

## MOULDING ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS IN SCHOOL

### FORMAREA CONȘTIINȚEI ECOLOGICE ÎN ȘCOALĂ

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**Abstract:** Ecological education is a form of education, which, through a system of specific activities, ensures the moulding of ecological awareness. Moulding ecological awareness in school has two main components: a cognitive one and an affective one. There have to be a good cooperation between topics in school so that each of them aids in moulding ecological awareness in children. Bringing man to the verge of respecting nature and landscape values can be done through instruction and education. Ecological education aims at guiding the student, i.e. the future citizen, to a more objective point of view over reality (whose fundament is the relationship between man – men – environment), to enhance him to participate, to become aware of the future, of the fact that the life of future generations and its quality largely depend on his options. At present, it is necessary to study ecology at school, with a view to teach the young ones – anybody else, in its debut stage – on why and how to protect nature. It is necessary that ecological education be an important part of school education and instruction.

**Rezumat:** Educația ecologică este o formă a educației care, printr-un sistem de acțiuni specifice, asigură formarea unei conștiințe ecologice. Formarea conștiinței ecologice în școală are pe lângă componenta cognitivă și una formativă, afectivă. Trebuie să existe o bună colaborare între discipline, încât fiecare dintre ele să aibă un aport la formarea ecologică a copiilor. Aducerea omului în situația de a respecta valorile naturii și ale peisajului în care trăiește se face prin instruire și educație. Educația ecologică își propune să conducă pe elev, deci pe viitorul cetățean, spre formarea unui punct de vedere mai obiectiv asupra realității (al cărei fundament este relația om-oameni-mediu), să-l incite la participare, să devină conștient de viitor, de faptul că viața generațiilor viitoare, calitatea ei, depind într-o mare măsură și de opțiunile sale. În prezent, se impune ca o necesitate studierea educației ecologice în școală, educație care își propune să învețe pe cei tineri – pe toți oamenii de altfel, în faza ei de debut - de ce și cum trebuie protejată natura. Este necesar ca educația ecologică să fie un pivot important al educației și instrucției școlare.

**Key words:** ecological education, ecological awareness, and ecological behaviour  
**Cuvinte cheie:** educație ecologică, conștiință ecologică, comportament ecologic

#### INTRODUCTION

Ecological awareness is that segment of the general human conscience directed towards the world of the bios (of the nature). The ideal of ecological awareness or the so-called “biotic democracy” has its roots in a deep knowledge of the role of each species on the Earth and excludes any narrow human conception and practice according to which living organisms are either useful or damaging. Biotic democracy admits that each living organism has a role within the living world. This conception rises, from an affective prospective, each species to a priceless rank within living organisms; the disappearance of one of them makes the planet Earth poorer.

Ecological education is that form of education that through a system of specific activities ensures the moulding of ecological awareness. Ecological education in school should have a system of objectives including:

- the transfer of knowledge (moulding and fundamenting ecological knowledge or culture);
- moulding psychic structures such as habits, skills, and abilities (components of an ecological behaviour particularly those concerning natural and environmental protection);
- moulding and developing some value systems, some emotional commitments, and moral and aesthetic relationships, as well as some visions, understandings, or theoretical conceptions.

The system of ecological knowledge accumulates gradually and constitutes the necessary premise for the students to understand the fact that the environment, as well as the nature of the relationships between man and nature and man and environment, is vital both for the individual and for the entire humankind. Accumulating knowledge, necessary in fact still has a too large share in ecological education. We need to intensify ecological education in the sense of focussing on issues and values, and on involving in a larger measure of all affective, moral, and aesthetic values (Fodor, 1996).

Adopting a "style of life" is the result of one's personal options. Information and technical data play an indisputable role but one should also involve the affective component to reach the goals. Adopting a forceful position from the teacher will result in a docile acceptance from the student, but this acceptance will lack personal motivation. The student needs a relaxed environment in which to be able to define his own personality, his own desires, to develop a value hierarchy, a climate that allow him to communicate, to have the initiative, and to have the courage to state his own opinions.

The teacher has to develop a certain type of climate in the class. He should ensure the necessary conditions for the students to feel comfortable, relaxed, and therefore have a cooperative attitude.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The logical scheme of approaching ecological education has the following steps:

- Perceiving and observing nature. This first step can be achieved by outings, study trips, and expeditions. Under the teacher's guidance, students perceive visually, orally, etc. everything surrounding them. This is the first step of direct contact and is the premise for the following steps.
- Defining feelings acquired during the perception of the environment. In this stage, the teacher should make comments on these aspects and underline our belonging to the natural life systems and on the communion that should exist between our environment and us.
- Getting involved personally. Through talks, and because of defining the place and role in space and time of each of us we can point out ways of individual involvement, of getting useful.
- Committing him. This step is essential in the moulding of proper behavioural structures. Where there is involvement there has to be responsibility. As we can see, the level of information is low. Emphasis should be laid on sensorial perception, on sensation analysis, on grouping within natural life systems, on defining the personal role, i.e. on individual involvement and on committing.
- Developing a strategy for action. This step is the passage to concrete facts. The fact that as teachers we organise activities together with our students is not enough. What would matter is to allow students to learn how to do it. Only then ecological education would be full, and there would be no concern for our future.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to mould ecological awareness, teachers can organise all kind of activities in school as alternate activities. Thus, at primary school level, we can organise activities aiming at:

- getting the students sensible (through readings: “Gândăcelul” by Elena Farago, “Legendele faunei”, “Legendele florei”, “Scrisoare din Delta Dunării” by Mihai Platon, “Mărinimie” by Emil Gârleanu”, etc.);
- getting the students to identify (rocks, plants, animals, etc.);
- getting the students perceive (noise, colours, etc.);
- getting the students to observe freely or not;
- getting the students to explore the environment in the area;
- getting the students to measure (temperature, nebulosity, wind speed, etc.);
- getting the students informed;
- making the students document;
- making the students see documentary films („Migrația păsărilor”);
- making the students to collect (leaves, shells, branches, thatch, catkins, etc.);
- making the students landscape parks and green areas;
- making the students take care of animals (met during trips, walks, etc.);
- making the students clean the classroom, the school and its surroundings, etc.

Here is an example of activity for the entire class: the thread-ball game. The goal of the game is to make up a food chain and to make them aware of the necessity for maintaining it. The students wear a tag with the name of an element of the food chain (the tags will be attached on their breasts with a safety pin or around their necks).

The game starts with solar energy (the teacher). He has a thread-ball in his hand. He holds the end of the thread and throws the ball to another element (grass, algae, and leaves). The element chose (i.e. the child) chooses an animal that could eat him (snake, deer, mouse, etc.) and throws him the ball, still holding the thread.

The next student throws the ball to a meat-eater hawk, fox, frog, etc.), still holding the thread. When the ball gets in the hands of a predator that cannot be eaten by another, he dies and the ball is given to the ants and bacteria that attack corpses and transfers the energy of the animal into the soil, and the ball gets back to the Sun thus marking the beginning of a new life cycle.

The students are confronted with a true network while the ball gets from one hand to another. The students are asked to destroy part of the network by a so-called catastrophe to see how the food chain is affected and to demonstrate the interdependence between the elements of the food chain.

Games are also important in the moulding of ecological awareness in secondary school and in high school. Games are pleasant, funny activities that enhance students' creativeness and optimism as complementary to work and contributing to moulding skills.

Types of games: carnival, contest (building, linguistic, drawing, sense development), drama, mime, dressing up, enigma, riddles, skills, outings, perspicacity, logics, cleverness, scientific, humour, and checking up.

## CONCLUSIONS

School should get more involved in ecological education. It should help the students to get aware of the global existence of the environment, to get to the essence of natural environment evolution and to all the issues resulting from it.

Accumulations at an early school age should not be only quantitative, but they should also lead the students to committing by playing different roles and by assuming different responsibilities. At any educational level, teachers should focus on developing affective skills and then on cognitive ones. Information should be properly selected so that they allow the students more chances to adapt and to have a proper, positive behaviour towards the environment.

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