

## **Recent orientations of environmental education, aims and practices: The shape of the things to come**

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### **Περίληψη**

Οι σκοποί και οι προτεραιότητες της περιβαλλοντικής εκπαίδευσης μεταβάλλονται σταδιακά εντός της δεκαετίας του 1990, καθώς νέα θέματα εισάγονται στο διδακτικό ρεπερτόριο, νέοι τρόποι σκέψης, ενώ ανοίγονται ενδιαφέροντες ορίζοντες για την γεωγραφία. Οι ερευνητικές δραστηριότητες στην περιβαλλοντική εκπαίδευση σε συνδυασμό με τις νέες διαστάσεις, που προσέλαβαν ορισμένα περιβαλλοντικά προβλήματα υποχρεώνουν σε μια σχεδόν ριζική επανεκτίμηση του περιεχομένου και της δομής των πρακτικών της περιβαλλοντικής εκπαίδευσης. Η μελέτη αυτή προσπαθεί να καθορίσει τις νέες τάσεις που επικρατούν στην περιβαλλοντική εκπαίδευση για το κοντινό μέλλον.

### **Abstract**

The aims and priorities of environmental education have gradually changed over the last decade: new items in the environmental education agenda, new approaches to the old problems, new ways of thinking, new attitudes in the making, new roles for geography. Ever since the Tbilisi Conference, the International Environmental Education Programme has constantly been organising itself on new grounds. But, the research activities in environmental education, in conjunction with the new dimensions that certain environmental problems have assumed, force the existing environmental education aims and practices to a radical re-appraisal of content and structure. This paper defines the new global trends in environmental education, while making some forecasts for the future of environmental education.

### **Introduction**

Environmental education in cooperation with international agencies has been fruitful in a number of cases, such as those of Finland (created a

national strategy for both formal and informal environmental education), Kenya (pilot programme for teaching environmental education at schools), Morocco (incorporation of environmental education in the University curricula), China (environmental education in the biotopes), India (environmental education in problematic urban areas with the use of multimedia), Argentina (environmental education in rural schools with organised tutorials). Yet, in most countries of the world and in most cases, environmental education has not brought the desired results, contrary to the educators' initial expectations. Consequently, a question raises as for the future of environmental education in view of a) the failures so far and b) the shifting global, international and national requirements.

### **Environmental education: from failure to success**

Before the current trends are defined, it is important to see some of the most usual causes of failure of environmental education so far. Such causes have been: a) the fact that environmental education is underestimated and it is not considered to be a "course", b) environmental education is often taught by untrained trainers, c) most governments do not provide adequate funding for environmental education activities and environmental education is not a priority per se (although environmental protection is), d) environmental education does often encompass a very wide spectrum of environmental problems, so as to become too broad for any specific requirements, e) the implementation practices are often far too simplistic.

Yet, there is an increasing forcing induced by international economic, environmental and other agreements. International conventions for environmental protection require increased awareness for their implementation, international trade agreements force for certain specific ways of environmental management and these, in turn, induce specific requirements for environmental education.

Also, the international priority for development is forcing for an updated attitude towards environmental management. Finally, shortcomings in the budgets of all major international and national organisations often reflect their increasing inability to meet the ever increasing high costs of environmental protection. It is precisely this situation, that forces for further preference for spending on environmental education (hence, prevention of environmental damage) rather than on environmental restoration.

These facts allow to understand some of the forthcoming evolutions in environmental education.

## Some future perspectives

On the basis of the current condition of environmental education, it is possible to delineate the trends of future developments in environmental education.

1. Environmental problems will be better incorporated within the environmental education practices.
2. Political attitudes towards environmental problems will be changing and more responsibility will be required.
3. Appropriate training of trainers will be essential.
4. Environmental education will become scientifically, economically, administratively more integrated.
5. An equilibrium between theory and practice will be easier to attain by the future training programmes in environmental education.
6. An emphasis in problem solving is apparent and it is expected that more and more the environmental education will focus on problem solving rather than on training in environmental management and/or conservation.
7. This will eventually enhance the creativity and the subjective aspects of environmental problem solving, which, in turn, will result in increased sense of responsibility.
8. The increase in the number of environmental training centres and information centres is also a foreseeable tendency for the near future.
9. The role of technology will be very important in determining the attractiveness as well as the applicability of the environmental education courses.

## Conclusions

The aims of environmental education have been characterised by a marked emphasis on environmental conservation and protection. These will certainly persist in the near future, although a new umbrella - notion has been introduced recently, this being the impact of the principle of sustainable development. The financial requirements to sustain the environment up to a certain level of development increase and this has become a widely accepted fact. Hence, well organised environmental education should take into account not only the requirements for restoration of an already badly damaged environment, but also two other facts: the fact that the prevailing need of the humankind is still the need for economic development and the fact that environmental education can be a cost - beneficial activity compared with environmental restoration.