



Ontario, Canada

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Education in Canada is a provincial responsibility and due to provincial differences, the range of EE embedded in curriculums also varies to some degree. For this reason, we will focus on Ontario as a best practice model for EE strategy and action.

Ontario's Ministry of Education policy framework for environmental education (2009) recognizes the importance of local, place-based learning as well as the complexity and multidimensional nature of EE, stating that "environmental education [in Ontario schools] will draw on effective learning strategies – including inquiry, problem solving, critical thinking, and assessing alternatives – that engage students personally in their own learning, connect them to the world they live in, and give them the systems thinking and futures thinking they will need to become discerning, active citizens."

In 1973, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) embedded environmental science courses into the province's elementary and secondary schools. Over the following two decades, EE increased in the Ontario curriculum. In 2007 the OME formed a Working Group on Environmental Education and it was tasked to "analyse needs and research successful approaches to teaching and learning about the environment in secondary schools."¹

The working group's 2007 report, "*Shaping Our Schools, Shaping Our Future*", recommended that there was a need to "increase the cross-curricular focus of environmental education by embedding environmental expectations and topics across all subjects, disciplines, and grades. The report also provided an operational definition of EE which has since guided EE in the curriculum, specifically it stated that it should be:

"Education about the environment, for the environment and in the environment that promotes an understanding of rich and active experience in, and an appreciation for the dynamic interactions of:



The Earth's physical and biological systems



The dependency of our social and economic systems on these natural systems



The scientific and human dimensions of environmental issues



The positive and negative consequences, both intended and unintended, of the interactions between human-created and natural systems."

The OME response to the document was to release an EE standards statement and policy framework entitled *“Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: A Policy Framework for Environmental Education in Ontario Schools”*. This document provided strategies, actions and goals for the required EE implementation in Ontario schools.

The document:

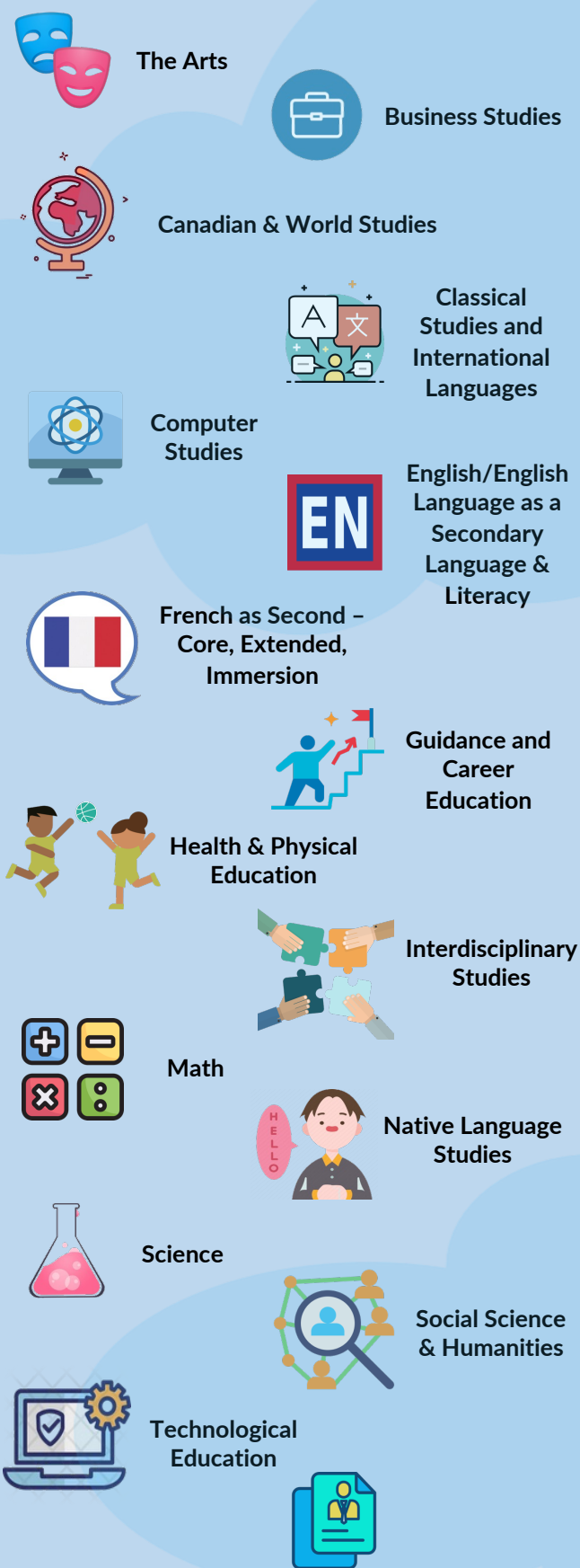
- 1 Addressed changes in teacher training, methods of student engagement and community connections and environmental leadership;
- 2 Called for the adaptation of an integrated approach to EE; calling for EE to be embedded throughout the curriculum.ⁱ

While there remain challenges to embedding EE across the Ontario curriculum, the province does have direction, political attention and gives substance to the advancement of EE in schools. The implementation of the EE policy from 2007 has not been without its challenges, like many countries post the 2007 global financial crisis, reduced funding and resources in education, was one of the biggest challenges to implementation of EE as outlined by the OME standards and policy framework - and for many years there remained a need for developing educators’ capacities for EE and curricular resources.

To answer this need, in 2017, the OME produced two resource guides (grades 1-8 and grades 9-12) on *“Environmental Education: Scope and Sequence of Expectations”* for the Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8 and 9-12. The documents provide scopes and sequences in the learning expectations in the curriculum that relate to, or provide opportunities for, environmental education”, it goes on to say that

“educators in every discipline can use [the document] to inform program planning, in order to take advantage of opportunities to support students’ development of related skills and knowledge.”

With regard to Grade 9-12, the following curriculum areas were covered with regard to embedding EE across the curriculum:



The elementary curriculum scope and sequence is broken down by grade requirements.

“Ontario’s education system will prepare students with the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and practices they need to be environmentally responsible citizens. Students will understand our fundamental connections to each other and to the world around us through our relationship to food, water, energy, air, land, and our interaction with all living things. The education system will provide opportunities within the classroom and the community for students to engage in actions that deepen this understanding.”ⁱⁱ
Shaping our Schools Shaping Our Future (2007)

It is clear that EE has been a focus for educators in the province of Ontario, it has not been without criticism concerning the need for more capacity and appropriate resources, but these are common concerns and perhaps reflect economic factors rather than ideological barriers. The recent OME documents offering scope and sequence are certainly strong steps in the right direction and demonstrate provincial commitment to ensure that EE is one of the pillars of a student’s life.

Reference:

- ⁱ Edu.gov.on.ca. 2021. *Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: A Policy Framework for Environmental Education in Ontario Schools*, [online]. Available at: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/enviroed/ShapeTomorrow.pdf> [Accessed 4 January 2021].
- ⁱⁱ Edu.gov.on.ca. 2009. *Shaping our Schools Shaping Our Future: Environmental Education in Ontario*, [online]. Available at: <http://yourschools.ca/wp-content/uploads/pdf/environmental/Shaping-Our-Schools.pdf> [Accessed 02 December 2022].
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ministry of Education, 2017. *Environmental Education: Scope and Sequence of Expectations Grades 1-8*. Ontario: Ontario Public Service.
Ministry of Education, 2017. *The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9-12 Environmental Education: Scope and Sequence of Expectations*. Ontario: Ontario Public Service.
- ^{iv} Equivalent to primary level in the UK

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