

Addressing the Fears Of Teaching Environmental Education in the Classroom

By Sarah Meyers, Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter, Gaia Project Eco-Intern

1. I don't know enough!

Possible solutions:

- a) Collaborate with your colleagues.
 - i. Exchange activities/units that you've already tried
 - ii. Have a planning session together – two brains equal an increased creativity power
- b) Ask parents and community members if anyone has skills to share (and someone will!) and bring them in as a guest speaker.
- c) Lead the students using the inquiry process – focus on teaching them how to ask better questions, and how they can use observation and low-tech experiments to draw their own conclusions
- d) Have your students do the research!
- e) Jump in anyway! Environmental education relies on the concept that children develop, (in the words of Rachel Carson,) “a sense of wonder”. A hands-on experience will teach us far more than a page of facts! Take a look through the activities from various organizations (see the Web Links section for contact information). Many are easy to set up and quick to do.
- f) Arrange a workshop for your school or community – WildBC, the Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter, Ducks Unlimited and many others have both resources and workshops for educators and for youth. Check out the Web Links section for more information on these organizations, including contact information.
- g) Sign your class up for a Green Street program – they have a great variety of topics and partnership organizations. Your class will either benefit from a visiting presenter, or take part in a “do-it-yourself” project with online/phone support if needed. Their web address is www.green-street.ca.

2. I have too much to teach already.

Possible solutions:

- a) Focus on ways to integrate environmental themes into subjects that you already teach (ex. novel study, art, debating, statistics). *Environmental Education In the Classroom: A Guide For Teachers* (http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/environment_ed/), is an excellent guide on how to assist teachers of all subjects and grades to integrate environmental concepts into their daily lesson plans.
- b) Reassure yourself that you don't have to “re-invent the wheel”! There are many well-prepared, creative, accessible resources out there. All you have to do is implement them! See the Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter Education Program's **Web Links** and **Downloadable Resources** for suggestions.
- c) Remember that the Prescribed Learning Outcomes (BC Curriculum) regularly deal with topics directly related to the environment. Many others are open (ex. “propose and compare options when making decisions or taking action”) and you can put an “environmental twist” on them.

3. I don't know how to deal with controversial issues (ex. forestry: conservation vs. industry)

Possible Solutions:

- a) Take a such as one by Pat Clark workshop through the BCTF, or the Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter's Teacher Training workshop. The most important thing to remember is to choose your issue carefully. Pat Clark suggests you to choose an issue that
 - i. has no clear resolution that people would agree on right away, and
 - ii. has had public prominence and received media attention over a period of time (i.e. it is not just an issue that you are close to).
- b) Focus on the goal of critical thinking. Questioning, synthesizing, and drawing conclusions are valuable skills for our students to learn.

4. It takes too much time to organize!

Possible Solutions:

- a) Start small! Environmental education doesn't have to be complex. A consistent vision and regular exposure to the natural world can have just as much impact as an elaborate field study- maybe even more! Try to develop routines (ex. weather station; weekly walks).
- b) Go for activities that require fewer materials.
- c) Get some parents involved and delegate.
- d) See 2. a) & b) above.

5. There's no green space around my school!

Possible Solutions: (a little trickier, but still possible!)

- a) Make the site come to you! *Green Teacher Magazine*, for example, has some good articles about setting up a terrariums, hydroponic gardens, and ponds. See the **Web Links** section of the Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter Education Program's web site for contact information.
- b) Transform an area in your classroom into an ecosystem – murals and models can bring a rainforest or underwater haven to "life"
- c) Get involved in a *Growing Schools* program and put in a garden. Hundreds of curricular topics can be explored using the garden as a "spring board". From plant life cycles to seasons, P.E. to a potential market, the possibilities are endless!
- d) Take advantage of environmental education programs that are already established, such as the *Sea to Sky Outdoor School* (Sunshine Coast), *North Vancouver Outdoor School*, or the *From the Forest to the Sea Watershed Project* (Galiano Conservancy)
- e) Plan for one to two camping trips. Especially at the beginning or end of the year, this adventure can be a wonderful "bonding" time for your class. There are opportunities for astronomy, ecology, biology, geology, wide games – you name it!
- f) Explore the "issues" side of the environment- land use, urbanization, pollution, climate change, species conservation, off-shore drilling etc. You can hold debates and community meetings, start awareness campaigns, or build models (ex. solar oven).

6. I'm concerned about safety when we leave the school grounds.

Possible Solutions:

- a) Read the suggestions presented in the *Salish Sea Educator's Guide* (http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/oceans/salishsea/default_e.htm). Or talk to the educators at Sea to Sky Outdoor School. There's a lot of experience to draw from in these two sources.
- b) Visit the *Outdoor Classroom* article on the **Downloadable Resources** section of the Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter Education Program's web site for tips and techniques for planning an outdoor field trip.
- c) Know your site! Do a pre-site check to assess potential hazards, learning opportunities and materials or resource needs for the day (ex. dip nets, Ziploc bags for pond studies, etc.)
- d) And finally, ask parents to get involved – invite them along on the field trip too!