

Contribution for workshop n. 61 “School, ecology and degrowth”

Introducing didactic material

by Flavio Cagnato (Associaz. Eco-Filosofica)

Translated by Erika Battocchio

**A CULTURAL AXIS FOR ITALIAN EDUCATION:
DEEP ECOLOGY AND DEGROWTH.**

Italian education in the last twenty years has faced many reforms that, however substantially, never seriously put into discussion the cultural basis on which education should be build.

Instead, the dominant logic of utilitarian interest and economic profit has been able to transform education into a big business, without a purpose suitable for the needs of our time.

As claimed by late, lamented Massimo Bontempelli, teacher and philosopher, in a small but precious book that warned us since 2000 against the economic drift of education:

“ A school system, or one of its divisions, is capable of performing its educational function insofar as it is organized around a cultural axis. What is, in fact, a cultural axis? It is a common horizon of cognitive and normative values that represent a common referential model for a plurality of knowledge of which transmission is organized... the definition of cultural axis requires an understanding of social development dynamics. The society in which we live is been dominated for a quarter of a century in a totalitarian way by a completely self-referential worldwide economic mechanism. It is a totally foolish mechanism , socially and ethically...”¹

¹ Massimo Bontempelli, *Un nuovo asse culturale per la scuola Italiana*, Ed. CRT, 2000, pag. 5 e 15.

Bontempelli proposed, then, to use a cultural axis of history, and we think that such an idea is very interesting. But today, after many years of didactic experiments and, given the environmental destruction to which the planet is subjected and the increasingly urgent warnings coming from official environments as the European Commission and United Nations Organization with its *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment*, we think it is more appropriate to propose ecology as an axis around which we develop education. This, by the way, can give vitality to many disciplines, connecting them to a daily reality that is going to be increasingly dramatic every day, stimulating interests motivation in students.

We think that nothing is more important than ecology, the discovery that nature is a unified, interconnected whole, in which every part is connected with others, where every entity has its own intrinsic value, and which expresses itself completely in the totality.

About this, writer Aldous Huxley said:

“Never give children a chance of imagining that anything exists in isolation. Make it plain from the very beginning that all living is relationship. Show them relationships in the woods, in the fields, in the ponds and streams, in the village and in the country around it.”²

This educational matter, elaborated during the last decade, has the goal of building additional curricula for primary school, so that through all the subjects the educational activities can point towards a cultural axis that we consider central to facing present crises: education of deep ecology.

It is necessary, then, to develop a fundamental precision and explain what deep ecology is.

Deep Ecology

Ecology is the study of relations and problems that involve all inhabitants of the earth's family. However, it is necessary to go further than that in order to avoid mere activities of environment conservation that benefit exclusively utilitarian human interests. Today, it is

² A.Huxley, *Island*, Harper and Brothers, 1962

necessary to rethink human impact on the whole planet, impact that is more and more unsustainable every day.

Deep ecology does not exclude virtuous actions such as energy conservation, pollution control, respect of the earth, recycling, etc., but it tends to include them in a global vision of the world in which every natural entity is considered worthy of attention and respect that is separate from its utility for humans.

In education, there are many activities about ecology that stay in the “superficial ecology” area because they don't challenge the causes of environmental problems.

Only a total cultural paradigm shift will be able to prevent these activities from remaining basically “detail activities,” in order to transform them into a great intervention capable of reforming all the programs of Italian education from the inside out.

At any rate, putting systemic-ecologic thought in place against the utilitarian-consumeristic model is necessary so that we can eliminate the most serious and dangerous pollution – that of our minds and social imaginary.

The concept of deep ecology was developed in the beginning of the 1970s by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who sought to underline the difference between “shallow ecology” and “deep ecology.”

The fundamental difference between the two ways of understanding ecology is that “shallow ecology” is anthropocentric (centered on humans and their interests) and thus all the activities are then oriented to maintain the planet as a liveable place for humans, separate from and superior to nature.

According to Kantian values, humans are considered the end-all-be-all, the source of all value, and only secondary value is ascribed to nature, which is meant to be used by humans.

“Deep ecology,” instead, does not separate human beings from the natural environment; it considers animals, plants, rocks, water, air, and humans as a part of a whole-- integrated, related, alive.

It does not consider the world as a collection of isolated objects, entities fumbling in the dark of their very own existence, but rather as an elaborate web of life in which everything is connected and interdependent.

“Deep ecology” recognizes the intrinsic value of all living beings and views humans as just one particular strand in the web of life. It has the goal of “seeing things as they really are” – that is in their close connection, so that from this new awareness can come responsible and sustainable behaviors. Arne Naess says:

“Care flows naturally if the “self” is widened and deepened so the protection of free nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves ... Just as we need no morals to make us breathe ... [so] if your “self” in the wide sense embraces another being, you need no moral

exhortation to show care ... You care for yourself without feeling any moral pressure to do it ... if reality is like it is experienced by the ecological self, our behavior naturally and beautifully follows norms of strict environmental ethics.”³

Therefore, the materials that we propose follow the purpose of causing a paradigm shift in the way of thinking, giving back to education its central cultural function, which has been clouded by pedagogic activism that has forgotten to base its action on knowledge in line with current needs and a philosophical thought capable of leading toward a meaningful horizon that keeps up with our times.

To this end, the position of Guido Dalla Casa is interesting; he, together with the ecophilosopher Paolo Vicentini⁴ of Treviso, has been one of the first in Italy to speak on this topic:

“When we talk about ecology and conservation of Nature, taking into account 'visions of the world' seems something abstract, or less practical, compared to giving advice about waste management or conservation of forests, but it is only because talking about 'visions of the world' gives long-time effects. But they are aspects that deeply affect our behavior and attitude, compared to quick practical advice for small ecology.”⁵

This new cultural structure could open really interesting new perspectives for Italian education, or at least for those teachers who want to make good use of their remaining teaching freedom.

Deep ecology and systems thinking

One must remember that 2007 educational curriculum for primary school had, as qualifying reference, the elaboration of French philosopher Edgar Morin, which oriented pedagogical activity towards replacing linear and conflicting thinking with a more complex vision of reality, capable of seeing things as a whole, with the goal of reconnecting to knowledge. Edgar Morin said:

³ In F. Capra, *The web of Life*, Anchor, 1997

⁴ To see the important input to the deep ecology movement by Paolo Vicentini, visit the website of Associazione Eco-filosofica, www.filosofiatv.org.

⁵ Guido Dalla Casa, *L'Ecologia Profonda*, Ed. Mimesis, 2011, pag. 186.

“Today relations between personal microcosms and humanity and planet macrocosms have a double sense. On one hand, everything that happens in the world influences the life of every person; on the other hand, every person has in her/his own hands a unique responsibility towards the future of humanity.”

And more:

“Students' need of knowledge is not satisfied with a simple pile of information in different fields, but only with a clear control over each subject and, at the same time, with processing of interconnections ... in this way, education can reach some priority goals. It must put together the big objects of knowledge – universe, planet, nature, life, humanity, society, body, mind, history – in a complex perspective, dedicated to overcoming the fragmentation of subjects and integrating them into a new overall view ... it must spread awareness that the big problems of human conditions – environmental degradation, climate chaos, energy crisis, unequal distribution of resources, health and disease, encounter and debate between cultures and religions, bioethics dilemmas, the search for a new quality of life – can be faced and solved through a close cooperation not only among nations, but also between disciplines and cultures.”⁶

This method, followed by Italian education in 2007, introduced new, important perspectives towards pedagogical activities focused on an ecological vision, that is not trivializing but rather brings wider possibilities.

As American physicist and ecophilosopher Fritjof Capra states:

“The new vision of reality we have been talking about is based on awareness of the essential interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena – physical, biological, psychological, social, cultural ...

The systems view looks at the world in terms of relationships and integration. Systems are integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller units... Examples of systems abound in nature... The same aspects of wholeness are exhibited by social systems – such as an anthill, a beehive, or a human family – and by ecosystems that consist of a variety of organisms and inanimate matter in mutual interaction.”⁷

We want to remember two other interesting documents that come from inside the world of education and are capable of deep connection with ecology issue. The first document is an old Ministry newsletter from February 4th, 1989. The most meaningful part says:

“ For the first time in human history, the environmental problem gains worldwide attention and asks for a constructive commitment from every nation in order to restore the biological

⁶ Edgar Morin, *La scuola nel nuovo scenario*, speech at the Congress “Culture School Person”. Towards national guidelines, Roma 3/4/2007.

⁷ F. Capra, *The turning point*, Bantam Books, 1982, and *The web of Life*, Anchor, 1997

balance of the planet... environmental education must stimulate students to a particular sensibility towards environment problems, in order to create a new culture that transforms the anthropocentric view of human-nature relation in a biocentric one that considers humans as a part of biosphere... environmental education is a goal for all the disciplines.”⁸

It is interesting to note how this ministry document more than twenty years old identified exactly the heart of the problem, yet we haven't taken any steps in this direction since then, with the exception of a single document, as far as we know, that followed and developed those guidelines: *“Ecological alphabets” - Manifesto for an environment education of the future.*⁹

In this text, certainly one of the best that official institutions have ever written about environmental education, they discuss deeply and widely the fundamental points of 1989 newsletter. They also pointed out the need to develop an ecologic-systemic thought and approach, in tune with nature seen as a living organism with its own cycles. They critically discussed the problem of “never ending” growth and focused on deep ecology and recovery of ancient knowledge with an intercultural approach.

This document also made clear the need for radical cultural change to free the imaginations of children and youth from conformity imposed by education-enterprise, dominated by utilitarian purposes and miseries.

Another fundamental thing has been highlighted: teaching subjects, which were influenced by the dominant culture and based on the ideology of economic development, unlimited material growth and obsessive attention for technology, nullified “good practice,” feeding an overfed imaginary, full of “wasteful ideas”. They stated:

“Why teach - usually in afternoon projects or workshops – to recycle rubbish, collect old batteries, save energy, if in curriculum subjects we keep using violence as a model for relation between humans and Nature? If in literature we amplify the Prometheus myth, exalting all-powerful ybris... If in physics, in math we perpetuate the “death of nature,” the image of nature as “dead matter,” as merely numbers of simple mathematical laws that we can reproduce and control?...Why teach new 'environmental competencies', if these competencies are dominated by technology – or rather techno-science – the procedure that is usurping the science essence, its capacity for foresight, for pure and uninterested research, full of wonder and contemplation.”

The political conditions of that time made a partial diffusion of this manifesto possible, but for us it remains a fundamental reference for our dissertation.

⁸ C.M. n. 49 of 4th February 1989.

⁹ The document has been written by a group of intellectuals by the initiative of Laura Marchetti, Undersecretary of State in collaboration with Minister for Environment during 2007-2008. You can find the document on www.filosofiatv.org.

Now, we clearly see the need to take back and expand these ideas because, in the meanwhile, the environmental situation has grown worse and, with it, the socioeconomic situation of the world.

Herein lies the urgency to rebuild the meaning of education based on a cultural axis that takes into consideration current dynamics, which are responsible for loss of dominant sense.

Deep ecology and pluralism

Another aspect that gives deep ecology a central relevance is that we can consider it, because of its radical non-anthropocentric and non ethnocentric approach, indispensable as a philosophical support of what should be the base for education: pluralism.

Public school should be totally open to this thought, refusing to take sides with some cultural positions rather than others, with some ideologies or religions at the expense of others.

This principle, shallowly handled, is subject to deviations and constant measure of power.

A good example is the invasion of one-way thought of consumerist economism, which gives rules to the entire world, education included.

A systemic thought based on deep ecology can be a powerful antidote, capable of letting education keep its function and prerogatives, sparing it as a place of cultural and mental health.

Fritjof Capra is very clear about this:

“Deep ecology is supported by modern science, and in particular by the new systems approach, but it is rooted in a perception of reality that goes beyond the scientific framework to an intuitive awareness of the oneness of all life, the interdependence of its multiple manifestations and its cycles of change and transformation. When the concept of the human spirit is understood in this sense, at the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels connected to the cosmos as a whole, it becomes clear that ecological awareness is truly spiritual. Indeed, the idea of the individual being linked to the cosmos is expressed in the Latin root of the word religion, religare ('to bind strongly'), as well as the Sanskrit yoga, which means union.”¹⁰

¹⁰ F. Capra, *The turning point*, Bantam Books, 1982

We can integrate this with the thoughts of Gregory Bateson, who invites education to look at the “structure that connects” and wonders:

“What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all four of them to me?”

“Why do our schools teach us nothing about the pattern which connects? Is that teachers know that they carry the kiss of death which will turn to tastelessness whatever they touch or teach anything of real-life importance? Or is that they carry the kiss of death because they dare not teach anything of real-life importance? What's wrong with them?”¹¹

Bateson also thought that the anthropocentric approach had to be overcome because we need to understand that human beings are just a limited part of a bigger system that cannot be recognized and dominated. This is the direction that teaching should take.

Now an explanation is fundamental in order to avoid misunderstanding. When we say that criticizing anthropocentrism is the qualifying aspect of deep ecology, we do not mean an undifferentiated biocentric egalitarianism. On the contrary, we think that what gives deep ecology its quality is openness and welcome attitude towards every difference, which must be accepted for what it is. All the entities, all the things that are, coexist and belong together with a limitless cosmos, in which we all find a position, depending of each one nature. From our point of view, it is not good to give more importance to some, for example humans, “*imago dei*,” at the expense of others.

We also think it is not good to give more importance to some entities, nearer to human beings from an emotional perspective or because considered nearer to humans' sensory awareness, at the expense of others, as plants, mountains, rocks, seas, rivers, etc. We also think it is not good to value humans in a shallow way.

On the contrary, the critique of humans must be done thoroughly and accurately because humans really are the worst animal on the planet. Glorification of rational thinking is considered a superior function reserved to humans. This way of thinking does not take in consideration that this utilitarian approach, considered the best quality, is responsible for the devastation of the earth and suffering of the vast majority of humanity.

¹¹ G. Bateson, *Mind and Nature*, Hampton Press, 1979

Of course, it is not about deleting rationality from human actions but rather subordinating it to the most qualifying intellect.¹² Conscience itself, another praised human quality, at this point seems to us a simple corrective attempt and rational thinking regulator, with the purpose of maintaining the human will to power over the entire nature as long as possible.

A earthworm does not need a conscience in his daily job as wise gardener and compost maker; a tree does not need a conscience to bloom and bear fruit; the sea does not need a conscience to give its contribution to preserve climate sustainability.

Konrad Lorenz said:

“Everything animals know about the external world is real and correct.”¹³

Animals (and plants, mountains, seas, etc) know and do. In a way that is immediate and does not need to use rational calculations or conscience.

All told, we think that deep ecology itself, with its total denial of anthropocentrism (which puts object-nature in subject-human's-hands) is the right support for letting humans best qualities surface: their intellectual and spiritual possibilities, their generosity, care and solidarity, sense of responsibility, love for others and for beauty, etc.

Anthropocentrism, as suggested by Bacon, Descartes, Kant and Hegel, denies the more appealing aspects of humans from the most basic level.

Deep ecology states, in one of its fundamental principles, that reality is a whole in relation, where subject, object and their relationship belong to a unified whole, and the relationship itself is not something separated, that comes in second place, but is rather a part of both participants. This position is Plato-esque, using sun symbolism, states that what allows the object to be seen, the subject to see and the sight itself (the relationship) is something that goes beyond them – the light, given by Sun/Good, the endless home that allows every entity to manifest itself, so none would prevail over others. Right then we find the highest point of western thought. We can reach all of this through a path of purification from all the egotistic aspects of anthropocentrism.

¹² With “intellect ” we mean the overindividual and non-personal faculty which comes from immediate contemplative experience, where personal ego is silenced and purified from its utilitarian purposes. This lets us approach the whole and be in tune with it.

With “reason” we mean the individual and personal faculty that lets us have a certain kind of knowledge, using logical concepts. It is acceptable in this terms. We critique its pretension of finding application in other contexts, becoming a utilitarian tool, through which human power of will expresses itself and used with violence and arrogance over nature and other humans. The “selfish reason,” from Descartes to the modern era, is been seen as the only way to knowledge, confining intellect in oblivion. The heart of anthropocentrism can be found right here.

¹³ K. Lorenz, *Der Abbau des Menschlichen* , Piper, 1983

Starting from here we can reach a real conscious openness. Silencing the meanness of human individualism lets authentic wisdom express itself.

We can state that respect for all is around us, aside from the value humans give; it is the basis of an authentic pluralism, which deep ecology's radical thought expresses.

With pluralism we don't mean a kind of relativism, in which any thought, any theory, any behavior are worth the same. Pluralism is a method of approaching reality, taking into consideration different paths of knowledge and a variety of points of view.

This is allowed by a *nous* contemplative capacity, as understood by ancient Greeks. This capacity, together with a wider intellectual open mind, is capable of getting nearly to limitless reality, which is still impossible to capture and circumscribe, but can be guessed and approached.

We can value differences based on this level of openness.

Deep ecology and education

Focusing educational activity in this direction means not wasting time in multiple detailed activities and losing the generalized view which gives sense and meaning to every single part. It means developing a way of looking at things that is capable of pulling together, reunifying, and

welcoming instead of separating, excluding and setting at odds.

We think that at school, deep ecology can find an important educational fulfillment namely "idea-structure" theory by Jerome Bruner.

Bruner said :

“Understanding consists of grasping the place of an idea of fact in some more general structure of knowledge. When we understand something, we understand it as an exemplar of a broader conceptual principle or theory.”¹⁴

And also:

“The teaching and learning of structure, rather than simply the mastery of facts and techniques, is at the center of the classic problem of transfer.”

“Mastery of the fundamental ideas of a field involves not only the grasping of general principles, but also the development of an attitude toward learning and inquiry, toward guessing and hunches, toward the possibility of solving problems on one's own.”¹⁵

Bruner thinks that idea/structure are proper organizational ideas inside every subject, but also cross to disciplines. They are built on fundamental concepts and become proper keys to reading the entire learning process.

This goes beyond education based on activities (Dewey style), which privileges children's immediate interests and life experiences. With this method it is possible to connect notions and move them in different areas in order to “learn to learn”. This is the only way to get rid of methodological technicality and reach true competence.

In learning processes led by ecological and systemic thinking, one not only acquires knowledge but also develops a capacity that assists his/her thinking process, encouraging them to “learn to learn”.

Deep ecology highlights, based on a historic-geographic context, two fundamental idea/structures: cosmocentrism and anthropocentrism. Comparing them, deep ecology develops research and educational activities on more important aspects, promoting their understanding and their utility in more difficult readings.

For many years, using this method, we elaborated on educational material that turned into notebooks for children. These notebooks contain knowledge and tools regarding ecologic considerations, appropriate for addressing planetary problems.

These notebooks had different themes: intercultural education; trees in myths and legends; water; Christmas, Saint Francis and Master Ibn Arabi's simplicity teachings; rhymes and stories for an ecological approach to Italian language teaching; integration of history and geography with a deep ecology approach, dedicated to the culture of Great Mother Nature.¹⁶

¹⁴ J.Bruner, *The culture of education*, Harvard University Press, 1996

¹⁵ J.Bruner, *The process of education*, Harvard university Press, 1960

¹⁶ All these materials can be found at filosofiatv.org in the “scuola e formazione” section

Within these activities, we have been able to pay close attention to some more relevant themes: economy and work, politics, religion, science, technology, art, etc.

The last *Notebook for Education to Deep Ecology*, contains short stories and poetry.

It pays particular attention to a non technical approach to the teaching of Italian language, adding ecocentric content in order to underline the fact that language is often not neutral but has the capability to alter the perception of reality.

We must always keep in mind some important considerations, as those of Arnold Gehlen. He considers language as a proper technique, that can allow humans to become independent from the “here and now,” but can also lead humans to detachment from things (in light of utilitarianism).

Daniel Stern's position is also interesting. He states the the word is an indispensable means for adaptation to environment, but it also separates the unique experience of the child into a dualistic one, experienced reality and symbolic reality.¹⁷

Gregory Bateson also warns about the risks of “separation” in language:

*“The language bears inscribed in its structure forms the atomistic thinking, because it asserts that 'things' 'have' qualities and attributes in a certain way . Children are told that a 'noun' is the 'name of a person, place, or thing,' that a 'verb' is 'an action word,' and so on. That is, they are taught at a tender age that the way to define something is by what it supposedly is in itself, not by its relation to other things. Language education cultivated in an ecological perspective should instead point out that things have certain characteristics - as - placed in a certain context”.*¹⁸

In preparing our material, we kept what Luigina Mortari wrote in consideration:

“Selfish thinking, busy compressing reality into algorithms, subject dominates object, with whom it relates in a separated way. In evoking thinking, the subject relates to things with discretion, based on listening and empathy. State of mind is what determine this interpretation of language as ecological. Careful listening is the first form of care for the world. (G. Stenstad, 1992). To live carefully on the Earth, we first should learn to listen to the full circle of silence, so speaking becomes a witness of belonging to the rest of nature.

¹⁷ For an interesting debate, see Matteo Andreozzi, *Verso una prospettiva ecocentrica*, Ed. Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, 2011, pag.44 e ss.

¹⁸ Luigina Mortari, University di Verona, pedagogist and educator quotes and comments Bateson in Luigina Mortari, *Abitare con saggezza la terra*, Ed. Franco Angeli, 1994, pag. 193.

Thinking that does not start with listening risks becoming a violent way of relating with things; it uses the logic of dominance and assimilation of other to oneself.”¹⁹

Eliminating language is clearly impossible, but it can be used from a deep ecology perspective, enriching it with cultural content that helps to neutralize its harmful aspects.

There's one last important thing we want to say: we think deep ecology, as we tried to outline it, can open greater and more interesting educational perspectives. It can give incentives to research and study for a “deep inter-culture” education, with the goal of encountering and creating dialogue between different cultures, and not with the goal of mere compensation.

It is going to be an important moment for education to rediscover teachings and spiritualities of the Aborigines, the South African Bushmen, and the Native peoples of the Americas but also the wisdom of Taoism, Sufism, Buddhism, Franciscan Christianity, Hinduism and all visions of the world that, in different ways, have maintained a deep relationship between humans and nature.

Luigina Mortari also writes:

“The ecophilosophy principle of looking for ecologic thought seeds in cultural history lets us discover the importance of being open and listening to knowledge from the past and from other places. They are full not only of ideas from current science, but also from a lost wisdom.”²⁰

Deep ecology and degrowth

Deep ecology should lead to a lifestyle of simplicity and an ethic of limit and sharing, making humans presence sustainable for itself and for all the natural world, ending the crazy consumerist system which destroys the Earth and consumes our lives in a constant run to have more and more.

¹⁹ You can find this in L. Mortari, *Ecologicamente pensando*, Ed. Unicopli, 1998, pag. 93.

²⁰ Luigina Mortari, *Alla ricerca di un orientamento ecologico per abitare la terra*, in *Pluriverso* n. 2, 1997, pag. 96, 97.

All this is very important in primary school, since children are one of the main targets of the advertising industry, which induces a constant dissatisfaction that can be overcome only by buying (or so advertisements tell us).

But in this case too, one has to pay attention to not get stuck in activities based on a superficial activism. It is necessary to create a different environment in school, where children can find different ideas from which they can learn and think, in order to nurture their natural closeness with nature. From this, they will learn balanced and responsible behaviors.

We think the most important quality of school is to bring children to different world experiences, led by a non-calculating way of thinking, open to meeting all aspects of reality, capable of welcome and sympathy, without meanings already determined by someone else.

It is possible to create an integrative curriculum that, through all disciplines, lets the most important elements of a sustainable lifestyle emerge, simplicity in consumption and respect of nature, which most populations on the planet had for millennia.

History can highlight how humans lived in harmony with nature, different forms of religion connected with earth and its cycles, self-sufficient activities, community connections through gift, etc.

This will show the falsity of the idea that all cultures and civilizations developed in a linear fashion, based on acquisition of goods.

Geography will help by discovering ecosystems and their interconnection, with their unlimited ability to sustain the web of life. Some time can be used for landscape study, meant as meeting point between nature and culture, in which learning to read expressions of different visions of the world is possible.²¹

Science will work on the “ecological footprint” in order to analyze the impact of modern world industrialization, which has made it more difficult for the planet to regenerate itself. It can show how recent scientific studies, free from economic interests, highlighted the non-sustainable unlimited worldwide economic growth.

These brief indications can be developed and expanded in appropriate ways in different disciplines and type of education.

²¹ See *European Landscape Convention* art.6

It will be necessary, once again, to introduce activities from a deep ecology point of view that will allow these needs to be given meaning. They will become the fundamentals of “ecoliteracy,” promoted by Fritojf Capra:

“What is sustained in a sustainable community is not economic growth, development, market share or competitive advantage, but the entire web of life on which depends our long-term survival. In other words, a sustainable community is designed in such a way that its ways of life, businesses, economy, physical structures, and technologies do no interfere with nature’s inherent ability to sustain life.”²²

Only through the path we have outlined, can youth gain fundamental expertise, real eco-competence, integrating content and meaning in European competence, which will finally teach:

- *“an ecosystem generates no waste, since one species’ waste is another species’ food;*
- *matter cycles continually through the web of life;*
- *most of the energy driving the ecological cycles flows from the sun;*
- *diversity guarantees the capacity of recovery;*
- *life, since its beginning more than three billions ago, has not taken over the planet by combat but by networking.*

Teaching this new knowledge (which is also ancient wisdom) will be the most important role of education in the next century.”²³

In regards to growth and economic development, which also wants to give guidelines also to education, Arne Naess, father of deep ecology, said during an interview:

“What we need today is a tremendous expansion of ecological thinking in what I call Ecosophy. Sophy comes from Greek term sophia, “wisdom,” which relates to ethics, norms, rules and practice. Ecosophy, or deep ecology, then, involves a shift from science to wisdom. For example, we need to ask questions like: why do we think that economic growth and high levels of consumption are so important? The conventional answer would be to point to the economic consequences of not having economic growth. But in deep ecology, we ask whether the present society fulfills basic human needs like love and security and access to nature, and, in so doing, we question our society’s underlying assumptions. We ask which society, which education, which form of religion is beneficial for all life on the planet as a whole, and then we

²² in D.Orr, M.K.Stone, Z.Barlow, F. Capra, *Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World*, Sierra Club Books, 2005

²³ In D.Orr, M.K.Stone, Z.Barlow, F. Capra, *Ecological Literacy: Educating our Children for a Sustainable World*, Sierra Club Books, 2005

ask further what we need to do in order to make the necessary changes. We are not limited to a scientific approach; we have an obligation to verbalize a total view."²⁴

Angela Danisi is a pedagogist at the University of Bari. Her ecophilosophical position is expressed thusly:

*"Teachers' wisdom training needs to focus on the ability to enter oneself, being able to pause, enjoying all the necessary time to rethink one's own thoughts and choose them with attention, leading destructive thoughts outside one's mind, as they can contribute to bad attitude, feelings and behavior. Every action is born in thought... "Deep education" to an eco-reflexive thought is the foundation for a real process of urban and worldwide sustainability."*²⁵

The current economic-social-cultural paradigm entered a deep material and meaning crisis that is widespread and irreversible. One-way thought, typical of a economic and utilitarian system which has colonized the social imaginary for the last centuries, is responsible for the devastation of society, minds and environment. Its failed promises of wellness for everyone, based on constant, useless, and stupid buying, can be seen by everyone. It failed in its own field of action.

The worst insanity and negligence would be to let it now impose its ideology on school and education.

We can say, as lifelong teachers, that being part of the ecophilosophy cultural movement brought stimulating research and study. This exciting adventure gave us intellectual stimuli that will help us to face young generations' needs, and it gave back to the teaching profession its much-needed dignity and cultural value. We hope our work will be useful to our coworkers.

Finally, We would like to quote Barry Lopez:

*"At the heart of the story, I think, is a simple abiding belief: it is possible to live wisely on the land and to live well. And in behaving respectfully towards all that the land contains, it is possible to imagine a stifling ignorance falling away from us."*²⁶

²⁴ In B.Devall-G.Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, Gibbs Smith, 1985

²⁵ A. Danisi, *C'era una volta il futuro*, Ed. Cacucci, 2008, pag. 72, 60.

²⁶ Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*, Vintage, 2001