

THE ALLIANCE NETWORK FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Professor Terence John Mills

Director, Center for Environmental Education
Oklahoma State University
United States of America

Ecology teaches us that all things are connected—that you can never do only one thing. Every event, no matter how small, interacts and influences other events. Science has provided us with a fair amount of knowledge of the interactions within and between the physical and biological factors of the earth, but we know very little about how people around the earth interact and communicate through social organizations. How might we better use international organizations and communication skills to share ideas and resources, confront environmental issues, and solve problems to our mutual benefit? The existence of the BIOS convention makes it evident that we realize environmental problems are global and will require national and international organizations to develop and refine strategies for communication.

This paper presents a general description of the (1) Alliance for Environmental Education, (2) Network for Environmental Education, (3) role played by Centers for Environmental Education (CEE) in the Network, (4) potential to network using EcoNet Telecommunications and (5) international activities of the Alliance.

The Alliance for Environmental Education

The Alliance is the broadest coalition advocating environmental education in North America and the world. The Alliance is made up of many diverse national, international and regional groups conservation and education organizations, corporations and organized labor, representing millions of active members.

Since 1972, the Alliance has defined the national environmental education agenda and is a strong advocate for a long-term sustainable quality environment through education and training. The Alliance supports the concept that education is the key ingredient in our global efforts to achieve environmental quality without sacrificing economic progress. Its mission is to enhance communication, cooperation and exchange among organizations.

The Alliance supports the balanced and fair examination of issues. Key issues before the Alliance are:

1. Networking between grassroots, national and international groups;
2. Development and expansion of environmental education beyond its current traditional boundaries;
3. Identifying the changing need of resource utilization and recovery;
4. Strengthening, expanding and permanently infusing environmental education efforts at all levels of society; and
5. Building an environmental ethic.

The Alliance for Environmental Education publishes the Network Exchange and holds national and international networking conferences. The Alliance has recently been very active in passing federal legislation, i.e. the 1990 Environmental Education Act. In addition, the Alliance manages the computer conferences on EcoNet. To carry out these activities, the Alliance has formed partnerships with government agencies, businesses, corporations and environmental groups from the private sector. Within these partnerships in North America, the Alliance for Environmental Education has a membership of fifty million people.

Network for Environmental Education

In 1986, the Alliance for Environmental Education and two government partners, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) launched the Network for Environmental Education (NEE). The initial structure used for the NEE was the organizational model used by the thirteen university environmental education centers located in the service area of the Tennessee Valley Authority. Ten years of successful cooperation by these Centers convinced the Alliance that the Tennessee Valley Authority's Centers had significantly broadened the base of environmentally literate citizens who could make informed judgments about environmental issues. The plan was to expand the TVA model to develop a Network to promote public and private partnerships to broaden contacts and collaboration at local, state, regional, national and international levels.

In the four years since its creation, the Network has grown and continues to grow into a structure that:

1. Builds an environmental education constituency and increases collaboration
2. Creates a mechanism for sharing resources and ideas
3. Promotes public and private partnerships, and
4. Fosters communications, cooperation and information exchange among organizations.

Currently, the Alliance Network for Environmental Education is actively linking together Centers for Environmental Education. For example, the AEE will convene its annual conference, entitled "Network Globally Act Locally," June 20-22, 1991 at the Washington Dulles Ramada Renaissance, Washington D.C. The goal is to help build and strengthen an international network for environmental education. Along with international participants, representatives from 155 Alliance member organizations across the USA will attend.

Within the USA, the Centers have been organized into five Regional Councils with no less than five or more than twelve states in a region. Each Regional Council has an elected Chair responsible for the coordination of activities. This structure is loosely defined and is just about what the members within a Regional Council wish it to be. In my role as the new Chair of the fourteen Southern States Council, I am educating myself and encouraging others to use EcoNet's electronic mail and conferencing systems as the major method of communication between Centers. The Council Chair also works to resolve issues between new Centers and existing Centers by identifying each Center's strengths and, if possible, creating an agreed upon division of labor. At this time, there are 75 active Centers in the USA.

Network Centers for Environmental Education

Most Centers are established at colleges and universities where the goals generally include teaching, research and service. With these three goals stated as part of their mission, Centers housed in a university have little difficulty promoting environmental education for both pre-university and university students as well as organizations in the corporate and public sector.

The major emphasis in a Network Center is on teacher education, program and materials development, community outreach and research. Each Network CEE provides environmental education for teachers at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. For example, at the CEE at Oklahoma State University for graduate inservice teachers, we conduct kindergarten through high school teacher workshops on the content, methods, philosophy and curricula for interdisciplinary environmental education.

In cooperation with the Masters and Ph.D. Environmental Science graduate degree program, the OSU Center is home for graduate students majoring in Environmental Science with an emphasis on education. These Masters and Ph.D. graduate students select and conduct research in environmental education. Research topics have focused on Multi-user Interactive Computer Simulation (MICS) for water resource management, children's cognitive development of water cycle concepts, and assessing the educational needs of science teachers.

At the undergraduate level, we are currently developing a new interdisciplinary environmental science education course specifically for future teachers of children in grades five through nine (ages eleven through fifteen). The course stresses the inter-connectedness of all things, ethics, and exciting hands-on EE activities that teach major concepts of ecology.

Programs developed by the Center staff and graduate students continue to vary. For example, in early 1990 a team of four Center staff and graduate students took over an entire seventh grade class of 600 students in a metropolitan Jr. High School. The program we developed served to provide (1) a day of outdoor environmental education for the students and (2) a chance for the teacher to receive instruction in EE implementation.

Repeating a program developed in 1990, the CEE at OSU will conduct its second Academy for Interdisciplinary Environmental Science in the summer of 1991. Multi-cultural student research teams, taught by a multi-cultural university faculty, will travel across Oklahoma to investigate interdisciplinary environmental problems. The Academy is designed for High School students sixteen to eighteen years old and is funded by corporate and government grants.

The OSU CEE is probably weakest in the development of instructional materials. We did, however, conduct a teacher workshop to prepare teachers to use the Earthday 1990 Curriculum and arranged to duplicate and distribute these materials to every school system in Oklahoma.

An example of a recent outreach project is the Solid Waste Environmental Action Project (SWEAP). SWEAP involved a partnership between the OSU Network CEE, the United Campus Ministries, and the Society of Environmental Scientists. The goal of this group has been to conduct research and present data to convince the OSU administration to create a formal policy on recycling. The institution has accepted our data and is currently organizing a pilot project for the recycling of paper.

These examples are offered only because of my familiarity with them. There are so many things being done. There are more than 75 Network Centers doing many exciting things and many of the activities we are conducting in the OSU Network CEE are built upon ideas shared with us by members of the Alliance Network. The power of sharing successful teacher training models, programs, materials and research is considerable. Network Centers for EE provide environmental education for over 150,000 teachers yearly. These teachers have the potential of reaching 5 million students yearly, and the number of Centers continues to increase.

Alliance for Environmental Education and EcoNet

In the Spring of 1983, the Farallones Institute received a grant from the Apple Computer Company to develop a computer-based telecommunications network. The result of the Farallones Institute effort was EcoNet, its name derived from 'ecology' and 'network'. EcoNet's purpose was to study the feasibility of using advances in microelectronic technology for national and international communication.

EcoNet has become a powerful computer-based communication system helping the environmental movement throughout the world to communicate and cooperate more effectively and efficiently. A large computer, based in northern California, USA, connected to Telenet, a common carrier telephone, enables EcoNet users to communicate globally, usually through a local telephone call.

If you have access to just about any kind of personal computer and a modem, EcoNet will let you talk, plan and work with people in over 70 countries, including the USA. You can hold electronic conferences to plan joint projects, post your events on an international bulletin board and call for the latest information on environmental topics. A very attractive feature of EcoNet is that it can save your organization money. You can send messages, letters, documents rapidly for pennies per page.

EcoNet is the telecommunications network of choice for the Alliance and the Network CEE. There are more than 700 local USA members and more than 70 international members. EcoNet is a service of the Institute for Global Communications (IGC).

International Activities of the Alliance Network

The Alliance Network for Environmental Education is busy traveling to &127; &127;country after country to bring Centers into the Network. The goal of the Alliance is to have at least one Center in each country to act as a central information dissemination hub. At this time, the Alliance Network is working to enroll the following Centers: four in Brazil, one in the USSR, four in Czechoslovakia and at least one in each of the remaining Eastern European countries. There are active Centers in Bogota, Colombia and Egypt.

Recently, the Organization of Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD) became a partner in the International Network for Environmental Education. The Alliance is working with the OECD to establish the Network in twenty-four nations.

All national and international organizations are encouraged to join the Alliance for Environmental Education either as member organizations or as Centers in the Network for CEE. The Alliance for Environmental Education plans to assist those seeking membership or Center status by coordinating institutional/corporate partnerships. If needed, partners may help applicants with registration fees, equipment, materials or services.

Summary

Despite all the legislation, all the regulations, all the investments and all the good intentions, we are losing ground in the struggle for environmental quality. Despite deeply held concerns about declining public health and the health of the planet in general, we continue to abuse the land, air and water that sustain us.

In order to prevail, we must transform our concerns into a new environmental ethic, an ethic that supports creating an environmentally literate citizen of the world capable of wise decision-making that will sustain mankind on a finite planet. It is the life-long process of education that will make this critical transformation possible. Education is the key ingredient in global efforts to achieve environmental quality without sacrificing economic progress. Likewise, there cannot be economic stability in the absence of a sustainable quality environment.

Nothing less than lifelong environmental literacy, with each generation being taught anew, is needed for survival. The infusion of environmental education throughout the international community is crucial. The Alliance for Environmental Education and the Network for Environmental Education wishes to join in this international effort.

Professor **Terence John Mills** earned his Ed.D. at Indiana University and is now a member of the faculty of Oklahoma State University. His areas of expertise are science education and environmental education on which he has published 38 articles, and has received extensive funding in his efforts to promote environmental research. He also directs the board of the Alliance for Environmental Education.