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Editorial: Embedding sustainability education in practice

[Alison Glover](#), [Open University in Wales](#) 26 May 2021

The global issues of climate change, protecting the environment, and ensuring equity and fairness for all continue to gain increasing prominence in everyday consciousness. The role of education to drive this agenda and bring about change has never been more important. This series of blogs presents a range of perspectives regarding the efforts being made in Wales, England, Northern Ireland, and across Europe and southern Africa to embed sustainability in education from the early years to higher education. Opportunities and challenges emerge and present a variety of ideas for people to consider adopting or adapting in their own practice.

In this special series, [Pavla Boulton](#), for instance, considers how digital technology can be blended with outdoor learning in the early years to support a holistic 21st-century curriculum helping children to reconnect with nature in Wales. [Verity Jones](#)'s research is also based in Wales, investigating giving children the opportunity to act on their knowledge of sustainable foods by integrating the eating of insects into school systems. [Mathew Jones](#) emphasises the importance of creativity, problem-solving and authentic learning experiences in Welsh education to empower and educate teachers to embed these approaches in their teaching. Moving across the border into England, [Elena Lengthorn and Megan Asbury](#) raise the importance of adopting a democratic approach to curriculum change for teacher education at the University of Worcester. [Zoe Robinson](#), also based in England, discusses the role of sustainability-focused degrees and the need to not only value the interdisciplinarity of discipline specialists working together, but also support university students to develop generalism as a specialism. [Geordie Ractliffe and Tamzin Ratcliffe](#) explore place-based eco-pedagogies delivered in

the UK, and across Europe and southern Africa, that help develop young peoples' understanding of interdependence with the natural world. Finally, **Stephen McCloskey**, based in Northern Ireland, challenges us on the contribution of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and proposes that educators should question the SDGs' underpinning development paradigm.

Embedding education for sustainability cannot happen too soon. Events that are believed to be linked to climate change are becoming more frequent, and with an increase in extreme weather, melting polar ice, wildfires and flooding it is imperative that the delayed United Nations COP26 climate conference now planned for November 2021 in Glasgow agrees on co-ordinated actions to address this issue – the role of sustainability in education is therefore key for all. We must prioritise our focus to fulfil the world's need for 'peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, and lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places' and, as David Orr continued to comment, these people require the 'moral courage willing to fight to make the world habitable and human' (Orr, 2004, p. 12). By ensuring that opportunities to embed sustainability in all learning are fulfilled, any barriers and challenges that are overcome encourages optimism that progress can be made.

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The range of initiatives drawn from different nations and settings presented in this blog series provide us with ideas to consider for our own practice; maybe there is potential to adapt and introduce some of the aspects presented here with those you work with. Or you may be involved in similar activities that positively impact educating for sustainable development – if so, please ensure these are shared so that others may learn from your success and continue to replicate/adapt and embed education for sustainable development further. This is critical if children and young people are to have opportunities to engage with the wonder of the natural

world and truly develop as well-informed ethical citizens prepared to take action to make the world a better place for all.

Reference

Orr, D. W. (2004). *Earth in mind: On education, environment, and the human prospect* (10th anniversary edn). Island Press.