



Programs

"Programs Bring Science Centers to Life"

Programming

Science centers give science a presence in the community and offer people of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to ask questions, discuss, and explore varying aspects of science and technology. Programming is the "educational envelope" that surrounds the exhibits in a science center, where education is recognized as informal learning rather than more formal "classroom-style" learning, yet still a process with an outcome. So what is the function of programming in hands-on science centers?

First, programming can provide the means for meeting educational learning standards. Exhibits on their own may serve as tools to assist in the advancement of science literacy, but it is the educational programming that gives direction and focus to the exhibits so that educational standards may be addressed. Therefore, science centers should be active participants in the work of improving science literacy.

Secondly, programming "extends the life of exhibits." Just as there is more than one way to approach a problem, typically there are numerous ways to utilize exhibits in explaining scientific phenomenon. Programming, therefore, advances the educational process by recognizing various aspects of approaching science, as well as aiding in the cost effectiveness of presenting scientific principles in science centers.

Thirdly, use of programming promotes scientific literacy by demonstrating the interconnectedness of all of the sciences.

Environmental Programs

The Natural Sciences are an important part of any science center, since their applications are a part of our everyday life. Environmental education, an aspect of the Natural Sciences, brings about awareness of our surroundings and instills the knowledge that we are all a part of one global community.

ENVIRONMENTAL Programming

The above Flash video shows a portion of a guided field excursion on a boardwalk through an endangered mangrove environment. The "learners" here are all from a rural Zulu school. Even though they live within an hour drive from the Indian Ocean, these Zulu students had never experienced any of the coastal environments. The "explainers" leading the excursion were trained at the UNIZUL science center, and run their guided tours in both isiZulu and English. This particular group is being guided in isiZulu.

ENVIRONMENTAL Programming Needs

Dr. Hutter put together and filmed the mangrove environment field excursion during his Fulbright stay in KwaZulu-Natal in 2004. An associated computer program was constructed in both English and isiZulu, but is not yet available to learners due to a lack of funding for computers to house the programs.