

Environmental and Sustainability Education in Context

What is Environmental and Sustainability Education?

Finding a definition for the varied forms of education that seek to maintain the health and integrity of the biosphere is a challenge. There is no single adequate definition to encompass the great diversity of approaches and philosophies they entail. Over the last century a range of terms—conservation education, wilderness education, outdoor education, environmental education, and more recently education for sustainability and ecological literacy—have been used to describe learning about human relationships to the earth. The relationships themselves have included everything from resource use to the aesthetic appreciation of nature, from the acquisition of scientific knowledge to a preservationist philosophy about the web of life, which includes humans.

Environmental and sustainability education today is perhaps best defined by its desired outcomes. To EEON, E&SE means the transmission, growth, and application of environmental knowledge across all sectors of society. Such learning is essential for the cooperative building of an ecologically literate and sustainable society, and for the decision-making and behavioural choices required to maintain a healthy environment. Environmental and sustainability education encompasses all types of education across sectors of society, leading to this common goal.

Some Guiding Principles

The foundations of environmental or ecological learning are deeply rooted in the notion of connections. These include connections across educational and professional disciplines, and across the social, biological, economic, political, technological, cultural, historical, aesthetic, and moral aspects of learning about the environment.

EEON believes that the following principles are key to guiding environmental and sustainability education:

- humans are a part of, not separate from, the natural environment
- the environment must be considered in its totality, with a focus on the dynamic interactions among human systems and natural systems
- environmental learning, to be coherent, must be interdisciplinary
- the scope of learning encompasses both short and long-term futures, as well as issues from the local and regional to the national and global levels
- critical thinking, problem-solving, and the ability to consider a diversity of viewpoints are core skills
- values and ethics guide environmental attitudes, actions, and decision-making
- citizens' participation in sustainable solutions is essential across all sectors of society, and within all realms of business and activity
- environmental and sustainability education is a process of lifelong learning

