# Empowering pedagogic design
## Implementation of basic principles in the post-soviet educational system
### *Example: ESD in Ukraine*

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*For three years my colleagues and I have been working to implement Lessons for Sustainable Development in Ukrainian schools. We have come to believe that some characteristics of ESD are particularly important in the creation of an ESD model for teaching and learning at school. So let me describe their content and essence which we found in our experience.*

## Squeezing SD into a standard curriculum

The first such characteristic is the transdisciplinarity of SD as a phenomenon (M. Mehlmann). In an educational context it means that the curriculum should consist of elements from many different school subjects.  And not only such elements but also a lot of information from and about real (everyday) life. So we had to create a special new, integrative and inclusive subject and implement within the current model of school education.

Ukrainian educators traditionally connect SD to the sphere of natural science. And there is certainly something in this. For example ESD students can definitely benefit from their classes in chemistry (composition of water, air), physics (measuring of energy and power intensity), biology, and other knowledge about nature.

However, ESD also demands great attention to social aspects, because a sustainable society cannot function without democracy, ongoing dialogue, participation, and the empowerment of people – individuals and groups. Also SD is only possible when human relationships are based on respect, tolerance, intercultural cooperation. So from the perspective of the standard school curriculum this is already 'social studies' and even social psychology, social 'engineering', or even philosophy.

This very short list, which can be continued and continued, shows what complex and difficult curriculum topic we have. We believe that we need not only a separate ESD subject but a general ESD approach for the whole curriculum development process as well.

## Finding the 'right' teachers

The next challenge is very practical and important for schools: which teachers will deliver the ESD course?

In our experience the first candidates who present themselves are mostly teachers of biology and geography, with experience of environmental education. Consequently, they are happy to emphasize environmental topics rather than embracing the whole of SD – a fact noted and regretted by UNESCO when assessing the progress of the UN Decade for ESD.

It is interesting that sometimes the purpose of the ESD course is understood better by teachers of history, school psychologists, social pedagogues because they are not locked into an "environmental stereotype". The challenge is to find, motivate and train them – and to help create opportunities for them in their schools.

## Educating for action

Another characteristic of ESD which is stressed by UNESCO is the fact that the ESD Decade is FOR sustainable development rather than ABOUT it. So the main goal of ESD is to equip our students with all necessary skills to act for SD –at the most basic level, to develop their skills to relate to themselves and interact with others and with the whole world more harmoniously.

This is a special way of thinking and acting. If we look at this as an educational objective we need to train our pupils in such thinking and acting during our lessons, to gain their own experience, discuss it with others, enrich each other in ESD ideas – to move much further than teachers can propose them today. It gives rise to specific pedagogical challenges, because practical realization of this objective requires:

– Creation of a comfortable, safe, stimulating atmosphere during the lessons: a democratic learning space which awakens and encourages the creative abilities of children
– Use of teaching methods and procedures which help to involve the learning resources of each child to dialogue, and engage in cooperation based on her/his individual style of learning.
– Development of an image of desirable student behaviour which is adequate to ESD rather than to an educational situation focused on accumulation of knowledge.

These elements are not part of standard teacher training in the former Soviet Union, so we needed to pay very special attention to them when developing the methodology for our "Lessons for Sustainable Development": one lesson a week for a full school year, for 14 year olds.

## Starting point
The course was designed according to the principles of empowering pedagogy developed within the international GAP community. Ten key success factors have been identified.

### 1. Focus
Clear focus of the curriculum, the whole learning process and each lesson:
  a) On individual solutions and choices of each student or each participant of ESD
  b) On human needs in a planetary context
In our course this principle was realized through special structure of the content; each student is invited to make a choice and decision about their own lifestyle, behaviour and immediate actions.

### 2. Caring
Choice of topics and learning material is connected with the most urgent and important problems of SD. On one hand, students care about these problems and on the other - they want to solve them. Caring about something is the basis for the student's motivation for action.

### 3. Formulating questions
There is an ongoing process of asking questions by teachers and students: questions predominate over answers during the lessons.

### 4. Finding out
Making a discovery, finding information: each topic of our course begins with students exploring their own lifestyle and habits. Then they need to find information about the topic. This kind of investigation is the way to initiate a discussion and enter the topic.

### 5. Formulating intention
An invitation to personal and group goal-setting: after their explorations and based on results students develop the intention to begin their action and present it to classmates during meetings in ecoteams.

### 6. Taking experimental action
During the lessons students are invited to take experimental actions for SD. They are very simple, for instance:  think before buying; try to avoid purchases at least one day. The learning process may be reinforced by also inviting them to coach others to formulate intention and take action – see Invitation.

## 7. Feedback
The learning process provides for regular feedback about students` actions and ideas which they receive from other children and the teacher during small group work and whole class dialogue.

## 8. Invitation
During the lessons students act on their own, so the teacher cannot tell them to do something or apply pressure on them in authoritarian way. S/he supports/empowers them to be active. So the teacher needs to invite them
   a) To personal experience / experiment
   b) To reflection
   c) To coach and teach others

## 9. Continuity
The methodology presupposes some constant elements (they are basic for the structure of each topic). Among them
   a) An ongoing cycle: choice –> finding out –> action+results
   b) Low threshold (each student chooses something feasible for herself/himself), small steps
   c) Teamwork (the key model of students` actions is cooperation), intercultural cooperation

## 10. Legitimacy
   a) Endorsements
   b) Publicized results
This principle means that everything that has been done should be made legitimate or, in other words, both acceptable to the primary 'target groups', and – since this is a school curriculum - also officially adopted for the national educational system. One of the keys is to give wide publicity to our practical results.

## Evaluation
To say that this course is successful is an understatement; it is succeeding beyond all expectations. Evaluation of the first year of full-scale testing (in over 50 schools) was carried out in October 2007 using a Pattern Laboratory approach. The evaluation was focused on
   • Identifying major factors contributing to the success, to make the experience easier to replicate
   • Clarifying ways in which future projects could be even more effective

The conclusions were grouped under three headings:
   • Learnings for local implementation, that is for teachers, school heads, and local educational administrators
   • Learnings/opportunities for the national team developing the program and training teachers
   • Learnings for the international support team

## Learnings for local implementation
### Practical advice
   • Use regular parents' meetings and parents' organizations for inviting and attracting
   • Organize SD-related events to include parents
   • Initiate transdisciplinary activities involving partners outside school
   • Develop a media strategy, place items in the local media (papers, TV etc.)
   • Keep careful statistics of actions, intentions and (above all) results
   • Present potential benefits of behaviour change to service providers, using the statistics; liaise actively with the national team
   • Support those (pupils and parents) who are active 'ambassadors'

*Personal support for teachers and others directly involved*

    a. Get a personal coach or mentor (e.g. mutual mentoring, praxis group)
    b. Work with your own response to 'no', and to non-functioning routines and people
    c. Practice deep listening and 'giraffe language': practice listening and learning in a genuine and mutual way
    d. Continue to empower yourself and others – an ongoing process

**Learnings/opportunities for national team**
*Build on a successful process*

- Create a national communications and PR strategy
- Test small-group fora for mutual mentoring
- Seek to develop truly mutual relationships
- Emphasize the role of NGOs as links and cross-fertilizers between partners
- Continue working to secure practical support on the state level
- Reinforce political influence and make sure of municipal support
- Support local groups to produce statistics, eg concerning potential benefits

*Raise funds to keep program momentum*

- Find ways to meet the large and growing demand for teacher training
- Raise funds for bigger print runs of the materials in 2008
- Fund a position as public relations manager/strategist
- Find ways to compensate teachers for taking on extra work

*Develop additional materials*

The team had already identified a wish for additional materials concerning economic sustainability, (more about) social sustainability, and specific action steps for rural communities. Additional proposals from the evaluation workshop:

- Create/offer 'on-demand' education and information packages about aspects of sustainable development for different audiences
- Produce special materials for parents e.g. about food, health, lifestyle, to enable those interested to participate more fully
- Offer teachers basic training in managing micro projects with pupils
- Develop a checklist of criteria for selecting/recruiting teachers to work with sustainable development (a first draft was produced during the evaluation workshop, see below)

**Learnings for international team**

The evaluation showed that all ten key success factors had been implemented in the project work and materials, and all were confirmed to be important. Recommendations for improvement in future development projects:

1. Add some training modules at a meta level:
    – about personal change
    – about handling 'no'
    – about the role of leadership
    – about forms of partnership and cooperation
2. Consider the role of intercultural learning in and for sustainable development, including intergenerational, inter-gender, cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral, cross-cultural.
3. Research better ways of developing and presenting cost–benefit calculatons.

**Conclusions**

Involvement of *students* in ESD is much more than an enjoyable learning process, it gives them methods and tools which they need to be successful in many spheres of life, and develops their confidence that they themselves, their country, and humankind have a future.

The most important skills and characteristics for an ESD *teacher* are:
- Commitment to the SD idea
- Confidence that it is important to go this way
- Openness to new, especially transdisciplinary, knowledge and skills
- Readiness for effective cooperation with students, equal participation in the SD adventure
- Professional pedagogical and psychological knowledge and skills – and willingness to develop them further

All these skills and characteristics are interconnected and create together the basis for ESD.

*What next?* The success of the TDP program gives rise to other challenges, e.g.:
- How to add new topics to the curriculum, and make it more flexible according each school's needs
- How to find more effective ways to train a new generation of teachers – teachers for ESD
- How to integrate ESD into every subject as a general approach to curriculum development.