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## Scope of Ecopedagogy in Promoting Environment Conservation Practice and Values

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### ABSTRACT

Environmental degradation has emerged as one of the most pressing global concerns in the 21st century. Rapid urbanization, overconsumption of resources, and unsustainable lifestyles demand a radical shift in how society perceives and interacts with the environment. In this context, education plays a pivotal role in shaping responsible environmental behavior among future citizens. Eco pedagogy, rooted in critical pedagogy and sustainability education, emerges as a transformative approach that nurtures ecological consciousness, socio-environmental responsibility, and a holistic relationship with nature. This paper explores the scope of Eco pedagogy in promoting environmental conservation practices and values, advocating for an education system that fosters critical awareness, participatory learning, and ecological stewardship.

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### Introduction

Eco pedagogy, a concept derived from Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, aims to cultivate a planetary consciousness among learners through education that is democratic, transformative, and ecologically literate (Kahn, 2010). As an educational philosophy, Eco pedagogy emphasizes the interconnectedness of social justice, environmental sustainability, and cultural diversity. In the current climate crisis and



ecological degradation, education must move beyond traditional content delivery to foster skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary for sustainable living (UNESCO, 2017).

The essence of ecopedagogy lies in preparing learners to recognize the interconnectedness of human actions and ecological systems. It promotes eco-literacy, which includes understanding ecological principles, systems thinking, and sustainable living (Capra, 1997). Education for sustainable development (ESD) as promoted by the United Nations advocates a comprehensive approach to integrating sustainability across curricula, pedagogy, and learning environments. Eco pedagogy resonates with this vision by focusing on education as a tool for environmental justice and ecological preservation (Misiaszek, 2016).

Through critical reflection and active engagement with real-life environmental issues, Eco pedagogy aims to empower learners to become agents of change. It not only addresses the scientific aspects of environmental issues but also integrates ethical, cultural, and political dimensions. The learner is encouraged to examine societal structures, challenge environmental injustice, and contribute meaningfully to conservation efforts.

### **Environmental Conservation: Concept and Significance**

Environmental conservation refers to the sustainable management and protection of natural ecosystems, biodiversity, and resources to ensure ecological balance and quality of life for current and future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It encompasses both conservation—the responsible use of nature—and preservation—protecting ecosystems from human interference.

Key environmental concerns today include climate change, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, pollution, and unsustainable agricultural practices. Conservation practices aim to mitigate these challenges by promoting sustainable land use, afforestation, pollution control, and efficient resource utilization (MEA, 2005).

Effective environmental conservation involves strategies like:

- Reforestation and afforestation
- Sustainable agriculture and organic farming
- Rainwater harvesting and water conservation



- Renewable energy adoption
- Waste reduction and recycling

Environmental conservation is not merely a technical or scientific challenge but a socio-cultural responsibility. It requires the collective effort of individuals, communities, institutions, and governments. As such, it must be embedded into the value systems and educational frameworks of society.

### **Importance of Environmental Conservation**

Environmental conservation is central to sustaining life on Earth. Its importance is highlighted by several factors:

- **Reduction of Pollution:** Conservation reduces air, water, and soil pollution, safeguarding human and ecosystem health (Pimentel et al., 2000).
- **Resource Management:** Ensures the sustainable use of non-renewable and renewable resources like fossil fuels, water, and forests.
- **Biodiversity Protection:** Conservation helps preserve species diversity, which is critical for ecosystem resilience and ecological services (Wilson, 1992).
- **Climate Regulation:** Forests and wetlands act as carbon sinks and regulate microclimates.
- **Sustainable Development:** Integrating conservation into development ensures that economic growth does not compromise ecological integrity (Sachs, 2015).
- **Ecological Balance:** It maintains food chains, nutrient cycles, and natural population controls, ensuring ecosystem functionality.

Water conservation, a key element of environmental conservation, ensures a sustainable supply of freshwater. Traditional water management systems such as tank irrigation in South India or the stepwells of Gujarat are examples of ecologically sound indigenous knowledge (Agarwal & Narain, 1997). Incorporating such practices into modern conservation programs enhances cultural relevance and community participation.

### **Environmental Values and Social Responsibility**

Environmental values refer to the ethical principles and priorities that guide human interaction with the natural world. These values include sustainability, stewardship, equity, and respect for all life forms (Leopold, 1949). Cultivating such values is critical in building an environmentally responsible society.



Social responsibility towards the environment involves individual and collective actions to reduce ecological footprints and promote sustainability. These include:

- ❖ Participating in environmental movements and community clean-ups
- ❖ Practicing eco-friendly habits like reducing plastic use and recycling
- ❖ Supporting green policies and legislation
- ❖ Incorporating sustainable choices in daily life

According to Hungerford and Volk (1990), environmental education must foster environmental sensitivity, knowledge, and action-taking skills. Similarly, Phalke (2000) emphasized core environmental values such as ecology, health, and sustainability, which must be internalized through responsible behaviour.

Developing environmental values through education can nurture a generation that recognizes the moral obligation to protect Earth. Eco pedagogy offers a potent means of embedding these values in learners by connecting them emotionally and intellectually with their environment.

### **Eco pedagogy and Its Benefits**

Eco pedagogy provides a framework for rethinking education in the Anthropocene. It goes beyond environmental education by integrating justice, equity, and participatory learning. Its key features include:

- **Holistic Understanding:** Emphasizes the interconnectedness of ecological, social, and economic systems.
- **Critical Thinking:** Encourages learners to question environmental injustices and consumerist ideologies.
- **Empowerment:** Enables learners to become change agents and community leaders in sustainability initiatives.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Incorporates indigenous knowledge systems, local ecosystems, and lived experiences.
- **Place-Based Learning:** Connects learners with their immediate surroundings, fostering emotional and ethical bonds with nature.
- **Sustainable Practice:** Promotes real-world applications such as organic farming, composting, water-saving techniques, and energy conservation.



Classroom applications of Eco pedagogy include:

- ❖ School gardens and agroecology projects
- ❖ Eco-clubs and green school audits
- ❖ Storytelling using indigenous ecological narratives
- ❖ Field visits to nature reserves or local water bodies
- ❖ Simulation of environmental decision-making processes

When learners engage in such activities, they not only understand environmental issues better but also feel empowered to act.

## Conclusion

Eco pedagogy redefines the purpose of education in the 21st century by centering ecological consciousness, critical inquiry, and civic responsibility. It promotes not only knowledge but also values and skills essential for creating a sustainable and just world. By engaging learners through participatory, interdisciplinary, and reflective methods, Eco pedagogy helps internalize environmental values and motivates concrete conservation practices.

In fostering ecological identity, place-based attachment, and environmental action, Eco pedagogy stands as a transformative educational strategy. As environmental crises escalate, integrating Eco pedagogy into curricula is not an option but a necessity. It is through such holistic and value-driven pedagogy that we can hope to build a future where humans live in harmony with nature.

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