

## ENVIRONMENTAL-EMBODIED EDUCATION: VIRTUES FOR SOCIAL HYGIENE AND SELF-ENJOYMENT

RADU SIMION\*

**ABSTRACT. Environmental-embodied Education: Virtues for Social Hygiene and Self-enjoyment.** The contemporary debates concerning environmental education and ethics are continuously growing, developing new ways of perceiving the self in relation to the biotic community and to nature as a whole. Sustainability virtue ethics is a field that can provide a theoretical and practical structure for what it means to live a good and pleasant life, building attitudes characterized by caring, awareness, awe and responsibility. The aim of this paper is to draw a map of how to generate a context that facilitates a real transformation in the way individuals relate to nature, an education for empathy, with a sense of belonging and a maximum of adaptability. Based on my experience as an educator in a green school (Green School Romania) and as a researcher in the field of moral eco-pedagogy, I intent to talk about how environmental experiential education is an Archimedean point for what it means to develop a sensuous enjoyment and self-enjoyment in the biotic community, moving away from defensiveness and unjustified fears. In the context of risk management and long-term strategies for protecting and preserving the delicate equilibrium of life on Earth, environmental virtue ethics represents a necessary and helpful tool, based on interaction and on a focus on the process, discovering the miracle of being aligned with the rhythms of nature. This paper is designed to stand up against the instrumentalism and the dominant egoistic attitude of being above nature, trying to replace them with the attitude of fitting into nature with curiosity, simplicity and serenity. Using the model of moral eco-pedagogy (experiential learning about, for and from the environment) and non-violent communication, I will show that the individual begins to become that self that one truly is, a process of self- realization and engagement with an impact on how he relates to the moral patients and the natural world.

**Keywords:** *education, ethics, embodied, virtue, sustainability, outdoor*

---

\* PhD candidate, Doctoral School in Philosophy, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. E-mail: radusimiondan@yahoo.com

## **1. Introduction**

I left the city behind forty minutes ago. I gently step on the ground, my skin has a delicate smell of grass and my thoughts are silent, deeply connected to all the roots of the oak trees I'm walking through. The geography of this place is kind of similar with the geography of my own soul. The whole atmosphere of this walk is touchy, refreshing and I feel my heartbeat being like a reflection of a drum I heard some time ago. All I want now is to be in a close connection with the rhythms and the dances of life, to avoid rigidity and to explore the ecstatic moments of delight that nature is giving to me for free. As a researcher but mostly as a living being, to be in direct contact with nature is a necessary requisite for loving it and for preserving its beauty and integrity. I like to be right in the process of exploring the life in nature, to face myself in different situations, to grow. The aim of this article is to draw a map of how to get closer to nature's rhythms, to learn how to understand and appreciate its complexity and to awake the ecological unconscious that provides our connection with our personal evolution here, on Earth. In the last three decades, the separation between man and the environment has continuously grown. In the same time, the physical and emotional problems have increased dramatically, and there's a large bibliography and scientific articles on this subject. I do not intent to repeat all the data related to this separation, but rather to show how things could be fixed. I do not expect to provide a solution to every problem people are facing concerning their relationship with the environment, but rather to simply describe some attitudes and methods inspired by the environmental-embodied education (or experiential-based education in the outdoors) that could successfully widen the perspective about the natural world and our role in the its dynamics.

## **2. What does environmental-embodied education wants to treat?**

First of all, environmental-embodied education (abbreviated as EEE in this article) methods propose an opposition towards the ignorance related to the way we treat biodiversity. The loss of biodiversity is a real fact, being almost like an assault on the basis of life on Earth. We are facing natural disasters and threats because of the intrusive attitude man has razed the wild areas in order to create living spaces, but also agricultural activities which comes with the domestication of animals and crops. There is a crack into the circle of maintaining and preserve biodiversity because of the fact that the individuals do not realize that all our needs have nature as a source. As Barry Commoner claimed,

“We have broken out of the circle of life, converting its endless cycles into man-made, linear events: oil is taken from the ground, distilled into fuel, burned in an engine, converted thereby into noxious fumes, which are emitted into the air. At the end of the line is smog. Other man-made breaks in the ecosphere's cycles spew out toxic chemicals, sewage, heaps of rubbish-testimony to our power to tear the ecological fabric that has, for millions of years, sustained the planet's life.”<sup>1</sup>

Our needs are infinite but the resources are scarce, finite. We have to recognize that nature is indispensable for human life, so it is rational, of all things, to identify the far measure of its use and to develop institutionalized but also personal models of education for develop ourselves in the spirit of an intelligent and sustainable moral of consume. The real change should make us to change us toe perspective on nature as something exterior to us, wild and dangerous, and to recognize the environment as a space which gives us resources and indispensable conditions of life. We are anthropic negative factors, even limit- factor, because of the huge destruction against nature, especially in the last two centuries. The evolving of species over millions of years is now threatened by a dangerous way of perceiving the environment only as a gift, for which we always seems to find good excuses for exploiting it. The extinction rate of all wary of species is now exploding and some scientists are talking about the sixth mass extinction, and it's not because of the natural climate changes, but is caused by us.

In his famous book *Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold said that an action is right “when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community”.<sup>2</sup> The ignorance leads to the opposite values, to an intrusive attitude through which the natural world is placed at the periphery of our interests; satisfying all our needs become a priority, not just of those that are vital for surviving and human flourishing. The dissolution of ignorance can be done starting from the dissolution of the idea of separation between human being and the environment. A more accurate defining of the environment could probably help us to overcome the duality man- nature. The environment includes all that can be defined in relation and in contradistinction with people, and the problems related to the environment represent perception and action dysfunctions about the ways we act on ecosystems surrounding us, but also on those that we know less.

We need an essential dialogue with nature, not just a functional one. Dialogos = the presence of logos in every manifestation of life requires a dialogue structure with the natural world, and this should be an authentic one, not a

---

<sup>1</sup> Barry Commoner, (1972), *The Closing Circle. Nature, Man, and Technology*, Bantam Books, New York, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Aldo Leopold, (1949), *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 224–225.

domination and a submission one. Our presence in nature should connect us with something from our own nature. To invest in closeness to nature is an investment in our own moral, emotional and spiritual conformation of the self. The ignorance is capable of building a huge wall between the personal self and the world which it belongs to, and leads to an unrealistic view on our importance and role in the holistic image of the Cosmos. The closeness to nature is capable of healing the cultural and social autism individuals manifest stronger and stronger, a dysfunction defined by the feeling of isolation and loss, alienation and the decrease of sensory receptivity, the decline of emotional resilience and capacity of taking risks. In the same time, the cognitive overstimulation because of a more and more alert everyday rhythm of the *fast food, fast-love, fast-life society type* leads to a loss of the capacity to be aware, interested and curious about the aesthetic and spiritual beauty of biodiversity. Caught in the tiring dynamics of daily routine, individuals tend to become immune to higher emotions and thoughts, we lose our creativity and finally, our health. Obesity, myopia, concentration issues, aggressiveness, poor social-emotional development, depression, generalized stress- these are some of the diseases that are increasingly grow in recent years. These problems can be healed by a constant contact with nature and a lifestyle which opposes a sedentary life.

Another issue EEE has to treat is the way which we perceive ourselves in relation to the other people, with the moral patients and with the world as a whole. Education plays a crucial role in drawing of a wide and comprehensive image on the dynamics of life. In the same time, our lifestyle, our thoughts, values and attitudes are influenced and are influences the way we are positioning ourselves in the biotic community, and also the position we assume. It is more obvious that the man assumes the leader position, which implies domination and discretionary obedience depending on his needs. This aspect is not going to change in the near future and it is not necessarily wrong, as long as we can introduce here a logic of equilibrium between what we take from nature and what we give back to nature. Ignoring the natural rights of the other species leads to abuse, atrocities, extinctions and irreparable damages. The species coexist in biotic communities in which each part has a certain importance and role, from plants that give us oxygen to the bees which pollinate and keep alive biodiversity through their work, to animals who are making seed disperse by eating food.

The crisis of our perception on the world as a whole refers to the instrumentalist, mechanistic and reductionist way we divide the living elements of biodiversity in order to fit our needs. The perspective on human being should be, maybe, a more comprehensive one. Man is in essence an emotional, relational, contextual and ambiental being, belonging to both human and biotic community.

Ecological consciousness is not based only on rationality and an account of costs-benefits short-term scheme, but also on emotional intelligence (care, compassion, empathy, love and respect). On this line, it is really important to rethink about the role of emotions and values in the process of taking decisions and on the relation between ecology, economy and ethics, following a direction of real sustainable societies, not just slogan- ones. As long as we perceive ourselves as being consumers and having the right to discretionary aggress biodiversity, we will still be caught in a trap and we could tragically remain stuck in it.

Sustainable development and an assumed, genuine management on the way we live our lives involves a change from dependence to autonomy, from consuming to produce food and smart ideas for present and future. It seems that we often find convenient excuses for not being change factors and we neglect the negative impact of the social sedentariness. People should take action and start to develop a more sustainable and healthy philosophy on how they perceive the link between goods and the space from which they come. We are consumers, but we also can be producers. The value of work should not be underestimated, especially when it comes to food. The genuineness employer who gives us food and a safe place for personal and societal evolution is the Earth, the Sun, the mountains, the rain, the ground, and the authentic personal freedom should guide the individual to destroy the separation from the others and to inspire him to cooperate, to teach him how to value life or to teach him to recognize the value of work, friendships and solidarity. A healthy economy is one in which the people are producing in a sustainable way, based on their necessities but not on all their whims and hedonistic, materialistic pleasures. The rush for pleasure is the one that always keeps us unsatisfied. Education should make the individual being capable of taking decisions based on facts and a critical judgment of their way of goods acquirements, to teach them the importance of integrity and to accept and assume the responsibility for their choices. Unhappily, we are making this tasks incredibly difficult for ourselves.

Maybe we should get back the ability to create a safe space for listening our emotions, to integrate our needs in a healthy economy of using the resources and to learn how to integrate our intellectual awareness (defined in terms of curiosity, compassion, gratitude, the use of intuition and moral imagination, love) in action. A change of perception requires an attention on the state of *awakeness* (presence, attitudes, reactions, fluidity of the self and flow) and *awareness* (noticing the world and understanding how it works, in order to properly integrate oneself into the dynamics of life). Most of the people are scared of nature and feel confused when it comes to establishing a profound connection with it. Caught in the tyranny of immediate interests, we can hardly retrieve ourselves in a free nature, with a

preoccupation towards our self as a symbol for the love and care we have for the Whole we are organically identify. Accepting the fact that the interconnectivity connections are incorporate in the structure of our lives, then every part of this huge whole could be relationally defined through interrelated connections with the other parts, as long as the Whole has an ontological priority. This way, the care we manifest for ourselves and the natural world surrounding us identifies itself as a preoccupation for the natural world in its entirely complexity. We should have a more liberating life process, searching for an exit from static ways of perceiving life, and to rejoicingly reconnect to its organic rhythms and dances. Contemporary man is often unable to recognize the intrinsic value of nature (recreational, aesthetic, scientific, therapeutic and spiritual value) or its instrumental value (in terms of genetic diversity, symbolic and historic value) and finds himself alone, violent and selfish. He becomes alienated because he loses the ability of feeling and understanding the unity of all things, thus becoming conditioned, inert and confused.

The environmental embodied education (or environmental experiential education) and the virtues related to nature has to have the capacity and the power to awake the *thereness*, a term that defines the constant availability to be close to nature in order to protect and restore it when it needs to. This is the meaning for values in actions and it is essential for social hygiene both as individuals and as a community. The problem with formal institutionalized education is that it is too static and it's unable to provoke children and youngsters to explore, to touch, to feel, to smell and to express their curiosities. Nowadays, we face the phenomenon of criminalization of play and the obsession for order, organized play without the interactive experience. Nature is seen as something to travel to, always far away from our civilized world, an unfriendly space where every movement could potentially lead to a danger. The banking education in action is leading to less contact and a sedentary lifestyle.

The term of banking education was invented by Paul Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and it is characterized by an educational model where the teacher "talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable".<sup>3</sup> We live in the era of hyper-protective parents (or helicopter parents), also facing a tendency to reduce the space of freedom to explore and the "knew it all" state of mind, defined as a horizontal, superficial type of knowledge. The commodification of nature is increasingly develop in the mentality of the individuals, the sensory experiences are slowly decreasing and the individual becomes a bystander rather than an active participant to the process of discover the world. Robert Moore, professor at North

---

<sup>3</sup> Paulo Freire, (2005), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, The Continuum International Publishing Group, New York, 71.

Carolina State University talks about the need of experiential experience with all our senses, claiming that

“Children live through their senses. Sensory experiences link the child’s exterior world with their interior, hidden, affective world. Since the natural environment is the principal source of sensory stimulation, freedom to explore and play with the outdoor environment through the senses in their own space and time is essential for healthy development of an interior life.[...] A rich, open environment will continuously present alternative choices for creative engagement. A rigid, bland environment will limit healthy growth and development of the individual or the group.”<sup>4</sup>

The development of inventiveness and imagination is related to the experiences in the outdoors, the natural space being suitable for exploring the beauty of solitude, serenity, contemplating the Space, giving significations for things and emotions, letting yourself being amazed and discovering the flavor of fully presence. Autonomy in education is vital for the individual to take the initiative, to become curious, interested, to search for the answers that fits his needs and to develop in his own rhythm, depending on the learning style, on the type of intelligence (according to Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences) he manifests or on the languages of attachment. Contrariwise, in the model of banking education “the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher”.<sup>5</sup> The students become passive actors and develop a tendency to take the information as it is, not being able to investigate the foundations of the world they are studying. Therefore,

“The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.”<sup>6</sup>

An education model for understanding the natural risks and for an appropriate management of environmental issues requires a pedagogy of openness and interest, and this could not exist without an experiential model in which the child learns how to think, how to create and take decisions on his own. In order to understand the

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Louv, (2010), *Last Child in The Woods*, Atlantic Books, London, 66.

<sup>5</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 73.

<sup>6</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 73.

fundamental social, ecological and cultural principles, there is a need for creating pedagogical contexts capable of generating changes but also to keep alive the interest for exploring, encouraging the solitary experiences in nature and embracing the risk-taking processes. The real learning takes place by exposing the individual to the environment. In this way, he becomes more alert and aware of his body motions, of the thoughts, starting to have a better focus on oneself, developing motricity, starting to recognize the unjustified fears that he has to overcome. The ideas start to articulate more accurate and the individual realize that the quality of interaction is given by the availability of playing and allowing myself to be fluid, organic. Thus, the individual starts to use his enthusiasm and intelligence for his own growth, becoming more aware of his capacities and the value of the environment he is living in. In environmental embodied education, the educator intercedes the relationship between the learner and the outdoors, building a bridge between the observer and the observed object. In the dynamics of this relationship comes up the key of closeness, and the individual starts to accept himself with kindness, compassion and tenderness. Waking up the sensible nature in a mechanized man, the experiential education in nature gives the individual the possibility to place correctly to his needs, without creating damages to the others. As Holmes Rolston III claimed,

“Nature is a vast scene of birth and death, springtime and harvest, permanence and change; of budding, flowering, fruiting, and withering away; of processive unfolding; of pain and pleasure; of success and failure; of ugliness giving way to beauty and beauty to ugliness. From the contemplation of it we get a feeling for life's transient beauty sustained over chaos. There is a music to it all – and not the least when in a minor key. Though we are required to spend our lives in struggle, yet we are able to cherish the good Earth and accept the kind of world in which we find ourselves. *We are finding out who we are by finding out where we are and how we are emplaced there.*”<sup>7</sup>

Environmental- based education helps the individual to overcome his limits and to set up his “risk thermostat”, gradually learning what is safe and what’s dangerous, adapting, learning to interpret the signs and stimuli from the environment, having a positive attitude to changes and variable conditions. In nature, the individual meets himself in an hypostasis where he has to know himself better and to value the creative, emotional and physical potential. Multi-sensor experiences in nature are

---

<sup>7</sup> Holmes Rolston III, (2005), *Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole*, in Ronald Sandier, Philip Cafaro, (eds.): *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 64.



helping to build cognitive networks that are necessary for supporting the intellectual development. The culture of control and domination changed the perspective on education, making it more rational but less emotional, narrative and open to diversity. As Aldous Huxley said, “Literary or scientific, liberal or specialist, all our education is predominantly verbal and therefore fails to accomplish what it is supposed to do. Instead of transforming children into fully developed adults, it turns out students of the natural sciences who are completely unaware of Nature as the primary fact of experience, it inflicts upon the world students of the humanities who know nothing of humanity, their own or anyone else’s.”<sup>8</sup> Based on my experience as an educator in a Green School in Romania, I will explain how we can replace fear with F.E.A.R (Feeling Excited and Ready,<sup>9</sup>) and how to discover and experience the state of flow, in terms that Mihály Csikszentmihályi defined it.

Last but not least, the environmental ethics needs some improvements for its theoretical and practical offer to become more attractive, with substance and meaning. We need more intelligent and adaptable ethics for present and future, and, as I previously said, there is a strong need for incorporating the emotional intelligence into the ecological consciousness. There has to be room for sensibility and joy in the discourse of the environmentalists and naturalists of all kind. Maybe we need a philosophy and an education of celebrating life, of discovering, appreciating and sharing our human and organic common roots. The academic discourse on virtues is sometimes too inflexible and rigid. The ethicist has to leave the heights of the institutionalized values that he is trying to explain, being unable to animate his discourse with his life and professional experience and with the joy of living what he preached. What is missing in the environmental ethics is the education and the models of exposing and active implication, a real commitment towards nature. The dance of imagination is dissolved by the rhetoric of arguments and metaphysical pies in the sky. Instead of convenient speeches, environmental ethics should propose a courageous exercise of education for closeness, to inspire and to produce an infrastructure of direct contact with the environment that stimulates the rise of ethical values and attitudes. Where there is no emotional investment, there is no substantial and lasting bond. There is a need for participative environmental ethics, with a current and extended perspective on the methods to incorporate theories and values into practice.

---

<sup>8</sup> Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, 22–23.

<https://www.maps.org/images/pdf/books/HuxleyA1954TheDoorsOfPerception.pdf>, accessed 21 March 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Term used by Neale Donald Walsch in his book, *When Everything Changes, Change Everything*.

The time for systematic exposure of theories has gone, it is time for intelligent, courageous and innovative ethics for the environment, where the criticism to be really constructive, where the anxieties related to climate changes to be treated with real and viable solutions. It is really important for me to note that learning is not necessarily the result of teaching good advices and theories, but rather we should understand life, connections and facing fears of strengths as educational experiences. As Ivan Illich said, “most learning happens casually, and even most intentional learning is not the result of programmed instruction”.<sup>10</sup> As a conclusion to what I previously expose, environmental ethics should meet experiential education for better and valuable results, not only at a level of intellectual acquisitions of values, but especially on the level of individuals’ cognitive and emotional evolution mechanisms.

### **3. Which are the instruments EEE is working with?**

The most powerful instrument that is able to provide solutions to the problem of deficient communication of man with his own nature and the environment could be the environmental-embodied education (or experiential-based education in the outdoors). I already established that the ambient problems have, on the core, some difficulties of understanding of the place and the role of our species in the biosphere. Just as Peter Jones said,

“while technological development has greatly increased our ability to have an impact on global ecological processes, in every real sense we remain simply a single species in a complex ecological web, joined in myriad relationships with other species, and with nonliving components and systems within the ecological whole. [...] It is our perceived separation from nature, a form of environmental alienation, that lies at the heart of the ecological crisis. In this sense, it can be argued that we have lost sight of our place in the natural world and, perhaps most important, lost the sense of connection, of relationship to the other parts of the web.”<sup>11</sup>

For recognizing the environment as a factor for social, emotional, physical, cognitive, emotional and moral development there is a need for a bridge to facilitate a certain type of profound communication between the individual and the surroundings.

---

<sup>10</sup> Ivan Illich, (2000), *Deschooling Society*, Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd; New Edition, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Jones, (2010), *Responding to the ecological crisis: transformative pathways for social work education*, Journal of Social Work Education, vol. 46, no. 1, 71.

Environmental embodied education, a pedagogical model I am going to detail in the following, is a transformative pedagogical design. My transformative education and learning model is based on Jack Mezirow's considerations, who claims that this educational approach is "learning that transforms problematic frames of reference- sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change".<sup>12</sup> Transformative education propose a critical reflection exercise manifested in two distinct directions: a critical reflection on other people's assumptions (an objective orientation of the reflection) and one that is addressed on the self (a subjective orientation, which implies a research of the validity of personal assumptions related to our personal relationship with the environment). In *Responding to the ecological crisis: transformative pathways for social work education*, Peter Jones says that

"encouraging students to critically consider the assumptions, values, and beliefs of modernity, and the ways in which these are implicated in the current ecological crisis, will be an essential step in developing a new worldview. equally important, however, will be creating the space within which students can reflect on the ways in which the presuppositions of the dominant paradigm have shaped their personal worldviews and their own values and beliefs, particularly the way in which they see their relationship with the nonhuman world".<sup>13</sup>

There is a need for reexamination of the assumptions we usually use when we face the natural world, together with an orientation towards moral values and principles (for example: the oral principle of justice, of caution, of subsidiarity). The process of self-discovering, with an healthy growth and a realistic image about our place in the world is not a difficult one, if we assume a type of education for honesty and dialogue. Also, "the containerized kids" (accustomed with the indoor spaces) need to be released, and the model of environmental embodied education could open the doors of perception for them. As Ionescu and Glava claimed,

"starting with these ages, at the school curriculum level, many highly valued school subjects include abstract, depersonalized and decontextualized learning contents, associated with education as symbol manipulation. Most of the school contents are emptied by the aspects that could physically, emotionally or creatively

---

<sup>12</sup> Jack Mezirow, (2003), *Transformative learning as discourse*, Journal of Transformative Education, 1(1), 58.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Jones. (2010), *Responding to the ecological crisis: transformative pathways for social work education*, Journal of Social Work Education, vol. 46, nr. 1, 74.

involve students in the construction of meanings. Students tend to not recognize the relevance of the academic contents for real life problem solving, and even though sometimes they are successful with this type of learning, the results prove not to be persistent in time or transformative.”<sup>14</sup>

So, what is the environmental embodied education? Let’s begin with some words of John Rich, who described an adequate image of it, proposing an imaginative exercise:

“I imagine a classroom that turns outward, both figuratively and literally. The grounds would become a classroom, buildings would look outward, and gardens would cover the campus. The works of naturalists would be the vehicle by which we would teach reading and writing. Math and science would be taught as a way to understand the intricacies of nature, the potential to meet human needs, and how all things are interlaced. A well-rounded education would mean learning the basics, to become part of a society that cherished nature while at the same time contributing to the well-being of mankind.”<sup>15</sup>

So, experiential learning in nature is learning by doing, a process in which the learners are immersed into the experience, then they have a reflective observation, followed by an abstract conceptualization on what is relevant to learn from the experience (in terms of rules, values, attitudes) and the active experimentation of testing the values and concepts. The experience-based education is a learning process in which the subject is directly in touch with the reality being studied. On the basis, this education model is based on the constructivist theory of learning, in which the truth is independent from experience, but it has to be inferred by a reflection and an observation process. The knowledge is not a product but a process, and the ideas are continuously refreshed through the experience, as a fluid movement. The body of knowledge becomes a process of transaction between personal knowledge and social (exterior) knowledge, the environment becoming a pedagogical instrument, with a strong social and cultural value. Here are some of environmental- embodied education’s features:

- a) The learner is directly participating to the learning experience, rather than being just a spectator or a passive information receiver (like a data warehouse).
- b) The learning activities requires personal motivation, invested energy and responsibility for the learning process.

---

<sup>14</sup> Thea Ionescu, Adina Glava, (2015), *Embodied Learning: Connecting psychology, education and the world*, Studia UBB Psychol.-Paed., LX, 2, 5–17, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Louv, (2010), *Last Child in the Woods*, 136.

- c) The learning mechanism has to contain a mixture of both process and content, has to make sense and to be real in terms of consequences for the learner. The learning process has to be relevant, to feed learner's interests and to be provocative enough to stimulate, but not too difficult because it will have a demotivation effect.
- d) Lack of criticability from the others. The learning space has to be a physically and emotionally safe space for exploration, with a sense of support, acceptance and non-violent communication. The excessive judgment leads to a decrease of the levels of interest for the studied object and an growing rate of the dissatisfaction and stress. The methods of communication that fits in this pedagogical structure is non-violent and empathic communication, based on emotional intelligence as a basis for cognitive acquisitions, on cooperation and respect. In the same time, a dissonance in the way individuals perceive and act in the environment is able to potentially stimulate them to explore and take the risks on their own. The learning process is truly enhanced when individuals are given the opportunity to operate outside of their comfort zones. A reality that is perfectly predictable does not stimulate the individual to face obstacles and to properly manage the risks. Also, the freedom and the independence of the learner tends to decrease, together with the decline of emotional resilience. Obsessively over-protective parents are slowly destroying the development of children's autonomy, structuring their free time but potentially killing the necessary dreamtime and solitude moments. In an era of too much control and of a rush for performance, free time is becoming a luxury. Environmental-embodied education allows the individuals to discover the beauty of nature in their own rhythm, to take their time for identifying patterns in the environment and to act responsibly, according to some principles and environmental values discovered by them and abstracted with the facilitator. A flourishing life implies a creative adaptation to the variables of the surroundings. An essential fact in environmental-embodied education is that the facilitator guides rather than telling the learners what to do; his job is to help individuals to understand why their actions are valuable and which are the consequences of certain actions. The communication model is clear, without reprovals and threats. The moral subjects learn how to become courageous and honest by facilitator's courage and honesty. Because playing is the way the children learn better, the facilitator is supporting the children to explore, to enjoy and to be amazed by the variety of natural surroundings' beauties. Just as Rabi Martin Levin claimed in Richard Louv's *Last Child in*

*the Woods*, “our goal should be to live in radical amazement. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.”<sup>16</sup>

So, in environmental- embodied education me and the children from Green School are watching through magnifying glass the motion of ants on the ground, we analyze plants’ growth and have our own pedagogical garden. The children explore and refine their senses in the sensory garden, make environmental art, they eat and have the possibility to sleep outside in an oriel, the relax in the hammocks, observe the clouds and discover the dynamics of weather and temperature, they weekly clean up the shore of Somes river near our school and learn about anthropic impact on species and natural habitats, they find worms and manifest awe and wonder towards them, they learn to cook, to take care of animals and to value the potential of honest and empathic dialogue, developing a broader holistic perspective on things. Through empathic communication, they start to express a rational thinking, in which their wills and needs are expressed in terms of preferences (“I wish, I will do my best to get this...”) but non catastrophic (“It has to happen!”), learning how to have realistic expectations. This way, the individuals (children in this case) start to assume the virtue of simplicity, with a rational and a limited use of external goods in order to reach happiness; they rather discover the importance of temperance and the value of *soft-fascinations* (sunsets, the movement of snow-flakes through the air, the heat waves of the sun touching the ground). Using this approach, the children will develop a sense of belonging and a softness in treating themselves and the others, restoring and appreciating nature while they restore and appreciate themselves. Just as in the triadic structure of happiness, developed by the psychologist Martin Seligman, through EEE, the individuals cultivate an appetite for exploring the activities that bring a pleasant life, learning to be aware of their strengths, being implied in self-efficacy activities and learning to be consistent in their values. Also, they tend to feel more comfortable in intimacy, with a higher appreciation of solitude, without the fear of being abandoned or unloved.

#### **4. What results in terms of values, virtues and attitudes does EEE provides?**

From the authentic interaction with the outdoors we can get the resources for redefining the values that guide our lives, having a more profound image of the way natural elements work and discovering the joy of being surrounded, starting to

---

<sup>16</sup> Richard Louv. (2010), *Last Child in the Woods*, 292.

feel and show respect for all living beings. The quality of interaction between man and the environment modifies the internal structure of the individual, this one starting to be rightly oriented to nature, a virtue involving an

“indefinite range of reasons taught for responding, in the broadest sense, to nature, in certain ways. These include, at least, wondering at, looking hard at, finding out more about, rejoicing in, understanding why other people spend their whole lives studying, being anxious to preserve, not dismissing or ignoring or destroying or forgetting or assuming one can always put a price on...everything in the natural world.”<sup>17</sup>

The individuals discover that they are part of something bigger than their own personal space of interests and become more interested in admiring, preserving and restoring nature, as a gesture of an intrinsic architecture of self-care. EEE is a shout against the indifference, its methods of closeness to nature teaching them to correctly position towards their needs without being greedy. An education for a better fit into natural world is one that teaches individuals how to assume the happiness of living without creating damages. The greatest advantage of this education model represent the fluidity of the self, with curiosity and awareness. Just as Carl Rogers said in *On Becoming a Person*, the widen of perception through the concrete experience help the person to become “more able to listen to himself, to experience what is going on within himself. He is more open to his feelings of fear and discouragement and pain. He is also more open to his feelings of courage, and tenderness, and awe. He is free to live his feelings subjectively, as they exist in him, and also free to be aware of these feelings.”<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, the person become to understand the value of exploring nature by himself and to be richer in experience, not to validate it through some concepts or theories. If the moral or spiritual master is the one that is able to stimulate the discover of truth and beauty that was in the intimate personal world of the individual from the beginning, then natural world is truly a link between the complex parts that makes the individual to become that self that one truly is. The self-confidence arises from the confrontation with the imposed limits, so the dissonance that is created by an unfamiliar environment and a certain level of perceived risk leads to an increased intensity of activating intrapersonal and interpersonal processes.

---

<sup>17</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse, (2007), *Environmental Virtue Ethics, Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, ed. by R. L. Walker, P. J. Ivanhoe. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 167.

<sup>18</sup> Carl Rogers, (1961), *On Becoming a Person*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 188.

We often have the idea that for surviving we have to compete, to fight, to show that we are better than the others (survival of the fittest). Maybe we should make a switch to real cooperation, dialogue, eating and celebrating friendships together, adapting together and creating nature-smart communities, with people able to discuss and be interested in producing food and values, minimizing the negative impact on the natural environment. The power and the value of a society relies in its capacity to become a potential moving solution, fighting against the indifference, discrimination, violence and conflict. For reaching this state, there is a need for an education against delusion and, maybe, a step back in order to retrieve the natural closeness for the organic from we are made by, too. Or, in David Thoreau's words,

“Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or breakfast, gently and without perturbation; let company come and let company go, let the bells ring and the children cry – determined to make a day of it. Why should we knock under and go with the stream? Let us not be upset and overwhelmed in that terrible rapid and whirlpool called a dinner, situated in the meridian shallows. [...] Let us settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion, and appearance.”<sup>19</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

Maybe, just as Antaeus, the mythological figure who used to win a battle as long as he remained with his both feet on the ground, the man remains morally creditable as long as he is not taking his hands off the world he's living in. When his attitude towards nature become intrusive, the whole structure based on his capacity to moral self-legislation dignity and rationality will fall. The ecological crisis represents a crisis of perception about the habitation of the moral subject in a world that he received as dowry. Cultivating a moral of care, based on empathy and strong relationships- this is a promise for present and future generations to have a better place to live and a manifest against dangerous overconfidence, ignorance and anthropocentric approach. As Stegner Wallace memorably said,

---

<sup>19</sup> Henry. David Thoreau, (2004), *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, The Internet Bookmobile Edition, Text from the Library of America Edition: *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 73. <https://azeitao.files.wordpress.com/2007/05/walden.pdf>, accessed 21 March 2018.



“Something will have gone out of us as a people if we ever let the remaining wilderness be destroyed; if we permit the last virgin forest to be turned into comic books and plastic cigarette cases; if we drive the few remaining members of the wild species into zoos or to extinction; if we pollute the last clear air and dirty the last clean streams and push our paved roads through the last of the silence, so that never again will Americans be free in their own country from the noise, the exhausts, the stinks of human and automotive waste. And so that never again can we have the chance to see ourselves single, separate, vertical and individual in the world, part of the environment of trees and rocks and soil, brother to the other animals, part of the natural world and competent to belong in it. [...] So, for the sake of our own identities, of being who we are where we are, of being at home in the world, we need to maintain the integrities of the fauna and flora on our landscapes. Else we will become strangers to our places; we will be misfits, upsetting residents. We reach the truth that we are embodied persons.”<sup>20</sup>

Environmental-embodied education represents a removal of the individual from his comfort zone and a refreshing offer for our civic culture. The effort of a critical evaluation of the assumptions we use in our lives may be a huge and difficult challenge and, therefore, we usually try to avoid it. But the beginning of every possible change is the meeting of the individual with himself in a lucid and unconcealed manner. *Gnōthi seautón* – know thyself, the ancient greek aphorism that once was inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, it’s an advice for moral hygiene that EEE tries to adopt and practical implement through the variety of its methods. This is, maybe, a part of the geography of hope Wallace Stegner was talking about, and a self-loving strategy for a flourishing life seen as a harmonious cohabitation with nature, with the Cosmos.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Commoner, Barry, (1972), *The Closing Circle. Nature, Man, and Technology*, Bantam Books, New York.
- Freire, Paulo, (2005), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, The Continuum International Publishing Group, New York.

---

<sup>20</sup> Wallace Stegner, (1961), *The Wilderness Idea, Wilderness: America's Living Heritage*, ed. David Brower, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 97–102.

- Hursthouse, Rosalind, (2007), *Environmental Virtue Ethics, Working Virtue: Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, ed. by R. L. Walker, P. J. Ivanhoe. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Huxley, Aldous, *The Doors of Perception*, 22-23,  
<https://www.maps.org/images/pdf/books/HuxleyA1954TheDoorsOfPerception.pdf>.
- Illich, Ivan, (2000), *Deschooling Society*, Marion Boyars Publishers Ltd; New Edition.
- Ionescu, Thea, Glava, Adina, (2015), *Embodied Learning: Connecting psychology, education and the world*, Studia UBB Psychol.-Paed., LX, 2.
- Jones, Peter, (2010), *Responding to the ecological crisis: transformative pathways for social work education*, Journal of Social Work Education, vol. 46, nr. 1.
- Leopold, Aldo, (1949), *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford.
- Louv, Richard, (2010), *Last Child in The Woods*, Atlantic Books, London.
- Mezirow, Jack, (2003), *Transformative learning as discourse*, Journal of Transformative Education, 1(1).
- Rogers, Carl, (1961), *On Becoming a Person*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.
- Rolston III, Holmes, (2005), *Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole* in Ronald Sandier, Philip Cafaro, (eds.) *Environmental Virtue Ethics*, Lanham. MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.
- Stegner, Wallace, (1961), *The Wilderness Idea, Wilderness: America's Living Heritage*, ed. David Brower, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.
- Thoreau, Henry, David, (2004), *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, The Internet Bookmobile Edition, Text from the Library of America Edition: *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*,  
<https://azeitao.files.wordpress.com/2007/05/walden.pdf>.