The use of criteria when planning, evaluating or completing a project: the case of the ENSI Quality Criteria and the Curriculum Key in Iceland

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INTRODUCTION

This is the story about a research and development project in Iceland between 2007 and 2011 named "GETA". In Icelandic the name means "capability" and reflects the interest of the project in both Action Competence and Action Research. The underlying focus of the project was to understand what types of educational practice lead to Sustainable Development (Action ESD, 2007).

The project model involved school-university co-operation, a year of preparation for the researchers, a year-long in-service course for teachers, assessment of ESD policy and practice in Iceland, small group work and for some, voluntary work with schools as GETA advisors. Three years of low-level funding were provided by Reykjavik Energy and four preschools and four compulsory schools in different municipalities elected to join the GETA project. About 25 teachers and most principals took part in managing school projects of their own choice and around 12–14 researchers took part, several going on to study further. An active web-site was maintained on all project activities (http://skrif.hi.is/geta). The site was still accessible in March 2018.

In this paper we describe and comment on the origin and use of two rather different tools used to strengthen ESD activities in the GETA project. One of these tools was the set of guidelines developed and distributed by ENSI and SEED entitled 'Quality criteria for Education for Sustainable Development' (Breiting, Mayer, & Mogensen, 2005). The other was the Curriculum Key developed by a sub-group of GETA researchers in order to analyse the national curriculum in Iceland at that time (2008). This analysis turned out to be helpful for teachers in developing their own ESD curriculum within their schools.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRICULUM KEY (CK)

In 2008 the GETA sub-group wanted to develop a way of investigating the opportunities for sustainability education within the three national curricula valid at the time. These were written for pre-schools, compulsory schools and secondary

schools, most parts of which had been approved in 1999 and some revisions in 2007. One of the researchers began by identifying four characteristics of sustainability education though conceded that the first three were closely linked to Environmental Education. These four were 1) developing values, attitudes and a feeling for nature and the environment, 2) acquiring knowledge which helps people to use nature in a sensible way, 3) undergoing and education that would foster democracy, participation in society and development of action competence, and 4) learning about equality and multiculturalism. After further review by GETA researchers two more characteristics were added to the Curriculum Key; one on welfare and public health and another on global awareness. Finally, a seventh characteristic about economic development and future prospects was added (Norðdahl, 2009).

The process of making the Curriculum Key showed the flux and extent of ideas and definitions of sustainability, sustainable development and sustainability education at the time (Table 1) and it was clear that opportunities for working with ESD become apparent when applying the Curriculum Key to a school curriculum (Jóhannesson et al., 2011, Norðdahl, 2009).

Table 1. Characteristics of sustainability education included in the final version of the Curriculum Key

Values, opinions and emotions about nature and environment
Knowledge contributing to a sensible use of nature
Welfare and public health
Democracy, participation, and action competence
Equality and multicultural issues
Global awareness
Economic development and future prospects.

The Curriculum Key group set itself the task of looking for signs in the Icelandic national curriculum that indicate the range of opportunities for working on areas of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The group found that several opportunities existed for teachers to practice education for sustainability (EfS) but that a clearer definition of sustainability education (SE) was needed.

The Curriculum Key was also used as a tool to analyse existing school activities thereby extending the understanding that teachers and advisors had of education for sustainability (Pálsdóttir, Pétursdóttir, Óskarsdóttir, Jóhannesson, & Norðdahl, 2009; Norðdahl, 2009; Jóhannesson, Norðdahl, Óskarsdóttir, Pálsdóttir, & Pétursdóttir, 2011).

USING THE *QUALITY CRITERIA FOR EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

Quality Criteria (QC) for ESD had been developed in Europe through a research and development project (Breiting, Mayer, & Mogensen, 2005). In 2005 one of the Danish specialists, S. Breiting introduced the QC to one of the GETA researchers (SB) who recognised their potential for school development in Iceland and set about translating the criteria from Danish into Icelandic. An English version of the guidelines in English was ready in 2005 (Breiting, Mayer, & Mogensen, 2005)/2008) and was used in early 2007 in creating the aims and objectives of the funding proposal for the GETA project (Action ESD, 2007).

The Quality Criteria were found to be helpful in the work of the project GETA and were used at several stages and in different ways. The guidelines are presented in a clear and logical way regarding both time and place with each criterion following the same format; first examples of relevant practice are given, then some background information and finally the guideline or criterion itself.

Using the Quality Criteria guidelines and related European materials, three principles for action were put forward in the GETA proposal (2008) each giving an indication of the kind of practice the project would pursue (Table 2).

Table 2. Principles for action in the GETA project based on the QC approach

	Quality Criteria (QC) for ESD	Based on principles of action arising from the QC	Consequences of following the principles
1	**Teaching and learning processes**	*Knowledge* *Developing knowledge for and about sustainable development*	*Actions for teaching and learning, in informal and formal settings that enable teachers and learners to build up their knowledge about natural resources and sustainable development*
2	**The school policy and organisation**	*Respect* *Encouraging respect for nature and society*	*Actions within a school that encourages respect for critical values, democratic procedures and social inclusion in developing sustainable practices in Iceland and elsewhere*
3	**The school's external relations (society, community)**	*Responsibility* *Nurturing a sense of shared responsibility for our common future*	*Actions at community level that encourage schools and other organisations to work together in sharing responsibility for a sustainable quality of life*

The Quality Criteria also provided the framework for the main evaluation of the project under the theme 'Look back, around and then forward' (Table 3). At the evaluation meeting teachers, advisors and researchers discussed the development, status and progress of the school projects. School groups varied in the way that they responded to the questions or reflections; some found it difficult giving just the names or content of previous and/or planned projects but others wrote extensive reports on each of the six sections (Table 3).

Mogensen and Mayer (2005) suggested in their review of Eco-schools in Europe that no one criterion should be used to evaluate ESD. It is the interaction of conditions that is just as important as the conditions themselves. This remark guided our approach in setting up the framework in Table 3. Each school was to answer each question in groups prior to and during an evaluation meeting.

The quality criteria were also helpful to advisers when providing feedback to teachers and when writing reports on each school´s activities (Bergmann et al., 2010).

Table 3. The framework for an internal evaluation meeting on the theme Look back, around and forward – reflecting on progress

Sites of action for ESD within QC In and interaction between QC		***Questions about ESD***		
Quality Criteria (See Table 2)		***What were we doing before we joined this project?***	***What did we do at our school this year?***	***What will we do next year?***
1	*Learning and teaching (classroom)*			
2	*School (as an organisation)*			
3	*Community/local society*			
1, 2	*Learning/teaching in interaction with the school organizations*			
2, 3	*The school interacting with local society*			
1, 3	*Learning and teaching linked to the community/ society*			
	Our future vision	**What was it?**	**What is it?**	**What could it be?**

It should be noted that the GETA participants also found the document which Huckle (2006) prepared on ESD for the Teacher Training Agency in the UK to be very useful.

REFLECTIONS

The suggestion by Mogensen and Mayer (2005) that developments must be considered in context proved to be crucial to understanding the achievements of the GETA project. For example, we realised the need to create time and space for the development of new and challenging ideas in order to understand the complexity of sustainability. Sometimes we were impatient with ourselves and others and then we needed to go back to the principles, aims and objectives and the guidelines and reassess.

The GETA Curriculum Key was intended as a tool for analysing the national curriculum but proved to be useful at school and classroom level as teachers engaged in planning and evaluating their work and passing findings on to others in need of information in order to understand EfSD. The Key became part of the document 'Welfare for the Future' (2010 version, 3rd edition) of the Icelandic governmental policy on sustainability (Ministry for the Environment, 2010).

The GETA Curriculum Key also facilitated the inclusion of education for sustainability as one of six fundamental pillars in the National Curriculum Guide in 2011. General text on sustainability education was included in all three general guides, for pre-school, basic schools and secondary schools. However, the seven characteristics of sustainability education in the Curriculum Key were not included directly as a single statement but were distributed across the three guides. Most importantly, the emphasis on Action Competence (Jensen and Schnack, 1997) became a part of the general text on sustainability and under the democracy and human rights pillar there is an emphasis on collective responsibility for creating a sustainable society. Some of the text in the National Curriculum (2013) and general guides (2011) was developed from the GETA Project and added credibility to the GETA Key.

We believe that the GETA work was used because it was available – it was in the right place at the right time. The GETA group took seriously UNESCO's call that all citizens – including researchers – had a responsibility to initiate and develop policy and practice for sustainability education. In addition the Curriculum Key had an impact on the work of the project schools as the GETA report on the experience of eight schools questions shows

> "[it was discussed] whether the topics and issues addressed by the schools as being on the road to ESD have a beginning or an end. The schools usually emphasised that their projects were extensions of their regular work or were continuations of projects which could strengthen ESD. They felt that their co-operation with GETA would give some of the projects new dimensions, e.g. environmental projects considered the social dimension" (Bergmann et al., 2010, p. 6).

Our conclusion is that the Quality Criteria and the Curriculum Key can be used in several ways: to support the planning of a new project or the evaluation of one underway or the outcomes when nearing completion. Both can be used to chart progress against a base line or the achievement of a goal; approaches that are in fact

complementary offering project participants a chance to look back and assess, look around and reflect or look forward and plan. Teachers and school leaders can select appropriate criteria from the Curriculum Key and the Quality Criteria to allow aspects of sustainability to be incorporated into the curriculum. The tools provide the means to support the implementation of an ESD curriculum and provide examples of sustainability and expose opportunities that lie in the nooks and crannies of the curriculum, the classroom, the school or the community.

These two tools form part of the same development kit and are linked by the principles outlined in Table 2 that offer ways to make new spaces in which 1) to learn about sustainability 2) to respect others and other disciplines and 3) to share responsibility for school and sustainable development. The principles are within each of us and each itself contains all three. Building up knowledge and respecting others and other forms of knowledge, and then taking responsibility are powerful tools for learning about SD and life itself.

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In the Icelandic way we did not observe formalities and did not inform the central ENSI office of our use of the guidelines nor its translation. We hereby offer our apologies.

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