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**VALUE EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN  
PRESERVING THE COASTAL ENVIRONMENT**

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***Abstract***

The process of public participation is one of the most developing processes in regard to the dialogue taking place between the residents and citizens with the different authorities. One might ask where to begin and what are the limits of this dialogue?

In the current paper I would like to discuss the issue of value education starting at young age through the education system (schools). Values and value education receive central stage in the public discussion, pedagogic thought and educational practice in society as a whole and in the education system specifically.

The need to educate the next generation in regard to sustainability and environmental preservation, including the coastal and marine environment, is derived from the fact that the sea is one of the most important natural resources, and at the same time it is the most polluted. Research findings show that the main cause for coastal pollution is the bathers and swimmers own doings. They tend to dispose waste which harms the entire marine environment.

Marine waste reaches the seas and oceans and as such it is defined as an international, cross-countries problem. Therefore, in 2013 the Mediterranean countries, including Israel, have decided to fight this phenomenon and reduce its damages. The current paper will discuss the different ways and importance of youth participation in this effort to preserve the environment, including value education.

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## 1. Introduction

The process of public participation is one of the most developing processes in regard to the dialogue taking place between the residents and citizens with the different authorities. One might ask where to begin and what are the limits of this dialogue?

In the current paper I would like to discuss the issue of value education starting at young age through the education system (schools), as well as part of the familial experience where parents and their children arrive to the coast for leisure, and at the same time are being exposed to values such as coastal environment preservation. Values and value education receive central stage in the public discussion, pedagogic thought and educational practice in society as a whole and in the education system specifically.

In the last few years major changes have occurred in the pupils' self-perception and the way they perceive others. Their way of thought and self-efficacy has changed dramatically as well. The average adolescent pupil is more open-minded, more aware to his own abilities and less chained to norms and ideology as was in past times. They live and act in a constantly changing world and they change along with it.

The need to educate the next generation in regard to sustainability and environmental preservation, including the coastal and marine environment, is derived from the fact that the sea is one of the most important natural resources, and at the same time it is the most polluted. Research findings show that the main cause for coastal pollution is the bathers and swimmers own doings. They tend to dispose plastic waste such as nylon bags, food packages and disposable dishes which harm the entire marine environment: the marine life and leisure bathers alike (NRDC 2014).

Marine waste reaches the seas and oceans and as such it is defined as an international, cross-countries problem (Ibid). Therefore, in 2013 the Mediterranean countries, including Israel, have decided to fight this phenomenon and reduce its damages (Israel Ministry of Environmental Protection n.d.). The current paper will discuss the different ways and importance of youth participation in this effort to preserve the environment, including value education since school age and as part of schools' curriculums.

## 2. Problem Statement

The interaction between people and the environment means that there is a mutual influence, where one side-effects the other and vice versa. Humanity receives natural resources from the environment that include quarried substances, raw materials, energy and other ecological resources such as air to breathe and water to drink. In this sense the environment assures our physical existence, but it also serves as a source of relaxation, wonder and inspiration that feed our spiritual needs as well.

This mutual effect is not always harmonic. We pollute the air, water and ground with by-products that in turn return to poison us. We overuse the natural resources, irreparably waste non-renewable resources and interrupt delicate natural balances. We also affect future generations, damage the flora and fauna that share the earth with us, while on top of that there is the fact that human economic, political and social institutions unequally distribute the depleting resources and thus different countries face different environmental risks and their citizens' lives are worsening. This unsustainable conduct is leading humanity to the verge of major challenges (Bridges 2002).

If such a description of the state of affairs is correct, then proper environmental education has to serve as the basis of the 21<sup>st</sup> century education in a whole. Nonetheless, we must ask what is proper environmental education, what are its elements and to whom it needs to be taught.

In this day and age the human society is becoming more and more aware of the global environmental crisis, which led to international consent regarding the need to find new ways of development, i.e., a sustainable development that serves the needs of the current generation without harming the ability of the next generation to self-sustain their needs. This idea is based upon the realization that human development depends on local and global ecological systems (Ibid).

Since the education system has a key part in moulding attitudes, changing norms and initiating actions of ecological civil responsibility, the place of environmental education is on the rise (Bar-Haim, Yaish & Shavit 2008). The understanding that the wellbeing of future generations depends on the seeds of knowledge and responsibility that society sows today is shared by both the ministry of education and the ministry of environmental protection. The current paper aims to better understand the means to implement sustainable conduct among pupils, teachers, schools and communities.

Key actors that are responsible of school curriculums believe that the standpoint of sustainable education has changed in the last decade. It shifted from scientific fields towards the socio-philosophical fields. Sustainable education as well as other subjects such as musical education, safety education, health education etc., are no longer considered to be narrow disciplinary fields, but multi-disciplinary worlds with socio-cultural perspectives, theoretical frameworks and models for educational activation.

Despite their importance, they are not being taught as a lesson in the system. The schools as key educational actors have, undoubtedly, the responsibility to develop and implement them, while these initial steps also grant the opportunity to find vast educational solutions that will reflect the creative nature of teachers as educators, their dedication and the schools as leading factors in the community. In other words, it is possible to say that it might enable teachers to realize and fulfill their educational dreams and passion, as well as an opportunity to develop meaningful educational processes in cooperation with the community. It seems that the awareness and belief of the teachers and the community surrounding the school regarding active sustainable education is the first step towards planning and activating it (Tan & Pedretti 2010).

Such an educational curriculum is not easy to develop and implement, nor is it easy to promote awareness to it. There are many contents, values and ways to do so. Nevertheless, small groups of active learning for pupils, focusing on relevant problem identification, locating and analyzing data, getting familiarized with the relevant literature and wise interpretation, will allow to implement and develop knowledge with minimal systematic investment and in the shortest time (Ibid).

Another difficulty in creating such a curriculum lies in the fact that environmental education is not only multi-disciplinary but also interdisciplinary. Analyzing and understanding environmental dilemmas, while taking into account the unbreakable linkage between the ecological-environmental and social components, necessitates an integrative and holistic approach of the teaching-learning process that crosses the line of the traditional disciplinary borders. Therefore it is not surprising that environmental education faces difficulties in the disciplinary structure that characterizes the current education system (Stevenson, 2007).

In the Israeli context, a new educational reform was implemented a few years back. It is called "Ofek Hadash" (New Horizon), which supplies the organizational infrastructure necessary for developing active learning in small groups of multi-disciplinary subjects that might involve outdoor learning as well, such as community and peer group meetings, experts and other key factors (Israeli ministry of education n.d.).

Doctor Daphna Goldman and peers, from the program of humanity and environmental studies in Beit Berl academic college raises the question to why one must deal with environmental education. According to her, environmental studies give answer to wide educational goals. She also claims that we have no other choice. Humanity faces an environmental crisis due to its dependency on life-supporting ecological systems. This crisis is manmade, and only men, only people can initiate, design and promote a different balanced way. In other words, environmental education is an existential need (Goldman, Yavetz & Pe'er 2014).

Following the above mapping of the importance of environmental education, it is the time and place to further deal with the connection between environmental and sustainable education, outdoor learning and the historical context of environmental education. It is also important to establish some basic guidelines for environmental education activation and map the existing models to such a field.

### **3. Research Questions**

What is a proper environmental education?

What are its goals and how can it be developed and implemented in the education system?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Understanding and defining environmental value education in order to turn it from theory into practice and implementing it in the education system.

### **5. Research Methods**

Our research is mainly based on the literature review.

### **6. Findings**

The aims of proper environmental education: In 1977 the UN organized a conference on environmental education that was held in Tbilisi. This conference was the first to define the roles, objectives and characteristics of this kind of education. According to the Tbilisi declaration, the goals of environmental education are:

- 1) To foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
- 2) To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
- 3) To create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment.

The Tbilisi conference promoted the recognition in the importance of environmental education and gave rise to the number of educational programs worldwide, but it did not clarify enough the linkage between the scientific and societal values in this field, nor did it portray the proper and efficient ways to achieve these goals.

Though most people agree to the necessity of clean air, clear waters and pleasant environment, not everyone is willing to pay the price for them in their priorities in times of conflict, for instance between making a living to environmental protection or between developments versus preservation. Many surveys and studies held worldwide regarding public viewpoint on environmental protection show that the majority of the population (at least in developed countries) is aware to various environmental problems and declare on its wish for better governmental solutions. At the same time, a significant lower rate of responses declare they are willing to pay personal prices in dealing with these problems, i.e., pay higher taxes, change habits or lower their standard of living. This gap is called "The Environmental Deficit" (Klein 2009).

With this deficit in mind, the goals of the Tbilisi conference were too general and undemanding. A more solid and specific ideological content must be casted within the Tbilisi declaration. Furthermore, the declaration did not define the exact nature of environmental education based on the above three goals. The mentioned goals were so widely defined, that different and even contradicting environmental educations may rise from it.

Therefore, in order to turn theory into practice, we must take into consideration basic guidelines for environmental education activation. The following guidelines that will be introduced are not hierarchically or linearly ordered. They were chosen and introduced since I found them to be acceptable among professionals.

1) The school's community is a learning community in an ongoing process, and it includes all the pupils, teachers, school's staff and the parents. This community needs to be a part of the learning and changing process since the environmental education program will be created to last for the long run and will be structured gradually and as a continuous process. The education process will include activities, guidance and a continuing education program;

2) Relevance and actuality – the environmental education should deal with actual and relevant subjects for the pupil as an individual and for the whole school's community. There is no point in dealing with subjects that are estranged to the pupils' worlds of interests. Therefore the school must match the program to the children's surroundings, characteristics, interests, as well as to the school's staff and community;

3) Environmental education must be based upon knowledge from various fields (science, geography, history, politics) and contain socially exciting aspects. It is also beneficial for the knowledge acquiring to be held through active participation of the pupil and with interaction with others such as teachers, community members, professionals etc. These means help the learning process to be more meaningful for the pupils and help them see the relevance of the subject to their everyday life;

4) Environmental education is more efficient when held outdoors. It helps the pupils to feel attached to their surroundings, to feel they care and responsible. Outdoor learning also allows them to directly experiment with phenomenons;

5) Environmental education is taking place in a socio-cultural context that must be taken into consideration as well. Different societies have different cultures, histories and sets of values, and they all should be reflected in the curriculum;

6) Environmental education is interdisciplinary and is based upon different contents and sources. It can reflect almost every subject studied in school and can be implemented as part of the school's program with all-inclusive participation;

7) Environmental education must supply tools, thinking strategies and actions in order to develop the next civilian generation in a democratic society; It also must educate to critical thinking and to develop relevant skills such as making arguments, establishing stances, asking questions, collecting and analysing data from different sources etc.;

8) Environmental education can also strengthen collaboration inside and outside the schools, place of residency and state. These are necessary for the success of the process that includes the environment and society, which is something that will be demanded of the future civilians;

9) Last but not least, environmental education educates to take action. It allows the pupil to experiment with making actions aimed to protect the environment and active citizenship.

An exact definition of the goals of environmental education must start in defining the goals of education in general, mainly because environmental education is first and foremost education. I believe that if the education system wants to deal with actual education and not just with granting individual tools for personal success, they must nurture school graduates who are "human" or "people of culture".

This is true in regard to the Israeli society as well. It has no hope for the future if pupils will not be taught to identify with a valuable social goal that is bigger than themselves. This kind of education has the potential to supply the education system with an actual pedagogical horizon. Human-focused environmental education is not only science. It must deal with the essence of our existence, our affinity towards other, may they be other humans, animals or plants that share the planet with us.

The humane environmental education deals with human essence: whether human beings are selfish economic creatures acting for self-gain in the short term while taking advantage of their surroundings, or rather human beings see themselves as part of the entirety of humanity and planet, connected and responsible to their own generation and those to come.

## **7. Conclusion**

A proper environmental education is the humane education of our times. It nurtures thinking and moral pupils; pupils who deal with essential questions regarding the proper ways to live and exist; pupils who are environmentally sensitive and modest, with good virtues that will rehabilitate our interconnectedness with the world; pupils that are not afraid to deal with issues of injustice and believe they have the responsibility to leave a better world than the one they were born into.

Following the above standpoint, the two pillars that humane environmental education must base upon are: 1) Environmental education is an education for responsibility, consideration of others, sensitivity and modesty; 2) Environmental education is a civil and political education for caring, involving and the belief of one's ability to change the world.

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