

## **RCE Launch Conference**

**5th June 2009**

The London Regional Centre for Expertise (RCE) in ESD was launched at a conference on 5th June 2009, at London South Bank University (LSBU). An RCE is an active network of organisations working together to promote Education for Sustainable Development in their region and includes the whole education sector, community groups, businesses, local authorities, individuals and organisations. This launch aimed to start the process of making London a more sustainable and inclusive place to live, work and play, where communities are empowered to participate in creating a more sustainable world.

The first speaker, Charles Hopkins, currently the UNESCO Chair at York University in Toronto, is directly involved in moving teacher education towards addressing sustainable development as well as working with the United Nations University to develop RCEs around the globe. Hopkins pointed out that educators across the sectors in each RCE need to consider issues relevant to their own regions, to develop public awareness and understanding and to train people to work towards sustainable goals. He reminded us of the impact that developed countries are making on the planet and the urgency of reducing our huge environmental footprint.

The second speaker was Dorcas Otieno, Senior Lecturer at the School of Environmental Studies at Kenyatta University. She presented some of the major urban challenges for RCE Greater Nairobi, Kenya, including poor solid waste management which has contributed to the highly polluted Nairobi River, in addition to lack of employment and income and serious urban poverty. There is poor awareness of the close links between health issues and environmental issues. So a major goal of RCE Greater Nairobi is to enable representatives from all sectors to promote public awareness and encourage active participation to improve the environment. Dorcas described the Nairobi River Programme to rehabilitate the river. She spoke of the need for partnerships and networks concentrating on local issues, training teachers in ESD and finding ways to localise the curriculum.

Irina Detlefsen gave a German perspective by speaking about Munich RCE, called BenE Munich, which was accredited in January 2007 by the UN University. This RCE works as a network, a lobby group and a driving force for change including their annual climate change campaign.

Ann Finlayson gave the UK context for RCEs. She began with reasons why they are needed before providing an overview of ESD in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. She referred to the Transition Towns movement and how it has spread the message through communities sharing experiences and learning skills for sustainable living.

The next speaker, Chris Church, spoke of the London context for an RCE, including the size of London, its ethnic and cultural diversity, the challenges of poverty and high mobility, and also the opportunities offered by the range and diversity of its communities. He referred to some of the educational and outreach projects in London, including school travel plans, organisations such as Food Up Front and Project Dirt, and projects working with specific ethnic groups.

The morning speakers gave delegates a great deal to think about; Charles Hopkins and Dorcas Otieno on the global context with Irina Detlefsen, Ann Finlayson and Chris Church bringing the issues closer to home.

The conference continued with afternoon workshops across the education sectors: place-based learning; teacher education; Higher education; Curriculum, Campus and Community.

Positive existing initiatives were celebrated with three presentations: Glebe School in Bromley; Hackney City Farm; Transition Town Tooting.

London RCE will hopefully become a valuable network for education for sustainability.

Alona Sheridan, NAEE Executive