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Social Justice in Sustainable Development

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Definition

Social justice in sustainable development is understood as the ability for societies to change and create situations that are equally accessible to all, including marginalized and oppressed individuals within different communities, and for societies to include people of different races, ethnicities, gender, class, and other axes of difference that create inequality, in decision making and efforts in sustainable development. Social justice in sustainable development includes diversity. That diversity includes different aspects of differences needed to maintain life (Martusewicz et al. 2011), including all the contextualized aspects of ecological justice such as food justice. Diversity is the strength within society and is needed to create sustainable systems in our communities.

Introduction

Since sustainable development refers to ideas and actions invested to meet the needs of the present without marginalizing the future (Waghid 2014), it not only focuses on environmental concerns but also on social structures and developments that contain "features of oppression, domination, exploitation, and injustice" (Evans 2012, p. 12). One of the purposes of sustainable development is to create sustainable communities. Martusewiz et al. (2011) argue that these developments are the basis of our community, needed to protect the future of our children and the expanded life systems within our planet.

The term social justice alone, as stated by Griffiths and Murray (2017, p. 44), is a "complex- and contested-notion that is constantly evolving because the world is always in a process of becoming something else." Nolet (2009) defines social justice as "fair and equitable distribution of resources" (p. 14). Agyeman et al. (2017) believe that social justice involves a form of cultural identity. For example, they make a connection from this belief to Hmong families in California who farm and widen this work amongst extended family members and that this practice runs opposite of California labor laws requiring farms to have workers' compensation insurance.

In these sections, sustaining social justice in policy and management through the lens of critical pedagogy is explained in three different sections. The first section focuses on sustainability development residing within critical pedagogy. The next section focuses on social justice in higher education within the policy and management realm. Finally, the last section discusses social change through policy and management curriculum.

Sustainability Development Resides Within Critical Pedagogy

The United Nations Development Programme (2017) integrates social justice in sustainable development and explains it as a means to "promote inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." The relationality of social justice in sustainable development to society is critical because for a societal transformation to occur, equitable education and resources should be within reach to all from within the community. In agreement, the United Nations Development Programme promotes inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. Societal transformation cannot be annexed from social justice as it requires the equal and full participation of those in the community (Waghid 2014). A societal transformation involving social justice can help build more balanced, sustainable, and inclusive communities, hence the need to integrate critical pedagogy in policy and management practices of adult learning and higher education institutions as well as in sustainable development efforts in society. These systems (adult learning, higher education institutions, and society) within policy and change have the ability and rare opportunity to begin a dialogue at the core of higher education in preparing students and members of society for this societal transformation.

Critical Consciousness of Society

Sustainable development cannot succeed in its sustainable form without addressing the social inequities and situations of human struggles (Kolan and Sullivan TwoTrees 2014). Agyeman et al. (2001, p. 78) tell us that for a society to be truly sustainable, it has to "ensure a better quality of life for all, in a just and equitable manner." Still, with the growing need to integrate challenges and efforts of sustainable development to include social justice, those in the field continue to practice within a paradigm shift that ignores the need of integration of sustainable development and social justice, hence overlooking and neglecting that privilege and power play a critical role through systematic implications (Littig and Griessler 2005).

Liberation of Society

In analyzing social justice in sustainable development within critical pedagogy, it is important to recognize several factors: (1) who the oppressed or marginalized groups and the oppressors are, (2) situations of oppression, (3) the awakening of critical consciousness, (4) and (5) the liberation process (Freire 1970–2005; Evans 2012; Lange 1998). Using the different segments of critical pedagogy, the assessment of oppressed or marginalized groups are those of different races from the majority group, ethnicities, gender, class, and other categories of difference that create inequality. The oppressors can be described as those who may be in a position in leading, co-leading, or involved in efforts of sustainable development. Another proponent of an oppressor can be described as situations and preferred norms created by society that do not allow a pathway for those involved in or leading sustainable efforts to include marginalized or oppressed groups in these movements and in decision making.

Even in times of uncertainty, Freire (1970–2005) believed that educators should still trust that learners can bring about change, that each person can be an agent of change, and that they are not slaves to their social environment. He viewed education as a means of liberation.

In the process of liberation, Freire wrote that the oppressed is the one to lead the cause of the liberation process because the oppressor is not adequately equipped to lead this strife, for he is dehumanized by dehumanizing others. The oppressor does not lead because liberation threatens his freedom to oppress.

Transformation of Society

For a transformation to happen and for social justice to be restored and included in sustainable development, the oppressed or marginalized groups must look at their situation critically in a dialogic manner (Freire 1970–2005). Freire states that once this has been reached the oppressed will gradually come to understand the social truth and the conflicts within it. Ensuing this realization, according to Freire, the oppressed can begin to become awakened, therefore, becoming critically conscious. Being critically conscious is closer to the process of liberation. They (oppressed and marginalized groups) lead in this quest to become liberated as they seek to be included in sustainable development efforts. As the oppressed and marginalized groups liberate and create a passageway for their oppressors to understand the need to include them in efforts of sustainable development, they act with a sense of humility and "radical love" (Lange 1998, p. 89) as they see and "understand the necessity of liberation" (Freire 1970–2005, p. 45).

Paulo Freire worked with the illiterate poor where he empowered them to be self-conscious of their situation in having critical consciousness. Critical consciousness, according to Freire (1970–2005), is when one is awakened of his own conscious and begins to assess his social discontents as they indicate an oppressed situation. He believed that through the guidance of teachers, learners go through a process of change, realizing their own thoughts and perceptions of the world as they begin evaluating new revelations, challenging their own thinking. Freire concluded that the dominant social structure creates a culture of silence which overshadows the dominated and abolish the self-image of the oppressed.

Social Justice in Policy and Management Within Higher Education

Tina Evans (2012), author of *Occupy Education,* writes that society has created, delineated, and prescribed norms for society and that society goes about these daily norms, contributing to systems that lead to destruction which cripples personal growth, needed to create healthy and equitable systems. And yet, society goes about their daily life as if the world revolves around them, as if there is nothing society needs to contribute in sustaining what it has and come in contact with. It is this very thinking and the failure to address this ecological crisis in policy and management "that have promoted the very crises we now face" (Dentith and Griswold 2017, p. 53). In fact, it is people who are highly educated, who graduate from the world's best colleges that "are leading us down the current unhealthy, inequitable, and unsustainable path" (Cortese 2003, p. 16).

Restorative Paradigms of Thinking

When policy and management in adult learning and higher education respond to "these challenges will there be the possibility of altering the course of our current environmental and cultural crisis" (Dentith and Griswold 2017, p. 53). Lange (2004) tells us that for change to take place in a worthwhile and relevant fashion the cemented understandings of thinking need to be disturbed. Policy and management have an important and critical opportunity in being a vehicle for the much needed transformative change in social justice and ecological justice in the responsibility to prepare society ready to engage in sustainable developments (Dentith and Griswold 2017). Critical pedagogy serves as an instrument in this important framework to help entangle unsustainable paradigms (Cajete 2015) and to include marginalized populations in the important aspects of policy and management in adult learning and higher education. The intention of critical pedagogy is to foster a critical awareness of the different developments that can help create

equitable situations for all and together create a liberation pathway to help transform from old paradigm thinking into a restorative place (Freire 1970–2005).

Policy and management in adult learning and higher education institutions have the flexibility in their decision making to generate an educational framework integrating critical pedagogy that includes participation in the liberation process after being critically aware of who the oppressors or oppressed may be and of the situation of oppression. This effort must come after the analysis of one's worldview, as every adult has a different "worldview that includes perspectives, attitudes, and values" (Dentith and Griswold 2017, p. 13). Policy and management can be a part of a system in encouraging society to "develop sustainability-oriented worldviews" (Evans 2015). It is these different individual worldviews that contribute in the awakening of critical consciousness and, as a result, create a liberation process to restoration.

Deep Cultural Shift

If policy and management in adult learning and higher education institutions have the ability and capacity to integrate critical pedagogy in connecting social justice in sustainable development efforts, then why doesn't it occur? If it is to develop a world of individuals who understand "concepts of justice, inclusion, and peace" (Education for Sustainable Development Goals 2017, p. 43), then why not act upon these yearnings (Cortese 2003, p. 17)? Meadows (1997) was cited in Cortese (2003) in which she argued that it is difficult for adult learning and higher education institutions to take on this responsibility at a deeper level because of a "deep cultural shift" which is the "most important leverage points for institutional transformation." This "deep cultural shift" requires adult learning and higher education institutions to truly reflect on their thinking and transform critically in ways that will integrate a shift in how policy and management is executed. In reflecting on the deliverance of policy and management, adult learning and higher education institutions need to contemplate on practices in this effort to transform this "deep cultural shift." It requires these institutions to be vulnerable and humble in their new way of thinking. This according to Lange (2004) is an alarming experience that challenges the "consciousness" of recognizable patterns and customs. This is a shift harder to accept than one would think as policy and management in adult learning and higher education institutions will need to become critically conscious of the oppressed, oppressor, situations of oppression, and the liberation process.

Equity in Education

An argument might be made that there is a push towards the policy and management changes at the adult learning and higher education institution levels. But as Morgenstern (2012, para. 5) tells us, these facts may suggest that there is effort regarding policy and management developments; however, he argues that these efforts are from only one frame of mind asking the question of "is it also devoutly eco-centric?" He continues to state that "campus sustainability has long been premised on the 'three legs of the stool': environmental protection, fiscal equity, and social justice" (Morgenstern 2012, para. 3). He points out 92% of staff members in the policy and management sustainable development field are white individuals. Dylan Ruan (2016, para. 14) writes about his fellow professor, David Pellow, who argues that the "lack of diversity is holding us back" from sustainable developments.

For policy and management sustainable development efforts to create a more equitable integration of the different aspects of sustainability (environmental, social issues, economic), people of color need to be included in the conversations and actions needed in developing these efforts. In reflection of the importance of including people of color in the dialogues of sustainable developments, Julian Agyeman stated in an interview conducted by Abrokwa and Carter of the Harvard Journal of African American Public Policy (2008, p. 71), that along with environmental protection, social justice is also a prerequisite "for a truly sustainable community." Unless action is taken seriously and an integration of social and economic equity is sought, the objective of obtaining a more sustainable world cannot be achieved (Agyeman et al. 2001).

Policy and Management Curriculum for Social Change

Critical pedagogy stems from critical theory and is a belief that the cultivation of learning in policy and management in adult learning and higher education institutions is interconnected with all aspects of society to secure "greater social justice" (McArthur 2009). McLaren (1994) states that people do not stand apart from our social connections but that they are a part of it. For this to occur, we can focus on developing policy management curriculum within a lens of critical pedagogy.

The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, also known as AASHE, has put out "A Call to Action" for policy and management in adult learning and higher education institutions to instill learning in the preparation of students in ways that will strengthen and equip them ready to take on the challenges of sustainable concerns such as "climate change, loss of biodiversity. . ., limited water resources, global health issues, and extreme hunger" (Sustainability Curriculum in Higher Education A Call to Action 2010, p. 3). In addition, according to the United Nations Fund for Population Activities' website, there is currently a world population of over 7.5 billion. It is estimated to increase at a rate of 1.2% each year reaching an estimated 11.2 billion in the year 2100. This population increase contributes as another piece in the challenges of sustainable development. AASHE states that the instilling of transformative policy and management education to equip learners and society ready to work on these challenges is a "significant" issue and it can be developed and sustained through the teachings of those who have firsthand contacts with students. ". . .it is going to depend on the expertise and ability of approximately 1.2 million faculty in the United States who write course syllabi, sit on curriculum committees, develop student learning outcomes, and create new academic programs to integrate sustainability into their teaching as they see fit" (AASHE 2010, p. 3).

Critical pedagogy requires a curriculum within a framework focusing on social change. "It is both a philosophy of education and a social movement that aims to dismantle oppression by placing communities at the center of awareness, decision-making, and action" (Cajete 2015, p. 121). Policy management curriculum through the lens of critical pedagogy for social change can be examined with the work of Gregory Cajete, Elizabeth Lange, Tina Evans, and Paulo Freire. Cajete creates curriculum that is culturally responsive connecting it with the indigenous knowledge of education. Elizabeth Lange (2004) researches and writes about curriculum through a lens of restorative and transformative learning. Tina Evans (2012) discusses critical action and solutions for empowerment in her research and books. Paulo Freire's (1970–2005) work with critical pedagogy was defined as a means to liberate and not just simply a system of "banking" information. As stated by McArthur (2009), Paulo Freire, author of Pedagogy of the Oppressed, believed that assessing the world is not enough to change it, instead there needs to be opportunities and pathways of moving forward, hence liberation. Lange (1998, p. 83) explains in further detail Freire's meaning of liberation as "a change in heart" as she cites him stating that, "Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth."

Final Remarks

This summary outlined social justice in sustainable development in policy and management through the lens of critical pedagogy. Within critical pedagogy, this entry explores that sustainability development resides within critical pedagogy, policy and management curriculum for social change, and social justice within higher education in policy and management. These three key ideas support the framework for social justice in sustainable development through policy and management.

Cross-References

▶ Critical Theory
▶ Cultural Sustainability
▶ Experiential Learning
▶ Transformative Learning

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