

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Teaching Sustainability

*edited by Kirsten Allen Bartels and Kelly A. Parker
(Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2012, 262 pages)*

Reading an edited book is akin to opening a carton of Neapolitan ice cream; there are several blocks of distinct ice cream flavours with the only common factor being they are all ice cream. So when you evaluate the Neapolitan ice cream, do you comment on the entire block of ice cream or dissect it into its individual parts and comment individually on the look, texture, and taste of the chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry flavours? Or do you do both? The book *Teaching Sustainability* (2012) edited by Kirsten Allen Bartels and Kelly A. Parker is Neapolitan ice cream. Four distinct parts on the topic of teaching sustainability sit between the bookends of its front and back covers: “Sustainability as a Core Value in Education,” “Teaching Sustainability in the Academic Disciplines,” “Education as a Sustainable Practice,” and “Leadership and Reform Strategies for Long-Term Institutional Change.”

Parker’s introduction to the text does an admirable job of positioning the topic of sustainability beyond environmental subsistence, while providing convincing arguments for elevating sustainability in higher education to encompass economic and social aspects. The book’s introduction prepares readers for its structure and suggests that each section hangs together and is tightly focused on the section theme. Yet Parker implies that the book’s chapters can be read in any order. These divergent points of view leave readers wondering, if each chapter is true to its section theme, how can they be read in any order? The reality is that each chapter is a self-contained unit unto itself. And, yes, while the chapters can be read in any order, there are some chapters that, if grouped together, give a more robust picture of teaching diversity. For instance, “Who Will Teach the Teachers?” by Patrick Howard and “Teaching Sustainability Leadership,” by Courtney Quinn and Gina Matkin, when read sequentially, allow one to grasp both the why and the how of teaching sustainability.

There are some must-read chapters, such as Douglas Klahr’s “Sustainability for Everyone.” In 21 pages, Klahr lays the groundwork that allows any instructor to understand sustainability and how to apply it in his or her discipline. Klahr is clear in his prognosticating: Sustainability is the “overarching ethos that will govern the lives of this and future generations of students. We—and our students—have no choice ...” (p. 21). While Klahr’s chapter meanders into a description of the resources he used to structure his first interdisciplinary course that included sustainability, tucked among the lines are gems of knowledge on understanding sustainability.

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In the first section, Catherine O'Brien's "Sustainable Happiness and Education" is another must-read chapter because it goes beyond positioning sustainability in a universally applicable context and provides a tool—the baseline chart. Instructors can use the baseline chart to introduce sustainability to any audience in a meaningful and practical way. On the other hand, in the second section, George E. Brooks' "Writing Banana Republics and Guano Bonanzas" makes no bones about the fact that this chapter is his soapbox to move forward his agenda. Brooks claims that teaching sustainability is not rocket science, and every instructor must find ways to introduce sustainability into his or her teaching.

The jewel of this book, in my opinion, is "Who Will Teach the Teachers?" by Patrick Howard. This chapter clearly outlines why teachers need to teach sustainability and how that responsibility is enacted. Conversely, one of the downfalls of the book is that in a number of instances contributing authors use their chapter to profile their specific programs. But, if Klahr's look into his crystal ball is correct and that sustainability will govern the lives of this and future generations of students, then communities of university and continuing education administrators must pay attention and insist that sustainability be built into every course they offer. Alex Lockwood, Caroline Mitchell, and Evi Karathanasopoulou in "Communicating Sustainability: Teaching Sustainable Media Practice" go one step further and suggest that teaching sustainability be approached as a transformative process aimed at shifting the consciousness of students dramatically and permanently.

Bartels and Parker have succeeded in *Teaching Sustainability* in presenting a broad perspective of this topic across a number of disciplines. However, if as a reader you are looking for a quick how-to guide on the five W's—*who, what, when, where, and why*—of introducing sustainability in your classrooms, don your Sherlock Holmes cap and grab your magnifying glass: "The game is afoot." Although there is no question that each chapter has its own sustainability theme and tells a good story, it is lamentable that even after reading the entire book, the reader doesn't have a template lesson plan for teaching sustainability—and maybe there is none. However, if you have integrated sustainability into your lesson plans and want to see how other instructors teach sustainability, then get your hands on this book.

So, when one reviews an edited book, do you focus on the whole or its parts? It is unfortunate that editors of compiled books don't prepare transition paragraphs between the book chapters. Short snippets of thoughts that bridge the chapters and sections would guide readers through the material. Unless the editors have taken the time to prepare linking paragraphs between each author's contributions, the product appears piecemeal and one must comment on the look, texture, and the taste of chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry ice cream individually. I look forward to the day when editors go beyond pasting together independent chapters on a topic and make time to see how chapters can be linked together into one integrated story that can be read from cover to cover.

Reviewed by Caterina Valentino, Ryerson University