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Doğa İyidir: Parçalanmış Aile Sistemi Çocuklarına Yönelik Eğitim Projesinde Doğanın Etkisi

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Öz: Bu çalışmanın amacı parçalanmış ailelerde yetiştirilen çocukların bitki ve hayvanlara karşı olumlu bir tutum kazanacağı etkinlikleri uygulamalı olarak gerçekleştirmek. Daha önce yapılan psikolojik araştırmalar doğanın onarıcı bir etkisi olduğunu göstermiştir. Doğada zaman geçirmek stres seviyesini azaltır, doğacı zekâyı (Howard Gardner tarafından Çoklu Zekâ Kuramında tanımlanmıştır) ve yaratıcı yetenekleri geliştirir. Parçalanmış aile içerisinde yetişmek veya çevresi tarafından ihmal edilmek çocukların zor yaşam koşullarında yaşamasına neden olmaktadır. Zor koşullarda yaşamlarını devam ettiren çocukların doğa ile temas halinde olması onların gelişimi için yararlı bir uygulama olarak görülmektedir. Neredeyse tüm alan uzmanları ekolojik bir felaketin kenarında olan modern dünyada bitki ve hayvanlarla insanların birlikte varlığını sürdürebilmesi konusu üzerine fikir üretmek zorundadır. Bu sürdürülebilirlik konusunda en önemli görevler eğitimciler ve psikologlara düşmektedir. Eğitimciler eğitim programları ve uygulamalar gerçekleştirerek toplumdaki ekolojik bilinci artırmaya çalışır. Psikologlar ise doğadaki varlıklar arasındaki ilişkileri psikolojik açıdan araştırır. Bu çalışmada çocuklar için ekoloji, eğitim ve psikolojik açıdan uygulamalı olarak işlenmiştir. Çalışmada, ilgili çocukların psikolojilerini etkileyen doğa uygulamaları örnekler üzerinden açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Doğa, eğitim, parçalanmış aile çocukları, psikoloji.

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Abstract: The subject of the text is on how to implement the favourable attitude towards plants and animals in children being brought up in the disfunctional families. The psychological researches show the restorative nature effect. Contacting with nature reduces the stress level, develops the naturalist intelligence (having been discriminated in Multiple Intelligences Theory by Howard Gardner) and creative abilities. Being in touch with nature seems to bring a lot benefits for children whose growth is endangered by the difficult living conditions and surroundings. The modern world being on the edge of ecological disaster challenges nearly all professionals to think over the issues of co-existing humans with plants and animals. This important task is put forward by educators and psychologists. The former ones try to broaden the ecological consciousness in the society by realising educational programs and prompts. Psychologists still explore relations among entities in the space of nature in the psychological terms. The article grasps the two approaches – ecological psychology and an educational offer of the literary-educational project for children. The chosen examples of nature influencing psychological processes are described in the paper.

Keywords: Disfunctional family children, education, nature, psychology.

Introduction

A family system is formed by the three elements – communication processes, acting and co-acting being realised by family members. A family is a group of persons who are interdependent to each other (Bradshaw, 1990). Those persons share the same family narrative, acting and emotional bonds that are undertaken as to cater for needs of individuals belonging to the family. The base of the family is built by adult partners who are thought as the architects of the family. A mother and the relationships to herself, a father and the relationships to himself, and relationships between them determine the family model.

There are more risk factors of a child growth in the dysfunctional families than in the family systems good enough to facilitate child development. Yet psychological and educational supporting diminishes the endangered child growth. My deep belief is that children (and adults too) are characterised with the potential of creativity, and they are influenced by growth drives and aspirations. I share an opinion with Evelin Kirkilionis (2014) and think that children have the development chances even though they lack in caring and effective parents and they face the difficulties at the beginning of their existing. If there is the only reasonable and sensitive adult nearby, who makes for a child and supports this very young person with an attention then the risky growth factors will be reduced. It does not matter whether the person is a child relative. Estimating and respecting the child strengthen her/his abilities and the self processes. They will result in understanding an individual's needs and boundaries. This is the capital for the self-identity processes. The individual who recognises the personal boundaries, abilities and gifts tries not to withdraw from her/his plans and not to keep the dysfunctional family system. Creative activities strongly correspond with children's needs of understanding and expression. They also enhance the positive self-esteem.

There were nine children at age from six to 10 who were participating in the literary-educational project that had been written by me. The children attended the community day care centre in Gdańsk. They all were being brought up in the dysfunctional families but not in the pathological ones. It means that strong violence forms, poverty and psychoactive substance addictions were not observed in their families. Yet the children have experienced the difficulties being implied by the dysfunctions in the families. They communicated to each other through conflicts. Working together and sharing tasks were difficult for them. They denied experiencing frustrations and were trying to achieve their goals by forcing others to follow their intents. They thought domineering over others to be the success key. Their copying styles were illusively based on the "strong" will. They also manifest anger and dejection which not being able to control these emotions.

While drawing, painting and making paper cut-outs, the children tended to be perfect and strongly criticised their own efforts and products. While the project being in progress, they were gaining more trust in their abilities and productivity. They started to follow the process of creation that seemed to fascinate them. They also understood that each try could be improved even many times.

Being in Touch with Nature and Psychological Processes

Children, brought up in the dysfunctional families, seldom lead good lives full of interesting activities being done with parents, siblings and grandparents. Those children do not have an effective mediator between them and the world. Not only does an adult show some fragments of the world to them but also nobody explains it. A lot of children (from dysfunctional families and functional ones) living in big European cities are lack in touch with the wild nature. They know streets and backyards paved with stones and tiles as to keep them clean. The streets and backyards are dotted with weakling plants in the concrete flower-pots. When they are asked

about the luxuriant vegetation, children recall the supermarket walls covered with ivy, which easily tolerates the shortage of the sunlight.

Nowadays humans have reached the edge of ecological catastrophe that means extinctions of different species. Although many people value plants and animals for trying to reduce harmful activities, there is much left to do for saving nature. Protecting the natural environment is important if one does care for surviving all species including homo sapiens. Sitting in the high grass of wild meadows, wandering through woods, soaking during storms, waving with winds, listening to plants' sounds and animals' voices, watching colours of changing seasons – enrich human sensual perceiving. Communing with nature gives individuals an exceptional experience of oneness with other living beings. Contacting with nature brings a sense that is expressed in the amazingly same way – 'I feel that I am alive'.

Multiple Intelligences Theory is no longer doubted though the author of the theory had to bear numerous mocks formulated by some supporters of the concept traditionally understood as the psychological construct measured by Intelligence Questionnaire. Howard Gardner (1983) has suggested that people could have eight intelligences: linguistic, logical or mathematical, visual (working while analysing pictures), musical, bodily/feeling, interpersonal (contact with other people), intrapersonal (understanding oneself) and naturalist. The new kind of intelligence has recently been discovered: existential one. It makes people be able to think in the universe context, to experience deep love and trying to understand the death importance and meaning. Individuals have these nine intelligences but in different proportions. So one person might be strong in musical and bodily intelligences while another may be stronger in language and understanding other people. Traditional education systems may have tended to focus on some intelligences over others, especially on language and logical intelligences. Gardner did not manage to separate the brain area responsible for the naturalist intelligence. It is a weak part of the theory and the psychologist was aware of it.

Although Multiple Intelligences Theory was published almost thirty years ago but the issue on, how contacting with nature effects development of central and peripheral nervous system in children has not been explored profoundly apart from researches on attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Some studies show that being in touch with nature is very helpful and one can think beyond drug therapy for treating ADHD (Kuo & Taylor, 2004). Green play settings also help healthy children who are inspired by nature and their behaviours are changed thanks to it (Taylor, Kuo & Sullivan, 2001). When children were playing indoor and using toys, they formed the group hierarchy by physical rivalry. While playing in the green natural surroundings, children were building their status in a group expressing, their language abilities, and creativity. The more creative children were the higher place that they achieved in the group. In accordance with psychological studies, being in touch with nature increases a concentration level of children. People who are suffering from clinical depression also say about more optimistic mood and thoughts after spending some time in forests and parks.

Educators and psychologists know that rare contacts with nature may result in difficult consequences. Individuals, whose lives are limited to the culture of technology, communicate to each other easily but some pieces of information that are exchanged and do not deepen knowledge and reflection. The culture of technology reduces the number of direct human interactions and relationships. Others do not become known and familiar. People are lack in closeness and physical touches. These lacks may intensify aggression in an individual, in a group, and in a society (Jackson & Kochtitzky, 2001).

Contacting with nature reduces the stress level (Kaplan, Kaplan & Ryan, 1998). Companies' employees who could look at trees, bushes and grass feel less frustration and think

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about their jobs more friendly than those who were deprived of green views. These studies by the Swedish researchers prove decreasing in cognition functions and cognitive performance caused by deficit of contacts with nature (Hartig, Bööök, Garvill, Olsson & Gärling, 1999). The experiment participants were doing activities being strongly focused on the challenging task for 40 minutes. Next they were randomly assigned to the groups of different relaxation styles. They could walk in the local wood, could listen to music, could read a newspaper, could walk in the city centre or could sit in silence space. Relaxation for each group lasted 40 minutes. People who had walked in the forest did the next task significantly better than participants of other groups. Moreover “forest walking” group of participants expressed comfort and reported less angry emotions than other persons. Green is good as it brings psychology restoration. People exposed to environmental influences restored by nature’s colours, sounds, voices, and smells. Researcher reported that their senses to revive and vice versa the surroundings lacking in wild nature impoverish human senses (Louv, 2008). Howard Gardner must have added that it narrows the naturalist intelligence down.

A literary and Educational Project: Implementation of Nature-Friendly Attitudes

Aim and significance

Since children typically pay more attention to animals than plants, I wanted to open their eyes to the silent presence of trees, bushes, and herbs growing in woods, parks, city squares, and backyard gardens.

The ancient Fertile Crescent cultures occupying the area of the contemporary Syria, southern Anatolia, and Iraq treasured plants. Lush vegetation, its reviving vitality and the food it provided encouraged people to settle down. Human trust in the green life and the powerful magic of unbridled vegetation changed history. Nomadic hunters and collectors turned to gardeners, farmers, vine growers, and animal breeders. Ancient Greeks believed that plants were analogous of people. The anemone dazzling with its colour and flowering on the grave of Adonis, the narcissus with its sweet fragrance on the grave of Narcissus, the hyacinth for Hyacinth, or the lime trees of Philemon and Baucis complementary to the figures and their everlasting life reviving each spring. The vitality of plants penetrates death and mitigates the mourning. It is not incidental that various cultures and religions plant them in their cemeteries.

In the pre-Christian Europe, trees were objects of cult. The Celts, Slavs, Germans, and Goths would pray in their sacred groves. People took advantage of the healing properties of trees and other plants. All of them were ascribed symbolic and magic meanings. Echoes of friendship with trees have survived in certain customs. As late as in the sixties of the previous century, ‘trees of life’ would be planted in Poland for the new-borns – a birch or lime for a girl, and an oak or maple for a boy.

The project intended for children from disfunctional families revived their friendship with trees. It was constructed based on three ideas. The first one was to draw the children’s attention to trees. The second involved developing an understanding of the relationship between people and trees, or broader – with plants; the third inspired recording of the experience of nature in literary and artistic forms. There were four goals which injected organisation into the project: to broaden the knowledge of the biological, cultural, and ethnographic facts about the plants in the immediate neighbourhood; to develop naturalist intelligence; to develop literary and artistic interests; to inspire reading through the process of creating a book. Project execution took twelve weeks. We would wander in the woods and landscape parks around Gdańsk. We would also meet in the working room of the therapeutic care centre to talk about plants and create illustrations. Below, selected project tasks are presented.

Methods

Task 1: Trees in Proverbs of Various Cultures

The children draw paper slips at random from a magic box. Each slip features one proverb connected with forests, trees, and vegetation. Each child reads his/her proverb and explains how he/she understands it. The instructor ponders the explanation deeper by talking to the other children. Then, the children illustrate the proverb they have drawn in any desired technique. Here are some exemplary proverbs, which I present in the literal meanings and their English counterparts in the square brackets:

[A leopard can't change its spots] Literal translation: Nature lures the wolf into the forest.

[Nature endures] Literal translation: We were non-existent, the forest was here; we will cease to exist, the forest will be here.

[Learning is not a waste of time] Literal translation: Learning does not lead you astray into the woods; instead, it leads you out of the woods.

[Take no haste] Literal translation: The wood rustles, it has the time.

[Let sleeping dogs lie] Literal translation: Don't call the wolf out of the woods.

[Don't teach a man to fish] Literal translation: Don't teach an old gorilla the paths in the jungle.

[Obstacles can become an opportunity] Literal translation: The roots of the tree which grew in winds are strong.

[The further you go, the less you know] Literal translation: The farther into the woods, the denser trees.

[The more, the merrier] Literal translation: Floats on joy the one who has mushrooms in the wood.

[Blind as a bat] Literal translation: He walked in the wood, but saw no trees.

[For every action there is a reaction] Literal translation: Whatever you call in the wood, you will hear in the answer.

[Creaking door hangs longest] Literal translation: The creaking tree stands longer in the forest.

[If it does not freeze on the loth, a fertile year may be loth] Literal translation: December rime on trees foretells a fertile year

[If Christmas day be bright and clear, there'll be two winters in the year] Literal translation: With the trees blooming in November, the winter will last till May]

[Who saw a peacock dance in the woods?] Literal translation: The peacock danced in the woods, but no one saw it.

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[To carry coals to Newcastle] Literal translation: To carry wood to the forest.

[When trouble come, they come together] Literal translation: All goats will jump on a leaning tree.

[Nobody is infallible] Literal translation: A man who is never wrong and a tree that will not burn do not exist.

[In your heart of hearts] Literal translation: The heart is like a nut springing the tree of arteries and veins

[Blind with love] Literal translation: A man in love is like a man in the wood his eyes fixed on one tree only]

Task 2: Words and Rhymes

The task requires a literary gift from the educator. The children draw colourful carton slips from the magic box. The slips are differ in colours. Each slip bears words related to plants. The children read the words and explain their meaning assisted by the adult. Each child makes up any desired number of sentences using the drawn words. The instructor puts down the sentences. Then, engaging his/her imagination, he/she creates a story, image, or rhyme of them. The task may be pursued in groups of children, and in the case the carton slips differ in colours from group to group, e.g. there is a group with green slips and a group with yellow slips. The words used in the task are as follows: orchard, garden, apple tree, pink, white, starling, buds, fresh, wind, flower, fragrance, squirrel, beech, leaf, meadow, grove, grass, sun, dew, fog, boletus (kind of mushroom).

Task 3: Recognising Natural Habitats

Children draw sets of carton slips from the magic box. Each slip in the set bears one letter, and the whole set forms a word. The children arrange the letters into words and explain their meaning assisted by the educator. Here are exemplary words of the task: wet meadows, herbs, oakwood, thicket, marshland, rushes, swamp, grove, and wilderness.

Task 4: Recognising Herbs

The children draw tiny bags from the magic box. The bags contain dried herbs. The children guess the names of the herbs guided by their smell, taste, and appearance. Then, they draw carton slips with letters. The letters in the sets form the names of the herbs recognised by the children. Exemplary herbs to be identified include basil, coriander, oregano (origan), rosemary, pink pepper, black seed, saffron, bitter brush, thyme, and puffball. The set may be replaced with any other.

Task 5: Plants of Meadows and Woodlands

The children match the plant names with their photographs: spindle, ash, bulrush, hornbeam, robinia, hops, viola tricolour, celandine, poppy, anemone, clover, iris, evening stock.

Task 6: Birds around Us

The children match the bird names with their photographs: rook, duck, jackdaw, great tit, jaw, crow, and finch. They describe bird sizes by referring to the size differences between them, e.g.: The finch is smaller than the crow.

Task 7: Bird Watching

The children produce bird watching cards. The observation lasts one to several days. We devoted two days thereto. The observation card is a large sheet of paper divided into three columns: the bird's silhouette, its name, the number of birds of the specific species noticed. Bird silhouettes, produced by the children in any desired technique are pasted in the respective rubric.

Task 8: A flower Calendar of the Year Seasons

The children are astonished when compiling the flower and season calendar of the year—typically, they think the chill of the winter makes any flowers wither away. The calendar is divided into seasons of the year: winter, spring, summer, and autumn. The children draw pictures of flowers in the relevant section of the sheet, under the name of the respective season of the year. Since the children create one calendar as a group, the carton sheet should be large enough to accommodate all children comfortably. The work on the calendar is preceded with a talk on insects attracted to the flowers.

The questions leading into the talk with the children:

- *What flower shapes do butterflies choose, and what flowers attract bees? What does it depend on?*

- *What colour flowers are preferred by bees, butterflies, moths?*

- *Why do flowers emit fragrance? Does the fragrance change over the day and night?*

- *Can flowers be poisonous? Examples of poisonous plants: thorn apple, yellow iris, buttercup, autumn crocus, henbane. The plant names will change as the geographical regions change.*

Conculusion and Discussions

The joint actions resulted in the creation of a children's book with rhymes on trees and other plants, illustrated by the project participants. "Songs of trees". A book for children contains fifteen rhymes – eleven devoted to trees, and four to natural expanses with their plants and animals. The publication of the book and the execution of the project were financially supported by the local authorities of the City of Gdańsk.

The trees I depicted in rhymes were selected by the children who expressed appreciation and admiration for the beauty and strength of plants. The illustrations convey those emotions. Interestingly, the trees they selected are significant in cultural, ethnographic, and symbolic terms: the birch, beech, oak, rowan, horse chestnut, hazel, lime, butternut, plane, apple tree, provence rose, and willow. The slender birch tree, symbol of the northern countries, has accompanied the man unaltered in form for seventeen thousand years. Airy beech forests coat the moraine hills, and their fruit, the beechnut, feed wild boars and squirrels. The red-glistening rowan fruit attract birds and, along horse chestnuts, they are natural toys loved by the little ones. Hazel and apple tree with a wealth of symbols ascribed to them are the nourishing trees. Limes, with their exquisite round silhouettes, not only rustle their leaves but also sing with the bees collecting their pollen. Willows with their green crowns budding as early as the last snow symbolise life reviving in the spring. In the wetlands, willows helped drain the water, and their bark contains salicylates reached for in medicine since the ancient times.

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The group actions taken over the duration of the project made the children aware of the world of nature around. They do not need always travel far to find it. Wild nature, though threatened as it is, remains alive and talks to anyone who is willing to hear its soft voice. It was a lesson in attentiveness. The vegetation cycle, the varied images of plants, the bird concerts, and the solidity of trees emanating the sense of safety let the children experience astonishment, peace, consolation, admiration, interest, excitation, i.e. the emotions rarely felt in disfunctional family systems. Thanks to the project, the children broadened their spectrum of emotions and learned new ways of reacting. Murky pits under the roots, tree hollows veiled with cobweb glistening with dew, and the lap of a stream you hear even before you see it are stimulated the development of the children's imagination. Objects unmet before triggered curiosity. They prompted the children to give them names and comprehend them, thus stimulating cognitive processes typically neglected in troubled families. The joint work consisting in recording the experience of the nature through verbal description and creation of images reduced the feelings of loneliness, isolation, and underestimation characteristic for children rejected by their guardians. The publication of the book, on the other hand, enhanced their self-esteem, which is invaluable for children frequently feeling less competent and less productive than their peers.

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