



EETAP *Resource Library*

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Go out and Teach! What Preparation Do Environmental Educators Need?

Across the country, there is a dramatic move in the direction of “teacher accountability.” More and more school districts, states, and members of the public are holding teachers responsible for the performance of their students. In their view, satisfactory performance for teachers should be directly linked to student performance relative to disciplinebased standards or other benchmarks set at the state and local level.

How well prepared are teachers for these responsibilities—as they enter their first teaching jobs and as they develop professionally through the course of their teaching career? Perhaps there is a parallel responsibility on the part of the institutions that train teachers as well as the agencies that certify them. If teachers’ success hinges on student performance, then the success of education programs and state certification programs should perhaps hinge on the performance of the teacher in the classroom.

Many states have made a serious commitment to environmental education. Some states and school districts have already set learning standards or benchmarks related to environmental education. What competencies do teachers need to provide that environmental education? How can those competencies be gauged? What should university pre-service training programs include to assure these competencies?

Similar concerns arise in nonformal education. How do administrators at parks, zoos, museums, aquaria, camps, nature centers, and other nonformal education facilities gauge competence of the educators they hire? What should an on-going professional development program look like?

Until recently, there has been no comprehensive means of gauging the basic competence of environmental educators, and judging the quality of the educational programs that train them. *Guidelines for the Initial Preparation of Environmental Educators*, published in 2000 by the North American Association for Environmental Education, makes these

competencies explicit. Developed through a national process of review and comment involving hundreds of individuals and organizations, these guidelines provide a shared view of the core skills and knowledge environmental educators need as they enter the field.

Guidelines and indicators of proficiency are offered in six thematic areas, providing the scaffolding upon which meaningful instructor training programs can be created. The guidelines describe a baseline of skills and knowledge relevant whether:

- ! Within the context of pre-service teacher education programs *or* for environmental education courses offered to students with varied backgrounds such as environmental studies, geography, liberal studies, or natural resources;
- ! For the preparation of teachers working within the formal education system or instructors working in nonformal educational settings offering programs at the pre-kindergarten through 12th grade levels; and
- ! For full-time environmental educators *or* those for whom environmental education will be among other responsibilities or integrated into a broader curriculum.

Guidelines for the Initial Preparation of Environmental Educators is organized around six themes that describe essential knowledge and skill areas. General guidelines are offered under each theme, as well as suggested indicators to use in instructor and program assessment. References to relevant articles and books guide a deeper exploration into each theme.

The themes are:

#1: Environmental Literacy covers, in broad summary, the content knowledge and basic skills required of environmentally literate educators. These competencies are outlined in detail in the companion

piece to this document, *Excellence in Environmental Education—Guidelines for Learning (K-12)*.

#2: Foundations of Environmental Education outlines what educators need to know about environmental education as a field. Understanding the theory, practice, and history of the field gives new educators a rich foundation on which to build.

#3: Professional Responsibilities of the Environmental Educator describes the professional responsibilities and standards associated with environmental education.

#4: Planning and Implementing Environmental Education Programs delves into the basics of instructional design and implementation, focusing on the imperative to blend high-quality education with the interdisciplinary, hands-on, investigative learning focus of environmental education.

#5: Fostering Learning covers the skills needed to nurture open inquiry and investigation, especially when asking students to consider controversial environmental issues that require students to reflect seriously on their own and others' perspectives.

#6: Assessment and Evaluation describes basic knowledge and abilities educators need to assess learner progress and evaluate their own instruction.

Need more resources?

To explore other resources about instructor training and competencies within the environmental education field, you can search the databases of Educational Resources Information Center/Clearinghouse for Science, Mathematics and Environmental Education (ERIC/CSMEE) and Eisenhower National Clearinghouse (ENC). These two databases have a multitude of resources available to educators. On line, these resources can be accessed by typing

<http://www.eelink.net>

Page down to CLASS-RESOURCES, DIRECTORIES, then to EE-RELATED EDUCATION SITES that will lead you to ERIC or ENC. You will then be able to search ERIC and ENC databases by following the appropriate pointers. Some of the resources relevant to our topic are identified below.

From ERIC

Simmons, D. (1995) *The NAAEE Standards Project: Papers on the Development of Environmental Education Standards*. Rock Springs, GA: North American Association for Environmental Education. (ED 406177).

The four working papers contained in this publication

discuss the importance and need for environmental education standards, review what has been done in the past, and propose a framework of actual preparation of standards in three key areas: (1) student performance; (2) educator performance; and (3) education material.

Looking at Earth from Space: Teacher's Guide with activities for Earth and Space Science (1995). ERIC Document Reproduction Service. (ED 392630).

The Maryland Pilot Earth Science and Technology Network (MAPS-NET) project was sponsored by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to enrich teacher preparation and classroom learning in the area of Earth system science. This project can serve as a model in preparation of environmental educators.

From ENC

Environmental Education Teacher Resource Handbook: A Practical Guide for K-12 Environmental Education (1997). R. J. Wilke (Ed.). Corwin Press, Inc., a Sage Publications Company. (ENC 015651).

This handbook, designed as a practical reference for curriculum developers, education faculty, and both veteran and student teachers, provides information about the background of environmental education curriculum, as well as current information about publications, standards, and special materials for K to 12 EE.

The Reality of Change (2000). Series: ENC Focus. Eisenhower National Clearinghouse. (ENC 016776) <http://www.enc.org/focus/topics/change/index.htm>

This world Wide Web site maintained by Eisenhower National Clearinghouse contains the issue of the online magazine, ENC FOCUS: A MAGAZINE FOR CLASSROOM INNOVATORS, exploring how teachers face and embrace the changing nature of classroom instruction.

This information sheet was prepared by Michele Archie of Harbringer Institute, Bora Simmons of Northern Illinois University, Joe E. Heimlich Ph. D. and Sabiha S. Daudi, Graduate Research Associate of EETAP Resource Library at Ohio State University Extension.

EETAP Resource Library is a project of the Environmental Education and Training Partnership effort. The goal of the Resource Library is to increase educators' access to and use of databases such as ENC and ERIC. This information sheet may be freely reproduced for educational purposes.