

TITLE:

ESD in Teacher Training at Somerset College / University of Plymouth

DATE: **March 2010**



SUMMARY

An unusual but easily replicable approach to integrating ESD into the teacher training curriculum at a group of colleges across the South West was led by Somerset College.

The academic approach allowed lecturers to learn along with their students and has resulted in a ripple effect, so the students those teachers go on to teach are also enthused about the subject.

INSTITUTION PROFILE

15 buildings
517 staff
7775 students
1 campus plus student residences
Semi rural

EAUC COMMENT

This case study demonstrates the efficacy of a new initiative that truly encourages the integration of sustainability in the lifelong learning sector by starting with the trainee teachers. Training teachers to be knowledgeable about ESD is an obvious but somehow extraordinary step forward for the sector and the EAUC fully supports this venture.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Somerset College, in partnership with HELP CETL, the Centre for Sustainable Futures and the Peninsula Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training, all at the University of Plymouth



THE PROBLEM

Somerset College is one of eight colleges in the South West which offer the Cert Ed/PGCE, incorporating the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector, in partnership with the University of Plymouth.

ESD (education for sustainable development) had been informally introduced to the college's trainee teachers due to the enthusiasm for the subject of one staff member, Denise Summers. However, as it was not a part of the curriculum which was assessed, the learners did not have to engage with the subject.

Denise recognised that to facilitate a change in the next generation of students within the Lifelong Learning Sector, their teachers needed to be knowledgeable about ESD and able to apply it to their subject specialisms. Only through introducing it to trainee teachers was this change going to take place.

THE APPROACH

As the PGCE/Cert Ed programmes were being re-written for September 2007 to incorporate the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector, it was agreed that an assessed learning outcome relating to ESD should be included.

Denise found that each of the Initial Teacher Training team (Johanna Wright, Dianne Dowling, Chris Savory and Ros Spain) had an interest in ESD, but there was a lack of confidence and understanding in how they might integrate it into their curriculum.

The team decided to take an action research approach known as "co-operative inquiry", where each of the team members was both co-researcher and co-subject. This participative and democratic approach encouraged the team

to work collaboratively on the creation of new curriculum materials as well as to regularly reflect on progress, share developments and plan future actions at regular inquiry meetings.

Funding for this action research project was provided by HELP CETL and the Centre for Sustainable Futures – two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at the University of Plymouth. Somerset College and the Peninsula Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training also provided funding.

OUR GOALS

- To support each other in developing the knowledge, skills, values and confidence to integrate ESD into the teacher training curriculum
- To embed ESD throughout the provision so that it was not seen as a 'bolt-on' extra
- To develop session plans and resources to introduce ESD within each of the core modules of the PGCE/Cert Ed
- To enable trainee teachers to develop the knowledge, skills and values to introduce their students to ESD within their own subject specialisms
- To share developments with colleagues across the partnership

OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

Obstacle

- Finding the time
- Confidence in embedding ESD
- Some students questioning the relevance of ESD to their practice

Solution

- The funding for the action research project paid for much of the time needed. The team's developing professional and personal interest in ESD complimented this as the project developed and provided the enthusiasm and motivation to continue.
- The co-operative inquiry process allowed the team to learn together, as they shared their experiences and concerns and developed the confidence and ability to introduce ESD.
- A generic introduction to ESD gave students ideas to research and develop within their own subject specialisms and soon resulted in a realisation that ESD was relevant to everyone.

PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

- Session plans and resources for all of the core modules have been developed and refined following their use over the last three years
- The resources have been shared across the South West college and university partnership headed by the University of Plymouth
- 900 students have graduated from the courses since ESD was formally introduced to the curriculum. As part of their work, each will leave with a clear plan for how to introduce ESD into their own subject specialism
- The students' mentors – practising teachers and trainers – have expressed interest in learning more about how to embed sustainability into their own teaching practice
- The team's work has been promoted regionally and nationally through conference presentations and papers
- The project was 'Highly Commended in the 2010 Green Gown Awards in the 'courses' category, and shortlisted in the 2009 Awards in the 'research' category.

LESSONS LEARNT

- The co-operative inquiry approach was instrumental in supporting the professional development required to embed ESD within the curriculum.
- Members of the team originally lacked confidence in their knowledge to introduce ESD. It is important to recognise that you don't have to be an expert to do this – students and teachers can explore and learn together.
- Even learners who are sceptical about ESD can come to understand its relevance once they research it in relation to their subject specialism. An embedded approach is essential in making this happen.
- Introducing ESD to trainee teachers and sharing developments has resulted in a 'ripple effect' in which the students taught by the teachers trained at these colleges have been introduced to ESD; colleagues across the partnership and further afield are using and developing the resources and encouraging their students to do the same; and the mentors of these trainee teachers are also taking an interest in ESD and considering developing it within their own practice.
- Using a co-operative inquiry, action research approach is a very effective method to encourage curriculum and professional development within a team. It is an approach which is entirely appropriate to ESD, but could be used for many other curriculum developments. Working collaboratively in this way can provide a more effective and creative result than working in isolation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Lesson plans and resources developed by the project

<http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/esd>

Denise was originally inspired by Stephen Sterling's book (2001) *Sustainable Education: Re-visioning Learning and Change*. Dartington: Green Books.

Heron, J. and Reason, P. (2001) 'The Practice of Co-operative Inquiry: Research 'with' rather than 'on' People', in Reason, P. and Bradbury, H. [eds] (2001) *Handbook of Action Research*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

The Genesis Project

<http://www.genesisproject.com/>

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www.somerset.ac.uk

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