‘More Than Scaling Up’: A Critical and Practical Inquiry Into Operationalising Sustainability Competencies

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With our globalized economy and sophisticated technology, we can decide to end the age-old ills of extreme poverty and hunger. Or we can continue to degrade our planet and allow intolerable inequalities to sow bitterness and despair. Our ambition is to achieve sustainable development for all. . . . **Transformation is our watchword.** At this moment in time, we are called to lead and act with courage. We are called to embrace change. Change in our societies. Change in the management of our economies. Change in our relationship with our one and only planet.

Dominant (Status Quo) Grand Narrative

- Anthropocentrism; Humans are the Measure of Existence
- Focus on Narrow Self-interest and Individualism
- Economic and Technological Growth are Inherently Good; Progress is Inevitable
- Planet is an Infinite Source of Raw Materials and Waste Sink

Life-Affirming Root Metaphors

- Identification with All Life and a Flourishing Earth
- Commitment to the Common Good and Appreciating Interdependence
- Economic and Technological Growth are Neither Good Nor Bad; Progress is Contingent
- Limits to Exploitation; Conservation and Regenerative Use of Natural Resources

New, Life Affirming (4th Revolution) Grand Narrative

(Glasser, 2016)
1\textsuperscript{st} Order Change: Being less UN-Sustainable (Less Bad)

2\textsuperscript{nd} Order Change: Becoming NetPositive (Improve quality of life for all) (Glasser 2014)
UNESCO’s challenge: “more than scaling-up”

“...more than the alignment or scaling-up of existing good practice will be needed—with greater attention to systemic approaches to curriculum change and capacity-building for leaders.” (UNESCO 32, 2014)
‘HEIs are serving a failing system in need of reinvention and are losing the capacity to engage in critical reflection and advance ways of thinking and acting that go beyond their immediate mandates.

In an increasingly individualistic and consumerist society, social responsibility gets lost in the noise of markets, financial metrics, rankings, and competition.’

-‘A Higher Calling for Higher Education’, Cristina Escrigas, 2016, Tellus Institute

http://www.tellus.org/tellus/publication/a-higher-calling-for-higher-education
What is Education for?

Socialization Function—to replicate society and culture.

Vocational Function—to prepare people for employment.

Liberal Humanist Function—to develop the potential of individuals.

Transformative Function—to facilitate change towards a more equitable society and a better world (improve quality of life for all).

A model: systems of interest & influences

- Sustainability competencies work
- HE system
- Global challenge
CHALLENGE: What would it look like to create LfSCC that were up to our call for transformative, species-scale change?

(Systems Thinking)

(Affinity for All Life)

(Anticipatory)

(State of the Planet Knowledge)

(Normative)

(Wise Decision Making)

(Strategic)

(Modeling Sustainable Behaviors)

(Interpersonal)

(Transformative Social Change)

(Glasser 2014)
Who is looking at what?

- Western Michigan University
  - state of the planet
  - knowledge and wise decision-making

- University of Vechta
  - anticipatory thinking and the promotion of psychological resources
  - hermeneutic analysis

- Plymouth University
  - systemic (relational) thinking
The Sustainable and Global Citizen

There will be opportunities to develop and practice your:

1. Sustainability awareness
   By understanding the knowledge, skills, and attributes that are needed to live in a way that safeguards environmental and societal wellbeing, both now and for future generations.

2. Systems thinking
   Being able to appreciate the interrelationships between environmental, social, economic, and political systems when you are trying to understand and respond to sustainability challenges that exist at local and global levels.

3. Openness
   To encounters with people with other cultural perspectives and different worldviews, and being willing to question and reflect on your own perspectives on sustainable development.

4. Responsibility
   Knowing that your actions have consequences and seeking to enhance wellbeing, social justice, and ecological integrity within your academic, professional, civic, and personal life.

5. Change-leadership
   Willing to act collaboratively in bringing about change towards more sustainable futures at your own personal and community levels.
WMU Work

- Core Competencies
- Research

**Case Report**

**Toward the Development of Robust Learning for Sustainability Core Competencies**

Harold Gieseke, PhD and Jamie Irias

**Introduction**

While improving quality of life has long fascinated humans, there has recently been a growing interest among communities, schools, and governments to create sustainable well-being societies. The global sustainability movement has aimed to educate people about the interconnectedness of consumption and production, environmental quality, climate change, loss of biological and cultural diversity, economics, ethics, and human behavior; and thereby improve quality of life through sustainability education that is accessible to all, environmental protection, improved governance, improved health care, meaningful work, enhanced equity, peace, partnership, and social justice. Within the higher education setting, successful implementation of transformative sustainability declarations and commitments such as the Earth Charter, the Climate Covenant, the Talloires Declaration, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and UNESCO’s Global Action Programme will require a radical shift in the mission, purpose, and structure of higher education institutions. This is demonstrated by the fact that many academic institutions still focus more on improving the campus than on a more immersive and comprehensive approach that integrates and delivers sustainability across both curricular and research domains, building rich and robust campus cultures of sustainability that are improving quality of life for all on campus and beyond, as their raison d’être. Taking this latter approach is necessary to produce meaningful, transformative behavioral change in the wake of complex and highly inter-meshed economic, environmental, moral, and societal sustainability challenges.

Many authors have highlighted the importance of formal education and its specific role of higher education in training citizens and future educators in dissemination of critical knowledge. A better understanding of human capacities, capabilities, and competencies for facilitating such societal transformation toward sustainability, and an improved understanding of how we can promote their development through learning and formal education, are crucial to the success of this venture.

As is the case with many emerging and growing domains of learning, there have been logistical, conceptual, and institutional obstacles regarding the integration of sustainability into formal education, and the integration of education into sustainability initiatives. Despite the dramatic increase in sustainability programs within higher education institutions, there is no standardized tool or measurement system by which to assess competency in sustainability or sustainability literacy. Thus, with the increased manifestations of sustainability-related disciplines within the higher education curriculum, especially at the graduate level, the need for well-defined, overarching competencies, regardless of the interdisciplinary nature of the field, is readily apparent.

According to an article by Vincent and Yeh, the National Association of Environmental Professionals (NAEP) and other similar organizations advocated for the creation of...
WMU Work

- Core Competencies
- Internship
  - CC-based
  - 1 Semester
  - Cross-campus
WMU Work

• Core Competencies

• Internship

• Catch Simulation Game
  
  Face-to-Face
  
  Applies 2 Core Competencies
  
  Available to all FREE in 2017
WMU Work

• Core Competencies

• Internship

• Catch

• Learning for Sustainability Graduate Certificate
  Cross-institutional (serves all Masters & Ph.D. Programs)

Certificate Program in Learning for Sustainability
(16 graduate credit hours)

The Certificate Program in Learning for Sustainability (LFS) is designed to develop competencies needed to wrestle with complex real-world problems and sustainability challenges. Students will be engaged in learning how to explore the complexity of human cares and situate that inquiry in the context of factors impacting quality of life and the state of the planet. Participants will develop new skills in systems thinking and modeling; understanding and evaluating the ecological and social impacts of transport, housing, energy, food, water, forestry, healthcare, financial, and manufacturing systems; critical and anticipatory thinking; mindfulness; awareness of place; empathy; problem posing and problem solving; planning and decision-making; designing and evaluating interventions to enhance wellbeing (products, policies, social innovations, enterprises, etc.); transformative change; collaboration; and social learning.
Invitation
(1). How far does HE policy reflect and accommodate the growing calls for transformative change coming from outside?
(2). Is the current debate on sustainability competencies sufficient in light of the bold and radical calls for transformative change (SDGs and UNESCO GAP)?

What additional key questions persist?
(3). What effect and influence might education for sustainability competencies have in terms of facilitating transformative social learning, supporting system structure change, and cultivating informed responsibility?
(4). How can curricula and pedagogy be better aligned to facilitate the building of meaningful sustainability competencies in both teachers and learners?
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