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Re-Wilding the academics



Picture from AoS Worksop

In September of this year I attended the Teacher Education for Equity Sustainability Network (TEESNet) conference at Liverpool Hope University as well as organising and participating in The Art of Sustainability (AoS) workshop held at the Wye Valley Sculpture Garden, Tintern Wales.

Both events concerned themselves with Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) and how to bring the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) into mainstream education.

At TEESNet listening to the attendees, three clear themes stood out for me:

1. Teachers are at full and often overfull capacity dominated largely by numeracy and literacy at the expense of other subjects.
2. The SDG's are often seen as adding to this workload by requiring additional research that is not necessary by the curriculum.
3. Teachers must work with the curriculum as it stands.

At both events Dr Ron Johnston was sharing his work on UNESCO's MGIEP Textbook for Sustainable Development A Guide to Embedding. The guide offers the solution of 'embedding' sustainability issues into textbook structures "incorporating ESD as an integral element of curricula and other aspects of formal education, not as an 'add-on'".

It proposes that at present "Textbooks present a largely untapped opportunity to integrate peace, global citizenship and sustainable development into formal education"

Assuming the curriculum is not about to incorporate the SDG's any time soon, the guide proposes embedding SDG's into the subject specific material, thereby adding no further burden to teachers or requiring a change to the curriculum.

Given the points above, this seems a sensible approach.

However, in my presentation in the AoS workshop I asked whether there wasn't a missing dimension.

That it was not only a case of extending but also deepening.

In only extending we risk teaching the subjects as abstracts removed from nature and the deep connection so important to engendering a caring citizenship.

And this is where experiential based learning plays such an important role in that it makes the abstract real by asking the learner what they feel.

But experiential based learning is marginalised due to the demands above and the difficulty in quantifying thereby justifying the money.

But without a deep connection to the outcomes are we not in danger of repeating the same mistakes that sustainability is trying to amend?

If well being is the deliverable of the SDG's then should we not dwell for a while upon the Wellness of Being? And is this not something we experience?

The AoS workshop incorporated experiential based activities from myself and Forest School, trainer Jackie Roby of Go Wild Ltd.

Feedback was everyone found the workshop relevant and they'd thoroughly enjoyed themselves; I particularly liked one participant realising how very bookish, he'd become and another simply ending with: I needed this.

Steven England

Founder and trainer: The Art of Sustainability.

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