

Waterbury science teacher finds way to conduct virtual field trip

By KEVIN ROBERTS REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN
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Courtney Bauknecht waded into the cold waters of Black Rock State Park, on a mission for the children she teaches.

Carrying an orange Home Depot bucket, the Brass City Charter School science teacher brought her students with her into the water, via a Facebook live video, on April 3. It was time for the annual trout release.

Under normal circumstances, the annual event had included a full field day with different activities, but the students couldn't be there with Bauknecht and other teachers, like gym teacher Kenneth Engelhard — schools are closed until at least May 20 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While kneeling in the water, she reached into the bucket, scooped the tiny creatures from the bucket and let them go free, all on camera to give her students a virtual classroom in nature.

"I wanted everybody to feel connected," Bauknecht said in a phone interview Tuesday morning from her Woodbury home. "I don't know that I was able to do that for them in the moment, but I think they did that for each other."

Bauknecht released about 150 trout into the water. Her third- and fourth-grade students had watched the fish hatch from tiny pink eggs, when the only evidence they were trout was the pair of black eyes on the egg. The eyes are the first thing that develops.

During the video, Bauknecht pointed out that the little trout needed to be able to use rocks to hide from predators.



Waterbury teacher takes virtual field trip

Bauknecht, 40, describes herself as having a “little kid, TV personality,” and she feels that helps keep the younger students engaged when she posts on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

“I just wanted them to feel like they were there,” Bauknecht said of the trout video.

Bauknecht, who was an employee of the Connecticut Science Center, came to the Brass City Charter School part-time, thanks to a November 2014 partnership between the center and The Leever Foundation. Bauknecht co-teaches with teachers from kindergarten to fourth grade at Brass City.

The trout eggs are picked up in December or January, and the students learn about structure, functions, and about survival.

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Bauknecht, who graduated from Holy Cross High School, taught the students about macroinvertebrates, small bugs that indicate how clean water is by their abundance.

“I actually learned a lot more this year about how they actually manage trout populations,” Bauknecht said. “The river ecology is really counted on those macroinvertebrate samples.”

The COVID-19 pandemic also has turned Bauknecht’s home into a life science lab. She will be hatching chicken eggs at home, as well as tending to a bearded dragon and a tortoise.

“I miss seeing the kids,” Bauknecht said. “It’s a challenge to teach to a screen, to teach to a camera, and have faith that there’s interaction happening on the other ‘cyber side.’”

Bauknecht said she believes the social media posts, such as the trout release video, are helping, so she’ll keep doing them.



Brass City Charter School science teacher Courtney Bauknecht releases trout at Black Rock State Park. (contributed photo)