Focus

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Deirdre Hogan & **Roland Tormey** examine in depth the relationship between development education and education for sustainable development, and aim to provide clarity as to why tensions and uncertainty exist between the two. They address the necessity of both groups of practitioners reconciling their differences to work together and address the pressing issues of today.

Introduction

As the concept of education for sustainable development (ESD) gains momentum and exposure during the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014, DESD), its relationship with and similarities to development education (DE) are increasingly considered. Is ESD the same as DE? Is DE a subset of ESD? Are DE and ESD competing or complementary approaches to education? What is their relationship with environmental education (EE)?

DE and EE emerged from different traditions and contexts but their aims and objectives occasionally overlapped; the ESD concept drew significantly from the prior work of both. All three forms of education have much in common. They all seek to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable the learner to critically engage with issues of injustice, inequality and unsustainability and to take positive action for change. They share a vision of education that moves away from conventional didactic teaching methods and towards more active, participatory and interdisciplinary approaches, and they promote learning that results in positive action for social and personal change.

In spite of the similarities, the nature of the relationship between DE

and ESD in particular remains unclear and at times is a source of confusion and apprehension for advocates and practitioners in the field. This article aims to provide clarity on the relationship between the two concepts. It begins by examining development education and environmental education, and exploring the contributions of each to the emergence of ESD. It identifies some of the tensions and uncertainty that exist between DE and ESD, while emphasising the strong relationships between their contents, methodologies and ideologies. The article concludes by urging that the tensions be addressed through open dialogue and collaboration while realising the immense potential of combining efforts in order to meaningfully address the complex and interrelated issues addressed by both fields. The need for education for positive change is too critical to be lost in a battle of words.

The contested ownership of ESD

When the UN declared that 2005–2014 would be the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, responsibility for developing a strategy for the Decade in the European region was assigned to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The UNECE drew together representatives from governments, academia and NGOs from North America, Europe, Russia, Turkey, Israel and the Central Asian former Soviet Republics to accomplish this task. When this group came together for their second meeting in Rome in July 2004 it was immediately evident that the sub-committee responsible for drafting the text and its subsequent revisions had done an excellent job, as most areas of contention had been resolved. It appeared that there would be few difficulties in putting the final draft of the strategy to bed.

However, one problem area remained. The paragraph that briefly sketched the history of the education for sustainable development (ESD) concept made reference to the place of environmental education (EE) as one of the building blocks of ESD, but made no reference to development education (DE). It seemed a small matter when a number of delegates suggested that this omission be corrected. Yet it became the major bone of contention in the Rome discussions.

It quickly became apparent that, while some of those from Northern and Western countries were familiar with DE and tended to view sustainable development as the child of two conceptual parents (development and environmental sustainability), many of those from Mediterranean countries or from the East had little familiarity with development education and tended to view sustainable development as an outgrowth from the environmentalist movement. Some felt that recognising other forms of adjectival education

alongside environmental education was, somehow, conceding the political capital accrued by the environmentalist movement to 'some group of developmentalists' who had not toiled long and hard alongside them. What seemed at first like a minor amendment became an ideological battle for the soul and political capital of the ESD concept.

In the end a compromise was found and the final text made reference to both environmental education and 'development and other targeted forms of education'. The shortened form of environmental education (EE) was capitalised to give it the status of a proper noun, while development education was clearly de-emphasised. Paragraph 13 of the strategy, adopted at a UNECE meeting of ministers in Vilnius on March 18, 2005 states 'It [ESD] broadens the concept of environmental education (EE), which has increasingly addressed a wide range of development subjects. ESD also encompasses various elements of development and other targeted forms of education' (UNECE, 2005). Yet, the conflict becomes more important than the compromise when two separate groups feel ownership of the concept of ESD to the point where they are in contention. In a different context, O'Sullivan (2005) acknowledges that when different educational positions become subsumed under a common title there can be a process of pastiche-making, a process of cutting, pasting and splicing which glosses over different positions and creates the semblance of unanimity. However, he believes it is better to explore the diverse positions as such, because it is precisely the interplay between positions that generates critical thinking about them (2005:320).

Despite development education and environmental education operating mostly within their own distinct sectors, they did not develop entirely without influences from the other. There were a few who have addressed environmental issues in their DE work as well as some who have addressed development issues in their EE work. Yet it was more often the case that DE work was delivered with little reference to environmental sustainability, and that EE practitioners often neglected global development and inequalities. As the concept of sustainable development evolved, however, it became clear that these types of concepts cannot be easily separated. Therefore, we need to move from a situation where DE and EE are seen as separate but occasionally overlapping to a situation where they are seen as integrally intertwined. This is the conceptual shift that we seek to explore here.

Development education and environmental issues

The concept of development education (DE) emerged in the 1970s from the work of international aid agencies and development non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who recognised the need to educate the developed

world about issues of poverty and injustice in the Third World (Regan, 2006:108). The Joint UN Information Committee (JUNIC) working group on DE, led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), created international partnerships with NGOs and built links with public interest groups and development action networks. National committees on development education also began to emerge in several countries. UNICEF established a clearinghouse through which national committees, NGOs and field officers were kept informed of new ideas, publications and productions that would support the integration of DE into formal, non-formal and informal education (UNICEF, 1986).

Ireland was receptive to the DE message. There already existed a strong connection to developing countries through Irish missionary organisations and the Catholic Church strongly supported their initiatives. Trócaire was established in 1973 by Irish Catholic bishops with a dual mandate to support development projects overseas and to inform the Irish public about the root causes of global poverty and injustice. It was a forerunner to DE in Ireland, and from the early stages committed to spending 20% of its income on education of development issues (Kirby, 1994:68). In the mid-1970s the Development Education Commission (DEC) was set up within the Confederation of Non-Governmental Organisations for Overseas Development (CONGOOD) to promote DE within the non-formal education sector. The DEC engaged in information sharing, political lobbying on development issues, public education campaigns and the joint production of development literature (Dóchas, 2005:12). The case for DE in Ireland was strengthened further in 1978 when the Department of Foreign Affairs introduced a DE grants scheme.

While DE traditionally focused on poverty and related issues, a number of authors and practitioners recognised the importance of the environmental link to human security. In an Irish context, for example, the *75:25 Ireland in an Unequal World* resource produced by CONGOOD in 1984 identified the environment as a key development education theme. In the UK, the Development Compass Rose, which originated in the work of the Birmingham Development Education Centre (DEC) gave environmental concerns a central role. The development studies literature, from which DE drew some of its inspiration and content material, also included a growing focus on environmental issues. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), for example, placed a growing emphasis on the relationship between the environment and development, as was evident in a number of Human Development Reports (UNDP, 1992; 1998; 2003; 2006; 2007) that explicitly addressed the environment as a key theme. In 2000, the United Nations included environmental sustainability as one of the

eight Millennium Development Goals and, in 2006, the White Paper on Irish Aid referred to the importance of environmental protection in supporting livelihoods of people in the developing world (Irish Aid, 2006b:63).

Environmental education and development issues

The emergence of the term environmental education (EE) can be traced back to the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, Sweden. The conference recommended the establishment of the International Environmental Education Programme (IEEP) to raise awareness of environmental problems and to build EE capacity across member states (United Nations Environment Programme, 1972). The *Belgrade Charter*, produced in 1975 at the International Workshop on Environmental Education in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, provided a *Global Framework for Environmental Education*, stating that EE programmes should be interdisciplinary, involve active participation, have a global perspective, and consider both current and future situations. It went on to suggest that 'environmental education should consider the environment in its totality - (including) natural and man-made, ecological, political, economic, technological, social, legislative, cultural and aesthetic aspects' (UNEP, 1975). In subsequent years principles, guidelines and actions for the implementation of EE were developed through the Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education, held in Tiblisi in 1977, and the International Congress in Moscow in 1987.

While environmental education (EE) focused primarily on issues such as acid rain, pollution and depletion of natural resources, it broadened its remit to address development issues. International conferences identified the root causes of many environmental problems in social, economic and cultural terms (UNESCO, 1987:5). Speakers from developing countries at Stockholm in 1972 emphasised that the task of resolving environmental instability was second to providing more immediate needs such as food, shelter and healthcare:

> "...for two-thirds of the world's population the human environment was dominated by poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and misery…until the gap between the poor and the rich countries was substantially narrowed, little if any progress could be made in improving the human environment" (UNEP, 1972).

The relationship between the environment and poverty was further noted in the final report of the Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education in Tiblisi in 1977:

"...environmental problems are not just those of the detrimental or irrational use of natural resources and pollution. They include problems of underdevelopment, such as inadequate housing and shelter, bad sanitary conditions, malnutrition, defective management and production practices and, more generally all problems which stem from poverty" (UNESCO, 1977:11).

Integrating development and environmental issues through ESD

A major conceptual breakthrough came with the work of the World Commission on Environment and Development, otherwise known as the Brundtland Commission, which was established by the UN to re-examine global environmental and development problems and to suggest practical and realistic proposals to address them. The resulting Brundtland Report promoted the concept of sustainable development, defining it as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Brundtland, 1987). It identified three components to sustainable development: economic growth, environmental protection and social equity, and suggested that all three could be achieved by gradually changing the ways in which we develop and use technologies (Environmental Literacy Council, 2006).

The work of the Brundtland Commission was followed up at the Rio Summit in 1992, which produced Agenda 21, a blueprint for sustainable development into the 21st century. Chapter 36, *Promoting Education, Public Awareness, and Training,* focused on the role of ESD in providing access to quality basic education for all, building public awareness of sustainable development issues, reorienting existing education to incorporate sustainable development concerns and ensuring that training programmes for all job sectors reflect sustainable development practice. Ten years later the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg recommended that the United Nations General Assembly adopt a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, from 2005–2014, with UNESCO as the lead agency.

The apparent tensions between DE and ESD

The concept of education for sustainable development essentially combines development and environmental educations by adding social and economic perspectives to environmental education and environmental concerns to development education. Perhaps more importantly it brings environment

and development educators closer together under a new, all-inclusive school of thought. However, despite occasional overlapping between EE and DE in the past and the necessary merging of the two fields of operation that ESD provides, tensions remain between DE and ESD.

Advocates of ESD suggest that environment and development organisations share common concerns with regard to the sustainability of the planet and its people and should therefore make strong partners. But, as the discussions on the UNECE Strategy (and the text adopted in the strategy itself) make clear, there are those within the ESD movement who see it primarily as an outgrowth, and a refocusing, of EE. One consequence of this is that some who call themselves practitioners of ESD still focus largely on environmental themes of climate change, pollution and resource use.

This apparent centrality of EE concerns to some ESD practice has meant that ESD has been met with caution by some development educators, who have argued that 'ESD is not a partnership of equals, with the more public-friendly environment message eclipsing or minimising the importance of human development' (McCloskey, 2003:192). It is widely recognised that ESD is more than simply the sum of DE and EE (Bourn, 2003:12; Fien, 2003:4; Martin, 2003:11) and so there may be a concern that focusing all eyes on ESD can detract from their respective agendas for change. There may be a feeling among DE practitioners that they don't want to lose their title of development education practitioners and that too many years and too much effort were invested in creating a profile for DE to sign their work over to ESD. The uncertainty is strengthened when considering how the different adjectival educations have often been isolated from each other in the past, pursuing separate agendas and seldom forming strategic alliances (Regan & Sinclair, 1999:29).

These divisions are given greater meaning as each draws from a different constituency, coordinated by a different group, relating to a different government department and seeking funding from different sources. In Ireland, environmental education is led by agencies like An Taisce and ECO-UNESCO and supported by organisations such as Comhar and Ecological Environmental Non-Government Organisations Network (EENGO); development education is led by agencies like Trócaire and Amnesty International and coordinated by Dóchas; and education for sustainable development is currently coordinated by a National Steering Committee on ESD comprising representatives from a variety of departments and agencies. At governmental level, EE is housed in the Department of Environment and Local Government, DE is located in the Department of Foreign Affairs, and the National Strategy on ESD is the preserve of the Department of Education and Science.

While it would be a mistake to overstate the separateness of these contexts (for example Irish Aid has long funded environmental education projects which had a development component), they do at the same time constitute different milieus within which EE and DE have historically conceptualised themselves, within different sets of relationships and different 'powerbases'.

Grounds for collaboration between DE and ESD

Given the apparent centrality of EE concerns to ESD, and given the parallel and marginally overlapping past agendas of EE and DE, it is not surprising that development educators might be slow to engage with the ESD agenda. Notwithstanding this fact, however, the conceptual linkages between DE and ESD are striking. These similarities can be readily seen in a comparison of nationally and internationally accepted definitions of and strategies for DE and ESD. We will now explore a number of these linkages using the Irish Aid definition of DE, and UNECE and UNESCO documents on ESD, as our reference points.

Both DE and ESD refer to the complexity of development issues. Irish Aid describes DE as a process of 'increasing awareness and understanding of the rapidly changing, interdependent and unequal world in which we live' (Irish Aid, 2006a:9). UNESCO describes ESD as a process of helping people to 'better understand the world in which they live and address the complexity and interconnectedness of problems such as poverty, wasteful consumption, environmental degradation, urban decay, population growth, health, conflict and the violation of human rights that threaten our future' (UNESCO, 2003).

The primary emphasis of DE is global poverty and related issues of underdevelopment, human rights, food and water security, health, trade, peace, education and gender. DE promotes an awareness of the causes of poverty and underdevelopment, an understanding of rights and responsibilities, and an appreciation of opportunities to effect change for a more just and equal world (Irish Aid, 2006b:107). Similarly UNESCO, addressing the goals of ESD, recognises that 'poverty eradication is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development' (UNESCO, 2002:3). ESD explores the same issues that DE seeks to bring to the fore, including poverty alleviation, citizenship, peace ethics, responsibility in local and global contexts, democracy and governance, justice, security, human rights, health, gender equity, cultural diversity, rural and urban development, economy, production and consumption patterns and corporate responsibility (UNECE, 2005:4). Martin writes that the new goal

of sustainable development means that at last DE and EE practitioners have 'the same hymn sheet and the divergence of the early years [have] started to coincide' (Martin, 2003:11).

While DE recognises the importance of the environment for human security, its practices tend to focus on the social and economic issues that relate to development. ESD on the other hand places the environment on an equal standing with social and economic factors. UNESCO defines ESD as 'a process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology and equity of all communities' (UNESCO, 2003:4). As well as the issues listed above, ESD also focuses on areas such as environmental protection, natural resource management and biological and landscape diversity (UNECE, 2005:4). The importance of environmental concerns in addressing human development needs has been increasingly recognised within development literature, and a UNDP Human Development Report has recently noted that 'climate change is a massive threat to human development and in some places it is already undermining the international community's efforts to reduce extreme poverty' (2007: v). As such, ESD provides the broadened focus for DE that is becoming increasingly necessary.

Active and participatory learning approaches of DE and ESD

As with other education sectors, DE and ESD are both located on the periphery of formal education curricula, and seek to integrate a global perspective into existing disciplines and programmes. Both advocate the use of a holistic and interdisciplinary approach. UNECE states that ESD should use a range of participatory, process- and solution-oriented educational methods tailored to the learner (UNECE, 2005:7). Similarly, Freirean liberation theory, which underpins DE, promotes problem-based learning, dialogue and participation within a co-operative learning environment where the teacher engages in learning with the student (Freire, 1970).

The complexity of development issues necessitates that learners have an opportunity to develop skills such as information processing, critical thinking, systemic thinking and personal reflection. These skills support engagement with the depth of information available, as well as the contradicting arguments and the absence of one simple solution. UNECE (in its strategy for ESD) describes this methodology as using 'systemic, critical and creative thinking and reflection in both local and global contexts' (UNECE, 2005:4). Irish Aid describes it as 'seeking to engage people in analysis, reflection and action for local and global citizenship and participation' (Irish Aid, 2006a:9).

Change begins with the learner. This may mean reflection on personal behaviour and practices and acting accordingly. Actions consistent with sustainable development include reducing energy consumption in the home, minimising one's ecological footprint, recognising and promoting cultural diversity, critiquing Ireland's Overseas Development Aid programme, taking action in developing countries through NGOs or volunteering organisations, becoming ethically aware consumers and taking an interest in media representation of local and global issues.

The conceptual relationship between ESD and DE clearly addresses the need for development and environmental issues to be addressed in an integrated way, and it is essential that we find ways of moving beyond the tensions which have characterised relations between practitioners of DE and ESD. Increased interaction between departments of education, foreign affairs and environment (as well as between the activists and movements they interact with) will be necessary for the development of an Irish National Strategy for ESD, particularly given the traditional separation of environmental and development education discourses. Such a process of bringing together people from different traditions, with different priorities but the same basic goal, is not always easy, but it is essential if we are to build a strong basis for addressing joint concerns. It is in the best interest of both DE and ESD that development educators do not leave the field of play to those who prioritise environmental concerns, but instead actively engage in the process of forging a unifying and comprehensive ESD.

Conclusion

The concepts of development education and environmental education emerged in the 1970s to focus on issues associated with underdevelopment and environmental degradation respectively. As time progressed it became apparent that these individual agendas were interrelated; global poverty could not be considered in isolation of the environment and vice versa. The Brundtland Report reconciled the interests of both under the umbrella of sustainable development, and Agenda 21 put forward the concept of education for sustainable development. However, tension remains between DE and ESD, partly due to disparities in tradition, relationships, and how and where each is organised. Notwithstanding these differences, DE and ESD are very similar in terms of content, methodology, ideology and commitment to action for positive change. In light of this it is essential that practitioners of DE and ESD work together to share educational expertise, to combine forces and to strategically plan for a future that places DE and ESD at the centre of formal, non-formal and informal education.

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