


The Effectiveness of Environmental Art in Education and Fostering Nature-Friendly Children

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Abstract

In response to contemporary environmental crises, environmental education grounded in environmental art has assumed a prominent role in conveying ecological concepts and promoting sustainable development in many leading countries. This study aims to expand interdisciplinary dialogue between environmental art and environmental science by examining the theoretical foundations for collaboration between environmental scientists and environmental artists at the international level. Through a review of global experiences and environmental theories related to environmental art, the research explores how children's engagement in environmental art activities can strengthen their connection with nature, foster ecological thinking, and encourage responsible environmental behavior. The findings indicate that environmental art holds significant potential as an effective tool for teaching essential environmental concepts and principles to children, enabling them to develop sustainable attitudes and ethical awareness toward the environment. Furthermore, educational approaches based on environmental art provide a practical and flexible framework through which children can interact sustainably with their natural surroundings, enhance environmental literacy, and cultivate nature-friendly and environmentally conscious identities from an early age. Many international practices in environmental art education can also be implemented in Iran, provided that they are adapted to local organizational, cultural, social, ecological, and climatic conditions, as well as national, religious, and regulatory frameworks.

This study is applied in purpose and descriptive-analytical in methodology, relying on primary research sources, library and documentary studies, and the translation of relevant texts. Ultimately, the research seeks to identify and present the most influential capacities of environmental art in children's education, active participation, and the cultivation of lifelong respect for the natural world.

Keywords: Environmental Art, Children's Art, Environmental Education, Nature-Friendly Children

1. Introduction

In the contemporary world, humanity stands at a critical moment in its history. The global environmental crisis facing societies today is extensive in scope, and since the environment is an inseparable part of human life and its protection is a global concern, environmental education is widely recognized as the most fundamental and systematic means of raising environmental awareness and fostering environmentally appropriate behavioral patterns. The first step in confronting environmental problems—and perhaps the most essential strategy for environmental protection—is to enhance the level of environmental awareness through education. It is through structured and principled education that meaningful changes in beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors can be achieved and institutionalized within society. Among the pressing yet often overlooked consequences of the environmental crisis is the phenomenon of generational environmental amnesia. As the roots of this issue lie in childhood, early childhood emerges as an appropriate and critical starting point for environmental education. It is widely acknowledged that childhood is the most effective period for shaping attitudes, instilling correct values, and providing scientific and practical education aimed at environmental protection. The focus of the present research is therefore on children—particularly those for whom nature has become more of an abstraction than a lived reality. Under such conditions, it is essential to establish a meaningful bond between children and nature, effectively restoring their ecological identity.

Today, children are indirectly exposed to global environmental crises through textbooks, media, and educational materials. However, paradoxically, their direct interaction with nature has been significantly reduced. This disconnection has been described as “nature-deficit disorder,” a condition rooted in human alienation from the natural world. As humans are inherently part of nature, the inability to perceive and

experience this connection has led to the exploitation of natural resources and a diminished understanding of the Earth as a nurturing entity. In response to the environmental crisis, many artists have assumed the role of advocates for nature. Environmental art—whose central concern is addressing environmental issues, proposing alternative models, and contributing to conservation—has emerged as a particularly effective medium for environmental education among children. One of the most important characteristics of environmental art is its ability to communicate directly and intuitively with audiences, maintaining continuity with natural environments and offering a powerful means of engaging with environmental challenges. In this context, the environment is no longer merely the subject of artistic works but also a space for their creation and presentation, becoming integrated with art itself.

Art, with its unique expressive language, has the capacity to convey concepts and truths that cannot be fully articulated through words alone. Consequently, it serves as an effective tool for children to express complex ideas, emotions, and experiences that may otherwise remain unarticulated due to linguistic limitations. Accordingly, the present study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching environmental concepts through environmental art and to examine how its educational potential can be directed toward enhancing children’s environmental attitudes and literacy. More specifically, the study seeks to highlight the importance of children’s interaction with nature through innovative, nature-based artistic educational approaches. Given the recognized importance of early environmental education and the growing emphasis on modern educational methods, it is necessary to draw upon the experiences of leading countries in the field of environmental art-based education as reference models.

This research is guided by the following questions: How, and through which facilities, patterns, and artistic tools, can children’s

sensitivity toward environmental protection and conservation be assessed and enhanced? How can ecological thinking be fostered in children through artistic education conducted in natural contexts?

Currently, environmental art education is experiencing significant growth and popularity within educational programs and is increasingly recognized as a key component of environmental education and sustainable development. Environmental art education is understood as a means of enhancing learners' capacities in both art and science, while ensuring that learning processes are diverse, meaningful, memorable, and authentic.

2. Literature Review

A review of printed and electronic sources revealed no studies that directly address the specific focus of the present research. However, several related studies examine aspects of environmental education and the need for innovative approaches to environmental learning for children. Among these is the study by Zahra Akhoundi and Asghar Fahimifar (2018), entitled "Creativity-Based Teaching of Environmental Skills to Children through Environmental Art Based on David Kolb's Experiential Learning Model," presented at the International Conference on New Findings in the Field of Teaching and Learning. The authors conclude that aligning formal educational processes in school settings (reflection and conceptualization) with informal learning experiences in nature (concrete experience and active experimentation) can facilitate creative environmental skills education. Such an approach supports all four of Kolb's learning styles—divergent, convergent, assimilating, and adaptive—in children.

3. Research Methodology

The present study employs a descriptive-analytical approach within an interdisciplinary research framework. Drawing on primary research sources, translated materials, and library and

documentary studies, the research seeks to identify and analyze the capacities and potentials of environmental art in teaching environmental concepts to children. The documents examined primarily include the findings, experiences, and theoretical contributions of domestic and international scholars working in the fields of environmental education and environmental art.

4. Findings

Environmental education viewed through the lens of environmental art enhances children's perceptions of nature and increases their sensitivity to the living world around them. A key feature of this educational approach is that it derives its principles directly from nature, internalizes them through conscious engagement, and ultimately returns them to the environment through creative expression. Environmental art encourages children to explore, reflect upon, and critically engage with nature, providing opportunities to project personal thoughts, emotions, and interpretations. Ryan Taylor, a prominent environmental theorist and artist, identifies three primary perspectives through which environmental art influences environmental education:

1. The environment as the subject of artistic work
2. The environment as a medium for creating artistic work
3. The environment as the audience for artistic work

In the early twentieth century, a new form of environmental education emerged in Finland, in which artistic practices played a central role. Environmental education based on environmental art was formally introduced in 1995 by Finnish art educator Meri-Helga Mantere as a novel teaching and learning approach. This model emphasized the development of environmental understanding and responsibility through perception,

observation, and the artistic expression of personal environmental experiences. Mantere emphasized that the environment had become an integral component of art education in Finland, incorporating critical environmental inquiry. She argued that artistic experiences enhance perceptual abilities and deepen understanding of both people and the world. As an environmental activist, artist, and educator, she advocated the use of artistic strategies—including elements of art therapy—to foster sensory awareness, personal engagement, and creative expression. She highlighted the importance of awakening the senses and returning to fundamental emotional and perceptual experiences as a means of cultivating environmental sensitivity. In a later interview, John van Boeckel quoted Mantere as stating that the complex challenges of the modern world demand the highest levels of creativity from individuals' minds and emotions. Environmental education based on environmental art is therefore grounded in the belief that environmental awareness and sensitivity can be effectively developed through sustained artistic engagement.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, strategies for enhancing environmental education for children can be categorized as follows: Creating free and spontaneous learning environments in natural and open spaces to reconnect children with nature, and expanding educational initiatives such as nature and environmental schools. Employing relevant and appropriate artistic methods—particularly environmental art—to teach environmental concepts and values. Adapting and localizing successful international models of environmental education based on environmental art. Research of this nature contributes to the development of new insights in environmental education and supports the advancement of environmental culture, literacy, and ethics among children. Such efforts raise awareness of environmental

preservation, protection, restoration, and sustainable behavior. In many advanced countries, environmental art-based activities aim to facilitate dialogue and emotional engagement between children and nature, fostering deep affective connections between human culture and the natural world. In Iran, however, challenges remain, including limited environmental awareness, weak communication between humans and nature, insufficient educational infrastructure, and a lack of coherent and codified environmental education programs for children. Although various environmental education initiatives have been implemented in recent decades, structural limitations—such as inadequate legislation, weak inter-agency coordination, limited public participation, and a shortage of trained specialists—have hindered their effectiveness. Achieving international standards in environmental education requires comprehensive planning, institutional reform, and the integration of global scientific and educational experiences. Learning from the research and practices of advanced societies can help avoid redundancy, reduce costs, and support the development of sustainable and effective environmental education programs.

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Author's Contribution

The research was conducted solely by the author.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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