

The development from being a green-school to become an ESD-school

The greening process and learning

Students learn a lot when they are greening their school yard. While they build waste management facilities, vermi-composts, develop gardens with medicinal plants, cleaning areas from plastic, they certainly learn a lot of facts but also develop different abilities. They get the possibilities to start their personal development processes to evolve an individual action competence. In planning and building different kinds of greening facilities students e.g. learn to: communicate with peers, co-operate, participate and solve problems. These altogether positive personal changes will also hopefully result in a raise of their self esteem. In the school greening process teachers also become learners. The new tasks 'forced' them to communicate with peers and their students in new ways. The teachers get the opportunities to develop a more autonomous decision making and solve many technical and logistic problems during the practical work. Also school managers become learners. The principal needs to learn more about funding applications, planning and organization of new type of unusual school activities. The staff and students need maybe to be encouraged by the management when things are not working out in an expected way. Greening activities are certainly learning experiences for all stakeholders involved.

The green school becomes an ESD school

A whole school approach towards ESD requires that the development of the 'outer' activities in the school yard also turns into a development of more 'inner' school processes. After the first focus upon the schoolyard and other outer activities e.g. cleaning plastics there is a need to make attempts to change the ordinary educational activities. A common theme for ESD schools is the focus on learners' development of abilities and skills. Working on real life issues and making different practical exercises facilitates students' development of abilities such as decision making, critical thinking, and democratic skills. They can participate in exercises that develop and clarify their own values, and they can also learn to identify and formulate different types of key-issues. Beside these important abilities, to be able to handle an increasingly complex world in an informed way, it is important to pay attention to students' personal development. The increase of self confidence, empowerment and ownership in problem solving is almost a prerequisite for being able to use the



developed abilities in an informed way and unfold a developed action competence. The ability for an informed action could also be facilitated by personal characteristics e.g. be patient and listen to others opinions, to be able to feel empathy with other peoples' life situations, cultural understanding and also respect their way of thinking.

Reorganize for development in school and community

The focus on the learner needs to be facilitated by changes in the school organization, structure and classroom teaching. The organization needs to offer possibilities for teachers and students to meet each other outside the classroom in discussion about an overall school development. Regular meetings where the principal is joining are essential. This type of organization allows democratic discussion regarding school development in general to flourish. This could be issues such as discerning key issues and contribute to the local community building or work with other types of real life issues. It could also be school issues as to make schedule adjustments temporarily or more regularly create opportunities for the education activities to be more subject integrated and thematic. It is vital that the student get possibilities to use their democratic rights to participate and take full responsibility for their own education. They need to experience an everyday type of democracy in the school and in the societal work where they soon will be the key stakeholders.

PhD Per Sund
Mälardalen University

