Environmental Education

We love nature and want a healthy environment

A basic guide to objectives and educational examples for teachers, educators and public administration.
Objectives

What are we attempting to accomplish with environmental education?

The goal of environmental education in the Czech Republic is to develop the competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) necessary for environmentally responsible behaviour, i.e. behaviour that is most beneficial for the current and future state of the environment in a given situation with given possibilities.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms lays down the right to a favourable environment. But how can we ensure a favourable environment? Three paths (or combinations thereof) have been borne out long-term. The first path is restriction. Certain activities that damage the environment can be prohibited and punishments issued for violating such laws. The second path is incentives. Certain activities that damage the environment can be prohibited and punishments issued for violating such laws. The second path is education. We can educate people in order to decide to behave in an environmentally friendly manner of their own free will. Education helps create an environmentally friendly culture, a society that sees the value and usefulness of having a clean and healthy environment in our country and on our planet even without rewards and punishments.

What are we attempting to accomplish with environmental education?

• a relationship with nature
• a relationship to a certain place
• an understanding of nature and the ability to investigate it
• the ability to resolve problems and conflicts related to the environment
• the readiness to act on behalf of the environment

Environmental education allows people to predict, recognise and address the issues that threaten life on our planet. (UNESCO)
A relationship with nature includes a sensitivity to and empathy for nature and the environment, including a sensitive relationship to plants and animals. A good relationship with nature bolsters the motivation to further investigate and discuss environmental issues. It is a basic precondition for people to have an interest in learning more about the environment, being concerned about it and taking steps to protect it. For this reason it is a primary aspect of environmental education and therefore a relationship to nature should be fostered from an early age. The more children spend time in the outdoors, the more they support environmental care as adults. An other aspect is that sufficient contact with nature has a positive impact on the physical and mental health of all people, on their feeling of satisfaction with life, and even their work or educational success. To facilitate a relationship with nature it is good to ensure children have sufficient contact with it and enough time for independent play outdoors and getting to know the natural environment. Contact with nature should be pleasant and free of stressful experiences. Development of a relationship to nature is supported by various outdoor events or appropriately designed green space in places where children spend their time – in public parks, playgrounds and schoolyards. The example of adults, especially parents and teachers, plays a great role.

We like it outdoors and love nature

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The deeper the roots we put down in the place we live, the greater the hope we will take care of it ourselves in the future.

Relationship to place means the sense of belonging of each person to the place and region in which they live. Place does not refer solely to nature, but includes the whole environment of our lives – cities, villages, the countryside. Relationship to place has four basic levels. There is the biophysical level expressing knowledge of local geography and nature. There is the psychological level, which reflects our identification with a place and the ability to perceive and appreciate its uniqueness. The socio-cultural level consists of our knowledge of the stories associated with the place and our understanding of how society shaped the place in the past and how it does so today. Last is the political-economic level, which concerns our understanding of the opinions of various interest groups in using the place and our awareness of our own options for actively influencing the future development of the place. Relationship to place should be developed starting at childhood, ideally throughout one’s whole education. The deeper we feel our roots in the place we live, the greater the chance we will take care of it ourselves. It is best to realise development of relationship to place by connecting school education with the local community and local realities. Today we speak of locally anchored learning. Local awareness events organised in the community also provide a great motivational dimension. Particularly effective is strengthening relationship to place in conjunction with other areas of environmental education: building environmental sensitivity in local nature, exploring such nature and learning to understand it, addressing local environmental issues and conflicts and actively participating in care for local natural and cultural wealth.

We are forming a deep relationship to the place we live.

I know my local countryside and perceive its uniqueness. I am aware of the landscape in its context. I appreciate my region and feel responsible for the place I live.
Understanding nature helps us anticipate the impact of our activities on the environment.

Understanding the laws of nature helps us anticipate the impact of our activities on the environment.

Understanding nature means grasping the basic ecological processes and inherent laws – the principles by which nature operates. The most important laws are found in the flow of energy and the cycles (e.g. the water cycle or carbon cycle), in food relationships (e.g. the relationship between producers, consumers and decomposers), the relationships between organisms and the environment (e.g. the balance and disruption of an ecosystem), in the social structure of populations and communities (e.g. competition among organisms) and human influence on the environment (e.g. greenhouse gas production). The goal is for each person to understand these inherent laws, to notice their manifestation in nature, to connect them to their own life and to be able to predict possible consequences of our actions on the environment. Through research findings and skills, everyone should also learn to formulate simple research questions and propose basic procedures; collecting the necessary data and organizing, assessing and interpreting them.

Our understanding of the laws of nature fundamentally influences how effective our efforts to protect it will be.

Understanding nature should be developed starting with pre-school age children. Field-based learning and inquiry-based teaching have proven effective. With such methods, children are led to discover the laws of nature themselves, rather than having them presented as truths to be memorized. Gradual development of skills enables older students to conduct various research projects independently and these skills can be well applied in investigating issues and conflicts related to the environment. A further shift in understanding of the laws of nature takes place at university and in vocational education.

We investigate nature and learn how it works.

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Successful resolution of even the smallest environmental problem provides the confidence to attack more serious issues.

Environmental problems arise when a certain part of the environment is threatened. This may or may not be caused by human activity. Conflicts arise if there are multiple opinions on how to resolve a given problem. These constitute a public debate on addressing the issues. The ability to deal with environmental problems and conflicts includes a whole range of relatively sophisticated procedures utilising methods from natural and social sciences. Environmental issues must be analysed and their causes, mechanisms, consequences, and economic, social, and historical context investigated. A key skill is the ability to evaluate information from various sources, identify the sides of the conflict and analyse the values, convictions and intentions the various parties bring to the table. Only then should one move to assess the various proposals for resolving the issue or propose one’s own solution and negotiating a solution that is acceptable for the various parties to the conflict.

The ability to resolve problems and conflicts related to the environment should be developed once children are somewhat older – once they have acquired a certain relationship to nature and a certain understanding of the laws of nature. More important than a general and superficial overview of existing problems is that the issue grabs the attention of a person; that they accept it as their own and learn to analyse it in depth. Appropriate projects are those that draw people into the investigation and searching for potential solutions to real local environmental problems. The successful resolution of even the smallest problem lets one experience the feeling of success and motivates people to take on more serious issues.
Environmental education prepares and motivates people to act on behalf of the environment, while the actions themselves remain the free choice of each individual. By acting on behalf of the environment we return to the primary objectives of environmental education in the Czech Republic: developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for environmentally responsible behaviour. Such behaviour is seen as responsible personal, civic and professional conduct regarding the treatment of nature and natural resources, consumer behaviour and active influencing of one's surroundings using democratic processes and legal avenues. Treatment of nature and natural resources includes, for example, minimizing and recycling waste, saving energy and water, and approaching nature with respect. Environmentally friendly consumer behaviour means things like buying local products or those labelled as ecological. Active influencing of one's surroundings means influencing other people to behave in an environmentally friendly manner, for example by getting involved in public decision-making processes or discussions with elected representatives or candidates for public functions. An important principle remains that environmental education prepares and motivates one to engage in such behaviour, but the actions themselves remain the free choice of each individual.

We work on behalf of the environment.

I understand the basic principles of environmental protection. I am sparing with nature and natural resources and am an environmentally friendly consumer. I also motivate people around me to do the same. I believe that I can personally influence the resolving of environmental problems.
The 7 faces of environmental education

The goals of environmental education are clear, but the path to achieving them is long and sometimes never-ending. Many organisations, experts and volunteers set out on this journey with admirable dedication and knowledge. There are all manner of options for which way to go and what form to choose. You will see for yourself on the following pages what the main forms for implementing environmental education are in the Czech Republic. For each of them we have provided a specific example that is successfully fulfilling these goals.

Set out on a journey with us...

1. Ecological Education Programmes
2. Overnight Programmes
3. Long-term Education Programmes
4. Teacher Training
5. Leisure Programmes
6. Events for the Public
7. Ecological consultancy
Small aquatic animals can tell us a lot about water quality. We discover what they need to live and how the interconnected ecosystem of a pond works.

Ecological Education Programmes (EEPs) are educational lessons prepared for classes at nursery, primary and secondary schools. They take place as part of the school curriculum under the guidance of expert instructors and add an ecological and environmental dimension to the learning process.

The common objective of the programmes is to emphasise ecological thinking and behaviour and the shared responsibility of each person for the state of the environment. This takes place through interactive, creative and cooperative learning methods that are chosen with regard for the age of the children and their experience. Important principles applied in putting together the programmes are tying in to the general curriculum, scientific accuracy, respect for the developmental needs of children, clarity, playfulness, cooperation.

The programmes take at least two hour-long class blocks; at preschools at least sixty minutes.

Ecological Education Programmes deal with getting to know nature, ecology in the professional sense, environmental topics and environmental protection. They generally take place outdoors, at ecological education centres or “eco-centres”, at other organisations with such a focus, or also directly at schools. You can find detailed information on several dozen providers of Ecological Education Programmes on the Environment Ministry’s web portal www.ekocentra.cz.

In this EEP by Brno-based Lipka, students become journalists who want to write an article about the mysterious death of fish in the Blaťák pond. First, however, they have to get to the bottom of this mystery.

The first step is for the newsroom to discuss possible reasons for this tragedy. In two groups they try to discover the cause of this anomaly in Blaťák. With the help of experiments and games they investigate the influence of various human activities on the pond’s ecosystem. Then they set off into the field. They get to know the functioning ecosystem of the pond, sampling and observing aquatic organisms. They take note of the environment that aquatic organisms need to survive.

In conclusion they meet up again in the newsroom. Based on what they have experienced and the information they have collected they assess the possible reasons for the poor condition of the Blaťák pond and propose solutions. The writing of the article itself crosses over into other school subjects.

Example of good practice
Overnight programmes are generally five-day events focused on strengthening the relationship to nature and respecting the principles of sustainable development. They are attended primarily by primary and secondary school students, but there are also specific programmes for teachers, families or the professional public. Overnight programmes are based on the idea that a well-prepared multi-day series of activities led by professional instructors in an appropriate environment can provide greater educational impact than single-day programmes or standard classroom lessons. Stays with unique experiences and frequent contact with nature often become a significant life experience for their participants that shapes their relationship to nature and willingness to care for our environment.

Overnight programmes are focused on getting to know the most common habitats and groups of plants or animals, general ecology, energy use, development aid and sustainable development, as well as inanimate nature or cultural topics. The ecological education centres that provide overnight programmes also attempt to demonstrate modesty and respect for the environment in their operations as much as possible. For example, they thoroughly recycle waste, use energy devices such as heat pumps and solar collectors, raise domestic animals or make use of local organic foods when preparing meals. You can find detailed information about some ecological education centres at www.ekopobyt.cz.

The Švagrov ecological education centre is an example of the around twenty overnight centres that we have in the Czech Republic. Everything functions together at Švagrov – the beautiful natural surroundings of the Jeseník Mountains, the pleasant base of the renovated eco-centre building, the artful and professional teachers, and the healthy meals making use of regional products. During the overnight programmes in Švagrov (e.g. Winter in the Forest, They Are Around Us, Ecosystems), they always consider the following issues: me and society, me and the class, and me as a unique and free person.

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Not only do students learn about environmental topics, but they also do something specific for the environment. At least once a year, days of action take place at Eco-Schools. In Jilové u Prahy the boys and girls improve the surroundings of their school.

Children and pupils at nursery, primary and secondary schools have been participating in long-term educational programmes for environmental education for many months or even years. Under these programmes they get acquainted with nature, monitor and evaluate the environment around them and get involved in transforming their own school or municipality so that it is more friendly both to those who live there and the environment as a whole.

The programmes make use of project-based and experiential teaching methods and locally anchored learning. They are based on practical experience, with children dealing with model or real problems in real or model situations. In managing these problems they develop expert knowledge related to the environment and life skills such as planning their work, working together, leading others, negotiating and presenting their results. Every school in the Czech Republic can get involved in a long-term educational programme. Once a school has signed up, it generally receives a whole range of services associated with the programme: seminars for teachers, extensive methodological materials, worksheets for the kids, and ongoing consultation. Some programmes can be realised by a teacher with their class, while others are intended for the whole school.

Long-term educational programmes are generally based on tried-and-true programmes from abroad that are taking place in many countries, thus allowing important international collaboration and an exchange of experiences between teachers and students in various parts of the world. Detailed information on the most important programmes can be found at www.terezanet.cz or www.skolaprozivot.cz.
Teachers try out in practice an activity for supporting teamwork – “Blind Square”. The team is tasked with creating as precise a square as possible out of rope under very difficult conditions. The key to doing so is agreeing with each other, listening to each other and personal responsibility.

School is a place where we can educate future generations across the board, affecting every student. Environmental education is currently one of the cross-cutting topics of primary education. Every primary school in the Czech Republic must incorporate environmental education into its curriculum.

In order for environmental education at schools to be effective, to draw on professional expertise and to reflect current trends, teachers need a great deal of support. This support is not only provided by the environmental education programmes for students presented above, but also through various forms of further education for teaching staff. Teacher training focuses on methodological assistance for teachers in planning, implementing and evaluating environmental education.

Environmental Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) school coordinators from three regions managed to realise specialisation studies in cooperation with the Centre of Education, Liberec, and the educational centres SEVER, DIVIZNA and PALETA. The studies take place in the form of a multi-day meeting at various interesting sites in the aforementioned regions: DOTEK – House of Reshewn Traditions, Ecology and Culture in Horní Maršov in the Krkonoše Mountains (SEVER), 3EV Česky Živý in Senohlavy, STRUBL Vek Eco-Centre in Oldřichov v Hájích and the PALETA Eco-Centre Oucmanice.

The important thing is the applicability of the acquired knowledge in practice – the participants take part in a range of practical activities, field programmes and visits to interesting schools; as part of the lectures they meet exceptional individuals, chat with active CEPA coordinators and get to know them better. The teachers not only visit important natural areas but also get acquainted with the offer of other educational institutions focused on ecological education.

Example of good practice

SPECIALISATION STUDIES

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Example of good practice

THE CEPA STANDARD

The new standard for studying specialised activities in the field of environmental education was issued by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in 2015. The standard stipulates that specialised studies must include at least 250 hours of instruction. Of the total number of teaching hours, no more than 20% can be used for distance learning, i.e. e-learning.

9 000 teachers take part in over 600 environmental education training events every year

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It was quite a problem to tear the children away from the bryozoans. One camp-goer became so taken with the research that bryozoans became the topic of her secondary school independent study the next year. She is now studying science at university in Brno.

Leisure programmes comprise various activities and events with natural and environmental topics for children that take place outside of school, i.e. in their free time. They include regular after-school activities and clubs as well as one-off camps and trips. These activities make it possible to develop children’s interest in nature and getting to know nature outside of school. This means that a vast majority of these activities can easily take place in a natural environment.

Activities, clubs, camps and trips with an environmental focus are provided by many ecological education centres or eco-centres, or specialised centres for children and youth. Taking only the organisations associated under the nationwide Paradise Network of Ecological Education Centres, over 150 after-school activities are offered, which are attended by over 1900 children. Every year these organisations organise over 650 camps, trips, and other one-time events for over 14,000 children.

The Chaloupky Ecological Education Centre organises various types of camps – day camps, camps for the whole family, and the newest is a blacksmith camp, where boys spend the whole week pounding the anvil. For the organisers the camp is a teambuilding session and for the children a period of adventure, friendships old and new and enjoying the outdoors. The biggest event is a two-week camp in wood-based tents on the banks of the Nový Kanclíř pond in South Bohemia.

Example of good practice
Events for the public

210,000 people visit over 800 public events that take place every year

All these activities are focused primarily on protecting nature, environmental care and sustainable development. Very frequently the events relate to special days associated with the environment – Car-Free Day, Arbor Day, Water Day. The most popular are the celebrations of Earth Day on 22 April.

Example of good practice

OLOMOUC ECOLOGY DAYS (EDO)
This successful ecological festival with twenty-five years of tradition is organised by Sluňákov – the Olomouc Centre for Ecological Activities. At very little cost a large event for more than 20,000 attendees has arisen, made up of a wide variety of programmes: educational programmes for schools, exhibitions, trips to interesting sites in the countryside, conferences, excursions, and cultural performances. During all these events people receive much information about the relationship between man and nature. Discussions with leading Czech personalities from science and social life paved the way.

Purely environmental subjects are paired with topics from culture, philosophy, sociology, psychology and other fields. The festival alternates with a highly attended Eco-Fair. In part, this programme took place in the newly opened Litovelské Pomoraví House of Nature, which is a unique attempt to create a composed landscape. The House of Nature comprises five natural habitats typical for the wetlands around the Morava River, decorated with artworks by leading Czech artists.

In the “Garden of Eden” at the Litovelské Pomoraví House of Nature, guests were welcomed by its creator, František Skála. Dressed up as a monk, he contemplated in a garden full of plants and animals. While constructing it, Mr Skála had taken care of a stray cat, which in return decided to spice up the performance with its own theatrical debut.

ECOLOGICAL EVENINGS
Ecological Evenings take place in Olomouc year round, following up on the success of the Olomouc Ecology Days discussions. They attempt to create an environment in which the participants communicate, listen to each other and express their opinions. Space is also given to criticism of ecological activities. “The goal of the discussions is not to resolve problems, but the possibility of creating and correcting opinions. More information is uncovered during a conversation than during a monologue,” adds Sluňákov director Michal Bartoš.

Olomouc Ecology Days (EDO)
210,000 people visit over 800 public events that take place every year
More and more public offices are starting to implement simple environmentally friendly measures. Replacing PET bottles with tap water in pitchers truly costs nothing.

The goal of consultancy is to provide citizens with objective and comprehensive information on the environment, on ecological problems and how to solve them, and on products and their influence on the environment. Ecological counselling centres respond to individual inquiries, organise educational events, implement specific projects and issue publications. They provide the public, municipalities and other target groups with professional support and thanks to their actions in various regions they are able to cover questions on environmental protection throughout the country. The advantage of using eco-counselling services is in the individual approach, the connection to the local environment and assessment of the issue in the broader context.

The spectrum of topics is very broad: from consumer information to protection of local nature to addressing complex and long-term cases of damage to the environment, on ecological problems and how to solve them, and on products and their influence on the environment. Ecological counselling centres respond to individual inquiries, organise educational events, implement specific projects and issue publications. They provide the public, municipalities and other target groups with professional support and thanks to their actions in various regions they are able to cover questions on environmental protection throughout the country. The advantage of using eco-counselling services is in the individual approach, the connection to the local environment and assessment of the issue in the broader context.

Water poured into a graceful glass pitcher is practical and looks much better than an unsightly plastic bottle. You can have the quality of tap water checked. To let the chlorine evaporate, let the water sit for a minute. The price of a pitcher is generally recovered in less than 10 bottles worth of packaged water. Aside from money, you also save on unnecessary packaging (25 empty PET bottles weigh 1 kg), the transport of bottled water to the store and the effort of carrying a heavy load.

The STEP Eco-Counselling Network connects ecological counselling centres from around the Czech Republic. Since 2011, STEP has been working with Opava City Hall to introduce environmentally friendly operations and green purchasing. They drew up an initial analysis of operations and from it an Action Plan was created.

What was achieved? Aside from thorough recycling of waste, the city hall also focused on preventing it from being created. It now purchases supplies in bulk economic packages, uses reusable toner cartridges and prints on both sides. Instead of plastic bottles, water is provided in tasteful glass pitchers. The heating is set up to maintain an optimal temperature. The cleaning staff was trained in ecological cleaning and cleaners use environmentally friendly chemicals, which has contributed to a healthier working environment. The old flushing systems in the toilets were replaced with modern efficient ones. Water and inappropriately lighting was replaced with efficient LED lights and fluorescent bulbs. An integral part of the change was informing employees and visitors.

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More and more public offices are starting to implement simple environmentally friendly measures. Replacing PET bottles with tap water in pitchers truly costs nothing.
Environmental education in the Czech Republic has more than fifty years of history behind it. In strategic documents we tend to speak of Environmental Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) and Environmental Consultancy (EC). Today in the Czech Republic there is a comprehensive system of coordination and support for these areas which is broadly enshrined in the public and non-profit sectors, in school, after-school and further education, and which is grounded in programme and educational documents, legislation and financial programmes.

Among the key documents that provide for and enshrine CEPA and EC are the State Programme for Environmental Communication, Education and Public Awareness in the Czech Republic, which is approved by a government resolution, is long-term in nature and is implemented through three-year Action Plans (primary responsibility falls to the Environment Ministry and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, but others are involved too). Furthermore there is Act No. 123/1998 Coll., on the Right to Information on the Environment, which under Section 13 charges the aforementioned ministries with providing systematic support to these areas. In the education sector, environmental education is enshrined as a “cross-cutting” topic for the general curriculum at various levels of education. Development of CEPA and EC at the regional level is significantly helped along by the regional CEPA concepts approved by the regional government in all 14 regions of the Czech Republic. In terms of funding, important support from EU funds was secured in the past in part of the Operational Programme Environment and Operational Programme Education for Competitiveness. For the sake of illustration, OP Environment helped dozens of entities in the Czech Republic to build or renovate eco-centres in 2007–2014 with a total contribution of around CZK 800 million.

The key sources of funding for CEPA and EP are currently:

- National Environment Programme coordinated by the State Environment Fund, from which CEPA and EC support is estimated at around CZK 50 million a year.
- Subsidy programme of the Environment Ministry for supporting NGO projects from which projects focused on CEPA and EC are also supported annually at a rate of around CZK 2–10 million.
- The subsidy levels for CEPA and EC from regional budgets vary by region, but range from around CZK 0.5 million to around CZK 10 million.

Several foundations and endowment funds support CEPA and EC projects, the most significant being the Environmental Partnership Foundation. Corporate support as part of corporate social responsibility is a welcome source of funding for some CEPA programmes. It is the Environment Ministry’s goal to secure long-term function of the CEPA and EC system with the highest possible quality while remaining open to new approaches and trends.

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- Objectives and Indicators for Environmental Communication, Education and Public Awareness in the Czech Republic (2011)
- Recommended Expected Outcomes – Environmental Education in Primary Education (2011)
- From publicly available sources on environmental education and eco-counselling programmes.

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