

## EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A COMMON GOOD FOR BOTH NOW AND THE FUTURE

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### Abstract

Altruistically speaking, humanity has now reached a point where it has recognised that it has a responsibility to achieve a development that is sustainable. This responsibility is outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This notwithstanding, as an intrinsically selfish creature, humanity also has a need to fulfil its own needs. This concept is set out by Maslow. Education is undeniably a linch-pin in marrying these two concepts, aiming to meet the challenges and the needs of both today's and future generations. Whether and how these needs are met for any learner affects the learner's motivation to learn and the educator's motivation to teach. Moreover, during their time in education learners form habits of mind, beliefs, and principles that will stay with them throughout their lives. This is why it is so crucial to reflect on the type of education that best 'cultivates and guides the sustainable humanity' of the learners. This is the challenge facing today's Anthropocene society. Any approach must be based on the vision of a just and equitable future for the next generations on a stable and resilient planet. With this in mind, we describe the paradigm shift towards an education for sustainable development. Subsequently, one of the principle outcomes of this contribution is a series of eight features which could be used as a template for any realignment of education aiming to achieve sustainable development at the same time as fulfilling Maslow's needs. Finally, further research may build upon these conclusions so that researchers are spurred to examine the topic in more detail in future practical work.

**Keywords:** *Educational guidance, human needs, Maslow, transformation, sustainable development goals (SDGs).*

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### 1. Introduction

Our world is continually progressing, and we must endeavour to re-adjust it towards a path that is sustainable. This entails a new way of doing things that improves our environment while at the same time ensuring justice, social equality and economic stability. This progress, however, is impossible without education, just as education is impossible without progress. Logically, therefore, the concept of sustainability is critical in any educational transformation. With this contribution we expand on the work of numerous writers in order to synthesise their perspectives and develop sensible approaches in this area. With this in mind, we, first, outline the necessity for a certain education in today's society and identify the unique challenges that education faces, such as alignment with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as Maslow's human needs. Subsequently, we synthesise eight features for an education for sustainable development check and guidance. This should aim to foster collaboration in the hope that education can continue to evolve supported by research.

### 2. Method

This contribution is based on a search of the literature for keywords like "education for sustainable development," "humanistic education," "human needs" and "paradigm shift." This was conducted using the following databases: Google Scholar, WorldwideScience.org, jurn and pedocs. "Characteristics," "definition", "inclusive", "challenges" and "transition research" were also used as keywords. We concentrated on articles that contained material relevant to a paradigm shift in favour of a humanistic education, with a particular emphasis on global sustainable development. We went on to

check the references provided by these search strings to see if there was any further content that might be relevant. Using the keyword search, specified above, the total search outcome was 9363 results of which 151 were considered important (see references; Quendler, Lamb, & Driouech, 2020). Moreover, the work by Papalia and Olds (1989), Berger (2000) as well as Bee and Boyd (2006) also provided food for thought. This contribution also draws from previous work by Quendler, Lamb and Driouech (2020). We present a summary of our findings from a thorough review of the literature in the following sections.

### **3. The multi-level paradigm shift**

We live in a world of manifold, complex relationships within a knowledge society, and at a time where technological developments are continually imposing "game changes" with hitherto unimageable rapidity. Everything is in a constant state of flux leading to additional challenges coming up daily. As said, education plays a crucial role in addressing any challenges. Nevertheless, the former is itself also subject to a paradigm shift, as described below.

The paradigm shift toward viewing the world in less economic and more sustainable terms is challenging the traditional way we think about education. ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) has evolved as a paradigm for rethinking education today. Such an education attempts to refocus education in order to empower learners in their interchange of knowledge to build values, attitudes and skills that encourage them to act sustainably for both present and future generations. Actually, what is meant here is to teach learners to manage behaviour, i.e. their needs while respecting cultural diversity and the earth. (United Nations, 2017) Furthermore, whether and how these needs are met for any learner has an impact on both the learner's motivation to learn and the educator's motivation to teach. In this regard, it goes without saying that Maslow's hierarchy can be used to improve the quality of education (cf. SDG 4) through motivation. When all levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs are met, learners show their full ability and eagerness for learning and acting in a sustainable way. Rethinking education in this sense entails reshaping it around components that actually put the learner at the heart of the system, i.e. humanistic-centred education. A vast number of authors have said and advised this (see Baillargeon, 2006; Marcotte, 2006; Maslow, 1987). On this track, we must think even further, prioritising the multi-dimensional development of the learner in a multi-dimensional world in order to make him or her an autonomous person. Such a person is capable of making fully conscious decisions for himself or herself (cf. Maslow, 1943, 1987), rather than focusing merely on becoming a functional citizen, well-integrated in the economic and political system of society within a given environment. Current knowledge of the requirements for the proper development and functioning of a human being makes it possible today to redefine approaches for rethinking our education systems. Based on the SDGs (United Nations, 2017) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943, 1987) education and training programs should enable each learner to achieve greater fulfilment of his or her potential under an umbrella of sustainable development. They must be built around eight features in order to truly provide an inclusive education that is potentially available to all learners.

### **4. Paving the way to an ESD: An inclusive field of research**

Accordingly, education that is based on and for the SDGs as well as human needs implies the need for deep changes in educational values, assumptions, policy, and practice. It goes hand in hand with the renewed global commitment envisaged in the Education 2030 agenda. This may represent an opportunity to rethink the need for ESD in order to address the challenges arising from the changing education and policy landscape. For that we have to consider multiple worldviews and alternative knowledge systems, as well as new frontiers in science and technology such as advances in neurosciences and developments in digital technology. Moreover, a broader perspective should be adopted by shifting the focus to human needs, imagination, and activity in a wide-scale system of transformation (cf. Quendler, Lamb, & Driouech, 2020). Experience tells us that such transformation covers eight features, for which further research for a successful, practical implementation needs to be undertaken.

(1) Essential: Is the fulfilment of needs part of a process of humanistic or human-centred education (Maslow, 1943, 1987)? Does education help a person to become the best human being possible according to his or her potential? How are the learner's needs fulfilled? How are the needs linked to sustainable development in an individual and collective sense? What is the role of needs in a transformative learning approach? (see Quendler, Lamb, & Driouech, 2020)

(2) Sustainable: Is sustainability integrated in any education system, both in terms of content and method? How are sustainability and the needs of the learners linked? Does sustainable digital modernisation take place? Is the emphasis on the potential of SDG innovations to catalyse transformations to more a sustainable learning of learners and working environments? (see Quendler, Lamb, & Driouech, 2020)

(3) Healthy: Does it embody and advocate healthy approaches to education (both learning and teaching), life, relationships, family and friends? Does education promote the biological, mental, moral and social well-being? (cf. Maslow, 1987)

(4) Tenable: Is it "ethically acceptable," as Sterling (2008) puts it, "working with honesty, justice, respect, and inclusivity"? Are there a range of educational realities in light of the many different political, cultural, social, environmental and economic contexts throughout the world? (see Morin, 2000)

(5) Feasible: Does it deploy, promote and teach using the current state of knowledge, technology and pedagogies in a way that is practicable? Are substantial changes in the social networks of learners and in the development of practices, routines, preferences, and interests of various social learning groups instigated? Is the 'how' of teaching and learning in the future already considered? (Quendler, Lamb, & Driouech, 2020)

(6) Viable: Is the education system financially viable, meshing with the market, fostering employability on the one hand, while maintaining academic integrity on the other? Is the system financially self-sustaining or are there dependencies? Are the latter above reproach? Is education defined as a never-ending process? (Quendler, Lamb, & Driouech, 2020)

(7) Effective: Is an individual capable of achieving, depending on their particular circumstances, the various combinations of what he or she can do or be (see Sen, 1992, p. 38–34)? Are capabilities conceived as temporary, changeable outcomes of evolving long-term co-evolutionary processes? (see Quendler, Lamb, & Driouech, 2020; Toner, 2011) Does education multiply the human being's ability to know and transform reality? Are learners capable of reasoning and evolving in their process of consciousness (cf. Maslow, 1987)?

(8) Common: Does everyone have access to quality education guaranteed by a minimum of infrastructure? How can we ensure that ESD is a common good but individualism is guaranteed? Is ESD as a common good a valuable complementary concept for the governance of education in a changing environment? How can the public interest and societal/collective development in contrast to an individualistic perspective be preserved?

## 5. Conclusion

This contribution aims to outline the theoretical and multifaceted foundations for a sustainable education as a common good for all people. This would ensure that all young people, both now and in the future, have access to a sustainable and inclusive education. We have shown that there are various concepts that can be used to approach the critical rethinking of our education. Such an approach is about the transmission of what mankind has learned about itself. At the same time, it is also about innovation, which means giving learners and educators the tools to push the boundaries of what is known and taught, to create new realities or generate new understanding from current ones. Such an approach is based on thoughts that emerge from the "zeitgeist" and is supported by literature. The practical implementation is still pending. Any practical finishing touches are welcome, running under the slogan "coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success" (Henry Ford).

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