

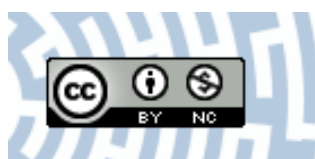


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In Harmony with Nature – Elements of Ecology in Pedagogy and Art

Abstract

The contemporary educational process, in its guidelines, is based on the formation of pro-ecological awareness just in the youngest generation. An interesting way of turning out specific contents by adults makes it possible to bring this theme into effect. There are applied direct and indirect effects. One has to remember the important role of the language used in each area of knowledge. Such an education is conducive to arousing sensibility to the surrounding world, and contact with nature beauty gives happiness and secures a young human being's comprehensive development.

In this paper some notes of selected ecological aspects in pedagogy and art are included. They are mainly focused on language, music and an interdisciplinary educational project realized in Silesia.

Key words: *ecology, education, elements of ecology in pedagogy and art, linguistic image of the world.*

Introduction

The conception of education and upbringing of society aware of the importance of environmental protection should be a crucial aspect of the contemporary educational process. This process is closely connected with young people, so the content that allows to mold a proper pro-ecological awareness has to be shown in an interesting way. Only in this way it can result in the effective and responsible study of attitude towards problems related to the environment.

Environmental problems are strictly connected with ethnic roots. Recent research shows that the absence of a meaningful ethnic culture for many students is both palpable and real. Youth, which have only intermittent contact with nature, are unable to live happily and they have serious problems with their culture identity (Tanaka, 2009, p. 84). As Nancy Wood said “Above all is the long-living spirit/ Which is the thread from generation to generation,/ As long as the land we live on is everlasting,/ And our children have a place to lie down” (Wood, 1989, p. 5).

It is important to teach sensibility to nature from the beginning of the educational process. There are two kinds of contact with the beauties of nature. The first is direct, e.g. walks, hiking trips, direct work with plants and animals during which children can observe interactions of ecosystem elements (Budniak, 2004, p. 325; Lawson, 1971, p. 22). The second is indirect and it concerns art in general, especially works of music, painting or poetry. Both of them make a human being happy and cause their comprehensive, versatile and harmonious development. They also allow them to experience nature with all the senses, which assists impressions connected with nature as well as elementary teaching it and also satisfies the need for uncovering and comprehension of the nature around us.

Children, teachers and artists – cooperation

Nature has always been a source of inspiration for artists and educators. Children have to be taught that man is an inseparable part of nature. In art the phenomenon of nature penetrates the work through the artist’s imagination and it is seen in their mind’s eye. Then, thanks to the pedagogical gift of people who teach and bring up the young generation, pupils start to be ardent lovers of nature. This feeling comes into being not only by skillfully passed knowledge but also numerous works of art created by outstanding poets, painters and composers assist this process. The word, picture and tone that are inspired by nature make us think of the beauty of the natural world and they help us in the life compatible with ourselves, other people, and nature.

An example of such a trend is the project *In harmony with nature – elements of ecology in pedagogy and art*, which was realized at the beginning of 2009 in Silesia. This unusual scientific, educational and artistic project was carried out by the Department of Music Education and Arttherapy of the University of Silesia in Katowice. Its originator, Professor Mirosława Knapik, attracted to the project a team of outstanding scientists and artists who deeply care about the education and upbringing of young people steeped in European culture. It was a return to

the sources of the European thought in its humanistic basis, which appreciate the harmony of human development. The program of the project encompassed several types of activity – there were concerts, exhibitions of pictures and photos, film projections. The title harmony was visible everywhere – it was a noticeable phenomenon between artists and audience, the young and the old, the healthy and the handicapped, teachers and students, and so on.

All projects of such a type conform to the foundations of authors and participants in the well-known Summerhill School pedagogical experiment (Appleton, 1992, p. 69) focused on the ecology of childhood. Its basic question is: how can we best nurture the child and allow it to take its natural course? In such artistic and pedagogical projects we do not only teach children but learn from them – for example, their delight, candour, engagement and getting profits out of nature's wisdom.

Language

The language is a basis which determines the process of upbringing of each human being (Malinowski, 2002; Kubica, 2000). The linguistic image of the world is included in the vocabulary and grammatical structures of a particular language, i.e. the ones which concern the content plane (semantic level) and the expression plane.

Words and structures used to describe the world around us give much information about how the relationship and attitudes towards the natural environment are perceived by the inhabitants of particular places, regions, and countries. Therefore, it is so important to study linguistic behaviour. Polish peasants' stances on the environment that are preserved in their language (often in local dialects) have an expressive character (Kurek, 2004). The pro-ecological stance was natural for Polish rural area inhabitants. It is authenticated by numerous examples of preserved linguistic constructions, rich in synonyms of names for plant (Pelcowa, 2001) or bird species (Kucharzyk, 2007). These examples should be included in the education of youth, especially now, at the beginning of the 21st century (Simonides, 2007). The youth of today have to know that the Polish peasant has inherited the knowledge of the responsible way of farming from his ancestors because only respectful handling of the soil and domestic animals or game made it possible for him to survive. The ecological stance is natural in the Polish culture of rural areas and it is not an invention of present times. Unfortunately, the young generation are learning it as something new, which is caused by the predatory exploitation characteristic of the totalitarian regime after the Second World War.

Poetry and music

A teacher well-prepared for their work appeals to rich folk icons connected with wide nature (mountains, water, trees, etc.) as well as domestic fauna and flora. The exemplification of that creative activity is the set of Christmas carols and songs, the largest and the oldest in Polish culture. The common knowledge of them results from deeply ingrained Catholic Church ceremonies, especially ones connected with the experience of Christmas (Łobos, 2008, p. 188). The harmony of the natural world, appearing in Polish Christmas carols, always brings to mind the history of their origin throughout the centuries, which helps teachers to introduce the young generation to the world of culture. A valuable tool, useful in the education and upbringing process, could be, inter alia, the artistically worked out Polish Christmas carols and songs, which are found in Polish folk songs and dances inasmuch as they are worked out by brilliant, outstanding, multi-talented poets, composers and artists. Namely, teachers can use the recently edited album with Witold Lutosławski's *20 Christmas Carols* (Lutosławski, 2007). This album is unusual owing to the mature interpretation and school age of the performers, who are mainly students of the Karol Szymanowski State Grammar Music School in Katowice (the choir was prepared by Mirosława Knapik, the orchestra was conducted by Szymon Bywalec). Christmas carols are miniature masterpieces. If they are used in the education process, then one takes note of the importance of the lyrics that build the essence of life principles, which are connected with harmonious living with God, fellow man and the world of nature. This knowledge is the inheritance from our previous generations with whom we have co-created European culture for over a thousand years.

Singing is the most effective way of values transmission because the beauty of music allows to deeply experience the essence passed by the semantic level of poetry. A carefully written and composed piece of art pierces into the depth of young souls, teaches them sensibility to the world around – people, animals and plants. This knowledge was carried into effect by Maria Konopnicka in her countless poetical works dedicated to children. Before the Second World War Maria Konopnicka's songs were very popular and the most frequently sung secular songs at homes and schools. For example, *Songbook for Children* by Maria Konopnicka and Zygmunt Noskowski contemplates the beauty of Polish scenery as well as its admiration. The songs praise the inhabitants of Polish picturesque countryside, who take care of their family and neighbours.

Nowadays these songs are almost unknown to youth because they were prohibited by censorship after the Second World War (Łobos, 2007). Hence, young

people are limited to singing and listening pieces promoted in the mass media. It is a truism that ecological songs have a stronger influence on youth than biology lessons at schools so many adults attribute great significance to these songs. Unfortunately, many authors of these “ecological” lyrics are surprisingly ignorant about environmental issues.

Music

The appropriate school education brings children closer to the cultural output of their region, country, etc. The nature was always a crucial imperative for composers living in the previous epochs – in principle, from the beginning to the present day. The output of Polish composers, such as Karol Szymanowski or Wojciech Kilar, is particularly attractive for young people. It is caused by the fact that these compositions are devoted to mountains – the Tatra Mountains are an important element in the Polish music landscape; simultaneously, they strongly appeal to feelings and show youth the beauty of classical music.

The music education of children was the passion of the Hungarian composer and educator, Zoltan Kodaly. His heritage has two aspects – one has to be in harmony with oneself (it can be reached by active contact with music, starting in childhood) and one has to live in harmony with nature (by casual, spontaneous contact with folk music in the family).

It is important during the work with young people that the background is always a specified leitmotif. Nature present in musical pieces is an extremely interesting subject. It can build the atmosphere of eeriness or mystery, sometimes it is a background for essential historic events (it is also an important problem in the young people education). Descriptions of nature are very vivid, which frequently gives an impression that they are very transient. Music education should make students aware of the role of nature in music, i.e. nature not only evokes idyllic sights but it can also arouse emotions, for example patriotism.

Final remarks

The delights of landscape beauty, the contemplation of phenomena that occur in the natural world are an inseparable part of hikes and holiday trips to many charming nooks of our homeland. A proper attitude towards the world of nature, i.e. one of respect and humility, is molded from early childhood on by direct contact with

fauna and flora. With time, the reflections resulting from personal experience and wonderful pictures which are the artistic interpretation of outstanding poets, musicians or painters complement one another. A human being, inclined in this way, is capable of making use of the knowledge in the field of environmental protection in action – knowingly and responsibly, as Józef Tischner said.

The project *In harmony with nature – elements of ecology in pedagogy and art*, mentioned in the first section, was a fruitful undertaking. Young people willingly took part in the concerts, exhibitions and workshops. For the sake of its interdisciplinarity (the linguistic, literary, pedagogical, artistic and philosophical problems were considered) it may be an inspiration for holistic education of Polish educators.

It is worth noting that experiments undertaken in other countries show that pro-ecological activity in after school clubs makes children benefit from a diversity of interactions, such as age, gender, ethnicity, different skills which not only play an important role to keep children motivated but also contribute to the formation of their self-identity (Calderon, 2009, p. 9). Simultaneously, one has to remember that “environmental education must incorporate at the outset training in basic pedagogic techniques as well as environmental matters. [...] Environmental education must lead to a way of thinking rather than provide ready made prototype solutions” (Lierop, 1998, p. 29).

Children frequently join spontaneously, willingly and enthusiastically in pro-ecological activity (e.g. they plant trees or collect recycling paper) but they simultaneously perceive the hypocrisy of pseudo-environmentalists and politicians that are responsible for the environment condition. The authentic pro-ecological standpoint arises thanks to education and upbringing compatible with oneself, other people and the environment, characteristic of Polish tradition. This standpoint surely will not be a result of expensive conferences or gaudy campaigns organized by ecologists who are advocates of eco-terrorism, which is based on disrespect for human life and spoiling somebody else’s property...

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