

PRESENTATION. SPECIAL ISSUE:

The Natural Environment and the Development of Human Identity

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Vol.: 2026, 38(2)

Start Date: **01/02/2025**

Submission Deadline: **30/10/2025**

Publication Date: **01/07/2026**

In every process, event, phenomenon, or educational practice, the environment is one of the vital dimensions that, along with time, directly mediates the process of human construction and the education of the human being. Education, as a situated activity within a specific space and time, requires an understanding of its processes not only through the relationship between 'you and me,' but also by integrating the environment. This includes natural elements, occurrences, moments, events, public squares and places; settings, landscapes and local scenes, gestures, smells, resources, textures, streets, and pathways, among others.

Within this educational triangulation of the self (ego), the other (alter ego), and the natural environment (alterum), our relationship with the natural environment has evolved over the centuries. Currently, as research, experts, and international organizations indicate, we are experiencing a deficient and deteriorated relationship with the natural environment, lacking the essential connection that should exist between humanity and nature. In fact, we can assert that there is a "nature deficit," characterized by an absence of landscapes, natural circumstances, places, and settings that bring us closer to nature. This deficit prevents us from seeing ourselves not only as visitors but also as integral parts of the intricate web of life, as eco-dependent beings. Among other consequences, this has led to an unprecedented environmental crisis, evidenced by climate change that has resulted in what is now referred to as a climate emergency.

The absence of identity-developing practices in the natural environment, the lack of life experiences within social coexistence frameworks, the exclusion of sustainability criteria from curricula throughout the educational system and higher education, or simply the failure to recognize nature as an integral part of human development—these factors significantly impact human development and education. The development of personal and collective identity and education itself is impaired in terms of values, emotions, beliefs, attitudes, commitments, and, inevitably, behaviors.

Therefore, education—through its various processes, practices, and manifestations, and above all, through educational research, both basic and applied—must take the lead in generating thoughts, studies, and actions that address this cultural, social, and human demand. We need studies, data, and reflections that provide answers. Without an environment, there is no education; and the natural environment is one of the key contexts for comprehensive human development that places sustainability at its core. Turning our backs on it has severe consequences. We seek strategies, mechanisms, arguments, and actions that foster a deeper connection, harmony, and a responsible relationship between humanity and the natural environment in order to understand human construction and education in sustainable terms.

This special issue aims to publish articles that address this demand, presenting research concerned with education where the natural environment is an intrinsic element. It seeks to expand the scientific and academic understanding of environmental education, its associated topics, and sustainable human development. Covering school and social spheres, the issue welcomes contributions derived from theoretical, philosophical, empirical, policy-driven, and practical research, as well as evaluated experiences related to Environmental Education and education for sustainable human development.

Some key questions to consider include: What relationship should educational knowledge have with nature and the natural environment? What pedagogy is required to shape a human being who recognises themselves as part of the natural environment? Is an approach based on objective knowledge sufficient, or must we integrate relational, emotional, and ethical perspectives? What kind of education (environmental education?) do we need? What educational theory or theories should we uphold to address the socio-ecological crisis? What ethical and moral principles should guide human development to ensure compatibility with respect for nature? How can education challenge and transform anthropocentric assumptions that limit our relationship with the planet? How can eco-dependence and environmental justice be integrated into educational practices? What educational practices can be considered successful examples of transformative education? What characteristics do these practices share, and how can they be replicated or adapted to different cultural and social contexts? Articles may address, among other topics, the following:

- Ethical, philosophical, and pedagogical reflections on the relationship between humans and the natural environment.
- Advances in the pedagogical foundations of Environmental Education and sustainable development.
- Traditional and emerging materialities and ontologies in environmental education research.
- Educational challenges in school contexts related to environmental issues and climate change.
- New narratives, and alternative languages in education to understand the connection to the natural environment amidst the environmental crisis, climate change, and nature deficit.
- Theories, mechanisms, practices, and competencies for sustainability learning.
- Studies, and community action projects for Sustainable Development.
- Training and professional performance in environmental education and sustainable development.

- Urban education and sustainable development models for transforming identity practices.