

IMPACT OF ADOPTING “SUSTAINABILITY” EDUCATION INTO CURRICULUM

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Formal education is the process of receiving or imparting structured and systematic instruction, of established knowledge, facts and figures, of encouraging students to experiment, enquire, collaborate and cooperate especially at educational institutions such as at schools or at universities. (Team MyGov, 2022)

The history of “formal education” dates back to about 2000 B.C. when Literature, Languages, Philosophy, Sociology, History, Geography, Mathematics, Social Sciences, Human Sciences, insights into Flora and Fauna and all forms of Art were an integral part of the curriculum. Great minds and great educators walked their knowledge-thirsty students down the paths of wisdom and enabled and empowered them to take giant steps in every conceivable field and thus facilitate the evolution of the world.

I often wonder and ask myself whether the curriculums offered in schools all over the world are enough to ensure the rise of the bar in the graph of progress in the 21st century.

Statistics have their own stories to tell. While only a century ago two billion people treaded the face of the earth, the human population has quadrupled to eight billion in the current world. Along with a much-increased life expectancy, the statistical data do not augur well for the future.

There is only one planet Earth! While Mother Earth has been unconditionally bountiful since time immemorial, the sustenance of the ever-growing population and its augmenting need and greed is the single greatest challenge today. In the garb of “development of technology”, Nature and her resources have been brutally used by thoughtless and selfish human activities.

“What about the sustenance of the future generations?”

“Would the future generations bear the harsh brunt of our follies?”

These are scary questions that responsible human beings are asking themselves. Hopefully, we will be able to answer them with our hearts.

The little phrase “Catch them young” emphasizes the importance of the formative years of the child when any experience, positive or negative is etched indelibly on the tabula rasa. It is, hence, of utmost importance to ensure today’s child has been imbibed with positive values, the responsibility of taking care of himself, his neighbors, his community, his country and the world that nurtures him. When the miniscule seed of love, care, pride and responsibility is

painstakingly planted in the young mind, the sapling sprouts up and grows into the benevolent tree, ready to improve the world. What better way to ensure that these values are carved into the minds and hearts of the children than an age appropriate curriculum with a bias towards sustainability?

In an effort to quench my own thirst, to find answers to my own query, I began researching on how schools were adapting and adopting curriculums to sensitize the young minds, to create the awareness of the importance of becoming responsible and caring citizens of this world.

Lo and behold, I took notice of activities that my school has been encouraging us to perform...teaching young children from the nearby village schools, who are economically less fortunate than I am, of painting the walls of their schools to make them cheerful, of planting saplings to make their homes more beautiful. These are activities that I have performed quite mechanically! For the first time I realized what my school has taught me, and I am proud and grateful.

I also realize that many schools in and around my neighborhood have adopted farms and encourage their students to cultivate organic vegetables, all the while teaching them about the dignity of labor, bounties of nature, conservation of soil, mechanical and chemical sciences and so much more.

I read about curriculums followed by schools in various parts of India and their immense effort to sensitize students about their indebtedness to nature and to the society which nurtures them.

Having watched videos of schools and the systems of education in various other countries like Finland, France and Japan, I opened my eyes to the fact that all over the world, eminent educators are dedicating themselves to make a difference in the world.

However, we all have a long way to go to achieve a better world.

I believe that the first step to achieve a sustainable and egalitarian world is to emphasize the incredibly important role of women in society. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". Down the ages, eminent women have proved their innate ability to be leaders, politicians, scientists, educationists, artists of various genres and multi-taskers...not mentioning their roles as mothers, wives, partners and homemakers...in shaping society.

I am immensely proud that some of the most challenging positions in the Indian Defense Services are held by women and their battalions look up to them with respect. It is important to include the duties, rights of women, equal opportunities, equal wages and so on, in the curriculum of schools. I find myself getting goosebumps when I listen to the song "I am a woman", brilliantly sung by Helen Reddy. (Brown, 2022)

What a difference it would make to this world if the motto "Each one, teach one" could be embedded in the minds of young students. A day of the week could be assigned when certain students could participate in programs of teaching, as assistants, private tutors or helpers of students less fortunate than themselves. (*Each One, Teach One*, n.d.)

The three Rs, "reduce, reuse, and recycle" need to become the mantra to be chanted every day, every hour.

Most architectural institutes encourage budding architects to design buildings that incorporate as much natural light as possible. Designing solar panels could be a wonderful idea too. The famous Gaudi's "Sagrada Familia" in Barcelona could be the best example ever and many projects could be based on this gorgeous piece of architecture.

Sustainability could mean different things in different geographical areas of the world. Various means of saving water included in the curriculum would make a great difference to society. The students, having been made aware of the immense scarcity of potable water in various parts of the world such as in South Africa, could be involved in poster making competitions illustrating the importance of conserving water.

They may be encouraged to harvest rainwater in barrels to water the plants in parks, schools and other areas. Crop rotation could be an excellent idea in areas which face a sparsity of agricultural land.

The inseparable relationship between paper, trees and finally climate is an important aspect of the curriculum. The ill effects of felling trees for personal gains, of hazards of indiscriminate deforestation are terrifying to students, once they read about them as part of their curriculum. Reading news items, listening to podcasts or watching video clips of the fury of Nature, in the garb of forest fires, landslides, floods, act as eyeopeners for them.

To reinforce the studies of Geography, Nature Study, Botany, Chemistry, visits to farms could be organized. Students of every age group enjoy outdoor activities as they dig, plant, prune, pluck and tend the farms and the produces. Lessons with illustrations and graphs on, perhaps, the ill effects of overusing soil, leaving it fallow become more meaningful when the students are actually involved in such activities. I cite the example of a day visit organized by my school for the primary classes to the Najafgarh Farms, not far from the city. There was much excitement as the little ones returned after having petted animals, fed ducks, plucked berries...the joy was infectious.

For older, city bred students, such visits could be the means for teaching the importance of mulching and composting by collecting vegetable waste and peels and treating them aptly, or the importance of planting trees for the purpose of rain precipitation, air purification, prevention of soil erosion.

Animated videos, films, projects, competitions and visits to various relevant places are always excellent methods of going beyond the textbooks and boxes.

The hazards of indiscriminate use of plastic on health and the environment could be stressed upon in the curriculum. Students could conduct researches or undertake projects to clear up forests, rivers and seas in an effort to save the environment, animals and marine life. The “Ocean Cleanup”, a non-profit organization of Netherlands or the “Namami Gange Programme”, launched by the government of India in 2014 are just a couple of examples of important topics of research by students. (*National Mission for Clean Ganga, 2024*)

The importance of biodiversity and the delicate balance of a food chain could be well explained with visits to zoos, aquariums, reptile houses and participating in organized safaris.

“Recycling”, “Upcycling”, creating “Wealth from waste” and “Sharing” are mantras of the modern world where couturiers are proud of their creations, sans wastage. The budding “Vinokilo” an indo-german house of couture makes special efforts to create gorgeous products keeping the mantras in mind. Another Indian startup company “Kitschbits”, flaunts its excellent upcycled items of home décor with pride. Young students could be encouraged to create greeting cards, decorative items, wall hangings, bags from old paper, cloth, pieces of used button and other objects.

The importance of research and usage of “renewable energy” when included in curriculum could hope to bring about life changing results. The study of tapping wind and water energy and supplying the same to distant locations when included as part of the school curriculum, will arouse compassion in the young hearts and will help them to understand that in order to create a self-sufficient sustained society, every person must be sensitized about their responsibilities of using energy thriftily as well as ensure economic progress.

Industrially developed countries are being requested time and again to reduce their load of indiscriminate production of articles in an effort to reduce the carbon imprint and the greenhouse effect looming over Earth. The Copernicus Climate Change Service, (C3S), has been steadily reporting and warning of the ever-increasing global warming. The business houses would help in protecting the world if only they took heed of the impending danger.

Business studies taught as a subject in school, could initiate students on the importance of setting up businesses which are environment friendly. An example would be locating factories

outside residential areas, making products ethically and with recyclable material, and running factories on minimum pollution fuels.

Science and Technical Studies classes could encourage researches and experiments on the usage of electrical vehicles. Renowned automobile companies like Tesla, Toyota and Tata are examples to be reckoned with.

The impact of adopting a curriculum in which “sustainability” plays a pivotal role can not only bring great rewards but also is of utmost importance. It affects the very core of human existence. It ensures the survival of the human race along with its flora and fauna.

Films on the evolution of the human race from prehistoric to the modern day keep students enthralled as they watch with bated breath and absorb facts of the world then and now. Viewing such films would cause the sensitive minds to wonder whether the “evolution” and “development” of the world is positively proportional or inversely proportional to “development of technology” and whether it would be a cause for the potential extinction of the human race.

It is needless to say that for the past two to three decades, educators and policy makers have become increasingly aware of the immense need to weave in theoretical and practical knowledge of “sustainability” into active day to day curriculum with the mission to create awareness among people, old and young, of the hazards of over exploitation and misuse of Nature and her resources and to be able to leave behind a healthier world for the generations to come.

While there is innumerable research, studies and conscientious efforts to save the Earth, there is still a very long way to go. It is only when every single person on this Earth is sensitized and dedicates himself to save the environment, the world, will the Sun of the healed world emerge. That will be the impact of adopting “Sustainability” education into the curriculum.

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