

The Role of Relationships in Teaching Content Important for Sustainable Development

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Abstract: The article recalls the opinions of scientists on the current state of the environment and the need for effective education in the field of sustainable development. It also presents considerations on the importance of human relationships (mainly between teacher and student but also student with him/herself). The aim of the study was to determine the knowledge and understanding of the role of relationships in solving environmental, educational and personal issues among the students of the Faculty of Biology and Agriculture of the University of Rzeszow in Poland. A survey was carried out among 100 participants, including 64 % of women. The research indicates that according to the surveyed students, the teacher should have authority and passion, and regardless of the subject they teach, they should also be interested in environmental problems with a good understanding of the assumptions of sustainable development. To save life on the planet, the majority of the students agreed on introducing the term "violence on the environment" in order to facilitate the creation of an ethical basis for improving the relationships with nature degraded in the 21st century by man. The respondents recognized the importance of good relationships with various people (student-teacher, student -student, etc.) as well as themselves. Highlighting these facts and disseminating them among teachers at all levels is of great importance and may be relevant for the effective teaching of the content related to sustainable development, which has become a priority. The study confirms the right assumption of a decade of education for sustainable development, concerning the necessity of constant education of various age and professional groups of the society around the world. There is little time left before it turns out that we will be the only species able to report their own destruction.

Keywords: sustainable development, university education, relations.

Introduction

Over 25 years have passed since the First Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (The Rio Declaration..., 1992) where the whole world, seeing the threats to the global population of Homo sapiens, committed itself to following the path of sustainable development. The Union of Concerned Scientists and more than 1,700 independent scientists, including most of the Nobel Prize winners in the field of science, wrote "Warning of scientists from around the world for the mankind" (Ripple et al., 2017). These anxious professionals have called on humanity to limit the destruction of the environment and change the way the Earth and its life are managed. "In their manifesto they expressed their concern about the approaching destruction of the planet Earth due to the disappearance of the ozone layer, the shrinking of freshwater resources, the elimination of marine organisms, the expansion of dead zones in the oceans, deforestation, destruction of biodiversity, climate change and constant population growth. The WWF report (Stando, 2018) says that people murdered over 60 percent of animals in the world. And it took "only" 40 years. The issue is more serious because biodiversity is the basis of ecosystem services for humans (Johnston, 2018).

The signatories of the statement believe that the vast majority of risks identified earlier did not cease, and "most of them are getting worse". However, these trends can be reversed and ecosystems can be regained.

Meanwhile, people do not change their attitude to nature and are stuck in consumer habits, or change very slowly. Why is it like that? Do they not receive the information justifying the need for immediate action? Are the methods of transferring knowledge and activities used in education for sustainable development simply ineffective? The whole world is looking for effective methods of teaching and learning and wonders where the secret lies. Or maybe in the world where everything is faster and faster, there are not enough adequate relations on the teacher-student plane? The issue is also being dealt with by such authors and researchers as R. Andersone (2017), B. Kalke and I. Sumane (2016) as well as K. Karasniece and A. Abele (2016).

The publication is a continuation of considerations in the field of seeking effectiveness for the dissemination of important content, including promoting sustainable development, which gives an opportunity to protect and restore ecosystem services for the human kind (Kostecka, Cyrankowska, Piersiak, 2016; Kostecka, Cyrankowska, 2017; Dyrtrtova, Nemejc, 2018; Kostecka, Cyrankowska, Podolak, 2018).

The aim of the study is to draw the students' attention to the role of relationships in their personal and educational environment and to determine whether they are considered important. The publication emphasizes their relevance for teaching content connected with sustainable development.

Methodology

The following study is a review article based on a problem study and brief analysis of the selected literature. The authors of the study examined the opinions of students of Agriculture, Environmental Protection, OZEiGO (Renewable Sources of Energy and Waste Management) at the University of Rzeszow (Poland) on the subject of selected teacher characteristics and his/her relationship with students.

The following questions were answered with 5 answers available (yes, rather yes, I do not know, probably not, no). One question was open.

The survey's questions were divided into three groups:

- I. Is it important for the teacher to have authority? Should the teacher convey a visible passion? Should every teacher, regardless of the subject they teach, be interested in environmental problems? Should they understand the assumptions of sustainable development? Is it worth introducing the concept of "violence towards the environment"? Why? (Explain). How can it help?
- II. Are the teacher-student relations important for the learning outcomes? Do you agree with the statements? Taking care of myself I care about people around me; - Relationships are very important a) with family; b) with friends; c) with colleagues; d) with neighbours; e) with the teacher; f) with strangers (in the street, on the bus, in a shop).
- III. Are relationships with yourself important? (- I try to make everyone like me; - I often compare myself to others; - I accept myself; - I demand a lot from myself; - I know my strengths; - I would prefer to be someone else; - I like being alone with my thoughts; - I appreciate myself).

Students were randomly selected for the study, but within a target group. In total, 100 people were interviewed (including 64 % of women). All the students knew the assumptions of sustainable development and were aware of the civilization threats. This was due to the educational path they had previously covered, which included subjects, such as ecology or environmental protection with the presentation of sustainable development assumptions and the importance of their implementation.

Results and discussion

Research indicates that according to the surveyed, the teacher should have authority and should convey a visible passion (Table 1). Moreover, regardless of the subject they teach, they should now be interested in environmental problems and should understand the assumptions of sustainable development (Table 1). How to make up for these shortcomings, because the reality is usually different? Here, of course, the right assumption of a decade of education for sustainable development (Kostecka, 2009) is confirmed here, namely, the necessity of constant education of various age and professional groups of the society around the world. There is little time left (Ripple et al., 2017) or we might be the only species able to report their own destruction.

Trying to find effective means to change the ethical attitudes towards sustainable development, the respondents were asked whether it was worth introducing the term "violence towards the environment."

Most respondents answered yes or rather yes (74 % in total). Explaining why and how it could help, the following issues were raised (according to the frequency of mentioning, starting from the most common argument): the very word "violence" is associated negatively and is usually used with reference to people and animals, but in connection with the environment, it can also draw people's attention to the environmental degradation and appeal to more people; it is necessary to make everybody, especially

young people, aware of the threats to the environment; many people do not realize how environmentally harmful their behaviour is; it can help change the way people think and act.

Table 1

Answers to the first group of questions (%)

Question / Answer	Yes	Rather yes	I do not know	Rather not	No
Is it important for the teacher to be an authority figure?	72	20	4	2	2
Should the teacher convey a visible passion?	60	32	6	2	0
Should any teacher be interested in environmental problems?	38	42	12	4	4
Should they understand the assumptions of sustainable development?	60	32	8	0	0
Is it worth introducing the concept of "violence towards the environment"?	50	24	18	2	6

The respondents also gave some examples of environmental violence, namely: massive deforestation; littering the environment; destruction of biodiversity; urbanisation of green areas; lawn destruction; disturbance of balance.

Summing up these assessments, it can be said that the introduction of the concept of "violence towards the environment" may facilitate the creation of an ethical basis for improving relations with the degraded nature, in order to save the planet and ourselves.

The second part of the survey included proving the assumption that teacher-student relations and student's relationships with themselves were important for the participants. Most of the respondents agreed with it (Table 2 and Table 3). The only exceptions were questions concerning comparisons to others and "would I prefer to be someone else".

Table 2

Answers to the second group of questions (%)

Do you agree with the following statements?	Yes	Rather yes	I do not know	Rather not	No
Teacher-student relations are important for educational outcomes	68	30	0	2	0
Caring about myself, I care about people around me	52	36	8	0	4
Relationships are essential	90	10	0	0	0
a) with family	96	4	0	0	0
b) with friends	88	12	0	0	0
c) with colleagues	68	30	0	2	0
d) with neighbours	52	38	4	2	4
e) with teachers	56	38	2	2	2
f) with strangers (in the street, on the bus, in a shop, etc.)	26	44	16	8	6

As the research results show (Table 2), teacher-student relations are assessed as important. The vast majority of respondents (52 % - yes and 36 % - rather yes) think that taking care of themselves in a healthy, wise and non-egoistic way, they care for others. Everybody acknowledged the importance of relationships (90 % - yes, 10 % - rather yes), and relations with family were considered to be particularly important (96 % - yes, 4 % - rather yes), then with friends (88 % - yes, 12 % - rather yes) and with colleagues (68 % - yes, 30 % - rather yes). Relations with the teacher showed slightly lower figures (56 % - yes, 38 % - rather yes) as well as with neighbours (52 % - yes, 38 % - rather yes), but in total

they were positive valued by the majority. Although 16 % of respondents did not know whether relationships with strangers were important, and 14 % even thought that they were not or rather not, almost half of the students considered them to be important or rather important.

What were the relationships with the students themselves? (Table 3)

Almost all of the students surveyed considered themselves important (96 %), which is reflected in self-acceptance (90 %), self-appreciation (78 %) and awareness of their strengths (78 %), as well as self-satisfaction (66 %). However, at the same time, as many as one third of the respondents did not know whether or not they would prefer to be someone else. Over half (64 %) set high standards for themselves and the same percentage tries to be liked and accepted by others. A similar number of students (62 %) do not compare themselves to others and like to be in their own company with their thoughts (70 %).

Table 3

Answers to the third group of questions (%)

Do you agree with the following statements?	Yes	Rather yes	I do not know	Rather not	No
Good relationship with myself is important	92	4	4	0	0
I try to make everyone like me	16	48	10	20	6
I often compare myself to others	14	10	14	44	18
I accept myself	50	40	8	2	0
I demand a lot from myself	28	36	20	10	6
I know my strengths	42	36	16	4	2
I would prefer to be someone else	2	2	30	18	48
I like to be alone with my thoughts	34	36	8	20	2
I appreciate myself	40	38	14	8	0

We do not always realize how important relationships are. They affect the quality of private and professional life, influence satisfaction and efficiency, and consequently have an impact on mental and physical health. We usually think about relationships with other people, however, B. Siegel (2014) says that these are indeed very important, but the most important is the relationship with yourself. Meanwhile, we usually pay too little attention to ourselves, and when we do, we often suspect ourselves of the worst traits, such as egoism, egocentrism and narcissism. So, how to build a healthy relationship with yourself and with others? W. Glasser (2008) draws attention to behaviours concerning relationships and distinguishes between habits that build or destroy them.

Among the habits that build relationships, we can distinguish: care, listening, support, encouragement, trust, respect and cooperation. Habits that destroy relationships include blaming, criticizing, moaning, grumbling, threatening, punishing, and even rewarding if it is a form of control (Glasser, 2008). M. Gandhi (2018) discovered that "Man often becomes what he believes himself to be" and M. Peer (Peer, Howes, 2018) shares a similar view, saying that "First, you create your beliefs and then they create you."

We study the outside world, and we do not know and underestimate our own internal wealth and potential. We also do not know what limits us. Getting to know ourselves, we will gain self-confidence based on a healthy sense of self-worth, and our actions will be more focused, sensible and effective. The result may also be better health and a greater sense of fulfilment, contentment and happiness.

And what are additional benefits? Being oneself releases the life energy that has been trapped in conditioned thoughts and attitudes (Chopra, 2017).

N.D. Walsch (2017), on the other hand, claims that from the perspective of his life, you can see that life is not about us. It's about all those whose lives we touch and how we do it. But in order to do it with respect, wisely and with love, you have to try to be the best version of yourself so that when we touch the lives of others, we all grow. Therefore, a positive attitude towards ourselves, other people and nature, that surrounds us, is of crucial importance for building sustainable development and a better world for everybody.

Conclusions

The situation on Earth requires quick and effective remedial action in the space of man-nature relationship and the utilization of its resources. In studies on a selected group of Polish students, it was shown that a modern teacher should have authority and communicate knowledge with a visible passion. They should also understand the assumptions of sustainable development to share this knowledge. The surveyed students accepted the implementation of the term "violence towards the environment", by means of expressions like: massive deforestation; littering the environment; destruction of biodiversity; disturbance of natural balance, the use of which personifies the natural environment, gives weight to the phenomenon and fills the issue with emotions. This way it should be easier to acknowledge the problems and find solutions for the common well-being.

To repair our relationship with nature and to take care of the environment in which we live, good relationships with ourselves and each other, mutual respect, understanding and empathy are strongly needed. We will not understand other people without understanding ourselves and we will not be able to change the behaviour of others, we can only change ourselves. That is why it is so important to get to know yourself by carefully observing your thoughts, words and beliefs, as well as be open for transformation, a different way of thinking and acting, suitable for the changing reality in order to be able to counteract real threats. The habits that build relationships could be support, listening, encouragement, trust, respect and cooperation, but the habits destroying relationships are criticizing, threatening and punishing.

The conducted research has shown that the awareness of the majority of the students in this field is high and it is a good start for the targeted and effective action in the future for the benefit of all humanity.

A good teacher-student relationship is able to transfer the passion to the next generation. Teachers who know the foundations of sustainable development, focus their students' attention to the disappearance of the ozone layer, the shrinking of freshwater resources, the elimination of marine organisms, the expansion of dead zones in the oceans, deforestation, destruction of biodiversity, climate change but also try to find solutions, are now a valuable asset to societies struggling with unrestrained consumerism and anthropo-pressure.

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