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## Visual Arts as Advocacy: Empowering Future Educators to Inspire Environmental Consciousness

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### ABSTRACT

The urgent need for sustainable development calls for innovative educational concepts that appeal to people intellectually and emotionally. Ecological thinking implies a holistic approach, which is essential for teachers to integrate environmental issues in all subjects to make sustainability a natural part of students' overall learning experience. This article explores the importance of visual arts education in promoting awareness of sustainability issues and emphasizes how creative expression can translate complex environmental challenges into relatable, visual narratives. It also explores how visual arts education can teach students critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills essential to addressing the global environmental crisis. By developing ecological literacy, future teachers will be prepared to mold environmentally aware, critical-thinking students in elementary school, where attitudes and values toward nature and sustainability are beginning to form. The article lists some important visual artists in the world and Croatia who have addressed environmental issues in their work and discusses the possibilities of connecting their artistic practice with the content of art education. Some examples of practical tasks are given for students to develop their own ecological thinking and explore ways in which it can be used creatively and critically in art lessons. By integrating the topics into the curriculum, teachers can create a rich, multi-layered educational experience that prepares students to think critically and creatively about their relationship with the environment. By integrating visual arts and sustainability, academic institutions can cultivate an informed, empathetic, and proactive generation capable of envisioning and realizing a sustainable future.

**Keywords:** ecology; holistic learning; interdisciplinary approach; sustainable development; teacher education