

Skyros Project: A Place-Based Climate Change Education Approach

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Abstract

Climate change represents one of the most contentious issues in environmental history, driven by both natural processes and human activities. The complexity of its causes and effects often impedes effective communication and education, posing challenges for climate change education (CCE). The primary goal of CCE is to foster 'climate action,' encouraging behaviors and practices that reduce human impact on the global climate, thereby mitigating the effects of climate change on all forms of life. Research suggests that place-based education (PBE) is particularly effective in this context, as it directly links learning experiences to the physical environment, making the impacts of human behavior on climate more tangible and relevant. The "Skyros Project," conducted at Linaria Port on Skyros Island, Greece, serves as a model of PBE in action. This project, a collaboration between the University of West Attica and the Skyros Port Fund, has been recognized for its innovative approach to climate change education. A central feature of the project is the Summer Academy of Environmental Educators, which combines formal and non-formal education to train future environmental leaders. The program offers participants hands-on experiences in authentic environmental settings, enhancing their understanding of climate change and strengthening their commitment to environmental stewardship. Through a blend of lectures, experiential learning, and place-based activities, the Skyros Project effectively equips participants with the knowledge and skills needed to protect ecosystems and build resilient communities. This comprehensive approach not only deepens students' understanding of climate change but also prepares them to address its challenges, fostering a generation of environmentally responsible citizens.

Keywords: Climate Change Education; Place-Based Education; Skyros Project; Environmental Stewardship; Experiential Learning

Introduction

Climate change stands as one of the most debated topics in environmental history, with both natural processes and human activities contributing to its causes. This complexity frequently hinders communication and educational efforts [1]. The aim of climate change education (CCE) is to promote 'climate action,' which encompasses behaviors and practices by humans that mitigate their impact on the global climate, thereby lessening the effects of climate change on both humans and non-humans [2].

Some studies indicate that place-based approaches can be effective for teaching climate change, as they highlight local, observable impacts, thereby linking human behavior directly to climate change [1].

Place-based education (PBE) is a teaching method that highlights the relationship between the learning experience and the physical environment where both teachers and students are situated [3]. There are four distinct dimensions of place-based education (PBE):

- "Learning in place": involves shifting teaching and learning activities from the traditional classroom setting to an outdoor space, with the lesson plan itself remaining unchanged.
- "Study of the place": focuses on examining the environment and its processes while being present in that location
- "Learning from the place": emphasizes the educational value of the environment and its elements, which play a unique role in the learning process.
- "Learning for the sake of the place": seeks to promote change in the environment, drawing on insights gained from the other three dimensions [4].

Skyros Project's Approach

A small port on Skyros Island in Greece, Linaria Port, has been recognized by the United Nations as "the blue port with a shade of green," symbolizing an environmentally sustainable community

that effectively promotes responsible environmental behavior both within the local population and among visitors [4]. In this Port, the “Skyros Project” has been held annually since 2015, as part of a successful collaboration [5]. The “Skyros Project” was created through a partnership between the Environmental Education, Training, and Communication Research Unit of the University of West Attica and the Skyros Port Fund [7] and since 2024, it has also involved the Skyros Municipality.

A central element of this project is the Summer Academy of Environmental Educators, which is recognized as a pioneering program in training future environmental educators. The academy integrates both formal and non-formal approaches to fostering responsible environmental behavior and promoting public health. Graduates are prepared to contribute to a range of institutions, including schools, environmental centers, museums, gardens, and mass media, where they can address issues related to Environmental Education, Public and Community Health, and the Environment (<https://kedivim.uniwa.gr/en/course/therini-akademia-perivallontikon-ekpaideyton/>).

A two-week summer educational program where students are encouraged to participate in on-site lectures held across various locations on Skyros Island, including on a boat and at Linaria port. The primary goal of the Skyros Project is to engage college students, particularly those from the University of West Attica, by offering them hands-on experiences in real-world environmental settings at the harbor, to deepen their commitment to environmental responsibility [7].

The subjects are presented by qualified professionals during boat trips around the island or at the Linaria port, utilizing place-based education to deepen students’ understanding of climate change. The assessment and evaluation process has shown that experiential learning enhances the educational experience, making learning both effective and enjoyable. Educators in the “Skyros Project” employ a range of tools, including environmental and climate change communication, education, and citizen science, to help participants mitigate and adapt to climate change. This training equips participants with the knowledge and skills needed to protect fragile ecosystems and build sustainable communities capable of withstanding the impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events [7].

Conclusion

Climate change remains a highly debated issue, influenced by both natural and human factors, which complicates effective communication and education efforts. CCE aims to inspire ‘climate action’ by encouraging behaviors that reduce the human impact on the global climate. Research suggests that PBE is a particularly effective method for teaching climate change, as it connects students to the physical environment and highlights the observable impacts of human activity. The “Skyros Project” serves as a model of PBE in action. Through a combination of lectures, experiential learning, and place-based education, the Skyros Project not only deepens students’ understanding of climate change but also equips them with the skills necessary to protect ecosystems and build sustainable communities. This holistic approach to education, integrating climate communication, education, and citizen science, effectively prepares participants to mitigate and adapt to the challenges posed by climate change, fostering a generation of environmentally responsible individuals ready to tackle the complexities of a changing world.

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