

Introduction

Explains the purpose of the resource pack and how it works; written from the author's perspective as useful background reading for users of the pack

I have a question for you – yes you! - the reader of this document: how does the work you do affect the wellbeing of the world around you? How might it affect the world in years to come? Yes I know these are rather huge questions that probably require huge and complex answers, but I think it is worthwhile each of us asking these questions every now and then for the sake of our own consciences and the world in which we live. In truth it is unlikely that any of us can completely answer these questions for certain (particularly those of us that cannot foretell the future!), but if, like me, you wish to raise your awareness of such questions, then you may find this site of interest. This project is aimed primarily at people involved in further and higher education, but it could be adapted for other purposes.

What's it all about?

Simply put, the site is intended as a resource that will help both teachers and students in further and higher education to look at the sustainability issues of the subjects they study; It will hopefully help them identify questions and find information and hopefully solutions to those questions. It will not provide all the answers and information they need for this by any means, but it does put forward an idea on how to begin asking the right questions. The [Subject Areas](#) section of the Site contains useful sources of information and provides a forum for debate and the sharing of resources within different subject areas.

This site contains a lesson plan which can be used by any teacher or person involved in education to guide a workshop on sustainability for either teachers, teachers in training or students. The workshop encourages and assists participants to research specific questions about their own subject disciplines; it also encourages them to add or link their research to the database into subject area sections; thus helping the enriching the site for further users and increasing the flow of information within subject areas between colleges about sustainability.

The lesson plan is intended to help participants to ask questions such as 'what are ethical issues of my subject in terms of humanity; how does it relate to ideas such as fair trade and human rights'. It also can help participants to look at the environmental issues of their subject – both in terms of moral and ethical debates and also the actual environmental

impact of both the study of the subject and the subject itself. It encourages students to look at both the academic discipline with which they are involved and also the related industries for which they are being prepared for, and, in the case of teachers, preparing others for. Crucially, One of the key features of the lesson plan offered is that it gets the participants to assess for themselves what their own preferred definition of sustainability is and which issues contained under this vast umbrella term matter most to them (thus ensuring personal engagement with the process).

The terms 'Sustainable Development' and 'Sustainability' are themselves questionable and open to different interpretation. There is some exploration of this within the section ' Defining Sustainability'; Within which I have also included quotes and definitions. This section forms the material for the first part of the lesson plan.

One of my key intentions for the site is that it should be user friendly. I am trying here to make important but complex issues easily accessible. The principle of The SITE Workshop is that it only requires a facilitator with a basic overview of the issues involved (established by reading the lesson plan and introduction pack beforehand) Each participant engages in asking questions of ethics and sustainability about their own specialist field. My theory is that using this resource pack requires no previous experience or expertise in sustainability issues. However, I anticipate that to some extent, every participant will have some degree of prior knowledge or uniquely useful insights that will contribute to the learning processes of the others involved within the lesson. The contents of the SITE may well fall short of some peoples needs, particularly where expertise and experience in sustainability all ready exists. However, if some participants in the exercises given here learn nothing new about their own subject, the collaborative nature of the exercises should at least help them to learn something of their classmates subjects – and as sustainability is partly about how issues fit together, they will hopefully learn something of value from this.

The ideas put forward within this project and the exercises I have designed might also be more helpful to some and less so to others because each of us has a unique way of understanding and explaining concepts; and this is only one person's method (mine). I would hope though that each user of these exercises could adapt and improve them if they felt the need. Contained within the ESD section of the subject areas are links to a wide range of similar initiatives and training materials created by other organisations, some of which may suit some people better than the models offered on The SITE.

Although much of the format and content of this resource pack is of my own design, it is also very much informed by similar initiatives which I investigated as part of my research for this project. More than this it actually includes some of the texts and exercises that I found particularly inspiring, uploaded into the ESD subject area (and in quotes and references throughout the project). I have included these materials so that users can benefit as I did from reading them and also define their own views by critically comparing different material.

Rationale

Explains why the author designed the resource pack; originally used as the basis for the lesson introduction – subsequent users of the pack may wish to adapt it to their own perspective, but may wish to use the quotes (included in the lesson resource sheets and powerpoint)

The idea for this project came out of an assignment module that I did for my PGCE on 'Alternatives to Mainstream Provision in Post Compulsory Education'. For my assignment I looked generically at environmental awareness in Higher Education. The investigation involved my looking at various theories on 'ecoliteracy' and the importance of Education for Sustainable Development. This assignment module was an option module and the opportunity to look at 'ecoliteracy' as a subject amongst many others was also down to the students. This made me wonder why education for sustainable development wasn't a mandatory part of every teacher training course. This might seem like a rather extreme proposal to some but I am convinced it would be worthwhile. As I wrote in my essay;

I realised that as a teacher I am responsible, whether consciously or not, for transmitting cultural values to others. It dawned on me then; that the education system is hugely responsible for transmitting and influencing cultural attitudes to the environment, not just through teaching specific subjects relating to the environment (such as environmental sciences), but on every level at which those attitudes operate!... in every curriculum there should be embedded a perspective that considers the environmental context of the subject, after all, almost every kind of human activity has some kind of effect on the environment

Through my assignment I came to see how intrinsically linked environmental issues are to other issues of a more social and economic nature and that educating students for Sustainable Development could effectively raise awareness of the environment and much

more besides.

I am not alone in thinking this, we are according to the recent United Nations agreement, in a 'Decade for Education for Sustainable Development'. Various important national and international institutions have produced high profile reports, declarations and strategies for such initiatives: In the UK for example, we have had the government Department for Education and Skills produce a Sustainable Development Action Plan (DfES, 2004); this in turn influenced the Higher Education Funding Council for England's Sustainable Development in Higher Education Strategy (HEFCE, 2004), which has enabled the funding of various initiatives nationwide such as the University of Plymouth's Centre for Sustainable Futures. Internationally we have had such excellent initiatives as the UNESCO Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future (UNESCO, TLSF) programme available online.

The presence of such high profile support suggests that many people believe Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to be an important factor of all future education: to quote from Forum for The Future

There is no single home for sustainability. It doesn't belong to any specific academic discipline or school subject line. Nor is it the domain of any sector – environmentalists, educators, business or government. It is everybody's business. If the objective is to make thinking and acting sustainably a normal part of everyday life at home and at work, then everyone needs to be sustainability literate and relevant provision needs to be integrated into the content and delivery of all courses in all disciplines. (Forum For The Future, 2002)

the theory is of course, that the world needs such sustainability literate people:

“ Only those caught deep in denial can ignore the mountain of scientific data about destructive effects of human activities on the earth. Only those who choose not to see can ignore the human tragedies unfolding before our eyes evident in poverty, malnutrition, and violence. But only those equipped to discern and think critically will understand the magnitude of the problems and the choices to be made if we are to create a decent and humane future” (Orr, D, 1992)

However, it is not just a matter of saving the planet; as the demand for sustainability literate people grows, so will the need for providing this education:

One of the most important drivers for sustainability literate graduates will be the demand from employers. The growth of interest in responsible corporate behaviour means companies increasingly have to manage and report on their environmental and social performance alongside their financial one. Anticipated changes to company law could make reporting of material impacts mandatory for large companies, with smaller ones influenced via the supply chain. (Forum for the Future, 2002)

What's different about this document?

As you will see from the supporting material appendix, there are lots of similar initiatives on facilitating ESD within schools and colleges, some of which have a 'resource' pack type of format which is similar and influential to this one. Each of these resource packs that I have researched however, have a slightly different focus to the one I had in mind.

Some (Forum for the Future's '*Learning and Skills for a Sustainable Future*' pack for instance) are focused on *creating* curricula grounded in sustainable theories and practice. Whilst I whole heartedly support this approach and believe it will certainly help create more sustainable education, its likely uptake depends upon demand for such course provision. In my opinion there is still not enough demand for sustainable education in mainstream practice. The intention for this (the one you are reading) resource pack however, is that it can be applied to existing curricula, thus raising awareness of how sustainability is relevant to academic disciplines where it is not already recognised. This would, in theory, create more demand for sustainable provision in mainstream education.

Many of the other resources I researched are aimed at primary and secondary education. The UNESCO Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future document (UNESCO 2003) and the QCA ESD (QCA 2004) document for instance both have some excellent ideas for introducing awareness of sustainability issues based around existing curricula. I have included some of these exercises in the supporting material section as they could easily be adapted to a post 16 context. What's different here about this resource pack however, is that it is specifically aimed at post 16 education and has arguably more emphasis on the students themselves critically investigating the sustainability issues of their subject.

There are many articles and publications in circulation which do address both generic sustainability issues in post 16 education and the specific sustainability issues of academic disciplines. Unfortunately, none of these publications that I have researched so far are in a resource pack or lesson plan format. I have referenced some of these publications in the supporting material section of this document as they could provide valuable 'further investigation' material for the participants of the lesson plan given here.