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Introduction

Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development as a Contemporary Educational Priority

The phenomena of information noise and information overproduction relate to many contemporary civilization challenges, including the realization of the idea of sustainable development. Continuous education in the area of solving environment protection and human health problems seems to be one of the priority tasks of the didactics of biology.

Volume I of the Annals touched upon the topics related to didactics of biology in the context of its shifts as a pedagogy subdiscipline and a subject of the Nature Studies. Volume II covered the issue of educational models in the area of biodiversity promotion. Volume III, in turn, focused on “health literacy” – knowledge and skills every member of the knowledge-based society should possess on the topic of health.

The challenges the contemporary schools on all educational levels have to face revolve upon the interdisciplinary approach to environmental protection, and in the wider meaning, sustainable development. It is a difficult and complex task, because of the fact that currently the actions taken by schools, from primary school to an university, are too slow in comparison to social changes and needs regarding the environmental problem solving. Climate changes, ecological catastrophes, atmosphere pollution or modern-age diseases are crises the contemporary world has to face. The human anthropogenic activity contributes to the disadvantageous changes in the natural environment. This is why appropriate education plays an incredibly important role in the shaping of a proper life style and acting towards environment protection. More and more attention to the issues of global and local actions of the society on sustainable environment is being paid by governments, governmental and non-governmental organizations and scientists of many countries.

Environment protection is a multidisciplinary subject from the border of a number of scientific areas, which becomes more and more important in the sphere of social responsibility for the coexistence of man and nature. Educational negligence in the area of promoting respect to natural environment and media actions towards promoting consumptionism result in the contemporary civilisation life style not always being in accordance with taking care of nature, and the environment protection

awareness is too low to take any actions towards counteracting the natural resources degradation. This is why it is so important to educate specialists in the environment area and prepare students of both future teachers and decision-makers to properly include environmental protection into the educational process and understand the essence of managing the environment. It is also important to work towards the safety in terms of “global education,” which can be achieved through proper educational work on the local and national scale, e.g. through promoting innovative interdisciplinary research and educational projects undertaken in cooperation with specialists and institutions of different areas of science. These actions should include the issue of the environment in the cultural, economic, political, democratic and technological approach in the international context. The results achieved on the basis of this cooperation can contribute to implementing new teaching strategies for environmental protection. Exchanging experiences, test results and formulated materials is a chance for teachers, educators and also students to start increasing the capabilities, range and quality of environmental education. Teaching about the environment should be connected with the understanding of the needs of specific people, stimulating solidarity in the range of economic, ethical, political and cultural actions and raising the sense of co-responsibility for improving the environment.

A reflection on the function of formal education in promoting the rules of sustainable development should include the multiplicity of education goals and the readiness of students and teachers to cooperate in this aspect. Helping schools implement good practices on the environmental protection should be supported by the municipalities and local societies. The actions programme of the local government should be based on promoting the knowledge-deepening process on environmental protection, as well as organizing the initiatives engaging the society of a given region to actively improve the state of the surrounding environment and increase pro-ecological awareness, and thus take effective actions in the region.

The dynamics and complexity of the environment as a place where a man lives requires considering it in the scope of multidimensional education open to the society's needs. Shaping the right attitudes and opinions towards the pro-ecological actions should be permanently implemented in the school and university curricula and understood as a list of teaching and learning goals. Implementing new content regarding the scientific advances in the field of sustainable development in the formal education should be correlated with the promotion of the upbringing towards the respect for nature protection laws. Only the right motivation of the members of the society to implement the environment protection knowledge, take actions in this regard and use the proper system of values in the environment protection aspect can influence the global problem of environment pollution, respect the law in this regard and creatively solve the worldwide problems of sustainable development. Learning the practical competences in understanding and integrating the actions towards shaping the pro-environmental attitudes and supporting the initiatives on the notion of being responsible for the future of the world in the difficult reality of

today can be facilitated by modernizing the educational process and filling the gaps in the students' knowledge structure regarding the issue of environment protection.

The special educational role in teaching about the environment is being played by the media as means of non-formal education. Through this the society can receive information on the advantages resulting from the latest genetic and technological studies about biodiversity, as well as use them in a balanced management of natural resources. Monitoring the protected areas, developing strategies and programmes of maintaining biodiversity and information on the international cooperation in this area should reach as many people as possible. A very important role in forwarding the right patterns of nature education is being attributed to the organization and coordination of an information network on the international arena through the integration of environmental, artistic, economic and social science knowledge. A good way to understand the environmental problems and analyze the social behaviours in this regard is the popularizational activity of the university. The constant decline of the environment quality, social and economic problems and inappropriate behaviour of people in the aspect of nature protection require higher schools to strongly influence the knowledge and the shaping of the system of values of students in the area of increasing the environmental awareness and motivate them to solve local problems of sustainable development. The constant development of the society, both economically and technologically, creates the need for the higher education institutions to look for ways of realizing the goals of environmental protection and to create methods that make society aware of the need to responsibly deal with environmental challenges of the modern world.

Katarzyna Potyrała and Karolina Czerwiec