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Education and Learning in Sustainable Development: Foregrounding an Emergent Discourse

Bob Offei Manteaw
University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana

Abstract

The framing of education and learning in sustainable development has evolved out of global environment and development discussions to shape how knowledge, learning and action are applied in efforts to address complex socio-ecological and sustainability challenges of the times. Such framings have over time contributed not only to the establishment of the importance of education and learning in issues of environment and development – sustainable development – but also to the definition of what forms education and learning should take. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) has since emerged from such framings in international discussions to pave the way for the formal recognition of the role of education and learning in the global quest for sustainable development. While the ESD discourse has since evolved to become a pragmatic educational ideology and tradition; while many countries and institutions have embraced its ideals in practice, not a lot of attention has been given to the seemingly *instrumentalization* of education in the ESD discourse. This work foregrounds ESD as an emergent discourse to critically explore how education has been framed in the discourse. Through Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, the paper examines the *coarseness* of words used in creating the ESD discourse across time by paying close attention to texts – specific language use – in key *discourse moments* to understand how linguistic choices, power, and institutional structures have helped to create a role for education in sustainable development and how that has facilitated the formation of the ESD discourse.

Key words: education, sustainable development, ESD, critical discourse analysis.

Introduction

The framing of education and learning in sustainable development has evolved out of global environment and development discussions to shape how knowledge, learning and action are to be applied in efforts to address complex socio-ecological problems of the time (Bengtsson, 2016). Environmental Education (EE) and more recently, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), both emerged from such framings in international discussions to pave the way for the formal recognition of education and learning as critical pathways to highlight human-nature interactions and to confront associated impacts (Reid, 2002; Zygmunt, 2016).

Such framings have over time contributed not only to the establishment of the importance of education and learning in issues of environment and development – sustainable development – but also to the definition of what forms of education and learning are required to address the challenges of our unsustainable present. The emergence, therefore, of sustainable development as a concept and a new development pathway and the underlying challenge of cognitive and lifestyle modifications ultimately made the quest for sustainable development an educational issue and a learning affair (González-Gaudiano, 2015; Choondassery, 2017; Merritt et al., 2020; Heasly et al., 2020; Salīte et al., 2020).

The urgency for change in behaviors, attitudes and cultures towards sustainable practices almost logically necessitated the invocation of the role of education and learning in the sustainability quest. This initiated global discussions and debates about the meanings of sustainable development and what forms education and learning might take. Education for Sustainable Development then emerged as a response to this need and to set in motion series of international discussions and debates, what Laclau and Moufee (1985) describe as "Articulation" – to signify the *different moments of discourse*.

While many have since embraced ESD as the kind of pragmatic and transformational educational paradigm needed to address the socio-ecological and sustainability challenges of the current global era (Leicht, Heiss, & Byun, 2018), others have raised concerns about the seemingly instrumental framing of education in the discourse and have argued that such framings reduce the intrinsic essence of education to a set of mechanistic tools to be applied in times of crisis (Jickling, 2005; Gomez, 2005; Caretea, 2005).

Jickling (2005), in particular, has been blunt about why education should not just be for sustainable development. He says: "Regardless of one's predilections [on ESD] the forces of globalization will influence educational decisions" (p. 252). Inherent in this assertion are issues of power, politics, language, and geo-politics. In other words, who decides on what sustainable development is, whose voices are heard and unheard, what language or languages are used, what are the standards, what kinds of learning are good enough, what are the standards and who determines them? These are critical underlying questions of the ESD discourse which, for some reasons, have been muted in the acceptance and celebration of ESD as a novel educational tradition.

My aim here is to foreground these questions within the broader ESD discourse and use them as a basis to trace and analyze the framing and conceptualization of education and learning in the global quest for sustainable development. In particular, it is my desire to critically explore the *instrumentalization* of education in the discourse of sustainable development to understand how such framings have happened through articulation, signification and naturalization. The main approach the author' use here is Discourse Analysis (DA); however, where necessary I employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a method within the broader discourse of discourse analysis. The work proceeds from the premise that action is generally believed to speak louder than words; however, it is also the belief here that this assertion very often ignores or underestimates the power of words and the ideas, creativity and power of those behind the use of words (Adams, 2009).

I take the position, therefore, that words sometime speak louder than action or at least they determine action, and in these processes usurp the power of action (Bergen, 2012). As a critical discourse analyst, my interest is to shine the light on words-in-use

(discourse) and to carefully examine their "coarseness" to establish how they have informed the framing of a role of education in sustainable development. Such examinations, ultimately, will serve as a basis for me to act upon *the word* with a view to acting on *the world* (Freire, 1972). Acting on the *word* and the *world* will thus be my way of unveiling how discourses, such as the ESD discourse, inform social practices.

Sustainable Development: The Challenge of our Time

Irwin (2001) observed that any meaningful discussion on the concept of sustainable development or sustainability "needs to be set in context to explain its emergence and influence" (p. 35). Placing it in the perspective of its emergence onto the world stage and following the logic of its conceptual evolution makes it much easier to understand the various debates about the meaning of terms such as *sustainability* and *sustainable development*, as well as the role of education in the process. This is also against the background that the last few decades have seen the term sustainable development emerge as one of the most popular development catchphrases in recent times and has in unprecedented ways brought to the awareness and consciousness of the world the extent, scale and magnitude of human impacts on nature.

From the destruction of biodiversity, environmental degradation, global resource exploitation, increased production, unrestrained consumerism to exponential growths in world populations, there were worrying concerns about the growing imbalance in human-nature interactions which threatened the long-term sustainability of the planet (Adams, 2009). These had become pervasive realities both locally and globally and provided insights into the complex array of challenges facing this historical moment. They were, and remain the socio-ecological and cultural challenges of the times which called for urgent actions to change course (Porritt, 1996).

Changing course implied knowing, understanding and acknowledging the unsustainability of development patterns on a fragile planet and to commit to a set of new development pathways that are capable of bringing about the requisite transformations. The urgency for transformation through responsive interventions at global scale became the central concern of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) also known as the Brundtland Commission whose final report, *Our Common Future,* proposed a new model of development – sustainable development – and one that "sustains and expand the environmental resource base" (WECD, 1987, p. 1).

The commission then noted that: "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable-to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (p. 8). This has since become the conceptual interpretation of what was then an emergent concept and has indeed become the most referenced definition even though other definitions have since emerged (Dresner, 2008; Robertson, 2017). The phrase sustainable development, used in this context, and from this time on, took on a whole new meaning to mark the beginning of its different conceptualizations.

In spite of early contestations in meaning and implications (Rogers, Jalal, & Boyd, 2012), the concept gained widespread support and political currency at the United Nations World Conference of Environment and Development (UNCED, 1992), known also as the *Earth Summit*, which took place in in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The conference,

known to be the largest ever assemblage of heads of States at any one event in the world, provided yet another forum to table and discuss global sustainable development concerns and to agree on measures to address the problems.

In the final conference document, titled Agenda 21 for the 21st Century – Chapter 36 was dedicated entirely to education and the promotion of Education and Public Awareness and Training. The chapter notes: "Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of people to address environment and development issues" (p. 2). This was the maiden and formal introduction of education in the quest of sustainable development; it was a *discourse moment* which also marked the beginning of the framing; or better still – the reframing of the role education in the global quest for sustainable development.

Ten years after the *Earth Summit* in Brazil, a follow up conference known as the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), or Rio +10 took place in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Summit reiterated earlier concerns raised in Brazil and concluded that expected transformations and transition to sustainability as discussed at the *Earth Summit* in Brazil had been slow in coming or none at all. At this conference, the scope of the concept of sustainable development was expanded to include issues of poverty, health, social justice etc., and in ways that also called for the deepening of both the thinking and practice of education in sustainable development.

In the end, the Summit backed the declaration of the first decade of the new century as one for reflection and action and one in which focused education and learning was to play a central role in scaling up global efforts towards sustainability (Lafferty & Eckerberg, 2013; Fischer et al., 2015). A proposal for a United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development to serve as an international concerted period of focused action on education and learning for sustainable development was tabled and eventually approved and launched officially as a United Nations project in New York in March of 2005. The DESD, as it was later to be known, ran from 2005–2015 and was managed by UNESCO, the United Nations education and learning arm.

Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis

My approach in this work, as indicated earlier, is discourse analysis (CA), but critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be employed as a methodology within a larger method of CA (Fairclough, 2013). I make a distinction between discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis and this is essentially because, "Different approaches fit different issues and questions better or worse than others" (Gee, 2006, p. 5). Such a distinction allows different approaches in analyzing different issues. While education for sustainable development is the overarching discourse under discussion, the specific focus is to examine and analyze how education has been framed in the broader concept of sustainable development.

The overall desire, in this regard, is to trace the emergence, evolution and development of the ESD discourse and to establish its capacity to influence contemporary educational thinking and practice in diverse places. And, I do this through textual analysis which involves the analysis of the form, content and organization of texts – what Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer to as "texture". Philips and Jorgensen (2002) validate this approach by noting that in discourse analysis "The analyst has to work with what has

been said or written, exploring patterns in and across the statements and identifying the social consequence of different discursive representations of reality" (p. 21). In line with this and within the context of the ESD discourse, I pay close attention to text by examining its texture (form and content) to establish how linguistic choices enact social practices.

Discourse, irrespective of its nature, is data depending on how they are used to understand an aspect of the world or social life. Foucault (1972) writes that, "Discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Discourses are not objects; they do not identify objects; they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their invention" (p. 49). Discourse, (Fairclough, 2013) is a particular way of talking about and understanding the world, or an aspect of it and in doing so, have a high propensity of infringing independent thought. Discourses, therefore, generate 'preferred' meanings or representations which eventually influence ideology formation. Discourses are ideological and they blur meanings (Purvis & Hunt, 1993).

To analyze discourse is to interrogate such processes of meaning and ideological formation and it is also about theorizing. Central to understanding discourse theory is the issue of *power* and here power is Foucaldian; power permeates all levels of society through every social practice (Katz, 2003). Power relations are embedded within social relations and are exercised through institutional relations that discipline our ways of thinking and how our actions are regulated (Foucault, 1977). Discourse therefore becomes a major instrument of power and control so any attempt to analyze discourse in a critical manner must be considered as a serious endeavor which is aimed at unveiling and clarifying how power and discriminatory values are inscribed in, and mediated through the linguistic system.

Analysis therefore becomes political in intent and purpose and as a critical analyst, my major preoccupation here is to closely study the selected texts with a view to investigating the *texture* – form and content – of these texts (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Taking into account that discourse is structured by dominance, and that every discourse is historically produced and interpreted (Wodak & Meyer, 2001), it is also important to highlight the fact that dominant structures legitimatize the ideologies of powerful groups and to reproduce such ideologies. What this means is that dominant structures stabilize conventions and naturalize them and in doing so the effects of power and ideology in the production of meaning, roles, and signifiers are obscured.

It is against this background that I find a careful analysis of the ESD discourse meaningful and important to serve as an avenue to uncover taken-for-granted assumptions and underlying constituents of power. Four fundamental concepts are therefore indispensable in all discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis processes: the concepts of history, power, language, and ideology. These form the basis of study and analysis. What is distinctive about CDA is that it addresses the real issues of contemporary times with a view towards progressive revolution (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). This then makes the concept of sustainable development, one of the most pressing political challenges of our time, and associated discourses of education and learning, well-suited for critical analysis.

Grounding the ESD Discourse in Context

To trace the framing of education in sustainable development, I have restricted my analysis to key educational documents which responded to the demands of sustainable development, as were clarified in the Brundtland Report. Thus, the following documents: *Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 – The global action plan for sustainable development (1992)*, *The Johannesburg Declaration – The report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002)*, and *The Draft Implementation Scheme of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005)* will inform the analysis.

These documents are selected because of their trailblazing roles of linking education directly to sustainable development and their specific characters of being a direct response to an identified role for education in sustainable development. My strategy here is to pay close attention to texts – specific language use – in the different documents and to examine how linguistic choices and structures have helped create the discourse of education for sustainable development. Through this, I will also show how paying close attention to text can increase the value of discourse analysis as a method for researching different ranges of social science and cultural studies questions.

I start off, therefore, with a historical methodological approach, which involves the location of the discourse in its historical context with a view to paying close attention to how the discourse has evolved over time. This approach is far from being a mere historical commentary; it is a critical narrative and an examination of key discourse moments as they happened in history and how different power dynamics have shaped the development of the discourse. This is followed by a discussion on how power influences language use in the selected texts and how such usages help in forming ideologies. The last category to conclude the analysis is a critical examination of how *preferred meanings* as they emanate from power are articulated, re-signified and eventually naturalized. The central issue that drives the entire analysis is *power* and/or the abuse of it.

Locating the Discourse in a Historical Context

All discourses are historical and can only be better understood if they are located in their proper historical context (Meyer, 2005; Wodak, 2001). Context within the subject of critical discourse analysis (CDA) carries a lot of significance. Much as locating a discourse in a context suggests a limitation to that particular context, there are other factors that necessarily work together to influence the production and interpretation of a particular discourse. Context therefore is constitutive, and the different constituents combine to define the discourse as well as help shape its development (Maybin, 1999). Situating a discourse in a historical context does not make it independent of other *extrahistorical* factors such as social, psychological, political and ideological, which all work together to direct a particular discourse.

It is from such a perspective that sustainable development, as an emergent idea, gained political currency and widespread acceptance through the now famous Brundtland Report of 1987 (*Our Common Future*) and in spite of the fact that there are reports of earlier usages of the phrase prior to the report (Borowy, 2013; Brown, 1970; IUCN, 1980). The period of the report, however, has since served as the point of conception and has largely become a reference point for the induction of the phrase into the develop-

ment discourse. This, as indicated, is against the background that earlier usages of the phrase existed and makes it all the more interesting how the definition given by a United Nations endorsed commission has since become the 'preferred' definition, and in that regard the *official knowledge*.

The articulation, signification and naturalization of the sustainability discourse has, for the most part, been framed as having originated from the Brundtland Commission's 'official' definition. This perception was validated by Warburton (1992) when she said in her preface to the book: *Community and Sustainable Development: Participation in the Future* that: "For the purposes of this book, the definition of sustainable development is the original one proposed by the Brundtland Commission …" (pp. xv–xvi). By this, she articulated, signified and naturalized the notion of *officialness* of the commission's definition of sustainable development.

What constitutes *original* or *official*, as implied by Warburton is of particular interest to this work and especially the role of power, status and authority in the signification and naturalization of such processes. The commission's definition is made to acquire the history and character of being *original* and in the process infringes on independent or alternative thought to pave the way, through articulation, for that ascription to be universally and naturally accepted. Again, such descriptions as exemplified by Warburton's assertion ascribe power, authority and significance to the commission and by doing so initiate a discourse moment that creates a *preferred* meaning obviously because of the status of the commission and the special privilege and access they have in controlling public discourse and communication.

Ultimately, the assumption of 'officialness' and the creation of a preferred meaning of sustainable development succeeded in infringing independent thought, or the recognition of the validity of earlier interpretations. Dresner (2008) asks, rather rhetorically, "Why was the Brundtland report so influential?" (p. 32), and he answers his own question by noting that "Many people have claimed that it was not very intellectually innovative. [however] It was after all the unanimous report of a group of establishment politicians and diplomats from all over the world (p. 33). The unanimity of establishment politicians and diplomats put together by the powerful United Nations to determine and articulate what sustainable development should mean provides a good example of how power and authority are constituted not only through status but also in language use to create discourse. Thus, the influence of the Brundtland Commission in initiating and driving the sustainable development concept and discourse becomes evident in their status and the authority behind the establishment of the Commission.

Following the naturalization of the meaning, and demands of sustainable development, came the role of social behaviors and attitudes which eventually introduced education in sustainable development thinking and practice. This was at the United Nations Conference of Environment and Development in Brazil where for the first time ever conscious efforts were made to link education and sustainable development, and to initiate a certain perception of education as an instrument for the achievement of sustainable development. The role of education thus became central in *Agenda 21* where Chapter 36 was entirely devoted to the promotion of Education, Public Awareness and Training.

The document talked about the "Reorienting of education towards sustainable development" by indicating that "Education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of people to address environment and development

issues" (p. 2). The idea of reorientation presupposes that educational systems and approaches prior to this call were largely deficient or incapable of leading societies onto the path of sustainable development. While the document established a role for education in sustainable development, it also raised significant questions about what kind of education is good enough for sustainable development and what forms it should take. Implicitly, also, it raised questions about who determines what constitutes education for sustainable development.

The call for the reorientation of educational systems for sustainable development has since been the basis of the role of education in the concept of sustainable development. Even though not a great deal had been achieved since 1992, in terms of "reorientation" of educational systems, a follow up summit in Johannesburg in 2002, dubbed The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), revisited the issue of education by making it a central focus of the conference. It was at this conference that Japan proposed a United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), which was subsequently proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly at its 57th meeting in December of 2002. The period 2005–2014 was officially designated as the duration of the decade. A U.N. General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/57/254) of February 2003 emphasized that education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development, and it designated UNESCO as the official Task Managers. The resolution stated that:

> *The General Assembly, recalling chapter 36 of Agenda 21, on promoting education, public awareness and training, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992…*
>
> *Appreciating the contribution made by the Commission on Sustainable Development to the issue of education for sustainable development since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development…*
>
> *Emphasizing that education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development…*
>
> *Decides to proclaim the ten-year period beginning on 1 January 2005 the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development…*

It is worthy of note here that the DESD was proposed by Japan, a powerful nation and a prominent member of what is usually described as the *international community*. It is equally worthy of note that the language chosen by the General Assembly is not only reminiscent of Chapter 36 of *Agenda 21,* but actually "recalls" how the Agenda emphasized the importance of using education, public awareness and training to promote sustainable development. The DESD, as was widely known, has since elapsed and its *ideals* proffered internationally over the ten-year period, continue to be idealized into educational ideologies or standard practices by countries and organizations. It has also provided a good example of how power, language, and ideology converge to shape social cognition.

Power, Language, Ideology and Social Cognition

Critical, as used in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), is applied in a special sense aimed at showing the connections between language, power, and ideology as social practice. Such connections may not be obvious, so a critical analysis of discourse and its linguistic elements unveil the hidden determinants in the system of social relationships (Fairclough, 1992). This actually forms the basis of CDA, and it is viewed as integrating (a) analysis of text, (b) analysis of processes of text production, consumption and distribution, and (c) socio-cultural analysis of the discursive event (Fairclough, 1995). The key issue here is to account for the relationships between discourse and social power. More specifically, the aim is to describe and explain how power is enacted, reproduced and legitimized through the language of the dominant group or institutions.

Guided by a framework of discursively mediated discourse, directed by dominance and inequality, this section focuses on social institutions such as the United Nations, which according to Fairclough (1995), contains diverse "ideological-discursive formations" (IDF) which is always present in institutions and are dominant in facilitating the forming discourses in accordance with its own ideological norms. IDF, therefore, is a kind of speech community with its own discourse and ideological norms primed by their position and power to set the agenda and to create discourse. A key characteristic of a dominant IDF is its ability to articulate, popularize and naturalize their institutional ideologies or to make them attain a common sense and non-ideological status. The effectiveness of this process is largely dependent on status within the social institution, and with status comes power which in turn leads to access and control of communication and public discourse.

The United Nations and associated organs are thus foregrounded as institutions with IDF attributes and obviously because of their status, power and abilities to set and direct global agenda based on their ideological beliefs and norms, and to turn such agenda into what I describe *as global common sense*. A good example of this happened both during and after the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD, 2002) in Johannesburg where the discourse of sustainable development was expanded and made to acquire a new sense of urgency. The inclusion of issues of poverty, health and social justice in notions of sustainable development almost immediately expanded the scope of the concept of sustainable development to include themes or subjects which were not originally considered in the concept. The Draft Implementation Scheme of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development which emerged out of the Johannesburg conference was unequivocal about the fact that:

> *The 2002 Johannesburg Summit broadened the vision of sustainable and reaffirmed the educational objectives of the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All Dakar Framework for Action…* (p. 11).

Highlighting poverty as a global issue within the concept of sustainable development was both a linguistic and ideological turn. Linguistically, the language of poverty and injustice gives the concept more global currency and acceptance, while neutralizing the different contestations, especially from poor developing regions of the world. Ideologically, a new cognition of the concept was created as there was a marked shift from its historical origins steeped in narrow environmental conservation and preservation arguments to a broader discourse of cause and interconnected effects.

As this resignification process took place, it is worthy of note that most developing countries, as members of the United Nations, had objected to what they call excessive signification of environmental issues in the concept of sustainable development (Emas, 2015). They perceived a narrow focus on the environment as luxury and something they could not afford to do in the face of stark poverty and their unavoidable dependence on the natural environment for survival. Sustainability to most poor people of the world, and more so to Africans, is also survivability which makes it all the more necessary that any discussion on sustainable development should take into consideration their unique realities (Dei, 1993; Manteaw, 2009; Brunold, 2015; Laine, 2016; Heasly et al. 2020).

So, in Johannesburg, South Africa, and on African soil – the belly of the beast – so to speak, it became a perfect occasion for conference leaders and discourse makers to highlight and include the issue of poverty to satisfy poor developing country members and also to expand the meaning and implication of the concept of sustainable development. This also ultimately implied the role of education was to be re-signified and naturalized to make it more responsive to the needs of the poor. Article 3 of the Johannesburg Declaration stated that:

> *At the beginning of the summit, the children of the world spoke to us in a simple yet clear voice that the future belongs to them, and accordingly challenged all of us to ensure that through our actions they will inherit a world free of the indignity and indecency occasioned by poverty, environmental degradation and patterns of unsustainable development* (p. 1).

The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) is a far-reaching and complex undertaking. Its conceptual basis, socio-economic implications, and environmental and cultural connections make it an enterprise, which potentially touches on every aspect of life. The basic vision of DESD is a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learn the values, behavior and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive transformation (p.4).

The opening lines of the introduction to the DESD Implementation Scheme resonate with the preamble of *Agenda 21*. It states:

> *There can be few more pressing and critical goals for the future of humankind than to ensure steady improvement in the quality of life for this and future generations, in a way that respects our common heritage – the planet we live on… Education for sustainable development is a life-wide and life-long endeavor which challenges individuals, institutions and societies to view tomorrow as a day that belongs to all of us, or it will not belong to anyone* (p. 7).

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation addressed education in many of its sections. The term *education* was used to describe organized learning processes both in formal and non-formal learning settings. The choice of language in the DESD implementation scheme reflects not only the shift in meaning in the concept of sustainable development, but also the role and nature of education. The phrases, "life-wide" and "life-long" were used for the first time to describe the form and nature of ESD. In life-wide, a reference to multi-sector and multi-issues was invoked as a reminder of the multiplicity of issues included in the concept.

Life-long, on the other, was to suggest that the quest for sustainable development, or the sustainability transition, is an on-going endeavor with no endpoint so education

processes for sustainable development should also be on-going and life-long. The World Summit on Sustainable Development, therefore, was teleological, in its ability to complete the shift in meaning of the concept of sustainable development and to initiate a new era of articulation and resignification of the role of education in that regard. The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, as was proposed and subsequently launched became the vehicle for the articulation, signification and naturalization of the new ideology of educating for sustainable development.

Articulation, Signification and Naturalization

The ultimate objective for a dominant discourse type is the recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness (Bourdieu, 1977). In other words, a dominant discourse's ability to infringe independent thought or meaning-making, makes it impactful and successful. Such a process does not happen by accident, but through carefully orchestrated processes of articulation, signification and naturalization of a particular discourse. The articulation of a discourse type therefore has a direct relationship with language and society and extends to power and ideology. The constant articulation and signification of a discourse type is the path to hegemonic and common-sense ideologies. Whatever is being articulated may not substantively be common sense, but may acquire common sense from the repetitiveness and forcefulness of the rhetoric.

The Declaration of a decade of sustained and concerted actions of education and learning for sustainable development was to conclude the naturalization process. The discourse of ESD and the role of education in sustainable development had earned legitimacy as an international common sense program for which all governments as well as other stakeholders were to participate and ensure that education processes are responsive to the ideals of sustainable development. This became a central message in the UN General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/57/254) which gave final approval to the DESD. It invited:

> *Governments to consider the inclusion of measures to implement the Decade in their respective educational strategies and action plans by 2005, taking into account the international implementation scheme to be prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (p. 2).

The common sense approach to signifying the discourse of education for sustainable development and in that regard creating a role for education in sustainable development started slowly from the Rio and Johannesburg conferences and to the declaration and launch of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Van Djik (1995) notes that "Much of 'modern' power in democratic societies is persuasive and manipulative rather than coercive (using force) …" (p. 85). In short, common sense status is attainable through manipulation of discourse to manufacture consent of others (Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Successful articulation results eventually in the *naturalization* of the discourse, which is then perceived not as that of a particular grouping within the institution, but that of the institution itself. All this, however, borders on social and cognitive psychology which makes the task of discourse studies, and CDA in particular, about studying the precise cognitive structures and strategies involved in the processes that aim to affect social

cognitions or mental models of groups into accepting *naturalized ideologies* such as a role of education in sustainable development.

Conclusion

Action, as was discussed earlier, is believed to speak louder than words; however, there are also times when some words speak louder than action. In short, language and discourses are powerful as they are ideological and have the ability and propensity to inform and direct social practice. The complexity of the function of language, as a cultural tool that mediates relationships of power, privilege, social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge, is the focus of discourse studies and critical discourse studies (Rogers et al., 2005). In foregrounding ESD as an emergent discourse, this work aimed to explore, with a view to understanding, the discourse of ESD, how it has emerged, evolved, where it is going and its capacity to influence contemporary educational thinking and practice.

This approach is necessary considering the fact that sustainable development, the mother concept, out of which ESD emerged, has undoubtedly become one of the most prominent and pervasive phrases in contemporary development and governance discourses. As an emergent concept, however, sustainable development has been fraught with both linguistic and conceptual confusions and since confusion is a hallmark of words that are used differently to connote different ideas, the concept has since resisted precise meaning. By drawing education into the discourse, the capacity of the concept to direct human progress and to restructure development thinking and practice around the world seems to have been established even when concerns remain about the exact meaning and implications of the concept.

The need to analyze the ESD discourses has, therefore, arisen because of the need also to understand the role of education in the quest for sustainable development and the power of language in the production of the ESD discourse. More importantly, perhaps, it is also imperative to critically explore, to understand how discourse production processes influence social action and practices. This is necessary because words and discourses, as demonstrated in this work, do not by themselves constitute power; they are framed and made to assume power by those behind the use of words (Fairclough, 1994; Habermas, 1977). To understand the working of words-in-use to frame discourses such as ESD, it is critically important to carefully and consciously examine their origins, intentions, and evolution over time. Such studies, in my view, have the potential to not only clarify the role of education in sustainable development, but also to facilitate an understanding of their current influences as well as future potential.

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Correspondence related to this paper should be addressed to Dr. Bob Offei Manteaw, University of Ghana, College of Basic and Applied Sciences, Center for Climate Change and Sustainability Studies (C3SS), Legon, Accra, Ghana. Email: rmanteaw@ug.edu.gh/ bobmanteaw@yahoo.com