Epistemic groundings for literacy in sustainable development at the local governance level

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Coverage

- Background and rationale
- Paradigms of sustainable development
- Relationship to sustainable education
- Link to literacy
- Paradigms of literacy
- Role of literacy in sustainable education
- What type of literacy?
- Relevance for local government workers
- Relevance for local government academics

Background/rationale/definition of terminology

- Epistemic Vs. Epistemology (cal) Process vs product
- International consensus about the importance of literacy in sustainable development (see Myhill 2009)
- Contentions about the extent of success (Ade-Ojo 2009a, and b, Moss 2009)
- Yet, some form of unanimity across continental divide leading to exhaustive literacy programmes (Skills for life (2001) DFEE (2003, 2004 etc) in the Uk, Hartley and Horne (2006) in Australia, Robinson-Pant (2009) in Nepal, EDRS (2001) in Asia and the pacific, Skinner (2009) in Ghana .

Key questions

- Why do we have different perceptions of the success of literacy development programmes?

- Why are there divergent views on the success of the same programmes?

- Preliminary answer: Our understandings of sustainable development vary just as our understanding of literacy, our way of knowing literacy vary.

Rationale

- Establish the different ways in which we know/understand literacy

- Drawing from above, have a clearer understanding of how literacy will function based on the different ways in which it is known and understood in the context of sustainable development.

Sustainable development: A contested paradigm

- Has been a focus since the magna Carta of 1297 (Contains a statement on the relationship between conservation and intergenerational equity)
- One of the most contested paradigms in social discourse
- Laden with divergence in opinions

Definitions illustrating divergence

- *'sustainable development is maintaining and enhancing the quality of human life—social, economic and environmental—while living within the carrying capacity of sustaining eco systems (Drummond and Martin' (1999)*

- *'A better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come' (DETR 1999)*

- *'Treating the earth as if we intended to stay there' (Tickell 2000).*

- *'the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Adeyeri 2002 cited from World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).*

Implications of differing definitions

- Perceptions of sustainable development are coloured by different epistemic realities

- Different strands/aspects to sustainable development

- There cannot be a convergence of views amongst people who have different epistemic realities of sustainable development

Framework of sustainable development: three aspects (Harris 2001)

- Economic: advocates a system that must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis, to maintain manageable levels of government and external debts, and to avoid sectoral imbalances that damage agriculture or industrial production' (Woods 2007).

- The environmental strand: demands the maintenance and non-overuse of non-renewable resources with a strong emphasis on the process of replacement of such resources.

- The social: emphasises equity, provision of social services and political participation and transparency. Developing from these divergent anchors to our perceptions of sustainable development are differing epistemic realities.

Preliminary conclusions

- Three epistemic realities of sustainable development and each is addressed by at least one of the definitions provided earlier

- Requires different strategies

- Difficult to find consensus amongst different positions

Convergence in divergence

- We are not born with our world views
- So, sustainable education is a crucial part of achieving sustainable development
- As noted by EDRS (2001:10), regardless of the divergent views on what constitutes sustainable development, 'Development cannot take place by itself' … as 'education becomes the most important factor for development…'.
- Literacy is a key part of sustainable education at non – formal education level (EDRS 2001, Hartley and Horne 2006, Moser 2001)

Further competing epistemic realities: Paradigms of sustainable education

- Seen from two perspectives:
- 1. the 'formation of a sensibility about the urgency of the environmental crisis and responsible development'
- 2. 'a concept of intrinsic educational sustainability' :(Mandolini 2007)
- Relating to 2 above, sustainable education is an instrument which 'builds and strengthen the individual's means to shape his/her life autonomously and to be able to lead himself/herself on' (Jamsa 2006),
- And to 1 above, it is a wider instrument which must now 'catch the historical needs, seize good development directions, and make culture attentive to the values that it expresses' (Konsa 2004).
- While one role focuses on the practical consequences of being educated as manifested in economic development, the other relates to a hermeneutical responsibility and moral prominence.

Preliminary conclusions

- 2 epistemic realities for sustainable education
- While reality 1 is driven by economic imperatives, reality 2 is driven by other social and human realities
- Has implications for literacy as a component of sustainable education.
- Leads to competing epistemic realities 3: Literacy paradigms

Competing paradigms of literacy

- Key questions:
- Is literacy merely a set of skills which enables us to meet the economic demands of society through employability and regeneration of capital?
- Is literacy more a tool for the individual than the society?
- Expect different responses and in each response we find the epistemic realities of literacy for different people.

Literacy: 2 major models of perception

- Two models have historically been at counterpoints.
- 1. Autonomous
- 2.Ideological (Street 1984 and 1995)

Autonomous model

- Traditional

- Dependent on writing

- Cognitive

- Dominant

- `dominated the approach to literacy, not only in academic circles, but also in more powerful domains such as the reading lobby, development agencies, and those responsible for "illiteracy" programmes ---`. (Street 1995:153)

- `absolutely necessary for the development not only of science, but also history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explanation of language itself`. (Ong 1982: 14)

Ideological

- Typified by the New literacy and New London group
- asserts that `literacy is a social practice` and that the basic unit of a social theory of literacy must be literacy practices. (Barton and Hamilton 2000:8) Illustrating this cardinal point are six propositions:
- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events, which are mediated by written text.
- There are different Literacies, which are associated with different domains of life.
- Social institutions and power relationships pattern literacy practices, and some Literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. (Barton and Hamilton 2000:8)

Implications of epistemic divide: Autonomous model

- Cognitive perception
  - Literacy without context
  - Banking education (Freire 1974)
  - Emphasis on skills development
  - Value for money ideology
  - Irrelevant curriculum
  - Basic education only
  - Literacy must focus on economic development
  - There must be a standard form of literacy

Implications for social model

- For empowerment
- Literacy to meet individual needs
- for critical thinking
- Focus on understanding issues of inequality
- Learner centred curriculum
- Lifelong education
- Building capacity to challenge inequalities through informal and non formal routes
- Pro-poor participatory strategies
- Raise awareness of rights, responsibilities and potential for change
- Livelihoods approach

Some further conclusions

- Perceptions of literacy will invite different epistemic realities

- Strong links between strands/perceptions of sustainable development , education and literacy

- Our epistemic groundings in relation to literacy will colour our perception of literacy's role in sustainable development

Implications for local govt reps

- 'The major responsibility of local govt representatives is to initiate and implement development programmes and a continuous improvement of the socio-economic condition of people and a sustainable development ' (EDRS 2001)
- The Lg rep in order to respond to the above will have to be
- 1.Planner- setting goals and objectives through identification of needs, designing detailed organisational structure, methods and strategies to meet goals– decentralisation
- 2. decision maker- making choices between epistemic realities
- 3.Manager- giving vision, personal accountability for achieving established measurable results
- 4. Motivator- sensitising people about the importance of literacy and persuading them to participate
- 5. Community mobilisers – Exploring the various support types needed for development and the implementation of literacy programmes(Local national and international)
- 6. Monitor and evaluator- Checking mile stones, building feedback system for assessing results

Role of academics in local govt

- Capacity building: raising awareness with LG reps
- Policy activists- Research, policy discourse and role as policy advisers
- Human resource development: Training and identification of literacy trainers