



PLACING ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN SLOVENIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The National Education Institute of Slovenia enhances educational quality by linking pedagogy with practice, particularly through environmental education. Each year, around 250 primary and secondary school teachers participate in study groups that meet three times annually to develop teaching materials and promote key environmental objectives such as critical thinking, ecological awareness, and responsible action.

This case study, “The Nature School of the Greatest Wisdom” by Dr. Majda Naji, emphasizes a broader educational vision—one that values understanding life and nature over academic achievement alone. It advocates for freedom of thought, emotional intelligence, and learning rooted in natural experiences. Drawing from philosophical insights, the study presents education as a lifelong journey aligned with nature’s rhythms.

Teachers are encouraged to act as guides who nurture rather than instruct, helping students grow with patience and awareness. This holistic approach fosters not only knowledge but also personal and environmental responsibility.

Keywords

Environmental Education, Holistic Learning, Nature-Based Pedagogy, Teacher Development

The National Education Institute is a professional institution that covers pre-school, primary and secondary education, combining teaching theory and practice and thus contributing to a continued quality of the Slovene schooling system. We implement the theoretical findings of pedagogy in practice, and in turn raise the questions that arise in the teaching practice at the theoretical level.

One of the institute main task is preparing seminars of in service training and exchange the experience with teachers in study groups. During school year around 250 teachers from primary and secondary schools visited 10 study groups of environmental education. Each study group has three meetings during a school year.

In this groups teachers prepare materials for use in the field of environmental education. They try to attain the environmental education objectives in their school praxis:

- To realise that environment is a complex entity and that each intervention can have consequences for society and space.
- To collect and process social, cultural, economic and ecological data from various sources.
- To formulate an appropriate questions on the environment and carry out a study of it.
- To willing to apply personal capacities in order to improve the environment.
- To be critical of information relating to the environment and test the personal opinion against facts.

These objectives can already be included in the cognitive sphere of specific subjects.

Case study

The nature school of the greatest wisdom

1. To young people

What does word education mean? Shouldn't the teachers ask themselves why they educate and why are students being educated? Is the purpose of going to school to learn different subjects, pass exams, compete with others for better grades, in short, a preparation for earning for living?

2. Understanding life and nature

It is far more important to achieve the understanding of life and nature than to become a good physicist or a chemist. Life does not mean only having a job, a profession, it is much more: life means the poor and the rich, life is a constant struggle between nations and religions, life means birds, flowers, rivers full of fish, life is the sky, and the earth. Therefore education has no meaning if it does not help us understand life and nature in all its aspects, with all its beauty and pain.

3. Freedom of thought

It is very important that we receive education in the environment which can give us freedom. Freedom does not mean that we can do what we like – it means that we can study life more in depth. It is very important that we are allowed to think without fear, not merely following the already established patterns, but being able to discover reality. Life will show all its beauty but only if people have freedom to develop their personalities.

4. Goals of education

The purpose of education is to eliminate the destructive fear which comes from within or from without and damages human thought, relationships and love. If we are full of fear we cannot observe and study life and nature, and become aware of it. Fear prevents us from becoming intelligent, since intelligence is the ability to think without fear and established patterns.

5. Nature, school of the greatest wisdom

Every person who wants to learn has to realise that mind has been granted to us as the greatest gift of nature. The question is how mind can be the best utilised. It is important to understand the importance of sound and healthy knowledge which will be used for the benefit of the nation and mankind. Here is a story of a science teacher who said that students used only printed books and none had ever tried to teach them from non-printed ones. The disciples asked the teachers to give them an example of a non-printed book. "This is NATURE", he said. (Anthony de Mello)

6. Schools of human life

All stages of life can be divided into seven educational levels which can be compared with natural phenomena:

- the school of birth is linked with the beginning of the year and the month of JANUARY;
- the school of early childhood is similar to FEBRUARY or MARCH when buds on trees start shooting;
- the school of childhood is like APRIL when first flowers start blossoming;
- the school of adolescence is related with MAY when fruits start forming;
- the school of adulthood is like the months from JUNE to NOVEMBER when fruits become ripe and the plants get ready for winter;
- the school of old age is like DECEMBER when the year terminates and human life ends.

(Jan Amos Komensky)

7. Teacher – the servant of nature

Some thoughts about nature as our teacher:

“Nature is the best teacher” (Katon)

“We cannot miss the way if we are directed by nature.” (Cicero)

“Let us not be led astray from the path which nature has given to us.” (Seneca)

Those who live accordingly will realise that learning can be pleasant and easy. On the other hand, those who are violent to nature or act against it will inevitably end in destruction. A teacher should always be supportive, not going against nature, never doing things too early waiting for the time to ripe. A small bird cannot break its wings if kept safely in the nest. It can break wings if frightened or if it must suddenly leave the nest. Therefore the teacher has to know when and how to pass knowledge to students.