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INTEGRATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INTO EDUCATION: STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMING CURRICULUM AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper explores the pivotal role of education in fostering sustainable development. Education is defined not only as the acquisition of knowledge but as a process of self-development that enhances understanding, consciousness, and capabilities. Given the unsustainable trends of current advancements, the paper emphasizes the need for education to address and integrate sustainability principles. It argues that education should provide the necessary awareness and training to shape the minds of youth towards sustainability. The paper highlights how educators and educational institutions can evolve into essential tools for achieving sustainability by incorporating sustainable development practices into their curricula. It offers practical solutions for how institutions can integrate waste management and sustainable practices into their operations, thereby setting a tangible example for students and inspiring a broader cultural shift towards sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Education, Self-development, Environmental awareness, Curriculum integration, Waste management

INTRODUCTION

Education is known to be the process of imparting as well as receiving knowledge and the transmission of skills and information essential to every individual. It is the backbone of society and a crucial part of humanity. But education also has a huge hand in the overall development of any individual to enhance the understanding of the world within and around. It develops the consciousness and aids a person in recognizing their capabilities which can further help them to lead a quality and a civilised life. As Bertrand Russell points out in his essay, The Functions of a Teacher, "Teachers are more than any other class the guardians of civilization. Civilization in the more important sense, is a thing of the mind, not of material adjuncts to the physical side of living. It is a matter partly of knowledge, partly of emotion. So far as knowledge is concerned, a man should be aware of the minuteness of himself and

his immediate environment in relation to the world in time and space. He should see his own country not only as home, but as one among the countries of the world, all with an equal right to live and think and feel.” Thus, it becomes important for the educators to impart the appropriate knowledge, keeping in mind the world and how it works in reality.

We all have witnessed how since a few decades, for the sake of economic and technological progress, humans have continuously been exploiting nature and its resources. For our sake, it is the health of the environment that has taken the toll. Joyce Msuya, Acting Executive Director UN Environment in UN Environment’s Global Resources Outlook, 2019, Natural Resources for the Future We Want, prepared by The International Resource Panel mentions, “Global gross domestic product has doubled since 1970, enabling immense progress, and lifting of billions of people out of poverty. At the same time, this economic growth has been fuelled by a relentless demand for natural resources. At no point in time nor at any level of income, has our demand for natural resources wavered. Our consume and throwaway models of consumption have had devastating impacts on our planet. This report finds that 90 per cent of biodiversity loss and water stress are caused by resource extraction and processing. These same activities contribute to about half of global greenhouse gas emissions.”

The subsequent increase in the consumption of natural resources has further led to a major decline in the air quality and climate change due to the accumulation of greenhouse gases. A report published on 14 May, 2024 by the World Weather Attribution mentions, “From Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria, in the West, to Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines in the East, large regions of Asia experienced temperatures well above 40°C for many days. The heat was particularly difficult for people living in refugee camps and informal housing, as well as for outdoor workers. Heatwaves are arguably the deadliest type of extreme weather event and while the death toll is often underreported, hundreds of deaths have been reported already in most of the affected countries.”

It therefore becomes crucial for the integration of sustainable development and its principles in education for creating environmental awareness, skills, values and attitudes that are in line with sustainability and also for equal participation in decision making. The concept of sustainable development emerged out of the growing dependence of the world on natural resources which has a huge impact on the environment. And education is the only way

through which adequate training can be given to the upcoming generations. In the report by UNESCO on Education for Sustainability, it says how sustainable development is more of a moral percept than a scientific one as it depends on the notions of peace and human rights. It also says how sustainable development is the acknowledgement of the interdependence between human and nature and that none can exist without the other. Even though the idea around sustainability is a complex one, it is still achievable to some extent through constant reminders for informed decisions as one step is progress enough.

There are numerous ways to inculcate lessons about sustainable development in the curricula without putting a strain on the teachers as well as overburdening the students emotionally.

1. Adaptation of practices of sustainability throughout the educational institution:

It becomes crucial to integrate the practice of sustainability in a wider aspect for the students to understand how sustainability is not just an individual effort but also a team effort. The institution and the teachers can lead as examples for instance by installing particular dustbins for biodegradable and plastic waste, or by picking up litter, by installing solar panels to conserve energy and also by finding ways to preserve water.

Institutions can also spread the message by giving bus facilities to the staff so that they do not commute individually. It is crucial to understand that sustainability will not come only by saying but only through doing. They can also install water preservation models in the campus. It will even be better if parents along with students are engaged in various activities as students learn more through engagement. Engagement means not making anyone feel inferior if they are not able to comprehend but to aid them and making them feel involved.

2. By reducing unnecessary wastage and combining education with sustainable ideas:

There are many ways through which educators can limit the wastage of resources and integrate ideas that are sustainable in their teaching. They can give students assignments that do not require wastage based on paper use. In this modern world, students can learn more through the use of technology. We all understand how files and assignments further lead to a plethora of wastage of time as well as space.

3. By taking the Inter-disciplinary approach for overall learning:

Our generation has always been taught about the doom of the world due to its repeated actions but unfortunately were never given practical solutions to also deal with it. But as

educators of today, it becomes our duty to provide the students with these solutions by intermingling them into our lessons and through all the subjects. Lessons should not just be about cramming of facts but also information about the very real happenings around the world.

For instance, while teaching Geography and telling the students how Himalayas are essentially called the Young Mountains, it is also important tell them how the new infrastructure projects are leading to disasters that could have been averted. Usha Rai in the article String of disasters in Himalayas should prompt urgent reconsideration of big infrastructure projects says, “Despite repeated warning from geologists and environmentalists about the fragile status of the Himalayas and the need for utmost caution while constructing dams, roads, power plants or tunnels, haphazard construction for energy, increased revenue from tourism and pilgrimages continues unabated. In fact, with the steady decimation of forests, torrential rains and landslides becoming chronic, the government needs to relook at all its projects in the Himalayas and this includes the Char Dham Yatra route, the power projects and road widening for increased traffic.”

While also teaching the students about how sun and its radiation is required for a balanced ecosystem, it is also important to teach the students about how global warming can also lead to a disruption in these balances. In her article, What is The Albedo Effect And How Does it Impact Global Warming? Ines Gendre talks about the albedo effect and how the increase in deforestation and melting of the polar ice caps is leading to global warming and climate change.

While teaching History as a subject, students can be made aware of the policies and actions of the past that have led to the grave situation of global warming and the need for sustainability which can further aid them to make wise and enlightened decisions. For instance, they can be taught how imperialism led to the colonizers plundering and exploiting the natural resources of the colonized which further led to poverty and reduction in necessary resources for the colonized to survive.

4. Teaching that sustainability is a state of mind:

Sustainability is not just about behaviour but is a state of mind. It should not just be about building habits but it should become a lifestyle where students opt for more sustainable ways of doing everything in their lives. They should be taught that even if one person follows

the sustainable trend, they are doing their part and that it will further encourage people around them to do better as well.

Teaching the importance of peace and compassion to students will also aid the planet as it will lead to inculcation of tolerance and open mindedness towards one another as lack of compassion and intolerance has surely led to the crisis we are facing today.

5. By building a lifelong relationship with nature:

It is only by building a lifelong relationship with nature we can avert the never-ending problem of global warming and thus further create a generation that can overcome it.

The teachers can organise field trips where students are brought and taught about and in nature and thus create a personal connection with it. They can be taught in the playgrounds of the institution to make them feel one with nature. Students can be involved in various tree planting activities in and outside school.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is evident that education has a big impact in an individual's life and thus integrating sustainable development in education gives all of us a unique opportunity to rethink the choices we make in our everyday lives. Education for Sustainable Development is significant as it teaches our present and the future generations to make wise and informed decisions related to sustainability and also how they can bring new ways of sustainability to the table as education is all about teaching as well as learning. There are various methods through which sustainability can be taught to the students without exhaustive lectures and meaningless theories. They can be taught to reduce waste through waste management, the importance of team effort towards sustainability and how most importantly empathy and compassion is a way towards a healthy and a wealthy Earth. Thus, by inculcating such measures, education can bring about the much-needed cultural shift in the practices of sustainable operations and set a concrete example for the youth.

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