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Developing Leaders Through Mentoring in Environmental Education

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Abstract

This article gears towards substantiating the claim on the importance of environmental education in building leaders for the present and future generation. It emphasizes the integral role mentorship programs play in developing effective environmental leaders. These leaders should contribute to building environmentally friendly and sustainable societies in the future. Hence, the author elaborated on these through the following subheadings: overview of environmental education; concept of environmental leader; improving environmental education leadership skills, and mentoring of leaders in environmental education.

Introduction

There are several complex environmental problems affecting the Earth due to man's technological drive to making it suitable for his existence by manipulating its pristine state. Environmental problems that are of paramount importance in recent years are unpredictable climatic conditions, flooding, rise in average global temperature, depletion of the ozone layer, urban decay, drought (Erhabor, 2016), deforestation, incessant occurrence of earthquakes and other disasters. These problems pose a serious threat to humanity and other life forms' existence on planet Earth. Erhabor further posits that planet Earth is remarkably prolific, hospitable and the unique world in the universe (to the extent of human knowledge) compared to the conditions faced on other planets in our solar system. The mild temperature of Earth is relatively constant, plentiful supply of clean air; freshwater, fertile soil that regenerates endlessly and spontaneously by biogeochemical cycles and biological communities (Cunningham and Cunningham, 2006). This makes the Earth sacred and vital to create a balance between human activities and ensuring the protection of the Earth's resources and conditions that sustain life. Despite the measures that have been put in place to curb the various environmental crises faced on Earth, most of the strategies are categorized as being focused on end-of-the-pipeline control and treatment especially in developing countries, rather than prevention. Hence, in terms of prevention, it is pertinent to increase the knowledge of the populace and thereby create

positive attitudes that lead to environmental friendly behaviors toward the Earth resources and conditions.

Therefore, environmental education has an integral role to help find innovative ways of improving environmental knowledge and understanding. It also fosters positive attitudes and attributes to overcome environmentally destructive behaviors, which result to individual desire and willingness to take action for the environment. However, in fostering environmental education and actualizing its goals, it requires leaders with wide knowledge, a critical perspective and a strong ethical sense towards the environment.

To become a good leader needs some preparation. That is if an individual desires and possesses the will power he/she can become an effective leader. They are developed through an extended process of self-study, education, training and experience. Leadership here involves influencing others to accomplish an objective and direct the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Leadership differs from somebody being in a position as a manager or supervisor because leadership makes followers want to achieve high goals rather than simply asserting authority. Thus, a key component in improving the environment is leadership, hence the need for creating environmental leaders.

Environmental leadership is an ability of an individual or a group to guide a positive change towards better environmental future. In order to ensure environmentally sound values and problem solving abilities to sustain living organisms' existence, there is need for environmental leadership through environmental education. Forster (1993) stated that an environmental leader should strive to instill strong philosophical belief about environmental issues coupled with scientific knowledge that will make up the foundation, which will help them deal with issues on the local, national and global scene. Therefore, in order to develop good environmental leaders, it becomes necessary to assign the young adults to work with more experienced people to serve as friends, supervisors, and mentors. In view of this, a mentorship program is proposed or seen as an effective way of developing environmental education leaders. Mentors here are seen as ordinary individuals that possess unique desire, drive to environmental education, and are willing to share or relate their personal experience on environmental issues with others (mentee). Mentors are to embark on shared leadership giving of scientific information, professional support or personal friendship to emerging environmental leaders. Thus mentoring is an integral part of developing effective environmental leaders and has the ability to build leaders in environmental education who are better able to convey the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, and participation necessary to solve environmental problems.

Accordingly, Akiyama, Hanaki and Mino (2013) asserted that these environmental leaders may in the future play a key role in decision making processes within different levels of society, including companies, NGO's, regional communities, specialist groups, local, national government and international organizations. Consequently, the purpose of this article lies in its ability to contribute to the general body of knowledge on mentoring to discover its role in developing potential environmental leaders.

Overview of Environmental Education

Environmental education is "...an approach, a philosophy, a tool, and a profession" aiming to fulfil three goals:

- foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political, and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas,
- provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment,
- create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups, and society as a whole toward the environment (Ardoin, 2009).

Environmental education is a term, which has evolved through time and is defined by its origins as well as by what it has come to be. Historically, the impetus for environmental education can be traced back to writings of Plato, but it took nineteenth century educationalists such as Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Louis Agassiz and Wilbur Jackman to advocate the importance of nature study. In the 1920s 'outdoor education', a term anchored in the sound principle that learning takes place faster and more efficiently through direct experience, became popular. Later on, terms like outdoor recreation, field studies, conservation education, environmental interpretation and environmental education began to be used interchangeably (Fortino, 1996). In the early 1990s' the field includes experiential education, environmental science and ecology. In recent time, the drive is on making it a separate subject taught at the various stages of education, although most countries implement environmental education in the school system through the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach.

Environmental education has a wide range of audiences and takes place in a range of settings. Environmental education could be formal or informal, where "formal" refers to education that occurs in a traditional school setting and "informal" refers to education in broader public settings. Environmental education also uses a range of strategies and teaching techniques, which can be used separately but ideally, build upon each other (Ardoin, 2009). Education researchers Scott and Gough (2003) describe this continuum as: information, communication, education, and capacity building activities delivered primarily in formal and informal settings aiming to increase the capacity of civil society to support and work for environmental preservation (Adrion, 2009).

Environmental education allows everyone to work toward a better quality of life. In this regard, environmental education is a process of increasing knowledge and awareness of the relationship between man and their environment. It creates a set of values and feeling of concern for the environment enabling to acquire environmentally friendly behaviors and skills in solving environmental problems (Srivastava, 2008). Hence, environmental education is concerned with knowledge, values, and attitudes aiming for responsible environmental behaviors.

Concept of Environmental Leader

In this technological era, we are facing complex environmental problems such as climate change, flooding, incessant earthquakes, limited resources, and global conflicts; there is

a need to link leadership and the natural environment. Therefore environmental leadership development is of paramount importance for reducing the alarming rate of environmental deterioration in the world. According to Akiyama, Hanak, Mino (2013), there are many leadership theories but environmental leadership accepts none. Transformational leadership is popular in studies of environmental leaders and theories to help in understanding the behaviors of environmental leaders. Transformational leaders tend to induce followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations of both leaders and followers. In collective leadership, leaders respond to time and place in a situation of diminishing natural resources and growing environmental degradation.

An environmental leader is seen as an individual who possesses the best qualities of leadership that include commitment, values, decision making skills, vision, communication and making meaning for followers through shared leadership. In this regard, an effective environmental leader is more than a good facilitator of learning, as he/she embodies a fundamental philosophy of environmental values (Fortino, 1996). The leader should both inspire and transform individual followers so that they develop a new level of concern about their human condition and sometimes, the condition of humanity at large. Therefore, an individual who makes people engage in eco-actions, converts followers into environmental leaders.

The traditional focus of environmental leaders has been on individual development but in recent time, it involves individual and institutional development. They promote sustainability by infusing their desire to protect the natural environment into their decision making and action processes. According to Akiyama, Hanak and Mino (2013) environmental leaders are required to have strong motivation, expertise and leadership. The authors further stated that strong motivation on a clear understanding of the urgency of the current state of sustainability and action is required. This motivation has been observed to be influenced by environmental ethics, ability to achieve various needs, ability to understand the connection between the environment, economy and society. All these affect the willingness to act in solving environmental problems and build environmental leaders.

Another essential element of environmental leader are leadership skills. It involves the transfer of their knowledge, information, and technology for solving environmental problems. To achieve this, an environmental leader require abilities that capture environment, economic, and social characteristics. Also, organizes a fresh perspective on environmental protection and collaborates with stakeholders by listening to their opinions (Akiyama, Hanak, Mino, 2013). Furthermore, other elements of environmental leaders are visions and proper interaction with constituents. Mahony (1995) stated that skillful environmental education leadership needs to reach agreement in informal settings. Hence, leaders must empower their followers by giving voice to their aspirations and by instilling in them the confidence. Therefore, environmental leaders could identify global, regional, and local environmental problems and propose solutions to these problems (Akiyama, Hanak, Mino, 2013).

Improving Environmental Education Leadership Skills

Environmental education is geared towards a community of partners so that students, teachers, non-governmental organizations and politicians can work together in identifying and resolving environmental problems. According to Taylor (2008), leadership capacity spreads across a broad range of stakeholders such as politicians, city officials, and emergent leaders in the public and private sectors. Others are researchers, educators, communities and individual citizens. This reveals the pivotal role of leadership in the drive to achieve community partnership among key stakeholders.

Environmental education has advanced over the past 50 years from the perspectives of natural resource management and the management of environmental organizations. It has always focused on how to foster changes in individuals that are associated with pro-environmental actions and behaviors in order to solve environmental problems. To find solutions to current environmental problems needs integration of the scientific knowledge with findings from practices. It is important to develop human resources with holistic views. This raises the need to develop environmental leaders that can significantly contribute to resolving global, regional and local environmental problems. Effective leadership in the field of environmental education is crucial in order to establish environmentally sound values and problems solving abilities to sustain our Earth (Thomas, 2003). Hence, according to Fortino (1996), environmental leaders should strive to instill appreciation, sharpen awareness, dispense knowledge, skills about the environment and set a direction. In actualizing these, environmental leaders must be able to assist learners of any age in developing commitment to result in informed decisions, responsible behavior and constructive actions. The development of environmental values, formation of individuals, and societal behaviors that reflect that values are essential in solving environmental problems. In view of this, various higher education institutions have developed environmental leadership programs. Other ways of developing environmental leadership is the forming of academic network among universities. For example in 2008, the University of Tokyo developed the Asian Program for incubation of environmental leader (APIEL). In the United States, liberal arts colleges have created programs in environmental leadership. Through environmental education, Carter (1993) proposed some conventional approaches in teaching values and skills applicable to environmental leadership.

- Classical approach – presenting ideas, values, and skill manners by emphasizing theoretical rigor and historical depth.
- Experiential approach - training in specific acts and skills that develop moral character for leadership
- Growth oriented approach – examining values and leadership skills in the context of a student’s own immediate world.

Other approaches are developmental approach (assumes leadership behavior is predicated upon theoretical abstraction and information), pre-profession approach, instructional approach (assumes a specific set of values). However Fortino (1996) proposed some other alternatives in teaching environmental leadership through environmental education. For instance the Sierra project was organized around key components such as survival skills, social perspective taking, community building, conflict

resolution in society, life and career planning, socialization and community service. Others are awareness of self-reflection, understanding the concept of values and leadership judgment, inferring and analyzing values implications, and focusing on values from a holistic perspective.

For example, in most developing countries, higher educational institutions have a crucial role to play in fostering the development of environmental leaders. There is a need to re-orient higher education in these countries with the task of observing how the existing knowledge on environmental education and sustainability can be widespread. There is also a need to create equilibrium in the society between investing for sharing existing scientific knowledge and further extension of that knowledge.

Accordingly, Onuki, Akiyama, and Li (2012) emphasized on leadership pedagogy that is important to extend basic knowledge of how the world works for the common good. This raises the need for various environmental leadership programs in universities, organizations, and other institutions.

Mentoring of Leaders in Environmental Education

In the field of environmental education, it is essential to locate those individuals with leadership potential and skills they need, and train them early to be effective environmental leaders. They could be assigned to work or study with experienced people who could serve as friends, supervisors, and mentors. Emphasis here is on mentorship. Mentoring has been touted as a way of bolstering leadership (Shea, 1992). According to Fortino (1996), there is a positive correlation between mentoring and leadership.

According to Wong and Premkumar (2007), human beings like trees in an old forest tend to thrive best when they grow in the presence of those who have gone before them. This is mentoring. Mentoring is the learning process where helpful, personal and reciprocal relationships are built while focusing on achievement and emotional support (Wong & Premkumar, 2007). According to Ragins and Kram (2007) "... mentoring is an ancient archetype originated in Greek mythology." Mentoring is an intentional process and a nurturing process fostering the development of the protégé towards their full potential. Hence mentors overall role is to promote the growth and development of a potential environmental leaders. Mentors are a critical support in guiding them to enhance their planning, instructions, content knowledge, and orient them to environmental problems. The beneficiary of the process of mentoring is referred to as the mentee, mentored, student or protégé. However, Hansman (2003) stated that the mentoring relationship could be a development opportunity for both mentors and mentees. This type of relationships has the propensity to foster psychosocial development as mentees enjoy higher self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-assurance. Accordingly, Wong and Premkumar (2007) feel that mentors can benefit from enhanced self-confidence of their capabilities for reflective thinking and communication, as well as personal satisfaction of contributing to the discipline and the next generation.

There is a dearth of literature on the role of mentorship in environmental education. Beeler (1988) states that mentoring being an integral part of personal development and is considered as a tool for young ambitious professionals who might become administrative leaders in the parks and recreation field. The protégés are usually well educated, have a high energy level, possess skills and abilities along with a positive attitudes that may lead to success in a leadership position. Fortino further extended, mentors would need people who have transformed in their worldview, who move beyond vision, to dispense knowledge about controversial issues and are capable of inspiring others to undertake personal transformation. Mentors are an extraordinary commitment to environmental issues, willingness to disclose a personal and professional lifestyle. To substantiate these characteristics, Udall (1986) identified some mentoring themes such as being a critical friend, giving support, nurturing, opening opportunities, giving feedback, risk taking by mentor, seeing potential and having mutual respect.

Various scholars have provided evidence on the role or importance of mentorship in developing leaders in environmental education. For instance, Fortino reported the work of Foster (1993) when he described the typical leader for a nongovernmental organization as often poorly prepared and trained, isolated from his/her peers and practicing a trial by error style of management. Amongst his five leadership strategies, he advocated that mentorship could help to enlarge the pool of leaders. In addition, Lyon (1993) described himself entering the field of environmental and natural resources accidentally, but his mentors motivated his transition to leadership in policy and legislation. Mentorship has a major role to play in developing leaders in environment education in the world.

Conclusion

Within the broad range of environmental issues, facing the world today training and mentoring environmental leaders is vital. This brings to the fore the need for environmental leaders who see problems holistically and propose new ways of mitigating the existing problems in the world. The author believes in full implementation of a mentorship program in all helm of affairs especially through environmental education to bolster the development of young environmental leaders in society.

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