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THE IMPORTANCE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Introduction

The concept of sustainable development is an important milestone in the environmental theory because it posits how society itself should be organized, and not simply why certain environmental protections should be adopted or how they can be best implemented. This ambitious interpretation is widely shared by business leaders, policy activists, and academics alike. Of course, just how much social and economic change is necessary to achieve sustainability depends upon how “unsustainable” one believes the present to be. Many advocates of the idea clearly believe that the present will be quite unsustainable and thus are prepared for radical change (Taylor, 2002).

What Is Sustainable Development?

It would be reasonable to explain what the concept of sustainable development is, in order to understand why it is important. Sustainable development, as a concept, emerged in the 1970’s simultaneously with the increasing industrialisation. Especially simultaneously with the report called “Collective Future” published by the World Environment and Development Commission in 1987, the concept of sustainable development, which has the principle of increasing development in consideration with the environment, attracted a lot of attention (Ercořkun, 2005)

The Brundtland Commission’s brief definition of sustainable development as the “ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” is surely the standard definition when judged by its widespread use and frequency of citation. The use of this definition has led many to see sustainable development as having a major focus on intergenerational equity. Although the brief definition does not explicitly mention the environment or development, the subsequent paragraphs, while rarely quoted, are clear. On development, the report

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states that human needs are basic and essential; that is economic growth—but also equity to share resources with the poor—is required to sustain them; and that equity is encouraged by effective citizen participation (Kates v.d., 2005).

One of the most important things to support the vision of sustainable development was seen with the Rio Peak in 1992. Rio Peak, the largest meeting ever with a participation of 172 countries as well as our country, is a meeting where the participants approved of social and economical structures, by means of globalisation, to be achieved in consideration with the environmental values and the principles of the sustainable development. The results of the sustainable development were published with a declaration AGENDA 21 (Demirayak, 2002).

The *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* flashes out the definition by listing 18 principles of sustainability (McKeown, 2002):

- People are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.
- Development today must not undermine the developmental and environmental needs of the present and future generations.
- Nations have the sovereign right to use their own resources, but without causing environmental damage beyond their borders.
- Nations shall develop international laws to provide compensation for the damage resulted from the activities under their control which cause to areas beyond their borders.
- Nations shall use the precautionary approach to protect the environment. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, scientific uncertainty shall not be used to postpone cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.
- In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process, and cannot be considered in isolation from it. Eradicating poverty and reducing disparities in living standards in different parts of the world are essential to achieve sustainable development and meet the needs of the majority of people.
- Nations shall cooperate to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.
- Nations should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and promote appropriate demographic policies.
- Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens.
- Nations shall facilitate and encourage public awareness and participation by making environmental information widely available.

– Nations shall enact effective environmental laws, and develop national law regarding liability for the victims of pollution and other environmental damage. Where they have authority, nations shall assess the environmental impact of proposed activities that are likely to have a significant adverse impact.

– Nations should cooperate to promote an open international economic system that will lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries. Environmental policies should not be used as an unjustifiable means for restricting international trade.

– The polluter should, in principle, bear the cost of pollution.

– Nations shall warn one another about natural disasters or activities that may have harmful trans-boundary effects.

– Sustainable development requires better scientific understanding of the problems. Nations should share knowledge and innovative technologies to achieve the goal of sustainability.

– The full participation of women is essential to achieve sustainable development. The creativity, ideals and courage of youth and the knowledge of indigenous people are needed too. Nations should recognize and support the identity, culture and interests of indigenous people.

– Warfare is inherently destructive of sustainable development, and nations shall respect international laws protecting the environment in times of armed conflict, and shall cooperate in their further establishment.

– Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible.

– In order to achieve the aim of providing sustainable development, both nation wide studies by governments, and international studies by political and social organisations are being conducted. According to the Agenda 21 the main aims set by the Council of European Union, one of the most important political associations, are (Council of The European Union, 2006):

1. **Environmental Protection.** Safeguard the earth's capacity to support life in all its diversity, respect the limits of the planet's natural resources and ensure a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment. Prevent and reduce environmental pollution and promote sustainable consumption and production to break the link between economic growth and environmental degradation.

2. **Social Equity and Cohesion.** Promote a democratic, socially inclusive, cohesive, healthy, safe and just society with respect for primary rights and cultural diversity that creates equal opportunities and combats discrimination in all its forms.

3. **Economic Prosperity.** Promote a prosperous, innovative, well-knowledged, competitive and eco-efficient economy which provides high living standards and full and high-quality employment throughout the European Union.

4. **Meeting Our International Responsibilities.** Encourage the establishment and defend the stability of democratic institutions across the world, based on peace, security and freedom. Actively promote sustainable development worldwide and ensure that the European Union's internal and external policies are consistent with global sustainable development and its international commitments.

One of the most effective ways of ensuring we appreciate the importance of sustainable development is through the education process. Clearly it cannot start very soon, it must be ongoing and it must provide us all with consistent messages. It is vital that all of our young people are educated for sustainable development because they are our future. If they fully understand the issues and act upon them they will build our future based on justice and respect, respect for all people and for all living things! A lack of understanding of issues or a rejection of them will lead, quite frankly and bluntly, to a no future at all (Davidson, 2003).

Education for Sustainable Development

Education at all levels can shape the world of tomorrow, equipping individuals and societies with the skills, perspectives, knowledge and values to live and work in a sustainable manner (UNESCO, 2003). For this reason, it is a must that sustainability is adapted to the field of education. Alberta and Manitoba have emphasized the importance of education and training in Sustainable Development Strategies. This can include strategies for sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry practices, natural resource management, and other sectors of the economy. The concept of life-long learning has been raised as a key thrust to achieve sustainability. But changes in education and training are necessary to meet the demands of the 21st Century. Learners will require new ways of thinking, new attitudes and skills to creatively address complex issues and opportunities related to over-population, skill shortages, disease, poverty, environmental degradation, climate change, the depletion of the ozone layer, uneven distribution of resources, and other interrelated issues. Learners will require a greater understanding of the interdependence of the economy, environment, and social issues; understanding of interrelationships and systems by thinking, consensus building, and decision-making; and the ability to identify both sustainable and unsustainable practices. People will be challenged to envision a sustainable future, so that they will know what to aim for and can think through the consequences of their behaviour and actions (Council of Ministers of Canada, 1999).

Briefly, education for sustainable development is about (Corbett, 2005):

- The interaction and interdependence of society, economy and environment
- The needs of both present and future generations
- The local and global implications of lifestyles choices

Origin of Education for Sustainable Development

The education for sustainable development first took place in the 36th section of the Agenda 21. This laid an important foundation to plan education for sustainable development over the world. Later the UN expanded the chapter and made it more specific and appointed Unesco as responsible for coordinating education for sustainable development within the UN organization. The Millennium Declaration of 2000 contained goals relating to the promotion of sustainable development, global partnership, and equality and quality of education. At the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in 2002, the programme of action emphasized the special role of education and defined education and training as decisive factors in the promotion of sustainable development. The United Nations has declared the years 2005–2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. The goal is to have sustainable development in the educational system of every country within the decade. The strategy aims to reinforce the role of sustainable development in regulations concerning education and integrate sustainable development in all education and in the operational culture of schools (Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, 2006)

The Importance Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development prepares people of all walks of life to plan for, cope with, and find solutions for issues that threaten the sustainability of our planet. Many of these key issues were identified at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and further reaffirmed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. Understanding and addressing these global issues of sustainability that affect individual nations and communities are at the heart of Education for Sustainable Development. These issues come from the three spheres of sustainable development – environment, society and economy. Such issues are highly complex and will require broad and sophisticated educational strategies for this and the next generation of leaders and citizens to find solutions (UNESCO, 2005).

Some of the important qualities of the education for sustainable development are (Karma, 2006):

- Interdisciplinary and holistic: learning for sustainable development embedded in the whole curriculum, not as a separate subject;
- Values-driven: sharing the values and principles underpinning sustainable development;
- Critical thinking and problem solving: leading to confidence in addressing the dilemmas and challenges of sustainable development;

- Multi-method: word, art, drama, debate, experience, different pedagogies for modelling processes;
- Participatory decision-making: learners participate in decisions on how they are to learn;
- Applicability: learning experiences are integrated in day to day personal and professional life; and
- Locally relevant: addressing local as well as global issues, and using the language(s) which learners most commonly use.

Education for sustainable development has four major truths(United Nations General Assembly and UNESCO, 2003):

Promotion and improvement of basic education. Access to basic education remains a problem for many, especially girls and illiterate adults. The quality of basic education must improve to focus on imparting knowledge, skills, values and perspectives throughout a lifetime that encourage and support citizens to lead sustainable lives.

Reorienting existing education programmes. Rethinking and revising education from nursery school through university to include more principles, knowledge, skills, perspectives and values related to sustainability in each of the three realms – social, environmental, and economic – is important to our current and future societies. This should be done in a holistic and interdisciplinary manner. The best chance of success of education for sustainable development lies not in a separate programme but in embedding its vision within other initiatives.

Developing public understanding and awareness of sustainability. To make progress towards more sustainable societies requires a population that is aware of the goals of sustainability and has the knowledge and the skills to contribute towards those goals. Informed citizenry and knowledgeable consumers can help communities and governments to enact sustainability measures and move towards more sustainable societies.

Training. All sectors of the workforce can contribute to local, regional and National sustainability. The development of specialized training programmes to ensure that all sectors of the workforce have the knowledge and skill necessary to perform their work in a sustainable manner have been identified as the critical components of education for sustainable development.

The goals of education for sustainable development are (Londroos, 2006):

- To enhance the understanding of the connection between human welfare, ecoeffectiveness of the economy, and protection of the environment
- To enhance the understanding of our cultural heritage, of different cultures, preconditions for trust between human population groups, and justice
- To increase people’s readiness to notice changes taking place in the environment, society, human welfare, and to work out their causes and consequences

- To bring about changes in daily practises and to cause people to commit to a sustainable way of life
- To increase readiness and motivation to be active, participating citizens, members of the work community, and members of the other communities
- To provide vocational skills in different fields of vocational education, creating opportunities for making each branch of industry more sustainable

Education for sustainability also demands to have an awareness of how the global system works and how all the parts are interconnected. This entails having a deep concern about the welfare of the planet, its ecosystems, its culture and its people. It is important for people to understand that they are part of the nature and we are part of a larger system. Therefore, we need to view our problems holistically (Qablan, 2005).

In the past decade or so, there has been an increasing focus of attention on the environment, not just from environmental groups but also in the media, in politics and among the general public. The Rio summit on the Environment in 1992 and Agenda 21 urged individuals and communities to think of themselves as 'global citizens' and stressed the central place of education in the promotion of sustainable development. Education in this context is described as 'holistic, experiential and egalitarian' (Peacock, 2004).

Importance of Global Citizenship Education for Sustainable Development

The Johannesburg Earth Summit in September 2002 provided an excellent opportunity to raise teachers' and pupils' awareness about global citizenship and to engage them in in-depth studies of local environmental issues that make the link between local and global issues explicit. The creation of a curriculum development project based around the Earth Summit also provided a tangible exemplification to enhance teachers' understanding of education for sustainable development (Scrivener, 2003).

Education for sustainable development and global citizenship is about (Evans, 2005); "the links between society, economy and environment and between our own lives and those of people around the world; the needs and rights of both present and future generations; the relationships between power, resources and human rights; the local and global implications of everything we do and the actions that individuals and organisations can take in response to local and global issues".

The examples below can be given to the dimension of the global citizenship in education for sustainable development (Summers and Kruger, 2003):

- Things can be done to make the school environment better for animals, plants and ourselves, e.g. creating a 'wild' area or planting 'butterfly-friendly' plants

- Children can co-operate with others to take energy-saving measures in school
- Individuals can make a difference to the problem of waste by using the ‘4 Rs’ (reduce, reuse, repair, recycle)

Around a third of teachers feel that there are benefits for learners in following a programme in Education for Sustainable Development Global Citizenship. Teachers who feel that there are benefits, identify them as following (Estyn, 2006):

- improved aspects of learner subject knowledge and skills that are included in national curriculum requirements;
- development of learners’ values, including empathy and tolerance towards others that help pupils to respect other people;
- changes in learners’ behaviour – from increased recycling to conflict resolution and reduced vandalism;
- enhanced levels of learner responsibility and participation in activities such as recycling or decision making;
- learners’ improved ability to consider, debate and initiate issues, for example at the school council;
- access for all learners to topics and concepts that are relevant and current;
- raised self-esteem of learners;
- enhancement of learners’ critical thinking;
- changes to the school environment, such as school grounds development and maintenance, and rebuilding programmes;
- cost savings, for example through better use of energy and paper;
- improvement in school-community relations; and
- a better school ethos.

Conclusion

It is possible to achieve sustainable development by causing individuals to gain knowledge, talent, attitude and values that they will be aware of. Thus it is a must to apply the strategies of the sustainable development. Education for sustainable development develops and strengthens the capacity of individuals, groups, communities, organizations and countries to make judgements and choices in favour of sustainable development (UN, 2005). The aim of education for sustainable development is to make individuals think about not just the society they live in now but also the sustainability of the planet they live on. In exploring issues of sustainability students must grapple with the concept of the common good and individual responsibility, both of which are central to the

idea of global citizenship (Council of Ministers of Education, 1999). Global citizenship is quite important in respect of education for sustainable development to gain a global dimension. Education for Global Citizenship enables pupils to develop the knowledge, skills and values needed for securing a just and sustainable world in which all may fulfill their potential (Oxfam, 2006).

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