

Presentation – Environmental Education and the Brazilian school context: current challenges, permanent reflections¹

Educação Ambiental e o contexto escolar brasileiro: desafios presentes, reflexões permanentes

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ABSTRACT

This text is an introduction to the dossier “Environmental Education and Elementary and Secondary School: contexts and practices”. The dossier includes eight articles focused on this theme that discuss various perspectives, needs, means, and practices to conceive Environmental Education in diversity, with reflections, ideas, and objectives that promote plurality, as well as representativeness in the development of a more egalitarian, fair and sustainable society. The subjects covered in the dossier articles are divided into three main themes linked to Environmental Education: public policies and curriculum, teacher training, and practices carried out in the school context. The articles presented were produced by researchers from different Brazilian regions and the products of these researches show the variety and scope of thoughts and proposals, which characterizes Environmental Education as a polysemic field and capable of producing rich knowledge for our reflection on the challenges to be faced in the search to assist and value the training of citizens who develop a critical and transformative view concerning socioenvironmental issues.

Keywords: Education. Environmental Education. School context. Environment. Public policies.

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RESUMO

Este texto é uma apresentação do dossiê “Educação Ambiental e a Escola Básica: contextos e práticas”. O dossiê contempla oito artigos voltados à essa temática e que discutem variadas perspectivas, necessidades, meios e práticas para se conceber uma Educação Ambiental na diversidade, com reflexões, ideias e objetivos que contêm a pluralidade, bem como representatividade na formação de uma sociedade mais igualitária, justa e sustentável. Os assuntos tratados nos artigos do dossiê estão distribuídos em três eixos temáticos vinculados à Educação Ambiental: políticas públicas e currículo, formação de professores, e práticas conduzidas no contexto escolar. Os artigos apresentados foram produzidos por pesquisadores de diferentes regiões brasileiras e os produtos dessas pesquisas evidenciam a variedade e abrangência de pensamentos e propostas, o que caracteriza a Educação Ambiental como um campo polissêmico e capaz de produzir rico conhecimento para nossa reflexão sobre os desafios a serem superados na busca de auxiliar e valorizar a formação de cidadãos que desenvolvam um olhar crítico e transformador no que diz respeito às questões socioambientais.

Palavras-chave: Educação. Educação Ambiental. Contexto escolar. Meio ambiente. Políticas públicas.

The exercise of philosophy consists of learning to see through certain glasses until the limits of that vision are revealed and the need to change lenses arises. (GIANNOTTI, 2011, p. 193, our translation).

Is it different in Environmental Education?

We present the dossier “Environmental Education and Elementary and Secondary School: contexts and practices”. The idea for this work came from our concerns as researchers about the place of the environment in the educational sphere and how this debate has been developed in school spaces. Environmental Education is a field of knowledge established over the last few years, very promising in terms of a critical and socio-environmentally responsible citizen and their formation, but characterized by a paradox, particularly in the Brazilian context.

Probably few individuals, if asked about the importance of this field, would deny its urgency and potential. Particularly because Environmental Education has been identified as fundamental in the development of sustainable societies, despite the meanings behind these widespread concepts of sustainability and

sustainable development, as highlighted by Jacobi (2005). Therefore, the importance of Environmental Education is always highlighted in different speeches and rhetoric. However, as it is a polysemic concept, it has often been misunderstood to its objectives and its value to society, in addition to being far from having a priority position in formal schools worldwide (PALMER, 1998; CARTER; SIMMONS, 2010), being no different from what happens in Brazil.

Several authors have reported that, in addition to becoming polysemic, Environmental Education, as presented in textbooks, as well as practiced in Brazilian schools, in general, is still very much associated with behavioral changes, little favoring a transformation of values and the individual, denouncing a very instrumental perspective (LAYRARGUES; LIMA, 2014; FARIAS *et al.*, 2017; BIONDO, 2019). The result of this scenario is a generalized feeling of frustration, which is aggravated by the environmental and educational setbacks in the current Brazilian political scenario. Tristão, 2005, reflected on this in her article entitled “*Weaving the threads of Environmental Education: the subjective and the collective, the thought and the lived*”:

I have thought and observed, in several meetings with teachers, environmental educators, and educators, that this can be the triggering element of the feeling of frustration and anguish they sometimes feel for the gigantic ideal of reversing the situation of the destruction of natural and rescue the relationship between culture/nature, society/environment. The big issue is not the feeling for this great co-responsibility, but the feeling of an unbearable weight in which responsibility and impotence confront each other when the result of the educational process does not revert to significant daily practices (TRISTÃO, 2005, p. 253, our translation).

Therefore, it was from these concerns and reflections about the Environmental Education activities currently developed in Brazilian schools that the idea of this dossier emerged, seeking to assess what has changed, particularly after the publication of the *Ministério da Educação* [Ministry of Education] (MEC) report entitled “Education in diversity: what schools that claim to carry out environmental education do” (BRASIL, 2007, our translation). The questions initially proposed were debated by researchers from different Brazilian regions who responded to our invitation, which represents and provides an important diversity of research, and also takes regional contexts into account. Questions such as: “What kind of Environmental Education is practiced in schools? What are the influences of public policies aimed at Environmental Education

in force in the country and the activities developed in these spaces? What are the pedagogical practices used by schools to insert Environmental Education into the curriculum? What changes are taking place in school life as a result of this insertion? What are the possible impacts of these practices on school communities?”, has led us to outline three axes of study related to Environmental Education in the school context: public policies and school curriculum, teacher training, and pedagogical practices in school spaces.

In the opening of the set of studies that make up the dossier, the article entitled *An education for the end of the world? Contemporary socioenvironmental challenges and the role of Environmental Education in school contexts* proposes a relevant and urgent discussion on the challenges that humanity is currently experiencing, witnessing socio-environmental, economic and health conflicts, the increase in social inequalities, disrespect for space and knowledge produced and cultivated by traditional communities, scientific denial, climate change, among many other situations that exert a direct influence and compromise the balance and life of the planet. Given the discussed scenario, the text promotes an important reflection on the challenges and contributions of Environmental Education in the school context. The school is not the only way to solve socio-environmental issues, however, in this space there are conditions and potential for the production of new knowledge, in a cooperative and transformative way, to intervene in the causes of problems and not just in solving their effects.

Concerning the first axis, public policies aimed at the field of Environmental Education are currently in force in the country, such as the *Política Nacional de Educação Ambiental* [National Environmental Education Policy] (BRASIL, 1999) and the *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Ambiental* [National Curriculum Guidelines for Environmental Education] (BRASIL, 2012). However, how does the product of these policies materialize in school spaces, considering, for example, among other factors present, that the individuals who make up these spaces bring with them experiences and experiences that can influence the actions carried out at school? The article entitled *Indicators for evaluation of public policies of Environmental Education in schools: an analysis in the light of the policy cycle and the theory of enactment* promotes this discussion, through the presentation of the process of construction and application of a matrix of indicators, intending to evaluate the impacts of public policies on Environmental Education in school spaces, with the observation of specific dimensions identified in the study. Such discussion leads us to reflect, among other situations, on the value of the collaborative and collective character of Environmental Education projects developed in school environments and also on the potential and challenges existing in the realities of schools, factors that influence decisions, and future actions in this field.

In this same line of thought, that of understanding the factors that influence the insertion and presence of Environmental Education in school curricula, the article *Environmental Education in the micro contexts of curriculum production at school* is presented, in which the authors, taking the policy cycle approach as a theoretical basis, analyzed the paths for this insertion in two basic education schools, considering that the school spaces are constituted by different local contexts that influence the elaboration of their curricula. As a product of immersion in the chosen institutions, to understand how environmental issues are inserted and discussed in these spaces, the results lead us to reflect that the form of development of Environmental Education is plural and that each school universe has its dynamics, plans, and conducts actions that consider their needs and experiences, concepts and values, which can characterize the breadth of the field of Environmental Education.

The planning and development of Environmental Education actions in school contexts involve several professionals, including teachers. The second axis contemplates this very essential theme. From the perspective of these professionals, what are the difficulties that arise for them to conduct Environmental Education activities in schools? Can such difficulties influence the effective participation of teachers in activities promoted by the school? If we consider that teachers have an important role in bringing students closer to scientific knowledge, giving them a voice and attention to their experiences becomes essential for the planned actions to be effective and meaningful. The article *Environmental Education: aspects that hinder teacher engagement in public schools in the Federal District* presents the results of a survey that provided public school teachers participating in the research with a significant moment of exposition of their reports on this issue. The results lead us to think about the diverse and broad challenges to be overcome, which range from aspects that involve the structure and functioning of schools to aspects of initial and continuing teacher education, concerning Environmental Education.

The third axis favors reflection on how Environmental Education can be contemplated in school actions, which opens up a field for promising proposals. The article entitled *Reflections on climate change communication and environmental care: the teachers' view in the school context* presents the results of a survey carried out with teachers whose objective was to understand how they discuss issues related to climate change and the meaning of the term environmental care in their classes, as well as how they perceive their students' impressions regarding these issues. The research leads us to reflect on the potential of these discussions in the classroom, about coexistence and relationships with the environment in the search for a society that is sustainable, objectives that are present in the scope of Environmental Education.

Given the various social and environmental challenges, it is essential to include the discussion on natural disasters. But how to promote this debate in school spaces to awaken the interest and participation of students? This is the theme of the article entitled *Disasters in Brazil? Practices and approaches in education in risk and disaster reduction*, in which the researchers present practices in Disaster Risk Reduction Education (DRRE) and indicate connections of this theme with Environmental Education in points contained in the Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility Treaty. These practices were shared in a national campaign, promoted from 2016 to 2018, called #AprenderParaPrevenir. The authors analyzed the school activities presented, as well as categorized the types of didactic approaches involved in such practices, showing, through the presented discussions, the interactions and possibilities with the field of Environmental Education.

From the idea that Environmental Education is plural and that school spaces can cultivate different ways of relationships between members of their communities, the article *A school-environment between poetics, narratives and experimentations* intends to show that in these spaces it is possible to have diversity in the development of proposals for Environmental Education. The authors call the school space the school environment and seek to show, from the report of the planned workshops and the narratives presented in the text (constructed and recorded in a field diary), that art and poetry can help raise students' awareness in the that it concerns the interactions existing between human beings and nature and that through these forms of expression we can recognize and value the experiences and knowledge that different actors in schools have and share in these spaces.

The discussion about the place and potential of Environmental Education and the relationship of this field with sustainability has been presented as the focus of several studies, such as those by Jacobi (2003) and Loureiro (2014). Concerning the school space, there are studies on the relationship between the field of Environmental Education and the concept and objectives of the so-called sustainable schools. The article *Sustainability practices and ecosophies in Primary Education schools in Brazil and Australia* proposes to present the results of experiences developed by public schools in both countries (in Brazil, the investigation took place in the state of Espírito Santo, and Australia, in the state of Victoria), which developed actions or which adhered to national programs to encourage the development of sustainability practices. The text is an invitation to reflections on the meaning that the authors highlight regarding sustainable practices, considering the principles of ecosophy. The results show characteristics, values, and efforts present in these two very different

contexts, towards effective collective actions in the quest to overcome existing economic, political, and social challenges in building fairer, more democratic, and sustainable societies.

Given the rich diversity of studies presented in the dossier, it is possible to highlight experiences that bring us hope, but also the challenges that lie on the horizon, which shows that many of the problems pointed out by the MEC report in 2007 are still present, as an Environmental Education still training (BRUGGER, 2004) with little inclusion in the curricula, and aggravated by recent setbacks in the Brazilian educational scenario, such as those brought by the Common National Curriculum Base regarding the space of Environmental Education, as shown by studies such as those by Andrade and Piccinini (2017), Behrend, Cousin and Galiazzi (2018) and Oliveira and Neiman (2020). However, resistance is always present, being the result of the flame of persistence and resilience that shines in the heart of each environmental educator. And in this sense, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in its recently released report “Learn for our planet: a global review of how environmental issues are integrated into education”, invites us to intensify efforts until 2030, considering the information, presented in the report, that 45% of all education documents studied, from 46 UNESCO member states, made little or no reference to environmental issues (UNESCO, 2021). Stefania Giannini, UNESCO Deputy Director for Education, highlights that:

The world has long acknowledged the need to harness the power of education to meet sustainable development challenges, but there is still not enough systematic information on where countries stand on addressing climate change, biodiversity and environment more generally in education systems. To make progress, we must understand where the gaps lie (UNESCO, 2021, p. 4).

Finally, we hope that the works that make up this dossier can contribute to the maturation of our reflections on what Environmental Education is necessary in the context of the Brazilian school, to consolidate the formation of an Ecological Subject capable of being and being in the world in a more balanced and responsible way, with the adoption of ecologically oriented attitudes, overcoming the individual-nature dichotomy (CARVALHO, 2013).

In line with the notes presented by UNESCO, it is essential to adopt new directions and perspectives for Environmental Education in the Brazilian school context! The pandemic caused by the new coronavirus brought the world to a

halt, and forcibly, together with the already undeniable transformations that have been taking place as a result of climate change, caused us to reflect on the impact of the presence of our species on the planet, as well as to reassess our way of perceiving and relating to the environment; And so, conducting Environmental Education proposals that incorporate the climate emergency into their agenda, make people realize the simplicity of the Earth and the complexity of the world and societies (SATO; SANTOS; SÁNCHEZ, 2020), as well as incorporating the values of cultural diversity, of limits and potentials of nature, equity, and democracy (LEFF, 2010).

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