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**Book Review**

## Book review: *Sustainable and Democratic Education: Opening spaces for complexity and the future*, by Sarah Chave

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## Book review: *Sustainable and Democratic Education: Opening spaces for complexity and the future*, by Sarah Chave

New York: Routledge, 2021, 210 pp., ISBNs: 978-0-367-15102-7 (hbk); 978-0-429-05502-7 (ebk)

At a time when sustainable and democratic education is gaining increased attention, Sarah Chave's book, *Sustainable and Democratic Education: Opening spaces for complexity and the future*, invites readers to rethink the dominance of Western concepts and worldviews in the educational area. The book aims 'to contribute both to becoming aware of one's entrenched worldviews and to finding new ways to be and be together' in educational settings (2). With this aim in mind, Chave touches on ideas offered by many ancient and modern thinkers, such as Plato, Braidotti, Biesta, Buber, Gilligan, Kant, Macmurray, Parmenides and Rancière, reflecting on how these contributions impact our understanding of sustainable and democratic education. Primarily, however, the author builds her arguments from views offered by Hannah Arendt. Thus, the book is organised in nine chapters: the first three are devoted to philosophical investigations on subjectivity and sustainability; these are followed by five chapters (Chapter 4 to Chapter

8) building on Arendt's philosophical concepts and arguments; finally, the last chapter (Chapter 9) offers a rounding conclusion.

In the introductory chapter, Chave considers the issue of subjectivity, and discusses 'new ways to be a subject who acts and takes responsibility' in a 'constantly changing and transforming world' (12). Building on work by Biesta (2010, 2011, 2013) on the role of education, Chave draws attention to the need for a process of 'subjectification' (65) that allows the exploration of different and unforeseen possibilities of being a subject in educational settings. She argues that sustainability cannot be taught as a topic simply within regular subjects such as mathematics, geography and physics, as sustainability is more than technical, methodological or theoretical information; it is an existential process built by different and unique subjects. Therefore, this chapter invites readers to reconceptualise sustainability as a dynamic and vivid existential process allowing for other ways of being and subjectivity.

In Chapter 2, Chave unpacks the roots of Western thought that undermine sustainable educational environments. This search for historical justification for educational problems is one of the original aspects of this book. From this starting point, the author offers a critical perspective on ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato (2007), who places an emphasis on a particular and absolute truth. Chave argues that the perspectives of philosophers such as Plato lead people to perceive the world as a place consisting of stable and unchangeable parts. Yet, according to Chave, the world is not a static place, it is an arena of change and transformation. Thus, effective sustainable education must be centred through understanding the fluidity of the world and the pluriverse of ideas which it holds.

In Chapter 3, Chave extends her investigations to reflect on the role of the European Enlightenment in shaping approaches to education. She examines the philosophical roots and meanings of concepts such as separation, autonomy and rationality, which are at the centre of Western philosophy. In doing so, she interrogates the works of Kant, Levinas, Buber, Macmurray and Gilligan. She claims that concepts explored during this period have come to 'act as barriers ... for more sustainable and democratic education and new futures' (2). Chave reflects on Kant's (2007) ideas about rationality and autonomy, criticising them in the context of subjectivity. Similarly, she explores Buber's (1970) concepts of the I-Thou relationship and offers a critical analysis of materialistic I-It relationships. Within this context of curating effective sustainable and democratic educational settings, she argues that there is a need to establish relationships based on I-Thou dialogue to foster understandings of coexistence. Building on this, Chave (51–5) looks to the work of Gilligan (1982) and extends the scholar's ideas of care with the concept of 'future-tended-care', which highlights how actions in the present time are vital for the next generations.

Following the review of philosophical literature in the first three chapters, Chave turns her focus to the ideas of Arendt (1958) in the ensuing five chapters, analysing them within the context of democratic education. These chapters mainly aim to explore epistemological and ontological meanings of being human.

Thus, Chapter 4 centres on the analysis of the issue of 'others unlike us' (67). Chave starts with a criticism of human consciousness, which is one of the key concepts at the heart of Western thought. Chave's criticism is based on the argument that Western conceptualisation of human consciousness excludes subjectivities of 'others unlike us', such as plants and animals. According to Chave, the self and consciousness of a human being are shaped by interaction with the environment. In other words, to become a conscious self and subject, there is a need for connections with other species, people and subjectivities living in the world. Sustainable and democratic educational settings can only be built by these kinds of relational settings, allowing for a variety of different voices and subjectivities.

Chave continues to focus on Arendt's concepts through the succeeding chapters. In Chapter 5, the author predominantly analyses the term 'visiting', which 'values the space and distance between "Self" and "Other"' (86). This chapter emphasises the importance of impartial and unbiased encounters in sustainable and democratic educational settings. Chave (86–90) considers the question of how actors in educational settings could manage to build existential 'visiting' atmospheres supporting neutral, unprejudiced and interpersonal encounters, to ensure all voices are honoured. In Chapter 6, Chave builds on Arendt's (1958: 237) concepts of 'forgiveness' and 'mutual promising', to argue that sustainable and democratic education has the potential to create an environment full of endless beginnings. These terms are used here as a driving force that strengthens the hope of building sustainable and democratic educational environments. Subsequently, in Chapter 7, Chave argues that one of the major barriers to new ways of being is that, as noted by Rancière (1991), existing education systems make 'education a process of stultification' (96). Chapter 8 revisits the concept of 'others unlike us' seen in Chapter 4, and

the relationship between human beings and the wider natural world. Chave here emphasises that there are many valuable creatures in the ecosystem, and that we human beings represent only one of these species. Thus, the author invites us to reflect on how viewing our own subjectivity as the correct one leads us to deny the subjectivity of 'others unlike us'.

In the concluding chapter, Chave advocates for sustainable and democratic educational atmospheres that go beyond dominant Western narratives. Throughout the book, she presents case studies from experiences in her own professional life as a teacher. These examples provide a basis for her theoretical arguments on democratic and sustainable education. At the same time, they enable us to gain a deeper understanding of how to implement these theoretical considerations in real life.

In all these aspects, the book not only provides theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature, but also contributes to educational practice. The book provides points of support for educators who seek to work collectively with their students to reflect on subjective perspectives within sustainable and democratic education. In doing so, it encourages students to be active learners taking responsibility for harnessing reflexive learning and creating an inclusive educational setting. More broadly, it contributes to wider debates on subjectivity within 'ecology, complexity theory, future studies and politics' (Birch, 2022: 138).

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