

ADULT EDUCATION FOR THE BIO-ENVIRONMENT

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It is generally agreed upon that education has been one of the most effective and possibly best ways of solving environmental problems. Undoubtedly, education could figure prominently in solving social and economic problems. At least, it could create the necessary conditions for action and train people to conduct themselves in the desired manner, by actively participating in and organizing activities against the destruction of the environment. One must keep in mind that environmental problems have their origins in different and very complex types of social, political, economic and cultural factors. Therefore, it is misleading to say that education is the sole and best way of solving environmental problems. Such a statement would contrast our knowledge and understanding of social change as well as the role of education as a social institution. From this point of view, education—as a process of change—depending on its aims, scope and quality, may greatly contribute to solving environmental problems by changing people's way of thinking, behavior, values, knowledge and skills necessary for protecting the environment.

One of the fundamental functions of education in society is to transfer the scientific and cultural accumulations to the younger generations so that they can get along with the existing social, cultural, political and natural environment. Another main function of education, no less important than the first, is to make individuals able to change and improve their social and natural environment. With regard to the first function, education has been conservative, in the sense that it aims at the maintenance and preservation of the existing social, economic, cultural systems. Some people may understand this as meaningful and may think of it as a tool for the preservation of the bio-environment. Surely, the environment cannot be protected unless the behavior towards and understanding of the environment by people is changed in the proper way. The second function of education is to make people able to criticize, evaluate and change the existing system. It is a fact that this function of education could be effective only to the extent that the democratic processes and institutions will permit. This mostly depends upon the politically influential groups who hold the power in their hands.

As it has been provided by many modern constitutions and several universal declarations and international documents, every human being has the right to live in a decent, beautiful, clean, healthy, green and comfortable environment. According to Article 56 of the Turkish constitution, "Everyone has the right of living in a healthy and balanced environment. It is a duty of the State as well as of the citizens to develop the environment, protect environmental health and prevent the pollution of the environment".

As it is mentioned in the Turkish constitution, protection and development of the environment is not merely a responsibility of the State, but also a duty of all Turkish citizens. It is necessary that everybody be aware of the rights and responsibilities towards the environment. Unless citizens are taught these subjects, they cannot utilize them to fulfil their civic responsibilities.

In the master plans of some countries for the development and protection of the environment, a special emphasis and appropriate special sections are given concerning this very subject of citizenship education. This should be in accordance with the education for democracy.

Since formal environmental education is presented in another paper in this conference, I will confine myself to the environmental education for adults.

Aims of Environmental Education in General

There are two main reasons to make a presentation at this conference concerning adult education for the environment. First of all, we must refer to the deeper sense of responsibility on the part of adults, those people who are continuing to destroy the bio-environment. To protect the natural, and even the artificial environment of our world, and to stop resource depletion, action must be taken urgently to reorganize our educational systems, especially non-formal educational institutions, by placing more emphasis on environmental problems. Secondly, the problems to be tackled are those created not by children and young people, but by adults.

Within this context, the aim of both formal and informal environmental education is to:

- acquaint citizens with these rights and responsibilities toward the environment
- make them capable of defending their rights before the public and judicial authorities
- to influence decision-makers to take initiatives for solving such local and civic problems related to the environment
- to participate in activities of civic organizations. One has to know how to utilize the natural resources without causing harm.

Another important aim of education for the environment is to help individuals to conceive of their natural and man-made environment, not as commercial commodities, but as something vital for themselves and the survival of future generations.

The recently founded International University of the Bio-Environment (I.U.B.E.) has not been a formal type of higher education institution, providing university education based on scheduled formal instruction, but an action-oriented approach as to, in the words of Dr. Agni Vlavianos-Arvanitis, "influence decision makers – who were the children of yesterday, but the adults of today – at different levels so as to impress upon them the need to incorporate respect for both short and long term planning". In other words, the I.U.B.E., although a meta-university, embraces the needs of future generations, but also covers target groups including senior decision makers of society including government officials and bio-environment activists. This means that by further continuing education programs, the I.U.B.E. aims at dealing with extended education for adults. The term 'adult' covers not only the decision-makers, but also the people who are effected by or subjected to the decisions regarding the protection of the bio-environment. Taking into account the above-mentioned reasons, we must give necessary emphasis to the education of adults for protecting our bio-environment.

One of the important functions of education in modern society is to keep individuals informed and enable them to solve problems that are confronted by the whole of society in which the individual lives, through active participation and by utilizing mutual help methods based on joint efforts. Another important point is to answer the question concerning the type of adult education needed in environmental issues. We agree with those who defend the idea that adults need more problem-solving and action-oriented educational programs to develop their sensitivity, awareness and consciousness for the protection of the bio-environment. Adult education must not only deal with but also emphasize 'education about the environment'. This type of education would lead to changes in adult thinking, behavior, understanding of the system of the bio-environment as life itself. In addition, adult education for the environment must enable adults to know their rights as human beings, which they are entitled to exercise, many of which are laid down in most modern constitutions as well as universal declarations, conventions and other multilateral documents signed by many countries in the world.

As regards the protection of the natural environment, one must first learn and understand to rediscover the regularities of the bio-environment and natural phenomena so as to understand the harmony which exists in nature, to achieve a deeper understanding of the damage caused by humanity and to realize how one is being destructive to the bio-environment.

Another aim of education for the environment must be the development of the concept of the 'Bio-environmental Citizen' who will be able to fully exercise his environmental rights, and be ready to take any necessary steps against the harmful and destructive endeavors destroying the bio-environment.

It is also clear that environmental problems can only be solved through the process of participatory democracy. Therefore, in developing countries, education for the environment means education about, for and within democracy, based on full participation of the people within social, political and cultural affairs at all levels of government, concerning them as citizens.

In tackling environmental problems and in increasing public awareness at community levels, adult education is not only a task for governmental and formal educational institutions, but also a function of local governments as well as civic and voluntary, non-governmental organizations.

Within the same context, another point is the role of the mass media in educating people about environmental issues. In some countries, like Turkey, radio and television are under the control of the state and have been very reluctant to give information and insensitive towards environmental problems.

What we may expect from adult education in environmental subjects can be summarized as follows:

- creating and feeding affection for the bio-environment,
- promoting public consciousness to stop social and economic activities from demolishing the balance of the biosphere,
- taching the ways and means of using and living within the natural environment's resources.

It is not intended to go into the details concerning the aims and entire scope of environmental adult education. Instead, as an annex to this paper, we added the text of a declaration made and signed by more than six hundred eminent persons including professors, writers, intellectuals and experts in environmental education and planning and announced to the press and public opinion in Turkey on the World Environment Day, June 5, 1991. Originally, the text of the declaration was a product of our course in 'Adult Education and Environmental Problems' at the Ankara University Graduate Program in the Fall term of the 1990-1991 Academic Year. The text was based on the research of our students attending the above mentioned course, developed by them with the feedback of colleagues at the same University.

Among other educational programs and activities, the I.U.B.E. must be a pioneer for launching a curriculum to train adult educators and establish extension services for the same purpose.

Annex **Declaration of Adult Education for Environmental Sensitivity**

The following is the text of a declaration prepared by a group of graduate students at Ankara University as a product of their classwork for Professor Cevat Geray's course on "Adult Education and Environmental Problems", in the Fall term of the 1990-91 Academic Year. It was announced to the public on the World Environment Day June 5, 1991.

Aims of Adult Education

Adult education for the environment aims at helping the individual citizen realize the following goals:

- acquire a critical view and sensitivity of consciousness in our relations with the environment;
- become aware of our responsibilities towards the environment, and develop the proper attitude, so as to actively participate in decision-making processes and precipitate a cause transformation on the environment;
- develop a conduct easing the participation through voluntary and civic organizations and take initiatives in reaching solutions on political, legal and administrative issues;
- become aware of the fundamental right for an environment in which one can live in a humanitarian atmosphere, and seek the health and well-being of the society by respecting the environment without causing any harm to it;
- realize the vital importance of natural life and natural resources for humankind;
- develop a lifestyle to maintain the historical environment and the cultural heritage.

Scope of Adult Education for the Environment

Contents of 'Education for Environment' must cover the following:

- the importance and meaning of ecological approaches in relationship to humanity with effect to the environment;
- causes and effects in the destruction of the historical and natural environment;
- the need for democratic institutions, democratic values in the preservation of the environment, the importance of participation, the importance of local governments and civic organization;
- aimed at the realization of rights of the environment and participation of individuals into the decision-making process and impart the necessary technical and political knowledge;
- the importance and meaning of organized demonstrations;
- the legal framework and the rights of the environment;
- different alternatives and implementations of energy for the conservation of the environment and prevention of technologies which have destructive effects on the environment;
- the importance of sustainable development based on own sources of communities, developing consumption habits to meet real needs;
- search for ways of living in balance with nature and without destruction of the natural environment;
- the importance of the conservation of historical sites as cultural heritage.

Principles

The summary of 'Principles of Activities of Education for the Environment' as given in section 3 of the announcement:

- everyone has the right to be educated and to educate others about the environment;
- education for the environment is for all sections of the society within the framework of 'lifetime education';
- precautions must be taken by the state for education on the environment and all needed sources must be provided by the state;
- at every level of education, ecology and the bio-environment must be taken as an interdisciplinary subject;
- every educational activity carried out by civic institutions for the environment must be supported by the state and all restrictions on the freedom of meeting and organization for the environment must be abolished;
- people must actively participate in the educational process by assuming the responsibilities of planning and implementing, and

education should be based on using the experience of participants;

- education for the environment must be given inside the environment; furthermore, the environment must not only be used as a subject of education but as the educative stage like a classroom.

Priorities

Subject Priorities

It is clear that priority must be given to the subjects aiming at the development of consciousness, confidence, trust and enjoying the 'Rights of Environment.' This includes finding ways of reacting against individuals and politicians who misuse, erode and destroy the environment. Creating and living in a healthy, high quality environment and teaching legal methods of collective action against harmful endeavors to the environment are issues of priority. It is important to give priority to the knowledge of environmental resources which cannot be reproduced, and to activities causing a deterioration of the environment. Understanding the need and methods for conservation of historical and cultural monuments and sites must become a priority in education.

Priorities For Target Groups

In dealing with the problems of education programs for the environment, priority must be given to people living in the most problematic, polluted environments. These include damaged areas inhabited by people unaware of the problems, as well as uneducated and those unconscious of the effects of their activities, such as the urban and rural poor affected by malnutrition and other health problems. Education of workers, adolescents and women is very important since these groups have the potential of being most effective in the community. Especially the small-scale producers, people making their living from production causing destruction of the environment. People with little knowledge about nature, must be the target of adult education programs for the environment.

Priority should be given to the education of the following groups:

- people living in the most polluted areas;
- people economically dependent upon producing, using and destroying natural resources (i.e. fishermen, hunters, farmers, etc.);
- urban and rural poor affected by rapid population increases which cause malnutrition and health problems;
- workers, adolescents and women having a potential impact in their communities.

Qualities of Educators for the Environment

An adult educator needs to have the following qualities:

- interdisciplinary education;
- be more than a teacher, a member of the group having leadership qualities, and assisting the group in problem-solving and performing collective actions;
- help people be actively involved in the educational process so as to assume responsibility in planning and implementing adult education. This process
- should be based on using the experience of participants in education;
- support group actions by creating a confident and helpful atmosphere among the participants;
- help the participants organize themselves, making them responsible at all levels of the educational process.

Methods and Implementations of Education for the Environment

The education and methods of people's organization must be implemented in the framework of mutual assistance, based on solving problems, helping and cooperating with each other within the common scope of public development.

Education for the environment could be in factories, fields and offices. New recognition and conduct towards the environment can only be learned by practical implementation.

Adult education is appropriate in educational centers such as community education and development centers, people's chambers, village chambers, local houses, environment houses, etc.

Tours to learn about historical and natural environments, videos, film, shows, walking and climbing activities must be organized; writing,

drawing, photography competitions with environmental subjects must be arranged; museums, libraries, national parks, historical sites are suitable for this purpose.

The following issues should be considered:

- to interest and motivate participants to affect changes in the community, the education of adults must be focused on problem solving; its content must be adapted to the needs, problems and sensitivities of people;
- participatory techniques may be used by referring to the participants' environment and experiences achieved in the past;
- audio-visual tools (mass media, film, posters etc.) must be used in order to make education more effective;
- coordination and cooperation may be achieved between civic and public institutions such as local governments, voluntary civic institutions and activist groups working for environmental ends, public administrations involved in decision-making and environmental education (directorates of environment, public education centers).

Conclusion

The success of educational activities for environmental sensitivity and consciousness is associated with a series of corrections in the social, economic, political framework as mentioned in the introduction.

Thinking politically, arrangements must be made towards a democratic life, participatory values must be spread to all parts of the community; pressures, restrictions and obstacles on freedom of thought must be abolished and the Constitution must be changed towards that direction.

Participation in decision-making, associated greatly with the level of democratization, is a sensitive factor in developing consciousness for the self-control of people regarding their action towards the environment, in both rural and the urban centers.

The greatest restriction on existing education comes from educational programs determined by the political power which rules the community. Due to today's legal arrangements, neither the citizens nor civic public associations (first cooperatives, labor unions, professional chambers and societies) are encouraged to participate in the decision-making for the environment and to be organized toward those goals.

Local governments, which should occupy the front line in environmental problem solving, are pushed backwards in the aspects of duty, competence and responsibility. Local governments should effectively get in touch with fellow citizens and encourage their participation and contribution.

Apart from differentiation in political ideology, parties should make a consensus on policies and managements for environmental problems which threaten the future of the world and of humankind.

In the framework of sustainable development and in the place of development without care for industrial pollution minimization, environmental impact analysis and treatment of plants should be realized by using an effective control mechanism with the participation of the local government and public. Fines for pollution must not be paid by the public, but by those who pollute.

A plan should be prepared including all policies and precautions, the sources reserved for development should be reviewed and monetary sources for implementing environmental policy should be found. The expenditures for defense should be decreased and this money should be added to the needed monetary source for the environment.

Education for the environment cannot reach the desired success without carrying out the correctives briefly defined above.

Professor **Cevat Geray** studied at Ankara University and received his Ph.D in Political Science in 1960. Prof. Geray has worked and managed several research projects concerning small municipalities and has been a consultant to Turkish Radio and Television Corporation. He has lectured and given courses on local government at Ankara University and the Public Administration Institute for Turkey and the Middle East. He has served as Dean of the Faculty of Political Science at Ankara University, served as Undersecretary of State for the Ministry of Reconstruction and Resettlement in Turkey and has published several books on Community Development and Urban Planning.

