

SHORT FEATURE

Motivating School Students to Carry the “Baton” of Environment Protection

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ENVIRONMENTAL Education (EE) has been introduced as a regular course in the formal school education system. The efforts to institutionalise EE at all stages of education was highlighted with the Directive of the Supreme Court of India (1991) which reiterated that, “We accept in principle that through the medium of education, awareness of the environment and its problems related to pollution should be taught as a compulsory subject. The Directive further stated that so far as education up to the college level is concerned we would require every state government and every education board concerned with education up to the matriculation stage of even intermediate colleges to immediately take steps to enforce compulsory education on the environment in a graded way.”

Further, in response to a PIL filed in the Supreme Court by Shri M.C. Mehta regarding making EE compulsory at the school level, on 18 December 2003, the Hon’ble Supreme Court directed NCERT to prepare and circulate a model syllabus in EE for all the states to adopt in their school education curriculum. The NCERT was appointed as a nodal agency to supervise the implementation of this Court’s order.

In Class I and II, EE is transacted through activities – teaching of language and mathematics is woven around children’s immediate environment whereas from class III to V a separate textbook on environmental science has been prescribed that touches concepts of the physical environment, family and social environment. The infusion approach in VI to X involves EE through subjects namely Science, Geography, English, Hindi. In Classes XI and XII, it’s project-based, besides infusion in electives. Additionally, NCERT has also brought out the ‘*Teachers Handbook on Environmental Education for the Higher Secondary Stage*’ for classes XI and XII.



Components of environment education

According to IUCN — The World Conservation Union, “EE is the process of recognising values and clarifying concepts to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the inter-relatedness among humans, their culture and biophysical surroundings. EE also entails practising decision making and self-formulation of a code of behaviours about issues concerning environmental quality.”



Environment rallies by school students

Environmental knowledge, attitudes and behaviours are required to be reflected in the minds of the students. Environmental attitude is directly linked with the level of knowledge regarding environmental issues possessed by an individual, which is expected to suitably modify the behaviour. Learning in the classroom is one thing but making a way of life out of what one learns is another. What a student is learning in school will be of little use if they do not see its applicability in real life. Environmentally responsible behaviour like carpooling, using cloth bags while shopping, segregating waste, making school single-use plastic-free, practising reduce/recycle/reuse, etc. have to become part of their routine life.



Students undertaking cleanliness drives on beach

There is a need to go beyond rote learning methods and learn through experiential learning by way of nature camps that help to trigger sensitivity towards the environment. Also, curriculum development initiatives (as per National Education Policy, 2020) can strengthen the movement of creating a green brigade. Today when environmental conditions are changing

adversely and all living beings are suffering from the negative consequences of environmental pollution and climate changes, there is a need to reorient the curriculum of environment education to make it more attractive and responsive to the local environmental issues. Specialised theme-based trainings are required for teachers who are teaching environment in schools.

For capacity building for environment education in schools, one programme is Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE), which is an international science and environment education programme. It provides students with an opportunity to participate in data collection and the scientific process. It helps in contributing meaningfully to our understanding of the earth system and global environment. The programme was announced by the US Government in 1994 on the occasion of the Earth Day and launched worldwide in 1995 (www.globe.gov/). This programme is coordinated by the GLOBE Implementation Office, located in Colorado, the United States & sponsored by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR) and supported by the National Science Foundation, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and US Department of State. Nearly 122 countries are currently participating in the programme including India.

In India, the Ecoclub Programme of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change is motivating school students to be involved in activities relating to the environment through quizzes, skits, rallies, drawing competitions, plantation of saplings in school premises, cleanliness drives within the school campus, activities on Swachh Bharat Pakhwada, etc.



Students taking part in nature walk/trails

Another programme called Nature Camping Programme provides exposure that goes a long way in sensitizing children towards nature and environmental issues and helps shape their attitudes and actions towards nature conservation and environmental protection. The nature experience has huge potential to trigger sensitivity towards nature appreciation and conservation, leading to positive environmental actions at different levels.

Another aspect to focus on is environment as a career option. Apprehensions towards a career in environment can



"It is very important that the capacity of students and teachers are build on Environment, which has to be ensured by initiating field-orientated learning activities and training programmes focussed on skill development for nature

protection. Further in schools, those teachers who have degree in Environment Science should be appointed to teach the environment subjects. Only competent teachers should be involved for environment education instead of teachers of Sanskrit, Hindi, English, Political Science, Sociology, Mathematics, Physical Education, Home Science, Computer Science, etc."

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only be removed through incentivisation and proper awareness about jobs available for environmentalists. The number of job opportunities for candidates having Environment Science background needs to be increased. Youth be made aware of the various opportunities that exist as career options for them like Environment Advisors, Environment Scientists, Professors, Environment Biologists, Environment Modelers, Environment Engineers and Environment Journalists. Some of the organisations like UNDP, UNEP, Embassies (dealing with environment matters), WWF-India, CEE, IUCN, BNHS, WTI, etc. also recruit people having an environment background.

We need to mainstream EE such that it develops responsible behaviour among the society leading to an improved environment. The educational value of sources like TV, newspapers, radio needs to be maximised so that they could be used as a powerful tool to change behaviour. To prepare the future generation to appreciate the importance of the environment holistically, EE plays a crucial role in schools.

Many young minds have adopted an environmentally friendly attitude and their green behaviour is visible in their actions. India has around 23% of the population in the 6-17 age group, and to ensure that this young population saves the environment, it is utmost important that they are provided with quality education concerning environment. And if this percentage contributes its small bit towards environment protection and conservation of natural resources, then one can imagine the cascading effect it will have on nature protection.

The growing interest of students and active participation in EE programmes are great indicators of the success of EE. Change in behaviour for positive environmental actions can't be achieved overnight nor can it be a one-time exercise, it is a constant process.

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