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Original paper

Education for sustainable development in national tests: the case from Slovenia²

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Extended summary

At the end of 2002 United Nations declared the period from 2005 to 2014 as a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). This shows that at the beginning of the 21st century education for sustainable development (ESD) is one of the priorities on the international and national levels. In such activities Slovenia do not lag far behind the developed world. Already in 2006, in the context of Target research programmes of Slovenian Research Agency two research programmes which deal with education and education for sustainable development were started. Many activities have been ongoing in Slovenian schools for many years, but they were not officially “labelled” as ESD. Such case is a several decades old international project OECD / CERi Environment and school initiatives that took place between 1990 and in 1994, and a wide networks of Eco-Schools, Healthy Schools, UNESCO schools, etc. were established. The aim of our research was to find out if elements of ESD are present in Slovenian primary schools. To reach that aim we were analysing in the framework of a wider research project “Analysis and encouraging the integration of education for sustainable development into primary schools” the Slovenian national curricula, textbooks, worksheets and national tests. Analyses of the material in use in primary schools, which in our opinion significantly affect the knowledge, process skills and attitudes of pupils were made in order to empower us, based on the results obtained and the theoretical bases (international and national documents ESD), to propose a comprehensive strategy for ESD. In this paper we are presenting the results of the analyses of national tests that all 15 years old pupils write at the end of primary school. Based

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on fundamental documents for ESD, prepared by UNESCO, UNECE, European Union, United Nations and others, we constructed the criteria that define ESD. Fourteen keywords were determined (sustainable development, ecology, healthy lifestyle, water, globalization, extracurricular activities, cooperative learning, critical thinking, democracy, active citizenship, tolerance, non-violence, self-esteem, positive self-image). We used these keywords in analyses of national tests which were used in the school year 2005/06, at the beginning of DESD. For this analysis the qualitative research method was used. Most elements of ESD were found in national tests for biology, some of them also in tests for Slovene language, while almost none were found in tests for mathematics. After 10 years, at the end of DESD, the same analyses were made because we wanted to know if there was any effect of the DESD on Slovenian national tests. While the test for Slovenian language at this period significantly increased the number of tasks associated with ESD there have been on the other hand a significant reduction of tasks associated with ESD in the national test for biology. National tests for mathematics however are again only marginally related to ESD. An interesting element of ESD has been found in the preliminary instructions for pupils for all three study subjects. We determined two key words: confidence and positive self-image. In the national tests we did not find content that could be linked to the following keywords: water, tolerance and non-violence. At least the keyword water would be fairly easy to use in tasks for national tests. National tests written for Slovenian pupils demonstrate that the tests could be means for the development of ESD, but they are far from used to the full possibilities. Comparative analyses of national tests used at the beginning and on completion of the DESD showed that in Slovenia we can hardly speak of a planned and systematic integration of ESD in national tests. It is generally known that with the national tests countries strongly influence teaching. We believe that even in a regular primary school curriculum there would be more connections to the ESD if the elements for sustainable development would be systematically included in national tests. This study shows the mirror to the authors of the national tests as well as the politicians that established the guidance of development of ESD.

Key words: decade of education for sustainable development, education for sustainable development, national tests, national assessment, primary school.

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