

How can we seize the opportunity to think about what profoundly matters?

Bill Scott

The academic journal *Environmental Education Research* was launched in 1995 and the lead paper in the first issue was by the venerable Scottish educator, John Smyth. Its title was: *Environment and Education: a view of a changing scene* and it reviewed the state of environmental education against the backdrop of human-environment relationships.

Smyth did not think environmental education should be a separate activity that had to cling by its fingertips to the edge of the curriculum, but a movement for fundamental educational reform in response to a rapidly changing world that was under increasing stress both from human-induced change to the biosphere, and – a key point – from human nature itself. In other words, environmental education needed to be about much more than the environment.

Smyth argued that environmental and social systems needed to be thought about together in a single conceptual structure. This was necessary, he said, if we were to tackle, in a realistic and practicable way, the global issues that challenge our survival. Careful judgement would be needed, he said, and the longer this was delayed the more difficult it would be to make real progress. This rethinking obviously needed to apply to the curriculum as well.

Twenty five years on there are signs that global policy initiatives are slowly beginning to do this integration, with the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals processes being international instances of this.

School educators find it hard, however, to mirror this effort for three reasons:

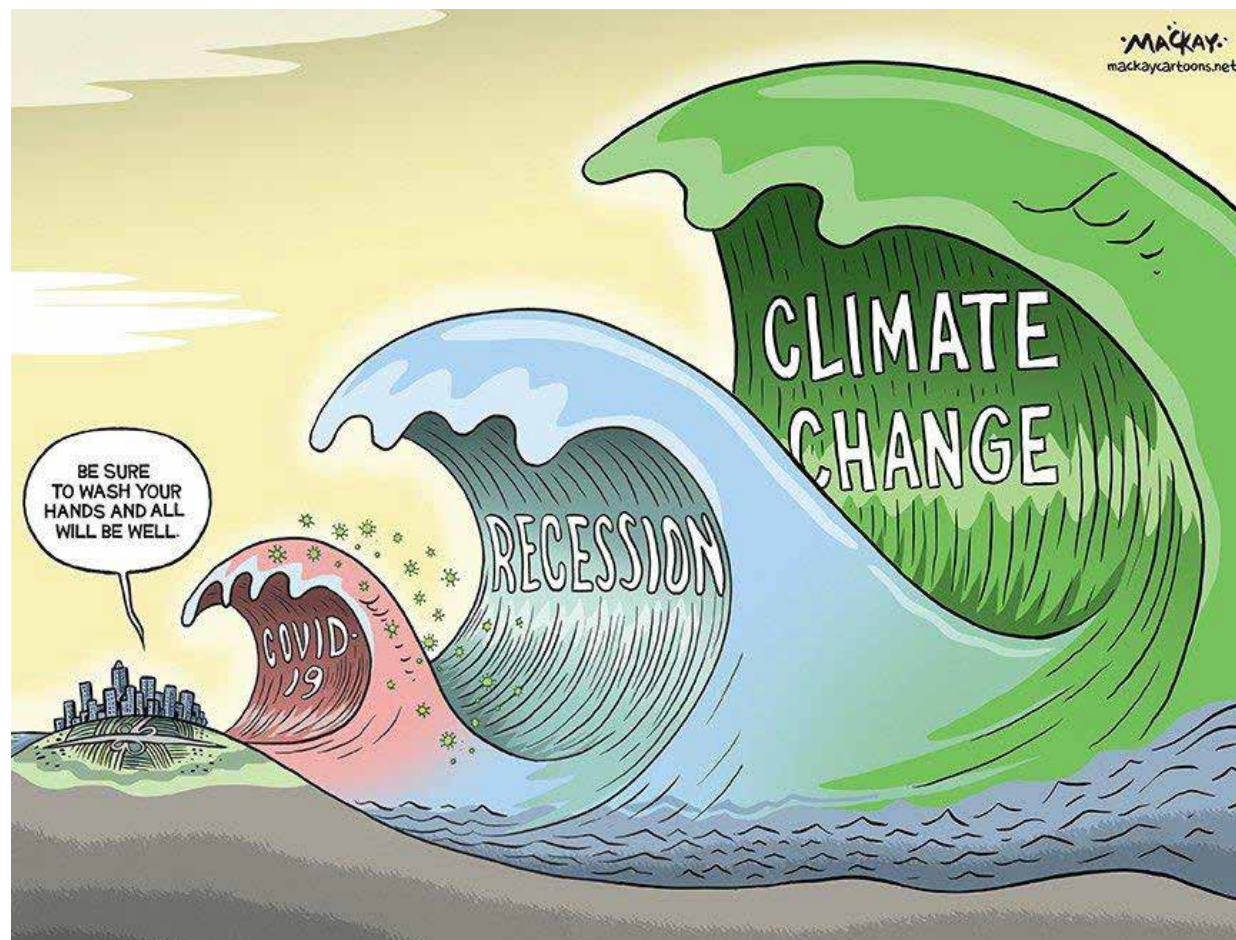
- ❑ because of the way that academic institutions tend to organise themselves within well protected disciplines,
- ❑ because national curricula do little to encourage integration,
- ❑ because too many external organisations which say they want to help still focus too much on their own interests rather than the bigger picture.



Ten years ago, Fumiyo Kagawa and David Selby explored what climate change education goals should be like and argued that we ought to seize the opportunity:

- i. to think about what really and profoundly matters;
- ii. to collectively envision a better future, and then;
- iii. to become practical visionaries in realising that future.

Unsurprisingly, because of their conservative and often utilitarian natures, very little of this is able to happen in schools. And yet this is just what the young people's groups such as **Teach the Future** are calling for in their protests about the inadequacy of current schooling.



With thanks to cartoonist: Graeme MacKay

<https://mackaycartoons.net>



They do not want more information or more history or greener exam questions; rather they want to be helped to be part of realising their own futures.

It is hard to see how what Kagawa and Selby propose, and what youngsters say they want, can be realised without the sort of **conceptual comings together and curriculum collaborations** within schools that John Smyth proposed.

To achieve this, partnerships between schools and external organisations will be helpful, especially if they are prepared to downplay their own interests for the common good.



So, with this in mind, here's a challenge to all those **organisations promoting development education and global learning: remember that tackling climate change and environmental issues is vital if all humans are to live fulfilling lives.**

And here's a challenge to those **organisations who promote environmental education: remember that how people live is key to resolving environmental issues.**

A third challenge, and the biggest I think, is for **all such organisations to come together, find common ground, and work in partnership to help young people learn about what should really and profoundly matter to us all.**

Finally - if you are **a member or supporter** of such an organisation:

- ♦ **How appropriate are these challenges to what it does?**
- ♦ **How good is it at recognising the bigger interconnected picture in its activities?**
- ♦ **How ready is it to forgo some of its institutional interests for the greater good?**

If you think that the organisation needs to do more, **then the challenge to you is to work with others to do something about it.**

Kagawa, Fumiyo & David Selby (2010) Introduction. In *Education and Climate Change: Living and Learning in Interesting Times*, edited by Fumiyo Kagawa & David Selby, 1-11. London: Routledge.

Smyth, John C. (1995) *Environment and Education: a view of a changing scene*, *Environmental Education Research* 1:1, 3-20.

We invited Ben Ballin to reflect on Bill Scott's challenges [page 9]

In 2008/09 Bill Scott provided the focus for a range of Tide~ creative work. The ideas, process and the Holland concepts are outlined - [here](#).

The Bill Scott Challenge, as it came to be known, remains important.

Ben is co-opted to Tide~ Trustee meetings. He has a lead role in the [West Midlands Sustainable Schools Network](#)

See also

- ❑ [Ben's response to the Nine Propositions Page 32](#)
- ❑ [Link to his podcast about Climate Education. Page 13](#)
- ❑ [Article from Elephant Times \[1\] inviting you to reflect on how we saw the educational implications of climate change 13 years ago.](#)

Firstly, I agree with him when he refers to John Smyth in stating that if we are to tackle the global issues that challenge our survival in a realistic and practicable way a radical review of education is required. Schools, in the main, remain 19th Century institutions not fit for 21st Century purposes. The Cambridge Primary Review was a serious attempt at reorganising education. That's the scale of thinking needed. However great, for example, eco-clubs are, that's not going to be sufficient.

Covid's disruption to schools could provide the opportunity for such rethinking, and a meaningful response to the national and global challenges we face... But is the political will there?

Secondly, I do think that there has been a move away from the battles over ground ... whether it's ESD, Environmental Education or Global Citizenship that's required.

Support organisations now face a crisis and an opportunity. There's a lack of resources, but then they don't have to please funders. They don't have to compete, they can work on areas of shared interest. At the support level there are beginning to be networks of networks, including schools. Schools need to know what's available, what's on offer and begin to pick each other's brains.

Some organisations are good at listening to schools when they engage in market research, but not so good when it comes to real partnerships. Real partnerships, that's the challenge.

Ben Ballin



"It's been a bit of a Bill Scott journey ... my teaching has changed, it is no longer primarily What They Need To Know: it is what will they discover, what will they question, what will this look like at the end of this week, this term, this year"

Lezli Howarth, Chandos Primary School

Learning as sustainable development

Bill's ideas about the need to build learners' capacity to think critically about sustainable development inspired a variety of Tide~ initiative. His paper:

Schools but not as we know them

synthesises his reflections on this work exploring these themes >>>

These ideas are pivotal to the fresh thinking we now need to develop an educational response to climate change.

See [Nine Initiatives](#) that developed practical responses to the Challenge.

Each group was asked to:

- ◇ explore how they can enable students' capacity to think critically about sustainable development;
- ◇ consider how the Holland Report key concepts might enhance this.

Taking young people seriously

Giving ourselves permission

Making it real

Teachers letting go

Bill --- William Scott is emeritus professor of education at the University of Bath.

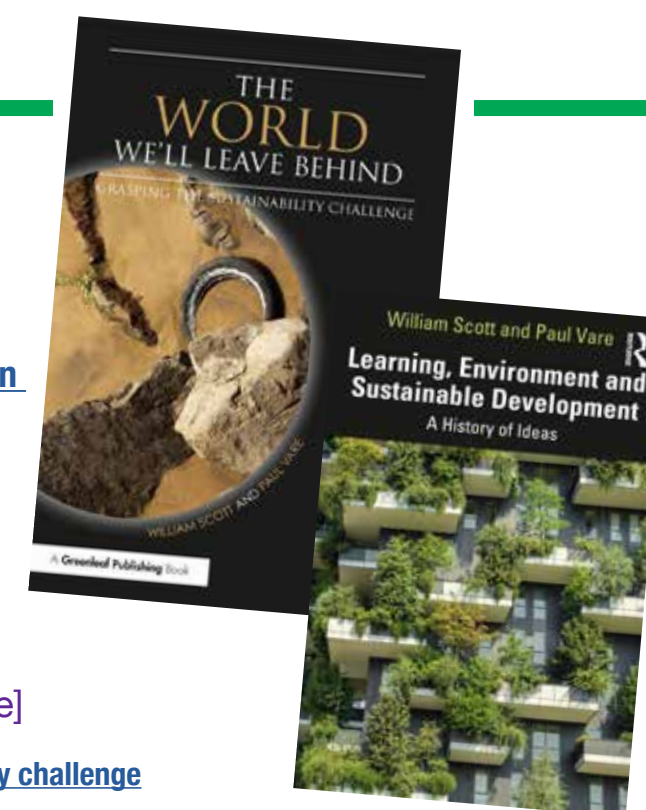
He is Chair of Trustees at the [National Association for Environmental Education](#)

He was one of the founding editors of [Environmental Education Research](#).

His latest books - [co-written with Paul Vare]

[The World We'll Leave Behind: grasping the sustainability challenge](#)

[Learning, Environment and Sustainable Development: a history of ideas](#)



The Elephant Times [4]