

Ontario's Sustainability Challenges and Opportunities

**Ontario Education for Sustainable Development Working
Group**

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*Reviving Environmental Education
in Ontario:
Facing the Challenges of Sustainable
Development*

Some Questions ...

- **Why is the need for environmental education even an issue?**
- **What part of “sustainable development” don’t we understand?**
- **Why do we do the things we do?**

... clearly there is something else acting to shape public policy in these areas that is not immediately obvious

People Live in Paradigms

- **Canadian society has long been shaped by a dominant paradigm ... which has shifted over time**
- **the first was the Agrarian Myth ... whose dominance was displaced by Industrialization ... and now, by an Urban Consumerism**
- **each paradigm requires adoption of certain tenets ... its mythology ...**

The Current Paradigm

- **In Urban Consumerism ...**
 - we are detached from the natural world, not part of the ecosystem ... thus, different rules apply
 - our use of the land is a “higher use”
 - our technologies will protect us from failures in our ecological systems
 - short term economic decisions are all that are necessary

The Current Paradigm

- **The attraction of Urban Consumerism ...**
 - it's simple to understand
 - it always provides an answer
 - it's hedonistic and selfish
 - it's immediately gratifying
 - it's easily exploited by large commercial interests
 - economists become the reigning professionals

What's the Alternative?

- **sustainability requires quite a different, more ecological paradigm to be adopted**
- **an ecological paradigm requires a sense of deep time and the intrinsic value of the biological world**
- **it's not simple and it often doesn't provide definitive answers**

What's the Alternative?

- **it requires working in spans of time and space that do not easily fit with our business, property and financial systems**
- **traditional economics doesn't cope well with such concepts ... and ecologists don't give answers ... they just talk about uncertainties**

A Clash of Paradigms

- the tenets of an ecological paradigm are at odds with urban consumerism ... there is an inherent discord which leads to conflicts
- the exclusion of environmental education from the curriculum serves the purpose of avoiding those conflicts

The Current Frustration

- the adherents of the current dominant paradigm don't see the need to cultivate such conflict
- they feel that emphasizing environmental concepts has no value to the socioeconomic system
- and they are not publicly challenged on this position

A Public Debate is Needed

Some tips ...

- do not accept moral equivalence of the two paradigms
- preach to the heathens, not the converted
- sell the value of an ecological paradigm not the curriculum

Conclusions ...in 2003

- **it's about shifting a paradigm ...**
- **and that's not easy ... you've got to be tough ... and persistent**
- **people have to see that there is another way of living their life**
- **if they see the value, they'll want it for their children**

What has changed in 2006?

- **SD is no longer an abstraction - we are living with system failures ...**
 - peak oil, electricity failures, a waste crisis, water shortages, invasive species, smog, gridlock ... **CLIMATE CHANGE**
- **Even if people struggle with sustainability we should be able to explain what is not sustainable and open their eyes to other approaches**

Six Principles of Sustainable Development

- **Anticipate and Prevent**
- **Full Cost Accounting**
- **Informed Decision Making**
- **Living off the Interest**
- **Quality of Development over Quantity**
- **Respect for Nature and the Rights of Future Generations**

A Strategy to Engage the Community

- **Sell the relevance**
 - “See what we mean this is a SD issue!”
- **Use the lexicon**
 - Six Principles of Sustainable Development
- **Be loud, get engaged and find champions**
- **Get adequate long-term funding**
 - Ask the multitudes each for pittance
- **Don't expect much from government**

Thank You for Your Attention

For more information ...

**The
Environmental Commissioner
of Ontario**

www.eco.on.ca