

BOOK REVIEW

Post-Sustainability and Environmental Education: Remaking Education for the Future

Edited by Bob Jickling and Stephen Sterling
Palgrave Studies in Education and the Environment Series. Gewerbestrasse,
Springer, 2017
doi: [10.1017/aee.2018.16](https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2018.16)

Reviewed by Meredian Alam, Sociology and Anthropology, School of Humanities
and Social Science, University of Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia

Discussion of environmental sustainability is still a ‘black-box’— its complexities largely ignored — within human-nature relationship studies. The onslaught of industrialisation and neoliberal corporate control has brought with it inattention to ecological issues in human-nature relationship studies. Quality of education, which should ideally be a space for resistance and defense against exploitation, is now in decline. Even worse, educational methods have recently been homogenised to adapt to the needs of global corporate interests. Education about environmental sustainability is globally applicable as a pedagogical reference for learning about ecological values. This book presents, in four sections, critical evaluations of the practice of education regarding ecological sustainability, making it easier to digest for readers with different study interests in environmental education and ideological criticism.

The revival of environmental education is particularly prominent in Part I, and the prerequisites for starting an ecological collective movement are the main ideas of Bob Jickling and Stephen Sterling. They open their discussion in the introductory chapter with constructive criticism of the general instructional model of education. Fundamentally, they demand that educators restore the field of education as an arena to give people the opportunity to feel the damage around them, act empathetically, and share a love for others and nature. These are aspects that have disappeared in contemporary society. The emphasis on the revitalisation of the experience of taste and empathy is significant because this process contains the power to change the world. ‘Creating educational experiences that are held, felt, and disruptive might be just the basis for learning that is, indeed, transformational’ says Jickling (p. 28). The ability to empathise with others and experience the world provides an opportunity for individuals to imagine what can happen in the future. The excessive materialism of contemporary society should be eliminated from daily life. Sterling terms this excessive materialism as ‘collective blindness’ (p. 31) or mutual aggression. Such ‘collective blindness’ has spawned apathy toward global issues that are impacting the planet’s future. For this reason, educators must refine teaching practices by adopting an ecological worldview mobilised through civil movement organisations.

Part II of the book suggests that every individual must be able to feel an internal agency to help create collective movements that can strengthen ecological solidarity between groups. The existentialist approach pointed out by Robert Camus, Sean Blenkinsop, and Marcus Morse (contributors to Part II) amplifies how environmental educators need to be considerate about the significance of their agency in the educational

milieu. Implicitly, environmental educators should embrace the alternative-thinking paradigm. This paradigm is a system that places their transformational leadership role at the centre of the curriculum and, through a critical teaching system, breaks the order of established educational pedagogy. At the same time, another contributor, Heila Lotz Sistika, responds to the potential of creating an individual agency in environmental education through 'commoning', an arena that allows the highest recognition of the formation of collective ideas at grassroots levels. Commoning allows the revitalisation of eco-centric sustainable lifestyles such as communal training in fishery management, community food gardening, and translocal food production in Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. The concept of 'commoning activity' (p. 68) includes the practice of building environmental-based solidarity, community economies and knowledge commons, which are crucial areas that can help people overcome the complexities of today that lead to the subordination of our environment.

The other moral message conveyed in Part III of this book is related to reviving the bond of experience, which addresses relationships with the natural milieu. First, genuine education must be revitalised as an educational ideology that emphasises the natural-human side, raised and born of Mother Earth. Authentic learning is rooted in a praxiology that states: 'engagement with nature, and its otherness, has shaped our senses, and is implicit in the logic of concepts that are generative of our form of consciousness' (p. 78). Awareness as the main element in human behaviour needs to be sharpened with experiences of immersion with nature for a more profound love of nature. While engagement with nature does not require a lot, it 'entails a fully bodied, multisensory participation in its otherness that invokes feeling as much as recognition, and receptivity to intimations of fitting and unfitting response' (p. 87). In other words, creative grassroots engagement is the best alternative for now, when the government has no obvious policy direction for education in sustainable development. This lack of direction is because at the same time, policymakers and governments do not have a firm policy for enforcing and advocating for the environment. However, according to Lesley Le Grange, the contributor of the section 'Environmental Education After Sustainability', governments and policymakers treat education as an object. For this reason, the concept of 'after-sustainability' (p. 77) involves a grassroots joint action of civil society movements undertaken as a collective pedagogy to sustain the environment.

Part IV of this book expands on the previous discussion by offering more detailed thought regarding reconstructing the critical awareness of individual agency. This section argues that education should aim to help people internalise their individual agency capabilities. Today's conspicuous hedonistic lifestyle has weakened the ability of people to critically analyse the environmental damage in their lives. Considering this, contributor Lucie Sauve contends that education must be capable of equipping people with a capacity and awareness to see the social inequalities that surround them. Thus, they can independently build a positive deconstruction of nature that is useful for the future of people and the environment. Furthermore, educators Edgar J. Gonzales-Gaudiano and Jose Gutierrez-Perez provide observations regarding highly fragmented communities. For them, social fragmentation is due to an industrialisation process that has generated alienated individualism. There is no doubt that a culture of economic individualism has allowed people to pursue their dreams and desires through possessions. But, at the same time, this culture builds social conflict and gives birth to injustice. As both authors emphasise: 'In areas where such investments are located, local relationships have been disjointed and then selectively integrated and subordinated to globalized value chains led by large transnational corporations' (p. 80). At this point, the two authors argue that massive investment will help to reverse the profound damages caused by social segregation, new social risk, rapidly growing inequalities, and decreasing local

connections; such investment can also help to increase the kind of local knowledge that is essential to thriving communities. Given the situation that leads to this apocalypse of social disintegration, resilient education is proposed in recent resolutions. The educational model proposed in this book focuses on building resistance to injustice and inequality by engaging in collaborative and engaging work that activates subjective awareness of ecological risks and atrocities. Therefore, the educational process should give strength to people to overcome everyday vulnerabilities. The fascinating reflection that should remain with us regarding the essence of education is that 'education must be environmental', because 'educations are near dependent on near and distant contextual variables' (p. 91). This is a constructive absolutism rarely thought out by educators and education experts.

This book presents environmental education as never having reached a 'perfecting'. However, at the same time, contestation and ideological competition are very deeply embedded in various environmental education models. Apple (2004) argues that the educational milieu is still a fertile ground for conflict and negotiation. Without the vibrant input of leaders in environmental education, the reality is that governments are influenced first by corporate investors, which compromises environmental sustainability. Although capitalist corporations now herald 'green economics', this is just one of the ways they profit from a public sentiment without really operating sustainably (Pey & Islam, 2017).

References

- Apple, M.W. (2004). *Ideology and curriculum* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Pey, P., & Islam, M.S. (2017). Eco-governmentality: A discursive analysis of state-NGOs-youth relations in Singapore. *Social Sciences*, 6, 133.

Reviewer Biography

Meredian Alam is a leading Indonesian environmental sociologist who also works as a sustainability consultant. Currently, he has just submitted his Sociology and Anthropology PhD thesis at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, the University of Newcastle, Australia. He holds a MPhil in Culture, Environment, and Sustainability from the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), the University of Oslo, Norway; and from Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia, a BSocSc in Sociology and a MA in Development Sociology.