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Using Ecopedagogy to Teach English at Higher Secondary Level

Rutuparna Sahu

Research Scholar

P.G. Dept. of English

Berhampur University

Berhampur- 760007

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Abstract:

The term Ecology has caught the attention of the 21st century people as life has become shaky because of the imbalance caused to environment due to deforestation, population growth, and misunderstanding among the various stake holders of the globe. Time has come for the human beings to do something and take required steps to safeguard the interests of the mother earth. It needs time to get the results. But it is wiser to make the young minds understand the issues, think critically, and act accordingly for creating a better earth to live in. Efforts are being put in different parts of the globe in this regard. And with the arrival of ecopedagogy, educationists are trying to use it while teaching various subjects. This paper focuses on how ecopedagogy can be used to teach English and sensitize the students of the higher secondary classes (of schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education) to various issues like ecology, deforestation, global warming, fellow-feeling, brotherhood etc. while learning their English lessons and improving their listening, speaking, reading and writing skill in English.

Keywords: Ecology, environment, sustainable development, understanding, eternity, nature.

Introduction

Ecology and environment are not the new terminologies for modern people. They are there since the beginning of human civilization. They have caught the attention of the 21st century people as life has become shaky because of the imbalance caused to environment due to deforestation, population growth, and misunderstanding among the various stake holders of the planet, the earth.

Defining Ecopedagogy

The history of ecopedagogy goes back to the days of discussions and practices influenced by Paulo Freire. It lays importance on the principles of fellow-feeling, understanding among all, and belief of the planet being an integrated whole than a collection of parts. Noting the general principles of ecopedagogy listed on the website of Ecopedagogy Association International, Khan mentions one of them as, “Ecopedagogy’s aim is to realize the planetary peace, happiness, justice, and beauty that would be manifested by sustainable social and cultural relations between peoples of the Earth” (iii).

Antunes and Gadotti view, “Eco-pedagogy is based upon a planetary understanding of gender, species, kingdoms, formal, informal, and non-formal education” (136). Thus, ecopedagogy centres round the concept of sustainability and tries to achieve peace, understanding, and fellow-feeling, establishing the principle of ‘live and let others live’ safeguarding the environment.

Need to Save Environment

With the population India reaching 1.34 billion in April 2017, India remains as one of the major contributors among the developing nations to global climate change. Iyer has pointed out, “In 2008, the top carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitters were China, the United States, the European Union, India, the Russian Federation, Japan, and Canada. India’s contribution was 6% in spite of being a developing country where as the contribution of the USA in spite of being a developed nation was 23% of the damage. These data include CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion, cement manufacturing, and gas flaring”(4).

We need to save the environment as we depend on it completely. If we do not have plants which are part of the environment, no animal can live as they provide us with oxygen and food. If we do not have sunlight, we will not get energy to grow. If we do not have land, we will not be able to build houses to live in.

The natural atmosphere is being polluted due to the unnatural human factors. It is the reckless human nature that is primarily responsible for the environmental pollution. It is the self-centered humans who are causing more destruction to the environment. So, it is the responsibility of every person living on this planet, the earth to check the causes that affect the environmental disaster and play a positive role to improve it. One must realize the importance of a healthy environment and that it is for his/her own benefit to protect it and to take measures to make the world clean and green as the proverb goes, “We won’t have a society if we destroy the environment.”

Role of Students in Saving Environment

Students, the most powerful stratum of the society, know the importance of environment and nature’s sustainability. Nature has endowed us with all the resources to which maximum beneficiary is human beings. Nature has full proof system of protection of all the creatures and environment subject to check on excessive pollution and resources utilization.

Students understand the need for protecting environment and they are prepared to fight against the contamination of atmosphere as today’s students are tomorrow’s citizens. Students need to promote plantation in surrounding areas. They should help the government and non-government organizations in preventing pollution from the society by actively participating in programs and by giving the information of those who pollute the environment. But how can they be made aware of these issues lies in all the teaching fraternity who teach the students who are the torch bearers of the nation.

Role of Teachers in Guiding the Students

Teachers, more particularly the teachers of English are no more knowledge givers in the era of Communicative Language Teaching in today's world. They are the helpers, facilitators, coordinators, and guides of the students. They need to follow and use the principles of Ecopedagogy to create awareness among the students and sensitize them to various issues like global warming, sustainable development, population growth, deforestation, and live and let others live etc. At the same time English language teaching when blended with environmental matters has many positive effects as pointed out by Veselinovska and Kirova that:

- It facilitates learning new words and their meaning.
- It enhances students' concentration during class.
- It reduces tension and fear of foreign languages. (1070)

Higher Secondary English Syllabus

The English syllabus for the Higher Secondary classes targets to develop the four skills of the students in English. It focuses on how the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skill of the students can be developed in English. For the same it has prescribed text books named 'Hornbill' which has prose and poetry lessons and 'Snapshots', a supplementary reader that has six prose lessons and a poem and long reading text of Oscar Wilde's 'The Canterville Ghost' (unabridged)/ Booker T. Washington's 'Up from Slavery' (unabridged) for class XI to help the students develop their LSRW in English. There are 'Flamingo' which has prose and poetry lessons and 'Vistas', a supplementary reader and long reading text of H. G. Wells' 'The Invisible Man' (unabridged)/ George Eliot's 'Silas Marner' (unabridged) for class XII to help the students develop their LSRW in English. The teachers teaching English at the higher secondary level in CBSE schools can contribute a lot in helping the students understand concepts like sustainable development, population control, afforestation, fellow feeling, brotherhood etc.

Using Ecopedagogy to Teach English Lessons in Class XI

The teachers teaching English can bring in the principles of ecopedagogy while teaching the lessons of the books prescribed for class- XI. While teaching the lesson, 'The Portrait of a Lady' by Khushwant Singh, the students can be sensitized to have concerns for stray 'dogs' and 'sparrows' as such animals behave humanly when they are taken care of. This has been well shown by the narrator's grandmother in the lesson. Through Shirley Toulson's poem, 'A Photograph', the eternity character of nature over the temporary character of human beings can be brought home. The students can be sensitized to the futile efforts being put in by humans to tame the resources of the nature in the name of advancement, industrialization, and development. In Walt Whitman's poem, 'The Voice of the Rain', the rain does its work in wiping out droughts, impurities of the earth and helping the seeds to sprout which in turn create greenery on the earth. The rain does so without being worried whether its activities are noticed or not. So, the students should notice the favour done by nature and safeguard it.

The lesson, 'The Ailing Planet: The Green Movement's Role' by Nani Palkhivala highlights the ecological situation of the earth and raises the issue pertaining to the ailing condition of the earth due to human beings. The author has talked about the arrival of the Green Movement in 1972 and how it changed the perceptions of the people from 'mechanistic view to a holistic view of the world' making the mankind understand the fact the earth is living organism. He has taken up the issues of sustainable development as the only contraceptive to save the planet from its present ailing condition. Human beings are only responsible for the present ailing condition of the earth for they have exploited the four biological systems: fisheries, forests, grassland, and croplands which are the determining factors of the economic conditions of the earth. The lesson ends with the words of Mr. Lester R. Brown, "We have not inherited this earth from our forefathers; we have borrowed it from our children" making it clear that human beings have to take the responsibility to safe guard the interest of the earth for the future. Through this lesson, the young minds studying in class XI can be sensitized to issues like:

- The earth being a living organism, its biological needs are to be taken care of.
- The concept of sustainable development.
- Creating awareness about the world's most dangerous animal i.e. human being.
- The depletion of the four biological systems (fisheries, forests, grassland, and cropland) of the earth.
- Forests precede mankind and deserts follow.
- Growth of population as one of the main reasons for the present condition of the earth.
- The era of responsibility has come for human beings.

In the poem, 'Father to Son', the poet, Elizabeth Jennings has dealt with the universal issue of generation gap through the voice of a concerned father who wants to establish healthy relationship with his son. The students can be made to realize the fact that the children should live happily with their parents instead of living in their own world.

The lesson, 'The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse' by William Saroyan throws light on the crazy character of the children to ride horse and their honest character. It also throws light on how the narrator's cousin, Mourad had a way with horse, bird, and dog. It all depends on how we treat the animals and birds. While teaching the lesson, 'Ranga's Marriage' by Masti Venkatesh Iyengar, the students can be sensitized to the scenic beauty of Hosahalli village, its pond, creeper plants, and mango orchard. Through J. B. Priestley's play, 'Mother's Day', the students can be made to understand the issue of having concern for mothers at home who are not treated well either by their husbands or by their children.

Using Ecopedagogy to Teach English Lessons in Class XII

Though it is not possible to use the principles of ecopedagogy to teach all the lessons of the prescribed text books in Class- XII, there are some lessons which can be taught to the students using the principles of ecopedagogy. The lesson, 'Lost Spring' by Anees Jung in the

book, Flamingo highlights how the children like 'Saheb' and 'Mukesh' lose the spring of their life, their childhood as they had to work for earning their livelihood instead of enjoying life and studying at school. The poem, 'An Elementary School Classroom in a Slum' by Stephen Spender throws light on the undernourished slum children who attend school. It urges the people in power to do something to uplift the slum children who too can create history if they are provided with the basics like nutritious food, shelter, and clothing etc. So, through these lessons, the students can be sensitized to the inequalities prevailing in the society by which they will think over these issues and take steps to wipe out them.

In the poem, 'Keeping Quiet' the poet, Pablo Neruda emphasizes the need of introspection for mankind. Through this poem, the students can be sensitized to issues like:

- Man has become very selfish and his own actions are responsible for the miseries he is suffering from.
- Not to hurt nature and its elements like whales.
- The world stands divided because of the man-made barriers like caste, creed, religion, and geographical boundaries.
- There is a need of creating fellow-feeling, understanding, and developing brotherhood.
- Humans need to learn the lesson from the earth that life should flourish peacefully.

In the poem, 'A Thing of Beauty' the poet, John Keats gives the message that 'a thing of beauty is joy forever.' Through this poem, the students can be sensitized to issues like:

- A thing of beauty is joy forever.
- Beauty of nature helps in removing the sadness.
- Nature is endless fountain of eternal joy.

Once the students are made alert about nature, they will take care of it instead of destroying its resources for smaller gains.

In the poem, 'Aunt Jennifer's Tegers', the poet Adrienne Rich brings out the constraints a married woman encounters because of the dominant character of her husband. The students need to be sensitized to the issue of establishing equality between man and woman in the twenty-first century world.

The book, 'Vistas', the supplementary reader too has lessons through which the students can be made to realize issues like conservation of wild life, having concern for humanity, differentially able people, diversity in culture, and abolition of casteism in the society.

The lesson, 'The Tiger King' by Kalki highlights how the king of Pratibandapuram, known as the tiger king, kills tigers ruthlessly to disprove the astrologer's prediction that the death of the king would come from a tiger. Of course, the king meets his end because of a toy

tiger if not a tiger of flesh and blood. The lesson is a satire on the whims of the people in power. Through this lesson, the teachers can put forth before the students the need to conserve wildlife, particularly the tigers in the age of imbalancing of ecology due to the extinction of wildlife.

Pearl S. Buck's 'The Enemy' throws light on how Dr. Sadao Hoki, a Japanese doctor, rises above the petty prejudices of patriotism and racism and saves the life of a wounded enemy soldier of American nationality. Being guided by his conscience as a human being and professional obligations as a doctor, he does so. The students should be made to understand, realize, and act not on the basis of caste, race, and nationality but on the basis of greater values and obligations guided by humanity and ethics.

The play, 'On the Face of it' by Susan Hill presents two differentially able characters, Mr. Lamb and Derry to the readers and their reactions towards society and its people. Mr. Lamb, an old man with a tin leg has a very positive attitude to life and society whereas Derry, a fourteen year old boy with one side of his face burnt due to acid fall, has a very negative attitude to life and society because of the ill treatment meted out at him by the society and its people. In due course of their conversation, Mr. Lamb successfully changes the negative attitude of Derry and makes him lead his life. Through this play, the students can be made to realize the fact that the differentially able people do not need any kindness to be shown to them but they need to be treated equally with others by which they can live happily.

The lesson, 'Memories of Childhood' presents two autobiographical accounts: 'The Cutting of My Long Hair' by Zitkala-Sa and 'We Too are Human Beings' by Bama. In the first account, the author has given account of how she was compelled to shingle her hair in the boarding school though it was against her culture. In the second account, the author has outlined the stigma attached to the people born in the lower caste, the petty jobs to be undertaken by them for the people born in upper caste. In both the case, the authors have revolted against the evil systems in their societies. Through these accounts, the students can be made to understand and act on issues like:

- To have respect diverse cultures.
- Equality irrespective of caste, creed, and race.

Using Ecopedagogy to Teach Listening and Speaking Skills

The teachers should use listening texts/ audios based on nature, environment, global warming, and population growth along with the questionnaires to be attempted by the students to help the students develop their listening skill in English. They should also provide the students with opportunities to speak on such issues by which they will be able to develop their speaking skill in English and come up with new ways to tackle the issues.

Using Ecopedagogy to Teach Writing Skill

While teaching writing skill in English to the students, the teachers can encourage the students to write public notices, design posters, write letters to the editors of newspapers,

articles, speeches, and debates on issues like gender discrimination, ecology, environment, need of fellow feeling and brotherhood etc. This will help the students to improve their writing skill and raise their voices against all issues that need to be taken care for establishing a better earth to live in.

Conclusion

The challenges like saving environment, sustainable development, gender justice, need of fellow feeling and understanding that the present world is facing can be taken up while teaching English. No doubt, it is a little difficult and all the issues cannot be taken up while teaching every lesson. But it is worth trying on part of the teachers teaching English to create awareness among the students about the issues while teaching the lessons as analyzed in this article. Once the students are made aware of these issues, they learn English and are ready to take steps to create a better earth for all to live in.

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