

# Chapter 6

## Sustainability and Education Academy (SEdA)

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### Introduction

How can school and education system leaders gain the knowledge and strategies needed to create sustainable organizations and promote a commitment to sustainable development with their students? As a former director of the Toronto District School Board, I have seen countless examples of education for sustainable development (ESD) in action. Yet, one of the most profound lessons about what ESD truly means—for students and communities—was driven home to me far from Toronto and Canada.

In 2009, I visited a village in the Masai Mara region of Kenya. Here, women and children walk miles to retrieve water from a dirty river, which they haul back to their village for drinking. The closest hospital is a 9-h drive away. The local school is a mud hut. In every respect, this is a world away from North American society.

Standing in that Kenyan village, one young man had a keen understanding of the overwhelming needs facing Africa. He had faced them himself, and long dreamed of ways to give African youth a better opportunity. But the young man was not a villager; he was a Toronto high school student who had arrived in Canada from Africa 2 years earlier. Now he was back in Africa, with 14 schoolmates, tutoring Kenyan children and helping to build a new school from the ground up.

The trip was part of his high school's Kenyan Leadership Experience Program, which combined classroom instruction in Toronto with 1 month in Kenya. The students had raised money for the Kenyan school, and once in Africa, they mixed the mortar and toiled on its construction with their own hands. They were literally laying the foundation for greater learning opportunities for generations of Kenyan children.

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While living in Africa, this young man wished for the means to have such an impact. “Now that I’m in Canada,” he told me, “I’m so happy to be making use of all the opportunities that we have to make a difference.”

The Kenya trip was an initiative of Marc and Craig Kielberger’s Free the Children, a not-for-profit group that empowers youth to make a difference for other children around the world (e.g., international projects that provide clean water, health care, and sanitation.) The Kielberger brothers are also members of the ESD advisory board of SEdA—the Sustainability and Education Academy, based at York University in Toronto.

I am privileged to be the co-director of SEdA, which offers a comprehensive program for leaders in education from across Canada—a program that aims to inspire, create, and support a culture of sustainable development in all aspects of an education system. SEdA is the only leadership training program in Canada focused on helping senior education leaders to incorporate ESD into all aspects of their school systems.

SEdA, like the school project in Masai Mara, reminds us that education is not just about math, science, and English. It is also about encouraging students to learn about their place in the world, and how they can contribute in making their world a better place, whether at their doorstep or thousands of miles away.

To understand the focus and impact of SEdA, and appreciate the complexities of supporting education leadership for ESD in Canada, it is helpful to start with the Canadian context.

## **The Canadian Context**

Canada is one of the most resource-rich countries in the world, from mining to forestry to oil and gas. These industries have traditionally been the backbone of the Canadian economy. Yet, like many countries, Canada is moving toward a knowledge-based economy. The services sector accounts for an estimated 66% of the country’s gross domestic product (Statistics Canada, 2009). As with any knowledge economy, the most important resource is a well-educated population.

The changing needs of the labor force and the aging population (and, therefore, the increasing competition between education and health care for public funding) are just two of the forces that have important implications for the education sector.

Other factors at play include Canada’s multicultural make-up, one of the country’s defining characteristics. Canada is described as a “mosaic,” where different groups are encouraged to live together equitably while maintaining their ethnic and cultural diversity (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009). This is a country with a high degree of immigration and, in some regions, a significant Aboriginal population. In fact, Canada is home to over one million Aboriginal people and this population is the country’s fastest-growing sector (Statistics Canada, 2008, 2011).

Against this backdrop and the new consideration for education leaders comes the concept of sustainable development. In 2005, the Government of Canada acknowledged education as a key strategy in managing sustainable development. The focus was defined as, “developing practical sustainable development strategies and raising public awareness ... to achieve the overall goal of improving individual and societal well being socially, culturally and economically” (Government of Canada, 2005, p. 4).

The *Education for Sustainable Development* page on the Canadian Commission for UNESCO Web site lists eight key action areas for project implementation:

1. Gender equality,
2. Health promotion,
3. Environment,
4. Rural development,
5. Cultural diversity,
6. Peace and human security,
7. Sustainable urbanization, and
8. Sustainable consumption (Canadian Commission for UNESCO, n.d.).

In Canada, education is a provincial/territorial responsibility. There is no federal department of education or national system of education. Instead, an association called the Council of Ministers for Education Canada (CMEC) provides a forum for provincial ministers of education to discuss matters of mutual interest. To address ESD at a pan-Canadian level, CMEC has produced several reports about the state of ESD in Canada (CMEC, 1999, 2006, 2007). In 2008, CMEC published a framework that provides specific statements relating to the future of ESD in Canada (CMEC, 2008).

While there have been many positive examples of ESD in Canada, ESD has not been a key driver of education reform, with the exception of the province of Manitoba (Manitoba Education and Training, 2004).

Canadian education policies and practices have centered on sustainability from an environmental perspective. However, the focus on the social aspect of ESD has increased, as evidenced by policies around equity, social justice, character development, citizenship, and civic engagement. The link among these social, environmental, and economic policies are emerging in provincial policies and in school systems’ programs and practices.

## The Foundation of SEdA

To date, SEdA is the only leadership training program in Canada focused on providing the knowledge and skills to help senior education leaders understand this relationship and to incorporate ESD into all aspects of their school systems.

The SEdA program began in 2005 through grants from Environment Canada and the Suncor Energy Foundation. It was originally adapted from a successful Sustainable Enterprise Academy (SEA) that the Schulich School of Business at

York University offered to leaders in the business field. The program design was a collaborative effort, with contributions from:

- Faculty at the Schulich School of Business;
- Faculties of Education and Environment at York;
- UNESCO Chair on Reorienting Teacher Education to Address Sustainability; and the
- Not-for-profit organization, Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF).

The development process included ongoing collaboration with education leaders in school systems, as well as business leaders who are champions in ESD. SEdA also has a national and international group of advisors who are leaders in ESD to provide advice and ideas on successful global practices.

SEdA's flagship offering is a series of Education Leader Seminars (see Sect. 6.4). Each seminar is a 2½-day event, aimed at informing and motivating education leaders—giving them the knowledge and strategies needed to transform school systems into sustainable organizations.

SEdA embraces the concept that leadership is distributed across all aspects of a school system, and needs to be supported and encouraged accordingly. For each seminar, SEdA encourages school divisions to bring a team of school and system leaders, including the Director or Superintendent and trustees. As a team, all workshop participants can later champion and build the capacity for supporting ESD in their systems.

While SEdA is still in its relatively early stages, growing and learning along with its participants, the creation and operation of SEdA responds to three fundamental challenges for Canadian educators:

- It is critical to understand the social, economic, and environmental components of ESD and their interrelationships in the Canadian context.
- Numerous and competing demands are being made on the education system. If ESD is seen as another priority that detracts from the existing priorities—such as literacy, numeracy, equity, and responsible citizenship—it will not be readily embraced. Instead, it is important to recognize how ESD can be incorporated into the existing priorities in education.
- SEdA recognizes that leadership for sustainable development currently is not incorporated into leadership training for educators in any significant way. SEdA does not compete with the multitude of leadership training programs, but provides a unique niche that adds value to the understanding and skills that education leaders require to succeed.

### ***Social, Economic, and Environmental Components of ESD***

The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) states the need “to create ... a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learn values, behavior and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and positive societal transformation” (UNESCO, 2005, p. 6).

This statement is subject to many interpretations; one estimate suggests that there are over 200 different definitions of sustainable development (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2010).

A survey conducted by the Mustel Group in 2009 reveals that few Canadians were able to define the term “sustainability.” However, over half (56%) of those surveyed were familiar with the definition of “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Hoggan, n.d.).

This broad nature of ESD makes it an elusive topic. For example, several Canadian provinces have policies that reflect an environmental emphasis on sustainability. Yet, UNESCO (2005) distinguishes ESD from Environmental Education (EE), and considers EE to be just one part of a comprehensive program of ESD responses. This lack of clarity creates a challenge for leaders to provide a coherent context for the range of initiatives that fall under ESD, including areas such as social justice, equity, responsible citizenship, and environment and financial literacy.

### *Incorporating ESD into Existing Education Priorities*

The most common focus of ESD in the education system is on the environment and facilities. School systems have demonstrated cost savings in their energy and waste reduction policies and practices, and this focus is also incorporated into classroom programs. Students are encouraged to develop an environmental ethic, for instance, that includes energy and waste reduction.

Consider the efforts of Dearness Environmental Society, a SEdA partner. This not-for-profit organization provided support to teachers, students, administration, and facility personnel around integrating ESD into policies and practices, particularly related to energy and waste reduction (DES, n.d.). Eventually, students and teachers became more interested in creating hands-on links to global and local problems. Dearness’s work has evolved into a comprehensive service. They now work with individual school districts to provide support across the system. Dearness shares SEdA’s position that ESD should not be seen as an “add-on,” but should be incorporated into all aspects of the education system.

Improving literacy and numeracy outcomes is a key priority in all school systems. Its success in Canada is reflected in the country’s high standing in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results and continuously improving graduation rates (OECD, 2010). Educators are hesitant to detract from this priority. Yet, to close the achievement gap between the high- and low-achieving students—and to improve student engagement at all levels—schools need to provide a purpose for education that resonates with students.

ESD provides a context and a purpose for teaching literacy and numeracy—and with measurable results. For instance, involving students in case studies that explore the social, environmental, and economic implications of climate change supports the goal of responsible citizenship, and meets curriculum expectations in many subject areas. A problem-solving approach to issues that are relevant to students

also engages them in learning, and inspires them to take action in their local and global communities.

In this area, one of the SEdA partners, LSF, provides significant leadership in teaching and learning across Canada (LSF, n.d.). The not-for-profit LSF was founded in 1991 by the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy (NRTEE) to implement sustainable development education in Canadian schools. Since then, the LSF has introduced many pan-Canadian sustainable development initiatives in education (LSF, n.d., 2009), which align with UNESCO's philosophy and vision. These include:

- Establishing ten provincial/territorial ESD working groups in collaboration with Environment Canada and Manitoba's education department. These groups are active in sponsoring public forums, providing input into provincial curriculum reviews, developing resources, planning conferences, and creating Web sites.
- The Canadian Sustainability Curriculum Review Initiative which encourages and supports curriculum reform across Canada in order to align school curricula with the goals of ESD.
- Youth leadership forums that focus on local ESD issues. These forums encourage youth to develop and implement their own action projects within their school or community.
- An online ESD Resource Database, "Resources for Rethinking," which includes lesson plans and other curriculum resources for teachers from K-12.
- Professional development for educators to encourage ESD in classrooms.

### *ESD as Part of Leadership Development*

SEdA is based on the belief that if we are truly committed to sustainable development, then it must be an integral part of leadership development. A key question is: How do we engage staff, students, and the community as full partners in embracing the opportunities and overcoming the barriers to incorporate ESD into all aspects of the school system? Understanding the value of that effort is a critical component of the leadership development program.

For SEdA, the focus is on engagement rather than persuasion. Persuasion too often emphasizes one-sided arguments or indoctrination. In contrast, engagement is based on a two-way dialog and mutual learning. For example, rather than trying to sell a predetermined view of sustainability, educators can use a dialogue-based approach to engage others in defining what sustainability means to them—and what steps they are prepared to support to achieve it. SEdA uses a group activity, "Imagine a sustainable community," as a starting point in its seminars. Finding a common ground builds a sense of community and confidence in people's ability to work together. It also creates the shared norms that are the strongest motivators for action, and for changing behavior.

Empowering our students and others to devise and take actions that promote more sustainable development is an essential element of SEdA's change management

strategy. This strategy positions the school system as an important partner and a model for the public and the community in creating a more sustainable future.

## **The SEdA Seminar**

At each SEdA seminar, school systems are invited to bring a team that includes representatives from all central departments, school administrators, and board trustees. These teams work with an experienced coach who provides direction and supports the concept of distributed leadership. The following account describes what happens during a seminar and the overall goals.

### ***Incorporating ESD Broadly***

One of the key resources developed by SEdA is a “Domain Framework” for incorporating ESD and evaluating ESD in all aspects of the school system (Table 6.1). These five domains reflect the way school systems are traditionally organized. The domains are:

1. Governance (Board Services),
2. Curriculum/teaching learning (School Services),
3. Human capacity building (Human Resources/Employee Services),
4. Partnerships (Community Outreach Services), and
5. Facilities (Operations Services).

The Domain Framework identifies questions in each of the domains. These questions guide the focus on ESD in each of the central departments and schools. The framework also provides a tool to measure and evaluate the status of implementation. The results of the evaluation can be used to review progress, to identify areas requiring additional support, and to celebrate and share successful practices.

SEdA participants are encouraged to examine their system priorities and look beyond what they are already doing in ESD, to embrace creative and innovative ideas. They, then, identify ways to move from their current reality to their vision using strategic tools and supports provided by SEdA, and by sharing successful practices.

The coaches respect the context of the team’s community and the provincial or regional goals and priorities. In particular, the Aboriginal perspective is represented (e.g., respect for the earth), with that experience and historical commitment helping our understanding of sustainability and providing a rich context for ESD.

A guiding principle of SEdA is that the richest learning occurs from sharing our stories and experiences. So SEdA is compiling and continuously adding case studies from ten jurisdictions: Saskatoon Public Schools (Saskatchewan, 2011), Manitoba (a provincial approach) (2011), Rainbow District School Board (Ontario) (2007c), York Region District School Board (Ontario) (2007b), Toronto District

**Table 6.1** Domain framework for a whole-system approach to ESD

Domains	Elements	Degree of implementation				
		Not considered	Beginning	Some progress	Satisfactory progress	Full implementation
<i>Governance</i>	<p><i>1.1 Policy</i> A systemic approach to implementing SD priorities is reflected in the system's strategic planning, asset management, policies, and school improvement plans</p> <p><i>1.2 Decision-making</i> The system and schools embrace a transparent, inclusive, participatory approach to decision-making, involving all partners</p> <p><i>1.3 Finance and budgeting</i> Progressive approaches to financial modeling and budgets reflect both short and long term sustainability of the education system</p> <p><i>1.4 Monitoring and evaluation</i> Assessment mechanisms measure progress in systemic implementation of ESD principles</p>					
<i>Curriculum/teaching/learning</i>	<p><i>2.1 Curriculum</i> (a) Policy and resource documents reflect the cross-curricular focus of ESD across all subjects and grades, and through integrated courses of study</p> <p>(b) There is continuity of scope and sequence of ESD implemented across all subjects and grades</p> <p>(c) ESD resources are provided for teachers including a variety of media, sample units of study, course profiles, teaching guides, electronic and text based resources</p> <p><i>2.2 Teaching</i> (a) Pedagogical approaches include critical thinking, active citizenship, systems thinking, inquiry, active learning, problem-solving, futures thinking, emphasizing both a local and global approach</p>					



(b) Natural and human-built environments are utilized as sites of discovery and active learning

### 2.3 Learning

(a) Schools provide a safe and supportive learning environment in which students are engaged in decision about their school and their learning

(b) Transparent assessment mechanisms monitor student achievement in ESD, including an action learning approaches

### 3.1 Leadership

#### *Human capacity building*

System and school administrators demonstrate commitment and leadership in the implementation of ESD across the system

### 3.2 Professional development

(a) Professional development provides teachers with ESD competencies, including knowledge, skills, perspectives, pedagogical approaches, and using ESD as a theme to contextualize learning

(b) Professional development provides non-teaching staff with the knowledge and skills to further ESD goals of the school and system

(c) Staff share good practice, learning models and resources that support ESD

### 3.3 Human resources

(a) ESD competencies are addressed in performance appraisals and hiring policies

(b) HR policies for all system staff support SD capacity building, mentoring, collaborative and lifelong learning

(c) Diversity is celebrated and is reflected in the staff who all work to build respect among all members of the school and community

(d) Staff are recognized and rewarded for ESD leadership

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(continued)

**Table 6.1** (continued)

Domains	Elements	Degree of implementation			
		Not considered	Beginning	Some progress	Satisfactory progress
Facilities and operations	<p><i>4.1 Facilities</i></p> <p>(a) Sustainability principles are applied to the design, construction and renewal of school buildings, including innovative financial models</p> <p>(b) Schools structures and outdoor spaces are “facilities that teach” sustainability practices</p> <p><i>4.2 Operations</i></p> <p>(a) Sustainability principles apply to all aspects of school management, procurement and resource use</p> <p>(b) Sustainability principles apply to transportation decisions</p> <p>(c) Audit tools are used to assess impacts and improve efficiencies</p>				
Partnerships	<p><i>5.1 Parent and Community Partnerships</i></p> <p>Parents and the community are actively engaged to address local sustainability issues through community projects and/or partnerships</p> <p><i>5.2 Learning</i></p> <p>(a) Cooperative education supports ESD partnerships with the community</p> <p>(b) Opportunities exist to engage parents and the community in the practice of ESD principles</p>				

School Board (Ontario) (2007e), Richmond District School Board (British Columbia) (2008a), Quebec (English and French) (2008b), Australia; Ireland (2007a), and the United Kingdom (2007d). The case studies are available on the SEdA Web site (<http://www.yorku.ca/seda/casestudies.html>).

The case studies focus on the challenges, opportunities, and accomplishments within each of the domains. This helps participants to understand the evolution of a concept, and the ways in which ESD is understood and implemented among the various jurisdictions. This rich resource is the only Canadian story of how school systems are implementing ESD.

SEdA seminars bring in a wide range of experts, including university representatives, not-for-profit organizations, members of the business community, and government officials. Between them, they play different but key roles in the education system, as partners, teacher trainers, creators, and disseminators of knowledge, policy-makers, and advocates.

The core business for school systems is teaching and learning. For this reason, building capacity for supporting teaching and learning for ESD is a major focus of the seminar. Speakers share successful practices in school systems, as well as in universities in Canada and internationally, regarding professional development and programs that support ESD.

At the end of the seminar, participants share their message and strategy with another team as part of the peer mentoring/coaching strategy. In this way, all participants receive useful advice as well as confidence. Most importantly, they have an understanding and a commitment to commence or continue the ESD journey.

## ***Building Sustainable Communities***

An integral part of the seminar is understanding ESD in terms of sustainable communities and school systems. A community could be as small as a few neighborhoods, or as large as a city, province, country, or even a global community. Based on our experiences, sustainable communities are defined as healthy, thriving, livable places where:

- People care for themselves and each other, as active participants toward a common good.
- Education and healthy lifestyles (well being) are high priorities.
- Diversity is valued and respected.
- Employers are attracted to the community because of a well-educated workforce.
- Social services are available and accessible.
- Members of the community work together to create an environment that values sustainable development, and encourages innovation and risk-taking, based on these values.

Participants are asked to envision their community as a sustainable one and consider how education and their leadership would contribute to this community. They are also asked to reflect on the implications for their communities and their lifestyles if *all* the communities on earth had these attributes.

## ***Goals of the Seminar***

As a result of a SEdA seminar, participants are expected to:

- Understand their system's commitment to ESD (province and division level).
- Develop a change management strategy to incorporate ESD into all aspects of their system.
- Articulate their role as leaders in implementing ESD.
- Communicate their understanding of ESD to fellow staff, students, and the community.
- Know who to contact within SEdA and other resources for advice, support, and ideas around ESD.

The SEdA seminar is one stage in the process of implementing ESD. It is an important component, but becomes much more valuable with ongoing support for ESD within the system. To this end, SEdA faculty are engaged with ESD leaders in Ireland, the UK and Manitoba to implement an evaluation workshop based on successful practices, which will support work at the central administration and school levels. In addition, SEdA is committed to providing ongoing support for implementing ESD at the system and school level.

## **Conclusion**

Transforming school systems into sustainable organizations requires time, commitment, and support. This is a journey. All sectors of the community contribute to ESD. For example, the knowledge leadership provided by universities and the advocacy leadership and resources provided by not-for-profit organizations contribute to education priorities (e.g., responsible citizenship and improved graduation rates) and, therefore, to student success. The goals of responsible citizenship and character development are key education goals in all jurisdictions—and are an essential component of ESD.

Think of the Toronto students mentioned at the outset who visited that village in the Masai Mara region of Kenya. The experience was an education for me in the power of ESD, but offered even more powerful lessons for the students, about:

- Sustainable development from the perspective of a developing nation.
- Sharing, equity, and helping the less fortunate.
- Conflict resolution, and how to get along with and support each other.
- Our interconnectedness, and respecting people from other backgrounds (something that is essential in a diverse society).
- Personal and collective responsibility and character.

If we can nurture students who have that sense, who look outwardly as well as inwardly, then I have no doubts that our communities—locally and globally—will be sustainable.

Based on SEdA's experience, education leaders who have successfully embraced the concept of ESD have a number of qualities in common.

- They are courageous, passionate innovators who have the vision and personal attributes to engage others.
- They understand how to build, implement, and monitor an action plan and incorporate ESD into all aspects of their school system.
- They understand and model sustainable development in both their personal and professional lives.
- They have the skills to communicate their vision of ESD.
- They reach out to nurture partnerships with community organizations, NGOs, and post-secondary institutions that support the goals of ESD.

The education leaders that we work with through SEdA, the increasing emphasis on ESD at the provincial and federal level, and the work of the various school districts, schools, and classrooms are all indications of a growing understanding and commitment to ESD. That is all the reason for optimism.

Preparing youths to become citizens who can contribute to the betterment of our communities requires not just the traditional 3Rs of schooling, and not just the environmental 3Rs of reduce, reuse, and recycle. Students also need to take to heart the 3Rs of respect, rights, and responsibility. What better model for Canadian students than an education system that demonstrates this in all aspects of their work.

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