

## **Best Practice and Challenges in Education for Sustainable Development and Global Education**

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### **Abstract**

This paper describes some of the developments to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Education (GE) in programs at the University of Hertfordshire including the BA Education Studies, BEd and PGCE offered by the School of Education. These developments were initiated by the 'professional lead' in ESD and GE. In particular, the paper will discuss the conceptual framework, which underpins both the development and audit of ESD/GE practice in the School of Education. Results from this audit and later impact assessment are presented. The key outcomes of this work, particularly the value of the conceptual framework, lessons for the future and a proposed agenda for further research and development are also discussed.

### **A framework for developing education for sustainable development and global education**

The original conceptual development of a framework for ESD and GE was undertaken by the professional lead in this area in response to considerable variation in the use of terminology and overlapping constructs in these curriculum areas. For example, what are the differences between global dimension, global citizenship and global education and do they matter? In this paper, as in the research and development processes, the term 'global education' is used as it most accurately describes this work. It focuses on educating about global issues and also embraces dimensions of global citizenship.

Initial thinking was that it would be hard to educate about issues and citizenship, local or global, without embracing education for sustainable development. How could we be good citizens if we did not care for our habitat, our planet, and work

toward everyone sharing a similar quality of life? In 2002, the QCA identified and proposed seven key concepts of ESD as follows:

- Citizenship and stewardship
- Sustainable change
- Needs and rights of future generations
- Interdependence
- Diversity
- Uncertainty and precaution
- Quality of life, equity and justice

At this time the underlying government conceptualization of a global dimension to the curriculum included the following eight key concepts:

- Citizenship
- Social Justice
- Sustainable Development
- Diversity
- Values and Perceptions
- Interdependence
- Conflict Resolution
- Human Rights

(Global Perspectives and Teachers in Training, DEA, 2003, p.54)

Teachers were, therefore, being faced with 15 key concepts to plan for within ESD and GE. These two initiatives are obviously inter-related and the professional lead wanted to refine and simplify these concepts. If these two dimensions are interwoven and brought together as joined-up thinking across the curriculum, then coverage of the conceptual field could and should be more meaningful and coherent. The following ten concepts were developed. These continue to underpin Education for Sustainable Development and Global Education in the undergraduate programs in Education at the University of Hertfordshire.

**Citizenship and stewardship**  
**Needs and Rights of Future**  
**Generations**  
**Interdependence**  
**Social Justice**  
**Conflict resolution**

**Sustainable Development**  
**Uncertainty and Precaution**  
  
**Diversity**  
**Quality of life, equity and justice**  
**Values and perceptions**

However, it became evident that colleagues, especially if new to ESD/ GE thinking, found it difficult to see what these concepts meant in practice. Ten sets of images were produced to illustrate the concepts and thus help staff to 'visualize' ESD and GE. They were useful, but ten posters took up a lot of space, even when part of a 'corridor' display. The next development was that of a 'mind' map which was compact and could be adapted to fit any institution, school or discussion group through the use of suitable examples.

The mind-map (p.4) shows the key concepts, with a short explanation of each. A second mind-map has been developed with quotations from the School of Education and University strategic plans under each of the concepts. This is used as a broad audit of aims and objectives. A third mind-map has the concepts and blank windows for use as a school, class or subject planning or audit tool.

Following these curriculum representations associated materials were introduced through a staff meeting with 'compulsory' attendance followed by other voluntary meetings. Staff discussed implementation of these ideas in both initial teacher education programs as well as education studies modules on sustainable development and global education.



## Research and Methodology

The research study<sup>1</sup> that follows investigates how far these initiatives to introduce and embed principles of ESD and GE are evidenced in the practice of colleagues at the University of Hertfordshire in education programs. An audit was, therefore, undertaken in order to establish good practice and identify gaps, with a view to suggesting how these might be filled. A researcher experienced in conducting and analyzing interviews made initial contact with interviewees via email. Interviewees were selected on the basis that they were Initial Teacher Training tutors or those who taught on the education studies modules. The response rate was 60%.

It was explained to interviewees that the question to which the audit sought an answer was: *to what extent do staff integrate coverage of ESD and GE concepts into module sessions in each course?*

During semi-structured interviews, interviewees were asked to:

- look at the mind-map and to think where the concepts come (if at all) into their modules

<sup>1</sup> This research was supported by a grant from East of England Development Education Network (EEDEN) and the Department for International Development (DfID)

- think of examples of how they teach about these concepts within their subject or professional courses, and finally
- reflect on how they felt interview participation may have affected, if at all, their perception of the ESD and GE concepts and of their own teaching practices.

Within this paper full details of the analysis of interview responses are not presented or discussed due to lack of space. These can be found in the Report submitted to the East of England Development Education Network (Bloomfield et al, 2009). However, in the next section some key findings are presented. These give rise to a number of issues as well as evidence of impact arising from tutors engaging in such research and development work.

### **Key findings**

The rationale for this audit was to understand the extent to which ESD and GE concepts were covered across curricula within the School of Education, but also to gauge the enthusiasm towards the teaching of these themes amongst staff.

#### **Finding 1: Staff welcomed the audit and look forward to more information, discussion and development in this area.**

The majority of those interviewed expressed enthusiasm about the audit, to learn the outcome and to see what “others are doing” across the department. For example,

*‘What I am hoping will come out of this, is a better idea of what people are doing. I do think these things are important and want to know where there are gaps. I am very interested in examples of where people have done it so we can see how it can be used.’*

The common hope expressed following interviews was that the auditing process would eventually lead to a greater understanding of what was going on inside the School of Education on ESD/GE concepts, and facilitate discussion around how best to develop teaching practice in this area.

#### **Finding 2: The mind-map is an effective and useful organising tool that has enabled staff to surface their practice and subsequent interventions**

The mind-map was found to be familiar to staff as it had been on display in the corridor and introduced in a staff meeting. It also formed the basis for a discussion about 'next steps' as many staff wanted to see it developed further and used more widely. As one interviewee put it *"we need examples to help the concepts come alive"*.

The mind-map was also a useful tool for prompting discussion in interviews and helping staff surface their practice. Some staff felt that they might not be able to contribute to the interview until they saw the mind map. From that point, they found discussing the themes relatively easy and could relate them back to their teaching. The mind-map made the concepts recognisable and allowed staff to link them to their own curricula with ease. In this sense, it has been a very helpful organising tool and provided an effective basis for discussion. A number of staff took the mind-map away with them following the interview as they wanted to remember to use it with students.

### **Finding 3: The professional lead is seen as a 'champion' for the ESD and GE agenda**

The Professional Lead in Primary Geography, Global and Sustainable Development in Education has taken a key role in promoting both interest and action around ESD and GE principles even though many made the point that they have been embedding these concepts in their teaching for years. For example,

*"Peter is brilliant, he has really influenced my thinking on this."*

*"I see Peter as a resource as to how we can embed [ESD principles] in what we are doing."*

*"He is very knowledgeable and helpful when it comes to these issues".*

They considered it important that there was an easily recognisable person- a champion - within the department with whom all ESD and GE concepts were linked.

### **Finding 4: ESD and GE Concepts are, to some extent, implicit in all teaching practice**

Rather than thinking that these themes are not reflected within their teaching practice at all, the opposite view was put forward by the majority of interviewees: that these concepts are often 'part and parcel of what teachers do'. One clear example of this relates to the theme of sustainable development. Teaching staff place a high premium on modelling behaviour to student teachers. One such example of this relates to the use of materials during practical exercises in Art or Science classes. Modelling the careful use of resources, according to most interviewees, is something that teachers have always done:

*'Sustainable development is key for me because a lot of the resources that we use in Design and Technology are reclaimed, recycled...we bring in the boxes....at the beginning of the year groups we talk about reclaiming, reusing, we introduce students to places like WRAP [recycled materials source for schools].'*

There was a sense that an understanding of, and commitment to ESD and GE themes are fundamental to one's personal and professional development as a teacher. There was consensus among staff that they see their role as instilling a sense of reflection in students and to develop their skills as critical thinkers. In doing so, students would understand *their own* values and perceptions and then be more conscious of those that they might impose on a classroom of students. Across the board, many tutors integrate the concepts, which they deem to be important, without expressly presenting them. For example, many staff regard themes such as conflict resolution as a broader issue that is always covered during generic sessions e.g. behaviour management modules, an area that is comprehensively taught across subjects and course levels.

### **Finding 5: Staff felt that the teaching of these concepts should be made more explicit in teaching practice**

Overall, a majority of interviewees felt that greater weight should be given to the more explicit teaching of these concepts to students. This finding mirrors that of the University of East Anglia audit (EEDEN, 2005), which also noted staff's desire to make the concepts more explicit, and a fundamental part of their teaching practice.

One course director felt that students needed this connection underlined to them. In this way, students could in turn, feel more confident about their understanding of the

themes and of addressing them with pupils in schools. Again, she felt that a more fully-fledged edition of the mind-map could aid this process. Following the interview, she decided that students should use the mind-map within their schools tasks when planning lessons. She also felt that secondary trainees were best placed to incorporate these concepts in their subject knowledge audits for instance.

### **Finding 6: Interview as Intervention**

In many cases, the interview was welcomed as an ‘excuse’ or ‘opportunity’ for much needed reflection on these concepts outside of teaching and to think more in depth about the rationale for course content, how it may have changed over the months and years and the priority that should be given to ESD and GE more generally. It was clear, therefore, that the very act of interviewing this sample of tutors about ESD and GE issues had in many cases affected their thinking around these concepts. When asked to reflect on the impact that the interview process had had on them, common responses were:

*‘Doing the interview just makes you think how can we make this more explicit? Students need it made real to them.’*

*‘When we were planning our programmes, fairly recently I have been involved in the evaluation of a programme and we didn’t explicitly look for these themes, but perhaps we should have done? It needs to be done at that stage, when we are writing the courses and the curriculum.’*

### **Discussion**

Researchers for the audit at the University of East Anglia (UEA) found a mixed response to the question about coverage across the curriculum. This was not the case within the School of Education, where every respondent was able to easily identify where at least one or two of the ESD or GE concepts came into their teaching practice. This audit clearly provided an outlet for how staff have already embedded these principles in practice. Interviews revealed that across a wide variety of subjects, professional modules and levels, ESD and GE themes are already integrated into the curriculum.



Some subjects and professional modules naturally lend themselves to ESD and GE themes. However, where this is not the case, staff are innovative in their teaching practice and have been able to prompt discussion around the themes anyway. There are a number of courses where the connections are very explicit but the themes become manifest, in a much more implicit manner, across most modules. This seems to indicate that the profile of ESD and GE within the department is relatively high.

The role of the Professional Lead in facilitating discussion and raising the profile of ESD and GE in recent years has been crucial and his work most appreciated by interviewees. However, it is clear from this audit that a number of staff are also very committed to ESD and GE issues both personally and professionally. For others, the themes are implicit in everything that they teach. Many believed the School of Education had a whole school approach to creating learning communities which naturally enveloped ESD and GE concepts.

### **Evidence of Impact and Future Directions**

The final Report (Bloomfield et al, 2009) presented the findings described in this paper as well as more detailed information on the interview content. As part of the funding contract the researchers also shared recent progress and outcomes as required *'to help review your progress and impact in relation to promotion, partnership, practice, policy and progression'* (EEDEN, 2009). In this discussion the team identified further progress and future directions as follows.

Many staff have welcomed the idea that the mind-map be developed to the extent that pictorial representation of concepts accompanied the descriptive paragraphs or concrete examples of how that theme might be addressed across a range of subjects. These are currently being developed. Further opportunities arise for more promotion through 'Away' days and whole staff meetings. The team is currently promoting discussions and dissemination of findings within the university, through EEDEN, national and international ESD and GE conferences.

This project led to partnership activity with the formation of a team of three to carry out the research. This partnership has resulted in more effective conceptualization of the research and its execution. It proved an effective collaboration between colleagues who had not previously worked together but who had complementary skill sets.

The research has also provided documented evidence of GE/ESD practice. Those interviewed had had a look at what they are doing/ not doing and how explicit it is in their area of the curriculum in relation to the Strategic Plans of the School of Education and University of Hertfordshire. This practice can be taken forward through further documentation of examples of practice and dissemination locally and nationally.

There have been some opportunities for policy development and analysis through the university and School of Education strategic plans and mapping the key concepts into the mind map. The conceptualization offered here is important to the development of ESD and GE in the curriculum, including that of tertiary education. The greatest impact is likely where the concepts of ESD and GE are linked, embedded **and** explicit. The experience of schools, for example, How Dell provides evidence of impact not only for students, but also their parents and in the wider community.

Further progress of this work will need the team to prioritize possible projects arising from this audit. For example, further uses of the mind map in practice by staff and students could include:

- the students using the mind map as a tool to evaluate their modules and teaching experience
- as a structure for peer observation as part of appraisal and/or assessment processes
- as a basis for further development of tutor practice on opportunities for meeting the requirements of ESD/ GE
- provision and promotion of key teaching resources, for example, a Teachers' TV program

- further development of policy
- underpinning a collaborative research project with other Eastern Region ITE providers

Evaluation of these practice developments would, of course, need to be built into these initiatives to maximize the opportunities for the articulation of research, practice and policy. In this way it is possible to take forward all three in a systematic and coherent way and build on these beginnings to embed and make explicit the linked concepts of ESD and GE as widely as possible.

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