

CONCEPTS AND TRENDS IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

L. Hens

Human Ecology Department, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

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Summary

This paper aims to analyze the complexity of environmental education (EE) and its different basic aspects. It analyses the recent history, the goals and the methods used in contemporary EE. The picture which emerges is that EE is a complex and long-term process, and needs continuity to be effective. It uses a broad range of teaching and learning techniques and instruments. It is most ambitious in its targets, and not only aims at informing and training people, but also to raise their awareness, to change their attitudes, and eventually, to promote environmental action.

The complexity and the specificity of the field become even more transparent during analysis of the ways in which the different target groups in EE should be approached. For each main group involved (authorities, business and industry, the scientific community, environmental NGOs, citizens and consumers, the media) there is a rapidly increasing number of ways and more specific instruments in approaching EE.

This paper reviews basic elements of EE (history, goals and methods) and pays special attention to the specific EE approaches for the different target groups in environmental management and policy.

The relationship between environmental education and education for sustainable development is analyzed. The continuing discussion which links these themes with poverty is described. Although there is a straightforward logic in this line of thinking, this evolution should not reduce the attention paid to actual environmental problems.

The paper concludes with the description of an EE project aimed at teaching high school pupils how to deal with the environment in and around their school.

The overall evaluation of EE shows the growing distance between its activities in the field and its theoretical aims. This finding calls for significant monetary investment, both in the industrialized and developing countries.

1. Introduction

Promoting environmental awareness, behavior, and eventually action through education, and raising public awareness and training are the goals of environmental education (EE). This field of growing complexity and interdisciplinarity, is attracting more and more attention as the discussion of environmental issues increasingly involves whole societies.

2. Historical background

It is not easy to trace the origins of environmental education (EE). It is certain, however, that the nature conservation movement, from the beginning of its activities during the second half of the twentieth century, both in the USA and in Great Britain, had an agenda of disseminating its ideas through public education. Specialized publications were set up to achieve this objective. This model has been used not only by the nature conservation movement in many countries, but also by associated groups, such as the environmental movement and consumer groups.

Other factors that have contributed to the development of EE are national and international events, existing educational traditions, and the rise of concern for the state of the environment, to name a few (MESAGES, 1996). Table 1 lists a series of recent international key events in the area of EE. One of the elements the Table highlights is the internationally leading role of UNEP and UNESCO and more particularly, UNESCO's EE-programme. They motivated the organization of the Tbilisi conference in 1977, which is still a main point of reference, and continue to promote EE worldwide.

	Event	Venue	Feature
1970	IUCN International Workshop on EE	Carson City, Nevada (USA)	first definition on EE
1972	Intergovernmental Conference on the Human Environment	Stockholm, Sweden	recommendation on EE, decision to create the UN Environment Programme
1975	Workshop on EE	Belgrade, former Yugoslavia	Belgrade Charter on EE, Launching of UNEP/UNESCO International EE Programme (IIEP)
1977	Intergovernmental Conference on EE	Tbilisi, former USSR	Review of developments on EE and Declarations and Recommendations on EE
1987	Intergovernmental	Moscow, former	Review of progress

	Conference on EE	USSR	since Tbilisi and priorities for EE in the 1990s
1992	UN Conference on Environment and Development	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	Chapter 36 on EE - EE as a trans-sectoral element in Agenda 21

Table 1. Selected international key events on environmental education during the period 1970-1992

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Biographical Sketch

Professor Luc Hens obtained his Licentiate in Biology from the Free University of Brussels (FUB) in 1974, Aggregation of Higher Secondary School Teaching from the FUB in 1975, and PhD from the Faculty of Science of the FUB in 1981.

Professor Hens is a member of several professional societies and recipient of a number of honors and

awards, including the prestigious award of the Belgian Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts which he was awarded in 1984. Currently he is the Head of the Department of Human Ecology at the FUB.

He has been responsible for organising and/or participating in several international research and postgraduate teaching programmes in many countries including Bolivia, Bulgaria, Brazil, Brussels, the Czech Republic, Ghana, Hungary, Turkey, the Ukraine and Vietnam.

To date the publications of Professor Hens number about 200, including twenty-six books. He is also the co-editor of the journals *Environment, Development and Sustainability* and *Environmental Pollution*. His teaching and research interests include environmental management, sustainable development, human ecology, and related issues

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