



Bioethical Education and Attitude Guidance for Living Environment

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS



Erasmus+

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Authors: Maddalena Nicoletti, Pier Giacomo Sola

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beagle
Bioethical Education
and Attitude Guidance
for Living Environment

Environmental mindfulness

Introduction

1. Environmental ethics: definitions and categories

Environmental ethics is the part of environmental philosophy which considers extending the traditional boundaries of ethics from solely including humans to including the non-human world ⁱ. It can be defined also as the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of, the environment and its non-human contents ⁱⁱ.

The need for an “environmental” ethics arise from the consideration that several environmental problems are currently seriously undermining the traditional belief that the moral community should be restricted to human beings only. Environmental ethics has taken up the challenge and opened an extremely urgent and inspiring call for philosophical research. This is the call for extending the moral community to non-human and non-paradigmatic entities, regarding them as “moral patients” ⁱⁱⁱ.

The question is: what, if any, moral obligation does man have to the preservation and care of the non-human world? We refer to Environmental Ethics (plural) and not merely to Environmental Ethic (singular) because there are several different approaches to the issue: anthropocentrism, animal liberation/rights theory, biocentrism and ecocentrism, among others, all provide ethical justifications for environmental protection ^{iv}.


In the present contribution we do not intend to support one or another specific approach. Nevertheless, one of the scopes of Beagle Project is to offer innovative practices to teach and to learn about environmental ethics. Bearing in mind such an intent, we would like to propose some tools based upon “**mindfulness**” exercises and activities.

2. What is mindfulness? Why use it for questioning environmental ethics issues? Which role can it play in early education?

Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing one’s attention to the present moment. Being mindful means being aware, taking note of what is going on within ourselves and outside in the world, without shying away from information or feelings that we do not like or do not wish to be true ^v. It can be defined as paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgementally ^{vi}.

Mindfulness can be developed through meditation and other contemplative practices.

Even if mindfulness is derived from Buddhist traditions, it is not a religious or spiritual practice: it must be recalled that the modern, Western technique has been developed during the late 70s of the last century by Jon Kabat-Zinn, who affirms that “mindfulness can be considered a universal human capacity proposed to foster clear



thinking and open-heartedness. As such, this form of meditation requires no particular religious or cultural belief system” and that the “practice of mindfulness may be beneficial to people who might be unwilling to adopt Buddhist traditions or vocabulary” ^{vii}. Indeed Western researchers, clinicians, teachers, educators and trainers who have introduced mindfulness practice into their programs teach these skills independently of the religious and cultural traditions of their origins.


Research indicates that mindfulness contributes to subjective well-being, giving rise to stronger **empathy and compassion** towards ourselves, others and our environment, and **facilitating clarification of goals and values**. For such reasons, programs based on Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) model or similar models have been widely adopted in schools, prisons, hospitals, veterans centres and other environments.

“**Environmental mindfulness**” refers to the practice of mindfulness applied to the natural environment, in the sense that the practice of mindfulness can help **cultivate a non-dualistic consciousness**, can lead to **compassionate attitudes and conduct towards the other-than-human** and can contribute to **support a transition toward sustainability**.

Many authors ^{viii} have underlined that the current ecological crisis arises from our dualistic consciousness which **separates mind from body and self from world**. This dualistic consciousness prevents us from experiencing the value in nature, and therefore leads to instrumentalist treatment of nature ^{ix}.

Mindfulness, and environmental mindfulness in this case, can help our civilization to shift from the dualistic consciousness of subject-object dichotomy that leads to instrumentalism, to the non-dualistic consciousness that experiences intersubjectivity or “interbeing” ^x. Intersubjectivity or “interbeing” means a sense of knowing the other as a “fellow being” whose identity and welfare are bound up in some ways with one’s own. From this integration flows love of life and deep appreciation of the other beings’ existence ^{xi}. As a result, environmental mindfulness can ^{xii}:

- change how we think about the social and environmental crises that affect our world;
- help us to take the actions needed to build a more sustainable society (for instance by modifying how people process information about risks, changing their environmental behaviour, and by increasing their motivation to reduce suffering and support governments’ environmental actions);
- help cultivate compassion and our intrinsic moral values which, in turn, can be reflected in actions for the common good;
- help us consider the consequences of unquestioned structures and power relations, at all scales;
- practicing mindfulness with students and children open air, out of classrooms, help them to connect, appreciate and develop a relationship with the natural world. The practice of mindfulness allows students to pause, experience the present moment and give gratitude for all the elements of the natural world that support our daily lives ^{xiii};
- help the development of the so called “naturalistic intelligence” of children ^{xiv}.



As far as the results achieved by environmental mindfulness, on the one side it must be noted that there are few researches exploring the role of mindfulness in sustainability^{xv} and formulating the hypothesis that mindfulness and a more mindful way of living might encourage pro-environmental behaviours. Also, long terms-effects of environmental mindfulness are lacking of experimental evidence, and both quantitative and qualitative research effort are called for^{xvi}.

On the other side, though, it must be noted that do exist a quantity of practical examples of applied mindfulness techniques used to rise people (and children/students) awareness about environmental issues and sustainability, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries. Indeed many mindfulness teachers, educators, trainers and practitioners believe that mindfulness practice in schools, workplaces and elsewhere is a policy that contributes to reason about the environment and can contribute to understanding and facilitating sustainability^{xvii xviii}.

The relevance of this educational objective to the issues and concerns surrounding environmentalism is clear, and the practice of (environmental) mindfulness should be integrated into education. Indeed, as it has already been noted above, during the last decade several attempts have been made to create and to put into practice environmental mindfulness lessons and programs for children (especially in Anglo-Saxon countries), in order to help them to mindfully discover and develop a closer connection to the environment^{xix}.

A very recent research^{xx} conducted on 44 environmental mindfulness lessons has confirmed that such lessons are very useful as far as raising students' awareness of the interconnected and interdependent nature of human existence and the natural environment. On the other hand, the same research has shown that in the lessons reviewed there was little content related to learning the skills to act in a positive way towards the environment. Thus the authors point out the necessity to develop environmental mindfulness lessons that are connected to other curriculum areas and provide students with the knowledge to act positively towards the environment.

Workshops

The present contribution moves from the aforementioned researches and practical experiences to develop some new ideas and contents for teachers and students, with the aim either to raise students' awareness of the interconnected and interdependent nature of human existence and the natural environment, and to provide them the skills to act in a positive way towards the environment.

Our efforts result in the proposal of some workshops based on environmental mindfulness practice, described below.

- i https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_ethics
- ii STANFORD ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY. (2002). *Environmental Ethics*. Substantive revision Jul 21, 2015. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-environmental/>
See also:
ANDREOZZI, M. (2015). *Le sfide dell'etica ambientale. Possibilità e validità delle teorie morali non-antropocentriche*. Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto. Milano.
- iii ANDREOZZI, M. *Ibid.*
ROLSTON, H. III. (1991). *Environmental Ethics: Values in and Duties to the Natural World*. Published in: *The Broken Circle: Ecology, Economics, Ethics*. F. Herbert Bormann and Stephen R. Kellert, Eds. Yale University Press. New Haven. ISBN 0-300-04976-5. Available at: <http://www.ecospherics.net/pages/RolstonEnvEth.html>
- iv YANG, T. (2006). *Towards an egalitarian global environmental ethics*. Environmental ethics and international policy. ISBN 978-92-3-104039-9 – © UNESCO
- v ERICSON, T. & KJØNSTAD, B. & ANDERS, B. (2014). *Mindfulness and sustainability*. Ecological Economics. 104. 73–79. 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2014.04.007. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262491494_Mindfulness_and_sustainability
- vi KABAT-ZINN, J. (1994) *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hyperion. New York.
- vii LUDWIG DS, KABAT-ZINN J. *Mindfulness in Medicine*. JAMA. 2008;300(11):1350–1352. doi:10.1001/jama.300.11.1350
- viii See for example:
EVERNDEN, L. L. N. (1993). *The natural alien: Humankind and environment* (2nd ed.). University of Toronto Press. Toronto
LAING, R. D. (1980). *What is the matter with mind?* In K. Satish (Ed.), *The Schumacher lectures* (pp. 1-19). Sphere Books. London.
- ix It has to be noted that this concept is expressed not only by research but also - even if under different forms and different cultural frameworks - by Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si* (2015) and by several Buddhist leaders (see for example: NHAT HANH, T. (2013) *Love letter to the Earth*.)
- x “*Interbeing*” is a relatively new term coined by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh to describe the essential interconnectedness of the universe. See:
NHAT HANH, T. *What is Interbeing?* Excerpt from *Teach Breathe Learn* by Meena Srinivasan. Available at: <http://www.rinagpatel.com/blog/2016/9/2/what-is-interbeing-by-thich-nhat-hanh>
- xi BAI, H., SCUTT, G. (2009). *Touching the Earth with the Heart of Enlightened Mind: The Buddhist Practice of Mindfulness for Environmental Education*. Canadian Journal of Environmental Education, v14 n1 p92-106. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ842742.pdf>
- xii WAMSLER C., *ibid.*
WAMSLER, C., BROSSMANN, J., HENDERSOON, H. et al. *Sustain Sci* (2018) 13: 143. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-017-0428-2>
- xiii COOK DEEGAN, P. (2014). *Outdoor Mindfulness Exercises for Earth Day*. Updated April 21st 2015. Available at: <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/outdoor-mindfulness-exercises-earth-day-patrick-cook-deegan>
- xiv According to Gardner, individuals who are high in this type of intelligence are more in tune with nature and are often interested in nurturing, exploring the environment, and learning about other species. See:
GARDNER, H. (2011). *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Basic Books. New York.
CHERRY, K. (2019). *Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, Verywellmind, Updated April 03, 2019. Available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/gardners-theory-of-multiple-intelligences->

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- xv BARRETT, B. et al. (2016) *Mindful Climate Action: Health and Environmental Co-Benefits from Mindfulness-Based Behavioral Training*. Sustainability vol. 8,10 (2016): 1040. doi:10.3390/su8101040. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5170843/>
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- MORGAN B. & ALBRECHT N. (2019). *Environmental Mindfulness Lessons for Children: A Content Analysis*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332221737_Environmental_Mindfulness_Lessons_for_Children_A_Content_Analysis
- WAMSLER C. (2017). *How mindfulness can help the shift towards a more sustainable society. The Conversation*. Available at: <http://theconversation.com/how-mindfulness-can-help-the-shift-towards-a-more-sustainable-society-79127>
- WAMSLER C. et al. (2018). *Mindfulness in sustainability science, practice, and teaching*. Sustainability Science. 2018, Jan 01. Volume 13. Number 1. Page 143-162.
- xvi ERICSON, T. & KJØNSTAD, B. & ANDERS, B. (2014). *Mindfulness and sustainability*. Ecological Economics. 104. 73–79. 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2014.04.007. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262491494_Mindfulness_and_sustainability
- xvii ERICSON T. & KJØNSTAD B. & ANDERS B. (2014). *Ibid*.
- xviii See for example:
- CONFINO, J. (2012). *Interview. Beyond environment: falling back in love with Mother Earth, Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh explains why mindfulness and a spiritual revolution rather than economics is needed to protect nature and limit climate change*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/zen-thich-naht-hanh-buddhidm-business-values>
- NHAT HANH, T. (2013). *Love letter to the Earth*. Parallax Pr.
- NHAT HANH, T. (2014). *Falling in Love with the Earth. Statement for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. Available at: <https://plumvillage.org/letters-from-thay/thich-nhat-hanhs-statement-on-climate-change-for-unfccc/>
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- SOFER, O. J. (2018). *Mindfulness of Body, Mindfulness of Earth*. Available at: <https://www.mindfulschools.org/personal-practice/mindfulness-body-mindfulness-earth/>
- xix Examples of environmental mindfulness for children:
- SALAZAR SHAPIRO, D. (2018). *The Magical Mindful Day*. DeGaS Publishing. San Diego, CA
- THE SOUND OF CELESTE. (2016). 5 Nature-based Mindfulness Activities For Young Children. <http://theparentcollaboratory.com/5-nature-based-mindfulness-activities-for-young-children-a-guest-blogger/>
- ST. ANDREWS SAMAKEE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL: <http://www.standrews-samakee.com/about-samakee/environmental-mindfulness/>
- YBTT & THE MINDFUL PANDA. (2018). *10 Activities For Practicing Mindfulness In Nature With Kids*. <https://www.yourbodythetemple.com/mindfulness-in-nature-with-kids/>
- xx MORGAN B. & ALBRECHT N. (2019). *Environmental Mindfulness Lessons for Children: A Content Analysis*. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332221737_Environmental_Mindfulness_Lessons_for_Children_A_Content_Analysis