

**APPROACHES TO TEACHING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN ALBANIA:  
THE CASE OF SUBJECT SCHOOL PROGRAMS****Arjan Shumeli, Albert Kopali, Jorgji Stasa**

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Received: 2012-11-30 Accepted: 2012-12-10 Published: 2012-12-20

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**Abstract**

This study emerges from the need to address the issues that environment faces in Albania by trying to pinpoint the underlying causes which are primarily human-made. Since humans stand behind the deterioration of environment the main focus of the study will be the evaluation of environmental education in the Albanian setting which is responsible for shaping up the environmental awareness, knowledge, and participation of citizens in getting involved with environmental actions. With the decline of quality of environment in the country it is necessary to re-establish the place that environmental education deserves in the national curriculum, subject programs and textbooks. The intended purpose of the research study is to present as a final product the information derived from poring over the national program and the subject programs developed by the Institute of Education Development. The study shows that Environmental Education (EE) is integrated into other subject fields through the multi-disciplinary and thematic-based approach. There is no separate EE subject in the pre-university curriculum except for the "Nature Knowledge" subject offered in the fifth grade at Lower Secondary Education which encompasses elements of EE in its range of topics. The findings will be necessary since they will be able to guide future environmental policies by the responsible institutions for development and implementation of environmental education in Albania

**Keywords:** environmental education, curriculum, school programs approaches.

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**1. Introduction**

**E**nvironmental degradation in Albania has been heavily felt over the past two decades of transition. The culprit for such an environmental mess in the country is to be sought with the greed of various companies and irresponsible individuals who are more concerned with their individual gains rather than the benefits that are to be derived from protection of environment. The wisdom of the pursuit of affluence at the cost of the environment began to be questioned in earnest in USA in the 1950s<sup>41</sup>, whereas in Albania one does not see any such efforts coming even close to it. There has been no awakening of the general public by way of environmental movement or conservation movement or green movement for that matter to take environmental matters seriously into their hands. The media has attempted to bring the deepening environmental problems to the attention of both senior figures and down at the grassroots levels but these are not adequate enough to move the country further towards the environmental awakening needed at the turn of this century. But the alarm has been sounded and the Albanian public should become more acutely aware of a deteriorating environment as well as some of the underlying causes of that deterioration. The underlying cause relates to mismanagement of all aspects of environment including improper handling of household and construction wastes, water, air and soil pollution and loss of habitats and species. There is

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<sup>41</sup> Bodzin, A.A., Klein, B.Sh. Weaver, S. (2010). *The Inclusion of Environmental Education in Science Teacher Education*, Springer.

a lack of proper administration of waste disposal in the country. There is a limited number of land-fills to take in all the wastes generated by the population and no targets sets to reduce the amount of such wastes being generated in a single year. In 1995 the amount of wastes produced in the country was in the tune of 520 000 tons<sup>42</sup>. Much of the wastes is left uncollected and dumped along the river banks, agricultural land and the coastal line. Quality of air and water has declined significantly and the waste treatment plants are just beginning to be built in major cities. All of the above have affected deeply the surroundings and the habitats. The rich variety of living organisms in Albania accounts for about 30 % of the European flora, but they are not protected properly. They are on the brink of extinction because of the pressure being exerted over the diversity of ecosystems, loss of habitats in woodland and in protected areas due to human factor<sup>43</sup>. Another reason for such degradation of quality of environment of heavy consequences to human health is poor enforcement of legislation despite the fact that Albania has become signatory to many international treaties and organizations. Albania has made some progress in approximating its environmental legislation to EU standards. However, there is a tendency to concentrate efforts on adopting new legislation, with the consequence that implementation of already transposed legislation is falling behind<sup>44</sup>. Those questions, and many others, are still being asked today and it is through the discipline of environmental education that we can provide answers and map the way to solutions. What follows is an exploration of status of environmental education and its integration into the various subject areas.

### **Purpose of environmental education**

The quality of life in this country is dependent on the quality of the environment in which we live. Our immediate environment is a part of the national environment, each component of which affects and is affected by all the rest. Many environmental problems are of national concern and solutions call for national and international coordination. Many strategies for addressing environmental problems highlight the need for everyone to learn about the environment and adjust their attitudes to a more environmentally friendly way of living (*Rio Declaration, The Earth Summit, 1993*). Environmental education is a process aimed at developing a world population that is aware of and concerned about the total environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, attitudes, motivations, commitments, and skills to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones (*UNESCO-UNEP 1976, p.2*). Environmental Education is the process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the interrelatedness among man, his culture and his biophysical surroundings. Environmental education also entails practice in decision making, and self formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality (IUCN, 1970).

### **Origins of Environmental education in Albania**

A new focus on Environmental Education in Albania can easily be traced in the wake of the collapse of communist system in 1990 since environmental issues were not a burning issue prior to that period. The post-communist years in Albania during that period saw a proliferation of efforts to reach international accords and treaties for the protection

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<sup>42</sup> Environmental evaluation in Albania in the wake of the conflict. United Nations Environment Programme, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> Environment today, Monthly edition by Regional center of Education, Tirana, no.114, October 2006.

<sup>44</sup> Qirjo, M (2008) The Western Balkans Environmental Programme: Review of Policy Integration and Capacity Development Need Assessment Studies, UND.

of environment. Legislation on environment was brought in line with the EU context and many protocols and treaties were adopted by the Albanian government. The Ministry of Environment which was established after 1990 made the protection of nature, habitat, national water resources, to name but a few, a top priority. To promote environmental awareness and foster environmental action and respect of environmental legislation at the regional level the regional environmental centres were specifically established. In addition, the Ministry of Education through the subordinate Institute for Education Development made integration and infusion of environmental concepts and philosophy an obligation for both the subject programs and textbooks.

### **Materials and methods**

The subject programs<sup>45</sup> along with some representative textbooks were subjected to an internal evaluation and assessment process to find out any references to environmental education. The assessment of instructional programmes is critical and of value to outside observers since it provides information on the needs, opportunities and problems within the specific environmental areas served by the subject programmes. Subject evaluation refers to the process of studying the merit or worth of some aspect or the whole of a program. The focus of subject programs evaluation could include the content of the program and / or student needs and intended targets, program design, material used in instruction, objectives for students' outcomes, student progress, the learning environment, and the outcomes of the instruction. Moreover, such a process is important since it helps guide or improve a programme to bring it in line with the best practices applied in the EU countries. A needs assessment approach helps identify the very needs of the learners, the school programme itself, the community and other entities (*parents' school boards*), whose interests are served by the programme. It is extremely important to assess the objectives and goals of a programme as well as its instructional planning (learning theories and approaches to environmental instruction, content selection of topics around environment, organization, learning resources) the instruction strategies and learning activities and finally the learning outcomes.

### **Results and discussion**

True to its content the National Curriculum in Albania is structured around the core curriculum and the optional one. Even in countries that have traditionally a core-based curriculum<sup>46</sup>, there is a trend of integrating and infusing various types of education including civic education, road education, economic education, health education, sustainable education and environmental education into basic education. The national curriculum has it spelled out that our pre-university education is all set towards shaping up the student where, among other stated objectives, stands out the one statement "it (pre-university education) should fulfil the responsibility about protecting the environment"<sup>47</sup>. What is more, further to this under the paragraph "*Expected outcomes of learning*" it is proclaimed that "upon the completion of the pre-university education the student should attend to his personal hygiene as well as to the immediate surroundings". The one intended target for a student to achieve upon completion of the secondary education is 'to make smart decision for a healthier life adopting the right and proper attitude toward protection of health and environment and the place of work and beyond' (National curriculum framework, Tirana, 2012). Under

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<sup>45</sup> Programs of basic education at [http://www.izha.edu.al/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=65&Itemid=84](http://www.izha.edu.al/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=65&Itemid=84)

<sup>46</sup> Finland, Germany, France, Belgium, Cyprus etc.

<sup>47</sup> Draft curriculum framework of pre-university education, Tirana, 2012, pg. 6.

the heading "*cross-curriculum topics*" of the pre-university curriculum framework, an important place is taken up by the "sustainable development." The purpose of sustainable development is to bestow the possibilities of a better life to both present and future generations. The curriculum should educate in students the ability and inclination to pursue a lifestyle and take action towards maintaining sustainable development. Students should be able to explore the challenges of sustainable development from different personal angles, those dealing with the effects of human activity upon the environment; problems associated with population growth and explosion, poverty and hunger alleviation; renewable energy and conservation, business enterprises and technologies that meet the principles of sustainable development (*Pre-university curriculum framework, Tirana, 2012*). In analysing environmental education infusion into the various school programs, which for ease of analysis were grouped under (1) natural sciences, (2) social sciences, and (3) others, it is shown that in light of the curriculum implementation the approaches into teaching EE were divided into: (1) environmental education as a separate subject, (2) multi-disciplinary approach to environmental education; (3) theme-based approach to environmental education; 4) cross-curriculum activities

### **Environmental Education as a separate subject**

In examining the various subject programs for the lower secondary education (grades 5-9) in Albania it is revealed that environmental education does not appear as a course on its own with its own rights. The beginnings of environmental education as a subject on its own are to be seen in the case of the "Knowledge on nature"<sup>48</sup> offered as a compulsory course in the 5th grade. The "Knowledge on nature" school program designed by the Institute of Education Development is intended (1) to promote in students the abilities to understand nature and acquire the basic scientific concepts; (2) to help students discover the interaction between animate things and environment and the dependence of the former on the later; (3) to promote personality, environmentally friendly behaviour and attitudes etc. The aim of such a course is to confront students with the animate and inanimate world. By being exposed to the surrounding world students acquire experiences with organisms, materials, objects and phenomena. Nature education is organised in such a way that the children are given the scope to explore nature. By investigation they try to find answers to the questions they have formulated. Starting with the involvement with things around them, their understanding of man-nature relationships in the real world will increase. There are many countries which do not include Environmental Education as a separate subject including Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Sweden, England, Scotland, Cyprus etc. The only exception is to be made with Denmark, The Netherlands, Finland where Environmental Education features as a subject on its own<sup>49</sup>.

The inclusion of Environmental Education as a subject in its own right carries certain advantages among which stand out the following: (1) an adaptability is established between content and teaching-learning methods; ((2) the teachers have a high sense of developing this type of education; (3) time is distributed in such a manner in order for the students to acquire knowledge, abilities and right attitudes towards environment. There are also disadvantages that include: (1) the Environmental Education subject might not be granted its own critical status among the other subjects (3) its inclusion might add a burden to the already busy schedule of students. In support of such a claim

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48 Knowledge on nature program at <http://www.izha.edu.al/programet/klasa5/Dituri%20natyre%205.pdf>

49 Stokes, E., Edge, A., West, A (2001). Environmental education in the educational systems of the European Union, EU-commissioned.

Final report.

Papademetriou (1998)<sup>50</sup> in his study indicates that inclusion of EE in the core curriculum carries disadvantages that relate to the space that it will take over from other subjects that rightly need to be covered at this stage of pre-university education.

### **A multi-disciplinary approach to environmental education**

The multi-disciplinary approach constitutes a full step towards implementing EE at schools. This approach uses the integration of elements of EE into other subjects and disciplines by giving a holistic nature to this type of education. Environmental education taps into a broad range of source disciplines for its content. Science, mathematics, language arts, social science, politics, and philosophy make up just a part of the mix. It also draws from a broad base for its pedagogy. As previously noted, its historical roots can be found in nature study, conservation education, and outdoor education. The effectiveness of the multi-disciplinary approach emerges from the statement coming from the *Biology School program* compiled by the Institute for Education Development. The program has been conceived on the basis of the topics to be handled including natural environment, understanding the place of species habitats, the food chains, life in various settings, ecosystems, man and nature etc (Biology, grade VI.) The same applies to biology program for grade VII which states “The teacher should make sure that students differentiate the special groupings of living creatures, to differentiate the peculiarities between the plant and various species, the interaction between the species and the habitats in which they live, to adopt observation strategies and gain an insight into nature, in order to be oriented towards a certain habitat. Despite the advantages deriving from handling EE through various disciplines there are several critics that do not favour such an approach. . Sterling & Cooper (1992: 95)<sup>51</sup> argues that if teachers deal with many things all at the same time, this could lead to students getting stressed out and being overcome by the information and their complexity.

### **Theme-based approach to environmental education**

Theme-based approach to teaching EE can be easily noticed across various disciplines primarily in the field of social sciences where various themes on environment are spread out across the respective textbooks. This approach does not necessarily constitute a thorough approach to teaching EE. Theme-based units are also a tool for teaching a range of skills and content by integrating curriculum environmental areas around a topic. The aim is to assist learners in developing general environmental skills through interesting and relevant content. The theme must be very interesting to students and must allow for environment content to be acquired always in the service of communicating about the theme. This approach is widely used across many subjects and students get to know the environment around them through the topics. Suffice it to compare the theme-based approach to teaching EE through the English course: “Pollution, protection of environment are topics dealt with which are accompanied with the relevant lexical items which are not treated as a specific aim in itself (*English Language course, grade V*).

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<sup>50</sup> Papademetriou, V. (1998). *Environmental Education and School*, Typotheto, Athens.

<sup>51</sup> Sterling, S. & Cooper, G. (1992). *In Touch. Environmental Education in Europe*. WWF. UK.

**Cross-curriculum activities**

Almost all of the courses featured in the curriculum of the lower secondary education level underlie the need for extra-curricular activities. They highlight the need for various activities that should be regarded as an essential aspect of the school core activities. Take-home assignments and laboratory work are considered as key to providing students with adequate knowledge about the environment. Since environmental education begins at school, it encourages learners to understand and form connections with the environment in their own neighbourhoods, in the community they are a part of or by means of visits out to zoos and various habitats where students gain a first-hand experience of the physical world they live in. It is through these connections that students gain the knowledge and skills that help them make sound decisions about the environment. Learning in this context is not only meaningful but also inspiring. Such experiences can positively shift patterns of student behaviours because they are rooted in emotional experience. For all the above reasons, it is one thing to have EE integrated into the subjects' areas, and another thing to really implement it. The difference between these is at times quite considerable to be reconciled.

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