

Original paper

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Environmental Competencies as a New Form of Learning

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Extended summary

Global environmental crisis - climate change, disrupted balance and pollution of ecosystems - is the reality of modern society. The environmental crisis is increasingly becoming the crisis of humanity, because faith has been lost in unlimited progress and optimistic future. Consequently, and quite justifiably, environmental culture, as a construct of environmental awareness, values, norms, learning and responsible behaviour, should be viewed as a prerequisite of sustainable development. What is being advocated is the development of critical awareness of individuals, to make them understand that preservation and improvement of healthy, environmentally clean environment, suitable to human beings, is necessary. Environmental culture includes a systemic development of individual environmental competencies, and this requires an interdisciplinary approach to educational processes, as well as new learning strategies.

Education and life-long learning are the key prerequisites for the development of modern society, and environmental culture should be an integral part of that process.

Some countries insist on the availability of education and life-long learning as an interactive process involving all stakeholders in education (primary school teachers, students, social environment). The essential educational values include: responsibility, identity, solidarity and equality, and co-existence with nature as a condition for a responsible decision-making and good-quality management of personal, natural and social resources.

This paper looks at the recently conducted research on the goal and potential of an educational process which is based on environmental values and embraces environmental culture as the key educational orientation. The values of environmental culture include: protection and

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preservation of the environment and natural resources, protection of human rights and democratic civil society, social cohesion, health, cultural and historical legacy, sustainable development. The desired outcome of this process is a competent individual who understands the concept of environmentally sustainable development, accepts environmental culture as a lifestyle and a mode of professional behaviour, and whose behaviour is environmental, socially acceptable and responsible. These outcomes require new learning strategies, competent teachers and children (students) as active participants in education.

New learning strategies include specific activities which facilitate learning, make it more enjoyable, efficient, easily controllable and transferable. Such activities are: discovery, exploration, experiencing, study, evaluation, practice, creation. Metacognitive strategies include planning strategies (goal setting, planning the form and rhythm of learning activities), organisation and monitoring, integration of different cognitive processes (perception, analysis, construction, evaluation). Self-respect and self-confidence are encouraged, as well as building positive relationships with peers, responsible decision-making and action. The learning process is oriented towards creative and constructive problem-solving, development of planning skills and team work, development of information search skills and social skills.

Environmental learning culture encompasses new learning strategies, individual learning, critical thinking and social constructivism. Environmental learning is interpreted as a return to learning in nature and about nature, which emphasises the existential meaning of learning.

Environmental education should involve interdisciplinary and holistic approaches, and it is for this reason that environmental learning, as a new learning culture, should be incorporated in the curricula as an interdisciplinary field. The integration of environmental culture in educational curricula may bring a long-term benefit to individuals and the society as a whole.

Key words: environmental culture, environmental competencies, new learning culture, responsibility.

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