

INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Peter Blaze Corcoran, Brandon P. Hollingshead, Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Arjen E.J. Wals and Joseph Paul Weakland (eds.), Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2014, eISBN: 978-90-8686-802-5 | ISBN: 978-90-8686-252-8 (pp 432, Hardback 67 Euros; EBook 67 Euros)

Reviewed by Neil McLennan, University of Aberdeen

It took me some time to get into this book. The lengthy title covers many topics and I wondered if I was the right person to be reviewing a book on intergenerational learning and sustainability. From the outset it was clear that sustainability was the main focus alongside intergenerational learning but with leadership issues peppered throughout, sometimes more specifically than others. Two of the contributors make the point that isolating yourself with passionately convinced people is not leadership (p. 100). A point to be reflected on throughout and the work would have been further strengthened with more leadership specific contributors alongside those from sustainability and intergenerational learning backgrounds.

Nevertheless, once into the book, I consumed without pause and have returned to it many times since. The breadth of contributors is impressive and to be celebrated. The work is dedicated to the memory of Wangari Muta Maathai and Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela who are both described as transformative leaders committed to intergenerational collaboration. The backdrop is clearly set in this book; a world with environmental issues aplenty and in which the UNICEF budget has some \$4 billion per annum (2011/12 figures) and yet global military spending is \$1.57 trillion; a world where, in the UK it was established that 25% did not think employers adopted a leadership style suitable to respond to the global financial crisis (2013 survey), while in Australia 75% felt their workplaces needed better leadership (2014 survey).

Leadership can both be the saviour or the scapegoat in sustainability and other settings. Through time there has been a phenomenal growth in leadership literature alongside management texts. However, trait-based approaches have now been superseded by more nuanced distributed models and, notably, more sustainable ways of leading and managing than the heroic approaches of antiquity. Nevertheless, and frustratingly, this book in itself returns to age-old leadership models which have re-emerged under new guises. The clue to this is in some ways in the title. Transformational leadership has suffered from criticism that it is "heroic leadership" in disguise. Its links to charismatic leadership and confidence can detract from the model's deeper consideration of leader/follower dynamics and how values are important in that relationship.

Other leadership models are discussed in the book, for example adaptive approaches. However, is there enough of a depth of understanding as to what sustainability in leadership might look like and what approaches might support the mission in this broad area of sustainability? Heila Lotz-Sisitka notes in chapter 1 "We need distributed, transformative leadership for social justice, education and sustainable development." However model descriptors are sometimes bandied about without in-depth analysis of what each one means beyond the title and the impact of that approach. Furthermore, there is a returning dalliance with transformative approaches, the book title being the most overwhelming evidence of this. Do we return too readily to the leader figurehead rather than leaders and acts of leadership embedded at all levels?

Barrineau and O'Kronlid make a powerful point that transformative leaders can solve simple issues but not profound ones like climate change. A new leadership approach is clearly needed. Alas whilst this book identifies that issue, it also creates an opportunity for further work on what leadership models would work for a sustainable future and whether extant models are fit for this purpose. One chapter that is worth exploring is Fein's analysis of leadership philosophes from locust to honeybees, while Director of the Swinburne Leadership Institute's chapter is sure to be of interest to those in Scottish education seeking new insights into leadership models and tensions. Like this review, he grapples with issues around transformational leadership, offering 'eco-leadership' as a flexible model instead.

The introduction to this book asks about the conservatism of both learning and leadership. Perhaps there does need to be more transformative approaches, perhaps distributed models have diluted efforts, spread autonomy and accountability whilst the system-wide malaise continues in a neo-liberalist world. Furthermore, if it is about activism, including against established conservative authorities, then the transformational leadership model is useful. Nevertheless, transformation might lead from within, but does it deliver systemic, external gains across the board? And moreover, do the impacts of transformational approaches sustain? That after all would seem to be the message of this book, whether we can move from age-old strategizing in a one-on-one conflict situation to establishing new alliances and leveraging new networks who have not already bought into or practice sustainable approaches.

Beyond this technical critique on leadership styles and frameworks, the book guides the reader well through principles, perspectives and praxis whilst lighting sparks along the way which are still resonating. But it also leaves many unanswered questions. For example, the introduction openly states that the book does not define intergenerational learning. It also would have benefited from a defining sustainability and leadership. The broad openness to intergenerational learning is nonetheless welcome in a world where the avant-garde might emerge. At one point, intergeneration is noted as not only helping young and old alike but also helping less advantaged 'generations' such as the unemployed or isolated. A deeper critique of this might ask questions about aid or agency approaches and the relative value of each.

Like the current single focus of Scottish education, this book focuses singularly on sustainability. It is perhaps inhibited by this single focus and by 'turning point' statements. Akin to Scotland's poverty gap focus there is a reliance on education as the solution. The once in a lifetime opening of the book - "Ours is a unique historic moment" fails to account for everything that has gone before and the fact that work will go on long after our current interventions. The book is multi-faceted in many ways but would have benefited from more in-depth consideration of leadership, and moreover, models of leadership that might be sustainable.

LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN TIMES OF ACCELERATING CHANGE

Arjen E. J. Wals and Peter Blaze Corcoran (Eds). Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2012, eISBN: 978-90-8686-757-8 | ISBN: 978-90-8686-203-0, (Pages: 550; Hardback 69 Euros; EBook 69 Euros)

Reviewed by Jonathan Firth, University of Strathclyde

Education can engage with sustainability in various ways. Schools and universities can make use of sustainable practices in their infrastructure and methods, teach skills that support sustainable behaviour, or raise awareness about threats to our climate or about other global issues. "Learning for sustainability in times of accelerating change" covers all of these aspects, but —perhaps most importantly — it urges a rethink of the scope, methodology and structure of education such that it contributes to tackling human impact on the planet, and prepares young people to be the environmental advocates of the future. According to the editors (p.15), this is a more urgent form of change than technical progress: we "must develop a new way of being in the world".

With this ambitious agenda, it made sense for the book to begin by tackling the economic and social context to education; the first section (of three) accordingly looks at "Re-orienting science and society". It includes an environmental critique of neo-liberal capitalism (Ch. 1), and of the role of schools and the curriculum in supporting existing power structures rather than providing avenues for change (Ch. 3). The impact of cultural values and the need to translate research into practice are also covered. The book's arguments are not limited to formal education; it also includes chapters on building resilient communities, learning in the workplace, and the educational effects of civic participation.

Among the less obvious approaches to sustainability was the chapter by Neilson and colleagues (Ch. 17) on the role of spirituality — the authors explain that keying into teachers' existing cultural values is a powerful way to further a sustainable agenda. In terms of the role of the pupil, the chapter by Tauritz (Ch. 19) argues that there is no choice but to involve young learners in difficult environmental debates, and that

the uncertainties these involve can be educationally beneficial. Similarly, Kelsey and Armstrong (Ch. 11) reject the idea that environmental topics are too gloomy for young learners but note that children need to be equipped to think creatively and critically, and not presented with scare stories.

Broadly speaking, then, the book advocates for the empowerment of learners, teachers and communities, leading to an optimistic impression that if people are equipped with the right skills and information, they will make positive choices. However, given the historical inertia throughout the educational system, a reader could question how easily such changes will translate into mainstream practice. A future volume would therefore benefit from chapters exploring how principles of behaviour change from social and clinical psychology can be applied to these areas, or how behavioural economic 'nudges' can contribute by making sustainable choices more convenient than their alternatives.

At times the sustainability agenda in schools is associated with relatively peripheral activities such as outdoor learning and community projects, and it was therefore good to see contributions that tackled the content and structure of the core classroom curriculum. In particular, the pedagogical issues addressed throughout the third section ("Re-imagining education and learning") greatly appealed to me as a teacher educator. Zandvliet's (Ch.20) discussion of 'socio-scientific issues education' — through which scientific topics are examined with reference to environmental values, legal issues, and individual reasoning — presents an appealing alternative to STEM. However, Tschapka (Ch. 26) presents a cautionary tale around embedding sustainability via cross-curricular situation-based education in the Swiss curriculum, and the strong politically-motivated push back that this stimulated. In Scotland, too, we have unfinished business in terms of the interdisciplinary principles of CfE. Learning for sustainability could provide a way forward, although Tschapka's chapter suggests that political common ground will need to be established.

There are a number of case studies reported on in the book, such as learning about conflict resolution and land use from indigenous communities (Ch. 14), engaging young people in urban development planning (Ch. 30), and harnessing time-travel narratives (Ch. 5) or storytelling techniques (Ch. 29) to foster sustainable thinking. There is a danger that smaller projects can give the impression of tinkering around the edges of global sustainability problems such as climate change and overpopulation, or of failing to address the structural issues discussed earlier in the book. However, it's important to recognise that such projects are deliverable by individual teachers and departments, allowing them to connect and contribute meaningfully to a larger-scale movement.

The latter point reflects one of the main dilemmas in environmentalism — each individual has a trivial impact on the planet, but yet individual changes are necessary for vital collective action to occur. By linking classroom practice to a broader agenda, this book helps to remind us that sustainability activities shouldn't be treated purely in terms of learner activities (an occasional STEM lesson on renewable energy, an essay about global warming, and so on), while key structures remain unchanged. If education is to prepare young people for tomorrow's world, multiple levels from the classroom upwards must play their role (and as the book subtitle itself reminds us, we are faced with the prospect of accelerating rather than steady global change). In such a context it seems irresponsible to cling to a status quo of educational practice; as Nelson and Cassell (Ch. 3, p. 63) put it, "schooling practices may essentially be ignoring the most critically important issues in our time on earth".

This book provides a set of tools, arguments and insights that could be applied across education in any country. It is attractively and clearly presented, logically ordered, and the detailed author biographies are a welcome feature, although the lack of an index was a flaw. Overall, it is a welcome contribution which is highly accessible to education students or lecturers and should be essential reading for policy makers.

YOUNG PEOPLE, EDUCATION, AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT. EXPLORING PRINCIPLES, PERSPECTIVES, AND PRAXIS

Peter Blaze Corcoran and Philip M. Osano (Eds), Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2009 eISBN: 978-90-8686-691-5 | ISBN: 978-90-8686-093-7 (Pages: 416, Hardback 65 Euros; EBook 65 Euros)

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In their introduction to this collection of essays, the editors outline an ambitious range of aims, objectives, and hopes for the book. These include recording, explaining, and highlighting theoretical perspectives and practical approaches “at the intersection of young people, education, and sustainable development” (p.22), emphasising the opportunities of education for sustainable development, and contributing to a wider conversation on the topic. Broadly, the book explores a range of ways in which young people can contribute to, and lead on, sustainable development.

The collection is carefully structured into three parts which align with the book’s title; Principles (9 chapters), Perspectives (14 chapters), and Praxis (12 chapters). Each part begins with an introduction, which summarises the content in much the style of a journal editorial and seems particularly useful for readers wishing to identify the chapters of greatest relevance to them. The individual essays are contributed by a diverse range of authors, who discuss a wide variety of contexts, cultures, and geographical locations.

Perhaps unsurprisingly in a book of this type, some of the chapters have a more engaging tone, and some a more coherent structure, than others. Most engaging for me were those chapters which included personal stories (such as Chapters 1 and 8). The power and importance of storytelling is highlighted in a number of ways throughout this book, for example in relation to Native American cultural history and ethics (Chapter 11), and the use of the Scottish Storyline approach to lesson design (Chapter 23). Some of the essays are explicitly based on evaluation and research work, and I generally found these more engaging than those with a more descriptive approach. I also enjoyed the opportunity to hear directly from project participants, as in Chapters 13 and 20, for example.

Although many of the essays focus on the environmental aspects of sustainability, some also use a broader conceptualisation of “sustainability as a holistic concept that goes beyond environment” (p.343). In Chapter 12 the authors discuss sustainable employment, while Chapter 33 focuses on sexual health, and HIV/AIDS in particular. The balance of chapters is however weighted towards environmental topics, and I felt that some of the other chapters were less well integrated into the overall structure than they might have been.

In a previous review of this book, published when the book itself was still quite new, Francis (2010) noted that there was a deal of repetition between chapters. This can understandably detract from the readability of a book, but to me this is not a book which readers are expected to devour cover-to-cover. The editors are clear in their introduction that the intended audience for the book is a broad one, including educators, policy makers and politicians, and the general public. The content is such that readers may discover the book in different ways or through seeking information on a variety of topics. The repetition of certain facts or elements of history appropriately recognises that readers are likely to engage with chapters individually, or not in sequence. Helpfully, perhaps recognising that there are inevitably a number of points of repetition throughout the book, the editors have provided a selection of useful Appendices which summarise or reproduce some of the key documents referred to by contributors, such as the Millennium Development Goals. The three-part structure helps readers to navigate the book and identify chapters of greatest interest, but I felt that the book would also have benefitted from a conclusion to each section, which could go beyond summarising the chapter content and draw together some of the themes and commonalities of the essays in that section. This could help readers to understand the interconnections and encourage them to read additional chapters.

The book is now almost 10 years old, and while it was fascinating and enjoyable to read about some of the work going on around the world in relation to sustainable development, this was slightly overshadowed by the knowledge that much has changed since the book was published. Many of the authors connect their work directly to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, or to the Millennium Development Goals, which concluded in 2015. While some of the authors provide web links which allow readers to explore the progress of the projects and activities described, sadly some of these are now

inactive. Nevertheless, the contemporary relevance of the book is clear. I was particularly struck by the description in Chapter 15, for example, of the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany as the first to have explicitly stated 'environmental objectives'. I am far from being a football fan, but immediately connected this with the more recent 2018 World Cup in Russia and discovered that attention to environmental and wider sustainability issues has continued. Furthermore, many of the societal issues discussed in the book are still of huge relevance and significance today; much has changed, but much remains to be addressed.

The overarching message of this book for me is nevertheless one of hope. I found the essays in the 'Perspectives' section, in particular, were optimistic in tone, and as the Afterword suggests, "the stories in this volume are full of the possibilities that emerge when we honour and support young people" (p.356). The book is an ambitious, broad and diverse exploration of topics around learning, sustainable development, and youth. It captures a 'moment in time' in relation to these topics in an interesting and usefully structured way.

REFERENCES

Francis, C. (2010) Young people, education and sustainable development: exploring principles, perspectives and praxis, *Environmental Education Research*, 16:2, 247-250.