



Environmental Education or Indoctrination?

by Amy K. Frantz

Children should learn about the environment. Concern for the world we live in is a good thing. But environmental education must be based on sound science. Too often, our children are exposed to one-sided, biased information that is closer to political indoctrination than education. *Status Of Environmental Education In Iowa And America*, a joint Policy Study by Arlan DeBlieck of Public Interest Institute and Michael Sanera and Robert Dean of Center For Environmental Education Research, explores environmental education requirements in Iowa and looks at environmental education reforms adopted in Arizona.

Before 1970, environmental education consisted of “educat[ing] students about natural resources, how they were used, and their importance in creating this nation’s economy.”¹ The first Earth Day was held in 1970, changing the focus of environmental education (EE). Environmental activists sought to build support for their causes by convincing children that the earth was in danger and teaching them what needs to be done to “save the earth” — politicizing EE.

In 1990, the National Environmental Education Act created the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Office of Environmental Education. The Office of Environmental Education provides grants, internships, and fellowships to promote environmental education.

Environmental Education in Iowa

Iowa’s requirement for EE has existed since at least 1966, when the Iowa Code required education in the conservation of natural resources for grades 1-6. In 1977, the requirement was expanded to include teaching environmental awareness, and to include grades 7-8. In 1981, grades 9-12 were added, thus requiring EE for all grade levels.

In 1989, the specific EE requirements were repealed from the Iowa Code. Instead, the current law states that the State Board of Education shall establish education standards. These requirements are now found in the Iowa Administrative Code, which requires education in the “conservation of natural resources and environmental awareness,”² but leaves it to local school districts to decide how to meet the requirements.

There is no state or regional office of EE in Iowa. Several state agencies have a hand in EE. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) distributes the first \$350,000 of Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) funds in the form of grants to educators, provides program services and materials (with a website listing programs that are available), and sponsors conservation centers (like the Springbrook Conservation Education Center) used for EE. Soil and Water Conservation Districts provide people and resources to promote EE.

A Publication of:

Public Interest Institute at Iowa Wesleyan College

600 North Jackson Street

Mt. Pleasant, Iowa 52641-1328

Phone: 319-385-3462 Fax: 319-385-3799

E-Mail: piiatiwc@se-iowa.net Web Site: www.limitedgovernment.org

The Iowa Conservation Education Council (ICEC) is a private organization created to develop and promote EE. At one time, ICEC was working with the Iowa Department of Education to develop a “master plan” for teaching EE, but these plans have been shelved for now.

The Governor’s Conference on Environmental Education is scheduled for May 2000. Iowa’s first Democratic Governor in 30 years may try to move toward more centralized control over education, including environmental education, in Iowa.

Environmental Education in Arizona

Arizona enacted a comprehensive EE program in 1990, designed to “increase awareness of the environment and to promote knowledge of environmental concepts, develop positive attitudes and values toward the environment, and encourage civic and social responsibility toward environmental issues.”³ When schools implemented this program using non-scientifically-based science and promoting political action, parents and lawmakers were upset.

The concerns of his constituents and his own concerns as a parent led Arizona State Representative Rusty Bowers (now a State Senator) to begin the effort to reform the state’s EE program.

The new program, the Arizona EE Reform Model, repealed the state-mandated EE program, restoring local control over education decisions. Environmental education must be based on current, scientific information and must present a balanced viewpoint. The new model also requires a more balanced membership on the Arizona Advisory Council on Environmental Education (AACEE), created in 1990 to operate an EE grant program.

The AACEE has adopted the North American Association for Environmental Education’s Guidelines for Fairness and Accuracy. These guidelines state that environmental education must be fair and accurate when discussing environmental issues, and must present all sides of an issue “[w]here there are differences of opinion or competing scientific explanations.” The AACEE has also created the Class Environmental Research Contest for students in grades 6-12. Winning classes receive a grant for a class field trip related to the topic of their paper.

Environmental Education is important for our children. But that education must be balanced and based on current scientific information, not an attempt to turn school children into junior political activists on behalf of an environmental cause.

ENDNOTES:

¹Sanera, Michael, Robert Dean, and Arlan DeBlicke, *Status Of Environmental Education In Iowa And America*, Public Interest Institute Policy Study 99-1, December 1999, p. 7.

²*Ibid*, p. 15.

³*Ibid*, p. 20.

⁴*Ibid*, p. 24.

Amy K. Frantz is a Research Analyst with Public Interest Institute.

*Permission to reprint or copy in whole or part is granted, provided a version of this credit line is used:
"Reprinted by permission from INSTITUTE BRIEF, a publication of Public Interest Institute."
The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of
Public Interest Institute. They are brought to you in the interest of a better-informed citizenry.*