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Environmental Ethics and Spiritual Ecofeminism as tools for environmental education in a politicized ethics of care.

Ethics, Psychology and Environmental Education

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Abstract

There is an urgent need to change our patterns of behaviour in order to face the environmental problems of today's World. Environmental Education by the hand of environmental ethics, as one emerging field of philosophy that is linking religion and environment as interdisciplinary approaches as those concerning Human Ecology, have one of the main roles to call for changes. With these approaches, we are examining the relationships between men and nature. The present paper wants to illustrate the different approaches that environmental ethics, with a main focus on spiritual ecofeminism as tools, can be very useful to change our individual behaviours in order to promote a change in the society. There is no doubt that individual and social agency requires a reorientation of a new curriculum framework and approach, with new pedagogical strategies that engage and breathe real authentic life into the process of learning and the nature of education experience. The emergent postmodern education is paying attention to these ecological concerns and brings attention to the unconscious as well as the physical, emotional, and psychological places of education, to celebrate the interconnectedness of knowledge, learning experiences, international communities, the natural world and life itself. In agreement with these approaches, Spiritual Ecofeminism then implies that there is an urgent need for the development of an holistic education that takes into consideration not only cognition, but also, emotions, spirituality, and kinesiology as important aspects of the learning process. Therefore, although these ideas are challenging science, education needs to be careful and self critical in the process of incorporating spirituality into an environmental education pedagogy. Spiritual feminism in particular, has a lot of potential to positively influence a political environmental education that embraces diversity and holistic learning, specially contesting other more dominant ways of viewing nature for environmental education.

Environmental Ethics and Spiritual Ecofeminism as tools for Environmental Education and Development of Holistic Curriculums.

With the present paper I want to establish what have been the ideological and intellectual influences, with a human ecological and interdisciplinary approach, that has influence the academic field during the last 20 to 30 years in the areas of environmental education to face the current problems of today's world at the environmental level. First I want to make a description of the different aspects of environmental ethics, religion and ecology with some of its thinkers and theories, to pass to engage the ideas of feminism and specially spiritual feminism as tools that can help engaging people in changing their behavioral pattern, and linking the challenges of current science theory, the educational need, for incorporating spirituality into an environmental education pedagogy. I will discuss what have been some of the current curriculum developments in postmodern education, which incorporates holistic approaches that celebrate the interconnectedness of knowledge, learning experiences, international communities, the natural world and life itself.

During the last decades, we have observed numerous efforts for collective action to help the global problems of today. Nevertheless, the pessimism among the population and the denial among other people, makes evident that our attitudes and decisions, values and behaviors are crucial for life on Earth, with a main concern for a sustainable future for the planet.. There are many things done by the different intellectual influences of the Earth, and a call for interdisciplinary research that links, not only natural and social sciences, but also ecological design and technology, religion, ethics, and spirituality. (Tucker, M E. 2006) .

We need to put attention and strengthen our efforts in changing our behavior patterns in the relationship human-nature. Here areas like environmental ethics as emerging fields of philosophy that examines man's relation to nature, and some other, and as different as socialism that studies man's relation to man, and feminism that studies man's relation to women. Here the area of ecofeminism and green politics, expresses a synthesis on all these three concerns (Russel, C et Bell, A, 1996). On the other hand we have other emerging fields that of religion and ecology as it is being recognized that religion is more than simply a belief in transcendent deity or a means to an afterlife. This is also a call that the United Nations (Forum on Religion and Ecology, 1998) and many other scholars have pointed out (Harvard conference series at Harvard Divinity School's Centre for the Study of World Religions) as the environmental crisis requires radical changes not only in the public policy but also in individual behavior. In this sense, religion, religious teaching, and leadership are powerfully able to influence personal conduct and commitment. (Tucker, M E. 2006).

Religion then, plays a fundamental role for changing this paradigm. We also need to reevaluate the different meaning of religion in the modeling of our society. Religions are seen as providing a broad orientation to the cosmos and human roles in its attitudes towards nature for millennia in different cultures around the globe. Here, specific practices to effect self transformation and community cohesion within a cosmological context are important. It involves all cosmological stories, symbol systems, ritual practices, ethical norms, historical processes, and institutional structures that transmit a view of the human as embedded in a world of meaning and responsibility, transformation and celebration. It connects humans with a divine presence or numinous force and they bond human communities, and assist in forging intimate relations with the broader earth community. (Tucker, M E. 2006).

According to Russel and Bell, We need to make also an integrated and interdisciplinary research to put together a Policy Ethic of care, environmental education and the role of the grass movements in activism. The grass root movement during the last hundred years has focus mainly on four platforms to address the global movements of the century that is, the social justice movement, the peace movement, the environmental movement and the appropriate technology movement. For all this policy implications, we need to take into consideration the precautionary principle as the main thing for call into action. (Drengson, A. 2000). Some notions from the North American Ecofeminist theory, as in its focus on contexts and relationship, expresses the links between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature of patriarchal culture, as part of that paradigm shift we need to take, specially in the social transformation needed. (Russel, C et Bell, A, 1996) In this sense, Ariels Sallehs believes that spiritual feminism in particular, has a lot of potential to positively influence a political environmental education that embraces diversity and holistic learning, specially contesting other more dominant ways of viewing nature for environmental education. (Salleh, A. 1992).

Tucks explains that many of the environmental ethics reports are now basing their research on the new area of research as religion and ecology, particularly on areas like spiritual ecofeminism. They have also been linked to social change in areas such as the abolitionist and civil rights movements. There are new alliances emerging now that are joining social justice with environmental justice. Religions can encourage values and ethics of reverence, respect, redistribution and responsibility for formulating a broader environmental ethics that includes humans, ecosystems and other species. With the help of religion humans are now advocating for a reverence to the earth and its long revolutionary unfolding, respect for the myriad species who share the planet with us, restraint in the use of natural resources on which life depends, equitable distribution of wealth, and

recognition of responsibility of human for the continuity of life into future generations.

The area of Religion and ecology has also a human ecological approach in the sense of interdisciplinarity found. Here Arne Naes with her theory of deep ecology emphasizing the primacy of the natural world over human prerogatives and Clarence Glacken with her study of nature in western culture is also are some important authors in the area of philosophy. Other studies includes the anthropologists Julian Steward in cultural ecology, to describe the relations between the environment and economic and technological aspects of society, and Roy Rappaport in understanding the ways in which ritual sustains social life in specific bioregions; Geographers like David Soper and Yi fu Tuan, with their special and ecological characteristics of religion; Historians like Tomas Berry and William Mc Neill; Theologians like Jhon Cobb and Gordon Kauffman with their theoretical and engaged perspectives by suggesting ways in which Christian beliefs can be more effectively express theologically and environmental action; Ecofeminist like Rosemary Ruether, Sallie Mc. Fague and Heather Eaton which illustrated the contested nature of the treatment of the Earth and the exploitation of women; and Ecojustice writers like Robert Bullard, Dieter Hessel, and Roger Gottlieb that have also made important contributions to understanding the linkages between social injustice and environmental, remark some of the most important authors that have influence intellectually on the area of Religion and Ecology.

Some of the most influential ideas about ecofeminim, politics and spirituality come from Starhawk who argues that Earth based spirituality is rooted in three basic concepts she calls “immanence, interconnection, and community”. There the notion of immanence suggest the Earth is dynamic and alive, and submits that the sacred is the world, is us. Starhawks leaves the idea of the sacred open to many

conceptualization /Goddes, God, Spirit, etc) and argues that form of sacred manifest as is not as important as how deep experiences offer a connection with the Earth and the World around us(Salleh, A. 1992).

On the other hand, we find arguments like the ones of Robottom about technocratic rationality, that says that by framing environmental problems as technical matters, the strong political dimensions of environmental issues disappear, it is also the value free images of environment and ecology that are taught. Robottom suggest that human interest are overlooked when environmental problems are describe only in scientific terms. By priviledging the authority of science, one very particular form of knowledge becomes favoured and dominant. Here Starhaws interconnectedness, makes room as a challenge for environmental education as it is rearely self-reflective about the role of science and technocratic rationality. By focusing on interconnectedness, Starhawk makes room for a joining of politics, science and the sacred. She calls this “building community”, a community that becomes a place in which can be empowered and in which can be connected to the Earth and take action to heal the Earth. Starhawk (1990) argues that the idea of Earth being alive “is becoming an acceptable intellectual philosophy” pointing to the popularization of the Gaian hypothesis, claiming that scientist are unknowingly acknowledging what people in tribal cultures, witches, shamans and the like have been saying for years: the earth is alive. Because environmental education have been influenced by gaia imagery (seing the earth is alive, seing the earth as a nurturing mother) and the cult of the romantic and education inspired by deep ecology probably tends to be the most so. Heller (1993) talks about how the metaphors of deep ecology idealize nature. “Mother Earth and mother Gaia reflect the idea of nature as the pure, ideal, all giving women for whom every ecologically minded knight should willingly risk his life”. To ignore the sacred and the magical connections one can develop with nature would be an unfortunate omission. (Salleh, A. 1992). Although terms like

“magic” and “spirituality” tend to make people uncomfortable, especially within the context of education, there maybe room for magic and the sacred in an ecofeminist environmental education. Seeing science as being potentially non-positivistic and technocratic, a way of “looking more deeply ar the earth as a living being” is spiritual. According to fry when education is seen to have magical possibilities that enhance its politization, it does not seem so out of place to connect learning, magic, and politics. (Fry, K. 2000). Accordingly, Salleh also agrees that the growth and development of holistic education, which argues for the importance of not only cognition but also, emotions, spirituality, and kinesiology as important aspects of the learning process. These ideas are challenging science but education needs to be careful and self critical in the process of incorporating spirituality into an environmental education pedagogy. (Salleh, A. 1992).

Despite all these assumptions about spiritual ecofeminism, not everyone agrees, mainly those concerning deep ecology. Zimmerman’s “feminism, deep ecology, and environmental ethics” argues that Male deep ecologist should consult women who are more in tune with natural world than men. The historical process puts women close to nature, while men are seen to be active in the sphere of culture. Feminism has never been about a transvaluation of values, such as the repressed feminine, nurturant side of our culture can be woven into all social institutions and practices. Feminism at large does not aim to be a blue print for some purist matriarchal dictatorship – the mirror image of patriarchy feminism is a catalyst in the ongoing development of human self-conciuousness. Ecofeminist are now waiting for men to take the corresponding next step in their emancipation from patriarchy so that together we can “negociate” a fair and human “contract” with “nature”, as it were. Under Patriarchal culture, the program of repression that has treated women and colored peoples as resources, from the beginning of recorded history, has also been the ideology that plunders nature. This association of women and minorities with nature means that if there is to be any chance of

political change in attitudes toward the environment, there will have to be a shift in gendered and racial attitudes at the same time. (Salleh, A. 1992).

There can be no doubt that individual and social agency requires a reorientation of a new curriculum framework and approach, and new pedagogical strategies that engage and breathe real authentic life into the process of learning and the nature of educational experience. The rescuing of agency, via inquiry into the everyday in which learners really live, is one strong possibility. A humanly constructive approach to reflexive inquiries by intelligently embodied learners, teachers, policy makers and researchers, is creative, practical, enabling, and non-idealistic solution that curriculum theorists now need to consider in relation to an education for being in the environment (Payne, P. G. 2006). A new holistic perspective is essential for the emergence of compassion, optimal learning environments, non-violent conflict resolution, just relationships and ecological sustainability. Curriculum theorists have joined in the revolution on bringing interrelatedness with nature, some have proposed a vision of "sacred interconnections" (David Ray Griffin, 1990), "responsive teaching" (Chet Bowers and David Flinders, 1990), "ecological literacy" (David Orr, 1992), "holistic curriculum" (John P. Miller, 1988), "curriculum as place" (Joe Kincheloe and William Pinar, 1991; Patrick Slattery and Kevin Daigle, 1991), "the sacred circle" (Robert Regnier, 1992), "a post-liberal theory of education" (Chet Bowers, 1987), "insight-imagination" (Douglas Sloan, 1983), a critical process curriculum" (Kathleen Keeson, 1993), an inspiring holistic vision (Ron Miller, 1993), and the unity of related plurality" (Donald Oliver and Kathleen Gershman, 1989). The vast majority of curriculum scholarship with a holistic and ecological emphasis in the past ten years by these and other widely respected educators is indicative of the centrality of these issues in postmodern curriculum development. How will these ecological and holistic theories of curriculum and instruction be incorporated into postmodern schooling? (Slattery, P, 1995).

The emerging postmodern holistic and ecological models of curriculum dissolve the artificial boundary between the outside community and the classroom. Postmodern teaching celebrates the interconnectedness of knowledge, learning experiences, international communities, the natural world, and life itself. However, like John Dewey (1938), who warned that not all experiences are necessarily positive educational events, it is also important for teachers to orchestrate holistic learning experiences thoughtfully and carefully. Field trips, guest speakers, nature studies, and visits to museums are encouraged, and not just for the sake of alleviating boredom or indoctrinating students with a narrow political or cultural perspective. There also should be an attention directed towards architecture, classroom milieu, the natural environment, and the inner environment of students and teachers. (Slattery, P, 1995).

The circle as an important structure for developing postmodern theories of education is proposed by Robert Regnier of the University of Saskatchewan. Regnier (1992) proposes a process of pedagogy based on an aboriginal approach to healing using the Sacred Circle teachings of Canadian Plains Indians at Joe Duquette High School in Saskatoon. Healing, as well as teaching, are seen as integral to the transition toward meaning, wholeness, connectedness, and balance. Regnier (1992) uses the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead to demonstrate that human development, learning, teaching and curriculum development are all manifestations of process. By recognizing human growth and learning as genesis and process, it is possible to construct a pedagogy that reflects dynamic, interdependent, and cyclical character of reality. (Slattery, P, 1995).

The challenge for educators, according to Bowers, will be to find suitable analogues for songs, stories, dance, and art, either from current cultural artifacts. Ultimately, educators must be receptive to including in the curriculum the

contributions of various cultural groups and relate this to living in a sustainable balance within the larger web of life. This receptivity by educators “will require escaping from many of the prejudices that are now the basis of our modern hubris”. Thus, postmodern education that is attentive to ecological concerns must begin with attention to the unconscious as well as the physical, emotional, and psychological places of education. (Slattery, P, 1995).

Environmental education has in some ways already incorporated aspects of “spirituality” into its pedagogy. This has in some ways already incorporated aspects of “spirituality” into its pedagogy. The Spirituality I see as working for the benefit of a politicized ecofeminist environmental education is one that not only sees the earth as alive and dynamic but also a spirituality that focuses on the ability to change energy (consciousness) and perform magic. Spirituality that focuses on both individual and community, as well as agency and context, is one that is political. Where ecofeminism has tended to be split between political and spiritual orientations, political magic may be one attempt to heal the divisions as well as critically and thoughtfully engage in an environmental education that incorporates learning, magic and politics (Fry, K, 2000). There also should be an inclusion of activism into environmental education. It should move from being simply about the environment in a traditional classroom setting or being conducted in the environment on content from traditional subjects. Teaching for the environment should through the encouragement of environmentally responsible behavior or activism as well as teaching with the environment where deep personal connections are fostered. (Russell, C. L. 1997).

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