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The Psychology of Nature Connection: How Environmental Education Develops Ecological Empathy and Action

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Abstract

There is a growing body of psychological evidence that demonstrates the profound benefits of nature connection for human well-being and ecological action. This review paper discusses how environmental education generates ecological empathy and pro-environmental behavior through psychological mechanisms. Based on the synthesis of environmental psychology research, social cognition, and education science, the paper explores experiential change of nature-based learning experiences influencing children's and adults' sense of identity, emotional well-being, and ecological citizenship. Relevance includes forming biophilia, the role of sensory immersion, and cognitive reorganization achieved through experiential learning in natural settings. The article also examines barriers such as urbanisation, screen addiction, and socio-economic deprivation, which limit access to nature and undermine learning outcomes. Moreover, the paper examines how teachers, mentors, and role models are engaged in facilitating emotional connection to the environment. Through international case studies and educational programs analysis, the review demonstrates that fostering a psychological sense of nature connection improves not only environmental learning outcomes but also other mental health goals. The paper proposes that fostering ecological empathy through systematic and informal educational interventions is essential to facilitate progress in community and institutional sustainability transformations.

Keywords: Nature connection, Ecological empathy, Environmental psychology, Experiential learning, Pro-environmental behavior, Environmental identity

