

BOOK REVIEW

Teaching for Sustainability: Inquiry, Values and Action Across the Curriculum

Jillian Cupitt & Syd Smith Macmillan Teacher Resources, South Yarra, 2012,
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Written for use by classroom teachers, *Teaching for Sustainability* provides an effective link between curriculum prescriptions and everyday teaching practice. It is a well organised text, valuable for teachers undertaking the programming tasks associated with incorporating sustainability into their work. In particular, it could function as a convenient handbook for Australian teachers implementing the cross-curriculum priority ‘sustainability’, as required under the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority, 2010).

In addition to teachers, preservice teachers and teacher educators will welcome the many practical teaching suggestions and planning outlines provided. While being situated within an Australian perspective and resonating with the recently developed Australian Curriculum, it has relevance to any teachers motivated to engage with local, and then wider, manifestations of global sustainability issues. Although examples of learning experiences are predominantly aligned with primary school, the modes of practice described in the book apply across all school stages. Detail provided strongly supports not only the work of individual teachers, but also whole school planning for sustainability.

Initial chapters reveal the authors’ interpretation of teaching for sustainability. Specifically, they recommend that teaching for sustainability be incorporated across the curriculum and based on an inquiry learning approach. It would be organised around sustainability issues relevant to students’ own lives, giving them opportunity to explore the impact of their activities on the environment; their values, needs and wants; and vision for the future. It would provide them with the ability to identify and solve problems and the opportunity to collectively and individually take action for sustainability. The authors argue that ideally this approach would be common across the whole school, thus providing support for individual teachers who endeavour to incorporate sustainability into their teaching program.

Chapter 2 provides preliminary explanation of terms used in subsequent topic chapters, each of which begins with three concept organisers: systems, world view and futures. Tables listing learning experiences at each primary stage expand the authors’ notion of the concept organisers. Under *systems* are learning experiences that explore the interrelatedness of human society and environment. An example for lower primary is for students to ‘track the life of basic products such as bread, milk, cereal’ (p. 23). An example for middle/upper primary is for students to ‘investigate communities of living

things and their interaction with non-living things in [various] habitats ... weather, water, soil' (p. 23). Under *world view* are learning activities which encourage students to 'look at issues at a big picture level which could involve changing and reflecting on ethical principles and values' (p. 9). Under *futures* are learning experiences that 'facilitate development of a vision for a preferred world' (p. 9). An example for middle/upper primary is for students to 'examine land use history locally, nationally and internationally and explain how technology has shaped today's world. Use these understandings to make informed decisions for the future' (p. 24).

The 'sustainability action process' is central to the authors' interpretation of teaching for sustainability. This process, as outlined by the authors, is intended to be used by the teacher to progress students towards taking action for sustainability. The sustainability action process is made up of five stages, each with a defined teaching and learning purpose. The first stage, *making the case for change*, is about information gathering in relation to a sustainability issue on a broad scale and as manifested within the school. In the second stage, *defining the scope for action*, students explore the issue further, investigating options for making a change within the school. In the third stage, *developing a proposal for action*, students draw on their findings to propose then select solutions to the issue at hand. The fourth stage is about *implementation* of the action and the fifth deals with student *evaluation* of the effectiveness of their action. A further short section in Chapter 2 demonstrates how sustainability can be programmed as a cross-curriculum priority.

Subsequent chapters apply the above organising ideas to each of four topics designated as fundamental to teaching for sustainability: energy, water, waste and biodiversity. These topic chapters follow a matching format, beginning with the three main concept organisers (systems, world view and futures). Here, the authors provide a broad outline of each topic. Some of the views they express could be disputed by readers and this section lacks reference to debates and information sources that could have strengthened the argument. A particularly useful attribute of this part of the topic chapters is the inclusion of activities appropriate for each stage of primary school learning. Constructive ideas for learning experiences across environmental, economic and social systems for each primary stage are provided in a readily accessible table format.

Each of the four topic chapters is strongly practice oriented in that it also provides learning experiences outlined under each stage of the student action process. Comprehensive detail is given on how to conduct environmental audits within the school: on energy, water, waste and biodiversity. Numerous examples of learning experiences relevant to all key learning areas of the curriculum are provided.

The extensive teaching experience of the authors is evident from the detail of learning experiences and organisational procedures provided, especially in the four topic chapters. Cupitt's inspiration is a deep love and understanding of nature. The underlying premise of the book is that teaching for sustainability is about more than nurturing such attitudes. Rather, it requires a pragmatic and organised mode of practice that incorporates skills of social and scientific investigation and of means of living in a more sustainable way.

Reference

Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority. (2012). *The Australian Curriculum*. Retrieved from www.australiancurriculum.edu.au

Reviewer Biography

Dr Julie Kennelly has worked in teacher education with both pre-service and in-service teachers. She is currently employed by the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities to assist in teacher education projects relevant to Education for Sustainability.