

## Teaching Life Cycle Concepts to School Children

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If life cycle thinking is to be integrated into how our society views issues of sustainability and protecting the environment, new generations must be taught to use life cycle thinking at an early age. They must become familiar with the concepts of systems analysis, input output analysis and the holistic evaluation of environmental impacts.

The life cycle framework provides an excellent way to organize the teaching of math and science as well as the social sciences. Teachers can choose a particular product as the basis of the entire curriculum for a term or a year. That product is then evaluated from cradle to grave, allowing children to understand the implications of the decision to use a particular product. Along the way, concepts such as sampling and statistics, chemistry and materials science and physics are incorporated in the curriculum.

Concepts such as historical and societal choices can also be incorporated, allowing children to see the ripple effects of decisions, and to understand the law of unintended consequences. In fact, Life Cycle thinking should provide an anodyne to that law.

We have developed a program to teach teachers of middle school children (roughly ages 10 to 14) life cycle concepts. The program is offered over a two-day period, with a curriculum based in part on the book *LCA for Mere Mortals* (Schenck, 2000). Specific product LCA's are reviewed, and the participants leave the workshop armed with materials to teach children using life cycle tools.