


Engagement Through Emotions-The Case for Climate Change Education

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***Corresponding author:** Arooj Naveed,
Independent Water Researcher, Pakistan

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Arooj Naveed*

Independent Water Researcher, Pakistan

Opinion

In education, when considered from a cognitive perspective [1,2], linking Climate Change (CC) to emotions remains a decisive factor for effective learning. An example of this includes a dramatic presentation of existential threats on humanity, nature, and confrontations of missing climate actions that would evoke negative emotions. These include guilt, frustration, worry, fear, and stress [3-5]. Whereas, one positive emotion added to this negative set of emotions includes hope [6-10]. This is where one can establish the case for emotions & climate change education.

On the emotion of worry, it has been found that societal issues can be promoted through critical thinking. Therefore, some political psychologists see the emotion of 'worry/anxiety' as a precondition that causes people to become more mindful, promoting mannerism of in-depth thinking [11,12]. Additionally, researchers of climate psychology found that worry about climate was related to people seeking information [13]. According to Verlie and colleagues, "Climate anxiety is not an illness or disorder but an appropriate and even valuable source of discomfort that can provide an important lens through which people can reevaluate what is important to them. It can help them find meaningful ways to inhabit the world [14]. Henceforth, worry becomes the first step in engaging the larger society and its societal issues.

Over the past few years, an increased interest in educational researchers wanted to consider the emotion of anxiety and worry, regarding problems, concerned with sustainability [15-17]. However, educating young learners about the given threats increases their worries [18,19]. Therefore, it has been argued that teachers need to acknowledge the prevention of hopelessness and promotion of hope, through the practice of agency [15,17,20,21]. In this trend, what remains worrisome is how some teachers' anxieties might influence the emotions of their students [22]. Nevertheless, engagement through emotions creates a pathway for the inclusion of awareness and mindfulness amongst students to take action in the future, which would be environmentally friendly. For example, in one of my classes for environmental sciences, one assignment for students' agency included redesigning the course content of the subject, using SWOT analysis. The analysis reflected their voiced concerns about the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities, demonstrating student agency, while at the same time empowering them to envision the cause for hope that can exist in the future. Examples of these included the student's voices about the course including "enlightening the students with current environmental problems, impacting socio-economic and political life of the people. Furthermore, it focused on developing skills that would make the students capable of analyzing the policy documents, while enhancing their critical thinking skills to propose solutions, regarding the issue." Similarly, another student mentioned how, "The hands-on activities like situational analysis, policy analysis, and community-based projects can help to foster critical thinking among students. There are several means in the course to develop practical skills in students through group research, simulations, and reflective essays. It is

also aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), making it relevant to real-life challenges globally." Furthermore, "The localized focus on Pakistan's climate challenges, such as the floods of 2022 and subsequent water scarcity, adds a meaningful dimension, making the learning process not just academic but also deeply personal and impactful. For instance, studying the social and economic impacts of the 2022 floods can prepare students to propose sustainable policies tailored to mitigate future disasters in Pakistan."

Climate change is a core existential problem that concerns the survival of humanity. According to empirical research, it has been established that young people worry about climate change [23,24] (for a review see Ojala et al., 2021). For this reason, climate change engagement must be incorporated through voicing student agency, as one of the decisive tools evoking a positive set of emotions and meaningful actions. To summarize, we can state that emotions lead to thoughts and how they shape our actions. From fear to anger, serenity, happiness, and excitement, we can learn to become mindful of our surroundings. An exhibit of this can be of a running tap water; with the emotion reflecting fear of the tap running dry which would lead the individual to instigate an action of turning it off, thus saving water. In a world that is quickly changing and evolving, it would be a great learning space for students to be hopeful, analyze situations, present their findings, and propose solutions. Thoughts?

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