

The Center for Environmental Teaching at Kansas State University provides a link between the public schools and university resources in the area of environmental study.

center for environmental teaching: a service to schools

Robert James



Science environmental education is the primary concern of Bob James, associate professor in Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University. He has taught science in high schools in Missouri and Iowa. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa; his M.A. from the University of Northern Iowa and his B.S. from Northwest Missouri State University.

Institutions of higher education across the country are struggling to find a role to assist in the solution of problems related to the environment. A broad spectrum of attempts have been made varying from the institution of a College of Ecology; the establishment of an undergraduate environmental science program, with or without teacher certification; the organization of a cadre of undergraduate student activists; to the formation of some type of curriculum materials center. Unfortunately, most of these efforts lack a direct contact with one of the objects of their efforts, that is, the public. The College of Education at Kansas State University has inaugurated the Center for Environmental Teaching (CET) in an effort to provide for a direct link between the public schools and the University community. CET focuses on the implementation of a variety of environmental education programs in the public schools.

The relationship between the university community and the K-12 schools has available to it a wide variety of resources. These include student-organized activist and interest groups, environmental education curriculum materials, the basic support necessary to conduct inservice and community education, a tremendous spectrum of resource people, and library facilities which can provide a rich foundation in basic science as well as serve as a loan agency for materials to be tested. Two local agencies on the Kansas State University campus and in the Manhattan community (the Manhattan Advisory Council on Environmental Education) have worked diligently to compile a list of these resources. The amount of resources available free of charge is surprising.

A basic aspect of the establishment of such a center is the development of guidelines not only for the direction of the center but for assisting the schools in developing their own programs. The guidelines regarding curriculum implementation of the KSU Center for Environmental Teaching are as follows:

1. Environmental Education in the K-12 schools should not be an additional course, unit, or period, to be added to an already cramped public school curriculum. It should be thought of as a basic integrating thread linking all content areas and relating those content areas to each other.
2. Although ecology as a discipline provides basic understanding of the interactive nature of biological environments, environmental education should not be thought of as ecology per se.

3. Environmental education curriculum developments in the public schools must recognize the basic resource limits characteristic of the public school budgets and curriculum. Therefore, programs which are adopted can best be implemented when their budgetary demands are small.
4. Effective environmental education programs must take into account all that is known about the nature of curriculum change, teaching and learning theories, the basic underlying concepts of environmental science, and the inherent threads which can link the discipline. This will require a serious effort of inservice training for practicing teachers and appropriate background for preservice teachers.
5. Any program in environmental education should be aimed at an awareness on the part of each student that his environment does not exist apart from him. In short, "You Are an Environment."¹
6. Environmental education in any local school district should be community-centered, i.e. built around community resources, personnel and problems.
7. It is suggested that local environmental education advisory boards be established to support school programs. They should be made up of community and school personnel willing to help the school program. The school program should be thought of as part of the community education effort.²
8. Public school administrators and supervisors, school boards—in short school decision makers—must be informed on the needs of their community for an environmental education program.
9. Environmental education should be justified on the basis of the needs of society to solve the environmental problems which confront man.

In its effort to encourage the implementation of effective environmental education programs the KSU Center for Environmental Teaching has developed, and continues to seek to develop, a broad spectrum of activities to enrich this relationship. Each quarter the Center publishes a newsletter—the CET News. This newsletter is the primary channel of communication between CET and teachers and administrators. Regular items include, "Environmental Issues in the State of Kansas," a commentary on current items of interest to environmentally aware citizens; interviews with KSU staff and faculty who have demonstrated a potential to have a message of interest to the public schools and who can provide some kind of resource to those schools; a section on news items of events and opportunities for learning, whether conferences, teachers' meetings, camps, or whatever; and a section on "Tips to Teachers on Environmental Education Teaching Techniques." An effort is made to garner ideas from the teachers themselves. In addition, a regular section is given over to publishing additions to the KSU Environmental Education Curriculum Materials Center.

Another activity carried out by CET is an annual environmental education conference. This meeting, first initiated in 1972, provides, in a one-day format, an open and direct forum between KSU personnel, resource people around the state, and K-12 teachers and administrators. A

broad spectrum of activities and topics are covered in a one-day meeting. The primary objective of these sessions is awareness of environmental problems and of potential roles of the schools in developing programs aimed at helping to resolve our environmental difficulties. In addition to resource personnel from the University, public school personnel with a particular interest, talent, or teaching technique are invited to participate. Regional and National leaders are invited to speak. Local community agencies such as governmental conservation agencies, Extension Departments, League of Women Voters, and others are encouraged to make presentations, prepare displays, etc. A second basic objective of these conferences is to familiarize teachers and administrators with the resources available to them in the local community. In general, speakers are asked to donate their services. This reduces considerably the potential to draw "big names" but at the same time impresses school districts that programs can be developed around local resources and local personnel.

Another important phase of CET function is the assimilation, evaluation and dissemination of previously prepared curriculum materials. The KSU-CET is particularly fortunate to have a vital relationship with the Farrell Library Environmental Education Curriculum Materials Center. They handle procurement and dissemination and make these materials available to us and to the schools for their use.

Another major function of CET is its commitment to research in the area of environmental education. During the 1973-74 school year, Dr. Jerry Jinks, Associate Professor of Environmental Education, Eastern Montana State College, Billings, Montana, developed an interdisciplinary Model of Environmental Education.³

During the 1974-75 academic year the CET Director, Dr. Robert K. James and Mr. George Potts are directing a major research project in an attempt to determine the status and needs of environmental education in the state of Kansas. This research is made possible through a small grant from the KSU bureau of research.

Ideas we hope to implement in the future include: significant flexibility in establishing inservice programs of short or long duration in local school settings; consultants' service coordinated through the Center for Environmental Teaching; a board of directors made up of a variety of university personnel and public school people; the seeking of funds from outside agencies in order to carry on more effectively the program of the Center for Environmental Teaching; and the preparation and dissemination of materials developed in connection with CET.

FOOTNOTES

1. Noel McClinnis, *You Are An Environment*. (Evanston, Ill.: The Center for Curriculum Design, 1972)
2. D. Bennett, "The Environmental Education Committee." (Yarmouth, Maine: Maine Environmental Education Project, 1972)
3. J.L. Jinks, *A Theoretical Model For A Pandisciplinary Environmental Education Curriculum*. (Unpublished dissertation, Kansas State University, 1974)