

Now or Never – With Environmental Education for the Sustainable Development

Introduction

Nowadays more and more people show us certain solutions to realize sustainable development. First of all we should change our point of view; however, to do so, is the most difficult thing in the world. Yet we have a real chance to reach this among the generation growing up. Achieving the necessary transformation within society, which would show humankind being at crossroads the way leading to sustainable development, is a challenge waiting for public education. It is the competence of the teacher to form the attitude and whole personality of a would-be adult in a way that he/she would want to be a part of sustainable society, due to his/her values.

It is very sad that despite every development, the ecological footprint keeps enlarging. It is an even more serious problem, regarding the fact that our humankind is not in a sustainable phase any more. This statement, however, has hopelessly little trace in our everyday life. It seems that we are in need of one more decade to be able to see clearly all the consequences of overshooting, not to mention that two more decades, which we need in order to be able to make overshooting generally accepted as a concrete fact. In the past few decades, time has been consumed by useless debates, and actions that reacted well-meaningly to the challenge, though none of them was really committed to the issue. We have no other 30 years to be wasted; consequently a lot of things should be changed in order to avoid collapse in our century.

The Pedagogy of Sustainability

According to its aim, the pedagogy of sustainability is a learning process that continues throughout life, which creates citizens who are well-informed, active, have a creative, problem-solving way of thinking, who are familiar with the science of environment and nature, with society, law and economy and who commit themselves to taking either individual or common measurements. These measurements can ensure a healthy environment and an effective economy for the future.

Many teachers help society in achieving the sustainable level. They make individuals, communities, establishments and governments aware of the importance of sustainability. In the forecoming decades, this pedagogy can serve as a means to build a stronger relationship between the world of work and classrooms, and between schools and society.

Environmental education has become widely known and accepted, it is present at every level of the educational system: from kindergarden to PhD formation. Nevertheless, the higher the level is, the less wide the topic is.

Hungarian Practice

The Hungarian National Syllabus of Education contains a chapter titled ‘common requirements between fields of cultures’ which is in accordance with the Tbilisi document. It claims environmental education to be an interdisciplinary subject, it fixes multi disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity, it puts an emphasis on the elements of maintenance of living nature, of the responsibility of citizens and of helping to live an environment-conscious life. The educational framework published in 2000 is a document that regulates the content of primary and secondary education, and as such, it follows and –in some parts- makes further completions concerning the concepts used in the National Syllabus. The frameworks integrate the content and requirements of environmental education into the separated subjects, significantly enlarging the earlier connections –that were seen only in case of science subjects - with technical and sociological fields. It is within this document where the term „sustainable development” appears for the first time, concerning the documents that regulate the content of Hungarian education.

In order to help the realization of environmental education with regard to the framework, an aid has been published. This helps the teachers in the following way: it provides not only a detailed description concerning the environmental content of the separated subjects from the 1st to the 12th grades, but it also describes the methodology and learning methods of these, and deals with the possibilities of environmental education inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, it relates all these to assessment and quality insurance. Finally, it gives an overview concerning the environmental education in case of children from different national and ethnic minorities, children with different disabilities and children with significant talent.

The Hungarian National Strategy of Environmental Education (NSEE) deals with the following areas in details. Firstly, the role and tasks of citizens, communities, churches, press, adult education, work, leisure, traditions, arts and the government regarding environmental education. Secondly, it declares that our efforts should be increased so that the different educational communities –inside and outside school- could prepare for their tasks based on a comprehensive planning. The NSEE has both an epoch-making and an international significance, due to the fact that it characterises environmental education as a process that includes the whole society, and institutional education is only a part of it.

Problems and Solutions

Hungarian researches prove it that among students and teachers there is an extreme uncertainty about environment and environment protection. Knowledge and attitude are not consistent with each other, the cognitive system –related to environment- of the Hungarian teachers is made inadequate due to several misconceptions. However, the regulation of environmental education within the syllabus can be called exemplary. It offers a wide range of possibilities in order to realize environmental education and its values are also properly highlighted. In spite of all this, environmental education faces a large number of problems in Hungary.

I would like to summarize these below in 8 points, and I would also like to make suggestions on how to solve them.

1. The conservatives of the educational system. This is the one thing which is the most difficult to be changed, and we also need to be the most careful in case of this, as in well-functioning educational systems it is conservatism that ensures the maintenance of values. So from all the above mention 8 points, the other 7 should be targeted more concretely, paying a lot of attention on not to destroy the elements of the system that are functioning well.
2. The basic education of teachers is not adequate. We need compulsory courses in environmental education within teacher training. At least a half-year long course should be introduced, which would provide both theoretic and practical education, and which would be connected to the given major of a teacher.
3. The extra work of teachers is not properly financed. Extra money should be given for extra work. The leadership of a school should receive that amount of money with the help of which they would be able to recompensate the teachers doing extra work.
4. The lack of proper pedagogical aid. We need aids that could be used in everyday education. We are in need of creating such pedagogical aids that pay enough attention to the characteristics of a Hungarian school (45 minutes long lessons, frontal classwork, teacher - as the absolute dominant person), provide us with the possibilities of realizing environmental education, and show how to gradually step out from these frames.
5. The lack of pedagogical research. We need researches that are close to practice, and which can properly describe the everyday practice of environmental education. Meanwhile, based on this description they should provide us with suggestions on how to take further steps. These suggesstions should be easy to introduce.
6. The lack of scientifically well-based improvements. We need improvements based on schools. There should be such improvements in which government and civil establishments related to environmental education co-operate with schools. This co-operation would mean financial resources, new ideas and consultation, which could help the developmental work of schools.
7. The lack of adequate and accredited further studies. We need courses that can be used in everyday practice. Each accredited course should contain such compulsory elements (observing lessons, exam teaching) that guarantee the effect of the course on the practical work of the students.
8. The lack of support concerning the non-accredited further studies. We need support beyond accreditation. There should be support for those shorter, more flexible courses (lectures, consultation, demonstration teaching) that are currently not included in the accreditation system.