



RELATIONSHIPS • RELEVANCE • RIGOR

Environmental Curriculum

Fundamental Principles

Three unifying principles ground this curriculum: place-based education, educating for sustainability, and making connections. Imagine each of these three principles as one leg of a tripod, a tripod which supports the DATE curriculum; each is essential to maintaining the curriculum's integrity and balance. As much of the curriculum as possible is focused on the children's own place, using the school and its environs, local neighborhoods and parks, and other features of Dekalb and DeKalb County as educational resources and learning environments. "The three primary goals of educating for sustainability are environmental integrity, economic prosperity, and social equity." (Anne Peracca Bijur, Incorporating Educating for Sustainability into the revision of Vermont's K-12 Education Standards, University of Vermont Master's Thesis) With attention to these goals, DATE's students will be on their way to becoming engaged and involved adult citizens who can create a sustainable future for themselves and generations to come. Making connections is how the brain, through synapse formation, learns and increases its capabilities. Making connections is how the ecosystems of the global environment are maintained. Making connections has been the result, if not the goal, of technology for millennia, from increased interaction, including commerce, between ancient cultures with the invention of watercraft to wireless telecommunications of the present day. The DATE curriculum integrates place-based education, educating for sustainability, and making connections in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary ways using a project-based approach.

Project Based

Each grade will be engaged in projects of varying lengths throughout the year, projects which will emerge from student-generated inquiry about the environment, using technology in developmentally appropriate ways and involving community members. Projects for each grade will be designed to address the Georgia Performance Standards across the curriculum and to increasingly expand students' understanding of the environment as they

move through the nine DATE grades. For example, the foci of kindergarteners' projects will be quite local and limited in scope (i.e. school grounds and each student's home and neighborhood) while the eighth grade projects will be more far-ranging in terms of both context and scale (i.e. helping to address environmental issues in Dekalb and perhaps elsewhere in Georgia and relating those to national and global concerns). All grades will also be involved in an ongoing school-wide garden project on the eight acres of the DATE grounds. The garden project is a vehicle for integrated learning, as each grade's garden project can be designed to include all four core curriculum areas (English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Socials Studies) as well as other curriculum areas. The project will also provide stimulating opportunities for developmentally-appropriate technology use, from trowels and hoes to using computers to lay out garden plots. Here are some examples of how DATE's three fundamental principles will ground the school garden project.

Place-based education: In developmentally appropriate ways, students will investigate questions such as What can we grow here in our soil and climate in this part of Georgia? Who in our community can be most helpful to us in meeting our garden project goals? How can we serve our community through our efforts?

Educating for Sustainability: Students will explore how we depend on the local environment and what necessities it provides. Through inquiry they will discover where the food they eat comes from and what impacts human land use has on the environment.

Making Connections: Composting is just one example of how the school garden project will help students experience and understand connections, connections which also apply to the community beyond the school and even to the biosphere as a whole. Students will grow food in the garden. Garden produce will be used in the school, compostable school-lunch waste will be collected as part of a student-designed and-maintained composting program, and the compost product will go back to the school garden(s) for soil enhancement, completing a cycle and offering a plethora of opportunities for learning about a variety of broad-ranging yet interrelated topics from nutrient cycling in an ecosystem to municipal waste management.

The school garden project will provide opportunities for interdisciplinary individual, small-group, and full-class projects as well as "buddies" collaboration between grades when older students, seventh graders, for example, work with younger "buddies", perhaps second graders, thereby enhancing the sense of the community at DATE. This is also a project for the larger community. Community members will participate, including local

garden experts who will provide advice and guidance and parents who will volunteer to work with students to maintain the garden(s) over the summer. The project will serve the community in that garden produce may be used at the school and perhaps at Dekalb public events. The school garden project is the hallmark manifestation of DATE's unifying principles of place-based education, educating for sustainability, and making connections in an environmental context using technology.

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