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conceal or convey? reflecting on the impact of pedagogical practice on the attitude towards nonhuman animals

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As the popularity of vegetarianism and veganism increases, there are also more and more studies on the subject. Research is being conducted, for example, into the motives behind this lifestyle. In most cases, a decision to adopt a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle represents a break with previous upbringing and socialization. But how exactly and on the basis of which means do these educational practices operate and function in the first place? In this article, I discuss the potential impact of different pedagogical practices on the attitudes of humans towards nonhuman animals. As I show, there are various situations in which a person learns speciesist attitudes over the course of his life.

Keywords: education, ethics, Moral, pedagogy, Speciesism

Even though vegetarianism and veganism have become more and more mainstream in recent years (at least in the global West), adherents of these diets and lifestyles can still be considered social minorities:[1] Depending on the source, the proportion of vegetarians in Germany is 7-10 %, while the proportion of vegans is 1-2 % (Statista, 2022). As a carnivorous norm in dealing with non-human animals, therefore, one can observe an attitude that is speciesist[2]. Thus, the question arises how attitudes towards non-human animals of any kind emerge, consolidate or are disrupted. Especially in pedagogy and educational science, there can identified a striking research gap concerning this subject. It is therefore of pivotal importance to address the question of how speciesist attitudes may be learned and unlearned.

In this article, I discuss the potential impact of different pedagogical practices and arrangements on the attitude of humans towards nonhuman animals. These settings are presented roughly according to the point in time at which a person usually encounters them for the first time biographically.

1 Children's Toys

Shortly after birth, humans come into contact with a wide variety of toys (Macho, 2022, pp. 63–69.). An example of toys that can promote a speciesist attitude is that of the Dutch company 'kidsglobe'. The company's target group is already clear from its name. Its articles can be ordered on the Internet as well as in retail stores in Germany, the Netherlands and Great Britain. Two particularly striking examples representing animals in the dairy industry are a miniature calf box and a replica of a barn in which cows stand, eat and are milked at a roundel. There is no trace in these toys of the negative and traumatic influences on the animals caused by the far too early separation of cow and calf, or of the negative health influences of serial pregnancies (Flower & Weary, 2001).

The children only learn that and how the animals can be used, but nothing about the perspective of the animals and the effects on them (Wallén, 2022).

2 Media Representation of Animals

As a representative example of the typical representation of non-human animals, I will take the example of the well-known elephant Benjamin Blümchen: This fictional cartoon character is adapted both literarily and in the context of television formats, a feature film, and radio plays. The talking and upright-walking elephant represents an example of anthropomorphization not only through its ability to articulate speech, but also through his clothing as well as the way he interacts with people in a manner alien to his species. The fact that there is also a zoo director named Herr Tierlieb (Mr. Animal-Loving) in the fictional world of Benjamin Blümchen will be critically examined later in the section on circus and zoo visits.

In addition, not only Benjamin Blümchen, but also all other media aimed at (young) children mostly tell 'child-friendly' stories of and with non-human animals. Even the world of factory farm animals, which can be described as cruel and horrible, is presented in such a way that there is a 'happy ending' (Buchner-Fuhs, 2014, p. 307). Explicit depictions of violence and facts about animal suffering again do not exist in these stories.

From a sociological perspective, these media representations weigh all the more heavily if one takes into account that, due to the phenomenon of 'rural exodus' associated with social change, fewer and fewer children have real experiences with animals that they could contrast with the fantastic constructs (human or otherwise inappropriate abilities of the animals) of the picture books. Thus, there is a lack of experiences, encounters, and experiential knowledge from everyday life (Buchner-Fuhs, 2014, p. 318).

On the one hand, these mediations block the view of the true nature, the real abilities and the real needs of the animals and at the same time hinder the enlightened and critically oriented socialization of growing people. Furthermore, taking into account power and domination relationships, it becomes apparent that the depictions are often oriented towards the function that non-human animals have *for* humans. As a result, they can often be classified not only as anthropomorphizing, but also as anthropocentric and speciesistic.

3 Design, Form and Packaging of Animal Products

In many places, the distribution of 'Kinderwurst' to children at the meat counters of (German) supermarkets is common. However, besides the obvious aspect of conditioning towards a normality of eating the flesh of dead animals, this social practice has other components as well: On a semantic level, children experience the product through the name 'Kinderwurst' as something produced especially for them. Furthermore, these small gifts trigger positive feelings in the child and parent(s) due to their gift character. On a visual level, it is often added that motifs of laughing and happy bears (also 'Bärchenwurst') or other animals are used.

As with the two previous examples, information is merely filtered and sometimes distorted. An example of the socializing influence of animal products on children is the sausages of the company 'Puttkammer Fleischwaren'. In addition to the 'Unicorn Bratwurst', which is targeted at children and thus pedagogically relevant, colored pink and packaged in rainbow colors, the company has also been offering a 'Ladies Bratwurst' in pink and a 'Guys Bratwurst' enriched with beer since 2017.[3]

This reproduces gender stereotypes in addition to speciesist socialization: Men are 'guys', and naturally like beer and eat sausage. Women are 'ladies', and are attracted by the color pink, little hearts and a curved font on the packaging. These small details could be part of a correlation between several different mindsets: in recent years, the field of psychology has demonstrated that speciesist orientations correlate with sexist and racist ones (Caviola et al., 2019). Moreover, the specific connotation of flesh and masculinity coupled in this way is also found in the philosophical context, where there is talk of phallogocentric and carno-phallogocentric structures (Wright & Adams, 2015).

While the previous examples all stem from socializing and therefore informal settings rather than explicitly pedagogical ones, the focus will now turn to institutionalized pedagogical practices and arrangements.

4 Animal Products in Everyday School Life and Curricular Requirements

In the case of everyday school life, the EU School Program can be mentioned from the recent past as an example of the implicit teaching of speciesist norms. The aim of this concept, promoted by the Federal Center for Nutrition, is to bring the daily portion of milk to children at school or daycare (Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft, 2023). Another central component of this program is the commitment of participating institutions to accompanying educational measures, which are intended to increase children's acceptance of milk (Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft, 2023).

Potential disadvantages of the consumption of animal products, such as the impact on our climate (Foer, 2020), details on the production of milk (see above) as well as the consequences of factory farming for human and non-human animals are not mentioned here either.
The anthropomorphizing presentation of the school milk program in Hessen shows that the presented pedagogical and socializing settings are also interwoven, interact with each other and are mutually dependent on each other. In this, a cow can be seen standing upright (on two legs), winking, and wearing sunglasses.

This information transfer is to be regarded again as one-sided, uncritical and incomplete. Also, the practical application of the 'responsibility acceptance for animals' formulated in the school law as part of the 'education and education order' of the school can be examined critically. The perspective on non-human animals as farm animals subordinated to humans that is conveyed in this way can thus be understood as part of a hidden curriculum, which points to ambivalent and unintended consequences of pedagogical action.

However, the fact that the topic (in contrast to some other curricular content) actually arouses students' interest is evident from a descriptive study on animal welfare as a curricular content in high schools conducted between 2014 and 2015 and published in 2016: although interest in the topic was evident, only about a quarter of all children surveyed said that the topic was also covered in their school lessons. The associated teacher survey also showed that a large proportion of the teachers included had not been trained in this topic either during their own studies or via comprehensive further training courses. Appropriate teaching of this content in the context of lessons is therefore dependent on a high level of individual effort and self-initiated, extracurricular commitment (Haimerl, 2016, p. 131).

5 Visits to Zoos by School Classes

As an example of a school-based practice outside the classroom, school class field trips to zoos can be named. Zoos see themselves as very important extracurricular educational institutions: 'Education' is one of the four pillars on which the concept of the World Zoo Association, adopted in 2005, is based. According to their own statements, zoos register about 750 million visitors annually, 60 % of whom are younger than 14 years of age. Accordingly, zoos appear to be particularly attractive for (young) children. In many large German-speaking zoos there are also zoo schools, which are specifically dedicated to providing information about zoos and animals. However, these schools tend to be oriented towards propagating wishful thinking, such as the preservation of species by zoos and the supposedly species-appropriate keeping of non-human animals in zoos (DeGrazia, 2012; Ladwig, 2021). As an example, it can be countered that parallel to this, the term zoochosis has long been established in scientific discourse, which, as a derivative of the term psychosis, describes neurotic and repetitive behaviors of non-human animals in captivity (Goldner & Zodrow, 2017).

These pedagogically mediated contents and representations are still to be classified as anthropocentric since they are based on attitudes that involve a superordination of human (primarily economic, but also cultural) interests. Even though more and more zoos have recently dedicated themselves to the topics of animal welfare and species-appropriate husbandry, most efforts remain ineffective and the positive effects for the animals marginal.

Compared to previous settings, however, it is striking that this is the first in which a 'real', close encounter with the animals takes place, rather than a media-mediated portrayal or consumption of the products in question.

6 Animal Assisted Pedagogy

Animal-assisted pedagogy offers, within the framework of certain pedagogical and therapeutic objectives, potentially meaningful and enriching opportunities for individual support in areas of different focus, such as learning empathy skills, building trust, and practicing prosocial behaviors. The methods and the species used are manifold: using small animals like guinea pigs and hamsters is as popular as the work with dolphins in the so-called dolphin therapy, the use of dogs as 'emotional support animals' as well as educational riding and vaulting on horses or donkeys.

As an example I examine (curative) pedagogical riding and vaulting as a setting in more detail since the speciesist elements of animal-assisted pedagogy can be clearly illustrated here: in addition to structural question marks such as the appropriate professional training of the leading staff as well as the empirical lack of clarity about the benefits of these offerings, the physical and psychological effects on the animals (typically horses, but occasionally also donkeys) have to be considered in particular. On the psychological level, the signs of zoochosis described in the previous subsection are also evident in horses; presumably because they are confined in cramped stalls and pens, contrary to their nature as running and fleeing animals. On a physical level, apart from the obvious injury caused by being hit with the crop, there is also the damage to the dentition caused by the snaffle and the stresses on the spine caused by human weight. These often weigh all the more heavily because the horses and donkeys are often used and loaded at an age when the skeleton is not yet fully formed and is therefore all the more at risk and vulnerable.

Of course, these psychological and physical impairments of the horses are not due to the educational

use, but occur just as in normal riding and vaulting. However, here again the underlying pedagogical moment is decisive, in which a superiority of humans over horses is postulated, so that the horse must serve as an instrument and object for human purposes and interests, and damage to the non-human animal is accepted in favor of humans. In addition to the 'officially' communicated goals of curative riding, this speciesist treatment in the sense of the previously discussed hidden curriculum can once again be understood as the teaching and learning of implicit content, which shadows the superficially communicated content.

7 Dissection and Other Animal Experiments at School and University

In the educational sectors of secondary schools and universities, dissection is still common today. These studies, performed on animals both dead and alive, are more common in the United States than in Europe. Nevertheless, in Europe, dissection takes place primarily in biology studies as an integral part of the practical phase and also in sections of medical studies.

Many of the animals dissected are bred specifically for the experiments planned on them. This often results in a 'surplus' of animals, which are then simply killed. In addition to this obvious ethical absurdity, it must also be taken into account from a scientific perspective that the frequently postulated gain in knowledge from dissecting and other animal experiments is questionable (Gericke, 2015).

In addition, studies from the U.S. indicate that dissection is seen there as an imposed duty rather than as a freely chosen form of instruction on the part of the students (Oakley, 2013). If they refuse to participate in dissection in classroom situations, teachers seem to occasionally respond by pressuring them to participate, excluding them completely from class, or even threatening to give them bad grades (Oakley, 2013, p. 372).

8 SDG's / ESD as Anthropocentric Foils

As the last stop in our foray through explicit and implicit pedagogical practice, we have arrived at the topic of our time, which of course is also negotiated in our country's educational system: sustainability. For the theoretical and didactic orientation of 'Education for Sustainable Development', an orientation to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals often takes place. These political objectives of the United Nations (UN), which came into force in 2016 with a term of 15 years, are intended to serve worldwide to ensure sustainable development on an economic, social and ethical level.

In addition to the fact that these goals have been developed not only by but also primarily for humans, other details speak to their inherent anthropocentrism and speciesism. Instead of referring to the interspecies coexistence complex applicable to several of the goals (e.g., health and well-being; no hunger; sustainable consumption and production; climate action; life under water; life on land; peace; justice and strong institutions), non-human animals are mentioned only once in the original UN document, and that is under item 2 ('No Hunger'). From my point of view it would be obvious to refer to the possibility to feed a much larger human population by plant-based nutrition (Cassidy et al., 2013). However, we read: "2.5: By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species" (United Nations, 2015, p. 15). Paradoxically, both domestic and farmed and wild animals are to be protected in their species populations. The fact that this can mean for the respective species either caring,

continuous breeding, impregnating, killing and eating or in the latter case respectful handling of the boundaries of the habitat is a prime example of speciesist thinking and acting.

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1. This article is based on previously published articles of mine (Giehl, 2018, 2021) and is a condensed and revised version of them.
2. The term speciesism goes beyond this and, according to Richard Ryder, is to be understood as 'the moral discrimination of living beings on the basis of their species membership' (Ryder, 1970, pp. 1–2). The lives and suffering of these individuals are not taken into account, or are taken into account to a lesser extent, because they do not belong to a specific, prioritized species (e.g., homo sapiens).
3. For visual impressions of the product selection see: https://www.facebook.com/Puttkammer.Wurst/photos/a.307848679278971/1435356409861520/?type=3 (Accessed: 10.11.2022).