

Moral EDUCATION

A HANDBOOK

VOLUME 1
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Environmental Education

The goal of environmental education can be established most easily from a human-centered moral perspective. We depend on clean air to breathe and clean water to drink. Healthy soils nurture plants that in turn nurture us. Toxic wastes cause innumerable diseases and sometimes death. Thus, children need to learn the knowledge and the skills to engage in behavior that sustains the natural world so as to sustain human life.

Yet that goal by itself can be read as a truism. It is like saying "we should seek to end poverty." Most people would say, "sure that is a good idea." But often at stake is how such goals are both achieved and coordinated with competing interests.

In his classic essay on the conservation ethic, Aldo Leopold (1949/1970) writes of his disappointment with traditional environmental education insofar as it fails to help people develop a "love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value" (p. 261). "No important change in ethics," Leopold writes, "was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions" (p. 246). Thus, many environmental education programs engage children not only intellectually but also experientially, seeking to nurture children's loyalties and affections with the natural world.

To achieve these goals, one need not step far from one's home. Even in the inner cities there is nature at hand and under foot that can be used as the basis for environmental education. For example, a study that investigated the environmental views and values of African American children in Houston, Texas, found that these children were fascinated with the animals and vegetation within their reach: butterflies, ants, trees, worms, spiders, leaves, and flowers. As one parent said:

My kindergarten daughter, she might see something that looks injured or, um, she saw a worm. She doesn't pick up these black ones or brown ones because they sting. So this one was a yellow one and she said he was hungry. So she picked him up and took him over to a leaf and put him on it. You know, they do those type things. (Kahn, 1999, pp. 223-24)

Other educators go further and argue that a goal of environmental education is to help children recognize not only their interconnection with natural entities and systems, but that nature itself has moral standing independent of human well-being. This orientation is sometimes referred to as biocentric (nature focused) as opposed to anthropocentric (human focused). Psychological evidence suggests that children are able, at times, to articulate two forms of a biocentric orientation. One form focuses on the intrinsic value of nature, for example, that nature has its own telos, or end point, or ideal way of functioning (for example, "without any animals the world is, like, incomplete, it's like a paper that's not finished" [Kahn, 1999, p. 137]). A second form focuses on the rights of nature (for example, "I think that the animals have as much right to live and to have good conditions of life as we do, and the pollution that affects us will affect them also" [Kahn, 1999, p. 177]).

While educating for a biocentric worldview may be desirable, it is clearly contentious. Thus, another framework, which has the potential to garner wide buy-in, builds from E.O. Wilson's evolutionary account of biophilia: what he calls an innate affiliation with life and life-like processes. In this account, the human mind came of age hundreds of thousands of years ago through daily interactions with a vibrant and diverse natural landscape and that still today we depend on such interactions not only for our physical health

but also for our psychological well-being. Hundreds of empirical studies have, in turn, supported the biophilia hypothesis, showing that contact with nearby nature leads to increased enjoyment, fewer feelings of isolation, higher satisfaction with one's home and job, lower stress, and better health.

Regardless of one's goals vis-à-vis anthropocentric or biocentric values—or whether an account of biophilia straddles both orientations in a nuanced manner—environmental education depends on engaging children intellectually, experientially, and morally as they gain scientific understandings of how human activity affects larger ecological systems.

Further Reading: Kahn, P.H., Jr. (1999). *The human relationship with nature: Development and culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Leopold, A. (1970). *A Sand County almanac*. New York: Ballantine Books. (Original work published 1949.) Orr, D.W. (1992). *Ecological literacy: Education and the transition to a postmodern world*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Smith, G.A., & Williams, D.R. (Eds.). (1999). *Ecological education in action: On weaving education, culture, and the environment*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Wilson, E.O. (1984). *Biophilia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Peter H. Kahn Jr. and Rachel L. Severson

Erikson, Erik

American psychoanalyst Erik Erikson was born near Frankfurt, Germany, in 1902. His parents were both Danish, and they encouraged Erik to study art and languages during his early school years. Although Erikson received no formal university schooling, he trained as a psychoanalyst in Vienna under the tutelage of Anna Freud from 1927 to 1933. Erikson immigrated to the United States in 1933, where he taught at Harvard University from 1933 to 1936 (and again from 1960 to 1970). His major contribution to the psychoanalytic tradition is his theory of eight psychosocial stages of development. First published in 1950, Erikson's *Childhood and Society* has continued to exert far-reaching influence in the field of child psychology.

Erikson's research included a wide variety of studies, such as post-traumatic stress disorder in returning veterans of World War II and child-rearing traditions among the Native American Sioux and Yurok tribes. He was also interested in studying the social behavior patterns of troubled adolescents and disturbed children. Erikson wrote extensively on what he considered to be the impact of rapid social changes in America, for example, the generation gap, juvenile delinquency, and racial and gender divides. As the preeminent psychoanalyst in America, Erikson was in agreement with most of the tenets of Freudian theory. However, there were some important differences between these two strong theorists. Freud believed that human personality is mostly developed in the first five years of life, while Erikson thought that our personality continues to develop throughout our lifetime. According to Erikson, we are influenced by the experiences at each of eight progressive stages of psychosocial development over the course of our life. These stages are Trust vs. Mistrust, Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt, Initiative vs. Guilt, Industry vs. Inferiority, Identity vs. Role Confusion, Intimacy vs. Isolation, Generativity vs. Stagnation, and Integrity vs. Despair.

The first psychosocial stage of Trust vs. Mistrust occurs during the first year of life. Erikson defined trust as entailing both an essential trustfulness of others and also a sense of one's own trustworthiness. During this first year of life, according to Erikson, an infant will develop trust if his most basic needs for food and comfort are regularly met. He also