

Essential Elements of Sustainability Education Template

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Key Words: Sustainability Education, State of the Field, EdTracks, Systems Thinking

Learning Outcomes

Enduring Understandings/Big Ideas:

Systems thinking, interdependence, human/nature connections, the self and well-being, patterns of nature and of human systems; viable economies, social/equity concerns, stewardship, respect for nature's limits; regeneration, intergenerational thinking, resilience thinking,

Content Knowledge:

Ecological economics, systems theory, ecosystem services, biological cycles, biodiversity, population, sustainable agriculture, energy, population, green building, transportation, life-cycle assessment, carrying capacity, economic inequity, localization, leadership styles, resources conservation (water, soil, wildlife...), activism, biomimicry, permaculture, regenerative design, globalization, micro-finance, conservation psychology, impact of technology/media, indigenous wisdom, traditional ecological knowledge, governance models, local bioregions, active democracy, place-based learning, human-centered design, alternative economic metrics (GPI, Happy Planet Index...)

Skill Sets:

Critical thinking, research methods, understanding the relevant context of issues, analytical skills, community organizing, use of social media in activism, identifying "trim tabs" or leverage points, persuasive writing

Attitudes:

Abundance vs. scarcity, the whole vs. parts; the power of the individual; power and love as tools for social change; the strength of collaboration; seeking alternative ways of problem-solving, us vs. them, corporate rule, active citizenry, optimism vs. pessimism

Behaviors and Actions:

Sharing best practices and case studies, empowering individuals and communities to take action, encouraging: compassion, empathy, mindfulness, consciousness,

The Classroom or Educational Setting

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Practices Aligned With Learning Outcomes:

An important aspect of the curriculum involves highlighting the interrelationships between the various topic areas. By emphasizing the connections and relationships between various subjects, students will gain a better understanding of the context for the issues covered. This calls for close integration between the various departments and developing important themes that cross pollinate the various disciplines. During the instruction, students will benefit from being challenged to take a systems approach and seek out an understanding that incorporates the not always so obvious connections between topics. One key element in learning about the interrelationships is the connection and often separation between humans and the environment. Understanding the numerous ways in which we are an integral part of nature is important to emphasize in the curriculum.

Characteristics of Authentic Engagement:

Authentic engagement begins with the self—knowing oneself and then knowing others and expressing compassion and empathy for other beings. From there it expands to regional and global engagement after we examine how we can contribute and make a positive change in the world. At this larger scale a sense of “universal responsibility” takes hold whereby we feel the connection between our values and actions and its impact on other people and on the world.

In sustainability education, the authentic engagement asks each of us to learn how to get in touch with our own values and then share our perspectives with others. An important aspect of this engagement is active listening so that we allow the space for other points of views and empathize with another person’s perspectives.

Schools/Institutions

Favorable Conditions—Organizational Policies and Practices:

The essential aspect for sustainability education for institutions is to identify and cultivate the relationship between academic research, coursework and the facilities including the campus and its connections to local communities and its biogeography. In this way, the campus is integrated with its biome in terms of its use of resources and with its neighboring communities. This integrative approach should strive for a regenerative model implementing policies and practices that enhance the environment, local economy and neighboring communities.

Communities

Characteristics of Institution-Community Partnerships:

The institution/community partnerships should be designed to enhance both entities in ways that they could not do by themselves. The first step is to discover why the partnership is beneficial and identify how both parties would benefit from an alliance. The types of partnerships can range from collaboration on resource conservation (water, waste, energy), community education programs, internships, etc. The key is to make the initiatives doable within a set time period and available budget. Generating small “wins” in the form of pilot projects goes a long way towards building confidence and establishing relationships that can later mature into more ambitious objectives. Understanding the character of one’s institution and identifying why a partnership makes sense is of critical importance.