A New Direction for the Education Connection

Grayson C. Brown

As an entomologist, you are an educator, whether you want to be one or not. You know interesting things about a dominant life form here on earth, and people want you to tell them some of those interesting things. The educator in you is often informal, as when someone first discovers that you are an entomologist and bombards you with the typical lay questions:

Why do insects fly to lights?

How can I keep Japanese beetles off of my roses?

What’s the biggest/smallest insect in the world?

Why did God create flies?

Universal as these informal settings are, though, eventually most of us find ourselves in more formal educational situations. Some of us teach at educational institutions in lecture and laboratory courses—a role often accompanied by one-on-one instruction or mentoring, as when we are training graduate students or technicians. Others of us teach at various kinds of extension training or outreach programs, in which we train nonentomologists (e.g., farmers and health care workers) how to manage a particular set of insect-related problems. Still others are entomology specialists in a multidisciplinary group of other professionals (e.g., military and industrial organizations), in which one of the duties is to provide information on the entomological aspects of specific problems.

The array of educational settings is large, and a variety of techniques are needed to effectively educate across all settings. As the new contributing editor for the Education Connection, I want to address that variety as a place where we can share our experiences with specific techniques that do or do not work. This emphasis is a break from past columns, which tended to stress programmatic themes, such as a school IPM program or pedagogical approaches to training programs. I am looking for articles that are immediately applicable to a significant segment of this column’s readers.

Format for Education Connection Papers

I am particularly looking for articles that detail specific teaching techniques. The preferred papers are those that can identify a specific setting or situation, the problem encountered in that setting, technique(s) developed by the author to overcome the problem, and evidence that the technique was or was not successful. If enough such papers appear over the years, this column will accumulate a useful “toolbox” for teaching methods that can be helpful in any common entomological teaching situation.

To accomplish this goal, the articles should have a similar format so that readers can focus more quickly on issues of interest. The ideal article will be arranged as follows:

An Introduction will, in a couple of paragraphs, introduce the specific situation (lecture, laboratory, extension, etc.) and specific problem (disinterested students, not enough time, etc.).

Next, a Teaching Methods section will describe the details of the technique: how it was implemented, what materials were needed, etc.

An Evaluation and Discussion section will then report any evidence of the method’s effectiveness. Student surveys, test scores, peer review comments, and so on are examples of evaluation information that would be appropriate in the Evaluation and Discussion section.

The paper will also have the other elements standard to an ESA paper (key words, references, acknowledgements, etc.). Education Connection papers do not require an abstract.

Each article should include a particular example of the technique’s implementation, described in enough detail so that a reader could duplicate it; we will set off this example in a highlighted sidebar or box. For instance, if an article deals with techniques to provide hands-on experience with insects in a winter lecture course with 200 nonscience freshmen, the sidebar might describe one specific take-home or in-class assignment that demonstrates the article’s main point. These sidebars should be short and to the point—200 words or less.

Not every article will be able to follow this general format. Nevertheless, there are advantages to consistency, particularly from the readers’ point of view, and I encourage authors to try to conform to this format when practical.

These articles will not be restricted to traditional educational settings. Techniques used by trainers and educators in the military, industry, foreign assignments, etc., are encouraged. Furthermore, commentary on published articles is also welcomed and may also be published here or elsewhere in the American Entomologist.

Finally, if an author has a manuscript idea that may not fit into the above framework, that author should contact me to explore the idea’s compatibility with the Education Connection.

How to Submit Articles

If you would like to have a paper considered for the Education Connection, contact me directly, preferably by e-mail (gcbrown@ix.netcom.com), with a brief outline (two pages or less). With that outline, I can encourage or discourage full paper development and offer suggestions on how
to develop the manuscript. Following the outline review, the manuscript should be prepared and submitted as described in the Information for Contributors on the inside back cover of this issue. The manuscript will then be reviewed like any other refereed publication.

Please keep the articles short and to the point. They should be less than 2,000 words (two to three times as long as this note). Remember that the best articles will be used by other entomologists in front of students, so there need not be extraneous detail.

A Final Thought

Whether or not you choose to submit a paper to the Education Connection, please let me know what you think about the new format. Also let me know if you find specific articles to be especially useful to you. Feedback that I receive from the readers of this column will help me select and edit future articles so that the Education Connection increases in value and relevance over time. Ultimately, the Education Connection is your column, not mine, and any guidance that you can offer to make it more useful to you will benefit all of us entomologist-educators.

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**Swarms of gnats**

_in early evenings were fodder for fun when I was eight riding my bike out on the gravel road, my outstretched hand waving through the spinning clouds of bugs. Coaster-gliding into globes of haze I’d shut my eyes and feel the tiny flies nick my face.

Now I know a bit more about these black vapor swirls, these gathering storms of males, these miniature leks for luring mates to dance within their domes; how midges might hover over some marker in the dirt or grass or drift along with a moving target—maybe a boy or girl on a bike dallying for one last spin before being called in for the night.

Bruce Noll