

Foreign Language Education and Environmental Consciousness

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Environmental education should be *for* nature, not merely *about* nature.

One autumn, when I was in elementary school, I joined my friends in throwing stones at birds as moving targets. My mother tried to convince me to quit it by talking, but I couldn't understand her reasons. However, my grandmother simply kept silent.

Another time I ambushed a group of sparrows in our yard. One of them was badly injured and the others flew away. My heart was beating quickly. My grandma's pale face in a window caught my attention. Tears were rolling down her cheeks. She pointed to a sparrow that appeared to be more agitated than others on the wall: "Look! Do you see the bird that is most restless?" she said with a trembling voice. "She is the writhing sparrow's mother." She shook my whole worldview: Mother? Child? For a week I stayed at home, full of sorrow over my crime.

My grandma helped me appreciate the life, feeling, emotions, and love in the animal world. She told me stories about animals and how kind the prophets were towards animals. I watched her talking and cooing to animals as if she was cooing to a cute child. One day after school I saw a lot of chickens in our yard. Grandma had bought them for me. I walked them every day. A sense of responsibility for their protection grew in me. The animals' cute, innocent, impartial, and nonjudgmental moods stimulated me to also begin cooing over them, and this was very soothing. Little by little, my friends who used to hunt birds and mock me for becoming so sensitive about them joined me in thinking about, watching, and even walking the cute chickens. It did not take much time before taking care of chickens became a way of life in our neighborhood.

However, time, vehicles, and cats ambushed my little friends one by one. One day a motorbike ran

Note: The author wishes to acknowledge the ongoing influence on his work of his teacher, Dr. Mehdi Mahdavinia, who "rekindled the fire" in his heart.



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over my loveliest rooster and my uncle had to put an end to his pain. That was a very painful day for me, not only because I lost a friend but also because I realized where one of our most common foods came from. Bill Crain (2009, 2) points out that “for most children, the first and most upsetting confrontation with adult views seems to occur when children discover the source of the meat they eat.” When I realized this, despite my parents’ attempts, I couldn’t eat meat for several years.

I did everything to help animals — from nursing a shot eagle to drying off waterlogged sparrows with hairdryer. I didn’t have the heart to ride a donkey in our village and I even carried some of his load to make his burden lighter. I was careful about ants and other tiny animals. Although I was careful not to harm them myself, I still didn’t like predators like cats that killed my chickens; or wolves, sharks, snakes, crocodiles that were (unfairly) cast as relentless murderers in the movies.

Once I found a wounded dove on our roof. I took care of her for a while, but one day, when I was at school, a cat pounced on her. When I saw her bloody feathers I was filled with sorrow and anger. That afternoon, my siblings showed me the cat in our yard and, filled with revenge, I threw a stick at her. She fell down on the ground. My world turned dark and I burst into tears when I saw her unconscious. Fortunately the cat stood up in a minute. I ran to the kitchen to fetch her a little meat. She sniffed at it but she didn’t touch it, and with a sad look in her eyes that I will never forget, she left. She was a predator by nature and her own life depended on her prey.

I firmly believed that I didn’t have the right to let my selfish ego meddle in nature’s lifecycle. I wish the science books I had read had cultivated this sense of holistic reverence in me before had witnessed these events; instead, they encouraged me and my friends to dissect animals and plants. I understood in the depth of my soul that “life is as dear to the mute animal as it is to any human being; even the simplest insect strives for protection from dangers that threaten its life” (Dalai Lama 2006, 5); and that the balance of “existence and non-existence gives birth to (the idea of) the other” (Lao-tzu 2008, 10).

These experiences also helped shape a subconscious decision in me to refrain from controlling ani-

mals as my possessions. I preferred to watch and care for them from afar while I had my inner discourse of love with them. I think it’s time for us to re-conceptualize our epistemology of love towards nature. This love should be more of a love for *being* rather than a desire for *having*. Much of the harm done to nature results from the epistemology of *having*, because it takes the form of keeping animals in cages in zoos, circuses, aquariums, and even our homes. It takes the form of enjoying, owning, and displaying animal skin, heads, and tusks; it takes the form of enjoying animals as food. Human beings occupy and destroy nature and animal habitats because they think they love nature, but we should know that love is the opposite of possessiveness and greed.

Until last year I really was personally not very ecologically sensitive. When I saw the amount of pollution in the swamps, coastlines, and rivers of the northern parts of my country, I began to reexamine my role as an educator: “What is the point of teaching/learning English or any other subject when we are oblivious to safekeeping the beautiful natural world that God has entrusted us? What is the point of teaching foreign languages when we are still foreigners to the language of our hearts and of Mother Nature?” As I learned more about a holistic way of life and education through my professor, Dr. Mahdavinia, I decided to set my class objectives beyond the subject matter alone and on more important issues: protecting nature and encouraging others, especially my students, to do it as well.

Context

When I first visited a new school in Tehran province where I was about to start teaching, I noticed that flowers and natural scenes were painted on its walls. As I entered the school building, the sight of three stuffed animals — a seagull, a weasel, and a woodpecker — on three shelves in the corridor caught my attention. On those shelves there were many alcohol jars containing small animals and embryos. It was a school for talented students and each year hundreds of students compete for admission. It was a highly disciplined test-driven school in which students were pushed to get high scores on their tests. They were so stressed out about trivial things like grades, rankings, and tests that they could hardly think of anything that

was really important. The atmosphere was so limiting to me, but I had a newborn dream: to help my students become more ecologically sensitive.

Preliminary Steps

I think the first step in educating a child to befriend Nature is befriending his/her own nature. How can we expect a child who constantly experiences insults to respect nature or others? The elementary school years were the scariest years of my life because children were insulted and punished for their childish mistakes. I was punished on the very first day of school because I didn't know how to hold a pencil. I held it in my fist and hoed the first page of my notebook by pressing it down too much. Perhaps one of the main reasons why we are animal hunters was the treatment we got in school. Children who are mistreated show aggressive behavior (Webb 2007, 48; Cattanaach 2002, 64), especially in their play, to master their traumatic experiences. Victims of this aggression could be their toys, others, themselves, and nature. To a generation brought up with an aggressive traditional education nature may be nothing more than an "aggression-release toy."

Traditional education attacks the heart of a child's nature and soul by limiting his playtime, overloading him with stressful tests and homework, suppressing his creativity and imagination, and ignoring his unique voice in a strict disciplined environment.

More humane educational approaches, however, value the child's nature; in them his uniqueness and polarities are acknowledged; he is the subject of his own learning; imagination and creativity are seen as means of contributing to his personal development (Dufeu 1994, 12-22); and the relationships between self and Soul, self and community, linear thinking and intuition, mind and body, and one's relationship to nature (Miller 2008, 13-14) are all strengthened.

In my class, student portfolios largely replaced tests and textbooks. We would communicate our feelings through reflective essays and journaling. Art was encouraged because it helps develop feeling (Miller 1983, 167), creativity and connection to creatures, creation, and Creator; and "enable[s] us to see beyond the 'purposive consciousness' which has led us into ecological peril" (Reason 2007, 35). My students were

especially pleased with my caring for their feelings and the respect and trust I showed to them.

Advanced Steps

I believe that ecological sensitivity is nurtured through our sense of wonder, our appreciation of our interconnection and oneness with the universe, global responsibility, and a vision of hope.

A Sense of Wonder

Wonder appeals to our nature because it is a "part of our response to the real and is present from birth" (Miller et al. 2005, 70). Education should promote wonder by connecting the child to the whole of the natural world. Unfortunately, as Njus (2010, 11) puts it "in traditional, government-mandated, test-driven education we insist so much on performing up to someone else's expectations that children soon lose their sense of wonder."

Reflecting on a Powerpoint presentation on the vastness of the universe, the students commented that

We have an endless life.

God has created the world beautiful and harmonic.

In comparison to the world we're both too small and too big.

Creation is so great and we are so tiny. Thank God because I'm not too big to become supercilious and not too little to not exist.

A Sense of Interconnection and Oneness

Causality "has been observed in infants as young as 4 months" (Matsumoto 2009, 61). It becomes more sophisticated as they grow, but, because of our dominant compartmentalized modern worldview, most of us focus on daily life and stop exploring the causes and effects of many important issues in the world. On the other hand, there are men who can see invisible webs of unity in the universe to the point of oneness. They suffer from the suffering of others because they are a part of the living and conscious body of the universe. Education should help the child perceive more and more interconnections to achieve the level of oneness with the whole of creation.

In class we devoted a session to the “butterfly effect.” After some students expressed their thoughts about it, we collaboratively wrote about the effects of an act of kindness: “I help a poor man. He becomes happy and he buys food for his family. They become happy and [and] they pray for me.” We talked about this and drew, with our non-dominant hands, similar interconnections between natural forces and elements. We even wrote dialogues among the forces and elements, which I call “divine discourse” because students presented a conversation of love between mountains, plants, and animals.

With a different group of students I tried free drama, to help them put themselves in nature's shoes. After a ten-minute group discussion, each group began to improvise what was happening around them in the natural world and what humans are doing to her. Students played the roles of trees, rabbits, horses, rivers, birds, monkeys, fire, hunters, woodmen, and those who pollute nature.

When their plays were over, I asked them reflect on their experiences for a few minutes and write down their feelings. They wrote:

I felt bad when I was cutting the tree.

When people watered me I felt good but when they cut me I felt angry.

As an inoffensive hare I felt bad when hunters attacked me.

I played the role of a tree. Two hunters came and broke my branches. One of them shot the hare and he shot me in the eye, too.

I was the woodman. When I cut the tree I felt pity for it, but I had to cut it down to make money for my family.

Global Responsibility

Becoming more aware of and understanding the interconnections and awareness of global issues better often leads to greater global responsibility. We decided to write a letter to God about human behavior towards nature:

Dear God, we killed the fish; we burned the trees ... and we polluted your sky. I don't know why we ... destroy the Earth.

A dominant mechanistic, ego-centered, consumerist, and compartmentalized mentality has numbed modern man. Under the influence of this perspective we run the risk of stagnation and death for humanity and Nature. We begin to believe that an animal or any other being is beautiful when it is tamed, imprisoned, frozen, or stuffed. This is the same mentality that believes that an ideal student is obedient and willing to be passively stuffed with force-fed information. It is the mentality that sees nothing wrong with destroying forests and plant diversity, while beguiling people with green parks and streets lined with homogenized trees. It is the same mentality that tries to homogenize people in and by politics, education, research.

Envisioning Hope

Despite the dominance of this mentality, we should never surrender to disappointment. Paulo Frier (in Miller et al. 2005, 72) says:

I do not understand human existence and the struggle needed to improve it, apart from hope and dream. Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearing, and become a distortion of the ontological need.... When it becomes a program, hopelessness paralyzes us, immobilizes us. We succumb to fatalism, and then it becomes impossible to muster the strength we absolutely need for the fierce struggle that will re-create the world.

The class visualized a hopeful future for the Earth and humanity. The results of the students' reflections often surprised me. One group conceived of the Earth as a living being with a face. Every element of nature was represented as a part of this face, including human beings. All the limbs were interconnected and an ailment in one limb could affect the whole body.

Another student drew Earth as a sacred mother who held in her arms all her children and wrote:

I close my eyes: I see the forest. There are animals in it. Lions play with each other. Animals are happy. I see a beautiful dog. It has a baby. Mother Earth is clean and happy. I see tall trees. The birds sing. I am happy for Earth. It isn't dirty. It isn't polluted. It is green and beautiful. I love earth.

Reflections: From Words to Deeds

When man's spiritual, mental, physical, and linguistic contact with nature is minimized, he will start to take for granted the modern mechanistic lifestyle. It starts with diverting thought and discourse from important global issues to trivial matters and whatever engages him in the relentless competition of consumption and exploitation of nature.

Mechanistic and positivist education has deprived students of even linguistic contact with nature.

Among the 448 words in the first two books of junior high school English used in Iran the only nature-related words I found were cat, fish, dog, hen, bird, park, and trees. In the level three book, I found only the words lion and tiger as wild animals, and they were illustrated in the cages of a zoo. In those three books, only one reading was about animals, and that was in the zoo. Iranian students have to study these books over and over and they seldom get the chance to go beyond them. I devoted most the activities of my class to imaginative arts-based language learning. It was interesting that nature, over time, became my students' favorite theme, especially for drawing.

In my students' descriptions of their artworks, metaphoric language and personification increasingly emerged, something that they rarely encountered in their English textbooks and standardized tests. For example, students may not use personal pronouns "he," "she," "I," "you," and "we" for nonhumans. Instead, educators should encourage this perspective to nurture man's holistic and spiritual character for building a better world.

In my classes I have done my best to transcend a teacher's limitations in a test-driven structure-based language curriculum. My language class objectives extended well beyond grammatical structures and vocabulary words. I had my students learn the past tense through critical reflection on the past; practice and learn connectors while discovering the interconnections among all things; learn imperatives through a rally for protection of nature; and learn the future

tense by hoping and envisioning a brighter future for humanity and Mother Earth.

The results were positive: There were intimations of ecological sensitivity in students' artwork and writings, and even some changes in their behavior towards nature were reported by some parents. One mother wrote to me that her son "doesn't leave rubbish in nature anymore...." One student confessed that "animals have feelings, too. They have their own sweet life. I wonder how we can kill them. I decided not to eat meat anymore, but my dad doesn't

allow me." I appreciated these changes but a dream warned me not to stop here.

One night I dreamt of a crying tree on fire. In my dream I thought it was unusual and that I should record that moment. As I was taking pictures, I asked myself why I didn't extinguish the fire. I dropped the camera and fetched a bucket of water, but it was too late. The

tree was already lying in his ashes, breathing his last breath. I woke up with sadness. Nature was trying to warn me not to live only in a world of theory. Nature taught me that environmental education should be *for* nature, not merely *about* nature. The objectives of a nature-friendly curriculum should highlight the environmental crises around us and solve them with the help of children who are encouraged to hope, dream, and act for a better world.

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The thought manifests as the word,
The word manifests as the deed,
The deed develops into habit,
And the habit hardens into character.
So watch the thought
And its ways with care,
And let it spring from love
Born out of respect for all beings.

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Education is very important in our life. An educated person is one who knows a lot about many things. He always tries to learn, find out, and discover more about the world around him. The role of foreign languages is also increasing today. Thanks to the knowledge of foreign languages one can read books, magazines in the original, talk to foreigners, translate various technical articles. Moreover, joint ventures which have recently appeared in our country need specialists with profound knowledge of foreign languages like English, German or French. To know foreign languages is absolute necessary for every educated person, for good specialists. Our country is transferring to a market economy. Research and innovations should improve living, working conditions of our people. Environmental concerns are also important issues in the context of the South China Sea. The chapter contributed by Robert Beckman, Director of the Centre of International Law, National University of Singapore and his research associate Leonardo Bernard, deals with the issue of vessel-source pollution in the South China Sea. What about indigenous languages, traditional human communities, and cultural artifacts – many of the same moral claims made on behalf of wilderness would apply with equal force to these things? Where consciousness is not present, individuation and the distinction between part and whole are not likely to be ethically crucial. Language teaching can surely benefit from a theory of creolized texts. A creolized text is a text combining verbal and nonverbal information. It was broadly studied on the material of caricatures, cartoons, comics, and advertisements. Yet, their research in teaching materials can make a noticeable contribution to the theory of creolized texts. Here we describe some theoretical basis for exploiting creolized texts in a foreign language classroom. Our research aims at studying the functions of a creolized text that can be used in a language classroom: visualization, sense production, emotional impact, text compression, providing social background. The visualization consists in using the photo or the picture in a creolized text. as a system of educational institutions in which foreign language is studied, that is, a system as a social institution. Ideology, the state and its economic demands, traditions and rituals of pedagogical consciousness were and remain the leading guidelines for education in society. Since the education system in the field of foreign languages is one of the subsystems of the general education system, the remark made has the most direct relation to it. Changes in socio-economic and political conditions inevitably entail changes in the requirements for the education system in foreign languages, its main components, and the nature of relations in it. Foreign language teaching methods applied in the UK and Russia are reviewed, using as an example Durham University (UK) and Tomsk State University (Russia) in the conditions of the modern educational environment. The new educational environment is defined. The specificity of the language environment for teaching foreign languages is characterized. A comparative analysis of approaches and methods to foreign language teaching is conducted. Conclusions are made on the effectiveness of the approaches to organizing the modern educational process.