

Education for Sustainable Development

In the early days of concern for the environment it was clear that education had a role to play and that this role was not one that could be fulfilled simply by investigation of, and transmission of information about, the environment. As E. F. Schumacher pointed out in 1973:

At present, there can be little doubt that the whole of [hu]mankind is in mortal danger, not because we are short of scientific and technological knowhow, but because we tend to use it destructively, without wisdom. More education can help us only if it produces more wisdom (1974: 66).

For Schumacher, education was about values, and it would only be through the transformation of the values that pervaded a culture that positive change regarding the environment would come about.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has now become the accepted term for an endeavour that aims to bring about positive change in regard to the intertwined nexus of environmental and social justice issues. Bringing together three complex and contested terms does not by itself solve a problem, but it helps to focus efforts and gather a set of values together under a particular banner.

We are about to enter the last year of the UNESCO ‘decade of ESD’. This initiative has aimed to bring together and address a wide range of concerns including: improving access to basic education; reorienting education to address sustainability; developing public understanding and awareness of sustainability; and providing training programmes for private and governmental sectors and civil society. Sustainability here is understood to encompass societal meanings, such as a move to more participatory forms of government; economic meanings, such as a concern about the impact of economic growth on society and the environment and a commitment to social justice; and environmental meanings, such as concern for the fragility of the physical environment and human actions upon it (UNESCO 2006). The interlinking of these themes has been a major aspect of ESD with the aim of ensuring that these links are always evident and brought to students’ consciousness in a new way.

For many readers of this journal the ESD agenda has a double aspect: as educated global citizens we need to be aware of our personal actions, but as educators we need to take note of the mission (should we accept it) of reorienting education to address sustainability, construed broadly, as above. The UNESCO framework argues that the reorientation that is required in education does not just mean bringing different subject content, for example climate change or biodiversity, to a wider range of students. Rather, it proposes a shift in the nature of education from what it has become (discipline-content knowledge/skill accumulation) to a broader transformational aim where students’ concerns, dispositions and values are positively awakened and brought into

a global context. Students need opportunities to experience and come to feel that environment and social justice matter. This requires different methods, specifically, 'participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development' (UNESCO n.d.). The change in values that these methods aim to bring about is crucial because without such change we don't arrive at the wisdom that Schumacher indicated would be needed. As he said: 'If still more education is to save us, it would have to be education of a different kind: an education that takes us into the depth of things' (2010: 17).

Thus, for educators the demands of ESD are extensive. It is not enough that in your subject area you cover issues of sustainability; you also need to cover them in a way that makes possible an alignment of the students' values with the values of ESD. Even then, however, the development of your teaching practice only impacts directly on your own students, so a further question arises: are you also raising your colleagues' awareness of this initiative so that they can introduce it in their teaching too? Beyond a lack of knowledge, two potential problems that one might encounter in attempting to raise colleagues' awareness could be: (i) a resistance to the interpretation of education as having a role in bringing about change in students' values; and (ii) perceiving ESD as emphasising social and cultural issues over more ecocentric concerns and approaches (Kopnina 2012).

There have been numerous initiatives using many different approaches across the university sector to encourage ESD (Hegarty 2011, Hopkinson et al. 2008). However, these are usually driven by a few committed individuals, and the critical mass is not yet there to ensure that all students are challenged to examine their own values from a globally-informed perspective. If the depth of learning required is to be supported by educators, then they must themselves have engaged in the challenge of considering their own values about everything from global equality of opportunity to personal consumer choices (Butler 2010, Middlemiss 2010, Raterman 2012). Perhaps a decade was too short a timescale to imagine that such radical changes could be set in train.

Looking into the depth of things does not need to lead to despair. For example, if students are asked to consider photographs of a drought-stricken village, and if they choose to examine the reasons for, and their feelings about, such a situation, then they can find a spur to action that can lead to a greater sense of meaningfulness and purpose in their own lives. As the debate that begins this issue of the journal between bleak naturalists on the one hand and cheerful naturalists on the other (Kidd 2013) illustrates, knowledge about the nature of the world and our potentially destructive role in it does not necessarily lead to despair. When held in a supportive, educative space, such knowledge can lead to an awakened empathy, an informed sense of purpose, and a desire to contribute positively to the world.

ESD emphasises the role of education in nurturing the values, dispositions and actions that will bring about a more sustainable future. It has been helpful in bringing to the fore the idea that knowledge is not enough, for knowledge, as we have seen, doesn't change behaviour. Matteson considers the way in which environmental virtues can support sustainability and makes a case for adding to the usual environmental virtues, such as respect and humility, that of environmental creativity, which is necessary if we are to respect the natural world while also living within it (Matteson 2013). The two papers on climate change in this issue (Tremmel 2013, Habib 2013) are exactly the kind of papers that should find a place in the ESD aspects of a degree or postgraduate programme because they, like other recent papers (Gloetzbach and Baumgärtner 2012, Husby 2010), delve into the full complexity of the climate change issue with regard to social justice – social justice across geographical space and time. The final paper develops another ESD-related theme, that of participatory practices. Through an insightful and grounded study a case is made for the greater use of deliberative planning that genuinely makes use of participative activities rather than allowing them to be lost behind external experts and technical models (Elgert 2013). Thus, we can see from this issue of *Environmental Values* that the information and research for the new educational programme is readily available. What we now need is to reorient ourselves as educators and citizens to make use of this material.

ISIS BROOK

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