THE EVOLUTION OF TEACHING: COMPARING THE TEACHING OF THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION IN SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the theory of evolution, which lies at the heart of all sciences, is crucial for public high school students. Many surveys have been conducted throughout the U.S. to track the level of understanding and instruction of biological evolution among educators. Our study focuses primarily on South Dakota teachers. We sent questionnaires to a cross-section of SD high school biology teachers to ascertain their understanding and acceptance of the scientific method and their teaching strategies regarding the theory of evolution. The questions focused on quantitative information regarding science class curriculum to qualitative information including subjective interpretation of community or administrative pressures to teach only certain science subjects. Similar surveys were conducted in 1988 and again in 1999. We compared the results of this survey with past survey results and our data indicated how teaching has changed over the last 20 years in SD. To date there remains low understanding and teaching of the theory of evolution in classrooms. A correlation is indicated between an educator’s understanding and acceptance of the scientific method and biological evolution and the level of student knowledge regarding the theory of evolution.