

## **A ética do cuidado animal: aprendizagens a partir do protagonismo infanto-juvenil a partir da I Conferência Municipal Infanto-Juvenil de Educação Ambiental do município de Rio Grande**

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### **Resumo**

A partir da pesquisa exploratória e da análise documental, procedemos à investigação sobre as demandas, propostas, intervenções e avaliações desenvolvidas pelo conjunto de protagonistas da I Conferência Municipal Infanto-Juvenil de Educação Ambiental (Rio Grande, RS), em 2019. Dentre os resultados obtidos, sobressaíram os temas dos resíduos sólidos e dos Direitos Animais (27,66%). Neste ensaio, concentramos nosso foco analítico/descritivo sobre este último, enfatizando a relevância do precoce envolvimento destes sujeitos apreendentes com tal temática, e a profundidade das questões levantadas, de modo a buscar sensibilizar o público adulto e os tomadores de decisões para a melhoria das relações humanas para com os Direitos Animais. Tais iniciativas explicitam o valor dos processos de ensino-aprendizagem, quando realmente participativos e efetivos, de modo a assegurar o respeito à outridade, em todas as interações sociais, e o incremento da qualidade de vida, humana e não humana.

**Palavras-chave:** Direitos Animais. Escola. Meio Ambiente.

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# **The Ethics of Animal Care: learning from child and youth protagonism from the I Municipal Children's and Youth Conference on Environmental Education in the city of Rio Grande**

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## **Abstract**

From the exploratory research and document analysis, we proceeded to investigate the demands, proposals, interventions, and evaluations developed by the set of protagonists of the 1st Children and Youth Municipal Conference on Environmental Education (Rio Grande, RS), in 2019. Among the results obtained, the themes of solid waste and animal rights stood out (27.66%). In this essay, we concentrate our analytical/descriptive focus on the latter, emphasizing the relevance of the early involvement of these apprehensive subjects with such a theme and the depth of the issues raised. We seek to sensitize the adult public and decision-makers to the improvement of human relations towards animal rights. Such initiatives make explicit the value of the teaching-learning processes, when they are really participative and effective, in order to assure respect for others in all social interactions and increase the quality of life for humans and non-humans.

**Keywords:** Animal Rights. School. Environmental.

## **La ética del cuidado animal: aprendiendo del protagonismo infantil y juvenil del 1er Congreso Municipal de Educación Ambiental Infantil y Juvenil en la ciudad de Rio Grande**

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### **Resumen**

A partir de la investigación exploratoria y el análisis de documentos, hemos procedido a investigar las demandas, propuestas, intervenciones y evaluaciones desarrolladas por el conjunto de protagonistas de la Conferencia Municipal de Niños y Jóvenes sobre Educación Ambiental (Rio Grande, RS), en 2019. Entre los resultados obtenidos, se destacaron los temas de residuos sólidos y derechos de los animales (27,66%). En este ensayo, centramos nuestro enfoque analítico/descriptivo en este último, enfatizando la relevancia de la implicación temprana de estos sujetos aprendientes con tal tema y la profundidad de las cuestiones planteadas, para tratar de sensibilizar al público adulto y a los responsables de la toma de decisiones sobre la mejora de las relaciones humanas hacia los derechos de los animales. Tales iniciativas hacen explícito el valor de los procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje, cuando realmente participativos y eficaces, con el fin de asegurar el respeto a los demás en todas las interacciones sociales y aumentar la calidad de vida para los seres humanos y no humanos.

**Palabras clave:** Derechos Animales. Escuela. Medio Ambiente.

## Introduction

**Environmental Education**, as both a proposal/intervention and an area of knowledge, must not ignore the means by which it is proposed, nor the class of subjects to which it is directed. "Verticalized" Environmental Education, treated in a "banking" manner (FREIRE, 1997), will hardly provide meaning, coherence, and depth, especially in the school socio-system. This tendency is observed in global themes related to environmental issues proposed for children, for example, which can create insurmountable gaps between what is, what is thought, and what can be done to make a place to live cleaner, fairer, and with better spaces and processes.

In this context, the proposal and development of the 1st Municipal Children's and Youth Environmental Education Conference (CMI-EA), organized by the Rio Grande Municipal Education Department (RS), held in 2019, was based on the voices of children and adolescents from the Municipal Education Network from various localities. The conference aimed to understand the different environmental problems they face and, primarily, to involve the participants in these surrounding factors, providing an opportunity to reflect on the origins of these issues and possible solutions. The conference sought not only to hear the voices of children and adolescents but also to stimulate their awareness of environmental issues and foster critical thinking.

The conference involved over 2000 participants from the Rio Grande (RS) school community, covering all levels and modalities of education. Students actively participated by identifying environmental problems and suggesting solutions. The results of the 2019 CMI-EA were documented and a report on the event was published: "Belonging is Necessary: Report of the 1st Municipal Children's and Youth Environmental Education Conference" (GT-EA/SMED, 2020). This publication served as the basis for the present study.

This paper proposes an analysis of the results from the 1st Municipal Children's and Youth Environmental Education Conference to understand the relevance of the topic of animal rights for students in the municipal education system of Rio Grande (RS). The justification for this work is based on the importance of examining the concerns observed by the younger population, particularly in public basic education. Understanding that children and youth have given such relevance and attention to animal rights issues in our society, confronting and denouncing exploitation, mistreatment, abandonment, and negligence, implies recognizing that this topic increasingly transcends specific legal and philosophical areas and enters the most human senses of empathy and compassion, as well as the most essential rationalities of ethics, justice, and respect. It is therefore

crucial to document and research cases and studies on this topic to contribute to the formalization and appreciation of animal rights in the school curriculum and, consequently, in recognizing the pursuit of these rights as legitimate and spontaneous in society's ongoing quest for improvement.

It is important to note that the Curricular Orientation Document of the Rio Grande Territory (DOCTR) (SANTOS et al., 2019), based on the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), was constructed and completed in the same year as the aforementioned conference. This document, like the BNCC, is normative and should be considered as guidance for Early Childhood Education and Elementary Schools in Rio Grande. The topic of animal rights is present in it, included in Contemporary Cross-Curricular Themes related to Environmental Education. Both the spontaneous manifestations of communities and the growing appreciation and formalization of the topic in curricular documents should contribute to making the issue of animal rights increasingly present, rooted, and effective with each generation.

The guiding research question for this work is: "What is the relevance of the field of animal rights for Environmental Education?", considering this case where student protagonism and personal/local involvement with the listed topics are evident. We know that animal rights can be understood as an inherent field within Environmental Education, but it also has its own specificities and is not always visible compared to more prevalent and popular topics when discussing Environmental Education.

## **The Emergence of Environmental Education, Neglect, and Animal Exploitation**

According to Quintas (2004), environmental issues emerged at a historical moment when humanity's relationship with itself diverged from its relationship with non-human nature. The author suggests that social relations arose that justified the use of "natural resources," including the lives of other beings, exploited by humans according to their convenience throughout history, and even today, despite the proliferation of alternative forms to reduce exploitation.

Grün (1996) asserts that after the Industrial Revolution, nature was commodified, with business interests increasingly overshadowing natural concerns. Trein (2012) explains that both human labor and "natural resources" were progressively absorbed by the capitalist system, becoming subjected to the growing demands of the market. Consequently, the lives of animals, both wild and domestic, also became targets of these new demands and "needs" imposed by the market.

Regarding wild animals, Harari (2016) notes that prior to the Agricultural Revolution and its

resulting ecological changes, *Homo sapiens* were already responsible for the extinction of about 50% of Earth's large mammal biodiversity. The Living Planet Report 2020 (Almond et al., 2020) references a 68% reduction in monitored species of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and fish between 1970 and 2016. According to Morandini and Cunha (2021), wildlife trafficking in Brazil generated about \$2.5 billion in 2012, making it the third most lucrative illegal trafficking activity in the country.

Animals also suffer indirect impacts from anthropogenic actions not directed at them but that affect them nonetheless. Every year, over 8 million tons of plastic are dumped into the oceans, where they are readily ingested by marine animals (Häder et al., 2020). Research on various marine species has identified plastic ingestion as a cause of death. Another indirect cause of death and population decline is the use of pesticides in monoculture farming, which affects ecosystems, contaminates soil and water, and reduces the availability of food and reproduction opportunities for endemic or surrounding animals (Chen et al., 2010).

Estimates of Brazilian livestock are quite significant: 215 million cattle and 34.4 million slaughtered animals in 2015 (Neto, 2018); 9.5 million goats and 17.9 million sheep in 2017 (Magalhães et al., 2018). As observed, livestock populations are very numerous and generate significant income. However, as in various other economic sectors, this substantial financial input does not necessarily translate into better social well-being, as the income tends to be highly concentrated, and the socio-environmental impacts are considerable.

Examining the ethical conflicts of wealth concentration, sociologist Bauman (2015) cites a United Nations University study indicating that in 2000, the wealthiest 1% of adults owned 40% of global assets, and the top 10% of the global population held 85% of the total global wealth. In sectors of the economy where income derives from animal exploitation, similar problems of wealth concentration persist.

Santos et al. (2020) highlight that, in Brazil, as of 2018, the number of companion animals (dogs, cats, birds, and ornamental fish) exceeded 132 million individuals, making this market significantly important from an economic standpoint. It is important to note, however, that the relationship with these pets is not always responsible or healthy, even though the motivation for keeping such animals differs from industrial or exploitative purposes. Impulsive purchases of domestic animals, especially dogs and cats, often lead to abandonment (Santos et al., 2020), causing suffering for the animals who, due to domestication, are left vulnerable to hunger, cold, thirst, and various forms of violence.

Dogs and cats living freely without guardians in urban centers face numerous risks. Street dogs primarily rely on human waste for food (Srinivasan, 2019), which often leads to poor health. The physical condition of street dogs is crucial for their survival, and those suffering from nutritional deficiencies are more susceptible to infectious diseases (Cortez-Aguirre, 2018).

Kitala et al. (2001) report that the life expectancy for male street dogs is about 3.5 years, while for females it is 2.4 years. Given that dogs with their needs met can live up to 12 or even 20 years, this statistic is alarming and reflects an institutional and social abandonment of a species within human society. Dogs are frequently exposed to diseases and microbes harmful to humans as well (Galluzzo, 2020). A study in Japan found an average life expectancy of 13.7 years for dogs with guardians (Inoue, Kwan, & Sugiura, 2018). Furthermore, neutering, while the only viable and effective measure for controlling stray populations, also interrupts an animal's ecological function. Although necessary to prevent a greater harm the birth of numerous puppies who face a cycle of survival marked by danger, suffering, and neglect it is not entirely moral.

Anthropocentrism often leads humans to treat non-human animals as if they were mere objects without sentience (Spannring, 2017), exercising supremacy over them and prioritizing their lives and well-being according to what is deemed most convenient or profitable for humans. This human supremacy over animals can be correlated with the historical and recurring attempt at male dominance over women, often referred to by psychologists as "social dominance orientation" (Veser et al., 2015; Dhont et al., 2014; Kymlicka, 2017).

Naconecy (2016) describes anthropocentrism as positioning humans at the center of the universe, as if they possessed unique dignity, while non-human animals are considered little more than objects. Dhont et al. (2014) argue that human speciesism, or the discriminatory attitude towards other animals, is based on the group's sense of dominance. Regan (2006) notes that one common counter-argument against Animal Rights is that non-human animals are not deserving of rights because they do not communicate verbally or possess a language that is clear to humans. However, it is increasingly evident that the attribution of basic rights should be based on sentience the capacity to feel pain, pleasure, and the will to live.

The structure of our society is fundamentally built upon the exploitation of both humans and non-human animals (Harari, 2016). This fact and tendency could be better understood by examining the behavior of our species, *Homo sapiens*, which achieved its place in the world through competition, status leading to violence, extinction, survival, and discovery. The formation of cultures that have



The Ethics of Animal Care shaped much of human society in recent centuries, particularly in the West and the East, relies on violence both direct and indirect as a valuable cultural tool to maintain the *status quo*. Cultural violence, whether direct or indirect, legitimizes various forms of exploitation by naturalizing violent acts against lives deemed less intellectually capable or even perpetuating violence against groups of the same species deemed less deserving of rights (Galtung, 1990). Cultural violence often finds religious justifications for the belief that humans are superior to other beings, thus justifying that non-human animals should serve humans (MENESES, 2016).

According to Grün (1996), the topic of Environmental Education emerged on the global stage in 1972, driven by the First United Nations Conference on the Environment held in Stockholm. This event marked the beginning of Environmental Education being included in the agendas of official international organizations. Guattari (2012) emphasizes that an effective response to the complexity of the environmental crisis is only possible on a global scale, affecting crucial aspects of human life such as politics, culture, and society. It is essential to think and act simultaneously and interactively within the ecology of the environment, social relationships, and human subjectivity.

Reigota (1995) sees Environmental Education as a means to deconstruct anthropocentric views and their detrimental utilitarian logic. Rodrigues and Laburu (2014) argue that Environmental Education can be a key space and process in rebuilding relationships characterized by greater respect between people and other forms of life, acknowledging that all living beings possess this as an inalienable right. Ferreira and Azevedo (2019) highlight the need to create an ecological consciousness that reaches human society broadly, fostering the notion that all forms of life deserve respect.

Humans have exploited non-human lives intensely and extensively for a long time. The forms of animal exploitation are numerous, as are their consequences, which are connected to social inequality. Here, we only cite a few examples, but they already provide substantial material for ongoing reflection and discussion on the topic. This discussion should be amplified across various social spheres, as we can already see with admiration in public schools.

## Methodology

This study was based on exploratory research. According to Gil (2002), the purpose of exploratory research is to understand a particular phenomenon. In addition to deepening the knowledge about the studied phenomenon, exploratory methodology aims to raise new questions



about the topic (RAUPP; BEUREN, 2006). The exploratory research was conducted through document analysis and bibliographic review.

Data were obtained through document analysis. Document analysis aims to gather information of interest for the research by examining documents (SÁ-SILVA et al., 2009). For the development of this article, an analysis was performed on the document *Pertencer é Preciso: relatório da 1ª Conferência Municipal Infanto-Junvenil de Educação Ambiental* (Belonging is Necessary: report of the 1st Municipal Conference for Children and Youth on Environmental Education) (GT-EA/SMED, 2020).

At the CMI-EA, students identified the most relevant environmental problems to them and developed projects proposing solutions. This study analyzed the topics addressed to diagnose the relevance of the topic of animal rights.

## **1st Municipal Children and Youth Environmental Education Conference**

The CMI-EA 2019 was based on project-based learning methodology. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is a method that emphasizes interdisciplinarity, fosters collaboration, and promotes learning through problem-solving (PASQUALLETO et al., 2017). This method encourages students to seek information independently and extends to their lives outside of school, requiring dialogue between parties and aiming for collective results.

The CMI-EA was designed based on several legal frameworks, including: the Federal Constitution of 1988, Chapter VI, Article 225 [Everyone has the right to an ecologically balanced environment, which is a common good essential to a healthy quality of life, imposing upon the public authorities and the community the duty to defend and preserve it for present and future generations]. The National Curriculum Parameters from the MEC (BRASIL, PCN, 1997) [Paragraph 1, Item VI], highlight the need to promote Environmental Education at all levels of education and public awareness to promote the environment, followed by the inclusion of environmental topics. Law No. 9795 of 1999, especially Article 8, Items IV and V, encourages seeking curriculum alternatives for environmental training, including promoting the production of educational material (BRASIL, 1999). Resolution No. 02 of June 15, 2012, CNE/CP Opinion No. 14/2012 on National Curriculum Guidelines for Environmental Education (DCNEA), states that Environmental Education should be permanently integrated into National Education, being present in both basic and higher education (MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO, 2012).

The invitation to participate in the CMI-EA was sent to all municipal schools, with a total of 23 schools participating. The activities spanned the entire 2019 academic year, including monthly teacher training and school conferences (Stage I), followed by the major municipal conference (Stage II). During the monthly training sessions, the planning and objectives of the organization were presented, including methodology and other relevant strategies. It was emphasized that the initial steps involved observing the school and its surroundings from the perspective of the children and students, to diagnose existing environmental problems and then develop a project with strategies to address these identified issues. It is important to note that the identification of environmental problems began with student observations, preceded by an explanation of environmental themes.

After the conference, which involved more than 2000 people from our school communities and, in its final stage, gathered 350 people (delegates) who reported their experiences and research in the environmental field of their school or neighborhood, covering all levels and types of education [Early Childhood Education, Initial Years, Final Years, and Youth and Adult Education], the results were documented. Through the systematization of lists, tables, and graphs, various data from the conference were recorded and reported, including the emerging themes in the projects created and presented by children and adolescents.

This article originates from the results of the CMI-EA 2019: it addresses the spontaneous emergence, without any study induction by teachers or the Secretariat, of the topic of Animal Rights, the second most recurrent theme at the Environmental Education Conference, surpassed only by the number of projects dealing with solid waste, a constant and recurring issue in schools when studying or addressing environmental and sustainability concerns.

Faced with these results, we hypothesize that the topic of Animal Rights is more easily and intensely embraced by younger generations; likely, cultural changes related to the topic contribute to the fact that new generations have their cultural imprinting established early, during a period when the topic is more discussed, shared, and defended, thus emerging organically for these new generations. Our objectives focus on understanding and reaffirming the relevance of Animal Rights as an inherent area of Environmental Education, especially in contemporary public schools, and valuing the conference results, noting the organic growth of concern for animals in the curriculum and school projects.

## **Results and Discussion: The Importance of Animal Rights in the Youth Community of Rio Grande no Rio Grande do Sul**

The CMI-EA, titled "Pertencer é Preciso" ("Belonging is Necessary"), referenced the idea that a sense of environmental belonging must align with the duty to care. The conference took place in October 2019 and involved 23 schools from the municipality of Rio Grande, with more than 2000 participants. To take part in the conference, these schools were required to develop an Environmental Education project. This project involved devising strategies to address environmental problems observed by children and adolescents in their communities.

The conference received a significant number of projects presented.

[...] Each room was equipped with a computer and a multimedia projector, as well as a note-taker to record the key points of the projects being presented. At the end of each room's discussions, a delegate was chosen to present a summary of the discussions at the main plenary session in the afternoon (GT-EA/SMED, 2020, p.53).

At the conference, children and youth participated in a variety of activities in addition to the plenary sessions where projects were presented. These activities included workshops, experiences, watching shows, and general socializing. It is important to note that the then-Mayor, Alexandre Lindenmeyer, attended the event and delivered a speech to the students. He was presented with a letter from the local Taim community, written by the students, which outlined the environmental issues they had observed in their area.

According to the organizers and authors of the report, the greatest success of the CMI-EA was the active participation of the children and adolescents from the communities. They presented environmental issues from their perspectives, providing entirely genuine accounts. A total of 47 projects were presented during the municipal stage, divided into 08 different rooms for presentation. The projects were categorized into 13 themes for better visualization of the problems existing in the communities. These themes included: respect for others (social interaction); healthy habits; gardening and composting; agrochemicals and public health (Dengue); fires, deforestation, and degradation; traffic; animals; tourism; flooding; the environment as a heritage; the environment and community; school and community infrastructure (accessibility); recycling and reuse; conscious consumption; real estate exploitation; estuary pollution; waste, disposal, and collection; sewage; water treatment and potable water.

Among the themes addressed, two had a particularly high number of projects: solid waste,

The Ethics of Animal Care with the largest number of projects, and animals, with the second-largest number of projects. This article focuses on the theme of Animal Rights within Environmental Education, as detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1 - Students' Projects Related to Animal Rights**

School	Grades	Projects	Complaints and/or Proposals/Interventions
EMEF Manoel Martins Mano (Parque São Pedro)	Early Years and Final Years	<i>Love for Animals</i>	Inappropriate Disposal of Solid Waste.
EMEF Luiza Schmidt Tavares (Barro Vermelho – Povo Novo)	Early Years	<i>Valuing Our Fauna</i>	Predatory Fishing; Hunting of Wild Animals; Inappropriate Disposal of Solid Waste. Traffic around the School.
EMEI Casa da Criança (Cidade Nova)	Early Childhood Education	<i>Recycling at School - Little Collector</i>	Inappropriate Disposal of Solid Waste; Collection of Bottle Caps to Fund Animal Castration in the School's Surroundings. Addressing Local Trash Issues and the Number of Stray Animals in the Neighborhood.
EMEI Déborah Tomé Sayão (Bolaxa)	Early Childhood Education	<i>Nature's Guardians</i>	Need for Preservation of the Environment and Wild Animals in Bolaxa Urban Park.
EMEF Renascer (Ilha dos Marinheiros)	Early Years	<i>The World We See and the World We Want</i>	Inappropriate Disposal of Solid Waste; Consumption of Waste by Animals.
EMEF Eliézer Rios (Cassino)	Early Years	<i>Trash on the Beach</i>	Inappropriate Disposal of Solid Waste; Animal Mortality Due to Consumption of Trash on the Beach and at Sea.
EMEF Sant'Ana (América)	Early Years	<i>Recycling Saves Lives</i>	Abandonment and Mistreatment of Animals; Collection of Bottle Caps to Fund Animal Castration in the School's Surroundings
EMEF Argemiro Dias de Lima (Palma)	Early Childhood Education and Early Years	<i>Nature in Danger</i>	Use of Agrochemicals in Agriculture and Proper Use of Personal Protective Equipment; Waste Disposal in the Corsan Water Canal; Care for Animals in the School's Region.
EMEF Franklin Roosevelt (Magalhães – Taim)	Early Childhood Education	<i>Butterfly Life</i>	Use of Agrochemicals and Animal Mortality Caused by Them
EMEF Renascer (Ilha dos Marinheiros)	Early Years	<i>The lack of care for the Ilha dos Marinheiros and the consequences for the local fauna.</i>	Hunting of Wild Animals, Predatory Fishing, and Inappropriate Disposal of Solid Waste by Tourists..

Source: Developed by the authors based on data from CMI-EA 2019, available from GT-EA SMED, 2020.

In total, 47 projects were presented, 13 of which (27.66%) addressed issues related to Animal Rights. This indicates how important this topic is to the students, motivating them to try to raise awareness among adults. This encouragement to observe environmental issues can lead to reflection

by children and young people, ultimately resulting in respect for animal life.

In these projects, clear themes emerge that demand societal attention, such as: the abandonment of domestic animals, animal abuse, concerns about the overpopulation of stray domestic animals, animal mortality due to poisoning from agricultural biocides, animal mortality from consuming waste, and predatory fishing. These issues arose from the students' initiative, highlighting what has sensitized them.

In addition to the specific themes related to Animal Rights, the projects developed by the students also reveal their perspectives on effective recommendations for reducing or overcoming these problems. The students presented possible solutions to the issues addressed in their projects. From the 1st CMI-EA, its protagonists demonstrate their own sense of ethics according to Morin (2005), ethics allows individuals to act based on a balance of egocentrism and altruism. They show themselves to be highly sensitive and dedicated to contributing their knowledge and efforts to the cause of Animal Rights, even without theoretical or bibliographical prepositions on the subject. This proves that the organic nature of this theme is primarily grounded in human functions from an ethical and emotional perspective, through natural rationality and compassion. These facts show that the topic of Animal Rights, although not formally labeled as such, is a part of these students' everyday lives.

Just as Environmental Education is necessary and suitable for revisiting, questioning, and overcoming many issues related to the alienated consumption of "natural" resources, it can also play a decisive role in promoting ethics in human-to-human relationships and in humanity's interactions with non-human beings. Therefore, it is crucial to seek in Environmental Education the establishment of participatory and transformative socio-educational processes such as those described, developed in schools, and presented by their students—to change various forms of subjugation and oppression toward non-human animal.

Among the relationships that need to be redefined so that humanity can adopt and maintain a less toxic and destructive interaction with environments and other beings are the various interrelations between humans and non-human animals. According to Behling (2019), Environmental Education should question and provoke critical reflection (among other topics) about animal exploitation, aiming to modify and overcome the hegemonic and reductionist (parasitic, predatory, and/or opportunistic) thinking toward most animals, which dominates different areas of human knowledge and action. The projects developed by the students, as previously presented in the table, were: Love

for Animals; Valuing Our Fauna;

Recycling at School – Bottle Cap Collection; Guardians of Nature; The World We See and the World We Want; Trash on the Beach; Recycling Saves Lives; Nature in Danger; Butterfly Life; and Neglect of Ilha dos Marinheiros and Its Consequences for Local Fauna.

The project "Love for Animals" addresses the issue of accidental feeding of marine animals due to the disposal of solid waste in water bodies, similar to the project "The World We See and the World We Want". The project "Valuing Our Fauna" tackled threats to native fauna, such as hunting, fishing, and roadkill, promoting the importance of local fauna to encourage preservation. Given that it is a rural school, children's perception of native fauna with which they interact may be sharper. - The projects "Recycling at School – Bottle Cap Collection" and "Recycling Saves Lives" addressed the issue of uncontrolled reproduction of abandoned domestic animals by proposing practical actions such as collecting bottle caps for donation to animal protection groups that sell the material to fund spaying and neutering of street animals. Additionally, the project highlighted the issue of dog waste on sidewalks around the urban school. - The project "Guardians of Nature" predates the conference, originating with the school itself, as the school is located in the buffer zone of an environmental protection area, the Lagoa Verde Environmental Protection Area. The project aims to make the children from this school protagonists of environmental awareness, turning them into multipliers of environmental protection, and they also serve as guides on ecological trails in the reserve. The project "Trash on the Beach" addresses the problem of solid waste dumped on the beach, leading to the death of marine and terrestrial animals. The school is located on the sand dunes of Cassino Beach, so the students' awareness of the issue is heightened due to the natural environment of the dunes being part of their school context. – The projects "Nature in Danger" and "Butterfly Life" addressed animal mortality due to pesticide poisoning. Both schools are situated in rural areas and report problems related to human health and pesticide use, along with its harmful effects on fauna and flora – The project "Neglect of Ilha dos Marinheiros and Its Consequences for Local Fauna" tackled general issues about environmental problems affecting Ilha dos Marinheiros, a rural area where the two main sources of income are family farming and artisanal fishing activities that are environmentally sustainable but economically fragile.

It is evident that students possess a critical perspective, and as suggested by Reigota (1995), they exhibit a deconstruction of utilitarian anthropocentric logic. The projects reflect a search for a new relationship with non-human lives, aligning with the proposals of Rodrigues and Laburu (2014).



Each project engages with the discussion of human responsibility towards animals, protectionism, and broader environmental issues, such as the accidental ingestion of waste by animals, leading to their suffering and death. These themes, generally rooted more in ethics than in common moralism—where empathy, compassion, concern for the suffering of others, and injustice are central—demonstrate a genuine involvement of the participants and an engagement with these issues beyond mere notions of "right" and "wrong." The school transcends rules and laws by addressing individuals in their full diversity, complexity, and socio-emotional development.

Simultaneously, the reform of thought, as advocated by Morin (2000), aligns with the concepts and methods that underpinned the Conference, as well as this discussion, because it ensures that a thought process that distinguishes and unites, and is complex, rather than one that isolates, separates, and reduces, is necessary for genuine reform and for understanding and reflecting on the entire process.

The involvement of participants in the problem not merely as distant observers or solely as culpable causes brings a sense of belonging and the power of action and criticism, making the process more reflective and simultaneously effective in both understanding and practical actions. In this sense, plans and projects, which originate from the microcosm such as the body, the neighborhood, a small group with something in common, and the sense of belonging not only achieve greater success in meaning and practice but are also more just, considering socio-environmental vulnerability. By this, we mean that it is respectful and necessary not to blame developing individuals for various forms of environmental degradation when they themselves are undergoing a process of social degradation and lack basic physical, mental, emotional, and psychological care, sometimes from the state and occasionally from their own families, within circular processes of poverty and despair. However, this does not imply that children from marginalized areas cannot learn, produce, and reinterpret basic care for their environment and reflect on other environmental issues, such as waste. We assert that for Environmental Education to be more meaningful, it must restore equitable relational horizontality; ideally, it should be situated at the local level and relearn to listen to the "other," considering their concrete reality.

## **Final considerations**

Responding to the initial question that originated this study: "What is the relevance of the field of Animal Rights for Environmental Education, considering this case where there is evident student



The Ethics of Animal Care protagonism and personal/local involvement of the subjects with the listed themes?" we can infer that the relevance is crucial for new forms of understanding genuine, participatory, and engaging Environmental Education. In this case, the topic emerged directly from the children and young students. Moreover, the principles and theories related to Animal Rights have always intersected with Environmental Education, particularly concerning ethics, respect for others, and the connection to environmental degradation, which are fostered by both fields.

The organic emergence of environmental topics is of utmost importance for critical and transformative Environmental Education. As Loureiro (2004) notes, transformative Environmental Education is a factor that promotes social change, using the empowerment of individuals as inspiration, fostering citizenship, and developing an understanding of the complexity of the world as a whole.

Furthermore, revisiting the introduction of this text, it is essential that information, problems, solutions, and emotions that impact the daily lives of the involved subjects come from them. This approach invites them to share their experiences in the collective effort to build a better environment. Thus, we ensure that we are facilitating and contributing to a horizontal, and therefore, fairer and more ethical Environmental Education.

All the themes articulated in the analyzed Environmental Education projects are encompassed within the scope of Animal Rights. Consequently, it can be concluded that this is a topic that organically arises in communities, both rural and urban, and even in marginalized areas, despite not being strongly stimulated by public policies directed at curricular education. The emergence of this theme reflects a cultural shift; for younger generations, Animal Rights is part of their cultural imprinting. The children's appeal to report and seek solutions for issues related to Animal Rights indicates that this is a field of study and action of significant relevance for the newer generations.

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