

Engaging People in Sustainability Daniella Tilbury & David Wortman. Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK: Commission on Education and Communication, IUCN, 2004, 137 pp. ISBN: 2 83170 823 0

This book was published by the Commission on Education and Communication (CEC) to offer ideas and experiences to assist practitioners reflect on what sustainable development education means and to help engage people in action. The book is based on the exchange of professional experiences during IUCN CEC workshops during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg during August, 2002.

A foreword, from Denise Hamu, Chair of the CEC, outlines some of the work the CEC has been involved in on Education for Sustainable Development and IUCN plans for the decade. Support for the ESD Decade and future contribution are summarised as first, leadership in sustainable development, second, advocacy, and third, empowerment.

Sheldon Shaeffer, Director UNESCO Bangkok provides a preface which outlines the basic vision of the Decade as a “world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education for societal transformation” which is then translated into five objectives. While Shaeffer describes the concept of sustainable development as evolving, he refers to the three key areas as society, environment and the economy, with culture as an underlying dimension. Four key roles for education in sustainable development are outlined, first, as the primary agent of transformation towards sustainable development, second, to foster the values, behaviours and lifestyles required for a sustainable future, third, as a process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the equity, economy and ecology of all communities and fourth, to build capacity for futures oriented thinking.

This book is presented as six chapters. The first, an introduction, comments on the shift of education for sustainability from centre stage at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, to the international stage at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 2002. The question “What is sustainability?” is addressed, followed by expression of the view that education for sustainability seeks a transformative role for education. The collection of papers in the five chapters following are presented in a framework of the five key elements of good practice in education for sustainability. These are *imagining a better future, critical thinking and reflection, participation in decision-making, partnerships and systemic thinking*.

Imagining a better future draws together a collection of case studies from Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Wales. “It’s a Living Thing” is a professional development program aimed across a range of sectors in New South Wales and is delivered through Macquarie University and the Australian Association of Environmental Education. “Enviroschools” was initiated on a pilot basis in 1993 by the Hamilton City Council before it became national in 2001 and spread to numerous schools across New Zealand. “Vision 2020” operates in Hamilton, Canada where it was introduced 10 years ago to address growth and support regional planning efforts. “Planning for real” was introduced in Brecon Beacons National Park, Southern Wales, to involve local people in planning for the park. Based on its success a companion program called “Sustainability for real” was later introduced into local schools.

Each case study highlights the opportunities and challenges of envisioning. They describe community involvement in building a vision for a better future; where participants are encouraged to undertake a personal journey to uncover their beliefs

and assumptions, take ownership and responsibility, focus on hope and opportunities, strengthen intercultural understandings and empower individuals.

Critical thinking and reflection focuses on case studies from China, the United Kingdom, Mexico, the United States and New Zealand. In China, with assistance from the World Wildlife Fund, critical reflective thinking has formed a key component of the Environmental Educator's Initiative begun in 1997. Through a series of workshops teacher educators and key master teachers have been empowered to facilitate their own workshops with other teachers and school administrators throughout China's school system. Also with WWF assistance, the "What We Consume" program has been implemented in the United Kingdom. In Mexico, at the University of Guadalajara an environmental education program is assisting women to question and clarify their relationships to consumerism, health and the environment. At the Sustainability Education Center in New York City, critical thinking and reflection is being used to shape ways that youth view business and entrepreneurship, while in New Zealand critical thinking is used in postgraduate management studies.

Tilbury and Wortman describe the need to question assumptions and recognise bias around us. They describe thinking critically as involving a deep examination of the root causes of sustainability challenges and whether they are linked to economic, ecological or social issues. Thus each of the case studies in this chapter facilitate understanding of values clarification and empower people to participate in change.

Participation in decision making ranges from consultation and consensus building to decision making, risk management and partnerships. The case studies linked to participation are from Vanuatu, South Africa and Australia. In Vanuatu, presentations from a small drama group are helping to build knowledge within a community of low education levels and in South Africa a pilot "Learning for Sustainability" project has engaged teachers to construct their own sustainability knowledge and develop curricula relevant to their students. Participatory Action Research has been undertaken in Australia to enable participants to develop their own research questions, action plans and relevant data collection to their own workplace.

Each of these case studies ensures the learners are at the centre of the activity where they are engaging in dialogue to build knowledge. A sense of self reliance, inclusivity and long term participation also feature in each.

Partnerships for sustainability may take two forms; firstly, formal government partnerships with agreed aims and commitments and secondly, voluntary and self organising partnerships. The variety and intensity of partnerships which range from "arms length relationship" to "shared vision, innovation" are presented in a colourful table. Three world wide case studies are outlined in this chapter. They are the Earth Charter Initiative, the OECD Environment and School Initiative, and the University Leaders for a Sustainable Future. Each of these provide an opportunity for the partners to build a shared vision, combine their resources, help secure financial and technical support, challenge old world views and motivate for action.

Systemic thinking is described as relational thinking with its emphasis on integrative approaches and long term solutions. Two case studies feature in this chapter, with the first from Scotland. Here the WWF launched the "LinkingThinking" project to demystify and make accessible systems ideas and methodologies for educators and students. The original focus was on Scotland's rivers and since the pilot success the project emphasis has been broadened to education generally. The second case study is based in California and focuses on the need to understand ecosystems and cycles of life to create sustainable communities. Both studies encourage participants to view the

world in a wide, holistic way and to recognise the relationships which exist. Systems thinking is summed up in three dimensions; perception, conception and action.

The book is well presented, with numerous photos included to illustrate people engaging in sustainability discussion and activities. The language used is appropriate for both a general audience and as reference material. In my view, presenting this vast amount of information in succinct themed case studies was innovative.

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