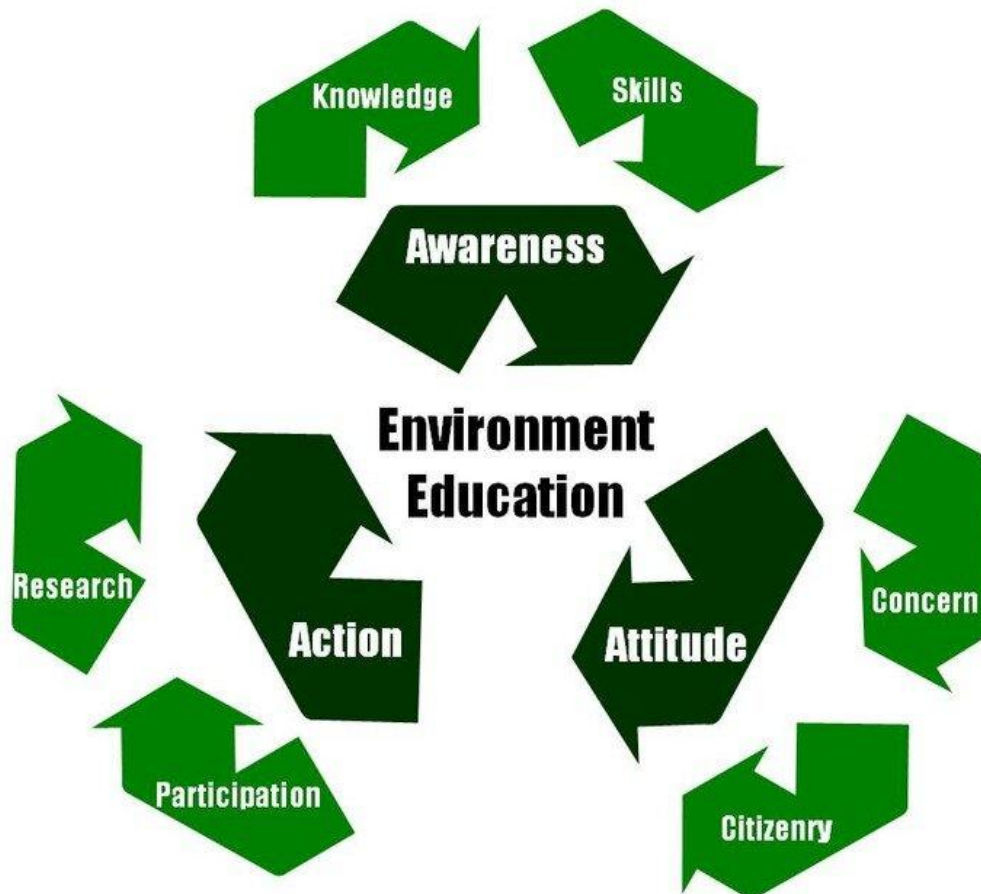


The Importance of Environmental Education

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Ohio Ocean Foundation (2022).

Introduction

The importance of environmental education in raising environmental awareness and supporting sustainable conduct in a world facing significant ecological challenges cannot be overstated. Environmental education facilitates the formation of responsible individuals with the knowledge and drive to protect our world for future generations. Human activities have destructive environmental effects, and there have been clear signs of planet deterioration. For instance: global warming, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, thinning of the ozone layer, water, air, soil pollution, and acid rain (Boca & Saraçlı, 2019). This ecological crisis endangers biodiversity conservation and the health and quality of human life. (Martian, 2015) As these issues grow, we must focus our attention and efforts on cultivating environmental knowledge and values for individuals from a young age. This editorial explores the need for environmental education and suggests ways to integrate it into educational institutions and communities.

What is environmental education?

The Tbilisi Conference defines environmental education as a process aimed at developing a world population that is aware of and concerned about the whole environment and its associated problems and which has the knowledge, attitudes, motivations, commitment, and skills to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones (Boca & Saraçlı, 2019). The main objectives of environmental education are: educating people about fundamental environmental issues, highlighting the cause and effect of all environmental processes, fostering the ability to think and understand across disciplines, teaching the basis of ecologically balanced use of the environment and its protection, teaching how to use natural resources economically, instilling an ethic that forbids actions harmful to both the environment and other people, and forming habits of ecological culture, generating a desire and capacity for cooperation in the effort to safeguard the environment, as well as the necessity to adhere to ecological rules and restrictions (Żeber-Dzikowska et al., 2016). Environmental education should not advocate a particular viewpoint or course of action. However, it should instead teach people how to weigh different sides of a problem through critical thinking and enhance their decision-making and problem-solving skills (Varela-Candamio et al., 2018).

The benefits of environmental education are numerous. The UN has acknowledged that environmental education develops and enhances the capacity of individuals, groups, communities, organizations, and states to make decisions that are in the best interests of sustainable development (Bell, 2016). It can encourage a change in people's perspectives, empowering them to make our world safer, healthier, and more prosperous, ultimately raising everyone's standard of living (Bell, 2016). Children with access to environmental education will be better equipped to deal with the repercussions of climate change comprehensively from the perspective of a responsible citizen, defending and upholding these values in all areas (Ogando, n.d.). Through education, children can participate in all aspects of climate change policymaking, mitigation, and adaptation (Ogando, n.d.).

Formal education

The role of educational institutions in regard to environmental sustainability activities is becoming increasingly common as environmental sustainability becomes a global issue of increasing significance (Boca & Saraçlı, 2019). They can contribute to developing a green society by supporting and maintaining environmental education and spreading awareness about environmental issues. (Boca & Saraçlı, 2019) Furthermore, the university is a crucial setting for developing processes for societal transformation. It must therefore be a forum for discussing current issues and societal demands. Because of this, it must ensure that students acquire the knowledge, abilities, attitudes, and values necessary to find a workable solution to environmental problems (Esteban Ibanez, 2020).

Moreover, schools can incorporate environmental issues into their curriculum in many academic subjects, encouraging a multidisciplinary approach to sustainability. Ideas like climate change, conservation, and renewable energy can be introduced to foster an in-depth understanding of environmental challenges at different grades (Vasconcelos & Calheiros, 2022). The curricula should be modified to ignite students' passion for environmental education, develop their volunteerism and encourage practical exercises in nature, such as learning about plants, cleaning actions in parks and rivers, and recycling garbage from tourist roads (Boca & Saraçlı, 2019). Schools can also develop environmentally conscious campuses by implementing sustainable practices like recycling programs, energy-efficient systems, and waste reduction initiatives. Students are given a sense of responsibility through these real-world examples, and they are motivated to continue to replicate these practices outside of the classroom.



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Informal education

Education activities may be delivered in formal or informal settings. Informal education aims to increase awareness and understanding while enhancing the capacity of civil society to work for the preservation and sustainability of the environment (Monroe et al., 2008).

- Strengthening community involvement:

Communities should embrace environmental education as a group effort. Local and national governments and non-profit organizations can cooperate to plan workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns. These activities may be targeted towards particular environmental problems in the area, enlisting the help of the local populace in the search for viable solutions. Moreover, these initiatives will facilitate deeper discussions towards the environment (Boca & Saraçlı, 2019).

- Mass media:

Mass media spreads information to make citizens aware of the risks of endangering our planet by not protecting the environment (Vasconcelos & Calheiros, 2022). TV programs, scientific documentaries, public service announcements, public displays and exhibitions, educational apps, and social media, among others, are all very helpful dissemination strategies.

- Fieldwork:

In addition to the above-mentioned educational methods, field trips are also crucial for environmental education. Learning activities outside the classroom that allow individuals to interact directly with nature can significantly enrich environmental education programmes. People can better understand the environment by participating in field trips to nature reserves, national parks, or local green spaces. Hence, they become even more aware of the practical effects of human actions on nature by participating in environmental restoration projects or community clean-up campaigns (Monroe et al., 2008).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the key to creating a greener and more sustainable future is environmental education. By fostering ecological knowledge, awareness and values, we enable people to take an active role in protecting the environment. To embrace environmental education and incorporate it into the fabric of our daily lives, schools and communities must work together. Through this collaboration, we can create a world community that values and defends the environment, assuring a better, healthier, and more sustainable future for generations to come.

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