"I'm not an authority figure, I'm just here to shine a light."

Leading Sustainability in Higher Education

Dr Katja M Hallenberg

School of Law, Criminal Justice and Computing, Canterbury Christ Church University

Symposium "Sustainable Development Research at Universities in the United Kingdom", 05-06/04/2016, Manchester

Aims of the Paper

Today's paper discusses 'work-in-progress' research into sustainability leadership in HE context:

- Research Aims
- Key areas of inquiry of relevance to the current study
- Narrative approach to sustainability leadership
- Methodology
- Emerging stories & themes

Research Aims

To explore the experiences and changing identities of 'sustainability leaders' in HE context

To engage with three interconnected 'stories' to build a narrative of what it means to be an 'sustainability leader' and discuss 'what works' in sustainability leadership

Story 1. 'You and sustainability/ESD'

Story 2. 'You and the project'

Story 3. 'You as a sustainability leader'

Literature: Key Areas of Inquiry

1. 'General' leadership studies: traditional (e.g. Armstrong, 2009) and contemporary theories (e.g. Parkin, 2010

2. Leadership research within HE context: parallels above, though with growing focus on distributed and informal leadership (e.g. Juntrasook et al, 2013), collegiality, empowerment and shared values (Knight & Trowler, 2001), current HE context → disengagement and disenchantment from formal leadership structures (Blackmore, 2014)

3. Education for Sustainable Development: critical, reflective, values-driven, ethical, participatory and transdisciplinary (UNESCO, 2004; HEA/QAA, 2014), head, heart and hands (Sipos, Battisti & Grimm, 2008)

Literature: Key Areas of Inquiry

4. Sustainability leadership:
   Rethinking the nature of leadership (Ferdig, 2007)

   Utilising change and the opportunities for new thinking and practices it creates

   Fostering participation and equity (Leuenberger & Waking, 2007).

   Learning *together with others*, personal meaning, addressing power dynamics (Ferdig, 2007),

   "Innovation, difference, adaptation and collaboration", transdisciplinary, enthusiasm, ownership and commitment (Newman-Storen, 2014: 5957).

   Positive deviance (Parkin, 2010)

Narrative Approach

A basic human way of making sense of the world, context- and culture-bound ways to connect past to the present (and future), ourselves to others and the world around us (Lawler, 2002)

Leadership (Simkins, 2005; Handy, 1989) and academia (Gidley, 2000; cited in Duke, 2002) as meaning- and sense-making

Leadership and sustainability as a narrative enterprises: a re-storying required

Key characteristics of narrative research approaches as summarised after Elliott (2005: 6) show clear connections to sustainability and ESD:

- Interest in lived experiences and their temporal dimension
- Empowering and involving participants
- Interest in process and change
- Interest in self and representations of self
- Awareness of researcher as a narrator

Methodology

Iterative approach, sense-making is a continuous, cyclical enterprise

Participants and narrative interviews:

 Purposive sampling of 5 'sustainability leaders'

 Interviews fragmented and incomplete but valuable (Lawler, 2002)

 Reflexive, interactive, 'shared stories'

Ethics

 Story-telling allows participants to set the boundaries (Elliott, 2005)

 Potential for unexpected, sometimes painful and very private stories

 Sustainability is a difficult and emotional subject (Ngwana, 2009)

 Nature of narrative research makes concepts anonymity and confidentiality rather fluid

Analysis

 What' the story tells us and 'how' it is told (Smith & Sparkes, 2006)

 First-order and second-order narratives (Elliott, 2005)

 Hernadi's triad: explication (what does it say), explanation (why does it say it), and exploration (what do I think about it) (Czarniawska, 2004).

Emerging Stories and Themes

Sustainability continuum: entry points and 'directions of travel' (personal, professional) – parallels to Dunphy, Griffiths and Benn (2003)

    Values, personal transformation, identity

Carpe diem: seizing opportunities, pragmatic optimism

Ripple effects & connectivity: people, projects, ideas

On leadership: distributed, sense of personal responsibility, being the critical voice, pointing out the uncomfortable, walking the talk/authenticity – parallels to e.g. Parkin (2010), Ferdig (2007), Shaw (2010)

First off because I asked for a recycling bin and because we didn't have one in the office to recycle the paper, it seemed we had a lot of paper so I asked for a recycling bin. Had to find, it was difficult to find where to get one from, and I got one from facilities. And I think at the time each pathway needed to have a sustainability rep so I was approached as someone who was interested and proactive in sustainability. Would I be the rep? **Now we all have to have a role in addition to our teaching role so I thought, well it was something I was interested in. I didn't know anything about, anything at all** other than that it was good to recycle at home so I took on the role and then I had to find out about it in order to work out what to do. So **I started asking around in my profession** and looking at sustainability in health and then I realised it was about more than just recycling and **my knowledge just went outwards in all directions** about things. I was asked at intervals to report back to our pathways but also to our department so I had to get reports together not only about what I had done but what I knew so it was educational as well as a facilitator. And I started going to the meetings to link with the rest of the university. I started off as being the champion, because we had champions then so I was the champion and I met other champions.

[...]

Coming to my stage of life cos at the time… **I'm late fifties and I'm thinking what's something I can do that's going to be fulfilling for me**, but I haven't got the time to take on PhDs or something like that cos it's just too long. **This is something I can have an impact on that I believe in**… And **go out and meet people and get out of my little box.** So it's been good for that.

[...]

I've always thought it was important to recycle things. At home I've recycled things. I've always made a point going to the bottle bank and noticing conservation projects. But **it hadn't really joined it all up for me**. And the idea… I've worked in the community with patients. The fact that having sustainable communities was a new concept for me, rather than it just being a material thing that it was actually social. And **social sustainability**, which you know I'm finding increasingly interesting as a model of treatment and… human resources and those sorts of things. Yeah, it's a… well, it's infinite isn't it, could go in hundred other directions.

Participant 1. Professional → personal

Emerging stories/themes:
- Values/ethics
- Personal gratification
- Beyond environmental sustainability
- Ripple effects (people)

It would probably start with the personal because if I didn't have the motivation to do it, I wouldn't have necessarily integrated it into my professional life if my professional life wasn't in education. So yeah, **I think it comes from a long-standing sense that we have to look after our environment. I come originally from Northwest corner of Ireland, from Donegal, so I was lucky enough to grow up in a fantastically beautiful landscape, right next to the sea.** And I completely appreciate that the quality of the air and the light and the lack of pollution that I grew up with and I contrast that with… I now live and work in one of the probably most crowded areas in Europe. And as it were in contrast to one another, it heightens by strong sense of you know, the way in which we live now in these highly or densely populated areas putting such a strain on the environment. So it is a mix of both. **It begins with personal but intertwined with professional pretty quickly.**

Participants 2 and 5. Personal → professional

Emerging stories/themes:
- Autobiography, identity
- Increasing contextualisation of own experience to broader context → from first to second order narrative

Well I think it's sort of **autobiographical**. In much as I was brought up in inner city Philadelphia, in 60s and 70s which was time of huge change and a lot of racial, community tension. And actually, **I attended the first ever Earth Day in April 1970.** I was only 14 but it was a huge event, millions of people came to it. And it was probably the first organised environmental consciousness raising event that had ever happened as far as I know. So it happened in lots of big cities across America. It now happens worldwide, I think it's become corrupted. But **it was a cathartic moment for me; that number of people, all kinds of discussions and presentations and stuff.** So I was lucky growing up in Philadelphia. We have a really massive park system so despite growing up in the city **I had access to lot of wooded, lovely areas to walk**. So as a result of doing this Earth Day I got involved in leading a project where we were cleaning up this one area, not far from school that I went, so it had shopping trolleys in the stream and that kind of thing. So that was probably my first sort of conservation, environmental activity. But as a city as well, it in the throes of ending the industrial, steel industry which had been dominant for a century and there was lots of pollution going on. It was also the place where it wasn't far from the nuclear reactor disaster at Three Mile Island. […] **So all of that was sort of happening as I was growing up. So because I was involved in all kinds of student politics and because it was such a very turbulent time**, … A time in America when students were very involved in all kinds of activism. Environmentally we were beginning to look at things that were going on. There had been a couple of environmental disasters before Three Mile Island, there had been an oil spill in California… So these things were starting to happen. So I think **that's how I initially became aware of things that were going on and disquieted by it.**

I guess **the biggest challenge is the one that I've always faced in that I've got so much other stuff that I've got to do.** You know what it's like. **My job is not to work on sustainability, my job is to teach and to make sure that everything that I have to do, you know, administratively and everything on our programmes is done.** Last Saturday I spent a whole day trying to knock up a programme review from last year, which has missed the deadline already. And I think it's going to be chucked back at me because it doesn't have everything in it. So that kind of thing, you know, I'm sure everyone's the same with the workload, it's one of the main obstacles. But then again, **I find that I have to look within the brief that I have, what can I do, what can I fit in, what can I squeeze in here and there?** And so this year for example, I asked if I could do more of the Design and Technology teaching for primary school teachers specifically because when I went on the five day intensive forest school training I could see a very clear link between what happens in primary schools in Design and Technology and what could happen in a forest school context, because they use some of the same sorts of processes and it's also very much about the tools and materials. And so I came away from that five day thinking that one way of getting more of those experiences at primary school was actually, don't even bother calling it forest school, just teach your design and technology outdoors and use natural materials and so on. And so I've requested at the start of this year to teach more Design and Technology, because one of my colleagues has left anyway. This spring I'm going to have a couple of groups and I'm going to experiment with them and maybe if I've got some forest school tools that I get through the Futures Initiative, maybe I can trial them with this group of students. **And so it's very opportunistic, that's where it has to be I guess.**

Participant 3.

Emerging stories/themes
- Challenge: time
- Challenge: sustainability as extra, not core
- Carpe diem: seizing opportunities

So basically, with that first grant, **I had a few hours to help me** with embedding sustainability in the programme. One of the things I did was to develop a module which was called 'public relations, media and sustainability'. From that module basically it was, it started off as being focussed on quite a lot on the environment. Because **basically I got some briefs from places, from local charities about conservation**, so it's promoting awareness of conservation and getting students involved with that. But then after sort of **when Futures Initiative was set up, so there's several people working there, then I actually started working more closely with the sustainable development office** and in particular [Name]. And looked at maybe how we could students involved in the kinds of things he was doing. So what we basically did was come up with briefs for the students to work to which raised their awareness of corporate social responsibility at Canterbury Christ Church. And also linked in with the different aspects of sustainability that [Name] and his team were focusing on. So things like Fair Trade, recycling, carbon emissions, all those different kinds of areas. **Then what happened was, as a result of that, some of the students started volunteering and became part of the Student Green Office**. And so the next phase was that I asked Peter for some more money to actually do a little research project about the impact that the module was having on students' understanding of sustainability. So that's ongoing at the moment. So basically **we've done one study, asking students, a pre-module and post-module survey about their understanding of various aspects of sustainability** basically using the QAA guidelines on sustainability. And last year we found that the module had quite clearly made a difference. They were engaged and we're repeating it this year, **hoping to get an article out of it. So far we have done a workshop at a staff conference, a couple of local, departmental staff development workshops, and we're giving a paper in the international [unclear] conference** in January from that little project. So in terms of sustainability, in terms of professional development and… It's sort of been good because **it's ticked quite a few boxes** so it's, in that sense it's an example of sustainability.
[…]
The other thing that came out of it was that **I also got involved with another colleague who is doing this project with me now. And I'd never kind of worked in collaboration with another person like that before** so that was something else that came out of it I guess. I think it was a lot to do with the kind of connections and networks that came out of it as well because as a result of the sustainability issues I came across [Name] and it turned out that I wanted to do something on this, you know a kind of impact study. And just through the various conversations that we had it turned out that he's a statistician and that he could help me with the quantitative aspects of it that I just couldn't do so we started working together…

Participant 4.

Emerging stories/themes
- Support: time
- Ripple effects: projects & people
- Research matters!

[...] the fact that I'd actually got something published. Because I think **in the world of academe I think people take notice, say 'oh you got published, oh have you got a…'** And my colleagues hadn't realised that you could publish in sustainable development, realising that it was important and an academic subject, that it was a published journal. **That gave me the strength through, to hold it 'oh yes look, I'm the foremost person in my field, because I've been acknowledged in this'** and that felt really nice. **Gave me credo, gravitas, to be able to say 'yes I'm…'** I've heard somebody talking about me accidentally, saying 'oh I gather there's somebody who's an expert, who lives near here' and I said 'oh is there? I must meet them!' and I suddenly realised it was me! And that was kind of amusing but I sort of realised 'ooh that's…' you know, that was kind of funny but I thought 'oh, well I suppose I am'. **When it comes to, in this university, health and sustainable development I probably know more than anyone else. And I suppose if I think about in that phrase, even now I think 'oh I suppose that's quite a big deal'.** Once you come to say things like that.

Q: Seems obvious from what you said but I think, other people must think of you as a leader in this area as well, since you've been hearing such nice things?

I think there are some people who do. And I think my, the Dean does. My Dean does. The professor does. I think the people who lead the teams do. **I don't think my peers think that much at all.** I don't think that they, they might just say 'oh', I mean like people will give a hand out in the meetings and apologise to me: 'Oh I'm sorry [Name] we've printed it out' and I think 'I might'. But somehow I think that's **an acknowledgement from them that I'm the one who's going to tell them off.** If people say 'oh I'm sorry I drove up there to do that rather than I could've emailed it' or whatever. I think get seen as the person who is the police person in it rather than… which is a bit, say sad, but… I say 'I don't mind, you can use as much paper as you like, I'm just telling you what the impact is, I'm just highlighting it'. **I'm not here to tell you what to do.** I mean I'm hoping your behaviour will change, I'm hoping things will get better but… **I'm not an authority figure, I'm just here to shine a light.**

Participant 1. on leadership

Emerging stories/themes
- Research matters & expertise
- External acknowledgement
- Non-hierarchical leadership ('critical friend')

Well I think with sustainability it kind of goes back to George Marshall's acknowledgement that **there's a socially constructed silence around climate change and even in our faculty this is clear.** We had a meeting when I was in the School of [Name] last year [...] one of the first meetings with all the programme directors in that school. We were looking at, I don't even know what it was, it was the strategy for the school for the next year or something, it had all of these lists of things and the word "sustainability" was used quite a few times and there was a discussion. And **at the end of the discussion I felt I had to point out to everybody that at no point in that document had the word sustainability meant the same thing it means in the university strategic plan**, where it's about sustainability as we kind of understand it in Futures Initiative terms. The word sustainability in that document was simply about the question: are our programmes sustainable? And this meant economically or financially sustainable. Are we going to recruit enough students? So in every single reference, that's what it meant. And there was no reference in that document to School's strategy vis-à-vis sustainability as I understand it. So, actually I think there's a long way to go and also I wonder whether or not people really want to listen. It's an interesting issue. However, having said that, I know that university wide there are people who are fairly well focussed on making it a university thing.

Q: So what was the response when you pointed that out?

Oh, 'thank you very much I will make a note of that'. But **there was, you could fee a tension as well, you know 'why you're bringing that up?' No one said that. But... It's a surprise when you say something like that, 'hey guys, so what do we mean by sustainability?' Well we never would have questioned that.**

Q: So pointing out the uncomfortable?

Yeah, pointing out the uncomfortable. It's not a big thing but yeah... **maybe that's not a leadership thing but more the role of the rebel,** I don't know. So maybe leadership can be interpreted in different ways? Leadership doesn't necessarily mean you've got a designated leader up there, you're **taking a lead just by showing an example.**

Participant 3. on leadership

Emerging stories/themes
- Pointing out the uncomfortable
- Positive deviance ('rebel leader')
- Walking the talk

Q: Do you see yourself as a leader in sustainability?

It sounds a bit too high-flying. I'm, you know, I think… There's two ways to do leadership. You can view it as a sort of status, hierarchical, kind of 'I'm paid a lot, I'm responsible for a lot' kind way. Or you can see it as a sort of, this sounds completely lacking in humility, but you can see it in terms of a **moral leadership**. So I don't get paid a lot, I don't get extra money for clacking on about the things I, I'm probably getting paid less because I do, but **I feel a moral imperative to lead, on raising people's awareness of these issues. So… Because I'm disturbed, I want everybody to be disturbed.** So I guess that must be a kind of leadership?

Q: Do you think others see you in that…?

Yeah, I do. Yeah. They do… 'Oh she's a mad American that goes on…' But in fact that's quite convenient because, I don't know if you find this, because I'm not English by birth I can use that to my advantage. So they think 'oh it's just this mad American batting on about things' and they'll tolerate me because they think it's normal for my culture which in fact isn't true at all. But hell if they want to believe that, I'm quite happy to… **Sometimes you can actually, if you're used as being the lowest on the totem pole, to use that… Their expectations are so low of your behaviour that you can just play along with that and you can, you know, you can be an agitator** and…

Q: You can get away with…

You can get away with a lot more without having to comply with the done thing.

Participant 5. on leadership

Emerging stories/themes
- Personal responsibility & values
- Freedom from below
- Positive deviance

Concluding Thoughts

Challenge of analysing and presenting interweaving stories/themes

Necessity of weaving in my own

Subverting stories of sustainability, leadership, power, education, learning, professional identity → positive deviance

"Because I'm disturbed, I want everybody to be disturbed."

Contact: katja.Hallenberg@canterbury.ac.uk

References

Armstrong, M. (2009). *Armstrong's Handbook of Management and Leadership: A guide to managing for results,* 2nd ed. London: Kogan Page.

Blackmore, J. (2014). 'Wasting talent? Gender and the problematics of academic disenchantment and disengagement with leadership.' *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33(1): 86-99.

Czarniawska, B. (2004) *Narratives in social science research.* London: Sage.

Dunphy, D., Griffiths, A., & Benn, S. (2003). *Organizational Change for Corporate Sustainability.* London: Routledge.

Elliott, J. (2005). *Using narrative in social research: qualitative and quantitative approaches.* London, Sage.

Ferdig, M. (2007). 'Sustainability Leadership: Co-creating a Sustainable Future'. *Journal of Change Management,* 7(1): 25-35.

Gidley, J. (2000). 'Beyond the Market Model'. *The Australian Higher Education,* 12 July, 44-5. Cited in Duke, C. (2002). Managing the Learning University. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Handy, C. (1989). *The Age of Unreason.* London: Arrow Books.

HEA/QAA (2014) *Education for sustainable development: Guidance for UK higher education providers.* Available online at http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/Education-sustainable-development-Guidance-June-14.pdf

Juntrasook, A., Nairn K., Bond, C., & Spronken-Smith, R. (2013). 'Unpacking the narrative of non-positional leadership in academia: Hero and/or victim?' *Higher Education Research & Development,* 32(2): 201-213.

Knight, P.T. & Trowler, P.R. (2001). *Departmental Leadership in Higher Education.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

References

Lawler, S. (2002). 'Narratives in Social Research' in May, T. (Ed) *Qualitative Research in Action*. London, Sage:

Leuenberger, D.Z. & Wakin, M. (2007). 'Sustainable Development in Public Administration Planning: An Exploration of Social Justice, Equity, and Citizen Inclusion.' *Administrative Theory & Praxis,* 29(3): 394-411.

Newman-Storen, R. (2014). 'Leadership in Sustainability: Creating an Interface between Creativity and Leadership Theory in Dealing with "Wicked Problems". *Sustainability*, 6: 5955-5967.

Ngwana, T. (2009). 'Learning and Teaching for Sustainable Development in Higher Education: Examining Dissonance and Instructional Strategy'. In Bell, L., Stevenson, H., & Neary, M. (Eds.) *The Future of Higher Education: Policy, Pedagogy and the Student Experience.* London: Continuum, 42-56.

Parkin, S. (2010). *The Positive Deviant: Sustainability Leadership in a Perverse World.* Abingdon: Earthscan.

Shaw, J. (2010). 'Papering the Cracks with Discourse: The Narrative Identity of the Authentic Leader'. *Leadership*, 6(1): 89–108.

Simkins, T. (2005). Leadership in education: 'What works' or 'what makes sense'? *Educational Management, Administration & Leadership*, 33(1), 9–26.

Smith, B. & Sparkes, A.C. (2006). Narrative inquiry in psychology: Exploring the tensions within. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(3), 169–192.

Sipos, Y., Battisti, B., & Grimm, K. (2008). 'Achieving transformative sustainability learning: engaging heads, hands and hearts.' *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 9(1): 68-86.