

“I ask for you to close your eyes and imagine. Imagine a curriculum . . .”

The Bethlehem Gadfly Environment September 24, 2020 3 Minutes

 Latest in a series of posts on the environment 

Second meeting on Bethlehem’s Climate Action Plan, October 7

*Audrey Dai is a senior at Moravian Academy and thinking about pursuing law or the behavioral sciences after graduation. Audrey presented this essay at the “Speak out!” Sustainability Forum, part of Touchstone Theatre’s **Festival UnBound 2020**, September 19. She first became interested in sustainability, specifically recycling, when she moved back to the states after living a few years overseas, joining Moravian Academy’s Green Team/Environmental Club in order to learn more about how an individual can help our climate. You can view Audrey reading her work [here](#) at min. 18:45.*

Climate justice

Audrey Dai

These two simple words are probably not as familiar as the now politically infused “climate change.” Instead, these words emphasize how environmental changes are an issue of civil rights and how these changes will disproportionately affect each of us living on this planet, just some more than others. And this is regardless of your political standing. In the words of Mary Robinson, the first woman President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, climate justice “insists on a shift from a discourse on greenhouse gases and melting ice caps into a civil rights movement with the people and communities most vulnerable to climate impacts at its heart.”

The importance of involving younger generations in matters pertaining to climate change is slowly gaining momentum. On a global level, steps are already being taken to do so through the establishment of the Youth Climate Summit by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in 2019.

But for youth to raise their voices, they must first be properly educated on the effects of climate change. However, the quality of education a child receives is largely linked to socioeconomic status. Those who live in poverty are most likely to be the ones without adequate resources, education, and support, while those who live in luxury or comfortability are most likely to be the ones with sufficient resources, higher education, and the ability to provide or receive support. In the Lehigh Valley alone, approximately 13% of our 841,000+ population live in poverty. This means that around 109,000 people are living without necessary resources or opportunities. Paying attention to these areas and focusing on bettering the lives of those who live there will lead to overall progress for everyone. I understand that this is not just an issue the Lehigh Valley faces. It's more than a local issue, but everything has to start from somewhere, and we can do that. Together. We can build a foundation, give the next generation sufficient resources and high quality education for them to raise their voices about these injustices, and to call for justice to be served. We need to invest in our children, our future generations, because, as stated by Mary Robinson, "Youth are the majority. Youth have to have their voice, their perspective, and their urgency included."



This is why we need a curriculum that integrates environmental science and advocacy into our local school system.

Here's an example of why we need this curriculum. When I started to get into sustainability, I was super into recycling, but here's the thing . . . I wasn't even recycling the proper way. "Recycling" for me consisted of me just putting unwashed plastic right into the recycling bin and calling it a day. It wasn't until my mom caught me by chance and told me I had to rinse out plastics that I actually started to recycle.

I realized that by wanting to protect the environment, I had inadvertently contributed more harm than good. But I feel that this could have been easily prevented if we had been provided with the proper education.

Now I ask for you to close your eyes and imagine. Imagine a curriculum that integrates climate education and environmental advocacy that surpasses the traditional classroom setting, emphasizing hands-on service learning. Imagine the impact we can make together, not just now, but, most importantly, for our future generations as well.

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