

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF EDUCATION FOR HEALTH

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**Abstract:** *Author refers to basic problems and thematic areas regarding the environmental and ecological education in context with the education for health with a special focus on transformation of the curriculum of pregradual preparation of undergraduate primary school teachers . The enlistment of the environmental education among cross-curricular themes pertaining to current framework of educative programmes represents a significant step forward especially concerning their understanding. The basic competence/capability of an individual is to become a cultivated guardian of the health and the environment. Such a competence - associated with students orientation in interrelated, spontaneously existing, causal relationships in the environment - obviously influences the quality of care for the environment and the health respectively.*

**Keywords:** *health, healthy life style, quality of life, care for the health, care for the environment, the attitudes, cross-curricular theme, environmental education, education for health, competence.*

Every unfavourable change of environment limits quality of life. This fact is an important commitment to care for the environment as an integral part of the ecological/environmental education. A variety of research works of czech and foreign authors (e.g. BUBELINIOVÁ, HAVLÍNOVÁ, LIBA, WIEGEROVÁ, YOUNG, WILIAMS) as well as official documents (e.g. WHO, the advisory board of the czech government for health and environment, National health institute, Action plan for the health and the environment of Czech Republic /NEHAP/) are devoted to the link connecting the health and process of health support and sustainable development.

The aim of our research project was to cast light upon the formation of the relation to the environment with a special focus on the care for the health. There has recently been a significant shift from empirical to ecological paradigm and concomitant change of attitude from positive to socially critical one. The education has thus become more or less friendly to the environment, comprising attitudes, values and positive behaviour (HUCKLE, STERLING 1996, PALMER 2001). The questions of the value of the health and potential threat of health disasters serve as special motivating means for the formation of the above noted educational process.

## **Instrumental and explanatory function of environmental education**

The relationship of man and the nature is presented as „a struggle of biosphere and technosphere“, thus the need to renew the balance between man and the nature based on the principle of positive feedback is obvious (LIBA, 2005, s. 63). The comprehension aimed at understanding of harmony of natural events, their links and the existence of causal, spontaneously occurring relationships in the environment and subsequent disturbance of such a harmony induced by humans is inextricably bound to the above noted educational process.

Regarding the ecological/environmental education, the critical point represents understanding and description of relations and connections among the components of the environment, especially the conditionality of the three basic spheres: biosphere, abiosphere and antroposphere, the relationships of human activities and their products and the nature, including recognition of unwanted consequences of human activities leading to devastation and endangering natural quality of water, air, soil, fauna, flora and subsequent health hazard, finally threatening the existence of life on the Earth (HORKÁ 1994, s. 36).

The environmental education is characterized by a new way of critical thinking reflecting global and partial dimension of dysharmony- human culture versus the nature. It originates from the appreciation of high value and irreplaceability of the nature as well as the acknowledgement of principal human dependence on biosphere. The facts above are considered to be determinants for understanding of necessity to change the life style and behaviour as well as the attitudes and value preferences etc.. The newly formed principles of human culture are featured accordingly: value priority of the nature for human life, human dependence on the nature and requirement for ecologisation of spiritual and material culture. Ecological/environmental education clearly tends to overcome primitive egocentric and self-centred opinions and value preferences and contributes to a newly formed human integration, presenting man as a part of the nature and culture. It also attempts to reverse current way of exploitation and damage to the nature, in other words to halt antropocentric ideation submitted to ecological discipline and ethical sensation.

Ecological / environmental education serves as a tool to assure not only the sustainability (for comparison HORKÁ, 2001) but also the health. Such a function is referred as instrumental.

In regard to the explanatory function of the environmental education, including analysis, explanation and clarification, such a function comprises:

- Detection of causes and consequences of destruction and jeopardy of ecosystems, different ways of air, water and soil pollution.
- Orientation in natural resources, principles of nature protection, human influence on the environment, limits of the environment.
- Search for the measures protecting the environment and their promotion, limitation of devastation and consolidation of ecological situation, treatment of natural resources.
- Respect for life in all forms and altruism in sense of evaluation the mutual

cohesion of the world, decisions and behaviour favouring ecological ethics and principles of sustainability.

We introduce basic strategy in order to reach positive changes of the environment, tools to assure sustainability of the human world which is needed for self-preservation. At that point we find framework for education for health and environmental education.

The main task of curriculum of education for the health regarding the environmental issues is to contribute to understanding that there are not only relationships: living things and environment but also the interaction among the living things themselves. There are also questions of the influence of the nature and social environment on man. Devastation of the environment is undoubtedly associated with the influence on human health (intoxication of soil, intoxication of water-poisoned fish meat, mental deprivation due to desolation caused by devastated landscape, poisons in the air which we breathe etc...)

The aim of the education for the health is to develop and cultivate the attitudes towards the health of an individual as well as the others, considering that such a value is irreplaceable preposition of adequate life. The individual should be aware of himself/herself and the environment and should behave as an integrated and responsible personality for the whole life. The care for the environment is considered to be a certain „overlap“ of the care for the health. As our recent studies have shown (HORKÁ, HROMÁDKA 2007, 2008), the pupils are often engaged in the environmental issues but the main reason of their interest is not the environment itself but the fears and worries about their own health.

**Environmental area** as a part of education for the health is focused in the below noted themes:

- analysis of the relationship of man and the environment,
- biological, economical, social, psychological determination of ecological problems, the influences of human activities on the nature,
- the influence of the environment (not only the natural one) on the health.

In agreement with the work of J. Šmajš (2001, s. 8–9), we accept the thesis addressing the need for another picture of the world as well as another education. The author provocatively defines a new geocentrism and the ideation respectful for the life. To approach such a goal, it is necessary to carry on a new structure of the content of education and pronounce positive effect on the formation of personality. The accent on lexical rationality, encyclopedism, technically oriented success and scientific progress support exploitative attitude of man to the nature and minimally cultivate emotional element of personality. A new structure of knowledge should regard rehabilitation of terrestrial nature, feeding human submission in accord with magnificent evolutionary creativity of the universe (2008, s. 55–59). J. Šmajš (2008, s. 55–59) challenges to biophilic orientation of education abandoning axiologically arrogant antropocentrism and additional mechanistic interpretation of facts and strenghtens the imprinting of life as the highest value.

## **Aspects concerning health in the environmental education**

The basic competence/capability of an individual (ŠVEC 2004, s. 29) is his ability to be a cultivated guardian of the health and the environment. The research works devoted to the topics of health support and ecological/environmental education (e. g. HAVLÍNOVÁ, HORKÁ, LIBA, WIEGEROVÁ) show that the level of ecological culture of a personality can influence, determine and stabilize 'immune system' and subsequently positive indicators of the health. The knowledge of existing interrelated causal, spontaneously occurring relationships in the environment influences the quality of care for the environment as well as care for the health. It also forms a basis necessary for individual ability to evaluate, to consider the risks and benefits and decide accordingly. Moreover, it also contributes to personal responsibility including consequences of behaviour in regard to the environment.

There are important thematic areas from the ecopedagogical point of view: Quality of the environment as an aspect of the health. Environment as a basic determinant of the health. Healthy environment as a target of the programme : Health for all. Ecosocial model of the health (for comparison Zdraví 21). The health as a central interest in the concept of sustainable development.

The following areas belong to domains of education for the health: health supporting way of living, exercise for health, environmental aspects of the health, analysis and search for the relations between man and the nature as well as the nature and the health, social aspects of the health, psychological aspects of the health, sexuality and health, care for personal health-hygiene, knowledge of the body, decrease of morbidity. (sr. WIEGEROVÁ 2005, s. 51)

## **Competence to support the health and to care for the environment in curriculum of czech school**

The enlistment of the environmental education among the cross-curricular topics of framework educational programmes signifies an important step forward especially regarding its perception. The competence of man supporting the health corresponding with the competences of man caring for the environment in the areas related to the below noted subjects:

- knowledge of the health as the most important value of life;
- knowledge of man as biological individual, dependent on particular phase of life, on the way of behaving, decision making, and the level of personal relationships and the quality of environment;
- basic knowledge about what is beneficial for health on contrary what is harmful and damaging to the health;
- taking advantage of acquired preventive measures for influencing the health in everyday life, strengthening the decision making and dealing in accord with the active support of the health every day;
- connecting the health and healthy human relationships based on ethical and moral values, with voluntary efforts;
- active personal contribution to the support of the health and its promotion including beneficial activities at school and in community.

One of the fundamental aims of basic education is to teach the pupils actively develop and protect physical, mental and social health and to be responsible for them. Regarding the key competences, the target is explicitly rationalized in scope of civil competence: the graduate of basic school comprises basic ecological context and environmental issues, respecting the demands on the quality of environment, makes decision in accord with support and protection of the health and the sustainable development of society. Occupational competence reflects the attitude to the results of human activity from the point of view reflecting protection of his own health and the health of the others, additionally incorporating the protection of the environment, cultural and social values. Communicative competence uses acquired communication skills necessary for the formation of interpersonal relationships as a basis for full-value co-existence and cooperation with others. Social and personal competence is described as the ability to form a positive self-perception based on the thoughtfulness and respect to others undoubtedly leading to strengthening of good interpersonal relations.

## **Teachers competence for education for the health reflecting environmental context**

In order to form concept of professional preparation of teachers is necessary to determine the structure of competence of a teacher and mediate knowledge about advisability and meaning of human behaviour and activities in the field of care for the environment. They are bound to specific methodology, immense pedagogical tact and suitable motivation and skills to connect affective targets with cognitive and psychomotoric ones. The teachers are supposed to be able to:

- to mediate the knowledge about advisability and significance of human behaviour and activities aimed at environmental issues
- to guide the pupils to make decisions considering healthy alternatives
- to clarify health risks (irrational nutrition, smoking, alcohol abuse)
- to select suitable and effective teaching procedures
- pedagogical tact
- to present the value of the nature in an attractive way
- to bring stimuli and experiences
- to make possible for students openly (without internal constraint and external influence) experience and comment on their own activity (care for flowers, dog, forest, fountain etc.)
- to be able to share emotionally their own experiences and feelings acquired out of school where there is chance to sense the magnitude and dimension of the nature and enjoy everything the nature brings about
- to induce such social situations which help students to show their empathy and sensitivity, to be sensitive and percetive to the needs and problems of others etc.
- their behaviour and dealing conform with the ecological commitment outweighing all extravagances of consumer life style, comfort and material advantages etc.

Based upon the theoretical outcomes, the results of pedagogical and research activities, we summarize that in order to improve quality of theory and praxis of education for the health reflecting the environmental context the following steps are necessary:

- to set up structure of education for the health and ecological/environmental education underlining existing interrelationships
- to reconsider the proportion of content between the education for the health and ecological/environmental education, to make precise their theory and methodology
- to make the strategy more effective concerning the understanding of activities supporting the health and quality of environment, their concrete application in every day life
- not to omit the influence of the hidden curriculum, make the research exploration and projects in the area of education for the health and the care for the environment
- to strengthen the will, consistency, self discipline, overcome the discomfort, thus the characters which are more or less constitutive and are not being nowadays encouraged
- to protect children from utilitarianism, instrumentalism and pragmatism of the adult world of previous generations,
- to introduce the world as the universe – order and harmony
- to implant to the children the opposite of what the everyday life brings as ethical, knowledge, relation and personal standard, standard of life style and value orientation
- to provide reserch exploration and projects in the field of health and the care for the environment

From the pedagogical point of view, it is fruitful to note that the correct decision making process about the health is not automatically set up. Physical, social, economical, cultural attributes of the environment the individuum lives in are considered to be the critical determinant of behaviour in favour of the health. Thus, it seems crucial to influence the environment in order to make the healthy selection easier, automatic and subconscious. Teachers ability to guide the pupils to decide for healthy alternatives, to clarify the health risks (unhealthy diet, smoking, alkohol abuse) is anticipated in connection with the support of society. They may be a significant stimulus for a change.

## ENVIRONMENTÁLNÍ ASPEKTY VÝCHOVY KE ZDRAVÍ

**Abstrakt:** Autorka vymezuje základní problémy a tematické okruhy ekologické/environmentální výchovy v kontextu výchovy ke zdraví se zvláštním zřetelem k proměně kurikula pregraduální přípravy učitelů 1. stupně základní školy. Zařazení environmentální výchovy mezi průřezová témata v rámcových vzdělávacích programech znamená významný posun v jejím chápání. Být „kulturním ochráncem zdraví a životního prostředí“ představuje základní kompetenci/způsoblost jedince. Kompetence souvisí

s orientací v existujících vzájemně příčinných, spontánně se uplatňujících vztazích v životním prostředí, která ovlivňuje kvalitu péče o něj a potažmo o zdraví.

**Klíčová slova:** zdraví, zdravý životní styl, kvalita života, péče o zdraví, péče o životní prostředí, průřezové téma, ekologická/environmentální výchova, výchova ke zdraví, kompetence