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CREATION OF TALENTED ANIMATORS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of youth is equated throughout the world with the notions of dreams, vision, scepticism and militancy for freedom, democracy and social justice.

In those countries where human freedom, democracy and social justice may be taken for granted, young people with restless minds often find their niche in the pursuit of justice among living creatures, within the framework of the maxim: «we all share the same planet».

I come from the country where democracy was born. A country where scepticism and militancy are the natural characteristics of people and our civilisation.

A species threatened by extinction through human indifference and egotism, i.e. by the suppression of its rights on the planet, provides a good opportunity to canalise the inherent notion of justice of the young and draw their militancy in order to safeguard the species' place on earth.

Such opportunity becomes unique when the species in question is a marine turtle, who reflects life on earth from the era of dinosaurs. Whose size is impressive, who moves slowly and majestically, whose gaze is wise, who is silent

and peaceful.

IMPLEMENTATION

Approximately 300 young people from all over the world come to work every year on various projects organised by the Sea Turtle Protection Society of Greece (STPS), mostly in field work. Most of them deal with the turtles themselves, collecting information that documents the importance of their habitats, the state of the populations etc.

The most outgoing of those young people, who preferably speak Greek, are the ones who get in touch with the public in order to give information and spread ideology to people, who are, in their vast majority, indifferent to environmental concerns.

From this pool of volunteers as well as from those working at the sea-turtles' hospital in Glyfada, out of Athens, we select those people who will become animators in the STPS Education Programme.

This Program runs since 1985 and consists of live presentations at schools, throughout Greece, creation and dis-

tribution of portable traveling kits and other educational items. The program is conducted with the approval of the Ministry of Education and the cooperation of the Education Departments at each Prefecture. The last years about 300 presentations per year, are conducted, either by the STPS special teams, or by the schoolteachers using STPS portable kits (Kremezi-Margaritouli, 1992).

The selection criteria for prospective animators are simple:

- Ability to communicate with people and exchange ideas.
- A strong point of view and militancy.
- Sociability.
- Co-operativeness and team spirit.
- Good diction.

Availability at least once a week. After the initial selection, the future animators go through constant and versatile training aiming to create capabilities of:

- Inspiring trust.
- Having in-depth knowledge on turtles as well as on environmental issues in general.
- Being courteous and conciliatory with opponents.
- Being likeable and enthusiastic.
- Being able to keep audiences interested and to improvise during potential adversities.
- Understanding their audience and knowing the school curricula.
- Caring for the good reputation of the Society and being ready to promote and defend its positions.

The training activities begin at the start of the School term by bringing together old and new members in a common group. We believe that collective activity is superior to individual efforts as it ensures continuation, co-operation, and enthusiasm. It is of beneficial importance to establish special meetings for the group.

Those meetings should take place at least once a month at pre-arranged times and places. For example, our group meets every first Thursday afternoon of each month at the sea-turtle hospital which also happens to be the main place of contact with school-children.

This has been going on since 1993 except for the summer months, during which schools are closed and the members of the group participate in the field work. In the meantime the members are trained on site during live presentations, were they are asked to undertake a specific role.

We thus have at least nine meetings of the group each year and as time goes by, the contact between members is constantly improved. Naturally the co-ordinator has the main responsibility for the formation of the group spirit and the quality of the work produced. He or she, must inspire the members, look after their inter-relationships and ensure that they carry out their responsibilities.

Every September, at the first meeting all members get

to know each other. All new members are given the so far activities of the education programme and documentation on the biology of the turtles and the positions of the Society as well as a bibliography on general subjects of Natural History and the Environment. Old members review and evaluate the work of the past year, set goals for the future and plan a yearly programme.

During the next seven meetings, members exchange positive and negative experiences concerning the program. Furthermore at each meeting specific activities take place that aim to the improvement of the group capabilities. For instance:

- Briefings on exemplary presentations by experienced and talented lecturers.
- Completion and discussion of a questionnaire entitled «I define myself as a turtler» which asks theoretical questions derived from hypothetical events that often happen in real life.
- Lectures by specialised scientists on environmental subjects.
- Information about the education programmes carried out by other NGO s' and exchanges of experiences.
- Attendance at lectures and seminars on educational programmes at other institutions (museums etc.).
- Hands-on exercises and exercises of body language aiming at liberating ourselves and facilitating communication among the members as well as with children.
- New ideas for publications and other activities are tested and if they are successful, they are adopted.

The last meeting is a celebration: we meet to eat and drink together, to dance, to joke, to thank one another and to look forward to the next school year starting in September.

Beyond those monthly meetings the group undertakes many other activities that deal with the public (sales stands, publications, fund-raising special events etc.). For example, this year we have to organise the activities for the 15th anniversary of STPS.

One important part of the educational process consists of criticism and commentary on every detail of an activity so that we can learn from our mistakes and those of others and also to be able to repeat satisfactory activities or avoid those with flaws. The co-ordinator encourages the animators to make well meaning comments on people and circumstances. By putting themselves in others' place they aim to obtain theoretical knowledge and experience.

DISCUSSION

From the educational program throughout the last 13 years we can deduce the following:

It has been carried out continually since 1985 and kept ties with old communication methods, while also building new.

The programme never lacked membership.

We approach about 15,000 children every year in small groups, either through direct contact or by the portable kits.

So we have succeeded in rendering the Sea Turtle, most popular among threatened species in Greece and also among wildlife in general. This has been found by research done at the University of Thessaloniki.

The animators trained in our group are in demand for other positions at the Society as well as at other NGO's and Institutions (and I'm afraid they are sometimes taken away from us).

The STPS has claimed and obtained a special space for educational purposes which is unique among NGO's in Greece.

However, the major achievement of the Environmental Education Group is that it has opened communication between children and adults while giving the opportunity to the animators to express their ideologies on justice among wild species, through the example of the marine turtle and to express a new environmental ethic.

Furthermore, a chance is given to young people to find a goal in life beyond themselves. To deal with the philosophy of, so to say, a «Democracy of the species » and at the well-being of the Planet.

Thus a charismatic species of fauna, unites children and adults, helps bring out selfishness, creates pure friendships and finally promotes civilisation and a wider sense of democracy.

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