

**The following is an extract from University of Hertfordshire report
'Developing awareness of Education for Sustainable Development:
foundations for our future' - a report on the sustainable development
learning journey of the Howe Dell School community: 2006 to 2007**

"This has been an exploration of the knowledge, perceptions, understanding and attitudes towards education for sustainable development, held by children and adults as they prepared to leave the established school site and planned for their future in a new community. The seven key concepts identified by the QCA (2002) are used as a framework to summarise the achievements which have been identified in the course of this research. Only those living and working within the community can fully appreciate the distance travelled. Their willingness and eagerness to share their achievements to date and plans for the future are testimony to their commitment to ESD.

1. Citizenship and stewardship.

This key concept was strongly represented in the data. Adults were confident in the leadership of this aspect of ESD. There was mutual respect for all members of the community, with many opportunities for older children to support younger children. Positive attitudes and values towards others were fostered, and older children were beginning to recognise responsibilities accompany rights, highlighted by the Buddies, School Council and Pupil Forum. The rights and responsibilities of all in the community to participate in decision making were clearly evident, with many initiatives to facilitate this. Adults and children alike were concerned with the management and cleanliness of local, natural and built environments. Again there were some proactive initiatives, such as planting the daffodil maze, as well as maintenance initiatives. Community cohesion was promoted through initiatives such as the Pupil Forum.

Adults expressed an ongoing need for training in ESD. Initiatives to increase involvement of families had begun. It was felt important to increase these initiatives, recognising the pivotal role of parents and primary carers.

2. Sustainable change

The paper recycling and reducing initiatives focussed most strongly. There were clear efforts to reduce electricity costs by switching off lights, computers and interactive white boards. Likewise children and adults reported efforts to ensure taps were turned off. Vegetable waste was composted and used in gardening projects which the youngest children engaged in. There was some evidence that children were beginning to distinguish between wasteful and sustainable products, for example the use of rechargeable batteries or purchase of mechanical toys as opposed to battery driven toys. Children and adults engaged in some initiatives to reduce pollutants associated with car travel by walking, cycling, using skateboards or scooters to come to school. The youngest children saw such initiatives as having personal relevance to health and fitness, whereas older children more readily related the effects of their behaviours on others.

Overall, the potential to develop this aspect of ESD when housed at the new site was highly regarded by both children and adults. The visible sign of sustainability in the wind turbine on the new site was frequently mentioned. Children, via the Eco Squad, assemblies and the Children's Council and adults felt consulted in decision making regarding choices of sustainable materials for furnishings in the new school. This was achieved via staff meetings, the school website and school/home communications. It was felt more could be done to extend the recycling initiatives, to card and plastics and to promoting locally produced foods. The focus on reducing could also be highlighted further to bring it in line with levels of awareness regarding recycling and re-using.

3. Needs and rights for future generations

Children and adults felt there were opportunities to express their views, knew that these would be considered and that they would be informed of the outcome. Initiatives such as the Pupil Forum and Eco Squad provided models of the democratic process. At a local level children were beginning to understand that their actions might harm or improve the environment. They applied their local strategies and responses to more global issues. One example of this was the suggestion to send water to Africa, based upon the media image of bottled water being distributed in Sudan. Amongst the adults there was some sense of irritation at the speed of change and monitoring the use of resources on site. This was offset by the prospect of the move to the new site where it was anticipated self monitoring would be easier. Children were very clear about the effects on future generations of cutting down trees, both in terms of the air quality and supporting bird and animal life.

4. Interdependence

Cross curricular planning facilitated opportunities for children to develop critical thinking skills. The youngest children were encouraged to question and increasingly consider other people's viewpoints. Older children developed reasoning skills through use of texts and discourse.

Older children appreciated that climate change was impacting on natural cycles and ecological systems, for example that the polar bears were losing their homes because of melting ice. They could begin to suggest what was causing climate change but this tended to be in terms of broad generalisations such as 'pollution'. The global dimensions of interdependence tend to be construed as the minority world supporting the majority world, for example sending clothes and toys we do not want to Africa. There were no references to any reciprocal role, for example producing food for export.

It was felt that global links could be extended through internet exchanges with other schools. Critical and creative thinking might address ways of preventing loss of resources, as opposed to reacting to losses and reductions.

5. Diversity

Adults particularly readily confirmed the positive regard for diversity within the school community. Children from Year R utilised school grounds for observation of varieties of animals, insects and plant life, which instilled a respect for the natural environment. This remained with the children throughout as they recalled the time spent in Year R. Assemblies, outside visits both locally and abroad were utilised to celebrate diversity of cultures, nations and faiths. All adults responsible for teaching and learning were able to provide several illustrations of the way this key concept is met. Because the youngest children readily access this, it acts as a springboard for later critical reflection and appreciation of individual differences. It was reported that any racial incidents and bullying were dealt with promptly and effectively.

6. Uncertainty and precaution

The uncertainty of what opportunities the new site would afford played an important part in this key concept. The forthcoming changes precipitated a widening participation in decision making. Decisions had to be made which had immediate relevance, for example the use of sustainable materials balanced against budget constraints. Adults and children participated in making informed decisions, weighing the arguments. Arenas such as the Pupil Forum introduce children to an appreciation of adopting and managing a democratic process. Within year groups strategies which foster discourse such as 'talking partners', promote discussion and the realisation that other people may do things in different ways. The Suggestion Box acts as a vehicle for expressing ideas, whereas the response may champion caution. One example shows that the children were keen that old style school uniforms should be reused in Africa, but had not weighed the cost of transportation in economic or environmental terms. Adults would support them in thinking creatively about alternatives.

7. Quality of life, equity and justice

There were many initiatives cited which involved the children in improving the quality of life both for themselves in school and for others. Some of these were child initiated (Blue Peter Shoebiz Appeal), and some were adult initiated, but the aim was to individually and collectively make a difference. Children and adults could identify issues of litter which originated not from the school community, but from the local community. Whilst they were looking forward to a more secure site, they could also make suggestions for the reduction of litter and the cleanliness of the site for the benefit of the learning community. There was a sense that it was unfair that they looked after the site and others did not respect it in the same way.

Conclusion

The learning community has marked a path through the curriculum map for ESD, sometimes stopping to reflect, sometimes scurrying through. On occasions unexpected opportunities have presented themselves and been grasped with both hands. On other occasions potential barriers have been circumvented and the path rejoined. The path is not linear, but each time it is

visited, and re-visited it becomes more familiar and experiences more meaningful. The map is the tool, but it is the participants in the learning community who construct the knowledge, perceptions, understanding and attitudes towards education for sustainable development which will have an impact, within the school and community, for future generations.

The establishment of the Howe Dell School learning community on sustainable development can act as an example to other schools regarding means of addressing the ESD curriculum and can act as a benchmark on what can be achieved in a school. Much of the change had already occurred and been embedded in practice before the school actually moved premises, so there is little reason why the findings of this exploration should not be transferable to other institutions.”