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Forest Pedagogy towards the Problem of Polish Educational Monoculture: Projective Pilot Studies

Pedagogika lasu wobec problemu polskiej monokultury edukacyjnej: projekcyjne badania pilotażowe

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Abstract: The development of topics related to the idea of sustainable development, ecology and the climate crisis is increasingly supported by Polish educators, psychologists and therapists. At the same time, forest kindergartens as well as various grassroots initiatives based on the methodology of outdoor education are developing in Poland. The long-term achievements of practitioners – most often employees of the State Forests – for whom the forest education of the society has been one of the priorities since the early 1990s, deserves special appreciation (Wierzbicka and Czołnik 2022). In 2021, Forest Pedagogy was initiated in Poland as an interdisciplinary problem area, aspiring to a scientific sub-discipline (Paluch and Klimski 2022). The first contacts between foresters and educators gave rise to the question: Can the forest become a real “pedagogical medium” (Rykowski 2022), understood as an educational environment? What became clear was the problem of the similarity of the forest monoculture (management forests dominating in Poland) to the educational monoculture of the school and academic classroom system. Each monoculture is created with the view of matching the production demand for relatively identical objects – on the one hand, these can be trees “for boards”, but on the other hand, young people subjected to a systemic process of “labour force allocation” (Parsons 1969), serving the development of consumer attitudes. In both cases, the goal is to accelerate production, artificially stimulated competition, preventing the attainment of full maturity, or replicating an unambiguous and one-dimensional picture of the world. A symbolic illustration of the last phenomenon are the findings of a qualitative pilot study in which two groups of students completing a Forest Pedagogy course were asked to design a forest kindergarten. As it turned out, the respondents most often drew ordered elements of the urban playground infrastructure: swings, slides and sandboxes, in the vicinity of the building of the local kindergarten, which dominated the drawing. What is particularly poignant, in the analysed drawings the forest was only a symbolic background.

Keywords: Forest pedagogy, playground, non-playground, forest kindergartens, educational monoculture, forest monoculture, idea of sustainable development

Streszczenie: Rozwój tematyki związanej z ideą zrównoważonego rozwoju, ekologii i kryzysu klimatycznego coraz częściej wspierany jest przez polskich pedagogów, psychologów i terapeutów. Równolegle rozwijają się w Polsce przedszkola leśne i oddolne inicjatywy oparte na metodyce edukacji na wolnym powietrzu. Na docenienie zasługuje przy tym wieloletni dorobek praktyków – najczęściej pracowników Lasów Państwowych, dla których edukacja leśna społeczeństwa od początku lat 90 XX wieku stanowi jeden z priorytetów (Wierzbicka i Czołnik 2022). W 2021 roku zainicjowano w Polsce pedagogikę lasu jako interdyscyplinarny obszar problemowy, aspirujący do subdyscypliny naukowej (Paluch i Klimski

2022). Pierwsze kontakty leśników i pedagogów poskutkowały postawieniem pytania: czy las może stać się faktycznym „medium pedagogicznym” (Rykowski 2022), rozumianym jako środowisko wychowawcze? Widoczny stał się problem podobieństwa monokultury lasu (lasów gospodarczych dominujących w Polsce) do monokultury edukacyjnej systemu szkolnego i akademickiego (klasowo-lekcyjnego). Każda monokultura powstaje na skutek zapotrzebowania na produkcję względnie jednakowych obiektów – z jednej strony mogą to być drzewa „na deski” ale z drugiej młodzi ludzie poddawani systemowemu procesowi „alokacji siły roboczej” (Parsons 1969), służącemu rozwojowi postaw konsumenckich. W obydwu przypadkach chodzi o szybkość produkcji, sztucznie wywołaną konkurencję, uniemożliwienie pełni dojrzałości, replikowanie jednoznacznego i jednowymiarowego obrazu świata. Symboliczną ilustracją ostatniego zjawiska są wyniki przeprowadzonego badania jakościowego, o charakterze pilotażowym, w którym poproszono dwie grupy studentów kończących kurs z pedagogiki lasu, o zaprojektowanie przedszkola leśnego. Jak się okazało, badani najczęściej rysowali uporządkowane elementy infrastruktury miejskiego placu zabaw: huśtawki, zjeżdżalnie i piaskownice, w bliskości z dominującym na rysunku budynkiem osiedlowego przedszkola. Co szczególnie przejmujące, w analizowanych rysunkach las stanowił jedynie symboliczne tło.

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika lasu, plac zabaw, nieplac zabaw, przedszkola leśne, monokultura edukacyjna, monokultura lasu, idea zrównoważonego rozwoju

Introduction

The main purpose of the article is to draw attention to mental barriers in practical implementation of ecological and eco-pedagogical ideas in contemporary pedagogical thought in Poland. On the one hand, the most current needs as regards the protection of life and of the natural environment are popularized (Klimska and Leźnicki 2017; Klimska 2020; R. Sadowski and Łepko 2017; Kureethadam, Łepko, and Sadowski 2016; Wojciech Bołoz and in. 2016; Tuszyńska and Klimski 2019; Bałachowicz and Tuszyńska 2015; Korwin-Szymanowska, Lewandowska, and Witkowska-Tomaszewska 2016; Bińczyk 2018; 2017; Wolter 2011; Niedek and Krajewski 2021). On the other hand, the issue of changing the perception of educational activity related to nature constitutes a theoretical and practical challenge for school pedagogues, academic teachers, and even forest educators entangled in the instrumental and objectivist paradigm¹.

¹ The name “objective” refers to the etymology of the Latin *ob* (before) *-iectus* (to throw), which means an object given to be seen before us and our senses. This idea emphasizes the need to discover, get to know and describe only such phenomena that meet the criteria of visibility and measurability and do not concern the internal activity of the subject, which is difficult

This evokes and perpetuates a mental state derived from the Polish school, academic and church tradition, which does not allow one to get out of the pattern of passive existence among people performing similar or the same activities, which – importantly – are subject to external evaluation. This blocks the potential of moral imagination as well as methodical imagination in the generations of contemporary educators and foresters dealing with environmental education. Among both, we can meet supporters of a schematic, compulsive reconstruction of the existing reality, as well as those who want to change this reality in the spirit of ecological emancipation and cognitive constructivism.

One of the proposals explaining this division is the theory of rationality (Kwaśnica 2007), indicating the advantage of adaptive and conformist behaviours over emancipatory rationality, characterizing the worldview and behaviour of people who react constructively to the mistakes and shortcomings of their own era. Robert Kwaśnica called this dominion the maintenance of the “culture of obviousness” by societies that support

to observe. The objectivist approach was the basis of the positivist vision of the world and man.

replication of the existing and similar behaviours along with clear principles of functioning, within the rigid framework of systemic dependencies (Kwaśnica 2014). This phenomenon also fits in with the popular theory of Pierre Bourdieu called “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990), produced and sustained by traditional education systems, so that its participants consider this system as the only possible and natural one. In Poland, the education system is additionally entangled in historical and political conditions related to the *sovietization* of native science after World War II and its *westernization*, which has been ongoing since the fall of communism (Śliwerski and Paluch 2021, 305-314). Dorota Klus-Stańska, studying the conditions of the functioning and structure of the education system in Poland, points to the current, difficult to change objectivist paradigm, rooted in the positivist trend and used for its own political and economic purposes by both Marxist educational doctrines and those of neoliberal origin (Klus-Stańska 2010; 2018).

Lech Witkowski’s proposals should be mentioned as an additional hint in explaining the reasons for the divisions among people into supporters of stabilizing the status quo of institutions, and people breaking patterns and looking for new spaces of freedom and activity (their own and communities co-created with others). This researcher finds the common logic of these phenomena in the psycho-social development theories of Habermas, Kohlberg, Piaget, and Erikson, showing the human species as prone to develop progressive and regressive attitudes towards problematizing the image of the world and oneself. In practice, this means that people reach different levels (ceilings) of identity, which translates into the way of seeing (or not seeing) and creating (or recreating) the reality. As this problem is more complex and related to the moral maturity of individuals and entire societies, I refer the reader to a separate study (Śliwerski and Paluch 2021, 312; Maliszewski 2021, 19-20). However, I would

like to quote here Witkowski’s eloquent conclusion, illustrating the seriousness of the problem: “[...] the condition for particularly creative individuals to find a place or role in society is only to create them for themselves, or even **fight against the existing order** (my emphasis – M.P.)” (Witkowski 1989).

The conditions presented here, only in outline, determining the limited way of thinking of generations of Poles about the status of education, the way of perceiving the world and activity in it (especially of people who do not go beyond the multi-generational school tradition), are one of the main barriers to initiating and ultimately achieving mature thoughts and eco-pedagogical practices found in other cultural areas (English: Outward Bound / outdoor education, Archimedes Forest Schools Model; German: Erlebnispädagogik, Naturerfahrungsraum; Finnish: Sisu or Swedish Friluftsliv). It remains to be hoped that their current, but selective use by alternative education theoreticians and practitioners in Poland will, over time, go beyond developing the proven ideas of conventional education. We have cultural and volitional foundations (providing generational formation) to enrich the international eco-pedagogical discourse with our own sensitivity and attempts to put it in practice in the pedagogical medium that we want to establish, namely, the forest. We – educators, foresters, philosophers and linguists – face new tasks of an ontological, epistemological and axiological nature, redefining the nature of the forest, and – it must be said – human nature.

1. Monoculture as a guiding metaphor

The guiding metaphor of this article, illustrating the pedagogical problem reported here, is educational monoculture, as an interpretative proposal appearing in the title of the work and taken from the dictionary of foresters, in the context of centuries-old cultivation of managed forests, based on the phenomenon of “forest monoculture” (usually pine or spruce forests). As

we read in the dictionary of the State Forests, monoculture is: “Cultivation for economic purposes of one plant species, [...]” (Centrum Informacyjne Lasów Państwowych 2018). Comparing such a reduced ecosystem to the school system seems fully justified. After all – let us not be afraid to define – the Polish education system (both under socialism and capitalism) educates one type of an “exemplary student” for economic purposes, strengthening this process with school efficiency rankings, environmental and cultural pressure to succeed, triggered by personal ambitions and diminishing the importance of critical thinking and moderation in life. Tadeusz Sławek aptly calls this character – a graduate of the educational monoculture – “Nowhere Man”, defining him with the words of the famous song by The Beatles, with the same title:

He’s a real nowhere man
 Sitting in his nowhere land
 Making all his nowhere plans for nobody
 Doesn’t have a point of view
 Knows not where he’s going to
 Isn’t he a bit like you and me?

The last line that takes the form of a question: “Isn’t he a bit like you and me?” (Sławek 2022, 16) points to the disturbing isomorphism of all objects – including people – found in the territory of the “Nowhere Land.” Such conditions pose a double existential threat to the subject. The first one results consists in “becoming like others,” and the second – fully conscious – “being like others, precisely because others are like that.” Let us confirm – the etymological sources given in the Forest Encyclopaedia point to the combination of the Greek *monos* = one, the only and Latin *cultura* = cultivation (Zespół redakcyjny 2018).

Educational monoculture (the classroom system) is an environment as harsh for its “species” as the monoculture established by foresters for plants. As we can read further in the definition: “Monoculture is characterized by high susceptibility to outbreaks

of harmful insects or pathogens [...]”² Phenomena characteristic of a “single-species” closed school system cause pathogenic factors for the entire school community and society. These include processes indicated by researchers: “ritualization of appearances” (mechanical, unreflective and sometimes cynical duplication of behaviours and gestures maintaining the status quo) (Witkowski 2016); passivity (absorbing knowledge with the smallest effort, using cheat sheets, abbreviations, slogans) (Rutkowiak 2012); conformism and opportunism (using system weaknesses only for personal purposes); discrimination of those who think (avoiding contact, silencing people who think differently or discursively or use dilemma thinking) (Śliwerski and Paluch 2021); practicing submission and uncritical treatment of authority figures, rather than trying your own strength to measure up to them; “productive education concept” and training teachers as “reliable technicians” (Maliszewski 2021). In other words, the educational monoculture easily falls prey to plagues degrading social sensitivity, from which it is unable to free itself over time.

Let us move on to the last part of the definition of monoculture, in which we read: “[...] that is why it is replaced by multi-species systems, e.g., mixed forests.” The last sentence giving hope for the increasing biodiversity of Polish forests in recent years results from the international Convention on biological diversity (CBD) ratified by Poland in 1996.³ The fact of establishing

² All further parts of the definition come from two similar sources: the editorial team of the Forest Encyclopaedia, the Development and Implementation Center of the State Forests in Bedoń and the State Forests Information Center of the General Directorate of State Forests in Warsaw.

³ CBD was drawn up on June 5, 1992 during the so-called of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, constituting a sister convention to the Climate Convention and the Convention on Desertification. As we read on the website of the Ministry of the Environment: “[...] is currently one of the most common international agreements. Its parties are 195 countries of the world and the EU. [...] According to the definition contained

a global legal framework for actions promoting biodiversity gives food for thought in the context of possible work on the broad meaning of diversity in the social spectrum of the education system. We can mention here new identities and social roles of students, teachers and parents; new relations between man and non-human beings; in the developmental, cognitive and therapeutic dimension, a new approach to functions and dysfunctions called “neurological diversity” as well as in the space of various teaching and learning methods used by teachers (various types of alternative, home, remote, outdoor education); without omitting the “new spirituality,” recognizing various contemplative and axiological concepts above the existing religious divisions.

Ensuring the future of forests and societies has a common value, which is diversity (for human and non-human well-being), provided, however, that it is recognized by society as something natural, and, moreover, in each case it will be subject to self-regulatory mechanisms. This is the key difference between the human species and non-human species, indicating that self-regulation in the forest (in any natural environment) occurs spontaneously (provided there is no participation of alien-invasive species)⁴. In practice, this means that with the increase in the number of species, their degree of synergy and interdependence increases, positively influencing the quality of the entire inhabited environment. In the case of plants and animals, this process is biological and is regulated by the degree of species den-

sity in a given territory (in a given ecological niche or habitat type). As we read about self-regulation in forest ecosystems⁵, it consists in: “[...] the ability of living organisms (biological systems) and ecological systems to respond to stimuli of the internal and external environment. Thanks to the proper reaction to stimuli, they remain in a state of dynamic balance (homeostasis). Failure to respond properly means system failure, and at the same time deepens it – ultimately leading to the death of the organism or the disintegration of the ecological system” (Modrzyński 2018).

On the other hand, man (humanity) has a certain problem with his own self-regulation, within which we must also recall such concepts as: self-awareness, self-control, self-education⁶ or finally self-denial. From the perspective of psychology, human self-regulation is defined as: “[...] a quick reaction to emerging opportunities and equally quick ignoring unattractive matters, smooth adaptation to changing circumstances, overcoming obstacles and temptations, efficient conflict management between goals. Researchers generally mean the conscious control of behavior [...]” (Brycz 2008, 146), although – it is worth adding – that some of the self-regulatory activity is not fully conscious.

On the other hand, from a pedagogical perspective, we will pay attention to the deontological, and thus the existential and ethical, dimension of the self-regulation

in art. 2 of the Convention, biological diversity means the variability of all living organisms originating [...] from terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part. This includes diversity within species, between species and ecosystems.” Source: Convention on biological diversity. Accessed September 20, 2023. <https://www.gov.pl/web/srodowisko/CBD>.

4 I would like to point out that the colonization of new ecosystems by invasive species takes place with the participation of humans. It is responsible for 99% of such phenomena.

5 Within the problem of self-regulation in nature (eco-regulation) there are many specific phenomena, some of which I only mention here: competition between and within species, ecological succession, self-thinning, climax, densification of balance, adaptation, homeostasis, carrying capacity. I refer to specialized literature: (Mackenzie, Ball, Virdee 2000; Odum 1969).

6 Bogusław Śliwerski, when defining the “intra-action nature of self-education,” lists its occurrence in the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman and Hindu traditions, seeing its manifestations in: “self-improvement,” “asceticism,” “self-education,” “shaping will and character,” “self-mastery,” “self-development management,” “self-determination” and finally “self-actualization” (Śliwerski 2010, 93).

process based on experiencing the increasing degree of man's moral obligation towards himself, towards his neighbour and all species of the surrounding nature, and – which should be emphasized – towards his own mistakes, and mistakes of previous generations. In this context, the plant and animal world is subject to a process that can be defined by the well-known term “ecological succession,” progressing steadily – and thus in a sustainable way – in its proper space-time. On the other hand, the homo sapiens species – oppressive and invasive as it is – has a problem with moderation and behaviour indicating its ability to balance its aspirations and desires. It should be noted, however, that it is morally adaptable⁷ to any, even the least “fertile” and socially sterile conditions. Leaving further considerations to ecophilosophers, I find it necessary to point out that in an essentially human ecosystem, good can emerge in bad conditions, and similarly, evil can occur in a person developing in a very favourable environment. With many analogies between human and non-human species, this fact – the fundamental difference – cannot be overlooked here. This means that in the case of the human species, developmental conditions (in pedagogical language: educational environment, and in natural language: ecological niches or habitat types) do not have to completely determine its subsequent behaviour and life attitudes. Probably, the educational monoculture embedded in the expanding framework of consumerism has for years caused students and teachers far-reaching cognitive, emotional, psycho-motor and social or spiritual limitations, expressed by the term of the growing “nature deficit disorder” (Louv 2020). However, this happens to a varying degree and evokes various reactions in our country – mostly from complete passivity and acceptance (often based on fear) to full

7 Author's own concept (Polish “moralna adaptacyjność”) – the ability to relatively quickly adapt (actively or passively) to an ethically problematic situation experienced in the mode of internal dialogue.

emancipation in the case of some individuals or (still) minority groups.

2. General and operational definitions

Bearing in mind the above preliminary considerations, the following general definition of educational monoculture was defined as a systemically and arbitrarily conditioned attempt to shape similar beliefs and attitudes in people, ultimately maximizing the achievement of socio-political goals, including ideological ones.⁸

The mechanism that determines this dependence is based on uncritical performance of cognitive and psychomotor activities planned and assessed in advance by people. On the other hand, specifying this definition at the operational level corresponding to the assumptions of the conducted pilot study focuses on noticing in the educational monoculture the original (archetypical) patterns of human behaviour, based on the “collective unconscious” shaped on the basis of replicating the thoughtless use of urban playground infrastructure for many generations. By this, I mean the shaping by adults of the play space and psycho-motor activity of preschool and early school children and the need to compare them to the so-called “non-playgrounds”. As the author of the term, Anna Komorowska clearly states, “Non-playground” is primarily “not a square”, “more a garden, more a landscape”, “it is not necessarily a place for playing”, but a place chosen by children, also for “meetings, integration conflicts and their resolution” (Komorowska 2019).

The operational definition of the “non-playground”, created on the basis of the book led “Mud Kitchen”, on places that primarily

8 I think that for the needs of various mass and unifying phenomena, the proposed definition can be modified, depending on the focus of attention. From this perspective, an educational monoculture can also be understood as a systemically and arbitrarily conditioned, an attempt to shape consumer attitudes in people, ultimately maximizing the achievement of economic goals.

enable children: “access to nature, allow them to develop imagination and creativity, observe changes in nature and participate in the transformation of the playground. An open grassy space and a hill [...] develop postural and locomotion movements. The development of fine motor skills is affected by fine materials (sand, gravel, pebbles, bark) and loose building materials (boxes, ropes, fabrics and branches) that allow you to practice tool movements” (Komorowska and Rokita 2019). Further, the authors of the publication point to the polysensory nature of the natural playground, stimulating all human senses and the development of social skills during joint tinkering.

It seems that the continuation of the child’s multidimensional activity in natural conditions in later stages of life can be self-development in the style of Natural Movement (MovNat) practiced as part of maintaining good body and mental condition, using gross and fine motor movements natural for the human species (walking, running jumping, crawling, keeping balance or catching and flipping) in natural terrain (meadows, trees, rivers and lakes, hills, rocks). As MovNat promoters ask: “Do you want to look fit, or to be fit?” (McKay 2021), pointing out that they do not focus on their appearance, but on the way they feel and on the meaning of life. Physical effort based on adapting to natural conditions is conducive to developing psychomotor mindfulness towards oneself and nature.

However, according to the description of a public playground included in the guide for administrators and owners of such places, they are made up of: “usually a set of many devices, both traditional and modern: slides, swings, climbing walls. Recreation areas also have additional equipment such as: fences, gates, garbage cans, bicycle racks, plants and information boards” (Yearley and Berliński 2022). It is worth noting that these “sets of devices” and “equipment” are a permanent landscape of artificial recreational and motor infrastructure, both in

kindergartens and schools in large cities, as well as in small towns and villages. This approach is also finally reflected in the form of popular “fitness clubs,” most often visited by people working on their own attractiveness, enhancing their fitness predispositions. It is hard to resist the association of a series of evenly arranged treadmills and stationary bikes in closed gyms with a kind of monoculture.

3. Subject and method of pilot studies

The subjects of the pilot studies are projects of forest kindergartens, obtained in the mode of creating projection drawings by students of pedagogical faculties of the first year of full-time studies – hereinafter referred to as “Novices” (mostly without teaching experience) and the last years of extramural studies – hereinafter referred to as “Veterans” (mostly already working teachers and pedagogues of pre-school and early childhood education). The projection drawing had no diagnostic significance here, which occurs when analysing children’s drawings, as part of an attempt to capture the unconscious reflection of their psyche and emotions. In the conducted study, the drawing served only to illustrate the level of imagining by a total of thirty current and future Polish educators a specific educational space and the possibility of discovering it based on their own imagination, the needs of the body and spirit, and psychomotor attentiveness.

Both groups (eleven “Novices,” twenty “Veterans”) underwent thirty and fifteen-hour theoretical course introducing the issue of education in nature, but mostly focusing on the philosophical background of forest pedagogy. No examples of forest kindergartens were presented, apart from elements of outdoor education methods. The program difference in the course of the course was that the group of “Novices” was subjected to additional content related to the precise definition of the meaning and consequences of the conflict between anthropocentrism and biocentrism and the related experience

of their own subjectivity. It can therefore be assumed that the independent variable was professional experience and the level of students' awareness of the content related to the essence of human existence striving to experience cognitive and motor freedom in the open air, and the dependent variable was illustrating the space/places that could be used for this purpose. The drawings were made during the last class, using the "paper-pencil" technique, without showing or discussing any details of the already existing forest kindergartens or similar spaces. This procedure was not accidental. The purpose of such an approach to the content taught was to gain insight into its validity and possible shortcomings and errors that could be revealed during the design of the kindergarten, undertaken in the last class.

4. Research problems and assumptions

I would like to point out that the undertaken qualitative study was of a pilot nature, intended to provide a minimum of preliminary data that would encourage deeper analysis on a larger scale. Hence, two relatively general research problems were posed, expressed in the form of the following questions:

1. What meanings are hidden behind the disclosed and undisclosed objects of the kindergarten infrastructure that fit into the landscape of the forest kindergarten outlined by the respondents?
2. What meanings resulted from the interviews of the respondents with the researcher about the drawn projects of forest kindergartens?

4.1. Selected drawings of the "Veterans" group (Experienced teachers)

Examples of the "Veterans" group drawings are shown in Fig. 1 on p. 39.

4.2. Results - "Veterans" (Experienced teachers)

The dominant theme of the drawings of the "Veterans" group is a fairly detailed illustration of the infrastructure of the playground "inserted" into the forest landscape.

1. Often the focal point of the drawings or the object of the foreground is the kindergarten building, most often illustrated in the form of a rectangular building with arranged windows
2. Structural-functional logic dominates, which allows direct identification of individual children's "destinations" (sandbox, swing, slide)
3. An attempt to separate the trees from the centrally located area of the kindergarten, with the local use of closed fences, can be seen
4. The sun is in most of the drawings
5. There is a tendency to create order in the area
6. Tipi tents appear

To my question about the reasons for placing Indian tents, the laconic reply was: "I don't know, I've seen it somewhere before." On the other hand, an attempt to raise the topic of the presence of the municipal playground infrastructure in the forest ended with the following question from one of the surveyed teachers: "Is there something you don't like about the slide?" or "Do you have a problem with the playground?" The difficult moment of the conversation, which actually ended it, was the emotional statement of another respondent: "If you don't like something, draw it yourself (!)." In the "Veterans" group, it was noticeable and felt personally that attempts to start conversations about the justifications of their drawings evoked in some people behaviour that could resemble defence mechanisms. I do not undertake this topic here; however, I note the perceptible anxiety of the subjects (as well as my own) and the surprisingly uncritical identification with the convention repeated in the drawings.

4.3. Selected drawings of the "Novices" group (Unexperienced teachers)

Examples of the "Novices" group drawings are shown in Fig. 2 on p. 40.

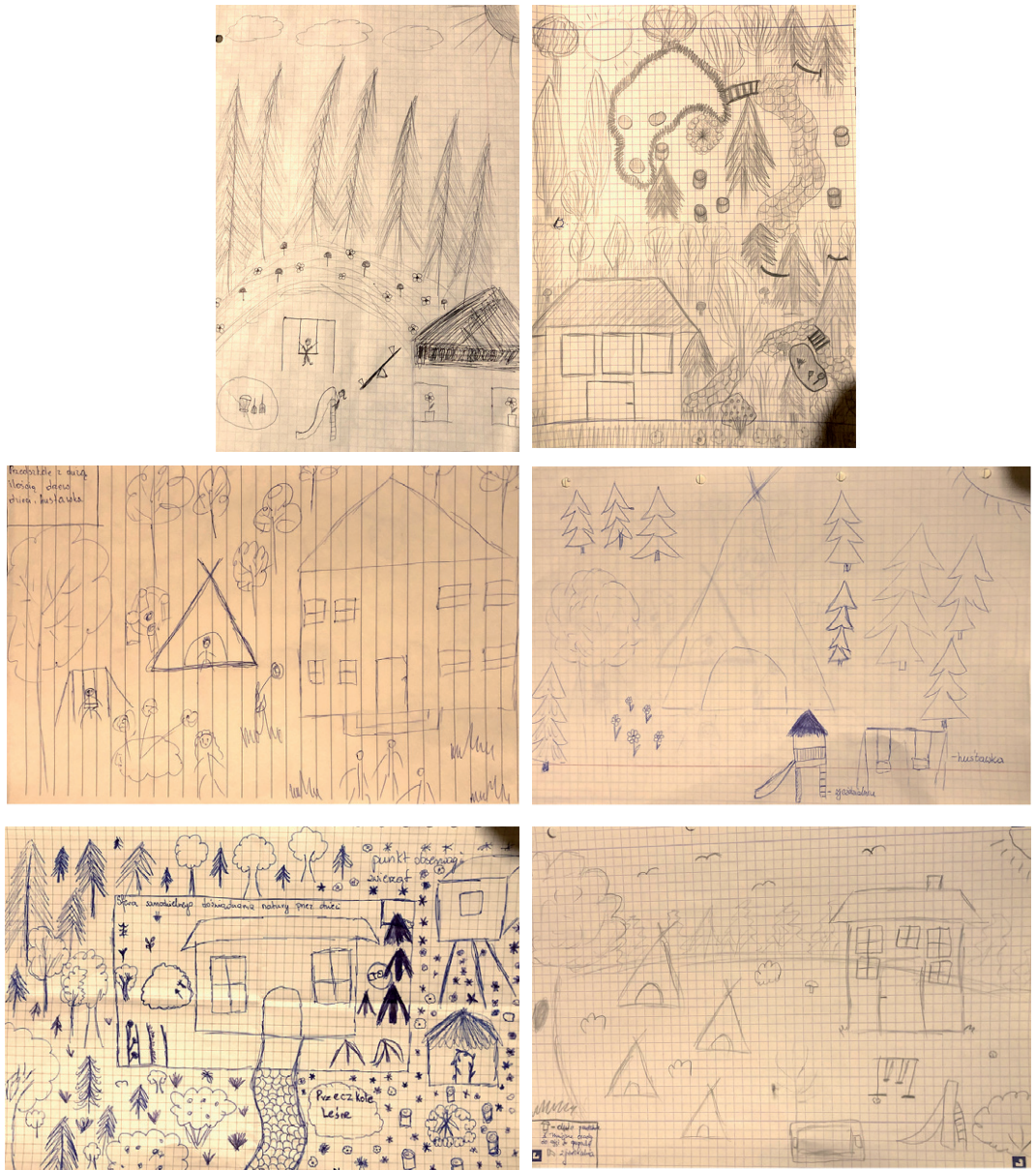


Figure 1. Examples of the "Veterans" group drawings. Task: Landscape a forest kindergarten

4.4. Results - "Novices" (Unexperienced teachers)

It is difficult to indicate the dominant theme of the drawings of the group of "Novices," although the forestation of the area and the uneven dispersion of various (sometimes difficult to identify) activities are noticeable.

1. The dominant theme seems to be the emphasis on the extent and accessibility of the area/space

2. Places such as "circles" can be noticed, integrating people around common activities or a hearth
3. Typical elements of school infrastructure can be observed: benches and blackboards, a canteen/a place for a meal, as well as hammocks, ponds, a rope park, vegetable patches

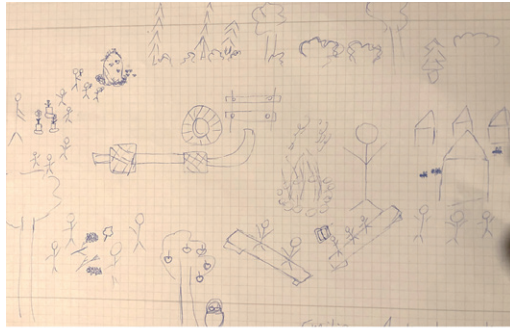


Figure 2. Examples of the "Novices" group drawings. Task: Landscape a forest kindergarten.

4. Here and there, figures of animals, beehives, and a place called “zoo” appeared
5. The human figures of the teacher and students are included
6. Heavy rainfall is included

To my question about the visible lines in the foreground of the drawing, the subject replied: “I started my story with rain” and continued: “Today’s forest pedagogy classes were a powerful experience for me. I looked at myself in a more existential way. I see changes in my thinking.” Another person justified the presence of a large number of trees in the drawing with the words: “I believe that the relationship of children with the forest is important. Today’s drawing class was therapeutic, in a way it was liberating.” The conversation was also joined by people who painted elements of traditional school infrastructure: “The crucial thing is children’s safety. The drawing made me reflect that through contact with conventional methods of upbringing I entered the framework of the system”; “I envisioned a forest nursery as a place for the whole year, so I started with a building in the middle of the forest, although I felt that spending time outside was the most important thing. The drawing made me realize that I think conventionally.” The person who drew benches and a board in the middle of the forest: “This image is so deeply rooted in our heads that we can no longer think for ourselves. When I heard a question about how we imagine a forest kindergarten, it immediately occurred to me to simply move a typical playground (from the city) to the forest.”

Conclusions

The study shows that educational monocultures affect the schematic, stagnant and unifying process of thinking and acting in nature. The pilot attempt to identify the level of imagining a year-round, open space of contact between the child and the teacher with nature, in which people interact with themselves and the environment, revealed the presence of mental barriers that prevent Polish teachers from reaching for the deeper

resources of methodological and moral imagination. Despite the socially, politically and media-supported “climate alert,” teachers experienced in working in conventional institutions, who attended a basic course in forest pedagogy organized as part of supplementary studies, showed neither special readiness nor the level of imagination that would allow them to illustrate something more than views they know from their own workplace and life experience. They also suggest the fearful reactions of some of the subjects to an attempt to initiate a conversation about the symbolism of their drawings. Being closed to “shifts,” confined to “rooms” and treating the “playground” as an isolated place are the hallmarks of the studied group, regardless of the fact that they placed trees, shrubs or paths in the drawings. The symbol crowning the axiological and epistemic profile of the respondents is always the shining sun, usually placed in the corner of a piece of paper, which – for example – may mean here that there is no need to problematize the image of the world and oneself (because the weather is always nice, and everything is as it is).

The respondents from the “Novices” group, without professional pedagogical experience and completing an advanced course in Forest Pedagogy as part of full-time studies, showed greater spatial and symbolic imagination, introducing solutions enabling children (and themselves) to have a close contact with nature. It is worth recalling here once again that the main difference in the educational program of the surveyed groups was the extension of the awareness of the “Novices” to the relationship between anthropocentrism and biocentrism, both at the theoretical level and through practical workshops. Despite the measures used, the respondents also felt the pressure to include solutions known to them from the “school bench” in the space of the forest kindergarten, which they openly and without stress indicated in the further conversation. It can be assumed that at the time of creating their works, the “Novices” were

looking for compromise solutions, satisfying the social conventions known to them, and at the same time opening up to a completely new place of man in nature and nature in man. The symbol crowning the axiological and epistemic profile of the respondents is the opening of the perspective of falling rain, which – for example – may mean here the awareness of the changeability of the conditions of life, existence and upbringing.

In the article, I tried to show that the study of mental barriers that make it difficult or impossible to adopt a pro-ecological attitude in the environment of kindergarten, early school and school educators (including academic teachers) requires in-depth interdisciplinary research on a wider scale. Forest Pedagogy, aspiring to search for the relationship between the natural and artificial environment and human upbringing, must take a stand here. Hence the attempt to include the concept of educational monoculture and the accompanying diversity and self-regulation into the current pedagogical discourse. The pilot study, small in its size, pointed to a serious problem of psycho-social developmental blocks of identity and – to use the language of Lech Witkowski – preventing the next generations of Polish educators from reaching higher levels of self-awareness and awareness of the problems of their era. I entrust the conclusion of the article – with the educational monoculture in the background – to the words of the leading representative of contemporary Polish pedagogical thought, Krzysztof Maliszewski: “Education, in order to respect the humanistic mission, must actively dissociate itself from the rules typical of low levels of identity, and thus eliminate incentives for particularism, opportunism or normative conformism” (Maliszewski 2021, 20).

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