

# International Consortium for Interdisciplinary Education about Health and the Environment – Second Winter Meeting

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Klaus Klein, Dr.rer.nat  
Robert J. McDermott, Ph.D.  
Dale O. Ritzel, Ph.D.  
Sandra Vamos, Ed.D.

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## ABSTRACT

*The second winter meeting of the International Consortium for Interdisciplinary Education about Health and the Environment was held under the auspices of the International Office of the University of Cologne, the Institute of Biology and its Didactics, the Abwasserforum e.V. Köln, and the Gesellschaft für Umwelt, Gesundheit und Kommunikation, December 18-20, 2008 at the University of Cologne, Germany. Several presentations and follow-up discussions ensued. This paper reiterates the purpose and philosophy of the Consortium and the need for interdisciplinary thinking about the linkages between the environment and health. Umwelt und Gesundheit Online, 2009; 2, 1-2.*

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## Background

The creation and promotion of the *International Consortium for Interdisciplinary Education about Health and the Environment* in 2007 was, in part, for the purpose of promoting interdisciplinary education and research about this vast topic. To date, members of and participants in the Consortium have come from universities in Europe, Asia, and North America. Members' professional interests are in the areas of environmental health, health education and promotion and other areas of public health, the environmental and earth sciences, including but not limited to ecology, meteorology, and climate change, other physical and natural sciences, the development and evaluation of environmental policy, the codification of legal and ethical practices related to the environment, geographical information systems, hazardous waste management, pollution of water, air, and other natural resources, occupational health, risk assessment, management, and communication and socio-psychological aspects of human behavior.

In its brief history, the Consortium has organized two meetings to foster international and inter-institutional collaborations; create a mechanism for participants to become better acquainted with

the diversities and similarities across their fields of endeavor; provide a limited infrastructure for promoting linkages between the academic and practice worlds; initiate an ongoing "think-tank" for promoting interdisciplinary teaching at the respective universities; seek mechanisms for bringing students of different countries and disciplines together; and prepare scholarly papers on relevant and timely topics for dissemination to the academic community. The immediate consequence of the inaugural meeting in 2007 was the rebirth of this scholarly publication (formerly *Umwelt und Gesundheit*) that was published in print form during the 1980s and 1990s. The first volume of the new *Umwelt und Gesundheit Online* produced 17 papers covering 116 pages of text.

The 2008 meeting was held December 18-20 at the University of Cologne, in Germany. This conference, including presentations and discussion, was sponsored by the International Office of the University of Cologne, the Institute of Biology and its Didactics at the University of Cologne, the Abwasserforum e.V. Köln, and the Gesellschaft für Umwelt, Gesundheit und Kommunikation. Scholars representing the several of the health and environmental sciences were invited conference

presenters and panelists. The theme of the meeting was "Hands-on Science – Health and Environmental Education."

## Program for the Meeting

The program for the conference included the following oral presentations:

\*\*\* *Hands-on Science: Education from the Perspective of the Cognitive Psychologist* (Hilde Haider, University of Cologne, Germany)

\*\*\* *Hands-on Science: Education from the Perspective of the Educator* (Ebru Zeynep Mugaloglu, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey)

\*\*\* *A Constructivist Method-Pool for Science Education* (Stefan Neubert, University of Cologne, Germany)

\*\*\* *An Environmental Training Program for Prospective Teacher* (Zerrin Doganca, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey)

\*\*\* *Advanced Inquiry Labs on Water with Special Emphasis on Water Problems in Israel* (Dana Yaron-Marcovich, Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel)

\*\*\* *Water: A Module for Learning Chemistry* (Daphna Mandler, Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel)

\*\*\* *Forest fires in Turkey: Setting up a Decision System for Prevention* (Orhan Yenigün, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey)

\*\*\* *Management of Construction and Demolition Wastes after Disasters* (Turgut Tüzün Onay, Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey)

\*\*\* *Canadian Quality of Life: Linking Social Environmental Indicators to Educational Objectives* (Sandra Vamos, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada)

\*\*\* *Quality of Life in BC: Connecting Social Environmental Indicators to the School Setting* (Laura MacNiven & Julia Hayos, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada)

\*\*\* *Environmental and Human Impact of 21<sup>st</sup> Century U.S. Hurricanes* (Robert J. McDermott, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, USA)

\*\*\* *Environmental and Health Issues Relating to Flooding on the Mississippi River* (Dale O. Ritzel, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, USA)

\*\*\* *Readiness of Change of Nursery Teacher Trainees to Adopt an Adequate UV-Protective Behavior* (Claus H. Reinhardt, Teacher Training College, University of Cologne, Germany)

\*\*\* *Hands-on Water Workshop* (Dana Yaron-Marcovich & Daphna Mandler, Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel)

### Follow-Up Discussion

Discussions about health and the environment must include methods and strategies for removing the disciplinary “silos” that act as artificial and useless impediments to scholarly discussion across professional fields of endeavor. Moreover, the dialogue cannot be unique to one nation or one continent. The future of the planet and the health of its inhabitants are dependent on international understanding and cooperation. Therefore, the participants of this second meeting must strive to bring in new colleagues from other countries not represented thus far.

### Connecting the 2007 and 2008 Meetings with the Future of the Consortium

The theme of the 2008 meeting was originally recommended to be “Hands-on Strategies for Translating Environmental Principles to the Public” but eventually became “Hands-on Science – Health and Environmental Education.” Although there was deviation from the original theme, a couple of the questions noted from the inaugural conference were addressed, in part, nevertheless (McDermott, Klein, Ritzel, & Vamos, 2008). Specifically, these questions included:

- The gap between science and practice versus public understanding – what can one do to narrow this gap?
- How can one motivate elementary, secondary, and post-secondary students to understand more fully the role that science plays in their lives?

What happens in the immediate future for the Consortium is unclear. Will there be a 2009 winter meeting? Perhaps, but if so, it may assume more of a workshop-type style and be more limited in scope. Other future considerations include splitting the Consortium into technical, behavioral, and educational spheres. What continues to be clear is the need for interdisciplinary collaboration and the principles identified in the organization’s defining paper (McDermott et al, 2008).

### References

McDermott, R.J., Klein, K., Ritzel, D.O., & Vamos, S. (2008). International consortium for interdisciplinary education about health and the environment – founding purpose and philosophy. *Umwelt und Gesundheit Online*, 1, 1-4.

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Klaus Klein ([klaus.klein@uni-koeln.de](mailto:klaus.klein@uni-koeln.de)) is Professor, Institute of Biology and its Didactics, and Director, Health Education Research Unit, University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany. Robert J. McDermott ([rmcdermo@health.usf.edu](mailto:rmcdermo@health.usf.edu)) is Professor and Co-Director, Florida Prevention Research Center, University of South Florida College of Public Health, Tampa, Florida, USA. Dale O. Ritzel ([dritzel@siu.edu](mailto:dritzel@siu.edu)) is Professor and Director Emeritus, Southern Illinois University Safety Center, Carbondale, Illinois, USA. Sandra Vamos ([svamos@sfu.ca](mailto:svamos@sfu.ca)) is Assistant Professor of Health Education in the Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. Copyright 2009 by *Umwelt und Gesundheit Online* and the Gesellschaft für Umwelt, Gesundheit und Kommunikation.

