Environmental Ethics Education as a Tool for the Prevention of Environmental Problems in the Community

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Abstract
Today environmental problems have reached very important and serious levels. Destroyed nature and contaminated earth by people day to day reveals this reality in the best way. People are responsible for the creation of this negative picture. However, people are dependent on their environment for living like all other creatures and also helpless against the environmental problems caused by themselves. Deterrent laws and fines are also inadequate for the prevention of environmental problems. People need to be conscious about the environment more than anything else. In this respect environmental ethics education will be able to guide them. The community members, becoming more conscious by environmental ethics education can question their relationship with the environment again and behave more environmentally friendly. For sustainability in the earth, people should learn how to behave ethically towards other creatures and nature. With this theoretical study, the importance of environmental ethics education for the community within the context of non-formal education will be discussed.

Key Words: Environmental Ethics Education, Community, Sustainability, Environmental
        Consciousness, Non-formal Education

1. Introduction

Today our old Earth has many environmental problems such as pollution, desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, global warming, ozone depletion, biodiversity loss, greenhouse effect, acid rains, global climatic changes etc. These problems have become a big threat for the future of all living things. Human is responsible for this threat. Irresponsible human activities towards the nature and the exploitation of the natural resources for the sake of human good are the real causes of this disaster. For the safer and healthier tomorrows, human should change his behaviors and leave all his harmful activities against the nature. Otherwise, there will not be an earth to live in the future. Something should be done immediately to make human aware of keeping environment clean and safe. Here, education is a key concept because through education, behaviors can be shaped in desirable way. If nature love is given to the community members through education, human-nature relations willl be better in the future. Environmental ethics will be able to guide to the efforts made in this
regard. Harmony between the human and nature will be provided by environmental ethics education because by means of environmental ethics people will be able to understand the real value of the nature. With the help of mass media, NGOs and the

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individual efforts, environmental awareness can be given through environmental ethics education to the members from every level of the community.

2. Objectives of Environmental Education

Large size of negative impact on the nature of human is a fact known by everybody today. Despite this, people continue to damage nature severely. However it has long been feared that human activity is causing massive extinctions. Despite increased efforts at conservation, it has not been enough and biodiversity losses continue. The costs associated with deteriorating or vanishing ecosystems will be high. In some way or form, almost all cultures have recognized the importance of nature and its biological diversity for their societies and have therefore understood the need to maintain it. Yet, power, greed and politics have affected the precarious balance (Shah, 2014). The real reason behind all these and the other global environmental problems is anthropocentric thinking.

Anthropocentrism refers to a human-centered, or "anthropocentric," point of view. In philosophy, anthropocentrism can refer to the point of view that humans are the only, or primary, holders of moral standing. Anthropocentric value systems thus see nature in terms of its value to humans (Padwe, 2014). Despite anthropocentric value systems, there are also people struggling for the solution of environmental problems in the community.

Many well intentioned people work hard to solve environmental problems but most of these well intentioned people solve very few environmental problems. Often, in fact, their efforts make the situation worse rather than better. Here are some of the main reasons why (Hughes, 2007: 3-4):

- They do not understand how they and others think and approach problems.
- They spend too little time ferreting out the real problem, issues and challenges. When participants fail to agree on the essence of the real problem, they wind up trying to solve different problems.
- They enter into discussions with preconceived solutions in mind. When this happens, success is measured by whether or not their preconceived solution is implemented, not by whether the true, underlying issue is addressed.
- They lack true open-mindedness. They are unable or unwilling to examine their own perspectives and arguments as critically as they examine those of others.
- They fixate on finding the right answer. They try to find one mega, do everything solution to a problem rather breaking the problem into specific challenges and solving the challenges one at a time.
- They fail to recognize that perspectives can be shaped by very different forces-reason, emotion, faith, culture, science- and thet no single force trumps the others in value or importance.
- They do not follw a problem-solwing approach (road map) that both insiders and outsiders can follow and understand. When others can't see how a touchy problem is being addressed, they inariably distrust the ultimate solution.

In order to solve environmental problems, primarily people should be educated about environmental protection and improvement. It can be carried out by environmental education. Environmental education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the

necessary skills and expertise to address these challenges, and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action (National Environmental Education Advisory Council, 1998). Acording to the decleration of Tbilisi Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education which was declared in 1978, objectives of environmental education are as follows (Hungerford and Volk, 1990: 8-9):

- **Awareness:** To help social groups and individuals acquire an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems,
- **Sensitivity:** To help social groups and individuals gain a variety of experiences in, and acquire a basic understanding of, the environment and its associated problems,
- **Attitudes:** To help social groups and individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment and motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection,
- **Skills:** To help social groups and individuals acquire skills for identifying and solving environmental problems,
- **Participation:** To provide social groups and individuals with an opportunity to be actively involved at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems.

All these objectives are for making people environmentally responsible citizens. By using these objectives an environmentally responsible citizen might be defined as one who has an awareness and sensitivity to the total environment and its allied problems, a basic understanding of the environment and its allied problems, feelings of concern for the environment and motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection, skills for identifying and solving environmental problems, active involvement at all levels in working toward resolution of environmental problems (Hungerford and Volk, 1990: 9). A comprehensive environmental education aims at developing the required environmental knowledge, forming the desired environmental attitudes, fostering the appropriate environmeatal values and above all the nurturing of well accepted norms of behaviors for the conduct of individuals, societies, communities, nations and world all around (Rai and Sharma, 2011: 35). Environmental education gives people the chance to gain awareness of the consequences of their actions. They will gain a better understanding and thinking towards environment. They began to think globally, holistically and ethically about all the members of the earth and see themselves as part of whole, members of the nature but not the owners. In order to give people such a perspective through environmental education, environmental ethics is of great importance.

3. The Concept of Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics is theory and practice about appropriate concern for, values in, and duties regarding the natural world (Rolston, 2003: 517). Its task is not only to justify in general terms if and why the protection of nature is morally right. It also should take into consideration all relevant arguments in concrete weighing processes and evaluate them, so that acceptable decisions for all involved people or parties are facilitated. That means, environmental ethics should evaluate decisions and actions relevant to nature conservation (Haider and Jax, 2007: 2560). By classical accounts, ethics

is people relating to people in justice and love. Environmental ethics starts with human concerns for a quality environment, and some think this shapes the ethic from start to finish. Others hold that, beyond inter-human concerns, values are at stake when humans relate to animals, plants, species and ecosystems. According to their vision, humans ought to find nature sometimes morally considerable in itself, and this turns ethics in new directions (Rolston, 2003: 517).

The field of environmental ethics concerns human beings' ethical relationship with the natural environment. While numerous philosophers have written on this topic throughout history, environmental ethics only developed into a specific philosophical discipline in the 1970s. This emergence was no doubt due to the increasing awareness in the 1960s of the effects that technology, industry, economic expansion and population growth were having on the environment. The development of such awareness was aided by the publication of two important books at this time. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring,* first published in 1962, alerted readers to how the widespread use of chemical pesticides was posing a serious threat to public health and leading to the destruction of wildlife. Of similar significance was Paul Ehrlich's 1968 book, *The Population Bomb,* which warned of the devastating effects the spiraling human population has on the planet's resources. Of course, pollution and the depletion of natural resources have not been the only environmental concerns since that time: dwindling plant and animal biodiversity, the loss of wilderness, the degradation of ecosystems, and climate change are all part of issues that have implanted themselves into both public consciousness and public policy over subsequent years (Cochrane, 2007). These serious environmental concerns led to ethical thinking to the natural world and people bagun to judge their own behavior towards nature. Here, environmental ethics has guided people.

Given that environmental ethics reflects the standards for action, there seems logic in understanding the determinants of behavior. Furthermore, it should include experiences wherein the individuals get the opportunity to discuss their own norms and the normative beliefs and thereby harmonize their own beliefs with the normative beliefs. Knowledge, attitude and individuals' moral stands and the social and moral values interact together to determine the behavior of an individual (Rai and Sharma, 2011: 35). There are three different value positions in environmental ethics that divides its terrain broadly in three main parts (Environmental Ethics Resource Center, 2008):

Human Centered: In a human centered environmental ethics, concerns about nature are based on the value it may have for humans in some way or another. In this context, nature (or the environment) is seen as something with instrumental value. Its value lies in the use that humans can make of it. Intrinsic value, that is value that something has in and of itself, is, for various reasons, reserved for humans alone. From this point of departure, different interpretations can be given of the use value of nature. One of these assumes that nature is nothing but a free and limitless source of energy and raw material, so that we, accordingly, need not to restrain us in our resource use in any way whatsoever. Conservationists, however, emphasize that there are limits to our resources, and that we should use it wisely, i.e. sustainably. Preservationists argue that some parts of nature, particularly pristine wilderness should be left to function with minimal human intrusion, and that non-consumptive use of it as wild-life sanctuaries, for example, where

we can go to contemplate and enjoy the beauty and wonder of nature should be the only activities allowed.

Nature Centered: In a nature centered environmental ethics, the intrinsic value of some parts of non-human nature, or the whole of nature is emphasized. Within this context, some bio-centrists argue that life itself should be our central object of moral respect, regardless of whether it manifests itself in an individual living entity, a species, or in a population of species living together and interacting with one another. Some eco-centered thinkers, on the other hand, takes it one step further and claim that ecosystems and all of its components, including the non-living and inorganic parts there-of should be the unit of concern of environmental ethics. For others within this domain, the biosphere and all the earth systems enabling it to exist is that which has intrinsic value and should thus be conserved for its own sake.

Radical: Radical positions in environmental ethics argue that people should discover and address the root causes of environmental problems. Different ideas about the nature of these root causes exist among deep ecologists, ecofeminists, social ecologists and bio-regionalists, but to some extent they all agree that addressing it will require a fundamental transformation of structures and institutions in society (Environmental Ethics Resource Center, 2008).

People aren't separate from the rest of nature, they are part of it and belong to the world not own it, so they should adopt an environmentally friendly lifestyle. Minds of people should be changed and they should be given ethical perspectives towards nature. This can be achieved by environmental ethics education.

4. Importance of Environmental Ethics Education For the Community Members

Education, including formal education, public awareness and training should be recognized as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential. Education is critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public participation in decision-making. Both formal and non-formal education are indispensable to changing people's attitudes so that they have the capacity to assess and address their sustainable development concerns (UNESCO, 2002).

Education is a basic factor in the development of communities and countries. Educated people are conscious people. Especially for environmental consciousness in the community people should be educated. This consciousness can be given to the community members through environmental ethics education. According to Linnanvuori (2013); solving global environmental problems requires a major change of values. As relates to environmental education, worldview, ethics and spiritual issues are important elements.

Environmental decision making by governments, businesses and individuals cannot be separated from ethics. For example, consider the issue of climate change. Decisions that we make today at the policy level and as individual consumers of energy and natural resources will affect all of humankind for generations to come. As pressures upon the Earth's natural systems increase, more and more people, young and old alike, are realizing that environmental issues concern everyone and that they cannot be resolved by technical means only. They understand that environmental management also rests on questions of ethics

(UNEP, 2006). Therefore, giving awareness to the community members through environmental ethics education can solve environmental problems permanently.

Conclusion

Human causes global environmental problems such as ozone depletion, climate change and loss of biodiversity because of rapid population growth and excessive consumption of natural resources. Despite this, human continues to destroy. However, carrying capacity of nature is limited. Because of unconscious behaviors of people towards nature, our old Earth and the lives of future generations are at great risk. People should internalize a lifestyle in harmony with nature immediately. Otherwise, future generations will not be so lucky. In this respect, environmental ethics education can lead community members. They will have environmentally friendly behaviors after environmental ethics education because they will have ethical perspectives towards nature.

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