

## The Past, Present and Future of ESD in The United States and Canada

米国とカナダにおける ESD の過去、現在、そして未来

Charles HOPKINS\*

### 要旨

カナダと米国の間には、経済、文化および環境面において多くの結びつきがあるが、ESD に関しては大きな違いがある。持続可能な開発それ自体がどのように認識され受容されているかさえ、両国では全く異なっている。まず、米国で一般的に用いられている用語は“Education for sustainable development” (ESD) ではなく、持続可能性のための教育“Education for sustainability” (EfS) である。本論では、最初にそれぞれの国で持続可能な開発がどのように始まったかを説明し、持続可能な開発の社会的影響への対応における両国の積極性の違いを論じ、その後に ESD の始まりを説明する。1992 年には両国とも強力な環境教育 (EE) プログラムを持っていたが、ESD 独自の役割についてはカナダのほうが若干より積極的に全国レベルで取り入れていた。米国での ESD はその黎明期に EE との強い連携を維持していたように思われるが、カナダでは、定型教育 (Formal education)、不定型教育 (Nonformal education)、非定型教育 (Informal education) のすべてのシステムを包括し、それらのシステムの目的を開発から持続可能な開発に書き換えるものとしての ESD のあり方がより良く受容されていた。本論は、ESD を定型的な K-12 教育に限らず、高等教育や企業内訓練などその他の公共啓発制度の重要な役割について論じる。国連 ESD の 10 年が始まった事は、どちらの国においても多大な影響を及ぼした。カナダでは ESD についての議論が特に定型教育においてより高度な透明性を保って行われ、一方で米国でも進歩があった。本論は、10 年間の事業が終了した後、両国において ESD がどのように進歩しうるかを展望する。

### Abstract

Although Canada and the USA have many economic, cultural and environmental ties there are some major differences when it comes to education for sustainable development (ESD). Even the perception and acceptance of sustainable development itself is quite different in the two countries. To begin with, the common term in the USA is often not education for sustainable development (ESD) but rather education for sustainability (EfS). The paper deals with the early beginnings of sustainable development in each country and discusses the differing degrees of willingness of each country to address the social implications of sustainable development before describing the emergence of ESD. While both countries had strong environmental education (EE) programs in 1992, Canada was slightly more embracing of a separate role for ESD at the national level. The early years of ESD in the USA seemed to continue with a strong affiliation with EE while in Canada the vision of ESD as embracing all of the formal, non-formal

\* UNESCO Chair, York University, Toronto, Canada

and informal education systems and re-purposing these systems from development to sustainable development was more acceptable. The paper is not limiting ESD to formal K-12 education and discusses the crucial roles of higher education, public awareness programs and corporate training. The arrival of the UN Decade of ESD had a great impact in both countries. While ESD discussions in Canada have achieved higher visibility, especially in formal education senior leaders, the USA has made also made significant progress. The paper looks at the way forward in the post- Decade era at how ESD may evolve in these two countries.

## **1. Prologue: Part 1-Sustainable Development (SD)**

Although the two countries have many economic, cultural and environmental ties there are some major differences when it comes to education for sustainable development (ESD). Even the perception and acceptance of sustainable development itself is quite different in the two countries. As a result, the acceptance and implementation of both SD and ESD are unique in some ways. To begin with, the common term in the USA is often not education for sustainable development (ESD) but rather education for sustainability (EfS). However, as the paper is to address ESD, I will continue to refer to both ESD and EfS as ESD throughout.

The United States and Canada have over 63 formal educational jurisdictions plus numerous private education schools, colleges, and universities all of which are involved in ESD to some extent. In addition, ESD includes the activities of the nongovernmental organizations, their federal/state governments, and the plethora of private/public sector training programs. Hence, only limited examples of legislation, policies, and programs related to ESD can be included in this brief paper and it is not intended to be inclusive of all the activity and programs concerned with ESD in the USA and Canada. Selected examples are provided to give an overview of the numerous, varied, and high-quality activities focused on ESD in parts of Canada and USA. The exemplars have been chosen on the basis of geographic representation, client groups, types of initiatives, and to illustrate the widespread nature of the involvement in ESD.

### **The Acceptance of Sustainable Development in Canada and the USA**

Some of the difference of the acceptance of sustainable development can be accounted for in the cultural foundations of the two countries. Canada traditionally has a much greater acceptance of government and social programs. Canada also has a history of acceptance of United Nations policy and programs amongst the general population. Contrastingly, American citizens are generally sceptical of all governments and the UN is sometimes seen as a “world” government trying to impose global policies upon them. Hence, when the 1992 Earth Summit created the global work programme entitled Agenda 21, there was concern and suspicion amongst both US business and private citizenry. Even the term sustainable development that originally seemed from the Conference title, *The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)*, to aim for a reconciling between economic and environmental issues i.e. be-

came suspect when Agenda 21, emerged embracing social aspects as well. At the federal level under the Bush presidency the term Smart Growth was used as the USA version of sustainable development as it only dealt with the two original concerns of environment and economy. Eventually the term “sustainability” replaced sustainable development as a suitable terminology in government circles. This slight change of wording of using sustainability avoided the use of the term “sustainable development” and the implied inclusion of social programs.

This is a simplistic explanation as other factors such as the reluctance of environmentalists in much of the developed world to embrace “development” of any kind. In the early days of ESD, its conceptualization and progress was largely under the influence of environmental educators and as a result, their interpretations of ESD as primarily EE had an impact on the terminology.

Canada on the other hand was firmly behind the Rio process. The Chair for UNCED was a Canadian, Maurice Strong, and the Canadian government with its many existing social programs such as universal health care had little problem with embracing the “social” sphere within sustainable development. Both sustainable development and sustainability was and is used in Canada. Although many Canadian environmentalists disliked the word, “development”, within the Canadian ESD community the UNESCO/international terminology of ESD is used.

### **The Early Days of Sustainable Development in Canada and the USA**

Once the UN accepted the Brundtland Commission Report, *Our Common Future*, and endorsed sustainable development as the new development paradigm, Canada moved to a mode of public consultation and sought advice from many sectors on how best to accommodate the shift. The concept of Roundtables was introduced by the Conservative government and used widely to engage citizens in inter-sectoral discussions on future growth and development. At both provincial and federal levels semi-permanent roundtables were established. The Federal Roundtable was called the National Roundtable on Environment and the Economy. From the beginning, the National Round Table was meant to be different. In 1988, the NRT was established to bring “*leadership in the new way we must think of the relationship between the environment and the economy and the new way we must act.*”<sup>1)</sup> In 1993, The Canadian Parliament legislated a new mandate setting out in statute the NRT’s uniquely independent, national policy advisory role on sustainable development and for more than twenty years under a variety of governments, the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy has been at the forefront of some of the most important debates on how to sustain Canada’s prosperity and future. However as of 2012, a new Conservative government abolished the NRT.

A second major influence on both the acceptance and implementation of sustainable development in Canada was the early appointment of a powerful Commissioner of Sustainable Development to oversee all departments within the Federal Government requiring them to address the implications for their policy and practice on sustainable development. Many provinces and territories followed the lead and have

appointed similar oversight.<sup>2)</sup>

While the concept of sustainability was being reasonably well endorsed in Canada there was a different mood in the USA. The worldwide recession that began in the early 1990s was top of mind. President-elect Clinton made his now famous comment regarding sustainability concerns by saying in his election campaigns, “it’s the economy stupid” and a tension between either focusing on the economy or the environment became widely embedded in the minds of the American public. Counter sustainable development initiatives, financially resourced by the energy and tobacco sector, isolated the environmentalists and social activists in the USA. While helped by some federal agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Science Foundation (NSF), sustainable development at the state and city level slowly progressed.<sup>3)</sup>

Federally in the USA, in 1993 President Clinton convened the Presidents Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD) in response to UNCED and Agenda 21. The Presidents Council included representatives from government industry and four non-profit/non-government organizations. The PCSD had no authority to make laws but was quite successful in producing a consensus-based national vision and strategy for sustainability before it was disbanded in 1999.<sup>4)</sup>

Some major sustainability achievements were accomplished by the private sector in the form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs and in the protection of water by governments but issues addressing social aspects of sustainability were largely neglected. For instance, President Clinton’s attempt on health care reform was defeated. Little success was made on other social fronts such as poverty, drug-abuse or racism.

### **Local Approaches to Sustainable Development**

In both Canada and the USA, sustainability issues were addressed more successfully at the city or regional level. While the term “Local Agenda 21” was not endorsed in either country as it was in Europe, there was progress made by mayors and local councils to address social, economic and environmental issues in a synergistic manner. Fortunately this progress has accelerated significantly as citizens see this approach as sustainable community development with direct local impact and not as a global strategy being imposed by a distant governing body.

## **2. Prologue: Part 2-ESD in the Early Years**

In both Canada and the United States formal education is largely under state or provincial control. The result is that ESD was implemented, if at all, in a very disjointed fashion. While federal help was sometimes available it was usually from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the USA or Environment Canada (EC) in Canada. Both these institutions had a strong environmental mandate and hence their funding influence on early ESD projects was predominantly of an environmental nature. Their

presence combined with the influence of the major environmental NGOs reinforced the concept within formal education that ESD was largely environmental sustainability. The absence of economic or social ministries or other NGOs speaking in support of ESD helped to reinforce the perception of ESD as being synonymous or closely aligned with environmental education. As a result, before the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) was declared, ESD was not initially directly engaged with the core disciplines of formal education but seen by many as a close relative of environmental education, global education and/or development education etc. Even those engaged directly in social issues that were a direct threat to a sustainable future such as racism, poverty or homelessness did not feel a part of ESD. School systems usually taught **ABOUT** sustainable development at times but not **FOR** sustainable development.

In the USA in 1994, the PCSD sponsored the National Forum on Partnerships Supporting Education about the Environment. The intent of the consultation process was to broaden the concept of “education” to include sustainable development. This forum and the consultation process resulted in the report entitled *Education for Sustainability: an Agenda for Action*. In this seminal document, EfS was defined as:

“...a lifelong learning process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy, and commitment to engage in responsible individual and cooperative actions”.<sup>5)</sup>

NGOs often inserted the most direct influence on EfS efforts in the United States by creating and implementing EfS curricula, disseminating academic standards, and facilitating the adoption of EfS practices. One NGO prominent in this regard was the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) who welcomed the synergy and formed an ESD Commission within the organization. This allowed ESD to have its own program strand. As early as 1996 the NAAEE conference in California had this author as a keynote speaker to clarify ESD. Slowly EfS has developed in the USA, especially within the private school systems such as the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and in Higher Education guided by The Association for the Advancement Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). Thanks to the work of these and other associations, EfS is accepted and is gaining in credibility. However, to date the focus on school performance and testing hurts ESD progress.

Recently there have been signs that the federal government once again wishes to take a leadership role in EFS. At the UNESCO World Conference in Bonn in 2009 the US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan sent a letter affirming the support of the USA towards ESD. Also following Secretary Duncan’s later admission that the Department of Education had fallen short of the goals established in the PCSD’s 1996 report, Duncan in 2010 announced that several new initiatives would be launched such as green job training in vocational education programs. He later reaffirmed this at the National Green Schools Conference in Boulder Colorado in 2011.

As sustainable development was being conceptualized in the mid 1980's, the needs of Canadian society were changing, especially in the large cities. There, large-scale immigration was shifting from Europe to Asia, Africa, and Latin America. There was also a great influx of refugee migrants from war-torn areas such as Chile, Angola, Vietnam and Cambodia. This shift called upon both formal and non-formal education to change to address the new social, economic and in some cases urban ecological issues. As a result a host of "adjectival educations" were created. "Adjectival" refers to the need to add a descriptor to the word education to signify the special focus. Some examples of adjectival educations are environmental education, anti-racist education, equity education, global education etc. There were over 100 such adjectival educations in the province of Ontario where I was a curriculum superintendent.

As it was in the USA it was into this mix of adjectival educations that ESD arrived in 1992. The arrival was further problematized by a deepening economic recession that forced many school systems to make cuts to their existing budgets at a time when there arose a need for a very costly expansion of their information technology (IT) systems. Thus, ESD being poorly understood by school leaders, needing considerable teacher professional development and occurring at the same time as IT expansion, ESD was sidelined as a subset of their EE program.

Sustainable development itself at the UN level was usually given to the Ministries of Environment. This link to ministries of environment, EPA and EC, further projected the perception of ESD as a direct offshoot of environmental education making it difficult to not only engage the core subject areas in ministries of education but also to widen the possibility of a coalition of adjectival educations to include social and economic sustainability issues. Often these social and economic issues were being addressed but not in the name of ESD. This issue of the perception of what ESD is, and is not, still exists in both countries. North American NGOs and professional development agencies such as the (NAAEE) and the Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication (EECOM) still have no collaborative ties to other adjectival organizations to facilitate ESD.

In Canada one ESD NGO was established in anticipation of Rio. Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF), is a non-profit organization created to integrate ESD into the curriculum at all grade levels in Canada. LSF was founded by a group of youth, educators, business leaders, and government and community members in 1991 in anticipation of the need for ESD.

### **3. Post UNDESD**

With the arrival of the UNDESD new attempts were made to link ESD to the formal education systems. The Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCU) played an active role in introducing the concept of ESD to its members at their annual conference in 2005 and has included ESD in their programs each year of the Decade. The CCU has also facilitated the inclusion of ESD within the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education (CCME). This was not the case in the USA.

Once formal education systems began exploring the concept of ESD for the UNDESD and understood the first of the four thrusts of ESD as *the access to and retention in a quality education*, ministries saw their responsibility as much wider than EE. CCME has identified ESD as one of their priorities and established an interprovincial working group to develop an ESD framework to assist the provinces and territories to develop their own ESD program.

One of their first goals of ESD in Canada and the USA is to establish the current state of implementation. Some attempts are emerging to rectify this isolation of approaches to sustainability issues. Human values education, for instance, is one such overarching concept underlying formal education in Canada. Values, one of the key components of sustainable development, are being addressed through detailed curriculum documents and extensive resources. In the *Foundation Document for the Development of the Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies Kindergarten to Grade 12* ...the role of social studies is defined in part as “to help students...to become active and responsible citizens, engaged in the practice of democratic ideals.” Specific goals emphasize that students must understand their rights and responsibilities in order to participate fully in society, value the diversity, respect the dignity, and support the equality of all human beings, and develop a sense of social compassion, fairness, and justice. The principles and goals of the *Framework* were used as the basis of curriculum development, teacher training, and the provision of resources and tools specific to student needs at different levels in several provinces and territories across Canada.<sup>6)</sup>

To address ESD in Canada more specifically, a partnership between Environment Canada, the Province of Manitoba, and LSF, eight Provincial/Territorial Education for Sustainable Development Working Groups have been established across Canada. Called ESD Canada, their collective purpose is to foster a culture of ESD by engaging leaders from provincial and territorial ministries, the federal government, the formal, non-formal, and informal education sectors, business, and community organizations in discussions and actions to advance ESD. To date, the ESD Working Groups have been active in sponsoring public forums, providing input to provincial curriculum reviews, developing resources, and creating web sites.<sup>7)</sup> The long-term objectives of the ESD Working Groups include:

- Integration of ESD into formal, non-formal, and informal education
- Coordinate implementation of ESD activities (i.e. curriculum, policies, research, teacher training, and facilities management)
- Establishment of strategic collaborations between governments, education sector leaders, businesses, and non-government organizations to increase their cohesion and leverage in creating a culture of ESD
- Coordination of stakeholders from formal, non-formal, and informal education sectors for policy input, debate, exchange, and planning to improve delivery of ESD activities

### ***Integrating ESD Throughout the Elementary and Secondary Curriculum***

If one were to classify the various approaches to ESD found in K-12 schools in the two countries the

following categories would serve reasonably well.

- 1/ the school **ignores** the need
- 2/ there is either a **club** or a project led by a few students and a teacher.
- 3/ there is a school-wide **project or focus** on energy or recycling or fund raising for the 3<sup>rd</sup> world.
- 4/ Sustainability and global issues are mentioned within in a number of **core subjects** such as science, social studies, civics and geography. This is seen as teaching **about** sustainability.
- 5/ A **whole-school** approach leading to certification such as a “Green school”, “Eco-school” “safe school” or an “anti-racist/anti-bullying school”. This is seen as teaching **for** sustainability.
- 6/ A **whole-school system** approach to education for sustainability. As many issues such as what gets taught, what is evaluated and reported upon and policy decisions ranging from purchasing to promotion are system-wide decisions ESD must move beyond the whole-school approach.
- 7/ A **whole community** approach. Educators do not own the education system. It is a service owned by the entire community. With the beginning of the UNDESD the United Nations University developed such a community/regional ESD experiment to research the possibility of schools and indeed all the formal and non-formal education actors in a region could work collaboratively to build more sustainable regions. This project called Regional Centres of Expertise in ESD (RCE) has grown from 7 entities in 2005 to over 120 worldwide in 2012. (There are currently seven RCEs in Canada and two in the USA).

#### 4. Postsecondary Education

Education for sustainable development is included in university and college programs across both countries. The databases of the university and colleges list hundreds of degree, diploma, and certificate programs under the heading of Environmental Science. Numerous other programs can be found under other search terms related to sustainable development as courses are found in numerous faculties, including science, education, social sciences, political sciences, arts, environment, and architecture. Community colleges in the two countries also offer hundreds of certificate and diploma programs related to sustainability issues.

#### 5. Teacher education

While isolated sustainability issues such as quality education or gender equity have been addressed at faculties of education and teacher education institutions (TEIs) for decades in both countries the first identified UNESCO Chair in ESD was established at York University in Toronto, Canada in 1999. The task was to develop global guidelines for UNESCO on reorienting teacher education globally to address ESD. Working with 35 other institutions in as many countries this project was completed in 2005. Now the Chair leads a network of hundreds of TEIs in 74 countries trying to bring about this reorientation process.

In Canada a national network of interested TEIs was formed called PANCANnet in 1999. It has raised the profile of ESD in Canada by embracing such issues as aboriginal education, equity, and gender. As well, the foundation courses in pedagogy and delivering ESD through the core disciplines are explored. A similar network of TEIs was begun in the USA in 2010.

While all TEIs are concerned with quality education initiatives, few see these as related to ESD. Many have programs on equity, global citizenship and environmental education but again these are not contextually linked to ESD in most cases. A few TEIs have ESD courses at the undergraduate level and even others have ESD Degree or Certificate programs at the graduate level. A network of all the TEIs in Manitoba, Canada where ESD is a priority goal of the provincial education system is the best example of ESD in TEIs.

Much more needs to be done. However there is no funding for these teacher education networks in either country. Little funding is available for research and progress relies solely on volunteerism and the support of the individual institution.

## **6. Public Awareness**

Public awareness and understanding is the third thrust of ESD. Sustainability issues are ever increasing in public attention through news broadcasts on such related issues as climate change, or the collapse of natural resources such as the cod and salmon fisheries. Unsustainable mining and energy production practices are rising in the attention of the broader population. Television documentaries and even popular movies now such as Avatar have subtle sustainability themes including social justice embedded within them.

This thrust of building public awareness and understanding is hard to capture as it is embedded in community learning and development. The following is an excerpt from the Canadian Report on ESD to UNESCO in 2010.<sup>8)</sup> The situation is very similar in the USA.

### ***Active Community Learning***

1. Not-for-profit, nongovernmental, and civil society organizations lead much of the public and community based activity linked to sustainable development. There is always an education component to these initiatives – whether through purposeful education with children, youth, and adults or less formal learning through public awareness campaigns and project involvement.

Not all public awareness programs regarding sustainable development are helpful. The term is often misused or misrepresented just as the term “green” is often exaggerated. This leads to a simplification of the concept and eventual public mistrust. “Clean coal” is one example of this misuse as little of the greenhouse gas emitted when coal is burned is ever captured and stored.

However, the increasing availability of information, be it product information, the plight of indigenous

people, or understanding poverty alleviation policy, leads to a more knowledgeable and understanding citizenry and achieving the third thrust of ESD.

## **7. Training - public and private sectors**

The fourth thrust of ESD is training. In both countries a great deal of work in ESD is devoted to training in the public, NGO and private sectors to address sustainability issues. Some is done to meet compliance. Some is done for increased profitability or efficiency. Some is done for enhancing their reputation and some is done because of the company or agency wanting to contribute to their community or constituency. NGOs such as the International Standards Organization (ISO), The Natural Step, and most government agencies have training programs in ESD. Many are self-funded through resulting savings in energy, water and waste management.

While larger businesses have the capital to fund these training programs one needed new frontier however is bringing this training and assistance to small and medium size businesses in both countries. There is also a need to move beyond the self-funding environmental programs to address social programs such as the training and broader social services available to youth and entry level migrant workers.

Just as public awareness is difficult to capture, training is also embedded everywhere i.e.

Working in partnership with nine other departments of the Inter-departmental Network on Sustainable Development Strategies and the Canada School of Public Service, Health Canada negotiated an agreement for the development and delivery of sustainable development training materials. Health Canada, Environment Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and Treasury Board Secretariat are among participating departments that formally committed to the project in December 2006.<sup>9)</sup>

## **8. Epilogue – The Future of ESD in Canada and the USA**

The future of ESD in both countries looks bright. The need for ESD continues to grow both from a rise in sustainability related issues such as climate change, biodiversity and social disparities and also the new needs of the workplace to build the hoped for “green economy”.

In Canada the emergence of the relationship between ESD and quality education is emerging. No longer is ESD seen as solely a moral obligation. It is a way to build a better life for all. In the USA and Canada, higher education working with programs such as the STAR program developed by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) and the professional development network of Canadian universities and colleges’ sustainability officers are bringing the concepts inherent in sustainability into HE curricula and operations.

Professional organizations ranging from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) re-

lated disciplines to the arts are looking to train their members on the impact and contributions of their professions to building a more sustainable future. For example, purchasing agents are beginning to include carbon content and CSR data in their purchasing.

In K-12 education the need to address a future “green” labour force requires a new look at technical and vocational education that is enhanced by social entrepreneurship skills. Presently both TVET and quality education are being considered within an ESD context at many levels including the UNECE and the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education.

Yet another area that will see a new relationship with ESD in North America will be the attempt to revisit aboriginal education. This revisit will be both an attempt to assist and improve the delivery of quality education to aboriginal people and also to learn from aboriginal traditional, ecological knowledge and wisdom.

All of this bodes well for the future need for enhanced education, public awareness and training regarding sustainability.

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