

Children, their World, their Education

Seminar, November 2014

Some thoughts from John Rhymer after stimulating and inspiring presentations by Robin Alexander and Cathryn Gathercole.

Many of us have spent the past 15 - 25 years lobbying, cajoling and entreating national governments of all political hues to regard education for sustainability and global citizenship as being essential for our young people in the 21st Century.

Faced with inaction from national governments around the world to the impending and growing crises of climate change, conflicts over oil, land and religion and global inequalities, who do we turn to in order to ensure that our children, the citizens of the future, receive the education that they need in order to face the challenges of the future?

As National Governments are not fit for purpose, who might our allies be? Who should we be engaging with?

The media? All too often the understanding of journalists, broadcasters and their editors is superficial and their interest short-lived. The BBC, in their concern for balance, give equal airtime to Climate Change deniers as they do to reputable scientists.

Industry and commerce? Traditionally regarded as the antithesis of a sustainable future, some leading Industries are starting to recognise and acknowledge the importance of environmental and social sustainability, as well as economic sustainability, and some far-sighted CEOs realise that the future may not lie in continued growth and globalisation.

Local communities? Local groups such as Transition Towns can support schools in developing the 30% of their curriculum that should be locally relevant and which arguably gives young people their best chance of becoming active and empowered global citizens.

Meanwhile, teachers can provide role models for their pupils, not only by living sustainably themselves, but by modelling the practices of a sustainable and just society in the way they teach, in the ways they interact with their pupils and in the ways in which schools conduct themselves.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland have embedded Learning for Sustainability throughout the professional Standards for Teachers, to support teachers in actively embracing and promoting principles and practices of sustainability in all aspects of their work.

Now that we have no English GTC, teachers in England will need to give themselves permission to adopt the same principles as their colleagues in Scotland, for no one else will! Perhaps it is time to re-visit the Schumacher briefing paper of 2001 by Stephen Sterling, "Sustainable Education – Re-visioning learning and change".