

Environmental Education (EE)

Vanessa Spero-Swingle

Get Outdoors! No Child Left Inside! Nature Deficit Disorder! The buzz words are endless as parents, educators, and politicians are starting to recognize the importance of getting youth active, aware, conscious, and outdoors. Environmental Education (EE) is not a new concept, its roots are embedded in the work of naturalists, conservationists, and ecologists dating all the way back to 1762 with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's educational philosophies. Most environmental educators of today turn to the 1977 Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education held in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia, in defining what environmental education is: *"Environmental education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action* (UNESCO, Tbilisi Declaration, 1978)."



During Budding Gardener Nutritional Camp youth learn about plants, including the biology behind them and how to plant them in a garden.

Structured with definitive goals and standards, environmental educators are not advocates, do not only teach science, and do not consider one activity to suffice in deeming it EE. Environmental educators are educators, they are a vessel to provide information, provide resources, and encourage exploration in the hopes that their students will choose to make their own decisions on environmentally driven topics. A large portion of EE lessons take place outdoors but it is not a requirement or necessity, as EE can include research and writing skills, public speaking, and mathematics as a sampling of indoor activities.



Outdoor Adventures Camp allows youth to explore one of Brevard's treasures, the Indian River Lagoon, through the collection and identification of fish and crustaceans.

The benefits of EE in the classroom show increased student attendance, improved attention in class, and reinvigorated teachers (Monroe et al, 2009).

Furthermore, students build real world problem solving skills while boosting their scores on performance tests. In the academic setting EE can thrive, but it is also essential in building connections in youth and adults in regard to their respective environments. EE can work in any formal, non-formal, or informal setting, as well in community, business, and/or family settings.

Beyond the academic benefits, EE can also include health benefits. Often times EE targets getting kids outdoors and active while encouraging them to explore their environment. This further addresses a new childhood epidemic, obesity. Statistics show that over the past three decades, obesity in young people has nearly tripled (National Center for Health Statistics, 2006). Children are exhibiting more “inactive” lifestyles that keep them indoors and sitting at the TV or computer (Robinson and Killen, 2001). The most effective programs are those that target getting youth active and involved in the outdoors. By educating youth about the environment and encouraging them to be a part of it, EE assists in combating childhood obesity.

4-H and EE principles go hand and hand in teaching critical life skills. For this reason Brevard County Extension supports initiatives for youth and adults to learn. Opportunities through our clubs (focusing on environmental projects and getting outdoors), classes (teacher trainings: utilizing outdoor spaces and Project Learning Tree), camps (Budding Gardener Nutritional Camp, Marine Science Camp, Outdoor Adventures Camp), and curricula (Junior Master Gardner, Project Learning Tree, Agriculture in the Classroom, 4-H) provide avenues for EE in Brevard.

Monroe, J.C., Randall, J. and Crisp, V. 2001. Improving Student Achievement with Environmental Education. FOR87. Gainesville, FL: [University of Florida](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fr114). 7 January 2010 < <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fr114>>.

National Center for Health Statistics. (2006). Prevalence of overweight among children and adolescents: United States, 2003-2004. Retrieved February 2, 2007, from http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hestats/overweight/overwght_child_03.htm

Robinson, T.N. and Killen, J.D. (2001). Obesity prevention for children and adolescents. In J.K. Thompson and L. Smolak (Eds.), *Body image, eating disorders, and obesity in youth* (pp. 261-292). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.