

### Reviewer Biography

Dr Lorne Butt is the Sustainability Coordinator at TAFE NSW Western Institute. Lorne trained as a biologist before joining the higher education sector. With a background in quality management, strategic planning and corporate governance, Lorne now specialises in sustainability practice, governance, education and research, and convenes the Leading for Innovation and Sustainability unit in the Australian Institute of Management Business School postgraduate program. Lorne is an Associate Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and a member of the British and Australia/New Zealand academies of management, the Australian Institute of Company Directors, and the Australian Association of Environmental Education.

## Education for Sustainable Development in Eco-Schools: Contextualised Stories From England and South Africa

Jo Anna Reed Johnson Lambert Academic Publishing, 2014, ISBN 3659167363  
doi: 10.1017/aee.2016.23

Reviewed by Jeddah Teasdale, Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School, Bowral, New South Wales, Australia

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Written as a critical reflection of education for sustainable development (ESD) as applied in two schools, this book aims to present the ‘realities’ versus ‘vision’ of ESD by taking an in-depth look at two eco-schools, one in England, the other in South Africa. This book could function as a useful reference for those researching sustainability approaches in schools due to Reed’s thorough attention to the history of background terminology, in particular ESD, and the meticulous analysis of methodologies used. Classroom teachers and school leaders may find parallels between their own schools and the case studies presented in the book, which may provide useful reflections to progress their own education programs.

Part A comprises an in-depth consideration of ESD, its aims, historical background, and current ideological conversations. The role and importance of participatory democracy, triple bottom line and whole-school approaches are highlighted. The United Nations Decade of Sustainable Development (DESD) acts as a springboard for discussion and a means to assess schools for a case study. The two schools chosen for the study had been awarded ‘Green Flags’ by the DESD program for their ongoing commitment and participation over many years. Reed discusses her methodologies at length, critically reflecting on her chosen approach, which adds credibility to the case studies in the following chapters. The insightful historical analysis of ESD raises many interesting points about our current education system and how it works both as a political agent for change as well as a suppressor of change. Reed argues that school systems are designed to shape moral and social beliefs and, as such, they form the basis for societal behaviours. The author goes on to explain that the various school systems correlate to ecological footprints of the countries in which they exist. The importance of democratic

participation is also highlighted, which exists at odds to a typical school environment; a juxtaposition that leads to what Reed terms as 'creative tension'.

Part B details the investigations and observations at the two schools. These schools' ESD settings may seem familiar to Australian readers despite vast differences in the cultural context. ESD practices at both schools are investigated at length and include both effective and ineffective strategies, some of which are often employed at Australian schools, such as lunch time 'eco clubs'. In both case studies, only a few students were actively engaged in ESD practices, with whole-school approaches limited to ad hoc events that the driving teachers were responsible for organising. Reed also reports on the successes of the programs and details the intense support given by the eco-schools movement in each country.

The common theme that runs throughout the book is the 'creative tension' between 'visions' and 'realities', which have been discussed at length. The reflection on 'actualities' in Part C is where many teachers working in environmental education may find parallels between their own school and the case studies presented. Overall, Reed considers the case study schools to be limited by a school culture without a pedagogy of student participation due to top-down teaching methods and an outcomes focus. The development of only a partial vision for whole-school approaches and the lack of participation from parents meant the school was limited in its ability to operate as a participatory community. The lack of physical space and time constraints were other impediments. These may be similar frustrations that many ESD teachers working in schools are experiencing.

Reed argues that traditional schooling methods that are top-down and outcome based stand at odds to ESD. In an Australian setting, we may see that the agenda of policy makers is at loggerheads with proponents of ESD, which may restrict whole-school support. Environmental initiatives are often supported by those in leadership roles but are limited by the time constraints of competing state-enforced outcomes. ESD often falls outside of core curriculum, despite Reed arguing that ESD practices constitute 'simply good practice' (p. 68).

The book falls short of suggesting ways to overcome the 'creative tensions' that currently exist in the two case studies, and most probably the broader ESD in schools movement. Reed suggests this as an area requiring further research. Teachers in particular may finish the book having gained insight into their own situations but with limited ability to implement strategies to better improve the ESD processes in their school environments. As such, the book may have limited appeal outside the academic realm. Overall, Reed provides a thorough and detailed discussion of two eco-schools and their implementation of ESD practices.

### **Reviewer Biography**

Jeddah Teasdale is a classroom teacher at Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School. She has a background in environmental education and graduated from Newcastle University with a Masters of Environmental Management (Honours) before working for many years with children in various environmental education situations. Her new passion is working within her current school to implement whole-school approaches to ESD that match visions with realities, using action research.