

Chapter 6

Educating for a Sustainable World: Bringing Together Indigenous and Western Knowledges

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ABSTRACT

Educating for a sustainable future and learning to live within our planetary limits is the most pressing challenge of our times. In this chapter, the authors present an emerging model of transcultural education that brings together Indigenous and western knowledges. This approach aims to engage learners from different cultures and knowledge traditions with the purpose of guiding them through ideas and processes of imagining, listening, speaking, and working together in a way that respects differences, acknowledges common ground, and seeks to co-create new knowledges. Bringing together Indigenous and Western knowledges in this manner creates a unique context that can potentially build the mindsets, skills, and dispositions that are needed for living and managing sustainably. A pedagogy grounded in this approach can potentially promote student interest and engagement across cultural and social divides, foster successful learning about bridging social inequalities, and cultivate an ethos of social, cultural, and environmental responsibility.

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INTRODUCTION

The most important task in our time is not to protect the land or create social justice but to create a sustainable culture. -Holthaus, 2008, p.6.

The world faces a cascade of challenges that grow in magnitude and complexity on a daily basis. Many voices within institutional and academic communities have drawn attention to the central role of higher education in tackling the complex challenges of ecological, economic, cultural, and social sustainability. There is a growing awareness that the current trajectory of development features unsustainable rates of consumption, waste generation, ecological destruction, greenhouse gas production, poverty, and social inequality. Countless examples of these complex issues can be found around the globe and in our own backyard. Creating a sustainable future and learning to live within our planetary limits is vital in our times. An interdisciplinary education focussing on environmentally and socially sustainable ideas and practices helps our students gain an awareness and knowledge of the importance of promoting and leading sustainable communities.

In light of these challenges, there is increased attention in both sustainability studies and management education on educating for innovative ways of advancing new ideas that promote more sustainable forms of enterprise. To date, however, only modest progress has been made by educators to better equip students to tackle complex strategic, moral and ethical dilemmas with knowledge, values, sensitivity and conviction. Fostering sustainability is a ‘wicked problem’ that challenges us to identify and negotiate self-referential dilemmas that arise when we question and ultimately challenge the core assumptions of our socio-economic systems. According to Audre Lourde (1984), it may be that the master’s tools may not be adequate to renovate the master’s house.

In this chapter we present an emerging model of transcultural education that acknowledges the need to engage new sets of knowledges and to bring these knowledges into conversation with each other. Following Ermine (2008), by “transcultural” we mean engaging learners from different cultures and knowledge traditions with the purpose of guiding them through ideas and processes of imagining, listening, speaking and working together in a way that respects differences, acknowledges common grounds, and seeks to cocreate new knowledges. We argue that the fundamental challenge of educating tomorrow’s leaders for a sustainable world begins by questioning the core assumptions of traditional western approaches to organizing in general, and sustainability in particular. In contrast to dominant western educational narratives, pedagogies, and curriculum developed for sustainability-related disciplines, we argue that a transcultural approach that ‘brings together’ Indigenous and western ways of knowing presents qualitatively different opportunities

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