

A Study on the Structure of Educational Practice to Promote the Formation of ESD Communities of Practice: Implications from Service Learning Cases in Okayama

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to clarify ESD's pedagogical significance and challenges and to explore the structure and characteristics of its contributing educational practices. This study focuses on the practice of service learning (SL) in two high schools and clarifies the requirements for forming ESD "Communities of Practice" (ESD-CoP) (Lave&Wenger, 1991), where ESD is practiced and mutually learned. In ESD-CoP, transformation occurs in various dimensions of SL collaborators and teachers. Additionally, by considering the fact that qualitative changes in practice occur simultaneously during the process and analysing this correlation, this study explores the dynamics that not only students but also participating practitioners and teachers deepening their learning are required for ESD.

Introduction

'What is ESD?', 'Why do we need ESD now?', or 'What kind of practices will lead to ESD?' If the key enablers of sustainable development are to become teachers, they will inevitably face these questions. New education, and the educational policy that supports it, requires new pedagogy. In the absence of a sustainable society, educational policies to promote ESD require more innovation. New pedagogy is also required to proceed with teacher education for ESD. However, it has been pointed out that ESD authoritatively promoted by international institutions and governments tends to be something of a 'Ship of Fools' (Gutiérrez & Pozo, 2005), 'Big-Brother' (Jickling & Wals, 2008) or even just a campaign within the economic growth agenda (Selby & Kagawa, 2014). Even in RCE Okayama, acknowledged as the most advanced ESD model city, many years have passed since the compilation of an ESD calendar, yet the existing curriculum remains unchanged and there is no demonstration of SDGs, which would benefit children or even neighbouring areas. Under these circumstances, teachers and educational institutions are required to come up with concrete proposals on how to transform into an essential sustainable society under the broad and vague concept of ESD and the simple, clear, 'catchy' ideas of SDGs. We seem to have no choice but to study the ground-based practice for its key success factors and implications for the structures.

In this study, 'ESD Practice' refers to educational activities and programmes that trigger the emergence of ESD. ESD does not end in a specific class with a unit but develops and expands from the starting point. This 'Expandability' is considered to be the quintessential feature of ESD, which refers to the formation of an ESD Communities of Practice

(ESD-CoP).

This study aims to clarify the structure of the ESD practice that produces this feature. In the two cases of long-term ESD practice that this study focuses on, qualitative transformations occur both in practice as well as in people. From the analysis of these correlations, we will explore the dynamics in which not only students but also teachers who are practitioners and partners deepen the learning required for ESD. This will clarify the structure and characteristics of ESD practice.

Literature Review

1. Requirements and Challenges of ESD

ESD is an empowerment process in which every person is transformed into a person responsible for creating a sustainable society. It is expected to question the very fundamentals of our modern education system through grass-root and daily efforts while envisioning a 'sustainable society' as an undecided and incomplete process. In particular, various educational practices from different fields interact among themselves and have the potential to invigorate one another. This is a characteristic of ESD that differs from conventional, modern education and is of vast pedagogical significance.

Furthermore, ESD expects changes in people's awareness and behaviour in all dimensions. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), everyone is a legitimate participant in some kind of community of practice. Therefore, it can be said that ESD is a process of legitimate peripheral participation in ESD-CoP. Thus, ESD-CoP does not have the characteristic of a steady partnership but continues to evolve as practices of different dimensions from different domains merge, come apart, or diffuse. 'Sustainable society' is a society in which ESD-CoP is activated. In other words, ESD is a broad and expansive practice, and the first requirement for its practice is to promote the formation of ESD-CoP. In addition, the three phases of FE, NFE, and IFE are interlinked, and its job is to deepen the interest in various areas while addressing local, daily, familiar issues. It is also important to consider ESD as an integral part of community practices.

2. Structure and characteristics of ESD practice

Based on the abovementioned ESD requirements, the structure and characteristics of ESD practices can be studied by focusing on Service-Learning (SL) as a practice that can contribute to ESD, reviewing the basic concept of its structure from the perspective of ESD, and considering the possibility and challenges of creating ESD.

Many studies have pointed out that the general SL is based on the concept of transformational learning and citizenship, in which there is an expectation for an individual's positive internal growth and transformation through experience, towards the justice society. There is a limitation in SL as it is based on and implemented within the traditional concept

and framework of citizenship as in something contributing to one, specific nation. That is to say, transformation or transformative learning in SL is different from that of ESD. However, when the SL sets the images of social and human as a process of a sustainable society, the infinite process, as its cornerstone, the theoretical limitations of SL can be overcome and it needs to be restructured accordingly (Shibakawa, 2017).

Methodology

As the first step toward the structural analysis of ESD practice, this study investigates SL cases (ESD-SL) of A Senior High School (A-HS) practiced as ESD in cooperation with the local practitioners, with so-called 'the whole school approach', since 2011. This study analyses the process of planning, operation, and new development based on field research. Based on interviews with teachers of A-HS and several main SL collaborators, and participation observations of SL related events and SL collaborators on the practice, this study examines the people involved through SL of A-HS and the dynamics of the practice, and analyses the factors that caused their changes and the possibility that learning as ESD will appear.

In addition, it is necessary to clarify the issues in the development of ESD-CoP into three interlinked educational practices: formal education (FE), non-formal education (NFE), and informal education (IFE). Therefore, as the second step toward the structural analysis of the practice, we focus on the ESD-SL of B Senior High School (B-HS), which started with the practice of ESD by one P.E. teacher, is now developing its curriculum and activities based on ESD, and is continuously developing the practice of ESD both inside and outside the region. With the aim of clarifying the structure of the practice that develops and expands beyond a specific lesson within one unit and creates the characteristics of 'Expandability' of ESD, the field surveys including the hearing surveys and the participation observations were conducted with teachers and others involved in the development of ESD practice at B-HS. The history and background of the practice development, the learning of the people involved, and the value brought by them were analysed. As a result of the research on the above problems and methods, the following results were obtained.

Results

The SL of A-HS has been practiced for over 8 years, led by the newly assigned principal who is conscious of ESD. At this school, the problem-exploring and experience-based learning which had been conducted for all students in the 'integrated study period' since 2003 have been restructured as ESD focusing on regional problems. The school as a whole aims at making itself as a local base for promoting ESD. As the number of SL collaborators increased in the neighbouring communities, new collaborative projects were created, and the relationship between the participants and the perspective of teachers also transformed.

However, ESD-CoP has not been activated yet as the local partners have changed every year and there are few continuing or developing projects.

Furthermore, to determine the characteristics of the SL as an ESD (ESD-SL), the study focused on the practical method of the same case and analysed the planning and management method based on ESD requirements. These are mechanisms to ensure the diversity of ESD fields and to enable various actors to interact with each other with an emphasis on the perspective of 'Sustainable society' in the overall plan and process of sharing the awareness of issues with SL participants, students, and teachers. These findings indicate that, compared to conventional SLs, they have raised awareness of sustainable societies, increased the opportunities for different areas of practice to interact, and provided students, teachers and the locals a first-hand experience in organising ESD-CoP.

Next, for the purpose of clarifying the problems in developing ESD as a practice, this paper analyses the transformation process in which SL collaborators of A-HS are involved in SL and the opportunity and factors that stimulated it. As a result, cooperative relations among collaborators emerged, and the scope of cooperation began to expand. It was not easy for the teachers to link various themes of interest with those of practitioners as ESD, or to advance SLs in cooperation with actors who are required to achieve certain results in a short period of time. However, it was suggested that this process of organising might include conflicts that are equally important as ESD, although the information was lacking. In addition, essential exchanges were created not within the framework of the SL but in informal settings close to its boundaries. Furthermore, while practitioners were caught in a dilemma due to the contradiction between SLs and ESD, the cooperative relationship dissolved within a few years before they could describe what ESD-SL was like, and there was a tendency to return to activities based on personal interests. In other words, ESD-SL has not yet escaped from the stage of practice in which teachers of A-HS are the leaders, which benefits only A-HS and ends within the school. Therefore, it has become a new challenge to promote the formation and organisation of a 'Communities of Practice' that continues to question the essence of ESD and works with others.

Given the changing nature of the Communities of Practice, new perspectives and structures are required for ESD-SL. Therefore, the structure required for SLs as educational practices to promote the formation of ESD-CoP was investigated. In the case of ESD-SL at B-HS, it started with a small practice by a single teacher and is now expanding outside the school and community framework. To clarify the structure of the SLs that are responsible for this situation, a field study was conducted to analyse the correlation between the qualitative changes in SL implementation from the planning stage of the SL at B-HS to the present and the formation process of an ESD-CoP through SL.

It was observed that various changes were taking place at various levels by SL

collaborators and that a wide variety of people in and out of the region learned through their involvement with ESD-SL and deepened their practice amid difficulties and conflicts. In addition, there is a process of organising a community of practice in which people involved in SLs, including teachers, learn from each other and promote ESD together with other practitioners. On one hand, it becomes clear that not only the values of ESD are important but also the new values and educational values that were created in the course of digging into the practice of ESD are shared among people, and that this is always being examined. On the other hand, it is still in the undefined, nascent stage. Schools and teachers are not clearly aware of what kind of structure of ESD-SL at B-HS promotes ESD-CoP, and trials and errors still continue.

Next, in order to determine the structure of the SL which creates ESD practice, we compared these two cases and analysed the structure to create an expanded ESD practice that promotes the formation of ESD-CoP. As a result, it was found that: 1) there is diversity in the practice areas, 2) multidimensional participation is possible in both areas and stages, 3) everyone involved in SL is a co-practitioner, 4) there is a place to promote interaction among SL collaborators (practitioners), 5) program flexibility and fluidity are high, and 6) the axis has shifted to informal learning place.

In addition, it has become clear that it is important to share a positive view of the following points with the parties concerned: 1. Fundamental questions about 'Modern Education' and 'Sustainable society' in the diverse practice areas, 2. Open and accepting attitudes towards uncertainty and tolerance to change during the process, 3. The entry point for ESD lies not in assigned tasks but in the interests and research themes of each person, 4. The positions of collaborators, teachers, and students are reversed or unclear, and 5. Creation of new values for a sustainable society by focusing their movement on 'Outcome' and 'Evaluation'.

Discussion

Based on the above results, in order to further promote the formation of ESD-CoP, this study aims to clarify the problems in the development of interlinked educational practices by the three phases of FE, NFE, and IFE. It analyses the conflicts between co-operators and teachers and the change of viewpoint in the development process of the practice of B-HS. The new challenge that emerges from this is the difficulty of maintaining the transformative aspects of ESD as a community of ESD practitioners, which is being promoted through SLs with formal education as the starting point. In the process of evolving SLs into practices that contribute to ESD, people need to accept uncertainty and be tolerant of change. Therefore, a structure that fosters a critical viewpoint is needed to question the obscurity of benefits and ESD itself. In addition, it became clear that it is a process that requires everyone to become a practitioner and learner instead of remaining in the position and relationship as a planner and collaborator of SL. Finally, it has become clear that there is a contradiction in

implementing 'Sustainable society' as an unfinished project within conventional SL. For example, an approach to problem-solving that focuses heavily on the sustainability of the surrounding region alone is not so much an expansive practice as it is a risk of being highly localised and specialised, which presents difficulties in linking to global challenges. However, examples also suggest the possibility that how to view 'FAILED' can make a difference. From the perspective of 'Sustainable society as a process', contradictions and conflicts in practice need to be emphasised and fully recognised.

Conclusion

Field research reveals the power of small practices and the importance of informal learning in the community. While the SL of A-High School is led by asking for the cooperation of the surrounding area through the school-wide approach, the SL of B-HS can be said to have achieved an SL like 'Feat' for various practices centring on the local community. Each practice is small, but each has its own axis of diversity and is self-rotating. In fact, the 'Future Children's Union' is an attempt to overcome the limitations of existing SLs. Furthermore, as an attempt to create a new ESD-SL, a CoP has been created to help children and adult supporters overcome the challenges of ESD. In this way, the community of ESD practices has been organised and each practice has changed. Looking at the spread of the ESD community from the B-HS region, numerous small practices, including those that have not yet occurred and those that are not yet visible, continue to expand.

The most important implication for ESD teacher education is that in both A and B high schools, instead of compulsory training or a top-down method, students learn informally by going out to the local community outside the school, meeting and interacting with various people, and above all, the activities that teachers themselves do as a lifework, not as 'Business' or 'class', are the basis for forming an ESD practice community. The beginning of ESD should be a teacher's enjoyment of change, enjoyment of fun, and satisfaction, rather than the dimensions of collaboration for SLs and ESD. Without these, conventional training and teacher training curriculums, such as understanding ESD as knowledge and recognising its importance, have a temporary effect and cannot expect continuity or growth. Teachers' educational institutions and educational policy-making institutions will need to actively support not only students but also the teachers themselves in their efforts to promote non-formal learning and ESD-CoP formation.

As a future issue, considering that there are various practical methods for SL, research based on the practice of other approaches such as higher education is necessary to develop ESD practice in which the three phases of FE/NFE/IFE are linked. The process of qualitative change in formal education, which is required for ESD, is also considered theoretically in this paper. It is necessary to continue the investigative research in the future.

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