

# **Whole School Approaches To Education For Sustainable Development Through School-Focused Professional Development (The SEEPS Project)**

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## **Abstract**

Sustainability in European Primary Schools (SEEPS) is a continuing professional development (CPD) project designed to help teachers promote whole school approaches to education for sustainable development (ESD) in their schools. The project adopts a school-focused approach to CPD. It provides materials to support teachers in developing whole-school approaches in their own schools, after a member of staff has been trained in the use of the materials. SEEPS believes that the best whole-school professional development occurs when theoretical, contextual, and personal knowledge are integrated

The most action-focused ESD occurs in schools that promote and maintain sustainable practices through the participation of pupils in whole-school approaches. If we want education to develop active global citizens who will practise sustainable lifestyles, how we educate is key. In whole-school approaches, the active participation of children as present citizens in deliberating, formulating, and practising sustainable lifestyles is expected to carry over into students lives in the community.

## **Project Rationale**

*Without the mass-involvement of young people in caring for the environment there is no hope of sustainability*

--Tickell, in Quarrie, 1992.

*It is now widely recognised that the success of curriculum innovation, whether internally or externally initiated, is contingent upon the professional development of teachers*

--Evans, 1993.

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The SEEPS Project distinguishes between rationale (why), vision (what), and design (how) in its promotion of ESD and organizational change. The project's vision is whole-school approaches. This is a process-based vision in which the emphasis is on *how* we educate. Sustainable outcomes are deliberated, decided, and practiced locally. SEEPS is also concerned with design, with how change is managed and evaluated. The Project takes a generally liberal humanist view of CPD. Although alternative theories, principles, and models are referred to in the project, it is left to individual schools and teachers to decide on the ideological perspective that underpins the application of ESD in their own school context.

### **ESD and Action**

Descriptions of environmental education (EE), ESD and sustainability education (SE) contain a consistent commitment to changing values, attitudes, and actions. These three strands can be traced in discussions of EE to more recent considerations of ESD in UNESCO sponsored conferences from Tbilisi (1978) to Thessaloniki (1997). Twenty years ago the purpose of EE was:

To foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas; to provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment; to create new patterns of behaviour of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment. (UNESCO, 1978. np).

By 1997 despite name changes, the commitment to promoting action was still clear:

..the effectiveness of awareness raising and education for sustainable development must ultimately be measured by the extent to which they change the attitudes and behaviours of people as both consumers and citizens. Changes in lifestyles as reflected in individual behaviour, households and at a community level must take place. (UNESCO, 1997: 4).

The promotion of environmental action is a clear feature of the UNESCO agenda for ESD. Unfortunately, considerable research shows, that while young people may demonstrate a high degree of environmental awareness and positive environmental values, they generally fail to reflect these perceptions and values in their actions, even at a shallow level (Wilkinson & Waterton, 1991, Froud 1994, Shallcross & Wilkinson 1994).

The thesis that increased environmental awareness and knowledge about the environment, would lead to action for the environment, was the main thrust of EE in the 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately, this simple linear, psychological model has not promoted sustainable actions on a sufficiently large scale (Sterling, 2001, Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Froud's (1994) research in the UK indicates that while awareness has led to high levels of concern about the seriousness of environmental problems among young people, paradoxically these young

people feel that there is little they can do personally about the more serious environmental problems. So while schools have done a good job in developing awareness of environmental issues, they do not appear to have developed the personal responsibility and/or action competence (Jensen, 1995), that appear necessary for the resolution of these problems at a societal level.

Inconsistencies between a school's day-to-day practice and its operational curriculum are more than simple sins of omission. Titman's (1994) research has shown that when school practices fail to reflect the environmental concerns expressed by its teachers, children may call the integrity of their teachers into question. Naji (1996) identifies feelings of both guilt and apathy among young people about the state of the environment in her research in Slovenia. This evidence raises the prospect that inconsistencies between what schools teach and what they do may be socializing hypocrisy (Shallcross, 2003) by educating young people to accept inconsistent behaviour as culturally and/or socially normal (Shallcross & Wilkinson, 1994). Aristotle described such inconsistent behaviour as incontinent. Posch (1993) describes it as a gap between espoused values-- the values people claim to hold--and values in action-- the values implicit in their personal actions.

### **Whole-School Approaches**

Recently whole-school approaches (FIGURE 1) have been advocated as a more promising way to develop action-focused ESD. Whole-school approaches imply that the concern shown for environmental problems in the formal curriculum are, whenever possible, reflected in day-to-day practice in a school's nonformal curriculum. In this way values and attitudes advocated in the classroom become habituated in the daily actions of teachers, pupils, and support staff. Thus, schools practise what they teach, values are reinforced in actions and consequently caught, rather than taught. A whole school approach, as FIGURE 1 shows, integrates pedagogy with the social/organisational and technical/economic aspects of school practice (Posch, 1999).

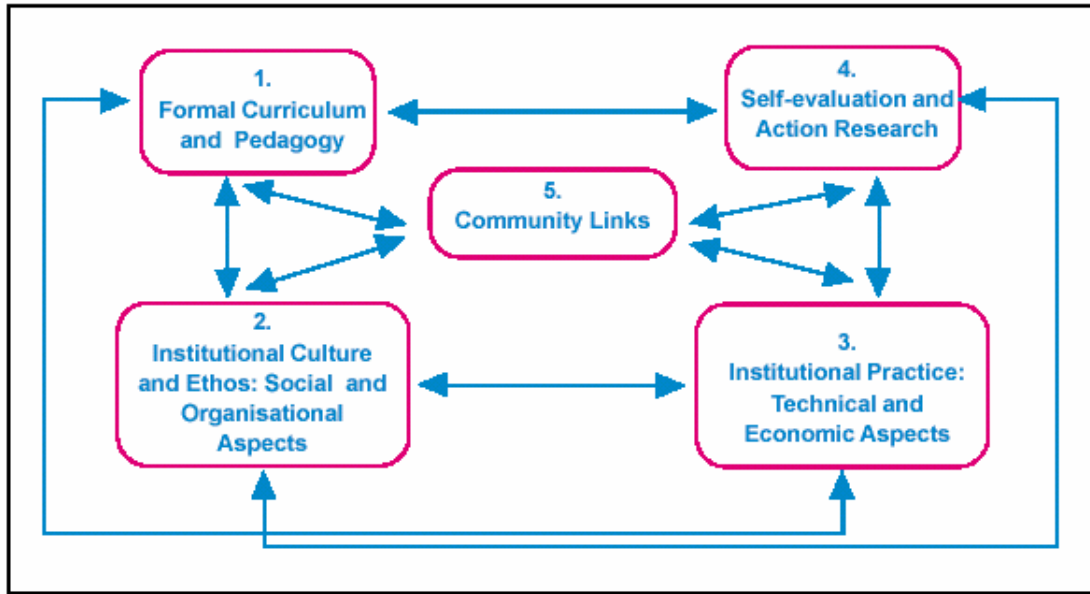
This is education as a way of life that is immediate and satisfying (Rudduck, 1999). A whole-school approach to ESD means "...working to make the educational institution a microcosm of the emerging sustainable society, rather than of the unsustainable society," (Sterling, 2001: 33) or "... shaping our interaction with the environment in an intellectual, material, spatial, social, and emotional sense to achieve a lasting/sustainable quality of life for all," (Posch, 1999: 341-2). Orr (1994) argues that education must to transform not only the substance and processes of the formal curriculum and the purposes of learning, but also how educational institutions and educational buildings work. In this way values and attitudes discussed in the formal curriculum will be continually reinforced by the school's institutional practices while its social and organisational culture promote attachment to and reduce defection from sustainable actions.

Besides integrating the five strands shown in FIGURE 1, whole-school approaches have implications for practice in each of the five areas. The curriculum, through topic work, thematic approaches, and/or the monitoring and managing of subject content should emphasize inter-connectedness. Curriculum content should also explore local, sustainable solutions to social and ecological problems. There should be strong, culturally situated, constructivist and experiential

dimensions to the curriculum. Implementing whole school approaches requires the evaluation of curricular, social, and institutional practices in schools and their links with the local community.

Are these practices the best solutions available locally? Can the school act as a research base to find out about environmental justice in the school and its local community? Most important of all, does the school act appropriately on this knowledge?

**FIGURE 1: The Five Strands of a Whole-School Approach**



Many relevant attitudes and values will be expressed in the ethos and daily practices of the school, in the literature that it directs people to, in the versions of life that it holds up as being successful, and the status it accords to different activities and relationships. These will need to be carefully evaluated from the perspective of sustainability if damaging inconsistency of message and pupil cynicism are to be avoided (Bonnet, 1999: 323).

In whole-school approaches, the peripheral participation of children can lead to their fuller participation in socio-cultural actions and thereby empower them as citizens. Action perspectives are also important because they can reduce feelings of powerlessness if they are formulated within a culturally critical as opposed to conditioned approach to civic education (Niemi & Junn, 1998). Learning, teaching, and action proceed hand-in-hand providing the opportunity to weaken defection from and strengthen attachment to environmentally just actions. Habituation through the continuity of social relationships within whole-school approaches is indispensable in reducing defection because it engenders the mutual trust that leads to cooperation (Ridley, 1996). To promote attachment, schools must engage with communities to become active agents of change rather than ‘passive transmitters of information or values’

(Uzzell *et al.*, 1994: 13). In short, schools that adopt whole-school approaches become communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Whole-school approaches encourage stamina if routine habits become accepted in interactions between children and adults in an environment of "ontological security" established early in life when the most influential actions and routines are least obvious to the young (Giddens, 1979: 218). Through such approaches, moral education commences at an early age (Farrer with Hawkes, 2000) as early childhood education rooted in communities of practice that involve pupils, teachers, parents, and other members of local communities.

Whole-school approaches engage with real issues because "[a]uthenticity is about school education getting as close as possible to the reality that awaits pupils after school" (Uzzell, 1999: 404). "Authenticity empowers because it facilitates the release of creative power from within instead of conforming with the hierarchies of power over people," (Begg, 2000: 114). Through a "[r]ethinking (of) the whole curriculum, transforming the culture of teaching and learning in schools and reconstituting the school as a social institution in relation to other institutions and agencies within society" (Elliot, 1999: 338) spaces for legitimate participation by pupils are more likely to be exposed. However, legitimate participation may not be encouraged if schools cater for participatory ESD only by allocating it space in the formal curriculum. How schools promote action is more important than the nature of these actions: the participatory route is more consistent with active citizenship and more empowering than the behaviourist approach. Whole-school approaches are not simply a reaction to the relative failure of awareness-raising and values education to promote action-focused education (Sterling, 2001), they encapsulate positive reasons for the advocacy of cooperation and legitimate and authentic participation.

The essence of the institutional dimension of whole school approaches (FIGURE 1) is its coherence in implementing the cognitive and affective messages constructed in the formal curriculum. However, since institutional practice, social organisation, and links with community are often regarded as marginal to formal learning, the core educational endeavour of schools, it becomes easier to innovate in these margins. While environmental awareness is necessary, it is not sufficient. Schools must close the gap between what they practise and what they teach if the values and attitudes that support sustainable actions are to become widespread. Hence ESD must explore whole-school approaches more enthusiastically. CPD programmes are obviously necessary to promote whole school approaches to ESD, but the crucial question is: What types of CPD programmes are most appropriate in promoting and realizing these approaches?

### **A School-Focused Model Of CPD**

The SEEPS Project has attempted to avoid some of the pitfalls associated with centralised, top-down CPD. A centralised approach sees the initiation of change as externally driven and does not consider how institutional factors in schools influence change, let alone equip teachers with the skills to manage change in their own schools. A centralized approach can be successful in some narrow content or methodological areas, such as the teaching of reading or mathematics, where the classroom teacher is the intended focus for change. However, in ESD, where the whole school becomes the locus for change, the centralized model has severe deficiencies (TABLE 1).

<b>TABLE 1: Reasons for the Failure of Centralised CPD</b>
1. One-off workshops are widespread but ineffective.
2. Topics are selected by people other than those for whom the CPD is intended.
3. Follow-up support for ideas introduced through CPD occurs in only a small number of cases.
4. Follow up evaluation is rare.
5. CPD rarely addresses individual needs and concerns.
6. Most CPD programmes involve teachers from a variety of schools. These programmes often fail to recognise the different impact of positive and negative factors within the schools to which these teachers return.
7 There is often a profound lack of conceptual or theoretical bases in the planning and implementation of CPD that would increase its effectiveness.

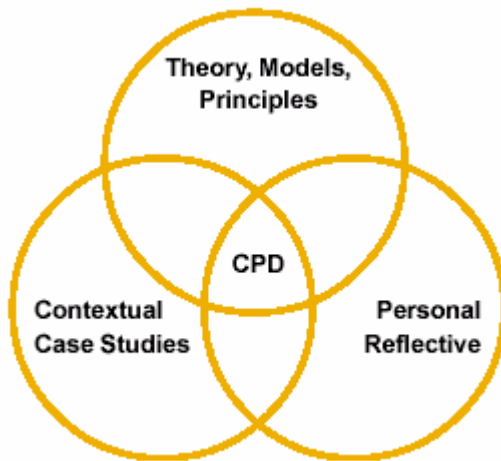
*Source: Modified from Fullan, 1991.*

For most people, especially children, the local is their most significant action field; local actions have global character. By drawing parallels with other local communities, local action becomes a microcosm of the global (Vognsen, 1995). Therefore, the clear focus of CPD in ESD is local school development (Evans, 1993). A school's environmental improvement is clearly intended to benefit pupils, but we should remember that schools are also workplaces for teachers and support staff. School development can benefit several groups: pupils, teachers, support staff, parents and school boards or governors. Therefore CPD designed to promote ESD must be context- based and relevant, and staff development must focus on the school as a social organisation. For school development to be authentic, schools need to be more fully integrated with their local communities and to forge global connections from these local links (FIGURE 1).

School-focused CPD is most likely to be successful if it integrates three knowledge bases; theoretical knowledge, contextual knowledge, and personal experiential knowledge (FIGURE 2). For this reason, theory, models, and/or principles feature in most units of the SEEPS Project and case studies of school and classroom practice are used extensively. One unit encourages schools to develop their own case study. By providing case studies that can be analysed using the theories, models, and principles contained or imported into the project, teachers are able to make informed judgements about which aspects of a case study can be adapted for use in their own school. Thus ideas are not copied uncritically. It is also inevitable that teachers will reflect on theory and context through the filter of their own personal knowledge (FIGURE 2). Many of the activities within SEEPS ask teachers to indulge in this triadic approach to reflection.

School-focused CPD offers solutions to many difficulties associated with centralised CPD (TABLE1) For example, a school focus ensures that staff development creates individual and organisational habits and structures that make continuous learning a valued and endemic part of the culture of the school. Besides creating the opportunity

**FIGURE 2: The Three Knowledge Bases of Effective School-Focused CPD**



for local derived action, a school focus also addresses the needs of schools and individuals. Hewton (1988) identifies two further advantages of school-focused CPD of particular importance in ESD. First, schools as learning communities identify and solve many of their own problems. Second, if schools are sufficiently motivated by the greater sense of control over their own affairs, they will find the resources to support CPD.

However, simply basing CPD in schools can lead to the pooling of ignorance (Blenkin et al, 1992). Parochialism is a problem when schools and/or individuals find difficulty in processing contextual knowledge based on the experiences of other schools and/or trainers. Another problem is that the range of CPD activities is limited by the expertise of the school's staff. A third difficulty is that CPD needs are frequently only those internal to the school, resulting in a myopic focus that overlooks or neglects external circumstances (Hewton, 1988). Other criticisms about school-based CPD have resulted from devolving budgets to schools, a process that has led to more school-based CPD. First, many administrative tasks, such as routine staff meetings, are included in CPD time. Second, schools are not necessarily adept at identifying long-term needs or needs that relate to their local environment. They tend, understandably, to be preoccupied with the latest curriculum or inspection initiative from central government, or the most recent strategy that will improve pupils' scores in national tests.

The most evident conclusions from these observations are that geographically and contextually CPD for school development through ESD must be school-focused, but this process must connect with the wider community. The move towards devolving CPD funding to schools in some European countries makes a school focus a pragmatic necessity in these contexts. Research conducted before the design of the SEEPS project identified three providers of CPD who stood out from the rest in UK primary schools:

1. Local government, mainly advisers or quality assurance personnel
2. School staff, sometimes working in school networks.
3. Radio and TV.

Change, if it is to be successful in stimulating and maintaining ESD, requires cooperation, not just within schools, but also between schools, external advisors and resource bases. In short, support networks are required that will help schools navigate through the helix that is change. Monitoring and evaluating change (FIGURE 1) against external criteria, such as good practices in other schools can be a significant boost to an organisation's confidence.

Without external connections and support, the motivation and progress of all but the most robust organisations towards school development will evaporate and with it the influence of these organizations' wider contribution to the International Decade of ESD.

## References

*References are cited in the references file on the accompanying SEEPS CD Rom with the exception of those listed below. NOTE to Kiran: the references from the CD should be copies here and the entire list alphabetized.*

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