



# International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education

ISSN: 1038-2046 (Print) 1747-7611 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rgee20>

## Investing in research and evaluation to improve practice is a direct way of showing we can act now for environmental education

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To cite this article: Alan Reid (2018) Investing in research and evaluation to improve practice is a direct way of showing we can act now for environmental education, International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education, 27:2, 99-102, DOI: [10.1080/10382046.2018.1440338](https://doi.org/10.1080/10382046.2018.1440338)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10382046.2018.1440338>



Published online: 21 Feb 2018.



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*What do you care about in environmental education that necessitates new horizons in research, intergenerational conversations, and stories from research, for the field to be a force for the future?*

*In relation to the Tbilisi Declaration, which parts and how much of the field has been shaped by the context for and drivers of environmental education then, and what should be the major concerns and priorities for environmental education now and into the future?*

These questions are broad and able to be responded to from a multitude of perspectives. They are also complex, but so too is the world in which we live. In the 40 or so years since the Tbilisi Declaration, few policymakers have stopped to consider whether we are educating our students for the world we want them to survive - and thrive in - in the future. Instead we see the creation of policy documents for the education of the here and now, and not for the conditions and challenges facing future generations. Consider the difference. By educating for the here and now, we educate our children about the world they live in. However, to educate them for the world we want them to enjoy in the future, we need to educate our children to be change agents, to be active participants in caring for their environments. To do this in an effective manner we need to ensure that national and international professional networks are in-place to ensure the quality of education in, about, and for the environment in communities, nations, and regions. This specification of the *communities, nations and regions* is critical. We cannot assume a “one size fits all” form of environmental education. Instead we must respect global and cultural diversity, just as we respect biological diversity. Ten *Draft Action Priorities* to guide this innovative environmental education for the next decade, have been postulated by the *Global Environmental Education Partnership* (GEEP) network and are outlined below ([www.actnowforee.org](http://www.actnowforee.org)).

### **1 Champion Environmental Education**

Become a vocal advocate for EE, and make environmental education's contributions to society more explicit to encourage higher levels of public support.

### **2 Build a Bigger and More Inclusive Field**

Ensure that people of all races, ethnicities, sexual preferences, genders, abilities, and socio-economic backgrounds have access to high-quality environmental education and are leading the movement to create a more sustainable future. Embrace new ideas, partnerships, and innovations from a diversity of sectors and fields to help achieve the sustainable development goals.

### **3 Create and Empower Global Citizens**

Promote environmental education's role in advancing civic engagement, enhancing deliberation, critical thinking skills, and active participation and motivating individuals, organizations, and communities to take an active role in creating positive change.

### **4 Grow Global EE Leadership**

Develop a leadership pipeline to create a cadre of global leaders who have the 21st Century skills to address current and future sustainability issues. Promote ongoing professional development to sustain leadership.

### **5 Invest in Research and Evaluation to Improve Practice**

Continue to invest in research in the field, to drive innovation and new thinking about what can help create a more environmentally literate and civically engaged global society. Deliver clearer actions, outcomes, and impact.

### **6 Connect and Collaborate for Change**

Collaborate with other organizations and agencies to create a multiplier effect that can impact the larger environment, sustainability, and education communities. Use the power of technology to leverage meaningful opportunities to learn, network, and share.

### **7 Expand Environmental Education's Role in Achieving Conservation Success**

Enhance collaboration between environmental education professionals and conservation leaders to more effectively achieve conservation goals—from protecting species and wild spaces to engaging people in conservation planning.

### **8 Provide Universal Access to Environmental Education and Nature**

Through innovative policies and practices—such as citizen science, project-based learning, and service learning—demonstrate how connecting people of all ages to nature, coupled with effective educational approaches, can help build a lifelong stewardship ethic.

### **9 Strengthen Environmental Education's Role in Achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals**

Actively develop partnerships and collaborations that address how environmental education can help achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and targets, leading to a more just, equitable society.

### **10 Develop a Global Fund for Environmental Education**

Identify and cultivate long-term funding sources to advance and sustain environmental education at the local, regional, national, and global levels and continue to support innovative partnerships to expand the reach and impact of the field.

Note that Actions 3 and 8 relate to the child being a change agent. Also notice the remaining eight action priorities – they relate to policy, cultural awareness, education practitioners, and researchers. This is not surprising as the Draft Action Priorities were crafted by a network comprised of policymakers, education practitioners, and researchers who represent government and non-governmental sectors from more than 20 countries and

regions. The GEEP believes that national and international professional networks are essential for the quality of environmental education, however these networks need support from a wide range of policy makers, environmental and educational organizations, and other stakeholders. Together, this network forms a partnership of professionals who are committed to helping global citizens address environmental and social challenges by developing and strengthening environmental education worldwide.

Although there is an abundance of innovative environmental education happening around the world, there is no easy, centralized way to know what is happening and to easily share success and learn from each other. Yes we can publish our research in outlets like IRGEE and Environmental Education Research, but we also need to showcase and share tools, resources, and effective practices, and to building vibrant learning network. We need to better support environmental education leaders —ultimately, elevating the impact of education as a strategy to address environmental and social issues. A good starting point for this are the case studies, national profiles, and research, development and evaluation projects listed at [www.thegeep.org](http://www.thegeep.org). Interestingly, on the GEEP website the above 10 *Draft Action Priorities* are available for comment until **Earth Day, 2018** (Sunday, 22 April), after which responses will be reviewed and the Call finalized. As Mahatma Gandhi said, “The future depends on what we do in the present.” We can all contribute as GEEP offers the opportunity to help shape a future-focused education agenda for environmental educators around the world by responding to the draft Call for Action.

In closing, one way of responding to the call to reconceptualise environmental education for now and into the future is to consider the lines of argument offered by Reid and Dillon (2017) in their introduction to the reference collection, “*Environmental Education (Critical Concepts in the Environment)*.” Our Preface started with the question, *What do people care about in environmental education?* So as with the opening questions of this Editorial, we ask you to consider this, examining: 1) *What do you care about in environmental education that necessitates new horizons in research for the field to be a force for the future?* and 2) *In relation to the Tbilisi Declaration, which parts and how much of the field has been shaped by the context for and drivers of environmental education then, and what should be the major concerns and priorities for environmental education now and into the future?* We need to be seen addressing these complex questions, and debating the plethora of responses – for how else will we achieve an effective model of environmental education? How else will we be able to continue to meet professionally at conferences and address areas of concern? For example, how can the organizing committee for the 2018 North American Association for Environmental Education Conference (<https://naaee.org/>) meet their goal of creating positive change for the future? To conclude, NAAEE has set three overarching themes for the program of the research symposium in 2018:

1. New Horizons in EE Research
2. Intergenerational Conversations
3. Stories from Research

Collectively, these themes aim to develop ideas and challenges that will drive the next generation of environmental education and its research, via intergenerational conversations based upon what we have learned in the past and that might prepare us for future research

into environmental education. In other words, investing in research and evaluation to improve practice is a direct way of showing we can act now for environmental education.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Gillian Kidman, Chew-Hung Chang, and the GEEP for the opportunity and feedback on this editorial.

## Reference

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