

# ENGLISH AS AN ARTS DISCIPLINE IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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The subject English can be used as a discipline or as a medium. This paper describes the form of English as a discipline and questions the way it is used in environmental education. A call is made to involve in environmental education those who understand the form of English as a discipline in particular and of the arts in general.

"Environmental Education is the process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among man, his culture and his bio-physical surroundings. Environmental Education also entails practice in decision making and the self-formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality."

(IUCN 1971)

"Environmental Education is a process leading to the acquisition of environmental knowledge and the development of attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour which reflect a concern for the health of the total environment as well as for the quality of life of all its inhabitants."

(Hurry 1982)

*Awareness:* to help individuals and social groups acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to, the total environment and its allied problems.

*Attitude:* to help individuals and social groups acquire social values, strong feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in its protection and improvement.

*Evaluation ability:* to help individuals and social groups evaluate environmental measures and education programmes in terms of ecological, political, economic, social, aesthetic and educational factors." (Objectives 1,3 and 5, Belgrade Charter. UNESCO 1976)

## INTRODUCTION

As the above representative quotations show, most recognised definitions, aims and objectives of Environmental Education include the area of the affective. In spite of this emphasis research (Berry 1974) has shown that in practice the tendency of Environmental Education curricula

"has been to promote environmental study as an objective, scientific, geographical, historical or sociological study. Children are rarely asked to draw conclusions or make judgements on the basis of their own experience of the environment. They are seen merely as collectors or recorders of information, and rarely as sources, interpreters or critics. The environment is thus seen in the context of academic study, involving only measurement and quantification . . . the affective relationship between our pupils and the environment, the area of sentiments and feelings about the environment is neglected."

(Adams and Ward 1982 p.20)

The reason for this is that Environmental Education has developed out of the scientific tradition, rather than the artistic tradition for which the affective domain is an important focus.

Environmental Education curricula are, therefore, perhaps not as effective in achieving the aims and objectives outlined above as they could be if they were holistic or truly interdisciplinary, that is, if they included the artistic and scientific disciplines. This observation is supported by Adams and Ward (1982 p.20), who state that

"any systematic approach to Environmental Education requires interdisciplinary study . . . Subject disciplines may be considered merely as languages: ways of knowing. Each discipline, with its own concepts and ways of understanding offers specialist approaches to study. In different contexts one may be more appropriate than another, or perhaps we cannot have a really complete picture of anything until we have approached it from different viewpoints."

## THE ARTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

In South Africa there is an awareness of the need for Environmental Education to be interdisciplinary and much emphasis has been placed on this need. (Archbald and Gundlach 1971, Stapp 1974, Hurry 1982 and Richards 1984). This is laudable and an important step-forward. What is troubling, however, is that through a lack of understanding of the nature of the artistic disciplines and the specific contribution their ways of knowing can make to the achievement of the stated aims of Environmental Education, the manner in which they are included in Environmental Education curricula is inadequate. They have either been reduced to non-disciplines which the artist no longer recognises as belonging to him, or they have been technicised to fit in with the scientific emphasis in the Environmental Education programme. They have not been allowed to make their specific contribution to encourage the way of knowing which seems to be as central to the aims of Environmental Education as the scientific, quantitative approach.

An effective way of illustrating this is to examine an arts discipline commonly included in the Environmental Education curriculum; English first language. English as an arts discipline has a contribution to make to the achievement of the aims of Environmental Education because of its unique way of knowing. We need to examine the nature of its form and see if its inclusion in the Environmental Education curriculum is true to this form or if it is being reduced or technicised.

## THE NATURE OF ENGLISH AS A DISCIPLINE

Initially, the distinction must be made between English as a discipline and English as a medium. Many Environmental Education curricula claim to teach English when they use it merely as a medium. It is assumed that English is included in the curriculum if the pupil is asked to give an oral or written report on an activity such as an analysis of vehicle flow through a certain urban area or to record sensory perceptions during a solitaire exercise. English is therefore not being allowed to make its specific contribution as a discipline.

This arises perhaps through a lack of understanding of the nature of English. One of the simplest ways of describing the form of English as an arts

discipline is to examine the four main traditions that have contributed to its form and to see if they are included in our Environmental Education curricula. Abbs (1982) describes these four traditions chronologically beginning with the Progressive Movement which began in the early 1900's.

The Progressives claimed that self-expression had been prohibited in the teaching of English and they called for an end to mechanistic forms of teaching. They felt that the child should be the centre of the curriculum and that schooling should be more spontaneous. This approach focussed on creativity, it celebrated feeling and individual self-expression. Rooted in the ideas of Rousseau, it was influenced by theorists such as Montessori and Pestalozzi. This emphasis on individual self-expression needs to be linked with the discipline of the next movement if we are to teach English effectively.

Abbs identifies the second movement as the Cambridge School which, under the leadership of F.R. Leavis, emphasised the principles of cultural continuity and critical community. These principles point to three responsibilities the teacher of English needs to hold. She must:

1. "initiate the child into the heritage of myth and literature, to provide the great but uncertain seed of impulse with a bed of culture." (Abbs 1982 p.14);
2. slowly convert the children into a receptive and discriminating critical audience, and
3. develop in her pupils an acute sensitivity to poetic language; give them a delight in words.

The third movement, and possibly the one felt most strongly in South African teaching at the moment, is what Abbs calls the Socio-linguistic School. This movement is informed less by literature or philosophy (as the Cambridge and Progressive schools were) than by linguistics and sociology. It saw the importance of language to the whole curriculum and emphasised the role of spoken language. It is this area which informs much English teaching in South Africa today. (Bakker 1985). English has become medium rather than discipline and the emphasis rests not on literature or creative work so much as on communication skills such as report writing and oracy and social studies. This approach to English teaching has become what many would term 'values education'. It has denied the discipline its own logic and what Abbs calls its own kind of "poetic praxis". Much English teaching within integrated Environmental Education curricula lies within the Socio-linguistic School.

The final movement is one that sees English as an expressive discipline, as one of the arts. This impetus in English teaching rests on the distinction between English as a medium and English as a discipline.

"All teachers, simply because they teach through language, are concerned with English as a medium. However, English teachers, as teachers of a specific discipline, are pre-eminantly committed to a particular kind of language, the language of literature and myth, the language of feeling and imagination, the potent language of expressive utterance, what D.H. Lawrence named 'art speech'."

(Abbs 1982 p.2).

Abbs links English as a discipline to the "common nature of the creative process as it manifests itself in all the arts," and claims that the arts form "one indispensable symbolic form for the comprehension of experience" (*ibid*) and must

therefore be included wholeheartedly within the total curriculum.

In summary, therefore, good English teaching should include a commitment to creative self-expression, and a honing of the child's critical abilities. It should give the child the skills to make sound qualitative judgements and must include the creation of a literate, articulate communicator who can assess his social milieu. At the same time it must be seen as an art discipline; "a literary-expressive discipline". (*ibid*).

#### IS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INTERDISCIPLINARY?

If we look at Environmental Education we can see that the English teaching that occurs frequently does not have the many-faceted quality described above. There is a focus on English as medium rather than as discipline. When it is included as a discipline it tends to fit into the socio-linguistic mode, it is used as communication or as a form of values education. If the emotional, creative aspect is included it is done so in a token fashion, for example the writing down of feelings while on a solitaire experience. These creative 'mutterings' are not honed and worked upon until they become art forms, they are merely accepted as they are and the Environmental Educator's conscience is clear: he has included creative writing. However, he has not used the subject as a literary-expressive discipline in the way Abbs urges us to do.

If the qualitative, critical aspects of English are included in the Environmental Education curriculum, their inclusion tends to be done superficially or in a token fashion: a book or poem about the natural environment is included not so much for its literary quality or its ability to hone the child's critical ability, but for its environmental theme. Thus many Environmental Education curricula are not interdisciplinary in the sense that they do not include English as a discipline.

The aims of Environmental Education show that the affective, emotional and qualitative components of an Environmental Education curriculum are as essential as the cognitive and experiential components. To return to the Adams and Ward quotation above

"each discipline, with its own concepts and ways of understanding offers specialist approaches to study. In different contexts one may be more appropriate than another, or perhaps we cannot have a really complete picture of anything until we have approached it from different viewpoints." (*op.cit.*)

Environmental Educators need, therefore, to include 'complete' English teaching in their courses if they are to be effective in the creation of an environmental ethic in their pupils. English as a discipline has a unique contribution to make and it must be allowed to make this contribution.

#### CONCLUSION

The above argument does not help the majority of Environmental Educators who wish to include English as a literary-expressive discipline in their programmes. Most Environmental Educators come from a scientific tradition and the teaching of English as I am describing it involves a specialised training in a particular way of knowing, often alien to those from the scientific community. My suggestion is that Environmental Educators need to reject the division in our society between the scientist and the artist. They need to recognise that the artist has a particular way of knowing that can help the Environmental Educator in the

achievement of his aims. The vital importance of Environmental Education to our survival and the creation of an environmental ethic in our population overrides the continuance of the traditional split between art and science. It might be useful for the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA) to examine its membership to determine what proportion of its members come from the arts community. I suspect there would be very few. This is largely because the Environmental Educator has not acknowledged the fact that the arts are a particular way of knowing which needs as much expertise to understand and teach as do the sciences. The teaching of the arts cannot be undertaken by an untrained person. Many artists see their discipline reduced to bark rubbings or poems about animals and reject an involvement with Environmental Education programmes. We must acknowledge our need of the artist's expertise so that our disciplines can work together to achieve the aims of Environmental Education.

Our civilization faces a new vision of reality "an ecological vision in a sense which goes far beyond the immediate concerns with environmental protection. To emphasize this deeper meaning of ecology, philosophers and scientists have begun to make a distinction between 'deep ecology' and 'shallow environmentalism': whereas shallow environmentalism is concerned with more efficient control and management of the natural environment for the benefit of 'man', the deep ecology movement recognises that ecological balance will require profound changes in our perception of the role of human beings in the planetary ecosystem. In short, it will require a new philosophical and religious basis." (Capra 1982 p.458).

If we are to attain the 'cultural revolution' Capra describes we cannot maintain the separation of Art and Science, we must work together if we are to move 'towards a more liveable future' for us all. (Stapp and Swan 1974).

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