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The International Journal of  
**Environmental, Cultural,  
Economic, and Social  
Sustainability: Annual  
Review**

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**Introduction to the Annual Review**

From Pedagogies for Sustainability to  
Transformative Social Change

DAVID HUMPHREYS



ONSUSTAINABILITY.COM

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# Introduction to The International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic, and Social Sustainability: Annual Review

## FROM PEDAGOGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY TO TRANSFORMATIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

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### ON SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH NETWORK EDITOR

David Humphreys, The Open University, UK

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This year's annual review of the journal engages with the theme "From Pedagogies for Sustainability to Transformative Social Change" that was the focus for the Fifteenth International Conference on Environmental, Cultural, Economic, and Social Sustainability held in Vancouver in January 2019 in partnership with colleagues from the University of British Columbia (UBC). My warmest thanks to our collaborators from the UBC, especially Peter Cole, Pat O'Reilly, and Tahia Devisscher. The annual conference is one of the activities organised by the On Sustainability Research Network established by Common Ground Research Networks in 2005. This network aims to provide a multidisciplinary space for considering holistically the many interconnected dimensions of sustainability. The publication of academic journals and books is an integral part of the research network's work.

Many scholars of sustainability critically interrogate the activities of political leaders, policy makers, business corporations, intergovernmental organisations, and other actors. Such critiques are often well-argued and backed with solid evidence and sound reasoning. By focusing on pedagogies and education, this edition of the annual review sets out to consider the work of universities in responding to global environmental degradation. Given that many environmental problems are continuing to worsen, might it be case that contemporary curriculums and pedagogies are part of the problem? Should we challenge ourselves to do better, and if so what should we be doing differently? What should our role be in generating solutions?

These are fundamental questions that go to the heart of the academic vocation. Many academics contend that we need to redefine our role and forge a new and more environmentally engaged scholarship that is fit for the challenges of the Anthropocene, with humans now the dominant force for planetary change. The four papers in this annual review all take a critical view of contemporary pedagogies and argue for ways in which university teaching on sustainability might change in order to engage more meaningfully with environmental problems and how human society can respond more robustly to them.

Many debates on environmental education explore how, and in what ways, educators should exercise leadership. The theme of leadership is explored in the first paper by Spencer Stober,

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who analyses the role of Nature-Centered Leaders. Stober has developed this concept as an analytical framework for examining and better understanding the role of leadership for sustainability within a diverse range of institutions (Stober 2013; Stober, Brown, and Cullen 2013). Nature-Centered Leaders seek to promote dialogue around shared environmental norms and values in order to forge common ground for promoting sustainability. Nature-Centered Leadership is not a separate and distinct category or theory of leadership but a way of thinking that all leaders may adopt when seeking innovative and creative ways to sustain the environment. How a Nature-Centered Leader operates will depend on factors such as the relevant and affected stakeholders and the environmental problems the organisation creates or seeks to ameliorate, as well as the local or national policy context. There is, therefore, no single approach to Nature-Centered Leadership but many different approaches depending on the relevant contextual factors. Stober argues that within the education sector a key challenge for Nature-Centered Leaders is how to implement more strongly the principles of the 1990 Talloires Declaration on the role of universities in environmental management and sustainable development. Action points that the Talloires Declaration promotes include creating an institutional culture of sustainability, educating for environmentally responsible citizenship, and fostering environmental literacy.

The second paper by Romina De Angelis focuses on school education in Jamaica. De Angelis differentiates between transmissive and transformative approaches to learning when considering the literature on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The relationships involved in the two types of learning are very different. Transmissive learning is based on the tacit and unquestioned acceptance of ESD as a set paradigm that is applied uncritically. However, embedded within the idea of ESD is the perpetuation of an unacknowledged power hierarchy between the Global North and Global South that fails to address the inequalities in international trade, transnational financial flows, and global economic governance that generate environmental degradation. In comparison, transformative learning seeks to distance itself from hierarchical approaches to learning based on the top-down transmission of the “expertise” of Western intellectual traditions, methodologies, and policy approaches. Transformative learning allows for contemplation and reflexivity that catalyse changes in the consciousness and awareness of learners and how they interrelate with the environment. Transformative learning guides learners towards and through a process of self-discovery that is emancipatory for both individual learners and their communities. De Angelis found evidence of both types of learning in Jamaica. Transmissive learning can be explained by the pressure on school staff to perform well against established criteria of educational performance. However, school staff also recognise the importance of transformative learning if students, and schools themselves, are to be active agents of change.

The third paper by Eduardo Jovel examines the role of a particular type of Nature-Centered Leader, namely Indigenous peoples. Jovel focuses in particular on the role of Indigenous people in educational curriculums in Canada. He argues that in Canada, as well as in other former European colonies, inequities have arisen from the Eurocentric structure and focus of the education system that historically has failed fully to recognise and improve the rights and living conditions of those who live on Indigenous land. As a result, many Indigenous people living off-reserve experience multiple challenges, including barriers to affordable education. Furthermore, educational curriculums, especially in urban environments, are often oppressive, presenting incomplete or inaccurate accounts of the history, rights, and cultures of Indigenous peoples and their relationship to land and nature. Jovel argues for the cultural mobilisation of Indigenous knowledge, with university education expanded to include Indigenous storytelling in order to promote greater awareness and understanding of Indigenous interconnectedness to place and nature. He places particular emphasis on orality—ceremonies, songs, prayers, and performances—as a pedagogic tool for transformative education.

The fourth paper, which is my contribution, argues that there is a pressing moral case for universities to rethink curriculums, as well our research agendas and models of corporate governance. Global heating should now be considered the most pressing global welfare problem of the twenty-first century, and the history that will be written of this century will in large

measure be an account of how well humanity heeded and responded to the compelling scientific evidence that time is running out to address this problem. The paper reviews some recent literature on environmental pedagogy that seeks to make the case for greater reflection and contemplation in university teaching, including encouraging students to reflect on ideas such as meaning, spirituality, inner life, and existentialism. The paper introduces the distinction between environmental education, which seeks to teach students to analyse environmental problems, and ecopedagogy, which involves advocacy of critical solutions that may run counter to the interests of those who benefit from contemporary economic and political power structures.

These four papers are offered in the hope that they will prove useful to those who work in education as teachers and researchers. Educational curriculums should always shift in response to changed exigencies in environment, society, culture, and the economy. Enormous strides have been made in environmental education in recent decades. In these uncertain and increasingly precarious times the challenge is for critical educators and members of the public to rethink the importance and role of education in stimulating the urgent social transformations that are necessary for nature and for environmental justice, both for the young and for those generations yet to be born. This is the fight of our lives, and we wish all concerned scholars and readers of this volume inspiration and every success as you search for and promote new environmental curriculums and pedagogies in your places of work.

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