

FROM THE EDITORS

SER Special Issue

Education re-viewed: putting sustainability at the heart of living

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This special issue comes at a time of growing public attention towards issues of sustainability; incumbent threats from climate change, loss of biodiversity, population displacement, and conflict worldwide are part of everyday affairs. However, as shown by the response to-date to the recent wave of climate protests, political and institutional lethargy towards such matters appears set to continue. We are particularly concerned, in this special issue, with the role that schools, teachers, universities and education more generally may play in this scenario.

The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) is unequivocal that the education of young children is considered a right, stating, 'all children have a right to be educated'. Within this framing, specific duties and responsibilities are placed on stakeholders - parents, teachers and the State - to ensure that this right is fulfilled. However, observing young people taking to the streets in protest makes it clear to the world how their claim is not simply directed to the right 'to receive an education' but on the right to an education which addresses the social and environmental challenges that we currently face, and that will worsen with time and inaction. The very meaning of 'being educated' is at stake.

The purpose of this special issue is to stimulate greater attention towards the role of education - and teacher education particularly - vis-a-vis matters of sustainability. As Kennedy (2018) recently highlighted, political scrutiny of teacher education has never been greater, not least when the quality of a nation's education system is often equated to the productivity of its schools, measured through pupils' test scores. Consequently, teachers are expected to be educated as skilled workers, able to master the industry of learning through what Biesta (2015) insightfully referred to as the 'learnification' of education.

What then, if all that happens in schools is framed according to what the brain may or may not retain; acquire or apprehend¹? Not only are such models of education short-lived and easily disposable, but they are incapable of the sort of critical self-reflection and affective connection - as Griffith and Murray (2017) advocated - that are a precondition of sustainability. In short, they suffocate sustainability.

It is thus worth returning to the seminal work of Stephen Sterling - now collected on a dedicated website <https://www.sustainableeducation.co.uk> - that engages with a 'sustainable' education, that is, an education which is durable, ongoing, and one that enables life to flourish: an education that opens up the prospects for a future, not one that closes it down. Internationally, the time is right, and the need urgent, to debate the multiple forms of such an education. A very recent issue of the journal *Sustainability Science* stimulates readers to disentangle ideas of performativity and training from the meaning of education and to recover the sense of the future as capability and freedom. Yet such capabilities and freedoms can only

¹ Apprehend and Comprehend in English are often used to mean the same: to understand something. However, the process through which one comes to understand is quite different. Apprehend from latin 'ab-capere' means to draw something in, to capture, to hold a concept, an idea or even a person (as holding in custody). Whereas, 'comprehend' from the latin 'cum capere' is a process of 'bringing things together', formulating a general sense of all the sensible dimensions of a process, a person or a situation.

be expressed within the wider relational context - of humans and non-humans - of which we are completely a part and upon which we ultimately and intimately depend, physically, socially and emotionally. The field of education as a whole includes the voices of many theorists - from Vygotskyan socio-cultural conceptions of learning to Dewey's pragmatic approach, and more recently, socio-material accounts of knowledge and learning, arguing for the impossibility of any thoughts to be present without accounting for the relational environment that surrounds and literally, envelops us. Hence, as affirmed by Stephen Sterling, sustainable education can only be such if it is concerned with the depth and quality of such relationships which sustain our being, their health and their integrity (<https://www.sustainableeducation.co.uk/key-ideas/>).

The papers in this issue of *Scottish Educational Review* offer a set of tangible contributions to the search for a sustainable education, by taking a critical and creative stance towards policy, pedagogy and practice. The collection of papers originates from a series of meetings organised under the auspices of Uearning for Sustainability Scotland, the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the Gordon Cook Foundation. The meetings were aimed at bringing together researchers and practitioners involved in Initial Teacher Education to share experiences and practices in their different institutions, with a view to stimulate greater dialogue and potential new approaches.

All five articles in the issue will thus address the question of how current education systems can be viewed from anew, so that a sustainable education can be pursued in our own practices as researchers and teacher educators. Importantly, in Scotland, teacher education is founded upon a model of partnership between universities and schools. Hence, the quest for a sustainable education cannot be confined to the work of universities nor schools in isolation of one another. The articles in this collection offer a set of different perspectives, focussing at times directly on the university component and at others, on the practices and experiences of teachers in schools. In addition, three book reviews dedicated to the field of sustainability studies will enable readers to widen even further the scope of current discussions.

Proceeding in order, the first piece is a conceptual article in which Sharon Hunter and Claire Cassidy considering issues of democracy, equality, human rights, and social justice in relation to Uearning for Sustainability. The authors contend that sustainability is more than 'preserving the environment' but that it is in fact linked to the fundamental assumptions we hold about other people's identities and views, that the moral and intellectual cannot and should not be divorced from the practical. Therefore, there is no real freedom and no real future if our education is unable to prepare students to handle prejudice and exclusion.

The second article, by Robbie Nicol, Ann Rae, Rosa Murray, Pete Higgins and Heidi Smith looks at a newly introduced, two-year Master's level course leading to a teaching qualification, developed at the University of Edinburgh. The authors are concerned with 'super-wicked' problems, as issues which transcend simple, reductionist or singular-based problem-solving initiatives. Instead 'super-wicked' problems are large-scale, shape-shifting and constantly evolving alongside people's perceptions and actions. Drawing upon a set of interviews with students and staff involved in the programme, the authors identify the fundamentals of an 'ethics of care' emerging from the structure, content and inter-personal relationships within the programme. The principle of 'being concerned' for others forms an important basis for re-imagining the onto-ethical epistemological shift that is necessary to extend care for the human community to include the non-human.

The third article, from Stephen Day, Uoise Scott-McKie and Andrew Killen interrogates the extent to which teachers can be prepared to handle controversial, socio-scientific issues by looking at their views of scientific knowledge and personal dispositions towards ambiguity and conflicting value-perspectives. Drawing upon a study involving students engaged in on-line discussions, the authors analyse the interplay between knowledge and beliefs to advance a critique of the notion of learning as 'apprehension', pointing, instead, to the value of thought emerging in context and in action.

The fourth article, by Beth Christie, Pete Higgins, Betsy King, Mary Collacott, Katie Kirk and Heidi Smith offers an extensive overview of Scottish education policy in relation to education for sustainability. The paper highlights how the term 'sustainability' features prominently in Scottish education, forming the core of the professional Standards for Teacher Registration and being one of the central features of the school curriculum. Specifically, in Scotland, this paper shows how the term 'Uearning for Sustainability' has been proposed to encompass global citizenship, education for sustainable development and outdoor learning. In this context, the authors interviewed groups of schoolteachers involved in a recently introduced professional development course, to explore how they would perceive their role in fulfilling policy expectations. The authors point to disciplinary boundaries and constraints arising from conflicting

agendas, and argue for the importance of new forms of teacher learning which are built upon the formation of communities of practice.

Finally, the fifth article, by Donald Gray, Uaura Colucci-Gray, Bob Donald, Aristeia Kyriacou and Daniel Wodah extends discussions about 'thoughts in action' introduced by papers one to four above, by looking more closely at the role of growing food in school gardens as a form of pedagogy to support sustainability transitions. The article offers a detailed account of a pilot study involving children, teachers and researchers growing food in three schools in the 'oil capital city' of Aberdeen. The study shows that the experience fundamentally challenges ideas of learning and curriculum as a set of pre-determined and pre-conceived outcomes, by affirming the value of learning as emanating from the material practice of the whole sensing body: a body that is not simply *in* the environment but *of it*.

The three book reviews in this issue cover three texts from the well-established series of scholarship on sustainability studies published by Wageningen Academic Publishers. The three texts include: "Intergenerational learning and transformative leadership for sustainable futures", edited by Corcoran and Hollingshead (2014) and reviewed by Neil McUellan (University of Aberdeen); "Uearning for sustainability in times of accelerating change", edited by Arjen E. J. Wals and Peter Blaze Corcoran (2012) and reviewed by Jonathan Firth (University of Strathclyde); Young people, education, and sustainable development. Exploring principles, perspectives, and praxis, edited by Corcoran and Osano (2009) and reviewed by Dr Ueanne Mclver, University of Strathclyde.

This issue traces an important journey in the field of sustainability studies. All contributions outline the efforts of researchers and teacher educators to take account of the various elements contained within the notion of sustainability education, while acknowledging the political landscape in which teachers and children work and learn together. In doing so, they engage with the creative tension between ideas and practices, with a view to effect considered action that is durable, in other words, sustainable living.

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