

Importance of environmental education

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



Journal Article 2: Cultivating artistic approaches to environmental learning: Exploring eco-art education in elementary classrooms

Often educators aren't sure of where to begin in regards to implementing environmental standards into their classroom. The article Cultivating artistic approaches to environmental learning: Exploring eco-art education in elementary classrooms written by Hilary J. Inwood, sought to change this by investigating how integrating environmental education with art education would work in an elementary school classroom.

Integrating art education offers an alternative way to further students' ecological literacy. It has been found that art education helps to change students' attitudes towards concerns in the environment, as well as altering their behavior towards the environment (Inwood). Environmental art education opens the door for environmental activism with various art forms for students of all ages.

It is also beneficial to teachers. When you think of art class in elementary school, you think of all of the tubes of paint, clay, paper, markers, etc, that line the classroom. This is a traditional hallmark of art class that can be changed with environmental art education because it helps the teacher to be more aware of all of the waste that can be created from making art projects and try to help curb it (Inwood).

This study consisted of four Canadian elementary school teachers along with a university based educator to investigate what it was like to develop working models of eco-art education in the elementary school classroom.

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The elementary school teachers would report back as a group to the university based educator to analyze their data. All of the elementary teachers had a love for the arts and the environment but didn't know where to start with implementing it into their classroom (Inwood). There were three main questions to be answered: how do teachers connect learning in the visual arts to environmental concepts and issues? What forms the curricular content and pedagogy of eco-art lessons? And what challenges do teachers face in implementing eco-art education with their own students (Inwood)?

In regards to the first question, the first approach used was learning in the environment. It took the students outside which is an unusual move as many teachers view it to be too chaotic to have art supplies with dozens of students outside. In this case, the four teachers used a lot of natural art supplies instead like tree bark. One example lesson was making butterfly relief sculptures, addressing the art education concept of shape, and the environmental education concept of ecosystems thinking (Inwood). The second approach was learning about the environment where art was made with either found objects or natural materials, helping the teachers to reinforce sense of place connections and human impacts (Inwood). The last approach was learning for the environment where students learned about artists who engaged in environmental activism and then students had the opportunity to make their own attempt at environmental activism. One such lesson was where they studied artist Andy Goldsworthy (art concept: art history, environmental concept: sense of place) (Inwood).

In regards to the second question, the structure of these eco-art lessons was similar to that of general art lessons which greatly helped to ease the stress of the general education teachers. The pedagogy of eco-art learning had some important distinctions such as the students were outside learning more often, cross-curricular integration was more clearly incorporated into the lessons, and links to environmental learning were made more explicit (Inwood). The four teachers agreed that the most important part of eco-art lessons was the inclusion of themes that work to raise “ awareness of humans’ relationships with and/or impact on the earth” (Inwood).

For the last question, the teachers realized that there were challenges of eco-art education that they had not thought of before. Things such as dealing with student behavior and insufficient amount of class time when teaching these somewhat elaborate lesson plans was a real challenge (Inwood). They also found that it took more time to prepare for these lessons and had to take into account the weather during preparation, which is not something the general education teacher usually has to take into account (Inwood). For all of the challenges, there were positives to eco-art education as well. Students were more excited and engaged in the lessons, students’ connections with place were enhanced, and it was pretty easy to connect these lessons into other parts of the curriculum (Inwood).

Overall, students and teachers alike can greatly benefit from eco-art education. By having students learn about their environment, what it should look like, and what they can do with their classmates to change it, students are engaged in place-based learning, activism, and collaboration (Inwood).

Teachers are able to bring these skills to their students without needing specialized training for it, which will greatly help to popularize this movement and help it to spread into thousands of schools everywhere.

I think the points that this article brings up are very good. I like the idea of integrating environmental education with art because it helps them to gain a better sense of place as they are using materials and creating projects about where they live. This article reminds me of discussions we have had in class in regards to integrating different subjects into social studies lessons and I think this article does a great job of explaining how easily environmental education can be integrated in. I feel that a lot of teachers may feel apprehensive about teaching about the environment because they may not know a lot about it themselves but by learning about it through art, I feel that it takes a bit of pressure off.

When I asked my mentor teacher about Environmental Literacy standards, I remember one specific thing she said they learn about is recording changes. I think this would be a great place to integrate eco-art because students could possibly draw a picture of the changing seasons by looking out of their classroom window. I remember in my fifth grade class where we did an eco-art lesson. We learned about different clouds and then our teacher let us go outside and lay down on the grass to draw the clouds we saw and to write a poem about it. I really enjoyed that lesson and it kept me greatly engaged in what we were learning, which is always what you want students to be doing.