

Elements of environmental education programs that help move learners to action

Consider the following list of almost 30 "program elements" that can add value to – and encourage action in - your environmental education program.

*This is an unordered list! As a program design activity, have members of your environmental education team consider your education program as they rank these elements by effectiveness. Ask them this question: **For your program, which elements would be most effective in helping learners move to action?***

Mentoring program. Learners commonly need the support, guidance, and encouragement of an adult or older learner. Create an 'adopt a classroom' program where committed and trained adults or older students re-visit a classroom or action group

Learning Scope and sequence. Develop your program to maximize the chance that learners will get to action. Staniforth suggests a sequence in which the scope expands outwards from the personal to one's natural community, to include cultural and social communities, regional national and global issues and action learning.

Values clarification. Include activities that get learners to 'unpack' the values that underlie their behaviours. Why do people think differently? Have learners reflect on their own values.

Collector Systems. Not all learners that you contact will want to take action. Set things up so that motivated learners (perhaps only one or two per class) will flow into an action-oriented group (perhaps a school environment club).

Reject the bell. Look for ways to extend learner action out of the classroom and the structured 'periods' of a typical school day. The creation of a 'Green Team' or 'Enviro-Club' concept allows you to meet at noon, after school, or even on weekends.

Take it outside. Serious time in the outdoors helps learners appreciate nature. Studies show that such 'significant life experiences' are key for the development of positive environmental values. In addition, hikes and pleasant outdoor activities can be 'carrots' that help attract learners to the action group.

Environmental Monitoring. Develop a monitoring program, or plug into an existing program such as the Watch series, in which learners follow science-based protocols and collect data that then becomes part of a meaningful regional study.

Link to existing issues. There are no shortage of pre-existing campaigns that many committed people are already working on. Present these campaigns to learners, or have learners research them and make a presentation to their peers.

Investigate Service Learning opportunities. Frame the project as a service project, or take advantage of pre-existing courses in which learners are required to engage in service learning. Consider action-based projects that allow you to partner with community service groups, Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, youth corps, etc.

Look to the curriculum. Many curricula encourage the creation of skill sets that are required for action-taking, or require that learners examine a variety of action strategies.

Incorporate peer teaching. To teach is to learn. Look for ways to get learners presenting and teaching to younger learners or to community members (part of mentoring concept as above). This allows learners to develop higher-level thinking skills and allows their work to be recognized and celebrated by younger learners and their peers. It is also a good way to get some action happening in other classes!

Give them action tools. Tools to encourage others to act range from postcards and draft letters to creative activities such as poster competitions or making a video. Brainstorm a list of such things with learners.

Give them inspiration. Assemble case studies of what other learners have done to help the environment. Search Alberta Emerald Foundation's on-line database for examples that will hit close to home!

Give them skills. Create simulation activities in which learners get a chance to practice lobbying decision-makers, conducting telephone interviews, surveying members of the public, or presenting to an audience, undertaking outdoor or community projects.

Suggest funding sources. There are numerous funders who love empowering learners to take action – you could point learners in the right direction. Point learners to Alberta Ecotrust, Shell Environmental Fund, etc. as per <http://abcee.org/pd/teacher-grants-student-contests>.

Give the program a name. Name your action program, and further formalize it through such things as certificates that recognize achievement within the program. This not only helps 'generate a buzz,' but also helps learners build resumes.

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Give them recognition. Never forget the importance of celebration and recognition as you and the learners communicate your accomplishments. Target groups include fellow learners, teachers and school administration, the community, and the media. May include such things as certificates of recognition, badges, bursaries, prizes.

Train-the-trainers. Enlist the help of teachers or adult educators in moving learners to action. ***Leap into Action*** is a superb activity guide for teacher, designed by BC Wild. It is available at the ACEE website (<http://abcee.org/pd/resources-for-professionals>)

Ask the audience when you design your program. Engage in participatory program design: once you've designed your action-oriented program, invite learners to join you over pizza in an informal focus group, and ask them what they think would work. Do follow up surveys as well to see what worked and what didn't to involve them in the adaptive management process

Evaluation Plan. Have an evaluation plan in place before you proceed, and make sure it includes both formative ('as you go') and summative ('at the end') components. Make sure your evaluation instruments measures easy things (such as 'number of learners contacted') AND more difficult things such as changes in learners' values and behaviours, and positive action that occurs as a result of the program. Set goals that are measurable at the outset. Share results with participants to show them that improvement is an important part of the program. A document entitled ***Measuring the Success of Environmental Education*** is available at the ACEE website (<http://abcee.org>)

Time. Effective and potent action projects take time. Build into the program ways in which learning activities are spread over time as learners move towards action. A one shot deal may not be enough to 'tip' learners towards action!

Be flexible about action projects. The action project must belong to the learners who do it; the locus of control should no longer rest with you or your program. It is acceptable to offer different levels of support depending on how close the action project is to your organization's mission.

Give your program a community focus. Action projects are most meaningful when they occur within the learners' community. Remember that community service groups or environmental groups can help with resources and ideas.

Encourage milestones as part of project planning. Break the work up into bite-sized chunks. 'Set learners up for success' by helping them identify specific sections of their project, create timelines for each section, and celebrate the achievement of each of these sections.

Other program element. Chances are great that we missed an important program element! Describe it:
