

Experience of the Institute of Sustainable Education, Faculty of Education and Management

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Introduction

Since the last decade of the 20th century, the Latvian education system has undergone a series of dramatic changes as the result of a significant political and socio-economic transformation. Power and organizational structures have been redefined along with Latvia's integration movement towards a market economy, mature forms of democracy, and, last but not the least, EU membership. These changes have offered opportunities (as well as challenges) for education for sustainability. These changes have also made it possible for ESD to become part of the formal learning experience in Latvian universities.

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Education for sustainability, "...the greatest resource for achieving a just and ecological society,"⁷⁶ includes an integrated vision of the environment, economy and society, and involves acquiring the knowledge, skills and values necessary to guide and motivate people for sustainable ways of living and informed citizenship. This inspiring vision motivated a group of professors at Daugavpils University to establish a new educational division, the Faculty of Education and Management (FEM). Since its establishment, this Faculty has focused its activities on the development of pre-service and in-service teacher education and training.

Overview of the development of the Faculty of Education and Management and the Institute of Sustainable Education

While the process of reorientation of education began with the current cadre of teaching professionals, it became clear that institutions of teacher education needed to reorient their pre-service teacher education to address the goals of ESD. Reorienting teacher education is, indeed, a key element in the development of new professionals committed to ESD. This will help them to become 'sustainability change agents' and will considerably shorten the response time for achieving sustainable development goals in education. The initiators of the FEM had a clear vision of this ambitious objective.



Latvia Daugavpils copy.

At the outset of its establishment and development, FEM faced a variety of challenges. The Department was engaged in extensive research activities in order to develop its own unique curriculum foundation for an integrated and holistic approach to education at Daugavpils University.

The first stage consisted of the official establishment of FEM at Daugavpils University in 1993. This marked the beginning of a transition process from the centralized and rigid regulatory-oriented educational system to a democratic, integral and holistic approach. The process was enhanced by the University's participation in a broad European dialogue on the future of higher education, particularly, within the context of the Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies (TEMPUS) projects.⁷⁷ The Tempus, with its strong focus on institution-based university cooperation, promoted the participation of Daugavpils University in its broad discussions on democratic cooperation, and social and environmental awareness in education. Since its inception, the FEM has based all of its pedagogical activities at the bachelor, master, and doctoral levels on the ethics and principles of sustainability that can be found in the text of the Earth Charter.

The second stage (1995-1998) was mainly focused on the integration of the holistic approach into the teaching and learning processes. This work was supported and stimulated by the Soros Foundation-Latvia, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Centre for Curriculum Development and Examinations, and other institutions that provided the professors and the research staff with opportunities to participate in the applied research activities for curriculum development and create a solid base for holistic, integrated methodology.

The third stage (1998-1999) was devoted to the investigation of the meta-curricular dimensions of teacher's education, with the issue of spirituality as the most common concern within the context of this holistic approach.

The fourth stage (1999-2003) was focused on researching the interconnectedness between the

⁷⁶ Schumacher, F. 1973 *Small is beautiful: Economics as People Really Mattered*. (Abacus, London).

⁷⁷ TEMPUS is managed by the European Commission's Directorate General on Education and Culture with assistance given by the European Training Foundation. The programme funds cooperation projects in the areas of curriculum development and innovation, teacher training, university management, and structural reforms in higher education. It puts special emphasis on the mobility of academic and administrative staff from higher education institutions, both from the EU and the partner countries, as the European Commission continues to consider higher education as a priority for its co-operation activities with the countries surrounding the European Union.

ecological and spiritual aspects of this holistic approach and its role in education for sustainability.

The fifth stage (2003) resulted in the fine-tuning of the new educational curriculum for ESD: broadening the educational perspective and goals, and clearly demonstrating the need for a new structural unit within the Daugavpils University - the Institute of Sustainable Education.

General Information about the Institute of Sustainable Education

The Institute of Sustainable Education (ISE, www.du.lv/ise) was founded in 2003 as a structural unit of FEM for scientific research activities in pedagogy, pedagogical and developmental psychology, and education and management. ISE consists of three departments: Department of Scientific Research, Department of International Projects, and Department of Scientific Editions. The Institute is committed to a transdisciplinary and holistic approach to curriculum development and the vision of education for sustainability.

Curriculum and pedagogical changes to promote sustainable education: Masters Programme on Pedagogy

Education for sustainability creates a lot of challenges to curriculum innovators, especially if it is interpreted as promoting change agency and not only as a content-

based discipline. However, Huckle stressed that curriculum reform can provide a context and opportunity for education for sustainability and facilitate opportunities for its inclusion into formal education.⁷⁸

An academic Masters Programme on Pedagogy that has been reoriented for ESD purposes can be used as an example of qualitative changes in the education process. The transformations have been implemented at three levels: programme structure, course content, and programme methodology.

Each educational programme is divided into distinct units: the *Holistic Pedagogy* unit consists of three courses, including Environmental Education; Spirituality of Pedagogy; and the Integrated Approach in Education; the *Educational Philosophy* unit consists of three courses, namely Theoretical Foundations and Contemporary Issues of Educational Philosophy; Education for Sustainable Development; and Innovative and Future Education. Each unit is taught from a common perspective and evaluates students' academic performance through an integrated paper. The challenge of these new study courses has been, and still is, to create a learning environment that is problem-based, eco-centric, focused on social change, and encouraging of learners' understanding of global change, and cultural and biological diversity.

The holistic approach, as a perspective of reorienting education towards sustainable development, reflects the belief that everything in the world is interconnected.



Prof. Ilga Salite inaugurates the establishment of the Baltic and Black Sea Consortium in Educational Research (BBCC), May, 2005



4th JTET Conference, Helsinki, June 1st 2006

⁷⁸ Huckle, J. (1995) *Reaching Out*. WWF: Godalming.

According to the holistic perspective, the educational process is based on the choices and responsibilities of each learner. Such an educational process encourages each learner to develop their own identity and to learn from others while being involved in educational and social processes themselves. The hope at the FEM is that the transformation of the Masters programme will foster qualitative changes – not only in the context of the study programme or the university, but also in the society at large. Similar qualitative changes were integrated into the professional training programme and into the FEM's Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral programmes in education at Daugavpils University.

Cooperation with UNESCO on curriculum development and practical implementation of ESD

As previously stated, in order to reorient the existing educational process towards the goals and values of sustainability, the ISE leadership began to refocus its discipline-oriented curriculum towards a competency based model arranged around a number of themes and learning areas. Active cooperation with UNESCO and participation in various EU educational projects and programmes helped them to move towards this goal.

From 2000-2004, the ISE staff participated in the first stage of the UNESCO University Twinning and Networking Programme (UNITWIN) project "Reorientation of Teacher Education towards Sustainable Development." The UNITWIN programme was conceived to advance research, training and programme development in higher education by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation through transfer of knowledge across borders. Participants learned how to develop their own educational and research materials.

Since 2006, ISE has been cooperating with the UNESCO Latvian National Committee, and also participates in the Associated School Project.⁷⁹ ISE staff and educators contribute to project activities aimed at implementing innovative approaches in the educational system and developing new teaching methods. The project sees the four pillars of education for the twenty-

first century as: learning to be, learning to know, learning to do, and learning to live together. The project promotes the participation of pupils and students in the development of peace, tolerance and democracy in Latvia and in the world.

Journal of Teacher Education and Training (JTET) / Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability (JTEFS)

Participating in the International Network on Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability provided Daugavpils University with opportunities for an extensive global dialogue, especially concerning action-research and ESD-related demonstration projects. The Journal of Teacher Education and Training (JTET) was created as the result of the activities of the International Network, and the University's desire to launch an international journal. The Editorial Board of the JTET brought together researchers from about 16 countries, and the first edition was published in May 2001. The authors shared the findings of research focused on their own methodologies to integrate the issues of sustainability, sustainable development and ESD into teacher training and education for sustainability. In 2003 the Journal received official recognition from the Academy of Science of Latvia (Council of Science) and was included in the list of universally recognized peer-reviewed scientific editions. By 2004, the Faculty of Education and Management had founded the Institute of Sustainable Education, and JTET became a journal of this Institute.

In April 2007, the Editorial Board of the JTET announced a change in the Journal's title to *the Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability (JTEFS)*. This change reflects the next stage in its development: the integration of accumulated experiences and research materials into everyday practices of teacher training and education for sustainability. Although intensive research and the theoretical development of methodological approaches continue, JTEFS will now give priority to applied research based on the principles of action research and the qualitative contributions from the multitude of new ESD practices and methodologies.

⁷⁹ The project was launched in 1953 in order to strengthen the commitment of children and young people to actively strive to promote mutual understanding and peace in the world. More than 7,000 schools in the world had joined the ASPnet by the year 2002. Latvia has participated in the UNESCO ASPnet since 1993, gradually embracing 26 schools. (<http://www.unesco.lv/eng/index/programs/asp.html>).

The Journal's contributors cover a wide scope of topics and research methodologies; integrate new ideas on education for sustainable education and sustainability per se. **The main JTEFS themes are:**

- Teacher education / professional development of teachers
- Involvement of teachers in different levels of education
- Didactics
- Curriculum issues
- Teachers' feedback on environmental education, education for sustainable development and sustainability
- Organizational management and others.

Practical and theoretical research: national and international projects

The faculty and research staff of the Institute closely cooperates with various research associations: All India Association for Educational Research, International Association for Children's Spirituality, International School Psychology Association, International Seminar on Religious Education and Values, etc, as well as a range of research networks: Environmental Management of Sustainable Universities, European Council for High Ability, etc. This productive collaboration contributed to ISE's efforts in developing the meta-curricular educational content by bringing in issues of spirituality, tolerance, and gender equality.

In order to integrate shared values and ethics for sustainability into the educational curriculum for teacher training, the ISE management initiated student activities connected with ESD and the Earth Charter. It also supported the foundation and development of a student's NGO based on the content and ethics of the Earth Charter; and, facilitates students' research on ESD and publishes its results.

The Earth Charter Centre for ESD is joining forces with the Institute of Sustainable Education to better assist the Institute's staff, researchers and students to develop educational materials; facilitate research and educational activities; and promote partnerships to integrate the

principles of sustainability in education using the Earth Charter as an ethical framework.

Challenges, Lessons Learned and Conclusion

Most modern western education patterns simply reinforce practices and methodologies to equip young people for the new information age and highly competitive economy. The process of market globalisation also negatively affects education and hampers sustainable development. To contrast this trend, the Faculty of Education and Management of Daugavpils University has been increasingly getting involved in processes of reorienting education to face the challenges of sustainability. As an example, the Faculty has become involved in the international network of teacher education within the context of the UNESCO global teacher education project and in the establishment of the Baltic and Black Sea Circle Consortium (BBCC) in educational research. In this sense, this University has shown its commitment to be in the forefront to promote processes of education for sustainable development in the regional and national level.

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