

EDITORS' NOTES

Why is it important to discuss environmental issues in the context of adult and continuing education? Many of the world's adults are very much aware of environmental problems and are afraid, in fact terrified, that the world is in immediate danger. Their understandings come from a variety of sources such as personal observations and daily lived experiences, their peers, news reports and other media, and community-action campaigns. However, environmental problems loom large and can be difficult to understand due to both their scientific nature, and more importantly, the complexity of ideological standpoints at their origin. The latter barrier makes it difficult for people to envision how they can possibly make a difference, thereby engendering feelings of hopelessness, fear, confusion, and apathy.

More educational opportunities are required in order for adults to come together and collectively share experiences and learn from each other, challenge assumptions and discursive norms, and create new knowledge for socioenvironmental change. Environmental adult education is one framework within which adult educators can facilitate collective learning opportunities for adults around ecological concerns in order to formulate concrete responses.

Extensive education programming and literature already exists for children, yet environmental concerns have been largely neglected in adult education discourse and practice. Discussions on environmental adult and popular education have been frequent in nations and regions of the world outside of North America. This volume represents a collaborative effort between scholars residing in Canada and the United States, many of whom have international origins, experiences, and perspectives, to illumine this vital subject for adult educators. Environmental adult education is inextricably linked with concerns already receiving much needed attention, including (1) oppression based on race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, religion, and national origin, (2) citizen participation, democracy, and civil society, and (3) social action. Environmental and social injustices are intertwined within a complex and intimate, interdependent relationship, and neither form of injustice can be adequately addressed or acted upon in the absence of the other.

The first three chapters of this sourcebook lay the foundations for environmental adult education. In Chapter One, Darlene E. Clover explains the scope of environmental adult education and situates the need for it firmly in a discussion of pernicious globalizing processes that negatively affect the environment and the quality of people's lives worldwide. Further, she argues that environmental deterioration is an issue that affects everyone—it is a cultural issue, a political issue, a social issue, a feminist issue, a global issue.

Environmental adult educators need to become activists, strengthen democracy, and forge strong links with community groups.

How people use language and metaphor to express their beliefs about their relationship with the natural world is the topic tackled by Lilian H. Hill and Julie D. Johnston in Chapter Two. Relationships embedded in a limited modern worldview separate humanity from the natural world, and this fallacy renders people nearly incapable of perceiving the causal factors of environmental decline. Adult educators can make it possible for students and participant collaborators to widen their perceptions to reconnect within the natural world of which we are an integral part. A spirituality of meaning and purpose can prompt humanity to heal the self-created alienation between people and the natural world. It is a call to action required for survival of the earth and all its beings.

Environmental justice, the complex and vital issue raised by Robert J. Hill in Chapter Three, acknowledges colluding factors of racism, classism, sexism, and hegemony that underlie environmental deterioration and worsening health of marginalized and oppressed populations locally and globally. Popular education and social movement learning are vital for people to name and combat inequity, and environmental adult education serves a crucial role by building environmental democracy. Environmental justice learning that leads to social transformation and more equitable conditions is critical to revitalizing a healthy ecology.

In Chapter Four, Jennifer Sumner links environmental adult education and community sustainability. The health of communities remains a critical issue in a globalizing world. Connection to place and life in community influence our relationship within the environment and help us relearn what people need for healthy living, working, and relating to one another and the earth. Environmental learning linked to life values, critical reflection, and dialogue engenders new ways of seeing and being in the world. Environmental adult education, grounded in the local and reaching out to other localities, can engender a global pedagogy of community sustainability.

Adult educator activists using environmental popular education to work with indigenous peoples is the topic raised by Dip Kapoor in Chapter Five. Indigenous peoples living on every continent cannot be easily subsumed into a single discussion. In his discussion of indigenous social movements in India, Kapoor considers practical and theoretical implications related to the use of popular education within social movements that are dedicated to opposing environmental displacement and oppression.

Women living the tensions between their environmental convictions and daily, pragmatic ethical choices is the subject of Chapter Six by Lee Karlovic and Kathryn Patrick. In a variety of ways, women are most affected by socioenvironmental degradation. Karlovic and Patrick choose one example of a group of seven women, with more than seventy-five years' collective experience in adult and popular education, who came together to explore intricate and complex connections between women, the environment, and adult education.

In Chapter Seven, Ralf St. Clair identifies and reflects on the challenges of environmental literacy. Before universal environmental literacy can be realized, the challenges of both literacy education and environmental literacy must be addressed. The need to convey key scientific concepts more accessibly, redress the dominance of government and “objective” science, acknowledge and value the experience of diverse peoples, and finally link experience to action provide substantial challenges to environmental adult education. Reconnecting the word and the world will not be simple or easy. St. Clair concludes that critically applying the metaphor of literacy to environmental challenges we face allows us to participate in changing social practices in the way we think about and act in the environment.

In Chapter Eight, Paul Bélanger proposes a new ecology of learning that confronts ongoing beliefs and practices in environmental education. Environmental education programming for adults has historically been paid too little attention, is often underfunded, and is frequently conceived as a public, one-way communication campaign. Creation of collective, social dialogue and significant learning opportunities linking local conditions to global issues is essential. An ecological understanding of learning involves adults connecting environmental learning to personal experiences in the environment, a focus on local problems and ecological risks, a lifelong learning orientation, and societal interaction and dialogue.

The editors close with a final chapter that summarizes inescapable themes addressed in this sourcebook: the pernicious effects of globalization, the interdependent entanglements of oppression of the earth and all its beings, and the need for opportunities and spaces within which to explore and challenge environmental deterioration. Environmental adult education taking place in social movements, communities, organizations, and classrooms begins with respect for ecological knowledge and attention to local contexts and conditions. Through a diversity of practices, it responds both emotionally and cognitively to ecological issues within the context of social and global concerns. To be effective, environmental adult education cannot be an isolated intellectual exercise. Instead, shared knowledge, dialogue, and social action are central to transformative ecological learning that connects us within the natural world and enables us to act for the survival and revitalization of all life.

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