

THE ROLE OF THE REFLECTION PROCESS IN WATER EDUCATION. THE POSTAL WATER PROJECT, A CONCRETE CASE

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Water problems all over the world demand a different way to behave, an ethical approach to water, more participative and responsible. This is not easy, because even though information, knowledge of issues and action strategies are determining elements in the process to shape this behaviour they are not the only ones. Situational factors, action skills, personal experiences and personality factors (attitudes, personal responsibility, etc) are important as well and they need to be taken into account during the environmental education process.

Children learn about water in their everyday life through a constant information flow, direct perception and interaction with others at school, the family circle and the community.

In many cases this learning process, as well as the relation with the social, physical and natural environment and the behaviour which evolves as a result, is not conscious. This level of unconsciousness makes it difficult to take the responsibility of personal actions into account and to acquire a sustainable commitment towards water. It is therefore necessary to develop reflection tools that help children to decide whether they want to change their relationship with water or not. We need to use elements that shape behaviour and help children become involved in their own change (which means a greater commitment) more than impose the way they have to behave.

One of the action branches of the Communication Office of the Lake (Mexico) is related to environmental education about water. Besides the production of educational materials research work is being done in order to understand the factors that shape behaviour and to develop educational tools and methodologies.

The Mail Water Project is an example of the research work done by the Office. It gives an idea of how develop a reflection process with children, which is a fundamental step in promoting a personal commitment to water.

The Mail Water Project

In November 1996 we started a project concurrently with French and Mexican children. Children in each country were invited to bring their knowledge about water in class and to explain to the other children their relationship with water through drawings. The drawings were mailed and, when received in each country, were used as a source of new information in the process and as elements for further activities.

The project allows not only the perception of water as a planetary issue (which is normally the aim of this type of networking activities on environmental education) but also the reflection upon the personal relationship with water. In order to explain to others how our water is, we need to explain it to ourselves, making the relationship conscious.

In the Project the educational process was conceived as a communication system with its own information flow connected with other communication networks (family and community) because we believe that, introducing the reflection process into this flow, gives the elements to build school activities and allows individuals to see their own reality, their own role and therefore decide if they want to change or not.