

ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING



Letter from the editor

The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development continues establishing bases and opening up channels through the territory cultivated by environmental education for 30 years in Latin America and the Caribbean. This process is generating public policies in the field of environmental education. In this context, Mexico presented its National Strategy on Environmental Education on 10 October 2006, signed by the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Public Education.

As a counterpart to the advances of public policies in this field, environmental education continues nourishing a movement of teaching renovation and social transformation. In this process, the Second Congress on Environmental Education for Sustainable Development of the Argentine Republic was held from 26 to 29 October 2006. It was organized by the Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic, the “Marina Vilte” School of Union Training, the Union of Education Workers of Buenos Aires and the Network of Environmental Educators of Argentina, and it included the participation of 2,300 teachers of Argentina.

In the sphere of cooperation by international organizations in relation to the Decade, the Latin American meeting “Building an Education for Sustainable Development in Latin America”, organized by UNESCO, together with the UPAZ Earth Charter Centre on Education for Sustainable Development and in collaboration with the UNEP Environmental Training Network, was held in San José, Costa Rica, from 31 October to 2 November 2006. The meeting brought together some 150 educators, university professors and civil society actors in a consultation to establish strategic lines and priority activities intended to guide the education transformation process and the consolidation of environmental education for sustainable development during the Decade.

In this context, the Cooperation Agreement signed between the Regional Offices for Latin America and the Caribbean of UNEP and UNESCO to implement and develop Decade activities was presented. The importance of imbuing environmental education with strong ethical bases underpinned by the principles of the Earth Charter, the Treaty on Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility and the Manifesto for Life was reiterated.

In the international sphere, the Fourth World Environmental Education Congress will be held in Durban, South Africa, from 2 to 6 July 2007, with the theme “*Learning in a changing world*”. This Congress will mark the 30th anniversary of the Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education that took place in Tbilisi, Georgia, in 1977.

Environmental education and the ethic of responsibility to society and nature have been sensitizing and permeating the constructions of scientific and instrumental rationality that have been established in modern civilization and have generated environmental degradation and social inequality processes. Thus, Itaipú, the world’s largest dam, has opened its gates to environmental education and management. A Meeting of Environmental Education Specialists of the Plata Basin was held from 29 to 31 August, with the participation of 80 educators, civil society actors and those responsible for public policy in the field of environmental education and management. The meeting agreed on a Pact related to its Dialogues. On 30 November 2006, an agreement, signed by Itaipú Binacional, the Itaipú Technological Park and UNEP, established the Plata Basin Socio-Environmental Knowledge and Care Centre, which includes Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

In these processes of social change, caused by the global environmental crisis and guided by a socio-environmental ethic, note should be made of the establishment in Mexico of the Union of Scientists Committed to Society and the launching of its Manifesto to promote “scientific and academic responsibility in the development of knowledge and its applications to benefit society and the environment”.

Finally, in this issue of *Environmental Training*, we share with our readers the publication of the book *El desafío ambiental* by Carlos Walter Porto Gonçalves, number 12 in the Latin American Thought series.

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Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

Agreement on UNESCO and UNEP Collaboration

In the framework of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, a collaboration agreement was signed by UNESCO, through its Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, and UNEP, through its Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. This arose in response to the recommendations contained in the Decade document, one of which is cooperation among governments, education and environment ministries, universities and schools, NGOs and civil society, as well as international agencies dedicated to environmental education. Through this agreement, UNESCO and UNEP assume the commitment to work together in education activities for sustainable development in the region.

The parties proposed to collaborate in achieving greater understanding of what sustainable development means among the people of the region through the following activities: support the countries in conducting events linked to the Decade; provide orientation for national policies that will promote environmental education and management; provide assistance for projects and programmes that will further environmental awareness in basic, middle and university education; disseminate texts that promote such environmental awareness through governments, educational institutions and civil society, as well as organizations dedicated to environmental education and training; and give assistance to researchers and to different educational programmes focused on sustainable development.

Both institutions expect to obtain the following outputs from these activities: benefits to the population of the region; collaboration of the population in the organization of and participation in events that promote sustainable development; collaboration among governments, institutions, civil society and organizations dedicated to environmental training; an increase in participation with a view to building sustainable development through the dissemination of research related to the topic.

The document was signed in October 2006.

Meeting on “Building Education for Sustainable Development in Latin America”, San José, Costa Rica

This Meeting was held in San José, Costa Rica in November of this year and brought together approximately 150 people, including experts in formal and non-formal education, representatives of education, environment and social development ministries in the region, teachers at the primary, secondary and higher education levels, and representatives of civil society organizations, as well as representatives of the private sector involved in education. The participants' discussions revolved around themes that can advocate the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Education for

Sustainable Development (DESD) in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Strategic Guidelines, a document that emerged from the meeting, established the proposal to achieve the objectives of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development through the following pivotal points: integration and harmonization of education policy; linkage of converging efforts; formulation and strengthening of regulatory frameworks and public policies; communication and information for sustainable development; strengthening of strategic cooperation; monitoring; and evaluation of results.

To work with the above-mentioned pivotal points, consideration was given to the following priority activities: strengthen national regulatory frameworks; formulate and apply integrated and intersectoral public policies; advocate research and the development of comprehensive curricular proposals, as well as non-formal educational methods; train basic, middle and university teachers in values and principles for sustainability; strengthen training in education for sustainable development of communicators and advocate self-regulating mechanisms of mass media to prevent messages of non-sustainable practices and activities; back and advocate community initiatives for solidarity in education and the economy; and encourage the development of opportunities for social participation in favour of education and sustainable development.

The final declaration of the Guidelines emphasizes that education for sustainable development is a right and an obligation of each and every inhabitant on the planet, and that the obligation is greater for governments. This calls for the adoption of intersectoral and transdisciplinary approaches that incorporate and value the contributions of each and every sector and actor.

Fourth World Environmental Education Congress, 2 to 6 July 2007, Durban, South Africa

This will be the first time the World Environmental Education Congress is held in Africa. It comes precisely when many voices are calling for a review of forms of teaching and learning beyond the classroom in the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The great challenge for those immersed in the spheres of education is not only what to teach, but also defining the effects of this teaching on building a sustainable future.

One of the objectives of this Fourth Congress, whose theme will be “Learning in a changing world”, is to foster reflection on the role and contribution of environmental education in learning processes in a continually changing world and to examine the 30 years of environmental education since the Tbilisi Conference (1977), where its bases were established. It is also expected to encourage a critical review of advances in the field of environmental education and its role in fulfilling the objectives of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The Secretariat of the Congress is also giving consideration to launching a World Environmental Education Association during the event.

Information: <http://www.weec2007.com>



Strategy of Environmental Education for Sustainability in Mexico

In October of this year, the Government of Mexico, through the Environment and Natural Resources Ministry and the Public Education Ministry, presented its “Strategy of Environmental Education for Sustainable Development”, in the framework of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014. The launching ceremony was headed by the ministers of the two ministries.

The document makes a diagnostic study of the state of environmental education in the country and proposes some lines of action for the sustainable development of the country through environmental education in themes such as legislation and financing, education and training, institutional strengthening and strategic guidelines for environmental education for sustainable development in protected natural areas. The operation proposals of the strategy include plans for responsibilities, evaluation and follow-up, and finances.

Second Congress on Environmental Education for Sustainable Development of the Argentine Republic

The Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic held the Second Congress on Environmental Education for Sustainable Development from 26 to 29 October in Chapadmalal, province of Buenos Aires. The objectives of the Congress were to strengthen the construction of environmental education in Argentina, to advocate the training and capacity building of teaching staff and social actors from the standpoint of Latin American environmental thought, to promote the incorporation of environmental complexity and knowledge in the curricula of higher education and to strengthen the Network of Environmental Educators of the Argentine Republic.

The event analysed forms of rethinking the education system from the standpoint of environmental education, of Latin American visions of environmental education and of environmental education in Argentina.

Environmental Forums 2006 of the Thematic Network of Environmental Education of Colombia

Colombia is the country of the region with the greatest consolidation of a National Environmental Training Network at the institutional level. This Network is a programme supported by the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Land-use Development and brings together education and training institutions in the field of environment.

Since 2002, the country has had a National Environmental Education Policy, approved by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Environment, Housing and Land-use Development. Several of its universities, coordinated by the Thematic Environmental Education Network, are immersed in the implementation of the environmental dimension in their different degree study programmes and many NGOs have proposed environmental projects, several of which have been put into operation.

The Thematic Environmental Education Network, established in 2003, was formed by the Colombian Environmental Training Network as part of a space for interdisciplinary analysis and reflection with mutual support by the participating institutions.

In the framework of the Decade of Environmental Education for Sustainable Development, the Thematic Network organized four forums in which citizens were convened to discussions revolving around the following environmental themes: Quality of Life, organized by the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional; Community and Forests, organized by the Botanical Garden of Bogotá, the Universidad Distrital and the Institute of Environmental Studies of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia; Higher Education and Human Development, organized by the Technical Administrative Department for Environment; and the Water Forum, organized by the Universidad La Salle.

Information: <http://www.dama.gov.co/dama.php>

Second International Congress for Sustainable Development and Environment, 2-4 May 2007, Manizales, Colombia

This event forms part of the outreach programme of the Universidad de Manizales, through its Environment and Development Research Centre and the Master's Degree Programme in Sustainable Development and Environment.

The congress will address the activities of universities, businesses and research at the service of sustainability. Professionals and researchers will engage in discussions and will contribute their professional and work experiences from their respective fields of endeavour.

Information: www.umanizales.edu.co

Sixth International Convention on Environment and Development, 2-6 July 2007, Havana, Cuba

The Science, Technology and Environment Ministry of Cuba is organizing this event together with social and academic organizations. The convention is open to researchers, professionals, educators, entrepreneurs and all people interested in the theme.

The purpose of the Convention is to continue delving more deeply into these themes and to expand the discussion to other themes, in view of the harmful effects on ecosystems, of which we human beings form part, caused by a development model that plunders the environment and its resources.

The event will include keynote addresses, roundtable discussions and a fair with environmental technologies, projects and experiences. Within the Convention, five congresses will also be held on the following themes: Environmental Education for Sustainable Development; Protected Areas; Environmental Management; Integrated Water Resources Management; and Ecosystem and Biodiversity Management.

Information: convencion@ama.cu



Posgraduate Study Programmes in Environment

Master's Degree Programme in Environmental Sciences, Republic University, Uruguay/School of Sciences

This Master's Degree Programme, launched in 1997, seeks to train researchers and professionals in the skills needed to coordinate interdisciplinary teams with the capacity to:

- diagnose, evaluate and manage natural resources;
- prevent, mitigate and reverse environmental disturbances;
- evaluate development plans compatible with the sustainability of ecosystems, social equity and the economy;
- strengthen the teaching of environmental sciences.

The study plan is divided into two parts: a required basic core and individual specialization. The first part is carried out during the first year and includes theoretical courses and laboratory and field practice. The themes dealt with are: evaluation and management of environmental systems and their natural resources; ecology; physical geography; economics; sociology; and environmental law.

In the second stage the courses are suggested by an adviser. The courses, which should always be at the graduate level and related to the theme of the thesis, may be in other programmes of the School of Sciences and other university services, including those outside Uruguay.

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Master's Degree Programme in Environment and Sustainable Development, Antofagasta University, Chile

This master's degree programme is aimed at the study of environmental challenges in the world today, as well as the prevailing situation in northern Chile in the area of influence of the Universidad de Antofagasta, more specifically in the Atacama Desert. There, several companies are exploiting different mineral deposits located in the zone, with adverse impacts caused by their use of the scarce water that exists there – basically extracted from wells – by deposits of waste resulting from activities to separate minerals and metals from rock and by washing.

Some of the programme objectives are to develop professionals with social commitment and a critical sense,

capable of meeting and interconnecting social, production and economic development needs in the framework of sustainability, taking into account the problems that the presence of mining, coastal and farming areas represent for the zone.

The programme lasts four years and is divided into three cores: basic, deeper and integrating. The curriculum is based on the interdisciplinarity required to address problems as complex as sustainable development with a strong sense of ethics.

Information:

<http://www.uantof.cl/maydes>

School of Environmental Sciences, Tecnological University of Pereira, Colombia

The Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira is committed to analysing the social, economic and political processes produced in the environment around it and to fostering the creation and institutionalization of academic units to enable research, teaching and social outreach in areas that prove to be of significant importance to the future of the community in its area of influence.

The School of Environmental Sciences contributes to the generation, implementation and supervision of public and private action alternatives; provides assistance for development plans, programmes and projects; and constitutes an effective area of vanguard interdisciplinary knowledge for the management and planning of environment and sustainable development.

It has training programmes such as a bachelor's degree programme in environmental management and graduate programmes for a master's degree in plant biology, a master's degree in eco-technology and specialization in local environmental management.

It also makes available the following environment-related research programmes:

1. Management under a culture of environment and peaceful coexistence.
2. Water and sanitation.
3. Biodiversity and biotechnology.
4. Management in Andean tropical agro ecosystems.
5. Land-use management.
6. Cleaner production.
7. Simulation and complex processes.
8. Laboratory accreditation.

Information: <http://ambiental.utp.edu.co>



Plata Basin Socio-Environmental Knowledge and Care Center

The proposal to create the Plata Basin Socio-Environmental Knowledge and Care Centre arose at the First Meeting of Specialists in Environmental Education of the Plata Basin, held in Foz de Iguacú, Brazil, in August 2006. It included the participation of 78 specialists and people involved in environmental education from the five countries with territory in the Basin. The purpose of the meeting was to reflect and establish a dialogue on the quality of life and the environment in the region. Emphasis was placed on the ethic of environmental care and the need to disseminate environmental knowledge, using water as an integrating core. The Dialogues Pact of the Specialists in Environmental Education of the Plata Basin was prepared at the meeting and it was agreed to create the Centre.

The Centre proposal is based on the following guidelines: water as the integrating theme; the basin as the operational territory; environmental thought as the conceptual framework of activities; environmental education as the social mobilizer; and the collective building of knowledge, activities and organization.

Some of the objectives proposed for the Centre are: to serve as a space for meetings, dialogue, research and studies on socio-environmental knowledge through classroom and distance education; to identify and establish mechanisms for linkage, cooperation and synergy facilitation between governments and different social actors in the region; to provide support for the collective building of socio-environmental knowledge, activities and organizations in the region; to encourage building capacities for the full exercise of citizens and participatory democracy of the inhabitants of the Plata Basin in themes such as sustainable use and management of water, as well as other natural resources in the region.

The launching of the Centre took place in the framework of the event “Pacts for Sustainable Life”, carried out in Foz de Iguacú on 30 November 2006.

Itaipú and Environment

The Itaipú Binacional dam and hydroelectric power plant is located on the Paraná River, 14 kilometres upstream from the border cities Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, and Foz de Iguacú, Brazil. From the outset of the project, it was thought that activities should be carried out for environmental conservation in the region in which the dam and hydroelectric power plant are located. That is why a Guiding Plan was established to guarantee the conservation of the ecosystems and the sound use of natural resources in the impact area of the dam.

The environmental activities and projects in the above-mentioned Plan carried out in the Paraguayan zone of Itaipú Binacional are, among others, those conducted in biological reserves and refuges, such as: natural resource management programs; species protection; public use programme (guided or unguided visits); awareness building campaigns; and reserves and refuge supervision system.

The Land of the Guaraní Museum has a significant biological and anthropological collection from the dam's zone of influence. Located in the Environmental Centre, it is a space for research and public information on the Guaraní culture and the natural heritage of the region and is an important tool of the Itaipú Binacional Environmental Education Programme.

Environmental Education is the fundamental pillar of conservation, sound use of natural resources and sustainable development. In Itaipú the programme in this area began to operate in 1990 and since then it has had activities established for each year, which are directed principally at generating a new relationship of people with nature, considering themselves part of it, and with the resources that it provides. One of its objectives is to train educators, municipal authorities and officials, farmers, neighbourhood committees, students and the general public. It also supports the tasks of formal education of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Paraguay and responds to a large number of capacity building or training requests from education institutions and various social groups and associations in the country.

Itaipú Binacional has a zoo in which there are representative samples of the animal species that inhabit all the dam area and its zone of influence. It also has an environmental library, a forest nursery, an aquaculture farm and reforestation areas. Studies on the dam water fauna, limnology, aquatic plants, sedimentology and climatology are carried out as well.

Finally, an Integrated Microbasin Management Programme, implemented in Itaipú, seeks to maintain the water and agricultural land quality all along the coastal side of the dam.

www.itaipu.gov.py



Environmental Education, a revolution in education

Rosa María Romero Cuevas²

Human history is in reality multiple and diverse histories of peoples in their relationships and forms of representing reality. This immemorial process of symbolic and cultural mediations between man and nature is undoubtedly clearer in the relationship between peasant farmers and the land, and becomes more obscure in the awareness of urban dwellers.

From the Latin American perspective, talking about environmental problems means talking about the crisis in ways of thinking and being in the world, because we have understood that our concepts as human beings have a direct impact on the ways in which we appropriate the world and construct education.

Modern education is excessively determined by emphasis on the development of reason in information. Symbols, shared living experiences and emotions do not form part of the education project, which, in line with the perspective of government bodies, increasingly responds to market needs.

Environmental education needs to become a process that acts as the fermenting agent in the development of a new culture through new ways of thinking. Thinking needs to be opened up to different human cultures to generate the possibility of vibrating, of becoming passionate about the world; that is, learning to think, revolutionizing education.

Environmental education needs the militancy of dialoguing educators who recognize and set forth our own insertion in the world. Dialogue means active listening; not just hearing, but imagining yourself in the situation of the other person; understanding is encompassing the other in your thought.

Since education is a process through which humanity transmits values, attitudes and forms of knowledge, it can also produce new patterns to enable the transformation of reality.

Educational practices have caused a break in our awareness of the relationships that exist between forms of social development, daily life and nature. Be it in the conquest of life space, in the use of natural resources or in technological development, situations arise in which there is a need to know the replacement limits and the risk to life stemming from processes of nature itself or from human activities. There is also a need to know about the forms of social organization, the existence of symbols and meanings of a cultural nature and human beings' perception of themselves. All of these factors are involved in understanding the human being's complex relationship with nature.

Thus, the serial scheme of learning by accumulation and repetition cannot be maintained. Instead, the possibility of group reflection and critical experience of what is said and accepted should be explored, working with conflicts, learning new languages and interiorizing theoretical content, as well as skills and complex concepts that require integration of a psychological nature. This would lead us to the pedagogical practice of a comprehensive and contextualized teaching-learning process in interdisciplinary and intercultural groups integrated in a common task.

We need to look towards alternatives that consider constructing knowledge, sensitivities and commitments to life and that enable us to delineate educational practices closer to environmental training.

Traditional pedagogical work can be defined as a pedagogy by itself; that is, pedagogical practice that ignores or excludes the best means of human realization, because it excludes imagination, sensitivity, creativity and the desire for life which exists in every human being. Thus, education that deals only with instruction slows and frustrates the development of the human being. Spaces for dialogue between generations and between cultures need to be constructed, along with the critical development of the world we live in, and the capacity to imagine possible worlds. Doing away with education that continues generating and imposing passivity and inertia on people is of vital importance. Against this type of education we propose the integration of intellectual and affective aptitudes in the broad meaning of using our senses to become emotional about the world in a collective construction, which is a position against the disintegrating work of current education; that is, it incorporates ethical, aesthetic, political and rational dimensions. We must educate, not just teach.

Current education hinders integral human development. This occurs because of different processes among which authoritarianism is outstanding. When one figure is the centre of an educational activity, supervision activities predominate over educational activities and the importance of interpersonal relations is denied; the educator addresses the students as a group and not as specific persons; he rejects collaboration among participants and encourages competition.

Environmental education means not only introspection, but also the development of commitments to otherness, which is not only other human beings of different customs, practices, cosmovisions and emotions, but also all that is different from me, from us, and that forms me/us as part of the universe itself. To fulfil the function of educating, people's formation should enable them to live and act in the world, and to dream and commit themselves to the future.

School education leaves people defenceless against problems that should be confronted in all spheres of life not linked to technical and immediate solutions. The way in which education imposes an awareness of power does not teach us how to deal with conflicts and difficulties. School lessons are of little use in facing personal crises, crises in our relations with others and crises in situating ourselves in the world, nor do they enable us to identify needs, emotions and feelings. The need to transform is always denied. In this way, education prevents the development of imagination and action for the future. The lack of contact between people, in the deepest human sense, is the source of ineptitude for overcoming conflicts and the impossibility of constructing human environments.

There are diverse alternatives in education. Starting with a statute of equity among the participants in an education process requires giving voice back to students. It is important to note the attitudes in the pedagogical relationship. Above content and methods, the most important factor in this proposal is to encourage change, the capacity to change and the possibility of facing change. In this way, the educator is a facilitator of the person's development.

But that is not enough. The education process cannot be reduced to harmonious group relationships. It is necessary for education to be an environment with the challenge to develop knowledge and thought capable of creatively arguing and constructing representations of the world. Education that stimulates autonomy and decision-making by the participants without their focusing solely on the immediate situation is necessary.

Teaching unlinked from politics is, of course, unviable. A course on historical development must begin with recognition that there are inherited forms of thinking and constructing the world. They were thought of by others and should not necessarily be maintained.

There are groups and conflicts among them. Avoiding them makes no sense, and neither does saying they are all there is. Education with an environmental perspective requires the exercise of democracy; each person must be given the possibility of power and conscious interdependence.

We cannot wait for a change in the system before we modify education. It has to be confronted now as one of the strategies not only possible but necessary to resolve the crisis of civilization in a commitment that will require a long period of encouragement with patience in the face of obstacles and love for humanity and life. This transformation in education should occur as daily task, in the way of organizing the development of the human being, in delving more deeply into theory and research. In particular, it should be in charge of the project for the future.

The task of seeking a revolution in education from an environmental standpoint becomes essential in view of the need to respond to social and human problems. Education in the twenty-first century should be aimed in that direction. For that purpose, there is a need to investigate education methods that are most consistent with this demand and will direct the communities towards desired futures and the promotion of community processes, so as to contribute to the formation of citizens responsible to themselves, to their social group and to their natural environment. The power we have as teachers in the classroom should be renounced in exchange for building collective powers; that is, for bringing democracy to the classroom.

In parallel, education will have to begin constructing a philosophical framework that gives new meaning to educational work in favour of the fight against imposition, silence, oppression and the absence of a project; that is, the fight against everything that would convert us into a dependent culture and the fight for the defence of our right to decide how we want to live. This involves the critical construction of reality that enables social emancipation, acquisition of the power inscribed in decision-making authority, as well as the autonomy that comes from knowing how to elect and how to choose.

From the diversity of our cultures, from the possibilities of our ecosystems, from the unity of distinct and possible worlds, we alone, as environmental educators, will revolutionize education and will transform culture to construct the bases of possible utopias from the perspective of a sustainable future.



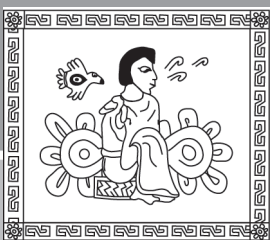


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The logotype of *Environmental Training* combines two prehispanic Mexican seals and a character from the post-Conquers Codex Mendoza. The logotype embodies a meaning of communication and environment, based on the following symbols: the flower seal signifies vegetation and crops and is related to water as shown by the presence of wavy lines. The bird is associated with life in the air and finally, the character with the glyphs represents the communication of thought, traditions and teaching.



July - December 2006
Volume 18
Number 39

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