



Viewpoint

Working with Environmental Education Pedagogies in Life Orientation to Enhance Social and Environmental Responsibility

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Abstract

The aim of this viewpoint paper is to generate interest in working with environmental education pedagogies in order to enhance the quality imperative of social and environmental responsibility for South African learners through the fundamental subject, Life Orientation. Drawing on our own experiences as Life Orientation and environmental education lecturers at a tertiary institution, we build, in this paper, on the initiative of the Department of Basic Education to include social and environmental concerns in the Life Orientation curriculum for the Further Education and Training Phase. As researchers, we therefore highlight, for South African Life Orientation teachers, the parallels that exist between environmental education and Life Orientation, and propose a guiding theoretical framework on how teachers can purposefully and effectively integrate environmental education pedagogies with Life Orientation so as to enhance the quality of their teaching practices and lesson objectives around specific contextual social and environmental concerns for their learners.

Introduction

South Africa, like most developing countries in Africa, faces numerous social and environmental challenges. HIV/Aids, the breakdown of social values, violence, crime, poverty, unemployment, safety concerns, environmental neglect, lack of basic services (safe drinking water and proper sanitation), climate change and food insecurity are but a few of the pressing problems that confront South Africans daily. It can be argued that these disheartening social and environmental concerns put sustainability under threat and therefore drive the need to develop contextually relevant environmental knowledge, skills and values to respond to these challenges. In this regard, Hornberg (2002:188) considers the inclusion of environmental realities in school subjects as a helpful framework to narrow the gap between learning and action, especially around social and environmental issues that touch people's daily lives. Interestingly, Dewing (2010:24) and Jickling and Wals (2008:7) also argue that the inclusion of the environment in classrooms creates a means for learners to investigate their own values, beliefs, routines and rituals. Furthermore, Jickling, Lotz-Sisitka, O'Donoghue and Ogbuigwe (2006:1) are of the opinion and argue that, when learners ask ethical questions on environmental issues, they can acquire knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to participate as active and informed citizens who are conscious and motivated to develop and manage their environment in a sustainable manner that maintains an

ecological balance. For this reason, the opinion of Lotz-Sisitka (2004:10) that the environment should be considered a relevant topic to which learners at school should react, is worth noting.

In South Africa, where there is a noticeable curriculum emphasis on the acquisition and application of knowledge, values and skills which are meaningful to the lives of learners (SA. DBE, 2011:4), it is important to educate and empower learners with regard to local, contextual environmental issues (Theron & Danzell, 2006:397). For this very reason, education, and, in particular, education with a humanistic and holistic approach (see, for example, UNESCO, 2015:10) can contribute to the enhancement of meaningful (environmental) knowledge, values and skills among learners. This relationship between knowledge, values and skills, especially within the local context, is captured by Lotz-Sisitka's (2012/2013:30) idea of 'learning as connection', an idea that connects perfectly with environmental education curricula as contextual bound (Ferreira, 2013:263). Given this connection, it is possible to equip learners with inseparable environmental knowledge, values and skills concerning real-life settings as outlined in the curriculum (SA. DBE, 2011:10). This can help learners to understand the root causes of current unsustainable socio-environmental behaviours in a particular context (see, for example, Ontong & Le Grange, 2014:29) and may prepare them to take concrete steps towards discovering their own sustainable life patterns (Pace, 2010:321).

Social and Environmental Issues as Curriculum Concerns

Social and environmental concerns have been accorded a high degree of prominence in post-apartheid South African education policy statements. Addressing these social and environmental concerns through the curriculum will undoubtedly require teachers to give expression to specific knowledge, skills and values that are embedded in the environment so as to prepare the modern-day learner to become a more environmentally competent and responsible person (Nsubuga, 2011:106). More encouraging is that Life Orientation (LO) is seen as an appropriate and useful 'vehicle' to take on this challenge of preparing learners to make informed decisions and choices and to take appropriate actions to live a meaningful and successful life in a rapidly changing South African society (SA. DBE, 2011:9; Theron & Dalzell, 2006:399). This implies that LO teachers should not just pay lip service to social and environmental concerns that threaten the health and well-being of learners. A starting point should be that LO teachers do not just think about the subject matter/facts to be covered (see, for example, Gravett & De Beer, 2015:3; Cooper, 2011:6) on social and environmental issues for departmental assessment purposes (SA. DBE, 2011:25–28), but should identify and integrate relevant contextual concerns with meaningful learning activities. The objective should be to actively involve learners and to guide them in developing a deep understanding with regard to the interrelatedness of social and environmental concerns and their implications for the health and well-being of the individual. The only way to ensure that this becomes a reality in LO classrooms is to stimulate teachers to deliver enriched, critical and productive knowledge, values and skills that will contribute to generating young and active citizens.

However, the notion of delivering enriched, critical and productive knowledge, values and skills around social and environmental concerns on the micro-level (classroom level) with a renewed interest in sustainable development, may not be so straightforward. Reasons for this are

that LO was, and still is, not well received by learners or by those teachers who are entrusted with the responsibility of teaching it. Teachers, today, still grapple with how best to educate the adults of the future with appropriate life skills knowledge, values and attitudes with regard to real-life concerns. Jacobs (2011) reveals that learners' interest in LO is dampened by the teacher's attitude to this subject. Researchers like Rooth (2005), Christiaans (2006) and Van Deventer (2009) trace the roots of this situation to a lack of appropriate epistemology and skills, which prevents teachers from successfully teaching curriculum content. As such, teachers are not able to capitalise on the opportunity which LO policy statements provide to include real-life contextual environmental and related sustainable concerns in the explicit curriculum. Neither will teachers be competent to provide learners with an opportunity to become critically aware of social and environmental concerns, or to address these concerns that confront them in their lives on a daily basis. It is thus clear that the effectiveness of LO as outlined in the curriculum seems to be doubtful (Jacobs, 2011:212; Prinsloo, 2007:155; Van der Walt & De Klerk, 2006:175).

Our concern is that LO teachers with inadequate professional knowledge and training within the field of environmental education might neglect addressing social and environmental concerns through the intersections of their teaching-and-learning practices. The renewed focus on content knowledge as stipulated in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) may become the biggest obstacle in that it can restrict LO teachers' perceptions, experiences and emotions with regard to social and environmental concerns when it comes to raising the cognitive awareness of learners. To transfer knowledge regarding complex social and environmental concerns through prescribed textbook activities, to passive learners who then absorb it, has the potential of isolating them from their local societal context. Not only can such an approach be seen as 'learner-centred emptiness' (Lotz-Sisitka, 2002:114), but it can also, according to Le Grange (2007:11), be labelled as a lesson in hypocrisy, for it highlights awareness of environmental concerns above active involvement. For LO, such approaches can restrain learners from benefiting from environmental learning opportunities by means of which they could have acquired knowledge, values, decision-making skills and critical thinking that are worth learning.

Two questions arise from the above: (a) How is environmental learning embedded in LO?; and (b) How best can teachers integrate environmental education and LO with their teaching and learning strategies to enhance meaningful and transformative real-life learning experiences with contextual social and environmental concerns? These are addressed in the following sections.

Parallels between Environmental Education and LO

If teachers want to successfully present themes relating to social and environmental responsibility, it is vital that environmental education should be considered in all teaching and learning activities. The reason for this is that environmental education, like LO, adheres to an integrated and holistic educational approach (Luke, 2001:195). It is linked to the quality imperative of education as encapsulated by the Global Education for All Monitoring Report of 2005 which states that not only cognitive understanding, but also the promotion of values and attitudes/skills are central to responsible behaviour (2005:17). Among scholars of environmental education and LO, there is widespread agreement that responsible behaviour is an important

feature of an individual's health and well-being. Moreover, there is much support in the literature for the belief that the parallels (see Table 1) between environmental education and LO can contribute successfully to the promotion of socially and environmentally responsible behaviour among learners. This means that learners will have to consider how their actions affect those around them, including the environment in which they live.

Table 1. Parallels between environmental education and LO

Parallels between environmental education and LO	Support references from an environmental education perspective	Support references from an LO perspective
<i>Holistic and empowering (focus on knowledge, values and skills)</i>	Gough & Gough (2010:342); Sauv� (2005:13); White (2004:81); Fien (2003:3); Luke (2001:195); Scoffham (2000:210); UNESCO-UNEP (1997:12)	Magano (2011:121); CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:9); Theron & Dalzell (2006:399)
<i>See the world as a set of related systems, thereby recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation</i>	Van Rooyen (2006:160); Rosenberg (2004:153); Sauv� (1999:11)	Magano (2011:121); CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:5); Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana (2006:2)
<i>Context-relevant (knowledge/ideas are not constructed in isolation, which makes the context of learning important)</i>	Tbilisi Declaration (1978)	Mahmoudi & Moshayedi (2012:1155); CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:4); Donald <i>et al.</i> (2006:180); Boler & Aggleton (2005:9)
<i>Socially and environmentally responsible citizens as the goal</i>	Sauv� (1999:29)	CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:5)
<i>Problem-solving</i>	Van Rooyen (2006)	CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:5)
<i>Learner-centred, with the emphasis on participation</i>	UNESCO (2014:22); Goralnik, Millenbah, Nelson & Thorp (2012:412); Stevenson & Stirling (2010:3)	UNICEF (2012:7); Helaiya & Goel (2011:19–21); Rooth (1997:75); WHO (1993:6; 1997:5)
<i>Concentrate on recent and future social and environmental concerns that are relevant to children's lives</i>	Stevenson (1997:193)	CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:15)
<i>Human rights</i>	Sauv� (1999:10)	CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:5)
<i>Dialogue: Acknowledge learners' opinions for the purpose of developing critical thinking</i>	Sauv� (1999:14); Mortari (2003:121); Pillay (2004:121)	Magano, Mostert & Van der Westhuizen (2010:22); Theron & Dalzell (2006:399)
<i>Value-oriented (recognition of values and skills development while not marginalising knowledge)</i>	UNESCO (1975:3)	CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:8)
<i>Lifelong learning</i>	Blum (2012:8); Stevenson & Stirling (2010:232); Le Grange (2002:83)	CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:8)
<i>Focus on the local environment</i>	Pillay (2004:121); McKeown & Hopkins (2003:119), Fien & Maclean (2000:101)	CAPS (SA. DBE, 2011:4); Theron & Danzell (2006:110)

The parallels between environmental education and LO emphasise the development of the whole person. The integration of knowledge, skills and values are, therefore, highly valued. Critical thinking, with an emphasis on lifelong learning, is also a central feature of both environmental education and LO, which highlights learner-centeredness, with a focus on the local environment. Although, in theory, the core elements that exist with regard to environmental education and LO are clear, the greatest challenge remains whether teachers will be able to integrate these two approaches in their teaching and learning practices in order to do justice to enhancing social and environmental responsibility among their learners. We contend that integrating environmental education with LO will be difficult, for the following four reasons:

1. CAPS introduces a content reference approach to social and environmental concerns as the foundation for learning;
2. There are given time frames in which to cover the course material on social and environmental concerns;
3. Adherence to departmental regulations regarding summative assessment is required (SA. DBE, 2011:33), which favours a teaching-to-the-test-or-examination paradigm; and
4. The role of the LO teacher in developing learning activities is not clearly spelled out.

The danger is that the teacher's role can be reduced to that of a mere implementer of predetermined learning programmes as set out in the curriculum policy statement (Grusedorff, Booyse & Burroughs, 2014:58). Our response in what follows is to explore possible opportunities within the curriculum which teachers can use to effectively integrate environmental education with LO on the topic of social and environmental responsibility within the context of the new CAPS policy framework.

Lenses in LO: Implications That Call for an Alternative Teaching and Learning Strategy towards Social and Environmental Responsibility

Four different lenses for teaching social and environmental responsibility through LO can be distinguished:

1. An *integrated lens* (taking a holistic approach to knowledge, skills and values);
2. A *critical lens* (identifying and solving problems and making decisions using critical and creative thinking);
3. A *transformative lens* (moving away from awareness to the application of knowledge, skills and values in real-life situations); and
4. A *contextual lens* (promoting knowledge in local contexts).
(SA. DBE, 2011:4, 5 & 8).

What emerged from these four lenses is the relationship that exists between the three environmental education approaches (about, in/through, for) and the embodiment of the mind (knowledge) and the implementation of knowledge (praxis). This focus affirmed Le Grange's (2004:388) argument that human bodies are not passively located in the world, but, rather, are productive agents that are able to change socio-environmental scenarios and/or conditions (in

the environment) through ‘thought in action’. The curriculum policy statement is also clear on how LO teachers can direct learners on a journey towards becoming thoughtful socially and environmentally responsible citizens. It is evident from this statement that learning activities need to be practical and should afford learners the opportunity to experience life skills in a hands-on manner (SA. DBE, 2011:25). The claim can then be made that, when environmental education is integrated with LO, it is possible to generate active, thoughtful citizens who are environmentally conscious and who are able to exhibit socially and environmentally responsible behaviour.

Making Social and Environmental Responsibility Relevant to Learners through Environmental Education

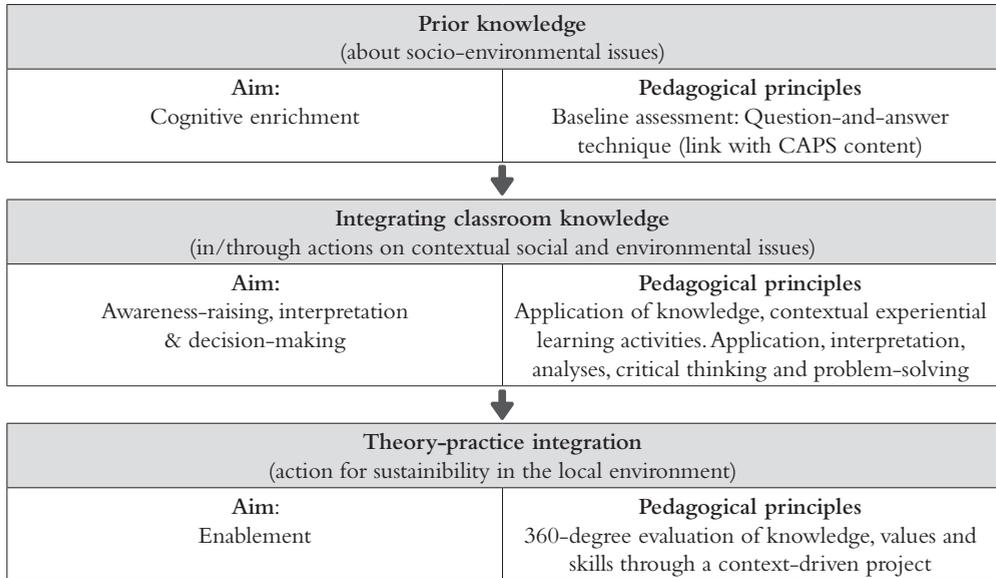
Except for the obvious parallels that exist between key elements of environmental education and LO (see Table 1), the major question that can be raised is: How will teachers in the FET (further education and training) schooling phase who are entrusted with the responsibility of teaching LO recognise whether the particular knowledge, skills and values embodied in this subject are realised in order to confirm learner growth and development? Undoubtedly, the answer to this question would encompass the concept ‘teaching strategy’, which, in itself, should be narrowed down to the specific aim that guides teachers in terms of social and environmental responsibility. Within this context, the curriculum policy statement highlights that the specific aim in managing the learning environment with regard to social and environmental responsibility should be *to guide learners to make informed and responsible decisions about their health and the environment* (SA. DBE, 2011:9). We are, therefore, of the opinion that this humanistic and learner-centred endeavour within LO can only be achieved through shifting the focus from teaching *about* social and environmental responsibility content through a prescribed textbook-driven approach towards creating meaningful learning opportunities where learners are allowed to learn *in/through* (experience and the application of knowledge in real-life situations) and *for* (striving for change as transformative action). In this way, learners will become ‘active participants in their learning, and co-constructors of knowledge’ (Meece, 2003:111). The essential implications of this are that teachers will have to carefully plan their learning activities with regard to key aspects of environmental concerns about the resolution of real-life challenges, and in such a way that opportunities will be created for learners to interact collaboratively with their environment.

A Proposed Enabling Framework for LO Teachers to Integrate Environmental Education into LO to Enhance Social and Environmental Responsibility

The most striking feature of environmental education, as articulated by Mlipha and Manyasi (2005:140), is that of a planned process enabling participants to explore the environment, to investigate recognised environmental concerns, and to take action to address the concerns for the benefit of the environment and life. This comprehensive explanation of environmental education makes it possible to include the three prominent approaches (*about*, *in/through* and *for*) to the environment in teaching and learning, approaches that were first formulated by Lucas (1972:98) and have frequently been adopted in South African environmental practices, as noted

by Le Grange (2004:390). Rather than opting for something new, the present authors find it sensible to use these three approaches, together with additional recommendations, as a basis to indicate to LO teachers how to purposefully and effectively integrate environmental education with the specially selected topic of social and environmental responsibility.

Figure 1. Integrating environmental education with LO: Enabling framework for learning as connection in the context of social and environmental responsibility



This framework serves as an active curriculum force (Wallin, 2010:2) because it enables learners to acquire interrelated knowledge, skills and values with respect to contextual social and environmental issues. It is therefore possible for learners to become consciously informed and environmentally responsible citizens through this framework, because it does not reduce activities to a mere transmission of knowledge (teaching *about*). The goal, therefore, is that education concerning social and environmental issues should be transformative. With the focus on education *in/through* and *for* the environment, knowledge becomes embedded in practice through learners' experiences with everyday (real-life) social and environmental concerns. The emphasis on education *in/through* and *for* the environment is also geared towards meaning and post-meaning, with the emphasis on changing the learners' mindset to that of becoming 'thoughtful citizens' (Singh, 2011:115). Education *in/through* and *for* the environment also underscores the value and importance of practising life skills (in the contexts of social and environmental responsibility) through a language of environmental education (Le Grange, 2010:22), which strengthen the idea that learners will experience LO as a useful subject that deals with the interactions that occur between society and the environment. The implication here is that learners will be holistically empowered with knowledge, values and skills which might ensure that the objectives related to social and environmental responsibility as positive human actions are easily attained.

Now that we have reflected on the above framework, we turn our attention to a few integrated, guiding principles on how LO teachers should go about developing and (re)designing lesson content on social and environmental responsibility that is context-relevant for their learners.

- *Identify* current and potential contextual social and environmental concerns together with your learners;
- *Consider* the best instruction method within each strategy of the framework that will enhance instruction and motivate your learners to learn more about the particular social and environmental concern;
- *Review/visit* the learning objectives of your lessons;
- *Assess* your instruction methods by asking the question: Will my instruction methods (about, in/through and for) for the specific lesson topic encourage my learners to apply their knowledge, values and skills so as to become agents of change within their environment?;
- *Select and implement* your instruction method; and
- *Reflect* on your lesson.

These recommended guiding principles serve as a helpful stepping stone to promote reflective teaching and learning practices that are locally relevant for the topic of social and environmental responsibility.

Conclusion

We wish to convey the message that environmental education can make an active contribution in the teaching of social and environmental responsibility within LO. This is a timely opportunity for teachers to rethink their teaching and learning strategies with regard to environmental concerns through LO so as 'to avoid this predominantly skills-based subject from becoming too theory-driven' (SA, DBE, 2011:25). The intention with this viewpoint paper would then be to provoke an ongoing and critical debate among academics and curriculum developers of the Department of Basic Education on the idea of integrating environmental education and LO with the topic of social and environmental responsibility.

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General Notes

1. Since 2011, 'social and environmental responsibility' has replaced the topic 'citizenship education' in previous LO policy statements.
2. The South African schooling system is divided into four phases: the Foundation Phase (Grade R–3), the Intermediate Phase (Grade 4–6), the Senior Phase (Grade 7–9) and the Further Education and Training Phase (Grade 10–12).

3. The most recent version of the South African school curriculum is referred to as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).
4. A key feature of CAPS is the differentiation between the subjects Life Orientation and Life Skills. Since 2012, Life Orientation became a Senior Phase (Grades 7–9) and FET Phase (Grades 10–12) subject. In the Foundation Phase (Grades R–3) and the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6), the subject called ‘Life Skills’ is taught.

Notes on the Contributors

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