

Bringing the *world* to the classroom

BY JEAN D'ANGELO

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D'Angelo**

Editor's note: This is the first in a series about a trip abroad by Menomonie High School agriculture teacher Jean D'Angelo.

As school resumes this week, many teachers will be asking their students, "What did you do over summer vacation?" This year, I will be able to share with my students an awesome life-changing experience about my travels abroad to South Africa.

From June 21 to July 13, I joined nine other U.S. teachers and 10 South African teachers on a field-based program learning about South Africa's culture, diverse ecosystems and environmental issues.

Global Environmental Teachings (GET) program, Global Environmental Management (GEM), and the Wisconsin Center sponsored the program for Environmental Education (WCEE) through the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Additional support for my travel came from the Menomonie community, including Menomonie Area Public Schools Foundation, Con Agra Swiss Miss, and the Greater Menomonie Area Community Foundation.

GET connects educators and students worldwide through environmental education. This is the third year GET has been offering international exchanges for teachers and the first year of an exchange between South Africa and Wisconsin. Trip leader Susan Ermer of UW-Stevens Point said, "The teacher exchange program to South Africa unites educators from the U.S. and South Africa so they can learn about environmental education through hands-on workshops while gaining a cultural experience."

Teachers had to apply for the workshop and be accepted into the program. Once accepted, we then enrolled as students at UW-Stevens Point for three college graduate credits. The first credit was online for four weeks, taught by Dr. Mai Phillips, senior scientist in the College of Natural Resources. Topics in the course included history, geography and climate of South Africa, diverse flora and fauna, economics and politics through the perspective of natural resources, agriculture and manufacturing. It also included current issues facing South Africa, including HIV, education and equality. I found this course to be very challenging, but an excellent addition to the travel and workshops because it allowed us to better understand the issues around the South African government, education system and culture before traveling there. The other two credits were earned by keeping a daily journal during our travels, presenting a lesson to all the teachers while in South Africa, and writing lessons that will be incorporated into our current teaching assignments.

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500
Jan 2007

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The South Africa program helped me increase my understanding of the world's diverse ecosystem and helped make the connection between Wisconsin's environment and those abroad. I will be using the knowledge I gained through this program to help enhance the current environmental education components into my curriculum. The school board approved a new pilot class called "world hunger" that I will be teaching this year. I am looking forward to using many of my videos and photos to help teach about global agricultural issues. I hope that my travel to South Africa, as well other educational experiences abroad will help to bring the *world* a little closer to my students and help them better understand how they fit into the big picture.

I would love to be able to take all my students with me to explore the world, but the best I can do as a teacher is to explore the world and bring a little bit of it back to my students.

Over the next several weeks, I will be sharing my educational experience of South Africa through stories and pictures. I hope to cover the following topics: Safari at Addo Elephant Park, biodiversity of plant and animal life on land and sea, the Great Fish River Game Reserve, global look at biodiversity in the Western Cape, environmental education programs, Kirstenbosch Garden, agricultural education in South Africa, Robben Island and current issues facing people today in South Africa.

For more information about South Africa or this educational program, contact me at Menomonie High School (715) 232-2609, ext. 151. I am also available for presentations about international travel.

"In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught." — *Baba Dioum, Senegalese Philosopher*