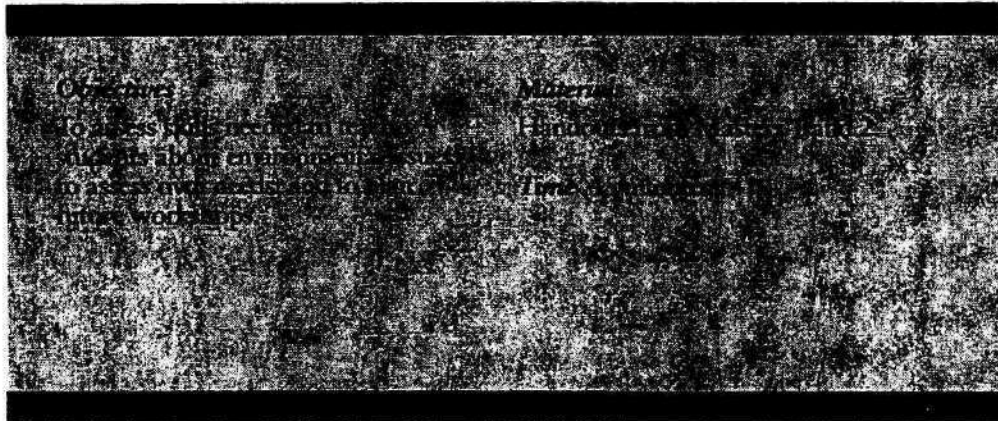


# What Skills Do I Need?

A survey and activity to (1) explain the key skills needed to address environmental problems and (2) assess participants' familiarity with those skills.



## Outline

1

Explain that using environmental issues to teach students involves a range of skills, including facilitation skills, that teachers themselves need, plus problem-solving and communication skills that teachers will want to develop in their students. Although teachers understand and apply many of these skills, they may not have had the opportunity to focus on where they have strengths and weaknesses as they approach issues in the classroom. (See pages 18–21 for additional descriptions of these skills.)

2

Distribute handouts from Master 1 and ask participants to work in small groups to discuss these questions:

- Do you address these skills in your classroom?
- Do you teach these skills to students?
- What criteria might you use to decide if you are successful in using or teaching these skills?

3

Lead a group discussion about the criteria that each group came up with and use these questions if appropriate:

- Which are skills teachers use every day?
- Which are areas in which teachers have questions?
- Which skills might teachers want more guidance, practice, and experience?

# Skills for Addressing Environmental Issues

When teachers and students are asked to explain environmental issues, they often think in terms of knowledge—facts about why global climate is (or isn't) changing; economic arguments for recycling; statistics that tie hazardous waste to cancer. But solutions to environmental problems depend even more critically on skills. Key skills needed by environmental problem solvers could be grouped into four general categories.

**Thinking Skills** are used in three ways:

- To generate ideas. This creative component includes coming up with new ideas, expanding possibilities, stretching the imagination.
- To clarify ideas. This analytic component enables teachers and learners to detect bias, identify assumptions, and in general, pull apart ideas to understand the pieces.
- To evaluate ideas. This is a critical thinking component. It involves assessing the reliability of one's information and inferring the consequences of alternative ideas.

**Problem Solving Skills** follow a series of steps:

- Defining the problem. A critical phase of good problem solving. Developing a shared definition of the problem is an essential first step. This involves analyzing the issue and identifying the needs and concerns of all involved. In addition to clearly stating the problem, it is important to agree on what criteria have to be met before the problem is considered "solved."
- Generating alternative solutions. A productive thinking phase, which involves coming up with a range of possible solutions and expanding on them.
- Evaluating and choosing a solution. An assessment and decision-making phase, which guides participants toward selecting an option that meets the stated criteria and goals.
- Implementing a solution and evaluating success. The "action-taking" phase, in which those involved implement and then monitor their chosen approach. The problem-solving effort may lead participants to discover complications, and a need to rethink the problem and explore other options.

**Group Process Skills** include:

- Effective communication. The ability to write and speak clearly, and to listen actively.
- Teamwork. Building on others' ideas and strengths. Giving constructive and supportive feedback.
- Conflict management. Identifying and resolving friction between group members.

**Facilitation Skills** help prepare leaders. Responsibilities of a group leader include the following:

- Keeping the discussion flowing smoothly and on target.
- Ensuring participation from all members.
- Helping the group complete tasks and make decisions.