

Book Reviews

The Handbook of Sustainability Literacy: Skills for a Changing World, edited by A. Stibbe, Green Books Ltd, Foxhole Dartington, 2009, 215pp, ISBN: 978-1-900322-60-7.

Set in the present context of growing global disquiet about the planet's future, the Handbook of Sustainability Literacy suggests that sustainability literacy could improve human interactions with the natural environment. In it, is a reminder that this generation are in as much danger as those yet to come, if our rate of natural resource consumption and mismanagement persisted unchecked. The structure of the book makes it an easy read. It is divided into two parts. Part one, 'Skills for a Changing World', presents skills relevant for sustainability based on the contributors' experiences and practices. Part two, 'Educational Transformation for Sustainability Literacy' is composed of four chapters that explore the potential benefits of educational reform to society.

An overview of the chapters reveals the deliberate effort taken to reflect the process of gaining sustainability literacy, which according to the layout, starts with appropriate skills and ends in change. The Introduction by Stibbe and Luna offers a gripping insight into the text; giving it this engaging character. The first four chapters ('Ecocriticism', 'Optimisation', 'Grounded Economic Awareness' and 'Advertising Awareness') provide the practical skills learners need to steer society away from this consumerist culture. The following two chapters ('Transition Skills' and 'Commons Thinking') imply that a move away from consumerism demands the skills for living positively with nature. The next chapters ('Effortless Action', 'Permaculture Design' and 'Community Gardening') hint that the transition to a low energy and non-consumerist society requires skills for working and living with nature. To emphasise that such a transition cannot happen without a change in mindsets, behaviours and lifestyles several chapters ('Ecological Intelligence', 'Systems Thinking' and 'Gaia Awareness') argue that learners ought to engage with the animate qualities of the planet and its interconnected systems (a renewal of old ways of thinking and doing). Further chapters ('Futures Thinking', 'Values Reflection and the Earth Charter' and 'Social Conscience') illustrate that new ways of thinking must be supported by an ethical foundation to prevent society from sliding back into the path of destruction. Discussion in the following chapters ('New Media Literacy' and 'Cultural Literacy') then suggests that to deal with dominant ideologies we need

skills for communicating new visions of the world in ways that reflect the changing order of the era.

The next three chapters ('Carbon Capability', 'Greening Business' and 'Materials Awareness') demonstrate the urgency with which society ought to take responsibility for their carbon footprints since businesses, materialism and carbon emissions all add to the global crisis. The unquestionable links between technological advancement, the use of fossil fuel, untenable natural resource extraction, waste and subsequent environmental damage all call for skills that enable people to re-think the purpose and contributions of technology to society (see chapters on 'Appropriate Technology and Appropriate Design' and 'Technology Appraisal'). At the same time, two contributions ('Complexity, Systems Thinking and Practice' and 'Coping with Complexity') also demonstrate that using technology without taking account of other factors is not the solution.

Further chapters ('Emotional Well-being' and 'Finding Meaning Without Consuming') suggest that sustainability literacy is about the person – his/her culture, environment and social orientation – and must consider the mind, explore individual and collective senses of well-being, and provide satisfaction with less consumption. Consequently, the following chapters ('Being-in-the-World' and 'Beauty as a Way of Knowing') re-affirm that the simple life requires skills for living as part of nature. Finally, the concluding four chapters ('Citizen Engagement', 'Re-educating the Person', 'Institutional Transformation' and 'A Learning Society') explore educational and institutional reform and suggest that until that transformation is made, learners will not gain from any of the skills outlined in the rest of the book.

Overall, the chapters are arranged in such a way as to take the issue back to the individual in their own context first instead of making it seem as though it is only a group of practitioners come together to tell the world how to become sustainability literate. The writers appear to say, 'yes, we may be experts, but we can neither teach you sustainability nor about it. This is something you learn'.

The fundamental message in the text is that sustainability literacy is the most effective tool for transforming society and by so doing achieving sustainable development. But, for society to transform, everything about how humanity interacts with itself and the biosphere must change too. This is echoed throughout the book, but with interesting dimensions (especially in the chapters on 'Futures Thinking', 'Values Reflection and the Earth Charter' and 'Social Conscience'). They each illustrate that sustainability issues are embedded in the way society organises, go beyond the realms of personal interactions, and reflect our diverse worldviews. Therefore, we cannot connect with the causes of unsustainability and would in a sense be ill-placed to act on them without awareness of both ourselves and society. The necessary change demands the development of a 'Social Conscience', as outlined in the contribution from Myshele Goldberg (p105), who describes it as an

individual's moral code. Goldberg demonstrates how the sense of right and wrong at both the individual and collective levels can inspire agency, and in so doing contribute to sustainability. Coupled with this message is the argument that '...the twenty-first century will be a time of change no less dramatic than that of the twentieth century, but that the changes will be of an entirely different nature' (p9). Taken at face value, the argument does nothing for the book. However, if explored against the backdrop of the calamitous state of the Earth, it begins to make sense. Namely, it spells out a multi-faceted global revolution, the dynamics of which will not be dictated only by social, political and economic forces, but also by the power of nature itself.

Although the publication will appeal to a wider audience, it might be easy to miss its applicability in other contexts because of the title. The fact that it is described as a handbook might deter some readers from engaging with it as they would consider it a classroom or instructional resource. Another aspect that exposes the book to criticism is the fact that most of the contributors are from the global North. This too, might weaken its global appeal and make the references to Afro-centric and other non-Western knowledge or application of sustainability literacy seem somewhat superficial. One could easily consider some examples (like the one on Uganda, p 118) to be authorial accidents and miss the value they add to the text. However, from an African perspective, the text provides some useful reflections about Africa's often under-reported contributions to sustainability literacy.

Interestingly, all the learning activities in the book echo the type of experiential or placed-based learning associated with informal education in Africa and other examples of Southern sustainability awareness. The variety of skills and contexts from which the contributions originate gives the book a wider appeal. Perhaps it was written this way to reinforce the need for alternatives in education or offer something that removes education from its current focus on skills for the labour market. The book therefore implies that social justice will continue to elude the world if the North does not reduce consumption or replace competitive material accumulation with the moral duty of acquiring resources to meet only identified needs.

However, the book does not present as direct a challenge to the North as might be required to stir fast action. As a result, some sceptics may say that the overall message is not forceful enough to either convince those posed to suffer the most from the pending disaster that there is interest in saving them or for those most commonly associated with causing the problems to feel shamed into taking responsibility for making the world a better place. All the same, what appealed to me the most was the way the publication dealt with the meaning of sustainability literacy; arguing that it is more than simply knowing about sustainability, rather it is about how you apply that knowledge (see p 10). However, the book also occasionally suggests that the world is already sustainability literate to a certain extent, especially

if we consider the knowledge and practices from the past or from other contemporary non-western cultures. Sceptics might wonder if such knowledge and skills already exist and are being applied elsewhere, why has it taken the world so long to recognise them? Inevitably this question will raise debates about both the politics of knowledge and the intentions of dominant nations with respect to sustainability.

Nevertheless, I think the text has largely achieved the aim of providing 'alternative possibilities, more grounded in the realities of the changing world...', and of opening up '...a range of previously un-thought-of paths, some of which will no doubt be rejected, but some considered worthy of further exploration' (p13). Although the editor admits in the text that the book is therefore bound to meet with criticism, he argues that the messages it contains had to be presented in this non-imposing manner in order to create room for constructive debate. So if you are interested in sustainability, I think this is the book for you. And if you are a sceptic, try it as well; it might surprise you into opening new areas for discussion.

Betty Okot

Tutor, Education for Sustainability Programme

London South Bank University

jabky@yahoo.co.uk

From the Global to the Local: Key Issues in Development Studies, edited by G. McCann and S. McCloskey, 2nd Edition, Pluto Press, London, 2009, 320pp, ISBN: 978-0-7453-2842-3

Before writing this review, I read the first edition to better understand why a second edition had been produced. Like the first edition, this second edition of Gerard McCann's and Stephen McCloskey's edited volume has contributions from mostly Irish and Northern Irish authors. Eleven of the thirteen contributors are academics and alumni of universities in Dublin and Belfast or have associations with Irish aid agencies. The first edition missed an opportunity to provide a distinctly Irish or Northern Irish perspective on Development and Development Assistance or Aid and, unfortunately, the second edition has also missed this opportunity.

The book's target audience is cited as 'tertiary level students, academics, teachers, development NGOs and civil society groups' (p18). It seeks to provide a 'useful introduction to development issues for the uninitiated' (p18) and has a four part structure 'to navigate the reader towards related issues' (p17). These are: development discourses and definitions, economic development, development policy, and human development.

The introductory chapter provides a descriptive account of development within an increasingly global society. While setting the scene for Andy Storey's chapter on human development, it left me wondering why and how too many times, with

references being made to instances and events which were then not substantiated. The chapter 'Measuring Human Development' did provide a more detailed overview of human development. It is concise and ambitious in the subject matter it covers, but I would have liked to have seen more attention paid to Amartyn Sen and his influence on not only the creation of the Human Development Index (HDI), but also on the poverty alleviation strategies used by leading aid agencies to quantify and qualify human development. Paul Hainsworth's chapter on the International Criminal court, as in the first edition, ignores vitally important aspects of development such as land reform and industrialisation. It assumes that readers know, for example, where Arusha is located and also understand the importance of the Rwanda trials happening in a neighbouring country that had provided refuge for those that fled the slaughter. Joanne McGarry's chapter on 'Perspectives on Aid' also missed an opportunity to explore aid through the lens of an Irish aid agency and to contextualise this huge topic in a more accessible format for the target audience.

In contrast, Denis O'Hearn's chapter on aid uses Ireland to illustrate the frailty of using trade as an agent of development and of the real impacts of neoliberalism on poverty alleviation. Satish Kumar's chapter on climate change and development and Chrispin Matenga's chapter on the MDGs also provide a Southern perspective and a well presented overview about how climate change is linked to human development and the MDGs, respectively. Gerard McCann's chapter on 'The Colonial Legacy', in contrast to his chapter in the first edition, acknowledges the importance of the impact of European imperialism on development aid and trade rules between EU states and the developing world.

Maeve Taylor's chapter on Gender and Development raises some thought-provoking issues, and in particular 'the widespread tendency to view gender equality as a strategy towards poverty reduction rather than as a development goal itself' (p185). In contextualising gender disparity within development policy and practice it provides an excellent introduction to this topic. Ronaldo Munck's focus on rural and indigenous mobilisation in Latin America centred around *dignidad* (dignity) rather than socialist ideals provides an interesting lens to introduce a discussion of the democratisation of Latin America and the challenges of globalisation to governance. The notion of attributing value, rather than analysis of a situation, through an ideological framework (socialism) recognises that the agenda set and language used are determined by the powerful. Anna Morvern's chapter on refugees is also useful in this regard, and it provides the reader with a thought-provoking account of the power of semantics. She focuses on the dehumanisation of refugees and how language has fed both popularist views of their acceptance, or lack of it, by British society as well as the process of their removal from Britain.

In the chapter on understanding and dealing with child labour, Madeline Leonard does just that and provides the reader with an introduction to some of the key issues related to child labour. It makes important points such as 'while compulsory educa-

tion is often seen as a panacea for child employment, working children... argue [when listened to] for the right to work along with their right to an appropriate education' (p233) – in other words, an education which is relevant to them and to their livelihoods. Stephen McCloskey's chapter on development education, in contrast to his introductory chapter, is written as if he is in element. There is a seemingly effortless eloquence to this chapter and as a result it makes for an interesting read that charts the growth, challenges and changes in the field over the last 30 years. In concluding the book, Gerard McCann's critique of neoliberalism and the Washington consensus, while informative, could have drawn together the key points from the other chapters and related them to the neoliberal experiment with both development and education.

Having lived and worked in Africa, Latin America and the UK for over 20 years, I read the book as a development, and development education, practitioner and academic. While it does provide a good overview and contains lots of information, some of the chapters are more informative and better written than others. Most of the essays are journalistic in style and descriptive in nature rather than providing an in-depth analysis of the subject matter. It is very ambitious in its subject matter and so results in a collection of essays about issues linked to development rather than a 'reader' on key issues in development studies. Consequently, I would find it difficult to refer to it or to recommend it as a key text or academic reference tool.

Cathryn Al Kanaan

Director, Sazani Associates

© 2010 Cathryn Al Kanaan

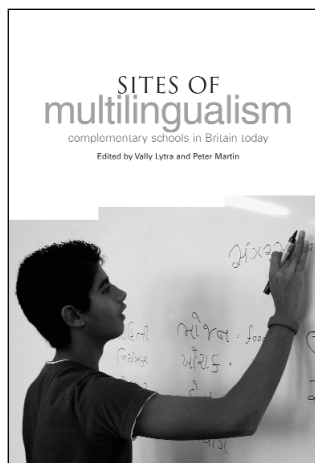
cathryn@sazaniassociates.org.uk

NEW FROM TRENTHAM

SITES OF MULTILINGUALISM: complementary schools in Britain today

Edited by Vally Lytra and Peter Martin

Here is cutting edge research on complementary schooling in Britain. The book brings together new and innovative language-focused research on complementary schools that serve the linguistic, cultural and social needs of a wide range of ethno-linguistic communities in Britain. It examines the language and literacy practices, the policy and curricular innovation that pertain in complementary schools in Britain today, and the experiences of the children who attend them.



Complementary schools have been on the margins of educational policy as research sites in their own right but recently this has changed. Now recognised as 'safe spaces' in which young children can explore their identities, they are seen as central to policy initiatives for promoting the languages of Britain. This book picks up on the spate of recent research to explore

- the range of language and literacy practices in complementary schools
- their innovations in policy and curriculum
- how the pupils, teachers and parents negotiate social identities and affiliations
- and the book demonstrates the importance of complementary schools in the lives and learning of bilingual pupils.

Sites of Multilingualism is essential reading for researchers and students in the fields of bilingual education and bilingualism, sociolinguistics, sociology and anthropology. It will also be relevant to teachers and teacher educators in complementary and mainstream schools and also to policy makers.

The contributors are Salman Al-Azami, Louise Archer, Taskin Baraç, Olga Barradas, Arvind Bhatt, Adrian Blackledge, Tony Clyne, Jean Conteh, Angela Creese, Becky Francis, Eve Gregory, Charmian Kenner, Li Wei, Vally Lytra, Peter Martin, Ada Mau, Efstathia Pantazi, Evangelia Prokopiou, Leena Helavaara Robertson, Mahera Ruby, Ana Souza, Raymonde Sneddon and Chao-Jung Wu

Vally Lytra is a Visiting Research Fellow at Kings College London.

Peter Martin is Professor of Education and Linguistics at University of East London and has been researching into complementary schools since 2001.

February 2010, ISBN 978 1 85856 454 8, 240 pages, 244 x 170mm, price £22.99

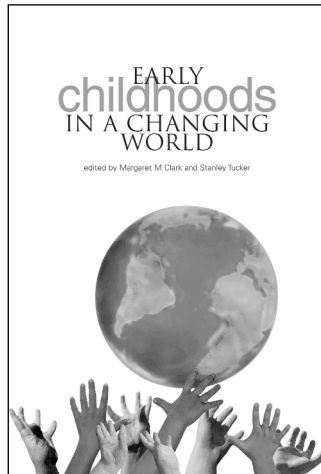
www.trentham-books.co.uk

NEW FROM TRENTHAM

EARLY CHILDHOODS IN A CHANGING WORLD

*Edited by Margaret M Clark
and Stanley Tucker*

This book challenges taken for granted views of early childhood across the globe. It deepens and broadens our understanding of what it means to be a child today and of the challenges children face in different parts of the world. The book is essential reading for all those working with young children, whether as practitioners, policy makers, or trainers and students of early years education and professional care. It will also be of interest to academics and sociologists in the field of childhood worldwide.



The authors are from the UK, Eastern and Western Europe, the USA, Australia and two countries in Africa. They reflect on the nature of childhood from their perspective and provide illustrative case studies on:

- the effects of changes in family circumstances
- the effects of poverty, rural and social isolation and trauma on young children's lives
- how new technologies are changing policy in early education
- how we ensure that children's voices are heard at home and at school.

The contributors are Jennifer Bowes, Stig Broström, Eileen Carmichael, Philomena Donnelly, Joanna Einarsdóttir, Eve Gregory, Mary James, Foster Kholowa, Horatiu Rusu, Siân Wyn Siencyn, Christine Stephen, Allison Tatton, Glenda Walsh and Lynne Williamson.

Margaret M Clark is Visiting Professor at Newman University College. She has an international reputation for her research in early education and literacy and was awarded an OBE for services to early years education.

Stanley Tucker is Professor and Dean of School at Newman University College. He has researched and written extensively on the lives of children and their families.

April 2010, ISBN 978 1 85856 473 9, 186 pages, 244 x 170mm, price £20.99

www.trentham-books.co.uk