



Falconry - its influence on biodiversity
and cultural heritage

Urszula Szymak and Przemysław Sianko (editors)

NATURE IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

IWONA LEWKOWICZ

ABSTRACT

Environmental education is extremely important to the didactic and educational influence of a preschool. Early childhood is the best time to begin a gradual formation of correct attitudes towards nature. Preschools have numerous opportunities to develop environmental sensitivity in children through contact with the animal and plant kingdom. Developing children's sensitivity to beauty of nature and the need to protect it increases their awareness of threats to the natural environment and creates a right response to inappropriate behaviour of other people. That is why a right attitude to nature must be fostered from an early age.

Particular attention must be paid to developing children's respect and sense of responsibility for the condition and reproduction of natural resources. This may be achieved by direct contact with nature, for example, by taking frequent walks or trips to various ecosystems. Such "expeditions" are aimed at showing children the diversity of nature throughout different seasons. Being in direct contact with the environment, children go through many distinct experiences and feel the need to protect that which is precious. Ecology becomes an important part of their lifestyle and the child shifts from being a passive observer to an active propagator of environmentally friendly attitudes.

KEY WORDS: *preschool, environmental education*

“(…) curiosity about the world is the foundation
of effective environmental education.”
(Więckowski 1993: 146)

“Raising children that respect plants and animals” is an important area of didactic and educational activities in light of the new programme act on preschool education. According to the core curriculum of preschool education for preschools and preschool units in primary schools, the most important goal of preschool education is to “facilitate and direct children’s development in accordance with their innate potential and developmental capacity and in contact with the social, cultural, and natural environment” (Journal of laws of 31.08.2007, No 157, item 1100). The most important aim of environmental education is to develop environmentally friendly attitudes and a sense of respect to nature. In order to foster these stances in children, education must start as early as possible, with preschools being the most suitable institutions to begin with. Environmental education develops character traits, attitudes, habits and even the views children have. “Preschool age is characterised by a significant intellectual advancement in the child’s development and it is an ideal time to introduce elements of environmental education, which should be continued in later years of learning” (Kutyłowska 1997: 12). Curiosity about nature, receptiveness, sensitivity and inquisitiveness give teachers a wide range of possibilities to make an educational influence. Almost all contacts with nature create in children a sense of wanting to experience it with all of their senses. “Contacts with nature form a sense of beauty, sensitivity, curiosity or awe. While an interest in nature, perceptiveness and reasoning develop, unconscious joy and astonishment transform into a conscious awareness of beauty. The child begins to see beauty in things in which it has not noticed it before” (Frątczak 2012: 35). Preschool environmental education entails: learning, understanding and remembering basic and fundamental information on natural phenomena in the child’s environment. It teaches that life is impossible without contact with nature, because everything that people need to live comes from the natural environment (Jabłońska 2005: 32). The fundamental need of every child is to experience nature and its elements. Education through nature also contains important moral aspects. Searching for the best ways of achieving these objectives, it must be remembered that the most effective methods and pedagogical activities are those which stimulate as many senses as possible. The role of the teacher is to create scenarios in which children will have an opportunity to learn about concepts and phenomena in a natural environment through observation and practical activities (Naprawa, Tanajewska i in. 2010: 139). By looking after plants and animals and taking care of the environment, to the best of

their capacity, children learn patience, perseverance, a sense of responsibility and friendship. Through contact with nature, the child becomes attached to it, naturally. The diversity of natural phenomena is an invaluable source of information, especially for preschool and elementary school children because they see it as an object of interest, activating their minds and encouraging to take action. Nature plays a crucial role in developing the youngsters' imagination. This fact is clearly visible during play, when children transform natural objects into "ships", "magic wands", "cosmic rocks", etc. Games involving the need to be in contact with nature create, by stimulating curiosity and joy, a strong and lasting impression on a child's psyche. They have a great educational potential in forming young intellects and psyches (Parczewska 2009: 83). "Learning about the phenomena which induced curiosity is usually accompanied by positive emotions: satisfaction, joy, pleasure, and contentment. Nature has a very strong effect on a young child's sensory and emotional sphere, forging unforgettable impressions and deep and diverse experiences, providing joy, astonishment and refuge, initiates the process of assessing different natural objects and nature as such. The natural environment gives children a chance to compare, seek, explore, collect, arrange, rate, measure, count, touch, smell, admire, and to experiment" (Parczewska 2009: 83). Interacting with nature makes a strong impression on a child's sensory and emotional sphere, combining experience with physical wellbeing. It forms qualities such as responsibility, patience, precision, diligence, sensitivity. Ecological education is a process involving all areas of a child's activity - the cognitive, the emotional, and the practical. By carefully selecting the methods and games, children are able to gain knowledge by employing all senses: sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch. Teaching through actions is excellent as children can gain practical knowledge that can be used later in similar situations, making these activities a lasting element of their world (Parczewska 2009: 85). Nature is a source of impressions, experience, and knowledge, providing children with an opportunity of all-round development. "Preschool age is a time of intense cognitive activity, with varied dynamics at different phases of this period. Children in phase III, aged 5.5-7, are distinct, in this respect. They are characterised by a greater capacity for independence and self control, and a wider circle of cognitive interests (a willingness to observe their environment and for acquiring knowledge and experience)" (Jaszczyszyn 2003: 17). Preschools not only foster a child's knowledge and impressions, but also significantly enforce his or her experience of the environment and its values. The identification, development, and exposition of an individual's creative potential, as well as the stimulation of personal development should be embedded education's highest concern (Bereziński 2009: 43). The aim of ecological education is to "form a conscious attitude towards the environment, a passion and respect for all forms of life, and appropriate and proactive attitudes

to nature and nature conservation. The aim of ecological education is to form ecological awareness and culture” (Frątczak 1995: 136). Children who study nature make a range of intellectual operations, such as analysing, synthesising, comparing, finding similarities and differences, until finally they reach generalization, the basis for creating nature oriented concepts. Nature is a significant factor influencing the capacity for concentration, which “constitutes (...) a measurable indicator of a child’s interest and potential” (Wood 2006: 67). All this shows that nature is not only complex, but also has a significant impact on people and their educational, aesthetic, health- and entertainment-oriented actions. Environmental education was not only directed at forming a cohesive system of knowledge, but also developing values which will lead children in their adult lives. It is therefore justified to say that children should be taught how to use environmental resources as early as possible. Ecological education at preschools should be a part of the activities connected with looking after and raising children and educating them, involving their teachers and family. By using various form of working with children they can be made aware of the fact that the natural environment is a living necessity for humans and should therefore be protected. The teacher’s main objective is to form a sensitivity for nature, animate and inanimate, and creating a sense of responsibility and great care for nature conservation. We are making children aware of the fact that by destroying nature humans destroy themselves (Jaszczyszyn 2003: 23). Nature seems to be an invaluable ally in the process of raising children as it responds to almost all of their needs, it fosters harmonious development, provides affirmative impressions and stimulates interest about everything that moves, lives, transforms. It is therefore up to the preschool teacher to use the educational, cognitive and health-related qualities of nature, to organize conditions for active interaction with nature in play and in learning, to create a proliferative environment for acquiring knowledge, asking questions, finding answers, sharing impressions and opinions. Conducting additional programmes connected to nature education or including modern media into the process should stimulate children’s involvement by relating to their emotions and imagination, all the while making the teacher’s work more effective (Szczołka 2009). Preschool age is the best time to initiate nature education. Children at this stage show a native sensitivity for their environment, as well as an emotional will to protect it.

LITERATURE

- BEREZIŃSKI F. 2009. Zagadnienia dydaktyki szkoły wyższej. OR TWP, Szczecin.
JOURNAL OF LAWS of 31.08.2007, No 157, item 1100.
FRĄTCZAK J. 1995. Świadomość ekologiczna dzieci, młodzieży i dorosłych w aspekcie

- edukacji szkolnej i nieszkolnej. Wydawnictwo Uczelniane WSP w Bydgoszczy, Bydgoszcz.
- JABŁOŃSKA M. 2005. Las i jego znaczenie. W: Wychowanie w Przedszkolu, Nr 8, s. 32.
- FRĄTCZAK J. 2012. Przyroda domem dziecka w kształtowaniu jego estetycznych, psychomotorycznych, społecznych oraz sprawnościowo - plastycznych - technicznych procesów i ich cech. W: Barczyk P.P., Kowolik P. (red.). W kręgu edukacji przedszkolnej i szkolnej. Mysłowice.
- JASZCZYSZYN E. (red.) 2003. Ekologiczna edukacja przedszkolna, Agro-Group, Białystok.
- KUTYŁOWSKA G. 1997. Ekologia w przedszkolu. Wydawnictwo Didasko, Warszawa.
- NAPRAWA R., TANAJEWSKA A., SZCZEPAŃSKA K. 2010. Uwierz w siebie. Program terapeutyczny dla uczniów o specyficznych i specjalnych potrzebach edukacyjnych, Wydawnictwo Harmonia.
- PARCZEWSKA T. 2009. Edukacja ekologiczna w przedszkolu. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie – Skłodowskiej, Lublin.
- SZCZOTKA M. 2009. Dziecko aktywnym odkrywcą i badaczem w procesie edukacji przyrodniczej. Edukacja elementarna. Grupa Edukacyjna S.A. Wydawnictwo JUKA, Warszawa.
- WIĘCKOWSKI R. 1993. Pedagogika Wczesnoszkolna. WSIP, Warszawa.
- WOOD D. 2006. Jak uczyć się i myśleć dzieci, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków.

NEWS REPORTS

