Bridging Education and the Environment

By: Raquel Friedmann

Environmental and outdoor education is gaining more recognition throughout California and being seen as a crucial way to hedge against future climate risk. As someone who is passionate about environmental sustainability and education I think the education system needs to include more opportunities for students to engage with environmental curriculum and experience nature first hand. The Carmel River Watershed Conservancy strives to do just that. They provide field trip opportunities for local schools and put together a large education event called California Wildlife Day. Through my internship with them I gained more opportunities to see how environmental education can inspire students to care about the earth and think more about how their actions effect it.

In my own experience in environmental education and through research, I have found that integrating nature into everyday curriculum has a wealth of benefits for students. Studies have shown that environmental education supports critical thinking skills related to the scientific method including: questioning, investigating, forming hypotheses, interpreting data, analyzing, developing conclusions, and solving problems (Archie, 2003). Integrating the environment into multiple areas of school curriculum can also help inspire students to become more engaged and excited about learning because it allows topics to be applied to everyday experiences in the natural world (Glenn, 2000). Putting a heavier focus on the environment within the education system supports the fostering of global citizens as well. This is accomplished through the cooperative learning aspects of environmental education that promote working in teams and having students participate in solving real world problems with a far reaching and long term view (North American Association for Environmental Education, 2001).

One of the goals of the Carmel River Watershed Conservancy is to "balance environmental protection with the diverse needs of the community." Teaching students that the environment is important and that they have a direct impact will help to bring this balance into view. As I finish my degree in International Environmental Policy I see a need to go forward and spread this environmental message. Through education we have the opportunity to raise up a new generation of global citizens that will bring more resilience and innovation to our world in order to solve the ever growing issue of balance between the needs of our communities and the protection of our earth.
