Water Conservation Education: an Investment for the Future

For a resource that covers nearly three-fourths of the earth's surface, it may seem meaningless to prioritize conserving it. There is approximately the same amount of water today as there was "millions of years ago," yet 780 million people lack access to an improved water source, 80% of all illnesses in the developing world are water related, and unsafe water kills 200 children every hour ("100 Facts"). Water conservation has been an issue hiding in the shadows for years, but it has only recently been yanked into the spotlight as the world has begun paying attention to climate change and its effect on the planet we inhabit. While water could be conserved by tightening faucets to prevent leaking, turning off the water when brushing your teeth, or only doing a full load of laundry ("17 Tips"), these small behaviors might not cut it. Instead of just looking at what we can do to help the earth now, we must also look to the future. And the best investment we can make – both in ourselves and in our planet – lies in education.

In recent years, a multitude of initiatives have been launched to combat droughts within the United States. One such project, entitled "Connect Our Future," organized communities in North and South Carolina to cut back on their water usage. One of the main tools this project used was "creating water management plans that include a focus on conservation" ("Water Conservation"). Essentially, neighborhoods would create an action plan that involved contacting public schools about water conservation education, listing out wasteful behaviors they could avoid, and volunteering to fix water issues specific to their communities. This project worked on installing new technologies within households including "low-flush toilets, low-flow showerheads, and faucet aerators" ("Water Conservation"). But even though these technologies can reduce water usage by up to 40 or 50% of what a normal utility would use ("17 Tips"), a cause equally as important to this project was "directed outreach for youth" ("Water

Conservation"). The "Connect Our Future" program realized that in order to change people's behaviors towards water conservation, they must begin educating kids at a young age. It is important to show kids why water conservation matters, what effect their actions have, and what problems we still have left to solve. If we truly want to change some of our wasteful behaviors, we must recognize that this generation probably won't change, but the next one will.

The effort to conserve water is not exclusive to the United States. Researchers in the Jordan Water Conservation Education Project evaluated 671 students (most of them girls living in rural environments) that belonged to eco-clubs in their high schools. The project exposed 424 of these students to an interactive water conservation curriculum while the other 247 received lectures about biodiversity issues. The study found that even though all of these students were passionate about the environment, the students who were exposed to the interactive curriculum "demonstrated a higher level of knowledge about water conservation and performed recommended" water conservation behaviors more often than the other 247 students (Middlestadt). A water conservation education exposes students to water problems and gives them the tools they need to solve them. If a kid makes these behaviors instinctual at a young age, these behaviors might become second nature to their children.

Water conservation is a pressing issue, but not everyone shares this same perspective. In a survey detailing public attitudes toward water conservation in several northeastern Colorado communities, researchers found that people "with less than a high school education or earning incomes of less than $15,000 per year more often opposed the various water conservation alternatives" (Flack). This highlights why education is so important: people become more open to water related innovations when they are better educated. Furthermore, the survey found that individuals "in communities with lawn watering restrictions were more willing to install

water-saving devices" (Flack). This is significant because it demonstrates how people will only value water conservation if it can have a tangible impact on their life. If we expose people to water conservation, they will be more likely to advocate for restrictions and further the discussion of saving every drop of water that we can.

While a water conservation based education will definitely help transform a country's values and increase awareness for water conservation issues, researchers in Morocco wished to determine what type of instruction would produce the best educated students and result in the greatest change in behaviors. The researchers observed that while Morocco had already incorporated water-related topics into its Primary and Lower Secondary levels, there was a "lack of field and extracurricular activities" (Amahmid). They further noted that while "students' attitudes towards water were positive, their daily water use habits" did not reflect these attitudes (Amahmid). To combat this issue, the researchers advocate for more field trips and hands-on extracurricular activities. These innovative experiences help kids visualize how their actions can make a difference. If we incorporate more environmentally themed excursions into American Elementary schools, students might start to value water conservation as much or almost as much as other kids around the world.

A water conservation education cannot simply barrage children with facts about water because telling people that "[t]hree quarters of all Americans live within 10 miles of polluted water" or that about "400 billion gallons of water are used in the United States per day" won't change anyone's behavior ("100 Facts"). We should absolutely try to create new innovations that save water, but a cause that is equally if not more important than this is educating children about their water footprint and how they can reduce it. Introducing an interactive curriculum can have a huge effect on kids' behaviors, even in children who are already passionate about saving the

environment, but an even better approach to teaching water conservation is through field trips and other activities that enable kids to see the far reaching effects that water has on our daily lives.

Water conservation will undoubtedly be a problem that will linger long into our future, and we would be foolish if our solution to this problem did not also involve an investment in our future. Educating our students about the importance of water conservation is a surefire way to ensure that people will care about water enough to save lives before they are lost. As a future educator, I am dedicated towards ensuring that my students will value water conservation, climate change, and, maybe most importantly, their own education. My future students will have the tools they need to change the world, and hopefully, that is exactly what they will do.

Works Cited

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