


Chapter 8


The Future of Sustainable Education in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

As the world grapples with mounting environmental, social and economic challenges, a re-envisioned higher education, built around the concepts of sustainability, is increasingly seen as an imperative. This chapter discusses the development of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), its guiding tenets, and the centrality of ESD in curriculum and pedagogy. The chapter argues that transformative learning, cross-disciplinarity, and indigenisation are important tenets to the development of a more holistic sustainability literacy. The chapter also highlights the need for a commitment to the values of ethical leadership and global citizenship as part of the strategic imperatives for equipping students to engage in and address complex social issues. It offers a vision for what universities of the future might look like as those in the academy move higher education beyond knowledge transmission to making sustainability actors seek to anticipate the trajectory of an ESD with transformative potential; an education that nurtures sustainable communities.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Getting higher education on the sustainable education track is a key juncture between what is required by society, the challenges of the global commons and the need for educational change. With the world confronted by ever more acute challenges such as climate change, diminishing resources and social inequality, higher education institutions (HEIs) have a clear role to play in realising sustainable development. They are knowledge repositories and islands of social transformation, where future leaders, who will form the socially responsible members that will tackle these challenges, are going to be groomed (Molokova, 2021; Reza, 2016; Chankseliani & McCowan, 2020).

Sustainability education focuses on the integration of environmental, economic and social dimensions into curricula and pedagogic practices, as well as the development of interdisciplinary learning approaches for the complexity of the 21st century (Park, 2024; Kocot et al, 2024; Uggla & Soneryd, 2023; Oyetunde et al, 2023). The advancement of ESD also shows that today's demand of educational institutions to rethink their classical pedagogies and embrace more luminous paradigms that can support their students to think critically and make responsible decisions (Park, 2024; Pandowo et al, 2021). This implies that sustainability must not only be eco-centred but that it should have a broader scope that involves socio-economic reality and community involvement (Sebire & Flores, 2023).

Engagement with education for sustainable development is not to be seen as a content provision, it is aiming for the development of a culture in HEIs of inclusiveness of sustainability actions. This includes greening campus, community based, local and global relevant research into sustainability challenges (Redman et al., 2021; Filho et al., 2019; Filho et al., 2018). Indeed, many institutions are now embracing innovative models of non-traditional pedagogical delivery, integrating theory and practice for learning and teaching, to produce change agents capable of influencing policy and practice in a cross-section of sectors (Ramos et al., 2015).

Furthermore, there is a reinforcement between the SDGs and higher education that allows institutions to promote systemic change (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2020). Through adopting and implementing such sustainability-based strategies, HEIs can not only complement their educational programmes but they can also contribute significantly towards global efforts to generate a sustainable future (Tapia-Fonllem et al, 2017). Consequently, the future of sustainable education in higher education is more than just desirable; it is imperative to meet new global problems and to build social resilience.

Ultimately, as leaders imagine where sustainable education is moving towards in higher education, institutions of higher learning must infuse a pervasive culture of sustainability that involves deep-seated change within their pedagogies, oper-

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