

Sustainable development education and Curriculum 2000

Ros Wade, South Bank University

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Abstract

In this article, Ros Wade shows how geography teachers can play a role in education for sustainable development (ESD). The article makes reference to Curriculum 2000; a UK government initiative aimed at promoting breadth whilst still maintaining some specialisation in the 16-19 curriculum. The paper provides some thought-provoking and interesting ideas about sustainable development education at the pre-tertiary level and will no doubt be of interest to GEES academics wanting to know more about ESD in the school curriculum.

Introduction

According to a Council for Environmental Education (CEE) report to the Department for Education and Employment and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, sustainable development education (SDE) is concerned with:

'the learning needed to maintain and improve our quality of life and the quality of life of generations to come. It is about equipping individuals, communities, groups, businesses and governments to live and act sustainably; as well as giving them an understanding of the environmental, social and economic issues involved. It is about preparing for the world in which we will live in the next century and making sure that we are not found wanting' (CEE, 1998, p. 30).

The term 'sustainable development' has its origins in the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) and Agenda 21 (UNCED, 1992). The plan 'Blueprint for Action: Agenda 21' resulted from Earth Summit of 1992 at which all the world's leaders signed up to a range of commitments on sustainable development. The definition in the Brundtland Report is probably the most widely used; 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987). However, the term is not unproblematic and there is a danger that it can be seen 'like Mom and Apple Pie [as] an incontrovertibly Good Thing and has an ability to mean all things to all people' (Killeen, 1995). For example, 'neo Liberal' economists maintain that market-led growth and the development of new technology will resolve environmental problems while, at the other extreme, 'deep green' ecologists maintain that economic growth is the problem and that we need to perceive nature as being of the same importance as human beings. UNESCO described it as 'an emerging concept' in which we can all play our part in shaping. There is no doubt that it is a contested term but there is also no doubt that there is a shared imperative to achieve it. To me, two factors are essential:

- People, equity and justice must be at the heart of any interpretation of sustainable development;
- It must apply to all of us, especially those of us in northern industrialised societies.

Why do we need SDE?

To quote Agenda 21:

'Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well being' (UNCED, 1992, p. 47).

According to the 1996 UN Human Development Report:

- 1.3 billion people (one-fifth of the human race) live in absolute poverty, lacking access to basic necessities such as food and clean drinking water;
- Northern countries with 25% of the world's population consume 80% of the world's energy.

And according to Oxfam, 'If everyone on the planet were to achieve northern levels of consumption then two extra planet Earths would be needed' (Oxfam, 1995).

We have all read the forecasts about depletion of the ozone layer, about the effects of deforestation and about climate change. The human race is like someone living way beyond his/her means. For a while we can carry on kidding ourselves that everything is fine, but some day soon, unless we take action to change our circumstances, we will have a rude awakening. This does not necessarily mean a natural disaster. Some would even argue that this has happened already: a lack of sustainable development for all has been cited as one of the root causes of the atrocity of 11 September 2001. And this terrible tragedy has highlighted the need not just to tackle terrorism (which is a major impediment to sustainable development), but also to address the wider inequalities and injustices in the world which terrorism feeds on.

Agenda 21 showed that world leaders could be united about the nature of the problems. However, agreement over the solutions is another matter and so far many of Agenda 21's commitments have been left unfulfilled. In November 2001 the Kyoto Protocol was agreed by 180 countries, however, this was without the support of the world's major polluter: the USA. However, the second Earth Summit, recently held in Johannesburg in 2002, provided an opportunity to review progress and gave educators a chance to feed into the discussions.

What does Curriculum 2000 say about SDE?

Although SDE is not awarded as high a profile as Citizenship in Curriculum 2000, it is nonetheless an important element of both the personal, social and health education and Citizenship frameworks. For example, at key stage 1 (age 5-7) 'students should be taught what improves and harms their local, natural and built environment'; and, at key stage 2, (age 7-11) 'students should be taught that resources can be allocated in different ways and that these economic choices affect individuals, communities and sustainability of the environment' (DfEE/QCA, 1999a, p. 139). The key stage 3 (age 11-14) and 4 (age 14-16) programmes of study contain more explicit opportunities for SDE, for example, 'students should be taught the wider issues and challenges of global interdependence and responsibility including sustainable development and Local Agenda 21'. They also underline the importance of taking responsible action: 'students should negotiate, decide and take part responsibly in both school and community based activity' (DfEE/QCA, 1999b, p. 184).

SDE is now also clearly identified within the rationale for the national curriculum where it states that the school curriculum should:

'enable students to think creatively and critically, to solve problems and to make a difference for the better ... It should develop their awareness, understanding and respect for the environments in which they live and secure their commitment to sustainable development at a personal, local, national and global level' (DfEE/QCA, 1999b, p. 11).

This is reinforced in the statement of values at the end of the *National Curriculum Handbook* which states that 'we should accept our responsibility to maintain a sustainable environment for future generations' (DfEE/QCA, 1999b, p. 148). This underlines its importance as an overarching concept for the whole curriculum, and the whole school ethos.

More specifically, references to sustainable development in geography have been strengthened across all key stages. This places geography teachers in a very influential position, both within the classroom, but also within the school as a whole. Research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on effective teaching of environmental education highlighted the fact that a crucial element in changing attitudes was 'the beliefs and practices of environmentally motivated teachers which are the most significant in prompting young people to take action' (Saunders *et al.*, 1995, p. 20). Further they found that 'the role of the geography department seemed key, with 'the constraints there having a significant effect on overall levels of students awareness' (Saunders *et al.*, 1995, p. 24). In other words, motivated and committed geography teachers can strongly influence the extent to which young people develop their own commitments to a more sustainable world. This has also been reinforced by the introductory rationale to the programme of study which talks of the importance of geography in inspiring students 'to think about their own place in the world, their values and their rights and responsibilities to other people and the environment' (DfEE/QCA, 1999b, p. 154). Of course, it is important that SDE is not confined to the geography classroom. As an overarching concept and imperative to action it must become part of our thinking at all levels, from home to school to public life. A further finding of the NFER research indicated that without a supportive school ethos, students were unlikely to change their attitudes or actions towards the environment. 'In other words, it is the culture that the school creates which has the strongest impact on the behaviour of young people' (Saunders *et al.*, 1995, p. 26). Specialist geography teachers are, however, perhaps uniquely placed in their potential to grasp key global issues, such as climate change, and to have an overview of the debates on possible solutions. As such, geographers are in a position to influence the school agenda, to promote cross curricular initiatives on sustainability issues, to offer in-service training to colleagues, and to advocate the need for SDE to be embedded within the school development plan.

How do we ensure that SDE is part of the school curriculum?

There is now clear commitment in the national curriculum rationale for developing whole school policy on SDE, as well as within the Citizenship and PSHE orders and this means that there has probably never been such an opportune time for teachers and schools to take this forward. In 1999, schools' minister Charles Clarke was quoted in the *Times Educational Supplement* as saying: 'Due to reduced prescription, there is ample opportunity for teachers to use a range of sustainable development issues and contexts to develop subject-related skills'. And David Blunkett praised primary schools for their success at integrating these topics into almost every subject, which is how he hoped the new framework would be implemented (*TES*, 25 June 1999). However, teachers are already overburdened by new government initiatives. There are also many contradictory government messages to teachers. Despite broad commitments to Citizenship and SDE, there has been much greater emphasis on league tables, testing and the literacy and numeracy hours. One could sometimes be forgiven for thinking that the present government's preoccupation with what can be measured indicates their understanding of what one of Oscar Wilde's characters called 'the price of everything and the value of nothing'.

SDE, of course, cannot just be the responsibility of educators. It has to be the responsibility of the whole community. But teachers are very concerned about the major issues facing us as we enter the twenty-first century and, as the NFER research demonstrated, geographers in particular are ideally placed to help students develop the knowledge, skills and values to address these issues.

What are schools doing already?

Many schools already deliver SDE although they may not actually be using the term. In Sutton and Croydon, for example, a number of schools have been working with Local Agenda 21 officers and Oxfam Education to develop projects on Fair Trade and sustainable water use. In Tower Hamlets the 'Global Footprints' project looks at how children can develop their knowledge and understanding of sustainability issues through numeracy and literacy initiatives and learn to take action to reduce the global footprint of their school. This has led to work on whole school ethos and participation, with several project schools setting up schools councils. These examples support the NFER findings about the importance of the school experience as a whole, including school policy documents and mission statements, what is on school noticeboards, and above all to attitudes of teachers and support staff. So, for example, the 'Developing Rights' project in Sheffield, which linked a strong commitment to an anti-bullying policy to conflict resolution on a national and global level, is also addressing SDE (Oxfam, 1998).

In 1997, Oxfam Education worked closely on a project with Goldsmith's Centre for Cross Curricular Initiatives to introduce SDE to novice teachers. The novice teachers devised projects in design technology, art, social science and drama. These explored a range of areas related to SDE, such as, appropriate technology, Fair Trade, sustainable tourism and conflict resolution. The projects were carried out in schools and the novice teachers were then able to reflect on them and adjust their practice accordingly. One of the key learning points for everyone involved in the project was the need for thinking and reflection time. This applied to students, novice teachers, initial teacher education (ITE) tutors and staff at Oxfam Education. What we are grappling with in SDE is not straightforward. There are no easy answers and the questions we need to ask ourselves reflect on our values and our present lifestyles.

This clearly has implications for ITE and for continuing professional development, as many teachers will look for training and support to develop their own perspectives and knowledge of SDE. The new Citizenship ITE courses offer an opportunity for commitment to sustainable development because surely it has to be an essential component of responsible citizenship. However, given current government priorities, many teachers may need to look for personal development in SDE outside their local education authority or government training, perhaps through undertaking distance learning courses.¹

What teaching resources are available for teachers in schools?

The following resources, some of which are available free of charge (see 'References and further reading'), although aimed at school teachers, may also be of interest to academics in the GEES disciplines:

- Oxfam's Curriculum for Global Citizenship (1997a) brings together environmental and development education into a model for SDE. It provides a framework across all the key stages, and includes suggestions for teachers and examples of good practice.²
- The Council for Environmental Education's Report to DfEE and QCA on Education for Sustainable Development in the Schools Sector offers suggested learning outcomes for each key stage.
- A free leaflet, which summarises some of the Report, is also available from the Council for Environmental Education.

In addition, there is a wide range of teaching materials available from organisations such as Oxfam Education, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). For example, *Citizenship for the Future* (Leat, 2000) and *The School is Us*, (Renton, 1999) (both available from WWF) offer practical ideas for SDE work with seven year olds and upwards. The primary school teaching pack *Thengapalli* (Oxfam, 1997b) looks at a project where villagers in India have revitalised their environment and achieved community renewal. Two issues of *Teaching Geography* (1996, 2001) have focused on teaching

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about sustainable development, citizenship and environmental issues. The Geographical Association has also published *Geography and the New Agenda* which focus on strategies and information for delivering SDE (Grimwade *et al.*, 2000).

How do we ensure empowerment?

Faced with the big questions it is easy sometimes for all of us to feel disempowered. We may understand how interdependent we are in today's world – how, for example, our demand for inexpensive Harry Potter merchandise can result in sweatshop labour in polluting factories in China – but, individually, we may feel unable to influence such trends. Global institutions of governance, e.g. the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have grown in power and influence without any parallel growth of instruments for global democracy, hence the importance of civil society and non-governmental organisations who are able to represent alternative positions on the world stage. It is heartening to learn that in the UK there are far more members of environmental organisations than there are members of political parties. Geography projects can offer ideal opportunities for both teachers and young people to explore issues together as a group and to develop ideas for action while Citizenship work can encourage schools to link projects with the local community. Using resources such as *Thengapalli* will help young people see that individuals and communities can take action and improve their lifestyles and living conditions. It is also good to remind ourselves that in the last 50 years, according to the 1996 UN Human Development Report: mortality rates of children have been cut in half, and the number of people with access to clean water has doubled.

In addition, the efforts of the Jubilee 2000 Movement, which campaigned for Third World debt to be 'written off', have resulted in a partial success; and we have also seen the influence of consumer power in ensuring the labelling of all genetically modified (GM) foods. The GM campaign illustrates how environmental and development issues can coalesce; such campaigns are concerned not only for the health of people and countryside in the UK, but also for the futures and livelihoods of farmers in countries such as India.

In teaching SDE, we educators are not on our own – we form part of a global movement that has its roots in Agenda 21. Educators all over the world are concerned about issues such as those outlined above as well as about outdated and inappropriate curricula. In Tanzania (ranked one of the poorest countries in the world), for example, the new Civics Curriculum includes environmental and citizenship education. All schools now have 'self-reliance' projects, which enable young people to play a part in supporting and developing their school. The teachers have to work with classes of 60 to 170 students in deteriorating school buildings, with inadequate pay and training, but the local community involvement is effective, and thus schools have been able to achieve a great deal. The Tanzanian model is perhaps one which educators in more affluent countries could learn from.

We all need to decide what kind of local and global future we want for ourselves and our future generations. We should consider what we would like future generations to be saying about the achievements of our time. If we cannot *imagine* a sustainable future then it is unlikely to be achieved.

I believe that we can and must all play our part in ensuring that SDE is at the heart of the curriculum. It is our chance to be part of the solution, not the problem. However, we must accept that there are no 'quick fixes' and no easy answers. Despite the limitations, I choose to be optimistic. I believe that Curriculum 2000 offers educators the scope and opportunity to engage students in these debates and to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to cope with the challenges to come. SDE can be motivational, can help develop a sense of responsibility, encourage participation and democratic action and develop critical analysis. If all this seems too idealistic, it is worth reminding ourselves of the words of

Oscar Wilde 'A map without utopia on it is not worth consulting'. As Curriculum 2000 has not provided us with such a map then we need to draw it for ourselves.

EndNotes

1. Many teachers find that the flexibility of distance learning enables them to develop their own thinking in SDE and apply it directly into the work they are doing in the classroom. It is available at South Bank University (www.sbu.ac.uk/fhss/eede) and the University of Bath (www.bath.ac.uk/education/ce/home.htm).
2. *A Curriculum for Global Citizenship* seeks to bring together the agenda for development and environmental education into a curriculum for global citizenship, linking the personal, the local, the national and global. In May 2002, a primary teachers' handbook will also be available, with practical class and school activities to support SDE.

References and further reading

- CEE (1998) *Education for Sustainable Development in the Schools Sector*. (London: DETR)
- DfEE/QCA (1999a) *The National Curriculum: Handbook for primary teachers in England (key stages 1 and 2)* (London: DfEE/QCA)
- DfEE/QCA (1999b) *The National Curriculum: Handbook for secondary teachers in England (key stages 3 and 4)* (London: DfEE/QCA)
- Grimwade, K., Reid, A. and Thompson, L. (2000) *Geography and the New Agenda: Citizenship, PSHE and sustainable development in the secondary curriculum*. (Sheffield: GA)
- Hicks, D. (2000) *Citizenship for the Future: A practical classroom guide* (Godalming: WWF UK)
- Inman, S. and Wade, R. (eds) (1997) *Shaping a Better Future: Development education within initial teacher education* (Oxford: Oxfam)
- Killeen, D. (1995) quoted in *Towards Local Sustainability: A review on current activity on Local Agenda 21 in the UK* (London: UNA-UK)
- Morris, M. and Schagen, I. (1995) *Green Attitudes or Learned Responses?* (Slough: NFER)
- Oxfam (1997a) *A Curriculum for Global Citizenship* (free copies available from Oxfam Development Education, Tel: 01865 311311).
- Oxfam (1997b) *Thengapalli*. (Oxford/Hampshire: Oxfam/Hampshire County Council Education)
- Oxfam (1998) *Developing Rights*. (Oxford: Oxfam)
- Teaching Geography* (1996) 'Teaching sustainable development and environmental education', special issue, October.
- Teaching Geography* (2001) 'Teaching and learning about citizenship and sustainable development', special issue, April.
- Renton, L. (1999) *The School is Us: A practical guide to successful whole school change*. (London/Manchester: WWF UK/Manchester DEP)
- Saunders, L., Hewitt, D. and MacDonald, A. (1995) *Education for Life: The cross-curricular themes in primary and secondary school* (Slough: NFER)
- UNCED (1992) *UN Conference on Environment and Development: Agenda 21 Rio Declaration* (Paris: UNESCO)
- UN (1996) *Human Development Report 1996* (Gland: UN)
- World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987) *Our Common Future (The Brundtland Report)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Further Reading

The DEA/CEE have developed a website on the World Summit for Sustainable Development for teachers – see <http://www.wssd-education.org.uk>

DETR (1999) *First Report of the Sustainable Development Education Panel* (London: DETR)

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Griffin, D., Meadows, J., Norman, A., Rogers, M. and Wade, R. (2002) *Teaching for a Sustainable Future: Embedding SDE in the ITT curriculum*. Centre for Cross-curricular Initiatives, South Bank University. (This is suitable for those in the ITE sector.)

The QCA website on sustainable development education contains case study examples and ideas for teachers <http://www.qca.org.uk>

The UNED-UK offer a free e-mail newsletter, Sustain(Ed), for teachers and educators on the World Summit for Sustainable Development 2002. Contact: abirney@earthsummit2002.org

Ros Wade

South Bank University
wader@sbu.ac.uk

Re-orienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability: Reporting on a UNESCO Initiative

William Scott and Stephen Gough
University of Bath

Abstract

This article describes a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) network set up to facilitate the way in which teachers are able to deliver sustainable development education. The article focuses on both the short- and long-term 'joined-up thinking' approach adopted by UNESCO to support the teaching of such important issues. The network itself is making use of the goals and descriptions of education in relation to sustainable development concepts across many countries, as used in Agenda 21, namely: improving basic education, re-orientating existing education and raising public awareness, understanding and training.

The Context

As we are all well aware, education, training, and public understanding of issues in relation to sustainable development have been recognised as major objectives of governments around the world since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development meeting in New York, in 1998, representatives of country after country testified that education (especially school education) was critical for a sustainable future. However, frustration was also prevalent because few if any models for implementing education in relation to sustainable development are readily available, and ministries of education around the world remain in something of a quandary over how to begin – although the recent Moscow seminar showed, there are the beginnings of experience. Many would go further; however, seeing the need, not only to incorporate sustainable development issues within formal educational programmes and structures, but also to re-orientate those same structures in order to make such incorporation both more feasible and more effective.

The world has around 59 million teachers and experiences a 5-10% turnover each year. Retraining this number of teachers to address education for sustainable development would be an immense task. Against this background, UNESCO has identified teacher education institutions within higher education as key change agents in re-orienting education. In their own particular ways, depending on context, they create the teacher education curricula, train new teachers, provide professional development for practising teachers, consult with local schools, and often provide expert opinion to regional and national ministries of education, although of course their ability to do this varies across countries depending on how much

freedom, responsibility and trust they are granted by governments. However, because of this influence in curriculum design, implementation, and the policy setting of educational institutions, it is argued by many that staff in teacher education institutions are ideally placed to bring about change that will promote education in relation to sustainable development, both in their own institutions, and in schools and therefore also help bring about systematic, economically effective change.

The UNESCO Initiative

In order to explore such issues, UNESCO and York University in Toronto, Canada, have established the UNESCO-UNITWIN Chair; the purpose of which is to provide advice to UNESCO and teacher training institutions across the world on re-orienting teacher training to address sustainable development. To facilitate and accomplish this, the Chair has established an international network of teacher education institutions that are working collaboratively to identify various ways of achieving this goal. The Chair [Professor Charles Hopkins] has formed a network of around 35 teacher education institutions from diverse regions of the world which are experimenting and researching effective methods of addressing the re-orientation of education.

Based on practical experiences, the network will advise UNESCO on how best to bring about institutional change in teacher training within higher education. Findings will be shared with other nations, ministries, and institutions around the world by publishing key findings and research results. The Chair's role is to facilitate collaboration between researchers and educators within and between teacher training institutions in order to develop and promote locally relevant education in relation to sustainable development. The work plan of the Chair calls for both short-term and long-term objectives:

Short term:

To undertake, through an international network of teacher education institutions, research and experimentation on different approaches to re-orienting teacher education toward sustainability.

Long term:

To develop suggestions and guidelines for re-orienting teacher education and associated realms of pedagogy, curriculum, and evaluation.

There are two tiers based on institutional involvement. Tier 1 Institutions are teacher education institutions who want to pursue large-scale changes in their teacher education programs in order to address sustainability. Tier 2 Institutions comprise those many faculty members and administrators who are working alone within their institutions to incorporate sustainability themes and pedagogy. As institutions join the network and gain expertise, they will share their experience and skills with other institutions both within the network and beyond. When we met for the first time as a UNESCO network, we agreed that if we were to do this effectively, there was a need to use a common research framework, which will allow comparison of results. This was developed by the Project Reporting Group, with representation from Brazil, the UK, the West Indies and Zambia, and is being used across the network.

Some Conceptual Issues

For the purposes of the Chair and network, a common understanding of the concept of education in relation to sustainable development is needed. However, rather than spending scarce time and energy defining this anew, the network uses the goals and descriptions from Agenda 21, agreed and signed by 179 world leaders in 1992. These concepts have been further refined by a series of major UN conferences in the 1990s. Of course, such education initiatives always carry with them the caveat that they should be implemented in locally relevant and culturally appropriate fashions. This caveat increases chances of successful implementation of education programmes and decreases the likelihood of importing inappropriate ones.