

## **Joint Statement**

### **Mainstream and Strengthen Environmental Education in Hong Kong School Curriculum**

This Joint Statement focuses on the promotion and improvement of the implementation of school environmental education (EE), and serves as a response to the public consultation of the initial recommendations of the Task Force on Review of School Curriculum (Task Force).

As promoted and supported by the UNESCO, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2019a). However, it should be stressed that EE and ESD share a vision of quality education and a society that lives in balance with Earth's carrying capacity (Pavlova, 2013). Hence, for the sake of having a clear focus, this Joint Statement concentrates on the environmental aspect in ESD that embraces the goals and objectives of EE set in the *Tbilisi Declaration* (UNESCO, 1977), but does not go too far for the education about the society aspects such as education for gender inequalities and economic problems such as poverty.

We agree with the initial recommendation proposed by the Task Force that pertaining to Values Education which stated that “*values education should be accorded high priority and continuously reviewed to keep pace with rapid societal changes to address new issues in the digital era*” (Task Force, 2019). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century when wellbeing of people, definitely including our students, are closely interweaved with their surrounding environment (social, economic and physical), we strongly believe that strengthening EE and raising its status in education well concurs with the importance of Values education accorded by the Task Force.

The enhancement and development of better implementation of EE in formal curriculum is urgent and imperative as we have some 10 years left to limit climate change catastrophe (CSD, 2019), especially given that EE being core in nearly all Hong Kong government's environmental policies, such as the latest Municipal Solid Waste Policy and Long-term Decarbonisation Strategy, the mainstreaming and strengthen of school EE will only boost the implementation of such policies. Also, EE is a global educational obligation and world's main trend and target. Therefore, Hong Kong, as an advanced world city, should take a leading role and act as the exemplar of EE, yet we are now far lagging behind when compared to other developed regions.

Moreover, EE contributes significantly to formal subject learning and environmental knowledge. It is also crucial for developing 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills such as critical thinking, oral communication, analytical skills, problem solving, and higher-order thinking (Ardoin, et al., 2017). It increases motivation for learning and promote pro-environmental attitude and behaviours. Links between contact with the environment and personal growth and well-beings such as self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-worth, and personal health are well-established, and it also brings great benefits to teachers, schools and the wider community (Ardoin, et al., 2017, Dillon & Dickie, 2012, Rickinson et al., 2004).

For the implementation of EE/ESD, the *Threefold Approach* which includes education *about/in/for* the environment should be adopted. Thus, from environmental programmes to school curriculum, EE could only be effectively implemented only if this approach is successfully addressed and incorporated.

We understand that with the current cross-curricular approach in the promotion of school-based and action-oriented activities (EDB, 2016), “elements of sustainable development have been infused into the curricula of various subjects in different levels of schools, from kindergarten to secondary” (EDB, 2010). However, when reviewing the existing status of EE in school curriculum, it is being largely peripheral (Ma, 2019). The mode of EE is primarily inclined to education *about* the environment, while education *in* and *for* the environment are lacking and need to be further developed (Ma, 2019). There are many obstacles for the success of implementing EE in school curriculum that includes: lack of time

due to compact school timetable and heavy workload for teachers; lacking support from the school administrators; lacking coordination and support among teaching staff, lacking expertise in EE, and lacking financial resources, etc.

Hence, based on the “Proposal for Hong Kong environmental education” (Ma, 2019) and professional comments from Hong Kong EE experts, a total of 15 recommendations in 6 aspects (Policy and governance, curriculum, school, teacher education, research, and collaboration with external bodies) for better implementation of school EE were given.

Below is a summary of the list of recommendations:

**Vision Statement: Student’s whole person and value development must emphasize on fostering the global citizenship concept through which students will have developed essential literacy and competence to tackle global environment and socio-economic threats, and to build a better future in which people live in harmony with each other and with nature.**

### **Policy and governance level**

**As Asia’s World City, Global Citizenship toward Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must be well emphasized in Hong Kong’s Education Policies, in which a comprehensive, independent and forward-looking section on Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development has to be included (UNESCO, 2019b); and all schools have to adequately take into account sustainability and nature conservation when formulating their own school-based policies/plans.**

- A Hong Kong first EE/ESD Policy and Action Plan should be formulated that set EE/ESD which is inclusive, participatory and empowering with a core strategic position in all society levels. Overseas example includes the “*The National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland, 2014- 2020*” (DES, 2014) and “*Living Sustainably: The Australian Government’s National Action Plan for Education for Sustainability*” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).
- UNESCO urged Member States to establish or enhance “*an ESD interdepartmental committee, national coordinating body, multi-stakeholder working group or platform*” (UNESCO, 2014, p.57) to oversee the implementation of ESD. A designated high-order committee with representatives from the Education Bureau, Environment Bureau, universities, environmental NGOs and schools should be set up under the abovementioned new section, to oversee the long-term development of ESD and EE in Hong Kong formal education for all school levels.
- Restructure the existing Education Bureau’s Curriculum Development Institute to enable ESD and EE to become an independent section, so that adequate professional support and resources will be allocated to result in impactful education outcomes.

### **Curriculum level**

**Higher priority should be accorded to EE in schools, strengthen Education *in the environment* (outdoor education) in particular. Sustainability must be well integrated in both primary and secondary school curriculum with clear learning goals and objectives with reference to international standards.**

- EE should be strengthened and accorded higher priority among different facets of Values Education. EE should be accorded more specific time allocation for teaching in schools, especially for learning in the natural environment. For instance, sustainability is one of three cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2019). Also, outdoor learning is one of the key approaches for the Scottish curriculum (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010).

- Review and enrich sustainability elements in curriculum across all key learning areas, to provide opportunities for students to become well-informed, actively involved, environmentally conscious global citizens. The “Guidelines on Environmental Education in Schools” (CDC, 1999) should be updated accordingly to the existing curriculum which give specific and update information for schools and teachers.
- A clearer context and definition pertaining to EE must be given prior to strengthening Life-wide Learning and STEM/STEAM education in schools. Education *in* the environment in EE should be aligned with and supported by the application of Life-wide Learning. While students should be able to understand and apply STEM/STEAM as important tools to aid building a better society in which sustainability is one of the aspects to be strongly emphasized.

### School level

**School is always regarded as a miniature of the society, and sustainability is the common value that societies worldwide is pursuing. Therefore, whole school approach for sustainability has to be widely promoted and subsequently implemented in school sector of Hong Kong. Schools are required to formulate their school-based sustainability policy with clear goals and performance indicators, as well as with adequate manpower allocated to ensure all associated works are up to standards, both locally and internationally.**

- Sustainability and nature conservation elements have to be part of school policy and 3-year plan.
- Resources should be allowed for schools to appoint an independent environmental coordinator teacher to oversee and coordinate school EE, whose level is similar to the School Curriculum Leaders.
- Revamp and integrate similar school programmes to ensure their objectives will be closely tied in with internationally agreed standards including SDGs and Paris Agreement on combating against Climate Change, and to archive stronger impact as a whole. Such programmes includes the Hong Kong Green School Award, the Student Environmental Protection Ambassador Scheme and related programmes under the Environment Campaign Committee, and the School Award Programme, School Outreach Programme and Sustainable Development Ambassadors programmes under the Council for Sustainable Development, etc.

### Teacher Education level

**Sustainability must be regarded as a key area for both pre-service teachers training, continuous professional development for in-service teachers and school management training, so that they will be equipped with necessary knowledge and skills to deliver related education activities for students and schools.**

- Environmental sustainability becomes a compulsory theme for continuous professional development of in-service teachers. Strengthen teachers’ Learning Circle, Community of Practice, Cluster coordinated by Education Bureau with supports from external organizations.
- Universities are encouraged and supported to develop programmes for pre-services teachers, in-services teachers and school management on sustainability and nature conservation.

### Research

- Education Bureau should conduct and promote research on Hong Kong’s EE. Moreover, EE/ESD researches should be given priority in government funding such as GRF, QEF, ECF and SDF, etc. Collaboration between government, school, tertiary institutes and professional environmental education organizations should be promoted in conducting such territory-wide research. Overseas examples includes the EfS Project that seeks to identify, verify, recommend and facilitate ways to improve the integration of EfS into learning as a cross-curriculum priority

across all subject areas under the Australian Curriculum, which was conducted by the Australian Education for Sustainability Alliance (AESAs), contracted by the Australian Government Department of Education in 2012 (AESAs, 2014).

### **Collaboration with external bodies**

**Education Bureau must take the lead to co-ordinate or/and consorting available resources in the government, private sectors, academia and NGOs for supporting schools to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate activities related to sustainability.**

- Set up local EE resources and field studies centres in different districts. Moreover, departments such as AFCD and LCSD should cooperate with external bodies to better utilize their facilities such as country parks visitor centres and urban parks to conduct district-based localized EE programmes.
- Establishment of partnership with schools and other organizations
- Under QEF/ECF, develop a new funding section specially designed for schools to implement EE/ESD.

We urge the Task Force and the Government to consider and adopt these recommendations seriously in response to the betterment of the society to achieve sustainable development, and to be an exemplar of world city to show the leadership, passion and sense of responsibility of combating world's environmental problem.

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