

**ECO CLUBS AND ECO-SENSITIVITY**

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**Introduction**

While everyone, everywhere, asserts the importance of 'learning to live sustainably,' environment remains a peripheral issue in the formal schooling system. Eco club (National Green Corps) is a forum in schools through which students can reach out to influence, engage their parents and neighborhood communities to promote sound environmental behavior. The main objectives of this programme are to educate children about their immediate environment and impart knowledge about the eco-systems, their inter-dependence and their need for survival, through visits and demonstrations and to mobilize youngsters by instilling in them the spirit of scientific inquiry into environmental problems and involving them in environmental preservation. It empowers students to participate and take up meaningful environmental activities and projects, and provide opportunities to explore environmental concepts and actions beyond the confines of a syllabus or curriculum (Arnold et al, 2009). It is not just an extracurricular activity but is a priority subject in the national curriculum. The purposes of Eco-clubs are to:

- ▶ Actively involve with nature physically and spiritually
- ▶ Gain an understanding of our environment and our place in it
- ▶ Provide a service to the community
- ▶ Protect and preserve wildlife
- ▶ Improve the natural environment
- ▶ Lessen our negative impact on the environment
- ▶ Develop and enhance our mental and physical skills and teach others about what have been learned.

**Eco-sensitivity initiatives by Eco-clubs**

Eco-sensitive means earth-friendly or not harmful to the environment. Products that contribute to green living or practices that help conserve resources like water and energy, prevent contributions to air, water and land pollution refers to this term. One can engage in eco-sensitive habits or practices by being more conscious of using earthly resources. Sustainable and environment friendly principles conducive to intelligent building include blending architecture with engineering design principles focusing on energy efficiencies, occupant safety/health and climate and context responsiveness with appropriate technology. The performance indicators of this quality includes growth in self knowledge and knowledge of the world around; improved and healthier natural environment; increase in species and biodiversity of wildlife; and gain positive and peaceful feelings.

Campaigns in Eco-club schools for promoting Eco-sensitivity constitute Tree Plantation drive, Zero Garbage concept, water and energy conservation, eco-care in schools and surrounding areas, action oriented programmes like paper recycling, vermicomposting, rain water harvesting, mushroom cultivation, waste management etc. Eco-sensitive activities under the scheme include:

- i. Motivating students to keep their surroundings green and clean*
- ii. Promoting ethos of conservation of natural resources*
- iii. Motivating students to imbibe habits and life style for minimum waste generation, source separation of waste and disposing waste to the nearest storage point*
- iv. Educating students to create awareness amongst public and sanitary workers so as to stop the indiscriminate burning of waste which causes respiratory diseases*
- v. Sensitizing students to minimize the use of plastic bags, not to throw them in public places as they choke drains, cause water logging and provide breeding ground for mosquitoes*
- vi. Organizing tree plantation programmes, awareness programmes such as quiz, essay, poster/painting competitions, rally, etc. regarding various environmental issues and educate children about 4R's and preparation of products out of waste*
- vii. Organizing Nature Trail in Ecotourism Centers/Wild Life Sanctuaries/Parks/Forest areas/Ecological Hotspots/Botanical Gardens/Zoos to explore Bio-diversity and its services to mankind.*

Capacity building measures include training teachers and students, create awareness and sensitivity among students towards environmental issues and their connected problems, impart knowledge to help individuals and social groups gain a variety of experiences and acquire a basic understanding of the environment and its associated problems, build attitudes to help individuals and social groups acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment, and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection, teach skills to help individuals and social groups to identify and solve environmental problems and lead students towards action to participate in appropriate action to help solve these problems and avoid future problems(Chawla,2006). The target goals are:

- Promote direct experiences using all their senses to actively explore, experience, make sense of their environment and have a sense of independence
- Encourage free-choice learning exercises with large degree of choice and control over the what, when and why of learning (for example through camping and walking in national parks, and visiting museums, zoos and gardens)
- Include families, communities and role models to predispose learners to take an interest in nature themselves and later work for its protection
- Provide opportunities for social connections
- Make it relevant to everyday life in the local context and give learners a chance to explore and experience what's around them
- Foster the role of 'active stakeholder' in the environment and decision making
- Target real local issues to explore problems and take actions
- Promote collective action to achieve goals working together with a group

### **Implementation of Eco Clubs**

The Eco Club in each school is made up of teachers and motivated students who care to learn about the environment, practice eco-sensitivity and take action to improve their immediate environment. It also offers a wonderful space to generate awareness, build attitudes and take up eco-friendly activities in the real world. Training sessions are carried out for teachers and students on how to set the clubs. A written guide to set up and run these clubs is provided and what kind of activities and projects could be undertaken. This guide helps to run the club systematically and successfully and reach out to the community.

Schools can also regularly attend the training conducted by the National Eco-Green Club Board. Reporting Schools committed to the initiative are expected to come up with an annual plan for their Club. Teachers who attend Eco Club training are given an Eco club evaluation check list sheet, filled in by schools and used for monitoring and evaluation. Awards are given to encourage club members.

### **Conclusion**

Learning becomes effective when the subject-matter is perceived by the learners as having relevance to them. Variables most closely correlated with environmentally responsible actions are perceived skill in using action strategies, level of eco-sensitivity, perceived knowledge of action strategies and locus of control. Effective environmental education programmes need to be personally relevant to the everyday lives of children and youth and what is in their 'own backyard'. It is important that programmes should be directly related to the local context and gives learners a chance to explore and experience what's around them. Research shows that empathy with and love of nature grows out of children's regular contact with the natural world. Frequent positive early childhood experiences with nature have a major impact on the healthy growth of mind, body and spirit. Hands-on, informal, self-initiated exploration and discovery in local, familiar environments are best ways to engage and inspire children and cultivate a 'sense of place' and a 'sense of wonder'. Environmental education programmes therefore need to emphasize the importance of active involvement of students, parents and community members in experiencing and learning about environment together.

### **References**

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