

REPORT

**Green Foundation Ireland, along with
Cultivate, ECO-UNESCO and
Good Energies Alliance Ireland,
present a morning**

MEETING

"A New Climate for Education"



The Teachers' Club, 36 Parnell Square West, Dublin 1
Friday 3 November 2017 10:00 – 14:30

Project Co-Ordinators:
Duncan Stewart and Eileen McDermott of Green Foundation Ireland

Green Foundation Ireland, in collaboration with **Cultivate**, **ECO-UNESCO** and **Good Energies Alliance Ireland**, and with financial support from the **Environmental Pillar**, presented this meeting.

Duncan Stewart (Chair of Green Foundation Ireland) opened proceedings and emphasised that we are in a state of emergency and how as citizens we are not informed enough to act. In particular, Duncan noted our education system has a huge role to play in educating our youngest citizens for meeting the challenges they will face in the future. Even more than the public not listening or hearing the message, politicians are not mandated to change situations – it is up to us as citizens. Duncan talked of the dramatic loss in bio-diversity in recent times. Currently, wildlife populations are at 60% of when he trained as an architect in 1970. By 2020 it is predicted that we will have less than one-third of all wildlife populations that we had on the planet in 1970.

In addition to the existential issue of climate change, where our carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere are now 45% above the highest they were in over 800,000 years and likewise with our total greenhouse gas emissions. This is a major catastrophe.

Davie Philip (Cultivate) who facilitated the event, spoke of how young people need to develop 'critical skills' including problem solving, empathy, a sense of place and the development of co-operative skills. As moderator he fostered a culture of achieving consensus and ensuring the day was productive and results-focused.

Breda Naughton (Department of Education and Skills) spoke of the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Strategy 2014-2020. Breda noted we need to provide relevant knowledge around the 'what, how and why' of ESD through creating 'clear values' and supporting informed and active citizens. "Environment must conspire and dovetail with social, economic and political agenda" – they must all work in tandem. She noted sustainable development is now beginning to pervade across the curriculum – there are so many issues around the topic, much of it relating to global citizenship and promoting global peace. On the day, Breda was due to attend another event focusing on the Irish language and she spoke of how, when there are so many curriculum concerns and time pressures, it is hard to find a priority focus for what is important.

Peadar Kirby (Professor Emeritus of International Politics and Public Policy at the University of Limerick) gave a very rousing talk on education as a zone of tension which has to be navigated. His key question: what is education for? He discussed the root word for different methods of education: 'Ducare' – to lead, a method wherein the role of teachers is to inform. 'E-ducare' – to draw out discussion from the class and push possibilities. This is more risky – we don't know where it will take us. Peadar noted the problem of institutionalisation of education – and the need to provoke subversion of the dominant paradigm. For centuries there was a religious paradigm and an alliance between church and state. The new paradigm, the 'techno-economic paradigm', serving powers of global capitalism, ends up undermining society and our ecological systems. There are few signs of greening society.

Peadar noted we need a 'New Climate for Education' – climate change has to be the most dominant of our concerns. We need education for what is the 'good life' in holistic terms. Most radical evocation of education by Pope Francis and *Laudato Si'* sees it as serving powers of global corporations and the need to resist the techno-economic paradigm. The encyclical talks of 'myths' of utilitarianism, individualism, unlimited economic progress and competition. Peadar noted: "Science tells us we are facing Armageddon – and it's not just science fiction! We need to radically change direction – there is no bigger challenge".

According to Peadar, education must always be 'subversive', bringing change from below and not imposing a restrictive status quo mind-set to just keep the show on the road. We must sow the seeds of new values and new practices, and inspire new 'imaginaries' with a questioning spirit. All education must 'enchant'. There is now an urgent need to challenge students and change society.

Elaine Nevin (National Director of ECO-UNESCO) spoke about how ECO-UNESCO focuses on environmental education with students and teachers in second level schools and with youth organisations, encouraging behavioural change with an emphasis on 'eco-literacy'. Their programmes focus on developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, critical thinking and self-awareness. This includes the Young Environmentalists Awards.

Another major focus is on Transition Year students who utilise a lot of projects in their learning and development. They are running a 12-week Pilot Youth for Sustainability Leadership training programme in 2018. They have also developed ESD resources and guidelines for teachers and students, such as sustainability tool kits for use in class.

Michael John O'Mahony (An Taisce Green Schools Programme) discussed the Green Schools Programme. Such a programme is in more than 50 countries and came to Ireland in 1997. The focus is on global citizenship, taking a whole school basis from school principals to the school cleaner. The programme is a 7-stage approach and it is important not to try to put square pegs in round holes. The programme has to become an intrinsic ethos of the school, they can identify impact, legacy and continuing school travel patterns. Developing leaders' knowledge is most important in driving behavioural change, these attitudes can cascade and grow as a result. Focusing on good teachers is very important, as they are key agents in education.

From age 10 to 18 there is a downward trend in appeal to environmental issues, which is sad. Furthermore, females appear to be more engaged with environmental issues. Cultural landscape has a huge effect, level of national engagement with environmental issues close correlation with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – lower income countries are more concerned about climate change. Michael John noted that empathy and listening are very important.

He quoted Harry S. Truman: "It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit".

Derek Grant (Primary Education Officer at the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment – NCCA) noted there has been a redevelopment of the curriculum to promote ESD. There are six Curricular Areas which comprise 11 subjects. There are several aims to this.

The first is to foster an understanding of and concern for the interdependence of all humans and all living things. The second is to create a sense of responsibility to long-term care for the environment, cultivating humane and responsible attitudes and an appreciation of the world. The third is to develop a broad and balanced view of the environment. Lastly, this reform seeks to encourage an understanding of the positive and negative repercussions of human acts on the environment.

An example of this is Geography. Students are required to identify attractive or unattractive elements of the environment. They also develop an awareness of the importance of the earth's renewable and non-renewable resources. Physical education and well-being is also seen as important across the curriculum. See the NCCA website at <http://www.curriculumonline.ie> for more detail.

Ciaran Monahan (Leaving Certificate Examination Paper Analysis Results) looked at how Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied exam papers represent environmental and sustainability-related questions on the papers. Most assessed areas of course were Geography, Agricultural Science, Biology and Construction Studies. He found that, unfortunately, several questions simply used climate change problems to look for maths solutions, not looking for any real understanding of rationale for sustainability. He mentioned how many papers focus on actions rather than rationale, the 'how' and not the 'why'. He stressed that an understanding of both was important to make change feel not only achievable, but essential.

Benjamin Mallon (Postdoctoral Researcher at Dublin City University) works in the Centre for Civil Rights and Citizen Education at Dublin City University. Ben is looking at pedagogic options for ESD teaching – working from theory to practice. Dublin City University is one of ten member universities of the Global Consortium for Sustainability Outcomes (GCSO), a global network of universities dedicated to scaling sustainability solutions with like-minded partners around the world.

Part of this work includes Educating School Teachers and Faculty for Sustainability through Continuing Professional Development. This project recognises that the world can only become sustainable if people of all ages learn how to behave more sustainably. It helps teachers to master principles of sustainability and provides practical strategies to help students attain relevant competencies via the public education system, from kindergarten to adult learners. This project will adapt competencies-oriented models to offer workshops for primary to tertiary educators, ultimately resulting in generations of students with deeply rooted sustainability competencies.

He discussed how *Farid's Rickshaw Ride*, written by Rowan Oberman, is "an ideal storybook for teaching which straddles curricular areas and links the local to the global". He underlined the need to link Climate Science, Justice and Action with a focus on becoming global citizens and the need to ensure we adopt a responsibility versus a blame approach to the topic of climate change which can be a depressing topic. The topic can also be scary for children; we need to be aware of this and teach in a positive, constructive way. We need to be careful that we do not push responsibility for solutions onto young people and understand they did not cause the problem.

Young People's Perspectives: Hannah Fitzpatrick, Ruairí Moore, Aoibhínn Nevin-Ginnetty, Lily Ní Dhrisceoil – these senior cycle students expressed their views on the current lack of ESD in secondary schools. They were very articulate and want more focus on this topic in secondary schools. They accept that they are 'privileged' in their knowledge of ESD, as they attend ECO-UNESCO special studies courses and are involved in extra-curricular ESD activity outside of school.

Kate Minnock (Secondary School Teacher, North Wicklow Educate Together) spoke of her efforts and the sacrifices she made to bring sustainability into the curriculum in her classroom. Mainstream teaching does not allow enough time or resources to ESD and she feels sustainability needs to be a separate subject in schools, involving phenomenon-based learning and critical analysis of topics. Kate stressed the need for teachers' voices to be heard in discussions of ESD in future.

Pat Brereton (Professor at the School of Communications in Dublin City University) spoke in general about his Environmental Communication research, from the representation of farmers' tension between being 'stewards' of the land versus 'despoilers'. As key agents in the Irish climate change debate, farmers have to be addressed and not just demonised. There is a broader need for engagement with stories around environmental issues which media can and do cover. While accepting the danger of ideological co-opting and reinforcing the dominant ideological agenda – and the dangers of greenwashing – nonetheless the media has a major role in developing a critical/creative imaginary and putting the subject on public consciousness. Pat's new book, *Environmental Literacy: New Digital Audiences*, seeks to promote the need to develop more critical agendas, while engaging with all the new media affordances from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, amongst others.

Keynote Listeners' Reflections

Kevin McCarthy (Department of Education and Skills) was very generous in his round-up of the proceedings and understood the need to develop a more reactive educational curriculum. He also noted the need to tap into both formal and informal education, as well as making discussions enjoyable for audiences in order to change hearts and minds, and therefore promote behavioural change. He mentioned a website specifically for ESD, with special areas on environmental issues: <http://www.scoilnet.ie>

Aedín McLoughlin (Good Energies Alliance Ireland) spoke of how she worked, after being a teacher, on cross-border initiatives in the North of Ireland and then five years ago took up resistance to fracking and helped to get the practice banned in Ireland. Aedín noted education is key to change and we have to find ways of making it enchanting. She emphasised how to win the support of people and create a sense of urgency using new media. Schools are not separate from communities and sometimes schools should use their political clout to promote environmental issues.

Conclusion

There was an overwhelming interest expressed by all participants in continuing this dialogue. We in Green Foundation Ireland, along with our partners, look forward to pursuing this important discussion.

Eileen McDermott
Director
Green Foundation Ireland

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