Book Review

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Education as the Practice of Eco-Social-Cultural Change, part of the Palgrave Studies in Educational Futures series, is a thought-provoking book written by Mark Fettes and Sean Blenkinsop. This insightful work, consisting of four captivating chapters, delves into the urgent need for transformative education in the face of global ecological, social, and cultural challenges. The authors explore the interconnectedness of the three key signifiers of the book series title, i.e. the Anthropocene, ecology, and aesthetic imaginaries, emphasizing the role of education in addressing these pressing issues. Through a combination of theoretical analysis, practical examples, and innovative perspectives, Fettes and Blenkinsop provide a compelling argument for reimagining education as a catalyst for eco-social-cultural change.

The first chapter, titled 'Transforming Education for Eco-Social-Cultural Change,' explores the need for radical shifts in education systems to address the ecological crisis and bring about sustainable cultural change. The authors argue that modern education, including formal schooling, plays a significant role in perpetuating the current predicament by fostering values and behaviors that are disconnected from nature and contribute to environmental degradation. Thus, the authors advocate for a broad understanding of education that extends beyond formal schooling. They critique the prevailing school systems, which are described as promoting a kind of cultural 'stupidification' resulting from humanity's disconnection from the natural world. As a result, they emphasize the importance of reimagining education beyond traditional boundaries and propose a broad understanding of educational activities. The chapter discusses the implications of the 'lock-in' effect in schools, where deeply ingrained assumptions and habits hinder transformative change.

It also highlights the disproportionate investment in education and the lack of critical questioning regarding the purpose and effectiveness of educational systems. The authors introduce the concepts of transformation, emergence, and resurgence as potential approaches for systemic change in education. They suggest that incremental adaptations are insufficient and advocate for fundamental shifts that challenge existing assumptions and embrace new possibilities. Overall, the opening chapter calls for a reevaluation of education as a catalyst for eco-social-cultural change and provides a starting point for exploring alternative frameworks and approaches.

Chapter two, titled 'Designing Education for Eco-Social-Cultural Change,' explores the concept of living within the Earth's carrying capacity and its implications for education. The authors argue against the core tenets of the Capitalocene — the socio-economic-political landscape sustaining the current educational regime, emphasizing the importance of refuting and undermining its norms. They propose three complementary perspectives: the wild, the sacred, and the just, as organizing concepts for ecological, social, and cultural change. The concept of the wild encompasses the entire life of the Earth, emphasizing dynamic, reciprocal self-renewal and challenging the binary distinction between humans and the more-than-human. The authors highlight the need for a civilization that resembles the forest, where patterns emerge from the actions and interactions of free wild beings. Additionally, they discuss the notion of sacredness, emphasizing the self-maintenance and self-renewal of land and the wider cosmos as a sacred experience for cultures in close contact with the wild. Overall, the authors argue for a shift in perceptions, values, and actions to ensure that human existence is responsive to and shaped by the Earth and its beings.

The third chapter, titled 'Reframing Education for Eco-Social-Cultural Change,' explores the concept of transformative design in education as a means to address the challenges posed by the Capitalocene, with a particular focus on overcoming the Society/Nature divide. The chapter emphasizes the need for macro-conversations and philosophical considerations to accompany educational practices aimed at fostering meaningful change. It highlights the importance of recognizing and questioning the implicit metaphysical assumptions and cultural habits that underlie educational work, as well as the potential resistance to radical changes. The chapter then introduces five categories for inquiry: epistemology, ontology, axiology, cosmology, and psychology, which encompass questions about knowledge, being, value, foundational stories, and human development. The authors acknowledge the limitations of their framework, which is framed through a Western philosophical lens, and encourage a humble and open approach to the discussion. Overall, the chapter provides a thought-provoking exploration of the theoretical foundations and transformative potential of education in the context of eco-social-cultural change, inviting readers to critically examine and challenge existing assumptions and practices in pursuit of a more just and ecologically sustainable future.

The closing chapter, titled 'The 4Cs: Practicing Education for Eco-Social-Cultural Change,' explores the need for transformative changes in education in response to the ecological crisis. The chapter emphasizes the importance of moving away from the tools, structures, and assumptions of the previous paradigm and offers four distinct educator stances or educational ethos for fostering eco-social-cultural change. The chapter discusses the concepts of competencies, capacities, and capabilities in relation to teaching practice. It critiques the reductionist nature of competencies and advocates for a broader understanding of capacities that encompasses individual and collective agency. Furthermore, it introduces the capabilities approach as a way of thinking about social development, justice, and freedom, highlighting its potential for promoting cultural

and communal well-being. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the significance of capabilities in the context of education for eco-social-cultural change, linking it to broader efforts toward justice, freedom, development, and resilience. Overall, this chapter provides valuable insights and perspectives on the necessary shifts in education to address the ecological crisis and promote a more just and sustainable world.

Now, to give a brief rundown, the book presents a highly collaborative and intuitive approach to research on educational principles for social innovation, drawing on a diverse range of perspectives including educational and community projects, social change organizations, and Indigenous innovators. This approach allowed for the emergence of surprising and insightful ideas. However, as the authors also note, this organic process made it challenging to organize the final report coherently. While the book provides a "tentative and sometimes sketchy map" of education as a practice of eco-social-cultural change, the authors acknowledge gaps and limitations, recognizing that the educational transformation required by the ecological crisis is far broader in scope than what is covered here. Despite this, the book will be undoubtedly generative in inspiring further work in this critical area, as education remains largely absent from mainstream discourses on large-scale social change. Thus, it is no surprising to claim that the book pushes readers to rethink the very foundations of modern education systems. The emphasis on embracing the "wild," the "sacred," and the "just" as organizing principles offers a refreshing alternative vision grounded in reciprocal relationships with the more-than-human world. While the scope of the changes advocated may seem daunting, it is maintained that the authors provide a valuable starting point for reimagining education as a catalyst for the systemic transformations needed to foster a more equitable and sustainable future.

Another point worth mentioning is that while there are other books that explore the role of education in driving social and environmental change, such as Douglas Bourn (2022)'s *Education for Social Change* and Seehwa Cho (2012)'s *Critical Pedagogy and Social Change*, this book offers a distinctive and innovative perspective. Unlike works that focus more narrowly on social justice or global learning, I maintain that this book takes a holistic view of the interconnected ecological, social, and cultural crises facing the world and it argues compellingly for a radical rethinking of education systems, moving beyond incremental reforms to challenge the fundamental assumptions underlying modern schooling. Therefore, *Education as the Practice of Eco-Social-Cultural Change* is not only relevant to specific subject specialists, but also holds great value for policy makers, religious education leaders, curriculum theorists, and anyone concerned with the role of education in addressing the intertwined challenges of our time.

In conclusion, as it has been explored throughout the review, the book charts a path for transformative change that goes beyond typical approaches to sustainability or environmental education. Thus, it is not an exaggeration if it is said that the book not only offers valuable insights into the potential pathways for systemic change and encourages readers to critically engage with the role of education in promoting sustainable and culturally meaningful transformations, but it stands out for its comprehensive, philosophically-grounded analysis and its bold vision for reimagining education as a driving force for eco-social-cultural transformation.

References

Bourn, D. (2022). Education for social change: perspectives on global learning. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

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