

UNECE Expert group on Indicators for Education for Sustainable Development
Fifth meeting, 20-22 June 2007
Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
Stubenbastei 5, Vienna (Austria)

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING SUCCESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNECE STRATEGY FOR ESD¹

Discussion paper

Introduction

The UNECE Steering Committee endorsed the indicators to assess effectiveness of the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for education for sustainable development (ESD) at its second meeting (4-5 December 2006) and entrusted the Expert Group with the following mandate: “Further to the relevant outcomes of the Moscow workshop, to explore the possibility of developing criteria to assess success in the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD in the countries of the UNECE region, based on the indicators and on the examples submitted by countries to the UNECE secretariat”.

This paper aims to facilitate discussion by the Expert Group on the criteria for assessing success in the implementation of the UNECE Strategy for ESD. At the time of the drafting of this paper not much related experience was available. The major source of information that was considered by the Secretariat is the “Quality criteria for ESD Schools”² developed by the “School Development through Environmental Education” (SEED) and the “Environmental and School Initiatives” (ENSI) networks (see the extract in the Annex).

Criteria

What: Criterion is a principle or standard by which something may be judged or decided³. It is advisable that criteria should be of qualitative value, but limited in numbers and easy to understand.

What for: The criteria could allow for qualitative assessment of the implementation of ESD and for judging whether this implementation is successful or not. This would help to enhance the performance in terms of ESD and to make comparisons between countries.

How: Criteria can be grouped in accordance with the thematic areas that correspond to the issues for reporting⁴. These areas can be accompanied by a rationale that would help to understand what these criteria mean in practice. A case story also may be added to provide a concrete example of implementation. “Good practices in ESD” submitted by the governments and stakeholders might be used for this purpose (see the web-site <http://www.unece.org/env/esd/GoodPractices/index.html>).

The list of the proposed thematic areas is as follows:

1. Criteria in the area of policy, legislation and operational arrangements
2. Criteria in the area of formal, non-formal and informal learning
3. Criteria in the area of the competence of educators

¹ This document was not formally edited.

² “Quality Criteria for ESD-Schools”, Guidelines to enhance the quality of Education for Sustainable Development; Soren Breiting, Michela Mayer, Finn Mogensen, May 2005.
(<http://www.ensi.org/index.php?modul=10&folder=47167>)

³ Source: Oxford Dictionary. Origin: Greek *kriterion* ‘means of judging’, from *krites* ‘a judge’.

⁴ See Indicators for Education for Sustainable Development, UNECE, 2006 (ECE/CEP/AC.13/2006/5/Add.1)

4. Criteria in the area of tools and materials for ESD
5. Criteria in the area of research and development of ESD
6. Criteria in the area of cooperation on ESD
7. Criteria in the area of conservation, use and promotion of knowledge of indigenous peoples in ESD

Risks: Subjectivity is the key risk for a quality criterion. What is perceived as a positive experience for one person within certain circumstances is not always a positive experience for another within other circumstances.

There can be two types by assessment: self-assessment, by the governments on their own performance and assessment by a third party, such as a group of experts.

Note: The following documents are enclosed as background materials:

1. “Quality Criteria for ESD-Schools”, *Guidelines to enhance the quality of Education for Sustainable Development; Soren Breiting, Michela Mayer, Finn Mogensen, May 2005.*
2. *Template for Reporting on the UNECE Strategy for ESD*
3. *Guidance for reporting*

Annex

EXAMPLE OF PRESENTATION OF A QUALITY CRITERION

(Extract from the “Quality criteria for ESD Schools”; SEED, ENSI)

1. Quality criteria in the area of the teaching-learning approach

- The teachers listen to and value the concerns, experiences, ideas and expectations of the students, and their plans are ‘flexible’ and open for changes.
- The teachers encourage cooperative learning and experiential learning.
- The teaching takes into account the value of practical activities by linking them to students’ concept development and theory construction.
- The teachers facilitate students’ participation and provide contexts for the development of students’ own learning, ideas and perspectives.
- The teachers search for ways to evaluate and assess students’ achievement consistent with the above mentioned criteria.

Example

A grade 8 class was investigating the villagers’ use of pesticides in their local community. As part of that work they visited a small farmer growing spring onions on hired land. He had arrived a year ago with his family from a part of the country where the rainfall had diminished, because of deforestation, and many families suffered a lot. The students got responses to their prepared questions about his use of pesticides and how he was affected. It was clear that he had many health problems by using them, but on the other hand it meant frequent crops of spring onions. He used a number of saw beds so he always had spring onions at different stages of development. Once a month he harvested a crop and brought it to a regional market to get the best price. From this income he could feed his family living in their common shack, and pay the rent for the land, and most of the money went to the remaining part of the family still living in their old area. When leaving the field the class passed a saw bed with spring onions that didn’ t look as fresh and healthy as the other spring onions - many had brown parts on the leaves due to an attack of larvae of moths. To their surprise, the farmer told the class that these spring onions were for their own consumption in the family and accordingly he did not like to treat them with pesticides. The

eager students continued with questions about why he did not sell such untreated spring onions on the market and he told the class that he couldn't get a good price for them at the market because they didn't look as good as the sprayed ones. Back in class the students were keen to say very negative things about the farmer because they found he had double moral standards just to get money. The teacher helped them to see the farmer's dilemma as a personal conflict and moved the attention of the students to the concept of the 'market mechanism. Because they were very upset about what they had seen the class wanted to investigate this in more depth. After a brainstorming they decided to investigate their parents' attitudes about this question and also to make a practical experiment at their small local market. They managed to buy a portion of nice looking spring onions and a portion of the spring onions without pesticides and brought them to the market. They had prepared big signs to explain the difference and wanted to sell them for the same price. At the market they made a survey of consumers' reactions and opinions. The project ended with an exhibition and hearing where the class described their findings and worries and asked the community in what direction they would like this issue to develop.

Rationale

Sustainable development is not a fixed thing but a quest for developing our daily life and communities in directions that benefit most people now and in the future and at the same time minimize our negative environmental impact. This requires active, creative and critical citizens that are good at overcoming problems and conflicts in co-operation, and able to combine theoretical knowledge with practical innovations and ideas. As a consequence the teaching and learning approach must have the learner at the centre and provide contexts to develop students' own ideas, values and perspectives. Teachers must consider students as active agents in the construction of their knowledge. As the issues related to sustainable development are often controversial and complicated it is important to be able to handle disagreement and complexity (see later). The focus on ESD can be used in the school as learning opportunities to teach the core subject areas, often with practical implications for students' daily life and the local community. At the same time this approach can enhance the students self-esteem.
