

Evaluation Methodologies For The Sustainable Cities Project

Key aims of the Learning for Sustainable Cities project are to:

- Challenge or change values and attitudes
- Encourage positive action

How can we try and assess or measure whether we are achieving these aims?

The project aims to develop a range of tools and indicators that will try and show that we are:

- Improving knowledge and understanding
- Influencing values and attitudes
- Developing 'action competence' (i.e. the ability to take action)

The importance of this last feature is recognised in the review of 10 years of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) published by UNESCO for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

"Indeed, among the most successful programmes are those that avoid the belief that awareness leads to understanding, understanding leads to concern, and concern motivates the development of skills and action. Instead, the key ingredient of success is to start from the questions, issues and problems that concern young people themselves, and to help them develop 'action competence' through community-based learning. Action competence brings the capacity to envision alternatives, clarify the values and interests that underlie different visions, and make choices between visions. This includes developing the skills to plan, take action and evaluate needed in active and informed citizens. Action competence brings knowledge, not just of the problem and its symptoms but also about its root causes - how it impacts on people's lives, ways of addressing it, and how different interests are served by different sorts of solutions."

(From Rio to Johannesburg: Lessons learnt from a decade of commitment, UNESCO 2002)

However, this issue of action competence is very difficult to measure. It is relatively easy to assess changes in knowledge and understanding, more difficult to assess values and attitudes. But the 'value - action gap', the difference between what we claim we believe in and what we actually do, is recognised as being hard to measure. A person may think that they believe in something but not carry it through into action, due to a range of factors such as social norms, peer pressure and force of habit. Although it is recognised that knowledge and understanding of an issue does not lead to active engagement with it, it is also acknowledged that values have both an affective and a cognitive dimension. Thus it is important that pupils have some

knowledge and understanding about sustainable development and related issues in order that they can begin to clarify what their values base is.

One way of looking at whether critical reflection and actual change are taking place is to try and build in evaluation through 'baseline assessment'. The tools the project has been putting together are aimed either developing self-evaluation or giving teachers manageable methods to assess change in their pupils.

In recent years teachers have been put under increasing pressure to carry out regular assessment of learning. Politicians are concerned about 'standards' with regard to international economic competitiveness. Whilst some regular assessment of learning is an important part of teaching practice, it can put a lot of pressure on teacher and learner if such assessments are seen as the sole indicators of educational achievement. The methods proposed here are more to do with assessment for learning. The focus is on the learning experiences themselves and giving more control to the learner to become a more reflective learner.

It is important for educators to begin to understand the world that young people are in. Setting up moral dilemmas and scenarios gets young people to talk about things and give a variety of points of view. Young people are often concerned about images of conflict and horror that the media brings into their lives, but educators do not always give them the space to voice their concerns. Educators need to give space to young peoples' voices and then engage in dialogue with those voices.