

Potentiality of a Community of Practice between Public Schools and the Private Sector for Integrating Sustainable Development into the School Curriculum

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Abstract : The critical time in which we live requires rethinking of many potential ways in order to make the concept of sustainability and its principles an integral part of our daily life. One of these potential approaches is how to attract community institutions, such as the private sector, to participate effectively in the sustainability industry by supporting public schools to fulfill their duties. A collaborative community of practice can support this purpose and can provide a flexible framework, which allows the members of the community to participate effectively. This study, conducted in Saudi Arabia, aimed to understand the process of a collaborative community of practice of involving the private sector as a member of this community to integrate the sustainability concept in school activities and projects. This study employed a qualitative methodology to understand this authentic and complex phenomenon. A case study approach, ethnography and some elements of action research were followed in this study. The methods of unstructured interviews, artifacts, observation, and teachers' field notes were used to collect the data. The participants were three secondary teachers, twelve chief executive officers, and one school administrative officer. Certain contextual conditions, as shown by the data, should be taken into consideration when policy makers and school administrations in Saudi Arabia desire to integrate sustainability into school activities. The first of these was the acknowledgement of the valuable role of the members' personality, efforts, abilities, and experiences, which played vital roles in integrating sustainability. Second, institutional culture, which was not expected to emerge as an important factor in this study, has a significant role in the integration of sustainability. Credibility among the members of the community towards the integration of the sustainability concept and its principles through school activities is another important condition. Fourth, some chief executive officers' understanding of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) towards contribution to sustainability agenda was shallow and limited and this could impede the successful integration of sustainability. Fifth, a shared understanding between the members of the community about integrating sustainability was a vital condition in the integration process. The study also revealed that the integration of sustainability could not be an ongoing process if implemented in isolation of the other community institutions such as the private sector. The study finally offers a number of recommendations to improve on the current practices and suggests areas for further studies.

Keywords : community of practice, public schools, private sector, sustainable development

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