

THE CROPPER FOUNDATION

A TWO-YEAR PROJECT TO SUPPORT THE INTEGRATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES INTO THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION CURRICULUM

Concept Note

‘If widespread calamity or social distress does not bring us to our senses first, imaginative forms of education may do so more pleasantly’ O’Riordan (1981) in Plant (1998).

1.0 Project Rationale

Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) continues to have the fastest rate of development in the eastern Caribbean and one of the fastest rates of development in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Accompanying this rapid rate of economic growth however are elevated levels of consumption and (land) conversion throughout the country which are resulting in a persistent reduction in the capacity of the natural environment to continue providing the services on which the nation’s well-being so vitally depends. What is apparent is that there is a growing gap between observable trends in the environment (including associated trends in human well-being) and the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago’s (GoTT) vision for ‘a country in which all persons treasure the environment and voluntarily use its resources wisely to ensure protection, conservation and restoration, so as to equitably meet the needs of present and future generations and enhance the quality of life’ (Vision 2020: Operational Plan 2007 – 2010. Investing in Sound Infrastructure and the Environment). It can no longer be argued that responses so far designed and implemented to deal with the country’s growing environmental problems are inadequate.

As noted by Tikka *et al.* (2000) ‘Many of the environmental problems which exist in our society today find their roots in the attitudes and behavioural patterns of people’. Attempts to mitigate these problems and improve sustainability have therefore rested on the development and implementation of environmental education (EE) programmes which are aimed at heightening awareness about environmental issues and promoting the development of a code of ethics, thereby empowering people to become more environmentally responsible citizens (Zelezny, 1999; Brackney and McAndrew, 2001). In Trinidad and Tobago, the need for such programmes has long been recognised, and in the National Environmental Policy for T&T (2005), it is recorded that ‘if the ethic of sustainable development is to be widely adopted, people must re-examine their values and alter their behaviour. Information must be widely disseminated through formal and informal education campaigns so that the required actions for enhanced environmental protection are widely understood. Environmental education for children and adults must be integrated in education at all levels’.

There are many actors and several programme and activities in T&T which are geared at improving environmental awareness. In the last few years, attempts have been made to make better use of the formal school system for integrating and mainstreaming environmental education. These include for example the attempt by the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago (MOE) to design a policy framework to guide environmental education in T&T; changes

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to the upper secondary school curriculum (CSEC and CAPE¹) to include more environmental elements; and several activities designed by NGOs and others to support the school system. Two deficiencies, among others, are apparent across these initiatives however:

- most efforts target the upper school level (especially the upper secondary school level)
- many of the curriculum elements related to environment are not making the crucial links required to influence values and attitudes and thus affect behavior (either in content or approach)

The emerging observation is that environmental education is neither being integrated systemically nor systematically into the formal school system.

In order to address many of the existing deficiencies and make efforts to integrate and promote environmental education more effective, it is important to start inculcating change at the earliest age possible rather than waiting for students to enter the higher schools levels (as is now largely the case). According to Tilbury in Wilson (1994), 'Environmental education based on life experiences should begin during the very earliest years of life. Such experiences play a critical role in shaping life-long attitudes, values, and patterns of behaviour toward natural environments.' It has also been noted by Kinder Nature (2004) that 'Environmental preschool programs can spark an environmental awareness and lay a solid foundation for the school-age environmental education building blocks that result in adults having the ability to make sound environmental decisions.' The importance of environmental education in early childhood thus cannot be disputed, and as synthesized by Wilson (1996), the rationale for environmental education during the early childhood years is therefore based on two major premises:

- the first premise is that children must develop a sense of respect and caring for the natural environment during their first few years of life or be at risk for never developing such attitudes (Stapp, 1978; Tilbury, 1994; Wilson, 1994).
- the second premise is that positive interactions with the natural environment is an important part of healthy child development (Carson, 1956; Cobb, 1977; Crompton & Sellar, 1981; Miles, 1986/87; Patridge, 1984; Sebba, 1991; Wilson, 1994) and that such interactions enhance learning and quality of life over the span of one's lifetime (Wilson, 1994)

In the last few years, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been allocating significant resources to the development of new (public) Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Centres throughout the country, and efforts are also underway to regularize all existing private ECCE centres. In order to provide a curriculum framework for ECCE centres, the Ministry of Education (MOE) established a National ECCE Curriculum Guide (2006) and all government and government-assisted ECCE centres are mandated to use this document. What is evident is that although environmental education is included in all strands of the Curriculum Guide, it has not been well integrated.

In an effort to assist ECCE teachers and the MOE in more effectively incorporating environmental issues into their curriculum, The Cropper Foundation therefore proposes to undertake a two-year project focused on the ECCE system throughout Trinidad and Tobago. **This**

¹ CSEC – Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate; CAPE – Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations.

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proposal is based on a strong interest in such an initiative that was expressed in preliminary discussions between TCF and members of the MOE involved in ECCE².

This project is guided by research which indicates that ‘an early childhood environmental education program requires more than a set of nature-related activities. Also required is some type of framework or structure to give it consistency and continuity’ (Wilson, 1993³). Some of the fundamental goals for early childhood environmental education programmes which have been identified as part of a learning framework therefore include:

1. To develop an awareness and enjoyment of the beauty and wonder of the natural world
2. To become aware of the concepts of cycles, diversity and interconnectedness in nature
3. To develop a sense of appreciation and respect for the integrity of the natural world
4. To develop a sense of caring for Planet Earth and an understanding of how different types of pollution might harm the Earth
5. To develop an appreciation that people are a part of the natural world, not separate from it
6. To develop an understanding of how to contribute to the well-being of the Earth

These goals can be seen to embody the changes which have occurred in environmental education over the last 50 years, moving from a purely nature-based approach to an approach which tries to address the challenges to sustainable development as a whole (see Annex 1).

2.0 Project Objectives and Anticipated Outputs

*‘Environmental education in schools...needs to be based on children’s understandings of environment rather than on assumptions of what children know and believe’
(Loughland et al, 2002)*

The main objectives of the proposed project are:

1. To make environmental information and technical assistance available to ECCE teachers through a series of workshops and tutorials, and through this, to assist in networking and information sharing among teachers;
2. To assist teachers in integrating environmental issues into various aspects of the existing National ECCE Curriculum Guide;
3. To assist in the provision of resource material which would facilitate (more) effective interaction between teachers and students in and outside the centre on issues related to the environment;
4. To design and assist in the establishment of environmental ‘learning corners’ in ECCE centres;
5. To work in collaboration with the MOE, the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) and other relevant stakeholders to establish an approach to working with ECCE teachers and students which:
 - seeks to directly address the needs of students

² Meeting held on October 06th 2008. In attendance were the School Supervisor II, the Family/Community Support Coordinator and the Quality Assurance Coordinator of the ECCE Division; and Mr. Winston Rudder (President) and Mr. Maurice Rawlins (Programme Officer) of The Cropper Foundation.

³ Chapter 2: Integrating Environmental Education and Early Childhood Education.

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- facilitates learning-by-doing through active involvement of teachers and students (even parents)
- avoids duplication of effort and seeks to maximize resources (funding, capacity and time)
- has a built-in monitoring and evaluation scheme

The main anticipated outputs of the project are:

1. A set of four (interactive) one-day tutorials and/or workshops with ECCE teachers which will be held throughout Trinidad and Tobago. It is envisaged that there will be three sets of these tutorials targeting teachers in different geographical areas throughout the country as follows:

- North and Central Trinidad
- South Trinidad
- Tobago

A tentative outline of the main topics to be covered in each set of tutorials/workshops is given below, and will be refined based on more in-depth discussion with the MOE and selected ECCE educators.

- a. Session 1 (tutorial in second month of project) - Improving teachers' understanding and knowledge of environmental issues and the roles of humans
 - b. Session 2 (tutorial in sixth month of project) - Discussions about the issues which are most relevant and interesting to young (3 to 5 year old) children; and consideration of the methods and approaches which could be employed by teachers to engage students.
 - c. Session 3 (tutorial in twelfth month of project) – Follow-up discussions about the issues which are most relevant and interesting to young (3 to 5 year old) children; and consideration of the methods and approaches which could be employed by teachers to engage students.
 - d. Session 4 (workshop in eighteenth month of project) – Discussion to assess the effectiveness of methods and approaches used or introduced by this project, and consideration of how these could be improved.
2. An activity/storybook or some other interactive product (such as a puzzle) which will facilitate interactive teaching between teachers and groups of children within ECCE Centres. This product will be designed so that teachers can use the material within it to present and discuss various topics, and it will also include elements which will interest and engage children. The exact nature and content of this product will be decided in further consultation with ECCE practitioners and with relevant officers from the Ministry of Education.
 3. Approximately thirty (30) plays and other drama performances which will be delivered at selected ECCE centres across Trinidad and Tobago. These performances will be designed and delivered with assistance from expert drama groups, including but not limited to, the Arts in Action Group of the University of the West Indies. The purpose of these sessions would be to heighten the awareness of students and their parents about various environmental issues using a medium which is of high interest to children – drama and

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song. The ECCE centres will be selected based on consultation with the MOE, and the scheduling of performances will depend on the availability of the chosen centres.

4. Establishment of a 'learning corner' in as many ECCE centres as possible which will help to foster a greater appreciation amongst children about their natural environment. Some ideas include the development of a small school garden; establishment of a fish tank or pond; and growing indoor plants.
5. A report which reflects on best practices and main lessons learned as a means of informing the development of future project and activities. This report will draw on the interactions with teachers during the course of the tutorial sessions and will also be based on a questionnaire which will be administered towards the end of the project.

3.0 Value Proposition

The way in which an organisation uses its assets to deliver value added through its products and services is called a value proposition (World Conservation Union, 2008). The Cropper Foundation's assets include its connections with individuals/organisations/institutions at all scales (local to global) which are key to its work; involvement in environmental education for the last five years through an established Programme (Programme for Environment and Resource Education); its network of colleagues and collaborators drawn from a wide range of disciplines and interests; its proven, strong leadership; and its highly motivated and competent staff.

The Cropper Foundation uses these assets to:

1. ***Provide credible and trusted information and knowledge.*** The basis for establishment of any on-the-ground activities undertaken by The Cropper Foundation has been careful research, review and assessment drawing only on credible sources of information and knowledge. Through the completion of two scientific assessments (one on the Northern Range and the other on the Caribbean Sea) and through the successful delivery of several activities over the last nine (9) years (including a number related to education), The Foundation has built a reputation among its clients and collaborators for setting and adhering to very high set of standards for any of its projects or programmes.
2. ***Convene and build partnerships for action.*** The Cropper Foundation does not have in-house the range of skills and expertise required to deliver on all of its programmes and projects. Further to this, it has been recognised that if a project or initiative is to be successful, it must be user-driver (including all relevant stakeholders). Successful design and implementation of The Foundation's initiatives to date have rested heavily on the TCF's ability to mobilize the right combination of interest, skills and expertise for activity delivery. Apart from its Board of Trustees, and a number of established advisory and technical committees, the Foundation has also developed a list of partner organisations/institutions and agencies with which it frequently partners and collaborates.
3. ***Maintain a local-to-global and global-to-local reach.*** Since its inception in 2000, The Cropper Foundation has been involved in activities from the local scale (in Trinidad and Tobago) to the global scale. This multi-scalar involvement has allowed for the transfer of

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knowledge and information from Trinidad to other parts of the world, as well as from key organisations/institutions/agencies/individuals in other parts of the world to the Foundation's work in T&T. Because sustainable development is such a rapidly-evolving field, these links have proven very instructive for the overall development of TCF's work to date.

4. ***Contribute to policies and practices in support of sustainable development.*** Having recognised that sustainable development is a very integrated and interconnected field, The Cropper Foundation tries to work through as many avenues as it could to influence approaches and behaviours in support of sustainable development. In doing so, the Foundation is guided by a core set of values and principles – equity within and across generations, peace and justice.

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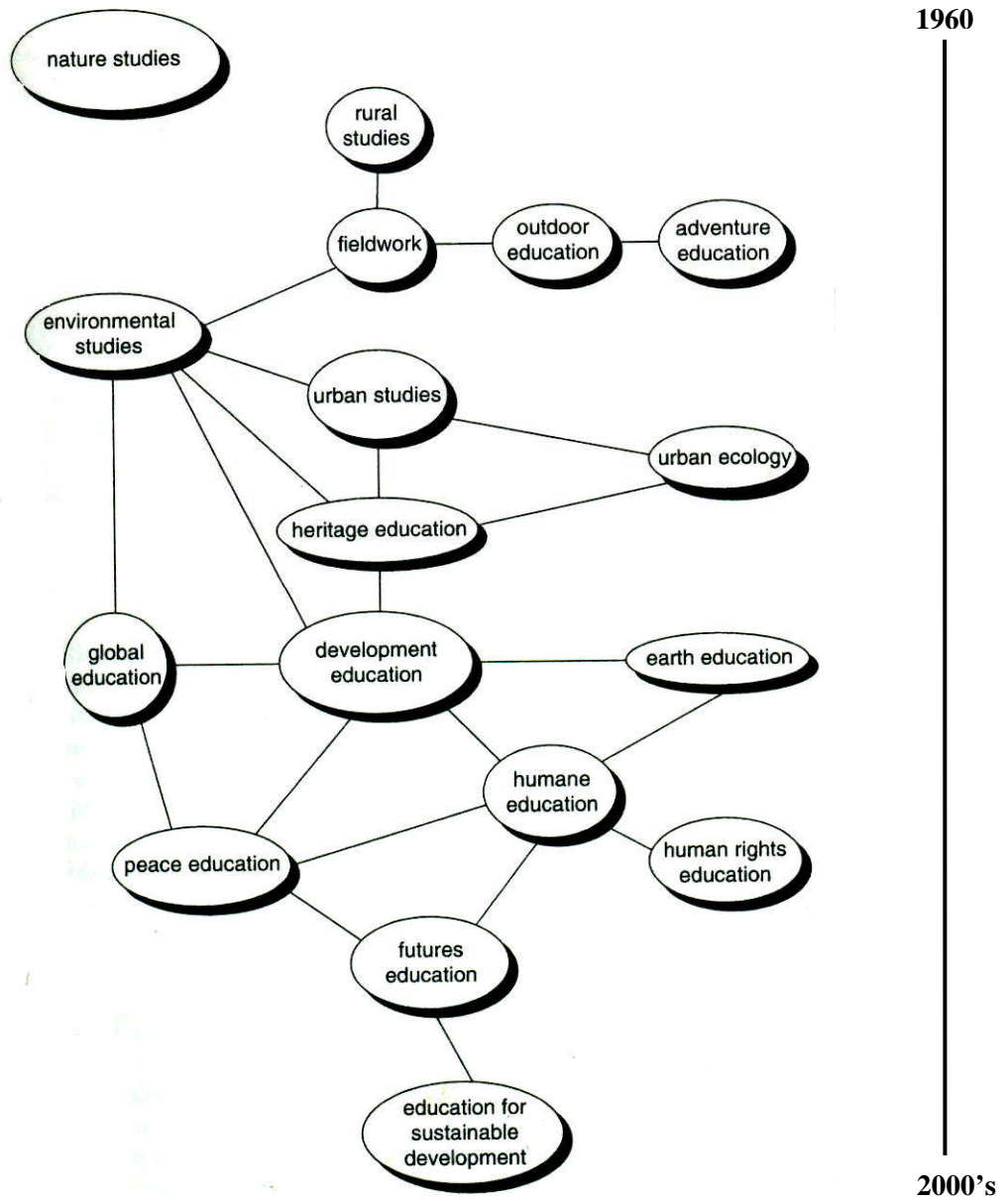
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Annex 1: Map of the development of different aspects or emphases of environmental education



Source: Palmer, 1998