



Bioethical Education and Attitude Guidance for Living Environment

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS



Erasmus+

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Bioethical Education
and Attitude Guidance
for Living Environment

1. HOW TO USE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

In your hands you're holding the result of the second intellectual output of the project BEAGLE – Bioethical Education and Attitude Guidance for Living Environment. Project gathers partners from Croatia, Slovenia, Italy, and Greece, under the umbrella of Erasmus+ platform, with a common goal of promoting bioethical education, developing critical thinking, and overall changing of attitude towards better understanding of our environment.



In this document, you will find the division of educational materials according to age groups of children and young people, and according to the educational methods used in materials. All materials are described in detail "step by step" and created in a way to promote interactive discussion and critical thinking among young people on bioethical topics.



The materials have an indicated age group of children, duration and number of participants, and are designed as independent educational aids with specific methodological guidelines. **This does not mean that you have to strictly stick to what is written, but you can adapt the materials, activities and offered questions to the needs and possibilities of the group.**

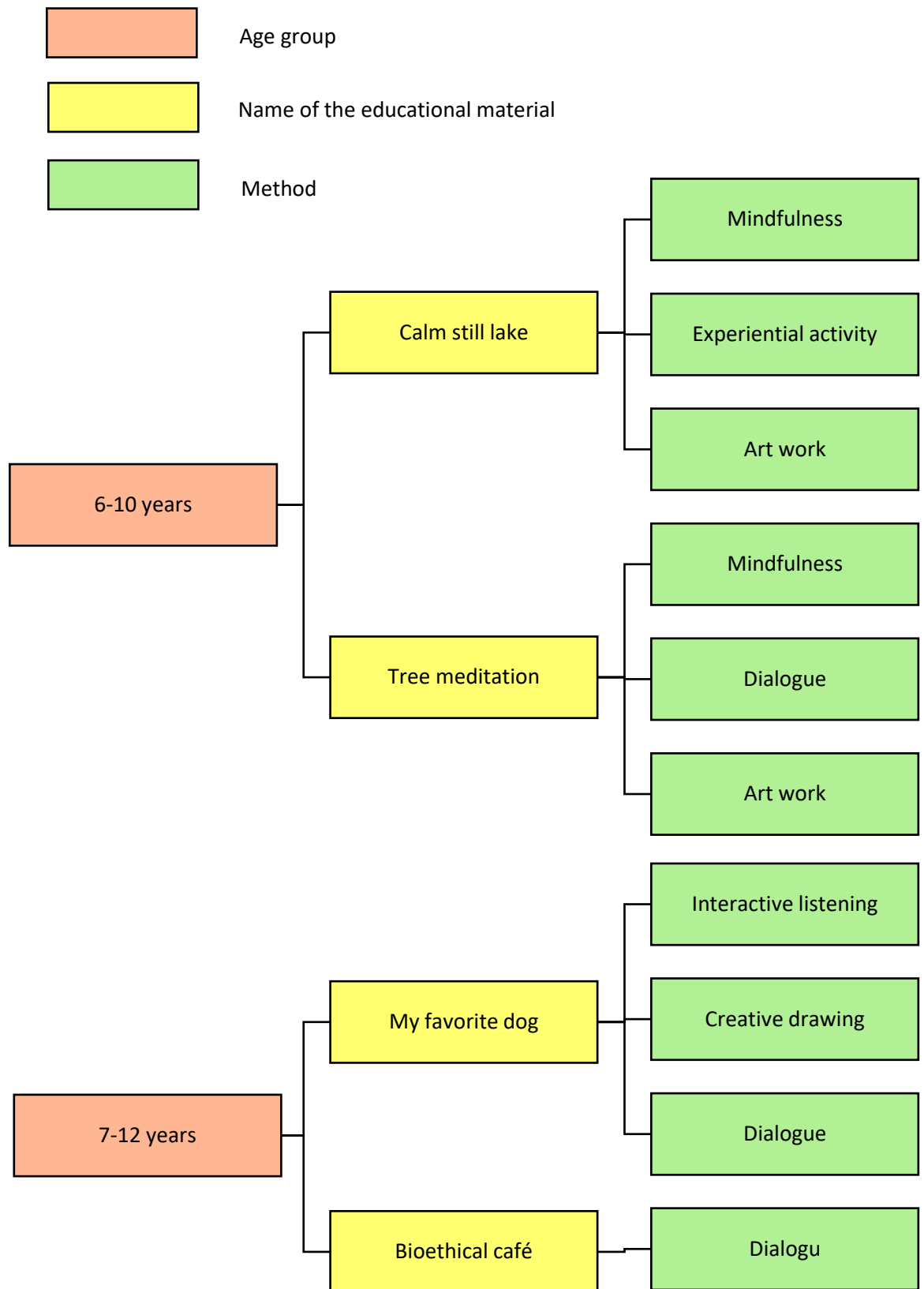


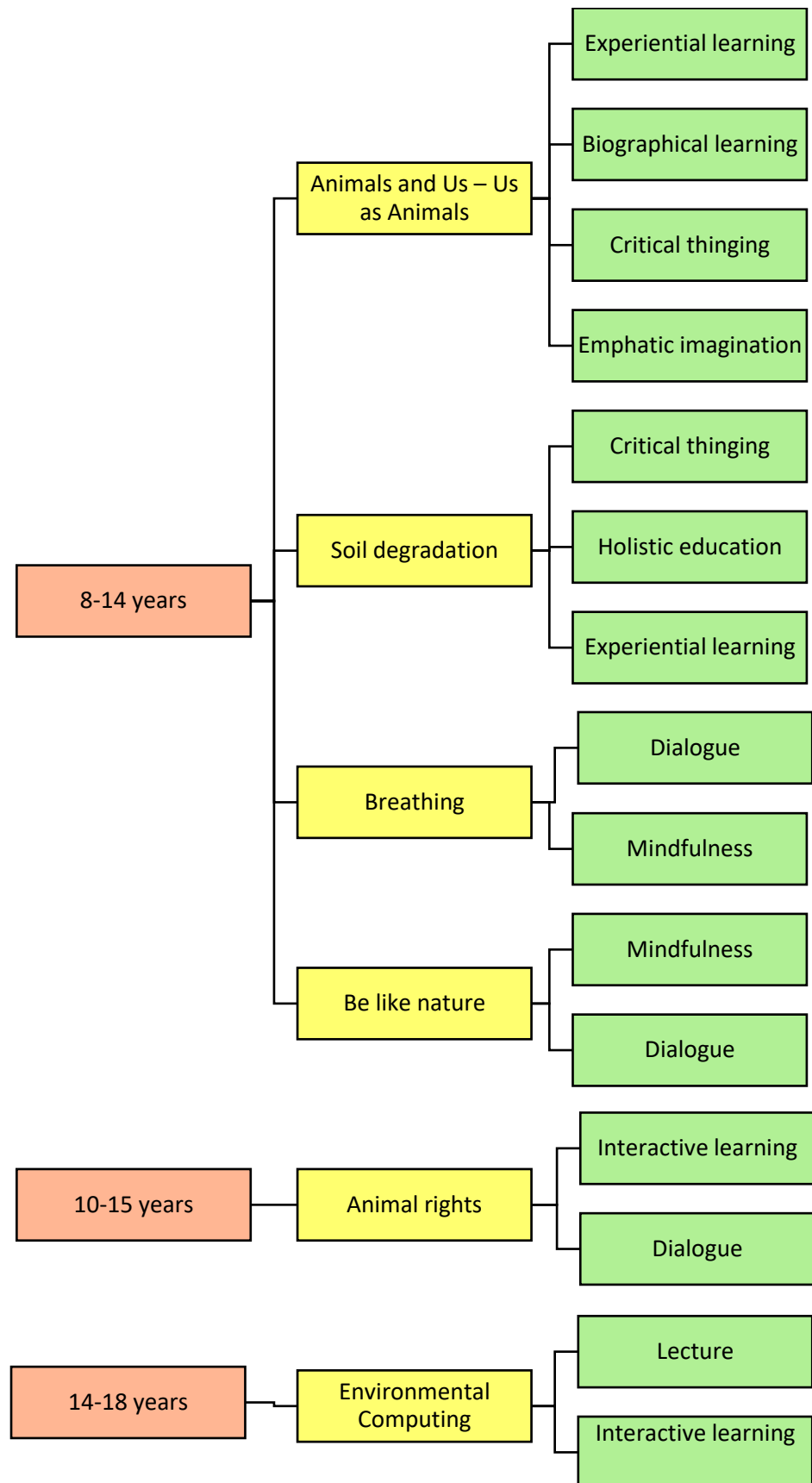
The materials can be used in different educational circumstances and contexts as well as in different national curricula because they deal with issues that have no boundaries, but are universal.



We hope that these educational materials will encourage you to be creative and give you a dimension in working and teaching bioethical topics in a simple, creative and fun way.

2. DIVISION OF EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS





Animals and Us – Us as Animals

Age range: 8-14 years old

Time: up to 45 minutes for each proposed activity

Group: group size varies

Materials and tools: sheets of paper (various sizes and colours), pencils, crayons and markers in various colours, stickers or post-it notes, large whiteboard or presentation poster (or empty wall)

Educational methods: experiential learning, biographical learning and the use of stories, critical thinking, emphatic imagination, philosophy with children.

Key learning points/learning outputs:

The main goals of the set of the learning activities proposed below are the following:

- to know and understand the main ethical approaches or perspectives in animal ethics,
- to recognize and appreciate the importance of our similarities and interconnectedness with animals,
- to be able to analyse and evaluate the main arguments and lines of thinking that are at the core of animal ethics,
- to understand the unity of the ecosystem and its moral importance,
- to use techniques of experiential and holistic learning to establish an ethical connection with animals,
- to be able to reflect on our own, human perspective in light of the topics that are discussed in animal ethics.


Introduction/context (about animal ethics):

Animal ethics

In this longer introduction, some aspects of the animal ethics are laid out and this represents a context for the learning activities that are proposed in what follows. It is thus important for the understanding and implantation of these activities.

Prelude

If possible and if time permits you, you can read a short novel (56 pages) by a Nobel prize winner J.M. Coetzee prior to engaging with students about the question of animal



ethics as part of bioethics. The story “The Lives of Animals” first appeared as Tanner lectures in human values (1997) and is freely available here¹, but you can also find it in the book format (possibly even in translation in another language that you may prefer). The story is an excellent source of wondering and contemplation on the concerns raised by animal ethics, in particular since it includes a highly personal and experiential perspective to these issues, often missed by more distanced and rationalized approaches to animal ethics. It will give you a framework for discussions with students and well as represent a source for experiential and holistic approach to teaching/learning about the topic.

Animal ethics

Animal ethics is a domain of practical ethics or bioethics that deals predominantly with the moral status of nonhuman animals² and the ethics of our practices that include them. It harbours numerous topics as well as various approaches. In what follows the predominant ones are briefly presented with the central concept being the title of each subheading.³ Each of them in a way represents an answer to the so-called animal question, that is the question that is at the heart of animal ethics and pertains to the question about the moral status of nonhuman animals and our relationship to them.

Suffering or the ability to suffer

Probably the most direct way to approach the animal question is by acknowledging the needless suffering that nonhuman animals undergo due to many of our practices and thus recognizing their ability to feel pain as an important similarity with human animals. This idea has been most clearly expressed by philosopher Jeremy Bentham, when he said that concerning nonhuman animals “the [relevant] question is not, Can they *reason?*, nor Can they *talk?*, but, Can they *suffer?*”.⁴ This points to one of the most central aspects of ethics. A writer, social reformist and one of the firsts that argued for some form of animal rights Henry S. Salt added to this a very simple line of thought, that “[p]ain is pain ... whether be inflicted on man or on beast; and the creature that suffers it, whether man or beast, being sensible of the misery of it while it lasts, suffers *evil*”.⁵ Similar ethical considerations can be traced back in the history of philosophy, e.g. to Pythagoras, Plutarch, and Porphyry, which stressed characteristics that


¹ <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/documents/a-to-z/c/Coetzee99.pdf>

² The term ‘nonhuman animals’ is used in order to hint to or illuminate the often missed fact that humans are also animals. (In the remainder of this educational materials we will stick to such a usage most of the time, except when sources that we are using refer back to the more traditional humans - animals dichotomy.)

³ Strahovnik 2013.

⁴ Bentham 1998, 26.

⁵ Salt 1892, 24.



nonhuman animals share with humans, in particular sentience (the capacity to feel, perceive or experience), followed by a fact that humans can for the most part refrain e.g. from eating meat and that it is a matter of basic justice that we withhold from causing nonhuman animals unnecessary suffering.⁶ In ethics, such considerations are most often stressed by utilitarian approaches since it is indeed very hard to find sensible reasons for exclusion of animal suffering and pain from our consideration of wellbeing. Such a view can be called ethical humanism and consist of a claim that all and only all human beings deserve moral consideration⁷, which results in a “sad” consequence that nonhuman animals lack moral standing and that moral status of our actions remains unaffected by more or less anything we do to them. The prevalence of ethical humanism throughout most of history of our ethical thought and practices, results in a state we are facing today, where over 70 billion nonhuman animals are killed annually, predominantly for food and as part of various testing and experimenting methods, having to endure a miserable, painful, and frustrating existence before their end.⁸ Similar considerations can be expressed in the language of interests. The characteristic of those nonhuman animals that can feel pain and pleasure (sentience) represents an important ground for the attribution of interests to them, especially the interest to avoid pain and suffering. Sentience is thus the most sensible and at the same time also the sole acceptable characteristics for drawing the line around a set of beings whose interests count morally (at least to some extent).⁹ A sentient being is a being capable of feeling pleasure and pain and is thus having at least a minimal interest to avoid pain; if a being is not sentient and cannot feel pleasure or pain, it cannot be hurt or harmed by our actions. All this result into a conclusion that as far as the suffering of animals is concerned – even in the absence of a precise standard of how to compare and weight different interests of human and nonhuman animals – we should substantially change our practices (meat production, intensive animal breeding, experiments on animals, uses of animals in zoos, etc.) that involve the latter. One way to overcome such a situation is first to open our hearts to this suffering (empathy) and perceive or experience nonhuman animals in a way that recognizes the moral relevance of their sentience.

Rights

Another approach to animal question includes an appeal to the rights of nonhuman animals.¹⁰ One must first and foremost emphasize that the rights in question are rights in the moral sense and not (necessary) also rights in the legal sense. Philosopher Tom


⁶ Engel and Jenni 2010, 9–12.

⁷ Engel and Jenni 2010, 14.

⁸ Singer 2009; 2006; Mason and Singer 2006.

⁹ Singer 2011, 50.

¹⁰ Regan 2004.



Regan argues that (at least some) nonhuman animals have negative rights of non-interference, such as the right not to be killed, not to be harmed or not to be tortured. Most of our existing practices involving nonhuman animals involve at least some kind of serious violations of such rights and are in this regard considered morally wrong or unacceptable.


Such approach is based on the ascription of intrinsic (inherent) value to all sentient beings, that is living beings that are experiencing subjects of life (e.g. with perceptions, beliefs, wishes, motives, memories, etc.) and whose lives can fare well or bad over time. As such they have “an individual experiential welfare, logically independent of their utility relative to the interests or welfare of others”.¹¹ This is then a foundation for their rights and morally obliges us to abstain from actions that would importantly hamper the lives of such beings. Although there are several important differences between the presented interests-based and rights-based approaches the practical consequences of both are or should be very similar. Both use the same (or at least very similar) criterion for the inclusion into the moral community in its widest sense and regarding the normative implications both approaches see the majority of existing practices involving nonhuman animals as unacceptable and unjustifiable, since we mostly appeal only to arbitrary and ungrounded differences about the status of sentient beings to justify unequal treatment. The rights-based approach could be understood as focused predominantly on securing the wellbeing of nonhuman animals (experiences of pleasure and pain) and sees the attribution of protective rights to them as the best way to implement this general aim.

What is the difference?

The crucial point in rejection of ethical humanism is related to the search for distinguishing characteristics between humans and nonhuman animals. Such a characteristic would then supposedly define the (proper) set of beings that share equal minimal moral status.

The problem arises when we appeal to some morally irrelevant characteristics or differences as relevant and thus justifying our unequal behaviour towards them. This should be rejected and such approaches claim that “in our attitude to members of other species we have prejudices which are completely analogous to the prejudices people may have with regard to members of other races, and these prejudices will be connected with the ways we are blind to our own exploitation and oppression of the other group. We are blind to the fact that what we do to them deprives them of their rights; we do not want to see this because we profit from it, and so we make use of

¹¹ Regan 1989, 38.



what are really morally irrelevant differences between them and ourselves to justify the difference in treatment”.¹²

This is a basis for an argument from analogy that puts speciesism (that is regarding human beings (as a species) as the only ones that deserve a moral status or as deserving a special moral status as opposed to other species but with no particular justification backing this up except for species membership) on a par with racism or sexism. But the analogy alone is not enough to discard ethical humanism, since its proponents might appeal to some other characteristic other than a mere species membership to justify the (moral) inequality between human and nonhuman animals. In the discussion in animal ethics we can locate several alternative candidates, e.g. linguistic abilities, language and/or speech, rationality, reasoning and responsiveness to reasons, ability to agree to social and moral rules, possession of the immortal soul, life in the “biographic sense of the word”, moral autonomy, the capacity to reciprocity, empathy, the desire for self-respect.¹³ Those are supposedly characteristics that distinguish us from nonhuman animals and that are thus justifying our special moral status.

All such attempts fall prey to the following simple dilemma. They face a very difficult task to find and defend a distinguishing characteristic such that either (i) only human beings have it (in this case many human beings will actually not have it, as it is the case with moral autonomy, rationality, etc.) or (ii) actually all human beings have it (in this case also at least some nonhuman animals will have it, e.g. capacity for sentience). An example of the first would be e.g. ability to agree to social and moral rules, which psychopaths lack, but are nonetheless treated as having the same moral status as others. The example of the former would be the capacity to experience pleasure and pain, which all human beings have, but at the same time, it is utterly clear that some nonhuman animals also have it. If one would focus on some other characteristics e.g. as the capacity for speech, then an open question would be, why is this capacity morally relevant at all. Since there seem to be no convincing candidates such an argument from analogy indeed refutes ethical humanism.¹⁴

Abolition


There is also another approach to the animal question that differs from the ones presented above in that it sees the mentioned approaches (focusing on animal wellbeing, prevention of needless suffering, etc.) as deeply mistaken. The main issue is that they merely focus on how we should treat nonhuman animals, and not on a more pressing issue that we should not treat and use them at all. Such a view is called abolitionism.¹⁵

¹² Diamond 1991, 319.

¹³ Engel and Jenni 2010, 19.

¹⁴ Engel and Jenni 2010, 20–21.

¹⁵ Francione 2009; 2010.



In a consumer society, a supposedly misguided perspective that only focuses on the pleasure and pain of the nonhuman animals gives rise to the talk about “happy meat”, “free ranged meat” and alike. The final purpose of such movements is merely better treatment of animals. Abolitionism takes a more radical stance of seeing any use of animals as morally unacceptable and claims that any “humane treatment” or “humane consumption” is merely an illusion.


Abolitionism also appeals to sentience and consciousness of beings as setting the limits for our use of animals as a mean or a resource. It advocates a full abolition of any use of sentient animals following the “zero tolerance” principle. It also notes how the so-called humane treatment of animals in food production goes in many cases hand in hand with economic interests of the food industry, since the facts reveal that certain measures that are part of the more “animal-friendly” production processes are actually reducing the costs (less dead animals as a result of diseases and aggression between them, reduced costs for medical treatments, etc.) and offering an opportunity to sell the meat at increased prices (since environmentally aware consumers are prepared to spend more on e.g. free ranged stake).

But the important question is not whether animals suffer less because of this, but is it morally acceptable that they suffer at all. Abolitionism also advocates the abolition of most domestic pets, since in many cases we are providing them with a merely sad existence given their nature, making them dependent on us, and – in the case of carnivorous pets – there is a question of the use and suffering of other animals raised to become pet food. The main impediment in all this seems to be that we regard animals as property, therefore as things, while we should move towards considering them as persons in the sense that they deserve a proper kind of moral consideration. Thus, if we really are morally concerned with animals, we should neither eat or wear, nor use them in such ways.

Care and companionship

There are several other ethical approaches to the animal question that fall outside of the broadly utilitarian or rights-based approaches. Most of these approaches focus on changing our relationship towards nonhuman animals and eliminating some deeply rooted posits that stand in the way of such a change. In this respect British philosopher Mary Midgley¹⁶ argues for the elimination of barriers that our culture has put between humans and nonhuman animals and are the foundation of our mostly unacceptable attitude to them. Those central barriers include a confusion in our understanding of concepts like belief, emotion, understanding, language and relations between them, a distorted view on morality that includes concentric circles of ethical importance of others and our relation to them, where we are at the centre, an excessive abstraction

¹⁶ Midgley 1983.



in moral thinking and reasoning, and an oversimplified view that compassion and empathy are limited in “volume” and that we have to conserve it only to the ones near and dear to us.

From such a perspective both the proponents of animal liberation movement and their opponents fall prey to a common mistake of excessively generalizing the issues, leading to reduction of all of our moral relations to a simple and abstract model of ethical relevance. Animal liberation, equality of interest perspective, and animal rights movement can be successful only in combating some of our excuses for our current treatment of animals, but they cannot, on the whole, represent a new basis for establishing an inclusive model of ethical community with a radical change of our beliefs and attitudes. The way to achieve this is to develop an enhanced concern for nonhuman animals based on our common evolution and different ways of our living together.¹⁷

Similarly, ethics of care approach emphasizes that our concepts of duty, moral principles, autonomy and individuality must be replaced with morally even more central concepts of relationship, companionship, sensitivity for the world around us and care. It calls attention to the importance of our focus and sensitivity for the suffering of animals, which is being inflicted to them as a consequence of our social and economic system. We need to reject an image of an autonomous, isolated, independent moral agent with rights and freedoms that was formed in the Enlightenment and replace it with a notion of a mutually depended and interconnected beings (ecosystem).¹⁸

For Cora Diamond, our relationship with nonhuman animals can be framed as a relationship of our fellow creature or a companion, which may be sought as company.¹⁹ Such a notion of a creature is not a biological one, but a moral one, and one that is crucially connected with our understanding of ourselves. “The response to animals as our fellows in mortality, in life on this earth [...], depends on a conception of *human* life. It is an extension of non-biological notion of what human life is”.²⁰ As such it takes us beyond moral notions of rights, justice or interest, towards respect, dignity, companionship and mutual dependence.

What establishes this relationship between us and nonhuman animals is a sense of vulnerability and mortality, which we share with them as connected to being a living body.²¹ When we perceive and treat nonhuman animals as objects, we fail to see injustice as injustice on the level of relationship with them and we stick to interests and rights. We can shift this perspective only by recognizing our common vulnerability. The


¹⁷ Engel and Jenni 2010, 33–34.

¹⁸ Engel and Jenni 2010, 35–36.

¹⁹ Diamond, 1991, 328–329.

²⁰ Diamond 1991, 329.

²¹ Diamond, 2008, 74.



very notion of (in)justice requires a level of established compassion and a loving relationship towards a being that can suffer injustices.

Conclusion

This brief reflection and overview of some of the most common approaches to animal ethics is a supporting framework that you as teachers and educators can use to address these issues with your students at the level appropriate to their age. It is meant to give you a platform for framing and discussing different questions with them and also to include several experiential and holistic aspects to these topics. In what follows there is a set of ideas for possible activities that you can also modify and upgrade given your interests and aims.

Learning activities/Step by step and ideas for adaptation


1. Suffering and wellbeing

The network

Step 1: In the first step ask students to each choose one animal and write it down on a piece of paper. In order to get varied answers, you can introduce an additional condition, e.g. the name of the student and the name of the animal should share a joint letter (e.g. Anne — tiger).

Step 2: In the next step students should find/think of two other animals that their initially selected animals are depended upon (e.g. as a source of food or symbiosis). They should write each animal down on a separate piece of paper.

Step 3: In this step find an empty wall or big presentation board/poster that you can use. Select a student that would begin this part of the activity (you can use a game or some similar activity for making the selection). The student should then put the piece of paper with the initially selected animal in the centre and two other animals around in a way that would enable him or her to connect them by drawing a line or gluing a piece of string in between the pieces of paper. While doing this he or she should explain how are the animals connected. A line thus represents an interconnection and dependence. Once the student finishes, another student approaches and repeats the process. If this student has selected any of the same animals, it should not double its presence, but just use an existing piece of paper with the animal that is already present, but marking a new connection. Repeat this step so that all students get their turn, and



at the same time all other students can suggest the drawing/making of other lines that they see fit given the appearance of the new animals in the network. You can also help them in identifying the interconnections.

Step 4: Once you have completed creating this visualization of the network of interdependence select a group of students (e.g. 5 students) that each gets one sticker with a human figure. They are instructed to each choose one animal that is in the network that human beings depend on and put a sticker next to it.

Step 5: Students are then invited to find possible examples of animals in the network that have no interconnecting lines with human beings. Next, that can count, what is the biggest number of steps that separate a given animal from interconnection with human beings.

Step 6: You can conclude with a general discussion about the importance of animal well-being and our interdependence with them that include our well-being.

2. Rights


Bill of animal rights

Step 1: Ask students to name their favourite animals. Each should choose just one animal (it could be wild, domestic or a pet animal) and they should one by one say what their favourite animal is and briefly explain why. Depending on the time you have available they should then either write down the animal or draw that animal on a piece of paper (which should not be too large).

Step 2: Divide the class of students into groups with 4 or 5 members, but make sure that each group consist of students that have chosen different animals. You can also structure this as a game. Once students are arranged in groups, proceed with the next step.

Step 3: Ask students/each group to first think of three ways in which their selected animals interact with humans (3 ways for each of the animal that the groups represent). Then they must briefly write down how these interactions/encounters look like, but from the perspective of the animal and not humans. They should then share their descriptions or ideas within the group, so that each student presents them to the rest of the group.

Step 4: Once they have completed the previous task, instruct students to devise a bill of rights that would protect their selected animals. They should think of and write down at least five rights that would protect their selected animals on a separate, large piece of paper, leaving enough room on it, that that could also glue pictures of names of the



animals on it afterwards. These rights could also be very specific and students must be encouraged to think from the perspective of the animals involved.

Step 5: One representative of each group (or groups as a whole) then presents the poster with the bill of right to everyone. After each presentation, you can involve students in discussion. Why they have chosen these rights? How and why are they important? Are they important for every animal that their group represented? Are they important to animals in general? Are they relevant for humans too?

Step 6: Find room for the posters with the lists of right in the classroom or in the school hallway and display them there so that also others can observe them.

3. Differences

Them and us

Step 1: Divide the class/entire group into groups with 3 or 4 members. Next, ask them to discuss between themselves and find 3 differences between human beings and animals (these could be very general or specific, e.g. some animals have feathers while humans do not have them. One member in each group should then write their answers down on a larger piece of paper. After they finish with this task, you can proceed to the next step.

Step 2: Invite the first group to share their suggestions with all the others. They should put forward the differences they have found and explain them. While doing so their suggestions as written down can also be displayed on the presentation board. After one group finished with this engage all students in a discussion (Socratic dialogue) about their suggestion in a way that you play the role of the one who challenges their suggestions (e.g. is that a real difference or in fact something that we share with the animals? Would bird still be birds (or animals) if they would lose all their feathers? Would somebody cease to be a human being if he/she would grow a feather? etc.) The aim is now to find and focus more on commonalities between humans and animals. After this discussion, move on to other groups and repeat the discussion process there.

Step 3: In the final step ask students to write a short reflection on the discussion and write down (just for themselves) 3 commonalities that they themselves share with animals and that are such that they are very important to them.



4. Abolition

Animal classroom

Step 1: In the first step explain to the students that you will all be engaged in the activity of determining in what ways do we use animals. At the start ask them if they know of any product that is made from animals, substances that derive from animals or their labour (and is such that it can presently be found in the classroom that you are in, e.g. leader shoes or bags). Challenge them to think hard about possible answers. Write the answers that you agree upon on the whiteboard.

Step 2: Introduce to students other suggestions that you prepare in advance (e.g. crayons are often made from substances deriving from animals; almost all plastic bags include substances from animals, etc.). Do a bit of research first²² and present the results (like said before things like plastic bags, things coloured in red, orange juice, varnish, sugar, fabric softener that we use for washing our clothes, etc. may be on the list). Write the suggestions on the table and move on to the next step.

Step 3: Distribute post-it notes or easily removable stickers to students (preferably in the same colour that). They can form groups of 4 or 5. Each group has then 15 seconds to use these stickers and stick them to the things that are on the list. Once one group runs out of time the other gets to go. This part of the activity finishes when all groups ran out of things to mark. You can then continue to the next, final step.

Step 4: Ask students to sit down where they feel most comfortable in the classroom. Then they have 30 seconds to just observe how the classroom with all the stickers looks like.


5. Care and companionship

A caring companion

Step 1: At the start ask your students to think of the animal that they first hear this morning on their way to school. What was the animal saying? What could it say to them if it could speak? What was the first animal they saw this morning? How did it look like? And perhaps, what was the first animal they felt (e.g. petted) this morning?

Step 2: Discuss with students in which way animals are our companions? Can only pets be our companions or are wild animals also interacting with us? In which way? Are we

²² You can use the following links: <https://www.businessinsider.com/15-surprising-things-that-contain-animal-products-2014-3>; <https://www.treehugger.com/green-food/9-everyday-products-you-didnt-know-had-animal-ingredients.html>



interacting with them (this could be in any way or shape, e.g. feeling amused when we see a squirrel hanging down and swinging on a thin branch on the tree in our garden or at the park)?

Step 3: After the discussion activity above you and your students should decide together on a joint “Caring companion” project that would involve interaction between animals and humans. There are several possible ideas that you can follow (from more basic to more elaborate ones), e.g. building feeding stands for animals and then observing them from a distance, arranging visits of the local animal shelter and providing company for animals there or volunteering in their activities, organizing a pet day at the local home for elderly where you arrange a session for joint time with pets, etc. (Make sure that you follow all the regulation and have in mind the well-being of the animals and also the possibilities for implementation). Make this part of your regular school activities and establish some sort of tradition.



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