



10 Minutes For The Planet

Beyond Ecophobia ©

by *Valentine Rinner*

Hello everyone and welcome to this week's episode of 10 minutes for the Planet. Today I'm going to tell you about a book I read a few years ago that had a critical impact on how I talk about nature and environmental issues. It is still a reference for me now when I think about what I'm going to share with you in 10 minutes for the Planet and *how* I am going to share it with you.

The title of the book is "Beyond Ecophobia, Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education". It was written by David Sobel, an American education writer, and published by The Orion Society in 1996 and re-edited in 2013.

Sobel is concerned about the way in which we talk about nature and the environment, that more often than not instigates a fear of nature: ecophobia. Indeed, today we overburden young kids (and less young humans too) with alarming problems about the natural world. This early awareness strategy just overwhelms children most of the time - and again to me this applies to adults as well - and causes at best disengagement and at worst despair.

In "Beyond Ecophobia" Sobel addresses cognitive readiness regarding when children should be introduced to the world they live in and specifically to different types of environmental concerns. He distinguishes 3 stages of development between the age of four and seventeen. During those stages, the world spontaneously perceived by a child expands as he grows up. The idea is to work hand in hand with their growing perception of the world and engage children in age-appropriate environmental educational activities. The book is specifically for teachers and parents and Sobel identifies ways in which we can teach pupils to apprehend the nature around them at different stages of growing up.

In short the intention is to start by encouraging voluntary empathy with the natural world through allowing and developing strong relationships with nature. Empathy prepares the next stage which is about exploration: further exploring landscapes, pushing boundaries, discovering new places. Only later during early adolescence, when the sense of self strengthens, has the time come to engage in social awareness and action. At this stage of cognitive development children are now able to apprehend not only their local environment but also how it is linked to the rest of the world, how local actions can affect the global environment and vice versa.

In essence, as Sobel puts it: "if we want children to flourish, we need to give them time to connect with nature and love the Earth before we ask them to save it." For me this

principle is relevant for any human being at any stage of their lives. It is only after one learns to love nature, value it and care for it that one is available and equipped to eventually tackle larger environmental problems.

With 10 minutes for the Planet, I constantly try to focus on aspects of the environment that foster empathy, enjoyment, love and care for the Planet, that encourage exploration and observation before we start getting into problems and global issues that are difficult to relate to in our everyday lives.

If you are interested in nature education and/or children I encourage you to get ahold of "Beyond Ecophobia". It is a short book and easy to read. As another option I invite you to take a few silent minutes and list what you personally enjoy the most about nature. Then, ask yourself whether or not it would be possible to enjoy those specific things a bit more in your life, outside of your organised activities. Now: just go for it!

Bye everyone and see you next week for a new episode of 10 minutes for the Planet.