**Education4Conservation – introduction to the program**

The goal of the Education4Conservation program is to help develop future conservation leaders by guiding and supporting teachers in educating children starting from a very early age. As of June 2024, there were 16 teaching teams, including 79 teachers and 1,244 students, in 20 schools across Indonesia, Madagascar, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. These numbers continue to grow every academic year.

**The key players in the program are teachers**

Education4Conservation is a flexible network of professional and volunteer teachers without a central organization governing the entire network. The coordinator (currently Stanislav Lhota) provides teams with the latest version of the E4C curriculum and offers close guidance each month. However, each teacher team operates independently, following its own organizational rules.

The Education4Conservation program's focus is not on teaching students directly but on mentoring teachers. In addition to the curriculum, we provide guidance to all teacher teams via WhatsApp groups and offer feedback on all reports. Teachers can watch videos of other teams teaching the same activities in our Facebook group, which benefits everyone through mutual learning and support.

To join the program, a team must consist of at least two teachers (each activity requires at least two adults) and meet regularly with the same group of students to teach the curriculum. There also needs to be an informal agreement that students will continue with the curriculum as they move from kindergarten to primary school, which often requires collaboration between local institutions.

Beyond these requirements, there is no strict model for organizing the work. Teachers can be school staff, freelancers, NGO employees, or local citizens interested in environmental issues. Teaching can take place at a school or another suitable location. Each team is fully responsible for ensuring its activities comply with local regulations and respect social and cultural norms.

**The curriculum starts with 4-year-old students and covers 14 years of education**

The Education4Conservation curriculum begins at the preschool (kindergarten) level, with most students joining around age 4 (ranging from 3 to 5 years old). The curriculum is designed to cover 14 years, spanning preschool, primary, and secondary education. Our goal is to follow as many preschool children as possible through secondary school graduation and university entrance, though this usually requires coordination between several schools and can be challenging.

We understand that most students will not complete the full 14-year course. Some will leave before secondary school, while others may join the program at a higher grade. However, we believe that the students who complete the course can become exceptionally skilled and motivated conservation leaders, and even those who participate for only a few years will be significantly influenced by the program.

The curriculum is currently available in English, French, and Indonesian, and a Spanish version is planned.

**The main concepts:**

* **Local issues can be framed globally.** The curriculum is used in several tropical countries but is always adapted to address local environments. Activities are broadly defined, allowing teachers to tailor stories, dramas, and lessons to local species and issues. For example, while a story has a given structure, teachers can choose the setting, the animals featured, and the specific environmental issues addressed.
* **Conservationists do not need to become biologists.** Although our primary goal is to educate future conservation leaders, we do not expect most students to become biologists or professional conservationists. We believe that caring for the environment is a right and responsibility of all citizens, and that most jobs have an environmental impact. The curriculum highlights the connections between ecology, students’ interests, and their diverse future careers.
* **Once you are motivated and skilled, knowledge will come.** We do not focus on teaching children many facts, since information is easily accessible today. Instead, we prioritize stimulating interest in nature, providing personal experiences, training practical skills, and demonstrating how to implement sustainability principles in our daily lives.
* **Broad understanding and critical thinking are more important than memorizing.** We teach broad concepts, including well-established topics like waste management and organic farming, and issues often omitted from environmental education, such as invasive species control. Rather than providing all the details, we encourage students to learn more independently through observation, reading reliable sources, and discussion. We want students to think critically about complex issues that do not have simple right or wrong answers.
* **Play and exploration will gradually turn into projects and action.** We believe in the value of slow, steady learning. We start by stimulating interest and joy through play and exploration of nature. Gradually, we introduce principles of sustainable living and project-oriented conservation. We hope the early play and exploration inspire and facilitate real-world project transition as students mature.

**Teachers participate in the development of the curriculum**

A core principle of our program is incorporating teacher feedback into revised versions of the curriculum. After each activity, teachers submit detailed reports with photos and usually videos. Based on these reports, the E4C curriculum is a living document that we continually improve. The teachers’ feedback helps us clarify and enhance activities, remove unnecessary details to allow more flexibility and creativity, and sometimes provide alternative versions of some activities so teachers can choose what works best for them.

While there is no payment for teaching itself, we reward teacher teams with a fee of approximately $22 as appreciation for each report. We update the curriculum at the end of each month to reflect teachers’ feedback. This teacher-driven development process is the most distinctive feature of our program.

**Experienced teachers guide new teachers, and schools partner with other schools**

To support the growth of the Education4Conservation program, we encourage experienced teachers to gradually take on mentoring and supervisory roles for new teachers joining our community. We also hope that better-resourced schools will partner with schools in less developed regions, helping promote environmental education internationally, especially in areas most needed. By fostering these relationships, we aim to expand the reach and impact of environmental education and build a stronger, more connected network of educators and students worldwide.