Promoting Environmental Education in Georgia

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Environmental Education and Geography: Science and Social Studies Join Hands

By Lynn McCoy, Southwest Georgia RESA

Humans are prone to categorize information in an effort to construct understanding of the world around them, sometimes resulting in a failure to see patterns and connections. Such is often the case with science and social studies. The term environmental education conjures visions of scientists getting down and dirty to unlock the secrets of Mother Earth’s ecosystems and their incredible array of plants and animals. Similarly, the term geography conjures visions of geographers ravering the globe, map and compass in hand, seeking to discover unknown frontiers in the global environment we know as planet Earth. Certainly, in our schools, science class and social studies class bring to mind distinctly different scenarios.

A deeper look into the philosophy of environmental education reveals a broader, richer concept that goes beyond the confines of science alone. Environmental education is education in, about, and for the natural environment. This definition tells us where the learning takes place, the topic to be taught, and the purpose of the activity. It refers to the total environment and its all-encompassing, including population growth, pollution, resource use and misuse, urban and rural planning, and modern technology’s demands upon natural resources. It may come as a surprise that implicit in this description we find plenty of geography, as well as connections to civics, economics, and sociology. Separating the science from the social studies becomes difficult at this point.

The theme this year for the ELink, newsletter of Georgia’s Environmental Education Alliance, is Habitats: Home Sweet Home. Science teachers across the state will guide students’ exploration of an amazing variety of habitats, such as deserts, bogs, marshes, forests, swamps, lakes, rivers, prairies, oceans, and even cities and suburbs. Students will examine the biodiversity of plant and animal life as they seek to understand the interdependence of each component and the resulting responsibility and irresponsibility. The tough social issues of changing long standing behaviors in a society may also enter the discussion. But, across the hall, science teachers will probably be doing the same.

So the question is asked, Is the study of habitats science, or is it social studies? Obviously, it is both. The disciplines are so interwoven as to make separation analogous to splitting hairs, a task hardly worth the effort. The gib question could be, Who cares? Just reach across the hall, join hands, and enjoy the richness of teaching it together!

Mark Your Calendar!

The 2004 EEA conference will be at the Retreat at Lake Blackshear, Georgia Veterans State Park in Cordele, Georgia
March 12-14th, 2004.

The theme this year is Environmental Education: Promoting Excellence Through Teaching, Research and Service.
Please check www.eealliance.org for more information.