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DELIVERING FUTURE CAPACITY IN THE KINDERGARTEN: GIVING CHILDREN A STRONGER ROLE, ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A contribution to the discussion by the
German Commission for UNESCO

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The German Commission for UNESCO is an intermediary organisation for Germany's foreign cultural and educational policy. On the basis of a unanimous resolution by the German Bundestag and with the support of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the German Commission for UNESCO coordinates the implementation of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in Germany and has established a National Committee to this end.

The paper at hand was drawn up and elaborated by the National Committee for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development with the participation of the Working Group on Elementary Education of the Round Table of the UN Decade. It was adopted by the Executive Committee of the German Commission for UNESCO on 29 April 2010.



DELIVERING FUTURE CAPACITY IN THE KINDERGARTEN: GIVING CHILDREN A STRONGER ROLE, ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A contribution to the discussion by the German Commission for UNESCO within the scope of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014)

Addressing those responsible for early childhood education in the federal and state governments, in local communities, non-governmental organisations and churches, as well as child carers

1. Education for Sustainable Development aims to provide each individual with an opportunity to acquire the values, competences and knowledge required to be able to create a future viable world, independently and autonomously. To promote this educational concept worldwide, the United Nations declared the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005 to 2014).¹ Education for Sustainable Development must begin to form in early childhood, even though it will continue to be significant across the whole lifespan.
2. Early childhood is a particularly sensitive phase in a child's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development. What humans acquire in early childhood in terms of basic skills, values and convictions plays a major role in how they will behave towards themselves, towards others and towards their environment in their further life. The principles of Education for Sustainable Development, such as the adoption of a situation, action and participation focused approach oriented towards integral and holistic, self-organisation and cooperation must, in this respect, be seen as key elements of modern educational theory and action.
3. Contemporary kindergarten education respects the protected space that childhood is – and simultaneously creates points of reference towards the life world. Children must not be weighed down by the problems of unsustainable develop-

¹ United Nations (2002): Resolution 57/254 adopted by the General Assembly, 20 December 2002. UNESCO (2005): United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). International Implementation Scheme. Paris. Bonn Declaration, in: UNESCO, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, German Commission for UNESCO (2009): UNESCO World Conference Education for Sustainable Development. Conference Proceedings. Paris, Berlin, Bonn.

ments for which adults are responsible; nevertheless, they must be accompanied appropriately as they proceed to learn about the world and its complex realities. Taking children seriously today, in their childhood, means giving them the opportunity to discover the enormous prospects that are open to them in a world that is developing ever more dynamically and that is becoming culturally ever wider and diverse so that they, too, can make their contribution. They must be given the opportunity to experience being ›small world citizens‹.

4. Education for Sustainable Development offers early childhood education a wide range of approaches and opportunities for realising its educational mission in a spirited manner:
 - a. Discovering and shaping the world: By coming to terms with topics of relevance to the future, such as biological diversity, water, climate, energy, a place to live, consumerism, clothing, health and nutrition, children advance and strengthen their skills and abilities in respect of participation and empathy, and experience that the actions they take are of importance.
 - b. Learning in projects: Education for Sustainable Development not only maintains close contacts with the life world via its objects and subject matter, but also promotes ›learning in real situations‹ and projects. Project work encourages the ability to organise oneself, a sense of community, negotiating and decision-making processes, and is particularly suited to fostering a child's learning.
 - c. Value based education: Children have an affinity for categorising the world along fundamental values. Education for Sustainable Development offers motivational access points for this. Acquiring facts about others and the environment here never occurs separately from the delivery of fundamental value orientations which make it possible to live together in the future in respect and tolerance.
 - d. Language skills and communication: Education for Sustainable Development delivers the skills and competences needed for engaging in participation and so consolidates the communication skills. In so doing, it supports the objective of promoting early childhood language learning and integrates this into the life world of children.
 - e. Science education: The delivery and acquisition of natural scientific contexts in the sense of learning through research and discovery are becoming increasingly important in early childhood education. In Education for Sus-

tainable Development, natural sciences phenomena can be particularly well presented in their existential significance for human life as well as in their complexity.

f. Inclusion: Inclusive education means all people having the same opportunities open to them for gaining a high-quality education, regardless of their particular learning needs, their gender, their social and economic backgrounds.² Education for Sustainable Development promotes inclusion in early childhood education through its principles of participation and a situation and action focused approach. It is particularly expedient and suitable for experiencing how tasks can be constructively solved in heterogeneous groups. Through the global horizon, Education for Sustainable Development additionally maintains close points of contact with topics of migration, diversity and equity.

5. How Education for Sustainable Development can be beneficially formed and integrated into early childhood education is already exemplified by a range of different activities.³ The German Commission for UNESCO welcomes these actions. It considers the further integration of Education for Sustainable Development into early childhood education to be necessary. The education and orientation plans pursued by the federal states in the elementary sector, of which some are being revised now, reveal numerous access points for Education for Sustainable Development. However, it is also apparent that Education for Sustainable Development has generally not yet been sufficiently integrated into the education planning.⁴ When revising the education plans, Education for

2 UNESCO (2009): Policy Guidelines on Inclusion in Education. Paris.

3 An example is provided by: »Leuchtpol« of Arbeitsgemeinschaft Natur- und Umweltbildung Bundesverband e.V.; »KiTa 21« of the Save-Our-Future Umweltstiftung Hamburg; »Leben gestalten lernen« of Landesbund für Vogelschutz in Bayern; Continuing training as a specialist for Education for Sustainable Development = »Fachkraft Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung« maintained by Evangelische Landjugendakademie Altenkirchen, Stiftung Ökologie und Landbau and Lokale Agenda 21 Trier on behalf of Landeszentrale für Umweltaufklärung Rheinland Pfalz.

4 Ute Stoltenberg (2008): Bildungspläne im Elementarbereich. Ein Beitrag zur Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung? Bonn. The study includes, inter alia, that: (1) Education plans which reflect contents, methods and working practices that can be seen as elements of Education for Sustainable Development, lack information on how specifically to organise and arrange this. (2) In topics such as »nutrition and health«, »water« or »energy«, which many education plans address, the associated potential for promoting sustainable educational approaches is not maximised. (3) Express reference to Education for Sustainable Development has only been found in very few education plans. (4) Although many education plans recommend cooperation with regional child care facilities in the sense of community building, environmental protection, nature conservation and consumer associations are only mentioned in one of the education plans.

Sustainable Development must be given broader scope and range in its capacity as a guideline. Where Education for Sustainable Development is not explicitly mentioned, it should be seen as one of the key guidelines in the practical implementation of the plans.

6. The great potential that lies in Education for Sustainable Development for early childhood education means that it is already necessary to acquaint trainee child carers with the concept of Education for Sustainable Development during their training and to continue to provide in-service and professional development courses for child carers on the contents and methods of sustainability-relevant education. The current professionalisation of child care training offers good opportunities for this.
7. Opportunities for daytime child care centres are available among the educational offerings provided here and extend beyond the preoccupation with sustainability-relevant topics. Daytime child care facilities can become significant pilot sites for a future viable local community, if they focus all their activities in line with the principles of sustainable development. This applies, for example, to the type of management, the choice of suppliers and the design of buildings and grounds.
8. Besides child carers, the authorities responsible for providing child care facilities bear particular responsibility for implementing Education for Sustainable Development. The wide-ranging creative freedoms open to individual providers gives them the opportunity to use the innovative potential of Education for Sustainable Development for a forward-looking, high-quality education. This also calls for dialogue between the providers on the principle of sustainable development.
9. Building on these considerations, the German Commission for UNESCO calls on those with responsibility in the federal and state governments and in the local communities, in non-governmental organisations and the churches, as well the child carers to comprehensively integrate Education for Sustainable Development into early child education. Education for Sustainability must become a decisive quality feature of early child education.