

**INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP  
AND STRATEGIES IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION**

# INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING

Series Editor: Patrick Blessinger

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INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND  
LEARNING VOLUME 22

# **INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

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# CONTENTS

*List of Contributors* vii

*Series Editors' Introduction* ix

## PART I PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

**Introduction to Sustainable Development Leadership and Strategies in Higher Education**  
*Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and Taisir Subhi Yamin* 3

**Chapter 1 The Teaching of Sustainability in Higher Education: Improving Environmental Resilience in Malaysia**  
*Glenda Crosling, Graeme Atherton, Munir Shuib, Asyirah Abdul Rahim, Siti Norbaya Azizan and Mohammad Izzamil Mohd Nasir* 17

**Chapter 2 Innovating Leadership Education: How Business Schools and Universities need to Innovate Sustainable Strategies in Leadership Education**  
*Anna-Vanadis Faix* 39

**Chapter 3 Sustainable Development of Leadership Strategies in Higher Education**  
*Sandra Mohr and Howard Purcell* 55

**Chapter 4 Moving Culture to the Center of the Curriculum: A Strategy for Regional Relevance and Organization Sustainability**  
*Cath Fraser, Philip Bright, Jack Keogh and Olayemi Abdullatif Aliyu* 67

**Chapter 5 Perceived Public Value, Community Building, and Sustainable Leadership Development in Agriculture: A Case Study of Capacity Building through the Nuffield International Farming Scholars Program**  
*Jean P. Lonie, Mark A. Brennan and Theodore R. Alter* 83

<b>Chapter 6 Learning for Uncertainty: Higher Education and Sustainability</b> <i>Abeer Salem</i>	<b>101</b>
--	------------

## PART II FRAMEWORK AND TOOLS

<b>Chapter 7 The Development of an Education for Sustainable Development Self-evaluation Tool to Support Staff and Student Development</b> <i>Loretta Newman-Ford, Sophie Leslie and Sue Tangney</i>	<b>117</b>
---	------------

<b>Chapter 8 Learning for a Sustainable Future: Developing Key Competencies</b> <i>Beena Giridharan</i>	<b>135</b>
--	------------

<b>Chapter 9 The Role of Leadership in Education for Sustainable Development Curriculum Reform in Indonesian Higher Education</b> <i>Adriadi Novawan and Siti Aisyiyah</i>	<b>145</b>
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<b>Chapter 10 Educational Leaders: The Value of Professional Development Schemes for Recognizing Influence in Learning and Teaching</b> <i>Julia Hope and Silvia Colaiacomo</i>	<b>161</b>
--	------------

<b>Chapter 11 Corporate Governance and Sustainability in HEIs</b> <i>Róbertson de Oliveira, João Leitão and Helena Alves</i>	<b>177</b>
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<i>About the Contributors</i>	<b>193</b>
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<i>Name Index</i>	<b>203</b>
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<i>Subject Index</i>	<b>211</b>
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# **SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION**

## **INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The purpose of this series is to publish current research and scholarship on innovative teaching and learning practices in higher education. The series is developed around the premise that teaching and learning is more effective when instructors and students are actively and meaningfully engaged in the teaching–learning process.

The main objectives of this series are to:

- (1) present how innovative teaching and learning practices are being used in higher education institutions around the world across a wide variety of disciplines and countries;
- (2) present the latest models, theories, concepts, paradigms, and frameworks that educators should consider when adopting, implementing, assessing, and evaluating innovative teaching and learning practices; and
- (3) consider the implications of theory and practice on policy, strategy, and leadership.

This series will appeal to anyone in higher education who is involved in the teaching and learning process from any discipline, institutional type, or nationality. The volumes in this series will focus on a variety of authentic case studies and other empirical research that illustrates how educators from around the world are using innovative approaches to create more effective and meaningful learning environments.

Innovation teaching and learning is any approach, strategy, method, practice, or means that has been shown to improve, enhance, or transform the teaching–learning environment. Innovation involves doing things differently or in a novel way to improve outcomes. In short, innovation is positive change. With respect to teaching and learning, innovation is the implementation of new or improved educational practices that result in improved educational and learning outcomes. This innovation can be any positive change related to teaching, curriculum, assessment, technology, or other tools, programs, policies, or processes that leads to improved educational and learning outcomes. Innovation can occur in institutional development, program development, professional development, or learning development.

The volumes in this series will not only highlight the benefits and theoretical frameworks of such innovations through authentic case studies and other empirical research but also look at the challenges and contexts associated with implementing and assessing innovative teaching and learning practices. The volumes represent all disciplines from a wide range of national, cultural, and organizational contexts. The volumes in this series will explore a wide variety of teaching

and learning topics such as active learning, integrative learning, transformative learning, inquiry-based learning, problem-based learning, meaningful learning, blended learning, creative learning, experiential learning, lifelong and lifewide learning, global learning, learning assessment and analytics, student research, faculty and student learning communities, as well as other topics.

This series brings together distinguished scholars and educational practitioners from around the world to disseminate the latest knowledge on innovative teaching and learning scholarship and practices. The authors offer a range of disciplinary perspectives from different cultural contexts. This series provides a unique and valuable resource for instructors, administrators, and anyone interested in improving and transforming teaching and learning.

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# PART I

## PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

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# INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Enakshi Sengupta, Patrick Blessinger and  
Taisir Subhi Yamin

## ABSTRACT

*Today's society is plagued with a myriad of sustainability-related issues such as poverty, climate change, environmental disasters, shrinking biodiversity, eroding of potential food-producing systems, disease and choking urban population. The nature of the problems requires societies to work collectively to find a solution to end such issues. Research is needed along with a supportive, functional and cohesive leadership across disciplines, sectors and organizations. Sustainability is the strategic imperative that one cannot keep ignoring any longer and time has come to build the momentum toward excellence, quality and reengineering. Institutions of higher education should work as equal partners in this journey toward sustainable development. World's leading international agencies are promoting and stimulating the intellectual debate toward incorporating sustainability in main stream education with the help of thought leaders. The effort will help learners to take informed decision and responsibility toward creating environmental integrity and economic welfare for all. This volume talks about innovative pedagogy and learning methods that address the current scenario and offer solutions to meet them. The case studies and approaches written by various authors from Malaysia to Australia talk about curriculum development and integrating sustainability with the core philosophy of the university. The authors have elaborated how leadership education needs*

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*to innovate for dealing with the current sustainability challenges. This volume is topical and comes at the right time when there is a heightened interest in sustainability education across the globe.*

**Keywords:** Sustainability; leadership; education; higher educational institutions; research; innovation; environmental concerns; pedagogy, strategy

## INTRODUCTION

The 1960s saw the rise of debates and discussions centered around the topic of sustainability and a growing concern among policy-makers and scientists to create a solution that will help mitigate the issues of our civilization chartering an unsustainable path. Several summits and discussion forums resulted in policy-making, norms and legalities that might help in binding the problems into a cohesive whole. Educational institutions with their researchers and scientists joined to minimize the escalating negative impacts that we as human are collectively responsible. The compounding damage to ecosystem and the social structure is leaving the future generation on a shaky ground that might jeopardize their continued existence on this planet.

The first and foremost responsibility is to create an awareness among the young generation of the impending gloom that they are likely to face in not so distant future. Education for sustainable development (ESD) is not just another subject in the curriculum any longer but a necessity that will encourage our future generation to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will empower and equip them to create a just and balanced society with an integrated approach toward saving the environment, alleviating the society out of poverty and moving in a trajectory toward sustainable development. ESD as a concept started growing with the need to address the environmental concerns and challenges that the planet is facing. ESD is holistic and transformational education and concerns learning content and outcomes, pedagogy and the learning environment ([United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \[UNESCO\], 2014b](#)).

The content and the curricula need to reflect the complex challenges of sustainability and cut across various thematic areas addressing key issues such as climate change, sustainable production and poverty. These critical issues should be integrated and aligned in both local and global contexts, which will help the young learners to understand the complexity and gravity of such problems and the means to address them in future. The curriculum should have elements of system thinking, decision-making and responsible business, which would further help the students to get prepared in facing an unstable future. Integrating the curriculum and making it all encompassing involves knowledge and skills of the faculty with a directional guidance from the institutional leaders. The pedagogy must be learner centered, transformative yet explorative, experiential and action oriented, which will help create a value-based attitude toward a sustainable future.

ESD should not be a single directional classroom delivery of lessons; it should encompass both virtual and real-life learning experience that can inspire the learners to evolve as better citizens of this planet. Such education may be formal or non-formal and holistic in nature, which is based on a lifelong learning. Evidence in the past has shown that it is not only sufficient for the teachers to develop their own teaching style but also develop a curriculum toward building sustainability. Leaders of the institution have a vital role to play in shaping the orientation of the institutions toward sustainability. The learning style must be adopted by the whole institution and not only by a particular stream of study. The capacity of the educators needs to be enhanced and supported by the policy of the institutions and the role that the leaders of the institution adopt. Interaction and involvement of local communities should be treated as an integral part of the university thus creating an awareness among the students:

In simple terms, sustainable development means integrating the economic, social and environmental objectives of society, in order to maximize human well-being in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. This requires seeking mutually supportive approaches whenever possible, and making trade-offs where necessary. (OECD, 2001, p. 11)

UN Decade of ESD (2005–2014) facilitated a series of movement between international and local players to reorient education toward addressing and achieving the challenges faced by countries in matters of sustainability. ESD occupies a prime position in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development along with its 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). The mandate is to recognize the need to combat and mitigate negative impacts created by unsustainable way of life and ensure peace, prosperity and partnership in order to take up the challenges that are necessary for survival of the planet and human beings. Universities and their leaders are expected to be a tuned to such needs and modify the way they think and act.

International players have been discussing the importance of education in promoting sustainability in all countries and creating “sustainable citizens” among students:

Education was deemed to be one of the most powerful tools at hand to drive the transformational changes necessary for sustainable development, but to realize this potential, education systems need to be flexible, culturally sensitive, relevant and suited to changing people's values and behaviors. (The World We Want, 2013, p. iv)

This also explicitly underlines that, “in order to act as a driver for change, education itself needs to change, to become transformative, to change values and behaviors” (UNESCO, 2013; UNICEF, 2013, p. 14).

The threats to the planet are too many, starting for climate change to spread of diseases unheard of in the past. Formal education to acquire knowledge to get a job is not enough. Education is the only solution that can help transform lives of individuals and transform them into change agents. Need of the hour is to promote the concepts of critical thinking, creativity as a resource and decision-making in a collaborative manner (de Haan, 2010; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2012). ESD is a dynamic concept that begins with a new vision of education

that will help enable empowerment among all strata of society and enable them to take responsibility for creating a sustainable future (UNESCO, 2002, 2005, 2014a). It is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary, no discipline alone can claim ESD as its own, but all disciplines can respond and contribute to ESD individually and/or collectively.

Institutions of higher education (HE) must address the global problems that the world is facing at this moment, which doesn't merely confine itself to economic problems alone. Educational systems ought to become more inclusive and equitable based on democratic rights and right-based educational models (Blessinger, Sengupta, & Makhanya, 2019). In the ever-changing world new demands are being placed on basic amenities like water, sanitation or food. The choking urban cities are in dire straits requiring innovative solutions and a new humanistic paradigm that can address these issues on a global scale. Educational institutions are the foundations on which students can learn about these issues with the help of new teaching and learning approaches, which are inter-related and inter-dependent to deal with the problems in an effective manner (Blessinger et al., 2019).

## THE ROLE OF A LEADER

Bringing about a change in the education system and inculcating a curriculum that supports sustainable development is a task that cannot be accomplished by an individual. This daunting task can be achieved only when faculty is adequately supported by a leader who believes that sustainability is the need of the hour in which all students needs to be trained. Teachers take collective responsibility toward pedagogical development and implementing it in the classroom but the lead is always taken by the leader of the institution in such matters. Building the capacity of the institution is a collective task that can only be accomplished when teacher leaders and their principals respect the importance of mutual trust, shared purpose and allowance for individual expression (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009). Such an ambience demands a dynamic culture of trust and hope that is shared between the faculty and the leader as the goal is same, imparting education toward creating a sustainable society.

Several academicians have pursued their research toward leadership as a means of improvement of the educational institution and a support for the leadership of professional learning communities (Hord, 1997). Robinson (2007) also advocates the attitude of the leader responsible for flagging the importance of teaching learning as "promotion and participation in teacher professional learning is an indicator of their focus on the quality of teachers and teaching" (p. 16); Stoll, McMahon, and Thomas (2006) agreed that the task of strategic leadership is creating and sustaining a professional learning community; Lambert (2006) further states that "when learning is continuous and participation in that learning is broad-based and skillful, high leadership capacity and the potential of sustainable, lasting school improvement result" (p. 253). Robertson (2013) also stated that meaningful leadership learning experiences require different paradigms of



learning where the leader is viewed as “leader-as learner” in metacognitive thinking. [Harris \(2008\)](#) (cited in Bush, Bell & Middlewood, 2010) claimed that leadership must extend beyond the principal as leader who must also pave the way for others in leadership:

meeting the needs of the twenty-first century schooling will require greater leadership capability and capacity within the system than ever before. It will demand that principals concentrate their efforts on developing the leadership capabilities and capacities of others. (p. 62)

Sustainable leadership is a phenomenon of twenty-first century and occupies a prime position in the face of dynamic changes and accountability. The Cambridge Institute for Sustainable Leadership presents this challenge in relation to solving social and environmental crises. They admit that most of the world’s failure to tackle the world’s pressing changes arises from ineffective leadership and lacking the quality and quantity of bold leadership that could have enabled us to shift toward a just and sustainable lifestyle. [Hargreaves and Fink \(2006\)](#) claim that sustainability “is the first and final challenge of leadership” (p. 273), and thus the offer of their framework of seven principles for sustainable leadership has guided many an aspiring educational leader. In all, they have claimed that “sustainability is a meal, not a menu. You can’t pick and choose. All the principles fit together” (p. 251).

*Sustainable Leadership Matters* – The prime responsibility of all education leaders is to put in place learning that engages students intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

*Sustainable Leadership Lasts* – Sustainable leadership means planning and preparing for succession – not as an afterthought, but from the first day of a leader’s appointment.

*Sustainable Leadership Spreads* – One way for leaders to leave a lasting legacy is to ensure that others share and help develop their vision. It means distributing leadership throughout the school’s professional community so others can carry the torch after the principal has gone.

*Sustainable Leadership is Socially Just* – Sustainable leadership benefits all students and schools – not just a few at the expense of the rest. In this respect, sustainability is inextricably tied to issues of social justice.

*Sustainable Leadership is Resourceful* – Sustainable leadership systems provide intrinsic rewards and extrinsic incentives that attract and retain the best and brightest of the leadership pool. Such systems provide time and opportunity for leaders to network, learn from and support one another, and coach and mentor their successors.

*Sustainable Leadership Promotes Diversity* – Promoters of sustainability cultivate and recreate an environment that has the capacity to stimulate continuous improvement on a broad front. Innovative schools create this diversity.

*Sustainable Leadership is Activist* – Sustainable leadership must have an activist dimension, engaging assertively with its environment in a pattern of mutual influence (adapted from [Hargreaves & Fink, 2006](#)).

Capacity building of an institution toward sustainability education cannot be achieved overnight and requires it to be an ongoing project. The act needs to be deliberate and strategic and focused over a period of time. The leaders of these higher education institutions (HEIs) have to be dynamic and ready to face challenges. The process is ever evolving and needs to be assessed on a regular basis with changes incorporated in the curriculum and mode of delivery as one progress with time. Emphasis has been made by academicians on “parallel leadership” where teachers and other faculty members assume the role of a leader independent of the support that they need from the authorities. It has become evident that “there has been a swing in educational theory toward a greater emphasis being placed on the potential for teachers to develop the prowess of teacher leadership within their organization” and

teacher leadership, specifically pedagogical teacher leadership, in concert with the meta strategic leadership of the principal is hereby posited as the basis for sustainable capacity building in school improvement. (Conway, 2014, p. 35)

## CONCLUSION

Imbibing sustainable development in the curriculum is not an easy task and poses several challenges. Sometimes the entire curriculum needs structural change, and standardization of the teaching content becomes an issue as different countries have different problems and needs various solutions to tackle them. An effective strategy and effective leaders can bring together aspirant members of government, civil society, teaching faculty and universities who can work collectively to create a vision for the future and work steadily to achieve it. An effective leader can build on “what works” and integrate different approaches and craft a framework that will help to achieve the goal of improvement in a sustainable manner. A robust strategy can help focus on what is realistically achievable and not get jeopardized it with overenthusiasm and unnecessary activities. A good strategy and a good leader focus on opting for an institutional change by prioritizing their work on a few objectives and activities that may bring out a paradigm shift toward sustainability.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

“The Teaching of Sustainability in Higher Education: Improving Environmental Resilience in Malaysia,” authored by Glenda Crosling, Graeme Atherton, Munir Shuib, Asyirah Abdul Rahim, Siti Norbaya Azizane and Mohammad Izzamil Mohd Nasir, discusses the findings of a study at a public university in Malaysia, which reflect the country’s evolving situation regarding sustainability education. The study aimed to explore the knowledge of and attitudes to sustainability of the academic staff at the university, and the pedagogical approaches they used in curricula. Through a mixed method approach, primary data were collected through an online quantitative survey containing 90 statements related to