ENSU 1000

Environmental Sustainability: Reflective Essay

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Learn, Protect, Share

*During my youth, environmental sustainability had not yet come to fruition. The widespread use of plastics was booming without any consideration of future effects. Plastic things were “cool.” Eye-catching disposable wrappers covered everything from candy bars to children’s toys. I can still close my eyes and see the bright yellow and red of my favourite plastic puzzle toy! My only childhood memory of recycling was the thrill of finding a pop bottle in the ditch, knowing that it would buy me a pack of bubble gum at the corner store. During school, the only form of recycling was to make sure all garbage went into the one receptacle available, and I never thought about a plastic bag found its way to the ocean.*

Recycling became more popular merely because of the monetary return. When I raised my children, companies were beginning to encourage certain kinds of plastics over ones that quickly broke down. Researchers were studying photodegradation of certain plastics and environmental consequences. I became aware of the sustainability movement when my children started school. In grade seven, my oldest daughter fundraised with the leadership team for a school solar panel. They travelled to other elementary schools to teach fellow students about the advantages of solar power. The leadership team helped earn money for the final solar panel the school needed to convert its lighting system to solar energy, leading to the school obtaining a grant to assist the installation of a geothermal heating system. Witnessing these students take a stand for the environment was my first experience seeing youngsters strive for a sustainable future in a small community.

Beginning my journey to a Bachelor of Education enlightened me on how essential it is to pursue a sustainable lifestyle. One of my first Open Learning courses was Geology, which touched on some critical facts leading to the melting of Arctic sea ice. I later used my interest in this area to complete an assignment on the topic of sea ice for a Geography course. I have an individual desire to preserve our Earth’s oceans and waterways, as I am a competitive rower and see the damage that water pollution causes to aquatic ecosystems. For instance, I often compete in Delta, British Columbia, in the Deas Slough. We row past houseboats in water that is teeming with garbage and sludge from both these residences and surrounding businesses. In the same time frame, I often see blue herons and harbour seals and think how horrible it is for them to live with pollution threatening their ecosystems.

I also understand and have witnessed how climate change has created extreme weather patterns, contributing to the Forest Fires of 2017. I evacuated from my home in 100 Mile House BC during this horrific fire season, but my learning happened after the fires had swept through the area. I was able to see the effects of the damaged landscape as mass wasting became prominent when rain demolished the barren hillsides of Cache Creek, BC. It was a living textbook experience to see this happen, and I now had a detailed understanding of how this runoff could potentially damage nearby waterways. I considered what damaging effects on fish that the debris flow would have to streams if it contained waste from the many surrounding cattle ranches.

My new consideration for environmental sustainability issues has influenced how I travel and will travel in the future. My husband and I enjoy snorkelling and interacting with tropical wildlife in Hawaii. We avoid the “tourist” activities that involve large, and often careless groups who damage delicate ocean ecosystems like coral reefs. We have made a yearly tradition of snorkelling with Galapagos Sharks and choose One Ocean Diving, a company that practices sustainable dives and educates their small group tours on the importance of ecosystem equilibrium. I know that it is vital to educate others, especially young people, about environmental sustainability. For my Bachelor of Education Science class, I assembled an eight-lesson unit that teaches intermediate students about the damage of plastic pollution in our local and global waterways. It encourages the children to think critically about solutions to domestic and international pollution issues and to consider the problems from a First Nations perspective. For instance, I will show photos of pollution in areas where I have rowed and snorkelled and engage the class in a discussion as to what damages could occur to these particular environments. They could work in groups to complete inquiry projects on pollution in different global waterways. My Ocean unit also includes an excellent hands-on activity where the students make an ocean garbage dangle from plastic pieces and walk through it to simulate what it feels like for an aquatic animal to be trapped plastic pollution. I plan to connect my rowing, travel, and environmental interactions with how I teach my future students so that they can hopefully gain a deeper understanding of the importance of ecological sustainability to secure a healthy Earth for their adult years.