ESSENTIAL OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION

B.J. McGettrick
Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK

Keywords: Knowledge-driven, citizenship, lifelong learning, reflection, sustainable development, pedagogy, core skills, competence, research-led

Contents

Summary

The promotion of active education is no longer restricted to an uncritical search for truth or academic freedom, nor the pursuit of education in a market-based knowledge economy. The only sustainable model takes account of truth, the marketplace, and society generally. This notion of education is not based on a discipline or a subject orientation, but on a way of thinking and behaving. It is the right of every person to receive such an education and the duty of every state to provide it.

The objectives of education should be concerned not only, therefore, with the content and skills of education, but with the human dispositions of dignity, humility, liberty, and freedom in a world that does not always promote these as vital to the human condition in the modern world.

An education that is sustainable needs to form and support people who live with rapidly changing social structures, and who themselves create new structures. To work as a leader in society is to be educated in that society as well as to educate others who form the society. This may mean putting dignity before price, and humanity before the economy. These are some of the marks of global citizenship, and it is the right of every person to have access to this throughout their lives. The pursuit of an education for sustainable development is central to these objectives of education.

1. Introduction

Education has a social purpose. It is based on a philosophy, and conducted in the social milieu of each country and each community. It is an intensely practical activity and is rooted in a particular time and place.

Education could be broadly defined as having a purpose that makes people more suited for life. It imparts to those involved in it a set of values, skills, and understanding that allows a more full part of life. It affects culture, the environment, humanity and roles in active citizenship.

Education can be broadly defined as being a conversation from one generation to another about matters of significance. It is concerned with the development of certain "core skills," variously defined either explicitly or implicitly, and these are different for each country. Different aspects are given emphasis at different stages in the education process, all emphasizing the centrality of language and mathematical skills (or skills of numeracy) as well as a general concern for subjects relating to environment, the arts, the sciences, personal and social education, and, in some countries, religious and moral education. In all countries, even those with long traditions of education, there is often a concern for the prime importance of language and mathematics in the formal education system. There is a focus for the processes of education, mainly by professionals; and the products of education by those who are looking for accountability, within which there is a strong tendency to dwell on "the measured outcomes of education" for public accountability. This is seen in such international surveys as the TIMS (The International Maths and Science Study) Survey.

The understanding of sustainable development in education varies considerably from country to country. Education for sustainable development can be understood only in the context of sustainable development itself. The diagram in Figure 1 may best indicate the interrelated nature of this context.
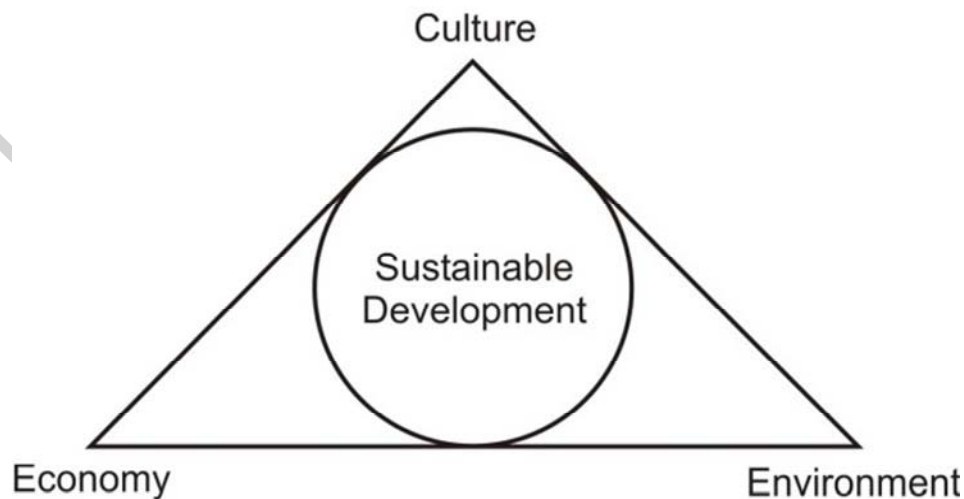

Figure 1. The interrelated nature of sustainable development

2. Different Aspects of "Being Suited for Life"

2.1. The Knowledge-Driven Economy

There are many different ways of considering how one is best suited for life. In many countries government looks at "the knowledge-driven economy" to determine the way in which the citizens of a country are able to contribute to the economic growth and development of that country and to society more generally.

To be engaged in lifelong learning is not only about employability, career development, and "the knowledge-driven economy," it is also concerned with humanity, values, and the way in which all individuals are able to develop their humanity in the interests of both their own personal development and the interests of society more generally.

To be educated is, of course, to imply some kind of acquisition of skills and understandings that could be described as "the basics." This would be defined as those skills, those understandings, those ways of thinking and doing that can be described in terms of skills, knowledge, understanding, and values. To be concerned with the core skills of education is to have a concern for the social, political, technological, scientific, aesthetic, and spiritual aspects of life. Education is not only about development in language and mathematics, important though these are, but to be concerned with the development of the whole person. The education systems of countries progressively develop the understandings and values of the citizens of that country and will include within the field of sustainable development some of the skills required for understanding and action.

Being more suited for life means the creation of active citizens. This implies the ability of the individual to contribute to social action in the interest not only of the immediate community but of the country as a whole. It also implies an ability to contribute to debates about the progressive development of a county and the way in which its social fabric is being adjusted to meet the changing needs of that society. Being a citizen of a country also implies a degree of citizenship in terms of global thinking. One of the outcomes of education is to assist young people to be more sensitive to global issues and particularly to issues affecting sustainable development, ecological issues, and matters relating to the environment.

An education system that extends beyond the knowledge-driven economy implies consideration of the education of values and of "the inner self." Education within sustainable development requires attention to a sustainable education—an education that builds on concepts of liberty, freedom, democracy, and truth. This education values a culture that transcends the market place and provides an ethical basis for thought and action.

To have the capacity to develop all aspects of sustainable development implies an awareness of the disciplines and principles of a subject that will contribute to the work of sustainable development. The global issues imply an understanding of culture, of the economy, and of the environment. To be educated in the field of sustainable

development is to make a contribution that takes account of all these dimensions of society and to take decisions that are sensitive to each of these.

-
-
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE **14 PAGES** OF THIS CHAPTER,
Visit: http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx

Bibliography

Eisner E. (1994). *Ethos and Education*, 12 pp. Edinburgh: Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum. [This discusses the creation of an ethos in schools that will allow education to do justice to the capabilities of students and the lives they have the opportunity to lead.]

Halstead J.M. and Taylor M.J., eds. (1996). *Values in Education and Education in Values*, 215 pp. London/Washington, D.C.: Falmer. [This book deals with the values that inform education and the values schools are justified in conveying to pupils. It argues that certain groups of values are central to contemporary education.]

Hicks D., ed. (1994). *Preparing for the Future: Notes and Queries for Concerned Educators*, 160 pp. London: Adamantine Press. [Discusses the type of education needed for the twenty-first century, including the task of educating for a sustainable future.]

Hicks D. and Holden C. (1995). *Vision of the Future: Why We Need to Teach for Tomorrow*, 139 pp. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham. [This book contends that images of the future play a central role in social and cultural change and considers the implications of this for educators and policy makers.]
Kennedy K., ed. (1997). *Citizenship Education and the Modern State*, 185 pp. London/Washington, D.C.: Falmer. [Citizenship education has become an increasingly important part of the school curriculum in various parts of the world. This book discusses the form it should take and the function it should serve.]

Lacey C. and Williams R., eds. (1987). *Education, Ecology and Development: The Case for an Education Network*, 163 pp. London: World Wildlife Fund and Kogan Page. [Written by educational researchers concerned with the environment, this book explores destructive trends within dominant world systems and advocates the broadening of the school curriculum and more public debate.]

Lynch J. (1992). *Education for Citizenship in a Multicultural Society*, 122 pp. London/New York: Cassell. [This book discusses the educational implications of cultural diversity and demonstrates that preparation for citizenship should be an essential part of school curriculum.]

Osler A., ed. (1994). *Development Education: Global Perspectives in the Curriculum*, 278 pp. London/New York: Cassell. [Discusses the challenges of introducing global and international perspectives into the curriculum.]

Randle D. (1989). *Teaching Green: A Parent's Guide to Education for Life on Earth*, 236 pp. London: Green Print. [This book guides parents and teachers in ways of providing an education that is good for the earth, and highlights technologies, lifestyles, and policies that will enable us to sustain life on earth.]

Spiecker B. and Straughan R., eds. (1988). *Philosophical Issues in Moral Education and Development*, 126 pp. Milton Keynes: Open University Press. [Discusses the view that education should not be concerned mostly with intellectual attainments and acquisitions of knowledge, and that equally important is the development of moral, personal, and social qualities in children.]

Steiner M., ed. (1996). *Developing the Global Teacher: Theory and Practice in Initial Teacher Education*, 174 pp. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham. [This book examines how teachers can incorporate a global perspective and commitment to sustainable development into the curriculum, and teach in ways that encourage cooperation, critical thinking and democratic values and practices.]

Williamson B. (1998). *Lifeworlds and Learning: Essays in the Theory, Philosophy and Practice of Lifelong Learning*, 220 pp. Leicester, U.K.: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE). [Discusses the view that lifelong learning is at the heart of current debates about the learning society, sustainable international development and world peace.]

Biographical Sketch

Bartholomew J. McGettrick, OBE, KCHS, Dhlitt, FRSA, FRSAMD, B.Sc., M.Ed., Dip.Ed., PGCE, is professor of education at University of Glasgow, and dean, Faculty of Education, University of Glasgow. In 1985 Professor McGettrick was appointed principal of St. Andrew's College, the National Catholic College for the Education of Teachers. He was formerly assistant principal (1975) and vice-principal (1980) of Notre Dame College of Education. On April 1, 1999 he was appointed dean of the Faculty of Education of the University of Glasgow.

He holds a number of prominent positions in national and international committees such as president of ACISE; chairman of the Schools Commission for The Holy Land; vice chairman of the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum; chairman of the Catholic Union, Scotland; chairman of Governors of Independent Schools, and chairman of Scottish Council on Independent Schools in Scotland; chairman of The Scottish Centre for Children with Motor Impairments. He is also involved in British broadcasting and education; and educational consultant to many organizations and institutions. Professor McGettrick chaired the Secretary of State's Committee on Education for sustainable development. He has been involved in various research projects, and in curriculum development in Scottish education, and has also acted as external examiner on a number of occasions. Professor McGettrick has contributed to international conferences, and worked in different international settings with research, consultancies and lecturing commitments.

His main areas of interest are sustainable development and education; values in education; educational management and administration; assessment. He also holds responsibilities in wider areas of public life, e.g. advising government and Church authorities on political and social issues.