

## Whole School/Institutional Approaches to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) – A Backgrounder

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### What is a whole school or whole institution approach?

If you conduct an internet search on whole institution or whole school approaches, it will become immediately obvious that this phrase is applied to a range of interventions, practices or educational themes. Some examples include:

- School planning/improvement
- Well being
- Health
- Bullying
- Literacy
- Inclusion/participation
- Behaviour management
- Teaching and learning;
- Sustainability/ESD
- Conflict
- Relevance
- Democracy
- Practicing what you are educating about

It doesn't take much to see how all of these can potentially be part of sustainability. However it is also clear, from an initial glance - even within the field of ESD - that these whole institution approaches fall into two types:

- a. whole school *engagement* on a *topic or practice*
- b. whole school *approaches* categorised by an *ethos/vision* and or a *framework*

Both types can be seen within the practice of ESD and both may well be valid depending on the situation and context or need that the institution or education system has to fulfil. For example, a themed approach may only look at the campus e.g. gardening or energy. An approach embedded in the ethos of an educational establishment might be visible in its mission statement, its aim and objectives or the way staff are evaluated.

Understanding your context and the options available will help you choose an appropriate purpose and framework. It may be helpful to consider the following 3 models of quality education that are predominant currently (Laurie et al 2016):

1. The **economic model of education** deals with inputs and outputs and uses quantitative measurable outputs. In whole institution approaches to ESD this would show itself as measures such as: reduced energy use; water saved;

number of girls attending school; retention rates of students and so on (Kumar & Sarangapani, 2004).

2. The **humanist tradition** emphasizes education as a process, with the student at the centre of that process. It aims to develop the whole personality as well as creativity and problem-solving abilities; it is described in terms such as learner centered, participative and democratic (Barrett et al., 2006; Kumar & Sarangapani, 2004).

3. The **'learning as connection'** model of quality arose from sub-Saharan Africa in the past decade. It stresses the importance of connecting existing learner knowledge of local context to the process of learning abstract concepts (Lotz-Sisitka, 2013).

Once you understand which of these models you are operating under you can choose an appropriate whole institution approach. The following table shows how common domains, approaches and characteristics fit into our two main types. The learning as connection model can show itself in the way the curriculum is designed and developed or the way community engagement or working with partners manifests itself. These are asterisked \*. It is important to note that this table is not exhaustive but the chosen activities show the difference between the two main approaches.

**Table 1: Comparison of types of whole institution approaches – some potential behavioural differences**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Whole School/Institution Approaches</b>	<b>Whole School/Institution theme/topic/issue approaches</b>
Vision/ethos/mission	Mission or vision statement related to purpose of the institution	Statement related to good practice or achievements
Governance	Senior leadership plus distributed leadership. Everyone in the school is responsible. Students may well be included in decision making. A plan usually accompanies this work, but builds on work and expertise in the institution. Follows an appreciative Inquiry approach – starting anywhere.	Champions identified. Coordinator or a team identified to carry out the work. Targets are often set, sometimes within a framework.
Curriculum, teaching and learning	Collaborative curriculum design*, participative, action research/learning based. Values and actions linked. Goals will keep changing as understanding of sustainability and practice develops. Based on local issues.*	Topics/themes selected but not across whole curriculum. Often linked to facilities outcomes. Some links to local issues.
Facilities and	Inquiry based projects* explore	Clear targets and goals are

Operations	how to improve facilities and operations depending on perceived needs and interests. These could change every year.	set with a responsible person usually designated. Can be linked with curriculum.
Building capacity	Professional development for all – less topic based, more process based including working with the local community.*	Training on the specific topics may be included. Training of lead person.
Assessment	Self assessment Assessment scales show progress and development (e.g. rubrics). Can be adjusted year on year. Formative.	Assessment framework used – sometimes designed outside of the institution. Assessment shows when targets are reached – summative.
Other institutional work – e.g. research	Linked to the plan.	Linked where it supports a theme or topic
Community and partnerships	Local sustainability issues and working with local community becomes the focus of the work.	Partners help to build, design or raise money for projects.

It's important to note that neither way is presented here as right or wrong – but it is difficult to compare such varied approaches or even to compare evaluations of such different approaches. So it is important to distinguish between the vision (desirable practice), the rationale (why a particular vision is desirable) and designs (how to journey to the visions) (Shallcross & Robinson 2008).

In fact starting with solutions or designs often leads to later frustrations as the next 'project' or task is not obvious. This is when the whole school/institution approach has been a bolt-on rather than embedded throughout the whole school/institution as a learning process. However the theme/topic approach has been shown to help the schools/institutions who don't know where to begin, get started.

### How are whole school/institution approaches organised?

There are two basic ways to organise the framework or rubric. Either it is a self-evaluating or developmental approach with domains and themes which can then be described by level or engagement, practice or expertise. Either the institution can design these including their actions in each cell of the framework, or it can be preset.

Here is what it might look like.

**Objective/mission – key core concept** e.g. care for oneself, care for others and care for the environment, citizenship or environmental stewardship etc

<b>Domain, topic, theme,</b>	<b>Curriculum (frame)</b>	<b>Campus (frame)</b>	<b>Community (frame)</b>
e.g. – governance, participation, curriculum, assessment, research etc		e.g. Environmental management	
Or: energy, food, water, etc (doorways)			
Eco schools 7 steps			

Or:

<b>Domain, topic, theme,</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Some progress</b>	<b>Satisfactory progress</b>	<b>Sustained work</b>
e.g. Governance	In Strategic plans	Descriptions of what this looks like in practice at each level			

The UNESCO Global Action Program Partner Network 2 has initially designed a generic framework to capture all the types of whole institution approaches being used so that we can learn from each other, compare and note what works where.

Some examples of existing whole school/institution frameworks are included in the reference documents referred to below.

## References

A health example:

<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/09654280710827920>

Domain Framework for Whole System Approach to ESD: Supporting educational leaders to create a culture of sustainable development, integrated into all aspects of the K-12 education system.

[http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/esd/pdfs/seda\\_domain\\_framework.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/esd/pdfs/seda_domain_framework.pdf)

Henderson, K and Tilbury, D. (2004) Whole-School Approaches to Sustainability: An International Review of Sustainable School Programs

[http://daten.schule.at/dl/international\\_review2.pdf](http://daten.schule.at/dl/international_review2.pdf)

Hopkins, C., Laurie, R., Mckeown R., and Nonoyama-Tarumi, Y. (2016) Contributions of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to Quality Education: A Synthesis of Research. *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development* 10:2 (2016): 226–242.

Kumar, K., and Sarangapani Padma M. (2004) History of the quality debate. Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2005 - The Quality Imperative.

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001466/146655e.pdf>

New Zealand – research, guidance and frameworks (2010) plus action competence

<http://www.tlri.org.nz/tlri-research/research-completed/school-sector/investigating-relationship-between-whole-school> - Health (Australia)

Shallcross, T., Robinson, J. (2008) Sustainability Education, Whole School Approaches and Communities of Action. *Perspectives on Education and the Environment, Health and Sustainability*; Springer: New York, NY, USA; pp. 299–320.

UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet): Getting climate ready- A guide for schools on climate action:

[http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/images/ASPnet\\_new/PDF/Draft-guidelines-on-Climate-change.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/ED/images/ASPnet_new/PDF/Draft-guidelines-on-Climate-change.pdf)