



TEACHERS AND DISSECTION

Many teachers have questions about classroom dissection. The following comments from teachers exhibit a range of issues associated with traditional dissection. ESEC is committed to offering support and solutions to the problems faced daily by teachers utilizing dissection in their classrooms. ESEC can provide training in and access to technologically advanced alternatives.

On Education Value

I tried several ways to convince students that dissection was a very useful tool in biology. I asked them to replace organs back into the pig using incorrect spatial orientations and then asked such questions as, 'Okay, you have used the sequence mouth-small intestine-stomach-why would this be a problem in the live pig?' It didn't work. I still could not elevate, in the students' minds, dissection above something regarded as an easy and 'fun time' activity in lab. George F. Edick, Professor at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute °

Our elimination of anatomy from introductory biology has nothing to do with opposition to dissection, but rather is based on the pedagogical philosophy that introductory biology should minimize descriptive biology and concentrate on developing creative scientific thinking. Robert M. Dawley, Professor at Ursinus College, PA °

On Economics

*I realize many of you are being held 'hostage' by the fetal pig market as I am. Anonymous AP Biology teacher **

*The [fetal pigs] we found last year were terrible...mushy and khaki/green color and poorly preserved. We had stepped down to save money. We have decided to switch to cats and just put more students per animal...instead of two to a pig we are going to have four to a cat, I hope. Charlotte Freeman, Girls Preparatory Schools, TN **

On Ethics

More and more, I find myself questioning the ethics of using animal specimens for dissection...I ask myself: "What is this exercise teaching students about the rights and the value of living or dead animals?" To be quite honest, my experience has been that most students don't perform a very good dissection. They usually don't have the skills and patience necessary. If the proper state of mind and skills were present (and to get to that point is no easy task), then dissection would be much more valuable. I just don't know that students are getting out of it what we want them to. And at such a cost both financially (specimens can be VERY expensive when you've got hundreds of students) and ethically. Elliott Kimmel, retired teacher (www.execulink.com/~ekimmel/fetal-0.htm)

* The College Board's website at the AP Biology Teacher's Corner: Dissections

° The Scientist's November 10, 1997 article, "Instructors Reconsider Dissection's Role in Biology Classes"

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