

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.)

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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

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

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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.

Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 outlines, but does not define, the role of education in relation to sustainable development. In doing this, it identifies three major thrusts:

- (1) improving basic education;
- (2) re-orienting existing education to address sustainable development, and
- (3) developing public understanding, awareness, and training.

These three thrusts, which have been re-confirmed at the World Summit in Johannesburg, are briefly elaborated here:

(1) Improving basic education

For many nations, the path to a sustainable future for their citizens begins with greater access to basic education. In much of the world, access, length, and quality of basic education are huge issues. In many countries, the current level of basic education is too low and severely hinders national plans for a sustainable future. Over the past decade, the definition of basic education has expanded to mean more than the ability to read and write. At one time, literacy and numeracy assured individuals and nations of economic prosperity; however, today's more complex international community calls for a broader understanding of society, economics, and environment, as well as the interconnections between them.

(2) Re-orienting existing education

The term "re-orienting education" has become a powerful descriptor that helps administrators and educators at every level to understand the changes required. An appropriately re-oriented basic education includes more principles, skills, perspectives, and values related to sustainable development than are currently included in most education systems. Hence, not only is quantity of education important, but appropriateness and relevance are also essential. Such an approach to education encompasses a vision that integrates a balanced approach to the issues of environment, economy, and society. Re-orienting education is also seen as developing an education that involves learning the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and values that will guide and motivate people to seek sustainable livelihoods, to participate in a democratic society, and to live in a sustainable manner. To effectively and completely re-orient education to address sustainable development, all disciplines in a teacher preparation institution can and should be involved in the process.

(3) Public understanding, awareness and training

Developing public understanding, awareness, and training was also stressed in Chapter 36. The world needs a literate yet environmentally-aware population and work-force to help nations implement national sustainability plans. To achieve such plans, specialised training programs must be developed for all walks of life. For the purposes of the Chair and the international network, this thrust will be limited to specialised training for teacher-educators, teachers, and administrators in formal education systems.

The work continues in each country and will be brought together in late 2003 when the Reporting Group will prepare a draft report to be considered by a final project conference prior to reporting to UNESCO.

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Further Reading

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Teacher Education, Outdoor Education and Sustainability in Scotland

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Abstract

This article explores aspects of teacher education and outdoor education and their relationship with education for sustainable development (ESD) in Scotland. It considers recent developments in national education policy and the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) initiative to 're-orient teacher education towards sustainable futures' with which the Faculty of Education of the University of Edinburgh is involved. The policy and practice of the faculty is discussed in relation to this national and international framework.

National Policy on Sustainable Development in Scotland

In July 1999, a Scottish Parliament convened in Edinburgh for the first time in almost 300 years. Whilst Scotland remains a part of the UK, a wide range of responsibilities and powers have been devolved to this parliament which include a number of policy areas central to ESD. These include environment, education, transport and health. However, some important policy areas such as energy and some fiscal measures are not devolved and this gives the parliament less room for manoeuvre.

As a signatory to Agenda 21, the UK government, and hence Scotland, is committed to its principles. These have been identified in Scotland through publications such as 'Down to Earth: A Scottish Perspective on Sustainable Development' (1999), which endorses the social, economic and educational aspects of sustainable development; and through the report of The Secretary of State for Scotland's Advisory Group on Education for Sustainable Development (1999) which focuses specifically on education.



Figure 1 Camping in the Outer Hebrides