

**Embedding Education for Sustainable Development and Global Education
concepts into teaching practice: the experience of student teachers**

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INTRODUCTION

This report follows a piece of research carried out in the School of Education, University of Hertfordshire, in 2009 ('Best Practice and Challenges in Education for Sustainable Development and Global Education'). This latter research described some of the developments to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Education (GE) in programmes at the University of Hertfordshire, including the BA Education Studies, Bachelor of Education (BEd), and the Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), offered by the School of Education. The final report provided an audit of ESD/GE practice within the school. Its **key findings** were that:

- (a) Staff welcomed the audit and looked forward to more information, discussion and development in this area.
- (b) A mind-map, developed at the School, which displayed and explained ESD and GE concepts (*see page four*) was considered an effective and useful organising tool that enabled staff to surface their practice in subsequent intervention.
- (c) The professional lead on geography within the School was seen as a 'champion' on these issues.
- (d) ESD/GE concepts are considered, to some extent, implicit in all teaching practice.
- (e) Staff felt that the teaching of these subjects should be made more explicit in teaching practice.
- (f) The research interview acted as an intervention.

One suggestion following this 2009 study was that further research might contribute to understanding how students plan to embed such concepts in their future teaching practice. The current study explored the following points:

- (a) The extent to which student teachers have embedded ESD and GE in their teaching.
- (b) Whether the ESD/GE mind-map diagram is effective in developing practice in student teachers.
- (c) With the awareness that ESD/GE issues are often perceived as intrinsically linked to the subject area of 'geography', we attempted to look at any differences between 'geography' and 'non-geography' students in terms of their commitment to and experience of embedding ESD/GE concepts in teaching practice.

METHODOLOGY

In May 2010, the Primary Tutor for Geography within the School of Education identified eight students who were currently on placement in schools and who had been given a presentation some months previously (November, 2009) on '*Sustainable Development and Global Education Issues*'.

The tutor identified students for interview whose subject specialism was geography, and in contrast, other 'non-geography' students (matched as closely as possible for age, gender, ethnicity and coursework grades). These students were approached whilst within schools on placement, by phone and email communication. In an attempt to generate further data, an email was sent to twenty-two trainee teachers requesting that they take part in the study. In total, two 'geographers' and eight 'non-geographers' responded to a request for interview and partook in the study. A total of ten interviews with students took place.

INTERVIEWS

Students were asked a series of questions around their recollection of a presentation on 'Education for Sustainable Development and Global Education' that they had been given in November 2009 (some six months prior to current research). In particular, they were asked about their recollection of learning within this session, the impression the session had made (if any) on them, the main points that they had retained and why. Finally, they were asked the extent to which they have/plan to embed the ESD/GE concepts into their teaching practice.

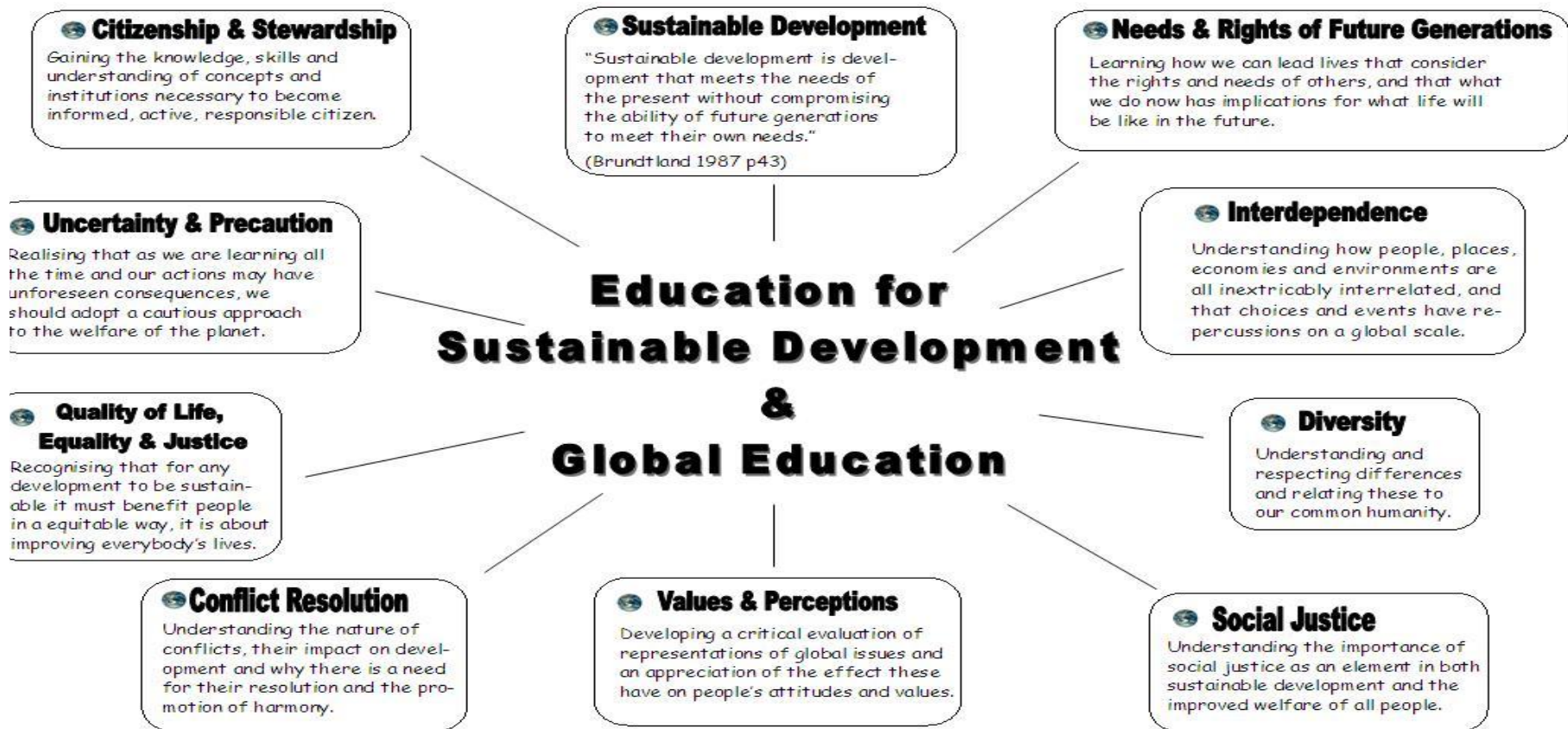
The learning objectives of the presentation that students viewed in November 2009 were:

- (a) to gain an understanding of the sustainable development curriculum
- (b) to learn more about Global Education
- (c) to understand the link between them
- (d) to think about how we can incorporate these into our teaching

The presentation addressed definitions of sustainable development, strategies for embedding concepts related to ESD/GE in the classroom, exploring the eight 'doorways' of

the Sustainable Schools Strategy (i.e. food and drink, energy and water, travel and traffic, purchases and waste, buildings and grounds, inclusion and participation, local well-being and the global dimension). It also looked at definitions of global education and citizenship, examining a mind-map explaining further the different concepts and discussing what they mean (see below). The session also made use of a Teacher TV clip on a school that was having a sustainability audit done.

The ESD/GE mind-map had been originally developed by the former Professional lead on geography within the School of Education in 2008. The concepts contained within the mind-map underpin Education for Sustainable Development and Global Education in the undergraduate programmes in Education at the University of Hertfordshire.



FINDINGS

The findings of the current study are that:

- (a) The geography students more easily recollected learning about ESD/GE issues and had a real drive to embed these concepts in teaching practice.
- (b) A more visual mind-map on ESD/GE issues would be a welcome teaching aid for all students.
- (c) The former professional lead and department 'champion' of ESD/GE issues was seen as 'inspirational'.
- (d) The interview worked as an intervention.

We discuss these findings in more detail below. This data comes with the caveat that invitation to partake in this research may naturally attract participants who are more enthusiastic and committed ESD and GE issues. Moreover, the sample size is small.

(a) The geography students had a real drive to embed these concepts in teaching practice

Both geography students interviewed were 'chomping at the bit' to get started and embed these concepts into their teaching plans. They had both recently been on school placements where (because of classroom restraints/extent to which classroom teachers were restrictive) there had been few opportunities to embed the concepts. However, the concepts were at the forefront of their minds. As they put it:

"If [the concepts] came up, I would do it."

"I always try and bring these concepts in."

Non-geographers, whilst considering themselves committed to teaching concepts such as sustainable development would often still think of it as a '*thing for geography*'. "*It is easier to see links in geography to these issues than in other subjects*". These students were more likely to talk about how they embed or wish to embed ideas around diversity, equality and social justice in their classroom teaching than other concepts which they saw as more 'geography issues'. For example, one student specialising in history talked about being

aware of 'quality of life' issues in the classroom, being aware of different circumstances and cultural backgrounds that pupils come from and accommodating that in her teaching. She expressed her emphasis on 'making sure children feel comfortable in the classroom'. Another student specialising in religious education made her focus conflict resolution, equality and social justice. She was overtly pleased to view the mind-map at interview and to be able to identify areas that she felt could confidently address in her teaching practice (prior to interview she had not felt confident about what she was able to contribute).

Similar to staff, students mostly considered the ESD/GE concepts as often 'part and parcel' of what they instruct upon as teachers on a daily basis. As one commented: *"I never think of them in this format"*, although she often considered them.

(b) A more visual mind-map would be useful

Similar to staff in the School of Education, all students appreciated having the mind-map as a prompt but would appreciate a more visual representation of ESD/GE concepts to aid lesson planning. The geography students who took part in the interviews had a stronger recollection of the mind-map and were more familiar with the terms described in it. They expressed more confidence about teaching around these concepts in the classroom and considered the mind-map an effective and useful tool. As one put it:

"I have them in my head [ESD and GE concepts] but refer back to the mind-map to put them in the lesson plan".

Similar to interviews with staff undertaken previously, interviewees were appreciative of the opportunity to be reminded of the mind-map. As one put it:

"It was really interesting to be reminded of the diagram and think about how to use it in the classroom" (non-geographer).

Others considered that without a visual aid accompanying the mind-map, it was difficult to read as *"the concepts merge"*.

(c) The former Professional Lead for Geography was an inspiration to students

Amongst the geographers, much of their enthusiasm for embedding these concepts resulted from attending workshops with the former ESD champion within the department. Some comments included:

'I would not have chosen geography without [name]...because he pushed that this is an amazing subject'.

"In our training, first and second years [name] was brilliant at bringing in [these concepts] and he always did. Everyone got his viewpoint...you can never move away from that... it was his thing".

Even amongst the non-geographers, they recall how the ESD champion modelled embedding the concepts. They vividly recall learning about innovative ways of doing so in classroom teaching. For example:

"In the second year, [name] sent us on a plane. We went on an imaginary journey to China. Within that, he taught us about how to look at the concept of travel, distance, time. He brought in different aspects of Chinese culture too".

"[Name] was inspirational in his outlook. I got loads of ideas in his tutorials. With him, he taught me that the starting point is always yourself".

"I want to use what [name] taught me in the classroom".

"He was inspirational. If you took the time to get him, he left a big impression".

In terms of which concepts students were more likely to embed in their teaching, sustainable development emerged as 'the obvious one' as 'everyone uses it in schools', according to interviewees, with diversity featuring highly too. As one non-geographer commented 'schools are big on diversity, if you come across it, you get it in, make [pupils] aware of it".

(d) The interview as intervention

As occurred with staff interviews, the interview process prompted students to take time to reflect on ESD and GE concepts and it had a validating effect when thinking about their own practice. Some comments included:

“It was really interesting to be reminded of the diagram and think about how to use it in the classroom”.

“I will definitely try and link it where I can.

{Re Citizenship] *“I try and teach that the choices they make have an impact. I try and model these concepts”.*

A common response at the end of interview was that students felt reminded, more enthused and aware of the ESD/GE concepts. As one stated:

“You have reminded me of them now” (non-geographer)

During interviews, it was not uncommon for students to reflect on perhaps a ‘missed opportunity’ where they might have embedded the concepts but had forgotten/failed to do so. As one stated:

“I could have brought in conflict resolution there, as we were talking about ‘balancing arguments’. Schools councils are also an opportunity to talk about conflict resolution” (non-geographer)

Students also used the interview as an opportunity to identify where schools were already doing very good work in this area. Some commented that their placement schools were ‘*on top of diversity*’, applauded ‘eco schemes’ that they developed such as a ‘Bugzone’ etc. or a ‘World awareness day’. All students displayed a rich understanding that there are many ways of bringing these concepts in.

One (geography) student talked about how she managed to ‘fit in’ the concept of equality into her ‘circle time’ in the classroom. She viewed ‘circle time’ as an opportunity to ensure that all pupils understood that ‘*we are all equal in school*’, that they each had a ‘voice’ and ‘*deserved to be heard*’.

Amongst the non-geographers, it was apparent that ESD/GE issues were still largely considered to belong to the subject area of 'geography'. They used the interview as a tool for thinking through how the concepts might apply to their chosen subjects.

For example, one student whose subject was physical education reflected on how she could be more mindful of issues around 'diversity' in her classroom. She expressed the view that *'even in P.E., I could be teaching around diversity, encouraging acceptance of others'*. She felt that where she may have considered ESD/GE issues previously as *'mainly relating to geography'*, that did not have to be the case. She considered that she is committed to the ESD/GE concepts by virtue of being a teacher but was appreciative of learning the terms for concepts she already believed in and was committed to.

Another student, who specialised in religious education, although she considered ESD/GE concepts to be in the main based in the subject area of 'geography', her thoughts were that as a religious education teacher, she was committed to diversity, teaching understanding, acceptance and tolerance of others. She enjoyed having the prompt of the mind-map for terms such as 'social justice', that although she is committed to, may not refer to that term so readily. She explained that her first priority as a teacher is to model that we all have the right to be listened to and heard.

Her recollection of learning about ESD/GE issues within her teacher training centred around attending workshops with the former Professional Lead on Geography within the School of Education. She recalls thinking, as a result of these workshops, that 'geography does not have to be boring'. As she put it:

"When people think of geography, they think about location, they don't consider other aspects. They look at where a country is on the globe, they don't see beyond that. Introducing those [ESD/GE] themes can make it a lot more interesting.....more visual".

Conclusions and Recommendations

The outcomes of this current research replicate many of the themes of the 2009 study conducted amongst staff at the School of Education. We consider this to be a significant and

interesting finding. In the following section, we set out a series of ways in which this research could move forward at the School of Education.

For teacher training students

- Look for opportunities for to embed the model into other subject areas
- Need to remind students about this area all the time
- Explore the possibility of an executive summary report to be circulated amongst staff
- Explore staff development opportunities for subject tutors based on the report's findings.
- Explore the need for a school 'champion,' who can inspire students to embed this into the planning and take opportunities when they arise. This report will be circulated to senior staff in the School of Education who may be in a position to facilitate this.

By implication, for teachers in school classrooms

- Mechanism for constantly keeping this issue alive and at top of agenda
- 'Champion' to do above and also encourage teachers to embed in planning (across the curriculum) and take opportunities to include this when it arises.

Implementation of these is beyond the reach of the research team (except by encouraging student teachers there could be a 'knock on effect' on the schools in which these students are placed for their teaching practice). EEDEN staff could address these aspects in their contact with schools in the region.

Future Research

We would like to be able to follow the final year students as they become NQTs. Some areas which would be useful to research are:

- Does the impact of the teaching they received diminish over time?
- Does this depend on their specialist subject?
- Does the school's general attitude to ESD/GE affect their enthusiasm / opportunities to include this in their lesson planning?

In addition, it would be useful to investigate practice with regard to ESD/GE issues amongst other teacher training providers in the region.

Note of Thanks

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References

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