Transcript Podcast Episode P1

Richard: Hello, welcome to this episode of our EcoGreen podcast. My guest today is Michael Nagel, who is an expert in education for sustainable development and will tell us something about this topic and describe its importance for political education in general. Hello Michael! First of all, I'd like to know who you are, what you do and what connects you to the topic of today's podcast.

Michael: Hello, nice to be here. I'm Michael Nagel. I work in the field of political didactics at the Institute for Didactics of Democracy in Hanover and, as you said, I deal with political education in the context of education for sustainable development and socio-ecological transformations. On the one hand, I am doing this as part of a dissertation that I am currently working on. I'm investigating the sustainability perceptions of politics teachers in order to develop didactic approaches for explicit political education for sustainable development and, on the other hand, I'm also working on the "Klima Aktiv" project, for example. This is about creating space for young people in schools to get involved in climate policy, and we want to accompany this climate policy involvement and make it usable as a learning experience. But I also find the topic very exciting beyond the context of my work and I am also committed to social justice and climate justice in various areas. So the topic is very close to my heart and I'm delighted that I can combine it in this way.

Richard: Very interesting! It's clear that you have many points of reference on the topic and different perspectives on education for sustainable development (ESD). If you could briefly explain this to me as an uninformed person: What is education for sustainable development actually?

Michael: Yes, good question! First of all, Education for Sustainable Development is a global education program that was developed by the United Nations. The foundation stone was perhaps already laid in Germany with Agenda 21 in 1992 and has since been promoted by the United Nations with ever newer programs. This ESD 2030 program is currently underway with the aim of advancing the so-called Agenda 2030 with these 17 sustainability goals, which I am sure many people are familiar with. That is one level. But ESD was not only promoted by the United Nations, but also by many other actors who somehow advance it through their daily practical work and conceptual work, and ESD therefore has very different roots. On the one hand, it comes from environmental education or peace education, human rights education or global learning. That's why topics such as sustainability in the face of planetary boundaries often play a role, but also global interdependence, which in turn comes more from global learning. Ultimately, what ESD means always depends to a certain extent on who is doing ESD. So the actors in particular shape it. There is no single definition with which everyone can say: "I agree with that." Perhaps the best way to put it is somewhat succinctly: education for sustainable development is education that aims to promote sustainable development - whatever that may be.

Richard: You're already talking about different levels. On the one hand, it's about promoting sustainability in a large context and, on the other hand, each and every one of us is also addressed. In your opinion, how do these levels relate to each other or who is ultimately addressed by ESD?

Michael: That's another exciting question, because ESD ultimately affects everyone. ESD is also super important because we currently have a way of life and economy that is based on the exploitation of people and nature. And human activity is increasingly overstepping planetary boundaries. We can see this, for example, in the climate crisis or the biodiversity crisis; global systems are being restricted in their function and, in case of doubt, cease to function. The consequences are water scarcity, food shortages and an increase in diseases, meaning that human well-being is at risk. Not all people are affected equally, but groups that are already marginalized or disadvantaged are particularly poor at protecting themselves against these consequences and are therefore particularly hard hit. This also perpetuates and reinforces global and social inequalities. This initial situation could therefore be described as a multiple, social ecological crisis. Admittedly, this is a somewhat unwieldy term, but I think it is quite apt. The response to this crisis, in other words to the crisis facing the whole of humanity, the whole world, is sustainability as an idea. As a response to such a crisis or the realization that things cannot go on as they are. And for this we need a transformation, a transformation of this current way of life and economy. We cannot determine this transformation in this technocratic process by some experts or something and then simply implement it, but it must be negotiated in the democratic process, i.e. in the search process of society as a whole, how this transformation takes place and as many people as possible should be able to participate in it and not only people who have a certain expertise or people who work in so-called sustainability-relevant professions or something like that, but as many people as possible. This requires responsible people who, on the one hand, have a certain amount of knowledge, but on the other hand, above all, have political analysis, judgment and action skills so that they have the opportunity to help shape these often conflictual negotiation processes when it comes to sustainability and somehow participate themselves. So in this respect, ESD as education, which aims to enable people to shape sustainability or sustainable development themselves, affects everyone.

Richard: If you say that education already has the opportunity to promote these skills for individual people, for citizens, for pupils to get involved in this process and shape it, what do you think would be important in the educational context in order to be able to realize this in the future? Because the difficulty with this topic is that our environment is constantly changing. You constantly have to find new concepts to implement ESD.

Michael: Exactly, so I think it's important that this transformative claim of ESD not only concerns the goal of education, but also education itself. So ESD also addresses education itself, wants to create new teaching/learning formats and change the education system itself, i.e. the way we learn as a whole. In this respect, ESD does not just concern individual subjects or individual courses, but addresses all educational contexts. In other words, all educational contexts should take up ESD in some way, even if this happens to varying degrees of course. Very often, however, ESD has a gap in its implementation when it comes to structures, i.e. the structures of the economy and society. Very often, problems and challenges that arise from the destruction of our livelihoods, as described earlier, are dealt with and somehow investigated in ESD courses. In some cases, approaches to alternatives are also presented, which works really well in many traditional ESD programs. But the reasons why this destruction is continuing, even though the alternatives are obviously known, even though there have been awareness campaigns for decades, are often not highlighted. This is a bit missing, i.e. ESD very rarely analyzes social power and domination relations in this way. Instead, solutions to the impending ecological catastrophe are sought

in individual changes in behavior, for example in conscious consumption or other individual decisions. The carbon footprint is often cited, suggesting that we can solve the climate crisis by simply driving a little less or eating less meat. It has long been clear in science that individual changes in behavior will not be able to solve this huge crisis, but that we need structural solutions, that we need to look at the structures: Which structures are responsible for this crisis coming about and for it continuing to progress? However, by individualizing this and suggesting that we can solve it through individual consumer decisions, the crisis is depoliticized and the causes are not only left aside, but in the worst case even stabilized by the fact that the structures remain hidden. This is why, in my view, we need an explicitly political ESD that, on the one hand, takes up the strengths of the already established ESD, but also draws on the experience of political education and uses it to further develop ESD. Because in order to overcome this crisis, we need to tackle the structures and that is precisely why we need an ESD that does this.

Richard: Finally, a plea for a more politically-oriented ESD. Thank you very much, Michael Nagel, for your insights.

Michael: Thank you very much and good luck with your project.

Richard: Thank you!