UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

A spotlight on...

An introduction to Education for Sustainable Development

Centre for Innovation in Education

Overview

"Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) encourages different disciplines to enter into dialogue, make connections, share knowledge, and work together on emergent areas. It aims to develop students' ability to understand and evaluate connections between big issues, such as inequality, public health, global consumption, biodiversity loss and the limits of natural systems. Learning for and about sustainable development aims to prepare graduates to be able to contribute to, stimulate and lead the debate on complex issues such as what constitutes global citizenship and good governance, sustainable resource use, and the determination of ecological limits." (QAA, 2014).

Benefits

- A catalyst to developing innovative learning and teaching.
- Can be engaging and motivational topic for many students and staff.
- Supports institutional and external drivers for sustainable development in education; including the University's signing of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals Accord (SDGs), the QAA's ESD guidance resources, and NUS campaigns.
- Can facilitate student's to make fulfilling career choices.

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Putting it into practice

Many programmes and modules will already include economic, social justice and environmental sustainability issues. ESD provides an additional reflective framework to review the effectiveness of current practice and to identify opportunities for enhancements. It particularly focuses on the development of student's skills and capabilities to become active change agents in their personal and professional lives (QAA, 2014).

Review sustainable development within your programme

Relevant to your subject area, review where you currently include, or could include sustainable development with your modules and programmes. Use the QAA's ESD guidance document as a starting point – includes sections on student knowledge, skills and attributes (QAA, 2014).

As an alternative the following student sustainable development capabilities framework may be more relevant to your subject area and programme learning outcomes. Consider where in your programme students are able to:

- Analyse and capture complex systems (local and global) across social, economic and environmental domains (system thinking).
- Collectively analyse and create future scenarios (narratives, visualisations) to solve sustainability problems (anticipatory, future-thinking).
- Negotiate sustainability values, principles, goals and targets (normative, ethical thinking).
- Design and implement strategies and changes towards sustainability (strategic).
- Enable and facilitate collaboratively sustainability research and problem solving (Interpersonal). (Wiek et al, 2011).

Select appropriate learning, teaching and assessment methods

Review the learning, teaching and assessment methods that you currently use, or intend to use, to support student competency development. Typical methods include, stimulus pieces, case studies, discussions and debates, authentic assessments, group work, research projects, volunteering and work placement opportunities, real-world projects and opportunities to engage in inter-disciplinary learning (Lozano et al, 2017).

Allign with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

Consider the relevance and application of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in your subject area. See the associated Enhancing the curricula with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals Spotlight guide.

Engage students in the process

Consider opportunities for students to become involved in enhancements within your modules and programmes. This could include students suggesting topic areas, mapping the programme against the SDGs for example (NUS, 2020).

Explore co and extra-curricular opportunities

Explore relevant to your subject area, opportunities to incorporate real-world projects and initiatives. This could include for example Guild of Student initiatives and projects, campus operations, and contacts with local organisations. The following resource offers examples from other institutions (EAUC, 2019

Challenges

- The term 'sustainability' can be problematic and hard to define in many subject contexts. Focus on appropriate real-world complex problems and student competency development.
- Research and practice into ESD can appear complex and tends to be developed for sustainability focused programmes. Select elements of this research that you think have most application.
- Can be difficult to find space in an already packed curriculum to include sustainable development as a new subject. Focus on existing areas of your programme that can be adapted and enhanced.
- Inter-disciplinary learning can be problematic particularly if assessments are shared.
- Some students may not find sustainable development motivational, and there may be distinct cultural and values differences between students that need to be facilitated sensitively.

Additional Resources & References

Can you help us improve this resource or suggest a future one? Do you need this resource in an alternative format? Please contact us at cie@liverpool.ac.uk

A full list of references are available on the Centre for Innovation in Education website.

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