

ARE SHOWS WITH ANIMALS REGARDED AS EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES? A STUDY WITH PORTUGUESE PRE-SERVICE PRIMARY TEACHERS AND KINDERGARTEN EDUCATORS

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For centuries animals have been seen as instruments to satisfy human needs and desires (e.g. food, clothing, working force, amusement). However, this view is changing. As Franklin (2008) points out, since the sixties of the twentieth century, the idea that the exploitation of animals is the price to pay for the well-being of human beings has been challenged as a result of the emergence of several animal liberation movements. However, this changing has been slow and unequal in different societies. Thus, it is important to identify whether the new values are in fact internalized in different countries, especially in future education professionals who will play a role in the training of future generations.

The present study seeks to know how pre-service primary teachers and kindergarten educators assess the educational interest of shows and exhibitions with animals. This type of entertainment has been considered a form of violation of animals' wellbeing. But, at the same time, children show a special attraction for animals (Patrick and Tunnicliffe, 2011) and the contact with them, through different ways, can be seen a motivating element for learning about the living world and even to improve awareness for the need of its preservation.

Therefore, 58 pre-service primary school teachers and 42 kindergarten educators answered an online questionnaire about the adequacy of including the following shows and exhibitions with animals in their teaching practice: horse competitions; birds of prey exhibitions; aquatic mammals' shows; pets competitions and exhibitions; circuses with animals. The assessment of the adequacy of each exhibition was done through a likert scale (1 - nothing suitable up to 5 - very suitable) and a justification was also required. The results were analyzed globally and also comparing the two groups of future professionals, using inferential statistics.

Globally, respondents were not particularly enthusiastic about this type of shows. The percentage of respondents who considered them suitable was: 12% in horse competitions; 25% in birds of prey exhibitions; 24% in aquatic mammals' shows; 12% in pets' competitions and exhibitions and exhibits; 10% in circuses with animals. Even so, the intermediate position (value 3) always ranged from 30% to 39%, in each show, which indicates that close to 1/3 of the respondents do not have a clear position about the present issue. The reasons given for the assessment of these shows as unsuitable were essentially related to the violation of animals' wellbeing and their poor educational interest. Those who took an intermediate position pointed out their relative interest or the possibility of being relevant in a certain context of learning. Those who considered them as suitable emphasized the interest that animals arouse in children, and the fact that animals are well treated. However, kindergarten educators were more enthusiastic about these shows, with statistically significant differences occurring among the groups, with the exception of circus. Circus was the show considered less suitable, mainly for the mistreatment of animals. The other shows were less associated with this mistreatment, which proves some unfamiliarity with the other forms of training animals as in case of aquatic mammals or racing horses, for instance. Thus, the approach of the present issue seems to be relevant in the training of all these future professionals, for the development of their critical thinking about it.

keywords: pre-service teachers, pre-service kindergarten educators, shows with animals, animal welfare.