How to plan and implement an environmental education program for a
conservation area: lessons from Australia and Borneo.

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The Augo Wetland Forest Park, along with other conservation areas around the
world, provides an opportunity for a personal connection with the natural world - an
opportunity for creating ways to convince people to reverse the degradation of the
planet.

In this presentation I use the settings approach, as used by the World Health
Organisation in health promotion, as a framework. The WHO’s 1986 Ottawa Charter
states that "Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday
life; where they learn, work, play, and love." I argue that, similarly, a conservation
area provides a setting for people to connect with environmental issues and can be
the place where positive behaviours and actions for the environment are created and
enacted. In a wired and virtual world, such settings may be the only opportunity
some people, especially children, get to connect with the environment. An evidence-
based, intentionally designed and implemented environmental education program
enhances the opportunities for the personal connection and subsequent action.

Planning and implementing an Environmental education program for a conservation
area requires an understanding of the principles of three domains:
• Environmental Communication
• Environmental Education
• Environmental Interpretation

In this presentation I define these domains and demonstrate how they become
interdependent within the context of a particular setting such as a conservation area.
I outline the principles of each domain and demonstrate how they can be enacted
with reference to environmental education program case studies from settings in
Australia and Borneo.

The first case study is based around a proposal for a planned residential community
at Eden’s Crossing, in Brisbane's high growth Western corridor. The setting featured
a number of important natural and heritage conservation characteristics and the
developer wanted to be pro-active in informing the market what this development
aims to achieve in terms of innovative community and environmental objectives. By
designing an education and interpretation program in line with best practice
education and interpretation principles the developers would be assisted in their
efforts to build community, preserve heritage, and facilitate environmentally sensitive
lifestyles for the future residents of Eden’s Crossing. Above all, the strategy focused
on advancing sustainability in a way that made the Eden’s Crossing greenfield
development significantly greener. It did this by interacting with prospective
purchasers, and building knowledge about sustainability with a view to shaping the
future community of Eden’s Crossing in terms of attitudes and behaviours.
The second case study is based around the development of the Rainforest Interpretation Centre (RIC), now renamed the Rainforest Discovery Centre, an environmental education facility managed by the Sabah Forestry Department (SFD) and located at the edge of the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve in the East Malaysian state of Sabah (Borneo). This setting is of paramount importance for biodiversity conservation and research and a vital habitat for orang utan. As an Environmental Education Consultant I was tasked with developing an environmental education program for this setting as part of the SFD’s long-term strategy towards sustainable forest management. By employing the principles of Environmental Education and Environmental Interpretation I designed and implemented a program with three major components:

- an environmental education component for visiting primary and secondary school groups.
- an environmental education component for in-service and pre-service teachers and teacher educators.
- a public awareness and environmental interpretation component which caters for the general public and tourists.

From these modest beginnings the program has expanded and new facilities have been developed to meet the demands of visitors, teachers and students. The effectiveness of the program can be traced back to the grounding in the principles of best practice environmental education, communication and interpretation.