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Reflections on the Ways to Build up Responsibility towards Nature in Primary School

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Abstract

Responsibility towards nature is a character trait that must be formed and developed from a young age. Children must learn how to fight against the complexity of problems, how to use interdisciplinary approaches by taking into consideration links with other problems, and to be able to evaluate facts and situations which lead to the deterioration of the environment. Alongside infusing the messages of environmental ethics, the use of pupil centered educational strategies represents an efficient way to train the children from the ecological point of view. Education cannot succeed in building up the ecological conscience and the ethic competences of the young generation without being accompanied by a new ethics – the ecological ethics – based on the man's respect towards nature, without using an adequate educational strategy and some dilemmas that include facts or situations which result in deteriorating the environment. This study aims to conduct a thorough analysis of the theoretical and practical ways to build up responsibility towards nature in the primary school.

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1. Introduction

The intelligent way of achieving ecological education leads most of the times to discrepancies between the ways of implementing this new education. The dissemblance generated in the relationships between man and nature are

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caused by knowing the ecological norms and values without assimilating and using them in daily behaviours, by not taking responsibility towards the actions of destroying nature, by the lack of respect towards it. In other words, every man knows that he should protect nature, but no man does it out of his own beliefs. Starting from these remarks, the present paper will emphasize the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach between ecological ethics and ecological education, so as to achieve a quality education.

2. Ethical Premises

The contemporary context of the problematic of the environment has imposed a reconsideration of the values and attitudes towards nature which led to the appearance and development of different currents of opinions and attitudes, one more adequate, complex or practicable than the other. The fact that the classical ethics which is mostly preoccupied with the human interests and the fulfilling of their purposes, did not manage to face the effects of the global technology and industrialization of the human society, led to a change in the ethical system and to a reconsideration of the moral attitude of man towards nature. This is why some of the nature centered ethics extend the sphere of the human morality without contesting its value in itself, but rather highlighting nature's and its elements' value. The two strong currents that have developed – the shallow ecological ethics which is represented by P. Singer, the initiator of the “free animals” theory (Singer, 1979) and by T. Regan who has created the theory concerning animal rights (Regan, 2004), and deep ecology represented by P. Taylor who extends the sphere of morality even upon plants by means of his biocentric concept (Taylor, 2011) and by J. B. Callicott who takes into consideration nature as a whole, with all its human, non-human and non-living beings, a biotic community which deserves moral consideration (Callicott, 1989) – have developed gradually towards offering moral consideration and inherent value to nature as a whole and to its separate components.

Even though they have a strong influence over the reconsideration of the humans' attitude towards nature, it is also known that these theories have certain limits. So, even if they fight from different positions in order to reach the same goals – for Singer, we are talking about the impartial use of the interests in order to increase utility and the happiness in the world, while for Regan we are dealing with not taking into consideration only the interests in order to increase the world's utility – the negative aspect is the fact that they allow the use and exploitation of some animal species in order to reach human goals, even if they are imposing to take into consideration the assuring and respecting of these non-human beings' wellbeing, and the fact that they have limited themselves at giving moral consideration only to sensitive living beings or to beings that have a purpose in life. On the one hand it is easy to understand and accept this limitation since these two theoretical concepts have been so revolutionary at their times for the field of ecological ethics and have succeeded to pass over the barriers of some concepts pertaining to the traditional ethics which were quite old and conservatory. Even in what concerns the deeper movement of ethical ecology, there are some limitations. Even though they manage to extend the sphere of morality over the whole ecosystem of the planet by taking into account not only the living beings, as biocentrism does, but also the non-living ones, even the whole ecosphere, as holism and eco-centrism do, by supporting their value in itself, we can still reproach them the constraint of liberty to act and even some radical ideas such as the number of people that can be sustained and tolerated by planet Earth because all the other components of the ecosystem deserve respect and moral consideration also. Even if men should show respect and responsibility towards nature, in the modern society there is a dissemblance so profound in the relationship between man and nature that in order to reach equilibrium in this relationship, it is needed an analysis of the causes and sources which have led to this context.

It is clear that the role of the ecological ethics in the contemporary world is to establish new directions, new landmarks on what concerns the relationship between man and nature. The ecological ethics must not be perceived as a concept that forbids the use of nature, but rather thinks at using it with care and respect. It must be present in all the political and economical decisions taken so as to think at the impact these will have over the environment. But here is where a problem emerges: from the grounds of which concept of ecological ethics should one make a decision? If we are to follow a man centered ethics, then only men will have an advantage, only their needs and interests will matter in favour of the non-human beings. The present day ecological crisis was the result of just such thinking. If man was to revise his thoughts upon his place in the world by turning himself from the master into the protector of nature, then in what degree will the adults (the moral agents) change their opinion about their own interests and will give up at them in favour of nature? On what degree and base will people take care of the

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