

INTERACTIVE METHODS OF DEVELOPING ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN CHILDREN

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Abstract: Developing environmental awareness in children is essential for fostering a sustainable future. This thesis explores interactive methods such as experiential learning, technology integration, play-based strategies, and community involvement to enhance children's ecological understanding. By engaging in hands-on activities, digital simulations, storytelling, and real-world environmental initiatives, children develop a lasting commitment to sustainability. Incorporating these interactive approaches into education ensures a deeper connection to nature and responsible environmental behavior.

Keywords: environmental awareness, interactive learning, sustainability, child education, ecological responsibility.

Environmental awareness is a crucial aspect of early childhood education, as fostering a connection with nature at a young age helps children develop a lifelong commitment to sustainability. In today's world, where environmental challenges such as climate change, pollution, and deforestation threaten ecosystems, it is essential to equip children with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to take responsible actions. Traditional teaching methods that rely on textbooks and passive learning are often insufficient in making environmental education engaging and impactful. Instead, interactive approaches that encourage direct participation, experiential learning, and creative expression allow children to develop a deep and personal connection with the environment. By incorporating hands-on experiences, technology-based learning, play-centered approaches, and community engagement, educators can cultivate environmental responsibility in children and inspire them to become active stewards of the planet.

One of the most effective methods of teaching environmental awareness is through experiential learning, which involves direct interaction with nature. This approach allows children to explore the environment using their senses, creating meaningful experiences that leave a lasting impression. Activities such as nature walks, gardening, and wildlife observation help children develop an appreciation for biodiversity and ecological systems. By touching soil, planting trees, and observing animals in their natural habitats, children gain a firsthand understanding of the

interconnectedness of living organisms. School gardens serve as valuable spaces where children can engage in sustainable agriculture by planting and nurturing crops while learning about composting and organic farming. Additionally, nature-based activities like hiking, camping, and outdoor scavenger hunts encourage children to spend more time outside, reducing nature-deficit disorder, a condition linked to increased screen time and lack of exposure to the natural world. Experiential learning helps children develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for the environment, motivating them to adopt sustainable behaviors in their daily lives.

The integration of technology in environmental education provides another powerful tool for developing children's awareness of ecological issues. Digital platforms, interactive apps, and virtual simulations offer immersive experiences that engage children in learning about sustainability. For example, augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) applications allow children to explore endangered ecosystems, witness the effects of climate change, and understand the impact of deforestation, even if they do not have direct access to these environments. Educational games focused on conservation challenges, recycling strategies, and renewable energy solutions encourage children to think critically about environmental problems and explore potential solutions. Online platforms that promote global environmental campaigns, such as digital tree-planting initiatives or virtual clean-up events, allow children to participate in collective efforts for sustainability. Additionally, technology fosters collaboration and knowledge-sharing by enabling children to connect with peers worldwide who are also engaged in environmental projects. By leveraging digital tools, educators can enhance children's understanding of environmental issues and empower them to take action.

Play-based learning is another effective interactive method that fosters environmental awareness in children. Games, role-playing, and storytelling create engaging and enjoyable learning experiences while reinforcing ecological values. Board games and puzzles that focus on sustainability challenges encourage children to think critically about environmental issues and develop problem-solving skills. Role-playing activities, such as pretending to be environmental scientists, activists, or wildlife conservationists, allow children to immerse themselves in real-world ecological scenarios and explore different perspectives. Storytelling, in particular, has a profound impact on children's emotional connection to nature. Narratives featuring animal characters facing environmental threats, indigenous wisdom about nature conservation, or real-life stories of young environmentalists inspire children to develop empathy for the environment and take responsibility for its protection. Drama and puppet shows with environmental themes further enhance engagement,

making abstract concepts more relatable and memorable. By incorporating play-based learning into environmental education, educators can make sustainability a fun and integral part of children's lives.

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