

Reviewer Biography

Susan Germein is a PhD Candidate at Western Sydney University. She has a research interest in community/place-based learning towards ecological sustainability. Susan has a background in EfS, having worked as a sustainability educator in the vocational education and community sectors, developing, delivering and piloting EfS programs. She was part of a national team delivering the Sustainability Champions Program in Australia: the Vocational Graduate Certificate in Education and Training for Sustainability (Swinburne University) and other accredited professional development programs for vocational education practitioners.

Higher Education for Sustainable Development

Kerry Shepard, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2015, ISBN: 978137548405
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Reviewed by Ian Thomas, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

This is a brave book. Perhaps, in the words of Sir Humphrey Appleby,¹ it is courageous. Why? Because the book attempts to provide an overall theory of how Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) can become part of higher education (HE). There has been no shortage of discussion about the complexity and difficulty of achieving such an outcome, and likewise there is discussion about the possible implementation approaches. So, attempting to provide a path through all this shows bravery.

This 'guide' comes from all the years that Shepard spent in both teaching and researching in HE institutions, and as an advisor on teaching and learning approaches. His ideas have crystallised from a sabbatical period to interview and talk with people involved in ESD working in a small selection of HE in New Zealand, Australia, Scandinavian countries, and North America; and some were sceptical about sustainable development. Importantly, the conversations involved more than just the usual academics. Equally, his approach has been to look for the positives rather than focus on negatives. In other words, while it is important to identify the existence of barriers to ESD, there is no progress if we stop there. The progress and positive aspect of Shepard's thinking is to look for what actions can progress implementation of ESD, rather than dwelling on barriers.

A further brave aspect of Shepard's work has been to look for a comprehensive approach to ESD. Specifically thinking about the audiences for this book, he has identified that the probable readers would be those involved with HE and be: passionate sustainability change agents, academic advocates for sustainability, (possibly sceptical) disciplinary focused academics, academic and educational developers, university managers and administrators, dispassionate researchers, readers from 'outside our ivory towers', and students and graduates. As a consequence, some readers may find the book more difficult to follow to extract precise ideas for their situations, as there is a chance that some material could be perceived as not directly relevant. However, Shepard attempts to moderate these difficulties by providing some guides for which sections

would be more relevant to each audience, and concluding with the final chapter, 'A Way Forward', which provides a broad canvas of the main thoughts.

As someone who for some years has been looking into the challenges of implementing Education for Sustainability (EFS) in HE, I have been impressed to see that Shepard has recognised that a range of factors will influence implementation at any specific HE institution. The challenge is a 'jigsaw', as he suggests. Shepard is clearly passionate about sustainability and thoughtful about his approach, as he has taken a holistic view of the situation and has been thinking systemically about what goes on in HE. Yet, as with any system or jigsaw puzzle, when we try to 'put them together' or decide what is important, for reasons of simple practicality we have to draw boundaries and make the number of pieces or components manageable. This is a limitation of the book, possibly coming from the data Shepard collected, to which I will return. However, the 'parts of the jigsaw' that Shepard identifies are that:

- HE curricula are multilayered, and not everything is clearly defined in learning objectives
- many teachers want to encourage students to be critical thinkers
- academic developers want to be part of the solution
- administrators and policy people want to focus on what is achievable
- some academics are committed to multidisciplinary teaching
- educational theory and philosophy can rationalise what is taught to avoid inappropriate values education
- some academics feel practical experiences outside the HE institution are important, especially regarding professions
- synergy can occur so that disciplinary, personal and societal values converge to produce happy academics.

For those coming from a scientific or positivist background, Shepard's research approach may seem blasphemous. He has taken a grounded theory approach, where it is the comments and opinions of the interviewees that guide the development of ideas (which can eventually build into theories). In essence, themes in the data have been identified and used as the basis for thoughts on the way forward. Those from a non-positivist background, though, are likely to be broadly comfortable with this approach. In any case, Shepard goes to great lengths to explain his approach to reduce any concerns about how his insights have developed; to the extent that in some sections the text reads a little like a research report.

The critical issue for Shepard, and others like Holdsworth and Hegarty (2015), is that ESD is much more than the content of the teaching (such as identification and analysis of issues like air pollution). Rather, the key for implementing ESD rests with the teaching of ESD; specifically, the processes by which students learn. Shepard provides a chapter and numerous comments outlining the educational approach that he and others (e.g., Barth, 2015) see as the base of ESD, that is, where students engage in deep learning, critical thinking, self-reflection, and affective behaviour. Underlying the elements of this approach entails the identification and discussion of values.

As with the evolution of environmental education and its expansion into ESD, values are a basic component to be recognised. The Brundtland report and Agenda 21 set the scene for Shepard to discuss the role of values education in ESD, and in academic and professional contexts. Further, he reinforces the importance of recognising values and their role in the development of curriculum, and in developing understanding of the role of values in students' academic and professional education. In this thinking, Shepard has many supporters, including myself (e.g., Thomas, Hegarty, & Holdsworth, 2012). While some may argue that values, and values education, have little relevance to HE, Shepard's research and discussion illustrate the relation to the basics of

sustainability and, more broadly, to the essence of teaching and learning. Shepard discusses particular connections between ESD and 'good' teaching and learning through his focus on 'affect', 'cognition', and 'criticality'. In promoting this relationship he has strong supporters, such as Holdsworth and Hegarty (2015), who see that our exploration of ESD approaches and pedagogy is both relevant and acts as an example for teaching and learning across HE disciplines.

The role of academics is central to many of Shepard's thoughts, and he comments on the need for them to be assisted to develop good teaching approaches, having acknowledged the disciplinary focus of most academics. With the current phase of setting HE 'quality frameworks' and the fall-out that anyone teaching HE students will need a PhD or equivalent, we see that lecturers, teachers, and coordinators are frequently appointed for their research output or potential, rather than their teaching ability or interest. Hence, there is even greater need to have programs to assist academics acquire good teaching practices, and thereby support them to develop their ESD pedagogy. Yet, ESD curriculum does not need to be something that is in addition to what academics already do in their teaching. Shepard makes the salient point that there is a need 'for more professional development support for higher education teachers but not radical changes in what and how university teachers teach' (pp. 82–83). Rather, it is a matter of helping teachers see how current curricula connects with sustainability matters and building those connections into their teaching. In the absence of formal development supports, teachers will be looking to books such as Shepard's for directions and details to help them develop their ESD curriculum. Unfortunately, this sort of detailed assistance is not forthcoming in this book. While Shepard provides the theory and ideas that can act as building blocks or even a scaffold for curriculum development, there is little to guide academics with the details or specifics, especially those involved in different disciplines.

Also, it is surprising that while Shepard makes mention of learning outcomes, these do not come out as being at the base of curriculum design. Much is made of the need for ESD teaching to lead to affective behaviour in students; and I agree. However, the purpose for this is not made clear. In essence though, HE provides education for the graduates — mainly the professionals who will be employed by community groups, government, and private industries. In these positions we expect them to work to support sustainability principles (which we expect they learned through ESD). However, they will not be able to do this unless the employer decides that they have the overall capabilities (i.e., skills, competencies) that the employer needs, and offers them a job. So, as ESD curriculum designers, we need to have an idea of the employers' needs and translate these into graduate attributes and learning objectives to guide curriculum development, moderated as need be to ensure that broad social and environmental ethics are not ignored. This is an unfortunate limitation of the scope of Shepard's jigsaw, or system. Increasingly, HE institutions have moved from being 'ivory towers' to being part of the broad community and having to interact directly with community, government and business. Hence, any thinking about curriculum, be it ESD or otherwise, needs to consider the relationship with these 'external forces'. Fortunately for ESD educators, there seem to be some strong parallels between the interests of the employers and the issues of concern to ESD. Specifically, the capabilities that employers are looking for appear to be close to the capabilities inherent in ESD curricula (Thomas & Day, 2014). The point that employers want graduates to have ESD-related capabilities could be a compelling incentive for academics not otherwise interested in sustainability to provide ESD for their students. Academics can then begin to think about revising their curriculum to mesh better with the interests of their graduates seeking employment, and thence probably achieve positive student 'satisfaction' and 'employability' scores from university and government surveys.

A positive surprise is the penultimate chapter and its discussion of measuring ESD. All too often we see ideas being presented without recognition of the need to review the value of the idea, that is, to conduct an evaluation and reflect on the exercise. We live with the assessment of students and the increasingly formal review of programs or subjects, and pleasingly, Shepard reminds us that we need to review ESD. However, he focuses the discussion on specific aspects, such as the extent to which students' awareness, or perhaps understanding, of sustainability may have changed through their HE experiences. Missing is consideration of whether the graduates, through their HE experiences, have developed the capabilities for them to act as sustainability professionals in their jobs. As a consequence, there is no discussion of how this sort of review can be used to inform curricular development in the HE. There is also discussion about conducting research into ESD, clearly an important issue since data need to be collected to inform improvements in ESD; however, discussion as to how such research could be designed is not included.

Threads discussed in earlier chapters, such as the parts of the jigsaw, are revisited in the final chapter, 'A Way Forward'. Yet it is refreshing to see that rather than sticking with the traditional conclusion and overview of previous discussion, Shepard has moved to a very different style. Essentially, the chapter is a dramatic presentation of a set of key players (many of the audiences he identified for the book) engaged in a meeting to discuss that university has to 'do something about sustainability' (p. 117). Through the characters' interchanges, the key aspects of ESD as developed by Shepard through his research and the previous chapters are presented and discussed. This amounts to a 'brave' approach to presenting Shepard's proposals in encouraging the characters to 'have a go', since some of his audiences (i.e., readers) may be put off by the dramatic or novelistic style, preferring a traditional type of conclusion. However, others are likely to become more engaged with ESD and enthused to work more strongly for it. Surprisingly, while students and graduates are seen to be an audience for the book, they do not rate a place in this conversation; nor, it seems from their absence in any data or theoretical discussion, are they seen as having relevance to the discussion of ESD in their HE institutions.

As well as the reinforcement of his key points, this final chapter is an important illustration of Shepard's discussion of ESD. In it, he demonstrates the multidisciplinary aspect of ESD through its contrasting style to earlier chapters and demonstrates an example of engagement with the reader or student to bring about the 'affect', 'cognition', and 'criticality', a key area of his earlier discussion.

I will leave it to readers of *Higher Education for Sustainable Development* to judge how brave Shepard has been. What he has done is to present research and discussion that helps to fill in part of the ESD jigsaw, and this will help to stimulate ESD in HE; by those new to the field to gain insight into what is involved, and for those 'older hands' reflecting on their ideas and practice. All this provides a base for the reader to plan implementation of ESD into their own (teaching) practice and/or to consider how they might introduce the ideas to others in HE. Any reader wanting specific guidance for the development of ESD curriculum will need to supplement their reading by accessing the growing networks and materials related to ESD, both in Australia and internationally. Even having a conversation with others about the book may open up a range of materials and supports that you were not aware of!

Endnote

¹ Of the BBC television program *Yes Minister*, and *Yes Prime Minister*, fame

References

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Reviewer Biography

Ian Thomas teaches into undergraduate and postgraduate environmental policy programs at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia, and has written 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.

Scientists, Experts and Civic Engagement: Walking a Fine Line

Edited by Amy E. Lesen, Ashgate Publishing, 2015, ISBN: 9781472415240
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This book's genesis is in concerns surrounding the ethics of how 'outsider' academics engage with local communities, for the purposes of 'grappling with complex, global problems with numerous causes, widespread and often unpredictable effects, and impacts on both social and environmental systems' (p. xvi).

Divided into two parts, the first part of the book has the feel of a memoir. This feeling is a result of how the authors' history of professional community engagement (aka 'civic engagement') and their sense of the relationship between community engagement and democracy are presented. The second, practice-oriented part also contains a more personal tone than is common for academic publications. Combined, the two parts form a book that clearly outlines the importance of community engagement, offers practical ways to go about academia-based community engagement, and identifies common pitfalls of academic-based community engagement. The personal tone embedded in the