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## The Need of Education in Respect for Animals (ERA) as a Subject of the Social Education Degree at the University: An Overview Focused on Spain

- This article highlights serious educational gaps related with respect for animals.
- Social educators should assume the challenge of filling this gap.
- The primary methods used here were a review of initiatives and educative experiences.
- We propose to introduce Education in Respect for Animals as a new and independent subject at the university level.
- We also conclude with other proposals applied to social nets and opened to educators.

**Purpose:** This article highlights serious educational gaps related with the respect for animals. We propose to include a new independent subject, named Education in Respect for Animals (ERA), within the curriculum of the Social Education Degree at the university level.

**Method:** This study is based on previous educative experiences and a review of various innovative initiatives. This article is a part of critical pedagogy, aiming to contribute to the social education curriculum. It incorporates the need for a post-humanist education in the way that Haraway named 'posthumanist landscapes', i.e., an inclusive education for this more-than-human world (Taylor, 2013).

**Findings:** The first part of this article reviews the theories of authors who have contributed to this area. Nonetheless the direction of this article is not to be framed in moral philosophy but a curriculum theory. Next we will contextualize and analyse the case of ERA in the Spanish educational system, concluding with proposals applied to social nets, university communities and open to educators and especially feedback from social education.

### Keywords:

Animal, post-humanism, human education, basic rights, cruelty, curriculum, ethics, respect, social education, university education, violence

### 1 Introduction: Why is it necessary to educate in respect for animals?

#### 1.1 The need of ethics in the treatment of animals

While other animals have evolved by adapting to the environment, the enormous evolutionary success of humans lies on their ability to modify the environment and not by adapting to it.

This utilitarian view of environment and animals strengthened in modern times is a 'naturalization' of oppression and places humans in an exploitative relationship toward the 'other' (Castellano, 2011). Non-human animals, domestic and wild, have been victims of the anthropogenic modification of the planet, due to the problems that humans have caused to them (Wolf, 2001). Humans are accustomed to live at the expense of other animals, accommodating their ethical limits to the overall benefit of the species, making a constant use and abuse of animals.

In this way, needs became customs, which symbolically structure our life, such as the need to eat meat or dress in animal garments. Quite a few authors have investigated human-nonhuman relations dominant in modern

consumerist societies. Articles like *Dressing down? Clothing animals, disguising animality* by Samantha Hurn (2011) or *Understanding Animals-Becoming-Meat* by Bradley Rowe (2011) have addressed these items from different prisms, firstly from the field of anthropology and secondly from education, seeking alternatives to animal abuse on a reflective and critical base.

The abuse of animals was not an ethical discussion in Europe until the Enlightenment in the 19th century. In countries like England or France, many enlightened thinkers argued that the ability of animals to feel pain or pleasure is not dependent on reasoning or on the intelligence quotient (Bekoff, 2003) and therefore, any animal should be ethically treated. During this time, however, Spain was particularly closed to the modern ethical, scientific and political thought. In fact, many of the current cultural Spanish deficits have been linked to the lack of the enlightened thinking. Although this philosophical movement forged the foundations of the current revolution about animal rights in Europe, Spain remained a step behind (Mosterín, 2010).

#### 1.2 The need to promote respect for diversity

When speaking of education on respect for diversity, it is necessary to move away from the educational orthodoxy that has placed us in a uniquely human socio-cultural context and to start to recognize other species in our interactions (Taylor, Blaise, & Giugni, 2012). Given this need to reconfigure diversity and the image of the other, some authors have sought an analogy for this type of

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post-humanist thought, post-colonialism and the image of the immigrant as someone different (Banerjee, 2012).

The way in which the dominant group has represented the other and the lack of respect with which it has been done, have no doubt conditioned the planet in which we live. The greatest revolutions in history were rooted in the respect for diversity such as equality among humans with different skin colours, non-discrimination by sex and, according to some experts, the one that will be the third millennium revolution, non-discrimination on the basis of the species (Querol, 2010). Educating respect for animals means to educate in the basic rights of all living organisms and, therefore, respect for diversity.

In this sense, the United Nations, whose aim should be to ensure the overall development of nations, tries to seek solutions to the social problems of racism or violence against women and focused its 2000 and 2001 summits on these areas. Both cases involved traditionally disadvantaged social groups, in which the law must be sufficient to solve the problem. Nevertheless, the UN goes beyond simply punishing these behaviours and in their reports establishes education as the first tool to encourage, promote and accelerate social changes of this magnitude (UN, 2000, 2001). This first line of action intensifies the idea that sudden changes which are unnaturally induced are always reversible and that real social transformation requires much more time and dedication, yet they are the most solid foundation on which to build a society.

The way in which such standardized arguments about differences are enhanced and provide feedback to youth has to do with their everyday environment. In this respect, the need to build a multicultural and inclusive education of post-humanist character is the essence of the educator's work (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008).

### 1.3 The need to promote respect for life

The Education in Respect for Animals (ERA) curriculum would be focused on three basic cores: the right to life, the right to freedom and the right to not suffer (GAP, 2009). In this sense, the ERA would specifically touch upon education with respect for wild and domestic animals through moral considerations, which until now were linked only to humans. To teach students that all animals have a common origin (Darwin, 1859) would help to understand that we also have common basic rights.

By taking this as a starting point, it is simple to find a component of democracy and social responsibility with domination, abuse and violence in common with the roots of ERA. Therefore we can be enlightened by some examples of feminist, indigenous or multiculturalist theories (Andrzejewski, 2003).

The need for this kind of post-humanist thought referred to pet animals also has been approached by MacPherson as an essential part of the modern education curriculum. He finds six beneficial areas: social mutual bonding, self-regulating negative impulses, enhancing positive feelings, empathy developing, communicating to

cooperate and responding to suffering and death (MacPherson, 2011).

In this sense, cruelty to animals is considered a powerful tool to predict antisocial behaviours (Gleyzer et al., 2002). In this regard, numerous studies (e.g., Hensley & Tallichet, 2009; McPhedran, 2009) show animal abuse as a predictor of violent behaviour toward humans, that is, abusers often show aggression first toward the weakest, such as non-human animals. In one of the most relevant studies in this topic, Ascione (1993) asked adult murderers about their history of aggression toward animals. Up to 58% of them recognized having previously abused an animal. This percentage clearly shows the relationship between the two types of violence. In fact, animal cruelty is considered an indicative parameter of mental disorders (Sperry, 2006). People who have mistreated an animal have crossed the barrier of aggression and are closer to the next step, which would be the mistreatment of other people.

It also has been seen that animal cruelty expressed in children maintains a direct relationship with aggression toward humans in adulthood. This aggressiveness is further enhanced by factors such as abuses and/or alcoholism of parents (Kellert, 1985). Therefore, in the same way we educate in the prevention of alcoholism, society should educate in respect for animals.

In short, previous studies and others released by the Group for the Study of Violence Against Humans and Animals (GEVHA)—a pioneer in Spain in the study of violence and its causes, whoever the victim is—reinforces the importance of educating for the elimination of all kinds of abuses, not only for being a preamble, but for being an important part of an overall violence. If we can influence this first step, in which violence toward animals is expressed, the chances of reaching the second phase of violence among humans would be reduced.

## 2 Framework and current context of education in respect for animals in formal teaching in Spain

From the 1970s, thanks to the publication of essays like *Animals, Men, and Morals* (Godlovitch et al., 1971) and *Animal Liberation* (Singer, 1975), several disciplines on respect for animals have been taught in a multidisciplinary way, mainly covering studies on philosophy, animal behaviour, agriculture and veterinary medicine at universities involved in animal welfare. In the early 2000s, teaching in respect for animals in the area of law also experienced strong growth, especially in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia (Eadie, 2011).

In a specifically educational context, the ERA has had remarkable growth in non-formal education, but this trend has not been clearly reflected at the university level (Burnet, 2000). However, we can consider that the beginning of the ERA at the university level is within some parts of humane education, which constitutes a formal degree at several American universities in collaboration with the Humane Society (e.g., University of Denver, 2016; Valparaiso University, 2016). The fact that



the ERA forms part of humane education studies reveals why we insist on the presence of the ERA at the university level because it recognizes the importance of teaching respect for the shared needs of living beings and the individual responsibility of students for empathy and problem solving (Onion, 2014).

Education in respect for animals has no representation in the different educational levels in Spain except for the recent creation of networks of university teachers. Thus, although we understand that respect for animals should be built with early intervention, we realize that the clear message not only fails to leave marks but it dissipates when formative grade increases.

In Spain, the Royal Decrees (1513/2006, 1630/2006, 1631/2006) that normalized minimum teaching at various levels in December 2006, slightly touch in some cases education on respect for animals in an ambiguous and low implicant manner, both for students and teachers. In all cases, it consists of students acquiring knowledge of animals and their favourable treatment as part of a person's moral development but does not teach that treatment as the inherent right of a sentient living being. The approach is closer to developing our ethical values than thinking of animals as living beings with their abilities, concerns, needs and feelings.

In childhood education in Spain, an essential goal is the identification of animals for assessment of their importance, our relationship with them and the rejection of negative actions toward them. Perhaps in this sense, the core curricula are ambitious enough, although its implementation is another matter. Teaching children to appreciate the importance of each animal for what it is and not by the utility it is given should be one of the primary objectives. To communicate values for dogs and cats while the stereotypes about pigs or cows as farm animals persist is not the best way for students to value the individuality of every living being (R.D. 1630/2006).

In primary education, the core curriculum is detached from education for respect for animals except for those animals closest to humans in order to know, appreciate and learn to care for them. In this sense, respect for animals seems more a way to work the sense of responsibility of the student than to enhance the ethics of respect for life in its broadest meaning (R.D. 1513/2006). Again we return to use what should be a matter for the benefit of animals as a subject through which to achieve some desired values such as the responsibility of a child to feed or walk his/her pet a certain number of times per day. There definitely is a positive meaning in this context but it is insufficient.

If we look for references of core curricula in secondary education, we find that the same theme where respect for animals is explained also covers diverse topics such as health habits, the dimension of sexuality, involvement in sports and consumption habits. Therefore, what we find is a sort of compendium of healthy practices, and unless there is a direct involvement of teachers in any of the matters in particular, it will lead only to the ignoring all issues (R.D. 1631/2006). The feeling is that education in

respect for animals is used as a means to reach certain values but never as a solid purpose.

A few Spanish universities have included animal rights as a subject. The Autonomous University of Barcelona offers courses on Animal Rights and Ethics of Nature and Animal Rights Welfare; the University of Valencia offers New Rights, Are the Rights of Animals?; the University of La Laguna presents Ecological Ethics and Bioethics; and Saint Louis University teaches Ethics and Animals. Equally and complementary, there are some university subjects which are not specific to animal rights but include topics on ethics and animals (e.g., Ethics II at the University of Granada, Current Contemporary Ethical at the University of Balearic Islands, Applied Ethics at the University of Salamanca, and Human Rights at the Autonomous University of Barcelona).

The vast majority of these classes are free choice subjects that can be accessed through any university degree, but in neither those that specifically mention animal rights or animal ethics nor those with some content in the same matters can we see an approach to the issue of education in respect for animals.

In 2007, the arrival in primary and secondary education of the politicized subject of citizenship education represented a new push to transmit the values of equality, responsibility, peaceful relationships among individuals, respect, tolerance, rights, social injustice and diversity. ERA could have had a specific role in the Spanish education system. Nonetheless, this model of ethical and civic education present in primary and secondary school education arose in response to re-commendation number 12 listed in 2002 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2002).

Political tensions, however, caused citizenship education to be mortally wounded at birth. Any subject that requires critical analysis is controversial and emotional (Adrzejewski, 2003). After the change of government in 2013, the new Organic Law 8/2013 of December 9 designed to improve the quality of education (BOE, 2013) once again included citizenship education as a transversal subject with a cross-curricular approach.

Today's citizenship education program not only depends on the educator's will or ideology but also on the resources available for development of a critical and participatory education in a country that still is immersed in an economic crisis. Some authors have explored the role that they can offer to students, to the community in general and to volunteer projects such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), town council sessions, and ecological vegetable gardens (Jover, 2014) in this current context of crisis. This is the reality that determines the ERA in Spain today.

### **3 Education in respect for animals (ERA) at the university level: The creation of specialised social educators**

#### **3.1 ERA at the university level**

First, we should ask ourselves why we think ERA should be a university competence. Those who see the uni-



iversity community as one step of the advanced society that we would like to achieve might have answered this question already. The university community plays an important role in society, and we understand that universities should train and educate people without neglecting ethics and morality. There are many examples of associations born within universities as solutions to problems related to the loss of empathy for other animal species.

The social commitment and need for a reliable and standardized vector to achieve a change in the global behaviour of society places the social educator on the frontline of this battle (ASEDES, 2007). There are two reasons for which ERA should be absorbed by the social education curriculum within the university context.

First, the fact that the social education degree does not have its competences strictly closed opens the door to everything that, by its social relevance, needs a boost. Second, the fact that the social education degree is not closed is not accidental or due to a failure in its creation but the result of society's need to see its questions and competences increasing simultaneously. This same charge, paradoxically, makes essential the work of the social educator to encourage changes and to adapt to them.

Recently in Spain, the Professional Association of Social Educators of Valencia (COEESCV) established a framework agreement with the Valencian Society for the Protection of Animals and Plants and the Yelcho Foundation to promote educational activities that serve to enhance respect for animals. For this, the COEESCV hosts a specific commission for education in respect for animals in the same way as other committees with specific objectives within the framework of social education such as the fight against drugs or the elderly. This is a pioneer initiative in Spain driven within the social education environment which is entrusted with a dual mission. On one hand, it is designed to propose, develop and organize activities aimed at promoting respect for animals, both in the university sphere and other social networks. On the other hand, it was created to integrate and consolidate education on respect for animals within the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Valencia in order to grow the number of universities with specific subjects on the ethical treatment animals.

### 3.2 Standardization of the ERA

The first step in creating the specific subject on ERA within the academic degree of social education is the standardization of content and objectives. As we have seen previously, in Spain the current education system at all levels, including the university level, has no specific subjects for education on respect for animals. Ignorance, the lack of awareness and lack of support for teachers have limited the standardization of content. The effort to provide a minimum education in respect for animals primarily has fallen on individual initiatives or NGO volunteers. The absence of teachers of these educators has turned what should have been standard knowledge

into incomplete endless subjects which sometimes do not share objectives or criteria and, in most cases, have not been subjected to external criticism.

Diversity and division of organizations working in this field have resulted in different ideologies for animal protection and rights, with some programs being too radical in their approach and others blatantly conservative. Therefore, putting in common reasonable objectives should be one of the priorities on which to build the ERA. In addition, the standardization of ERA would allow the dissemination of ethical, scientific and legal knowledge, preventing the distortion of content or stereotypes that often are associated with animal defenders.

Nowadays, the inclusion of a new subject on education in respect for animals at different levels of studies at the school is not feasible due to the short time available to reach the minimum goals set for each subject. As a result, education in respect for animals at schools is limited to the extracurricular activities that teachers decide to devote to this field with all the problems that entails. Frequently, non-governmental institutions working to ensure respect for animals in society encounter economic and logistic difficulties when organizing roundtables, conferences, lectures, training courses, etc. The failure to reach these population sectors also makes it very difficult to raise awareness about the importance of respect for animals at the educational level, forming a circle where, if influence on society is not exercised, you cannot have input in educational levels and vice versa.

Certainly, some projects have been developed to share objectives, criteria and even materials, although among social educators few are known. One of the most outstanding programs was created by the World Society for the Protection of Animals. This program includes a database of teaching resources categorized by age and theme and aimed primarily at teachers and/or other organizations in defence of animals with the intent to globalize education in respect for animals, including in developing countries (WSPA, 2013).

Given the lack of a specific background, making a proposal for including the ERA at universities may seem an overly ambitious task. However, in a practical way, we propose six essential sets of subjects. The first block would consist of an introduction covering evolution and history as well as philosophical and ethical principles. The second block would cover topics on the cultural dimension of respect for animals through an analysis of language, popular culture, religion and cross-cultural analysis of the situation of the animals.

The third block would analyse the objectification of animals and its contemporary problems, both the domestication and use for consumption or leisure. We also consider the interest to add a fourth block specific to wildlife and its link with the environment. Finally, the fifth and sixth blocks would consist of a more practical set of subjects designed to introduce students to professional work. The sixth block would consolidate practical skills with the development of practical work focused on a particular area of the ERA.



In brief, our proposal would cover the following items:

1. Introduction
  - 1.1 Evolution and historical perspectives
  - 1.2 Philosophical perspectives
  - 1.3 Ethical perspectives
2. Animal culture
  - 2.1 Animals in language
  - 2.2 Animals in popular culture
  - 2.3 Religious perspectives on animals
  - 2.4 Cross-culturality
3. Animals like products
  - 3.1 Pets
    - 3.1.1 Problems arising from interaction
    - 3.1.2 Introduction to ethology of companion animals
    - 3.1.3 Assume the loss of an animal
  - 3.2 Animal consumption
    - 3.2.1 Animals in the food industry
    - 3.2.2 Animals and work
    - 3.2.3 Animal experimentation
    - 3.2.4 Considerations for the textile industry
  - 3.3 Shows with animals
    - 3.3.1 To combat indifference
    - 3.3.2 Bullfighting, circuses, zoos, aquariums and animals as bait
4. Wildlife: Conservation and Conflict
  - 4.1 Psychology of conservation
  - 4.2 Conflict of interests
    - 4.2.1 Exploitation, hunting, poisoning and illegal trade
    - 4.2.2 Loss of habitat
    - 4.2.3 Responsible tourism and exotic animals
5. ERA applied and emerging approaches
  - 5.1 Psychology of human-animal interactions
  - 5.2 Animals in the economy
  - 5.3 Animals, policies and laws
  - 5.4 Animals in education and development
  - 5.5 Effectiveness solutions in animal welfare
6. Student dissertation

### 3.3 Work areas of social educators specialized in ERA

Ideally, the main purpose to advance education in respect for animals should be the implementation of the ERA within the degree of social education at the university, but until this subject is implemented, social educators initially would be accredited with knowledge on respect for animals through attendance and/or participation in workshops, conferences, training courses, round tables or professional experience; in short, any activity organized by associations of defence of animals, foundations, governments and other key entities whose purpose is to develop respect for animals. These new social educators specialized in the ERA could be integrated in a local or regional network of schools to develop, after consultation with teachers and other educational personnel, the teaching tasks in matters relating to the ERA

at various educational levels through theoretical or practical activities but always clearly aimed to promote respect to animals.

This new concept in the context of social education could also be strengthened by city councils, as facilitators of society and initiators of change in civic society, linked to the departments of culture and education and based on the creation and promotion of citizen participation activities. Firstly, these social educators would be the standard defendants of ethical development in the treatment of animals. They also would be the vectors of transmission between novelties and legal and administrative advances on animal protection laws and/or municipal ordinances, and their practical application by the society. At present, in Spain, the absence of a common animal protection law emphasizes the importance of social educators specialized in the ERA. These educators would have knowledge about regional laws and ordinances; they would serve as the transmission vectors of laws to social networks with the idea to make these regulations easy to understand.

We should emphasize that although there are penalties against traffic offences, we still try to educate society in traffic education as a preventive measure from early ages. Similarly there are sanctions in cases of non-compliance with animal protection laws that should be applied, and we must also work from early ages for education in respect for animals.

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