

¿WHY TEACH ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES AT SCHOOL?

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Abstract.

This article is contextualized within the field of education, establishing links of collaborative innovation with the environmental context; therefore, the main objective was to promote the experience of environmental values such as responsibility, respect and love through the formulation of a classroom pedagogical project in first to third grade students of the Municipal Educational Institution (IEM) Heráldo Romero Sánchez in the city of Pasto. The methodology used was qualitative, which included observation, interviews, information collection and document analysis. The main results show that students have a good attitude towards caring for the environment, particularly in the disposal of solid waste; however, their understanding of environmental care is limited only to this scenario. Regarding environmental values, positive trends were observed related to the values of responsibility, respect and love. Responsibility is associated with human action towards the environment; respect is related to coexistence among students; and love is linked to the care and protection of the natural environment. Finally, the conclusions indicate that it is necessary to strengthen the connection between different values such as respect, responsibility and love to promote a broader vision of environmental care in students throughout their school career; which is why it is important to think about, talk about and put into practice the teaching of environmental values at school.

Keywords: Environmental values, responsibility, respect, love, courage, care for the environment.

Resumen.

El presente artículo se contextualiza dentro del campo de la educación estableciendo vínculos de innovación colaborativa con el contexto ambiental; por lo tanto, el objetivo principal fue fomentar la vivencia de los valores ambientales como responsabilidad, respeto y amor mediante la formulación de un proyecto pedagógico de aula en estudiantes de grado primero a tercero de la Institución Educativa Municipal (IEM) Heráldo Romero Sánchez en la ciudad de Pasto. La metodología utilizada fue de tipo cualitativa que incluyó observación, entrevistas, recolección de información y análisis de documentos. Los principales resultados muestran que los estudiantes tienen buena actitud hacia el cuidado del ambiente, particularmente en la disposición de residuos

¿POR QUÉ ENSEÑAR VALORES AMBIENTALES EN LA ESCUELA?

sólidos; sin embargo, su comprensión del cuidado ambiental está limitada solo a este escenario. En cuanto a los valores ambientales, se observaron tendencias positivas relacionadas con los valores de responsabilidad, respeto y amor. La responsabilidad se asocia con la acción humana frente al ambiente; el respeto se relaciona con la convivencia entre los estudiantes; y el amor se vincula al cuidado y protección del entorno natural. Finalmente, las conclusiones señalan que es necesario fortalecer la conexión entre los diferentes valores como el respeto, la responsabilidad y el amor para fomentar una visión más amplia del cuidado ambiental en los estudiantes a lo largo de su trayectoria escolar; razón por la cual es relevante pensar, hablar y poner en práctica la enseñanza de los valores ambientales en la escuela.

Palabras Clave: Valores ambientales, responsabilidad, respeto, amor, valor, cuidado del ambiente.

I. INTRODUCTION.

Humanity is currently immersed in an unprecedented environmental crisis. In the face of accelerated climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, environmental education has become a fundamental tool for strengthening the values and attitudes necessary for building a better future. Addressing the question "Why teach environmental values at school?" reflects a strong participatory interest in the current environmental context, given that the school, as a space for holistic education, plays a crucial role in this transformation process. It is here where students spend a significant amount of time and are receptive to new ideas and behaviors.

Teaching environmental values at school is vital because it addresses a current global issue. Social problems affecting the environment have a global dimension; therefore, they impact not just one part of the world, but the entire planet. Improving environmental conditions is a shared responsibility among all social actors. Achieving the necessary transformation requires the involvement of each individual and the utilization of all their capabilities, demanding a global and organized action to promote

deep changes in human consciousness, thought, and behavior. Encouraging environmental values through environmental education focused on new generations is essential (Nuévalos, 2008).

Environmental values strengthened in school help students develop a sense of responsibility, respect, and love for the planet, and encourage them to take action to care for it (Caduto, 1996). Thus, fostering a culture of environmental awareness from an early age promotes a harmonious balance between human well-being and environmental quality. Additionally, this will allow for the reinforcement of environmental values from the school, an essential activity for defining collective strategies in favor of the environment.

Currently, there is a growing interest in education from a new perspective rooted in environmental values, fostering more responsible, critical, and reflective individuals. As Rojas (2018) states, there is a need to educate individuals who respect the rights of nature and who are capable of expanding their critical and ethical capacities regarding the environment, thereby shaping better individuals for the planet.

A review of the state of the art, from general to specific, shows that according to Castro et al. (2009), it is necessary to foster in children respect, affection, and reverence for nature. This results in adults who are respectful of ecosystem resources and seek solutions that benefit the entire community. Similarly, Eslava et al. (2018) emphasize that educational institutions are where respect and care for ecosystems and natural resources should begin, as these sustain the planet and all its living species.

However, Gómez et al. (2012) point out that educational institutions currently show weaknesses in environmental education and environmental conservation. Since this is a relatively new issue, immediate action is required. Therefore, Cerón et al. (2015) argue that new methodological strategies must be incorporated into teaching-learning processes, prioritizing play and recreational activities to create meaningful, creative, and enjoyable learning environments for individuals.

The theoretical foundation of this research focused on three main variables: teaching-learning processes in schools, the acquisition of values, and environmental education. For the first, Vygotsky (1979) is referenced with his theory of higher psychological processes, arguing that these originate in social life, specifically in the child's

active participation in shared activities with peers, and proposes analyzing the development of these processes based on the internalization of specific social practices through dynamics, play, and group association.

Regarding the second variable, Cortina (1998) states that "there is an urgent need to educate in moral values, which can be achieved in various settings such as home, school, family, even on the street or through media" (p.18). Similarly, Trestini et al. (2009) argue that "the importance of education based on values, specifically environmental values, allows for the installation of ethical principles in children, fostering the growth and maturity of moral conscience, which enables individuals to develop habits and behaviors that support the environment" (p.32); these aspects are essential for human existence.

As for the third variable, Cerón et al. (2015) suggest that modern education should be framed as education that includes environmental values, where a new vision of the natural environment and the socioeconomic relationships between people and the environment is emphasized. Educational perspectives from an environmental education course should be transferred to schools under an emerging ecological paradigm. In this regard, Rojas (2018) affirms that environmental education has already acquired an essential dimension and should not be viewed as thematic education, as this would reduce and obscure the reality of everyday life.

Finally, Castillo (2010) emphasizes the need for teachers to propose sustainable ecosystem management plans to ensure dignified living conditions for the population. By understanding the historical interactions between knowledge, beliefs, and the environment, a holistic application of education can critically analyze current problems, achievements, and needs. This will make it possible to develop sustainable strategies that involve the community in preserving and improving their surroundings, thus ensuring a dignified life for all.

The school, as a space for holistic education, has the responsibility to instill environmental education based on values and the attitudes needed to protect the environment (Silva, 2023). Likewise, teachers play an active role in promoting environmental care, which is fundamental for driving the necessary educational transformation, especially within the framework of the competencies defined by the national curriculum regarding environmental education, aiming to form citizens committed to sustainability and socio-environmental balance.

II. METHODOLOGY.

This research followed a qualitative approach, based on the observation and interpretation of reality, which allowed for the analysis and description of the behaviors of both students and teachers involved. According to Hernández et al. (2014), this type of study focuses on understanding social realities from individuals' development within their natural environment to better comprehend the variables and phenomena within their own context.

An action research process was conducted, which led to the implementation of changes and formed an integral part of the research cycle. This is in line with Elliot (2000), who considers action research as a method that gives voice and prominence to participants, enabling them to construct in-depth and contextualized knowledge about their social realities by describing and analyzing daily experiences.

The study population consisted of first to third grade students at IEM Heraldo Romero Sánchez, Carolina campus. These students are in early childhood, a stage when they begin their first interactions with their surroundings and peers, making them a highly relevant focal group for exploring their educational process in environmental values.

Various data collection techniques were employed, such as observation, interviews with students and teachers, classroom observation rubrics, and photographic records, to support and enrich the study for subsequent analysis and discussion.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.

The findings of this study were obtained after organizing and analyzing the data collected through the aforementioned instruments. In order to better understand the information, a matrix was developed to extract data from both student and teacher interviews. This matrix helped identify analysis categories, emerging themes, and trends, which led to a better understanding of the information gathered.

The first category addressed in this research was environmental values among students. The results show that first to third grade students from IEM Heraldo Romero Sánchez associate environmental care with the management of solid waste, the protection of water bodies, and the general environment. This trend was highly prominent within the first category.

This is a positive trend, suggesting that students are engaging in various activities related to environmental care. Moreover, the emphasis on solid waste disposal is a good indicator of the school community's commitment to the environment. However, a comparison across the three grades reveals that most students associate environmental care exclusively with waste disposal or "picking up trash".

Although associating environmental care with solid waste management reflects a positive shift in attitudes toward environmentally harmful human actions, it also indicates a limited understanding of the broader concept of environmental care. This suggests that students' knowledge may be influenced by the type of environmental education provided by the institution, which is often geared toward cleanup campaigns or reinforced by teachers who emphasize picking up litter to keep classrooms or playgrounds clean.

It is important to highlight that environmental care goes far beyond waste collection. As Matías (2019) notes, teachers can incorporate environmental education initiatives into their teaching practices, establishing strategic alliances with local organizations to promote the practice of environmental values both within schools and the wider community. This approach allows students to develop a more comprehensive understanding that extends beyond their immediate surroundings and includes concepts like ecosystem conservation, biodiversity protection, and sustainable development; dimensions that help expand the notion of environmental care within the school context.

Similarly, Castro et al. (2009) state that "environmental education encompasses knowledge of global issues such as pollution (of water and soil), deforestation, and rational water use" (p. 376). Therefore, teachers should not limit their instruction to theoretical knowledge about these issues but should foster critical and reflective thinking that encourages students to analyze and propose solutions to social problems affecting the environment and to act responsibly and sustainably.

Additionally, the variables of responsibility, respect, and love-core environmental values examined in this study emerge as initial steps toward environmental practices and behaviors within the school. Students are encouraged to adopt responsible habits and behavioral changes that could have long-term positive impacts. Nonetheless, innovative strategies are needed to strengthen students' commitment and empower them to become agents of positive change within their institution, neighborhood, and/or community.

Regarding the subcategory of responsibility, most students expressed negative perceptions of human actions that harm the environment through solid waste pollution. Once again, responsible action is primarily associated with waste collection. Moreover, there appears to be limited action and response concerning the idea of social responsibility for the environment.

In student testimonies, the subcategory of respect was mostly associated with social interactions and coexistence among peers. While it is true that respect begins with others, it should also encompass all forms of life and invite individuals to recognize and embrace differences, strengths, and weaknesses in both themselves and others. This enables individuals to value and be valued, to gain new perspectives, and to act accordingly without harming any living being. Therefore, the results show that respect is being taught more from a social perspective, detached from its environmental dimension.

Some students did link respect with actions against environmental harm such as not damaging plants or cutting down trees. This may reflect some environmental educational practices present in the school, but such practices should be deepened to foster stronger commitments to socio-environmental issues.

Finally, in the subcategory of love, students associated this value with peer relationships and, to a lesser extent, with caring for plants, animals, and the Earth. This indicates a budding connection with the natural environment through small environmentally conscious actions.

Thus, the value of love in schools should go beyond affection and focus on valuing what is loved because it is meaningful and important valuing freely and spontaneously chosen actions. Miranda (2022) emphasizes that within environmental ethics, the

value of love motivates individuals to appreciate the interconnectedness of all life forms and to take responsibility for recognizing nature as a being with intrinsic value.

This approach helps reignite one of the most essential human traits: compassion, extending it to the natural world and promoting harmonious coexistence with the environment. In this sense, every life should be valued because it deserves dignity from every one of us; every place should be cherished because we enjoy being there; and the experience of existence and coexistence with other living beings must be respected.

IV. CONCLUSIONS.

In line with the findings, first to third grade students at IEM Heraldo Romero Sánchez demonstrated a favorable attitude toward environmental care, particularly regarding the disposal of solid waste. This was supported by environmental values such as responsibility and love. However, respect, although present, was primarily linked to social coexistence, suggesting a greater emphasis on social rather than environmental aspects.

Students associated love with environmental care, showing a connection with nature through small environmental actions. Therefore, environmental education must strengthen the value of love, encouraging students to value life, freedom, coexistence, and the natural world.

This finding highlights the need to reinforce environmental values like responsibility, respect, and love, to promote a broader vision of environmental education within schools.

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