

# The origin of environmental education education essay



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The environment encompasses all the living and non-living things that occur on Earth. The fate of the environment is entwined with that of every life that inhabits the planet including that of human beings. The industrialization era brought about devastating impacts on the environment and at the end of the nineteenth century, people started to apprehend the susceptibleness of the environment and the gravity of the implications if the environment was not taken care of. Nations gathered and issues about the environment were starting to take priority, hoping to obtain and sustain a better future for our planet.

Environmental education is not a contemporary subject matter. It can be dated back to as early as the 18th century with the treatise of Jean-Jacques Rousseau who stressed the value of an education that revolved on the environment. Some years later, the Swiss-born naturalist, Louis Agassiz, echoed Rousseau's philosophy. It was these two influential scholars who laid the foundation for a concrete environmental education program, known as the Nature Study, which occurred between the late 19th century and early 20th century.

Following the effortful work of many other naturalists, April 22nd of the year 1970 was declared as the first Earth Day; a national teach-in concerning environmental issues. This memorable event paved the way for the current environmental education movement. In the latter months, President Nixon passed the National Environmental Education Act, which intended to incorporate environmental education into K-12 schools. In the following year, the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE), formerly known as the National Association for Environmental Education, was <https://assignbuster.com/the-origin-of-environmental-education-education-essay/>

instituted to ameliorate the environmental literacy by supplying resources to teachers and promote environmental education programs. The following year was then declared by the European Council as the “ Year of the Environment”.

Environmental education was globally acknowledged when the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in 1972, in Stockholm, Sweden, affirmed that environmental education must be utilized as the key to address environmental issues all around the world. The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) generated three major declarations that have guided the course of environmental education. These were namely the Stockholm declaration, the Belgrade charter and the Tbilisi declaration.

The Stockholm declaration: The Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment took place between June 5th and June 16th of the year 1972. The document, consisting of 7 proclamations and 26 principles, was created in order “ to inspire and guide the people of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment.”

The Belgrade charter was held in October of 1975. This agreement was the product of the International Workshop on Environmental Education which was held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. The foundation of the Belgrade charter was the Stockholm Declaration which was improved upon by goals, objectives and guiding principles of environmental education programs which included the general public.

The Tbilisi declaration of October 1977, “ noted the unanimous accord in the important role of environmental education in the preservation and improvement of the world’s environment, as well as in the sound and balanced development of the world’s communities.” (Tbilisi, 1977). The Tbilisi declaration not only rationalized and elucidated the Stockholm declaration and the Belgrade charter but also included new aims and objectives as well as guiding principles of environmental education. Later that year, the Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia accentuated the responsibility of Environmental Education in the conservation and development of the environment as a whole on a worldwide level.

The importance of sustainable development was established in the year 1987, when the World Commission on Environment and Development published the Brundtland Report. This report, also known as ‘ Our Common Future’, enlightened the concept of sustainable development in which the protection of the environment and the economic growth were regarded as interdependent notions as well as the concept of social equity. According to the Brundtland Report, sustainable development implies “ meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987).

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development which took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, supported and embellished the goal of obtaining sustainability. This was achieved by means of international agreements made on climate variation, woodland and biodiversity. One of the most significant aspects of the Rio Earth Summit, was Chapter 36 of <https://assignbuster.com/the-origin-of-environmental-education-education-essay/>

Agenda 21; the fulcrum of our current environmental sustainable development. Agenda 21 focused on “ reorienting education towards sustainable development; increasing public awareness; and promoting training.” (Chapter 36, Agenda 21). Agenda 21 discards the view of the environment as a detached system and stresses the perspective of the environment as a holistic approach incorporating our surroundings as well as our existence, making use of nature and its resources.

Another crucial step forward in sustainable development was held in 2002 by the United Nations Commission; the Johannesburg Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa. This summit “ brought together tens of thousands of participants to focus the world’s attention and direct action toward... conserving our natural resources in a world that is growing in population, with ever-increasing demands for food, water, shelter, sanitation, energy, health services and economic security.” (Johannesburg Summit, 2002).

In 2005 the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation held the first National Environmental Education Week between the 10th and 16th of April. Later that year, the Centre for Environment Education held the Education for a Sustainable Future Conference in Ahmedabad in India. Over 800 learners, thinkers and practitioners from over 40 countries attended and established the Ahmedabad Declaration on education for sustainable development.

Environmental Education has long been considered as a crucial aspect of our existence. It is an international concern which has brought and has yet to bring all the nations together striving to reach one important goal, one which

gives the interdependency of the environment and that of organisms, including ourselves, the major precedence they deserve.

## **1. 2 Philosophy of Environmental Education**

Environmental education comprises several unique philosophies where each has its own objectives. However, the disciplines overlap in purpose and philosophy of environmental education. The two main disciplines of environmental education are that of outdoor education and that of experiential education.

Outdoor education refers to learning in, for and about the outdoors. “ It is a means of curriculum extension and enrichment through outdoor experiences” (Hammerman, 1980, p. 33). Through outdoors experiences, environmental education may be taught or enhanced. Experiential education is a process through which an individual assembles knowledge, skill and value from direct experiences.

Learning about the environment, being an outdoor or experiential education, is a way of teaching a person to love the Earth. Through this means, a person enhances his awareness and appreciation of the natural environment as well as learns skills in order to improve his life in the outdoors and learns relationships among the inhabitants. Moreover, the person has learned how to learn and can thus make his own decisions on how to care for the land. This great achievement is called environmental literacy. Thus, education becomes empowerment, where the individual can master complex skills and important decision making which are not affected by today’s changing society.

## **1. 3 Roles, Objectives and Principles of Environmental Education**

The Tbilisi Declaration, held in 1977, was the world's first intergovernmental conference on environmental education. It was organized by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in cooperation with the U. N. Environment Programme (UNEP)

The declaration accentuated the important role of environmental education in the conservation and development of the world's environment, as well as the sound and reasonable improvement of the world's communities.

The Roles, Objectives and Characteristics of Environmental Education as laid out during the Tbilisi Declaration as well as the two recommendations of the Conference are:

The Conference recommends the adoption of certain criteria which will help to guide efforts to develop environmental education at the national, regional, and global levels:

Whereas it is a fact that biological and physical features constitute the natural basis of the human environment, its ethical, social, cultural, and economic dimensions also play their part in determining the lines of approach and the instruments whereby people may understand and make better use of natural resources in satisfying their needs.

Environmental education is the result of the reorientation and dovetailing of different disciplines and educational experiences which facilitate an

integrated perception of the problems of the environment, enabling more rational actions capable of meeting social needs to be taken.

A basic aim of environmental education is to succeed in making individuals and communities understand the complex nature of the natural and the built environments resulting from the interaction of their biological, physical, social, economic, and cultural aspects, and acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, and practical skills to participate in a responsible and effective way in anticipating and solving environmental problems, and in the management of the quality of the environment.

A further basic aim of environmental education is clearly to show the economic, political, and ecological interdependence of the modern world, in which decisions and actions by different countries can have international repercussions. Environmental education should, in this regard, help to develop a sense of responsibility and solidarity among countries and regions as the foundation for a new international order which will guarantee the conservation and improvement of the environment.

Special attention should be paid to understanding the complex relations between socio-economic development and the improvement of the environment.

For this purpose, environmental education should provide the necessary knowledge for interpretation of the complex phenomena that shape the environment, encourage those ethical, economic, and esthetic values which, constituting the basis of self-discipline, will further the development of conduct compatible with the preservation and improvement of the

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environment. It should also provide a wide range of practical skills required in the devising and application of effective solutions to environmental problems.

To carry out these tasks, environmental education should bring about a closer link between educational processes and real life, building its activities around the environmental problems that are faced by particular communities and focusing analysis on these by means of an interdisciplinary, comprehensive approach which will permit a proper understanding of environmental problems.

Environmental education should cater to all ages and socio-professional groups in the population. It should be addressed to (a) the general nonspecialist public of young people and adults whose daily conduct has a decisive influence on the preservation and improvement of the environment; (b) to particular social groups whose professional activities affect the quality of the environment; and to scientists and technicians whose specialized research and work will lay the foundations of knowledge on which education, training, and efficient management of the environment should be based.

To achieve the effective development of environmental education, full advantage must be taken of all public and private facilities available to society for the education of the population: the formal education system, different forms of nonformal education, and the mass media.

To make an effective contribution towards improving the environment, educational action must be linked with legislation, policies, measures of

control, and the decisions that governments may adopt in relation to the human environment.

The Conference endorses the following goals, objectives and guiding principles for environmental education:

The Goals of Environmental Education are:

To foster clear awareness of and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;

To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;

To create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.

The Categories of Environmental Education Objectives are:

**Awareness:** to help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems.

**Knowledge:** to help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems. This is of utmost importance as the more people learn about their surroundings, the more they will tend to care about it. (Kriesberg, 1996).

**Attitudes:** to help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively

participating in environmental improvement and protection. Reinforcing this category, the attitudes of children are a major focus of many environmental education programmes. (Eagles and Demare, 1999).

**Skills:** to help social groups and individuals acquire the skills for identifying and solving environmental problems.

**Participation:** to provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems. Education needs to go beyond information and awareness to include behavioural change. (Niedermeyer, 1992). Moreover, all serious environmental education aims to motivate individuals to take responsible action. (Bogner, 1998).

**Guiding Principles - Environmental Education should:**

Consider the environment in its totality-natural and built, technological and social (economic, political, cultural-historical, ethical, esthetic);

Be a continuous lifelong process, beginning at the preschool level and continuing through all formal and nonformal stages;

Be interdisciplinary in its approach, drawing on the specific content of each discipline in making possible a holistic and balanced perspective;

Examine major environmental issues from local, national, regional, and international points of view so that students receive insights into environmental conditions in other geographical areas;

Focus on current and potential environmental situations while taking into account the historical perspective;

Promote the value and necessity of local, national, and international cooperation in the prevention and solution of environmental problems;

Explicitly consider environmental aspects in plans for development and growth;

Enable learners to have a role in planning their learning experiences and provide an opportunity for making decisions and accepting their consequences;

Relate environmental sensitivity, knowledge, problem-solving skills, and values clarification to every age, but with special emphasis on environmental sensitivity to the learner's own community in early years;

Help learners discover the symptoms and real causes of environmental problems;

Emphasize the complexity of environmental problems and thus the need to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills;

Utilize diverse learning environments and a broad array of educational approaches to teaching, learning about and from the environment with due stress on practical activities and first-hand experience.

## **Approaches to Environmental Education**

The ultimate aim of environmental education is to aid society in becoming environmentally knowledgeable; moreover, it endows people with the necessary skills and dedication for working, both individually and collectively, towards achieving and/or maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between the caliber of life and that of the environment.

There are several approaches towards environmental education, especially when dealing with young children, all enclosing the same aim. However the basis of each approach to environmental education encompasses education about, through and for the environment.

## **Education About the Environment**

The concept of education about the environment simply entails unveiling and divulging knowledge about our surroundings. The more a person becomes aware of his environment the more he can grow to appreciate it and thus make use of its resources in a sustainable way.

As Dr. Ken Gilbertson clearly stated, “ Environmental Education is a means to teach a person to love the Earth.” It is not proselytizing but providing a basis for comprehending complex social and natural/physical connections. (Dr. William Fleischman, 2010). Learning about the environment leads to a progression from awareness to action, a progression mirrored in the objectives set forth by the Tbilisi Declaration, to maintain responsible environmental behavior and a sustainable future. (Dr. Julie Ernst, 2010).

## **Education Through the Environment**

Education through the environment implies utilizing the surrounding ambient itself as a resource for the educational purpose. The environment itself is the most effective and readily available tool for environmental education.

Activities which take place outdoors are of utmost importance especially with the younger generation which tends to learn more through direct observation and experience. Appreciation of our surroundings is not something that could be learnt merely in a classroom, but requires an investment of time spent in the presence of nature, energy and reflection (Miles, 1991 p. 6).

Outdoor activities are also beneficial for one's peace of mind as nature itself has the power to instill serenity upon one's being, leading to a greater appreciation of the environment. In addition, outdoor ecology programs may influence a child's attitude and behaviour towards a more positive direction, provided that it takes place for an adequate amount of time. (Bogner, 1998).

As Rachel Carson once said, " If a child is to keep alive his/her sense of wonder, he/she needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him or her the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in." Environmental education encourages us to constantly rediscover that sense of wonder and bonds people and communities with the natural world.

When learning about the environment, one must take into consideration all its aspects, including that of the built environment. Equilibrium should be achieved between the natural and social world in order to reveal real life

situations and real issues and concerns, providing the opportunity to analyze the local environment as well as introduce the idea of environmental responsibility.

### **1. 4. 3 Education For the Environment**

Education for the environment encompasses the growth of a knowledgeable person into a motivated, responsible, caring individual, who seeks to take accountable action in order to maintain and nurture a sustainable environment. Environmental education endeavors to improve upon environmental ethics which would result in the advancement of the caliber of life on Earth.

Knowledge is of fundamental significance if one is to develop a sense of understanding and appreciation about his or her surroundings. However knowledge is only the first step and should always be followed by deed. Actively involving people, especially children, in their communities and in finding solutions to local environmental problems, encourages one's heart to become more active at a global level. As Hewitt precisely stated in 1997, " Knowledge alone cannot influence the protection of the environment." It is mostly through hands on experience that an individual is able to fully comprehend the value of our environment and develop a sense of compassion towards it.

By directly involving young people in environmental activities, they are being encouraged to evaluate their own individual impact on the well being of their surroundings as well as apprehend that along with others, we all affect the environment and thus let it be in a constructive compartment.

## **1. 1. 4 Games in Environmental Education**

Any form of education should always incorporate an enjoyable aspect, one in which the attention of the individuals involve is captured and maintained, making the learning experience more effective.

Environmental education could also be taught in a pleasurable manner. This could be done by the use of many games and activities which not only challenge the participants but also encourage the children to act on the knowledge they have obtained and become actively involved in the care and maintenance of the environment as a whole.

Playing games was thought of as a fundamental part of learning by many learning theorists including Piaget who strongly believed that games are an indispensable aspect of an individual's development of intelligence.

The additional advantage of playing games is that children become central to their own learning and a deviation from the normal teaching methods would ensure that every child is given the opportunity to participate and expand his or her skills in the concerned area.

## **1. 4. 5 Environmental Problems**

When a child is presented with a relatively intricate quandary at an early stage in his or her life, and is asked to propose some sort of solution to the predicament which he/she might encounter, the child starts developing cognitive skills which are beneficial for life.

Children should be exposed to environmental tribulations that occur in real life situations and should be guided to an appropriate and efficient solution.

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This was also one of the recommendations of the Tbilisi Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in the following statement;

“...environmental education should bring about a closer link between educational processes and real life, building its activities around the environmental problems that are faced by particular communities and focusing analysis on these by means of an interdisciplinary, comprehensive approach which will permit a proper understanding of environmental problems” (UNESCO-UNEP 1978, Recommendation No. 1).