

Educational Research

*Developing a Research Agenda for Education for a Sustainable and Secure Future
Diversity*

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Suggested Guidelines for Education for Sustainable Development Research Agenda

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I. Purpose and Goal of Research in ESD

Each organization, each university, each nation must set the purpose and goal of their research ESD within the context of the country, province, city, or school that is setting the agenda. The purpose and goal of THIS document is to establish the “big picture” of research in ESD that all these efforts contribute to.

II. Overarching Issues

Before research agendas are set, the creators must consider the overarching issues that come with research for ESD.

Because sustainability and education come from many traditions from around the world and many disciplines as well as the traditions have their own “languages,” it is necessary to define frequently used terms. Some of these will include:

- Sustainability
- Research for sustainability
- Research for ESD
- The “breadth” of ESD including public understanding/awareness; training
- Spirituality and related issues within ESD and the community
- And others

The overarching issues (to be expanded and clarified) will include constructs such as:

1. Research should reflect that education for sustainable development (ESD) ought to be locally relevant and culturally appropriate for all stakeholders.

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2. The purpose of ESD is to help individuals, communities, provinces, and nations reach their sustainability goals. One of the major research objectives is to ask if this is happening and to help guide educational program, practice, and policy so that it does.
3. Educational research should delve into sustainability issues of the community (e.g., is the campus maintained within principles of environmental sustainability and hiring policies should support gender equity).
4. ESD research should look at the well-being of the students, not simply academic performance.
5. Research needs to reflect local citizenship in that we expect our citizens to have critical thinking skills, to have the ability to act, and to have the ability to articulate different points of view (not a “knowledge based” curriculum only). ESD research can include measuring a broad range of outcomes including thinking, action, and affect.
6. ESD research should involve all three realms of sustainability—environment, society, and economy.
7. Baseline information of status of ESD should be established early so that comparisons in the future can be made to the baseline information. Baseline information will help establish whether or not programmatic changes have been effective.
8. Research at the national, provincial/state, and local levels should be cataloged and published in easily available and inexpensive format so that program and curriculum developers can learn and profit from the research.
9. Practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders ought work together to create a research agenda.
10. Research agenda needs to include components of free choice (nonformal and informal education) learning and media. Such research covers life-span – ESE through senior and community-based programming.

III. Key Priorities

All priorities for research must be defined within the context of the community and considering the sustainability strands. There are both short-term and long-term priorities. For many of these, developing baselines will be important for comparing future changes. The short and long term priorities must obviously be linked and explicit.

One priority, as an example of the types to be identified here, could be:

Establish criteria for transdisciplinary “metrics” that would become standard across ESD. Such metrics must be constructed to be “fluid” over time, change, and locale.

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IV. Process for Defining an Agenda

The idea of making an agenda for ESD from the concept of sustainability itself cannot be separated. Therefore, it will be taken as a given that environmental, economic, and social considerations are key elements of a sustainable society. Every agenda has a context. The different contexts of the institution, agency, country, region, etc. are unique. The relationships of environment, economic, and social aspects will and must vary dramatically in each situation.

The structure for considering an agenda incorporates four elements.

1. Conceptual process: to think through the steps of developing a research agenda. The beginning of this process includes:
 - a. Identify desired outcomes and vision of a sustainable society
 - b. Factor in the three elements of sustainability
 - c. Assess the most salient barriers and problems to reaching the desired outcomes and the strengths for reaching the desired outcomes in each of those areas
 - d. Catalogue what is known in the research literature about “everything” to do with the desired outcomes
 - e. Define how information flows through the target population (audience)
 - f. Perform a gap analysis (what needs to be filled)
 - g. Define how to get there
 - h. Data gathering
2. Recommendations – some guiding principles for making the agenda
3. Ways to extend the dialogue. Link with, mobilize, and use existing human resources, bring together researchers and practitioners; educators and communicators.
4. Strategy of promotion and promulgation of the research agenda
 - a. From theory to action
 - b. Make plan a reality
 - c. Determine how to sustain the effort

V. Ways to extend the dialogue

As in the individualized plans, there must be consideration given in the guidance document to ways in which the “dialogue” among researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders is continued. It is vital that there be considered and intentional reporting, sharing, and disseminating research findings and data. There must be, in essence, a “clearinghouse” approach to ESD research to further the field. This would include program evaluations as well as basic research. Consideration must also be given to ensuring that the dialogue is transdisciplinary and addresses the “languages” of the different disciplines (as in the definitions above).

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VI. Overall strategy of promotion

The overall strategy of promotion of the ESD agenda should engage researchers, practitioners, and users of the data from many different disciplines. Because so many disciplines contribute to ESD, within the educational community, all these stakeholders should also be involved in the strategy of promotion.

Some of the elements that will be included in the “strategy of promotion” section include:

- Inclusion of evaluation component for ESD programs
- Development of critical thinking skills in formal education/measurement of change
- Data collection on sustainability on the local level must tie to larger systems and vice versa
- Money for research needs to be “set aside” – campaigns for adequate funding to carry out the research are to be undertaken