

An Apple Offers Valuable Environmental Lessons in Project Learning Tree Workshop for Future Teachers

Contributed by Tobie Baker
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Harold Anderson, state coordinator for Mississippi Project Learning Tree, points out the distinctions in foliage to UM elementary education students. UM photo by Tobie Baker.

OXFORD, Miss. - The day began with an apple, a symbol of the Earth. Its resources - peel, fruit and seed - are limited, much like Mother Nature's assets.

The apple wasn't left on a teacher's desk by a student; instead, it was a teaching visual in the recent Project Learning Tree workshop at the University of Mississippi Field Station. Some 150 UM education majors were taught interesting ways for teachers to incorporate the environment into their lesson plans.

"We learned why environmental education is so important," said senior Kimberly Logan of Abbeville. "The apple visually revealed just how few resources that we have on Earth. We must protect our environment, and this workshop will definitely be beneficial to me as an educator."

PLT aims to use the forest as a "window into the world" to increase students' understanding of the environment and instill the confidence and commitment to take responsible action.

Harold Anderson, a retiree of the Mississippi Forestry Commission, has worked for 10 years as the state's PLT coordinator. The program instructs pre-service and in-service teachers in 97 lesson plans across multiple academic courses of study, all of which are aimed at fostering better environmental understanding, he said.

"Project Learning Tree is good, unbiased, scientific material that's both fun and interesting," Anderson said. It is sponsored by the Mississippi Forestry Commission, Mississippi Forestry Association and the USDA Forest Service.

The workshop revealed just how easy and enjoyable it can be to incorporate environmental education into different subject areas, Logan said. Each participant received classroom supplies and an environmental education activity guide, designed not only to interest students but also to enhance their critical thinking skills.

"Project Learning Tree was amazing," Logan said. "It was a true learning experience from the introduction all the way through to the final activity. No matter what subject you teach, there are activities that can be integrated into that content area."

Logan expects to graduate in May, with plans to pursue a master's degree in education.

"Our pre-service teachers love Project Learning Tree," said Debby Chessin, UM education professor. "It's a great

modeling program that engages our students, and hopefully they, in turn, will be motivated in their own future classrooms to teach their students about the environment."

Since 1987, nearly 15,000 Mississippi teachers have participated in PLT training, and it's estimated that those teachers have reached more than 3 million students statewide, Anderson said.

With nearly two-thirds of the state covered by forests, Mississippi leads the nation in the number of tree farms, boasting more than 3,000 statewide.

For more information on the UM Field Station, go to <http://www.baysprings.olemiss.edu/> .