

...INCORPORATE ENV.ED.

Experiential Education (EE) staff often rely on nature or natural settings to conduct programs. Unfortunately, these resources are diminishing and worth protecting from increasing extraction and exploitation. One way to contribute to the protection of natural resources is to inculcate an eco-awareness in program clientele.

Generating a client eco-awareness begins with adding Environmental Education (Env.Ed.) to EE programs. Staff may be challenged and time-limited to do this well, especially if not trained in the principles or applications of Env.Ed.

PRINCIPLES

Env.Ed. is more than simply exposing clients to nature, teaching them Leave No Trace methods, and interpreting natural history. Env.Ed. moves beyond this to taking action on environmental issues. To achieve a shift from eco-awareness to pro-environmental action, clients must hold eco-sensitive beliefs and values, build on their knowledge of ecological concepts, understand the issues, and have the empowerment and skills to make a big difference in sustainability topics like decarbonizing the global economy.

Guidelines for Excellence in Env.Ed. Standards developed by the North American Association for Env.Ed. emphasize the importance of an “action orientation” and “skills-building.” Their guidelines describe four curricular channels:

1. **Questioning, Analysis, and Interpretation Skills**, including research & critical analysis;
2. **Environmental Processes and Systems**, including natural & cultural eco-heritage;
3. **Skills for Understanding and Addressing**, including comparative decision-making; and
4. **Personal and Civic Responsibility**, including being willing and able to take action.

Learning should also be fair, accurate, balanced, age and culture appropriate, and connected to the learner’s life experiences.

APPLICATIONS

The incorporation of Env.Ed. into EE activities is a complex process and so staff should attempt realistic applications. Here are some examples.

Skills Instruction: while learning basic climbing techniques in the western mountains of North America, access to high mountains travels up logging roads, across timber slash or debris, into unlogged forest, and then above tree line. A dialogue about the pros and cons of forestry is facilitated by staff. They examine the impacts of clear-cutting, discuss the necessity of lumber product for house construction, and talk about the ease of access provided by roads into the high country. Clients are left with comparative thoughts of costs and benefits, concern for tree replanting, and the desire to protect forests.

Nature Immersion: An EE program puts clients in solo locations to reflect on their journeys and contemplate beautiful scenery. Over time, the area used for this exercise has become crowded with eco-tourists seeking to enjoy the sights. Clients complain about negative disturbances to the values of solitude and naturalness. Unable to relocate, staff counter with a conversation about the impacts and importance of tourism.

Expeditions: While on a wilderness paddling trip in the Boundary Waters on the US-Canada border, staff normally might teach some natural history and ecological concepts, by explaining wildlife corridors or pointing out and discussing local animals. Later on, they might introduce an environmental issue like copper mining within the park boundaries. The next day they might paddle a pre-planned route past a mine and discuss a comparison of the mine with the surrounding pristine environment. Finally, they might conduct a role play of both sides of the issue, play recordings of advocates for both views, and discuss action that could be taken to sustain advocacy and contact their legislators.

Jeff Baierlein & Simon Priest

Jeff Baierlein
VIRISTAR
info@viristar.com
206-473-8050
viristar.com

FURTHER RESOURCES

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The Journal of Environmental Education. <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/vjee20/current>

Global Environmental Education Partnership. <https://thegeep.org/>

Environmental "Town Hall" Role Play example
https://www.sciencejournalforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/beaver_lesson_plan.pdf