



Global Network on Sustainability and Education

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1. The Global Network on Sustainability and Education

1.1 Sustainability

“Sustainability is the capacity to endure. For humans, sustainability is the long-term maintenance of responsibility, which has environmental, economic and social dimensions, and encompasses the concept of stewardship, the responsible management of resource use.” (1)

A transition to sustainability may be necessary, but is it possible? It will certainly not be easy. “Transition to sustainability is vitally important, and very scary. We need to calm our fears and build our capacity to hope.” (2) Building communities is an approved problem-solving approach for reaching elusive goals.

1.2 Our Initiative

The problem of climate change is complex and challenging. There’s a need to elaborate solution approaches inter-disciplinarily and cross-culturally. So during the Future of Education Conference in June 2011 the Global Network on Sustainability and Education (GNSE) was founded to overcome the worldwide problem of climate change and its consequences by means of education.

The GNSEs mission is

- to stimulate change at local level.
- to collaborate with global partners.
- to support the network partners with ideas, information, materials, links and contacts.
- to enable the community to grow the necessary critical mass in the necessary timescales.

The GNSE built up a blog providing information for stakeholders in vocational education and adult education: <http://gnse.wordpress.com/>. The network is open for new members. It can be interesting to join for all types of stakeholders in education, e.g. VET-providers, adult education providers, politicians, headmasters, teachers, trainers, counselors, kindergarten teachers etc. “Users / beneficiaries” of the educational system – pupils and participants – are very welcome, too.

2. The Role of Education

“Education should play an important role in enabling people to live together in ways that contribute to sustainable development. However, at present, education often contributes to unsustainable living. This can happen through a lack of opportunity for learners to question their own lifestyles and the systems and structures that promote those lifestyles. It also happens through reproducing unsustainable models and practices.” (3)

Educating for a sustainable future is a formidable challenge. How can we better understand the complexity of the world around us? What kind of world do we want for the future? How can we reconcile the requirements of economy, society, and the environment?

Educating for a sustainable future is not so much about a destination as about the process of learning to make decisions that consider the long-term economy, ecology and equity of all communities. Its goal is to build an enduring society. This involves learning how to anticipate the consequences of our actions, envision a sustainable future and create the steps needed to achieve the vision. Individuals, organizations and societies will perpetually have to make choices. This needs top-down strategies and bottom-up strategies simultaneously.

2.1 Education for Sustainable Development

“Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a vision of education that seeks to empower people to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future. It aims at improving access to quality basic education, reorienting education curricula, training and raising public awareness as well as helping people to develop the behaviors, skills and knowledge they need, now and in the future (UNESCO, Education for Sustainability—from Rio to Johannesburg: Lessons Learnt from a Decade of Commitment, 2002).

Following the Johannesburg Summit, the UNDESD was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly as a ten year period for education action beginning on 1 January 2005. UNESCO was designated as the lead agency in the promotion of the DESD. DESD seeks to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, in order to address the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems we face in the 21st century. The effectiveness of the UNDESD will depend on the strength and inclusiveness of the partnerships, networks, and alliances that develop among stakeholders at all levels.

The four major thrusts of DESD include:

- promoting and improving quality education;
- reorienting existing education to address sustainable development;
- building public understanding and awareness;



- providing practical training.

ESD supports five fundamental types of learning to provide quality education and foster sustainable human development, which are also termed as the five pillars of ESD. The five pillars of ESD comprise of

- learning to know,
- learning to be,
- learning to live together,
- learning to do and
- learning to transform oneself and society. (5)

2.2 Educators as change agents

There are over 60 million teachers/trainers in the world. Each one is a key agent for bringing about the changes in values and lifestyles we need. For this reason, innovative teacher education and continuing professional development is an important part of educating for a sustainable future.

The Joint Ministerial Session on ESD held at the Belgrade "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in 2007 recognized that the lack of educator competences is a frequent bottleneck in promoting ESD. The UNECE Expert Group for Educator Competences has drafted a range of educator competences and recommendations for policy makers. (3) UNESCO launched a multimedia teacher education programme "teaching and learning for a sustainable future" (6). It provides professional development for student teachers, teachers, curriculum developers, education policy makers, and authors of educational materials.

2.3 Sustainability in Education

Organizational development of educational establishments can support teachers continuing professional development effectively and vice versa. Again: We need top-down strategies and bottom-up strategies simultaneously!

According to the three dimensions of sustainability educational establishments can check their sustainability using the following criteria:

- economy - e.g.: energy consumption of buildings, curricula fit to workplace requirement, efficiency of teaching and learning, measuring outcome of teaching/training etc.

- ecology - e.g.: low energy strategies, certified equipment, use of low carbon servers, mobility of participants, choice of the event venue and accommodation for participants, waste management, water management etc

- society - e.g.: qualification and situation of staff, sickness absence rate of staff, dropout rate of participants, facilities for handicapped participants and staff members, gender mainstreaming and diversity management etc.

There have been developed several tools for measuring and improving different aspects of sustainability in educational establishments, yet, which can be used and implemented on organizational level. Some examples:

- Guidelines for the Sustainable Organisation of Events can be used. (7)

- There are various internet portals, that can be used to calculate transport-related emissions of greenhouse gases and that offer to arrange offsetting projects. (9)

- The EU Eco Label covers an increasing number of product groups, taking in major areas of manufacturing and also tourist accommodation services. The criteria for each product group have been identified on the basis of comprehensive studies of the environmental aspects related to the entire life cycle of the product. (8)

- The European Environmental Audit System (EMAS):

- Voluntary environmental management measures according to the amended EU Environmental Audit Directive allow all kinds of institutions, i.e. companies but also authorities, service units or even private households, to take part in the European eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS). Meanwhile EMAS has become an effective environmental management instrument in numerous enterprises. (10)

For other aspects you don't need tools – just awareness, consciousness or knowledge. One example is catering: Seasonal and regional products should be used, meat should be avoided. Preference should be given to organically sourced products and fair trade products, e.g. coffee, tea, juices. (11)

Our experience is: When you're open minded, searching for solutions, you'll find them but you'll find new questions and challenges, too! Sustainability is an extremely complex subject. Many solutions already have been found somewhere – we just have to exchange them. We need to use all our coping capacities to scrutinize second nature and abandon bad habits.

People all over the world start to recognize that we need more action and on a larger scale. So how do we inspire action at that pace and at that scale? How can we persuade ourselves to take nasty medicine?

3. Inspire sustainability transitions

"The environmental movement is not short of ideas. What we are short of is effective ways to communicate them. Curiously, we are often not well served by our own expertise. We have to learn to communicate with ordinary people without degrees in ecology, chemistry or environmental philosophy." (2, p.93) GNSE wants to bridge the gap between different cultures and specialist disciplines. We want to support people in education-related positions in finding local solutions for global problems. Share your questions and experience with us!



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