



The Eco Educator

Spring 2008 - Volume 13, Number 1

A newsletter of
Eco Education

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Technology Component Increases Impact of Environmental Education



As our communities become more invested in and dependent on technology, the opportunities to use new and exciting tools in classrooms seem endless. Steven Manson, a McKnight Land Grant professor in the Human-Environment Geographic Information Science (HEGIS) program at the University of Minnesota, wanted to use these new tools to combine spatial thinking with environmental education. After recruiting graduate students, including Len Kne, and partnering with Eco Education, Manson rolled out the Minnesota Interactive Internet Mapping project (MIIM).

MIIM is an Open Source-based project which uses other projects such as MapBender, MapServer, PostgreSQL and PostGIS to create a completely unique and interactive Web site for students to study and discover the environments around them. The Web site, now in its beginning stages, is being designed for kindergarten through undergraduate environmental classes to use in the exploration of Minnesota. Eco Education is piloting the Web site in City Connections classes at two schools: Horace Mann Elementary and Inter-District Downtown School.

Len Kne showing students how to use the MIIM Web site on their recent fieldtrip to the U of M campus.

Horace Mann Elementary teachers Pat Meuwissen, Ray Nelson, Rick Olson, Judy Ronnie, and Marianna Tennyson have been pioneers in exploring how MIIM can enhance their City Connections classes. Focusing on issues concerning the future of the neighboring Ford Site, these teachers are using MIIM to help students learn about land use, pedestrian traffic, development and resources in their community.

To kick off the new project, the HEGIS department invited 75 Horace Mann students to test the MIIM Web site in the GIS labs at the U of M campus. Students explored mapping tools in three rotations led by graduate students and were wowed by their expertise: Ryan Mettke, Wilson Library's Map Assistant, showed students old plat maps and aerial photographs of Horace Mann's neighborhood.

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Advocating Technology in Environmental Education

Kathy Kinzig, Executive Director

In the wake of Richard Louv's book "Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder," one might be somewhat surprised that Eco Education has been integrating technology into environmental education, or more specifically, into Eco Education's programming. Technology does have a place in environmental education, and we are seeking out which technological tools are most appropriate - tools that enhance the learning experience in the classroom and provide the potential to extend the knowledge and skills gained past that experience.

The benefits of technology are numerous. It helps us provide tools to students with different learning styles. Students who might thrive on taking in information through spatial or graphical means, for instance, can become much more engaged if the learning process involves technology such as interactive internet mapping tools like MIIM. And students who are visual or hands-on learners may become more engaged when given the opportunity to use digital media.

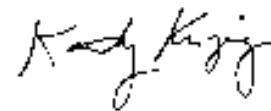
Technology can also help us connect with each other. Through the use of e-Mentoring's ecoLog, the learning experience is extended beyond the classroom and engages a much broader audience. Students connect with each other and connect with adults about environmental issues. This provides the exchange of ideas peer to peer, and also allows students to work with adults in order to explore professions, reflect and ask

questions about their lessons and reach deeper levels of understanding.

In addition, technology can be interdisciplinary. Through our e-Mentoring and Discovering Community initiatives, students are gaining knowledge of environmental issues while simultaneously building important skills such as framing questions, communicating ideas, writing reports and analyzing information. Technology used in our classes models tools used by modern science and professionals in the field or in the office, which exposes students to careers, field-work and real-life applications of their school work. We will keep you informed of the progress made through these new tools!

As always, we are grateful for your support of Eco Education, support that, among other things, allows us to continue to grow and integrate new technologies and methods.

Thank you!



Farewell to Brinkley

Brinkley Prescott, Eco Education's Development Associate of almost five years, left Eco Education this winter to pursue her next professional adventure. Brinkley, whose job entailed many behind-the-scenes activities, had a hand in most of the organization's large and detailed endeavors. Each year, she orchestrated our spring and fall campaigns. She managed our grants calendar and kept track of due dates, deadlines and reporting requirements - extremely important logistics without which an organization can falter. Brinkley was also in charge of our first fundraising event, the Earth Dinner, and subsequently, due to its success, continued to be the mastermind behind coordinating three of the four Earth Dinners hosted by Eco Education.

Brinkley is currently president of the board of directors for the MN Association for Environmental Education and serves on the board of the state Environmental Education Advisory Board. We have no doubt she will continue to make an impact on environmental education in MN. The staff and board at Eco Education thank Brinkley for all her many contributions to Eco Education which helped us strengthen what we do. We are sad to see her move on and will miss her laugh and the good cheer she bestowed upon us in the office.

Thank You Brinkley!

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Dan Sward gave students a 3-D tour of the world using Google Earth on the University's GeoWall. And, the highlight, Len Kne (with the assistance of Adam Berland, Julia Rauchfuss and Grant Elliott) led students through their first experience with the MIIM Web site. Students and teachers agreed that it was a fun and exciting fieldtrip.

Now that students are familiar with the program, they will continue mapping points on existing maps, and they plan to create a map which shows their ideal use of the land at the Ford Plant. The project, now almost completely maintained and continually expanded by Kne, has gone above and beyond the expectations of Eco Education. With MIIM, teachers have the advantage of using advanced tools to help their students investigate community environmental issues and they can customize Web sites to fit the needs of their students. Eco Education is preparing MIIM modules to be integrated into the City Connections curriculum for the 2008-09 school year.

To try out MIIM, go to <http://maps.umn.edu> and sign in as 'guest.'

"While MIIM provides digital maps and imagery in a manner similar to services like Google Maps, the project works with educators to identify features tailored to instruction. Key among these is a broad range of data, interactivity, security, ease of use, customization, analytical capabilities, low resource demands, and sustainability."

- Prof. Steven Manson



Students looking at plat maps in the Wilson Library.