

## Shelburne Farms' Sustainable Schools Project Education for Sustainability (EFS)

**Jen Cirillo**

**Emily Hoyer**

Shelburne Farms

**Key Words:** Sustainability Education, State of the Field, Shelburne Farms, Alternative Schools, Place-Based Education

**Education for sustainability (EFS)** is a lens that considers environmental & ecological integrity, economic vitality, and social justice/equity. Building upon big ideas, such as systems-thinking, interdependence, and community, EFS uses place-based education as the context, service-learning as a major strategy, and sustainable communities as the goal.



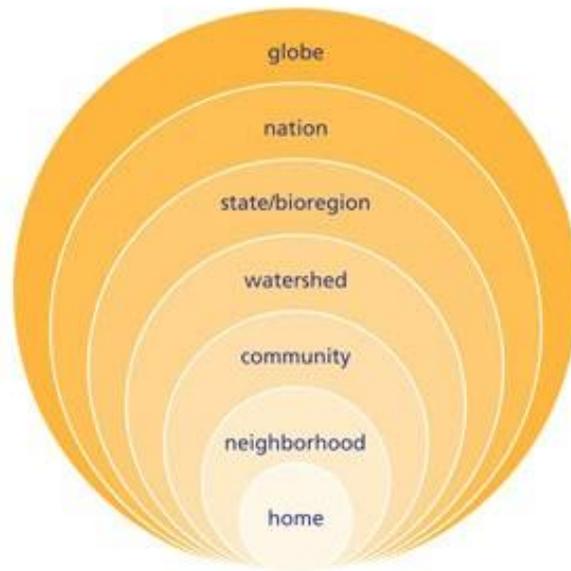
**Figure 1. Education for Sustainability Framework**  
*(Sustainable Schools Project)*

Sustainable Schools Project's (SSP) framework for EFS has been informed by our experiences working with schools and educators around the globe. The critical elements of our framework include:

- an understanding that the world is interconnected
- knowledge of human and natural communities, and
- knowing that individuals have the ability to make a difference (self-efficacy)

In brief, Education for Sustainability (EFS) fosters the following:

- The ability to integrate scientific, social, and economic thinking and knowledge;
- Real-world skills applied toward responsible ends;
- Appropriate applications of technology that help solve, not create, problems;
- Equity, justice, inclusivity, and respect for all people;
- A pedagogy that encourages creativity, vision, compassion, cooperation, and collaboration in every student and teacher.



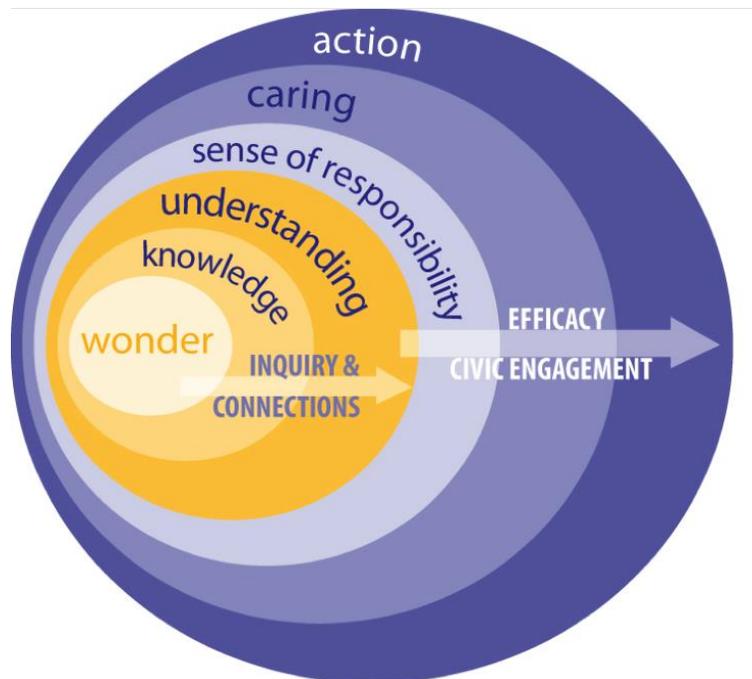
**Figure 2. Home to Globe - Developmental Continuum of Place (Sustainable Schools Project) - This graphic suggests a developmentally appropriate K-12 sequence of a child's ever-expanding sense of place.**

Education for Sustainability curriculum is

- designed using the backwards design process
- focused on big ideas and habits of mind more than content
- rooted in project- or problem- based contexts
- utilizes service-learning
- developmentally appropriate
- inquiry-based
- grounded in students' own place, while using the local as a context to understand the global

### Promising Practices for Education for Sustainability

1. Sustainability is used as a lens.
2. Students gain an understanding of the [Big Ideas of Sustainability](#).
3. Students actively think about creating a sustainable future.
4. Past, present, and future contexts and impacts are connected.
5. Students consider impacts of personal and community decisions.
6. Local and global perspectives, context, and needs are considered.
7. Academic learning is connected to a real issue or situation.
8. Students practice inquiry and an open-ended questioning process.
9. Students participate in problem solving, community building, and service-learning.
10. A program or curriculum demonstrates interdependence of economic, environmental, and social systems.



**Figure 3. From Wonder to Action (Sustainable Schools Project with Ewa Smuk) Education for Sustainability leverages students' developmental needs and innate curiosity to take what is important and relevant to children and use that to design learning experiences. By starting with young students' wonder and students' natural curiosity, we employ the inquiry process and make connections in the curriculum to relevant issues and to prior experiences. Through the civic engagement process (service-learning) we can deepen students' sense of responsibility, building upon their knowledge and eventually developing in caring and action.**

### **Promising Practices of Early Childhood Education for Sustainability**

1. Curriculum is integrated and place-based.
2. Learning and curriculum are play-based and emergent.
3. Sustainability is a lens.
4. Campus and classroom demonstrate and practice sustainability.
5. Young children explore their connection to and relationship with the natural and built world through developmentally appropriate Big Ideas of Sustainability.
6. Young children have a voice, make decisions, and draw connections between their choices and the impact on their worlds.
7. Local and cultural perspectives are considered and learned through building healthy relationships with family, classroom, and community.
8. Learning is relevant and connected to children's lives.
9. Children practice inquiry and open-ended questioning.
10. Anti-bias, equity, and justice form the foundation of our teaching.

### The 4-C's Model of Education for Sustainability

The model for Education for Sustainability developed by Shelburne Farms' Sustainable Schools Project looks critically at the life of a school, and has identified four key areas that need to be addressed to move toward becoming a sustainable school: these 4 C's are: curriculum connections, campus ecology & culture, community partnerships, and collaboration.



Figure 4. SSP's 4 C's Approach to EFS

**Curriculum Development** – Curriculum can be framed using the lens of sustainability to integrate curricular topics/themes, to teach skills and content, and to help students make connections.

**Collaboration** – To achieve sustainability, collaboration is an essential skill and process. Planning and learning must take place across all grade-levels, content areas, as well as with the larger community (families, businesses, government, non-profits) in order to create sustainable communities.

**Campus Practices & Culture** – Sustainability must be modeled as well as taught. It could be integrated in everything from student-leadership and school-wide decision-making, to school lunch programs, to waste management, to cleaning products, and to purchasing policies.

**Community Partnerships** - On-going community partnerships are vital to connecting the curriculum to relevant, real-world issues. Our research shows that the development of community partnerships has staying power and carries on past the initial efforts to integrate sustainability into a school.

Taken together, campus practices and culture, collaboration, and partnerships with the community might be considered the implicit curriculum.