

Australian Association for Environmental Education Policy on environmental education for schools

Policy statement

Primary and post-primary schools

The AAEE recognizes that School-based Curriculum Development is common-place within the formal education sector. Individual schools at both primary and post-primary level are now given virtually total responsibility for the design, development and implementation of their own educational programs. A curriculum can now be formulated which reflects the philosophy of a particular school and its staff which, in turn, is usually based on an awareness of the interest and needs of the area that it serves. Consequently, diversity is likely to be evident between any two schools even though they may be situated close together within a region. Only at the senior secondary levels are curricula still specified by a central authority.

Despite this diversity amongst primary and post-primary schools, the AAEE believes that there are certain policy guidelines for all education systems which can assist schools to express their own particular commitment to environmental education. Because Environmental Education covers such a broad range of curriculum alternatives, it is suggested that clear priorities should be established to enable this range to be limited somewhat to a more easily workable dimension. The AAEE recommends that state and regional authorities, and schools, consider adopting or adapting the following suggested priorities when developing their programs and policies.

Recommended priorities

1.0 For central and regional authorities

Central and Regional Authorities should:

- 1.1 establish central and regional EE committees to co-ordinate the development and implementation of policies in environmental education.
- 1.2 have central and regional committees prepare policy documents and guideline statements promoting the inclusion of EE in curricula at all levels of schooling, and facilitate the dissemination of this material.
- 1.3 Staffing:
 - 1.3.1 appoint permanent professional staff responsible for EE who will act as curriculum officers within curriculum centres, serve on curriculum committees, carry out specific research and development projects and consult with schools and advise on needs.
 - 1.3.2 employ support staff who will provide direct functional service to teachers and school administrators. These secondments should be to

those agencies which offer EE to schools as part of their overall function. These include:

- Government departments (Environmental and Conservation, Pollution Control, Education, National Parks and Wildlife, Sport and Recreation, etc.)
- Zoos, Museums, Historical Parks, Field Study Centres.
- EE Associations.
- Gould Leagues, etc.

Recommendations regarding secondments should emanate from 1.3.1. above.

- 1.4 support the development of EE Programs and activities at State and School level. There is a need for the preparation of an inventory of programs and activities presently available as well as a mechanism for this inventory to be regularly updated.
- 1.5 provide funds for a Professional Development Program. This program should cater for:
 - Statewide development
 - Regional development
 - Clusters/groups of schools
 - Individual schoolsThese staff development activities should be substantive and offer appropriate content as well as methodological training to participants, especially regarding incipient areas of the EE curriculum (Values, futures, controversial issues, etc.) In addition, state-wide Development activities should include a consideration of the principles outlined in the National Conservation Strategy for Australia (NCSA).
- 1.6 examine the adequacy of field-study centres in relation to the number of available in a variety of settings (urban and non-urban) as well as the quality of services available within them.

2.0 For schools

- 2.1 Principals should encourage the development of a school policy towards EE. Central and regional committees, staff and students of the school and the local community should be consulted during the preparation of such a policy document. The following model¹ could assist in this school-based initiative:
 - Establish a school-based EE Committee.
 - Establish specific goals and objectives for the school.

- Review the literature/resources.
- Establish specific school program goals.
- Develop the curriculum.
- Develop particular class activities.
- Establish a reinforcing environment.
- Establish a strategy to overcome constraints.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Whilst local EE programs should be encouraged, some recognition of the wider State, National and Global situation should also be included, e.g., the National Conservation Strategy for Australia and the World Conservation Strategy.

- 2.2 An approach to school-based EE curriculum development as outlined in 2.1 should provide for inter-disciplinary planning to take place.
- 2.3 Curriculum development should highlight those learning experiences which take place in local settings and enable direct study of the local environment to occur. Schools should recognise the advantages of “action research” whereby any study of local settings can be accompanied by appropriate student action which can effect some changes to the setting being studied. Hence excursions and camps should be considered as important elements of an EE programme.
- 2.4 School staff and EE committees should enlist the aid of resource persons in the central and regional organisations when they require assistance with either EE content or methodology, or when they identify teaching/learning resources.
- 2.5 Schools should be closely associated with local professional associations so that initiatives and achievements in EE can be readily communicated to others through news sheets, journals, meetings, etc. Furthermore, schools can give greater support to requests for secondments or for professional development programs by supporting local associations.
- 2.6 Schools should be encouraged to operate on principles that are environmentally sound. Consideration should be given to issues such as energy use within the school, waste disposal practices, and schoolground development.

Summary

The AAEE believes that these priorities represent the most effective means through which EE can be developed and fostered within the formal education sector. The AAEE urges central and regional authorities, and schools at both Primary and Post-Primary level, to adopt or in some cases, adapt the recommendations to promote EE as an integral component of all curricula.

1. Stapp, W. & Cox, D. *EE Activities Manual*, Michigan, USA, 1981.