

Environmental education: Some thoughts

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THERE has been a long-standing demand for introduction of environmental education in formal education system in our country. Finally, the Department of Environment undertook a project to prepare Environmental Curricula a few years back. Little has been surfaced in the media about the progress of the project. Moreover, it was known that the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has not been incorporated in the implementation process of project. Without the help of NCTB, the sole agency for implementation of curricula, and preparation of syllabus and distribution of books in the formal education system, how the curriculum would be implemented, remains a mystery.

However, I would not go to the process of implementation of the Environmental Curriculum, rather I would put some suggestions for making the environmental education syllabus more eco-centric.

All humans and their environment are inseparable and are interdependent for mutual survival. But in reality, environment is often ignored mainly for our ignorance and sometimes due to lack of self-motivation. And our educational system has utterly been overlooking the issue concentrating its thrust to so-called development.

Goals

The 1977 intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in Tbilisi, USSR, set forth a challenge to environment educators around the world: "To develop a world population that is aware of and concerned about the total environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, attitudes, motivations, commitment and skills to work individually and collectively toward solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones."

The notion that humans are superior to others, and human being has every right to overpower others, is central to our environmental degradation. So, study materials should be prepared to make the students sensitive to other living and nonliving beings.

Environmental education is open to many instructional approaches due to the nature of its content, and also tends to be interdisciplinary. In preparing the syllabus of environmental education, attempt should be made to achieve the following broad-based goals:

- λ Increase knowledge of students about the biosphere and ecosystems, including their functioning.
- λ Promote understanding about how people interact with their environment as individual and through their culture.
- λ Promote an understanding of basic ecological concepts, such as interdependence in nature, biodiversity, etc.
- λ Develop problem-solving strategies among students, with emphasis on local issues.
- λ Investigate the roles of individuals, communities and government in solving environmental problems.
- λ Encourage students to explore their environmental values.
- λ Promote a global perspective, but with a focus on the local environment.

Guidelines for syllabus

Environment simply means our surroundings comprising both the non-living (abiotic) and the living (biotic) components, and the study of interactions between these two is called Ecology. Omitting the linkages of ecology with almost all other disciplines is the serious lapse in our education today.

In the forwarding in her multi-award winning book, Silent Spring, Rachel Carson said, "The history of life on earth has been a history of interaction between living things and their surroundings."

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Environment is basically an area-specific subject, and therefore, in a country like ours with diverse ecosystems, a uniform syllabus would not be useful. Moreover, it has to be related to so many other disciplines, and adapted to so many age groups also.

Environment or Ecology is essentially a field- or case study-based subject. Classroom lectures alone would not do much in the learning process. Hence, field study tours as practical are must for all levels of education, particularly at the school level.

At higher levels, it could be project-oriented study, may be as group or individual projects, whose reports could be evaluated.

Implementation strategies

Teachers are the vehicles of transferring knowledge to the students. Teachers' training through refresher courses, seminars, guidebooks and field trips are prerequisites during the early stages of this educational revolution. Environmental education, however, should not be confined to the classroom alone.

Teachers and students should extend it through eco-development camps to rural people, who are our major producers and stakeholders in managing our natural resources, and through pam-

phlets, booklets and websites to urban people, who are the major consumers and polluters.

TV programmes, CDs and DVDs on environmental case studies would disseminate environmental messages faster to the entire country.

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