

Environmental Education through Media

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Abstract: *The scope of education has expanded from its formal definition to include various media which have potential to inform, create awareness and educate. This is important particularly in the context of developing countries where formal education still remains a luxury. Since environmental conservation is an important goal of development, all media have been reined in to create awareness and provide education. The large scale degradation of the environment requires enlightened citizen action to check the problem. Educational institutions also have a role to play in this regard. A combination of formal environmental education in schools and media education through various channels can be an effective strategy in sensitizing people towards environmental issues. A study was conducted to explore the impact of environmental education in schools through an experimental method. 150 students of classes 8th, 9th and 10th were shown educational programs over a period of three months and reports of pre test and post test of the experiment were analyzed to assess their increase in awareness of environmental issues.*

Keywords: Education, Environment, Media, Environmental awareness

1. Introduction

An intricate web of messages and information woven by the media threatens to overpower the traditional learning method, often accomplishing the task. Education is no longer a water tight compartment closed in on its integral components but is rather a fluid concept, affecting and being affected by the variegated media. The elements of media are not mere vehicles of communication; they often go one step further by conditioning thought and determining behavior. Apart from the power of messages they convey, media gain a tremendous momentum owing to their emotional content, informal setting, and ability to create a blend of education and entertainment and the refreshing effect they impart to education. While the schools have been reduced to isolated hillocks in the sea of media information, it is time to use an effective mix of both to achieve an unprecedented velocity in converting an information poor people to more aware, educated and liberated literates. This is especially true of developing countries, where learning through a formal education system is a luxury. These countries have a long way to go before the expensive school system can be utilized to spread awareness through its rigid and formal system of education to a majority of its working class.

The Comenius concept of school as adopted today remains a closed concentration of human beings for learning in a systematized manner, often within the boundaries of a rigid syllabus and limited to the confines of the instructor's experience. The media messages in contrast are available to anyone, anywhere, encompassing a wide range of topics and enriched by the participation of a number of resource persons. Hence the task now remains to build up a coherent relationship between education and the media, evolve a national plan of action, and balance instruction through the two means.

“Thought should be given more systematically than in the past to ways and means of combining organically and harmoniously the objectives, activities, production and methods of implementation of both education and of

contemporary communication technologies. In the years to come, all those who are keenly concerned with the problems of education and communication and are aware of their interdependence will be seeking to build bridges between the two reports and to institute a practical operational symbiosis between the two cultures, that of the school and that of the media each with its own individuality and without order of preference” [1]

2. Environment and Education

Learning is not confined to the institutions of education protected in its virgin state by teachers and administrators. Rather, it is a dynamic process which happens all the time in the life of a person, not being restricted to his/her formal school years. Since learning takes place everywhere, the environment and the process of learning are wedded to one another. The quality of the environment determines the learning opportunities available therein. Awareness requires education, and the awareness of environmental problems requires environmental education. It is a two way process – education can provide the impetus for improving the environment and an improved environment can provide enhanced learning opportunities.

Environmental education is an integrated process which deals with man's interrelationships with his natural and man-made surroundings, including the relation of population growth, pollution resource allocation and depletion, conservation technology and urban rural planning to the total human environment. Environmental education is a study of factors influencing ecosystems, mental and physical health, living and working conditions, decaying cities and population. Environmental education is intended to promote among citizens awareness and understanding of the environment, our relationship to it and concerned responsible action necessary to assure our survival and improve the quality of life. (United States Senate Report on Environmental education Act).

The doomsday ecologists point out that overpopulation, vanishing of wildlife, overgrazed ranges turning into deserts, forests to barren lands, erosion, pollution of land, water and air, and a host of other issues only point out to the impending disaster that we have triggered off. It is awareness, reason and rational action that offer a visible alternative to the continued misuse of the environment - a case for environmental education. The solution surely rests with the government and the schools themselves, which must implement the National Environmental Policy with more vigor. But the government ultimately depends on aware citizens to indicate the direction and implementation of public policy.

Environmental protection has not yet received due attention from the citizens, especially in developing countries, and a public policy on it will only be implemented successfully if the citizens take up the issue in all its intensity. The solution to present day environmental crisis does not lie either with the government or with the scientists but with a well educated citizenry. It is only an aware citizenry that can play an important role in environmental conservation. The immediate issue is to replace the short term attitudes to the environment which view it as a commodity to be exploited, with attitudes that look to sustainable rather than maximal level of progress and development. The route to framing a long term sustainable attitude to the environment invariably lies with education. The media must therefore, through its popular reach inform people about environmental issues, relationships and help them to sort out facts from an emotional rhetoric.

Environmental education should lead to the desire of directing one's activities towards improving the quality of the environment. It should enable the individual to perceive and solve the existing problems. In this regard it is the schools and colleges which have a very important role to play as they contain a more mature class of students on the one hand and well developed faculties for research and development of the environment on the other. They are also training grounds for both the future environmental experts who will deal with the problems in the field and future academicians who will be teachers of environmental education in primary and secondary schools. But it often becomes a bit too difficult to achieve this multidisciplinary objective.

Clay Schoenfeld [2] underscored the problem way back in the nineteen seventies as follows:

“If there is any agency capable of an objective role in determining the country's basic land and water problems, it is possibly the University. Yet the ordinary posture of a University may not be optimum for the task, for the University have become composed of highly individualistic professors organized into departmental enclaves and marked increasingly by the breakup of knowledge in little pieces”. The situation has not seen much improvement since then.

Though the situation of environmental education may look dismal, there is reason for optimism. Many of the colleges and Universities have started environmental education either as part of the formal curriculum or as an informal

component. They represent the awareness of the problem that is the first step towards the solution. Overnight changes cannot be made in teaching and learning. The fact that the first step towards change has been taken in schools all over the country towards the promotion of environmental education is in itself encouraging. Schools which have taken up measures to promote environmental education should involve students in the practical aspects of environmental education and training. They must stimulate them to participate in immediate and simple projects such as cleaning up their neighborhood, parks and streets. Academic education is essential, yet it must be combined with practical projects. As long as students are working and discovering themselves, they can appreciate the nuances of their learning better.

3. Communication Support for Environmental Education

Communication media offer a tremendous potential in making people aware of their environment and the associated issues, not only in schools but in all walks of life. The elements of media have reached people from all walks of life. They have reached millions of people with messages concerning the environment and have helped to place environmental conservation and improvement among top national and international concerns. They are also most effective in teaching school children and out of the school population. Media can foster environmental awareness and encourage people's participation in issues of its conservation. It has the potential to create community forums on environmental issues. Local projects, national trends and the latest communication technologies all can set the pace for a better understanding of the environment.

“The goals of environmental education programs in media should be to provide the learner with a direct experience in the real environment, so that he may develop an awareness and appreciation of the factors and interrelationships operating in the environment, leading to an ecological understanding of man's oneness with his environment and how he both affects it and is affected by it. Programs should encourage the learner to test the values of the society as well as his own, so that he may ultimately select those values in which he believes and which are relevant to him in dealing with the environment. He must be free to investigate alternatives and choose among them. Based on his knowledge and beliefs, the learner should be guided to make rational decisions leading to constructive action on environmental problems. Environmental education programs should seek to develop a commitment both towards the environment and towards learning that will last beyond the years of schooling and will form a lifelong concern [3].

Keeping this in context, an experiment was conducted with 150 children of classes 8th, 9th and 10th of an English medium school in the town of Tirupati. The sample that was randomly selected is as follows.’

Table 1: Gender wise and class wise distribution of sample in the final study

S. No	Class	Total
1.	8th	50
2.	9th	50
3.	10th	50
Total		150

In the first stage of the research, the tool of research was developed. The tool (a questionnaire) contained 60 questions that required answers to questions related to green house effect, air, water and soil pollution, clean energy use and methods to combat environmental degradation.

The knowledge of children in these various areas was divided into high, medium and low. Children who answered up to 20 questions correctly were categorized as low in environmental awareness, those who answered up to 40 questions correctly were categorized as medium in environmental awareness and those who answered up to 60 questions correctly were categorized as high in environmental awareness.

The children were then shown documentaries on every Saturday of the month for 3 months on various issues related to the environment. A post test was then conducted with the same questionnaire used in pre test to analyze any change in the improvement of their knowledge of the environment and related issues. The results of the pre test are as follows:

S. No	Class	Low	Medium	High	Total
1.	8th	32	12	6	50
2.	9th	31	16	3	50
3.	10th	30	17	3	50
Total		93	45	12	150

The results of the post test are as follows:

S. No	Class	Low	Medium	High	Total
1.	8th	3	3	44	50
2.	9th	10	2	38	50
3.	10th	4	4	42	50
Total		17	9	124	150

It is clear from the tables that there was a substantive increase in the knowledge of the environment related issues after the various programs were screened for the students over a period of three months. There was a 51% decrease in students with low awareness on environment related issues, 3% decrease in students with medium awareness on environment related issues and 75% increase in students with high awareness on environment related issues.

The study clearly indicates that students who viewed the programs on environment related issues had gained a higher awareness on various issues related to the environment. The study indicates that children in schools if shown programs on environment related issues will develop a greater awareness on these issues. Thus schools devoted to the cause of promoting environmental education through the media is the need of the hour. In the long term the crusade towards the establishment of a nationwide environmental classroom through media may lead to the development of an environmental religion which will involve recognition of non

economic environmental issues as factor in development and nurture of human identity. Therefore what is needed today is a whole lot of dedicated “environmental communicators” who can help shape attitudes of children towards conserving the bountiful nature and prevent its many hazards.

As Meining [4] demands:

“We need a much larger body of citizens whose eyes have been opened to see their surroundings with far greater appreciation and who thereby are not only enriched by what is good but appalled by that which is bad, and refuse to countenance the continued despoliation of their surroundings. The media have an important role to play in environmental education, conservation and sustainable development.

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