

Institutional strategies for education for sustainable development and global citizenship in Wales.

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Abstract

Global Issues such as climate change, poverty, health, education and environmental degradation are very topical, with substantial media coverage. The Welsh Assembly Government has published several policies prioritising sustainability in Wales across all sectors. Higher Education Institutions provide future citizens, who will lead, design and create change within society and it is, therefore, desirable for students to be empowered if they are to be effective. In 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government funded audits to establish the situation of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) within the higher education sector in Wales. Now the question arises as to whether institutions are developing the policies and strategies to tackle sustainability issues and whether staff and students perceive that they have a role to play. Considerable research has been carried out within pre-university education and their delivery of the ESDGC agenda. However, there appears to be limited scholarly literature regarding the implementation and impact of institutional strategies in the higher education sector, particularly as far as sustainability is concerned. This research will develop a conceptual and analytical framework as a guide for case studies in order to examine the implementation process and impacts at twelve Welsh Higher Education Institutions.

Introduction

In 1999 power devolved to a Welsh Assembly in Wales, approved by voters. Since being established the Welsh Assembly Government has demonstrated a strong commitment towards sustainability. Sustainability is written into the constitution and evident in the publication and implementation of several policy documents. These include:

- A Sustainable Wales, 2000,
- The Sustainable Development Action Plan, 2004-2007,
- Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship, 2006,
- One Wales One Planet, 2009.

During 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government endorsed their conviction towards sustainability when they funded audits to determine evidence of sustainability at all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Wales. There were two strands to the audit; (i) environmental management systems and (ii) the curriculum; using the STAUNCH tool.

STAUNCH was developed by the Centre for Business Relationships Accountability Sustainability and Society (BRASS) at Cardiff University (module descriptors were searched for breadth and strength of sustainability content using set criteria). Alongside the audits an *Analysis of Good Practice in the Higher Education Sector in Wales* (HEFCW 2009) was also commissioned. Around the same time the English Higher Education Funding Council and the Higher Education Academy in

Scotland also reported on sustainability within the sector. The reports identified gaps in evidence available; particularly in the appraisal of the mechanism of corporate planning and incorporating sustainable development into mission statements, strategic plans and policies. (HEFCE, 2009, p. 21; HEFCW, 2009, p. 17; Ryan, 2009, p. 21).

It is relevant to acknowledge that the political context of Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) is perceived differently in England and Scotland. Greater government priority is given to ESDGC in Wales and the terminology used differs. England and Scotland both use Education for Sustainable Development appearing to make the assumption that Global Citizenship is incorporated within the term. Whereas Wales have made a specific point of placing Global Citizenship alongside Education for Sustainable Development, ensuring it is viewed as equally important and not to be subsumed within the term 'sustainability'.

Research Aims

The question has, therefore, emerged as to whether the high profile of sustainability at the national government level is resulting in changes in policy development and implementation at the local level, in this case in HEIs. According to Jenkins and Healey (2005) mission statements of institutions do help develop a sense of shared purpose and influence planning, but 'most institutions attempt to deliver a range of semi-structured strategies' (Healey and Jenkins, 2005, p. 25). The outcomes of the research will, therefore, establish the current position of Welsh HEIs within the spectrum of change towards the necessary transformative learning (Sterling, 2001, p78). 'Transformative learning' involves a complete cultural shift in education and public awareness and this theoretical basis underlies the possibility of re-evaluating what education is for. In agreeing with Sterling's (2001) vision for a shift in perception; from education for socialization and employability the main function of education should be to contribute to a sustainable and just society.

This mirrors third order learning, as proposed by Bateson's hypothesis of learning (1972, p. 293), whereby true consideration of the learning process, not simply the content, is evident if transformative learning is to take place.

Key Questions

The purpose of the research is to determine the current position of ESDGC in the Welsh Higher Education sector by reviewing and analysing institutional policies and strategies, in light of Welsh Assembly requirements.

- 1) How do Welsh HEIs define ESDGC?
- 2) What are the approaches to strategy and policy development in Welsh HEIs?
- 3) What evidence exists of the impacts of policy implementation?
 - a) On campuses?
 - b) And within curricula?
- 4) What do students and staff expect is Higher Education's role in promoting the value and effectiveness of ESDGC?
- 5) What are the lessons to be learnt and shared between HEIs, both nationally and internationally as they strive to implement policy changes effectively?

The resultant findings should provide benefit to the Higher Education sector nationally and internationally, useful also when comparing other principalities with ESDGC high on their agenda. The findings will facilitate in the sharing and collaboration of good practice in achieving sustainability.

Theoretical Perspectives

Definitions

In contextualising the indicators evident for the impact of Higher Education Institutional policies and strategies for ESDGC there are several important theoretical perspectives that it is vital to explore. Defining 'Sustainable Development' causes much debate, but the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) provided the definition of sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without

compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The Welsh Assembly Government also uses this definition. Nevertheless, others believe that a degree of ambiguity exists when defining the concept and that this can be positive, 'the sustainability transition is plagued by a clash of interpretations and reactions regarding the purpose of sustainable development' (O'Riordan and Voisey, 1998, p. 24). These inconsistencies will be explored further within the context of society and the Higher Education sector, as Sibbel (2009) argues:

'It is the lack of understanding of the concept of sustainability that lies at the core if society is to become sustainable and for higher education to actualise its potential to contribute to sustainability' (Sibbel, 2009, p. 75).

Therefore, it will be vital to establish a clear understanding of the interpretation of sustainability at individual HEIs, across the whole sector, and the perception at Welsh Assembly Government level.

As for the Global Citizenship aspect, the Welsh Assembly Government emphasises the need for people to understand global forces that exist if they are to participate in decision making that results in an equal and just society. Within the context of sustainability, global citizenship is a much less developed concept. As far as Higher Education is concerned the concept has emerged via International Strategies (developing opportunities and recruitment internationally) and Internationalisation Strategies (attempting to ensure Higher Education incorporates local → national → global, on campuses and in curricula). Many are raising the profile of this aspect of sustainability, including Shiel and McKenzie (2008) where they draw together the relevance of globalization and citizenship and the important role that Higher Education has to play.

Progress

Internationally the profile of Sustainable Development is increasing, notably with the

United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014, being well underway. A major element of the United Nations Program is the emergence of Regional Centres of Expertise and Wales is aiming to submit an application to be acknowledged with such a Regional Centre of Expertise in 2009. The evolution of sustainability within the Higher Education sector has been fairly rapid since the 1990s, with various international declarations being signed. Wright (2004), in Corcoran and Wals, provides a useful synopsis of the increasing number of HEIs signing such declarations. A more detailed examination of these declarations is necessary to understand the sustainability transition that is happening. However, signed agreements do not necessarily reflect changes to policies and actions within an institution. Tilbury and Wortman (2008) explore the implications for such fundamental changes within the Higher Education sector and propose that 'institutions must seek opportunities to engage the entire campus by developing a shared future vision' (Tilbury and Wortman, 2008, p. 10). This 'future vision' will need to incorporate all aspects of Higher Education; from the built environment and management of estates to sustainability and citizenship issues encompassing staff and students within an enlightened curriculum. Again, examples of such successes will be examined: Corcoran and Wals (2004), and Gornitzka, Kogan and Amaral, (2005) present many case studies to show good practice of reform and change in Higher Education.

Policy Implementation

The study of policy implementation and change provides precision to the goals aimed for by HEIs. It is vital to identify the factors that both contribute and hinder the realization of goals and Cerych and Sabatier (1986) developed a framework within which to analyse such policies. It will be possible to incorporate their theory in the early stages to establish the main variables involved and discover the impact each has on successful policy implementation. For example, commitment to objectives, adequate financial

resources, interested groups, and social and economic changes (Cerych and Sabatier, 1986, p. 16) all need to be investigated if the impacts of effective policy implementation are to be identified.

The role of HEIs in implementing changes towards a more sustainable future cannot be under estimated and role models are needed to embody ideals totally as:

'the crisis we face is first and foremost one of mind, perception and values; hence, it is a challenge to those institutions presuming to shape minds, perceptions and values.....more of the same kind of education can only make things worse' (Orr, 1994, p. 27).

Supporting this argument, Sterling (2001) advocates a radical transformative paradigm shift in education with a strong emphasis on successful changes emerging from ownership and empowerment of principles and it is imperative that such rhetoric should emerge as reality.

From such ownership, 'deep-seated changes in our mental frames' (Doppelt, 2008, p. 141) will need to permeate and Doppelt provides much to support the processes required to implement strategies, concurring with many of the arguments edited by Corcoran and Wals (2004). The whole policy formation process will perform an important factor in successful policy impacts and it is imperative to identify the key stakeholders involved and whether this has an impact on successful implementation (Jenkins and Healey, 2005).

Progression towards sustainability can be associated with learning stages (Sterling, 2001) and these will be explored and exemplified in the real world to enable case studies and comparisons to be identified. Parallel to this the location of the institutions within models of the transition to sustainability will be established (O'Riordan and Voisey, 1998, p. 16). Specific to HEIs, a four phase model has been proposed (HEFCE, 2008, p. 80). This provides criteria to locate an institution within the following stages towards sustainability:

1. Grass roots enthusiasts,
2. Early adopters,
3. Getting really serious,
4. Full commitment.

It should be possible to clarify where Welsh HEIs are within the model as a result of the data collection and subsequent analysis.

Research Methodology

Data Collection

The data will be collected primarily by reviewing and analysing HEI policy and strategy documents. Such documents will include:

- Strategic Plans,
- Lead Strategy documents,
- Third Mission Strategy,
- Specific policies targeting environmental and sustainability issues; both from a campus stance and within the curriculum.

This will identify targets and actions reflecting institutional ESDGC changes that can be mapped accordingly to the Welsh Assembly Government's ESDGC requirements. It will be possible to apply some statistical analysis to the qualitative data by coding data, categorizing, and theorizing. Potentially applying Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Software Analysis (CADQAS), such as Nvivo (the program facilitates text searches, ideas can be linked; data coded and searched, and models to be drawn) to assist. Alternatively, making reference to STAUNCH as used to complete the curriculum audit. Also, there will be data available specifically concerned with environmental management systems and this will reveal changes over time. For instance, whether raising the profile of sustainability on campus is resulting in a more energy efficient environment.

Questionnaires and small focus groups with students and/or staff will broaden the data collection and provide explanation of some of the policy initiatives, in addition to pertinent case study material for dissemination within the sector. Also, the student and

staff expectations, perceptions and demands of the sustainability transformation will emerge. It is appreciated that the good practice study (HEFCW, 2009) collected data via interviews with senior managers, but alongside this it was pointed out that it was not clear what the student demand for ESDGC is, whether it should prevail as a specific optional course or within a cross-cutting context (HEFCW, 2009, p. 28). Also, the importance of publishing good practice was re-emphasised (HEFCW, 2009, p. 52) as well as the potential for exploring developments within the curriculum to embed ESDGC. Corcoran and Wals (2004) offer detailed arguments to support the inclusion of the case study methodology particularly if they are theorized and well documented, which will inevitably be the aim. Both deductive and inductive approaches will emerge; for instance predefined categories used for content analysis of strategies as well as inductively drawing out themes that arise within documents and collected data.

Summary

All HEIs in Wales will be studied to ensure a full evaluation of the condition of ESDGC within the Higher Education sector in the Principality. On completion of the Welsh study it may be relevant to make an international comparison and this would use some of the same methodology to acquire the data, which would allow for an accurate comparison to be completed. Following comprehensive examination and evaluation of the policies and resulting actions it will be possible to make recommendations in relation to good practice within the sector to facilitate a thorough transition to sustainability.

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