

Recommendations for the Implementation of the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (GAP/ESD)

Introduction

34 delegates from 11 countries met in Istanbul, Turkey on 26-27 September 2014 for the Learning Teacher Network's International Seminar on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The International Seminar, titled 'ESD at the Crossroads', aimed to investigate and conclude on five key ESD questions in order to highlight practitioners' in education and training views and experiences on successful practice, and to determine action for the upcoming UNESCO Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD.

The key questions addressed were: How can ESD support whole-school perspectives? How can ESD guide students to have the knowledge, skills and values to care for and solve the sustainable development issues that will arise in their lifetime? How can ESD promote innovation in the teaching - learning conceptual framework? How can ESD update and improve educational purpose and outcomes? How can ESD help to improve and enrich school curriculum development?

The final conclusions of the seminar dialogue, which identified a need for principal and initial action, are formulated into nine recommendations for consideration in the implementation of GAP/ESD and addressed to UNESCO, governments and the educational community.

The Learning Teacher Network is fully committed to playing its part in the capacity building of educators and trainers as well as promoting, supporting and influencing good practice in ESD in the unfolding context of the GAP developments.

Global Background

Based on a recommendation of the United Nation World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002), the United Nations General Assembly decided to dedicate a UN Decade to ESD (2005-2014). The overall goal of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) has been to integrate the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning.

The 2014 UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) from 10-12 November 2014 in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan will mark the end of the UN Decade of ESD (2005-2014) and see the launch of the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD. Under the banner of "Learning Today for a Sustainable Future", the Conference will celebrate the achievements of the Decade, identify lessons learnt while setting the stage for the future of ESD. The overall goal of the GAP is to generate and scale up action in all levels and areas of education and learning to accelerate progress towards sustainable development.

Seminar conclusions and recommendations

The seminar strongly voiced the need for action. There was a feeling expressed that there has already been ten years of talks and relative inaction during the Decade, relative in the sense that the issue of ESD and its impact on the curriculum of schools has been partial, dependent upon interested teachers and others, and has not been embedded within the curricula of countries. Now there is a firm need to take action and embed ESD concepts and issues with all curriculum subjects and also in all other aspects of what makes an educational organisation work.

A. Update and improve educational purpose and outcomes, and thereby also improve and enrich school curriculum development, by including ESD in policy, programmes and national strategies.

ESD is a national responsibility and for Government to include in policy, programmes and curriculum in line with international agreements made at United Nations summits and other international conferences.

1. Governments should include ESD into education and national strategies, governance, curricula, advisory systems or inspections and audits, etcetera as a compulsory framework and a mind-set with wider perspectives. This in line with the Bonn Declaration 2009, where it was agreed to reorient curriculum and teacher education programmes to integrate ESD into both pre-service and in-service programmes.
2. Governments should promote ESD's contribution to all of education and to achieving quality education within a coherent and systemic approach, as also expressed in the Bonn Declaration 2009. Furthermore, to develop national ESD indicators that inform the effective implementation and review of ESD outcomes and processes. These indicators should be included in the national systems for assessment and evaluation.
3. Governments should provide for research into the benefits of ESD to make this more transparent and to be a key and important driver of change.
4. Governments and national authorities should keep the curriculum up to date with "on the agenda" topics and connect ESD with relevant political themes and social challenges.

Access to and retention of Education for All is the first goal of ESD. Education and training are crucial to society for fostering and safe-guarding democracy while ESD is the instrument for addressing a range of perspectives of vital importance to a future sustainable society built on human rights, equality, tolerance and freedom. Youth unemployment and high level of early school leavers are factors that risk feeding anti-democratic movements and are currently unsustainable issues that cannot be ignored. Research could demonstrate socio-economic benefits of ESD.

B. Develop a whole-school perspective and promote innovation in the teaching - learning conceptual framework

Schools and teacher education need to "take ESD out of the box" and to model ways for success. There is a definite need now to move ESD from the hidden curriculum to the whole school perspective. This could be achieved by paying attention in particular to the following elements.

5. Schools and teacher education should create an ESD vision with a holistic approach to education for sustainability.

An ESD vision shall explain curriculum opportunities for embedding concepts and values, support cross-curricular teaching and learning, and describe added value, relevance and synergy effects. ESD core framework is about teaching values, social inclusion, respect and positive behaviour and human relationships. ESD shall be seen as part of the governance of schools and offering something of value to stakeholders as part of the whole school curriculum. It must be principled and value driven. ESD must have entry at all levels and any problems with ESD need to be highlighted as well. With a holistic approach with attention to social, economic, and cultural aspects – a wider perspective than environment only - ESD shall be regarded as a body of references, to which each curriculum subject shall relate. All school life teaching and learning should be based on the ideas of ESD. ESD must be mainstreamed so everyone is involved, knows about it and can use it. ESD and the concept of ‘Pay it forward’ by creating an ethical agreement and a common agreed language.

6. Schools and teacher education should create an appropriate working environment to make it possible for students’ learning, teachers’ teaching and curriculum performance to be centred on a vision of ESD.

The point of departure is the involvement of everyone at the school or teacher education, both staff and students. Leadership, coordination and resourcing “strengths” are key as a “whole institution” or systemic undertaking is embedded from policy to practice. Every discipline/group/teacher/employee can and should contribute. Encourage teachers and students to take action in a harmonised and multi-disciplinary approach. Train teachers in competencies, empowerment and values, and make use of teacher education for cascading relevant knowledge and skills. Identify which knowledge, skills and values that will be of major importance for students’ and teachers’ in their commitment to a sustainable society. Use innovative methods to let the students find new solutions, and involve students in the creation of an ESD self-directed style curriculum at all education levels. Make a secure game plan/system for ESD activities, topics, and projects, and allow time for this. Make use of peer education project work, “Pracademic” (practical+academic), “Think and Do tanks”, etcetera. Create action research framework to research the teaching of ESD. Form multi-professional groups discussing practical actions including all stakeholders within and outside the institution. Find ways to make ESD fun (competitions, experiments, exchanges, real life examples, ESD school visits). Initiate a process, make the movement (do *something*) and “walk the talk”.

7. Schools and teacher education should introduce new pedagogies and thinking methods, allow for mistakes and generate empowerment.

Implementing ESD perspectives is not about just the individual teacher but building sustainable mind sets and thinking methods; strategies for how to change perceptions. Keys to success in ESD and finding the road to sustainable thinking is by exploring multiple approaches to teaching and learning to make the learning relevant, by allowing for re-thinking and creating meaningfulness of content, and enhancing new and motivating methodologies besides traditional curriculum and teaching techniques so that students can really connect to subjects. Systems thinking model could support ESD through Mind Maps, use of multiple intelligences and feedback loops at every level. ESD is an approach to teaching and learning that includes awareness and how to work for a sustainable future but also self-development in learning instead of short term memorization of facts, combining thinking and action, and learning to adapt to changes because the future is about dealing with uncertainties. Creating a climate of allowing for

mistakes and “making a fertile soil” generates new ideas and new thinking. In particular, to students and teachers such approach builds self-confidence/self-esteem and reduces fears of imposed rules, audits, inspections, etcetera. Encouraging an 'advisory' context rather than a judgmental one is a productive approach. Teachers and students must move beyond “the victim role”.

8. Schools and teacher education should build ESD on evidence at assessment and evaluation.
In order to reduce stress and uncertainty when working for ESD there is a need for an evaluation and assessment strategy. Rigorous evaluation and evidence of how change happens and the impact of change in ESD supports the focus on quality in education. Collecting evidence and evaluations from projects, learning from good practice and using evidence based assessment programmes both guarantee sustainability in the ESD work and convince stakeholders on the benefits of ESD. ESD should be part of Whole School Evaluation – assessment of teachers who value ESD. Furthermore, ESD needs to be part of the schools quality systems including the references to evaluations and assessments.
9. Schools and teacher education should strive towards broader collaboration with society.
For successful implementation of ESD schools and teacher education need to address all stakeholders and to widen cooperation with and involvement from stakeholder groups in society. Opening up education and training for partnerships in the wider society will make initiatives enriched and more effective, ESD and curriculum work more real world connected and outcomes both more comprehensive and disseminated. Partnering means learning from other disciplines or areas of society. By opening up for collaboration with other parts of formal and informal education, NGO's, local business, etcetera the implementation of ESD would create a different dynamic and improve the solving of ESD related matters in a locally relevant way and with local solutions. Educational partnerships through for example e-Twinning can enhance international action.