Young People, Education and Sustainable Development: Exploring Principles, Perspectives and Praxis


Reviewed by Brandon P. Hollingshead

This volume offers a global perspective on education initiatives by and for young people that promote a transition to sustainability. The book draws inspiration from the Earth Charter and considers education in its broad form, including formal education, nonformal education and values education.

The purpose of the book is three-fold. First, it seeks to elucidate theories, principles, practices and approaches at the intersection of young people, education and sustainable development. Second, it documents local and global educational initiatives designed for young people that are geared towards promoting sustainable development in different parts of the world. Third, it seeks to draw the attention of policy makers, educators and donor agencies to the critical importance of involvement and participation of young people in sustainable development governance.

The chapters of the book are organised in three parts. Part one, ‘Principles’, describes educational philosophy for environmental education and education for sustainable development across varied geographical and cultural locations. Part two, ‘Perspectives’, contains contributions from a range of applied research, policy analysis and reviews on young people, education and sustainable development. Part three, ‘Praxis’, contains specific examples of projects, institutions and processes of education for young people to enhance their participation and involvement in advancing sustainable development. Many chapters are authored by Earth Charter practitioners and describe the utility of the Earth Charter in education for sustainable development.

Brandon P. Hollingshead works with the Centre for Environmental and Sustainability Education at Florida Gulf Coast University as an editorial associate on Earth Charter scholarship and education for sustainable development projects and publications. Email: bphollin@gmail.com
The following descriptions of a selection of chapters provide a sense of the scope and breadth of author contributions.

In ‘Eco-Pedagogy: Extending the Educational Theory of Paulo Freire to Sustainability’, Moacir Gadotti explains the concept of ecopedagogy as pedagogy for Earth and for education for sustainable development. Ecopedagogy is focused on life. It takes into account people, cultures and lifestyles, and it respects identity and diversity. Inspired by Paulo Freire and the Earth Charter, the author argues that it is not enough to educate for sustainable development. Rather, eco-pedagogy seeks to educate for sustainable lifestyles and livelihoods. Gadotti cites the Earth Charter as a holistic and integrated vision of sustainability that can guide our way forward. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is an opportunity for educators to imagine a new education paradigm that is founded on Earth Charter principles and values. Such an ecopedagogy suggests that the meaning of our lives is not at all separated from the meaning of the planet itself, and that to achieve sustainable development, we must cultivate sustainable lifestyles that connect us to the larger living universe.

In ‘Sexual Reproductive Rights and HIV: Experiences of Empowerment among Mexican Youth through the Earth Charter’, Namir Hadad Nava writes about education for sexual health and reproductive rights among youth in Mexico. Mexican traditions have generally hindered clear and objective attention to sexuality. Young people often lack access to information that would allow them to practice healthy and preventative behaviour against sexually transmitted diseases. The author describes a recent trend among Mexican youth who are motivated by the Earth Charter to address problems in the social and political spheres, including gender inequity, HIV/AIDS, discrimination based on sexual orientation, environmental degradation and issues of sustainable development. Inspired by the Earth Charter’s holistic vision of sustainability—one that includes sexual health and reproductive rights—Mexican youth have undertaken education campaigns that have spread across Mexico and much of Latin America. This chapter details some of these educational programs and reinforces the critical need to educate youth for safe and responsible sexual health.

In ‘Pacific Island Principles: Learning to Live Wise and Sustainable Lives’, Konai Helu Thaman and Randy R. Thaman explore environmental education and education for sustainable development from a Pacific Island nations’ perspective, a notion that is closely linked to peoples’ island cultures and worthwhile learning for cultural survival and continuity. The essay outlines the main sustainable development challenges facing education and educators in the Pacific. In particular, the authors see a Pacific perspective of education for sustainable development as a challenge to the hegemony of educational initiatives emanating from the international community, which are often underpinned by values that are associated with a predominantly Western view of knowledge and value systems. The education that young people need now—inspired in part by the Earth Charter—will require innovative, committed, unselfish, multitasked and multidisciplinary solutions to incorporate the broad cultural traditions of island life support systems in the rapidly changing Pacific world.

In ‘Developing an Ethics of Sustainability: Reading Environmental Literature through the Earth Charter’, James A. Wohlpart and Megan M. Melvin consider the role of the humanities in general and literature in particular in developing an ethics of sustainability. This chapter describes the teaching and learning for sustainability that
occurs in the Environmental Literature course at Florida Gulf Coast University. Here, humanities education becomes eco-education through exploring the relationships of humans not only to their internal worlds but also to their external worlds. In the course, students and instructors explore traditional definitions of ethics and sustainability, which sets the stage for engaging with the Earth Charter and thinking beyond anthropocentric views. The study of literary words through the lens of the Earth Charter allows students the opportunity to broaden their listening to include the forgotten voices of the natural world and of our elders. Because true learning of sustainability must be enacted in space and time, students complete a service learning project that allows them to bring their nascent ethics of sustainability to life.

In ‘Utopianism and Education Processes in the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: A Critical Reflection’, Heila Lotz-Sisitka writes that recent international policy literature on education for sustainable development puts forward utopian concepts of sustainable development and transformed learning as objects for educational thinking and practice. The essay draws on three illustrative educational investigations with youth in a South African context to critically examine how educators and scholars might engage with utopian concepts such as those proposed in the Earth Charter and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. It incorporates an engagement with other related utopian concepts, such as democracy and social justice. The author argues that if we are to keep valuable utopian concepts such as democracy, sustainability and social justice from becoming ‘toxic knowledge’, a reflexive realist orientation must guide educational engagements with such concepts.

The Principle of Sustainability: Transforming Law and Governance

Klaus Bosselmann, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, Surrey, UK, 2008, 252 pages, £55.00, US$99.95 (hard cover)

Reviewed by Rakhyun E. Kim

How should we transform the current system of law and governance if we are to build a just, sustainable and peaceful global society and institutionally implement the Earth Charter? What might a particular law say if the subjects of it are not only human beings but the whole Earth community? Klaus Bosselmann shares his insights on these questions and more in his recent book, *The Principle of Sustainability: Transforming Law and Governance*. A law professor at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, Bosselmann is a leading figure in international environmental law, especially because of his ethical and ecological approach to the subject.

Rakhyun E. Kim is a PhD scholar at the Fenner School of Environment and Society, Australian National University. Email: rakhyun.kim@anu.edu.au.