

EECONEWS



...a focus on EE in the Urban Environment

Winter 2011

Volume XXX

Issue 1

E-RICA is a Eureka Moment for Urban Science Teacher: Incorporating Environmental Ed into a Non-Fiction Reading Class

By Trista Smith

With state guidelines and strict standards to follow in schools systems, do you ever wish there was a chance to teach something of value that you feel your students should be aware of? Environmental education is a valuable field that gives teachers the chance to increase students' awareness and sense of responsibility. Sometimes in my urban school environment it is difficult to expose students to nature. I like to describe my school as not TOO urban, but urban enough not to have anything but parking lots to study. A perfect example occurred this past autumn. My students and I did an inquiry project in an open soccer field that only has some plant life around the outside of the "track." Sadly, on our second day over 1/2 of what the students wanted to observe and take data on was mowed down. I believe environmental education to be crucial for students, but without an accessible natural space, I decided to incorporate EE into our Reading In The Content Area (RICA) class.

In creating the Environmental RICA (E-RICA) curriculum I wanted to help students understand environmental situations and their responsibility to our environment. I wondered if creating an E-RICA class would give students a greater understanding and feeling of responsibility towards the environment and if the class would encourage more students to join the school's Environmental Club.

Before the coursework began, over half of the students stated they knew only "a little bit" about environmental issues, but believed understanding the environment was important. The issues that students initially believed to be the most important included recycling, habitat loss, and global warming. Some topics that were discussed during the daily, 30-minute E-reading class included: Environmental Impact, Pollution, Ecosystems, Endangered Species, Climate Change and Energy, and Conserving Natural Resources. I am happy to say that after the E-RICA class the students felt a wider array of issues were important! Not only were the previous three still important, but they also believed Alternative Energy was very important.

The majority of students enjoyed E-RICA and was interested in learning more about or joining the Environmental Club. Students were also asked at the end of their course to create an E-RICA (9-week curriculum) class for their peers during the second quarter. This task gave students the responsibility of educating their peers on what they believe to be important environmental issues. Students thought of topics discussed throughout the class as well as other topics they wanted to learn more about. Despite being in an urban environment, E-RICA was successful in expanding students' knowledge of the environment and connections they have with all living and non-living things.

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Trista and her current RICA students

Save the date Winter Snow Conference

Camp Nuhop
February 4-6

Wildlife Diversity Conference

Columbus
March 9

EECO Annual Conference

Maumee Bay
April 14-17

Life on a Sandy Delta

Hocking Hills
June 12-18

OEEF Grant Letter of Intent

July 8 Deadline

OEEF Grant Submission

July 15 Deadline