

Education for sustainable development

“Our biggest challenge in this new century is to take an idea that sounds abstract – sustainable development – and turn it into reality for all the world’s people.” Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations

What is ESD?

“Sustainable development provides a framework for redefining progress and redirecting our economies to enable all people to meet their basic needs and improve their quality of life, while ensuring that the natural systems, resources and diversity upon which they depend are maintained and enhanced for their benefit and that of future generations.” *Sustainable Development Commission*

“Education for sustainable development enables people to develop the knowledge, values and skills to participate in decisions about the ways we do things, individually and collectively, both locally and globally, that will improve the quality of life now without damaging the planet for the future.” *Sustainable Development Education Panel*

“We need to look at sustainable development as a whole – how we use resources without wasting them; how we teach and learn about sustainable development; how we generate the skills, knowledge and understanding to allow us to fulfil our duty as global citizens.” *Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education and Skills*

ESD is now firmly on the agenda of business, governments and non-governmental organisations. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published its Action Plan for Sustainable Development in Education and Skills in 2003 and the United Nations will launch a decade of ESD in 2005.

ESD and ITE

The TTA is supporting initial teacher education (ITE) providers to address ESD.

The Effective Practices and Research Dissemination (EPRD) team has commissioned online and paper-based materials to support subject specialist trainers new to initial teacher training. These are by writing groups from subject associations. All are to address the ways in which their subject can promote ESD. For further information go to www.tta.gov.uk/eprd

About Think Pieces

Think pieces are short articles which provide an overview of the latest thinking and ideas on topics relating to effective practice and research.

The team also commissioned a briefing paper on ESD to provide information and advice both for the TTA and the writing groups.¹ Following consultation and peer review, this paper is now informing the work of the groups and will be available from www.tta.gov.uk/eprd The TTA has set up a small ESD group to advise the subject groups.

The ESD briefing paper prepared for the TTA provides:

- an overview of the theory and practice of ESD as it relates to teacher training;
- links to a large number of websites that allow the reader to consider theory and practice in greater depth;
- suggestions for making both subject studies and professional studies more relevant to sustainable futures; and
- key references and pointers to sources of curriculum materials, research, and staff development.

To supplement the subject-specific advice found on subject association websites, here are some suggested activities which could help tutors seeking to introduce ESD into the three main elements of initial teacher training. Please note these are not prescriptive. The briefing paper and ESD web pages explore the background to such activities and invite tutors to devise their own.

Professional values and practice

Introduce trainees to the Earth Charter.² This is a set of internationally agreed, cross-cultural, cross-religious, cross-political values to guide our relations with the rest of human and non-human nature. Should teachers seek to promote these values through the taught and ‘hidden’ curriculum? In what ways can teachers try to ensure that such values are reflected in the everyday life of a school?

School councils are an increasingly popular way of introducing pupils to democracy and citizenship. Ask trainees to consider how school councils might be organised in ways that encourage pupils to consider their responsibilities towards people at a distance, people in the future, and other living things.

Ask trainees to debate the causes of unsustainable development and whether education is currently part of the problem or part of the solution. To prepare for this debate, trainees will need to read some contemporary social, political and educational theory and be able to identify different approaches to sustainable development in the pronouncements of politicians and others.

Knowledge and understanding

Ask trainees to study the ESD pages on the QCA website³ that relate to their specialist subject(s). The site outlines the requirements and opportunities for ESD in national curriculum subjects and GCSE qualifications, and identifies units within the QCA/DfES schemes of work that may be used to promote ESD. To what extent is there continuity and progression in such requirements and opportunities? Is it possible to teach complementary themes or content in different subjects? The QCA recommends such approaches in its advice on curriculum planning for ESD.

The QCA website⁴ suggests that ESD involves an understanding of seven key concepts. One page⁵ outlines the progression in understanding of these concepts from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4. Ask trainees to formulate their own progression using different examples.

“Understanding of sustainable development involves pupils considering the interaction between economic, social and environmental systems”.⁶ Introduce trainees to forms of curriculum knowledge and integration that encourage pupils to consider such interaction.

Teaching and learning

Ask trainees to think about a truly sustainable school: its design, use of energy and materials, treatment of waste, transport policy, links with the community, curriculum and extra-curricular activities. After they have prepared the brochure for their imaginary school they can compare their ‘design principles’ with those used by eco-schools,⁷ healthy schools⁸ and schools promoting fair trade.⁹

Trainers may wish to look at sources exploring the commercialisation of young people such as Alissa Quart’s book, *Branded: The buying and selling of teenagers*. How should ESD deal with consumer culture and present more sustainable alternatives?

Sustainable development has importance in places and communities where other issues may initially appear more urgent. Trainers might help trainees to plan a PSHE topic on healthy living, crime, housing, and/or social exclusion, which links solutions to local efforts to realise more sustainable forms of development. The project should develop and draw on links with local business, community groups and council officers.

References

- 1 The paper was written by John Huckle, an ESD consultant. Other members of the TTA’s ESD group are Margot Brown (York St John College); Keith Ross (University of Gloucestershire); and Maggie Smith (Open University).
- 2 <http://www.earthcharter.org/>
- 3 <http://www.nc.uk.net/esd/teaching/index.htm>
- 4 <http://www.nc.uk.net/esd/gq3.htm>
- 5 <http://www.nc.uk.net/esd/gq2a.htm>
- 6 http://www.nc.uk.net/esd/gq3.htm#curriculum_planning
- 7 <http://www.eco-schools.org.uk/>
- 8 <http://www.healthyschools.org/>
- 9 <http://www.comicrelief.com/schoolsandlearning/fairtradefun.shtml>