

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Dear Readers!

Education for sustainable development is one of the most important tools in raising awareness about environmental issues within a sustainable development context, i.e. a context in which environmental matters are taken into consideration along with economic, social, political and ethical issues.

With the decision to run the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), the United Nations acknowledges the usefulness of and the need for identifying suitable initiatives, approaches and methods, via which knowledge on sustainable development may be fostered, bearing in mind its inherent complexity.

But even though much has been said and written about education for sustainable development, there are still many problems associated with its execution. For example, there is a need to identify and document the wide range of projects and initiatives taking place today, and which exemplify the types of works that can be done, in a concrete manner. A second problem is in relation to the fact that even though much is happening, few of the current works are properly disseminated. Moreover, even though the integration of matters related to sustainable development at university level is a highly desirable goal, there are barriers preventing this from taking place, which need due consideration.

This special issue tries to achieve two things. Firstly, it is an attempt to address the need for the documentation of works and experiences on education for sustainable development. Secondly, it tries to promote some of the good works taking place on the ground, by disseminating research happening in different countries.

The first paper, written by Maris Klavins and Madara Pelna, from the University of Latvia, Latvia, identifies general trends in implementation of education for sustainable development into higher education in Latvia. The article explores to what extent and by means of which approach higher education institutions in Latvia have been attempting to incorporate sustainability in the curricula. The study results show that higher education institutions are at the first stage of transforming their curricula towards education for sustainable development, and the efforts to incorporate the issues of sustainability into the curricula can rather be characterised as education *about* sustainable development.

The second paper, written by Davi Foud Soubihia and Charbel Jose Chiappetta Jabbour from University of Sao Paulo Business School, in Sao Paulo, Brazil and myself, paper presents the results of a study on the analysis of training needs regarding environmental (green) management and climate change topics in micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in Brazil and its implications on education for sustainable development. It reports on an e-mail survey of Brazilian small enterprises, whose results indicate that they are indeed interested in environmental management and climate change topics in an education for sustainable development context. The study indicates that proposals for courses on environmental management and climate change should follow a systemic perspective and take sustainable development into account.



Paper three, written by María Novo, M. Ángeles Murga-Menoyo and M. José Bautista-Cerro from the National University of Distance Education in Spain, presents a research in the field of educational innovation, with the aim of incorporating in its learning model the methodological procedures resulting from recent developments in information technology. The teaching innovation projects presented in this work have been designed for students of Environmental Education and Sustainable Development as part of their Environmental Sciences and Education Courses, who were used to test the learning potential of two teaching methodologies, namely the Cmap Tools editor for the construction of concept maps, and online collaborative learning groups, intended to promote team work and encourage participation, dialogue and divergent thought.

Paper four, written by Michael Littlelydyke from the University of New England in Australia and Evangelos Manolas from the Democritus University of Thrace, Greece, focuses on how approaches to science education can contribute to or inhibit education for sustainable development, according to what degree it informs understanding of sustainability issues, how it may support values and beliefs underpinning sustainability and how priorities in constructing curricula can influence pedagogy. The paper offers examples of approaches to science education that may support education for sustainable development, are discussed with implications for appropriate pedagogy to support it.

Paper five is an example of scholarly research, in which I describe the evolution of the concept of sustainable development and process behind the its establishment at university level, including an analysis of the problems related to it and their roots. The paper also states what universities need to do in order to claim excellence in the field of sustainable development, listing a set of criteria that need to be fulfilled in order to achieve this goal.

Finally, paper six, written by Paul Pace, from the University of Malta, comparatively highlights the main characteristics of environmental education and some of its variants. The paper also critically analyses major international events addressing the need to implement environmental education and their impact on the educational community. These two reviews will act as a backdrop to a critical analysis of why the resources invested in environmental education have not provided the turnout expected. The paper concludes by making several reflections and concrete proposals about making the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development a worthwhile experience, especially at the grassroots level.

All in all, these papers attest the need of a systematic approach towards education for sustainable development and at the same time exemplify how useful and applicable research can be. I hope readers will find this special issue not only interesting to their day-to-day work, but also useful in their own attempts to put the principles of education for development in practice.

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