

## Higher Education's Sustainable Education Practices: Fulfilling Its Responsibility Through Collaboration and Innovation

Gadsby, Helen, and Andrea Bullivant, eds. 2010. *Global Learning and Sustainable Development*. London: Routledge

Jones, Paula, David Selby, and Stephen Sterling, eds. 2010. *Sustainability Education: Perspectives and Practice Across Higher Education*. London: Earthscan.

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As the world continues to experience environmental degradation, economic turmoil, and social inequality, higher education institutions and educators feel compelled to prepare students to manage such critical global issues through sustainable practices. However, implementing sustainable practices that “create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony” can appear overwhelming (EPA 2011). What strategies could higher and international education communities implement to further sustainability? To respond to such a query, *Global Learning and Sustainable Development*, by Gadsby and Bullivant, and *Sustainability Education: Perspectives and Practices Across Higher Education*, by Jones, Selby, and Sterling, are two new books of collective essays that offer international and interdisciplinary approaches to incorporating sustainability in education. After reading both publications, higher education and international educators will be inspired and better prepared at fulfilling their responsibility to collaborate with each other in order to implement innovative sustainable education practices.

#### *Responsibility*

*Global Learning and Sustainable Development* (Gadsby and Bullivant 2010) and *Sustainability Education: Perspectives and Practices Across Higher Education* (Jones, et al. 2010) are descriptive publications that include essays calling upon academics to be the leaders in promoting a sustainability education agenda. The authors contend that with such an influential position, higher and international educators have a responsibility to not only promote sustainability education through its curriculum, but also “through the process of research, devising, performance, reflection, for students to develop, individually and collectively, an intellectual, emotional and even a political commitment to the idea of sustainability,” (Jones, Selby, and Sterling 2010, 164). Specifically, both books describe curriculum planning ideas, classroom approaches, case studies, higher education policies, and Web site resources that implement sustainability as an integral, institution-wide theme.

Educators today need to understand the key milestones of sustainability education because they are educating the next generation, which will be responsible for dealing with environmental issues. Although Gadsby and Bullivant incorporate a European dimension throughout the book, the essays provide a broad historical context of global learning and sustainable development that originated from the 1960s that will assist educators in understanding the terminology, policies, and influencers of the global learning and sustainable education field. By knowing a historical context, educators can understand the previous actions and future directions they should take to create a sustainable education agenda. Jones, Selby, and Sterling also discuss from a historical perspective the inhibiting and enabling conditions of

sustainability education with the objective of motivating all of academia to continue the movement of sustainability education. Additionally, both publications envision higher and international education communities taking responsibility to not only educate students on sustainable practices, but also establish effective collaboration amongst each other for the purpose of advancing sustainable education in higher education.

### *Collaboration*

Higher and international educators will find it most useful that Gadsby and Bullivant (2010) explore 'global citizenship' by highlighting case studies of schools and communities that promoted sustainable education through collaborative experiential and inquiry-based learning. Effective components of educating for 'global citizenship' includes instilling in students a comprehensive understanding of the global partnerships that attribute to social justice, human rights, diversity, citizenship, interdependence, conflict resolution, and a commitment to sustainable development (Gadsby and Bullivant 2010, 87). Therefore, genuine collaboration between educators, students, administrators, and community not only promote an agenda for 'global citizenship,' but furthers the idea that collectively we can maintain such sustainable practices. As Jones, Selby, and Sterling (2010, 9) explain that by doing so, higher education and international educators are "making the process invitational rather than an imposition, dialogue rather than prescriptive, participative rather than directive."

Additionally, both publications provide descriptive ideas on how to collaboratively plan a sustainable education curriculum. In order to do so, it requires the entire school and teachers to work together toward creating cross-curricular themes that take into consideration the school's timeline, resources, and curriculum requirements. Schools should develop "an overarching institutional commitment through a consultative process, enshrining it in policy and supporting it with a strategic action plan for sustainability, in which curriculum, teaching, and learning are linked to the institution's campus and community-related sustainability goals and attendant initiatives," (Jones, Selby, and Sterling 2010, 10). As a result of collaborating, the higher and international education community will take ownership in the movement and strive for additional support in designing innovative sustainable practices.

### *Innovation*

Gadsby and Bullivant include a variety of essays that discuss innovative approaches to implementing sustainability education. The essays explain how institutions and educators must first examine their objectives, organize, and then plan goals toward implementing a more innovative approach to sustainable education. Educators will find the case studies of schools incorporating sustainable development as cross-curricular dimension to be helpful in designing their own curriculum, as well as motivating in making systematic change across the entire university. Specifically, Jones, Selby, and Sterling challenge higher education institutions to re-conceptualize their structure, curriculum, and research to be reflective of sustainability. In other words, educating students on sustainability requires an innovative and interdisciplinary perspective. An interdisciplinary approach would include, but not be limited to, strategies that promote group discussions, problem-based learning, service learning, critical thinking through case studies, and collaborative learning. However, the authors contend that universities need to consider integrating a systematic transformative learning approach that goes beyond college courses and/or projects and "speaks of learning to do, to be, to know, and to live together," (Jones, Selby, and Sterling 2010, 70).

To provide realistic context with such systematic redesign, Jones, Selby, and Sterling effectively discuss case studies of multidisciplinary approaches to sustainability education. In particular, the practicality of this book stems from these international case studies of educators who infused sustainability into a variety of disciplines including business, law, environmental sciences, nursing, arts, engineering, theology, social work, communication studies, economics, languages, social work, and education. As a result, educators will have innovative ideas on how to redesign their own lesson plans to incorporate a sustainable education component.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

Overall, *Global Learning and Sustainable Development* (Gadsby and Bullivant 2010) and *Sustainability Education: Perspectives and Practice Across Higher Education* (Jones, Selby, and Sterling 2010) provide the higher and international education communities with extensive guidance to successfully implement sustainability practices in their own education settings. Although Gadsby and Bullivant focus on the secondary education level and incorporate a European dimension into the case studies curriculum, the case studies could serve as comparative exemplars of effective incorporation of sustainability in schools. Regardless, the higher education and international communities will be pleased to read the comprehensive, step-by-step explanations of how educators can plan and implement a curriculum that embraces sustainability as a cross-curricular theme in *Global Learning and Sustainable Development*. Both publications offer questions for further discussion of the highlighted theme of global learning and sustainable practices, user-friendly tables, diagrams, and charts to assist with illustrating concepts, and helpful Web sites for additional research. After reading *Global Learning and Sustainable Development* and *Sustainability Education: Perspectives and Practice Across Higher Education*, the higher and international education community will feel better prepared to fulfill its responsibility in collaborating with each other in order to implement innovative sustainable education practices.

### **Reference**

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). 2011. *Sustainability, Basic Information*. Retrieved from [www.epa.gov/sustainability/basicinfo.htm#sustainability](http://www.epa.gov/sustainability/basicinfo.htm#sustainability).