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ENVIRONMENT ADULT EDUCATION AS A PART OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY POLICY

Olga M. Tytarenko

ABSTRACT

Environmental adult education for community sustainability situates local knowledge within a global pedagogy and activism of survival. Practical and theoretical considerations of environmental popular education within indigenous people's social movements are explained, the environment and adult learning is explored. The aim of environmental adult literacy

is to challenge scientific knowledge as the fundamental structure of learning, and to revalue people's experiential knowledge. A transformative ecological understanding of lifelong learning reconnects humans with nature and fosters social dialogue and action. Environmental adult education provides a rich and provocative discourse, and this article can be useful to readers seeking to connect social and ecological issues.

KEYWORDS

ecology, environment education, eco-friendly behavior

Human values such as solidarity, dialogue, and respect for all forms of life – principles which we have inherited from the various philosophical, political, and spiritual traditions – represent challenges and options in the face of the baffling socio-environmental changes that are witnessing in societies all over the world today.

At the same time, the events shaping modern history are making it clear how urgent it has become for humanity to eliminate all forms of discrimination and prejudice, from the most subtle to the most brutal. Gender and environmentalist movements play a key role in the process of developing new levels of awareness. Human societies must be willing and committed to implement changes that will ensure the future of the species. For changes to occur in behavior and attitudes, however, permanent and continuous education is necessary in every facet of our daily lives. Although the need for close communication and cooperation in the various areas of education may seem obvious, records of events and reports contain too little evidence of dialogue between the

environmental education sector and popular education for young people and adults.

Environmental Adult Education is recognized as a “hybrid outgrowth of the environmental movement and adult education, combining an ecological orientation with a learning paradigm to provide a vigorous educational approach to environmental concerns”.

In laymen's terms, environmental adult education refers to efforts in teaching environmental issues and how individuals and businesses can manage or change their lifestyles and ecosystems to live sustainably. The overarching goal of this field of study is to educate global societies to live more sustainably.

Environmental adult education is a relatively new and unique field of study and practice. It is a community-based method in which educators listen and respect the input of learners, and all participants are considered essential. During the last thirty years, environmental adult education has evolved. For more than a century, environmental and conservation organizations

taught adults environmental education with very little structure.

In a nutshell, the official history of Environment Adult Education (EAE) can be represented in the following way:

- In the mid-1970s environment adult education was officially recognized as distinct field of study.
- Late 1980s focused environment adult education on learner experience.
- Late 1990s - Early 2000 the focus in the environment adult education shifted to how to teach this discipline.
- And finally in 1997 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) hosted conference on adult education with EAE being one of the 33 workshops presented

The United States was one of the first countries to officially recognize environmental education. During a joint House-Senate session in 1968, Congress acknowledged the importance of environmental education, and in 1970 passed the Environmental Education Act, which established the Office of Environmental Education.

In 1988 UNESCO organized the first intergovernmental conference aimed at reconciling the environment and development, now known as “sustainable development”. In the following years, UNESCO and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) initiated three major declarations that defined environmental education. Those included:

- 1992 Stockholm Declaration. This document included seven proclamations and 26 principles “to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment.”
- 1995 Belgrade Charter. The product of the International Workshop on Environmental Education, this charter built upon the Stockholm Declaration by adding goals, objectives and principles for environmental education programs.

- 1997 Tbilisi Declaration. This document updated and clarified the Stockholm Declaration and the Belgrade Charter by including new goals, objectives, characteristics, and guiding principles of environmental education.

Educators in this field of study consider environmental problems with a holistic approach that combines social, political and environmental concerns into community dilemmas. Participatory methods allow learners to make connections between social issues and environmental problems. This connection allows adult learners to understand the core causes of major environmental issues and the resulting social inequalities. This method also allows educators to stress the importance of instilling environmental awareness so that learners do not forget their relationship with the natural world.

To summarize the methods of adult environmental education training, environmental adult educators strive to instill learners with:

- a knowledge of environmental problems and their causes
- the skills to engage in social activism to combat those problems
- the attitude of respect and connection to the natural world
- a desire to change current practices to protect the Earth

The following principles inspire the work of countless Adult Education initiatives throughout the world today and can be considered as the basic principles of this educational and social phenomenon now:

- Education is the right of all; we are all learners and educators.
- Environmental education, whether formal, non-formal or informal, should be grounded in critical and innovate thinking in any time or place, promoting the transformation and reconstruction of society.
- Environmental education is both individual and collective. It aims to develop local and global citizenship with

respect to the self determination and the sovereignty of nations.

- Environmental education is not neutral but is value based. It is an act for social transformation.
- Environmental education must involve a holistic approach and thus an interdisciplinary focus in the relations between human beings, nature and the universe.
- Environmental education must stimulate solidarity, equality, and respect human rights involving democratic strategies and an open climate of cultural interchange.
- Environmental education should treat critical global issues, their causes and interrelationships with a systemic approach and within their social and historical contexts. Fundamental issues in relation to development and the environment such as population, health, peace, human rights, democracy, hunger, degradation of flora and fauna, should be perceived in this manner.
- Environmental education must facilitate equal partnerships in the processes of decision-making at all levels and stages.
- Environmental education must recover, recognize, respect, reflect, and utilize indigenous history and local cultures, as well as promoting cultural, linguistic, and ecological diversity. This implies acknowledging the historical perspective of native peoples as a way to change ethnocentric approaches, as well as the encouragement of bilingual education.
- Environmental education should empower all peoples and promote opportunities for grassroots democratic change and participation. This means that communities must regain control of their own destiny.
- Environmental education values all different forms of knowledge. Knowledge is diverse, cumulative, and socially produced, and should not be patented or monopolized.
- Environmental education must be designed to enable people to manage conflicts in just and humane ways.

- Environmental education must stimulate dialogue and cooperation among individuals and institutions in order to create new lifestyles which are based on meeting everyone's basic need, regardless of ethnic group, gender, age, religious, class, physical, or mental differences.
- Environmental education requires a democratization of the mass media and its commitment to the interests of all sectors of society. Communication is an inalienable right and the mass media must be transformed into one of the main channels of education, not only by disseminating information on an egalitarian basis, but also through the exchange of means, values and experiences.
- Environmental education must integrate knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and actions. It should convert every opportunity into an educational experience for sustainable societies.
- Education must help develop an ethical awareness of all forms of life with which humans share this planet, respect all life cycles, and impose limits on human exploitation of other forms of life.

Environmental adult education generally takes place in a non-formal education setting. This means that the organized learning can take place in many forms including vocational education, literacy education and on the job training.

Adult learning is a central tool in the process of raising environmental awareness and promoting environmentally supportive action. Many environmental organizations disseminate information, organize community initiatives and practice non-formal adult education. Environmental educators and activists recognize the need to strengthen and innovate this educational dimension of their work. Environmental groups often seek the collaboration of adult educators, and in this sense they are trying to change their educational work from mere information sharing to more participatory and creative ways of learning.

Environmental issues are becoming more and more important for other fields of adult education too. Given the negative effects of environmental degradation and pollution on people's health, environmental questions can be dealt with in health education programmes. Environmental topics can also be an important component of community education programmes. Such programmes can provide a frame for linking environmental issues with social and political problems of the community.

Collaboration between environmentalists and adult educators should be strengthened. They could, for example, join efforts in planning and implementing activities at the community level and promote local capacity building. At the same time adult educators and environmentalists should work together in influencing policy, at both national and international levels.

The integration of the environment into general and vocational adult education can provide a range of new opportunities for an environmental education which is more relevant to learners' concerns. This is particularly important for developing countries which are today experiencing serious environmental problems that directly affect people's lives. Environmental education, if it is to be meaningful to adults in their daily lives, needs to address ecological questions in terms of the social, political and economic factors involved. In industrialized regions, for example, environmental education entails dealing with the crisis of modern production systems and their consequences for employment.

In developing regions, on the other hand, it deals with issues relating to global production structures, national economy, international trade, local agriculture, development aid and foreign debt. One of the big challenges for environmental adult education is to change the widespread belief that what happens to the environment is not caused by our own actions, but by someone somewhere else. Yet adult educators are aware of the fact that, although community action is a powerful tool, there are clear limits to what can be achieved at this level, especially when local political and social conditions are taken into account.

Although the negative effects of modern production and agricultural techniques on soil fertility, for example, are beginning to be recognized by many governments and aid agencies, yet there appears to be a continuing contradiction between the interests of economic growth and sustainable resource management. Technological progress is still considered a positive factor in economic development, even though it has many negative consequences for the natural environment. As a result, environmental education often receives little attention and financial support from policy-makers. This is especially the case in countries which already have few resources for education.

Environmental adult education often suffers from this mistaken conflict between economic growth and sustainable development. At times when economic needs are a priority, it might seem absurd to propose the integration of environmental dimensions into educational programmes. Yet this is a concern of many educators, social workers and development workers, in both developing and industrialized countries.

Environmental education has the urgent task of overcoming such misconceptions. It needs to stress that environmentally friendly technologies can be an opportunity to modernize and improve production systems. More importantly, such an education needs to reveal to its participants that an ecologically sound production strategy does not automatically imply higher costs and lower revenues. The use of renewable energy sources is a good example to show how such measures can help people improve their incomes.

Environmental learning encourages participation. It builds a vision in which the contributions of women, men, persons of different colors, abilities and creeds, indigenous people, the young and the old are equally respected. Environmental education explicitly draws from the knowledge of indigenous people and those who are closest to the land. The need to promote and build on local knowledge and indigenous traditions has been repeated time and again. Those communities often possess immensely valuable knowledge and mechanisms for coping with often harsh

environments is widely known and acknowledged. The expertise of the learners, who have a first-hand experience of the changing environmental balance, is regarded as an important source of knowledge.

Similarly, the role and authority of local communities in protecting their own environment is stated in many policy papers and reports. But in reality many indigenous populations today have been deprived of their rights, including property rights over the land they inhabit. Backed by national governments, international companies make enormous profits by exploiting national resources on a large scale. In these contexts, local concepts of resource management and conservation techniques have lost their meaning. Traditional knowledge, which functioned as part of a system of governance, no longer exists. It is often claimed that environmental education needs to include traditional knowledge and has a specific responsibility to revive and promote such traditions. However, in a context which is characterized by economic exploitation and political domination, local systems of preservation, which rely on local authority and control over resources, may no longer be effective.

It is nevertheless possible and even necessary to use traditional knowledge in environmental education, provided that local traditions are reassessed in the context of the present conditions. This process of analysis and comparison of different strategies should be carried out in conjunction with and under the control of local populations. A process of critically assessing the value of local experience and avoiding externally imposed solutions should form the core of any environmental education programme. Otherwise such initiatives face the risk of becoming mere folklore programmes.

- For the conclusion there should be also listed a number of problems facing current adult environmental education:
- Government and donor policies with regard to adult environmental education are in a precarious state.
- Environmental education is less developed in adult and non-formal sectors than in schools.

- Teaching practices in environmental adult education often tend to be limited to the transmission of knowledge rather than to promoting a critical examination of environmental problems.
- Practical solutions are seldom promoted in environmental education for adults.
- Environmental education is seldom linked to the immediate environment of the participants.
- There is often a bias towards promoting 'expert' knowledge and scientific and technological approaches.

There is still the pervading notion that science is neutral, progress linear and growth unlimited. In other words, rather than critiquing dominant models of development and economic growth, adult environmental education remains locked within ideologies which have caused many of our contemporary environmental problems.

To solve the problems above today the world is to understand the importance of environment adult education as the social problem. These include a close collaboration with the community and a democratic approach to project planning and implementation. Other strategies proposed were the integration of social, political and environmental issues into adult education programmes, identifying problems and the use of experimental and creative teaching/learning methods. The active involvement of non-governmental organizations and local associations has been an important factor contributing to the growing prominence being given to environmental adult education.

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