

Teachers agree Spence in a class by herself

Photo by Allen Weiss



Lundie Spence

In class or out in the field, Lundie Spence plays the Pied Piper of marine science.

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Lundie Spence stood at the front of the classroom giving instructions for the day's activities. The students listened intently, writing down the important points. Somebody raised a hand and asked a question. It was like any other day at school. But it wasn't.

The students were teachers, half from Puerto Rico and half from North Carolina. And the class was on the Caribbean island, getting prepped on the various corals they'd see during the afternoon's snorkeling trip.

The beauty and variety of the tropical environments lured Lundie, Juan Gonzalez and the rest of the class to take the plunge and bring the classroom to life in Puerto Rico. For a week, the teachers watched the pictures in their science books back home come alive and added a few new pages of their own.

To Lundie, learning through involvement is the key to spurring educators' interest in marine science. She, Gonzalez and Manuel Hernandez, the Puerto Rico Sea Grant director, organized the Puerto Rico workshop with this in mind.

"I wanted to design a program in which teachers become immersed in the environment," says

Lundie. Showing them around won't do the job. They need to learn investigative techniques and how to apply a new awareness and understanding in the classroom.

Without a doubt, Lundie met her goals. A few hours a day, the group met in the classroom to discuss Puerto Rico's ecosystems and to trade resource materials. The remainder of the time they set out to smell, taste, feel, hear and see the island.

Out in the field, Lundie played a Pied Piper of sorts, leading the group through mucky swamps, knee-high grasses and tangled root systems looking for specimens. She was a whiz at naming almost any plant or slinky, slimy thing that crossed her path. Together with Gonzalez, a field guide and many of the Puerto Rican teachers, she pointed out and named most every crab, coral, grass, lizard, flower, fruit or tree along the way. If she couldn't answer a question herself, she quickly asked the closest authority.

"She's something special," says Lucrecia Rousseaux of Charlotte. "She's so patient and loving . . . so good about giving the information.

She's so knowledgeable. It's an overwhelming experience. You never feel like she's being overbearing or this Spanish word "presumida"—presumptuous. She makes you feel good about what you're doing. The enthusiasm bubbles out of her."

If one of the teachers felt uncomfortable about her swimming or snorkeling skills, Lundie took her hand and guided her through the underwater world of boulder-sized corals and breath-taking beauty. When some of the class didn't understand a concept, she'd work through it with them until they did. And she was the first to make everyone feel at home, whether Puerto Rican or American.

"Lundie has a very organized sense of how to deal with people," says Phares Sechler of China Grove. "It keeps the workshop going and gets the job done.

"We could not get bored. There was more than enough for us to do. There was an allowance for us to be people, not just teachers. That's where a lot of the friendships were formed. When we shared curricula, everybody knew each other so well, it gave a beautiful depth to what

people were sharing. We were able to appreciate where they were coming from."

Five days into the workshop, the group took an afternoon to go over resource materials Lundie and Gonzalez had gathered. The books and activities selected could be adapted to science classes at almost any grade level. When the materials were not directly applicable, the texts ignited new ideas for different projects.

The story doesn't stop with these teachers in that classroom. Many of them plan to use the information from the workshop to influence others in their school or area.

"I'm going to present a mini-Sea Grant, Puerto Rico workshop to my faculty," says Rousseaux. "I want to share it with my whole school. I'm going to take the materials I have to a central place where they can be used."

"In my school," says Maritza Febo of Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, "I plan to get my fellow teachers moving." She wants to share her specimen collections and pictures from the workshop with them.

In addition, some of the Puerto Rican teachers are planning to meet with members of AMPEN, a marine and environmental education organization, to tell them about their experiences and share the materials. Through AMPEN, they'd like to develop a network of marine educators in Puerto Rico.

Lundie was the match that lit the blaze of enthusiasm in these teachers. In one week, her ideas, encouragement and confidence established new leaders in marine science education. From here, they'll take the flames and spread them to their students and other teachers. And so long as Lundie's around, there's little chance the fire will go out.

"I don't think that anybody could have put more into this workshop," says Kearns, "or that we could have gotten any more out of it."

Photo by Sarah Friday



For Lundie, teaching marine science comes naturally