

HOW TO CONDUCT A CONSERVATION EDUCATION WORKSHOP

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Abstract: Members of federal and state agencies as well as the public schools are being asked to provide conservation education information and activities for the general public. This session deals with successful teacher conservation education training activities in Oklahoma, general methods and procedures that characterize a successful workshop, and research providing data concerning workshop effectiveness.

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There is a growing demand for community and school environmental awareness in Oklahoma. To meet this demand a number of activities are taking place in the Southwest, as well as Oklahoma that are proving to be successful training programs for educators.

During this session I would like to present (1) a brief overview of some conservation/environmental education projects in Oklahoma, (2) those methods and procedures that have been of value in projects I have been associated with at the Oklahoma State University (OSU) Natural Resources and Environmental Education Center, and (3) feedback data from these projects.

However, before we begin I would like to initiate this session by practicing what I preach! A most important ingredient of any workshop is some method of creating positive human interaction. An activity in which people get to know each other, loosen up, and feel relaxed about sharing their ideas and feelings. There are a number of strategies. I have chosen to create an autograph party for this group (for information on this and similar activities contact the author). You need to obtain the signature of someone here who can provide you with information concerning each of the 20 statements being given to you. Everyone stand up and move to the center of the room and find these people.

Now that you have obtained the signature please return the statements and signatures to me. You can see there is a method to my madness! Along with humorous "light weight" information are statements that provide information about the group and set the stage for the activities that will follow in the workshop. Starting off a program with a non threatening, positive group interaction activity can be as important as anything else you do in the workshop.

What follows is a brief overview of different programs and delivery systems associated with the OSU, Natural Resources and Environmental Education Center. The programs are designed to offer unique delivery systems and break from the traditional college course scheduling.

ON GOING PROGRAMS

Multidisciplinary Outdoor Environmental Education Workshop

Each semester a 1½-day teacher's workshop is conducted to introduce educators to the methods and curricula for environmental education (EE). The overnight program stresses the development and use of the participants' local school grounds as environmental study sites.

Conservation Education Leadership Training Program

This intensive 8 AM-5 PM, 4-week program conducted in June is designed for K-12 teachers and administrators wishing to begin or improve a multidisciplinary outdoor EE program in their school system. Instruction takes place in strategic locations throughout Oklahoma as well as on the OSU campus. In cooperation with the 89 Oklahoma Conservation Districts the student may receive a scholarship.

Energy Awareness Work Conference

A conference/workshop for educators wishing to obtain knowledge of energy exploration, production, consumption, and conservation related to private industry, government and the consumer, the 3-week summer program provides scholarships to Oklahoma teachers interested in energy issues.

Graduate and Undergraduate EE Practicum

College students work with 6th grade pupils to gain experience with teaching methods unique to outdoor EE studies.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

Environmental Science Seminars

Researchers in such areas as wildlife, soil, water, air, population, and nutrition present 3-hour seminars. The objective of this program is to expand the summer CELTP component into the academic year where environmental science content can be emphasized. This is a cooperative project between OSU, NEOSU and ECOSU and supported by the NSF.

Ouachita National Forest Program

This program is a pilot research study to determine the feasibility of using motivating recreational activities to teach environmental concepts to the camping public.

Water Resource Management Simulator Training Program

Responding to an assessment of Oklahoma's water education needs, a computer simulating a river basins water resources, human consumption patterns and water quality is used to provide water education to High School students, teachers and the general public.

Other Training Activities

The NR&EE Center's staff conduct training programs in cooperation with the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation, U.S. Forest Service, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, State Department of Education and local school systems.

SUCCESSFUL EE WORKSHOP TECHNIQUES

The following list outlines the components found helpful in conducting a productive workshop. You can increase the value of your program if you:

1. include a sensory awareness component — slow people down and awaken all 5 senses.
2. use a multidisciplinary format — EE for and in all school subjects — not an additional teacher responsibility, new subject or course.
3. use 3-dimensional, "hands on" activities — get involved with the earth — get dirty!
4. present a balance between concepts and methods — not only what but how!
5. include individual and small group field experiences that generate information or a product that is to be shared with others.
6. provide learning within a relaxed, flexible atmosphere with human as well as environmental interaction. Use student ideas, provide opportunity for them to learn from each other and let them make organizational decisions.
7. offer change of pace using a wide variety of instructional modes — variety is the spice of life. Where time permits, use films, lecture, drama, simulation, experiments, discussion, field trips, recreation, demonstrations, individual projects, and library research time!
8. assign written assignments with practical application in the participants' actual school setting.
9. include continued communication with former program participants — how might you be of continued service? Create a mailing list and newsletter!
10. use former workshop participants as resource personnel — a turned on public school teacher can be a great asset in getting other public school teachers involved.

These suggestions do not represent a detailed all inclusive list, but those techniques most easily employed. They are to be used, of course, to varying degrees depending on the nature and length of a workshop.

PROGRAM FEEDBACK

Three of the aforementioned training programs have been studied in some depth.

Conservation Education Leadership Training Program

A pre test compared with a post test (administered 1 year after the training program) showed teachers, (a) included more EE topics in their teaching, (b) were more aware of environmental science resources and curricula and (c) spent more time on EE (Mills and Burris 1979). In addition it was learned that 84% implemented some type of EE study program.

Graduate and Undergraduate Environmental Education Practicum

A study of how high and low achieving 6th grade pupils perceived an EE experience showed a significant influence of the program on their perception of self, school and teacher (Shaw and Mills 1981). The lower achieving group responded as positive in the EE program as high achievers did in the regular school setting.

Ouachita National Forest Program

Highly motivational/recreational learning experiences were shown to be effective in teaching environmental concepts to family campers voluntarily participating in the program.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

In addition to the studies cited above, other background information may be found in Kellogg et al. (1975), Anon. (1977), Bost (1979), Miller (1979), and Mills (1980).

LITERATURE CITED

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