

ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS EDUCATION

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In the 21st century, perhaps the most important issue is the protection of our environment and the preservation of its values for future generations. Environmental awareness as a concept: *Environmental awareness is a concept used to express the awareness, sensitivity, and conscious responsibility of an individual or a segment of society concerning the state of the biosphere and the environment of the human population, and is often used in the form of an attribute.*¹ Environmental awareness, as such, is a concept taken in a very broad sense, as it is possible to contribute to the preservation of our environment in countless ways. Let's take as an example if somebody does not throw trash away on the street but puts it into the nearest bin. It might seem like a small step, but in my opinion, small steps are the ones someone can start with on the path of environmental awareness, since the next step could be selectively collecting their waste and disposing of it at designated points, or having it transported in sacks provided by the municipality. Of course, environmental awareness goes beyond just selective waste disposal. It also encompasses things like the preparation of organic foods, growing plants or keeping in mind the economical use of drinking water, but one could also mention the construction and use of passive houses that are becoming more and more widespread and also the exploitation of renewable

energy sources. A central, almost everyday issue these days is the unsustainability of the global lifestyle carried on by humanity and the necessity of immediate change, both in production and distribution, and consumer behaviour, too. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that more and more social groups, organisations and even individuals are recognising the inevitability of this change, the wealth of press coverage, the warning messages of scientists, the many press conferences, marketing campaigns, political statements, the vast majority of the Earth's population keeps on consuming our material goods and natural resources to the extent that will inevitably lead to an ecological disaster and the depletion of our resources.

In my study, I would like to stress the importance of environmental protection and the importance of the conscious education focused on it while examining its background in educational politics and broadly outlining the tasks related to environmental education in kindergarten and school.

INTRODUCTION

As civilizations evolved, the relationship of man with nature has also gone through important changes. In today's modern age man only sees nature as an inexhaustible resource and perceives itself as being above it (Huang, 2008). Many studies agree that a

1 Magdolna Aranyiné Farkas: Környezetvédelem alapjai a szépségipari szakmában (13.o), 2008

commonly accepted notion of nature describes it as an inexhaustible resource (Molnár, 2009).

Environmental education plays a key role in getting students acquainted with the concepts of environmental awareness and sustainability, and above all, it can inspire them to develop an appropriate relationship with nature. (Bonett & Williams, 2007; Dopico & Garcia-Vasquez, 2011)

The use of the concept of environmental education had started spreading in 1980, although it frequently happens that it is used as a synonym to the protection of nature (Havas, 1996). However, environmental education is a more complex concept, since it not only educates people on the appropriate environmental culture, but also shapes their attitudes, including the relationship with nature. It has an impact on the integration of lifestyle, values and the development of personality. (Füzné Koszó, 2002).

The goal of environmental education

The goal of environmental education is to transfer the operational skills that could be necessary to solve environmental problems. In doing so, it aims to forge a tighter bond between man and nature, trying to convey the aspiration or mindset that the condition of man's existence and survival is to preserve a healthy environment. Environmental education tries to contribute to restoring the lost balance between man and his environment.

Peculiarities of environmental education

Education places stress on developing character traits such as trust, tolerance, the ability to think freely, mental balance, community thinking and, last but not least, a need to shape a harmonious relationship with our natural environment. (Lehoczky, 1998)

Due to its characteristics, efficient environmental education differs from the traditional learning process, which comes from the subject of study. It is a lifelong process that starts at a very young age in kindergarten and continues from then on all the formal and non-formal levels. In its approach, it touches on several disciplines and studies the most important questions related to the issue from local, regional and national

points of view, too. It is very important that it helps students recognize the symptoms of environmental problems and find the reasons behind them and develop their environmental sensibility and value judgment. Overall it examines the environment as a whole, including the natural and artificial, social and technological environment. (Palmer & Neal, 1995).

A brief introduction to environmental issues

Scientists have been sounding the alarm for years, envisioning a dreadful future (and increasingly a present) of global warming, atmospheric problems, scarcity of drinking water, loss of biological diversity, desertification, food shortages and nuclear dangers. However, our race against the laws of nature seems to be losing ground in this matter.

Overpopulation, the inclusion of lower income social strata into global consumption, urbanisation and at the same time, the depopulation of the countryside are all symptoms of the craving for comfort, greed, selfishness and greed for consumption hiding in the human soul.

Unfortunately, there is almost no chance for the mass-level individual consumer attitudes to change as long as we are part of a global capitalist consumer society and economic system and a world order condemned to incessant, ever-increasing consumption as individuals, local communities and countries alike.

The present state of our environment is a faithful representation of our immensely unjust and corrupt human society (think about the proportion of Earth's inhabitants who are starving and thirsty right now with such overconsumption).

I have hopes, however, that it is not too late to believe and act to start global changes.

We are in the 24th hour, which is now recognized not only by scientists and ecologists, but almost all the economic and social groups that are involved, but the initiatives and the results achieved to decrease pollution, reduce consumption and production, and to stop population growth don't even slow down the pace of depletion of the resources of our planet and the global warming caused by the greenhouse effect.

Protection of the environment as conscious behaviour

Think about how quickly environmental education classes, excursions, and other training that are the foundation to an environmental attitude that begins already in primary school are forgotten when it comes to an individual's consumer behaviour and comfortable lifestyle. We educate (but not teach), we take no responsibility for our environment, our fellow human beings, and the quality of life of the generations that will follow us.

There are many definitions of environmental protection, but the essence is that we can consider it some social activity based on ecology. It is an interdisciplinary and human-centered activity at the same time. In the Lexicon of Environment and Nature, it is defined as: *"environmental protection is a conscious, organized, institutionalized human (social) activity that is aimed at the elimination and prevention of the harmful consequences of human industrial, agricultural and mining activity for the unharmed survival of wildlife and human."*²

Not only do we have to protect our environment, but we also develop it, that is, to carry a lifestyle that minimizes the adverse impacts that human activity has on nature, restores the damage done, and manages natural resources in a reasonable way. Large-scale production, however, means large-scale production, increased use of chemicals and the transportation of the goods produced in massive quantities.

At present, almost every country is dealing with environmental awareness on a different level, which is a new level that goes beyond environmental conservation to improve the quality of our lives and that of future generations. Today there are studies fundamentally questioning even the thesis of basic economic axioms that justify a fundamental change in the relationship between man and the universe. With our narrower environment, the Earth is necessary.

Environmental psychologists Michael P. Maloney and Michael P. Ward were dealing with the issue of environmental awareness. They found that people consider the state of their environment important; what's more, they deem it to be one of the main conditions of the future, but many of them do nothing for it. There is also a measurement method developed by Riley Dunlap and Kent van-Lierre to measure environmental awareness. Since then, it has several accepted methodologies to it. General tests have been conducted regularly for years. The survey is formed by the following questions:

- What are the main environmental concerns of the population?
- What social activity they think is the most harmful to the environment?
- What are the main environmental needs and ideas of the population?
- Who does the public expect the solution of environment and nature protection issues from?
- What would people be willing to do for the sake of the protection of the environment?³

*"Environmental consciousness is the environmental value system of individuals and society formed by the knowledge about the environment and moral conviction. It integrates the knowledge needed to understand the human-environment interaction and the approach that can outline the ecological, economic and social sustainability of our environment - and human life within it".*⁴

Thus, environmental awareness is not just an interdisciplinary set created by scientific methods, but thinking about environmental behaviour, so a kind of a learned attitude, too.

The interesting result of the surveys is that although a significant part of the responders considered many environmentally conscious conduct elements to be important, they still do almost nothing on their levels

2 Lexicon of Environment and Nature 2002. 636.

3 Ingenia Hungarica III. Dorottya Lévy: There is a need for environmentally aware education by the reuse of materials (56.o.); 2017.

4 András Donát Kovács: The role of environmental awareness fulfilled in regional development through Great Plain examples (3.o.); 2006.

(household, lifestyle) to achieve the goals of these questions even superficially (e.g. less household waste, use of public transportation, consumption or less food, selective waste collection, etc.)

It is an important change and paradigm shift to accept, recognize and even prove that sustainable growth does not exist, but sustainable development of quality of life does.

The establishment and acceptance of this view is not without sacrifices, as it not only demands a change in lifestyle and attitude, but also the voluntary restriction of consumption, too. It attributes greater value to a clean natural environment than the material set of annually changed smartphones; cars changed every 3 - 4 years and bigger and more beautiful houses and apartments. New generations must dematerialize, instead of accumulating material goods, striving to acquire moral and intellectual values and knowledge and to share and not own their property. It is necessary to reorganize social connections, small communities, families, and the atomized society again because the happiness of the human soul is determined by these factors, as we now know by experience. (Sanda, 2013)

Besides the personal level, another dimension of environmental consciousness is the deep gap between regions, nations, and even continents, in terms of the quantity and distribution of goods produced. A difference of three magnitudes between the consumption levels of the citizens of the world's richest countries and those of some countries of Africa is no longer a sustainable state.

It is also necessary to restrict the free flow of capital; it is not sustainable that some products travel around the globe twice or even three times during their manufacturing cycle before they finally reach the end-user. This involves the use of fossil energy of such amounts that it will cause the depletion of these energy sources before their substitutes and alternative technological tools appear in the industry and transport.

The relation between environmentally conscious behaviour and education

The spiritual foundation of pedagogy considers truth, beauty, and goodness to be the source of all other values. It derives the rest of the most important human values represented in education and training, but above all, in school education. In addition to moral education, literacy, equality, tolerance and social culture, its goals include physical health, sustainability, and education to environmental awareness. (Sanda, 2016)

Environmental education is vital to preserving the natural environment; it is of crucial importance for the development of the personality, especially of a child. It helps to form a sense of self-image and a consciousness of personal responsibility, develop a healthy personality, and create harmony between their physical, mental and spiritual traits. Environmental education can awaken a child to the beauty of nature and help them discover the creative side of human existence while also developing imagination.⁵

Efficient education does not primarily focus on the development of cognitive abilities and does not reach results by strict adherence to and enforcement of learned behavioural rules. (Sanda, 2019) Environmental education primarily aims at the harmonious and responsible coexistence of the individual with the environment through its own set of tools. The toolset, of course, is age-dependent, as, in playful conditions, the education of a child starts already in the kindergarten, who will later become a person who lives in harmony with the environment, a person with environmentally conscious thinking, having the knowledge, attitude, motivation and environmental ethics that it takes. One of the most important goals is to develop the right environmental attitudes, emotional attitudes, and environmentally friendly habits, including emotional influence and acquisition of objective knowledge.

It is important that the education of children is not confined to the walls of the kindergarten or school, since the most important patterns are taken from the parents, so it is very important to raise the awareness

5 Ferenc Kiss-Anita Zsiros: A környezeti neveléstől a globális nevelésig. Teaching material (p. 8.); (2006)

of the child to economic and ethical behaviour through, for example, exercising self-restriction while shopping together. Selective waste collection at home, the purchase of larger unit packs, energy-saving light bulbs, the economical use of energy, the consumption of organic products and less processed foods leave children with a very deep mark in a child's consciousness.

Kindergarten environmental education in Hungary

This is where environmental education can begin, so this foundational, playful approach can have a decisive role in forming an individual's environmental culture. Kindergarten age children follow patterns, so if they see an educator acting energy-efficiently, they will also do so. A child's personality in kindergarten can be best developed through play, this being the most common activity of children. Besides play, work-related activities are also important, as this sets the child's attitude to work, and they can experience the environment-forming effect of work.

Kindergarten tasks in environmental education

Children in kindergarten can be brought closer to their environment in the most diverse ways. Beyond simple and everyday basic activities such as selective waste collection or the creation of a nature corner, there are many opportunities at the disposal of kindergarten educators. It is advisable to adjust this to seasons' change or with significant "green days".

An apparent autumn activity can be raking leaves, but caring for autumn flowers or building a bird feeder can also be a great pastime. In addition to that, 23rd September is World Cleaning Day, 4th October is World Animal Day and 4th November is World Smokeless Day.

Snowfall in winter - if there is any - means a fundamentally different environment that can give new environmental education grounds. This is a good time to draw the attention to the changed functions of nature, the sleeping flora, or animals diving into winter hibernation. Activities that have the power to build

personality, and through caring, also to educate, are the continuous replenishment of bird feeders, working with germinators, and experiments with snow or ice.

Spring is a great opportunity to observe nature's revival, for outdoor gardening or taking care of spring flowers. On 22nd March, it's World Water Day, on 22nd April Earth Day that gives an excellent opportunity to organize a thematic program.

Walks around the kindergarten or hiking in nature can also provide great opportunities for children to know their environment, regardless of the season. With the screening of educational films or other creative, awareness-raising activities in the group room can also bring the subject of nature closer to the children.

Environmental education in schools in Hungary

Regarding schools, a worthwhile mention is the "Eco-school" program started in 2002. Schools can apply to the tenders announced in the framework based on § 191/A. paragraph (2) of EMMI Decree No. 20/2002. (VIII.31.) to be awarded the title "Eco-school" and "Heirloom Eco-school". Applicants set out to develop their pedagogical program and curriculum according to sustainability and global responsibility values. They identify ecological tasks to be performed during the school year, the performance of which is carried out, maintained and presented on their website. There were 967 Eco-Schools in Hungary in 2018, the application to which must be renewed each year, should a school want to remain in this circle.

The School Environmental Education Program, as part of the National Environmental Program, includes other programs for educational institutions such as the Forest School Program. Within this framework, about two hundred thousand students could participate in some forest school program in 2018.⁶ Other items include the Selective Waste Collection Program, the Composting Program and also the GLOBE Program.

In the current school environmental education, it is easier to implement the pedagogy of sustainability for lower-grade children because it is easier to develop a flexible curriculum for the students. In higher grades

6 The Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment.

and high school students, this is much more difficult due to the tight and fragmented timetable. This activity can be helped by close collaboration and commitment to the topic by the teacher colleagues. A more straightforward solution can be finding an opportunity where students can get a bit out of school constraints.

SUMMARY

The importance of environmental education is unclear to many people because they do not consider themselves committed to the cleanliness, order and health of their environment. Therefore, environment aware education has an enormous role, so that the coming generations can get the knowledge previous ones had no chance for. It is of utmost importance for humanity that in the future, a generation that is mindful of the environmentally-conscious lifestyle and sustainability could operate, preserving our world for future generations, because "we did not inherit the Earth from our fathers but our grandchildren." (David Brower) ■

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