

Reflections on environmental education, from the perspective of human rights education, and its influence on the culture of captivity of wildlife



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ABSTRACT

This theoretical essay explores the relationship between Human Rights Education (HRE) and Environmental Education (EA) in the context of wildlife protection and human health. Through the analysis of scientific publications on the interaction between HRE and EA, along with reflections based on the experiences of one of the authors as a Federal Environmental Agent, the need for a cultural change

in relation to captivity and wildlife trafficking is examined. In Brazil, wildlife trafficking has historical roots and is associated with cultural, social and economic problems. The persistent belief that keeping wild animals as pets is an act of love perpetuates a culture of captivity. However, raising awareness of society through HRE and EA is key to addressing this issue. The study reports positive experiences of raising awareness of the population through educational actions, including lectures in schools and the promotion of the voluntary delivery of animals to the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA). These initiatives demonstrate the transformative potential of education in cultural change regarding the maintenance of wildlife in captivity. Still, there are challenges to be overcome, such as the lack of investment and appreciation of EA in public policies. For HRE and EE to be effective, greater investment in the training of educators in these areas is essential. In conclusion, the importance of EE based on HRE for sustainable development and the need for comprehensive public policies in this direction are highlighted.

Keywords: Human Rights Education, Environmental education, Captivity of wildlife, Animal trafficking, Awareness, Public policies.

1 INTRODUCTION

This essay addresses the relationship between Human Rights Education (HRE) and Environmental Education (EA) in the context of wildlife protection and human health. The main objective is to analyze scientific publications that deal with this interaction between HRE and AE. In addition, it is intended to reflect on the implications of these areas in fostering a cultural change in relation to the captivity and trafficking of wild animals.

This study also seeks to establish a connection between the knowledge built throughout the development of the essay and the author's experiences as a Federal Environmental Agent. In particular, cultural perceptions related to the captivity of wild animals in Brazil are examined, as described and corroborated in previous studies. It addresses the practice present in Brazilian culture, transmitted from



generation to generation, in which the younger ones learn from the older ones the false belief that having a wild animal as a pet is beneficial both for themselves and for the specimen.

Based on this experience, it is observed that part of the population believes that keeping a wild animal under their care, even if in captivity and in inadequate sanitary conditions, is an act of love. Given this, the central question of this work is: is the act of keeping a wild animal as a pet really an act of love?

The overall objective of this essay is to analyze the relationship between HRE and AS and its implications for wildlife protection and public health. For this, a general characterization of the HRE and EA will be made, as well as an analysis of the current scenario of wildlife trafficking in Brazil and the human perception in relation to this theme.

Thus, the structure of this essay is as follows:

- a) The second section addresses Environmental Education (EA) applied to the theme of wildlife, from the perspective of Human Rights Education (HRE). Its subsections provide an overview of the importance of HRE and EA as fundamental human rights, as well as contextualize the scenario of wildlife trafficking in Brazil.
- b) The third section presents reflections and experiences of the author on the subject.
- c) Finally, the fourth and final section brings the final considerations of the study, discussing the challenges faced in combating the trafficking and captivity of wild animals, and points to the potential that HRE and EA have in promoting a cultural change in this context.

2 THE PROMOTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ANIMAL TRAFFICKING, FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

2.1 ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Human Rights Education (HRE) seeks the integral formation of the individual, in an ethical, critical and political way, developing these competencies in accordance with the dignity of the human person, one of the essential foundations of the Federative Republic of Brazil. This principle aims to protect and guarantee the basic needs of all individuals, regardless of their color, race, gender, or religion, simply because they are human. In this sense, according to Brazil (2018), HRE is understood as a systematic process oriented to the formation of the human being, covering: the construction and assimilation of knowledge about human rights, at the international, national and local levels; the promotion of a culture of human rights throughout society; the construction of citizen consciousness; the development of collective and participatory methodologies based on the experience of the citizen; and the strengthening of practices and actions for the protection and promotion of human rights.

As highlighted by Ximenes, Mollo and Ferrari (2019), the formation of the human being should be based on the integration of the contents proposed in the fundamental educational documents, such



as the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), with the elements that make up the HRE. In this way, it seeks to promote the inclusion and appreciation of diversity, as well as the full development of the human person as a citizen, which is the main purpose of the human right to education. Therefore, it is evident that education must be permeated by the principles of the HRE for an effective formation of the human person as a citizen.

Thus, it is evident the importance of incorporating the principles of HRE in the process of integral formation of the human being, in a multidimensional and transdisciplinary way, in order to cover its various aspects. However, it is worrisome to note that the training of educators does not satisfactorily address the theme of HRE. Few educational institutions have this concern and, even those that develop some work in this area, still have very limited actions (CARVALHO, 2004).

In this context, Claude and Andreopoulos (2007) emphasize the importance of HRE in the formation of citizens, since human formation is essential to promote freedom, peace and world justice:

The origins of notions of HRE – even the one that also considers it a human right – can be found in the original text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Introduction highlights the fundamental importance of a "common understanding" of human rights and fundamental freedoms in achieving "freedom, justice and peace in the world". It proclaims that a "common standard of realization" of these values, in national and global terms, requires, among other things, that each individual and organ of society, always bearing the Declaration in mind, try through teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms (CLAUDE and ANDREOPOULOS, 2007, p.229. emphasis added).

It is evident that, although the training of educators does not yet effectively incorporate HRE, it is urgent and necessary to interweave the principles of this approach in the educational process. Otherwise, the promotion of values such as liberty, equality and fraternity will be compromised. It is only through the development of these competencies that society can reach a more just and equitable level among its members.

2.2 ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Environmental Education (EA) is a process that aims to develop values and competencies in human beings for the protection and conservation of the environment, as defined in the National Environmental Education Policy (BRASIL, 1999). Thus, we understand EE as an educational field that acts in an interdisciplinary way and seeks to make society aware, through its individuals, about environmental issues and how to deal with them. EA should cover all levels of education, both formal and informal, and be targeted at all audiences. It is an essential tool to achieve sustainable development.

In this sense, Reigota (2017) considers EE also as a process of political education, as it goes beyond the analysis of human relations in the classical dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental), also covering the political and cultural aspect. Therefore, EA addresses



the ethical, political, economic and cultural relationships that human beings have with the environment, of which everyone is a part.

In fact, EA is integrated into the structure of Brazilian education. It is present in a transversal way in formal education, at various levels, and also in non-formal education, when working with traditional communities. In this context, the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) operates in the state of Piauí, assisting in the training of educators of formal education and carrying out awareness actions with communities on various topics, such as fauna, flora, fishing and environmental quality.

In this context, Silva and Almeida (2021) highlight the importance of Environmental Education from the perspective of sustainability:

Working Environmental Education from the perspective of Sustainability is of great importance in contemporary times, since both, in an integrated way, proportional to awareness, the construction of values and change of attitudes, possibilities that need to be based on the training of the subjects, whether through formal or informal education. (Silva and Almeida, 2021, p. 7)

Therefore, Environmental Education must become increasingly present in the Brazilian educational context, because without it the sustainable development of the country can not be achieved. It is perceived that this educational field seeks to engage all social actors and, for this reason, is strongly interconnected with the fundamental rights of the human being and Human Rights Education.

2.3 ON WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING AND CAPTIVITY

The trafficking of wild animals in Brazil has been a present practice since the discovery of the country, when Portuguese navigators took to the metropolis the unknown species found in the "new lands".

According to the report of the National Network to Combat Wildlife Trafficking (RENCTAS, 2001), part of the trafficked animals is destined for the international market, which ranges from collectors to large companies in search of appropriation of traditional knowledge through biopiracy. Another part supplies the national market, aimed at collectors and people who see these animals as food delicacies.

According to the same report, the basis of wildlife trafficking in Brazil is linked to cultural, social and economic problems, associated with the search for quick and easy profit, as well as the simple desire to have wild animals as pets. This cycle of trafficking and captivity of wild animals involves from suppliers and intermediaries to final consumers.

In addition to the numerous environmental consequences, such as the loss of biodiversity and health risks, wildlife trafficking reflects the objectification of animals, as occurred with human groups considered inferior, such as blacks, indigenous people, women and others, by the ruling classes. In



fact, many of these groups are still treated this way today. This treatment is the result of an anthropocentric view that places the human being in the role of a superior species, treating other species as mere environmental resources.

The current that recognizes animals as sentient beings seeks to combat the objectification of these beings. According to Behling (2019, p. 57), sentience:

[...] It probably exists in different degrees of complexity in the different animal species and, therefore, it is not a question of yes or no, but a gradual evolution, difficult to determine scientifically, including in humans. Therefore, there is no way to define, on the evolutionary scale, the limit between the presence and absence of sentience. (BEHLING, 2019, p. 57)

To effectively combat the trafficking and captivity of wild animals, it is essential to go beyond the actions of state supervision and repression. It is necessary to promote a cultural change in Brazilian society in relation to this theme. This can be achieved through the incorporation of Environmental Education and Human Rights Education in its formative process.

Environmental Education has the role of raising awareness and sensitizing people about the importance of protecting and conserving the environment, including wildlife. Through this approach, it is possible to promote a deeper understanding of the impacts of wildlife trafficking and captivity, as well as the ethical and moral issues involved.

In addition, Human Rights Education plays a key role in highlighting the importance of treating animals as sentient beings, with rights and dignity. By incorporating the principles of HRE into the educational process, it is possible to promote a critical reflection on the relationships between humans and wildlife, combating the view of animals as mere objects or resources.

Therefore, the promotion of cultural change in the fight against trafficking and captivity of wild animals involves the integration of Environmental Education and Human Rights Education in all stages of training, from formal to informal education. Through this formative process, it is expected that Brazilian society will develop a collective consciousness and adopt more ethical and responsible practices in relation to the protection of wildlife.

2.4 CULTURAL PERCEPTION ABOUT THE TRAFFICKING AND CAPTIVITY OF WILD ANIMALS

Despite being considered a crime under Brazilian law, wildlife trafficking still persists as a reality, and many people wish to own wild animals as pets. In Brazil, birds are the main targets of consumers, either due to the exotic beauty of their colors and plumages, or the quality of their song. In fact, IBAMA data indicate that 82% of the animals seized by the agency are birds, as reported in the National Report on Wildlife Trafficking of RENCTAS (2001).



Moura and Moura (2020, p. 16) report their experiences as public servants of the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) and observe the culture of captivity of wild animals:

[...] Many people still believe that acquiring wild animals from forests and keeping them in captivity is not a crime. The majority, due to complete ignorance of environmental legislation. [...] For a change, these same people who trap animals and claim to love them, naturally judge this type of behavior. It is, according to them, a "cultural issue", passed down from generation to generation [...] (MOURA and MOURA, 2020, p. 16)

As highlighted by the authors, the perception of wild animal owners that keeping them as pets is an act of love is a major fallacy that has been passed down from generation to generation. This false idea has lasted for more than 500 years and will only be overcome through the awareness of society through Environmental Education and effective actions to combat the trafficking of wild animals. This understanding aligns with the studies of Behling (2018, p. 106), which identify the various actors involved in the trafficking of wild animals and point to the cultural factor as one of the causes of the increased demand for specimens of wildlife to be raised as pets:

Closely related to the environmental problem of trafficking is the social and cultural problem, because the network created with this activity includes suppliers (people usually without access to education, health and economically excluded), middlemen or intermediaries, traffickers and, finally, consumers, who may be ordinary citizens, collectors or even entrepreneurs in the field. (BEHLING, 2018, p. 106)

This cultural heritage rooted over time has contributed to the misperception that having wild animals as pets is not an environmental problem. In this view, animals are treated only as objects or resources, completely ignoring their condition as sentient beings. Therefore, it is necessary to promote environmental awareness and education, coupled with cultural change, in order to challenge this perception and build a new vision that values wild animals in their natural environment. This approach involves not only actions to combat trafficking, but also the promotion of ethical values, respect for biodiversity and understanding of animal rights.

3 REFLECTIONS ON THE REPERCUSSIONS OF EA AND HRE ON "THE BIG LIE"

The actions carried out by IBAMA in the state of Piauí in 2020 highlight the importance of addressing both the inspection and repression of environmental crimes and environmental education and awareness. While the enforcement actions aim to curb the trafficking of wild animals and hold offenders accountable, the actions of IBAMA's Environmental Education Center aim to promote the change of perception of children in relation to the captivity of wild animals.

By conducting lectures in public schools, the team of IBAMA's Environmental Education Center in the State of Piauí (NEA) seeks to demystify the idea that keeping wild animals in captivity



is an act of love, showing that this perception is a 'big lie'. Through environmental education, children are sensitized to understand the importance of preserving fauna and respecting the natural habitat of animals.

In addition, the training of educators of educational institutions to act as environmental educators in a transversal way is fundamental to disseminate this knowledge more broadly. By integrating the environmental theme in different disciplines and school activities, it is possible to increase awareness about nature conservation and the protection of wild animals.

It is estimated that the action of the NEA has reached approximately 500 students and 30 educators, providing a significant impact on the training of these individuals and the dissemination of the values of Environmental Education. These actions, combined with measures to monitor and combat the trafficking of wild animals, contribute to creating a collective awareness of respect for nature and animal rights.

However, it is important to highlight that these isolated actions are not enough to fully combat wildlife trafficking and the culture of captivity. A continuous and integrated effort is needed, involving different actors such as governments, non-governmental organizations, educators, civil society and local communities. Human Rights Education also plays a key role in promoting a reflection on the intrinsic value of animals and the importance of respecting their freedom and well-being.

Only through joint actions and a profound cultural transformation will it be possible to overcome 'the big lie' and build a society more conscious and committed to the preservation of biodiversity and respect for wild animals. Environmental Education and Human Rights Education play an essential role in this process, empowering individuals and generating changes in behavior and values that reverberate throughout society.

Figure 1: Illustration of IBAMA's team of environmental educators in Piauí



Source: Moura and Moura (2020, p. 27)



Through the NEA's activities, it was possible to highlight the risks and consequences of keeping animals in captivity illegally, including the possibility of fines and legal sanctions. However, as a conscious and effective alternative, the option of voluntary delivery of animals to IBAMA was presented. This process allows the agency's technicians to rehabilitate the animals and return them to their natural habitat through controlled releases. An important aspect of this measure is that the owners of the animals do not suffer penalties or fines when they choose to hand over the animals voluntarily.

The result obtained through these environmental education actions was impressive. While only 19 specimens could be returned to the wild with the employment of 10 enforcement agents, the awareness generated in the students' families led to the voluntary surrender of 37 animals kept in captivity. This fact reveals a change in the cultural pattern, where the animal is no longer seen as an environmental object or resource and begins to be recognized as an integral part of the environment, just like humans.

These results demonstrate that environmental education plays a fundamental role in the construction of new perspectives and ways of thinking about the life and rights of the beings that make up our planet. By combining human rights with sustainable development, it is possible to bring about a profound change in the way animals are perceived and treated.

The voluntary surrender of the animals to IBAMA represents not only an opportunity for redemption for those who were keeping the animals in captivity, but also an important step towards biodiversity conservation and respect for animal rights. This approach based on awareness and cultural change has proven to be more effective than other measures, evidencing the transformative potential of education in building a more just, equitable and sustainable society.

It is in this perspective that Lelis and E yng (2020) teach us that:

[...] the National Plan for Education in Human Rights (PNEDH), with the purpose of promoting an education for the transformation of the human being in the relationship with himself, with his peers and, finally, with the environment to which he is part, being co-responsible for the existence, dignity of all living beings and for the guarantee of preservation and existence for future generations. (LELIS and EYNG, 2020, p.10)

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Despite the lack of appreciation of Environmental Education in public policies, evidenced by the low financial and human resources investments in its actions, it is clear that the most effective approach to combat the trafficking of wild animals is education, which seeks to transform the culture of imprisonment of animals into a culture of freedom and love for them.

At the same time, Environmental Education, when integrated with Human Rights Education (HRE), is strengthened as a process of formation of individuals as citizens, since the protective environmental perspective gives way to a more inclusive conservationist approach, in which human beings integrate with nature.



Although there are many challenges ahead, the results presented in the third section demonstrate that Environmental Education, based on Human Rights Education, is on the right track. However, for it to be effective, it is necessary a greater investment in public policies, with emphasis on the training of educators, both in the area of Environmental Education and in the area of Human Rights Education.



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