ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

‘STICHTING VELDSTUDIE HEI- EN BOEICOP’
a field study centre in The Netherlands

This article describes the activities at the centre and how they contribute to environmental education for adults and children. The centre I work at is part of ‘De Stichting Veldstudie Hei- en Boeicop’ which can be translated into English as ‘The Field Study Foundation at Hei- en Boeicop’. In this text I will refer to this foundation simply as ‘the field study centre’.

Foundation of ‘Stichting Veldstudie Hei- en Boeicop’
Drs. G.A. van Griethuysen founded the field study centre in 1988. At that time, he was teaching biology to students at a High school in Amsterdam. Because Van Griethuysen wanted to practise biology in the field as well as from inside the classroom, he decided to leave Amsterdam and buy a farm in the province Zuid-Holland. He found a suitable spot in a little agricultural village called Hei- en Boeicop, situated in a clay and peat area between the big rivers of Holland. Here he started building up a field study centre on the terrain around his farm and had several new buildings built. These are used as places for pupils and students to look up the names of the organisms they have collected in the field and to work out their results. An old hay barn was transformed into a simple laboratory where measurements and analysis on soil- and water samples can be taken. The new buildings also contain a fully-equipped kitchen, a library, places to sit and relax and watch TV in the evening and sleeping accommodation for 50 people.

Second field centre in Zeeland
In the first year of the field study centre, Van Griethuysen led many of the field study projects himself. In time, probationary teachers helped in leading the projects at the field study centre and eventually some ‘professionals’ were hired to lead the projects. Then in 1993 a second field study centre, ‘De Schelphoek’, was acquired, on one of the islands in the province of Zeeland.

Now, more than 20 years later, the centre has grown, with nine part-time staff who are paid out of the centre’s income from the visiting schools and other projects - the Foundation does not receive any funding from the government or other parties. From early spring until late autumn some 45 to 60 schools visit one of the field study centres each year. Twice a year extra accommodation is hired to support fieldwork for schools at other locations. Three quarter of the visiting schools are secondary schools, the rest is divided into primary schools, agricultural colleges, teacher training colleges, international schools and universities. Some schools (mainly the ones situated in the neighbourhood of the centre) do a programme of one day, but most schools stay at the centre for 3 to 5 days. In Amsterdam there is a third centre, led by our educators, De Oeverlanden, special set up for day programs for schools in Amsterdam.

Our aims
The most important aims of the field studies are the following:

- The development of interest in exploring the plant and animal life and all that has contributed to the formation of the landscape.
- Contributing to the personal development of people in relation to nature and the environment.

A common programme for a field study project at the field study centre
The programmes of the field study centre always take into account the wishes of the teachers. With primary schools, the programme aims primarily to let children discover new things in their environment and there is also time for sports and games outside. In general, secondary schools have a programme that is more stacked with serious fieldwork activities and most of the time the pupils are graded for their work. Student teachers use their time at the field study centre to
prepare their own lessons which they test at the end of the week with pupils from nearby schools. But in general the following components are present in a project:

- A welcome and introduction to the accommodation and house rules.
- An introduction to the programme, and letting pupils know what they will be graded on.
- A reconnaissance walk with questions about the area.
- A practice of fieldwork techniques; for instance pond dipping, learning techniques to describe vegetation, doing a soil drill, catching soil animals, making a sketch and a written description of the landscape, and taking samples and analysing them in the laboratory.
- A PowerPoint presentation about the geological formation of the area, or a field investigation
- An opportunity for pupils to suggest their own investigation: they fill in a form that explains their method and which materials they need. Usually the groups compare two different places, for instance the biodiversity on the land of a biological farmer, and the land of a 'traditional' farmer. Investigations on a transect are also possible, for instance the influence of discharged water on ditchwater, or the influence of pig farms or highways. The pupils will not only practise their skills in biology, but also in physics, chemistry, geography and language (interview and presentation).
- A day when the pupils are in the field to collect data.
- Processing the data into clear tables and schemes. After that the pupils will try to conclude if their hypothesis is rejected or not.
- Most schools end the fieldwork project with handing in a report. Besides that, many groups do a PowerPoint presentation about their investigation.

**Other activities at the field study centre**

The activities of the field study centre do not stop at organising school camps and nature holiday camps; many other activities have been created. Lesson programmes are now being developed for schools in other areas in Holland and also abroad, in Costa Rica and Morocco. Other fieldworkers develop new fieldwork materials and lessons and make educational boxes that schools can borrow or buy. The field study centre also makes colourful some 30 booklets, which describe nature walks (also inside major cities), have been written and published, during the last ten years.

In 2004 the field study centre bought a company that makes route markings for walks (www.lizard-point.nl). At the moment, two employees have a full time job making route markings, bridges, benches and information panels, which they place all over Holland and keep them maintained.

For more information about the field study centre you can visit our website: www.natuurkampen.nl (at the moment still only in Dutch)