Academics in the field of Education for Sustainable Development: their Conceptions of Sustainable Development.

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Recent policy and academic voices in the field of Education for Sustainable Development put forward the importance of a holistic approach to the concept of Sustainable Development. We investigated the personal understanding of ‘Sustainable Development’ of scholars involved in teacher training programs and in the academic field of Education for Sustainable Development. To this purpose, an on-line survey was conducted based on the principle of comparative judgement. After careful selection, 249 academics were found to fit the specific profile for inclusion into the study. All of them were invited and 56 of them participated. The instrument consisted of 16 statements built specifically to reflect different interpretations of sustainable development: fragmented, separated, holistic and integrated perspectives. Each participant compared 12 pairs of statements and were asked to decide which one better represented their interpretation of the concept of Sustainable Development in the context of Education for Sustainable Development. Using the D-PAC methodology for comparative judgement, our results show that the statements that were most often chosen prioritized an understanding of Sustainable Development according to which two or three of the dimensions of the concept (environment, society, economy) are seen as separated to each other and less often in an integrated way. The scale reliability was equal to 0.79, indicating good quality of the measurement. The results show that academics in the field of Education for Sustainable Development do not conceive of the concept of Sustainable Development holistically. There is also a tendency towards social and economic aspects of Sustainable Development. Implications for Education for Sustainable Development research and teacher training are discussed.

Keywords: Education for Sustainable Development; the concept of Sustainable Development; holistic approach; academics’ conceptions
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