

Development Education Research Centre
Research Paper No. 22 (Executive Summary)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Education For Sustainable Development
in Initial Teacher Training Programmes
at the UCL Institute of Education**

Douglas Bourn and Nese Soysal

Executive Summary

This research paper reviews the level of interest and engagement in education for sustainable development (ESD) within the UCL Institute of Education's initial teacher education (ITE) programmes, and gauges their response to the growing interest in sustainability and climate issues amongst many young people, as well as to the new UCL Sustainability Strategy.

It builds on previous work undertaken by the Development Education Research Centre (DERC) for UNESCO and the UK TEESNet network.

A review of the extensive literature around education for sustainable development shows the influence of international policy initiatives, such as those from UNESCO, on framing national programmes and practice. ESD is a contested term, as the literature review will suggest, but there is also a view from a number of academics and researchers to see its application as posing wider questions about the purposes and nature of initial teacher education. This includes putting sustainable development much more at the heart of teaching and learning and to see the field as relating to broader goals of social and environmental change.

Based on interviews with a range of subject leaders for the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and focus groups with students, the research addressed the following questions:

- 1. What are the perceptions of teacher educators towards ESD and its inclusion in their programmes?**
- 2. What are the teaching strategies employed in teacher education courses regarding ESD?**
- 3. What do teacher educators see as the opportunities and obstacles for promoting ESD in ITE curricula?**
- 4. What can be done to support teacher educators in embedding ESD into teacher education programmes?**
- 5. What are the perceptions of student teachers towards ESD and its relevance to their training?**

Findings

The evidence from our research shows that teacher educators had a comprehensive understanding of sustainability, including the social, economic and environmental dimensions, although there was a tendency to focus more on environmental matters. They also all made reference to skills and values as well as knowledge. Whilst most of the teacher educators recognised the interdisciplinary nature of ESD, they tended to focus on how it contributed to enriching their subject rather than posing a different approach to learning.

Whilst all teacher educators mentioned ESD as part of their teaching, the level to which it could be said to be embedded in the subject varied.

ESD clearly provides opportunities for a range of teaching methods and this was reflected in the findings including field trips, the involvement of external organisations and the use of role play and other forms of participatory learning.

Many of the teacher educators described a number of challenges in promoting ESD including constraints of time, the narrow subject based curriculum and exam focus they have to work with, and also in some cases lack of confidence and expertise in the area.

The student teachers were also very knowledgeable about ESD although they also tended to emphasise the environmental dimensions. They also wanted the area to have a higher profile within the curriculum and to be reflected across all areas of learning. They also saw ESD as a pedagogical approach, with the values behind it being very important.

Finally, there was a general lack of awareness of UCL's sustainability strategy. Whilst some were conscious of it, few were aware that it had a strong curriculum focus.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the researchers would recommended:

- 1. More emphasis is given to the professional development of the teacher trainers.**
- 2. Attention is given to the development of teaching strategies and materials for ESD.**
- 3. More research should be encouraged on how ESD could have a more prominent role within all teacher training.**
- 4. Teacher training courses could do more to highlight the potential of partnership with NGOs for delivering ESD.**
- 5. More should be done to influence the government to re-think the content of the national curriculum in response to the global challenges we are now all facing.**

Conclusion

In the wake of a global pandemic and mounting alarm at the impact of climate change, it is clear that there is no more urgent time than now to take action on global issues. ESD, as many thousands of young people have been saying during the past couple of years, has to be much higher up the agendas of policymakers. Education clearly has a major role to play in this. It is clear that within IOE, and UCL, there is substantial support and enthusiasm for raising the profile of, and building greater expertise in sustainability, as well as in embedding it more directly into all courses concerned with the training of teachers. It is up to the academic community, along with the engagement and involvement of student teachers, to make this happen.



Authors

Douglas Bourn is Professor of Development Education at UCL Institute of Education and Co-Director of the Development Education Research Centre. He is the author of *Theory and Practice of Development Education* (2014) and *Understanding Global Skills* (2018) and editor of the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Global Education and Learning* (2020). He is a member of UCL's Sustainability Strategy Committee and has been a member of past Government advisory panels on Sustainable Development Education, Development Awareness and Global Citizenship.

Nese Soysal is a visiting researcher from Turkey and researcher at Global Schools Programme Piloting Project led by United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network. She has completed her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction at Middle East Technical University in Turkey on Education for Sustainable Development and Initial Teacher Education. She has also worked as a teaching fellow at several universities in Turkey.

UCL Institute of Education (IOE) is a world-leading centre for research and teaching in education and social science.

The Development Education Research Centre (DERC) was launched in November 2006 with funding and support from the UK Department for International Development . It acts as the hub for knowledge generation, new thinking and quality output on development education, global learning and global citizenship.

As well as conducting and publishing research, DERC also runs public seminars, provides consultancy, and coordinates the activities of the Academic Network on Global Education & Learning. The key global education journal the *International Journal of Development Education and Global Learning* was founded at DERC as it edited by DERC staff.

Published by:

Development Education Research Centre
33 Bedford Place
London WC1B 5JU

Tel: 020 7679 8000
www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe-derc
© DERC August 2020

