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Forestry pedagogy in first person point of view

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Abstract: Forestry pedagogy is ecological education related with forests, processes happening in forests and management of it with benefits which people are bringing. Purpose of forestry pedagogy is for school groups of different ages - from children garden to high school, for parents with children, adults and groups with special educational needs. Education is executed by specialists called forest pedagogues, who present all processes and activities to the public.

Forest pedagogy entered in Bulgaria more than 5 years ago. For the last year many people serving in the forest and hunting economies of the Northeast State Enterprises passed this education. Many people out of the forest system took part in too. This made them members of forest pedagogues' as well. There are 13 forest pedagogues in Shumen area. This is the biggest group in Bulgaria which has got most hours spent in school and children garden in the region. The Aim of Shumen's forest pedagogues is to cover in their activities up as many children as possible. The whole idea is to start with the youngest and continuously each year growing their knowledge of the forests and their inhabitants.

Keywords: Forest pedagogy, education, children, forest

“If you plan for one year ahead, plant rice.
If you plan for ten years ahead, plant a tree.
If you plan for one hundred years ahead,
educate the population!”
Confucius

Introduction

The forestry pedagogy is characterized as „learning by experience in a natural environment” and is conducted with the active cooperation of the foresters and forestry pedagogues. This is a nature-situated

training aimed at revealing the complexity of the habitats, the functions and the needs of forests, providing information on the sustainable development of ecosystems and their nature conservation status in relation to forest-based activities. The forestry pedagogy examines the environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects of man-nature relationships in the context of a sustainable development. Forestry pedagogy is based on the knowledge of forest ecosystems and sustainable forestry and evaluates, promotes and presents the forests as a healthy and excellent places for education amongst nature.

The idea of implementing such kind of education came from the United States of America in the 1960s with the ideas of Joseph Cornell, later described in his book "Sharing Nature with Children" [1], after which this kind of training has been spread in Europe [6], where forestry pedagogy is viewed as branch of the environmental education and upbringing.

Forestry pedagogy is designed for work with school and pre-school children groups, children with disabilities and adults. The activities complement and extend the existing knowledge in an interesting and fun way. During classes the learners have the opportunity to use all their senses and immerse themselves in the environment around them. The children, the teenagers and the adults learn to understand nature better through interesting experiences. This way of learning strengthens the interest of society towards the forest and improves the connection between man and nature as a whole. The purpose of the training is not to be a direct lesson, but a light, pleasant, fun and interesting experience that leads to new knowledge.

The forestry pedagogy lessons are carried out by lecturers called forestry pedagogues who went through a special training course. This allows an adequate presentation of the activities, which are taking place in the forest in a fun and interesting way. During the course of their training, forestry pedagogues are preparing to work with different focus groups in a natural environment and are personally testing the games they will present during their lessons amongst nature. The educational activities in natural conditions are a way to overcome the alienation between people and nature. These activities are also means of overcoming immobilization and dependence on electronic devices, which means avoiding the "real deficiency of nature" as pointed out by [2].

The aspects of forestry pedagogy are divided into educational, socio-economic and environmental, as pedagogical, didactic and psychological approaches are being applied [3], [5].

The educational aspects include respect for nature, responsibility towards oneself and towards others, tolerance and solidarity. The classes stimulate the imagination and creativity, teamwork, interdisciplinary thinking, socially responsible behavior, curiosity and the concentration of learners.

The socio-economic aspects include raising the awareness for the benefits of developing a sustainable forestry, sharing information about the value of non-timber forest products and services, working in the field of forestry and forestry industries, encouraging the connections between rural and urban areas and promoting the use of wood, as a renewable material.

The ecological aspects include improvement of the understanding of forest management and providing more information on their role in the context of climate change.

The education in forestry pedagogy is based on several principles formulated by [4]. Carrying out the activities in a natural environment, using the available resources.

- Creating an appropriate environment and splitting the tasks into achievable parts;
- Using and engaging all the senses;
- Planning the lessons in order to gain new knowledge and follow-up development.

Educational and competitive forest games are practiced during the forestry classes. There are also adventures in the woods, exploratory tours, forest dedicated days, weekend programs and participations in forestry support work that are being organized. The tuition approach responds to the needs and interests of learners. The simpler, dialogue oriented approach, sets task limits and conditions, while the games remain the basic way of presenting new knowledge.

A feedback from the participants is provided at the end of each activity, in order for them to share their views on the games and the tasks accomplishment. All this is necessary for the follow-up behavior of forestry educators when planning the next games included in one activity, as well as in subsequent activities with the same group.

During the training in forestry pedagogy, the participants learn to rely on one another, to use their imagination, to intuitively feel the surrounding world, recreate the relations between the forest inhabitants

within the game, to maintain the fragile balance of nature and within their relations and last but not least, to seek the unfamiliar view of the world around them.

Goal

This review aims at sharing preliminary impressions and experience in forestry pedagogy classes with children from the city of Shumen and the region within the age range from 6 to 10 years old.

Exposition

In 2017 a training in forestry education took place in the Varbitsa State Forestry. It was organized by the Northeast State Enterprise, the Executive Forests Agency and the University of Forestry. The lecturer was Dr. Anna Petrakieva. During the training, Dr. Petrakieva shared with the new forestry pedagogues the achievements of one of the latest trends in forestry science, and presented the foreign and the Bulgarian experience from working in that field. The training was rich in theory and included many practical lessons. At the end, everyone took a practical exam after working with children from 1st to 4th grade. Thanks to the good work between the Northeast State Enterprise and the Executive Forests Agency, most of the forestry pedagogues are currently working in Northeastern Bulgaria. Nearly 30 experts are working with children from the educational establishments in the regions of Shumen, Varna, Dobrich and Targovishte. The team which is working on the territory of the Shumen region is the best of them all and includes a wide range of specialists. Unlike the rest of the country, the Shumen region's group is the only one that is working all year round and makes classes in which large groups of children can participate. The forestry pedagogues in the region are 12, including a university lecturer and a psychologist.

Results

So far, more than 2 300 children have been included in the forestry education classes in the Shumen region. Most of them are between 6 and 10 years old. The work of our team shows that classes with children from one age group are more successful. They are easily engaged in the learning games since all the children have approximately the same knowledge base. With the competitive games the mixed groups are losing the equality of each child and there are often disputes and hassles, which have negative effect on the activities.

The best realization of the lessons comes when there are children from the same age group, same class, or from the same friendship circle. Children are not worried when they know each other and the games are making make them learn and compete at the same time. This is strenghtening the team spirit and friendships between them.

Our current experience shows that lessons are most effective for children from a preschool groups and from 1st to 4th grade, when they are still ready to play, compete and also learn something new in a way that is different than what is provided to them in school. This is actually the most preferred age group for work. The children from higher grades seem to neglect the game aspects of the lessons, so the information should be presented in a different format that does not exclude the competition, but is consistent with the fact that teenagers want to distinguish themselves and show their individuality and creativity.

It is better to continue our work with children we have previously tutored. Our observations show better results from the repeated activities with children from the "Dimitar Blagoev" Primary School and kindergarten "Izvorche". A large part of what we have explained at our first meeting with these children has already been mastered and they want to have fun and learn with us again. That's why providing new information every time is very important. We hope that in 10 years the children we are working with now, are going to be a convinced defenders of the cause of protecting the forest, the parks, the mountains and the Bulgarian nature.

Unlike most children who live in the district center and rarely go out into the wilds, the scouts love the forest and its inhabitants and are not afraid of the animals. They know the plants and are always ready to add new information to everything they have learned on the camps and weekend activities during the winter. Twice our team had the opportunity to work with children from various scouts organizations across the country. Scouts are more disciplined, more responsible, and more open to learning new things. They are not afraid to get in touch with nature, to do something bold, and to learn something new.

The scout-children are trained to work as a team, to take care of one another and to easily solve their assigned tasks. They are ready to compete and they know what to do and how to act, in difficult

situations, or when there are bad meteorological conditions. Unlike other children, the scouts know how to survive in the woods, how to set fire safely, how to build a shelter, stretch a tent, and they know what to take in their backpacks. Some parts of this knowledge for survival amongst the nature is offered by us to the children during games, but for the scouts that's a routine. The lessons in forestry pedagogy are really successful with these kids. With them we are building-up knowledge despite that they didn't had any preliminary lessons.

Perhaps it will be good for forestry pedagogues throughout the whole country to start working more actively with scout clubs and their managers, because this education is a part of the scouting concept. The scout-children are easily recognizable among their classmates. They easily engage the others with their knowledge, and are making other kids want to learn more about the nature that surrounds them.

Kindergarten and school teachers, however are also an integral part of every lesson. Unfortunately, some of them are not interested in the lessons we are doing and it is often difficult to persuade them to join the cause. It would be good if primary education teachers and kindergarten teachers had the opportunity to get acquainted with the principles of forestry education, in any form, in order for them to be involved in the idea of preserving nature. This is a hard process that will take a lot of time, but one thing is certain - in 20 years we could congratulate ourselves, as our colleagues from Austria, Germany, Slovakia and the Czech Republic did.

Conclusions

After this review, several conclusions can be made and taken up into account when conducting further activities.

The forestry pedagogy lessons work best for children of one age group, from one class, or from one friendship circle. It is best to work with children from the age range between 6 to 10 years, where continuous teaching and repeating of information are giving visible results.

Working together with scouts eases the work of forestry pedagogues, since the scout-children are better prepared for lessons in the forest.

It is not enough that only with children are included in the forestry education. The training needs to be a multi-stage process, involving work with teachers and parents too.

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