

China's 'recycling economy' – from paper to practice

Climate change and sustainability are now hot topics in China, but it is hard to find research addressing the outcomes of Education for Sustainable Development, says Associate Professor **Yi Jin**.

*** Education Alliance Quarterly:** *In China's Policies and Actions for Addressing Climate Change it is written that a series of educational and publicity activities should "root the idea of a recycling economy deeply in the people's minds and create a sound social atmosphere". Is the idea of a recycling economy now rooted in China?*

Yi Jin: "We often read and hear the words of 'recycling economy', 'environmental protection' and 'sustainable development' in mass media in China, and it is widely accepted in China that economic development or improvement of life standards should not be got at the price of a destroyed environment or hurt of the future generation. However, many people may not understand the exact meaning of these words, especially the first one, and some may view climate change and sustainable development as others' responsibility than every individual including himself. They usually think that their behaviours could hardly make contribution to resolve the climate change problem, i.e. even with their changes in the way of life, the global climate could hardly change without changes in the large companies or industries, thus they would rather keep the way which they were used to. So the issue of climate change should be addressed more in education, especially its connections to every one's life and work."

EAQ: *In the national report about Education for Sustainable Development in China you conclude that few research studies address the actual role education play for sustainable development in China – despite the fact that all policies on sustainable development and climate change highlight the importance of education. How come there is such a difference between policy and research?*

YJ: "In my opinion, one reason might be the administration system in which there is not a specific department in the central government taking charge of designing, mediating and assessing Climate Change (CC) or Sustainable Development (SD). When I was searching in 'China fact file' at the Chinese government's official website, I could not find resources entitled 'sustainable development' or 'climate change' and just found something related to SD under the title of 'environment'. Without such a department, how to guarantee the execution of the CC and SD policies in different social sectors, and what force outside of education could study the role of education in CC and SD?"

Take environmental education as an opposite example: It seems that the Ministry of Environmental Protection

(MEP) was more active and influential than the Ministry of Education (MOE) in promoting environmental education (as well as ESD) in China. It was the MEP that conducted programs assessing EE practices in schools – the Green School program.

Another reason is found within the educational system. Similar to the first reason, it is not clear which department in MOE should take charge of ESD, and there is no procedure or instrument for assessing and evaluating ESD programs. In addition, empirical studies with systematical analysis might not be the dominant approach of educational study in China. So although there are lots of activities of ESD in schools and large amount of literature addressing ESD, nearly half of the papers theoretically are discussing about the concept and approaches of ESD, and the other half simply describe how ESD were conducted in schools. Thus among the literature about ESD, we could hardly find survey studies or investigations addressing the outcomes of ESD and the consequences in society."

EAQ: *What should be done to bridge this gap between policy and practice?*

YJ: "The first is to conduct teacher training based on the real meaning of ESD. The second is to try to establish some cross-disciplinary agencies that are in charge of organising, coordinating, and assessing comprehensive studies and projects of ESD. The third is to conduct empirical studies on ESD with systematic investigation and scientific educational experiments." ■

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What is the biggest challenge for climate change education in China?

"Firstly, the complexity of climate change issue has to be considered and addressed in climate change education, in which there are many unresolved dilemmas and problems. It seems that the climate change issue is more like a political one than a scientific or moral one till now, which may cause confusion in both educators and pupils who are ordinary people with little awareness of or interest in politics. Secondly, under the great pressure of examination and competition, it is difficult to make climate change education really impact on individuals' attitudes and life style rather than just help pupils get high scores. Thirdly, it is not clear who should take the responsibility to monitor climate change education in schools – and in what way," Yi Jin says.



YI JIN

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Favourite book about climate change?

"I do not have a book about climate change, but I do have one about the environmental issue – *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson."