

## **Social Studies (Sense of Place and Civic Engagement) Break-out Session Summary**

Recent studies show that “sense of place” and civic engagement activities may play important roles in developing environmentally literate students. 2013 Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Summit organizers created a Social Studies session to investigate how Environmental Education (EE) and Social Studies leaders might better connect geographic awareness (sense of place) and civic engagement competencies, since both exist in Social Studies.

Through issue investigations, EE provides a unique vehicle with which to connect students to their community and their world. While historically EE programs have sought to increase ties between people and places, often EE programs focus on environmental outcomes or building ‘natural capital’ as opposed to ‘social capital’. Social capital emphasizes civic engagement through collective action and may be represented as a society’s ability to solve complex problems, such as environmental problems. By seeking to increase civic engagement and sense of place through an interdisciplinary approach, both formal and non-formal education communities might also play an important role in increasing social capital.

### **Key Ideas:**

During the Social Studies session a few important ideas surfaced:

- Numerous program models for sense of place and service learning (which fosters civic engagement) exist; however, fewer program models marry EE and Social Studies topics explicitly with civic action. This gap might be addressed in the revision of the Teacher Supported Meaningful Watershed Education Experience.
- An interdisciplinary framework is needed to connect EE, STEM, and Civic topics. Daniel Edelson’s geo-literacy diagram is informative. This interdisciplinary framework should be programmatic and tailored for state Standards of Learning (SOLs).
- An event is needed to initiate the establishment of the aforementioned protocols / framework to support interdisciplinary education tying EE, STEM, and social studies topics with SOLs.
- Both formal and non-formal educators will need professional development and support to aid them in the use of a new interdisciplinary framework.
- The Earth Force Process emerged as a model interdisciplinary program for democratic / civic environmental education.

### **Format:**

Session facilitators Kacey Wetzel and Maria Arnold introduced the session and facilitated six panel presentations, with breaks for questions and answers after the three then all six presenters. Panelists used four guiding questions to frame their presentations:

1. How can we achieve environmental literacy outcomes through the use of cultural and historical sites?

2. How can the environmental literacy community better connect with the community service and volunteerism communities?
3. What are the key steps for incorporating civic education (focused on democracy and social justice) into environmental education programs?
4. How can we infuse best practices in civic engagement / skill building into environmental education professional development programs?

Panelists provided brief overviews of programs they lead and the specific elements of those programs that connect social studies and environmental education topics; some programs were geared specifically toward sense of place while others incorporated both place and civic education. Panelists included:

- Edward Kinman, Professor of Geography, Longwood University – Dr. Kinman presented his work on an interdisciplinary teacher professional development institute that seeks to integrate perspectives on the Chesapeake Bay through Sense of Place and Civic Engagement topics.
- Kurt Moser, Earth Force – gave a presentation on the Earth Force process which engages youth as active citizens in their environment and community. Kurt emphasized the civic engagement component of the Earth Force process and the value of civic engagement to develop students capable of making informed decisions.
- Lina Oliveros, National Park Service Corps – described her work with the National Park Service, where she manages Youth development Programs.
- Keith Roumfort, Alice Ferguson Foundation – led session participants through a discussion of the Alice Ferguson Foundation’s ‘Bridging the Watershed’ program.
- Abbi Wicklein-Bayne, Chesapeake Conservancy – Abbi described her work with the Chesapeake Conservancy as the education specialist and provided a summary of her work in partnership with NPS. Abbi focused her presentation on a program in the Patterson Park area of Baltimore City, which fosters community connections and civic action.
- Barbara Young, Science Specialist at the Virginia Department of Education - described Virginia’s interdisciplinary professional development watershed “academy” that partners with natural resources agencies. Each cross-curricular team is paired with a local community mentor and to help conduct project-based investigations/MWEEs.

After the presentations, participants provided recommendations and input in response to three questions. The facilitators closed the session with dot-voting, to expedite feedback on the ideas discussed, and a poster walk. The following bulleted points are listed in order of importance based on the results of the dot-voting.

**Identify at least one “BIG IDEA” that came up in discussion that might significantly advance your topic:**

- Numerous program models for sense of place and service learning (which fosters civic engagement) exist; however, fewer program models marry EE and Social Studies topics explicitly with civic action.

- An interdisciplinary framework is needed to connect EE, STEM, and Civic topics. Daniel Edelson’s geo-literacy diagram is informative. This interdisciplinary framework should be programmatic and tailored for state Standards of Learning (SOLs).
- An event is needed to initiate the establishment of the aforementioned protocols / framework to support interdisciplinary education tying EE, STEM, and social studies topics with SOLs.
- Both formal and non-formal educators will need professional development and support to aid them in the use of a new interdisciplinary framework.

**Identify at least two recommendations to advance your topic for the formal education community:**

- Formal educators need training and encouragement to connect social studies with science, math, and English, with a goal of breaking down silos and making concrete interdisciplinary connections.
- Teachers need to be provided case studies of existing successful interdisciplinary programs that are good models. Specific efforts should be taken to target elementary schools. A product should be developed for elementary schools, which make explicit interdisciplinary connections.
- Pre-service teachers also must be trained and provided products to make connections between disciplines.
- A clearinghouse for students/ teachers (through Bay-Backpack?) should be developed to provide interdisciplinary resources that support Civic action.
- A focus on principal / administrator training to build support for thematic teaching and interdisciplinary approaches.
- Efforts should be made to reach out to schools or school divisions vs. individual teachers. A systemic approach to fostering geo-literacy, sense of place, and civic action must be taken.
- LEAs must be encouraged to adopt programs and systemic professional development programs across disciplines.
- Expectations for teachers and students during field experiences should also be defined within the formal education side.

**Identify at least two recommendations to advance your topic for the non-formal / environmental education community:**

- Non-formal education should use local context/place to develop context and to tell a story, and should seek to identify pathways to arrive at a specific environmental issue or problem.
- The non-formal education community must be encouraged to conduct needs assessments prior to program development; they should also seek to incorporate NAI strategies and NAAEE recommendations.
- Non-formal educators must identify the “So what” themes; specifically, what themes/ skills/knowledge are important to the formal education community?
- Further efforts must be made to connect non-formal Ed programs with school divisions and connect to specific state Standards of Learning and local resources.
- Provide high-quality professional development to and for volunteers; e.g. classroom management for field studies.

- Non-formal educators should invite classroom teachers to be on boards of NGOs to further engage formal educators.
- Efforts should be made to encourage explicitly civic-minded activities as they relate to democratic processes. Support is needed to link culture and historic sites with state councils of social studies; for example, park managers should be encouraged to attend appropriate social science professional conferences.
- Non-formal educators need venues and support to foster relations with LEAs; efforts should be made to formalize relationships with an MOU or agreement.
- Both environmental science and social science involve critical thinking; it would be prudent to promote critical thinking as a skill common to both disciplines
- Further efforts must be made to detail and articulate expectations for teachers/ students/ parents during field studies.
- Civic action should be encouraged outside of the classroom as this can transform student's connection to place.

### ***References***

Marianne E. Krasny, Leigh Kalbacker, Richard C. Stedman & Alex Russ, Environmental Education Research (2013): Measuring social capital among youth: applications in environmental education, Environmental Education Research, DOI:10.1080/13504622.2013.843647.  
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