

Chapter 36

Intercultural Communication and Sustainable Leadership: The Case of a Joint Master Course

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ABSTRACT

The environmental, economic, and social crises we are increasingly confronted with locally and globally, including climate change, ozone depletion, biodiversity loss, and also economic and social issues, such as poverty, social inequalities, violation of human rights, gender inequalities, loss of indigenous knowledge, etc. call for changes in the ways we think, work, and act. In this context, a course dealing with intercultural communication and sustainable leadership that is part of a M.Sc. programme on ICT in Education for Sustainable Development has been developed and is studied in this chapter. The course puts emphasis on the most urgent and critical social, environmental, and economic challenges facing the world and explores how leaders from education, business, government and civil society are responding to global/local sustainability challenges. In particular, it elaborates on the nature of sustainability leadership and how it can contribute to transformational change. It does this by locating sustainability within the leadership literature and presenting a model of sustainability leadership that integrates three complementary types of leadership, namely: distributed; entrepreneurial and transformational. The course also examines the importance of sustainable leadership practices within organisations (e.g. schools, business, NGOs, public) and assess the potential benefits if institutions are more actively engaged in sustainable leadership practices. It explores how intercultural communication can contribute to positive change for sustainability and discusses that new theoretical frameworks are needed to better understand effective transformational leadership. It also elaborates how cultural orientations and intercultural communication competence affect the full range leadership framework and transformational leadership dimensions. This course is delivered through a Virtual Learning Management System (VLMS) based on Moodle open LMS.

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ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND

Education at all levels, but especially higher education bears its own responsibility for these crises, as through the education system all sorts of professionals and leaders who take decisions at all levels in public and private sectors, are educated. Corcoran and Wals (2004) observe that “[t]he scope and range of the negative impacts of university educated people on the natural systems that sustain Earth are unprecedented” (p. 3). All these have highlighted the important role leaders across all societal sectors can play and the urgency to develop a cadre of leaders equipped with the skills and competences to move society towards a more sustainable direction. This raises the question: what does this mean for those in leadership positions? The term of sustainable leadership represents a shift to capture and merge contemporary unsustainable leadership with the urgent global pressure for sustainable development through education. Unlike earlier descriptions of leadership which emphasised personal characteristics and capacities, sustainable leadership is often represented as a concept and a strategy with foundational principles drawn from sustainable development conceptions (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2004; Fullan, 2005). Academics can lead efforts to develop transformative intellectuals and sustainable leadership ready to confront the critical issues and foster opportunities for sustainable development.

While many nations around the world have embraced the need for education to achieve sustainability, only limited progress has been made on any level. Some of the more prevalent challenges are: a lack of or inadequately trained professionals to provide inspired ESD; disciplinary boundaries between subject areas persist as well as lack of educational leadership to support transformative pedagogies to address sustainability. Our state of the art reviews on Master degree programmes in the field of ESD showed that the great majority (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2012a):

- Focused on the environmental pillar of sustainable development, neglecting the other three pillars (social, cultural and economic);
- Did not exploit the potential of ICTs in addressing sustainability issues, especially Web 2 technologies and use of open education resources (learning objects) available in the Web; and
- Employed techno-centric approaches, meaning that curriculum is developed by experts without the end-users inputs.

There was thus need of Master programmes that are participatory, holistic, interdisciplinary and contextual, making use of ICTs both as learning pedagogies and means of delivering at a distance or through a blended mode. The course on “Intercultural Communication and Sustainable Leadership” is one of the 12 courses offered in a joint M.Sc. programme on ICT in Education for Sustainable Development. It is an interdisciplinary program that focuses on developing competency and skill on Education for Sustainable Development enabled through ICTs. The program presents a range of theoretical and practical concepts and contexts of education for sustainable development enabled through ICTs and draws from a wide range of teaching/learning methodologies. The overriding aims of the joint M.Sc. programme are:

- To enhance knowledge for informed decision and policy-making on education for sustainable development issues;
- To enhance critical, analytical and integrative skills for developing ICT-enabled ESD curricula and training programmes; and
- To produce professional experts on ICT-enabled ESD having the capacity to become reflective practitioners and agents of change, locally as well as globally.

In particular, the “Intercultural Communication and Sustainable Leadership” course explores

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