

Ecological Awareness Education in Contemporary Colleges and Universities and Its Enhancement Strategies

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Abstract: The ecological problems in contemporary times are becoming increasingly prominent. As the backbone of the nation's development, college students should be educated in ecological awareness, which is an urgent task of the times. This is not only an inevitable requirement for cultivating high-quality talents, but also an important part of ideological and political theory courses and a crucial link in the construction of ecological civilization. Colleges and universities should carry out ecological awareness education through various means such as improving the ecological curriculum system, integrating ecological awareness education into ideological and political theory courses, creating an ecological campus culture atmosphere, and organizing ecological practical activities.

Keywords: Ecological awareness; Ecological awareness education; Nature; College students

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Ecological awareness, in its literal form, refers to an active perception of the ecological environment. However, when delving into its essence, it encompasses human consciousness regarding their own survival and development. Although ecological awareness directly addresses nature, its ultimate focus is on humanity itself. How humans handle their relationship with nature determines how they treat themselves. This means that ecological awareness is expressed through human beings.

1 The Scientific Connotation of Ecological Awareness Education

Ecological awareness emerged with the birth of humanity, but the ecological awareness we refer to nowadays has a special contemporary meaning. The awareness of the ecological environment originated in ancient times when humans had extremely primitive tools, such as sharpened stones picked up at random. To adapt to environmental changes, humans would actively migrate to find suitable environments for their survival and development. Their production activities were dominated by the forces of nature. In the agricultural era, humans mainly consumed renewable resources, and due to their rudimentary production technologies and tools, their production behaviors did not cause significant damage to the ecological environment. During the long development of the agricultural era, human production capabilities gradually increased, and some ecological problems began to emerge. However, from an overall perspective, the negative impact of human production activities on the environment was minimal at that time.

After the modern era, especially in the industrial age, the advancement of science and technology enabled humans to dominate nature. They no longer held nature in awe and instead exploited it without restraint. In capitalist societies, capitalists pursued maximum profits without restraint, exploiting natural resources to the fullest. In the new century, with the rapid economic development, more ecological problems have emerged, such as global warming, deforestation, reduction of biodiversity, severe desertification, and water pollution, all of which affect human survival. Humans began to reflect on their relationship with nature, and ecological awareness with contemporary significance emerged. Ecological problems are the consequences of human misconduct, which stems from their perceptions. Therefore, to solve the frequent ecological problems, it is necessary to first change people's concepts and then take correct ecological actions under the guidance of new concepts. As the youth of the new era, college students should shoulder the responsibility of solving ecological problems

and take practical ecological actions.

2 The Necessity of Ecological Awareness Education in Colleges and Universities

To adapt to the development requirements of society and the needs of human development, colleges and universities have always been committed to cultivating talents who can correctly handle the relationships between people and society as well as among people, but have not placed sufficient emphasis on the relationship between people and nature. The goal of cultivating ecological awareness among college students is to guide them to correctly handle the relationship between people and nature.

2.1 College students in the new era are high-quality talents with all-round development

Marx once pointed out: "As natural, physical, sensual, and object-oriented beings, human beings, like animals and plants, are passive, constrained, and limited beings." This means that all human beings rely on nature without exception. Nature provides unlimited possibilities for human self-improvement, from meeting basic survival and production needs to engaging in spiritual artistic creation. The activities of college students to achieve self-improvement are also inevitably constrained by nature. They must recognize that without nature, all human development achievements will cease to exist, let alone any activities to improve themselves. Marxism holds that the essence of human beings, in their reality, is the sum total of all social relations. Here, social relations not only refer to the relationships between people and between people and society, but also include the relationship between people and nature. Only when all these relations are harmonious can college students avoid psychological imbalance and be beneficial to the construction of their all-round social relations. Because if a person does not respect nature and its life, they cannot understand the meaning of life in real life. From this perspective, ecological awareness education is also one of the means to achieve the socialization of college students.

2.2 Ideological and Political Theory Courses are the Main Front for Ecological Awareness Education

From the perspective of the disciplinary scope of ideological and political theory courses, they are the main front for moral education in colleges and universities. Incorporating ecological awareness education into ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities and helping college students correctly judge the relationship between people and nature and choose the right attitude towards nature through ideological and political theory courses enriches the content of moral education and expands the scope of moral education to the relationship between people and nature and intergenerational relations. From the perspective of the disciplinary content of ideological and political theory courses, ecological awareness is permeated in the knowledge points of the textbooks. In Chapter Twelve, a special topic is dedicated to elaborating on socialist ecological civilization, proposing that we should not only build a modernized and beautiful China where humans and nature coexist in harmony, but also promote the joint construction of a community of life on Earth by all countries. Therefore, incorporating ecological awareness education into the teaching system of ideological and political theory courses in colleges and universities is also a requirement of the content of ideological and political theory courses themselves. From the perspective of the characteristics and functions of ideological and political theory courses, colleges and universities offer such courses to help the educated solve ideological problems encountered in real life in a targeted and purposeful manner, enabling them to form ideological concepts and behavioral habits that are in line with the political, economic, and cultural development of a specific era. Conducting ecological awareness education for college students is a response to the changes in real social life.

2.3 To accelerate the construction of ecological civilization, it is necessary to cultivate ecological awareness

To carry out ecological civilization construction, it is necessary to conduct ecological civilization education and enhance the ecological civilization literacy of all the people. Special attention should be paid to the college students, who are an important force for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and are more receptive to advanced ideas. According to the dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness, only by establishing a scientific ecological awareness can the process of ecological civilization construction be advanced more smoothly. It is necessary to educate college students on ecological awareness. Their ecological literacy not only largely affects the overall ecological awareness level of the future

society but also directly influences the progress of China's ecological civilization construction.

3 Strategies for Enhancing Ecological Awareness Education in Universities

Ecological awareness education is a systematic project involving knowledge elements from various disciplines, which requires the integration of multi-disciplinary teaching resources. In the exploration of diverse development paths, some universities have finely divided various disciplines, leaving the disciplines isolated from each other. They have focused more on knowledge production and accelerating technological innovation, which in turn hinders the integration of university disciplinary resources into the cultivation of ecological awareness and is not conducive to the implementation of ecological awareness education in universities.

3.1 Improve the ecological curriculum system to make up for the shortage of teaching resources

Currently, in most universities, the curriculum settings and teaching resources for ecological awareness education among college students are relatively scarce. The majority of college students obtain ecological knowledge mainly through online media. The shortage of resources in ecological awareness education in universities is extremely inconsistent with the need to cultivate college students' ecological awareness. As a result, although some college students recognize the importance of correctly handling the relationship between humans and nature and the severity of the ecological crisis, they fail to receive guidance in basic knowledge, current political information, and systematic theories due to the fact that their schools rarely or hardly offer public compulsory courses related to ecology or courses for popularizing basic ecological knowledge. Universities should make great efforts in offering public compulsory ecological courses, recruiting and training full-time teachers, and compiling textbooks. Firstly, revise the original talent cultivation plans that serve the development of the school. In addition to the ecological courses already available in some relevant majors such as ecology and environmental science, public compulsory courses should also be offered across the university. The content of these courses should be comprehensive and rich, enabling students from all over the university to learn basic ecological knowledge, ecological ethics knowledge, ecological legal knowledge, etc. Ecological appreciation courses can also be offered to improve students' ecological aesthetics and stimulate their pursuit of beautiful nature and a harmonious environment, so that they can truly love nature and pursue natural beauty from the bottom of their hearts. Secondly, recruit and train a group of full-time teachers for public compulsory ecological courses. Although each university has a group of teachers majoring in the ecological environment, they are long-accustomed to teaching highly specialized and difficult-to-operate ecological knowledge to students in their own colleges, lacking the ability to vividly and simply popularize basic ecological knowledge to students across the university. The teaching methods of teachers directly affect the effectiveness of education. This requires universities to train a group of teachers with strong abilities to integrate theory with practice and who are good at popularizing basic ecological knowledge by combining real-life cases. Thirdly, select or compile textbooks that reflect the characteristics of the times, integrating the Party and the state's ecological deployments and calls as well as excellent historical traditions of ecological protection. When compiling textbooks, consideration should be given not only to the systematic professionalism of ecological knowledge in the textbooks but also to their applicability to all teachers and students in the university.

3.2 Integrating into Ideological and Political Theory Courses to Establish a Correct Ecological Outlook

Currently, the ideological and political theory courses offered in colleges and universities should, in light of their own characteristics, strengthen the ecological awareness education of college students from different perspectives with different focuses. Firstly, accurately identify entry-points based on textbook content to enhance the promotion of ecological knowledge. In the teaching of the "Basic Principles of Marxism" course, add a special lecture on Marx's ecological outlook. Based on the content in the first and second sections of Chapter One of the textbook, such as Marxist philosophical categories, forms of material existence, the material unity of the world, and the universal connection, change, and development of things, expound that human beings and human society originate from nature, and clarify the relationship between human beings, human society, and nature. In combination with the knowledge points about the natural geographical environment in the context of social existence in Section One of Chapter Three, emphasize the constraints of the natural

environment on human social life and production activities, and highlight the urgency of protecting ecological balance and reasonably regulating the material exchange between humans and nature. Secondly, organize special lectures by experts to improve students' ecological cognitive level. In addition to theoretical indoctrination and awareness penetration by identifying entry-points based on textbook content, special ecological education lectures should also be organized in the classroom. Combine what students have learned in class to explain the causes, current situation, and solutions of ecological problems, and build a relatively complete ecological knowledge system in students' minds. Explain the significance of ecological protection in the progression from the ancient era, the agricultural era, to the industrial era according to the chronological order. Let students realize that the improvement of production capacity and the acceleration of economic growth rate cannot measure human progress, and that every victory of humanity over nature will be met with retribution.

3.3 Create a campus ecological culture atmosphere and actively utilize implicit education

The university years of college students are mostly spent on campus. A good campus ecological culture atmosphere has an immeasurable positive impact on college students and plays a crucial guiding role in shaping their ecological values. We should fully leverage the subtle influence of the environment and transform the campus into a place filled with ecological elements. We should infuse ecological elements into the campus cultural atmosphere and cultivate the ecological awareness of college students by doing the following: First, the school should conduct overall planning for its hardware facilities, attach importance to the layout of campus buildings and landscapes, and the rational planning of school buildings and the sensory experience of the landscape are the basic projects for creating an ecological atmosphere. In the long-term planning of campus construction, attention should be paid to the coordination of the whole and the part, and the visual effect should be emphasized, maintaining the ecological beauty of the campus planning. Second, utilize the school's newspapers, radio and online media platforms to promote green ecological knowledge, and through these campus cultural carriers, innovate the publicity forms, such as making short videos, micro films, etc., and convey ecological knowledge to college students in a popular and enjoyable way. Third, organize various colorful activities on commemorative days such as "World Environment Day" and "Tree Planting Day", such as ecological knowledge competitions and debate competitions, allowing students to participate in the publicity and learning of environmental protection knowledge. Fourth, establish a sound campus environmental protection system, specially establish an association to supervise students' environmental protection behaviors, and use reward and punishment mechanisms to motivate students.

3.4 Organize various practical activities and adhere to the combination of big and small classrooms

Marx pointed out that "people should prove the truth of their thinking in practice, that is, the reality and power of their thinking, and the inherent nature of their thinking." Whether college students acquire ecological knowledge in public compulsory courses or ideological and political theory courses, only through practical actions and theoretical reflection on ecological phenomena in the ecological practice stage can they truly internalize the thoughts and ideas in the classroom into college students' ecological consciousness and externalize them into college students' ecological behavior. The practical activities of carrying out ecological awareness education in universities are rich and colorful. One is to organize college students to personally shoot micro films with ecological awareness education as the main theme, participate in the national micro film competition with their own works, and stimulate action and educate action through competition. The second is to encourage college students to participate in the "Three Down to the Countryside" activities during winter and summer vacations, and to hold ecological knowledge promotion activities in rural primary and secondary schools, so that college students can consolidate their own knowledge while explaining ecological knowledge to primary and secondary school students, and use lectures to practice and consolidate knowledge. Thirdly, universities should proactively contact local ecological and environmental protection departments, collaborate with them to organize green environmental protection activities, and allow college students to participate as volunteers. And obtain government funding support to jointly build an ecological awareness education base, allowing students to visit and learn at the base, and cultivate environmental awareness through scenario integration.

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