

Teaching for Social Justice: Towards Education for Sustainable Development

Authors : Nashwa Moheyeldine

Abstract : Education for sustainable development (ESD) aims to preserve the rights of the present and future generations as well as preserving the globe, both humans and nature. ESD should aim not only to bring about consciousness of the current and future issues, but also to foster student agency to bring about change at schools, communities and nations. According to the Freirian concept of conscientização, (conscientization) — “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality”, education aims to liberate people to understand and act upon their worlds. Social justice is greatly intertwined with a nation’s social, political and economic rights, and thus, should be targeted through ESD. “Literacy researchers have found that K-12 students who engage in social justice inquiries develop vital academic knowledge and skills, critical understandings about oppression in the world, and strong dispositions to continue working toward social justice beyond the initial inquiries they conduct”. Education for social justice greatly equips students with the critical thinking skills and sense of agency, that are required for responsible decision making that would ensure a sustainable world. In fact teaching for social justice is intersecting with many of the pedagogies such as multicultural education, cultural relevant pedagogy, education for sustainable development, critical theory pedagogy, (local and global) citizenship education, all of which aim to prepare students for awareness, responsibility and agency. Social justice pedagogy has three specific goals, including helping students develop 1) a sociopolitical consciousness - an awareness of the symbiotic relationship between the social and political factors that affect society, 2) a sense of agency, the freedom to act on one’s behalf and to feel empowered as a change agent, and 3) positive social and cultural identities. The keyword to social justice education is to expose the realities to the students, and challenge the students not only to question , but also to change. Social justice has been usually discussed through the subjects of history and social sciences, however, an interdisciplinary approach is essential to enhance the students’ understanding of their world. Teaching social justice through various subjects is also important, as it make students’ learning relevant to their lives. The main question that this paper seeks to answer is ‘How could social justice be taught through different subjects and tools, such as mathematics, literature through story-telling, geography, and service learning will be shown in this paper. Also challenges to education for social justice will be described. Education is not a neutral endeavor, but is either oriented toward the cause of liberation or in support of domination. In fact , classrooms can be “a microcosm of the emancipatory societies we seek to encourage”, education for the 21st century should be relevant to students' lives where it exposes life's realities to them. Education should also provide students with the basics of school subjects with the bigger goal of helping them make the world a better, more just place to live in.

Keywords : teaching for social justice, student agency, citizenship education, education

Conference Title : ICSJ 2016 : International Conference on Social Justice

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : January 18-19, 2016