

## History of Environmental Education

The roots of environmental education can be traced back as early as the 18th century when **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** stressed the importance of an education that focuses on the environment in *Emile: or, On Education*. Several decades later, **Louis Agassiz**, a Swiss-born naturalist, echoed Rousseau's philosophy as he encouraged students to "Study nature, not books." These two influential scholars helped lay the foundation for a concrete environmental education program, known as **nature study**, which took place in the late 19th and early 20th century.

The nature study movement used fables and moral lessons to help students develop an appreciation of nature and embrace the natural world. Anna Botsford Comstock, the head of the Department of Nature Study at Cornell University, was a prominent figure in the nature study movement. She wrote the Handbook for Nature Study in 1911 which used nature to educate children on cultural values. Comstock and the other leaders of the movement, such as Liberty Hyde Bailey, helped Nature Study garner tremendous amounts of support from community leaders, teachers, and scientists to change the science curriculum for children across the United States.

A new type of environmental education, Conservation Education, emerged as a result of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl during the 1920s and 1930s. Conservation Education dealt with the natural world in a drastically different way from Nature Study because it focused on rigorous scientific training rather than natural history. Conservation Education was a major scientific management and planning tool that helped solve social, economic, and environmental problems during this time period.

The modern environmental education movement, which gained significant momentum in the late 1960s and early 1970s, stems from Nature Study and Conservation Education. During this time period, many events – such as Civil Rights, the Vietnam War, and the Cold War – placed Americans at odds with one another and the U.S. government. However, as more people began to fear the fallout from radiation, the chemical pesticides mentioned in Rachel

Carson's *Silent Spring*, and the significant amounts of air pollution and waste, the public's concern for their health and the health of their natural environment led to a unifying phenomenon known as environmentalism. Environmental education was born of the realization that solving complex local and global problems cannot be accomplished by politicians and experts alone, but requires "the support and active participation of an informed public in their various roles as consumers, voters, employers, and business and community leaders."

One of the first articles about environmental education as a new movement appeared in the *Phi Delta Kappan* in 1969, authored by James A. Swan. A definition of "Environmental Education" first appeared in *The Journal of Environmental Education* in 1969, written by William B. Stapp. Stapp later went on to become the first Director of Environmental Education for UNESCO, and then the Global Rivers International Network.

Ultimately, the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970 – a national teach-in about environmental problems – paved the way for the modern environmental education movement. Later that same year, President Nixon passed the National Environmental Education Act, which was intended to incorporate environmental education into K-12 schools. Then, in 1971, the National Association for Environmental Education (now known as the North American Association for Environmental Education) was created to improve environmental literacy by providing resources to teachers and promoting environmental education programs.

Internationally, environmental education gained recognition when the UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972, declared environmental education must be used as a tool to address global environmental problems. The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) created three major declarations that have guided the course of environmental education.

In 2002, the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014 (UNDESD) was formed as a way to reconsider, excite, and change approaches to acting positively on global challenges. The Commission on Education and Communication (CEC) helped

support the work of the UNDES D by composing a backbone structure for education for sustainability, which contained five major components. The components are "Imagining a better future", "Critical thinking and reflection", "Participation in decision making" and "Partnerships, and Systemic thinking".

On June 9–14, 2013, the seventh World Environmental Education Congress was held in Marrakesh, Morocco. The overall theme of the conference was "**Environmental education and issues in cities and rural areas: seeking greater harmony**", and incorporated 11 different areas of concern. The World Environmental Education Congress had 2,400 members, representing over 150 countries. This meeting was the first time ever that it had been held in an Arab country, and was put together by two different organizations, the Mohamed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection and the World Environmental Education Congress Permanent Secretariat in Italy. Topics addressed at the congress include stressing the importance of environmental education and its role to empower, establishing partnerships to promote environmental education, how to mainstream environmental and sustainability, and even how to make universities "greener".

### **Stockholm Declaration**

June 5–16, 1972 - **The Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment**. The document was made up of 7 proclamations and 26 principles "to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment."

### **Belgrade Charter**

October 13–22, 1975 - **The Belgrade Charter** was the outcome of the International Workshop on Environmental Education held in Belgrade, Yugoslavia (now Serbia). The Belgrade Charter was built upon the Stockholm Declaration and adds goals, objectives, and guiding principles of environmental education programs. It defines an audience for environmental education, which includes the general public.

## **Tbilisi Declaration**

October 14–26, 1977 - **The Tbilisi Declaration** "noted the unanimous accord in the important role of environmental education in the preservation and improvement of the world's environment, as well as in the sound and balanced development of the world's communities." The Tbilisi Declaration updated and clarified The Stockholm Declaration and The Belgrade Charter by including new goals, objectives, characteristics, and guiding principles of environmental education.

Later that decade, in 1977, the Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in Tbilisi, Georgia emphasized the role of Environmental Education in preserving and improving the global environment and sought to provide the framework and guidelines for environmental education. The Conference laid out the role, objectives, and characteristics of environmental education, and provided several goals and principles for environmental education.