SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF ESD
Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Understanding within ESD
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1 Introduction

This paper seeks to concisely summarise how the social and cultural perspectives of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) may be addressed in the Asia Pacific region, specifically in relation to intercultural understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity, bearing in mind the objectives of the Experts meeting:

1. to identify and conceptualize the content areas for ESD;
2. to discuss the relationship of ESD with other education initiatives such as Environmental Education (EE, EIU, EFA, UNLD and MDGs);
3. to recommend guidelines for reorienting existing education to address sustainable development, and
4. to plan the organization of the APEID-APCEIU workshop on "Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability" in September 2006.

2 Content areas for ESD

According to the Guidelines and Recommendations for Reorienting Teacher Education to address Sustainability, prepared by the UNESCO Chair, York University Toronto, ESD is more than acquiring knowledge and understanding issues, it is also about developing skills, values and perspectives.

This suggests then that any reorientation of teacher education needs to identify what teachers, and ultimately their students, need:

- to know and understand;
- to do (skills and competencies), and to
• develop processes for exploring meaning, to clarify their own and other’s identity, socio-cultural and religious perspectives and world views, through values identification and development (ie learning to be), in order to
• learn how to live together equitably, peacefully and sustainably.

UNESCO Four Pillars
The UNESCO four pillars for learning, drawn from the UNESCO Report on Education for the 21st century, chaired by Jacques Delors, although published over ten years ago, provide an effective and relevant framework for ESD, that is easy to use and to apply flexibly in any context, namely:

Learning to Know, to Do, to Be and to Live Together

The framework presented by the four pillars has not yet been fully explored nor implemented and should not be discarded due to its simplicity nor for the time that has elapsed since it was published. In fact, I would argue that its merit lies precisely in its simplicity, especially when dealing with the challenging task of integrating the complex and interrelated multiplicity of issues to be addressed by ESD.

We should also avoid re-inventing the wheel, or creating new frameworks that are incompatible with what is already being implemented by stressed teachers working with an overcrowded curriculum. We should instead assist educators to streamline and integrate ESD content within existing curriculum reform strategies addressing global issues, with particular relevance and application to the local context.

A reorientation of education should therefore not seek to transform education, which is larger than the task at hand, but rather to reform it consistent with other parallel efforts. Of the three stages:

1 Education about sustainability (awareness)
2 Education for sustainable development (reform) and
3 Education as sustainable development (transformation),

we are advised to aim for stage two.
While this is slower, incremental reform steps are more achievable in terms of resources, more enduring and sustainable, before we are ready to implement transformative approaches.

In determining the content areas for ESD it is recommended that the Meeting on ESD in Thailand develop a matrix which identifies the content and issues for each of the ESD thematic areas, but which also identifies the values, perspectives and skills to be developed (see figure XX on Page XX).

3 Teaching-Learning processes for ESD

In addition to identifying the content areas for ESD, a reorientation of education to address sustainability also needs to identify the processes for teaching and learning that are most conducive to an integrated approach to ESD.

The APNIEVE teaching-learning process, developed by Dr Lourdes Quisumbing is a particularly appropriate model for addressing this, both because it integrates values into learning approaches, but also because it works very well with the four pillars and the Toronto Guidelines as illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toronto Guidelines</th>
<th>4 Pillars Framework</th>
<th>Process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and issues</td>
<td>L’ to know</td>
<td>Knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Cognitive &amp; Conceptual)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values, perspectives</td>
<td>L’ to be &amp; to live together</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Affective/Socio-cultural/Spiritual)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Valuing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>L’ to do</td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Practical/Kinesthetic)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As with any recommended framework, content or process for teachers however, it is important not to be prescriptive but to offer a guide for adaptation to any socio-cultural context. The process would therefore need to be adapted flexibly given that learning styles, needs and emphases are different across cultures and indeed for every individual. The objective then is to cater for all learning styles to ensure that learning is effective and accessible to all.
A reorientation of education to address ESD that is accessible must then reflect the very values and principles that are implied by sustainability (eg equity, cultural inclusivity and cultural appropriateness to name a few) and that are implied in numerous UN documents and UNESCO initiatives, in particular those that are of relevance to ESD (ie EE, EIU, EFA, UNLD, MDGs & UDHR etc).

The values related to each of the thematic areas would need to be identified and listed in the matrix mentioned earlier (see figure XX on Page XX), however it is likely that many of these values will overlap, leading to a synthesized list.

Some of the universal values related to Intercultural understanding and cultural diversity are:

- Appreciation of Diversity
- Mutual Respect, Tolerance, Acceptance, Understanding
- Human Dignity, Individual Worth
- Equality, Equity, Justice, Fairness, Equanimity
- Peace, Harmony, Social cohesion, Non Violence
- Care and Concern for others, Compassion,
- Inclusion, Sharing, Collective well being
- Truth, Reconciliation, Forgiveness
- Strengthening Cultural identity, language and heritage

The integration of values in education presents a number of problematic issues and questions such as “whose values are to be taught?” and “how are we to teach them?” Since values are more “caught than taught” then an emphasis on the development of the teacher’s awareness of the values reflected in their attitudes, speech, actions and behaviours is essential, in addition to whole school alignment with the values agreed by the school community. The process of identifying shared values would then draw in the entire community to the ESD discussion, resulting in effective, albeit informal, whole community learning.
The approach to values in ESD needs to be addressed sensitively to incorporate the universal values implied in relevant documents, while respecting the context-specific cultural and/or religious values, provided these are not contrary to human rights. Striking a balance between universality and cultural relativity should not however compromise human rights nor the principles of ESD.

In many cases, differences in values between cultures lay in the relative emphases, priority and importance given to some values over others. In cases where considerable differences in values do exist, the most constructive perspectives to be highlighted are those of complementarity and the beneficial synergies to be obtained from the richness of human diversity, mutual learning through sharing and exchange and unity through diversity.

The process of values learning would ideally be designed to draw from the learner the universal values inherent to the human spirit, with local cultural variations of emphasis. For this reason, the spiritual development of the learner, whether in a religious or secular context, is integral to the development of a set of values, perspectives and a world view which embraces the principles of sustainability, peace and human rights.

5 Social and Cultural Perspectives of ESD

I will briefly list here some of the social and cultural perspectives related to ESD, so that the areas of overlap may be clearly seen, highlighting the need for a synthesis to occur as part of the meeting in Thailand.

Social Perspectives:

- Human Rights and dignity
- Equity, equality, equal opportunity
- Social and economic Justice
- Social inclusion and acceptance
- Democratic participation and community-based decision making
- Civil society and citizenship rights and responsibilities
- Social cohesion, mutual respect and understanding
Appropriate support, self-empowerment and positive discrimination for the disadvantaged
Non discrimination on grounds of socio-economic status and/or gender

Cultural Perspectives relating to intercultural understanding and cultural diversity:

**Equity**, equal opportunity, equal access (gender, rural & marginalised)
**Structure of power** relationships –gender, indigenous, refugees, youth, social status
**Human rights** – including cultural & linguistic rights (indigenous peoples, refugees)
**Social and Cultural Inclusion** – participation in all areas of life (youth)
**Diversity** – Respect for diversity and sharing commonalities, Unity in Diversity - universal values balanced with cultural, traditional and spiritual values.

**Unity in Diversity - universal values of cultures & spiritual traditions**
Universality vs relativity – human rights issues

**Productive Diversity** – diversity as a socio-economic benefit, sharing & learning from each other, productive synergies

**Mutual Respect** for cultural identity, language, faith, heritage

**Tolerance acceptance of diverse cultures, languages, faith, spiritual traditions**

**Peace**, inner/outer, harmony – conflict resolution, mediation

**Reconciliation**, forgiveness, healing

**Indigenous issues** – linguistic, cultural, spiritual, land rights, traditional law & lifestyle,
Traditional knowledge (knowledge appropriation), living in harmony with the land
**Individualism vs Collectivism** sharing cultures/dominating cultures

**Countering Racism**, discrimination, xenophobia

In a nutshell, the reorientation of education for ESD would need to incorporate knowledge, understanding and respect for self, others and for all life, reflected in decisions, actions and behaviours.

6 **Integrated Framework for Reorienting Education to address ESD**

As mentioned earlier, it is recommended that a draft matrix be developed in Thailand incorporating the knowledge, skills, values and the desired learning outcomes of a framework for ESD in the Asia Pacific, accompanied by the processes and methodologies for doing so.
A draft Matrix for reorienting education to ESD.

7 Statement of Principles for reorienting education to ESD with specific reference to cultural understanding and cultural diversity

I have here listed some draft principles for underpinning the reorienting of education towards ESD for a culturally sensitive and culturally inclusive approach, insofar as they relate to intercultural education, cultural diversity and indigenous peoples.

Cultural Inclusive Principles for Intercultural Education

All learners benefit from appreciating and understanding cultural diversity
Develop the knowledge, concepts, values and skills that enable learners to participate effectively at local, national and international levels.
Promotes, values and uses the cultural and linguistic diversity of the learner in the classroom.
Includes and values a range of knowledge, experiences and viewpoints of a culturally plural society.
Provides students with accurate information of the history, lives and cultures of indigenous and other peoples.
Values and includes the cultural and linguistic knowledge and skills of learners in the learning process.
Promotes a human rights and human relations approach for countering racism and discrimination.
Allows learners to recognise, acknowledge and engage in diverse learning experiences.
A culturally inclusive approach to ESD requires:

A whole-organization approach which encompasses the curriculum content, teaching practices, learning environment, organisational processes and ethos.
A learner-focussed approach valuing the cultural/linguistic background and experience of learners.
Democratic processes in teaching/learning, and supportive teaching and learning environments that model democracy in action.
An integrative curriculum approach
Promotion of language learning
A conflict-sensitive curriculum that addresses socio-historical issues to understand causes of injustice and how these may be resolved.

Culturally appropriate Indigenous Education

Teachers use relevant and effective, culturally-appropriate methods of teaching.
Learning strategies acknowledge and accommodate different learning styles of all learners.
Students learn directly from Indigenous people or use resources developed by or in consultation with Indigenous people.
Learners are provided with opportunities to actively develop understanding, skills, knowledge and empathy.
Develop skills in critical analysis to understand the structure of power and injustice
Awareness of racism and discrimination and strategies for countering racism
Learning involves Indigenous peoples’ stories and view points.
A supportive learning environment that includes affective, cognitive, practical/functional and aesthetic dimensions and is relevant to the learners.
Involves parents and communities, by increasing their involvement in the children’s learning.
Educators become central figures who care, understand, guide and motivate learners.

Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples

Incorporate indigenous perspectives across the curriculum and in learning activities
Foster understanding and work together for a shared future in which all peoples are treated with respect and dignity
Consult local indigenous communities, elders and custodians of the land
Celebrate, value and learn from and about indigenous peoples, histories, cultures, languages, achievements, issues past/present, in places of significance if possible and with cultural instructors
Positive interactions between students, teachers, parents and community
Strive for equitable access to education and learning outcomes
Use culturally appropriate strategies for indigenous learners
Consult elders and use indigenous approved teaching resources
Value human rights, counter stereotyping and racism
Students learn about and participate actively in Reconciliation, healing and forgiveness with indigenous and/or marginalised peoples.

References


Guidelines and Recommendations for Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability, UNITWIN/UNESCO Chair for Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability, York University, Toronto and the International Network of Teacher-Education Institutions, UNESCO October 2005