

Education for Sustainable Development and the Eco School Initiative in Two Primary Schools in The North East of England

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Abstract : Eco-school is an international initiative that offers schools the opportunity to develop practices on education for sustainable development (EfSD). Such practices need to focus on nine areas, namely: energy, water, biodiversity, school grounds, healthy living, transport, litter, waste and global citizenship. Acquiring the green flag status is the ultimate stage (silver and bronze are the other two) that is awarded by a committee external to the school and it lasts for two years. Our project focused on two such primary schools that had acquired the green flag status. The aim of our project is to describe the schools' approach of becoming an eco-school, the practitioners' role in promoting the values and principles of such endeavors, thus identifying the impact of EfSD. We chose the eco-schools initiative as it gives a clear and straightforward way to identify a school with an interest in EfSD. The project is important because even though EfSD attracts high attention in rhetoric, there is evidence indicating that EfSD may be neglected in practice. This paper presents part of a bigger project that aims to compare how primary schools and early years settings have approached EfSD via the eco-school initiative in the North East of England. This is a qualitative project that used a case study design to focus on the practices of two particular primary schools to gain a green flag status. A semi-structured interview was used with the lead teachers/practitioners of the schools; an audit was also conducted as part of a tour of the schools' premises highlighting the initiatives, curriculum work, projects undertaken as well as resources available to school. A content analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted with the creation of response categories and response narratives by the two researchers first working individually and then collaboratively; the findings of the project reflected issues that concerned: a) pupils' cognitive, physical and socio-emotional development, b) the wider community and c) the lead practitioners' role and status in school. In relation to EfSD, our findings indicated that its impact upon these two eco-schools was rather minimal; a mismatch was identified between the eco-school practices and a holistic understanding of issues that EfSD aims to achieve. This mismatch between eco-school practices and EfSD is discussed with regard to: a) pupils' understanding of the sustainability dimension in the topics they addressed; and b) teachers' knowledge of sustainability and willingness to keep on such work in schools.

Keywords : eco-schools, environment, primary schools, sustainability education

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