Connecting Disciplines to Inform and Develop the Emerging Field of Environmental Health Literacy

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Roadmap

• Why Environmental Health Literacy?
• Implicated Disciplines
• Examples from the Field
• Whither EHL?
Health Literacy

• **CDC**: The capacity to *obtain, process, and understand basic health information* and services to make appropriate health *decisions*.

• **AMA**: The ability to *obtain, process and understand basic health information* and services needed to make appropriate health *decisions* and *follow instructions for treatment*.

• **HRSA**: The capacity to *obtain, process and understand basic health information* needed to make appropriate health *decisions* and services needed *to prevent* or treat illness.

• **Public Health Literacy**: The degree to which individuals and *groups* can *obtain, process, understand, evaluate, and act on information* needed to make *public health decisions* that benefit *the community*. (Freedman et al, 2009)
Environmental Literacy

• **Campaign for Environmental Literacy**: The capacity… *to act* successfully in daily life based on a broad *understanding* of how people and societies relate to each other and to natural systems…. [and] to incorporate appropriate environmental considerations into daily *decisions* about consumption, lifestyle, career, and civics, and to engage in individual and collective *action*.

• **NAAEE**: The capacity for individuals and groups to make informed *decisions* and *to act* on these decisions [based upon] knowledge and *understanding* of a wide range of environmental concepts, problems, and issues.

• **The Environmental Literacy Council**: A fundamental *understanding* of the systems of the natural world, the relationships and interactions between the living and the non-living environment, and the ability to deal sensibly with problems that involve scientific evidence, uncertainty, and economic, aesthetic, and ethical considerations.
A Few Implicated Disciplines
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Examples from the Field: Case One
Community-Identified Knowledge Gaps from a Superfund NPL Site

Paducah Future Vision Study
• Kentucky’s largest Superfund site
• Chronic risks, statutory complexity
• Stakeholder heterogeneity
• Info Needs: The Site’s Future
• Visual Elicitation

Stakeholder Questions
• What chemicals are “out there”?
• What do the chemicals do to health?
• How much groundwater contamination?
• How are “they” monitoring the waste?
• Could an earthquake disturb the waste?

• What keeps contamination from moving further south?
• Is a wind farm an option for the site after it’s cleaned up?
• How does the site affect my cancer risk?
Examples from the Field: Case Two
Stakeholder-Identified Knowledge Gaps for Post-Incident Decontamination and Clearance

Post-Crisis Communication Study
- Hypothetical water terrorism scenario
- Heterogeneous audiences
- Information Needs, Preferred Channels, Credible Sources
- Audio Elicitation

Stakeholder Questions
- What are the “national drinking water standards”?
- How was the water tested, and by whom?
- If water isn’t safe for the pregnant, elderly, and children to drink, how can it be safe for me to drink?
- What symptoms should I look for?
- How do I clean my sink after I flush my pipes? My water heater?
- Why should I believe that clear-looking water is dirty?
Whither EHL

- **Who?** Which disciplines are implicated that I didn’t mention?

- **What?** What are the boundary conditions and key constructs for environmental health literacy as a field of inquiry?

- **Where?** In what ways can we privilege context while fostering a foundational set of EHL capabilities?

- **Why?** How does EHL stand apart from similar pursuits?

- **How?** How do we negotiate across implicated disciplines? Create programming and curricula? Measure success?
What piece of the EHL puzzle do YOU have?
References


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