

About This Compendium

INTRODUCTION

This compendium offers background information and reviews of environmental education materials focusing on the topic of communities, specifically the interplay of natural and built environments. Interdisciplinary by nature, environmental education is appropriate in any subject area, and many educators often integrate environmental concepts into their lesson plans. Finding suitable materials, however, can be a time-consuming and complicated task. This compendium helps streamline the selection process by identifying and reviewing exemplary curricula that are appropriate for classroom use.

COMBINING TWO COMPENDIA

When the Curriculum and Compendium Project was established over a decade ago, it seemed logical to create one compendium on natural communities and another on human communities. Later when these documents came up for revision, it was determined that merging the two was appropriate, if not essential. Humans are a part of nature; our activities have an impact on natural communities, many of which have been transformed into built communities. In this new compendium it was therefore logical to broaden the scope and examine the concept of “community” and the interface of humans and nature.

CONTENT OF CURRICULA

An extensive national search was conducted to locate teaching materials that focus on the interactions between built and natural communities—terrestrial, freshwater, and marine. Through this process, numerous areas of study were identified, including issues related to sustainable development, global stewardship, human population dynamics, land and resource use, community planning, biological diversity, endangered and threatened species and habitats, human interactions within ecosystems, and ecological restoration. A key trait of curricula

reviewed in this document is the study of the impact of human behavior and action on communities, from built environments to wildlands. Most of the surveyed curricula provide students with opportunities to examine their own roles, behavior, and consequences of behavior in order to make responsible choices. Several curricula, however, go further to encourage students to analyze the real, long-term social and environmental costs of human activities on local communities, as well as the global community. In several instances, students are also provided with opportunities to engage in service-learning projects. From examining trees on school campuses to monitoring and helping restore the health of ecosystems, a variety of activities are encouraged in these exemplary curricula.

It should be noted that, because the *Compendium for Water Resources* offers a thorough review of curricula relating to wetlands and watersheds, these two topics are not dealt with extensively in this document.

In addition, considerable effort was directed toward the selection of materials that focus on North American and specifically, Californian ecosystems.

EVALUATIONS

On the following pages, both descriptive and evaluative information on each curriculum are presented. Evaluation scores are based on statistical means derived from these data. Two sample pages are featured from each curriculum. Due to the length of some lessons, only a portion of the sample lesson may be provided. Each evaluation includes a description of the curriculum, ordering information, a “report card,” discipline emphasis, and brief comments from evaluators. Exact quotes from the reviewers are given quotation marks. General comments are not given quotation marks.

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If we all treated others as we wish to be treated ourselves, then decency and stability would have to prevail. I suggest that we execute such a pact with our planet.

Stephen Jay Gould

REVIEWERS

The curricula were evaluated by two teams of educators from throughout California. One team represented southern California; the other northern California. These educators were chosen on the basis of their extensive environmental education experience and expertise, as well as background in the topic area and state content standards.

MATERIALS

The curriculum materials were evaluated with the use of an evaluation tool developed by the California Department of Education in collaboration with other state agencies. The goal of this evaluation was to identify those curricula that align with California content standards and present accurate and comprehensive issues related to the topic of built and natural communities.

Curricula were evaluated for appropriateness at four grade-group levels: K–3, 4–6, 7–9, and 10–12. Each piece was reviewed by a team of educators with teaching experience at the target grade-group level. Multi-level curricula were evaluated at each grade level that they encompassed, resulting in some curricula being evaluated at three or even four grade-group levels.

Each curriculum described in this compendium received an overall grade of B- or above. These materials are highlighted in the main part

of this document. Supplemental materials not deemed curricular in design or too narrow a topic are listed in the appendices, along with other resources, software, and websites.

For ease of use, the main body of the compendium has been divided into the four grade-group sections. Curricula are arranged within each section by rating; those with the highest ratings are listed first.

APPENDICES

Included in the appendices are a description of the Curriculum and Compendium Project coordinated by the Office of Environmental Education within the California Department of Education; the Unifying Concepts for Environmental Education; the Conceptual Matrix, correlations of the Conceptual Matrix to five sets of Content Standards for California Public Schools and the California Education Code; the evaluation tool and listings of supplemental materials, software, and internet addresses for on-line information about environmental education in general, and more specifically, issues related to the study of communities.

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DEVELOPMENT

Sixty percent of the curricula were developed by private organizations; eighteen percent by academic institutions; twelve percent by county, state, or federal government agencies; and ten percent by commercial publishers. As with material listed in other compendia, the majority indicated classroom field-testing prior to publication and release of the material.