

Call for Abstracts for the Annual Conference of the Subdivision on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) within the German Educational Research Association (GERA/DGfE)

**"Areas of tension in education for sustainable development and the
increasing diversification of the field"**

**from 18.09. to 20.09.2024
at the Otto Friedrich University in Bamberg**

The scientific discourse on education for sustainable development (ESD) is embedded in social dynamics and developments. In times of conflicting political debates, the increasing proximity of planetary tipping points, rapid technological developments and increasing social inequalities, it is necessary to reflect on research and theoretical approaches in this field. What is the current status of ESD discourse in theoretical, practical, and empirical terms? What are the main challenges and how does ESD research address them?

The purpose of this year's commission conference is to address existing discourses in the context of ESD and explore current challenges and controversies within the research field. It is important to note that the ESD field has become highly differentiated in recent years, as evidenced by bibliometric analyses of the research field (Hallinger & Nguyen, 2020; Wright & Pullen, 2007). ESD has become embedded in many educational discourses. For example, ESD is addressed in numerous specialised didactics as well as in various areas such as vocational education and training for sustainable development (e.g. Rebmann & Schlömer, 2020), teacher training for sustainable development (e.g. Fischer et al, 2022. Additionally research has been conducted in different areas of education, including higher education (e.g. Rieckmann et al., 2021), adult education (e.g. Schreiber-Barsch & Mauch, 2019) and early childhood education (e.g. Hedefalk et al., 2015). Research on large-scale assessments is also emerging (e.g. Costa et al., 2024; Costa & Taube, 2024).

Generally, the field of research of ESD is relatively young but rapidly growing, with roots in different traditions of various educational discourse fields, such as global learning or environmental

education. This rooting in different traditions and discourses, as well as the differentiation of the research field, offers both potential and challenges for theorising and empirical research in the field.

This year's conference will address the challenge of doing research and theorising in a multifaceted, multilayered and increasingly differentiated field. The focus will be on building upon existing findings and identifying areas of tension in the context of ESD. This meta-reflective view of the field seems particularly essential because research on the topic necessarily operates in tensions that can even be conceptualised as aporias (cf. Kminek, 2023). Discourses on sustainable development should be characterized by openness to account for the unpredictability of the future and to provide opportunities for future generations. At the same time, it is necessary to achieve closure in order to formulate concrete target perspectives, describe options for action and finally evaluate their (non-)achievement (cf. *ibid.*). The production of scientific knowledge is dependent on its framework and settings. Every setting, however, runs the risk of producing narrowness, of excluding bodies of knowledge and of causing discursive closures, as is evident in the discussion of postcolonial perspectives (e.g. Eberth & Röhl, 2021; Hamborg, 2017).

Research in the field of ESD is characterised by a high degree of factual and ethical complexity (Bögeholz & Barkmann, 2005). However, when objects are operationalised, for example in order to research the development of students' competences or to evaluate educational offers for adults, a reduction of complexity becomes necessary. Any attempt to operationalise competence facets and reduce complexity runs the risk of oversimplifying certain perspectives and reproducing simplistic views of ESD. This is particularly evident in the context of the operationalisation of global competences, as demonstrated by Costa et al. (2024), Ress et al. (2022), and Sälzer & Roczen (2018). In educational practice, complex topics require didactic reduction and topic selection to make the world accessible through examples, based on the principle of exemplarity. However, it is important to carefully select examples that are suitable for experiencing the understanding of generalizable principles related to sustainability. Teachers must also carefully select topics and methods for teaching. Empirical findings show that educators deal with complexity differently (Taube, 2022).

It may seem that the challenges outlined are sufficient to create a comprehensive conference programme. However, additional areas of tension arise when research is conceptualised as transdisciplinary or transformative research, as is often the case in the context of ESD (cf. e.g. Blank et al., 2023; Fischer et al., 2016; Schneidewind & Singer-Brodowski, 2015). In transdisciplinary research processes, researchers themselves become part of the transformation process (Singer-Brodowski, 2023; von Seggern et al., 2023). This raises the question of how to maintain a critical and reflective distance while being involved. Questions about the normative dimension of ESD, which have been repeatedly discussed and recently raised, remain relevant and are being raised again due to the differentiation of the field and new social challenges and

theoretical perspectives (Tryggvason et al., 2023). What characterises a theory-based, critical perspective on normative assumptions? What are the dimensions of current research approaches in the field regarding instrumental ESD approaches (Education *for* Sustainable Development) and emancipatory approaches (Education *as* Sustainable Development) (cf. Vare & Scott, 2007)?

These questions, and many others, are no longer limited to small research groups. They are now connected to a broad field of research with diverse approaches and perspectives. We invite researchers from various educational science sub-disciplines to present their specific research projects and perspectives on the field, different approaches, and localisations. We particularly encourage young researchers to submit their contributions.

Contributions to the conference can be submitted in various formats.

- 1) Abstracts of up to 2,500 characters (including spaces, excluding references) on ESD-related research projects focusing on the conference theme can be submitted for the presentation of **individual contributions**.
- 2) Additionally, it is possible to submit **working groups** consisting of two to three contributions focusing on a common research question. The concept paper for the planned working group should not exceed 5,000 characters (including spaces, excluding references).
- 3) In addition to the classic formats, **discussion forums** can also be submitted. These formats can relate to specific areas of tension, networking requirements, and challenges in the field, or be focused on specific sub-areas or fields of research. To propose a discussion format, a concept paper of 2,500 characters (including spaces, excluding references) is required. The paper should outline the basic intention, identify the need for the discussion and describe the proposed discussion format.

The abstract should include information on the authors (name, institution, research focus) and be submitted by 15 April 2024 to jana.costa@lifbi.de.

After the main conference, a networking meeting on **ESD in teacher training** will take place in the afternoon of **20 September 2024** (in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Ingrid Hemmer). You are all cordially invited to attend (more information will follow)!

Literature

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