

Sustainable Development Research at Universities in the United Kingdom: Approaches, Methods and Projects

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As with other volumes in the series, this collection of chapters comes from a symposium at Manchester University in the United Kingdom (UK); no year is indicated, but indications from within the past three years are given. The 22 chapters are not categorised, but as suggested by the volume subtitle, they cover a range of topics. Noted in the preface are three aims for the volume to provide an opportunity to promote the variety of relevant works in the UK, offer a platform for the exchange of ideas and information, and provide a sound basis for readers to inform themselves about methodological approaches and projects in the UK. Generally, these broad aims are reached; however, there is little insight provided into the range of methodological approaches possible.

In essence, the collection of chapters is mainly of descriptions of projects undertaken in a variety of UK institutions, businesses, or communities. As for methodologies, a case study approach is most common. Some chapters are essentially literature reviews, several report surveys for collection of data related to attitudes or practice, from small samples, and a couple report small-scale evaluations. Overall, it is hard to find chapters that provide significant new information, or concepts that are challenging. While some chapters provide hope that sustainable development concepts may be more influential in future practice, many projects provide broad information about recent practice, yet generally this does not indicate that there would be any noticeable change in society. Nonetheless, the diversity of material and experiences provides a beginning for anyone who is new to the topic to appreciate the breadth of issues, and an introduction to the literature and researchers. As such, it also demonstrates the potential for sharing experiences.

The audience for this material is primarily those operating in the UK; however, there are many situations that are similar to those experiences to be found, for example, in Australasia, and elsewhere. So there is potential to see the experiences of others and their case studies, and to consider comparisons with local experiences. Yet, given the different political and organisational arrangements in the UK, it is difficult to see how many of the projects' findings could be directly translated to other countries. Also, for those readers who have been engaged in Education for Sustainability (Efs) or Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), much of the material (methods, findings, proposals) will be familiar — although the comparisons with UK experiences may be valuable. Returning to the question then, in the Australasian context, it is new entrants to the Efs and ESD field (e.g., research students) who may gain most from the reported projects.

As I have noted, much of the work is descriptive, which is important for benchmarking and comparisons, but unless it is taken further does not necessarily lead to progress in the field. Perhaps this is not surprising given the title of the volume, the

volume's aims (related to promoting and sharing), and perhaps the context for the symposium. After looking at the chapters, I am left wanting to know where all this information is leading EfS and ESD practitioners and theorists. There is demonstration of the momentum that exists in the field, but there is little indication of traction — that is, advancement. With all the time and energy that the authors and researchers have devoted to the symposium and writing the chapters, what are the key insights to be gained? How can these insights be used to ensure that EfS and ESD are universally embedded in institutions and societies (as appears to be the goal of most, if not all, the authors)?

It would be a difficult task to include an overview chapter that provided some guidance on these questions. But such a chapter would give the researchers' work meaning, provide guidance, and could help to inspire actions to further EfS and ESD. To make this task more likely, we may need to be more focused and specific regarding the material to be published, and equally, the purpose of academics' gatherings.

Reviewer Biography

Ian Thomas is an Honorary Associate Professor at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, and before his retirement taught into undergraduate and postgraduate environmental policy programs, as well as writing on environmental impact assessment, environmental policy, and environmental management systems. In his research, Ian has investigated the issues of embedding environmental education and sustainability education in the curricula of universities, examined the status of tertiary environmental programs, and investigated employment of graduates from these programs. His recent research has focused on capacity building of academics to support Education for Sustainability curriculum and the graduate capabilities sought by employers in relation to sustainability.

Post-Sustainability and Environmental Education: Remaking Education for the Future

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Discussion of environmental sustainability is still a 'black-box'— its complexities largely ignored — within human-nature relationship studies. The onslaught of industrialisation and neoliberal corporate control has brought with it inattention to ecological issues in human-nature relationship studies. Quality of education, which should ideally be a space for resistance and defense against exploitation, is now in decline. Even worse,