summit in San Antonio, Texas. Dr. Charles stated in her opening remarks that this phrase about hope she had pulled from the education professional and expert David Sobel. Sobel is a leading professional in the field of nature-based education. He is also a professor at Antioch University in New Hampshire and by citing his words the attendees were immediately introduced to the idea of hope as an ecology.

An Ecology of Hope is the belief that hope lives in all parts of life. Hope is present and needed for life to thrive. There are two other trainers and important figures that I have studied in order to shape this project who embodied the concept of hope. The Dalai Lama and Richard Louv. The Dalai Lama addresses the idea of hope in conjunction with compassion. He states that it is the natural human state to be hopeful, compassionate, and happy. Being anything other than

that is depriving oneself of a natural process. Hope and compassion are a part of the natural

systems of the world. If we begin to analyze violence, crime, and unhappiness we may start to

find that all exist because there is a lack of hope, compassion, and happiness (Bstan-dzin-rgya-

mtsho and Tutu, 2016). However, the focus of this project is on how nature and hope lead to

stronger efforts in collaboration, which results in strong collective impact[1] In interviews with the

Dalai Lama he reveals his processes when dealing with pain, loss, or challenge and though he

does not directly correlate the positive outcomes of his processes with being in nature in a

physical sense, he relates it to a deeper level of connection with the world, which includes the

environment. Therefore, we can look to the teachings of the Dalai Lama as examples of how the

environment is encompassed in the process of developing hope and compassion in communities

in order to build more sustainable futures.

Also writing about sustainable futures is Richard Louv, journalist and author, who

published the prominent book "The Last Child in the Woods". Louv, through his books,

introduced the term Nature Deficit Disorder to his readers, which is a term that helps in

describing the negative effects of having a lack of nature in a child's life (Howard, 2013). As

Louv coined the term "Nature Deficit Disorder" in 2005, he also sparked the Children in Nature

Movement, which has since turned into an international movement. Louv sites several studies in

his book "The Last Child in the Woods" that provides scientific research and hard evidence that

a connection with nature is beneficial to children and their families in many ways. For example,

Louv quotes a parent saying, "My son is still on Ritalin but he is so much calmer when in the

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[1] Collective Impact- The approach calls for multiple organizations or entities from different sectors to abandon their own agenda in favor of a common agenda, shared measurement and alignment of effort. (Kania and Kramer)

outdoors we are seriously considering moving to the mountains" (p. 102). A family therapist, Michael Gurian, is quoted saying, "Neurologically, human beings haven't caught up with today's over stimulating environment" (p. 103). The theory that Louv and many other professionals in the field are working with is the well-established attention-restoration theory, which was inspired by philosopher and psychologist William James. James identified two types of attention, directed and fascination. James explored attention as it relates to the power of human will. He saw a need for voluntary attention to be employed when, "something did not of itself attract attention, but when it was important to attend nonetheless" (Kaplan p. 169 1995). "James emphasized the centrality of effort in the employment of this kind of attention" (1995). This effort into attending to ideas or objects that do not immediately attract attention could be fatiguing and his is where nature comes in. Stephen Kaplan, a professor at the University of Michigan, writes about the restorative benefits of nature. Kaplan acknowledges four studies that were done that speak to the relation between restorative experiences and information-processing effectiveness (p. 175). Kaplan cites a study by Hartig et al :

> *In the first study, Hartig et al. (1991) compared wilderness vacationers with urban vacationers and a non-vacationing control group. Only individuals with backpacking experience and who were engaged in regular physical fitness regimens were included in the study. Following their trip, the wilderness group showed a significant improvement in proofreading performance, a task that is highly demanding of directed attention.*

This example is just one of the many that have grown to examine the benefits that nature has on human attention and capabilities, a topic Richard Louv writes extensively about.

I began following Richard Louv's work while I was preparing a senior thesis for my undergraduate education. I had started analyzing characters in novels that were portrayed as

having either mental or emotional challenges. I focused on literature from the 1950s, looking at the Beatnik generation, and classic novels such as *The Catcher in the Rye*. What I had found, through using Louv's theory of Nature Deficit Disorder was that many characters from 1950s novels were suffering from a lack of "Vitamin N" (nature). I furthered my analysis of the novels and literature through the theory of Nature Deficit Disorder. While studying literature I had realized novels are often reflections of the time in which they were written. Whether they are predictions of the future, or mirrors of an author's current society, literature is able to give us a look into the past, present and future. From what I could see we had been struggling with Nature Deficit Disorder since the 1950s and we would continue to struggle with it if perspectives did not change.

With that being said, I found myself, as a trainer, wondering where will nature integrate itself into my own work? As I began this practicum I knew three things: nature had proven physical, emotional, and cognitive health benefits. We, as a society, have been struggling with a lack of nature connection for decades, and lastly training, for me, was an action verb synonymous with empowerment, and sustainable change. In order to figure out where nature would intertwine itself with my own work and philosophies it would prove useful to understand where and how Nature-Based Training began.

BACKGROUND

The Beginning of Nature-Based Training

A. *Natural Learning: Indigenous Communities*

For many indigenous communities in the U.S., learning is a cyclical process and is best done outside, in the environment and in a hands-on way. Indigenous education or non-western education was the beginning of the natural learning movement. I will look at their ways of

learning and how that has been incorporated, or not, into the American Education system today. The background of indigenous knowledge and learning is important for the development of this Capstone because it will become necessary to provide evidence and examples of the benefits of nature-based training and education for the learner, whether they be youth or adults. "This aboriginal educational system was composed of teaching the youth the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and dispositions required for successful functioning as adults in real world settings. Learning was underpinned by a reverence for nature and a sense of humans' responsibility to nature (Johnson et al., 2005)" (Yeboah, 2005). There is the belief that humans and their communities are a part of the natural system, not separate. Therefore, education is done in such a way that lessons seem relevant to everyday life, work and culture.

There is something to be said for the fact that this kind of knowledge and learning is seen as less substantial than the standard expectation of American Education, which is test-centered, statistic driven, and competitive. Non-western knowledge is a form that is often supplemental to the standard American education, but not the primary form of learning. Non-Western knowledge is viewed as abstract and non-analytical. It is used as a way to give the students "a break" from rigorous academic activity. Adult learning is typically viewed in the same fashion formal, academic, and based off of tests and results. Adult learning can take the form of professional development (PD) opportunities in the workplace. PD is typically done in the office, in large groups, and presented on screens or through webinars. The exception from formal adult learning happens in organizations that are dedicated to nature education and specifically train their educators to lead outdoor experiences. Organizations such as Outward Bound USA or the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) are examples of such trainings, as they are the

leaders in the Nature Education field and expect their educators to lead expeditions that require

certain skills and aptitude, which are seen as not necessary in the classroom.

Despite this bleak representation of adult learning there is evidence that proves nature-based

learning promotes and fosters collaboration among the participants whether they be youth or

adults. Adults and youth learn differently (Figure 2). The complexity of topics are what change

as youth transition to adult learning. However, the idea that I put forth is that nature is inherently

adaptable and complex, meaning learning opportunities can easily be adapted to fit into a model

of nature education. Thus, by disregarding indigenous ways of learning or more broadly,

experiential and inquiry based learning we are devaluing collaboration and community building.

Natural learning is not a new concept, but it has been overlooked in most educational

institutions. Now in 2018, indigenous knowledge and inquiry based education is making its way

back into the mainstream education system. Presently, there are Charter and Magnet Schools that

present their main focus as inquiry based education. For example, the Trevor Day School in New

York City, NY, focuses on inquiry based learning. Their mission states:

> *"Trevor celebrates diversity of thought, experiences, and culture; promotes compassion,*
> *collaboration, courage, and creativity; and develops in children a recognition of their own*
> *unique potential as lifelong learners and leaders who act as responsible global citizens in*
> *our world" (Trevor Day School, 2018).*

The Asheville Farmstead School in North Carolina, a nature based school, focuses on

connecting "students to an increased awareness of the natural world, the complexities of

agriculture and the interrelations of living communities" (Asheville Farmstead School, 2018).

Teachers are also participating in trainings on outdoor learning so that they feel confident and

capable in leading their students in nature-based learning opportunities. The educational mindset

is shifting, yet the testing and tracking system has not. An equilibrium has not yet been found in the United States when it comes to how we want our children to be educated and how we choose to track and test their knowledge.

B. National Park Service

As nature-based learning made its way into the school system it also began to integrate itself into the traditional conservation education world as well. The National Park Service is an example of how though in a natural setting, learning could still be traditional. The land established as a National Park was meant as a "pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people".   However, that soon shifted specifically with the creation of The Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which was established with its economic value in mind rather than its natural beauty. Perspectives on how and why we use nature is constantly shifting. Generally, though, and most recently, nature is viewed as a producer, of jobs, economic stability, and industry. With leisure time becoming sparse in the increasingly busy American work life, parks became a commodity. Everyone wants to be able to visit one, yet not everyone can. Access to green spaces became a huge inequity among the American people. Land increased in value, making it accessible to a select few. This fact drastically effected the way certain demographics were taught, how they processed information, and the kind of jobs they believed they could hold.

C. Texas State Parks

Natural-Based Learning in turn was not accessible to all demographics in the United States. If we take the state of Texas as an example, it became apparent to me that a large portion of the community did not have access to this kind of learning. Texas Parks and Wildlife department is charged, similarly to the National Park Service, with the task of preserving the land of Texas in over 90 state parks and natural areas. The partners that I work with as the Texas Children in

Nature AmeriCorps VISTA expressed that when working with Title 1[2] schools in their region

they found teachers and parents simply did not have access to information and lacked a way of

getting out to these natural areas to experience them. My focus then became not on the

perspective shift of understanding WHY we needed nature but on the HOW we needed to

incorporate nature into our everyday lives.

    A study done by associates from Yale, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and DJ Case and

Associates called *The Nature of Americans* (2017) showed us that citizens of Texas were fully

aware that nature had direct health benefits. What they were unaware of was ways in which

nature can be a part of our everyday lives.

    Though the purpose of both the National Park System and Texas State Parks has stayed the

same for decades: to preserve the land for benefit of the human population (National Park

Service, 2018) the way in which they carry out that mission has shifted to include conservation

and education. National Parks are now, quite often, sites for outdoor education programs by

outside organizations or programs conducted by National Park Rangers. Environmental and

conservation education are large pieces of what the National Park Service does as well as Texas

States Parks. They are now realizing the necessity of connecting families to the parklands in this

ever increasing technological world we live in. They have figured out that if they want the

human population to help care for the lands that are not protected by the National Parks Service

or Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, but are just as important, there needs to be an

investment on the part of the average American, to protect the land, which happens when there is

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[2] Title 1- Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. (U.S Department of Education)

a deep and personal connection. No longer can the National Park Service conserve the land on their own. There is a need for a team of dedicated individuals and groups coming from non-profits, businesses, and educational institutions. Collaboration is key in order for the National Parks Service and other conservation organizations to succeed in carrying out their missions of preserving the land for the next generation.

COLLABORATION

Collective Impact

If we look at the concept of collective impact we can see clearly, that collaboration is imperative in building communities and creating the kind of impact that most organizations only dream of making. While this capstone explores the benefits of utilizing nature-based trainings to develop collaboration within organizations that have different focuses but are fundamentally trying to accomplish the same goal, the Texas Children in Nature Network will be the focus. There will be an analysis of how the network functions, its perceived impact by the community, and its focus on delivering its mission.

Collective Impact is defined as a framework that attempts to work on solving, "large-scale social problems that require broad cross-sector coordination" (Kania & Kramer, 2011). The basic idea is that in order to achieve lasting change on a wide-spread social issue, there needs to be efforts made by groups or individuals representing all sectors in a community. The more complex description of collective impact includes five conditions that are said to create collective success. Kania and Kramer address these five conditions in their article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review. The first condition being "a common agenda", then "shared measurement systems", "mutually reinforcing activities", "continuous communication" and lastly, a "backbone support organization".

A Common Agenda

The common agenda is meant to ensure that all organizations involved in a movement are working towards the same goal. Take the Texas Children in Nature (TCiN) Network for example. Those that participate in the TCiN Network all have the common agenda of connecting kids and their families to the outdoors. Each organization may differ on one, how they accomplish this mission and two, the target audience. The most common target audience for the children and nature movement are at risk communities or at risk youth, however there are organizations that work on connecting upper middle class communities to nature. These kids may have access to the outdoors, but they do not interact with it. When we examine the children in nature movement, there are two main focus groups, low income areas that have little access to green spaces, and upper middle class and beyond, communities that have plenty of access to the outdoors but also have access to advanced technology that often deters them from interacting with their green spaces. It does not matter which group these organizations work with, what does matter is the common agenda of helping kids and their families make meaningful and personal connections with nature, which is believed and proven to improve their physical, emotional, and mental health.

Shared Measurement Systems

Kania and Kramer (2011) describe the shared measurement system in simple terms. The organizations participating in the movement must agree to evaluate and measure their success on the same terms and by using the same systems. Kania and Kramer also recognize that though, ten years ago this may have seemed impossible, advanced technology and web software allow us to share and evaluate information in a more uniformed way allowing us to measure success and

failures in a way that gives us an accurate idea of well we are accomplishing our goals and how sustainable our programs are.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities

Mutually reinforcing activities can become complex. For example, in the Texas Children and Nature Network, each organization has mildly different programs, that although they have a common agenda, can have different outcomes. This strategy is perfectly fine and preferred even when discussing collective impact. One might become muddled in this arena by wondering how a variety of outcomes can be conducive to reaching a common goal. The idea of collective impact requires diverse solutions and activities. Activities become mutually reinforcing when they are providing diverse solutions yet are still focused on the common agenda and are being measured by the shard measurement systems. An example of the shared measurement system in Texas is the strategic plan set forth by the Texas Children in Nature Network that was put forth by the steering committee at the networks inception. The strategic plan acts as a way for each member of the network to evaluate which goals they are and are not meeting. Another system of measurement that the Texas Children and Nature Network has implemented is the Gap Analysis (Figure 3). The gap analysis allows members to evaluate themselves specifically on one goal, which is to reach underserved populations in that state. The Gap Analysis shows a map of each member organization, their location and the county that they reside or serve in. Tools such as the Gap Analysis are meant to have a universal and unifying design so that the collective can evaluate their impact by the same standards. Evaluation methods are imperative to collective impact. As trainers and agents of change we want change in practices and attitudes to be sustainable, meaning they last beyond the immediate results of the program. Collective impact can help us in avoiding the negative impacts of social justice work, which include serving a

community without leaving behind a sustainable legacy that is able to be carried on by the community, leaving the recipients with pieces of a solution with no way of putting them together.

NATURE, COMPASSION, AND COLLABORATION: HOW IT ALL CONNECTS

At the University of Rochester, three researchers conducted four studies that analyzed the effects nature has on the human value system. The studies looked at intrinsic[3] and extrinsic aspirations[4] which differentiate between value on meaningful relationships, and personal growth (intrinsic) and a value on wealth and image (extrinsic) (Self Determination Theory, 2018). The study also worked to determine whether or not nature immersion influenced which value system humans leaned towards. What was discovered was that nature did in fact determine which type of value system people based their actions off of. The general results from all four studies were as follows: Those more immersed in naturals settings were more generous, whereas those immersed in non-natural settings were less likely to give" (Weinstein, Przybylski and Ryan, 2009). All studies indicated that participants exposed to nature valued intrinsic goals more than extrinsic goals. Another result showed the:

> "immersion did not affect reports of intrinsic aspirations for those exposed to non-nature environments, and it actually predicted higher valuing of extrinsic aspirations. Overall, these results are interesting because they suggest that nature which is inherently unrelated to human intervention, brings people closer to one another…" (2009)

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[3] Intrinsic aspirations- reflect prosocial and other-focused value orientations

[4] Extrinsic aspirations- reflect self-focused value orientations.

It is evident through these studies that nature has an effect on the level of compassion citizens exhibit. Here we link compassion with intrinsic aspirations. Intrinsic aspirations were linked with terms such as generosity, selflessness, and kindness. If compassion is defined as "a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for other people's suffering or bad luck and a desire to help" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2018) than we can state that generosity, selflessness and kindness are often ways in which people act compassionate to fulfill their intrinsic aspirations.

If we then analyze the qualities of a person who exhibits compassionate behavior, we may then begin describing such a person, as "in touch with other's feelings, "able to communicate how they, themselves, are feeling" or we might describe them as empathetic individuals. Empathy is not the same as compassion, though closely related. Empathy can be defined as "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another either past or present…" (Merriam Webster, 2018). Empathy is the action that compassionate people take in order to fulfill their desire to help those in need.

Often times this is where collaboration comes in, though not always. Collaboration can take place in any field or workplace. However, while we are specifically looking at the collaborative efforts of the Texas Children in Nature movement, we can gather that the individuals involved in collaborating are compassionate towards families that do not have access to nature and therefore, want to practice empathy by providing opportunities for families to get outdoors. Thus, we can connect compassion as a key factor in collaborating. RISE Beyond, a collaboration consultant organization, states that there are six skills are needed for effective collaboration. Those six skills include: communication, tolerance, authenticity, compromise, teamwork, and reliability (Wood, 2017).

Compassionate individuals are inherently authentic and tolerant. Being able to feel sympathy, empathy or compassion requires a sense of self and understanding of how one's actions can effect another. Being compassionate will also mean that you also possess an understanding of circumstances and individuals who are different from yourself. These self-reflective and understanding qualities will help groups greatly when working collaboratively. If we are thinking about collaboration within a grass roots movement that is working towards sustainable change in their community, then insights from a diverse selection of organizations, and individuals is necessary.

Once an organization has discovered the connection between skills for collaboration and qualities of a compassionate person they can think about ways in which to lead their staff and volunteers in developing said skills. The purpose of this paper is to determine that nature and experiences in nature, are a valid and effective ways to help professionals develop compassion and collaboration skills that can then be applied in their everyday work. The necessity for applying our collaboration skills and compassionate qualities in the work place is so we may create sustainable communities which are built on investment by ALL community members and input from a diverse group of individuals that accurately represents the concerns and priorities of that specific community.

If you have ever been camping, or simply gotten lost in a park on your way home from school you will be able to identify the relevancy of the six skills of collaboration in being outdoors. For example, finding your way home (without a GPS) requires tolerance, compromise, and communication. Maybe a person or two within the group thinks home is in one direction and the rest think home is in the opposite direction. Compromising on who might lead the way, can

make the trip longer, but also can lead you in the right direction if multiple people remember a variety of indicators that point your group in the right direction.

Growing a garden requires, reliability and teamwork. Imagine a group is experimenting with growing a garden. Teamwork is required for several tasks such as sowing and tilling the soiling, digging holes, and planting seeds, all of which are hard work, made easier when done in groups. Every gardener must cultivate a sense of reliability. If they do not water the garden, it will not grow which can be used as a metaphorical representation of the workplace. One must become reliable in order to foster a healthy work environment that will ultimately grow their business, staff, and program.

Lastly, authenticity shines through in nature in almost all situations. In order to be successful with a group out in nature where you may be facing challenging obstacles or situations, your authentic self must be present. When exploring natural environments there is a certain level of trust needed. If the participating individuals behave authentically the larger amounts of trust will be cultivated.

Our natural environment, provides us with a platform that authentically develops these skills and qualities, more so than experiences that are inside an office space or done over online platforms. As a trainer for the Texas Children in Nature Network I struggled to find the equilibrium in providing nature-based trainings and online content. Texas is a large state that requires time and money to traverse which were resources not readily available to me. I found myself coming up with nature-based workshops or professional development opportunities but being asked to provide webinars or trainer guides as replacements to in person trainings. As a trainer, I work with the philosophy that I must "practice what I preach" meaning, if I was going to encourage my partners to partake in nature-based professional development opportunities then

I need to provide such opportunities. I discovered a way to combat this disconnect between my trainer philosophy and my job tasks by creating a *Culturally Relevant Nature Educator Guide* (Appendix B). The guide will serve as a resource for nature educators to engage a more diverse community in their programs that way educators will have a guide to creating programs that are nature-based and relevant to their target audience.

In nature, professionals are able to be physically, mentally, and emotionally present while developing these skills. The concept of active, and experiential learning is what the Children in Nature movement is encouraging through their programs because children also benefit greatly from developing the skills described above, but how exactly do they do it, on a global and statewide level? This next section will dive deeper into the practices of the Children in Nature Network as a global leader in the movement and that Texas Children in Nature Network as a statewide champion of nature. The study will examine strategies and observations to determine the effectiveness of collaboration on both accounts.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CHILDREN IN NATURE MOVEMENT

The Children in Nature Global Movement

The Texas Children in Nature Network is considered a collaborative effort in getting kids and their families outdoors. The idea behind this statewide network in Texas stems from the global movement that is led by the Children and Nature Network (C&NN). C&NN was founded after Richard Louv published his book "The Last Child in the Woods" by Louv himself, Cheryl Charles, Martha Farrell Erickson, Martin LeBlanc, Michael Pertschuk and Amy Pertschuk. This co-founding paved the way for the establishment of a network rather than one single foundation that provided a single service. The Children and Nature Network has offered a prime example of

the collective impact model with their creation of a global network of organizations and people that have a common agenda of connecting children and their families to nature.

The techniques that the Children and Nature Network use in building capacity among the partner members are through training and research, two important elements in creating sustainable movements. Training allows the movement to be carried on by giving the community members the tools to have autonomy over the movement and how it pertains to their own community issues. There is no such thing as a one size fit all approach when it comes to creating sustainable communities. Therefore, training allows the mission of the movement to be handed down by generations while still adapting with the current societal issues. The children in nature movement lends itself to this quality especially because those involved hold the belief that the community is healthier when more involved in nature but what that looks like exactly is purposely left undefined.

In the technological age that we live in, finding research can be easy but it is still daunting. Typing in a single phrase allows us to peruse a plethora of results. The C&NN website has compiled an online research library with articles that have been written by scholars in the cross sections of nature. The cross sections of nature may include: health and nature, the economy and nature, education and nature, business and nature and the built environment and nature. The research is open to the public so that the community may inform themselves and those they work with. The purpose of the research library is to advance the evidence base for moving the children and nature movement forward and creating investment in the issue. It is often found that in order for change to be sustainable there needs to be a sense of investment from all members of the community, but especially those with decision making power such as our senators, and mayors. "It's important that collaboration be as inclusive as possible. This

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means individuals from different parts of the community for example, representatives from schools, businesses, and the government" (Community Toolbox, 2017). The people from these sectors that hold the power to initiate change are typically most interested in data, results, and facts that can be tangibly proved.

The Network was founded in 2006 and since its inception has built an investment in their mission which has sustained them through the process of building their tangible products such as the Natural Leader trainings and their research library. These resources are provided for individuals beyond the network to ensure that all have access to opportunities and knowledge centered around our environment.

The Children in Nature Network was able to evolve into an international movement due to its tangible products and ever evolving systems of knowledge. The Children in Nature Network has been able to adapt to the current issues facing the environment and our communities. They provide relevant and broad information. The articles that they present are a comprehensive compilation from the field but they are also representative of a wide range of communities, issues, and groups of people. The breadth and depth of the movement is what draws in investment and care from a large amount of people. When thinking about social movements that are aiming to change the attitudes of society and effect lasting change, the main concern would be to create a sense of investment from the whole community. As history will tell us, positive and effective change cannot sustain itself on the beliefs of just a few. Sustainable change occurs when organizations participate in collective impact practices. As stated earlier, collective impact, is important to a social movement because it works to engage all members of the community in meaningful and mutually reinforcing activities. The most effective way to build connection and compassion within a community is to ensure that all involved can

understand how our mission benefits their bottom line. Mutually reassuring benefits can range from economic growth, health and well-being, and creating a community that is safe and thriving for children to be raised in.

Texas Children in Nature Movement

The Texas Children in Nature (TCiN) movement has its roots in the Children and Nature Network international movement. The goal of TCiN is to provide more local and specific information to the residents of the state of Texas. TCiN can dive deeper into the environmental issues that Texas faces than the Children in Nature Network can. There is a specific niche that can be filled by TCiN, which it has thus far done successfully. Since its beginning in 2013 the network has grown to over three hundred collaborating partners over eight regions throughout the state of Texas. Texas is unique in its biodiversity that ranges from the tropical coast, to the dry land of the Caprock region in north Texas, making the environmental issues vast, and unique depending on what geographic location one has landed in. Increasing the need for a network that is working specifically on connecting Texas children to nature. TCiN based its mission on the proven lack of green space equality within major cities all over Texas. TCiN has found its home within the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department where it is unique to the department with its mission to increase access to green spaces that are not monitored by the State Parks department.

There are over ninety state parks in the state of Texas but the number of parks that are accessible to all Texans is low. The city of San Antonio is home to Government Canyon State Natural area and Houston can claim Sheldon Lake State Park as its own. However, even with a state park within their own city, residents of Houston and San Antonio have expressed either never having heard of the state land, or never having been able to get to the park due to its location on the outskirts of the city, where housing developments and shopping centers have

exploded, but public transportation routes have not. Texas Children in Nature promotes what they call "near-by nature". They are encouraging families to interact with ALL nature (city parks, backyards, and creeks) not just what media today has portrayed as the holy grail of mother nature, national and state parks. TCiN recognizes that both are equally as important for communities in developing their sense of environmental stewardship but the current portrayal and advertisement of nature does not exhibit that. Instead, nature is seen as space made for the enjoyment of the few not the many (DJ Case and Associates, 2017) If nature is a wild, faraway place, then how can we expect families that live in apartments on a busy city street, surrounded by concrete and traffic lights, to feel at home in nature? This is exactly the niche that TCiN fills within the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Much like the Children in Nature Network, TCiN serves as a facilitator and distributor of information and resources. Currently, TCiN is developing and working on three projects that fulfill this need in the community. There is the Campus Campout project, OLE! Texas (Outdoor Learning Environments) and the revamping of the Nature Rocks Texas website.

Campus Campouts

This project will provide community members with a guide on how to host their own Campus Campout at their facility. This individual could be a teacher, church leader, or parent. The guide is meant to act as a tool for interested "nature champions" as they are sometimes called, so that they may adapt a common program to fit the needs of their community. Research has shown that the most common barrier of getting kids outside is the fear of the unknown (DJ Case and Associates, 2017). Teachers and parents no longer have the knowledge that would allow them to comfortably and confidently lead their children in outdoor based activities. The interest is present; the knowledge is not. This lack of nature knowledge is a result of increased

time spent in the virtual world, and unequal distribution of resources to lower income communities (Louv, 2005).

The Texas Children in Nature Network recognizes the disparities and has created the trainer guide to help alleviate the problem. It is one step among many to come in getting children reconnected with their natural environment. The trainer guide will provide information on outdoor activities such as camping, event planning procedures, and outdoor safety tips in hopes to instill the belief that anyone can get out in nature.

OLE Texas!

The Outdoor Learning Environments (OLE!) in Texas project is a collaborative effort between Texas Children in Nature, Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Department of State Health Services. The premise behind this project is that "nature play" creates mentally and physically healthier children. The roots of this project lie in the Natural Learning Initiative (NLI) at North Carolina State University, where researchers, and architects alike are collaborating in order to build play areas for children that are based on their natural environment made with natural materials in hopes to instill a love of nature and unstructured play, which in turn will improve physical, social and emotional development in today's children. OLE! Texas is again, filling the need for information and knowledge on the health benefits of nature and providing guides and trainings for community members that want to see these Outdoor Learning Environments built in their area. OLE! Texas, through examples from the Natural Learning Initiative, are providing trainings for community members and architects in building outdoor learning environments. These trainings are based off of the principles put forth by NLI in North Carolina which are supported by research and data that proves certain design aspects we see in nature, can improve motor functioning and problem solving skills OLE! Texas is rapidly growing in the state of

Texas with four demonstration sites from Lubbock all the way down to Houston. As residents become informed and witness these demonstration sites being built more and more, they are pushing for outdoor learning environments to be built in their own schools, churches, parks, and childcare centers. The main focus for OLE! Texas are early childhood care centers, where research shows, that a connection with nature is imperative to early childhood growth and development (Natural Learning Institute, 2018). As the Campus Campout project does, OLE! Texas provides resources, guides, and tangible examples that community members can explore and adapt for the specific needs of their environment.

Nature Rocks Texas

Nature Rocks Texas is a website that runs in conjunction with the Texas Children in Nature main web page. Essentially, Nature Rock Texas catalogs almost all green spaces in the state of Texas and it continues to grow as the team members and partners grow in number. The site also acts as a catalog of nature-based activities for families and kids. Activities listed on the site can be anywhere from nature hikes to family workshops. TCiN Partners have the ability to update the website to include their own green space and programming. This allows the partners to increase online traffic to their own website as well as raise awareness for their space, mission, and programs. The Nature Rocks site provides as much information that is available on an activity and green space in order to create a comfortable situation for parents to take their children outdoors. If fear of the unknown is the issue we face, then providing families with information on what to expect when they decide to venture out to a new park or nature center is necessary. The Nature Rocks website aims to fill in the gaps on citizen knowledge of green spaces in Texas and activity preparation for parents.

The Necessity of Accessibility, Variety, and Adaptability

The efforts described above have been successful for three reasons: accessibility, variety, and adaptability, all concepts that are a necessity in providing effective and relevant programs.

Accessibility- as a whole, these three projects can be accessed by a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds, and in universal formats. Marketing material for TCiN projects is translated into Spanish, making the information accessible to the 85 percent of Texas residents that speak Spanish (Texas Tribune, 2015). The two other projects, OLE! and Campus Campouts can be accessed online or in PDF formats that are able to be printed out and distributed as partners see fit. A principle of universal design requires that information and materials be able to be accessed in multiple formats, ensuring that all interested individuals can benefit from the resources even if they lack on form of access.

Variety- OLE! Texas represents the built environment, Nature Rocks represents the media, and Campus Campouts represents the community. Variety in resources and projects in an initiative such as connecting children to nature is imperative when it comes to creating a sense autonomy for community members. TCiN recognizes and promotes the idea that there is not a single solution to the lack of nature connection dilemma and that collaboration is key in this movement.

Adaptability- Adaptability is important for a social justice movement such as this one. The reason being, as has been stated before, that there is not one solution that fits all. Within a social justice movement there may be sub- issues being addressed. For example, within the connecting children to nature movement, the Rio Grande Valley region in Texas is concerned with food and nutrition, while Houston is concerned with access to local parks and green infrastructure and San Antonio is concerned about public transportation as a solution to increase access to parks on the outskirts of the city. With a range of social issues within a statewide

movement the materials being provided and information being distributed needs to be adaptable

to the specific needs of any given community. Meaning general and unspecific instructions work

best, which is exactly what the Campus Campout and OLE! Texas projects do. Each provides

necessary information in a way that allows community organizers and facilitators to adapt it

based on the expressed needs of their own community.

A TRAINER LENS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELF-IMPROVEMENT

Lessons Learned as a Reflective Practitioner

As a trainer within the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) I have found

myself challenged by the attitudes of those within the many divisions of the department and by

the limitations that surround the agency as a government entity. Texas Parks and Wildlife

Department has an overwhelmingly white, male workforce. The agency has departments that

span from community outreach, hunter education and State Parks. Their mission presents their

purpose as "to manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide

opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations." (Texas Parks and

Wildlife Department 2018). The first part of this mission statement that addresses natural and

cultural resources is where I position myself as a trainer. My goal as a trainer in this context is to

enhance the experiences of youth in nature by helping to develop compassion among the adults

of their community.

It has become apparent to me through observation and conversation that not all adults that

are working to connect children and their families with nature are prepared to be culturally

relevant. As we think about cultural resources, and what that denotes, we can see that cultural

resources may be differently defined dependent upon where one is situated within the context of

culture. For Texas Parks and Wildlife, culture is natural history, artifacts within State Parks, and

historical landmarks. For me as a trainer, cultural resources are based on the variety of cultures that exists within the Texas community and how they interact with the land. We know that Latino Texas residents surpass the number of white residents in the state of Texas. We also know that Texas has a rich history of Hispanic culture. Looking at cultural resources from this perspective can often times put me on opposing sides of other Texas Parks and Wildlife employees who are concerned with preserving the current state of the Texas environment both socially and environmentally. Due to these particular circumstances in my professional setting I have identified three main concepts that must be present when creating our ecology of hope.

Lesson #1: Diplomacy is Key

This concept nearly seems self-explanatory. However, I mention it as my first lesson learned because of its importance and difficulty in being carried out. Diplomacy is a term that many understand as being important however, actually being diplomatic can take years of practice and large amounts of patience. Personally and professionally I have not encountered many people that I would consider diplomatic therefore, I have had to observe what I consider to be non-diplomatic behavior and form my own definition of the term. If we look at the definition of "diplomatic" in the Merriam Webster dictionary it will lead us to the term "tact" which may be able to more closely describe exactly what it takes to be diplomatic. "Tact" is defined as a "keen sense of what to do or say in order to maintain good relations with others or avoid offense." Tact, when used in the right circumstances can help to further create and increase the number of individuals or groups that are on board with the change you are attempting to initiate.

If I were to throw tact and diplomacy aside when working with groups in the state of Texas whom I am trying to gain investment from in the children in nature movement, I would not be as successful. An anecdote that proves such a statement occurred at a meeting I attended

for employees that deal with outreach and education. A colleague spoke up about his concerns on the focus that is being put on minority youth in Texas Parks and Wildlife Department careers. His concerns, he stated, stemmed from his experience as a young man going through the process and being rejected from positions only to realize that the position had been filled by either a woman or person of color. This man was expressing what he felt to be a wrong doing based on his own personal experiences. Those that responded to this man, responded with facts and figures about the actual numbers that exist on the percent of white males hired by the agency as well as acknowledging his experience without validating it. This single individual is not the spokesperson for TPWD however, he is an embodiment of the perspectives that needs to shift in order to create our ecology of hope on a global scale.

In thinking about how I would approach this man if deemed appropriate, led me to examine my own adeptness at being diplomatic. I gleaned from the responses of those who did address this man's concerns, specific strategies and skills that can be useful in being professional when dealing with opinions that differ from your own. Such strategies included, tone, facts, and recognition of opinions, all of which played a part in communicating clearly with this employee that TPWD will continue to pursue the involvement of minority groups in the career track as well as other populations. The skills that my colleagues exhibited were reminiscent of the theories I studied in our Foundation courses at SIT that focused on intercultural communications and a multicultural workforce. Tirmiz, a professor at SIT, writes in his text, *Effective Multicultural Teams* (2008)*,* that *"*management and leadership of multicultural teams involves effectively and creatively dealing with a variety of challenges that emerge as people from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other to accomplish the team task" (Tirmizi, p. 2). Though the TPWD team was not necessarily diverse in culture, or ethnicity, it was diverse in thought. The

same skills Tirmizi promotes in his book, apply in this case because, dealing with diversity of thought can be even more challenging. Our thoughts are not visible and often times not known by others on our team until we verbally express them as this man did. Therefore, I realized through my observations at this meeting, creativity is key in working with diversity of thought. Thoughts need to be gently made visible so that we may address, acknowledge, and deal with them.

Lesson #2: Training Requires a Compassionate Heart

This section is where I see compassion, nature and training interweaving. As a trainer I know that I need to have a compassionate heart for all people I interact with if I am going to train others on the topic and put forth the idea that compassion can help us create sustainable communities. What I have found through my position as the AmeriCorps VISTA with Texas Children in Nature is the difference between providing a service because it is a skill that you possess that you want to share with your community and providing a service or program because you believe that all people in your community deserve the access to or the capacity to partake in it. Through observations of Texas Children in Nature meetings that are comprised of partners from all eight regional collaborative, I have been able to witness the manifestation of this difference. For example, I have seen individuals that, though their intentions are good, struggle to connect their programs with the community, because of their lack of empathy and ability to connect their own positionality within the context of an under-served community.

The experience I have had working with upper middle class individuals that are working to connect families to nature has brought my attention back to the speech written by Ivan Illich, a catholic priest who expresses the misunderstandings that occur when we focus solely on our "good intentions". Illich expresses in his speech to teens about to embark on service learning

trips that despite our good intentions, the students have no common ground on which to stand with those they believe themselves to be serving. Illich says, "I am here to challenge you to recognize your inability, your powerlessness and your incapacity to do the "good" which you intended to do" (Illich, 1963). He criticizes the romanticizing of the poor in order to make oneself feel selfless. "The third largest North American export is the U.S Idealist" which Illich implies is a naive and self-centered way of thinking about one's own positionality in the world.

As a trainer, I identify with Illich's stance. If I am to be a part of the Texas Children in Nature movement, I must one, have a common ground on which to stand with those that I am working to serve, and two, a compassionate heart for the circumstances of others, not with the intention of simply "doing good" but with the intention of creating sustainable change.

Lesson #3: Collaboration is the Backbone of an Ecology of Hope

The Texas Children in Nature Network is reliant on collaboration. Its' foundation is based on the Collective Impact Model which would not exist if it were not for the belief in the effectiveness of collaboration in creating change that can be sustained by generations to come. Collective Impact is no longer, "just a fancy name for collaboration, but represents a fundamentally different, more disciplined, and higher performing approach to achieving large-scale social impact" (Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer 2012). The large scale social impact that I am addressing in this research and within the Texas Children in Nature movement is the idea that communities that are more connected with their environment locally and globally thrive and have happier, healthier, and smarter citizens.

Our ecology of hope will be consisting of intangible products. Hope itself is an intangible idea, along with trust, happiness, and compassion. What I have learned as a trainer through working with intangibles is that it becomes difficult to create investment in a collective impact

model when the outcomes are intangibles. There are three preconditions that are needed in order for the Collective Impact Model to be successful: "an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency for change" (Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer 2012). For a group of individuals to feel that they can contribute, oftentimes a tangible result is needed in order for organizations to feel comfortable engaging in a social impact movement.

The question I have asked myself as a result is how, as a trainer do I exhibit the benefits of the intangibles to those I want to engage in collaboration? One answer I have found is research. Stakeholders want to engage in research, facts, and examples, of how an intangible idea can improve our community. How can we use available research to spark collaboration? The right research can initiate conversation and interest. Then further express the urgency and need for a social change. This is only the first step in fostering collaboration among your participants, but it may just be the most important. Constance Russell writes in her article about nature experience as a motivator for conservation that caring does not necessarily constitute action, though this is the common belief. (Russell, 1999). In her studies of ecotourism and in particular, whale watchers, Russell found that the path to conservation is not as linear as we may think. Our nature experiences are heavily dependent on our past experiences. We seek out familiar opportunities and ones where we know what to expect. As a trainer, when I look at results such as these I know that part of my job will be to introduce participants to experiences that are unfamiliar to them. To empower them to feel confident in the knowledge and skills that they possess so that they may push their own learning edges when it comes to nature, collaboration, and their own community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE NETWORKS

After a deep analysis of the local and global movements to connect children and their families to nature, three recommendations arose. These recommendations are a product of my observations at regional meetings, TCiN events and workshops, and volunteer meetings. As I observed how other trainers and professionals conduct themselves in meetings and how they approach community outreach I was able to see more clearly the importance of community representation in social movements, the interactive presentation of facts and research, as well as accessibility.

Recommendation # 1: Community Representation

The Texas Children in Nature movement is working to increase access to nature for lower-income families. The families that are the target audience for this movement have little access to nature or their interactions with nature don't hold positive personal connections. The state of Texas is becoming increasingly segregated by economic status as the land becomes developed and more sought after for home buyers. Land can act as a sign of wealth, and for those who live in inner cities, with little green spaces to interact with, they are acutely aware of the inequalities that exist when accessing nature. As we think about social movements such as the connecting children to nature movement, we must also think about who is involved? Who is pushing the movement forward and is the movement relatable to ALL citizens. What we find is the that there are certain demographic groups that are left out of the planning process of social movements based on their economic and geographic circumstances. Abraham Maslow, expresses through his creation of the Hierarchy of Needs pyramid, that in order for humans to reach self-actualization, they must first have access to the basic physiological needs. Many inner city residents, lack the resources to reach self-actualization due to the inequitable systems that exist in the United states. If the individuals that are affected by a lack of nature connection the most

are not able to participate in a social movement because they are still struggling to meet their own physiological needs, then the change we are attempting to create will not be sustainable.

In the novel, "The Adventure Gap" by James Edward Mills, the author states that research now projects, "the US population will consist of a majority of people of color by 2050 at the latest" (Mills, 2014). If this becomes a reality then the majority of white, middle class individuals working to create a change in the field of environmental education, recreation and conservation will no longer have a sustainable solution, which leads me to recommend ensuring the participation of and representation of the local community or the community that is receiving the deliverables of the movement. Thus far, I have seen little to no representation from the lower income communities at regional meetings for TCiN. As an observation this has come to mean that there is either a lack of communication to the targeted audience or there is a lack of interest in the cause from the local community. A lack of interest means community members cannot see how nature can enhance their everyday lives and a lack of communication means that most community members don't even know that there are groups trying to increase their access to the near-by nature.

Recommendation #2: Interactive Presentation of Facts

As the world we live in becomes increasingly more reliant on technology humans are also becoming more visual. This I have learned through my observations and experiences working as a trainer in Texas. Picking up a printed copy of a research journal is no longer the most common mode of gaining information on a particular topic. Instead, there are websites, online journals, and videos that can now provide us with the information that we need. Therefore, as a trainer I have become increasingly more concerned with how to engage my participants in an exciting and meaningful way to create investment in nature and in themselves.

The most relevant example I will provide is my experience with hosting webinars on a website we use called Nature Rocks Texas. The Nature Rocks Texas website is meant to act as an online tool for families to use to find near-by nature and nature-based activities. It is a catalog of almost all green spaces in the state of Texas. As the TCiN AmeriCorps VISTA I have hosted eight webinars that go over the functions and tools available for TCiN partners to utilize in creating and advertising their programs. Throughout this process I have tried to make the online platform engaging, exciting, and relevant, which now leads me to recommend finding ways to present research in a visual and colorful way in an effort to gain the attention of professionals that are busy and often distracted by myriad of other tasks. Building a network requires professionals to dedicate time outside of normal work hours. If this is the case, then as a trainer, I must work to make the movement I am working within relevant and worthwhile.

Recommendation #3: Accessibility

I leave this recommendation as the last because it may be the most important. As we create an accessible social movement the other two recommendations will follow. Accessibility is a broad term that is defined simply, as "capable of being reached" (Merriam Webster, 2018). As a trainer my goal is to take accessibility one step farther, making programs, projects, and social movements not just accessible, but accessible to ALL citizens. This means following the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)[5]. UDL can be applied not just by classroom teachers but by all professionals. UDL allows educators, or program deliverers to be adaptable along with their learners and participants. Adaptability is a skill that can be developed while in

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[5] Universal Design for Learning- a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practices that: provide flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills and in ways students are engaged (Universal Design for Learning Center 2013)

nature, thus the premise that nature-based trainings can improve our collaboration and involvement in the movement to connect children with nature.

I recommend accessibility through UDL because of the observations I have made at meetings, and as I began to develop training materials for educators and parents. I examined the *Campus Campout Trainer Guide* I had helped create after attending a session on UDL at an Informal Science Educator conference in 2018. Following UDL principles I could see that the *Campus Campout Trainer Guide*, though it touched on all outdoor considerations from gear to safety, it was lacking considerations for students who may have physical, emotional, or comprehension differences from their classmates. For example, social narratives[6] are extremely helpful for individuals who struggle with transitions.

Thus far, we are working to make nature more accessible by showing families that they can interact with nature at little to no cost to them but we have not yet addressed accessibility in regards to physical ability. As a trainer I recommend working towards incorporating UDL principles in training materials being provided and the distribution process of knowledge and information. The hope is that by creating more accessible materials and knowledge citizens will become engaged in a more meaningful way because they see that those of us who are delivering programs, are taking into consideration their circumstances and experiences. Accessibility has become a staple in my trainer philosophy, both culturally and physically. From my work at Therapeutic Horseback Riding Ranches in Texas to my efforts to make nature education more culturally relevant, I aim to incorporate UDL principles in all trainings in hopes to work towards being once piece in the puzzle of creating a more sustainable future.

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[6] Social Narratives- visually represented stories that describe social situations and socially appropriate responses and behaviors to help individuals with ASD acquire and use appropriate social skills (Grand Valley State University)

A CONCLUSION TOWARDS A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Through observation, analysis and research it has become clear to me that as a trainer, creating professional development opportunities based in our natural environment can increase our willingness and capability to collaborate on community efforts. Completing tasks while in nature or while facing obstacles that occur in nature require collaborative efforts in a safe and successful way. The environment is constantly changing, requiring individuals who spend time in nature to be adaptable and flexible which are skills and qualities needed for collaboration. This is ultimately why I choose to spend a fair amount of my spare time outside of my professional work. I strongly believe that as a trainer, we must not just "talk the talk" but also "walk the walk" so to speak. I find too often that those advocating for integrating nature into the everyday lives of the community do not practice what they teach. Therefore, I will continue to develop my skills through nature experiences so that I may authentically and confidently become a trainer in collaborative practices, nature education, and compassion.

As I continue to develop my skills in training and experiential learning I am reminded of the questions that influenced my work when I began this practicum. I asked myself "How do I situate myself in the lives of others who have different experiences than my own?", "How do I work on attitudinal change when individuals do not necessarily see the need for such change?" and "How do we translate a statewide movement to a global movement?". The answers to these questions will never be simple or fully answered, however, the work that I have done thus far as an AmeriCorps VISTA in Texas has deepened my understanding of why I had these questions and how I might continue to work towards answering them. I realized that as a reflective practitioner I have developed a sense of self-awareness that allowed me to become sensitive to my own positionality within my own community and those communities that I do not call my

own. I found that listening was a productive way to situate myself in a new community.

Listening to their stories, their conversations and observing how they interact with one another

and their environment. Listening then leads to my second question, what if the people I am

listening to do not want to listen to me? What if, the people of the community do not see the

need for change but agree that they are suffering? I discovered a possible way to cope with this

close-minded mind set through chance. I was having conversation as part of an interview with

the Texas Parks and Wildlife radio show when the interviewer asked, "How do you tell people

that do not see the correlation between nature and positive health outcomes?" My immediate

answer was "Well we don't tell, we show". As a trainer that has a propensity for experiential

learning methods and who is a dynamic learner herself, it was a natural response, however I

realized how important the "show don't tell" philosophy was to my development as a trainer. If I

continue to showcase meaningful connections with humans and positive outcomes from being

connected with nature, then I might just be able to insight a statewide effort into a global one.

There is merit in grassroots movements growing larger, growing into international ones. But this

cannot be done alone. As a trainer I must build my own network, my own collaborations where

we show those us around us the value of the environment and compassionate human connection.

In order to work towards a more sustainable and compassionate future, ALL people must see

themselves represented and supported in society.

As we strive to build communities that are sustainable both environmentally and socially, we

must think about how to engage all citizens in meaningful discussions on what a sustainable

community looks like in hopes to create a global ecology of hope. Each community's Ecology of

Hope may look, feel, and sound different. The ways in which we strive towards a sustainable

future will differ and change as we grow as individuals and as a society, but what will be

important for us to continue to cultivate is hope. We must be the keepers of hope within

ourselves, each other, and our environment. Hope and compassion which, can be developed

through nature, will lead us to building sustainable communities in the future.

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APPENDIX A: FIGURES

FIGURE 1: COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Collective Impact Pyramid (Kania and Kramer 2011)

FIGURE 2: CHILD AND ADULT LEARNING

Point	Child	Adults
Readiness to learn	They are ready to learn what teacher's teach them . They must learn if they want pass the exam.	Adult become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do it in order to cope effectively with their real life situation
Orientation to learning	Subject matter oriented – Therefore learning experience are organize according to logic of subject matter content	They are task centered or problem centered (life center) .motivated to learn something extent that they perceive that it will help them perform task or deal problem that they confronted their life
Motivation	Only external motivators – Grades/Parent pressure /Teachers approval	External motivators – Better jobs, promotions , Salaries Internal motivators – Self esteem, Job knowledge

Child and Adult Learning Differences (Sanjeewa 2011).

FIGURE 3: Gap analysis
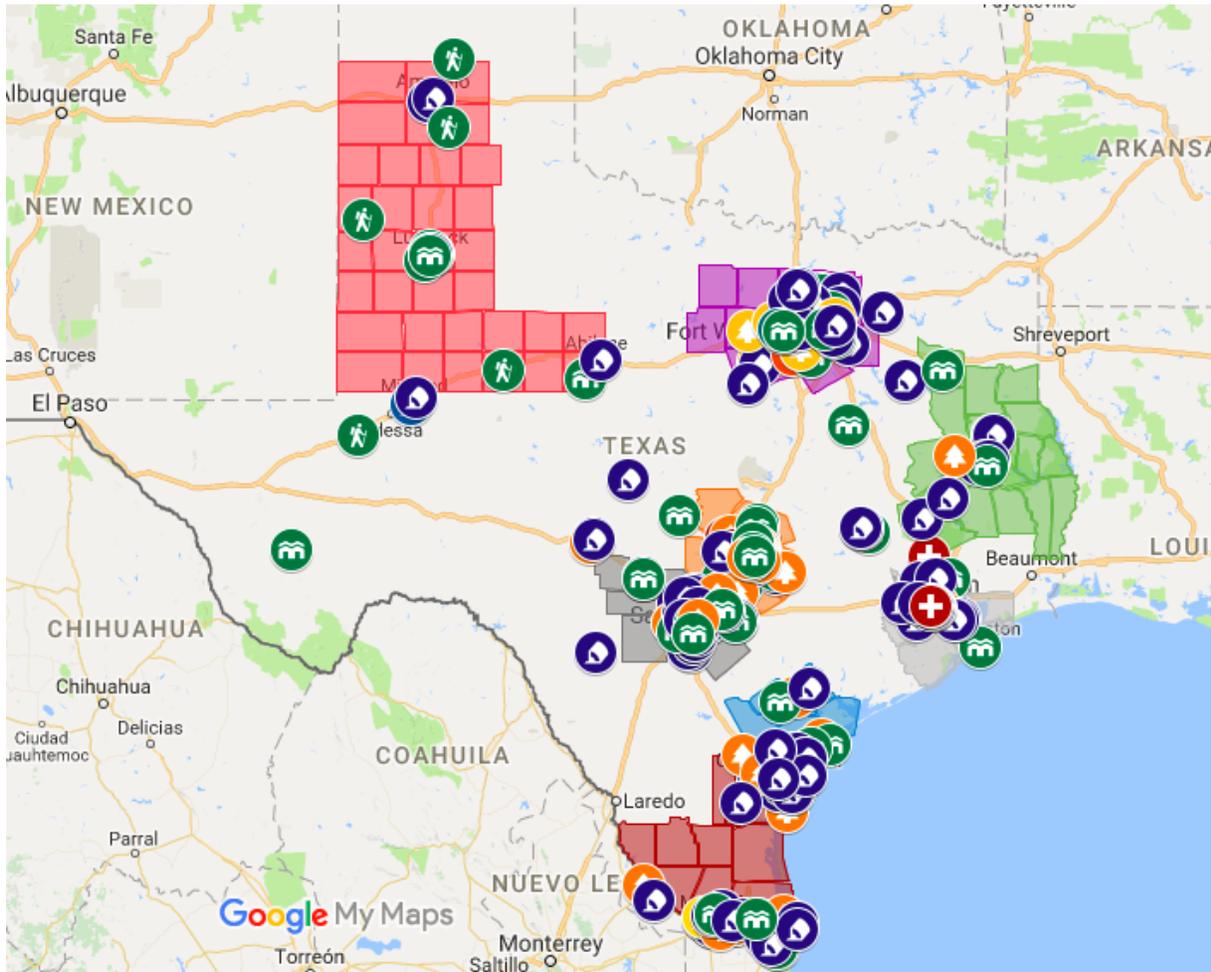
Texas Children in Nature Gap Analysis (Blakely and Herz 2018)

Texas Children in Nature- Becoming a Culturally Relevant Nature Educator

Introduction

"Broadly speaking, CRE is a way of teaching that empowers students and incorporates their cultures, backgrounds, and experiences into the school environment and classroom activities." (Steinhardt). Often times we hear CRE when referring to teaching practices in the public school system. However, this guide will address the need for CRE in informal educational settings, focused on nature and the environment.

As a network working to make a collective impact in the Texas community we want to fill in the gaps that we see and that have been reported in the effort of connecting children to nature. The *Nature of Americans Study* that was conducted by a collaborative group of environment and research experts gave us insight into the view Americans had of their interaction with the environment. After examining the results from the *Nature of Americans Study,* it was found that the relationship between Americans and nature is "nuanced and complex". The study encourages us to "question the one size fits-all" approach when thinking about nature connection.

Therefore, CRE can be introduced as one of many solutions in getting more Texas citizens outdoors: playing, exploring, and ultimately connecting with nature. CRE provides a framework for educators, and other nature enthusiasts to be able to create relatable nature experiences for ALL Texas residents.

Throughout this guide you will find narrative, and illustrative examples of how other nature educators have participated in CRE and the results of their efforts along with resources such as articles, websites, and an activity guide to help guide you in becoming a more culturally relevant Nature Educator.

Section 1: Understanding Culture and How it Relates to Nature

As individuals dedicated to getting kids and their families outdoors we must consider how becoming culturally competent can aid us in providing effective programs. Becoming culturally competent will allow you to: create more investment from the local community, create sustainable programs, and have a higher impact. In this next section you will find three examples of organizations in the U.S that provide culturally relevant nature programs. You can dive deeper into their strategies by visiting their websites.

Organizations #1: Latino Outdoors
The Latino Outdoors' mission is to bring "*cultura* into the outdoor narrative and to connect *familias* and youth with nature". They recognize that the Latino community lacks access to natural spaces yet they typically have a cultural connection the the land. Latino Outdoors provides culturally relevant nature education to Latino youth and families through programs that

allow them to connect with ancestral history with the land and their current relationship with the nature in their own community. Latino outdoors works to recognize the cultural significance of the natural world within their cultural identity. Their programs "honor the rich storytelling traditions of the Latino community."

*Latino Outdoors is a program based in San Francisco California, however; there are volunteers and field staff based in Texas that organize programs and events for the Latino community in Texas.

Contact Information: http://latinooutdoors.org/
Josie Gutierrez, San Antonio Program Coordinator

Organization #2: Hispanic Access Foundation
The Hispanic Access Foundation recognizes that Hispanics in the U.S severely lack access to natural spaces yet they still have a strong sense of conservation and desire to protect public lands. Hispanics are disproportionately affected by environmental pollution. "Latinos are 165% more likely to live in U.S counties with unhealthy levels of air pollution, unsafe drinking water, and mercury contamination." The Hispanic Foundation makes the connection that a healthy environment leads to a healthy community therefore they provide programs for Latino youth to engage with nature in a culturally relevant ways. For example, the Hispanic Access Foundation has engaged the community in conservation efforts along the Colorado River, recognizing that many Latino communities rely on the river as a natural resource. By engaging this group in conservation efforts they are gaining autonomy over an environmental issue that affects their daily lives.

*The Hispanic Access Foundation is based out of Washington D.C however; they serve Latino communities all over the country and have a team of field staff.

Contact Information: https://www.hispanicaccess.org/

Organization #3: Urban Roots
Urban Roots Youth Farm in Austin, Texas has become a staple within the community. As the only youth farm in the city of Austin, the work that Urban Roots is doing is unique. They have taken something that is a huge part of culture, and turned it into a vehicle for change and engagement. Youth that come to the farm to work and volunteer are able to engage with the land and grow their own produce. They are witness to the product of hard work and through that gain a sense of connectedness to the world that they live in. Food can teach us many lessons on nature and our environment. Food requires us to understand water, weather, and ecology and through lessons on these topics the youth at Urban Roots are connecting the natural world with their culture and how food is represented in it. Urban Roots youth can take the skills and knowledge the gain at the farm and bring it into their homes through cooking meals and gathering with family and friends.

Contact Information: http://urbanrootsatx.org/

Section 2: Resources to Get You on Your way

#1 Creating Inclusive Excellence: A Model for Culturally Relevant Teacher Education
Summary

With cultural relevance becoming increasingly important in the education field faculty from the University of Illinois and Ohio University set out to develop a model for culturally relevant teacher education. The study was driven by the the results of the researchers efforts to map the urgency of culturally relevant teacher education which found that 63 % of the U.S population is white though researchers suggest that those numbers will flip in the next 40 years and the majority of teachers in the U.S are also white. These numbers demonstrate the need for teachers to be equipped with the skills to provide culturally relevant education. The study found that two themes emerged through the workshops and conferences they conducted: 1. Critical awareness and 2. Acquisition of culturally relevant teaching strategies and tools. Teachers expressed they realized the importance of reflecting on their own positionality within their classroom among their students. It also became evident that there was a need for ongoing professional development in culturally relevant teaching. Though this study focuses on public schools and teachers it can be adapted to the environmental education field because environmental educators need to consider the concept of being culturally relevant in order to create meaningful connections between the community and nature.

Everett, S., & Grey, T. G. (2016). Creating inclusive excellence: A model for culturally relevant
         teacher education. *Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals*, *4*(2), 72-88.

#2 Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
Summary

Gloria Ladson-Billings from the University of Wisconsin Madison explores culturally relevant terms and techniques used by communities in the United States, including Hawaii, and Alaska, where teachers are working with predominantly native children. She explores terms such as "culturally competent" , "culturally appropriate, "culturally congruent," etc. The focus of this research is predominantly on the use of language in creating culturally relevant interactions and material for the classroom. Ladson-Billing cites other researches like Erickson and Mohatt who see culturally relevant teaching as bridging the gap between home and school. This research also addresses the issue of credibility, realizing that individuals are seen as more credible when they have experienced the topic of discussion directly. Ladson-Billing found in her observations of teachers of African American students that the teachers believed their students were capable, saw their pedagogy as an art, saw themselves as community members and saw teaching as a way to give back, they also began to use the student's own community as a basis for their lessons, which is now often termed as place-based learning or problem solving. Also identified in this study was the attitude culturally relevant teachers had towards knowledge and what they believed it to be. In regards to cultural relevance, knowledge is not static, it must be scaffolded and critically analyzed.

Ladson-Billing, Gloria. "*Toward a Theory of Culturally relevant Pedagogy.*" American
         Educational Research Journal 1995.

#3 Problematizing Nature Experience in Environmental Education: The Interrelationship of Experience and Story
Summary

No longer can we think about nature experience as a linear way to solve our conservation issues. Constance L. Russell, in her article on Problematizing nature experience, examines the field of environmental education and how we perceive it to be a way of connecting communities to nature. She

examines the common perspective that nature experience leads to a sense of caring which then leads to taking action. Russell has studied ecotourism and the whale watching industry to see if the having those up close nature experiences have made a difference in the amount of people dedicated to the a particular conservation cause. What was found, was the connection experience has with storytelling. Our experiences lead us to develop narratives and then influence us to seek out similar experiences. It is a recursive connection that defines how we see and connect with nature. Russell takes this problematization of nature experience and relates it to urban environmental education and connection where a common perception is that urban youth are not seen as having the capacity to become conversationalists. Because urban youth experience may not experience the "wildness of nature" they can be deterred from seeking out experiences that do not reinforce their perceptions of themselves. Russell suggests that we "move away from a linear model of the role of nature experience in environmental education."

Russell, C. L. (1999). Problematizing nature experience in environmental education: The
        interrelationship of experience and story. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *22*(3), 123-137.

#4 Culturally Relevant Schooling in Science for Indigenous Learners Worldwide
Summary

This chapter from the *Handbook on Research in Science Education* addresses the disparities that have been found among indigenous students within the field of science and math. STEM is a buzzword that is being used to emphasize the importance of encouraging students to pursue careers as engineers, scientists, mathematicians and technology gurus. However, what researchers have found is this; although we are focusing on STEM, there is low representation of indigenous students that are pursuing higher leveled science and math classes compared to their non indigenous counterparts. The chapter summarizes qualities of both forms of knowledge (WMS and IKW) and analyzes the idea of "science literacy for all" due to the connotation that "for all" means that science education is uniform and structured. The authors explain that when we refer to "science for all" the intention of this wording is meant to be inclusive of ALL knowledge systems.

Abrams & , Yore & , Bang & , Brayboy & , Castagno & Kidman, Joanna & Lee, Kunwoo &
        Villanueva & , Wang & Webb, Paul & Yen, C-F. (2014). Culturally Relevant Schooling in
        Science for Indigenous Learners Worldwide: Stressing the All in Science Literacy for All. 671 –
        696.

#5 Participation as a Supportive Framework for Cultural Inclusion and Environmental Justice
Summary

This article explores participation as a supportive framework for democracy, environmental justice, and cultural inclusion. It presents methods that have fostered cultural inclusion and connection to nature, by analyzing three projects in Boulder, Colorado and Salinas, California. Participatory methods included nicho boxes, photovoice, and garden art. These cases demonstrate how children's rights to participation, through nature and the arts, help create just sustainabilities through the creation of culturally relevant practices that bridge social and environmental justice.

Derr, V., (2017). Participation as a supportive framework for cultural inclusion and
        environmental justice. Revista Internacional de Educación para la Justicia Social, 6(1), 77-89.

#6 Hearing Ancestral Voices Through Creative Art- A Tool for Environmental Education
for Sustainability
Summary

The research presented in this paper draws on a study in the Kgalagari region of Botswana where participant observation workshops were conducted to illustrate the impact of using the Arts in Education approach (AiE). This approach was used through traditional storytelling in lessons on environmental issues in a rural primary school in the Kgalahari region of Botswana. The BaKgalagari Standard 4 children participated in lessons in which community elders were invited to tell them stories. The lessons conducted offered the participants exemplary activities in conducting a teaching unit incorporating story-telling, dramatizing and visual art, whereby the story was embedded within the learners' contexts and in the idea of environmental appreciation. The outcome of the study demonstrated that this approach can enhance learning by yielding a more egalitarian and communicative environment, which takes into account the voices of previously socially excluded learners, into the teaching and learning process.

Silo, N., Khudu-Petersen, K., (2016). Hearing ancestral voices through creative art –A tool
for environmental education for sustainability. International Journal of Education & the Arts, 17(9), 1-21.

#7 "Under-Participation" and Ethnocentrism in Environmental Education Research:
Developing "Culturally Sensitive Research Approaches"
Summary

Racial and cultural diversity issues have been a source of some interest amongst outdoor and environmental educators. Early research was framed in terms of the "under-participation" of people of colour, which led to the development of ethnocentric and methodologically problematical "marginality" and "ethnicity" theories. There is, however, a growing body of research, educational and otherwise, which focuses on people of colour, and which privileges culture as being central to the research process. Agyeman, offers culturally congruent research methods as a solution because as has been fund, when environmental educators are too perspective with their ideas of what "nature" is, minority populations are left out of the process in developing solutions for environmental justice issues.

Agyeman, J. (2003). "Under-participation" and ethnocentrism in environmental education
research: Developing "culturally sensitive research approaches". *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, *8*, 80-94.

#8 Culturally Relevant Education: A Guide for Educators
Summary

This source acts as a guide for educators who want to become culturally relevant teachers. Developed through NYU and Research Alliance for New York City schools, the guide addresses what CRE is exactly, why we should practice it and how we can practice it. Going over key factors of CRE, the resource guide goes over specific examples from the New York City area that are successfully incorporating CRE into their programs.

Liang, T., & Villavicencio, A. (2016). Culturally relevant education: A guide for educators.

Section 3: How to adapt your programs

Adaptation is one of the most important qualities and educator can have. By becoming adaptable you will more easily be able to create programming that can be relevant to a diverse audience of learners.

1. Add a narrative > Many cultures tell stories. They pass down an oral history through generations so that their culture can be preserved. They tell stories about the origin of their culture, stories about their families, and stories about why things work the way they do. Often times these stories include the natural environment. A way to make your programming relevant to a diverse audience is by finding a way to connect with their culture.

APPENDIX C: CAMPUS CAMPOUT TRAINER GUIDE

Campus Campout Trainer Guide

Introduction: How Do You Become a Trainer?
This project is meant to be created so that anyone in the community can be a trainer. The guide will provide a basic outline of steps and expectations to make the implementation of Campus Campouts as smooth as possible. Trainers can be teachers, parents, church leaders, or other community organizers that have the passion and dedication to getting their families involved in the outdoors. To become a trainer simply contact Texas Children in Nature Coordinator Jennifer Bristol and you will receive a Campus Campout Trainer Package and access to the Campus Campout Trainer of Trainers Webinar.
Contact: Jennifer.bristol@tpwd.texas.gov

Section 1: Recruiting Volunteers
As a trainer:
Initial Contact: Part of recruiting volunteers is being clear and specific about what the project entails and what their role will be. When you are making initial contact with volunteers be sure to share the How-To Guide with them. This way the potential volunteer will be able to clearly see what their capabilities and commitments are.
Also, provide any background information on your project you feel may be relevant to the volunteer experience i.e. how it began and your goals.

During Volunteer Time: Refer back to the How-To Guide and be attentive to any questions the volunteer(s) may have. If this is the first volunteer experience with you project be present and act as a guide through the process.

Sustaining Volunteers: the above strategy of clear and specific role responsibilities is key in sustaining volunteers. The more successful and enjoyable the first experience is the more likely the volunteer will continue to commit their time to your project. Another key part of sustaining volunteers is follow-up. Follow-up after the volunteer's first event, day, etc. to get an idea of

how they felt, how the overall experience was, and how they see themselves participating in the future.

Background check

> Background checks are crucial to hosting a Campus Campout. This event will require interaction with youth and their families. All volunteers must have the appropriate background check completed to ensure the safety of all participants.

> **As the trainer:** Research the forms necessary for working with children in your state (as requested by schools) As you begin to recruit volunteers, begin building information packets that will be distributed as they sign-up.
> In these information packets be sure to include all forms (background checks, emergency contact, references, health forms etc.) making the process as simple as possible for the volunteer thus ensuring a sustainable volunteer program.

Commitment

> Part of volunteer recruitment is ensuring a sense of commitment from your volunteers. Commitment can be defined in many ways and as the trainer it is up to you to decide what levels of commitment are necessary to make your project successful and effective.
> **As the trainer:** Set a volunteer schedule that is clear which hours volunteers are needed and for how many hours. As volunteers begin to express interest, make this schedule available. Be sure that you are clear on the minimum number of hours you expect to be committed to the project.

Short job/ duty description

> An accurate and detailed job description for volunteers is vital to creating a positive and sustainable volunteer experience.
> **As the trainer:** Provide clear and accurate descriptions of roles that need to be filled. If there are multiple duties for one role be sure to list all of them and the skills needed to be successful in this role. Be sure to create multiple descriptions and not just one over-arching description for the entire project where are a multitude of volunteer duties are possible.

*See the example role description in the "Form Example Guide"

Section 2: Working with the Schools

When working with schools it is imperative that you know the level of commitment of the staff i.e. Administration and teachers so that you can plan strategies for getting everyone involved.

> **As the trainer:** Gauging the interest and commitment of the school can be done through a Needs Assessment. The school may have reached out to you to host this program, however; if you are looking to involve schools that have not, a Needs Assessment will aid in proposing the project in a way that seems appealing to them and effective based on their needs. A Needs Assessment done with students and teachers in mind will make it more clear what the school community feels is their focus area (literacy, health and nutrition, outdoor interaction, science education etc.)

> You may also be a trainer that is not affiliated with the school and are looking for a

venue. In this case, when approaching a school to ask if they will allow you to use their grounds to host this event, create brief but convincing proposal that will allow school administration to make an informed decision i.e dates, time commitment, staffing, what their level of responsibility is.

Section 3: Working with the Churches and Non-Profits

Often the churches and non-profits in our communities want to help but often do not have the time, money, or other resources to be able to contribute in the way that they want to.

As the trainer: If you are looking to get the whole community involved it is important that everyone is included, not just businesses or companies that can provide you with monetary support. Often times churches or non-profits' strongest assets are their people power which is equally as important in hosting a Campus Campout. =

Of course, we want parents and students to be involved in putting on the event so that they have autonomy over it. However, we also want the parents and students to enjoy the event and be fully present without having to worry about tasks. Utilizing your relationships with churches and non-profits in your area can not only create buy-in for the community members who are a part of these smaller communities but it can also provide you with volunteers and team members that are vital to a successful Campus Campout.

Section 4: Communication within the Leadership Team

Working with Campus Campouts will mean working with a leadership team that consists of individuals from various organizations. A team may consist of: you, a representative from the host site, a representative from the gear provider and a parent leader. This combination of leaders will mean that each individual has a different communication style and different stakes being put into the event.

As the trainer: Creating a cohesive team is key in working with your leadership.

Train the leadership team together if possible, or give each individual the same training (The How-To Guide will be helpful in this)

Establish a common means of communication whether it be an email chain, group message, or a social media group. Be sure that all leaders are present in the group and establish ground rules or expectations on when, and how you will communicate.

Delegate. Ensure that each person has a specified role, just as you would for volunteers. Of course, roles may be shared or work together nut making sure each individual knows what their purpose is and what needs to be completed, communication can flow more smoothly, and the process becomes more effective.

Section 5: Working with TCIN Networks

With any project or event it is important to utilize your networks. The Campus Campouts is a part of the Texas Children in Nature project. This means that there is a network of non-profits in your area that are dedicated to getting kids outside. These partners can range from zoos and nature centers, to non-profits that provide educational programming but what they all have in common is that most likely have a skill or resource that could be helpful in the process of hosting a Campus Campout.

As the trainer: Create a sustainable, working relationships with TCiN partners in your area and

get the community involved.

Use the [Nature Rocks website](#) to identify who the partners are in your area.

See what their specialty is and see if it might fit into your Campus Campout

Reach out to a representative with a clear proposal of what you are looking for from them and how they can help. (Providing gear, volunteering to present an activity etc.)

Follow-up with your partner organizations after the event to thank them for their participation and to express your interest in continuing the relationship.

As a trainer it is important to create sustainable working relationships with community partners. This will ensure that the community is invested in your project, but more importantly in themselves. The Campus Campout is meant to be a benefit for the students by creating a happy, healthier, and smarter future.