

NEW WORK WITH WORKING GROUPS

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Vexation

About five years ago, I transitioned from a background in wildlife biology to the field of science education, but I always expected to stay closely tied to my roots in science. As I get further into the field of science education, however, I feel myself being pulled away from science. The disconnect between science and science education seems to go both ways. Not only are many science organizations struggling to successfully incorporate education, but science education programs also struggle to stay current with and connected to science. Very few of the faculty or graduate students in my Science Education department at UGA are in contact with scientists on a regular basis and vice versa. My vexation, therefore, is that there is a gap between the fields of science and science education. I am concerned that, at least for me, the gap will grow as my career continues unless a concerted effort is made to bridge the gap. Currently there are few easily accessible venues for scientists and educators to interact and cooperate with each other.

Through high school and the beginning of my undergraduate education I remained more or less uninterested in science. I majored in environmental biology because I cared about the environment, and honestly, because nothing better had come along. It was during a summer internship, after my junior year of college, working on wildlife research projects that I realized the importance of biology and the process of science. I had to see the application of the principles that I had learned in class to understand their relevance and to become truly curious and creative in the way I viewed science. After the internship I had new direction and enthusiasm. I finished my undergraduate classes with a concentration in wildlife biology, and learned more in the final year of my undergraduate career than I had in the previous three. After graduation, I spent a year doing behavioral research on marine mammals then completed my MS doing research on the population dynamics of black bears. During my masters education I was a TA for a number of wildlife biology classes, which I absolutely adored. It was so cool to expose students to different questions and methods related to the conservation and management of wildlife species. Sharing the connection between science and practical application that had turned me on to science just a few years previous was satisfying and rewarding, so I began to think about science education as a career.

After completing my masters I taught high school for four years, teaching Biology, AP Biology, AP Environmental Science, and Wildlife Ecology. In each of these classes it was important for me to have students understand the connection between the science they were learning and larger issues such as personal health and environmental conservation. As a science teacher it was important for me to remain connected to the current research in science, so I tried to regularly read journals that I had read during my masters such as *Ecology* and the *Journal of Wildlife Management*. Last year I began working toward my doctoral degree in science education with a focus on students doing science research in high school and college. My experience working on a research project had a great impact on me, so I am now interested in exploring the experiences of students participating in research. My focus is now on science education, but my foundations in science, specifically wildlife biology, are still fundamental to my motivations and interests.

In an attempt to remain connected to the science community that I used to feel a part of, I presented at the Wildlife Society's annual meeting last fall. I had presented my masters research at this meeting a few years previous and several of my old colleagues were present at the meeting. Although I felt socially at home at the conference with all the familiar faces, I also felt that the work I was presenting – a small mammal track tube project that I had done with the high school wildlife ecology class that I taught – was marginalized at the meeting. Most scientists realize that producing the scientists of tomorrow relies on the science education today and more tangibly that education is an integral part of most current NSF grants, but education is not necessarily something that all scientists see as a fundamental component of their community of practice. And in talking with former colleagues about teaching I found that they were, not surprisingly, unaware of much of the research that has been done in science education. I am frustrated because I know that important work is being done in fields of

science and in science education, but the transmission of information from one to the other is not fluid. Students would be much better served if we had more avenues for communication between science and science education.

Venture

The Wildlife Society has several working groups that function as forums for members with common professional interests to network and exchange information. There is an Education working group within the Wildlife Society, but it has not been very active for the past few years. The information on the website is outdated, and there is no indication of future activity. My venture is to join the Education working group of the Wildlife Society and to help revitalize it. This group could bring together researchers, practitioners, and educators with the common goal of sharing wildlife science with students and communities. I see the education working group meetings as a forum for discussion regarding the present state of wildlife science education, as well as a venue to share research, educational approaches, curriculum, programs, methods, ideas, and concerns. The discussions and ideas shared within the group would work toward bridging the gap between science and education in wildlife science. By establishing and maintaining communication among the members of the group, the gap will hopefully continue to shrink.

My first attempt to address my vexation was on a very personal level. I thought that at the very least I could make sure that I did not lose contact with the scientific community that I had been a part of since my masters program. I promised myself that I would attend a meeting and/or submit a publication to a science organization at least once a year throughout my career. By doing so I thought I might maintain the connection that I felt slipping away. Thinking about it more, I realized that my feeble venture would have little impact on others who also felt the gap between science and science education. I want to do something that others could participate in or that they could emulate in their own area of study.

Most science journals and conferences have an educational component, but it is usually scientists with an interest in education that are doing the educational work in their field. All of the most recent members of the Wildlife Society's Education Working Group are wildlife biology researchers. None have backgrounds in science education. It is admirable that they value education and are interested in working together to better education in their field, but without a connection to science education they may be selling their efforts short. The work that is being done in science education could inform the teaching approaches of scientists teaching courses and could help them understand the effects that their teaching can have on students. By focusing on bringing scientists and science educators together at conferences, we could work toward bridging the gap between science and science education.

I do not have experience with working groups, so I would benefit greatly from others' input as to how to get this ball rolling. I have contacted the individuals who were last listed as members of the working group. I heard back from one member who said the group will probably meet informally at the annual meeting this November. This group member also gave me the contact information for the current chair of the group, but I have not heard back from that individual as of yet. I mentioned in emails with past group members that I am interested in joining the group and attending any meetings at the conference in November. I hope that the Crossroads meeting will help me prepare to address my vexation at the conference. I want to do what I can to contribute to the working group and to increase the connections between scientists in the group and science educators, but I do not want to give the impression to the current group members that the work they have been doing is sub-par. I would appreciate suggestions on how to contribute effectively without overstepping any bounds in the process. If others have been in similar situations, I would be eager to hear their experiences, and I would be very receptive to other ideas and advice as I pursue my venture.