



Environmental
Education
Advisory
Council of
New York City

EEAC

eeac-nyc.org

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROJECTS FORUM (The Forum)

FORUM WORKSHOP V REPORT

2/9/2021

Mike Zamm
Co-Chair, The Forum

Forty-six people signed up for the January 14 workshop; 27 actually participated in the zoom meeting with 22 staying for most of the two hour session. The workshop began with a welcome from Environmental Education Advisory Council (EEAC) Chairperson River DiLeo and introductory statements from Forum Co-Chairs Mike Zamm and Dr. Mary Leou.

Mike focused on a brief history of the Forum and the transition from [Teacher Environmental Education Preparation \(TEEP\)](#) to the Forum. Mary stressed outdoor education as an important aspect of the Forum's work and the significance of the Forum as a vehicle to promote environmental education.

Presentations of current Forum projects followed. River DiLeo, Fran Agnone and Shig Matsukawa of the EEAC Steering Committee discussed the [Database on EE Resources \(EE Clearinghouse\)](#) that has been in development since Forum [Workshop I](#) in 2016.

[The Database](#), which is on the EEAC website, is ready to receive information on programs, curriculums, professional development opportunities, etc. from organizations and individuals throughout NYC and the surrounding region. It will hopefully become an invaluable source of projects and materials to be used in classroom and outdoors by teachers and non-formal educators. EEAC has commenced efforts to advertise this resource.

Mike Zamm and Mary Leou then discussed the [TEEP Syllabi Bank](#) (now a project of the Forum), which emerged as a project idea during an EEAC Steering Committee evaluation of Forum [Workshop IV](#). Seven very detailed college courses aimed at preparing prospective teachers to involve their students of various ages in natural/life science, sustainability and environmental science classroom and outdoor education experiences, are currently in the syllabi bank.

Mike and Mary described these submissions from NYU, CCNY and Bank Street and issued a call for workshop participants to urge colleges of education to adapt the courses in their teacher preparation programs.

Soon outreach to colleges of education throughout city and state will begin, to make them aware of the bank with the hope that the schools of education or related academic subdivisions will submit courses and/or adapt one or more of the offerings to their teacher training curricula.

Currently, we estimate that approximately 15-20% of the 131 teacher training colleges and universities in New York State offer significant coursework in environmental education. This makes it difficult for many teachers to adequately prepare their students to master

environmental content in State Syllabi and Standards or Regents Examinations.

It is also a dereliction of the responsibility to prepare youth to be informed and participating citizens in a world beset by climate change.

The third presentation in the segment on Forum related projects was the talk by Emily Fano, Senior Education Manager of the National Wildlife Federation, on “Current Initiatives in Support of Climate Change Education in New York City and State – the Work of the Climate and Resilience Education Task Force”(www.cretf.org).

Emily outlined a comprehensive set of programs and activities in the city and region. These include the [NY-NJ Climate Education Youth Summit](#) which will take place February 8-12 online (tiny.cc/climatesummit) and the **Resilient Schools Consortium (RiSC) Program** whose purpose is to “increase climate science and resilience knowledge and critical thinking skills of middle and high school students and empower them to build resilience in their communities”(www.riscnyc.org). A free RiSC curriculum is available at <https://www.riscnyc.org>.

Emily also mentioned efforts to advance climate education at the federal level. A letter was sent to US Climate Envoy John Kerry on 1-26-21, penned by the National Wildlife Federation, the North American Association of Environmental Education and signed by 180 organizations, asking that education be included in the Paris Climate Accord, using the US [Alliance for Climate Education \(ACE\)](#) framework as part of the pitch.

Also, a number of letters have been sent from a variety of organizations to the Biden-Harris Administration asking for climate education to be included in President Biden's climate action plan.

For more detailed information on ACE and these national efforts contact Emily at fanoe@nwf.org.

DISCUSSION GROUPS/PLENARY SESSION

Participants then chose to participate in one of four discussion groups concerned with “Engaging Our Youth – EE Civics and Climate Change.” Each group facilitator was given a series of questions to help guide the discussion.

Group A – Student Involvement in School Based Green Energy Systems

No participant signed up for this group. However based on previous Forum workshops a preliminary effort had been started on working with the [NOAA Center for Earth System Sciences and Remote Sensing Technologies at City College](#) to increase the number of school weather stations in NYC public schools and to identify and/or create curricula on climate change which would reinforce student activities around school weather stations.

This project was completely curtailed by the pandemic. EEAC/The Forum should take it up again once the health crisis is over.

Involving students in lighting conservation in school buildings is another possible project.

Group B – Student Involvement in Exploring Connections Between Climate Change and Societal/Global Systems

Emily Fano led the group; Hannah Jaris of NY Sunworks, Deborah Carlin of the City Parks Foundation, and Shig Matsukawa, Fran Agnone, and Sarah Pidgeon of EEAC participated.

The group addressed green infrastructure, biodiversity, railroads, community systems and food production as key areas for exploring connections between climate change and societal/global systems.

One basic, powerful project idea emerged from the discussion: create a biodiversity/climate change tour in NYC which would involve a visit to the [Hall of Biodiversity at the American Museum of Natural History](#), then trips to selected community gardens to compare life in each location, and walks in each garden neighborhood to examine food systems and other climate related services such as transportation and home heating.

This could be coordinated through a passbook system in which locations are listed and described and students have each page representing a specific site stamped by a representative of the local area once they have visited it. Classes could visit all sites in the passbook on a one day excursion or through several forays.

Group C – Student Involvement in Climate Change and Specific Measures to Save Energy and Reduce Pollution

Jody Reiss of DOE was the facilitator; Isa Del Bello of the EEAC Steering Committee, EEAC member Andy Stone, Mike Zamm and Christina Tobitsch of NYSOEA participated.

During the discussion on pollution and energy reducing variables such as electric cars, a green economy, stricter methane emission standards and effective resilience measures the group became aware

that the whole system of having an electric car system in the U.S. needs to be explained better to all Americans, from schoolchildren to the public.

Similarly, the connection between methane emissions and activities such as fracking and food production needs to be understood better.

Two project ideas that could be considered after this conversation are:

- A brief pamphlet or booklet on the entire electric car system and how it would work, especially if President Biden attempts to implement his campaign vision of 500,000 electric car charging stations in the nation.
- An initiative to foster skill sharing for non-formal educators so they can better inform themselves about how energy and pollution technologies work. This could include a syllabi bank and clearinghouse for informal educators.

Group D – Exploring Connections Between Climate Change and Universal Values/Human Rights

Ray Pultinas of the EEAC Steering Committee was the group facilitator; Bob Wallace and Mary Leou of the EEAC Steering Committee and Sarah Ward of the National Wildlife Federation participated.

They first reviewed key documents which addressed this topic:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
Ecuador's Rights for Nature
Random accounts by environmentalists

They each considered which document inspires them to defend our own human rights in the face of climate change. They also examined how each person is surprised or moved when understanding the connection between climate and human rights.

They agreed that ignorance dictates human interactions with nature. They evinced a mutual respect for very local, place based education that gathers community wisdom around a very specific place.

The group concluded that we need to explore the various natural systems that operate around us that we benefit from and actually rely upon for our existence. We are interdependent with the life systems that are being threatened.

Following from this discussion the group stated that we need to help young people to understand how nature works. This education can occur outside of formal education, but should also happen within it.

The final conclusion was that within the context of climate change there is a universal human right to learn how nature works.

A possible project: enshrine “the Right to Learn How Nature Works” in one or more state or city formal documents. This would require research into the appropriate document(s) and the means of amendment followed by political action.

PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Renew the effort, once the pandemic is over, to establish school weather stations in NYC public schools and identify or create curricula on climate change which would reinforce student activities around school weather stations.
2. Explore expanding student involvement in lighting conservation in school buildings.
3. Develop a NYC biodiversity/climate change tour coordinated by a passbook system with a visit to the Hall of Biodiversity at the Museum of Natural History followed by trips to select community gardens and their neighborhoods to examine food systems and other climate related services.
4. Prepare a pamphlet or booklet on how electric cars and related energy support systems work.
5. Create an initiative to foster skill sharing workshops for non-formal educators.
6. Enshrine “The Right To Learn How Nature Works” in one or more state or city formal documents.

Recommendations 3-6 are probably the most significant to pursue at this point with 3, 5 and 6 the most unique and potentially transformative. This will all require discussion by the EEAC Steering Committee and with all who have participated in the Environmental Education Projects Forum.