

# Chapter 1

## A Review of Integration of Environment Education Into Teacher Preparation Programs

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Compared to previous generations, children today spend less time outdoors interacting with nature and all it offers. The current leisure trends are encompassed in technology as it becomes more accessible to children. Perhaps there is a way to bring back the importance of nature and intertwine environmental education concepts into teacher preparation programs. In that case, there is hope for future generations of children to reap the benefits of nature and more community members who are environmentally literate. This chapter reviews the importance of incorporating environmental education into teacher preparation. The review of literature also discusses common approaches to addressing the current gap in environmental education implementation along with barriers that have been encountered.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

A critical issue facing teacher preparation programs in the United States is the gap in environmental education. In many education systems (both higher and P-12 education), there has been an increased shift toward the implementation of technological and online learning experiences. While these online collaborations are essential, how much is too much? How often have technology-based activities substituted environmental activities? How many hours a day do students spend indoors compared to outdoors?

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Can P-12 teachers regularly expose students to nature once again? Ferguson et al. (2021) state, “Teachers, by virtue of the roles they perform, are critical change agents in schools and beyond” (p. 1355). Educators must reintroduce opportunities to get students outside for nature education. Otherwise, the current gap in environmental education will only continue to widen.

Now, more than ever, teachers need to provide opportunities for students to disconnect from technology and welcome the exposure to learning more about the world outside the four walls of the classroom. According to Franzen (2018), “Environmental education develops an environmentally literate citizenry that makes choices that are better for the health of the environment, leading to a more sustainable planet.” It is possible to accommodate for both technology and environmental enhancements within all levels of education. For teachers to have a dominant role in preparing P-12 grade students, they must first learn how to incorporate environmental education into their curricula. Teacher preparation programs are responsible for providing experiences for preservice teachers to learn different ways of implementing environmental education into everyday discussions and activities, regardless of the grade level or content area in which they will be teaching.

It is common knowledge that P-12 teachers and teacher preparation programs have considerable content to “fit” into the school year. Because of this, it is vital to find existing places for connections to environmental education instead of simply adding more units to the curriculum and expecting them to be covered each school year. Some teachers have discovered ways to implement environmental education, but most of them need further guidance in this critical undertaking.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

When presenting the implementation of environmental education concepts to preservice teachers or within P-12 grade classrooms, educational leaders play an integral role. According to Mulvik et al. (2022), successful implementation of environmental education “requires the quality professional training of educators and school leaders, as well as opportunities for continuous professional development” (p. 9). In contrast, Gan (2021) discusses the idea of leadership existing in every person and promoting and fostering this thought “might help to integrate EE leadership in all school communities to include students, staff, and parents, both locally and globally” (p. 1462). Shriberg and MacDonald (2013) further explain:

*While there is not currently a recognized model for teaching leadership for sustainability, nor a standard set of skills for these leaders, programs are rapidly emerging in response to the urgent call (and high student interest) to develop*

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