Involving Students in Attaining Environmental Sustainability

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Various environmental problems pose a threat to environmental sustainability, among which global warming, urban air pollution, water shortages, environmental noise, and loss of biodiversity. Many of these problems are rooted in human behavior (DuNann Winter & Koger, 2004; Gardner & Stern, 2002; Vlek & Steg, 2007), and can thus be managed by changing the relevant behavior so as to reduce its environmental impacts. Changes in human behavior are believed to be needed because technical efficiency gains resulting from, for example, energy efficient appliances, home insulation, and water saving devices tend to be overtaken by consumption growth (Midden, Kaiser, & McCalley, 2007). Moreover, physical and technical innovations imply behavior changes as well because individuals need to accept and understand them, buy them, and use them in proper ways.

In the school, students are expected to attain development in all aspects – physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. This can be attained by allowing the students to learn not just the concepts and theories but also the practical and moral applications of these theories and concepts. In fact, learning becomes more meaningful if students learn to realize the value in their everyday lives of those theories and concept.

The idea of environmental education being injected to students should be in a way that they will not only learn to define key concepts like nature and environment but rather be able to appreciate the importance of those words. That’s why the most widely accepted notion among scholars in the field of environmental education is that the ultimate goal of environmental education is to influence behavior and to develop active citizenship.

In a study entitled, “Environmental Attitudes and Environmental Behavior-Which is the Horse and Which Is the Cart?” by Efrat Eilam and Tamar Trop, they said that the term “behavior” is mostly intuitively understood and most psychological and sociological research into behavior has not suggested definitions of the term. However, in the context of their studies, they understand the term as any active responsiveness to current environmental issues, believed to be pro-environmental by the person performing the response.

In one of the environmental journals, Pro-environmental behavior is defined as referring to behavior that harms the environment as little as possible, or even benefits the environment.

To be encourage, and engage students to develop pro-environmental behaviors, the Journal of Environment Psychology identified Four Key Issues For Engaging Pro- Environmental Behavior.

These are:
- Which behaviors should be changed to improve environmental quality?
- Which factors determine the relevant behavior?
- Which interventions could be best applied to encourage pro environmental behavior?
- Which are the effects of interventions?

Environmental problems are not just psychological problems; they are also ecological, technological, and socio-cultural problems. Directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, everyone is involved in the creation of the environmental problems that’s why everyone should also be involved in the formulation of solutions.

If everyone behaves responsibly with environmental sustainability in mind, the society will perform sustainably. If students at their young age are encouraged to get involve in attaining environmental sustainability, it is without a doubt that they will become magnificent team workers/players.
The following are some suggested activities that teachers can spearhead so that students can get involved with environmental sustainability:

A. Organize a movement/society/association/club
   - Involve students, teachers, and parents to actively participate in a civic organization that will expose them to issues and concerns about the environment.

B. Conduct Training/ Seminars/ Seminars/ Conferences/ Symposium on the issues and concerns of the environment
   - Develop awareness on the issues and concerns of the environment:
     - Establish linkages to agencies/ departments/ organizations that will strengthen their commitment to perform pro-environmental behavior.

C. Conduct various contests
   - Initiate projects/ activities that will allow students/ teachers/ parents to think and research on projects that will help them develop pro-environmental behavior.
   - Implement projects that will actively engage them to promote pro-environmental behaviors;
   - Motivate students, teachers and parents to continue exploring ideas and activities that will give benefits to the environment eventually instilling in them the positive effects of practicing pro-environmental behaviors.

D. Organize Monitoring Group and Conduct Research
   - Follow-up on the sustainability of the projects to ensure long term implementation to come-up with the best way to develop pro-environmental behaviors;
   - Come-up with researched-based recommendations on how to develop pro-environmental behaviors.

Reference: