

The NEXT big thing in water education is NOT about water...

ThinkWater is a national youth education campaign supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the goal of which is to help youth think and care deeply about water. Evidence indicates that creating lasting behavior change in students requires more than new information. Such change requires students to actively engage with information by thinking about it. In order for this thinking to occur, students (and educators) need to develop an awareness of thinking skills (e.g., metacognition).

What is the premise of ThinkWater?

1. Because water education already has an enormous array of excellent information and resources on water topics and issues, merely creating more of the same such resources would be additive. What water educators need is a “force multiplier” that leverages these amazing resources to cause youth to think and care more about water.
2. That multiplier is thinking. Evidence shows that thinking is the missing link that needs to be put back into the educational equation. To this end, the ThinkWater model focuses on “thinkifying” existing content curricula and training teachers to use thinking skills as their primary tool for learning.

What does ThinkWater do?

1. We provide the research, theory and practice that serves as the foundation for the transformation of water education. ThinkWater’s approach to education is based on cross-disciplinary research in human learning including: education, water education, metacognition, neuroscience, brain and behavior, systems thinking, youth development, and epistemology. ThinkWater’s theoretical foundation is “positively disruptive,” meaning that the theories that drive ThinkWater programming have the potential to disrupt every aspect of water education in a positive way toward more effective teaching and learning.
2. Based on this approach, we provide “thinkified” lesson plans, online training, new classroom tools and techniques, and a rich repository of resources to help both formal and informal educators to engage students in water topics through thinking.
3. We provide an online community that allows formal and informal water educators to visually map, analyze, present, share, adapt, rate, and discuss these “thinkified” lessons.



4. We provide online training to help water educators “thinkify” their own favorite lessons and share them with the online community.
5. The outcome of the online community is a “crowd-sourced” national water education curriculum that builds upon the best existing content and allows for long-term adaptability and sustainability. This online community ensures that the best water education lessons and activities “rise to the top” and are easily distributed (similar to finding the “just right” book on Amazon.com).
6. We provide rigorous assessment tools and techniques that measure both deep understanding of content and thinking skills and are integral throughout the lessons.

What makes ThinkWater different?

ThinkWater is different because we focus on the missing link in education: thinking. The problems water educators face are no different than the problems that math, science or language arts teachers face. Research shows that students are often “strategically compliant” (they are accustomed to learning how to “play the game”) but do not develop a deep love and connection to topics and learning. In addition, students become information-full but not knowledge-able. While they can pass tests, they rarely develop deep understanding of the ideas and concepts the test was on. ThinkWater focuses on using the best of water education programs (vast and rich resources) while changing fundamentally the way we teach these programs.

To that end, ThinkWater will have broad impact as the model on which to build other natural resource-related educational successes. The same approaches, techniques, and resources can be used to make educational initiatives more effective in areas such as forestry (ThinkForests), wildlife (ThinkWildlife), sustainability (ThinkSustainability), and climate (ThinkClimate) as well as other important areas such as ThinkSTEM.

ThinkWater encourages all formal and informal youth-serving organizations such as natural resource agencies, schools, nature centers, after-school programs, and museums, their administrators and education staff to join this thinking-revolution in to change Americans’ apathy toward water.

ThinkWater is a program with a very specific purpose: Get people thinking. Get them thinking about their thinking. Get them thinking about water. That’s why we say, the next big thing in water education isn’t about water.



Timeline

Program partners solicited: June 2014
Beta launch: June 2014
Official launch: September 2014

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