



Climate Justice Is More than a Political Football

Lead Librarian
Texas

Climate justice education is essential because it offers students the tools to truly see the interwoven threads of social and environmental challenges woven by the climate crisis. It's a shift from simply learning scientific facts about a changing climate to understanding its uneven impact, particularly on those communities already facing hardships. This approach encourages a deeper contemplation of historical currents, political landscapes and cultural norms. It's about nurturing informed, empathetic hearts and minds ready to engage actively in their communities.

When the lens of climate justice is missing from education, we risk blindness, ignorance of the disproportionate burdens carried by some, and failure to address the very roots of environmental injustice. Too often, the discourse around climate education becomes muddled, reduced to a question of belief rather than understanding. In some places, like my home state of Texas, the very term "justice" can be tossed about, losing its true meaning in the pursuit of political maneuvering. Students might grasp the science of climate change, yet fail to see why certain populations are more vulnerable or see how systemic inequities shape the environmental realities we face. Our young people need to be equipped to advocate, for themselves and for others, to carry these insights into whatever paths they choose as adults. They need the critical thinking skills to truly grapple with the climate crisis.

Being from Texas, a place I deeply appreciate for its natural wealth, I also feel a growing concern with our changing demographics. Sometimes, the prevailing political winds here seem to dismiss anything touching on "climate" or "justice" as simply part of a political agenda. As educators, we need to find ways to empower our students without getting caught in that crossfire. I envision an educational approach that weaves together different disciplines: science with social issues,

economics, and ethics. This interconnectedness would foster a true inclusiveness, ensuring that climate education is accessible to every student.

Beyond just lessons, we need to help them plan for action, inspiring students to become solution creators. They need to learn to examine the disparities in who is exposed to pollution, who has access to green spaces, and who is most vulnerable to extreme weather. In many communities, the reality is stark: lower-income areas often face more challenges along with fewer resources for adapting and recovering. Within our classrooms, these injustices might even be reflected in our students' own lives— the child with asthma from poor air quality, the lack of safe places to play outdoors. This underscores the urgent need for education that tackles both the causes and the consequences of environmental inequity. We must help them understand that this is the world they will inherit.

By placing climate justice at the heart of education, we do more than just prepare students for a changing world; we empower them to become the architects of a more just and sustainable future. Shouldn't our schools aim to equip students not only to adapt but also to actively shape a better tomorrow? Isn't that, at its core, the aspiration of every educator and every school?