Taming the beast

Understanding 'influence' within sustainability education

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PROVOCATION 1: THE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM

"so blinkered are we by the dominant ideologies of our age in which much of what matters in higher education is that which generates incomes and secures market positioning in world rankings and student satisfaction"

(Barnett, 2018:1)

'INFLUENCE' IN SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

*"All current systems could mean organisations tailor their sustainability strategy/actions to increase scores in these rather than areas of **specific benefit** to the individual University "(Anon, EAUC, 2019)*

1. We measure and report on what is easily measured and reported rather than on what matters and is valued

2. The reporting process starts to drive what we do

3. We adopt simple, linear ways of thinking about what we do

4. We compare and compete

5. We focus on questions of How rather than What or Why?

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- Has sustainability education has been 'tamed' to fit with the performativity culture in which reporting and measuring ultimately drive practice?

- How should 'influence' be understood within the context of sustainability education in HE.

- Who are we seeking to influence and why?

THINKING EDUCATIONALLY ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

Our theoretical friends
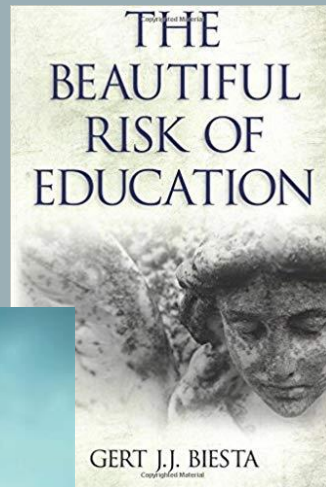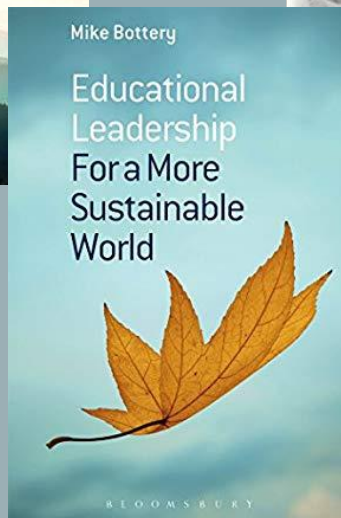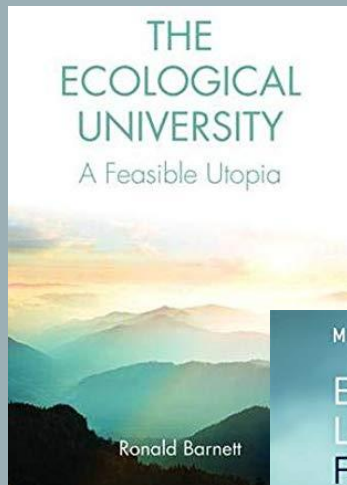
Bottery (2016) Educational leadership for a more sustainable world

Biesta (2013) The beautiful risk of education

Barnett (2018) The ecological university: a feasible utopia

1. BOTTERY - ON TAMING

TAME PROBLEMS

- Can be easily and tightly defined
- Can be understood in limited ways
- Standardised
- Rooted in certainty
- Solutions easily applied

WICKED PROBLEMS

- Difficult to define
- Can be understood in many different ways – hard to identify 'cause'
- Individual context may affect the nature of the problem
- Uncertainty about how to solve

2. BIESTA – ON WHAT EDUCATION IS (NOT)

- Desire for control – inability to endure uncertainty and risk

- Input/output logic – 'what works'

- BUT causality only occurs in closed linear systems…education is open, semiotic and recursive

Biesta critiques this attitude of control…

Education is not an intervention upon objects …it involves arousing the desire in another human being to want to exist as a subject…by establishing opportunities for dialogue with what or who is other

…And understanding of educational purpose

"The educational concern…lies in the transformation of what is desired into what is desirable…this makes the educational way the slow way, the difficult way, the frustrating way, and we might say, the weak way, as the outcome of this process can neither be guaranteed nor secured" (2013, p.3)

3. BARNETT - ON INFLUENCE

- 7 ecosystems (knowledge, social institutions, persons, the economy, learning, culture and natural environment) which both "influence it and are open to the university's own influences" (p.24)
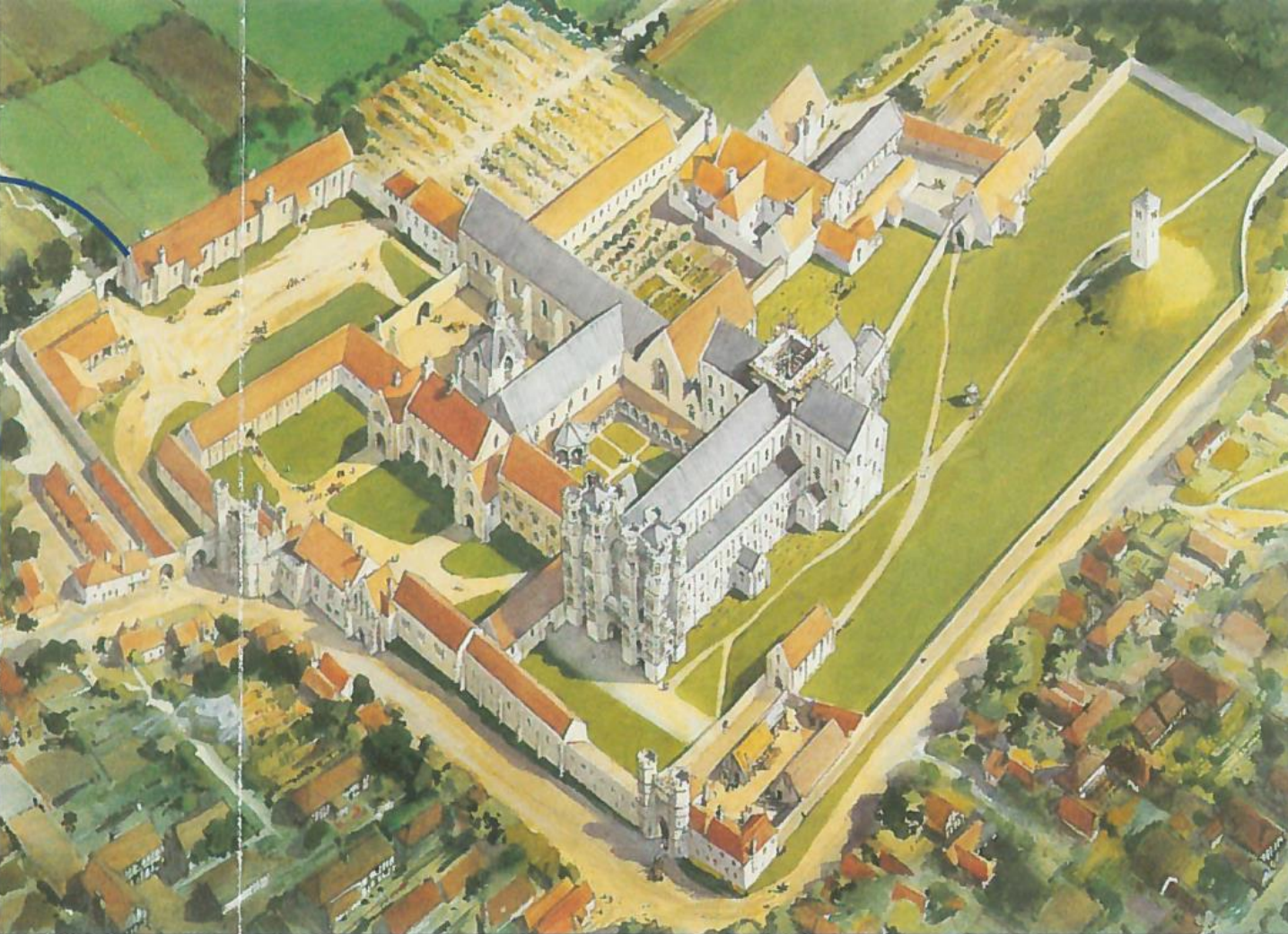- Each university has its own ecological profile and signature

"Being an ecological university is particular to each university, which has a responsibility to work out its own possibilities in promoting the wellbeing of the 7 ecosystems" (2018, p.9)

Provocation 2

Existing end wall of old bakehouse/brewhouse range as seen in insert from aerial reconstruction.

Reconstruction of the Abbey c1500 showing the outer precinct. (Drawing by Terry Ball) Copyright English Heritage Photo Library.

COLLABORATION

The FOUNDRY
Brew Pub

Our new home

The Foundry Brew pub and Canterbury Brewers
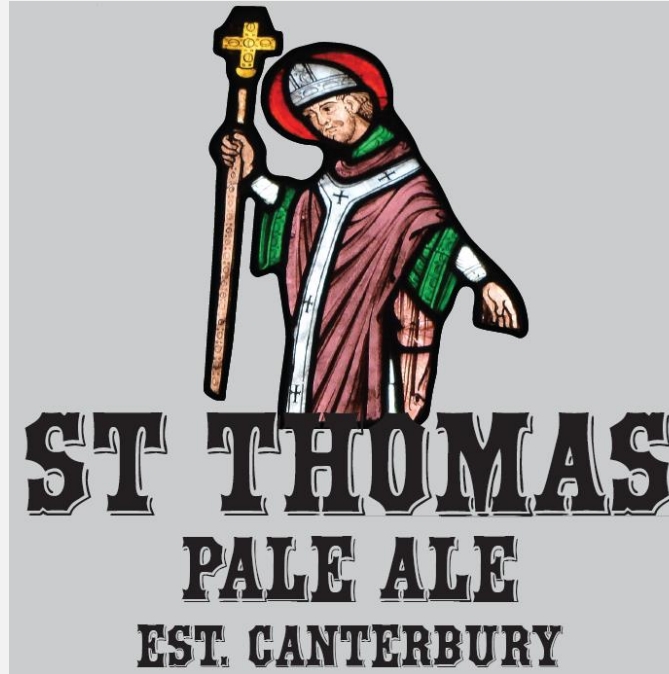Distillers have moved just around the corner to
Stour Street.

Our new home:
The Foundry Brewpub
77 Stour Street
Canterbury
CT1 2NR

Understanding

- ….. of the consequences of true collaboration

- ….. that good stuff happens when you accept uncertainty

- ….. of clumsy solutions that are 'good enough'

…OUR APPROACH

- Recognise a need to be "exquisitely sensitive to **Context**"
- Driven by a **Collaborative** framing of the problem
- **Critical** and creative approach to developing activity
- **Understanding** limitations

OUR RESPONSE

Has sustainability education has been 'tamed' to fit with the performativity culture in which reporting and measuring ultimately drive practice?

To some extent…we concur with Bottery that we too often use tame thinking to address wicked problems…

How should 'influence' be understood within the context of sustainability education in HE.

Influence is the wrong word to use in relation to education. As Biesta argues, by trying to control the educational process, "there is a real chance that we take out education altogether" (p.1). The educational task is the transformation of desire into the desirable (for self, others & environment)

- Who are we seeking to influence and why?

Barnett suggests that influence may be useful to understand the particular context in which each university is situated – but influence goes two-ways…