

Multicultural Environmental Education: Theory and Practice

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Abstract

With globalization, people are frequently called to work together for solutions to environmental problems much beyond our local realities. Thus, cross-cultural communication gains a special significance in the comprehension of environmental degradation and the identification of environmental solutions. Is Multicultural Environmental Education an answer to the challenges of our times?

Résumé

En cette époque de mondialisation, les êtres humains sont fréquemment appelés à mettre leurs efforts en commun pour trouver des solutions à des problèmes environnementaux qui s'étendent bien au-delà de nos réalités immédiates. Par conséquent, la communication interculturelle revêt une importance particulière lorsqu'il s'agit de comprendre la dégradation de l'environnement et de trouver des solutions environnementales. L'éducation environnementale à vocation multiculturelle est-elle la réponse aux défis de notre temps?

Theoretical Context: A Brief Introduction

Education is an art of process, participation, and making connection. Learning is a growth and life process; and Life and Nature are always relationships in process! (Cajete, 1997, p. 24)

As environmental education originated from nature and conservation studies, it was originally conceived as science education regarding the environment. With the influence of the ecological movement, the social and political dimensions of environmental problems were identified as necessary in environmental education (see Flogaitis, 1998). The Tbilisi Declaration (UNESCO, 1977) clearly stated that environmental education ought to have a holistic approach; it ought to be interdisciplinary, aiming for problem-solving, and addressing community problems and needs.

However, in practice, environmental education programs tended to emphasize the ecological aspects of the environment and to utilize mainly natural/physical scientific approaches and methods to understand them (see Tilbury, 1995; Flogaitis, 1998; Kakabadse, 1998). Susan Lewis and Kathy James

(1995) showed that in environmental education programs there was too much emphasis on biological science and on environments that most children do not often experience.

Education for Sustainability (EFS) (see for example Cortese & McDonough, 2001) or Environmental Education for Sustainable Development (EFSD) (or for a Sustainable Future, or for Sustainability) (see for example Tilbury, 1995) represent a paradigm shift in environmental education, with implications in both content and pedagogy (Kakabadse, 1998). This shift aims to promote sustainable living. Kakabadse (1998) writes:

The term “education for a sustainable future” implies a vision both of a sustainable future and of a process to make it a reality. To envision a sustainable future, we must identify the interrelationships of present trends in equity, economics and environment, and plan the processes and actions to bring about change. A sustainable future implies a sustainable environment capable of maintaining the diversity of life; a sustainable economy based on wise and equitable use of resources, and a sustaining society whose lifestyle, aspirations and values are in harmony with the natural environment. (p. 107)

As it can be seen, Education for Sustainability/Environmental Education for Sustainable Development acknowledges the significance of the socio-cultural parameters of environmental problems and solutions (see also Tilbury, 1997; Second Nature, 1995). Sustainability as an ethic, active learning and critical skills development, and action orientation constitute significant components of Education for Sustainability/Environmental Education for Sustainable Development programs (see Kecley-Laine, 1998; Second Nature & ULSE, 1995; Tilbury, 1995, 1997). Education for Sustainability/ Environmental Education for Sustainable Development adopts a holistic and systemic approach to environmental issues.

Sustainability has been interpreted in many ways. The variety of meanings of sustainability hints at the significance of culture in the study of environmental issues (see Bowers, 1993). On the one hand, we understand with the help of our value system. As Saul says, “Perceptions are culturally situated” (2000, p. 6; see also Munson, 1994).² On the other, the ecological degradation is a crisis in the value systems of our societies (see also Marouli, 1996). Thus, it is important to be cognizant of the cultural context in which a study—environmental education program or environmental research—is done.

The worldviews of marginalized people have not been represented in environmental education as the environmental justice movement has shown (see for example, Bullard, 1994; Lewis & James, 1995). Taylor (1996) writes: “More often than not, other cultures and perspectives have been excluded, or played marginal or insignificant roles [in environmental education]” (p. 3).

In addition, the representatives of this movement have documented that the environmental problems marginalized people experience are more than, and differ from, those of other groups (see, for example, Bullard, 1994;

Taylor, 1993; Running Grass, 1995, p. 9). Thus, both our understanding of environmental issues and the proposed solutions are culturally limited to and by the perceptions of the dominant group. Educational initiatives which start from an environmental justice perspective challenge mainstream environmental education. Running Grass writes:

As the Environmental Justice Movement challenges the definitions, concepts and philosophies of mainstream environmentalism, it is also challenging—and changing—those of environmental education. The cultural assumptions underlying the definition of “environmental education” as well as its pedagogy, practices, curricula, materials and the internal demographics of the field itself are being called into question. (p. 9)

Such environmental education initiatives tend to emphasize environmental rights for all, action and empowerment, aside of environmental knowledge.

In this context, Multicultural Environmental Education (MEE) highlights the importance of reaching out to culturally diverse populations and of understanding, respecting, and utilizing their perspectives in environmental education (see, as an example, Rosenberg & Nabhan, 1997). Peter (1997/98) writes:

Using a multicultural framework in environmental education is a way of acknowledging that students have different learning styles; that all students do not share the same beliefs or experiences; and that to understand any environmental issue, whether local or global, we need to understand the cultural factors that have created it. (p. 15)

Multicultural Environmental Education is a term which was introduced in North America in the early 1990s. As it is a recent trend in environmental education, little has been written about its theory and practice, especially in cited journals. However, it seems that Multicultural Environmental Education originated from the theoretical tradition of the environmental justice movement, and it has borrowed from multicultural education (see Running Grass, 1995; Peter, 1997/98). As Agyeman (1998) indicates, a link needs to be made between “the cross curricular theme of EE and the cross curricular dimension of multicultural education” (p. 150); and that is what Multicultural Environmental Education does (see, for example, Agyeman, 1995).

Multicultural Environmental Education refers to increased access of culturally diverse—not only the dominant—groups to environmental education and increased representation of their worldviews in it. In this context, access refers to several aspects of environmental education programs. Taylor (1996) writes:

Multicultural environmental education has to go beyond past attempts which interpreted “multicultural” to mean the inclusion of a few children from different racial and ethnic groups and marginal changes in the curricula, while for the most part continuing the dominant discourse and continuing to represent primarily the viewpoints of a limited sector of the population. For education to be multicultural, it

has to include a wide variety of students and perspectives in all phases of planning, development, teaching and learning. (p. 5)

According to Running Grass (1994), a well respected practitioner of Multicultural Environmental Education, Multicultural Environmental Education acknowledges that children may have different needs based upon and shaped by their places and conditions of residence; all cultures have a unique (and different from other cultures') relationship with the natural world; Multicultural Environmental Education helps children become aware of, understand, accept, and celebrate other cultures and their environmental traditions; Multicultural Environmental Education critiques and seeks to transform the forces which have oppressed people as well as nature; Multicultural Environmental Education envisions a multicultural society at peace with the natural world and itself; and, environmental education curricula and programs should be based on the direct and significant involvement of families and communities. Thus, exposure to and respect of cultural diversity, environmental justice, a constructivist pedagogy, and community involvement are significant components of Multicultural Environmental Education.

With such principles in mind, multicultural environmental education is very concerned with the educational process, the pedagogy of environmental education. Empowerment is a significant concern in such initiatives. Peter (1997/98) writes: ". . . multicultural education is much more concerned with how we teach than with what we teach" (p. 15).

Multicultural Environmental Education is a pedagogical process which ends up redefining both the content and the subject matter of environmental education.³

The Research: Questions and Methods

This research is an exploratory study on Multicultural Environmental Education programs. It seeks to explore Multicultural Environmental Education practice and the theory that guides this practice/these practices. The questions that guided this research are:

- What is Multicultural Environmental Education? What are its special characteristics?
- How has it been practiced?
- What difficulties have Multicultural Environmental Education programs faced, from what do they originate, and how have they been addressed?
- What is the theory of Multicultural Environmental Education?

The research was conducted in the United States during the summer of 2001 and concentrated on the practice of Multicultural Environmental Education.

Although we collected data on both non-profit organizations and universities, this paper will concentrate on the Multicultural Environmental Education work of non-profit organizations.

After an extensive Internet search and consultations with experts in the environmental education field, we got an idea of the extent of the practice of Multicultural Environmental Education (not many programs). On the basis of this overview, we decided to aim for 10 interviews in each of the aforementioned categories. However, we actually conducted 14 interviews with non-profit organizations, primarily from the United States but also from Canada. In the cases where a person-to-person interview was impossible (because of long distances), it was substituted by the filling of a questionnaire and a subsequent telephone interview regarding the answers that were not clear, or the questions that were not answered. In a couple of cases, we had a chance to actually briefly observe the program in action.

As this was not a statistically random/representative sample, we do not claim that this is a representative picture of the Multicultural Environmental Education field. However, given the extensive Internet search and the consultations with the environmental education/Education for Sustainability experts, we believe that this exploratory study provides an accurate initial picture of the variety of Multicultural Environmental Education programs that exist in North America and it suggests directions for further research in the field. In any case, what interested us was a rich description of Multicultural Environmental Education practice(s) and a deep understanding of it, in order for it to serve as a guide for new Multicultural Environmental Education programs.

Analysis

The following analysis will be structured around the following questions regarding the practices of non-profit organizations: How is Multicultural Environmental Education practiced? What do Multicultural Environmental Educators believe that Multicultural Environmental Education means? And what do they think its special characteristics are? What are the difficulties in doing Multicultural Environmental Education? From what do they arise and how can they be effectively dealt with?

The Practice of Multicultural Environmental Education

The practice of Multicultural Environmental Education was explored not only in terms of the environmental issues addressed, the methods/pedagogies used and the activities of the programs, but also in terms of their goals, theoretical underpinnings, and the constitution of the groups targeted/served.

Multicultural Environmental Education programs: Themes and activities.

The themes of the 14 programs contacted include: the study of a river (1), alternative energy sources (1), housing (1), sustainable agriculture (1), urban gardens (2), generally urban issues (2), local environmental issues (3), bio-diversity (1), cultural competency (1), and acquaintance with nature (1). In general, the urban environment has a special place in the Multicultural Environmental Education practice. Multicultural Environmental Education programs frequently address urban environmental issues. In addition, 5 of the 14 programs focus on local or community related issues (of which 3 in urban settings). Actually, Multicultural Environmental Education is quite frequently practiced in urban settings. Seven of the 14 programs explicitly work with urban groups, while 2 are implemented in urban environments.

The activities of the Multicultural Environmental Education programs vary from educational activities, inside and outside the classroom, to activist practices. The variety of the activities mentioned can be categorized as follows:

- educational activities (including training, curriculum development, consulting, journal publishing, children's environmental education program) 13
- activities for the promotion of people of colour into environmental professions 1
- activist practices (activist problem solving, teaching participants their rights) 4
- diversity related activities (aiming to acknowledge and respect other cultures) 4
- "practical" activities such as: 7
 - building houses (1)
 - creating and maintaining gardens (3)
 - food production and distribution (2)
 - services (1)
- activities related to the pedagogical process (field/hands-on exploratory learning, journal writing) 4
- community involvement and partnerships 2

It is interesting to note that aside from the educational or pedagogy related activities, the diversity-related and the activist-activities have a significant presence among the Multicultural Environmental Education programs. It is also noteworthy that community partnerships were mentioned as a special activity of these programs.

Multicultural Environmental Education programs: Goals, theoretical underpinnings, and groups targeted. From an examination of the data, it can be readily seen that there is no single way of practicing Multicultural Environmental Education; there are variations in Multicultural Environmental Education

practice in terms of the program’s goals and theoretical underpinnings of the program, or in terms of the constitution of the group addressed/targeted.

Regarding the description of the programs, the interview/questionnaire included questions requesting, among other things, a brief description of the project, information about the goals and aims, the activities, the decision making process, the emphasis of the program, the desired outcomes, the successes and the difficulties of the program. It also asked for the means they employed to deal with the difficulties identified. Table 1 is constructed on the basis of this information, and categorizes the Multicultural Environmental Education programs in terms of their goals, theoretical underpinnings, and group composition, as these stood out as significant dimensions.

Varieties/Types of MEE Programs Categorized	Total Number of Programs	Code Number of Programs in the Category
<i>On the basis of their goals:</i>		
a. cross-cultural understanding	9	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14
b. global/local connections	2	1, 8
c. environmental/social justice	6	3, 4, 6, 9, 13, 14
d. connection with the environment	3	3, 5, 6
e. environmental service	2	5, 10
f. a combination of the above	5	3, 5, 6, 8, 14
g. other	1	11
<i>On the basis of their theoretical underpinnings:</i>		
a. multicultural education/valuing cultural pluralism	7	1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14
b. environmental - social justice	7	3, 4, 6, 9, 12, 13, 14
c. global/local connections	1	8
d. other	3	5, 6, 11
<i>On the basis of the group composition:</i>		
a. multicultural/diverse groups	5	5, 6, 7, 10, 14
b. ethnic minorities/people of colour	4	3, 4, 9, 13
c. cross-national	3	1, 2, 8
d. white	2	11, 12

Table 1. Multicultural Environmental Education. Varieties/types of Multicultural Environmental Education programs.

From these data, we can observe that in general the main theoretical traditions that inform and guide Multicultural Environmental Education programs are indeed on the one hand, multicultural education, which values cultural pluralism and aims for cross-cultural understanding, and on the other, environmental justice, which highlights the close relationship between social inequities and environmental degradation, and aims towards environmental rights for all, including oppressed groups.

In addition, most Multicultural Environmental Education programs have cross-cultural understanding and environmental/social justice as at least one of their goals. Of course, cross-cultural understanding and environmental justice are not mutually exclusive goals; thus, some programs have both goals

simultaneously. Not surprisingly, the goals seem to match the theoretical framework on which the program is based quite well. Programs that target ethnic minorities are guided by the environmental justice theoretical framework, while those addressing culturally diverse groups usually aim to promote cross-cultural understanding.

Finally, most frequently, the groups addressed are either multicultural—including whites (5 programs), ethnic minorities/people of colour (4), or cross-national (3). Solely white audiences are infrequently the case. This may be explained by the origins of Multicultural Environmental Education in the environmental justice movement.

In addition to these general points, some more specific observations can be made:

- The Multicultural Environmental Education programs that target ethnic minorities are guided by the environmental justice theoretical framework.
- The Multicultural Environmental Education programs which aim for cross-cultural understanding usually (5 out of 9 programs) have other goals as well, e.g. environmental justice, personal and social change, global and local connections. Those that are based on a theoretical framework which values cultural pluralism usually address culturally diverse (4 out of the 7) or cross-national groups (2 out of the 7), while one targets white teachers.
- The cross-national programs often emphasize cross-cultural understanding and cooperation but also global and local connections. Making global and local connections was mentioned as a goal only by practitioners of cross national programs (by 2 out of the three programs working across national boundaries). In addition, cross-national programs are not very usual.
- Programs whose theoretical assumptions originate from both multicultural education and environmental justice simultaneously tend to be more holistic and to address people from all cultural backgrounds, including the dominant groups.

In summary, urban environments seem to have a special place in Multicultural Environmental Education programs. In addition, cultural-diversity-related and activist activities are usual in Multicultural Environmental Education, while community involvement and partnerships are also considered noteworthy. There is a variety of Multicultural Environmental Education practices in terms of goals, theoretical underpinnings, and groups targeted. The “types” of Multicultural Environmental Education programs that can be identified in terms of the theoretical framework and the goals of the program include programs promoting cross-cultural understanding, or programs working for environmental justice, or programs understanding and making global and local connections. A few have other goals.

In terms of group composition, the Multicultural Environmental Education programs address culturally diverse groups (including participants

from the dominant group), or ethnic (and other) minorities, or cross-national groups, or the white/dominant group. However, it is clear that Multicultural Environmental Education programs are usually targeted to ethnic minorities or culturally diverse or cross-national groups; they do not seem to be seen as relevant—in practice—to culturally homogeneous, non-minority groups. If whites are targeted, it is usually Environmental Educators, mainly working with people of colour.

Meaning of Multicultural Environmental Education: The Practitioners' Views

As expected, given the variety of the Multicultural Environmental Education programs, the way the practitioners understand Multicultural Environmental Education is varied too. There seem to be four main concepts which are particularly relevant for Multicultural Environmental Education: cultural diversity, culture and environment, environmental rights or injustice, and Multicultural Environmental Education as a process.

Cultural diversity. The diversity of views, values, and behaviours need to be acknowledged, valued, and utilized in the study of the environment and towards the delineation of innovative solutions to environmental problems.

Diversity may refer to any one or all of the following levels: context, group, content. Interestingly, most of the respondents focused on ethnic diversity when talking about “diverse cultures,” while few talked about cultural differences across class lines too.

Culture and environment. There is a need to “culture the environment,” in other words, to understand, explore and value the cultural parameters of the environment, environmental problems, as well as environmental solutions. It is important to be cognizant of the cultural lenses through which we view the environment.

Environmental rights or injustice. Most of the environmental problems affect more heavily the socially marginalized groups (in terms of ethnicity, class, etc.). For this reason, in environmental education we should talk about the environmental rights of all groups, as well as about the inequalities that exist and how they relate to the condition of, and the way we relate to, the environment.

Multicultural Environmental Education is most importantly a process. It is not the outcome that characterizes it but the process which emphasizes, seeks and “capitalizes on” diverse cultural experiences.

Most specifically, the answers of the practitioners regarding the meaning of Multicultural Environmental Education included:

- Cultural diversity in the group or context of the program characterizes Multicultural Environmental Education.
- Content diversity: culturally diverse educational materials and activities as well as discussions about varied cultural experiences are important components of Multicultural Environmental Education practice.

- Different pedagogies and processes characterize Multicultural Environmental Education programs.
- A main goal of Multicultural Environmental Education is the respect of cultural diversity.
- Multicultural Environmental Education aims at the participants' empowerment and involves environmental activism against social inequities.
- Culturing the environment: i.e., looking at the environment through an expressly and consciously cultural lens is significant in Multicultural Environmental Education.
- Environmental education and Multicultural Environmental Education should be the same, one practitioner said; they should both refer to and respect cultural diversity.

On the basis of the aforementioned responses, we can say that Multicultural Environmental Education has been interpreted: as a way of culturing the environment—cultural diversity in the content of the environmental education programs; as environmental education which works with culturally diverse groups; as a way of working with mainly ethnic minorities in order to empower them to realize and claim their environmental rights; or as a pedagogy which promotes cross-cultural understanding, respect, and cooperation on environmental issues.

When asked about the “unique” characteristics of Multicultural Environmental Education specifically in terms of goals, methods, and activities (in comparison to environmental education), several respondents did not respond. Those who did, mentioned understanding between different cultures—respecting of different perspectives, global and local connections, a new way of interacting with other people, and addressing the participants' quality of life as characteristic of Multicultural Environmental Education in terms of goals. In terms of methods/pedagogies, the respondents identified the uniqueness of Multicultural Environmental Education in: Action Research for Community Problem Solving (ARCPS, first proposed by William Stapp), allusion to participants' own cultures (even using different languages), fight for one's environmental rights, or focus on people rather than environment. A few said that there is (or should be) no difference between Multicultural Environmental Education and environmental education programs. Finally, in terms of activities, Multicultural Environmental Education programs were said to have more group processes—more emphasis on working together, activist tactics, or the 13 steps of the ARCPS model.

Generally, the most frequently cited characteristics of Multicultural Environmental Education can be categorized as:

- Those related to cultural diversity: openness and respect for different cultures, cultural understanding, disagreement without misunderstandings, community, cooperation;

- Those related to the educational process: critical thinking, environmental action/activism; and
- Those related to place and people specificity: sense of place, self worth, social involvement, people's sense of connection and of belonging, relevant to participants.

Other characteristics mentioned include global reach, local environmental education activities in global context. One respondent referred to the 10 principles of Multicultural Environmental Education as they were cited by Running Grass (1995).

In summary, the emphasis on the respect of cultural diversity seems to be important in Multicultural Environmental Education. In addition, it can be observed that aside from this goal, the methods of Multicultural Environmental Education seem to have some special character—again emphasizing the “culturing” of the environment and environmental education, challenging the cultural hegemony of the predominant environmental paradigm (e.g., what is environment, what is a valuable theme of environmental education, etc.), utilizing the cultural background of the participants, and valuing culturally diverse views. This seems to support the view that Multicultural Environmental Education emphasizes the process, and its uniqueness lies right there—the process, not the outcome or the goal.

Challenges of Multicultural Environmental Education Programs

What are the difficulties or challenges that Multicultural Environmental Education programs face? The collected data are summarized in the following table (see Table 2).

From these data, it can be observed that the challenges the Multicultural Environmental Education programs face mostly originate from the context of the program and the composition of the group involved. Programs that work across national borders face primarily logistical problems relating to the organization of the program and the communication of the groups (e.g. access to and familiarity with e-mail). Multicultural Environmental Education programs that address culturally diverse groups (including ethnic minorities or groups across national boundaries) have issues of language to contend with, as well as issues relating with the self and group image of the participants. Programs working primarily with whites contend with the participants' reluctance to include and equally value diverse cultural views.

Only for programs which address ethnic minorities, and have an environmental justice theoretical framework, the goals—along with the group composition—seem important. The respondents mentioned the need for the empowerment of the participants, they mentioned practical issues—like language (similar to cross-national programs)—as difficulties for Multicultural Environmental Education programs, but they also mentioned the authorities'/whites' negative reaction and reluctance to change.

Type of Multicultural Environmental Education Program	Challenges/Difficulties
<i>By group:</i> 1. cross-national	a. practical challenges in organizing and communicating across borders b. Affected by political situation
2. multicultural	a. different life experiences impact youth's interests/understanding b. teens are "group image" oriented c. class - not considered a cultural identity; cannot feel pride in being poor d. language - outreach becomes difficult
3. ethnic minorities	a. language b. authorities did not want to make changes because of cost, or dominant group dismissing the opinions of the ethnic participants c. kids used to "virtual reality;" little attention span for nature
4. white	a. reluctance to change and include/value diverse cultural contributions b. difficult to get enough diversity in the program
<i>By theoretical underpinnings:</i> 1. multicultural education - valuing diverse cultural views	a. political situation b. practical challenges in organizing across borders c. class - not considered a cultural identity d. teens are "group image" oriented e. reluctance to change and include/value diverse cultural contributions
2. environmental justice	a. class - not considered a cultural identity b. authorities did not want to make changes because of cost, or dominant group dismissing the opinions of the ethnic participants c. reluctance to change and include/value diverse cultural contributions d. kids used to virtual reality;" little attention span for nature
3. global/local connections	practical challenges in communicating across borders
4. other	a. different life experiences impact youth's interests/understanding b. difficult to get enough diversity in the program

Table 2. Challenges of Multicultural Environmental Education programs

The context and the group composition are especially important in understanding the difficulties practitioners of these programs face. It is only in the case of programs with socially radical goals and methods, like environmental justice and environmental activism (like protests), that the challenges the programs face are significantly determined by their goals.

The strategies the respondents used for dealing with the aforementioned challenges included: practical measures (like translations and ESL classes for language difficulties, lessons on e-mail use, multilingual teachers etc., for the practical problems), discussions about culture-related difficulties

(like discussions about ways of communicating criticisms across cultural lines, different ways of communicating about class issues or of approaching youth, etc.), and political pressure and alliance building when environmental rights are asserted and change is demanded. In some cases, the practitioners acknowledged that certain things are beyond their control, like in the case of the influence of the political context on the evolution of a cross-national Multicultural Environmental Education program. As expected, the ways they have chosen to deal with the challenges they faced have not always (at least not completely) been successful.

Concluding Thoughts

From the aforementioned analysis, it can be concluded that Multicultural Environmental Education practice is quite diverse. However, there are some frequently located types of Multicultural Environmental Education programs. Two dimensions seem to be significant in identifying typologies of Multicultural Environmental Education programs: their theoretical framework and the composition of the group they serve. In terms of theoretical framework, Multicultural Environmental Education programs primarily: value/promote cultural pluralism, or emphasize environmental/social justice, or global/local connections. In terms of their group composition, Multicultural Environmental Education programs can be addressing: multicultural/diverse groups, ethnic minorities/people of colour, cross-national groups, or white/dominant groups.

In addition, Multicultural Environmental Education programs quite often occur in urban settings. Urban issues, which are often seen as separate from environmental issues by the environmental education movement, often constitute the focus of Multicultural Environmental Education programs.

Multicultural Environmental Education has been interpreted in several ways. It has been understood as: environmental education which works with culturally diverse groups; or, as a way of working with mainly ethnic minorities in order to empower them to realize and claim their environmental rights; other times, as a way of culturing the environment and a way of promoting cultural diversity in the content of the environmental education programs; or finally, as a pedagogy which promotes cross-cultural understanding, respect, and cooperation on environmental issues. There is no consensus on its meaning.

The emphases on cultural diversity (construed, however, as diversity either in the group or in the context or content of the program), as well as a pedagogy which emphasizes a search and respect for diverse worldviews, seem to be significant characteristics of Multicultural Environmental Education. In addition, Multicultural Environmental Education programs tend to be consciously people and place specific.

It is noteworthy that despite the assertion of theorists that Multicultural Environmental Education promotes exposure to, and cultivates respect for, cultural diversity, in practice Multicultural Environmental Education programs seem to have often acted on a limited view of cultural diversity:

- First, Multicultural Environmental Education programs often really target culturally marginalized groups, excluding the dominant one(s). However, cultural diversity should not be limited to, or primarily refer to, group composition; there should also be diversity in the content and the pedagogy of the programs as well. If this is the case, Multicultural Environmental Education programs should also target dominant audiences.
- Second, they mostly understand “cultural diversity” in terms of ethnic origin and less frequently social class. However, culture and cultural worldviews have many other significant dimensions as well (including gender, level of education, nationality, religion, age, etc.), which also ought to be considered in environmental education. So, culturing environmental education or cross-cultural communication on environmental issues should take all the dimensions of culture into consideration. In addition, Multicultural Environmental Education, as it promotes the respect of other cultures, is valuable not only for heterogeneous or marginalized groups, but also for homogeneous and dominant ones.

On the basis of the above, the variety of Multicultural Environmental Education practices may be seen as an indication of lack of clarity, or inadequate development in Multicultural Environmental Education. However, I believe that the diversity of the programs should not necessarily be interpreted as a weakness of Multicultural Environmental Education. Instead, as Multicultural Environmental Education is context specific, each type of Multicultural Environmental Education could be useful depending on the context and the needs and the goals of the program. For example, when a marginalized group is addressed and the goal is to incite them to environmental involvement, an environmental justice type program may be the most appropriate. When a primarily white middle class group is targeted, a Multicultural Environmental Education program which aims to promote cross-cultural understanding may be better suited to the occasion. In a cross-national context, a cross-cultural Multicultural Environmental Education program may be more relevant when the partners are practically equal in the global scene. An environmental justice Multicultural Environmental Education program may be better for economically and politically unequal participants (e.g., the United States and Angola). Finally, I would argue that the more holistic programs seem better suited in most cases.

At the same time, it is true that on the one hand, more research on different aspects of Multicultural Environmental Education programs is needed (e.g., special characteristics of Multicultural Environmental Education in terms of content, pedagogy, activities, and meaning of Multicultural

Environmental Education, etc.), and on the other, additional work on the theoretical development of Multicultural Environmental Education is needed. Special attention should be paid to geographic differences of Multicultural Environmental Education. It is important to conduct comparative studies exploring Multicultural Environmental Education in other parts of the world,⁴ in order to appreciate and learn from the cultural diversity within Multicultural Environmental Education practices.

Finally, the name of Multicultural Environmental Education should be (re)considered. Should it be called Multicultural or Cross-cultural Environmental Education, or something else? As any term, it is context and culturally specific. The term Multicultural Environmental Education reflects the North American context and a specific theoretical framework favoured in the States—that of cultural pluralism. “Cross-cultural Environmental Education” may emphasize the context composition and the communication across cultural boundaries of all sorts, including national. And then again, how do you best call “Multicultural Environmental Education” which addresses a homogeneous group but wishes to promote respect of other cultural views of the environment? This is still an open issue, reflecting the need for further research on “Multicultural Environmental Education.”

In any case, environmental education ought to move towards “Multicultural Environmental Education” as the new global reality and the contemporary challenges require better understanding of culture, sincere appreciation of diverse worldviews, and increased access to and participation in environmental education and environmental decision making for all people. “Multicultural Environmental Education” surely points to the way we could work across national borders.

Notes

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- ² In the same light, it should be noted that the personal culture—the unique combination of social, ethnic and other cultural characteristics—of the authors, researchers, or educators is a significant parameter in the study of environmental issues or in environmental education. This was also highlighted by the collaborative research effort on the basis of which this paper is written. Thus, as the author is solely responsible for the views presented in this paper, this analysis is underscored by the culture and value system of the author which results

from the special combination of her social characteristics (Greek, woman, lower middle class origin, social scientist, American educated, etc.).

- ³ For example, as Taylor (1996, p. 4) indicates, taking diverse perspectives (she talks specifically about those of people of colour) into consideration has changed the way environment is considered.
- ⁴ It is interesting to note here that when practitioners were asked if there are geographic differences in Multicultural Environmental Education practice, they answered positively. Also, the data points to potential differences between the American and Canadian practice of Multicultural Environmental Education; however, this study cannot adequately draw any conclusions in this regard, as it was not designed for this purpose.

Notes on Contributor

Christina Marouli is a sociologist with expertise in environmental issues. She has been teaching at the higher education level in Greece for 6 years and has taught environmental protection and environmental education courses. She has also worked at non-governmental organizations. She recently received a Fulbright award with which she (along with a Turkish colleague) researched Multicultural Environmental Education programs. She now teaches at the Technical College of Greece, in Pireas.

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