
**Recommendation of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of
Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder of the Federal Republic
of Germany (KMK)**

and the

German Commission for UNESCO (DUK)

dated 15-06-2007

on

“Education for Sustainable Development at School”

ABSTRACT

After describing the initial situation and the targets of the paper, the Recommendation of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK) and the German Commission for UNESCO (DUK) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at School provides practical advice for the implementation of ESD at school and for a useful framework.

The definition of ESD formulates a vision of education and teaching which is meant to provide everybody with a better understanding of the world we live in and the capability to change it as regards sustainability. This particularly refers to the understanding of the complex connection between globalisation, economic development, consumption, environmental pollution, population development, health and social conditions. ESD defines a holistic interdisciplinary vision of education and teaching, imparting knowledge and options for action which are important for a sustainable future for our planet.

The concept of ESD aims at qualifying school students for active participation in the creation of an environment-friendly, economically efficient and socially fair environment, taking into account global aspects, basic democratic principles and cultural diversity.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

On 20 December 2002 the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) proclaimed the years 2005 to 2014 the global "Decade of Education for Sustainable Development". The global vision of the World Decade is a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive social transformation directed at sustainability. UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, was designated the lead agency for the implementation of the Decade. The activities in Germany are coordinated by the National Committee for the UN Decade of "Education for Sustainable Development" appointed by the German Commission for UNESCO.

The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) promotes the targets of the World Decade of "Education for Sustainable Development". Together with the German Commission for UNESCO, the KMK recommends further strengthening and embedding Education for Sustainable Development in schools. This recommendation is meant to provide schools with a guideline for the integration of the ideas of sustainability as a social responsibility in classroom teaching. This recommendation is not only meant for schools but also for the administration of cultural affairs and educational institutions for continuing education of teachers.

Joined to the promotion of Education for Sustainable Development at schools is the expectation that education will become a key for a sustainable society in the context of globalisation.

1. INITIAL SITUATION

On the occasion of the United Nations World Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, 178 governments adopted the "Agenda 21", which aims to achieve greater recognition of central ecological and social ideas at global, national and local levels, that is, everybody's right to live in dignity, the idea of global cross-generational justice, respect for the earth's capacity to absorb pollution and respect for different paths of cultural development.

Chapter 36 of the Agenda 21 points out that the idea of sustainability should be considered the basis of local, national and global development requiring innovative knowledge, new awareness processes and a change in attitudes. These aims cannot be achieved without far-reaching educational measures.

The World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, ten years after the Rio World Conference, reaffirmed the need for a global change of course toward sustainability. The participants of the World Summit underlined the need to integrate the central idea of sustainable development into all levels of the educational system – from pre-school education to university as well as in non-formal education. As a central support for the development of local, regional and national education plans, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the years 2005-2014 the World Decade of “Education for Sustainable Development” in December 2002. All UN member states are called upon to develop national and international educational activities to support the world community’s aim to safeguard conditions for life and survival for both current and future generations. In doing so the World Decade not only bears in mind the targets of the World Conference in Rio 1992, but also the UN Millennium Declaration from 2000, with its resulting Millennium Development Goals. In 2005 UNESCO presented an “International Implementation Scheme” (IIS). The IIS provides a comprehensive framework for actions to support the UN Decade. This is a strategic document, defining the goals of the UN Decade and relating them to other UNESCO activities in the field of education and teaching.

Since the mid-1990s the federal administration and the Länder have been adapting their policies to the basic concept of sustainable development which underlies Agenda 21.

- In 1998 the German Bundestag's Commission of Inquiry on the “Protection of Man and the Environment” published its final report entitled “The Concept of Sustainability – from principle to implementation”.
- In the same year the Bund-Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion presented the “Framework of reference for Education for Sustainable Development”.
- In 2000 the German Bundestag unanimously passed the resolution “Education for Sustainable Development”.
- One year later the German government set up a state secretary committee for sustainable development, which is maintained by the present government, and appointed the Council for Sustainable Development.
- In 2002 the national strategy on sustainability “Perspectives for Germany” was published.
- Several Länder additionally formulated their own strategies on sustainability, while others are still in the process of developing their own concepts.
- In 2005 the German Bundestag established a parliamentary advisory board for sustainable development.
- In 2002 and 2005 the Federal Ministry for Education and Research presented the government's first and second reports on Education for Sustainable Development based on a decision of the German Bundestag.
- To implement the concept of sustainable development into all educational levels in Germany, a National Plan of Action for the UN Decade was developed in 2005 on the basis of a resolution unanimously adopted by the German Bundestag. The aim is to integrate ESD cross-sectorally in all policy areas that are relevant to sustainable development. Some Länder have already initiated their own plans of action for the promotion of the UN Decade, while several others are preparing those plans.

2. OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT SCHOOLS

The aim is to embed the concept of ESD in schools. ESD is intended to provide school students with skills for sustainable development. Students will learn to recognise and assess problems arising from unsustainable development and apply their knowledge regarding sustainable development. ESD provides recommendations to acquire skills to shape the future. Sustainable development combines environment-friendly solutions with economic

efficiency and social justice, taking into account democratic political issues as well as global and cultural aspects.

The National Plan of Action includes numerous measures for planning, dissemination and embedding ESD. The BLK programme “Transfer 21” is one of these measures. The concept of participatory skills in ESD is being developed within the framework of Transfer 21, together with the “Cross-Curricular Framework for Global Development Education” being elaborated by the KMK and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Further important examples are the development of teaching materials on subjects related to sustainability (e.g. energy, climate protection, biodiversity) provided by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), the elaboration of a framework for “Education for Sustainable Development” for school curriculums in North Rhine-Westphalia, the certification of extracurricular educational institutions in the field of environmental education and global learning in Schleswig-Holstein, the establishment of a regional network for ESD in primary education in Bavaria, embedding the overall concept of sustainability in the vocational education and training ordinances issued by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), the initiative “Hamburg Learns Sustainability”, and the regional ESD network in Hesse. The measures cited above and a multitude of other measures from the Länder and also from the federal government, companies and organisations are aimed at preparing and testing teaching materials, developing quality criteria for teaching and evaluating student competencies in the context of ESD, establishing quality standards for ESD-schools, and forming regional networks as well as networks at national and international level.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AT SCHOOLS

The issue of sustainable development is very complex and therefore needs to be discussed as part of as many subjects as possible and in interdisciplinary and subject-linking programmes, as well as being an important topic of a school’s daily life. In the field of primary education, the interdisciplinary subject Social Studies and Science is suitable for teaching ESD issues, whereas in secondary education there is a need to deal with ESD issues in an interdisciplinary and subject-linking way and to strengthen the integration of ESD in the relevant subjects. It is important to provide a curricular structure for the wide variety of individual subject matters on the basis of skills and standards.

The guideline on “ESD in secondary education” prepared in the framework of the BLK Transfer 21 programme provides further concrete orientation in the field of activity concerning school and offers a guideline to support students, teachers and lecturers in continuing education to meet the demands made by the complexity of ESD by means of systematic teaching of skills. The “Cross-Curricular Framework for Global Development Education” was prepared by a KMK-BMZ working group and shows how competencies can be embedded in the curricula for an important ESD teaching field and how to teach competencies in different subjects as well as in cross-curricular and interdisciplinary teaching methods. Some Länder also have their own guidelines, of which use can be made.

ESD is a holistic concept. It not only offers opportunities to prepare lessons with regard to content and didactics, but also provides impetuses to develop an overall concept for schools, the school profile or the school’s quality programme. ESD points to possibilities for shaping a school as an open learning situation. Key activities in this context are the opening of schools towards the local surroundings and towards students’ real life situations, the design of schoolrooms and learning surroundings, and increasing the students’ opportunities to learn and to gain experiences. This concerns not only the acquisition of general knowledge but also the application of that knowledge in concrete situations where the students learn to assess the results of their own actions.

It is useful to apply quality development tools in schools for the implementation of ESD in schools. In the framework of an internal and/or external evaluation it is possible to check the extent to which a school has implemented development processes aimed at systemic embedding of ESD in daily school life. In this context an internal sustainability audit in the school can show the targets and measures which have already been realised. It is recommended to consider certifying schools which are particularly active in the field of ESD.

3.1. Acquisition of competencies

In the framework of the BLK “21” programme and its transfer phase (BLK “Transfer 21” programme), three different teaching and organisation principles for the acquisition of competencies have been developed to enable the students to deal with the key problems in the field of sustainable development, to discover possible solutions and to learn how to evaluate them and find possibilities for action. These objectives can be reached by teaching interdisciplinary knowledge, forms of participatory learning and the establishment of innovative structures.

- *Interdisciplinary knowledge* is based on the necessity of “linked thinking”, in particular the linking of the natural and cultural worlds and the development of corresponding competencies to solve problems. The objective is to establish corresponding issues and working methods within the curricula.
- *Participatory learning* takes up the central demand of Agenda 21 for participation of all social groups in the process of sustainable development. Schools can provide preparation for such participation by extending their teaching culture with teaching and learning methods aimed at conveying democratic participatory competencies.
- *Establishment of innovative structures* assumes that schools, as a holistic system, work for education by publicly discussing current issues in school reform such as quality development, profiling, opening of schools, learning culture etc., and by continuously developing the structure of such issues in participatory processes. Against this background, cooperation with partners from outside schools is very important.

The concept for the acquisition of participatory skills (Gestaltungskompetenzen) was developed and tested within the framework of the BLK programmes for ESD. Participatory skills are the ability to apply knowledge about sustainable development and to recognise the problems of non-sustainable development, resulting in drawing conclusions on the basis of analysis of the present and studies of the future as regards ecological, economic and social development in its interdependence, and making corresponding decisions suitable for joint political implementation.

Both the guideline “ESD in secondary education – reasons, competences, samples, exercises”, which was prepared as part of the BLK Transfer 21 programme, and the “Cross-Curricular Framework for Global Development Education in the Context of Education for Sustainable Development” which is very important in the context of ESD, connect with the increasingly results-oriented educational management and standards. To assist the preparation of new education plans and school curricula, partial competencies, contents/issues and sample exercises to test the acquisition of competencies in certain subjects are provided for the core competences in the area of global development studies. Competence profiles are being developed for different school levels and vocational education with the aim of consecutive learning. The guideline describes the concept of participatory skills, and offers example exercises and a catalogue of quality indicators for schools wanting to develop their focal point in a sustainability profile.

3.2. Cooperation in schools and with partners

ESD can only be viewed as a joint task for schools because it modifies the structures and communication patterns in schools as well as towards the surroundings of schools.

Headmasters or headmistresses are asked to support ideas and initiatives to promote a modification process. Coordination groups for work in the context of ESD bring together members from all areas of daily school life and facilitate close cooperation between school administration, student/teacher working groups, parents, technical staff and partners from outside the school system.

It is recommended to permanently maintain and strengthen existing local, Land-specific and national networks in order to develop curricula and the organisation of schools in a sustainable way. Against this background the participation of schools in programmes in their Land and cross-state programmes is also to be welcomed. International school partnerships can also be used to make clear the global aspects of sustainability and the perspectives of different cultures referring to sustainable development processes.

Systematic cooperation with partners from outside the school system increases the opportunities and framework of action for educational work in schools, resulting in a larger spectrum of themes and the promotion of competencies that are mainly covered by extra-curricular learning locations and programmes. In this way schools can become a part of municipal action programmes. In addition to non-governmental organisations and scientific institutions, companies are also important cooperation partners for ESD. The cooperation with these partners in the framework of ESD can result in school partnerships, student companies and jointly managed projects and campaigns.

3.3. Issues of sustainability in teaching

When deciding which of the various issues of sustainability are to be dealt with in the lessons it is advisable to consider the following criteria:

The issues should:

- be based on the principle of sustainable development (integration of different dimensions);
- be clearly related to ESD competencies;
- be of long-term importance;
- be based on broad and differentiated knowledge from science, research and politics with reference to the specific issue;
- enable relation to the daily life of the students as well as a global perspective;
- provide promising possibilities for actions for the individual and/or the community, the people affected, politics, economy as well as science and technology;
- offer favourable conditions for self-organised learning and changing perspectives;
- be relevant to the educational objectives of students;
- offer the potential to be combined with specific competencies to be acquired during lessons.

Tested teaching contents and numerous sample exercises for the wide variety of ESD issues have been developed in the framework of the BLK “21” programme and can be found in the guideline “ESD in secondary education – reasons, competences, samples, exercises” and in the teaching materials for global development in the framework of ESD.

3.4. Teacher education

The implementation of ESD in teaching and school development needs the development of corresponding competencies in all phases of teacher education in these standard areas:

- teaching;
- education, consulting and accompanying;
- general vocational competencies;
- internal evaluation, development and shaping of the school.

During the first phase of their studies teachers should already acquire competencies enabling them to deal in a professional manner with the subject of sustainable development in the context of schools. The interdisciplinary perspective is not only important for didactic-methodical implementation but also for a prior scientific understanding of the relevant issues. In the second phase, the basic aspects of ESD should be integrated more and more into education modules in the compulsory area. In the third phase, teachers should undergo teacher training that needs to respond to rapid global change and the modified requirements of schools.

Education for Sustainable Development can change teaching and schools in ways that enable us to appropriately react to the challenges of the future. Increasing efforts are made in all fields of school education in order to achieve the objectives of the UN Decade. KMK and DUK support schools in the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development.

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