

The Wallerstein Collaborative For Urban Environmental Education Year One Report June 1, 2001

Introduction

Initiated in the fall of 2000 with generous support from the Johanette Wallerstein Institute, the Wallerstein Collaborative For Urban Environmental Education was established at New York University. The Collaborative is affiliated with the Department of Teaching and Learning, the Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences in the Professions, and the Office of the Vice Dean of the Steinhardt School of Education and fills an important niche in the urban environmental education community. Under the direction of Dr. Mary J. Leou, the goal of the Collaborative is to establish a year-round environmental program to stimulate public school teachers in the New York metropolitan area to incorporate environmental education across curriculum areas. The initiative also seeks to increase environmental education opportunities for pre-service teachers and support the environmental education efforts of urban schools by providing courses, weekend programs, internships, lectures, institutes, and workshops throughout the year. A network of cultural institutions and environmental organizations work with the Wallerstein Collaborative to provide field-based learning opportunities for students and teachers. The following activities were implemented in the first year.

Teacher Education Projects

In year one, Dr. Leou began working with the Department of Teaching and Learning on the integration of environmental education into graduate and undergraduate pre-service programs. New teacher certification requirements will require an additional 100 hours of field observation prior to student teaching. This requirement presents a unique opportunity for incorporating environmental education into pre-service education in several programs across content areas in both elementary and secondary education.

Pre-Service Education

Professor Marilyn Sobelman, Coordinator of Inquiries courses, worked with Mary Leou to integrate environmental education within NYU's pre-service course entitled: Inquiries II. Thus all pre-service students are introduced to environmental education through readings and field observations in a variety of non-formal settings. In fulfillment of their field observation requirement, students observed teaching and learning in institutions such as museums, parks, botanic gardens, zoos, aquaria, and cultural institutions.

An environmental theme has also been infused into **Project MUST**, (Mentoring Urban Students For Teaching), an NYU program at the Center for Mathematics and Science, that introduces high school students to teaching careers. Through the Wallerstein Collaborative, students learn about educational careers in museums, nature centers, government agencies, and environmental organizations.

Project Learning Tree (PLT) Workshop

In January 2001, the Collaborative hosted its first Project Learning Tree workshop in Prospect Park in cooperation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Prospect Park Alliance. The workshop attracted 42 participants (the largest ever in New York City), which included teachers and NYU students preparing for teaching careers. The 6-hour workshop provided a wealth of information and materials for classroom use. Participants learned about the resources of Prospect Park and how to use the nationally acclaimed Project Learning Tree environmental curriculum.

Cooperating Schools

Each year NYU's student teachers are placed in approximately 150 local schools to complete their student teaching requirements. One long-range goal is to identify the environmental education needs of cooperating schools and work towards developing strategies to better serve them. To date, the Collaborative has provided assistance with school gardens, field trip planning, recycling, field-based projects, and staff development.

Science Coordinators Network Meeting

In February 2001, the Wallerstein Collaborative hosted the Science Coordinators Network meeting at New York University. Approximately 100 math, science, and technology coordinators from New York City's 32 school districts attended along with administrators from the New York City Board of Education and several environmental organizations and cultural institutions. The Collaborative will work with the Science Coordinators' Network to disseminate environmental education resources to teachers citywide and develop more long-term professional development initiatives that afford teachers opportunities to gain knowledge and skills in environmental education.

Water Power: A Conference For Educators

In cooperation with the City Parks Foundation, and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, the Wallerstein Collaborative organized a conference for teachers on the New York City water supply system. Our collaborators contributed \$20,000 towards this event. The conference was held on March 22, 2001, a professional development day for NYC teachers, which enabled many classroom teachers to attend. The conference featured presentations from dozens of environmental organizations in the watershed region, as well as classroom teachers who have successfully implemented water conservation projects in their classrooms. We reached out to over 2,000 teachers in the New York City watershed area, which was attended by over 180 classroom teachers grades K-12, and environmental educators from the NYC watershed region.

The conference began with a tour of the "Healing Waters" exhibit at the South Street Seaport and ended with a performance in the evening by the Arm-of-The-Sea Theater group, which performed the "City That Drinks The Mountain Sky." Workshops included the science of water, forest ecology, networking and communication in the watershed, and historical perspectives of the New York watershed. The interdisciplinary nature of the conference provided attendees with numerous ways to integrate water-related issues into their curriculum. Each participant received a resource package containing a plethora

of materials to use in their classrooms. Comments from participants illustrate teacher's enthusiasm and interest incorporating environmental issues into their classrooms.

A NYC high school teacher noted: "Today, in one day, you've provided important information that took me a couple of years to collect on my own! What a wonderful resource today was! I would love information on precipitation, storage, reservoirs, and consumption on the [conference] website if available."

An elementary school teacher stated: "We're planning on using the theme of the watershed and folklore to teach the importance of water to all living things. Your conference has added new insight that will enrich our endeavor."

A faculty member from Long Island University noted he would use conference materials to "develop course modules" for his classes in Applied Concentration in Natural Resources. "Contacts made here will hopefully facilitate field trips I'd like to plan."

A science cluster teacher from one of our cooperating schools in Queens writes: "This was the best staff development workshop I have been to. Thank you!"

Teachers' feedback from this conference underscores the need for more professional development opportunities, which focus on current environmental issues. Given the overwhelming positive response to this conference, the Wallerstein Collaborative is developing long-term strategies to offer more educational programs on water-related issues.

Parks As Classrooms: A Summer Institute

The Wallerstein Collaborative worked in with the National Parks Service and NYU's Social Studies Program to introduce teachers to the National Harbor Parks in the New York area. The National Park Service contributed \$20,000 toward this initiative which helped launch a summer institute entitled "Parks As Classrooms" and included scholarships for 9 classroom teachers.

The Wallerstein Collaborative also worked with the National Park Service and Project For The Arts to sponsor an art exhibition entitled "Reflections of Our Urban Environment." Over 145 entries were received from students in grades K-12. Student work was exhibited at the Ryan Center at Floyd Bennett Field, June 4-8 2001.

Graduate Internship Program

Through the Collaborative's extensive network, NYU graduate students intern in non-formal science institutions. In year one, students interned at the American Museum of Natural History's Center for Biodiversity, Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, Wave Hill, and Mashomack Preserve in Shelter Island, New York. Internships are available to students from the Department of Teaching and Learning, and the Environmental Conservation Education (ECE) Program at NYU. Dr. Leou serves as internship advisor for ECE students and also teaches courses in the program.

Outreach and Communication

A \$5,000 EPA grant has helped support the development of the Collaborative's website which will serve both the NYU community and the urban education community. EPA funding also supported a series of focus group meetings in order to obtain input from classroom teachers, NYU students, faculty, and the environmental community in developing the site. The website will highlight the activities of the Wallerstein Collaborative, promote NYU environmental programs and courses, provide information on career opportunities, funding, and links to environmental education organizations and resources. Eventually, the site will showcase projects and materials developed by students and teachers.

The Collaborative will continue to develop an array of resources through interdepartmental activities and initiatives and expand its services and programs to schools in the urban community.