

WOOD AND FIBER SCIENCE

JOURNAL OF THE SOCIETY OF WOOD SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME 31

JANUARY 1999

NUMBER 1

QUESTION: Should we or should we not speak up?

ANSWER: Most definitely.

OK, but about what you are thinking? About the environmental implications of using wood-based products, of course. Recently we held a Wood Magic Show at Virginia Tech for third- and fourth-graders. We designed the events and curriculum around Virginia's standards of learning for the third and fourth grades, and we used Mississippi State's highly successful Wood Magic Science Fair as a template. In short, we had a blast. When the kids were told by their tour guide that they were going to make plywood next, they literally jumped up and down and cheered. When was the last time you felt that way about making plywood? As they did the first time in Mississippi, we had some children who were under the misunderstanding that logging was responsible for the destruction of the rain forests, and let me tell you from first hand experience, *they* are not shy about speaking up. Fortunately, we did have events that discussed the importance of wood based products in their lives every day and about forest management activities versus the destruction of the earth's natural resources.

The children participated in a variety of fun-filled activities, demonstrations, and experiments. In addition to making plywood, they saw the intricate architecture of tree leaves and termites in our scanning electron microscope; they bent a piece of wood and saw how we design houses with the knowledge of the bending properties; they learned the role of terpenes in determining how a tree or piece of wood smells; they sanded off the surface of a used pallet and discovered that just a few swipes of the sander revealed intact and highly usable solid wood; they made paper from recycled cardboard box fiber; they puffed up their cheeks to blow soap through red oak sticks (some were white oak and that *really* puffed up cheeks); and eventually, they ate pizza with us for lunch. The last event of the program took place when the children and guests planted a tree seed as a symbol of what they learned at Wood Magic; and just before they got on their bus to go home, they had a chance to discuss reforestation efforts with us.

Those of us at a university are in a good position to take a leading role in education of on-campus

students and to hold programs such as a Wood Magic Show for children and guests. Mississippi and other similar university programs have the opportunity to interact with hundreds of children and teachers annually. As you probably guessed already, the impact of these programs is tremendous. Hundreds of children are introduced to the versatility, beauty, renewability, recyclability, and joys of wood. Their teachers and parents are also impacted by the contagious enthusiasm of these children. They leave this program chanting wood, wood, wood, wood is good. In fact, while I was shopping for groceries Saturday, I overheard a young girl say to her mother, "Can we go make some plywood again, please?" Also, this is a good opportunity to engage the college students with young children, industry personnel, and agency folks. It allows them a volunteer opportunity they would not have otherwise. If you haven't started a program like this at your university already, I highly encourage you to get started. It's a lot of work, but it's worth the effort.

But what about those who are in research labs, behind desks, in the industry? How can we contribute to public education about wood-based products and production? Even in this age of instructional technology, web-based learning, video conferencing, etc., I still believe the best way to interact with people is one-on-one. Individuals can contribute by participating with the university-based programs, by setting up their own classroom sessions, by attending club meetings, by becoming involved with local recycling and environmental groups. The list is limited only by our imagination. If we feel somewhat reluctant to get started because of lack of experience or materials remember that there is an increasing effort at universities and industries to take a leading role in environmental education. The mechanisms are in place. The lesson plans are done. The techniques are established. We are ready to speak up.

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