



CARIBBEAN  
PARTNERS FOR EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS



# QUALITY EDUCATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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## EDUExchange E-DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Date of Discussion: June 3 - 6, 2013

Dr. Lorna Down, Senior Lecturer at the School of Education was the moderator for the recently concluded Caribbean Partners for Educational Progress E-Discussion, EduExchange, held June 3 - 6, 2013. Members shared their views concerning education for a sustainable future. The full discussion is available on the <http://myspot.mona.uwi.edu/cop/groups/eduexchange-quality-education-sustainable-future>

**July 23, 2013**

This publication was produced for your review by the U.S. Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Alesia Riddell of the QED Group, LLC and Althea Aikens of the School of Education, UWI, Mona Campus.

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## PARTICIPANTS

We received ten comments for the discussion, for which we thank the following persons:

- Lady Ana
- Courtney Brown
- Halden Morris
- Lorna Thompson
- Rose Davies
- Carol Gentles
- Janice Holung
- M. Collins Figueroa

Contributors belonged to the following organizations:

- School of Education- UWI, Mona
- Church Teachers' College
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of National Security
- Joint Board of Teacher Education, UWI, Mona Campus

### ***Authors 'Acknowledgments...***

*Thank you to our moderator, Dr Lorna Down. Thank you also to everyone who contributed to the discussion by posting comments and sharing experiences, and resources.*

## BACKGROUND

The 1987 Brundtland Commission Report described sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UNESCO 2012). To live “sustainably” means finding ways of developing which will improve everyone’s quality of life without damaging the environment and without storing up problems for future generations... (UNESCO lens).

Education plays a major role in supporting national development and meeting the needs and objectives of a society. It is usually a vital instrument for good governance and informed decision-making.

### What is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)?



Down (2013) referred to the concept of education for sustainable development as “quality education for a sustainable future.” Education for sustainable development improves and strengthens the capacity of individuals, groups, communities, organizations and countries to make

choices in favour of sustainable development. It can promote a shift in people’s mindsets and in so doing, enables them to make our world safer, healthier and more prosperous, thereby improving the quality of life (UNESCO).

In essence, sustainable development speaks to issues of social justice, equity and protection of the environment. It requires (1) attending to (a) knowledge of sustainable development, (b) values supporting sustainable development, (c) thinking and decision-making skills that strengthen sustainable development and (2) integrating knowledge, skills and values to promote informed citizenship. (UNESCO Lens).

Our education has generally focused on developing worthwhile citizens who will contribute to a better society and a better future for all. Ian Boyne, however, in an article, entitled, ‘What’s an Education for?’ (The Sunday Gleaner, October 7, 2012) tells us that ‘no longer is there the dominant view that education is primarily about the development of the person and the creation of a virtuous society. It is about the development of the market... Education today is largely an instrument of production.’ His views reflect the global one that has acknowledged that as a global society we have educated citizens whose concept of development has led to a world social, economic and environmental crisis. The United Nations General Assembly declaration of 2005-2014 as the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development has been one of the essential ways nations have tried to address a seriously flawed concept of and practice of development and instead create a world in which people live sustainably.

**Dr. Lorna Down**  
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## Education for Sustainable Development in the 21st century

1. Education for sustainable development is setting a new direction for education and learning for all. It promotes quality education, and is inclusive of all people. It is based on values, principles and practices necessary to respond effectively to current and future challenges.
2. ESD helps societies to address different priorities and issues *inter alia* water, energy, climate change, disaster and risk reduction, loss of biodiversity, food crises, health risks, social vulnerability and insecurity. It is critical for the development of new economic thinking. ESD contributes to creating resilient, healthy and sustainable societies through a systemic and integrated approach. It brings new relevance, quality, meaning and purpose to education and training systems. It involves formal, non-formal and informal education contexts, and all sectors of society in a lifelong learning process.
3. ESD is based on values of justice, equity, tolerance, sufficiency and responsibility. It promotes gender equality, social cohesion and poverty reduction and emphasizes care, integrity and honesty, as articulated in the Earth Charter. ESD is underpinned by principles that support sustainable living, democracy and human well-being. Environmental protection and restoration, natural resource conservation and sustainable use, addressing unsustainable production and consumption patterns and the creation of just and peaceful societies are also important principles underpinning ESD.
4. ESD emphasizes creative and critical approaches, long term thinking, innovation and empowerment for dealing with uncertainty, and for solving complex problems. ESD highlights the interdependence of environment, economy, society, and cultural diversity from local to global levels, and takes account of past, present and future.
5. Linked to different needs and the concrete living conditions of people, ESD provides the skills to find solutions and draws on practices and knowledge embedded in local cultures as well as in new ideas and technologies.

*(Bonn Declaration, 6 – UNESCO, 2009)*

# FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Some discussants agreed that Education for Sustainable Development should begin at the Early Childhood Education level while others believe that it should be infused throughout all levels of educational institutions. The overall consensus however was that, while the early years is a good place to introduce education for sustainable development, its implementation throughout all levels of the education system will encourage its practice and acceptance across the wider society.

*“Education for Sustainable Development should permeate whole educational institutions of all levels”  
(Marceline Collins-Figueroa 2013).*

Many questions were raised regarding the factors or challenges that influenced ESD within the education system in and so answers were sought for the following questions:

- Why do we need to have this type of education system?
- Who will be the benefactors?
- At what stage of the educational pathway should such a system be implemented?
- How will such a development happen?
- Who will develop such a curriculum?
- How will we get "buying in" for such a program?
- How do we know that such a program will have a positive outcome for the future?

(Lorna Thompson 2013)

Discussants had various opinions in relation to the factors that may influence education for sustainable development within the society. It was inferred that there is a false dichotomy regarding the debate of “production oriented” versus “sustainable development focused education” (Courtney Brown 2013).

Other views were as follows:

- “One cannot guarantee that ESD will have a positive outcome for the future, it is critical enough for us to "buy into" and "sell" its tenets to Jamaica”
- There are enough physical, emotional and social indicators which should propel us in this direction.
- Violence is rife, economic strains confront us along with other social ills. I believe education for sustainable development can be a way to change this. If not totally, then partially. (Lady Ana 2013)
- The question one needs to ask is, sustainable development for whom, where? If the answer is FOR ALL then we will have major challenges as a world because our education, economies and social structures are not configured to achieve such goals. We are still configured as a world to take as much as we can from others for as little as possible and in return improve our situation in terms of health, wealth and other benefits so we may have a competitive edge. This can only be accomplished successfully by those who have the knowledge, skills and resources. (Halden Morris 2013).

## STRATEGIES

The discussants identified some areas in which Education for Sustainable Development may be beneficial to the Caribbean region. Curriculum development and implementation as well as environmental issues were two major areas that were discussed.

### *The Curriculum in Relation to ESD*

The current national early childhood curriculum for children from birth to five, fully integrates content and concepts that are consistent with sustainable development principles.

The complete syllabus of the Early Childhood Education three year diploma programme offered in teachers colleges, was reviewed and revised through the Environment Action Programme (ENACT) project supported by the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica (EFJ) (Rose Davies 2013).

In taking a whole institution approach, sustainability concerns should be a focus in the curriculum and pedagogy of all subject. Learning for a sustainable future should therefore focused on the relevance of ESD for students and the application of lessons learnt to their daily lives. Teachers should ensure that the concerns of the immediate community and of the country would be deliberately planned in the curriculum.

The events that occur from time to time would form "teachable moments" for discussion, debate, value clarification and analysis, as well as action as they deem necessary. (Marceline Collins-Figueroa, 2013)

### *The Environment in relation to Sustainable Development*

Students within all age groups need to develop responsible attitudes towards the environment. It was noted that even students can take action to improve what is happening in their world.

While the discussant noted that it may be difficult for students to enter the community as groups they are still able to effect change. Some of the suggestions were as follows;

- Making efforts to reverse the environmental degradation around them, changing the appearance of their schools' thereby making it an oasis within the urban area. In this regard, they will make an impression on their community and perhaps create opportunities for others to emulate

### REVISED CURRICULUM

The revised curricula went into use in 2004. The development of the new national curriculum for children from birth to five has continued its emphasis on infusing elements of environmental education and sustainable development throughout the curriculum. Perusing the curriculum documents will clearly reveal a range of ESD themes, especially the core one of facilitating children to develop respect for self, others and the environment.

Many of the teaching learning activities make use of the outdoor environment, highlighting the natural landscape, plants and animals. Children are introduced at the appropriate level for their age, to concepts of recycling such as reducing, reusing and recycling waste or found materials. Many of the teaching learning aids are made from recycled, cardboard, plastic, wood etc. Parents are also guided in the curriculum on how to build strong relationships and provide support to their children as they grow and learn. The curriculum to introduce ESD concepts in the early years does exist. I believe that if is implemented in the manner intended, children at the early childhood level will be sure to develop foundational awareness, knowledge and practice of ESD concepts and principles.

(Rose Davies, 2013)

their actions.

- The view was shared that three or four year olds can understand that trees are good because they give us shade and that they also help to 'soften' the hard hitting raindrops' effect on the soil so that the water drains into the soil rather than splashing it away.
- Children engage in activities that allow them to interact with each other regularly and they are constantly reminded of how to relate to each other in socially acceptable ways.

(Janice Holung and Lorna Down, 2013)

### ***Strategies employed at the Early Childhood Level***

Learning activities [at the Early Childhood Education level] ... focuses on caring for and protecting plants and animals, introducing concepts of preservation and conservation, discourage the cutting down or burning of trees etc. and not treating animals in a harmful way.

Environmental protection is emphasized in teaching/learning activities. Among the areas of focus are methods of garbage disposal, creating compost heaps, preventing pollution of the environment e.g. keeping the surroundings clean, desisting from polluting waters etc.

Five year olds at their appropriate level, learn about weather conditions e.g. drought and rain with flooding etc. Infused throughout all curriculum units, is the matter of building positive relationships and tolerance of diversity.

(Rose Davies, 2013)

The core of an education for a sustainable future as well as a better today and tomorrow, is that of teaching and learning centered in 'vision, values and virtues' (Lorna Down 2013). This need for "vision, values and virtues" was supported by Prof. Errol Miller who stated that "the essence of teaching as it has evolved from its ancient roots is vision, values and virtue. Devoid of these, teaching merely becomes instruction lacking in focus, purpose and meaning with respect to the larger issues with which each generation of humans must contend." (Miller, 2003)<sup>2</sup>



## RELATED RESOURCES

**Arbuthnott, K. D. (2009). Education for sustainable development beyond attitude change. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*. 10(2), 152-163**

Many programs for sustainable development (ESD) are designed to change attitudes and values toward the natural environment. However, psychological research indicates that several factors in addition to attitude influence behavior, including contextual support, social norms, action difficulty, and habitual behavior. Thus, if attitude change is to translate into altered behavior, education must extend beyond attitudes to assist people to act in ways consistent with their values. The purpose of this paper is to review the psychological research showing weak correlation between attitudes and behavior, the factors that mediate this relationship, and to describe the implications of these findings for university institutions and ESD programs.

**Bedasse, J. Education for Sustainable Development Initiatives in the Caribbean Commission on Education and Communication. Available at <http://jamaica.kdid.org/groups/eduexchange-quality-education-sustainable-future/esd-initiatives-caribbean>**

This document provides a snapshot of the many ESD initiatives in the Caribbean region and is not exhaustive.

**Down, L. (2006) Addressing the challenges of mainstreaming education for sustainable development in higher education. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*. 7(4), 390-399.**

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is a fairly new concept in Jamaica, like many other parts of the world. The country has, however, since the 1970s been pursuing the issue of environmental education and since the UN Conference in Rio De Janeiro in 1992 has made a national effort to promote environmental education for sustainable development. In keeping with this a national framework – the National Environmental Education Action Plan for Sustainable Development – has been developed. It is a plan that incorporates the concept of education for sustainable development. However, ESD has not been the focus of curriculum development in many areas. Attempts to date have largely centred on ESD within the sciences and social sciences in higher education. To mainstream ESD in non-science areas presents, therefore, many challenges.

**Lawale, S. & Bory-Adams, A. (2010). The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: Towards four pillars of learning. *Development: Society for International Development*. 53(4), 547–550.**

Education for sustainable development is a paradigm shift in education which goes beyond the traditional realms of education. Shivali Lawale and Aline Bory-Adams assess how education for sustainable development could build sustainable societies through the Decade of Education for sustainable development. They explore how to build a conceptual framework based on the four pillars of learning proposed by the Delors Report.

**McKeown, R. (2002). Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit. Version 2. Available from <http://jamaica.kdid.org/groups/eduexchange-quality-education-sustainable-future/education-sustainable-development-toolkit>**

The Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit is based on the idea that communities and educational systems within communities need to dovetail their sustainability efforts. As communities develop sustainability goals, local

educational systems can modify existing curriculums to reinforce those goals. As we developed the Toolkit, it became apparent that many communities have not developed sustainability goals or action plans on which to base educational change. As a result, we include some exercises to help communities develop such goals. We also include a few exercises to explain the concept of sustainable development.

**Mochizuki, Y. & Fadeeva, Z. (2008). Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCEs): An overview. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*. 9(4), 369-381.**

The purpose of this paper is to offer an overview of the United Nations University's Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCE) initiative—the global process created to support the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014)—and discuss the roles of institutions of higher education (IHEs) in RCE efforts.

The paper reveals the UNU's views about effective strategies to promote Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and discusses the roles of IHEs as partners within and among RCEs. Highlights the potential roles of IHEs in overcoming the compartmentalization of knowledge and linking policy and practice.

**Pigozzi, M. J. (2010). Implementing the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD): Achievements, open questions and strategies for the way forward. *International Review of Education Int Rev Educ* (2010) 56:255–269**

This paper looks at the implementation of the DESD from a global perspective. It takes the position that quality education is fundamental for learning how to live sustainably, and that the DESD needs to be better positioned in the education landscape and conceived as a global social movement that must be fostered and nurtured for the well-being of humankind. It suggests that, while there has been progress, much remains to be achieved. Several key challenges are identified. With regard to overcoming these obstacles, it focuses on macro-level strategies that would allow the development of environments in which actions can take root and grow so that the work of the DESD endures beyond the decade itself. Finally, it suggests that there are some opportunities that can be seized to make the task ahead easier to accomplish.

**Reunamo, J. & Pipere, A. (2011). Doing research on education for sustainable development. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*. 12(2), 110-124.**

Many education for sustainable development (ESD) programs are designed to change attitudes and values toward the natural environment. However, psychological research indicates that several factors in addition to attitude influence behavior, including contextual support, social norms, action difficulty, and habitual behavior. Thus, if attitude change is to translate into altered behavior, education must extend beyond attitudes to assist people to act in ways consistent with their values. The purpose of this paper is to review the psychological research showing weak correlation between attitudes and behavior, the factors that mediate this relationship, and to describe the implications of these findings for university institutions and ESD programs.

**UNESCO (2007). Good practices in teacher education institutions: ESD in action. Available at <http://jamaica.kdid.org/groups/eduexchange-quality-education-sustainable-future/good-practices-teacher-education-institution>**

This document presents case studies that reflect individual and institutional efforts to reorient curriculum, programs, practices and policies to address sustainability at institutions of teacher education.

**UNESCO Lens (2010) education for sustainable development lens: A policy and practice review tool.**  
Available from  
<http://jamaica.kdid.org/groups/eduexchange-quality-education-sustainable-future/education-sustainable-development-lens>

The *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Lens* has been prepared to support UN Member States to respond to these challenges through implementation of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014). The *ESD Lens* supports the goals of the DESD, and encourages policy-makers and practitioners in Member States to initiate the process of *re-orienting education*, particularly the formal education system, towards sustainable development. The overall goal of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) is for countries to integrate the understandings, skills and values inherent in sustainable development into all aspects of national education plans to encourage changes in lifestyles and behaviour that allow for a more sustainable and just society for all. This complements existing Education for All initiatives, and strengthens the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals. Education for Sustainable Development has the potential to improve the quality and relevance of education everywhere.

**Venkataraman, B. (2009). Education for sustainable Development. *Environment*. 51(2), 8 – 10. Available from [www.jamaica.kdid.org](http://www.jamaica.kdid.org)**

This brief defines *education for sustainable development*, highlights its challenges, current efforts and k - 12 learning standards for education for sustainable development. The brief noted that sustainable development requires transformation of the entire education system. The article highlighted the following statement made by the United Nations:

*"ESD equally addresses all three pillars of sustainable development— society, environment and economy —with culture as an essential additional and underlying dimension. By embracing these elements in a holistic and integrated manner, ESD enables all individuals to fully develop the knowledge, perspectives, values and skills necessary to take part in decisions to improve the quality of life both locally and globally on terms which are most relevant to their daily lives"*

The author notes that the "question now facing the educational community is how can ESD be translated into practice so that it may be effective in transforming society to a more sustainable future.