

**Extra-curricular education for sustainable development  
interventions in higher education**

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by

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## **Abstract**

Universities are seen to have a central role in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), partly through their teaching and research activities. However, the critique of Higher Education's (HE) contribution to sustainable development thus far points to the limitations of a discipline driven, curriculum content and solely student focused response. Within this context, extra-curricular interventions, for example, running awareness campaigns, creating groups and organising events, appear to have potential to advance ESD in HE. However, there has been little investigation or published work in this area. Ideas of *non formal* and *informal* education; *constructivist* theories of learning; concepts of *free choice*, *tacit* and *social learning*, and the notions of *whole systems thinking* and *sustainable education* all point to roles for interventions in the extra-curricular sphere.

This thesis explores the use of extra-curricular interventions in HE through an empirical investigation in the UK. A 2006 postal survey of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) records the extent and type of interventions in use and opinions about their utility. A case study, developed through action research, reports the use and impact of extra-curricular ESD-related interventions at one HEI over an academic year (2006-07). In this case study, regular contact with a group of staff and students over the year is used to map changes in their thoughts and actions relating to sustainable development, and to record the influences attributed to these changes.

Importantly, extra-curricular ESD-related interventions are found to be commonly used in UK HE, and to have a prominent position in ESD work despite their limited visibility in the literature. Their utility is confirmed as they are seen to provide experiences that contribute to student *and* staff learning, as well as institutional change. The evidence collected supports their roles as: *disciplinary bridge*; *community bridge*; *socialisation scaffold*, and *social learning arena*. They appear to have a useful developmental role in mobilising and motivating members of the campus community. As peripheral activities, however, extra-curricular interventions may be prone to erratic implementation through being under-resourced. They can extend

participation in ESD although will not reach everyone. They are best viewed as a complementary part of ESD and linked to a process of curricular and pedagogic renewal.

In addition to confirming the extent, utility and limitations of extra-curricular ESD practice, the research contributes a model to map understandings of sustainable development. This model points to a core environmental understanding to which extra layers and strands of thinking can be added. It also confirms the importance of *non formal* and *informal* influences in shaping people's conceptions of sustainable development.

## **Thesis related outputs**

### ***Published journal papers***

- Lipscombe, B. (2008). Exploring the role of the extra-curricular sphere in higher education for sustainable development in the United Kingdom. *Environmental Education Research*, 14(4), 455 - 468.
- Lipscombe, B. (2008). Understandings of sustainable development in a university community. *Internationale Schulbuchforschung - International Textbook Research*, 30(2), 565-580.
- Lipscombe, B., Burek, C., Potter, J., Ribchester, C., & Degg, M. (2008). An overview of extra-curricular education for sustainable development (ESD) interventions in UK universities. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 9(3), 222-234.

### ***Published conference proceedings and abstracts***

- Lipscombe, B., Burek, C., Potter, J., Ribchester, C., & Degg, M. (2007). Extra-curricular education for sustainable development (ESD) interventions in UK universities. In L. Downsborough & H. Lotz-Sisitka (Eds.), *Abstract book: 4th World Environmental Education Congress: Learning in a changing World*. Durban.
- Lipscombe, B. (2008). Education for sustainable development: the challenges and opportunities of using the extra-curricular sphere. In C. Shiel & S. Takeda (Eds.), *Education for sustainable development: graduates as global citizens. Proceedings of an international conference. Bournemouth, September 2007* (pp. 68-79): Bournemouth University.

### ***Other outputs***

- Lipscombe, B. (2007). *ESD The Extra-curricular dimension*. Paper presented at the Bridging the gap: how sustainability links campus, community & curriculum, EAUC 11th Annual Conference from [http://www.eauc.org.uk/file\\_uploads/6\\_\\_bryan\\_lipscombe\\_1.ppt#256,1](http://www.eauc.org.uk/file_uploads/6__bryan_lipscombe_1.ppt#256,1).
- Lipscombe, B., & Ribchester, C. (2007, July). *Making education for sustainable development: inside-out and outside-in*. Paper presented at the Sustainability and the curriculum: progress and potential conference, University of Bradford.

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