

Values, Training and the Environment

One of the most common problems encountered in the environmental education process is the emergence of ideological conflicts among participating parties with different beliefs and values about the 'nature vs. humans' relationship.

How does one train individuals and organisations to adequately recognise, understand and act upon environmental problems, while being acutely aware of the ideological implications of one's every word and action? Should trainers separate their personal system of values from the environmental education process? Can they? An attempt will be made here to investigate these questions in further depth.

Values are central to both the theory of environmental education (EE) and the practicalities of the training process needed to achieve it. This stems from the specific nature of the subject, as our societies' perceptions of the causes and solutions of environmental problems have traditionally been deeply divided along ideological lines.

Moreover, the training process in itself reflects and embodies the values of society; indeed, according to Halstead, 'it owes its existence to the fact that society values education and seeks to exert influence on the pattern of its own future development through education'. Hence, every aspect of training—from group dynamics to seating arrangements—necessarily reflects a certain ideology, i.e. 'a world view or system of concepts, beliefs and values'.

by Stefan Bužarovski



Whereas the larger-scale links between training and values have been extensively discussed and analysed, relatively little attention has been paid to the reflection of such interactions at a lower level, within EE itself. As a result, the influence of different value systems on the educational process frequently remains unexplored and/or tacitly accepted, forcing trainers to rely on their 'moral instinct' to make decisions about the aims and structure of each activity. However, this ad-hoc approach may create serious difficulties: not only does it decrease the effectiveness of the exercises in question—considering that the internalised ideas and aims of the trainer might diverge from those of the trainees - but it can also lead to serious conflicts in the execution phase (see Atfield and Dell, 1996).

The author of this article has personally experienced such an event, when a failure to clarify each others' ideological beliefs in the planning stage brought severe conceptual differences and an eventual all-out "war" when the activity was already underway. Namely, the prep team failed to recognise that not only the subject (e.g. air

pollution, energy use or deforestation) but also the form (e.g. open forum, small group discussions, strictly controlled plenary debates) of the activity implies a certain interpretation of environmental ideology on behalf of the organisers, which in turn can influence the outcome of the entire activity in an undesirable way. Thus, when designing the EE exercises planned, the members of the prep team were guided by completely opposing understandings of the social causes of, and solutions to, environmental problems. The major ideological discrepancies within the group surfaced too late - only in the course of the activity—when a number of individuals realised that some of the EE methods used were undemocratic and unfair towards minority groups. However, because others thought that such considerations were not directly relevant to EE - which they saw mostly as a technical concept - the entire educational process came to a screeching halt: instead of serving its intended objectives, the activity turned into a narrow value-based debate led by a few aggressive individuals. Clearly, to prevent such disasters, every trainer has to analyse the context in which EE is carried out, and design his/her methodology accordingly.

So, how would the role of the trainer in an EE seminar of 'The Association of the Young Technocentrists' differ from the one organised, say, by the 'Gaia Direct Action Movement'? Perhaps the first question to be asked is: does this particular activity aim to help the trainees fit into society as it is, or does it have a mission to develop young people who will seek to 'improve' society? The application of its answer to environmental education can lead to three discrete approaches, widely recognised in education theory: Clearly, it is very difficult to separate ideologies and values from EE, because of the controversial nature of the subject, as well as its inherent ideological link with the wider approaches in education. Clearly, it is very difficult to separate ideologies and values from EE, because of the controversial

Table 1: Classification of environmental education relative to its social objective (based on Fien, 1993):

Education about the environment: The most common form of EE, which simply emphasises knowledge about natural systems, processes and their management. Is this approach free of ideology, because its methods merely aim to bring out 'objective facts' to the surface? Many would disagree: there is an inherent danger that any uncritical representation of the combination of technical measures and behavioural changes - needed to respond to the global environmental crisis - will implicitly carry an ideological aura with it, considering the lack of a broad consensus about these issues.

Education through the environment: The trainees' experiences in the environment can also be used as a medium for education. Such a learner-centred approach adds 'reality, relevance and practical experience to the education process, providing trainees with an opportunity to gain an appreciation of the environment through direct contact with it'. The approach may foster a value-based environmental concern if its aim is to 'captivate the participants with the importance and fragility of ecosystems and landscapes, or if they become immersed in an ideological conflict over an environmental issue'.

Education for the environment: Unlike the previous two, this form of EE has an overt agenda of values education and social change. It aims to engage trainees 'in the exploration and resolution of environmental problems, promoting lifestyles that are compatible with the sustainable and equitable use of resources'. Building on education about and through the environment alike, it can help to develop 'an informed concern for the environment, a sensitive environmental ethic, and the necessary skills to participate in environmental protection and improvement'.

Some analysts argue that EE can be realised effectively only when a programme's open intention is education for the environment: training about and through the environment are valuable only as far as they can be used to provide skills and knowledge to support the formative intentions of education for the environment.

In addition to knowing what the aim of EE is, a trainer would also need to develop a coherent set of values and beliefs to guide educational decisions and explain their consequences. In other words, one also needs to know how one's approach relates to the major general orientations of pedagogy, relevant to EE:

Table 2: A categorisation of educational ideologies (based on Fien, 1993)

Perspective	Vocational/neo-classical	Liberal/progressive	Socially critical
Nature of knowledge	Objective: 'a public matter; skills and information which have their meaning and significance in occupational or disciplinary contexts; special emphasis on technical/rational/managerial interests of knowledge for control '.	Subjective: 'a private or individual matter; attitudes and living skills which have meaning and significance in the individual's life context and the culture; special concern for the practical/expressive/cultural interests of knowledge for communication, deliberation and refinement'.	Dialectical: 'an interplay of subjective views of the world and their historical and cultural framework. Knowledge is a social construct; therefore it only has meaning in actions or projects whose significance is in specific contexts. Emphasis on the role of knowledge in social action'.
Learning theory	Behaviourism; 'transmission' theories of learning	Constructivist-interactionist; 'the learner builds cognitive structures through interaction'	Social constructivist-interactionist; 'the learner reconstructs a social reality through historical and political processes'




This classification is insufficient if used in isolation, because it fails to address our societies' paradigmatic values and beliefs about the environment. Perhaps the following matrix can be used to provide an overview of the environmental ideologies taken up by the variety of organisations operating under the European youth sky:

Table 3: A synthetic map of environmental ideologies (based on Fien, 1993)

Technocentrism		Ecocentrism	
Believes that 'the existing structure of political power should be retained, but with a growing institutional responsiveness and accountability'		Demands that 'power be redistributed towards a decentralised economy with a greater emphasis on informal economic and social transactions and participatory justice'	
'Brown' (Cornucopian)	'Light Green' (Accommodationalist/Managerialist)	'Red Green' (Human welfare environmentalism)	'Dark Green' (Gaianist/bolistic)
"Technological optimism; all economic growth is good; suspicion of attempts to widen participation in social and environmental appraisal and policy review'.	'Economic growth and resource exploitation can continue, provided that the appropriate economic, legal and institutional measures are undertaken (i.e. taxes, fees, compensation)'	'Faith in the rights of nature; ecological laws should dictate human morality'.	'Faith in the co-operative capabilities of societies to establish self-reliant communities based on sustainable resource use and integration of work and leisure'
		'Lack of faith in modern large-scale technology; rejection of materialism for its own sake; belief in the intrinsic value of nature for defining and sustaining humanity'; 'small is beautiful'	

Whereas this is by no means a precise and comprehensive overview of all the available alternatives, it nevertheless can provide a useful guidance frame when combined with some of the aforementioned ideas:

Table 4: A combination of educational and environmental ideologies with different approaches to EE (according to Fien, 1993)

Environmental ideology		Educational ideology		
		Vocational/neo-classical	Liberal/progressive	Socially critical
Technocentric  Ecocentric	Cornucopian	Conservative education <i>about the</i> environment		
	Managerialist		Liberal education <i>about</i> the environment	
	Red Green		Liberal education <i>through</i> the environment	Critical education <i>for</i> the environment
	Gaianist		Liberal education <i>for</i> the environment	

→ **Major ideological direction of 'less restrictive definitions and analyses' of education about, through and for the environment (according to Fien, 1993)**

nature of the subject, as well as its inherent ideological link with the wider approaches in education itself. How does a trainer define his/her role in the EE process, considering this issue?

For a start, it might be useful to pay greater attention to the diversity of values in the ever-changing organisations that one serves, as well as their legitimate expectations. Furthermore, the aims and structure of each activity should be scrutinised carefully, to determine what values are embedded in it and to reflect on their justifiability and coherence. Because the statements that may emerge in the end may be ambiguous, provisional and less than totally clear (see McLaughlin, 1994) one may find it useful to compare and locate them in the above matrices. A successful outcome implies that the nature and the amount of ideology used will be balanced with both the aims of the organisation and the most effective educational approach in the given context.

References

1. Attfield, R. and Dell, K. J. (1996). Values, conflict and the environment. Aldershot: Avebury. This book may be useful for those wishing to gain deeper insight into the importance of ideology

and values in the emergence and resolution of environmental conflicts.

2. Fien, J. (1993). Education for the Environment: Critical Curriculum Theorising and Environmental Education. Geelong: Deakin University. A systematic overview—and analysis—of the generic links between environmental issues, ideology and education.

3. Halstead, J. M. (1996). "Values and Values Education in Schools". In Halstead, J.M. and Taylor, M.J. (eds.) Values in Education and Education in Values. London: The Falmer Press. This particular chapter - part of a book on a similar topic - examines the reflection of various value systems upon the educational process.

4. McLaughlin (1994), "Values, Coherence, and the School", Cambridge Journal of Education, 24, 3, pp 253-70. Although this article is more relevant to those working in a more traditional educational environment, it does contain some important conclusions and guidelines pertinent to the application of ideology in education.

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