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# The Future of Science Education in Elementary School

by Anah Soble



Somewhere between the 1st and the 6th grade we all learn that opposite poles attract, that the mitochondria is the powerhouse of the cell, and that the three basic types of rocks are igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary. Throughout our early education, many of us would cheer when we found out we would be watching an episode of The Magic School Bus or Bill Nye the Science Guy in class. Recycling and renewable resources have been important to us from the moment we first learned about terms like energy and conservation. Many college students interested in the sciences would say that their early science classes are what inspired them to continue to study science in the future. Science education is integral to any primary school experience.

However, the future of primary school science education is uncertain. When teachers are overwhelmed with standardized testing and preparation in reading and math (science is not tested until the 5th grade in Ohio), science is the first subject dropped from the school day. Many teachers complain about lack of training on how to teach subjects like basic geology and physics. To combat this, many school districts provide science kits with materials for various hands-on science activities from companies such as FOSS and Scott Foresman. These companies profit from their fun and easy-to-use kits which include most required materials for in class activities. For example, the kit introducing electrical circuitry would include insulated wires, switches and light bulbs. However, the teacher is often unable to find the time to learn how to use these kits.

"They provide in-service days in which we are supposed to learn how to use these kits, but at the same time, we are given all kinds of [test prep and grading] we are supposed to do. There's no time," says one 5th grade teacher in an underfunded school district in central Arizona.

That isn't to say that science is disappearing from schools. According to Ohio's New Learning Standards, science is still a part of the vision and goals of education. For each grade level, in the categories of "Earth and Space Science," "Physical Science" and "Life Science," but teachers are expected to fit all of this information into a school day with little administrative support. This leads to lower quality in the education. When there is time in the day to get to science, an overwhelming amount of information needs to be fit into the lesson in order to meet these standards. The quality of science education is dependant on teachers being given enough time in the day, the training, and administrative support. We often hear that with less focus on standardized testing and more attention on classroom learning, schools would be more successful, but action needs to be taken by lawmakers, administrators and parents alike. The next generation of engineers, researchers, doctors and science enthusiasts depends on it. ●

