

Achieving Sustainable Development through Transformative Pedagogies in Universities

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Abstract : Developing a responsible personal worldview is central to sustainable development, but achieving quality education to promote transformative learning for sustainability is thus far, poorly understood. Most programs involving education for sustainable development rely on changing behavior, rather than attitudes. The emphasis is on the scientific and utilitarian aspect of sustainability with negligible importance on the intrinsic value of nature. Campus sustainability projects include building sustainable gardens and implementing energy-efficient upgrades, instead of focusing on educating for sustainable development through exploration of students' values and beliefs. Even though green technology adoption maybe the right thing to do, most schools are not targeting the root cause of the environmental crisis; they are just providing palliative measures. This study explores the under-examined factors that lead to pro-environmental behavior by investigating the environmental perceptions of both college business students and personnel of green organizations. A mixed research approach of qualitative, based on structured interviews, and quantitative instruments was developed including 30 college-level students' interviews and 40 green organization staff members involved in sustainable activities. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Categorization of the responses to the open-ended questions was conducted with the purpose of identifying the main types of factors influencing attitudes and correlating with behaviors. Overall the findings of this study indicated a lack of appreciation for nature, and inability to understand interconnectedness and apply critical thinking. The results of the survey conducted on undergraduate students indicated that the responses of business and liberal arts students by independent t-test were significantly different, with a p-value of 0.03. While liberal arts students showed an understanding of human interdependence with nature and its delicate balance, business students seemed to believe that humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature. This result was quite intriguing from the perspective that business students will be defining markets, influencing society, controlling and managing businesses that supposedly, in the face of climate change, shall implement sustainable activities. These alarming results led to the focus on green businesses in order to better understand their motivation to engage in sustainable activities. Additionally, a probit model revealed that childhood exposure to nature has a significantly positive impact in pro-environmental attitudes to most of the New Ecological Paradigm scales. Based on these findings, this paper discusses educators including Socrates, John Dewey and Paulo Freire in the implementation of eco-pedagogy and transformative learning following a curriculum with emphasis on critical and systems thinking, which are deemed to be key ingredients in quality education for sustainable development.

Keywords : eco-pedagogy, environmental behavior, quality education for sustainable development, transformative learning

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