

Jacobs, G. M. (2016). Humane education: What it is and why it should be included in modern education. In N. Lysa (Ed.), *Modern tendencies in linguistics, cross-cultural communication and foreign language teaching methods* (pp. 15-16). Ternopil, Ukraine: Aston.

Humane Education: What It Is and

Why It Should Be Included in Modern Education

Humane education has existed since at least the 18th century (Unti & DeRosa, 2003). This paper begins with a brief definition of humane education and examples of how it can be incorporated in linguistics, cross cultural studies and foreign language education. Next, the paper discusses why humane education constitutes an important area for educators and researchers to consider.

What Is Humane Education

Humane education can be defined as education which encourages humans to (1) understand our impact on our fellow animals and to (2) endeavour to treat our fellow animals benevolently. Examples of humane education include linguists examining how the language choices we humans make reflect and impact our actions towards non-human animals (Dunayer, 2001). In cross-cultural studies, humane education could take the form of increasing awareness that other animals are also sentient, having the ability to think and to feel emotions (Balcombe, 2016; Bekoff, 2013). Foreign language educators can incorporate humane education in their increasingly urgent efforts to encourage students and people generally to act on global warming, a crisis which impacts all earthlings (Food and Agricultural Organisation, 2006).

Why Include Humane Education

As humans have become more technologically advanced and as our population continues to grow, our impact on Planet Earth has increased and

become more negative to the point that some scientists (e.g., Steffen et al., 2011) maintain that our planet has entered a new geologic age, which they label the Anthropocene. (The prefix ‘anthro’ refers to humans, and the suffix ‘cene’ refers to a geologic era.) Approximately 25 years ago, Orr (1992, p. 3) provided a glimpse of the Anthropocene’s daily adverse impact on the planet:

If today is a typical day on planet earth, humans will add fifteen million tons of carbon to the atmosphere, destroy 115 square miles of tropical rain forest, create 72 square miles of desert, eliminate between forty to one hundred species, erode seventy one million tons of topsoil, add twenty-seven hundred tons of CFCs to the atmosphere, and increase their population by 263,000.

Educators and other intellectuals have an obligation to engage with social issues, including issues specific to the Anthropocene (Crookes, 2013; Dewey, 1938). Many of these issues fall into the domain of humane education. Among them are the use of non-human animals for food, clothing, jewellery, research and entertainment, as well as other animals’ loss of habitat and access to clean natural resources.

Conclusion

Many topics call out for attention and action. Humane education is but one such topic. Fortunately, when educators and other intellectuals address humane education, other key topics are simultaneously addressed. For example, when humans cooperate to reduce the burden we place on our fellow animals, the cooperation we manifest, the empathy we demonstrate and the thinking skills we exercise all contribute to a more just, safer world for humans as well.

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