



# ENOUGH, FOR ALL, FOREVER: THE QUEST FOR A MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

**ENOUGH, FOR ALL, FOREVER.** These simple concepts provide a starting definition for the complexity of sustainable development and help frame the global search for solutions to the social, economic, and environmental issues that threaten the planet.

Last year, in the face of the overwhelming and negative implications of the 'ecological footprint', a Grade 4 girl in St. Mary's School in Hyderabad, India came up with the positive antidote of the 'ecological handprint' as a symbol of our efforts to reduce our 'footprint'. Now her handprint has spread not only across India but all around the world, and people are voluntarily contributing not only their hands but also their hearts and minds as their 'ecological handprints for change'.

Today, educators – including ministers of education, superintendents, classroom teachers, support staff, and students themselves – are aware of the sustainability challenges that will face our graduates. The world's current students will soon struggle to provide food, shelter, and other basic necessities for roughly 50 percent more people on the planet. The quest for these solutions will present a number of new challenges. Tomorrow's citizens will need to provide for these three billion additional citizens while using less water, less arable land, and with access to fewer ocean resources. In addition, they will need to discover how to increase our energy supply at least ten-fold while removing carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. These issues mainly address the population perspective. The need to solve the other environmental, economic, and social problems inherent in the concept of sustainability will prove equally challenging.

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**EN BREF** « Assez », « universalité », « permanent » : ces concepts contribuent à encadrer la recherche mondiale de solutions aux problèmes sociaux, économiques et environnementaux menaçant la planète. L'éducation en vue du développement durable (EDD) correspond à la contribution que peuvent apporter les systèmes éducatifs. Ses principaux objectifs – reconnus par les Nations unies – sont la qualité de l'éducation pour tous, la réorientation des systèmes actuels d'éducation en fonction de la durabilité, la sensibilisation du public et la formation. Comme la durabilité est encore une aspiration, personne ne possède les réponses requises pour dispenser honnêtement une « formation » conventionnelle. L'approche actuelle de développement professionnel consiste donc à présenter le concept de la durabilité, la nécessité d'agir et les défis inhérents de cette entreprise. Une fois que ces trois éléments sont établis, nous pouvons reconnaître les capacités et les forces existantes de nos systèmes et en tirer parti. L'espoir existe vraiment – ainsi qu'un rôle crucial pour l'éducation dans cette quête mondiale.

## A GLOBAL RESPONSE

These challenges have led educators to look once more at the standing question that has guided them for years: "What should our students know, be able to do, and value enough to act upon when they graduate?" Given the unsustainable world bequeathed to them, we need to rethink the necessary knowledge, skills, and values they will need not only to cope, but hopefully to flourish. Some skills are timeless, but others still need to be envisioned.

Recognizing this responsibility, education systems around the world are reacting. In 2003, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly officially recognized education, public awareness, and training for a special UN Decade to be addressed by all UN Agencies, member nations, and civil society. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD, 2005-2014) are now well underway. Although much was already happening in "random acts of education for sustainable development," the importance of ESD is now reaching the leaders of the world's education community, and a more concerted effort is emerging.

In April, 2009 a worldwide meeting of invited politicians and ESD experts was held in Bonn, Germany. Co-hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which co-ordinates the UNDESD, and the German Government, the meeting was attended by representatives of over 150 countries, including one third of the world's ministers of education. They gathered to examine ESD accomplishments to date, establish visions and goals for the next half of the decade, and plan national and regional strategies to build upon these early 'random acts'.

A major outcome was acceptance of the Bonn Declaration calling for a wide range of strategic action. The excerpts below shed light on the perceived relevance of ESD.

Despite unprecedented economic growth in the 20th century, persistent poverty and inequality still affect too many people, especially those who are most vulnerable. Conflicts continue to draw attention to the need for building a culture of peace. The global financial and economic crises highlights the risks of unsustainable economic development models and practices based on short-term gains. The food crisis and world hunger are an increasingly serious issue. Unsustainable production and consumption patterns are creating ecological impacts that compromise the options of current and future generations and the sustainability of life on Earth, as climate change is showing.

...Through education and lifelong learning we can achieve lifestyles based on economic and social justice, food security, ecological integrity, sustainable livelihoods, respect for all life

forms and strong values that foster social cohesion, democracy and collective action. Gender equality, with special reference to the participation of women and girl children in education, is critical for enabling development and sustainability. Education for sustainable development is immediately necessary for securing sustainable life chances, aspirations and futures for young people.<sup>1</sup>

This unanimously accepted Declaration calls on ministries, schools, faculties of education, and other stakeholders to take action. We can expect the Declaration to be considered in Canada in 2010. (The full text can be found at [www.esd-world-conference-2009.org](http://www.esd-world-conference-2009.org))

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## IT IS THE MOST EDUCATED NATIONS THAT LEAVE THE DEEPEST

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**ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTS UPON THE PLANET. CURRENTLY, SCHOOLING WITHIN THE OECD COUNTRIES, INCLUDING CANADA, IS PRIMARILY AIMED AT FACILITATING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.**

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## EDUCATING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Most simply described, ESD is the contribution that the world's education, public awareness, and training systems can make to society's quest for a more sustainable future. It is a simple concept. In the context of formal education, ESD is the contribution that can be made by the school jurisdiction in its entirety, preschool to tertiary, and even lifelong learning. It should not be seen as yet another issue tacked onto an overcrowded curriculum, to be delivered by teachers who are neither informed nor prepared by their boards and who lack the curricular resources and support staffs. Instead, the scope of ESD embodies the very purpose of education itself. ESD is not the fifth or tenth objective in a board's strategic plan but rather the outcome of its implementation.

The UNDESD international implementation scheme recognizes four main thrusts of ESD, which are not limited to formal educational systems.

The first thrust is the need to provide a **quality education for all**. In some countries this means addressing the 90,000,000 children, aged 6 to 11, who have no access to schooling. In countries such as Canada, this thrust is more about improving quality and addressing hard-to-serve students, dropouts, and those who graduate too 'under-educated' for decent work. Providing a quality education is a



core objective of both public education and ESD.

The second thrust is **reorienting our existing education systems**. It is the most educated nations that leave the deepest ecological footprints upon the planet. Currently, schooling within the OECD countries, including Canada, is primarily aimed at facilitating economic development in general and perceived as a key instrument in the race for national competitiveness. The OECD ministers – as well as educators throughout the developing countries – now realize we must plan for development that is more purposeful and sustainable. However, this reorientation process is not clear, and our Canadian education systems will collectively need to learn their way forward. Fortunately, the first steps in this process began this year under the leadership of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). Each province has appointed a representative to create frameworks for separate yet collaborative reorienting processes.

The third thrust of ESD is the need to build **public awareness and understanding** of sustainable development. This is largely the role of governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, and the private sector. A misinformed or under-educated public is a serious impediment in a nation's plan to react in a timely fashion. Schools and universities can play a part through student activism, early childhood/parenting programs, and by providing easy access to lifelong learning.

The fourth thrust is **training**. Whenever we do learn to do things that will contribute to sustainability, we must pass the knowledge, technique, or methodology on. Benefits from programs that increase the quality of education programs or designs for more energy efficient ways to run our plants and facilities add up quickly. In our schools, it is the professional development of teachers and support staff alike that will make the difference. The savings for our school and university systems to be gained by training custodial and purchasing personnel can be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. In addition, by actually practicing sustainability we end up modeling the right thing for the economy, the environment, the community, and most importantly, our students.

**SUSTAINABILITY IS STILL A DIRECTION, AN  
ASPIRATION. NO ONE HAS THE ANSWERS WE NEED  
TO HONESTLY PROVIDE TRADITIONAL 'TRAINING'.**

**STRENGTHS MODEL**

Reorienting our school systems is a huge task but it is also part of the timeless quest for excellence that is inherent in education. The concept of pursuing sustainability is simply bringing a clearer purpose and direction to our effort.

To date, most pedagogical reorienting and professional development includes learning new skills. There are several reasons that this traditional approach often proves to be impractical. The first is the cost of retraining the world's 60,000,000 teachers. Even a half-day workshop is beyond our financial capability. Second, where would we find the skilled presenters to do this training for each subject and professional skill set in the support staff? But an even more basic impediment to the traditional professional development approach is our need to honour the fact that we cannot yet envision a truly sustainable world. Sustainability is still a direction, an aspiration. No one has the answers we need to honestly provide traditional 'training'.

The current approach to ESD professional development, therefore, is to present the concept of sustainability, the need for action, and the challenges inherent in pursuing it. Once these three are established, we then acknowledge the existing capability within our system. We must begin the



**on my terms**

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Jelena Magliaro (University of Windsor)  
PhD student in Educational Studies, and recipient of a three-year SSHRC Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship

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process by engaging staff through their existing strengths. Education leaders, teachers, and support staffs are asked to identify how they can each contribute with their current expertise to begin the reorientation process. In essence, this strengths model infers that no single discipline or department can own or deliver sustainability; yet every discipline, department, and employee can contribute to the process. A systemic coordination effort is crucial. Existing fiscal resources such as building maintenance and curriculum renewal need to be reoriented and a priority for sustainability established. This emerging process has proven possible worldwide.

#### A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE

In the first ten years of ESD (1992-2002) there were at least a dozen major obstacles to its development, both globally and within Canada, including a lack of awareness that formal education was expected to play a major role in national sustainability planning, the lack of a mandate for structuring ESD within the formal education systems, and a failure to link ESD to ongoing education reform.

This situation has changed dramatically. There is now a clear ESD mandate from most ministries of education, parents, students, both the public and private sectors, and other stakeholders. Exemplary examples abound from those earlier pioneering teachers who have shouldered the load to date. School jurisdictions are making massive changes to curriculum, policy, and practices. Buildings are being renovated and new schools and campus buildings are trying to include the highest energy and natural lighting standards.

Transportation practices are being reviewed to address carbon footprints.

There is a growing understanding of the need for ESD and how it can be synergetic to many of the existing strategic plans. Seen initially as an insurmountable task that would require massive funding, ESD is now simply seen as a revision of the purpose of education. To this end, Donella Meadows, as cited in *The ESD Toolkit*, gives us hope and guidance:

“(T)he most effective way you can intervene in a system is to shift its goals, you don’t need money, or even new laws if you can just change the goals of the feedback loops. Then all the existing people, machinery, money and laws will start serving new functions, falling into new configurations, behaving in new ways and producing new results.”<sup>2</sup>

We are now seeing how we can both improve educational outcomes and do ‘the right thing’ by taking such simple steps as using the positive cash flow from retrofitting infrastructure, engaging sustainable purchasing policies, and using the strengths model to reorient curriculum and other practices.

Building upon initial success is underway across Canada. We are rediscovering environmental and outdoor education and First Nations initiatives. Progress continues with eco-schools. The Aboriginal Learning Knowledge Centre has created a First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model. We are addressing social initiatives such as character development, civics, racism, and equity. The early national supporters of ESD such as the McConnell Foundation, Evergreen, and Learning for a Sustainable Future continue to



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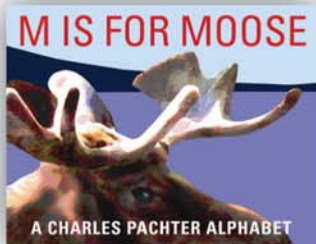
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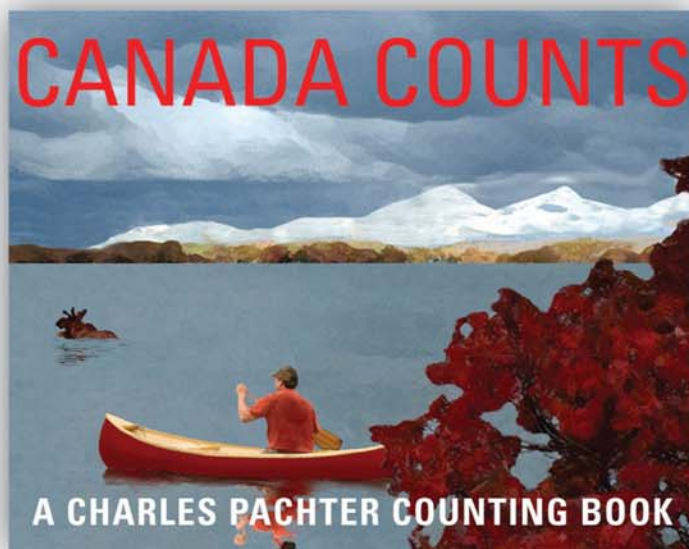
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facilitate the reorienting of education programs and curricula. Thanks to support from Environment Canada and others in the NGO world, we now have multi-sectoral ESD working groups at the provincial level. Private sector leaders, often working in synergy with various provincial and federal ministries and NGOs, have created many innovative ESD pilot projects such as 'ESD Canada'. Faculties of Education are exploring working in collaboration to deliver in-service and new teachers with ESD capabilities.

However, for whole-scale, systemic change, it is crucial to engage senior leaders in school divisions, teacher education faculties, and ministries of education in concerted action. EcoSchools can modify how things are taught and change the practices within a school setting, but the big reorientation requires the involvement of the senior education system leaders. What is constructed, mandated, financed, taught, examined, and reported upon is a purview beyond the students and teachers in any one school. To accomplish this senior leader engagement, York University, in partnership with Learning for a Sustainable Future, the Manitoba Ministry of Education, Citizenship and Youth, and the UNESCO Chair in Reorienting Teacher Education for Sustainability (with the financial assistance of Environment Canada and Suncor) established The Sustainability and Education Academy (SEdA). This is the first ongoing program in the world aimed at assisting senior education leaders to learn, through shared experience, how to effect the deep systemic changes needed to truly realize the massive contribution of formal education.

### A NOBLE MISSION

At Bonn, a minister of education from Asia requested that the concept of nobility be included in the Declaration. As Chair of the Declaration's writing team, I pursued the point with him. I learned that he was trying to imply that teaching to create a more sustainable future was somehow more 'noble' than teaching to simply improve test scores or transfer an isolated skill or fact. He saw pursuing the goal of sustainability as a noble act. He also suggested we might not only ask what education could contribute to a more sustainable future but also what the pursuit of a more sustainable future could contribute to renewing the nobility and dignity of public education and those who labour on its behalf. There is indeed hope – and a crucial role for education in this global quest for 'enough, for all, forever'. |

CHARLES HOPKINS is the UNESCO Chair at York University where he coordinates a network of teacher education institutions from 55 countries collaboratively working on the reorientation of elementary and secondary teacher education to address sustainable development. He is an ESD advisor to UNESCO and The UN University.

### Notes

- 1 Bonn Declaration, UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development. Available online <http://www.esd-world-conference-2009.org/en/whats-new/news-detail/item/bonn-declaration-now-available-in-8-languages.html>
- 2 Donella Meadows, *The Global Citizen* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1991), 250 as cited in R. McKeown with C. Hopkins, R. Rizzi, and M. Chrystalbridge, *The Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit* (Knoxville: Waste Management and Resources Center, 2002), 250. Available online <http://www.esdtoolkit.org>