

**Beneficial or detrimental? The
relationship between Sustainability,
Eco-schools and Ofsted reports.**

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- o This presentation is about the relationship between sustainability, Eco-schools and primary school Ofsted reports.
- o It aims to address the presence of education for sustainability in primary schools' Ofsted reports and their webpages.
- o Before I do the above though some thoughts on the terms:
 - o Education for sustainability
 - o Eco-schools and
 - o Ofsted reports for primary schools.

- o Education for Sustainability links environmental, social and economic dimensions.
- o Its core principle aims to reflect 'sustainable development' – a term that was defined by *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987) as: *"...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."* (1987, p.43).

- o One of its major predecessors of education about sustainability (among others such as development education) is considered to be Environmental Education (EE).
- o Education scholars and policy makers started to view EE in the context of EfSD. So a definition for EfSD according to UNESCO (<http://www.desd.org.uk/>) is:
‘Education for Sustainable development (ESD) is a vision that aims to inclusively empower all people to take charge, cooperate and create a sustainable future.’

- When it comes to school provisions, EfSD (like its predecessor EE) is seen as a cross-curricular dimension.
- This means that it should be seen as:
‘unifying areas of learning’, ‘aspects of learning that should permeate the curriculum and the life of a school’, ‘not curriculum subjects’, ‘not a statutory part’, ‘compelling learning experiences’. (‘Cross-curricular dimensions – a planning guide for schools’ QCA, 2009)

- o When it comes to teachers' practices, EfSD is presented in policy documents as a multi-dimensional area which includes three levels:
- o *'A commitment to care',*
- o *'An integrated approach' and*
- o *'A selection of sustainability themes or 'doorways'.*
- o (Sustainable Development in Action (SDA) – A curriculum planning guide for schools', QCA, 2009).

- o The first part represents **values** -‘A sustainable school helps learners care about themselves, each other and the environment’ (QCA, 2008, p.1).
- o The second part represents a **pedagogical tool** promoting the notion of an integrated approach to the curriculum that: ‘...explores sustainable development through its learning (**curriculum**); in its values and ways of working (**campus**); and in its engagement of local people and partners (**community**)’ (QCA, 2008, p.1).
- o The third part represents potential **content** for SD- eight themes/doorways (food and drink, energy and water, travel and traffic, purchasing and waste, buildings and grounds, inclusion and participation, local well-being and global dimension.)

- o Two issues for teachers:
- o This multi-definitional approach may confuse rather than help teachers work towards EfSD. All three dimensions(content, pedagogical tool and values) are important and do constitute the main 'DNA' of EfSD. The question is how these can be presented to teachers in a manner that make sense in terms of what they have been doing so far and what they need to be doing in future.

- o And the other issue encapsulated succinctly in the Bourn et al report (2016) that:
- o *‘Merely promoting learning about these themes is not enough. Alongside any form of promotion of learning about issues such as climate change, global poverty and gender equality, there needs to be consideration of how children learn about them, what influences their views and behaviours, and how a more critical and engaged approach towards learning can be promoted and sustained for both teachers and learners’.*
That is, focusing only on the ‘content’ is not enough; the other two aspects – ‘values’ and ‘active pedagogical approaches’ are necessary for achieving effective EfSD.

Eco-school is an international initiative that offers schools the opportunity to develop practices on education for sustainable development (EfSD).

Nine areas to focus namely:

- o energy,
- o water,
- o biodiversity,
- o school grounds,
- o healthy living,
- o transport,
- o litter,
- o waste and
- o global citizenship.

- o The aforementioned nine topics resemble the eight doorways of the National Framework for sustainable schools in England (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2009).
- o Thus the eco schools initiative seems to give a 'straightforward' way to identify schools with an interest in EfSD.

- o In its webpage <http://www.eco-schools.org.uk/aboutecoschools/theprogramme>, the eco-school initiative aims to: “...*guide schools on their sustainable journey...*”, that it provides “...*a simple framework to help make sustainability an integral part of school life.*”, and its mission is to “... *help make every school in the country sustainable...*”. But, there have not been, to my knowledge, studies that addressed the success of the eco-schools in relation to integrating sustainability in schools.
- o This interest in EfSD via the eco-school initiative may be limited (Scott, 2013, Chatzifotiou, Tait 2017) – and seen as tokenistic.

- o OFSTED reports
- o In October 2017, Amanda Spielman (Ofsted's Chief Inspector) argued that it is one of her aims as Chief inspector to identify and support what is best in curriculum design, development and implementation.
- o Education for sustainability as reflected in the Eco-school dimension does offer a good opportunity for schools and teachers to demonstrate curriculum planning, development and implementation within the National Curriculum subjects and beyond.
- o Amanda Spielman also highlighted the importance of curriculum development and implementation, implicitly emphasizing the role of the teacher and she said that: *"Little attention is given to developing more rounded curriculum knowledge. Indeed, a couple of head-teachers indicated that they could divide their staff into those who were strong in curriculum planning – those who trained a fair time ago- and those who were not."* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/hmcis-commentary-october-2017>)

- o There is a limited number of primary and secondary schools in England that have been identified as Eco-schools Ambassadors for a period of two years (2014-2016 and 2016-2018) within the Eco-school initiative.
- o Sustainability is an overall aim that eco-schools want to achieve and the term 'Eco-school Ambassador' reflects schools that have managed to be 'judged' as such based on their commitment to education for sustainability.

- o Methodology and conceptual framework
- o This is an exploratory, qualitative study that used the web-pages of six primary schools and their corresponding Ofsted reports.
- o Its aim is to investigate how schools themselves (via their web-pages) and their Ofsted reports include sustainability and how they use it (as a pedagogical tool) that can enhance their curriculum and potentially lead to a better Ofsted rating.

- o The six primary schools were identified via a list of schools (which included both primary and secondary) that contained schools that had been qualified as 'Eco-Ambassadorial schools'. This list was found originally on the English Eco-school webpage.
- o Content analysis of:
- o OfSTED reports and
- o Web-pages.

- Content analysis main aim is to identify and in many instances count as well, response categories that can help researchers understand better the topics they set to investigate (Matthews and Rose, 2010). Different scholars have discussed the use of content analysis as more pertinent to a quantitative approach (Neuendorf, 2005) but other scholars have highlighted that content analysis can also help researchers make inferences by identifying specified characteristics in the texts (Holsti, 1969).

- o Content analysis as a 'key-words-in-context' method to study key words found in the reports.
- o The words that were deemed as appropriate/relevant to look for in the Ofsted reports and schools' web-pages were words that related to the Eco-school literature such as: eco-school team, sustainability, the eco school topics which included: Biodiversity, marine, energy, litter, water, healthy living, school grounds, global citizenship. These terms and topics are the immediate and clear references within which education for sustainability can be discussed and they could be readily detected both in the schools' webpages and Ofsted reports.

- o Content analysis of webpages is somehow different to traditional texts. However, scholars like Krippendorff (1980) have addressed its value when he discussed such advantages like **being unobtrusive, able to cope with large amount of data and focusing on the artefact rather than the individual directly**. Other researchers as well like Kim and Kuljis (2010) have discussed the possibility of conducting content analysis on web-based content. They have discussed that both quantitative and qualitative content analysis is possible on web-based content. They claimed that: *“Typically based on an individual’s perspective, qualitative content analysis is similar to textual analysis in that it is primarily interpretive in nature, and often does not utilise statistics for data analysis.”* (p. 370).

- o Criticisms of content analysis of web-pages:
- o Research going out of date because of the changing nature of the webpages sampling procedures, size and potentially being devoid of a theoretical context because the focus may be on what is measurable (Seale 2018, Kim and Kuljis 2010).

- o The current project has used the web pages of schools that had been identified as Eco-Ambassadorial schools so in this respect **the sampling reflects a purposeful sampling as it is known within the qualitative tradition.** In terms of time lapse, the current project collected data from the web-pages of these schools during June – July 2018. Thus, the **web-based content analysis reflects that particular time period only;** however, it is important to highlight that even though the web-based data reflect one particular point in time, **this point needs to be seen in relation to the fact that these schools had been identified as Eco-Ambassadorial schools the periods between 2014-2016 and 2016-2018.** Hence, for the aims of the current project, the snapshot that these web pages provided in one particular time (June-July 2018) is important in relation to sustainability because of all the ‘Eco-school’ work that the schools had delivered.

- o FINDINGS

- o *Eco-school Ambassadors between 2014-2016*

- o *Primary school A* - the school required improvements in all categories (effectiveness of leadership and management, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, outcomes for pupils and early years provision) but one; the school was judged as good for the category 'personal development, behavior and welfare'.

- o Year of Ofsted report:2018 (2 years after the Eco-Ambassadorial role expired)

- o Content of Ofsted report in relation to sustainability:
Very general comments on British values that can reflect issues of democracy and social justice.

- o Content of web-page in relation to sustainability:
Nothing

- o Primary school B - the school required improvements in the following categories: overall effectiveness, quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for pupils; while the school was judged as Good in two categories, namely: effectiveness of leadership and management and personal development, behaviour and welfare
- o Year of Ofsted report: 2017 (1 year after the Eco-Ambassadorial role expired)
- o Content of Ofsted report in relation to sustainability: Involvement in school's community, keep school environment free from litter
- o Content of web-page in relation to sustainability: Nothing

- o Similarly to Primary school A, **neither the web page of the school nor its Ofsted report made any claim on education for sustainability or provided examples where one can see whether education for sustainability is practiced.** There were no links made to its Eco-school ambassadorial role. The webpage and the Ofsted report mentioned issues like British values for instance; the Ofsted report also acknowledged that the pupils in the school enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities but it did not provide any specific information on the kind of such activities.

- o Primary School C -the school had been judged as 'Good' overall.
- o Year of Ofsted report: 2017 (1 year after the Eco-Ambassadorial role expired)
- o Content of Ofsted report in relation to sustainability: Short mention of the use of school grounds in teaching.
- o Content of web-page in relation to sustainability: Clear mention to the Eco-Ambassadorial school role, outdoor education, global dimension.

- o Primary school D – the school has been judged ‘Good’ by Ofsted.
- o Year of Ofsted report: 2016 (the year that the Eco-Ambassadorial role expired).
- o Content of Ofsted report in relation to sustainability: Nothing.
- o Content of web-page in relation to sustainability: Clear mention to Eco-school, fundraising activities, eco-team doing a planting activity, mention of the term ‘sustainability’ for a project on improving the outside area.

- o Primary school E – the school had been judged ‘Good’.
- o **Year of Ofsted report:** 2015 (in between its Eco-Ambassadorial role) .
- o **Content of Ofsted report in relation to sustainability:** Short mention of the school’s links with a school in Spain (global dimension), use of outdoors.
- o **Content of web-page in relation to sustainability:** Local environment, natural world, culture and heritage, eco/sustainable way of life, forest school area, fair trade week, fundraising, Bike-ability course, Green Flag Award, save energy, Eco-Gate ways/topics.

- o *Eco-school Ambassador between 2016-2018*
- o *Primary school F* - The school had been judged as 'Good'. The October 2017 Ofsted report was a short inspection.
- o Year of Ofsted report: 2017 (in between its Eco-Ambassadorial role)
- o Content of Ofsted report in relation to sustainability: Nothing
- o Content of web-page in relation to sustainability: Eco-school approach, 6TH Green Flag Award, recycle, eco-team, Zoo lab, rainforest display, 'Healthy schools', environmental work, gardening club, 'walking to school initiative', 'Bird Disturbance Survey', 'Plastic pollution and the impact its having on the environment', fundraising.

o **Conclusions – Discussion**

- o Content relevant to education for sustainability is present and the eco-school approach has certainly facilitated the promotion of this content.
- o This content had a presence if only (or mainly) in some of these schools' web-pages which can have an impact (in terms of engagement as well) on their immediate community.
- o There were weak indications to education for sustainability as a pedagogic tool for developing curricula.

- o The Eco-school approach and all the work and time schools had to invest in was not always portrayed and promoted as a 'value-added' aspect of a school's ethos.
- o It seems that these particular schools who had followed the Eco-school approach promoted mainly the 'content' rather than the 'values' and the 'active pedagogical approaches'.
- o For schools who do not seem to capitalize on this investment (some schools hardly mentioned anything in their web pages), this can indicate that the Eco-school approach is an initiative that rests mainly with the interests of particular teachers within these schools; this means that if these teachers stop working on the initiative, then the initiative stops as well. It is more an 'add-on' rather than a 'built-in' aspect of the curriculum.

- o Ofsted reports of these schools addressed their extra-curricular activities (in the form of Eco-schools) minimally – if at all.
- o Schools and Ofsted reports should ‘feed’ each other (interactive). This has not been the case in this project. More worryingly, this was not the case even with schools that did give their Eco-school status and consequently education for sustainability, a good presence in their web-pages. Considering that one of the main purposes of Ofsted is to help schools become better and contribute to higher standards (Woodhead, 1999), it is rather disappointing to see that their individual school reports cannot seem to accommodate wider aspects of a school’s life and ethos.

- o Limitations of the study
- o Education for sustainability was explored by proxy; that is, the primary schools' involvement and commitment to the Eco-school approach was perceived as a good indicator of involvement and commitment to education for sustainability.
- o The aspects on 'values' and 'active pedagogical approaches' could have been better investigated using interviews or questionnaires.
- o Both Ofsted reports and webpages have a certain structure and format which may have prevented schools by default to cover wider aspects of education for sustainability.

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