

RVOEP Links Abstract Learning With Personal Experience

By Margo Porter, 3rd Grade Teacher

The learning programs at RVOEP are directly linked to the California State Standards. Our third grade curriculum, **The Role Of Living Things**, is supported by the Munch Line Monitors instruction at the site. However, instead of the exotic settings of the plants and animals pictured in our text, students are experiencing the concepts in a local setting. They see the known through new eyes and develop an appreciation for the environment that surrounds us.

Students are engaged beginning with the pre-discussions regarding our visit to the site. When we arrive, the students are immediately involved with the environmental respect modeled by the instructors. Cold temperatures, fog, mist, inconveniences (unconventional toilets, hand-washing, dirt, wasps) are presented in the positive light of outdoor learning. Instead of grumbling, students listen and become part of the adventure. The planned work is often interrupted by nature itself. The gray squirrel carrying a pine cone, the turkey vultures (peace eagles) sunning in a “dead” tree, the ant nest, darting lizards, chirping birds all offer a piece of the environmental story. These opportunities are incorporated into the work at hand. The students feel a rush of excitement and note how lucky they are to have seen these things.

Weeks after we return to our more conventional classroom, students offer responses to textbook lessons filled with examples from RVOEP. The food chain is explained through the munching they discovered. Their understanding of producers and consumers never fails to elicit examples from their tray findings. The “stories” are shared back and forth as they discuss terms and meanings used in the text. Without any prompting, they are linking abstract learning with personal experience.

My students can also relate the learning from past visits. They easily connect the learning lessons from then to now. The seeds are sown for appreciation, and a deep understanding of the vital links that sustain a healthy environment. While we all live in this area, not all students leave their city homes to explore the rural wonders of our geography. Those who do, usually lack the background to appreciate and truly see the resources. We have the learning resources here without having to travel somewhere else to see a working environment. The RVOEP site and educational programs are not only valuable, but they provide the vital opportunity to embed true learning in our own backyard.