

UNECE Steering Committee on Education for Sustainable Development  
Third meeting  
Geneva, 31 March – 1 April 2008

“How do teachers teach sustainable development?”  
a panel on competence in education for sustainable development in the education sector

**PRESENTATION BY CANADA**

Greetings from Manitoba, Canada. It is a pleasure to be here.

Canada is a federal country and Manitoba is one of ten provinces. There are also three territories. Because education in Canada is a provincial and territorial responsibility there is no national or federal minister or department of education. The provinces and territories do however work with the federal Department of the Environment on issues related to education for sustainable development.

I am going to talk about what we are doing in Manitoba in K-12 education regarding education for sustainable development. Many other provinces are doing similar things, although not all to the same extent

In Manitoba we are doing many things. I don't have time to tell you about all of them so will highlight what I think is most important under three headings: (i) providing leadership, (ii) supporting teachers, and (iii) working with partners. I will end by talking about the educational path that I hope we are on.

**Providing Leadership**

Actions take place in a context. This context is set in part, perhaps in large part, by those who are expected to provide leadership. In Manitoba we are doing this.

At the political level, the Minister of Education in his annual welcome back to school news release made education for sustainable development the central and main message. This has been reinforced over the course of the school year in other messages from the Minister.

At the organizational level, education for sustainable development has been identified as a departmental priority in internal and external statements and documents. This is reflected in a visible and concrete way in how we are allocating budget and staff time.

For example, we have allocated dedicated staff time to work on ESD. Senior staff also put in time and effort and we are redoing our education for sustainable development action plan to make sure it is relevant, specific and forward-looking.

All of these things send a big message to those who work in the department and to others. It says to them that this is important and you will get support for putting effort into supporting and promoting education for sustainable development.

## **Supporting Teachers**

In Manitoba, teachers are telling us that their day is full and there is little room to do more. Hence one of the biggest challenges is how to support teachers without becoming part of the problem.

For this reason we have chosen to identify opportunities in existing curricula rather than creating new mandatory curriculum. We are saying to teachers, let's work together to find ways to teach about sustainability as part of what you are already doing. Of course this does mean more work but the intent is to minimize the additional effort.

In support of this approach we have been identifying learning resources we hope teachers will find useful and, most importantly, providing professional development opportunities for teachers and school-based administrators. We also provide funding, albeit not a lot but to good effect, to support teachers and schools to develop ESD lesson and unit plans. In addition, we are going to be creating lesson and unit plans about some of the more difficult issues that teachers need to discuss with their students. We are also working with a school division to develop a course regarding the sustainable management of Lake Winnipeg.

We are encouraging a whole school approach whereby schools undertake a number of sustainable activities such as recycling, practicing water conservation, instituting no idling policies, using energy efficient lighting, and incorporating the teaching and learning of sustainability into the curriculum. What we are attempting to do is encourage schools to model what they are teaching. In addition, all new schools, which the province pays for, must be energy efficient and green.

At this point I would like to note that many schools and school divisions in Manitoba are already doing many impressive things with regard to the teaching of and being sustainable. In fact, in more than a few instances we are working to catch up with what schools and school divisions are already doing.

## **Working with Partners**

In Manitoba we believe in working with others in all areas of education. It is no different with regard to education for sustainable development.

Our most important partners are of course schools, school divisions and educational organizations. However, we are also working with many NGO's and other levels of government. We have also developed brochures for parents that outline what we are trying to teach our students and have held a number of youth conferences to engage students in discussions about sustainability issues.

We believe that by working together we can not only pool and share resources to find efficiencies and synergies, but perhaps more importantly, it is a way of creating a community value or ethic that goes beyond the school which says that learning how to live sustainability is important.

## **Concluding Comments**

So what kind of educational journey are we trying to take our students on? I think it goes somewhat like this: it starts with developing an honest and realistic understanding of what the issues and challenges are, moves to looking at what the solutions might be, which then becomes the resolve to do what needs to be done.

At the end of day, perhaps it all boils down to what will be the nature of the relationship between citizenship and planetary ecology for our kids. In other words, how should they think about what their individual and collective rights, responsibilities and entitlements will be in a future that is sustainable.

We believe that having these difficult and challenging conversations with our **children** and students, rather **than** trying to shelter them from such conversations, is doing the best thing we can to prepare them for their future. Furthermore, we believe most students want to have these conversations; they want to talk about what really matters, and about what can and should be done.

Thank you for your kind attention.