

Headline: Challenge to students: Study climate change

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From Sept. 20 to 27, students all over the world walked out of class for the Global Climate Strike. We did it for our lives, we did it for our future, boycotting school in the face of an impending climate disaster. But as the strikes wind down for now, I have a strange piece of advice for fellow young strikers: Go study.

Climate change is complex. The crisis we face involves multiple layers of interwoven issues. If, for example, we want to address CO₂ building up in the atmosphere, we also have to find out the amount of CO₂ actually present in the air, which countries and corporations emitted the CO₂, and at whose expense. All these issues and more are tied together, and being a good activist means being able to unravel them and see where they connect.

Of the different threads to be followed, science provides the clearest start. Understanding climate change requires understanding basic concepts, like global warming and greenhouse gases, and mastering these issues requires the lessons taught by basic biology, physics and chemistry. The first people to recognize climate change were scientists who had the training and bravery to read the data and warn us of the implications of the patterns coming out.

However, science by itself isn't enough. Humans caused climate change, and so are part of the equation, too. Which organizations, corporations and institutions began to dig up and burn fossil fuels for energy and money, and continue to do so today? Who runs them? Do the rest of us have any say?

On July 1, 2016, Gloria Capitan was shot dead in her village. She was a 57-year-old grandmother who spearheaded the Coal-Free Bataan Movement, leading her community in protest against the expansion of local coal plants. For that, she was killed. Since then, the Philippines has become the deadliest country in the world for environmental defenders. Where has justice gone?

If there's one thing to be sure of, it's that the threat posed by climate change affects everyone, everywhere, especially people already living on the margins. And as the world focuses on brave, intelligent Greta Thunberg, it risks forgetting about other voices that are just as vital. The indigenous youth, whose communities are among those most in danger of climate change, and who are fighting for their lives in the face of it—what insights do they have to share? Shouldn't they have a greater say in this crisis?

A big reason why getting organized is so important is that it's not just an additive process. It's multiplicative. Climate change is maddeningly complex. No one person could go at it alone, which is why we join together. Scientists pool their knowledge with community organizers and human rights defenders, while also seeking the help of artists to share their findings in new and powerful ways. Being an activist for climate change doesn't mean just showing up. It's also about joining the movement while bearing some skill or idea of your own to contribute to the collective effort.

The climate strike in September won't be the last. As governments around the world fall short of addressing the climate crisis, it's our young voices that will force them to sit up and listen. And as strikers continue to organize their own actions both locally and internationally, students should remember: Don't be afraid to get out of your classes, grab your placards and go study.

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