

Being and the Forest: Students' Transformation into Trees. A Phenomenological Study on Art-based Environmental Education Focused on Preventing Plant Blindness

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Abstract

Plant Blindness is a controversial concept which was coined by Wandersee & Schussler (1999). It is elucidated as the inability to see and understand plants and their functions which leads to an inability to appreciate the aesthetic values of plants and an anthropocentric view of plants as inferior to humans and animals. Art-based Environmental Education (AEE) can play a crucial role regarding students' awareness of plants and their importance to life on earth. This presentation is based on a participating action-research study on a Storyline conducted in two school-classes where art is used to deepen student's comprehension of forests and trees. During this five week long storyline the students are gradually being transformed into trees.

The study is based on a life-world phenomenological approach (Husserl, 2004; Merley-Ponty, 1995) in addition to theories of AEE (Mantere, 1992) and ecological literacy (Orr, Stone, Barlow & Capra, 2005).

Research Question: How do Pupils' experience the of transforming into trees?

The study includes participating observations and interviews which are videotaped. The empirical material is composed of field notes, video recordings, photographs and pupils' work such as paintings, drawings, photos, films, face masks and different texts e.g. diary, myths and information texts.

Result: AEE used in order to achieve sustainable sensibility and plant awareness may support the development of pupils' ecological literacy. This paper will give examples of how teachers and pupils experience and use the aesthetic values of plants and natural environments.

Keywords

Art-based environmental education, Plant blindness, Ecological literacy, Storyline, phenomenology.