ENGLISH AS AN ARTS DISCIPLINE IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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The subject English can be used as a discipline or as a medium. This paper describes the form of English as a discipline and questions the way it is used in environmental education. A call is made to involve in environmental education those who understand the form of English as a discipline in particular and of the arts in general.

"Environmental Education is the process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among man, his culture and his bio-physical surroundings. Environmental Education also entails practice in decision making and the self-formulation of a code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality."

(IUCN 1971)

"Environmental Education is a process leading to the acquisition of environmental knowledge and the development of attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour which reflect a concern for the health of the total environment as well as for the quality of life of all its inhabitants."

(Hurry 1982)

Awareness: to help individuals and social groups acquire an awareness of and sensitivity to, the total environment and its allied problems.
Attitude: to help individuals and social groups acquire social values, strong feelings of concern for the environment and the motivation for actively participating in its protection and improvement.
Evaluation ability: to help individuals and social groups evaluate environmental measures and education programmes in terms of ecological, political, economic, social, aesthetic and educational factors."

(Objectives 1, 3 and 5, Belgrade Charter. UNESCO 1976)

INTRODUCTION

As the above representative quotations show, most recognised definitions, aims and objectives of Environmental Education include the area of the affective. In spite of this emphasis research (Berry 1974) has shown that in practice the tendency of Environmental Education curricula is true to this form or if it is being reduced or technicised. English as a discipline and English as a medium.

Environmental Education curricula are, therefore, perhaps not as effective in achieving the aims and objectives outlined above as they could be if they were holistic or truly interdisciplinary, that is, if they included the artistic and scientific disciplines. This observation is supported by Adams and Ward (1982 p.20), who state that "any systematic approach to Environmental Education requires interdisciplinary study: subject disciplines may be considered merely as languages: ways of knowing. Each discipline, with its own concepts and ways of understanding offers specialist approaches to study. In different contexts one may be more appropriate than another, or perhaps we cannot have a really complete picture of anything until we have approached it from different viewpoints."

THE ARTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

In South Africa there is an awareness of the need for Environmental Education to be interdisciplinary and much emphasis has been placed on this need. (Archer and Gundlach 1971, Stagp 1974, Hurry 1982 and Richards 1984). This is laudable and an important step-forward. What is troubling, however, is that through a lack of understanding of the nature of the artistic disciplines and the specific contribution their ways of knowing can make to the achievement of the stated aims of Environmental Education, the manner in which they are included in Environmental Education curricula is inadequate. They have either been reduced to non-disciplines which the artist no longer recognises as belonging to him, or they have been technicised to fit in with the scientific emphasis in the Environmental Education programmes. They have not been allowed to make their specific contribution to encourage the way of knowing which seems to be as central to the aims of Environmental Education as the scientific, quantitative approach.

An effective way of illustrating this is to examine an arts discipline commonly included in the Environmental Education curriculum; English first language. English as an arts discipline has a contribution to make to the achievement of the aims of Environmental Education because of its unique way of knowing. We need to examine the nature of its form and see if its inclusion in the Environmental Education curriculum is true to this form or if it is being reduced or technicised.

THE NATURE OF ENGLISH AS A DISCIPLINE

Initially, the distinction must be made between English as a discipline and English as a medium. Many Environmental Education curricula claim to teach English when they use it merely as a medium. It is assumed that English is included in the curriculum if the pupil is asked to give an oral or written report on an activity such as an analysis of vehicle flow through a certain urban area or to record sensory perceptions during a solitary exercise. English is therefore not being allowed to make its specific contribution as a discipline.

This arises perhaps through a lack of understanding of the nature of English. One of the simplest ways of describing the form of English as an arts
discipline is to examine the four main traditions that have contributed to its form and to see if they are included in our Environmental Education curricula. Abbas (1982) describes these four traditions: chronologically beginning with the expressive movement which began in the early 1900's.

The Progressives claimed that self-expression had been prohibited in the teaching of English and they called for an end to such teaching. They felt that the child should be the centre of the curriculum and that English should be more spontaneous. This approach focussed on creativity, the celebration of feeling and the development of thinking. It should give the child the skills to make sound qualitative judgements and the ability to function as a literate, articulate communicator who can assume social roles. At the same time it must be seen as an art discipline: "a literary-expressive discipline." (Abbas, 1982).

IS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INTERDISCIPLINARY?

If we look at Environmental Education we can see that English teaching that is not primarily concerned with the language of literature and myth, the language of feeling and imagination, the language of metaphor, will not be included in the Environmental Education curriculum.

Abbas identifies the second movement as the Cambridge School which, under the leadership of F.R. Leavis, emphasized the principles of cultural continuity and critical community. These principles point to three responsibilities the teacher of English needs to hold. She must:

1. Institute the teaching of the heritage-myth and literature, to provide the great but uncertain seed of impulse with a bed of culture. (Abbs 1982 p.14).
2. Slowly convert the children into a receptive and discriminating audience of consumers.
3. Develop in her pupils an acute sensitivity to poetic language, give them a delight in words.

The third movement, and possibly the one felt most strongly in South African teaching at the moment, is what Abbas calls the "deep ecology" movement. This movement is informed less by literature or philosophy (as the Cambridge and Progressive schools were) than by linguistics and sociology. It saw the importance of an Environmental Education curriculum and emphasized the role of spoken language. It is this area which informs much English teaching today. This movement has been influenced by theorists such as Montessori and Piaget. This emphasis on thought expression needs to be linked with the discipline of the next movement if we are to teach English effectively.

Abbas links English as a discipline to the "common nature of the creative process as it manifests itself in all the arts" and claims that the arts form "one indispensable symbolic form for the comprehension of experience" (Abbs 1982 p.2) and must therefore be included wholeheartedly within the total curriculum.

In summary, therefore, good English teaching should include a commitment to creative self-expression, and a honing of the creative skills. It should give the child the skills to make sound qualitative judgements and to function as a literate, articulate communicator who can assume social roles. At the same time it must be seen as an art discipline: "a literary-expressive discipline." (Abbs, 1982).