

Chapter 7

Holistic Learning and Education for Sustainable Development: Building a Virtual Community of Engaged and Responsible Learners by Tokkatsu

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the implementation of holistic learning in virtual space and presents it as a humanistic approach to ensure students' democratic participation in online and distance learning. While education for sustainable development (ESD) envisions active and engaged learners, students struggled to engage in online and distance learning (ODL) during the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This study examines the holistic learning curriculum, tokkatsu—which originated in Japan—and discusses its prospect for nurturing responsible and active learners. In tokkatsu, students participate in nonacademic activities where they learn to take the initiative, have dialogue, and collaborate as responsible members of the community. This chapter presents an application of the tokkatsu in virtual space, taking a case from Indonesia. It describes the contextualized case of tokkatsu to build a community of learners in the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic and how challenges in the digitalization of the classroom were overcome.

INTRODUCTION

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) encourages learners to embody knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to transform themselves for a more sustainable and just society for all. To take up unforeseen challenges in the complex and rapidly changing society in the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) era, learning needs to be transformative to cope with rapidly changing societies (Pavlova, 2013). ESD targets:

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To empower learners to transform themselves and the society they live in by developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, competences, and values required for addressing global citizenship and local contextual challenges of the present and the future, such as critical and systemic thinking, analytical problem-solving, creativity, working collaboratively and making decisions in the face of uncertainty, and understanding of the interconnectedness of global challenges and responsibilities emanating from such awareness. (UNESCO, 2015a)

For learners to be active and engaging citizens, they need a learning experience that is beyond the traditional concept of narrowly defined academic learning and top-down dissemination of knowledge. Their democratic participation in building a relationship, involvement in decision-making, and taking active roles in their communities are essential.

The school shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic posed many challenges to students and teachers. In a difficult time, students needed more support from their teachers and peers. In reality, the traditional way of teaching and learning was reinforced in the online and distance learning (ODL) situation, and many students could not accommodate learning individually from the home environment. Learning loss encompassed not only academic learning but also students' social and character development. They were deprived of the experience of being a part of the classroom and school community. People realize that school serves a role of a social place where "students can learn and develop social competencies, such as self-confidence, friendship, empathy, participation, respect, gratitude, compassion, and responsibility" (Colao et al., 2020). There were concerns about taking care of mental health issues during social isolation and the need for social and emotional care of students (Adegboye et al., 2021).

In fact, ESD recognizes learning to be social and holistic and anticipates its experience to be more engaging and participatory. Learning for sustainability is defined by UNESCO experts by five pillars (Combes, 2005, pp. 216–217; Delors et al., 1996).

- **Learning to Know**, so as to acquire a taste for learning throughout life and for understanding the world. This concerns cognitive skills and reasoning.
- **Learning to Do**, so as to be able to deal with many situations and be an actor as well as a thinker. This focuses on practical skills and knowing how to act.
- **Learning to Be**, so as to better develop one's personality and be able to act with greater autonomy, judgment, and personal responsibility. This relates to personal skills and dignity.
- **Learning to Live Together**, so as to develop an understanding of other people and their own history, traditions, and spirituality, in order to participate and cooperate with others in all human activities. This has to do with social skills and social capital.
- **Learning to Transform Oneself and Society**, so as to develop respect for the environment, social solidarity, and a non-discriminatory, gender-sensitive world. This reflects a synergy of cognitive, practical, personal, and social skills to bring about sustainability.

However, this is not easy since such learning activities have not been structured within the traditional school system and require a systematic change. Especially in collectivistic societies such as Japan and Indonesia, people's well-being is greatly influenced by how well they can work with one another and with those who surround them. For a sustainable society, the integration of independent and interdependent dimensions is important; thus, the ability to work with others is essential, not limited to Asia but in other parts of the world (Kjell, 2011).

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