

Education in the North



UNIVERSITY
OF ABERDEEN

BOOK REVIEW

Sustainability for Whom? The Politics of Imagining Environmental Change in Education

Hanna Sjögren

Linköping, Sweden: Linköping University Electronic Press (2017) pp168, paperback

ISBN: 978-9-176-85782-3

Cathy Francis, catherine.francis1@abdn.ac.uk

University of Aberdeen, Scotland

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26203/98dc-ep72>

Copyright: © 2019 Francis

To cite this book review: Francis, C., (2019). Sustainability for Whom? The Politics of Imagining Environmental Change in Education. *Education in the North* **26**(1) pp. 95-96.



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

BOOK REVIEW

Sustainability for Whom? The Politics of Imagining Environmental Change in Education

Author: Hanna Sjögren

Linköping, Sweden: Linköping University Electronic Press (2017) pp168, paperback
ISBN: 978-9-176-85782-3

Cathy Francis, catherine.francis1@abdn.ac.uk
University of Aberdeen, Scotland

With the title; ‘Sustainability for whom?’, this paperback book of a modest 168 pages, immediately captured my interest as it was passed to me some weeks ago. What I found less attractive however was the subtitle ‘The Politics of Imagining Environmental Change in Education’. Nevertheless, imbued with; a degree of newly appointed lecturer enthusiasm; a dash of seasoned PhD student admission that it *would be good for my writing* and a succinct, persuasive dialogue with a colleague, I opened the book, began to read, and now I write.

To be honest, I found some of the chapters somewhat challenging whereas others appeared almost common sense. I also have to admit to reading the book twice over (and in some places three times) to fully understand some of Sjögren’s arguments and appreciate how her research perspective (including theoretical language and terms) articulated with mine. However, I enjoyed the rhythm of switching in and out of my comfort zone and the second sitting definitely provided depth and breadth I had not recognised previously.

Sjögren is concerned that although sustainability education is perceived to be a promising panacea for the future flourishing of life on Earth, essential questions have yet to be asked to elucidate just how sustainability is imagined and formed. Furthermore, she is interested in what it makes possible or involves. These questions are explored with Swedish teacher ‘instructors’ of all ranks and disciplines using material (participant interview transcripts) generated from her PhD focus groups to illustrate the argument to re-politicise sustainability in education. She posits that sustainability education will only achieve a fostering of human response to environmental change through a conscious re-politicisation of it.

Sjögren states her interdisciplinary study ‘uses theories and concepts from cultural studies, feminist theory, political theory and philosophy of education’. I suggest from personal experience, that one may need only have an interest in any one of these areas for it to be possible to gain from reading this book.

I found the study to be unashamedly Eurocentric, but I found this acceptable as it was clearly conceived in direct response to European Union organizational policy and aspiration. Whilst not negating the importance of a wide consideration of the perspective of others, I count myself as one of those hopeful to continue to share this perspective in the future. In raising this

observation, ironically and probably inadvertently, Sjögren's discussion of the significance of *Otherness* in sustainability education is exemplified in this publication itself.

The standout chapter of the book for me, was chapter six; *The possibility of human-nonhuman animal encounters in sustainability education*. It was interesting not only for its content but also for surfacing and directly demonstrating methodological and ethical dimensions of research. In this chapter, Sjögren briefly wrestles with her desire to include a discussion on human-non human relations or not, without it necessarily being well referred to within her transcript data. She then sets the word-processor in action and writes a well-constructed critique of the possibilities lost when human-nonhuman encounters remain unchallenged in the classroom and therefore remain faceless. I suggest this act of defiance demonstrates a direct politicisation of sustainable development education and I applaud her for it. I think perhaps it was at this point I began to understand the integration and power of politics in sustainability teaching and therefore understand Sjögren's call to re-politicise sustainability education. The absolute and visceral role of ethics within sustainability education was demonstrated in this chapter as she analysed the discussions held on meat production related animal welfare issues with focus groups. Importantly she emphasises the critical nature of teachers' intentional or inadvertent attempts to prompt response-ability in students whilst simultaneously comments on a concomitant responsibility of the teacher to influence learners.

In summary, I felt an immediate camaraderie with Sjögren who has produced this book as a direct fruiting of her PhD study. With almost four pages of acknowledgements she may be criticised as either uber-modest or cynically politicised but, I felt with the long list of appreciations she clearly and altruistically demonstrated her positioning within and amongst fellow learners. A final note...if you enjoy reading Haraway you'll probably enjoy reading this!