

Assessment for Sustainability

The volume of education continues to increase, yet so do pollution, exhaustion of resources, and the dangers of ecological catastrophe. If still more education is to save us, it would have to be education of a different kind: an education that takes us into the depth of things.
E.F. Schumacher

Reductionist Approach

- transmissive teaching – students reproduce teacher's perspective
- discipline-centred
- abstract
- theory based
- de-legitimisation of intergenerational/community/place based knowledge
- rational instrumentality
- focus on IQ
- social reproduction
- encouraging rule based behaviour
- competitive
- reductionist
- limited creativity of expression (limited to 'works of art')
- deep criticism of roots of discipline/education system discouraged
- focus on writing and writing about writing, and writing about writings about writing
- prescription of narrow linguistic repertoire (formal register/standard English/written English)
- university-internal
- outcomes based
- fragmented /atomistic
- mechanistic / technicalistic
- disembodied

An overly strong emphasis on this approach reproduces an unsustainable industrial society and a limited view of what it means to be human

Holistic Approach

- emergent learning (teacher & learners as an integrated system)
- transdisciplinary
- related to everyday life/local and global issues
- praxis based (dialectic relationship between theory and practice)
- legitimisation of diverse ways of knowing and being
- celebration of intrinsic value
- inclusion of emotional intelligence and ecological intelligence
- social transformation
- encouraging empathy / spontaneity / caring / intuition based behaviour
- co-operative
- holistic
- creativity of expression encouraged across the board
- deep criticism of roots of discipline/education system encouraged
- inclusion of primary sources (direct interaction with people and natural systems)
- flourishing of linguistic repertoire (to include oral/lyrical/poetical/informal/creative forms of expression)
- connection with wider community and natural systems
- process based
- integrated
- relational / ecological
- embodied

reductionism and holism
united in dynamic equilibrium



There is a growing sense that in our incessant rush to have more, we have become less. Sustainability is not just about restoration of ecosystems but also our own restoration to being fully human. For a long time, being human was defined narrowly in terms of language and rational instrumentality, but with an increasing awareness of having transgressed ecological and ethical limits there is now an urgent search for a more encompassing view of humanity.

One step towards sustainability is to make assessment reflect a more encompassing view,

including those aspects of being human which have helped past societies, and many present societies, be far more sustainable than industrial societies. Among many such aspects suggested are a sense of belonging to place, embodiment, connection, integrity, interrelationship, community, and dynamic creativity. This does not mean abandoning what we have, but placing it within a larger framework which recognises the complexity of humans and human systems, and their embeddedness in the larger systems which support life.

Arran Stibbe