

6.THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE AESTHETICAL TASTE THROUGH THE BUILDING-UP OF SKILLS AND ABILITIES TO PERCEIVE AND CREATE THE NATURAL BEAUTY

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Abstract: *The aesthetical dimension of personality is the most disfavored in the context of the contemporary school. However, the interdisciplinary approach to the study of various components of nature in disciplines like art, technologies, mathematics and natural sciences creates educational situations for developing the aesthetic taste. Besides practicing skills and abilities to perceive and create the natural beauty, the introduction of elements of ecological ethics contributes to the development of the aesthetic taste, as a premise for the pupils' ecological awareness.*

Key words: *aesthetical taste, the beauty of nature, ecological ethics, ecological awareness*

Introduction

If we are to answer to the question why do teenagers love kitsch in favour of value, we would be tempted to say that we are dealing with an art crisis, a crisis similar to a moral one, and that the young people are confused and do not know what and how to choose. “If there is an art crisis, that does not have to do with the lack of artistic creations, but with our perceptiveness towards this phenomenon. The so called ‘art crisis’ is in fact a communication crisis, a *sensitivity crisis* that does not adapt to the new means of expression. This is why it is important for us to permanently rebuild our receptive sensitivity” (Cucoş, C., 2002, p. 71). No matter its shape, the child is always under the influence of the beauty found in nature, art and society. The relationships formal – non-formal – informal is shaping the way in which the fine taste is built up, and also upon the reception and creation of the aesthetic values. In this context school has the duty to teach children the ABC of aesthetics, how to admire and perceive the natural beauty. This is the only means through which the aesthetic education can contribute to reaching the objectives of the ecological education. Building up the sensitivity of each pupil for nature, will teach them to offer an inherent value to nature, mainly due to its aesthetic properties.

Starting from these observations, the goal of this paper is to emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach between aesthetic education, ecological education and ecological ethics so as to reach a quality education. We will review different concepts and theories regarding the attitude towards environment and its problematic and the ways to put them to good use during the didactic activity.

Remarks of an Ethic Nature

The contribution of the philosophy of nature is remarkable in the way we understand different situations and we reconsider the values and the concepts related to nature. As part of nature, man has the same faith as the other beings:

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he is born, lives his life and dies. Changes have affected plants, animals, landscapes and even the cultures, in different époques, and they have all had the same destiny. The representations of nature and the way it is perceived in relations to man have changed also, not only because of the natural and scientific discoveries, but also because of the way in which man got to perceive himself and his purpose in this world.

When talking about the place of man in nature, Lothar Schäfer said that “man’s behaviour towards nature can be analyzed on three levels or better said, on three dimensions: man can relate to nature (1) by means of knowledge (2) of (technically and practically) acting or (3) by reflecting upon it (from an aesthetical point of view). The present day issue is if man should also adopt a moral-practical position towards nature” (Schäfer, L., 1999).

The fact that the ecological problems are in fact social problems and not natural ones is justifiable more or less by means of an ecological ethics, by analyzing the relationship between man and nature, by rethinking the value of nature. Thus, by analyzing the history of philosophy we might say that nature has been approached in approximately three manners: (1) nature as it is – this approach has links with the ideas of the beginning of the world and the uniqueness; transforming nature into a subject has led to the development of philosophy and science; (2) the nature that needs to be tamed – this approach refers to the transformation of nature, starting with the XVIIth century and the changes in philosophy and science, into an individual object of study for the natural sciences that were in a full progress; also in the XVIIth century nature is seen as an unlimited reservoir of strengths and substances for the technical-utilitarian practice; (3) the nature that must be protected – the ecological crisis proves that the subject related to nature must be re-evaluated and re-considered because seeing nature only as an object for the natural sciences and as an unlimited resource for the industrial- technological exploitations have led to the destruction of the natural equilibrium, its abilities to regenerate and recover, which threatens even the fundamentals of life: nature that was characterized until now as being indestructible and inexhaustible is in fact vulnerable, destructible and it gains a new value, that of a “precious good” that must be protected (Schäfer, L., 1999).

Another argument in favour of offering nature a moral value is its own aesthetic property or better said, its beauty, be it exterior or “given by certain details specific to the biological function of things”. This argument is being challenged and accepted at the same time (Elliot, R., 2006, p. 320). Holmes Rolston III argues that “nature has in people’s minds a long range of values” among which the aesthetic one, thus trying to prove the intrinsic value of nature. In discovering such an aesthetic value, it is crucial to separate it both from the utility and the life support and only those who will recognize this difference can appreciate the desert or the tundra” (Holmes, Rolston III, 1998).

The passage towards the ecological holism is made by the existence of some other moral features, even if they are being contested by the more restrictive ethics. Such an example would be the feature of being a natural

object, not one that is a result of the human created technology or of culture. According to it, the destruction of rocks – which are natural objects – by means of mining activity, is to be condemned. Some other features like the existence of a diversity of parts, the functional integration of parts, the existence of a balance and a self-adjusting system can be accepted as determinants of the moral significance of ecosystems and biosphere. By analyzing the natural character and the existence of a diversity of parts, R. Elliot compares a natural rock with a synthetic one or an area covered with rain forest with a similar one which was cleared and cultivated to prove the value of the natural ecosystem. Thus, the rain forest becomes valuable because of its diversity of flora and fauna and because of its beauty that was obtained “because of the way in which parts work in harmony in order to sustain the whole” (Elliot, R., 2006, p.321). The conclusion is that the ecosystem of the natural rain forest is definitely superior to the artificial environment. “A reason for which a man-made forest is not as good as the natural one is the experienced eye that can make the difference ... These differences can be spotted and they affect the value of the forest. The reasons for the low value of the <<fake>> forests are similar to those for the low price of a forgery” (Elliot, R., 1995, p.88). In this way one can prove that the restoration projects can be a viable solution for the destroyed environments and that their value can be restored. However, R. Elliot proves in his article that the regeneration actions “do not always bring back value because part of the reason we cherish the environment is because it is purely natural.” (Elliot, R., 1995, p.80)

John Passmore makes the history of the attitude towards nature by analyzing the philosophy of nature influenced by an anthropocentric vision and concludes that the philosophy of the modern West regarding the relationship man- nature can be classified after 2 main traditions: “the first one inspired by Cartesian is that nature is not alive and passive and that its relationship with man is a despotic one because the man can remodel and reshape it as it pleases because nature cannot oppose his desire in any way. The second one is inspired by Hegelian, and here nature exists only *in potentia* as something that is in man’s care and that is present in his art, science, philosophy and technology, thus something that is human, alive, something where man can feel just ‘at home’; nature is not something odd or strange, but a mere mirror in which man can see his own face. According to this second perspective, man is complementary to the Universe not only by living in it as it is suggested in the myth of the Genesis, but by helping create it ” (Passmore, J., 1995, p. 136). Taking into account this history of the attitude of man towards nature, the author understands as justifiable the demand of the environmentalists for a new ethical, religious and aesthetical vision upon nature.

Peter Singer presents even some more arguments in favour of protecting the wilderness, but this time from the perspective of the non-human beings. So, the destruction of the habitat in which animals live will cause a permanent loss. First there will be the problem of relocating animals in the near environment, that if there will be any free, uninhabited spaces and then besides the destruction

of some species, we should take into consideration the suffering cause during death (starvation, drowning, etc.). All of these are strong arguments in favour of granting animals a moral value. Therefore it is important when taking into account the decision to preserve or to destroy nature, to also think at the animal losses that nature will suffer. The real problem emerges when the author moves from the animal centered ethics to the life centered one, respectively to the totality ethics. "If we cease to speak in terms of conscience, the border between living beings and the lifeless natural things becomes even harder to protect" (Singer, P., 1993, p. 268). In order to better understand the intrinsic value of plants and ecosystems, P. Singer appeals to the arguments of the representatives of the deep ecology. Significant in this meaning are the principles for a deep ecological ethics of Arne Naess and George Sessions which were published in a magazine in 1984: "1. the wellbeing and prosperity of the human and non-human life on Earth has a value in itself (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the utility of the non-human world for the human purposes; 2. the richness and the diversity of the life forms contribute to reaching new values and are in themselves other values; 3. men cannot reduce this wealth and diversity, except when they are using it for their own vital needs" (Singer, P., 1993, p. 281).

But after all of these, P. Singer reaches the conclusion that the representatives of the deep ecology are not compelling enough on what concerns the intrinsic value of plants, species and of ecosystems because they find more important for the moral meaning the difference between the conscious and unconscious beings than the one between the living and the non-living beings and that the arguments of the animal centered ecological ethics are enough to protect the wilderness and nature in general. "The rejection of the basis of the deep ecological ethics does not mean that the process of protecting nature is less important. All that it means is that a type of argument – the argument of the intrinsic value of plants, species and ecosystems – is in the best case a problematic one. If it cannot be placed on a different, stronger ground, than we should limit ourselves to the arguments based on the interest of the present day and future, conscious beings, be they human or non-human. These arguments are enough to show that in a society when no one has to destroy nature in order to find food, survive or to find shelter from the nature's wrath, the value of protecting the natural areas that are left is far more important than the economic earnings resulted out of its destruction"(Singer, P., 1993, p. 284).

In the end, P. Singer highlights a new threat which is "the proliferation of the human species together with the secondary products of an economic growth" (Singer, P., 1993, p. 285). Starting from the premise that the ethical principles are changing too slow in comparison with the need and the urgency to intervene for protecting nature and some of these principles act exactly in the opposite way, P. Singer tried to elaborate a new environmental ethics, based on the following directions: to consider the damaging actions upon the environment as being dubious from the ethical point of view, and the unnecessary ones as being totally wrong; to save and recycle the resources which should be seen as virtues

while the useless use and the extravaganza should be perceived as vices; to show respect towards all the interests of all the conscious beings, including here even the future, distant generation and to appreciate aesthetically the natural places; to reject the ideals of a materialistic society in which success is determined by the consumption goods a person can accumulate and to appreciate success as the development of someone's abilities and as the fulfilling of new satisfactions and goals; to promote frugality as far as it is necessary so as to diminish pollution and to ensure that everything can be reused or recycled; to consider the theft of resources from the common property of the world and the throwing of the recyclable goods as forms of vandalism, the damnation to use consumable goods that are not necessary or that are seen as extravaganzas: the one time use products from paper, the furniture made up of wood coming from the tropical forests, etc.; to disapprove with the pleasures resulting from consumerism or from the food resulted from the exploitation of conscious beings, and to recommend frugality and the beauty of the social relationships, of sports and of leisure activities that are in harmony with nature (Singer, P., 1993, pp. 286-287).

Research hypothesis, objectives and research methodology

The interdisciplinary approach of ecological ethics and of the other disciplines from the school curriculum represents an efficient means to reach the objectives of the ecological education from a small age, the pre-school age. Being an older preoccupation of ours, by means of the present study we are trying to better analyze the interdependences and complementarities between the two fields and especially the way in which the intrinsic value of nature is reflected - by means of a series of properties such as: the aesthetic one, the property of being a complex system, a natural object, of having interests, etc. – in the educational content studied by children in schools. The hypothesis from which we started our study is the following: to know and to see these properties during the instructive- educational process, alongside with learning all the different techniques to reach these properties, contribute to ecologically build up the personality of pupils.

The Objectives of the research:

- to identify the attitudes of pupils towards the use of the properties which reflect the intrinsic value of nature in the instructive- educational contents of different disciplines: Environmental Knowledge, Practical Abilities, Arts;
- the good use of the experimental procedures in different contexts so as to make them part of the pupils' stock of information and attitudes which will be later on transferred into their daily lives;
 - to build up an eco-centric mentality on what concerns the man- nature relationships which will correspond to a preventive ecological behaviour towards the present and future problems of the environment;
 - to identify some psycho-pedagogical implications of some suppositions confirmed by the results obtained with the purpose to assure a better understanding of the relationships between man and nature and to improve the attitude of pupils towards nature.

The Research Methodology

In the present research the experiment was used and the experimental scheme supposed a random selection of a sample called experimental, followed by the analysis of the results obtained. The sample was made up of 35 IInd grade pupils from No.28 School that were all of the approximately the same age and that were manifesting an increased interest in studying. The research activity took place in the first semester of the 2013-2014 school year, when pupils have studied in Arts, Practical Abilities and Environmental Knowledge a unit called "Plants". Taking into account the age of the participants, we have tried to pinpoint among all the properties that reflect nature's intrinsic values the followings: the aesthetic value, that of being a complex system and that of being a natural thing. These have represented the independent variable of the experiment.

By comparing the pupils' ecological attitude from the moment of the final evaluation with the one they manifested at the initial test, we will notice an improvement in the way pupils relate to nature. All of these will be visible at the level of their mentality and in the way they will do their portfolio home works, and they will make up the dependent variable of the experiment.

The problem regarding the relationship between man and nature, the effects of uncontrolled intervention of man against nature, must be included in children's universe of knowledge, starting from the preschool period. Children literature, using the metaphoric language of descriptions, stories, poetry etc. represents an efficient mean of making children aware of the reality surrounding them. The texts regarding nature and beings are the most accessible to children, in order to encounter the environment with all its components, in order to become aware of the fact that every being, plant, stone etc. has a well-established role and is conditioned by numerous factors: the place it lives in, food, way of reproduction, relations to other elements of the ecosystem it belongs to. These writings are helping children to understand the relationship between man and animals or plants and their environment, contributing to fulfilling the area of means of achieving the objectives and ecological contents, establishing a transfer of knowledge. The major contribution of literary texts for children stands in the fact that it makes the cognition of nature's intrinsic value presented in scientific texts, more accessible, favouring the living and creation of positive feelings and conducts towards nature. Animals' interests and aesthetic proprieties that offer their moral value are described in a fine and crafty manner by the authors of literary writings. In other words, the complementarity of literary texts and scientific texts is highlighted by the reflection of the philosophical ideology and political ideology of the school books' and curricular materials' editors (Caciuc, V., 2011, pp. 221-227).

The three stages of the experiment have resulted into introducing during the classes of Environment Knowledge, Arts and Practical Abilities of some of the ecological ethics elements mentioned above in order to help reach the objectives of the ecological education and to overcome the purely

intellectualistic manner of approaching the problem of the environment and of the relationships between man and nature.

So in the pre-experimental phase, during the Environmental Knowledge classes, the children have learnt the main forms of relief with their own vegetation and fauna, while in Arts they have painted different landscapes specific for each area. During Practical Abilities, they had to attend a class called “The trees in autumn” where with the help of the dry leaves and plants the children have decorated a tree which was placed in an autumn scenery. Even if they were merely at the beginning of the experiment, during the debates the children have shown their total interest for protecting nature either so as to have a healthier environment or just to enjoy the beauties of nature. During the experiment the pupils have learnt about the structure of a plant and also about the role and the importance of each part of plant, they have learnt also about different types of plants, about the forest and its role in man’s life, and also they learn about different ways to protect nature and what a plant needs in order to survive. During this period, they have done some experiments themselves with the springing of wheat and corn and the pupils have had to observe the evolution of the new plants. They were questioned about what they have observed and learnt during this experiment. What was amazing was the fact that almost 80% of the pupils have said that the new plants are similar to some beings that one must respect, take care of and must offer the proper means for wellbeing. They have all answer to the question regarding their plans concerning the plants if they grow bigger and the pupils do not have a garden where to plant them. Another task for their portfolio was to create a poster entitled “The Forest, the Green Gold of the Planet” where children had to present their attitude towards the preservation of nature by using as an argument the aesthetic value of nature or its property to protect man’s health by preserving the quality of the air (the Ozone) or even its therapeutic functions. During their Practical Skills classes, they have had to make up the following portfolio: to create a fruit tree in the autumn with the help of dry leaves and other materials, a girl made up and embellished with dry leaves of different shapes, sizes and colours, an orchard in the autumn with the help of the collage technique, autumnal fruits (the apple and the pear) by mean of the technique to stick wrinkled paper, the pot of flowers in the autumn and dead nature by means of the same technique. During Arts classes they have had to paint: a carpet of leaves in the autumn, autumnal sceneries, the beauty of nature by using hues and tones, main and secondary colours, warm and cold colours. The post-experimental period coincided with the period for evaluating the portfolios created for the three disciplines and also with the final tests which were evaluating the knowledge gathered and the attitudes concerning the protection of nature.

Results and Discussions

While analyzing the results of the pupils’ activity, we have taken into consideration a series of criteria, among which: the scientific fairness, the use of the aesthetic properties of the nature’s elements, the conjunction between the

colours and the shapes, the correct use of the materials and of the working techniques, the pupils' creativity, etc.

Therefore, if the result for the first home works that made up the portfolios, are not quite encouraging (8.57% have received an A mark, 74.29% a B mark and 17.14% a D), among the week spots identified were: the scientific incorrectness, the negligent way of elaborating the papers and the fact that some of the papers were unfinished. On what concerns the following home works, the results were satisfying: the posters use fully the aesthetic property of the forest and they have promoted a protective attitude – 17.14% contained aesthetic aspects alongside messages that disapprove the destructive actions upon nature and that encourage the preservation of nature; 77.14% pinpoint to the aesthetic value by presenting sceneries from different arias and seasons; and 5.72% have not delivered any home works; the paintings from the Practical Abilities classes have proven the pupils' interest towards the aesthetic properties of plants both by means of their selection of leaves and fruits of different shapes, colours and sizes and of the accuracy of their work, the good taste welding between different materials and also by using correctly the working techniques (over 80% of their works have met the criteria); in Arts classes, the pupils have valued the aesthetic properties of plants by combining with good taste different categories of colours, hues and tones, by means of the accuracy in elaborating their works, etc, and they have created beautiful sceneries that arise the admiration even if they were elaborated in a childish way (85% of the works have met the criteria).

Taking into consideration the results obtained during the analysis of the pupils activities we can consider that our hypothesis proved to be right and therefore in education there must be an interdependence between knowledge, believes, attitudes and behaviour. In building up the moral-ecological conscience and behaviour of children of a small age up until the pre-school age, it is necessary to follow up all of these steps that will be reflected in an adequate behaviour from the part of children in their life and social activities, in their relationships with others and also with nature. This last one will be illustrated by showing a certain attachment towards plants and animals, towards everything which makes up nature. The dominance of the report between internal and external in the building up and the development of the ecological attitude are reversely proportional with the age. This means that if the child is smaller of age, than the social dominance will be higher because of the fact that the child observes and imitates the facts he sees around him. Later on he will be able to understand the importance of these deeds. Only by means of action will the ecological knowledge be transformed into ecological convictions. At this age, firstly the pupil explores the attitude and the behaviour of the people (adults) towards nature and only then he will focus upon the actions of other children (that have the same age as he does) and of his own, by analyzing the negative and the positive learning experiences, both his own and of others (Caciuc, V., 2013, p. 122 – 127). This is why I propose a broader openness towards ecological ethics which might bring back the moral values and virtues, the return to their abstract meaning and to the concrete reality they represent. For “in the

current context, when the need for morality is a priority, building an educational support which finds its essence in depth ethics is we believe welcome” (Jeder, D., 2006, p. 220). It is therefore imperative that the initial formation of the future teachers should emphasize the formation of an ecological attitude in order to manage a significant change in the formation of young characters, it is of utmost importance to focus on the initial and continued formation of teachers, from the perspective of ecological ethics and education, so that to prevent cases where the teachers are supposed to plead a cause which contradicts their own beliefs. Putting together a set of values able to lend nature and its components an axiological character cannot be achieved without the implementation of ecological ethics elements in the general, specialized and psycho pedagogical culture of the teaching staff. It is the only way for the educators to form personalities prone to granting respect and attention to nature, to take cautious decisions, useful not just for the present generations, but also the future ones.

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