An Afterword

Stephen Sterling and Bob Jickling

Abstract In this Afterword, the editors reflect on some of the main themes emerging from the collected chapters. They note that the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, *Education for People and Planet*, was launched just as the first draft of this book was completed. This report is welcomed as it couples the status of education with planetary prospects. Yet, it also serves to underscore the very purpose of this book by failing to recognize the nature and depth of change required in educational practice to meet the aspirations of the report's subtitle, "creating sustainable futures for all." Rather, as reflected by the different authors in this book, the editors suggest that there needs to be a disruption of dominant assumptions in educational thinking and purpose so that a cultural shift towards practice that is life-affirming, relational, and truly transformational can take root. This can be realized at any level of engagement through the role of "rebel teacher" and through "being differently" in the world.

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At about the time that we submitted the manuscript for this book, UNESCO published its Global Education Monitoring Report summary titled, *Education for People and Planet: Creating Sustainable Futures for All*. As a high-level and influential document for policymakers, it is significant that it links education directly to a sustainability agenda. But some of its key assertions bear scrutiny in relation to the theme of remaking education, as represented in this book. Consider, for example, the words of Irina Bokova, the Director General of UNESCO in the Foreword to the report:

> we must fundamentally change the way we think about education and its role in human well-being and global development. Now, more than ever, education has a responsibility to foster the right type of skills, attitudes and behavior that will lead to sustainable and inclusive growth. (UNESCO, 2016, p. 5)

While laudable, the idea of fundamentally changing the way we think about education is thwarted by her following sentence. Zygmunt Bauman (see González-Gaudiano and Gutiérrez-Pérez) takes us to the heart of this problem when he says:

> A habitual answer given to the wrong kind of behaviour, to conduct unsuitable for an accepted purpose or leading to undesirable outcomes, is education or re-education: instilling in the learners new kinds of motives, developing different propensities and training them in deploying new skills. (2005, p. 12)

Bauman then challenges the efficacy of this strategy and goes on to observe:

> The hopes of using education as a jack potent enough to unsettle and ultimately to dislodge the pressures of "social facts" seem to be as immortal as they are vulnerable (p. 12)

Indeed. This simple aim of instilling motives, developing propensities, and deploying new skills has never taken educators deeply into important educational questions.

Bokova's prescription for education underscores just how difficult making fundamental change in education will be. By insisting that education's aim is still framed in the language of "growth" also strikes us as self-defeating. As Sterling observes in this book, UNESCO has been suggesting the need for a "new vision" of education for some time yet what is often missing is a sufficient critique of the dominant cultural worldview which would then help clarify the grounding of necessary alternatives and possibilities (see also González-Gaudiano and Gutiérrez-Pérez; Sauvé). In practical terms, Bauman's key question about educators takes us to a critical point. He asks, "Will they themselves be able to avoid being enlisted in the service of the self-same pressures they are meant to defy?" (2005, p. 12).

This brief critique serves to bring the aims of this book into focus. All authors are, in their own ways, seeking to fundamentally disrupt dominant visions of education and its role in human well-being and global development, and to propose grounds for necessary change appropriate to the global challenges we now face. As the Earth is rapidly shifting from the Holocene to something being called the Anthropocene, there is a collective urgency amongst us to "educate a generation of students who grow dangerous to the status quo" (Orr, in preface to this volume).

Remaking Education and the Rebel Teacher

Talk of quality education, transformative learning, and education as a common good is ubiquitous in international discourse. Yet, there is seldom any in-depth guidance about what is meant by these terms, or how they might be realised. Indeed, transformation is harder than it may seem, often painful, and ultimately visible only in hindsight (Lotz-Sisitka; Jickling). Frequently, responses to anthropogenic environmental degradation have taken the form of some sort of "bolt-on addition to a super-ordinate pre-existing educational structure whose basic motivations were elaborated without any reference to ideas of sustainability" (Bonnett). In this kind of manifestation environmental, sustainability, and sustainable development education can only expect to have limited impact. Seen another way, however, these educations can also offer openings—invitations to look deeply into what is fundamentally wrong with education (Jickling). Or as Sterling says, "environmental and sustainability education have never been, and cannot be, ends in themselves, contained and complete. Rather, they imply and act as

outriders or a vanguard for a necessary deeper shift in educational culture." The task at hand is, in part, to revision what education can be, but more emphatically, it is to begin the concrete task of remaking education and the educational culture in which it sits. This work is to be done by "real people who are immersed in real places" (Blenkinsop and Morse).

These real people working in real places will inevitably be "rebel teachers." In the face of ever-present pressures to conform to the status quo—to an increasingly standardised, narrowly conceived, and internationally imposed framing of education—their task will be rebellious. When faced with seemingly overwhelming forces, the only choice will be for everyone to find, in their own way, something to do in response to the challenges. Rebel teachers will need to be ever-vigilant and prepared to name, resist, and denounce those things that they cannot accept and to propose and enact those visions for education that they can say yes to (Blenkinsop and Morse; Sauvé). This book exists to help readers find openings for themselves, and to encourage them to take part in the task of remaking education.

It is important to acknowledge that the authors in this book are, themselves, real people working in real places—and in their own ways they are rebel teachers. It would be incorrect to say that they are armchair scholars. They are not simply writing about abstractions, rather they are writing from decades of concrete experiences as educators and researchers working in real social settings. In important ways their writing reflects their own experiments in remaking education.

On Being in the World

We invite you to consider an additional theme that runs throughout the book—that is, being in the world. It is not enough for any of these authors to imagine bringing about change by simply thinking about the world differently, it is critical for people to be in the world differently, too. A number of years ago, Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston (1999) provided an engaging oeuvre into this kind of thinking. They maintained that how we carry ourselves in the world—that is the etiquette we travel with—will determine what we come to know about the world. They called this knowing "ethics-based epistemology." In other words, our relationship with the world—or our way of being in the world—comes first and shapes

what follows. This kind of thinking, which carries the promise of agency and inspiration, resonates deeply throughout the book.

Some authors discuss being and becoming in the world in relation to small-scale teaching and research experiments. For Lotz-Sisitka, this shifts the focus of education from enculturation towards aspiration and describes the outcomes as a kind of learning activism. Sauvé suggests that resistance can become "an act of creation, able to produce itself through other values." And, like Lotz-Sisitka, González-Gaudiano and Gutiérrez-Pérez focus on recovery of the "commons" and "commoning" activities. And they advocate carrying an attitude of "tragic optimism" into the world. By this they mean holding together an acute awareness of the difficulties of emancipation and resistance at the same time as an unshakable confidence in the human capacity to overcome seemingly insurmountable difficulties.

Other authors discuss being in the world as necessarily relational. For Bonnett, "if we are attentive, our being becomes infused with . . . interplay of anticipations. Without it, we enter ontological freefall: our lives untouched and unsustained by a world that we pass through but do not inhabit." For him, authentic education needs to be grounded in authentic human being, fully and bodily engaged with nature; it gives primacy to the ontological over the epistemological.

Interestingly, Le Grange acknowledges, like many other authors in this collection, that interpolating sustainability into mainstream discourse has done little to arrest deepening poverty or the erosion of the world's biophysical base. In response, he first gives readers options to rethink sustainability, but then, intriguingly, speculates about ways of transcending this term entirely. Like Bonnett, he sees this transcendence as relational and ontological. His ontology of immanence can arise when human thought is bent by the earth/cosmos and the individual self dissolves into relationship with the world. Here the subjective being in the world becomes ecological and the imperative to care arises within us as part of our ecological being in the world.

There are many possible ways of framing discussion about themes in this book. We have presented just a few. We hope the organisation of chapters will help readers find those most immediately interesting, but also those themes that emerge as new and challenging. It is, however, a flawed process. Each chapter reflects multiple themes that weave in and out other chapters. The book is a tapestry of ideas that defies simplified organisation. So, in the spirit of the book's intent as a heuristic—or agent of discovery—we invite readers to trace their own interests and priorities through the

book, and to find groupings of papers and themes that are imaginatively generative when placed in close proximity.

And Now, *Forewearde*

Whilst we were putting this book together, a kind of running joke occurred. This concerned the spelling of the guest piece that fronts the volume, where "Foreword" tended to revert to "Forward" on a number of occasions. But it makes a good "after-word" to round off this volume. Foreword comes from the Old English *forewearde* meaning toward the front, in front, toward the future. It resonates with the work and ground presented in this book, and importantly, pertains to what might come next.

"Forward" is a versatile word, having several forms. So, how do we forward this work (verb)? How do we look forward towards the future (adverb)? How do we ensure our educational thinking is sufficiently forward thinking (adjective)? And, will you be a forward (noun—as in a team sport) and a leader?

But this is not a call to rush on blindly, driven by the urgencies of global and planetary issues. Rather, it is first an invitation to stop, and consider what it is in our practice that lays the foundations for a better world for all. And go to forward with that, as part of the loose but growing global collective that believes such a world is possible.

References

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Stephen Sterling is Professor of Sustainability Education, Centre for Sustainable Futures (CSF) at the University of Plymouth, UK. His research interests lie in the interrelationships between ecological thinking, systemic change, and learning at individual and institutional scales to help meet the challenge of accelerating the educational response to the sustainability agenda. He has argued for some years that the global crises of sustainability require a matching response from the

educational community, together with a shift of culture towards educational policy and practice that is holistic, humanistic, and ecological. A former Senior Advisor to the UK Higher Education Academy on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and current National Teaching Fellow (NTF), he has worked in environmental and sustainability education in the academic and NGO fields nationally and internationally for over three decades. He was a member of the UNESCO International Reference Group for the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014), and he is currently co-chair of the International Jury for the UNESCO-Japan Prize on ESD. Widely published, his first book (co-edited with John Huckle) was *Education for Sustainability* (Earthscan, 1996), and this was followed by the influential Schumacher Briefing *Sustainable Education—Revisioning Learning and Change* (Green Books 2001). He also co-founded the first masters course in the UK on sustainability education (at London South Bank University), and led the WWF-UK project on systems thinking *Linking Thinking —new perspectives on thinking and learning for sustainability.*

His work at Plymouth involves developing strategies to support whole institutional change towards sustainability. Other books include (with David Selby and Paula Jones, Earthscan 2010) *Sustainability Education: Perspectives and Practice across Higher Education* and (with Larch Maxey and Heather Luna) *The Sustainable University—Process and Prospects,* published by Routledge in 2013.

Bob Jickling has been an active practitioner, teaching courses in environmental philosophy; environmental, experiential, and outdoor education; and philosophy of education. He worked as Professor of Education at Lakehead University after many years of teaching at Yukon College. He continues his work as Professor Emeritus at Lakehead University. His research interests have long included critiques of environmental education and education for sustainable development while advancing formulations for opening the process of remaking education. Jickling was the founding editor of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* in 1996, and together with Lucie Sauvé, he co-chaired the 5th World Environmental Education Congress in Montreal, in 2009. He has also received the North American Association of Environmental Education's Awards for Outstanding Contributions to: Research (2009) and Global Environmental Education (2001). In 2012, he received the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in recognition of contributions to Canada. As a long-time wilderness traveller, much of his inspiration is derived from the landscape of his home in Canada's Yukon.