

Goals

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During the recent WEEC 2024 meeting in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, I was entrusted as the strand chair for “the goals” stream for Environmental Education and ESD as reflected in the conference submissions and program. I am very thankful for the help offered by the various session moderators and rapporteurs who provided me with their thoughts and reflections on the sessions held in alignment within the theme. In summary, ‘the goals’ theme comprised approximately 38% of the total number of sessions given during the congress.

In my final remarks during the closing session, I noted that the goals of environmental education as presented at the congress were observed as having primarily three components:

1. A focus on the development of sustainability skills and/or competencies
2. A focus on behavior change and/or the development of positive environmental actions, and finally
3. A focus on the development and/or enhancement of environmental education policies or regulations

Of course, to achieve all ‘the goals’ of EE these subthemes are important and must be seen as inter-related. Together they can work to enhance the entire field of environmental education. In relating this idea, during the final plenary I shared a crazy dream that I had that helped me (and hopefully others) to envision what these goals might do for our collective future. In the dream, I envisioned the entire WEEC community situated on a giant football field (we call this soccer in North America):

At first, this giant field appeared to be randomized with a series of different activities going on ... and apparently there were no uniforms to indicate whether there were competing teams or whether we were all playing together ... in fact instead of the usual uniforms we would expect, the players in this crazy game wore all sorts of different attire that was either reflective of the various cultures they embodied or instead, the various roles they might play in the game Then I started to look a little closer ...

The first thing that I observed in the game was that many people were ‘practicing’ on this field. Simply put they were working on their skill sets and building the competencies that would eventually help them to get better at the game. Along with this practicing – there was skillful coaching too – this aimed at helping everyone (preschool to adult) to determine the role or position they might take in the global game and to enhance their unique and individual capabilities. I was once a coach too ... so this made me feel good to see this happening out there on the field ...

When I looked again, I could see that there were also skillful players out there on the field ... they were out there ‘doing their thing’ and demonstrating that the sustainability game can be inspiring and entertaining too! Some of the players were busy ‘deaking out’ their opponents and overcoming the obstacles in their way (creating behaviour change -- so to speak). Still others were forcefully moving with speed and accuracy toward the goal line ... and in so doing -- scoring with real and positive environmental actions -- this was good to see too!

Finally (and it took a while to notice this) with all the action on the field I realized that even the people on the periphery of the field were very active too. Whether

they were coaches, referees or merely spectators – all these folks were affecting the ‘rules of the game’ and together these important players would help to determine how the game will be played in the future. I hoped that this notion might expand what becomes possible later in the ‘environmental and sustainability game.’ Will we be able to play the game longer? (maybe go into overtime?). In the future, will the field be allowed to be larger? Can we have more and different kinds of players too?

I didn’t get the answers to all my questions because I had to wake up and attend more conference sessions on the last day of the Congress -- before the dream ran its course ... perhaps I will take up the dream again ‘down under’ when the WEEC resumes in Western Australia ... because I think they play football there too!