

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FORUM :

A NEW STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN FOR EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY (EFS)

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Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) manages the Education for Sustainable Development Forum (ESDF), which brings together organisations that run environmental and outdoor learning programmes. The sector, supported by DAERA, were keen to review the range of provision, identify the strengths and gaps, and create a new long term strategy for the entire sector. NIEL engaged McCreanor, Murray Rose Consultants to assist in this process. This strategy focuses on formal education and includes consideration of how environmental learning programmes support formal learning at all levels.

Education needs to focus more on understanding complexity, empathy and self/mutual understanding through transdisciplinary perspectives so that we can meet the future more sustainably. Central to this strategy is the consideration of what education for a sustainable future must offer to our children and young people and how our existing practice must be reconsidered and reframed to ensure that we collectively move our societies to more environmentally considered lifestyles.

“When we look to the future we confront many uncertainties about the world our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, will live in. But we can be certain of at least one thing: if we want this earth to provide for the needs of its inhabitants, human society must undergo a transformation. The world of tomorrow must

be fundamentally different from the world we know...We must strive to build a “sustainable future”...

Education, in the broadest sense of the term, plays a predominant role in this development aimed at fundamental changes in our ways of living and behaving. Education is the “force for the future” because it is one of the most powerful instruments of change.¹”



7

Educational areas² for Efs Skills:

1. Detecting error and illusion: Critical literacy skills
2. Pertinence in knowledge: Grasping general problems in which we only know partial solutions
3. Teaching the human condition: Understanding cultures and diversity; individual and collectives
4. Earth Identity: Recognizing that all things on the planet are interconnected
5. Confronting uncertainties: Offering young people the skills needed to be comfortable in uncertainty and unpredictability
6. Understanding each other: Identifying the obstacles we have understanding others and human complexities that can both assist and block development of empathy for others
7. Ethics for the human genre: Teaching about democracy and citizenship skills

These 7 skills should be embedded in any Efs curriculum development and youth engagement in line with the recommendations in the NIEL Strategy and Action Plan.

¹ Morin, UNESCO, 2021

² ibid

KEY LEARNING & RECOMMENDATIONS

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COLLABORATION

There are a wide variety of organisations offering environmental experiences for children and young people in Northern Ireland but there is a need for more collaboration between NGOs as well as between NGOs and educational institutions and youth services.

TRAINING

Many NGOs in the sector could benefit from a better understanding of curriculum requirements and how their services can meet and compliment curricular needs.

Teacher training and Teacher Professional Learning needs to make Education for Sustainability (EFS) a priority.

Action and ability to impact environmental issues such as biodiversity loss and climate change need to be stressed. There needs to be a shift from more traditional problem-focused to solution-focused materials and activities.

“*To be effective, environment and development education should deal with the dynamics of both the physical/ biological and socio-economic environment and human (which may include spiritual) development, should be integrated in all disciplines, and should employ formal and non-formal methods and effective means of communication.*”³

NORTHERN IRELAND CURRICULUM

The NI curriculum has lots of good content which could be better implemented. EFS needs to feature across the widest range of curricular subjects and topics as possible.

OPPORTUNITIES

Today's children and young people are constantly exposed to climate change and the ecological crisis: reflected in this generation's swell of interest, concern and anxiety about environmental issues.

The climate crisis is at the forefront of global consciousness.

Media attention has increased: Natural catastrophes such as volcanic eruptions, human caused activities e.g. plastic pollution and climate change, the covid 19 pandemic and species extinction are now mainstream topics.

Upcoming Global Observation Days: There are many key dates which offer platforms for awareness raising of the Strategy as well as to advocate for mainstreaming EFS across curriculum materials.

Upcoming UN Decades: These offer opportunities for sustained themes for NGO interventions and whole school/school network engagement: 2021-2030 UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration

³ AGENDA 21: United Nations Conference on Environment & Development, 1992, p. 319

EDUCATION ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

Developing knowledge and understanding about the environment and sustainable development, beginning with local, extending to an understanding of wider global issues



EDUCATION THROUGH SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE

Children and young people experience sustainability as modelled around them in school curriculum, culture, community and campus, and is reflected in both ethos and policies



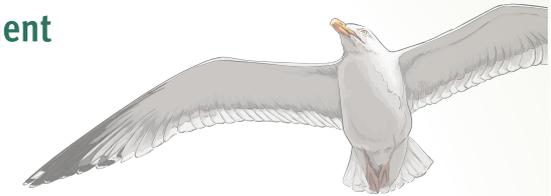
EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The development of positive attitudes and behaviours towards the environment and sustainable development alongside action and advocacy for wider change

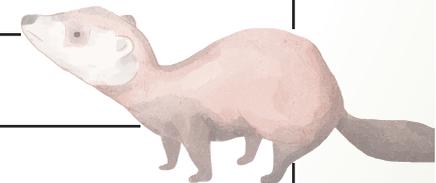


QUALITY EFS REQUIRES ALL THREE ELEMENTS

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EFS INVOLVES.....	EFS IS NOT.....
✓ being honest about the issues - allowing space to express frustration but then empowering with active hope	✗ all despair along with doom and gloom
✓ all ages	✗ too difficult or depressing for young people to understand
✓ the whole school community and is 'lived' through daily practice	✗ limited to certain subjects such as World Around Us, Geography and Science
✓ exploring the interconnection between all life on earth	✗ just about nature
✓ social justice locally and globally	✗ just about local environmental issues
✓ living a more sustainable lifestyle and being mindful of your surroundings	✗ simply about climate change
✓ making good sustainable choices and decisions	✗ making quick fix solutions without thinking of long-term or wider reaching impacts
✓ thinking about the future we want	✗ just about the future we want to avoid
✓ action	✗ telling people what to do and think





AREAS FOR ACTION

The strategy has identified 6 areas for action, namely:

1. Resourcing
2. Teaching and learning
3. Resources and activities offered through outdoor learning and site visits
4. Cooperation to deliver on wider education initiatives
5. Opportunities for Partnership and collaborative working
6. Initial teacher education and teacher professional learning

KEY ACTIONS!

- Allocate staff and resources to implement action plan
- Develop a one-stop-hub for Northern Ireland educators which is easily accessible and regularly updated
- Provide opportunities for educators and students to participate in NGO work placements
- Cooperate across the sector to research, advocate and deliver EfS and Action for Sustainable Development
- Provide training opportunities for NGO staff to embed EfS more widely through their educational offerings
- Create more positive framing around environmental discourse demonstrating positive solutions and actions
- Provide EfS training workshops for educators
- Create EfS resources which are in line with curriculum requirements

