POLICY, PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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Summary

This article provides essential general, as well as specific, information regarding policymaking, planning, and management processes associated with all types of educational endeavors. Such information is seen as vital to advocates of either innovative and/or traditional educational visions. The effective implementation of policies supporting education for sustainability in schools and school systems will depend largely on the effective understanding and application of the processes reviewed below. The effective use of schools in assuring a sustainable and diverse human future requires the development of educational policies dealing with all the complexities of sustainability and capable management and competent planning for their successful implementation.

1. Introduction

The history of modern educational systems is studded with examples of schools being used for broad, more normative (e.g., religious, ideological, cultural, national, etc.) goals. Whatever these broader educational goals, their effective attainment requires policymaking, planning and management that will serve them well and ensure their implementation. This means that policies should be based on the broadest support, coupled with rational, knowledge-based planning and management. The goal or vision of education for sustainability is no different. The effective use of schools to help assure a sustainable and diverse human future requires the development of educational policies at local, regional and global levels that will raise human understanding about the fragile nature of human-environment interaction. The actualization of such policies will require the planning and management of schools around such concepts as sustainability, sustainable development and sustainable futures. This article is geared to

help the advocates of this new educational vision to better utilize the broad areas of educational policy, planning and management in the achievement of their ideals.

The topic of policy, planning and management within the context of education for sustainability is vast; it covers three distinct bodies of literature. What constitutes policy is the subject of continuing debate in all circles, including those advocating education for sustainability. At the simplest level, policy constitutes the intentions of the legitimate decision making bodies that have the authority and the resources to orient, guide and organize the education system. Planning may be seen as a collection of tools designed for the rational allocation of resources (human, financial, physical), ideally in the application of the stated policies. Management covers a host of activities ─ including planning ─ that bring knowledge to the service of governing schools and the educational system to which they belong.

This topic is vast, but it is not disparate. What holds these three areas together ─ their point of convergence ─ is seen in the following:

- If policy is as implementation does,
- And implementation depends on ability (capacity, knowledge, resources, willingness) to get the work done,
- Then attainment of policy goals will greatly depend on the existing institutional capacities.
- Therefore, institutional capacities are crucial for successful implementation of the highly complex tasks (processes) of delivering the services expected of education systems.
- This means that "getting the policy right" ─ i.e., its successful implementation ─ requires capable management and competent planning.

Think of an education system as a firm or an enterprise. Once this idea is fixed, it becomes apparent that the education system is, more likely than not, the largest enterprise in many countries. After all, the "education enterprise" ─ especially in countries where the system is centralized and run by the education ministry ─ probably has the largest number of employees and, therefore, the largest payroll and the biggest budget in the country, along with extensive real estate holdings. In order to manage all this, education ministries display all the characteristics of large-scale, complex organizations. The "enterprise" can be seen as a complex organization which is functionally differentiated in that it can include a variety of lines of communication and authority, has functions that are centralized (e.g., budget, personnel management, curriculum development) and others that are decentralized (teaching), and processes large amounts of disparate information. It has a body of procedures, rules and regulations that guide all concerned (parents, students, teachers, administrators, etc) as they play their respective roles.

To this must be added the challenge of education's weak theoretical and scientific foundations, that can be as challenging to policies promoting education for sustainability as any other policy concern. There is no generally accepted learning theory in formal education, which means that there is relative uncertainty as to how to produce the desired results in student learning and achievement. Taking these factors

into account, it is easy to understand how difficult it is to make policy and manage such an enterprise. (In contrast, for example, in medicine, when a competent doctor makes a diagnosis, there is a high probability that he or she can predict the outcome. There is no equivalent in education.) Parents are concerned about the ascendancy of the values and teachings of the school over those of the family—i.e., the socialization power of the school. Indeed, people probably trust more readily their bodies to doctors than their children to the school. And, to compound the difficulty, everybody is an expert on education. It suffices to have been to school oneself, or to have children in school, to be convinced of one's convictions and expertise. This is why educational issues become so political, which has everything to do with matters of policy, planning and management.

The education "business," of course, is unique. It does not produce widgets; it produces a country's future. In terms of the sustainable futures envisioned by those advocating education for sustainability, this can be viewed in the form of children and young adults with increased levels of cognitive and social learning which encourage them to understand and support concepts like sustainability, sustainable development and sustainable futures. It can also be conceptualized as the production of the human and social capital, which is needed by all countries to actualize a more sustainable world model for humanity.

The development of education systems that advocate sustainability and sustainable development means, first and foremost, education systems that are healthy and viable, that are capable of producing curricula and programs, enrolling students and ensuring their learning to the desired standards. To achieve such standards basic education is seen as essential for the creation of a solid foundation for on-going school initiatives and curricula that promote education for sustainability. Policy formulation, planning and management, of course, are at the very heart of all such educational visions, including education for sustainability. Whatever the desired outputs and outcomes of the education system, these three functions will always play a central role. Viable policies and effective implementation will always require strong capacities for planning and management. UNESCO's EFA 2002 monitoring report makes this painfully clear. So does the UNESCO document *Education for Sustainability*: From Rio to Johannesburg: Lessons learnt from a decade of commitment (2002). A new vision that encourages sustainable living through education for sustainability requires a more holistic, interdisciplinary educational approach that promotes new values, behaviors and lifestyles to achieve a more balanced interaction between humans and the earth. Such a vision requires the forces of policy, planning and management for its successful actualization and implementation.

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Biographical Sketch

Richard Sack is a sociologist of education, working in educational planning and management. Much of his work has been in Africa. He received his Ph. D. from Stanford's International Development Education program and has taught at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Recently, he held the position of Executive Secretary of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa, which is a policy network, composed of African ministers of education and senior officials of most of the

development agencies active in education in Africa. Before that, he worked as an independent consultant, which is now again his current activity.