



EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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What is sustainable development?

The concept of sustainable development emerged as a response to a growing concern about human society's impact on the natural environment. The concept of sustainable development was defined in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission (formally the World Commission on Environment and Development) as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland, 1987). This definition acknowledges that while development may be necessary to meet human needs and improve the quality of life, it must happen without depleting the capacity of the natural environment to meet present and future needs. The sustainable development movement has grown and campaigned on the basis that sustainability protects both the interests of future generations and the earth's capacity to regenerate. At first it emphasised the environment in development policies but, since 2002, has evolved to encompass social justice and the fight against poverty as key principles of sustainable development.

Education for Sustainable Development should be integrated within the whole curriculum and cannot be tackled as a separate subject. The issues covered in schools should include local examples and encourage critical thinking and problem solving techniques. Education for Sustainable Development programs' success is achieved through the coalition of the various educational institutions within the community together with the non-formal sectors.

education play in sustainable development

Good quality education is an essential tool for achieving a more sustainable world. This was emphasised at the UN World Summit in Johannesburg in 2002 where the reorientation of current education systems was outlined as key to sustainable development. Education for sustainable development (ESD) promotes the development of the knowledge, skills, understanding, values and actions required to create a sustainable world, which ensures environmental protection and conservation, promotes social equity and encourages economic



sustainability. The concept of ESD developed largely from environmental education, which has sought to develop the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and behaviour in people to care for their environment. The aim of ESD is to enable people to make decisions and carry out actions to improve our quality of life without compromising the planet. It also aims to integrate the values inherent in sustainable development into all aspects and levels of learning.

Many believe that the effects of globalization in education are positive. As some contend, 'There is no greater context for educational change than that of globalization, nor no grander way of conceptualizing what educational change is about' (Wells et al. 1998: 322). For Waks, fundamental changes imply changes not only in subject-matter selection, but also in instructional methods, technology utilization, organization, and administration. It is not surprising that there are those who applaud educational policy decisions arising from global initiatives to 'improve' education. Although they tend to recognize difficulties and challenges, they basically have faith that good educational change can arise from the creative tensions and uncertainties which accompany the multicultural context and vague language. UNESCO's Education for All movement, millennium goals, and its decade for Education for Sustainable Development, for instance, are seen as opportunities for educational change. Education for sustainable development was launched by the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987), *Our Common Future*. It was propelled forward by the 1992 World Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, and was the focus of attention again at the World Summit on Sustainable Development at Johannesburg in 2002. Throughout this period, with the assistance of numerous additional conferences, concerted efforts have been made to transform environmental education into education for sustainable development.

The response by the environmental education community to these concerted efforts to convert environmental education into education for sustainable development has been varied (Hesselink et al. 2000). Some, who for a long time have claimed that environmental education has to examine issues related to inequity, North-South relationships, and sustainable use, welcome the move as a legitimization of their interpretation of environmental education. Others reject the move, somewhat ironically for the same reason. They suggest that environmental education is a well-established field that already examines the issues education for sustainable development is supposed to examine. 'Why throw away the baby



with the bathwater?’ they seem to say. Others, including ourselves, display more principled resistance. They question globalizing trends based on a vague and problematic concept such as sustainable development.

They also see a downside to the homogenizing tendencies of these global policy movements and take offence at prescriptive constructions such as ‘education for sustainable development’ that reduce the conceptual space for self-determination, autonomy, and alternative ways of thinking. Although these three types of responses can all be found in the environmental education community, by and large education for sustainable development has become widely seen as a new and improved version of environmental education, most visibly at the national policy level of many countries. We regard as problematic the emergence of education for sustainable development in educational policies and the pressure on the environmental educators around the world to re-frame their work as contributions towards sustainable development. Globalization, we fear, can be viewed as a process that strengthens the instrumental tendencies of environmental education to promote a certain kind of citizenship, particularly one that serves, or at least does not question, a neo-liberalist agenda. At the same time, globalization can also be seen as a process that allows powerful world bodies, such as the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and UNESCO, to influence educational policy agendas on a global scale with lightning speed. With these developments in mind, we make the following arguments. First, we identify anomalies that have arisen as world bodies such as UNESCO and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) have championed the conversion of environmental education to education for sustainable development. Second, we discuss these anomalies in light of an emancipator interpretation of education. Third, we present a heuristic that emerged while improving our own understanding of relationships between sustainable development, environmental thought, democracy, and education. We hope that the heuristic will be helpful to others when wishing to examine their own frames for making sense of sustainable development, and other global issues.

Obstacles and Challenges

1. Serious problems such as extreme inequalities among different human races and groups, vicious conflicts, loss of biological and cultural diversity, pollution and environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources have led to a state of “planetary emergency”. Driven by a focus on short-term benefits, individuals and society in general are not taking



into consideration consequences that will impact future generations (Educators for Sustainability, 2004).

2. Societies tend to be alienated of such a situation and so educators have to come up with innovative solutions and approaches to the challenges currently being faced.
3. In order to achieve this, a campaign, Education for Sustainable Development: A Necessary Commitment, was proposed by Educators for Sustainability so as to incorporate the study of the state of the world's environment into educational activities encouraging : the use of environmental resources following the three R's; Reduction, Re-using and Recycling progress of technologies to better satisfy human needs without any detriment to the environment the implementation of measures on both local and international scales to deter private interests that might harm future generations.
4. Unfortunately changing the world's mentality is difficult and requires time and resources. One of the major obstacles in fact is that the communities often feel helpless. Another issue is surely pessimism. This results mainly from a "diluted responsibility within the mass" and the indecisiveness to act (UNESCO 2005).
5. Communities' numbness to commit themselves arises from various factors;
6. Daily life concerns
7. Lack of time and information
8. Lack of motivation and refusal to integrate systems.

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