



School Teams from Arkansas and New York Develop K-12 Curriculum Units and Frameworks for Sustainability Education

Now in its sixth year, CELF's Summer Institute for Sustainability Education has trained hundreds of educators from public and private schools from across the nation. Held at Reid Castle on the picturesque 100-acre campus of Manhattanville College in Westchester County, New York, the CELF Summer Institute is one of the most comprehensive programs of its kind in the U.S. Once again, the 2009 Institute offered a carefully planned curriculum intensive, taking participants from acquisition of content knowledge, rubrics and tools, through hands-on workshops, and culminating in the redesign of a curriculum unit or map specific to the needs and interests of each participant or team of educators.

Having learned about the CELF Summer Institute at the 2008 Greenbuild Conference, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Deb Bruick, sent a team of K-12 teachers from the Bryant Public School District (Arkansas) with the goal of creating a comprehensive sustainability curriculum map for the district. Ms. Bruick sat on a Greenbuild panel with CELF Founder, Katie Ginsberg, to share her district's impressive LEED-certified and environmentally sensitive school building designs. Bruick and Ginsberg discussed how the school buildings and grounds afforded authentic learning opportunities and how the Bryant curriculum could be enhanced through reframing it around sustainability. Two teams of teachers from Arkansas joined multiple teams from New York and enthusiastically shared perspectives on sustainability and educational reform from their respective regions.

The CELF Summer Institute is built on the premise that Sustainability education or learning involves more than providing expert knowledge to inform people about sustainability issues. It is about encouraging transformative learning - the capacity to construct knowledge, to challenge practice, to critique and debate sustainability issues. Participants learned that sustainability education is not just about creating courses that target sustainability as a new subject area. It is about integrating sustainability learning opportunities across all subject areas, so that students will be better equipped to deal with sustainability issues in all aspects of life and question social thinking and practices which influence global-local futures.

Distinguished Faculty – Internationally acclaimed Sustainability Education trainers

The 2009 Institute offered two strands: a 5-day Institute for middle and high school teachers, and a 3-day Institute for elementary school teachers. The Lead Presenter for the Middle/High School Institute was Susan Santone, Director of Creative Change Educational Solutions, a Michigan-based K-12 curriculum development organization. Internationally respected as a consultant on sustainability, Santone, who has advised the United Nations and Redefining Progress (leading public policy think tank that created one of the original Ecological Footprint calculations), has written curriculum on a wide range of sustainability education topics, including human rights, land use and renewable energy.

Jen Cirillo, Director of Professional Development for Shelburne Farms, led the 2009 CELF Institute for Elementary Teachers. Jen works with teachers to develop curriculum that uses the concepts of sustainability to increase student academic achievement and civic engagement.



Laying the groundwork – context and systems thinking

Participants were introduced to the fundamental concept of sustainability education: the creation of a meaningful context for learning. The context is the real world pulled into the classroom through the methodology of systems thinking. All activities are replicable for students in the classroom.

From theory to practice – sustainability as a lens for teaching and learning

The balance of the Institute is spent on reshaping curriculum or creating new curriculum with sustainability education concepts providing an underlying theme. During this curriculum development portion of the workshop, presenters provide individual guidance and provide feedback as well as share sample lesson plans and curricular materials for out-of-the-box use. The K-5 workshop, with its special focus on place-based learning, provided hands-on activities to help teachers design SE lessons using their school grounds and neighborhoods.

Curriculum Resources – Expert-created; Field-tested

In addition to the curriculum developed on their own, Institute participants in the middle/high school workshop received subscriptions to an extensive library of interdisciplinary resources through the Creative Change Curriculum & Resource Center (CRC). From individual assessment tools to full courses with complete student booklets and multimedia support tools, the CRC offers a mix of materials to enhance existing lessons, redesign units, or create entire new courses.

The CRC enables subscribers to search for and download individual lessons by age, discipline, topic and more. The CRC also offers ready-made units. The units feature complete lessons that are provided in a sequence to support effective instruction. Teachers can download any and all lessons to create a customized unit complete with all student materials.

Elementary teacher participants received curriculum resources from the CELF Institute Library of Teacher-Created Units as well as materials from Shelburne Farms.

For all participants, CELF offers ongoing support and feedback as well as a password-protected site for educators to access and share sustainability education units and Summer Institute presentation materials.

Whether changing the lens on existing curriculum or developing new units or programs to offer a real world context for learning, the CELF Summer Institute helps educators take into equal account the interests of people, planet and profit. Every year participants in the program come to realize that sustainability education can be achieved within current state and national frameworks and standards. National studies have shown - and the Summer Institute feedback continually demonstrates - using sustainability concepts as a context for learning increases student engagement and motivation.

Institute participation is eligible for professional development credits or graduate credit through co-sponsor, Manhattanville College School of Education.

To register for the CELF Summer Institute, visit www.celfeducation.org or call (914) 238-4743.