

BOOK REVIEWS

ECO-schools: trends and divergences. A Comparative Study on ECO-school development processes in 13 countries. Finn Mogensen and Michela Mayer (editors). Vienna: Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, in collaboration with the COMENIUS III European network programme: 'School Development through Environmental Education' (SEED) and the international network "Environmental and School Initiatives" (ENSI), 2005, 360 pp. ISBN 3 85031 062 0

ECO-schools: trends and divergences conducts a comparative study of Eco-schools' development in 13 SEED network member and partner countries. The research study and resulting reports form stages one and two of a research project launched by the COMENIUS III European network programme: 'School Development through Environmental Education' (SEED). *ECO-schools: trends and divergences* has a companion publication *Quality Criteria for ESD Schools* (Breiting, Mayer & Mogensen, 2005) that represents stage three of the project.

The first section of the book offers perspectives on EE or ESD (education for sustainable development) including a theoretical exploration of the background, aims and analytical tools behind the comparative study. This initial six-chapter section was often painstaking to read and reflect upon, possibly due to the language employed, writing style, use of jargon and acronyms for government and non-government organizations. Comparative studies such as this are relevant and supportive of pre and in-service teacher education only if readable and accessible in the time-space compression of current educational environments.

Despite this, Chapter 3 does provide an interesting exploration and explanation of the six-part questionnaire that forms the basis for an overview of the state of art of EE in participating countries. An outline of trends and divergences in EE initiatives by member and partner countries appears in Chapter 4. The national coordinators who authored each report were required to apply guidelines when selecting each initiative. These included whether the pedagogy used in Eco-schools reflected a social-constructivist approach and how widespread a programme was throughout that country. A refreshing approach is taken in Chapter 6 as the authors offer a practical set of scenario developments that would assist schools and educators to identify and clarify their philosophical and pedagogical positions regarding EE or ESD, before and during Eco-school programme development.

Section two of the book contains reports from each of the 13 participating countries in the SEED project: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Korea, Norway, Spain and Sweden. Each country reports on national programmes and policy documents that support EE, on specific Eco-school initiatives and individual case studies. Each country report is followed by useful references including websites of relevance.

The annexure contains guidelines for countries completing national reports and a copy of the six-part questionnaire used as a basis for ascertaining the state of the art of EE in participating regions or countries.

Mogensen and Mayer's scenario table in Chapter 6 offers a set of position statements and values relating to three distinct visions of what a sustainable future might be. These scenarios will be familiar to some practitioners working in the EE field and include: a science and technology driven future, a new relations with nature driven future or a social change driven future where school is viewed as an educational research community preparing to respond to an uncertain and ever-changing future.

The editors encourage school communities to develop their own vision or scenario of EE or ESD and in using the 'scenarios' table, awareness is raised and congruence in approach is facilitated across teaching and learning theory and practice, school policy development and management and community cooperation, networking and collaboration. Mogensen and Mayer do not advocate one scenario as 'the best', but rather explain that each illustrates some trends currently found in Eco-schools programmes. Eco-schools are encouraged to create a climate of consensus and a whole-of-school approach where the environmental values of a school are reflected in everyday occurrences.

The programmes and case studies in section two provide opportunities to critically reflect upon and apply the scenarios framework found in Chapter 6. There exists a great diversity of approaches and responses to ESD, EE or EfS from the participating countries. As an educator currently working on EfS within the school sector, the initiatives and case studies highlighted within each country report enabled this reviewer to draw parallels, to affirm and critique current practices and initiatives and to pose new challenges for the sustainable schools movement within Australia. Some of these notable initiatives follow.

The Danish experience reports a need for inspiration and encouragement if schools are to take part in EfS. Professional, methodical in-service courses and the updating of teacher qualifications are seen as crucial to this, as is the development of cross-curricular teaching resources. The Green Touch Project in Aarhus qualifies teachers as 'critical friends' to mentor and encourage others in the school learning community. The re-orientation of the role of teacher as 'guide beside' rather than 'sage on the stage' (King, 1994) is exemplified in the MUVIN project in Silkeborg.

The role of schools in educational research and training is a familiar theme in the Spanish case study "Ecoles Verdes". In Barcelona, the Spanish equivalent of the Australian Association for Environmental Education, the SCEA, provides teacher trainers to participating schools. Mogensen and Mayer report that to join the Escoles Verdes programme, 80% of staff and students must support the joining of the project and 20% of teaching staff must have direct involvement. In addition there is a comprehensive set of criteria to meet prior to a school joining the project plus an ongoing commitment to action and evaluation over a minimum of two years.

In Finland, Timosenkoshi Nature School has broadened its original notion of EE to include all aspects of sustainable development, rather than a singular focus on developing positive relationships with nature. This Eco-school is also grappling with the challenge to increase students' opportunities for action and decision-making within its Eco-school programmes.

Significantly in support of this challenge, report editors Mogensen and Mayer caution that "the fact that an issue or environmental concern is addressed does not necessarily mean that it is significant for the pupils or is done so from a constructivist perspective." The authors also caution on "activism devoid of content" where schools join a programme for the prestige it brings rather than for a belief in the project itself.

In publishing this book the editors challenge educators, facilitators, curriculum writers, project officers and policy makers to explore and seek coherence between values, visions of a sustainable world and praxis. The frameworks, criteria and case studies

presented provide valuable material for reflection, critique and action by those involved in pre-service, in-service and post graduate teacher education. *ECO-schools: trends and divergences* also has relevance for both NGO's and government agencies that engage in EE, ESD or EfS with schools and community groups. Existing practitioners and facilitators will find inspiring approaches and productive critiques across a range of contexts from preschools in Sweden to the Baccalaureate programme in Spain. Whilst euro-centric in focus, additional Eco-school initiatives and case studies from Canada, New Zealand, Asia, the Americas and countries of the South would complete the global picture.

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