



# REPORT

## Green Foundation Ireland

is pleased to invite you to an

**EDUCATION SEMINAR and BOOK LAUNCH**

*"Environmental Literacy and New Digital Audiences"*  
*by Professor Pat Brereton*



**Venue: Oak Room, Mansion House, Dawson Street, Dublin 2**

**Monday 2 December 2019**

**18:00 – 20:30** (*registration starts at 17:45*)

## THEME

There is widespread public awareness of and concern about environmental issues at this time and this book launch will bring together two topical issues one relating to Environmental Literacy and the other to Eco Anxiety. While Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) continues to be a topic of debate in Ireland especially its inclusion in education curricula, there is no doubt that Environmental Literacy plays a huge role in ESD. Environmental awareness in turn has the capacity to lead to Eco Grief or Eco Anxiety for some who may find our current situation difficult to deal with.

This seminar and book launch tried to address both of these issues in a solution focused way, so that we are equipped with a more hopeful way of dealing with environmental issues.

**Eileen McDermott** welcomed everyone to the seminar on behalf of Green Foundation Ireland (GFI) and thanked Professor Pat Brereton for allowing GFI to launch his book *Environmental Literacy and New Digital Audiences*. Eileen also thanked the guest speakers and invited Pat to speak about his book.

### **Professor Pat Brereton, School of Communications, Dublin City University**

Drawing on Affordances of Conventional and New Media including fictional film, documentary and nature films, television series and quality streamed shows on Netflix, YouTube and online environmental programmes, video games and interactive media, the question raised in Pat's book is how to most effectively get environmental messages across?

*"We cannot be educators without instilling hope for the future"*

– Paulo Freire

With a growing backlash towards climate change adaptation, greater emphasis has to be placed on promoting education and environmental literacy across all aspects of communications studies.

"I would tend to endorse eco-literary scholar Greg Garrard's (2004) assertion that the definition of what counts as pollution, much less any major environmental issue, up to and including climate change, remains a cultural as well as a political question that depends as much on shifting values and priorities, as on actual emissions of toxic substances."

In relation to Environmental Literacy and Education, Pat noted this is not simply a top down process of disseminating correct attitudes, values and beliefs. There is a need to promote a dialogue with audiences of different persuasions and at all levels of engagement, to help highlight and at best co-produce consensual solutions to the major challenges of our time.

It is not simply about 'saving the whale' or indeed saving local habitats but is equally about the development of an appreciation of the wonders and beauty of the world and provoking a sense of wanting to save it.

The book contains 11 chapters as follows:

1. Environmental Literacy Introduction
2. Understanding Audience Psychology and Trigger Points for Promoting Environmental Literacy
3. Promoting New Media Literacy
4. Food Documentaries and Green Anxieties: Actively promoting Environmental Literacy
5. Eco-Documentaries: Old Problems New Aesthetic Opportunities
6. Contemporary Hollywood Blockbusters and Environmental Narratives
7. An Environmental Reading of Post 9/11 American Televisual Series
8. Netflix and Emerging Streaming Networks: New Forms of Immersive and Addictive Narratives and Characterisation
9. Video Games and Environmental Learning: New Modes of Audience Engagement
10. Going Viral: YouTube and New Forms of Environmental Literacy
11. Conclusion: Constructing an Environmental Literacy Consensus through New Media

Pat's book is available to purchase in book format with Kindle and e-book versions also available on-line.

### **Professor John Sharry, *Parents Plus Charity, Feasta, UCD and The Irish Times***

John discussed how to talk to children about the climate and ecological crises and raised the issues of 'eco grief' and 'eco anxiety' as aspects of climate change which we need to be aware of, as well as the importance of becoming informed as a parent. Being able to manage our own emotions in relation to climate change and environmental issues is vital. Also responding to children based on their age and development level is vital. It is very important to think through what message you want to give. John noted the importance of becoming solution focused – by channelling children's worry into action and helping children develop resilience.

It is really important to give children a happy childhood.

### **Elaine Nevin, *National Director of ECO-UNESCO***

ECO-UNESCO has been working with young people to promote environmental protection for over 30 years. And in that time Elaine noted they have been channelling the passion and energy of young people into positive environmental action through their range of programmes including their Young Environmentalist Awards, Youth for Sustainable Development, trainings and clubs.

"We work with over 10,000 young people annually in formal and non-formal settings – with a focus on non-formal approaches. We are affiliated to UNESCO are a QQI training centre and this year we were announced as one of Ireland's first SDG champions."

Elaine noted some of the work ECO-UNESCO is involved in including:

**Young Environmentalist Awards:**

- 2019 celebrated 20 years of YEA – showcase and awards ceremony with 1,000 young people in Convention Centre; 322 projects; 102 finalists; 7 semi-finals ECO-Dens; 57,521 online votes.
- First YEA Ideas Fest held in Tralee, Co. Kerry (for YEA 2020) – hackathon style event for young people to get input and feedback from local experts and decision makers.

**Youth for Sustainable Development:**

- Continued to support weekly after schools youth programme with a focus on SDGs and action projects. 202 young people trained as peer educators.
- Expanded to other locations in Ireland – Carlow, Bray, Drogheda, Navan, Kildare.

**Green Works:**

- Their first Green Careers event for young people 14-19 offering advice on green careers, progression and education opportunities. Supported by Accenture and the Department of Education and Skills.

**SDG Champion 2019 / 2020:**

- Announced by the Department of Communications, Climate Change and Environment as one of their first 12 National SDG Champions in September 2019.

**Duncan Stewart, RTÉ's Eco Eye and Director of Green Foundation Ireland**

Duncan noted the importance and urgency of the current situation and the importance of including Education for Sustainable Development within the school curriculum. Duncan also suggested twinning with schools in the developing world (where the effects of the climate crisis have already been catastrophically experienced). This would bring the reality of climate change to a new level of understanding for students. Duncan noted a new venture <http://www.ecoed4all.com> that he is involved with and which aims to promote ESD within schools and communities.

This was followed by a lively Q and A session before the event concluded at 8:30pm.

Eileen thanked everyone on behalf of GFI for their contributions and attendance.

**EILEEN McDERMOTT**  
**Director, Green Foundation Ireland**

**30 December 2019**



# ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY AND NEW DIGITAL AUDIENCES

Patrick Brereton



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Environmental literacy and education is not simply a top-down process of disseminating correct attitudes, values and beliefs. Rather, it is one that incorporates and facilitates a dialogue with audiences of different persuasions and at all levels of engagement, to help highlight and co-produce consensual solutions to the major eco-challenges of our time.

Exploring the growing power and influence of media formats and outlets like YouTube and gaming, alongside fictional and documentary film, this book considers new modes of environmental literacy to ascertain the effectiveness of digital and filmic stimuli on an audience's perception of environmental issues, and its specific impact on environmental action. Drawing on extensive research across a broad range of media formats, Pat Brereton establishes how environmental narratives and meanings are created and being received by contemporary audiences.

This book will be of great interest to students and scholars of environmental communication and media, eco-criticism and environmental humanities more broadly.