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EXTENDING HORIZONS : ECOPEDAGOGY AND ECOLITERACY IN ESL CLASS ROOMS

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ABSTRACT

For the last several decades, nature and environment have always been a source of human reflection and investigation, as ecological crisis is already upon us, the looming environmental catastrophe worldwide and the breathtaking arrogance with which powerful economic forces and their political hirelings miseducate, mislead and misdirect any honest accounting of the mess we are in. Education is a very powerful medium through which we can shock the world awake and shake the world from the deep ,deep and sometimes, wilful sleep of denial. Teachers, in general and ESL teachers specifically, are always concerned with the kind of material they present before their students. It can be claimed that the use of literature and language encourages more thoughtful and purposeful learning. Eco-pedagogy and eco-literacy will change the way we look at education and struggle in and for democracy. As such, the paper will deliberate the reasons behind incorporating eco-literacy and eco-pedagogy as a good source in ESL classrooms.

Key Words: Eco-pedagogy, eco-literacy, ESL classrooms.

Introduction

Several decades of debates and discussions about "our common future" left some "ecological footprints", not only in the economic field, but also in the ethical, political, and educational ones, to guide us on a possible path to face the challenges of the 21st century. Sustainability has become the dominant issues in the beginning of this century ,with impact not only on our planet, but also on the ability to re-educate our thinking and all our senses, with further possibility to rekindle our hope of a future with dignity for all. The sustainability values have terrific educational potential: the preservation of the environment depends on an ecological conscience and shaping this conscience depends on education. It is here that eco-pedagogy and eco-literacy comes to play a major role. It is a pedagogy to promote learning as the "meaning of the things from everyday life" as stated by Francisco Guttierrez and Cruz Prado.

Education is connected with space and time where relationships between the human being and the environment actually take place. They happen primarily at the emotional level, much more than at the conscious level. Thus, hey happen much more in our sub-conscious; we do not realize them and many times, we do not know, hoe they happen. So, eco-education is necessary to bring them to the conscious level and eco-education requires a pedagogy. These days we need an eco-pedagogy and eco-education. We need it precisely, because, without this

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pedagogy to re-educate men and women, we can no longer speak of earth as a home, as a burrow, for the 'animal-man' as Paulo Freire said. It is in this context that eco-pedagogy and eco-literacy popped up---and is still, in its infancy today—having been initially called "pedagogy for sustainable development", but has now gone beyond its initial purpose.

Eco-pedagogy is not just another pedagogy among many other pedagogies. Eco-pedagogy is an outgrowth of the developments of Critical Pedagogy, a body of educational ideas and practices influenced by the philosopher-educationist Paulo Freire. Eco-pedagogy seeks the possibility of the creation of a new ecologically sustainable civilization and see it in the fundamental democratic and planetary reconstruction of educational systems. Eco-pedagogy stems from real problems, contradictions and perspectives of life. It emerges as a multi-dimensional and planetary project whose roots can be found in the South and the First Earth Summit in Rio De Janeiro , Brazil in 1992. As Moacir Gadotti writes, it represents a pedagogical, social and political movement, a curricular approach and an integral project for a New Civilization that embraces an "Earth's paradigm", contrasting to the profound anthropocentric paradigm of thought , culture, education, economy, politics, life and future which western man and capitalist civilization try to globalise it. It is a new way of perceiving life and the world, a new way of building new future.

Eco-literacy is a term used by an American educator David.W. Orr and a physicist Fritjof Capra in the 1990's in order to introduce into educational practice, the value and well-being of the Earth and its eco-systems. It is a way of thinking about the world in terms of its interdependent, natural and human systems, including a considerations of the consequences of human actions and interactions within the natural context. Ecological literacy equips students with the knowledge and competencies necessary to address complex and urgent environmental issues in an integrated way and enables them to shape a sustainable society that does not undermine the eco-systems upon which it depends. The core aspects of ecological literacy are

1. Principles of living systems
2. Design inspired by nature
3. Systems thinking
4. Ecological paradigm and the transition to sustainability
5. Collaboration, Community building and citizenship

Ecological Literacy in a Global Issue Course

The Centre for Eco-literacy suggests the following principles for the integration of ecological literacy.

1. Ecological literacy is not an additional concept or subject to be added to the content of the course. It may be seen rather as a perspective or way of thinking through which any selected topic or issue may be viewed.
2. It is useful to focus on guiding fundamental questions, which may recur and open up conceptual links across disciplines {ex: science, geography, anthropology , politics, history, language, the arts, sociology, health etc.)
3. The conceptual links that tie subjects together help make learning more effective since they lead to learning that is more readily applicable to the real world.
4. Taking a hopeful, proactive approach and designing learning activities that engage students in potential solutions are important when teaching about environmental issues.

Teaching Ecological Literacy often involves the following:

1. Weaving ecological and systems approach into the existing curriculum in a coherent way that builds student knowledge over time. (The focus should be on ecological concepts and their relationships to each other—both the big picture and the details—and to the active preservation of the ecosphere rather than incremental inclusion of ecological concepts).
2. Building teacher capacity in the areas of ecology and systems thinking.
3. Learning from nature through immersion in the real world (nature and communities) and a deep knowledge of particular places.
4. Acknowledgement of place-based and experiential outdoor learning as essential to the cognitive development, health and well-being of children.
5. Cultivation of a sense of wonder, creativity and compassion for nature and for community.
6. Transformation of the school / college into a living laboratory of buildings and processes that teach children about their interconnectedness to nature and their communities.
7. Linkages to higher education resources and schools that allow students to continue the development of their ecological literacy.

Environment includes the observable physical, biological, historical and social milieu in which man lives. Environmental teaching is the process of clarifying concepts and fostering values for appreciating the inter-relatedness of every element in this world. It is both a style and subject-matter of education, with its roots on the natural, technological, socio-economic, political, historical, cultural, moral and aesthetic contexts of environment. It is a process of learning about the environment using environment as the medium with the aim to retard the deterioration of environment. Thus we can say that it is an education about environment through environment and for environment. It begins with using environment as a medium of learning and includes all that a student learns and appreciates. With environment as the content, through experiences associated

with the natural, physical and social dimensions of environment, education aims at developing environmental ethics for a balanced, healthy environment.

At the Secondary level, the objectives of environmental education are related to the development of the affective domain. Encyclopedia of Environmental Education has listed the following objectives under the affective domain.

1. To help acquire interest in the flora and fauna of the near and also the distant.
2. To appreciate the gift of nature.
3. To value the cleanliness and purity of our environment.
4. To help evince interest in the people and problems of the community and society.
5. To show tolerance towards different castes, race and religions and culture.
6. To love the neighbours and value mankind as a whole.
7. To value equity, liberty, fraternity, truth and justice.

The objectives related to the development of skills and abilities are:

1. To help develop observational skills and notice details usually not seen by an untrained eye.
2. To help develop skills required for making discriminations in forms, shape, sound, touch, habits and habitats.
3. To help develop ability to draw unbiased inferences and conclusions.
4. To help develop ability to make meaningful suggestions.

Environmental Behaviour in ESL classrooms

Development of responsible environmental behavior for the maintenance and improvement of our environment and in turn, out life itself can be promoted in the language classrooms. Learning of a second language like English will develop open-mindedness to accept life as such, to respect others and their cultures, to understand and appreciate everything in this world and to value whatever is good. The approach to teaching English in our school can be made effective if teachers of English follow strategies for realization of objectives under cognitive, psycho-motor and affective domains. A structured inter-disciplinary approach is necessary to get a way through and be imprinted in the child's mind. Language, be it piece of prose, poem, story or any type of composition can be taught through environment with natural and man-made surroundings along with the development of awareness, interest, tolerance of differences, satisfaction derived from achievement, desire to improve and active production of cross-cultural differences.

The most appropriate strategy for imparting environmental education should be selected by the language teacher. As the first step, relevant topics are to be identified. As analysis of the content with a view to find out the objective is to be followed by selection of an approach

to device learning experiences. Methods of teaching can vary depending on the immediate environment and other factors. Social relevance, utility, personal involvement of students and emotional commitment are to be taken into account before choosing a strategy. Language acquisition can be through social living and effective participation in day-to-day activities by incorporating appropriate themes, vocabulary items and patterns. The teacher has to keep in mind the objectives of environmental education when he selects methods and techniques in his classrooms. Through several activities, learners can be exposed to environmental problems. A team approach based on the need, level and availability of resources will be more effective in developing in the receptive minds sensitivity towards environment. Discussions, debates, dialogues, exhibitions, self-analysis etc are some of the techniques that a teacher of English can adopt to make his teaching pleasurable.

Conclusion

Think of the overtired, restless mind of the 21st C man in his secluded recesses, amidst his mournful thought, craving for the divine touch of the green carpets , the azure sky, the pious rivers, and the melody of the wings. Will the vital spark of heaven once again bless our mother Earth with all her treasures ? To put an end to man's inadvertence, there is dire need to make every individual environmentally conscious ecologically literate. Of course, eco-pedagogy and eco-literacy are the sine-qua-non for environmental protection. Future generation should be made to act as stewards in partnership with nature and to adorn Nature as she is the uplifter of the human spirit. Let us hope that we could once again ramble with the drumming rocks, the tuning wind and the singing sea and be entranced with the melody of Nature.

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