

The importance of the ocean in geography education

Zwartjes Luc

Geography Department, Ghent University, Flemish geography teachers association (VLA), European association of geographers (EUROGEO), Krijgslaan 281, S8, 9000 Gent, Belgium
E-mail: luc.zwartjes@ugent.be

When we look at the different school curricula in various European countries no real mention is made of an 'ocean studies' course. Mostly it is divided into study of marine life (in biology) and coastal processes and basics on sea currents (in geography or sciences).

As a result, the role of oceans in a lot of real important ecological and environmental studies we are facing today is not enough accentuated. A better understanding of earth's global systems is only possible if more attention would be given to the importance of the oceans. Therefore we use the concept of ocean literacy as developed by the Ocean Literacy Network. They define ocean literacy as 'an understanding of the ocean's influence on you and your influence on the ocean'. This was translated into seven essential principles:

1. Earth has one big ocean with many features.
2. The ocean and life in the ocean shape the features of Earth.
3. The ocean is a major influence on weather and climate.
4. The ocean makes Earth habitable.
5. The ocean supports a great diversity of life and ecosystems.
6. The ocean and humans are inextricably interconnected.
7. The ocean is largely unexplored.

For each principle a conceptual flow chart was developed, a specialised form of a concept map, that not only shows what should be taught, but also in what order.

When analysing the different flow charts we notice the interfaces with geography education, thus making it easier to match with the curricula. After identifying these matches an attempt is made to create a learning line in ocean literacy.

References

Resources on Ocean Literacy. 2011. Retrieved May 30, 2012 , from <http://oceanliteracy.wp2.coexploration.org/>