At a minimum, we must set a goal of ecological literacy for all our students at the tertiary level.

PHOTO: **MARKUS SPISKE/UNSPLASH**

Why climate needs to be a part of higher education

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In order to equip our future generations with the skills to deal with climate change, the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) has a target – Target 4.7 – that requires that, by 2030, all learners will acquire the knowledge and skills through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyle, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. Indicators to check the progress of Target 4.7 are the extent to which global citizenship education and education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment. So, we have an excellent target and related indicators to measure the progress.

However, what is the reality in the mainstream model of education? Since the 1972 Stockholm environmental conference, promotion of environmental education began to be mainstreamed into educational curricula, led globally by Unesco. Then came Chapter 36 of the Agenda 21 on Education, adopted at the Earth Summit in 1992, and finally SDG 4. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports call for action in striking a balance between lowering energy and resource intensity and promoting decarbonisation. But they overlook and underestimate the role of education in climate change, linking it narrowly to behavioural change through education and community approaches, including local and Indigenous knowledge. It is unsurprising that hardly any educator participated in writing the IPCC reports.

However, this oversight reveals a much deeper issue, which is a de facto endorsement of business-as-usual in education, as a solution to environmental change. The assumption is that a wider access to quality education would automatically translate into higher environmental awareness and behavioural change, and most international development efforts have consistently prioritised Western education models that focus on economic growth and social equity over environmental issues. So, the education-related works of the World Bank, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Unesco explicitly promote human capital theory, to realise the infinite growth paradigm. While their official statements align with SDG 4, they are targeted for promoting economic growth, as if there is no conflict between continued growth and environmental sustainability. Such angelisation of GDP growth is short-sighted, at the expense of limited environmental resources. This is evident from serious ecological crises all over the world.

But sustainable growth – the physical expansion of economies – is an oxymoron, because the former cannot continue *ad infinitum* in a bounded global ecological system. This oversight is the reason that education and research on SDG 4.7 (sustainable lifestyles and global citizenship) remains a neglected area. Unesco's Institute of Statistics has focused its efforts on developing metrics for SDG 4.1- 4.6, while leaving SDG 4.7 unaddressed; this omission is evident in the SDG 4 Data Book: Global Education Indicators 2018. Any discussion on SDG 4.7 is almost always linked to improvements in individual cognitive skills, suggesting that SDG 4 goals can be achieved under the current education paradigm.

But research by environmental psychologists shows that higher cognitive skills and knowledge do not necessarily prompt citizens into environment-friendly action. Rather, culture, including the concept of self (independent or interdependent self), affects how people are guided towards action. Western countries with dominant "independent" selfhood have higher carbon dioxide emissions and ecological footprints than in cultures with "interdependent" selfhood. Looking at the increasing disconnect between climate science and climate policies at international and national levels, it is clear that the Earth does not need mere "educated" consumers of knowledge; rather, it needs more "environmentally-educated" consumers.

This reality calls for a fundamental reconceptualisation of education itself, along the line of famous American ecologist Aldo Leopold, that we need not just higher "volume" of education, but a change in its "content." This will bring into sharp relief, together with knowledge and skills (curriculum), access and equity (structure), a more fundamental revaluation of self and others (our being), i.e. culture and our relationship with "nature." We must fundamentally change the way we think of economic growth as the road to sustainable development, because the latter does not always require growth for improving the quality of life. While many developing countries still need environment-friendly growth for development, developed countries must focus on qualitative development, as they have achieved enough quantitative growth through mass and junk productions. So, understanding interactions, particularly negative loops, among different SDGs and different dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – is instrumental in rethinking whether and under what conditions education can contribute to limiting climate change. This calls for a scathing critique of independent self-based Western model of education, with predominant focus on imparting knowledge and skills in numeracy. Do these skills fostering reflection over our "being" among students result in wisdom and self-realisation? Perhaps not.

In the end, let me recall the wisdom of Spanish philosopher Ortega Gasset, who criticised the modern trend in university education of micro and macro specialisations, which create "learned ignorants" who lose sight of the forest for the trees and leaves. We must maintain a balance between breadth and depth in disciplines across university departments. At a minimum, we must set a goal of ecological literacy for all our students at the tertiary level. No student should graduate from universities without a comprehension of the basic principles of ecology and ecological economics, carrying capacity, energetics, end-use analysis, how to live a good life, limits of technology, appropriate scale, sustainable agriculture and forestry, steady-state economics, and environmental ethics. As Leopold very cogently asked, "If education does not teach us these things, then what is education for?"

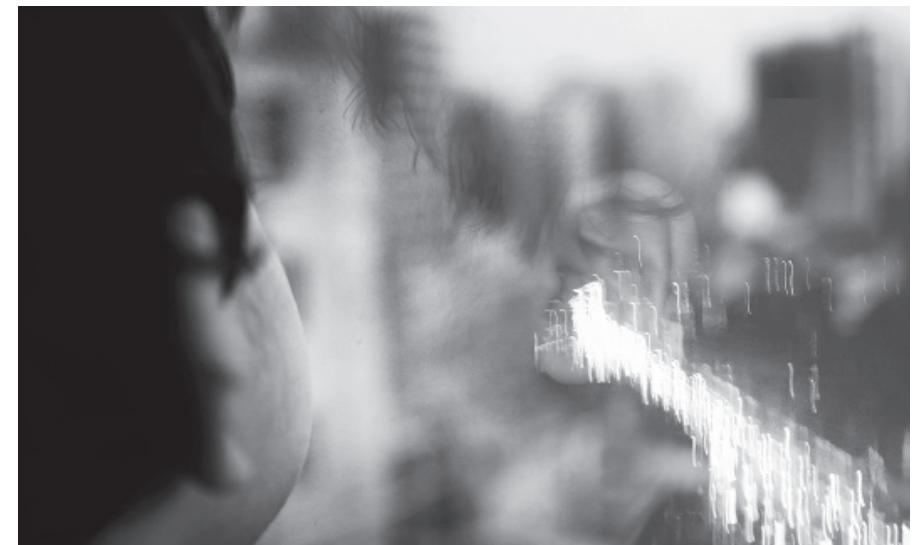## Schools can be vital to children's mental well-being

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SEKAI CHITAUKIRE

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the US, mental health "includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices." October 10 marked World Mental Health Day, the overall objective of which is to "raise awareness of mental health issues around the world and to mobilise efforts in support of mental health," as per the World Health Organization (WHO). This year's theme for the day was "Make mental health and well-being for all a global priority." This must include children as it is important for them to be aware of this issue and know how to take care of their own mental health and well-being.

Students spend about one-third of their day in school, and this makes schools an opportune place to teach about mental health as well as offer support to other students. There are several ways in which students may be equipped with knowledge about mental health, know how to protect it, and have the provision for the right kind of support when needed. Schools require dedicated

for all. Secondly, services should be provided for students who are identified to be at risk for mental health problems. Thirdly, specific services should be made available for students who have mental health concerns. Schools would need to have screening systems and tools in place to identify students who fall in the second and third tiers. These can be informal in-house tools like maintaining and analysing behaviour incidents and attendance. Another option can be formal validated screening tools, such as the Behavioural and Emotional Screening System (BESS). BESS is an instrument designed to provide reliable information on the behavioural and emotional strengths and weaknesses of children aged 3-18 years.

There are several other ways we can protect the positive mental well-being of students. To begin with, we can encourage them to lead a balanced lifestyle that combines school work, play, physical activity, socialising, and downtime. We can promote healthy choices like getting enough sleep, eating a balanced diet, and choosing quality friends. Smoking, vaping, drugs, and/or drinking must be discouraged,

When school students have access to quality mental health support, they are more likely to be successful and productive.
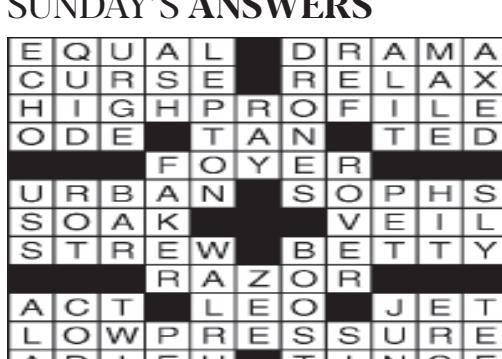
VISUAL: **KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO**

teaching and learning topics related to mental health and well-being, as well as mental illnesses. Our core responsibility is to offer a holistic approach towards education – one that includes academic and physical education, arts, and social and emotional learning components. The social and emotional learning topics can include resilience, emotional intelligence, decision-making, and healthy relationships.

School schedules and practices must allow students to take brain breaks regularly. We should also create a safe space and have trained mental health professionals available to students for counselling services. Schools can establish peer counselling programmes that allow students to meet with other students and talk about their problems. Consequently, we should also keep educating all staff members to recognise basic indicators of poor mental health and equip them with suggestions as to how they can support students in their classrooms.

Schools have a role to play in promoting and supporting positive mental health and well-being in children. One way to do this would be to implement a three-tier approach. Firstly, schools must promote a healthy lifestyle

and instead we should promote healthy coping skills when one is experiencing stress and pressure. Additionally, it is important to encourage meaningful connections with family members, friends, and the community. Finally, students must be reminded that there is no shame in asking for help when needed.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for prioritising our mental health and well-being. Continuous lockdowns and restrictions in almost every country in the world for varying lengths of time have greatly impacted our mental health and well-being. In Bangladesh, students were away from in-person school for about 18 months; young children, adolescents, and teenagers were not spared from the negative impacts on their well-being. The relevant stakeholders must work together to put measures in place that promote access to mental health services for all children. Research shows that when students have access to quality mental health services and support, they are more likely to be successful and productive, which leads them to do better in school and be positive, contributing members of society.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Buccaneer
5 Singer Tori
11 Maine national park
12 Mall come-on
13 Lease signer
14 Hearty entree
15 Magical
17 Track count
20 Theater worker
23 In the style of
24 Somber
26 Hoop attachment
27 Chiding sound
28 Football's Marino
29 Hour announcers, perhaps
31 Employ
32 Hawke of Hollywood
33 Gush
34 Come into view
37 Alan of "M*A*S*H"
39 Showy flowers
43 Inner being
44 "Raging Bull" star
45 Cocoon, for example
46 Norway neighbor

DOWN
1 Touch lightly
2 Road hazard
3 Sprinted
4 Second president
5 Minute
6 Puts away
7 Help out
8 Partnered
9 Flamenco cheer
10 Attach a patch
16 Elephant pair
17 Joust need
18 Alaskan native
19 Fixed, in a way
21 Make blank
22 Make fresh
24 Make amends
25 GI-enter-taining org.
30 Joe's veep
33 Paris sight
35 Frees (of)
36 Got larger
37 Nile serpent
38 Singer Rawls
40 Comic Caesar
41 Before, in poems
42 Heir, often

3-16

SUNDAY'S ANSWERS

BEETLE BAILEY — **BY MORT WALKER**

BABY BLUES — **BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT**