

# Towards an ESD indicator for the UK

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Bath Royal Literary & Scientific Institute  
Friday, March 17<sup>th</sup> 2006

## My presentation this morning

- ESD and social science
- Different social theories, different kinds of ESD, different kinds of ESD indicators
- Background to UK ESD indicator
- My work on ESD indicators for the Sustainable Development Commission
- Results of consultation on six possible approaches
- So what role for social science?
- ESD and New Labour's education policies

Good morning. I have been invited to present to you this morning the results of my recent work on ESD indicators for the Sustainable Development Commission. As you can see from this outline of my presentation, I wish to begin by placing such work in a wider social scientific context. Having examined the work I wish to raise questions about the role of knowledge from the social sciences in ESD and conclude by briefly placing it in a wider political context.

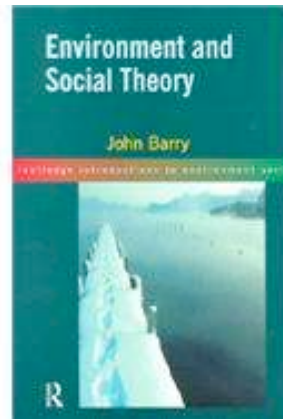
# Social science week

*What's science all about? Well, it's not just test tubes and technology. It's about people and society too. And that's what ESRC Social Science Week aims to show.*

*Social science is, in its broadest sense, the study of society and the manner in which people behave and impact on the world around us.*

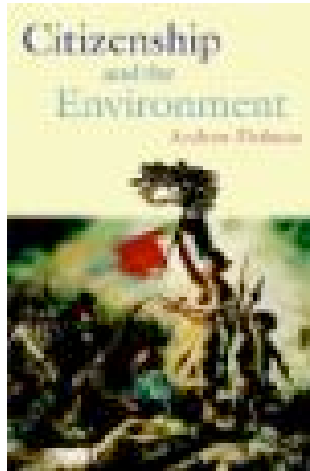
*Social scientists shape our lives usually without us even being aware. . . . Research findings continue to provide invaluable insights whether you are a parent, a local councillor, a police officer, or a business executive.*

<http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/what%5Fis%5Fsoc%5Fsci/>



Our examination of ESD indicators today is part of the ESRC's Social Science week. The week's organisers remind us that social science is about the study of society and the manner in which people behave and impact on their environment. In the fields of environment, development and education we have significant bodies of social science theory and research. Many of us believe that the application of this knowledge to ESD can both assist the transition to more sustainable forms of development and allow us to evaluate whether ESD is successful in realising this goal.

## ESD and citizenship education



*The citizenship curriculum. . . offers a gift-wrapped opportunity to politicize the environment for young people. Will this opportunity be grasped? . . . .*

*My advice, for what its worth . . . . is that in a constrained timetable, ethics, justice and fairness should take precedence over learning how to write letters to one's MP, teachers should systematically enact their own commitment and partiality in the classroom and the textbook should be replaced by the environmental campaign. P. 207*

In my opinion, citizenship education provides a key link between social theory and education for sustainable development. It is through citizenship education that students can acquire relevant propositional and procedural knowledge about environmental politics; develop appropriate skills, and come to appreciate how substantive and procedural values become enacted in policy.

As Andrew Dobson argues in the final chapter of his text there is considerable scope to foster environmental and ecological citizenship within the citizenship curriculum currently prescribed for schools, and it is regrettable that ESD at the primary and secondary levels has developed at some distance from citizenship education.

Not all would agree with Dobson's advice, but it reminds us that different social theories can be used to legitimate different forms of education and different forms of ESD.

## Prescribed learning and social change

*First it emerges from Kollmuss and Aygeman's reviews that a clear, linear mechanism linking learning to change in a positive way remains elusive and probably doesn't exist. Second resistance to (one might say denial of) this fact appears to be impervious to contrary evidence . . . . While the view persists that something as complex as sustainable development would happen if only people knew enough facts about it, it is more than fifty years since anyone believed that the best way to get a person to do something relatively simple, like buy a particular type of car, was to list its specifications.*

Scott & Gough, p. 112 -3

1. Environmental problems understood, social solutions understood (positivism)
2. Social problems understood, social and environmental solutions understood (critical theory)
3. Co-evolving problems and adaptive solutions (cultural or interpretive theory)



In their book, *Sustainable Development and Learning*, Bill Scott and Stephen Gough consider three kinds of theory that provide alternative foundations for ESD. They argue that both positivist theory and critical theory are too ready to assume understanding of problems and solutions – and too ready to prescribe learning on the basis of such understanding. Even if such understandings are valid, there is no clear evidence that prescribed learning leads to desirable change in the way that some, like Dobson and myself, would like to believe.

In opting for a third approach, Scott and Gough shift their focus from theories of social change to features of such change. In a post-modern world of complexity, uncertainty and risk, they argue that people's attitudes, interests and behaviours are multiple, dynamic and context specific. There can be no clear link between prescribed learning and environmentally responsible behaviour or citizenship. Rather than learning being a process that seeks to change people's knowledge, skills and values in prescribed ways in order to change the world, it should challenge their views of the world as a means of influencing their knowledge, skills and values, and hence their ways of thinking and living.

## Debate within the ESD community

teaching - learning  
content – process  
prescription - negotiation  
teacher as expert – teacher as facilitator  
academic knowledge – local knowledge  
universal truths – local truths  
learner as recipient – learner as co-researcher  
E(about)SD – E(for)SD – E(as)SD

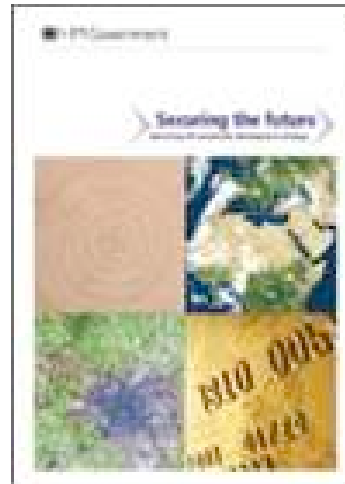
This seminar is not the occasion to defend critical social theory or examine the continuities and discontinuities of an ESD based on such theory with an ESD based on cultural theory, of the kind that Scott and Gough outline. Both regard sustainable development as a process of social learning, but draw on different kinds of theory and cast it in rather different roles.

It is sufficient for now to recognise a diversity of ESD theory and practice resulting in debate within the ESD community. Its members occupy different positions on such issues or continua as those sketched out here. Finding an ESD indicator with wide appeal will perhaps not be easy.

## The UK indicator

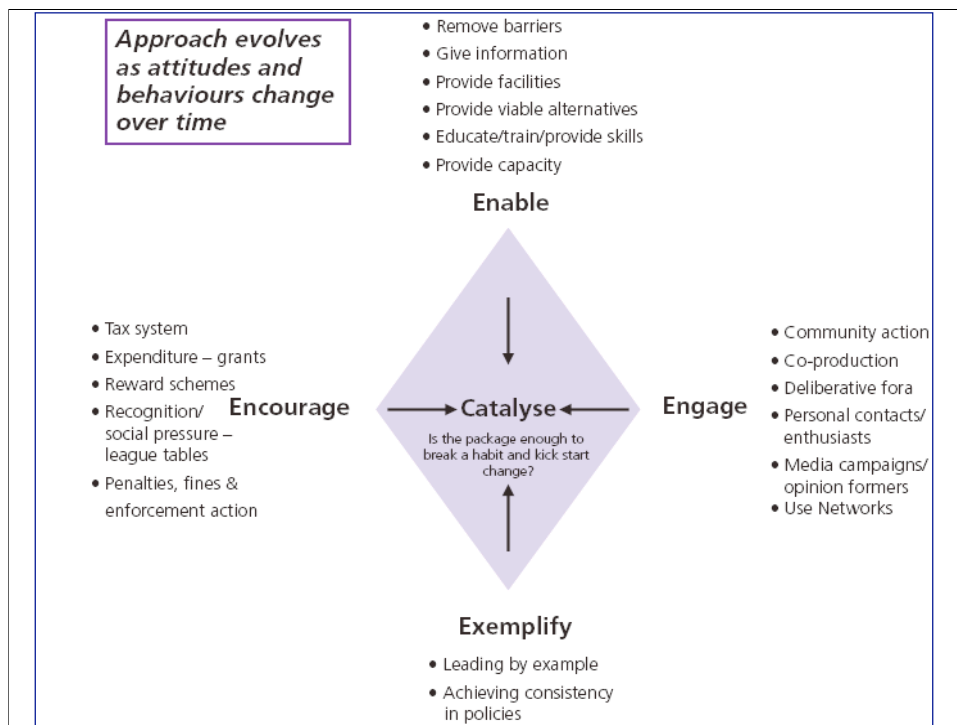
*In particular, the Departments for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and for Education and Skills (DfES) are actively seeking to develop an indicator to show the impact of formal learning on knowledge and awareness of sustainable development. Further work is needed on this, but the Government hopes that a suitable indicator will be agreed later in 2005*

*Securing the Future, page 22*



The UK Government announced its intention of developing an ESD indicator in the strategy for sustainable development it published last year. A factor that led to this announcement was the Environmental Audit Committee's critical review of ESD published in 2003.

Notice the wording of the proposed indicator – *to show the impact of formal learning on knowledge and awareness of sustainable development*. Note awareness before knowledge. No indication of what is to count as knowledge of sustainable development. No acknowledgement of the contested or discursive nature of sustainable development. But a welcome acknowledgement that further work was needed.



In the context of my earlier remarks regarding social theory and ESD, it is worth drawing attention to chapter 2 (Helping people make better choices) in *Securing the Future*. This states that behaviour change will be needed to deliver sustainable development; recognises the information alone does not lead to behaviour change; and proposes a new approach (as in the diagram) that enables, encourages and engages people and communities in the move toward sustainability. Education is seen as an enabler of attitude and behaviour change and to have a similar role in relation to sustainable development to that it has in promoting healthy lifestyles or civic renewal.

Some would see positivist social theory reflected here.



## An indicator to measure .

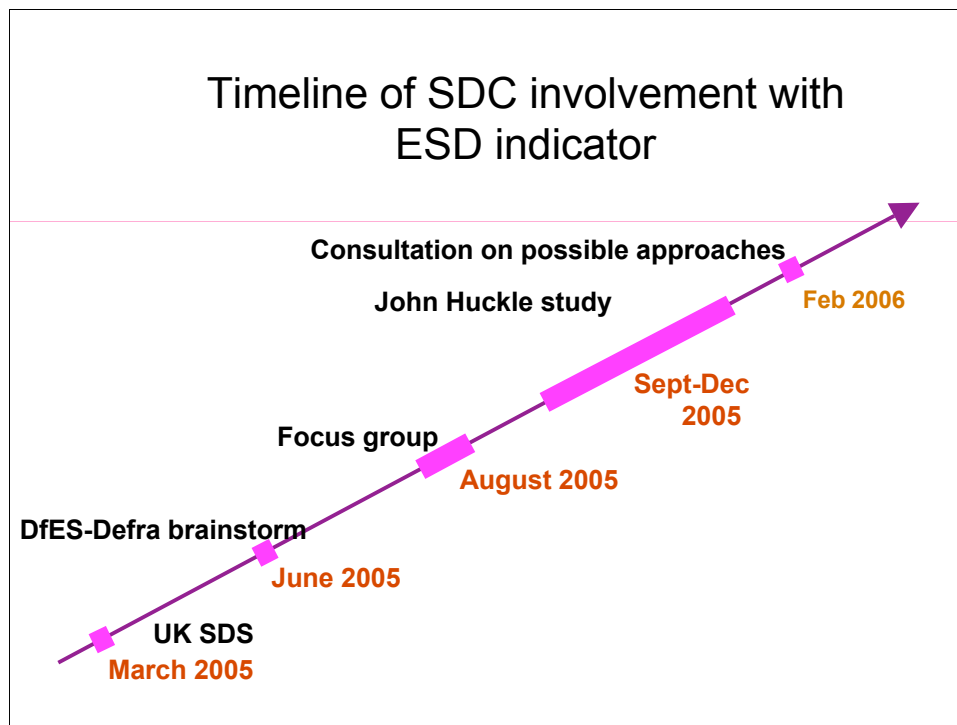
*The impact of formal learning on knowledge and awareness of sustainable development.*

As announced in *Securing the Future*

*The extent to which learners have developed the skills, knowledge and value base to be active citizens in creating a more sustainable society.*

To reflect the first objective of DfES action plan for SD

Once contracted by the Sustainable Development Commission I recommended that the proposed indicator be redrafted to reflect the first objective of the DfES action plan for sustainable development. It would then acknowledge skills and values alongside knowledge and awareness and suggest that the purpose of learners developing skills, knowledge and values is to equip them as active citizens capable of creating a more sustainable society.



The Sustainable Development Commission has the responsibility of developing the indicator and forwarding its proposals to DEFRA and DfES. Jake Reynold's is currently seconded from the SDC to advise the DfES on ESD. In August 2005 he consulted around twenty people on a proposal to base the indicator on a pupil questionnaire inspired by items used in the NFER's longitudinal study of the impact of the introduction of citizenship education in schools. Responses were overwhelmingly sceptical and this prompted the SDC to contract me to research other possible approaches.

### s3 Sustainable Schools self evaluation instrument

*Every school should [also] be an environmentally sustainable school, with a good plan for school transport that encourages walking or cycling, an active recycling policy (moving from paper to electronic processes wherever possible) and a school garden or other opportunities for children to explore the natural world. Schools must teach our children by example as well as by instruction*

*DfES 5 Yr Strategy, 2004*

1. School characteristics (1)
2. Stakeholders views (5)
3. Achievements and standards (1)
4. Personal development and well-being (5)
5. Quality of provision (4)
6. Leadership and management (1 + 10 foci)

It is worth noting that main trust of Jake Reynold's work in the DfES, in which he is supported by Ben Hren from WWF, is the development of policy on sustainable schools. An instrument has been developed for schools to evaluate their own performance as sustainable schools, and Ofsted may refer to this in future when inspecting all or some schools. The percentage of schools grading themselves good or outstanding, after Ofsted moderation, provides one possible ESD indicator.

## The six suggested approaches

1. The sustainability literacy approach\*
2. The sustainable schools approach\*
3. The citizenship survey approach
4. The action research approach (or sustainable schools approach 2b)
5. The Frame of Mind approach\*
6. The dilemma approach\*

\* Approaches for which a sample test / survey instrument was written

The paper I wrote for SDC suggests six possible ways of measuring whether learners *have developed the skills, knowledge and value base to be active citizens in creating a more sustainable society*. Each has a distinctive rationale and yields its own indicator. These are listed on the handout along with the advantages and disadvantages I claimed for each approach.

# Workshop 1

Andy Johnston, FfF	Leszek Iwaskow, Ofsted
Ben Ballin, Tide	Maggie Rodgers, Goldsmiths College
Ben Hren, WWF-UK	Martin Crabbe, Glebe School, Bromley
Chris Hirst, Brill Primary School	Morag Watson, WWF-Scotland
Connie Wessels, Girlguiding UK	Paul Vare, Learning South West
Janice Lawson, DfES	Sally Inman, London South Bank University
John Westaway, QCA	Sarah Taylor, DfES
June Thomas, Stow College	Steve McElroy, St Francis of Assisi Academy
Kate Perkins, Defra	

Written comments from Bill Scott, David Lambert

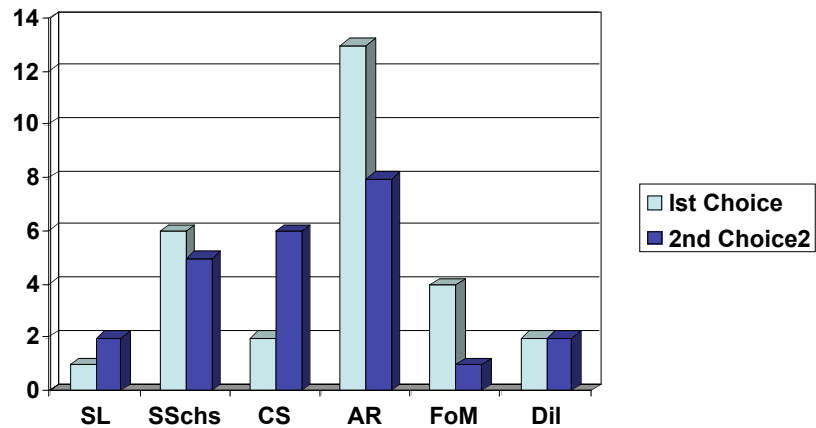
Once it received my suggested approaches the SDC arranged two consultation meetings at the DfES which around 30 members of the ESD community attended.

## Workshop 2

Barry Grieg, Scottish Executive	Kate Aydin, Oxford University
Bronwen Jones, Defra	Liz Wallace, Interboard ESD Group, NI
Carl Thurston, Eco-Schools	Michael Bonnett, Cambridge University
Cathryn Gathercole, DEA	Mike Tones, Durham CC
Chris Gayford, Reading University	Simon Stanley, DfES
Chris Southwood, Groundwork UK	Stephen Stirling, Plymouth University
Craig Johnson, Y&H ESD Forum	Steve Leman, DfES
Gill Hickman, Ringwood School	Wendy Miller, Plymouth University
John Rhymer, Worcestershire CC	

Some of you were present at one or other of those meetings.

## Preferences expressed by 30 participants



Participants at the workshops were asked to indicate their first and second choices from the six approaches suggested. They were also asked to rate the two approaches that selected with reference to eight criteria. You will find the table they used on the reverse side of your handout.

There was overwhelming support for the action research approach and some support for the sustainable schools approach. There was a clear suspicion, or outright rejection, of any approach that sought to test prescribed knowledge, skills and values.

## Any indicator should . . .

- Be manageable, meaningful and related to other evaluations taking place
- Free up rather than close down practice
- Reflect the values ESD seeks to promote
- Enable learning
- Reflect institutional learning rather than individuals' learning
- Be dynamic and stimulate continuing school and staff development
- Be partly authored by teachers and pupils
- Be adequately supported with time and money
- Be applicable across sectors

Participants expressed these views on the qualities of a desirable indicator.



## Tensions reflected in discussions

content focus / process focus  
single / compound / multiple indicator  
quantitative / qualitative  
prescriptive / locally determined  
self evaluation / survey / test  
approaches distinct / approaches overlapping  
imposed / optional

And their discussions reflected these tensions, with the majority perhaps indicating through its choice of the Action Research approach and its contribution to discussion, a preference for the kind of ESD underpinned by cultural theory that is advocated by Scott and Gough.

## Other approaches suggested

- Focus groups with pupils
- Potential of school development plans & pupil profiling
- School self assessment on S3 moderated by Ofsted

Other approaches were suggested – and some are still being received.

## The GA's response (David Lambert)

- Indicators only acceptable if they encourage the adoption or adaptation of effective practice
- Need to open up rather than close down the concept of SD via new approaches to existing curriculum (not a new subject with tests)
- GA needs survey revealed chronic lack of preparedness for ESD amongst teachers
- Testing the 'delivery' of ESD is deeply problematic and probably wrong headed
- Some of the suggested approaches, those that require tests (1 – 3), are 'almost ridiculous' in their complexity
- Danger of reducing ESD to 'learned correct responses'
- Favours AR, sees merit in FoM and Dilemma
- Use eg. 6 as research instrument to yield data > indicator

One lengthy written response, from David Lambert at the Geographical Association, brings me back to the role of social scientific knowledge in the planning, delivery and evaluation of ESD.

In wishing to avoid prescription, testing and 'learned correct responses', is there a danger that students will learn little if anything from the knowledge that the social sciences have accumulated regarding sustainable development?

## Questions for break-out groups

1. Are there any facts, concepts, principles, skills, and/or values from the social sciences, relating to sustainable development, that you would expect most school students to learn as a result of their participation in action research projects, whilst at school?
2. Why is it acceptable / not acceptable to prescribe such outcomes?
3. Why is it acceptable / not acceptable to base an ESD indicator on a test or survey of such learning?

This question informs the questions I invite you to address in your break-out groups this afternoon.

You will be provided with an outline of the action research approach, as presented to the SDC and those who participated in the workshops (see pages 3 and 4 of handout).

‘Our children need more than just higher grades’

*Education is about more than churning our efficient workers. It's not just what job we want but what kind of world we want to create. Children need the skills not just to play the game but the knowledge to change the rules.*

*But New Labour embraces a grim view of change in which people only respond to targets or competition. There is no space for consensus, cooperation or caring. Capitalism isn't on the national curriculum, but the education system rigorously prepares the minds of our children for it.*

Neal Lawson, The Guardian, 24.2.06

Finally I wish to remind you that social science also seeks to inform and critique social policy, including New Labour's policy on education.

On the day that the SDC organised its consultation on indicators, Neal Lawson from Compass, wrote a critique of the Government's education reforms in The Guardian. Sufficient to say that while on the one hand the DfES seeks sustainable schools that encourage pupils to care for themselves, others and the environment, on the other hand it continues to introduce policies which undermine the comprehensive principle and in Lawson's words leave little space for the consensus, cooperation and caring that many would see as essential for sustainable development.

In this situation ESD and an ESD indicator may amount to little more than 'green washing' but critical social science provides some of us with hope that things can be different.

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**Interested in educating for sustainable futures?**

If so you may find we share common interests.

I seek to combine critical social theories of the environment and education with critical pedagogy. The resulting forms of education are designed to empower citizens so that they are more able to realize a global democracy that gives full expression to environmental and ecological citizenship.

I have a particular interest in teacher education and after many years working as a college/university teacher, I am now a consultant on education for sustainable development (ESD).

On this web site you will find a list of my publications, some of which can be downloaded; notes and activities on ESD; and links to related sites.

I am interested in hearing from visitors via the feedback page.

### New on this site

**ESD briefing paper now published on this site.**

Between 2003 and 2005 I wrote and constantly updated a briefing paper on education for sustainable development for the Teacher Training Agency. This will be published on the Teacher Training Resource Bank (see links) and can now also be downloaded from this site (see downloads).

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