Climate Anxiety and Its Relationship With Environmental Education and Activism

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Context and Background

- Increasing climate action involvement is crucial since climate change impacts are being noticed around the world.
- To address this lack of involvement we need to consider changes in environmental education.

CLIMATE ANXIETY
A survey of 10,000 young people shows that negative feelings about climate change can cause psychological distress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely worried</th>
<th>Moderately worried</th>
<th>Not worried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very worried</td>
<td>A little worried</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- While increasing awareness is important in education systems, ensuring that it does not contribute to anxiety levels is critical. The millennial generation and Generation Z are the most environmentally oriented generations but they are experiencing climate anxiety at high levels (Figure 1).
- Thus my research explores how to educate children on the environment to increase levels of activism without increasing their climate anxiety.

Research Question

How can we improve environmental education to motivate students to engage in activism while limiting climate anxiety?

Internship and Methods

- Interned with UW Bothell/Cascadia College Sustainability Programs on their Common Caws for Sustainability Podcast.
- Created 6 Podcast Episodes exploring my research question with guests:
  - a UW Faculty & philosopher-in-residence at an elementary school
  - a founder of a climate activist group
  - a president of a village tribal council
  - a climate psychologist
- Created and edited all episodes using Audacity, shown in Image 2
- Conducted a literature review on eco-anxiety.

Results

To better teach environmental education curriculum:
- Reframe education style so that it creates spaces of inquiry for students to feel their emotions and ask questions
- Teachers should be transparent with answers, but deliver it in an age appropriate manner
- Implement generational thinking

To reduce levels of eco-anxiety:
- Find like-minded individuals that have similar feelings regarding climate change to talk with
- Focus on the bigger picture

Findings can be implemented in schools and at home to better support children.

Broader Significance

- Findings can be implemented in schools and at home to better support children.
- Bettering our environmental education can increase participation in climate activism, potentially reducing climate change impacts.
- Providing training for educators that explores how they can create spaces for students to discuss these feelings.
- Further research should explore other eco-emotions (eco-depression, eco-anger, etc.) and their impacts on activism as well.

Figure 1: This graph from Thompson (2021) shows the level of worry that global youth are facing. From "Young People's Voices on Climate Anxiety, Government Betrayal and Moral Injury: A Global Phenomenon" by Marks, E. et al. (2021).

Figure 2: Diagram depicting ideal relationship between environmental education, climate activism, and climate anxiety. By implementing changes in curriculum and in interactions with children hopefully education will increase participation in activism without increasing anxiety.

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