

The Education and Engagement Pillar of the CESF

“Our quality of life today, and the legacy we bequeath to future generations, demands fundamental change to the way in which we think about the environment” – Source: SFT, 2004

Purpose

A key component for the *Competitiveness and Environmental Sustainability Framework* (CESF) is the Education and Engagement Pillar. The purpose of this pillar is to harness the power of education for influencing individual behaviour. It is one tool for effectively delivery on the CESF results. The Education and Engagement Pillar strives to increase Canadians’ environmental literacy leading to more sustainable decision-making.

The purpose of this document is to generate discussion and receive direction on the Education and Engagement Pillar. Specifically, it suggests a definition, outlines recent context, explores problems and opportunities and proposes priorities for action.

Note that this document focuses on the education dimension of the pillar; the engagement portion will be developed and brought to Policy Brief as an immediate next step.

Introduction

Canada has an abundance of natural blessings and an enviable quality of life. And therein lies the problem. Abundance and comfort do not breed frugality, witness the following example:

Of the 29 member nations of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), only the United States uses more water than Canada on a per capita basis. Canada’s per capita water consumption is 65 per cent above the OECD average. *Source: OECD*

We have huge challenges ahead of us, particularly if Canada is to become a world leader in sustainability. The solutions, like the causes, lie in human activity, not only industry and commerce, but equally the collective and accumulated actions of individuals. Education is an integral part of a sustainability formula.

Despite decades of effort by countless public and private sector institutions, the concept of sustainable development has not captured the imagination of Canadians. We will have to use every lever at our disposal and build strong and lasting partnerships to ensure the progress our country and the world deserve.

The Case for Education

Canadians in all walks of life need to understand how their actions impact upon their environment and how the environment affects their health and safety. People need to know how to reduce their risk and protect themselves from environmental hazards and understand how, in turn, their actions affect the environment, their health and Canada’s competitiveness.

Environmental education is about helping Canadians understand, share and use information to make decisions and engage in action that protects the planet, improves human health and well-

being and enhances the competitiveness of the Canadian economy. Sustainability requires long-term and lasting behaviour change. Learning and internalizing environmental stewardship is an important way to achieve the behavioural changes that span generations.

Environmental education and engagement is a continuum of activities, including outreach and informal and formal education. It encompasses the acquisition of new perspectives, values, knowledge and skills that lead to changed behaviour. It reframes information using appropriate techniques and principles, and an understanding of how people actually learn, in a way that allows people to build, layer by layer, an understanding and appreciation of this large and complex issue, leading ultimately to informed choice and sustainable action.

The raw material for the Education and Engagement Pillar will largely be drawn from the Information Pillar. While the Information Pillar is focused on product (e.g., indicators, trends, other meaningful grouping / organization of data), the Education and Engagement Pillar is focussed on the process (e.g., an approach / plan / strategy) of making that information understandable and useable by various audiences. Outreach also has a role regarding education. Outreach is a means used to deliver our education goals. Simply put, it is a “how” in the education equation.

In all dimensions of the CESF, the contribution of many stakeholders is fundamental to making progress – it is a national framework. Within that framework EC will have certain roles and responsibilities. In the Education and Engagement Pillar, EC’s role is proposed to:

- provide leadership and coordination across levels of government and other sectors to increase both cohesion and leverage
- actively contribute to education in domains for which it has responsibilities

Current Context

Environmental education crosses all boundaries. Internationally, many countries have put in place national leadership on environmental education. International conventions to which Canada is a signatory, such as Agenda 21, have called for an emphasis on environmental education. At the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, Canada announced its own *Framework for Environmental Learning and Sustainability in Canada*. This framework, created through consultation with over 5,500 Canadians, provides a jumping-off point for moving forward.

In the federal context, many departments share in the responsibility for SD and, by extension, many of them view education as a key lever in attaining their objectives. Environment Canada has environmental education responsibilities under some of its legislation but it is generally more implied than specific. Education is a tool that increases the receptivity of Canadians to environmental sustainability thinking and action. Building environmental education into the body of generally accepted curriculum and learning activities of Canadians is a key requirement to build the awareness and receptivity of citizens to establishing improved environmental practices. In terms of environmental education programming, EC has many initiatives as do other government departments. Climate Change’s Public Education and Outreach is a notable example of one of the GOC’s investments to date in sustainability education.

Provinces have constitutional jurisdiction over formal education. Curricula vary from province to province. In the consultations leading up to the *Framework for Environmental Learning and*

Sustainability in Canada, educators made it clear that they need greater access to credible, balanced learning resources in both official languages. In terms of post-secondary education, sustainability is not always built in to some key programs such as commerce and MBA's, or in disciplines such as engineering and urban planning, although it will be a key component in the maintenance of Canada's competitiveness in the long term.

Individual businesses, particularly large ones, have environmental education programs and many participate in events such as Environment Week and the Commuter Challenge. Some businesses are trying to help consumers understand how their operations impact on the environment and what they are doing to minimize those impacts (e.g., through corporate sustainability reporting). From an industry perspective, environmental education is a key to furthering voluntary compliance.

Non-profits have been very active in environmental education, from Pollution Probe's Primer series to Pembina Institute's climate change educational initiatives. Within the environmental NGO's, there are some which include education as one element while others, such as Learning for a Sustainable Future, very specifically target environmental education. Other NGO's, such as those representing consumer interests, have begun to take some interest in sustainable consumption.

In terms of everyday Canadians, polling consistently tells us that Canadians rank the environment among their top concerns. We also know there is a fundamental disconnect between this statement and the behaviour of most Canadians. We are not "walking the talk". There appears to be a latent desire or potential among Canadians that we have thus far failed to capitalize on.

Problems and Opportunities

This section outlines problems and opportunities from two perspectives:

1. Surrounding conditions – CESF and Fragmentation.
2. Audiences – Consumers; Youth and Educators; Industry; and Cities and Communities

Surrounding Conditions

CESF

Education and engagement as one pillar for the delivery of the CESF supports the other pillars to make a difference in Canada's future. Connected and complementary strategies will leverage results.

For example, education can build upon the Information Pillar in positioning information for specific audiences. At the same time, the Education and Engagement Pillar is connected to the Science and Technology Pillar which is the basis of sound and credible information that is fundamental to education. In turn, education must be supported by the other pillars, e.g. economic instruments that set incentives and disincentives that coincide with sustainable behaviour.

Fragmentation

While environmental education takes place at most levels of government and in the private and non-profit sectors, it is too often fragmented and un-coordinated. While there are some networks on which to build, gaps and lack of coherence are issues.

Environment Canada itself has an uneven record in environmental education. While there is a great deal of activity, generally speaking it diverges along issue lines, its messages are disconnected, and it responds to short term needs or opportunities. Initiatives are underway to inventory education activity in EC and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise. Beyond this tactical support, there are no over-arching priorities, no common measures and no common messages that position or integrate our education activity. Furthermore, there is no strategy that links the environmental education and engagement agenda to departmental priorities such as air, water, and GHGs.

In the absence of a strategic approach, initiatives will continue to be ad hoc and uncoordinated. EC needs a strategy for environmental education and engagement that achieves a greater impact through cohesive action, in keeping with departmental priorities.

This strategy should then be extended to encompass the entire federal system to establish over-arching priorities, common messages and measures, and integrated planning.

Finally, the federal government should look to strategic collaboration with its partners in other levels of government, the NGO community, and the private sector. To the extent that efforts can be aligned or integrated through identifying common objectives and common priorities, environmental education will be more productive and more effective.

There is a concurrent opportunity to benchmark and track “environmental literacy” in Canada. This will allow us to measure progress over time and will guide the design and distribution of certain information by governments and other partners.

Audiences

For the average person/ organization, who is the audience for environmental information and messaging, the issues are complex and sometimes compete for attention. Like many complex subjects, sustainability is “owned” by the experts. The divide between the average person and the “expert” must be bridged. Issues and benefits should be defined from the audiences’ perspective while respecting the integrity of the information. As defined below, four audiences are particularly critical to address: consumers, citizens as youth and educators, industry, and cities and communities. However, it is important to note that although these groups can be viewed from an “audience” perspective where we wish to educate them, they are also, depending on the situation, our delivery partners. For example, educators are our partners when they use our tools and information to educate their students. A dual role exists, but the starting point is always to provide the tools necessary to educate people, either enabling them to make better decisions or assist EC in delivering its messages.

Consumers

Consumer demand for sustainable goods/services can be a powerful driver of change in business. Consumers purchase, use and dispose of goods. The power of citizens as consumers should not be under-estimated. Each choice to buy a more environmentally friendly product creates an

incremental beneficial impact, but the really important shift takes place when whole groups of consumers create a trend that moves the marketplace and creates a new bar for behaviour. This is where business and consumers intersect – what consumers demand drives how companies behave.

We need to understand and build on the nature of consumer demand for environmentally responsible products and services and for labelling and credentials to support these claims. Energy Star and the Environmental Choice Program are two good examples of eco-labelling but there are labelling gaps and opportunities to leverage labelling into product standards.

Youth and Educators

Think of “Source to Tap”. Consumers are at the tap. Youth and educators are at the source. Environmental education must target the successive, individual purchasing choices of consumers, but also work with youth and educators to instil the enduring environmental values that will guide future generations.

Young people, as the generation of the future who will benefit from sustainable practices, are not difficult to engage. In fact, they can easily become major contributors to the environmental education agenda by being transmitters of best practices and their own personal commitments to sustainable practices.

Environmental education and engagement is about connections. While having a place within a science curriculum, to realize its true potential, it needs to go far beyond the boundaries of one discipline. Environmental education can weave together many subject areas, demonstrating the vital interrelationships across disciplines. It needs to be practical and action-oriented, helping students to apply what they learn to their daily lives. The beauty of this is that not only does this result in citizens who will have the capacity to create and maintain lasting change, just as importantly, it teaches critical thinking skills. These are precisely the thinking skills that Canada needs to hold a competitive position in the world.

While the provinces have jurisdiction over formal education, it is still possible to work in collaboration towards shared objectives. This is the premise of programs such as Climate Change Public Education and Outreach. It funds formal education institutions (e.g., Eco-schools in the Toronto School Board) within the provinces to develop the means to link environmental examples to provincial curricula along with tools for teachers

Another avenue which needs to be exploited is in the business schools of the country. Sustainability, with its clear relationship to competitiveness, needs to be integrated into business school programming. We need to ensure that our future business leaders understand that environmental sustainability is not about tree-hugging – it’s about having a liveable country that maintains its competitive edge. Likewise there are opportunities to build more emphasis in other key domains such as health sciences and engineering.

Industry

Both large corporations, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can benefit from education but at the same time, each has very different needs. Sustainability is a long-term endeavour whereas, in the pressure cooker of competitive business and globalization, a shorter-term focus often dominates. The Education and Engagement Pillar will work with the sector tables to

identify how education might contribute to their agenda. An example of a point of connection is in eco-labelling where industry will have a direct interest in the standards on which such labelling is based.

Cities and communities

Cities and communities make critical decisions affecting the environment, from recycling programs to transportation to housing. Science and information are deciphered into a format that is easily understood by municipal decision makers, and in turn, the public. Currently a gap exists from receiving the information to understanding and applying it. Education therefore, is used to fill this gap. The Education and Engagement Pillar will be able to facilitate the sharing of useable information and to increase capacity to integrate sustainability into planning.

Priorities for Action

First priority is an **environmental education and engagement strategy** for EC, one that establishes clear objectives for environmental education, and then assesses what we currently do, what we are in the best position to do and what we must do to meet our objectives. We can then reach out to other federal partners and, in turn, to partner with other governments, the non-profit sector and the private sector.

In a phased approach, the strategy should:

1. Identify educational activities within EC to develop a strategy, identify common objectives, gaps and opportunities, and develop an action plan including innovative approaches and tools.
2. Align the environmental education efforts of other federal organizations so that they support over-arching priorities, have consistent messaging and benefit from the disciplines of research and evaluation.
3. Work with provinces in their environmental education efforts to ensure that the unique contribution available from the federal government, and particularly from EC, complements their programming.
4. Look for opportunities to partner with the non-profit sector, particularly those NGO's active in environmental education and consumer issues
5. Work with best practice companies implementing environmental learning approaches

The strategy will need the support of some building blocks along the following lines:

1. Governance needs to be addressed as a key component of the education strategy in two ways:

- Leadership – In EC an office should be created which would provide the driving force and focal point necessary to coordinate efforts and make progress
- Roundtable on Environmental Education and Engagement – There needs to be a venue for partners to collaborate and align strategies. The Roundtable would provide a means to integrate efforts where possible, to determine plans, priorities and respective actions, and to elaborate objectives and measures for environmental literacy. Membership would need to be determined, but should likely include certain other government departments, provinces (Ministries of the Environment and related

ministries; Ministries of Education), selected NGO's, and other stakeholders in the informal education domain. (NB – Relationship to CCME, CME and Industry Sector Roundtables needs to be thought through before moving further)

2. Targeting specific audiences will be another key component of the education strategy.

- For Canadians as citizens, the Education and Engagement Pillar is a critical point of connection. The pillar will segment Canadians into two audiences for attention:
 - Consumers
 - Youth and Educators
- For industry as a major CESF audience, and understanding that education has a role in the competitiveness formula, the Education and Engagement Pillar will collaborate with the sector tables and the other pillars to advance the integration of sustainability and industry.
- Cities and communities will find their best fit with the Information Pillar and the New Deal for Cities and Communities initiative. The key is to ensure that timely, relevant information is provided to decision makers and planners. As with industry, the Education and Engagement Pillar will support the other pillars by ensuring that sustainability is integrated into municipal decision making and planning.

3. Early Actions for Consideration

- Create a focal point on environmental education and engagement within EC.
- Get EC's house-in-order on environmental education and engagement to identify and maintain an inventory of all activities within EC in this area.
- Put in place the Round table on environmental education and engagement to begin engaging other partners. One item for early consideration could be scoping the feasibility of a national environmental literacy benchmarking study.
- Expand and revitalize eco-labelling to target mainstream consumer products. "Green consumerism" will be linked to environmental literacy as green purchasing action begins with environmental literacy. The strategy will also link to suppliers of environmental products and services to identify how best to increase the supply.
 - The UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development which begins in 2005 offers an early opportunity to put down a marker for environmental education. It is a platform on which to promote Canada's commitment to education for SD, and to launch a key pillar of the CESF, in particular the Education and Engagement Pillar and strategy development.

Conclusion

As one of six pillars, education and engagement plays an integrating role in the CESF. Education and engagement can leverage and further the success of the other pillars. To date, environmental education has lacked a comprehensive policy framework as its touchstone. The CESF addresses this gap. Setting education and engagement in this new context holds great promise for transformative thinking.