

Rejoinder

Convergence and Divergence: A Rejoinder to John Huckle

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I am pleased with John Huckle's reply to my position paper. I appreciate his work and I share most of his/her theoretical proposal. With John Fien, Ian Robottom, Annette Greenall and others who contributed, each in his/her own way, to develop the socially critical environmental education current, he is one of the authors who enriches the reading program of my graduate students. I agree that the inputs of the critical theory, reviewed in light of a constructive postmodern thought, give an essential dimension to environmental education: that of a critical appraisal of the interrelated social, environmental and educational aspects of phenomena and issues of our lives, in the perspective of personal and social transformations towards optimal environmental relationships. Without this critical stance, environmental education would lose most of its relevance. And it is precisely this critical standpoint that underlies the discussions of this colloquium. It is a matter of challenging old and new orthodoxies while inviting us, each one starting from his own referential framework, to go further . . . clarifying, consolidating, enriching or changing our initial positions.

First, I wish to specify that based on my research background, the expression "conceptual framework" has a different meaning than "theoretical framework." Concepts are elements of a theoretical system; they should ideally be coherent with the other elements of the whole system, in which they should find an explanatory integrated framework. But concepts do not constitute the entire system and it may happen that in an initial developmental stage of a theory, the different elements of the global construct do not fit together perfectly. In this sense, it is possible for me to disagree with concepts of *sustainable development*, *sustainability* or *sustainable future* as relevant basis for educational theory (because of the conceptual, ethical and cultural problems they convey), and at the same time agree with most of the other key concepts used by the proponents of "strong sustainability" (following Huckle's expression), such as "transformative education," "critical pedagogy," "democracy," and so on. I also agree with most of their theoretical framework (with its axiology and its strategic and

explicative aspects), as long as it can be interpreted without reference to the reductive concept of sustainability.

Then, there will be no surprise if I say that I agree with most of the arguments found in John Huckle's reply. Among others:

- Global capitalism (associated to excess of liberalism) is a feature of modernity, and is at the roots of our main social and environmental contemporary disorders. In very few lines, I presented the principal characteristics of modernity and postmodernity; I acknowledged the complexity and diversity of these sociocultural trends without insisting on this aspect, which seems to be a well known evidence amongst most environmental educators. I preferred to underline the epistemological, ethical and cultural roots of global capitalism. In his remark, John Huckle offers relevant complementary elements of analysis.
- Critical education, which finds an appropriate (but not the only) strategy in participative action research, is central to a constructive postmodern project (in rupture with modernity, but also with total relativism and nihilism).
- The socially critical versions of environmental education and education for sustainability (those "worthy of attention and advocacy") have many convergences. These, as well as their differences, should be clarified.
- The model of three interpenetrating spheres I used to illustrate the zones of interactions at the basis of human development is totally inadequate to conceptualise sustainability: I did not intend to do so. The concept of sustainability is not part of my referential framework.
- There are different conceptions of education for sustainability. In my paper, I suggest that the initial and core meaning of education for sustainability has to be distorted or inflated to be worthy of "attention and advocacy." I am not surprised that the proponents of a "strong sustainability" feel uncomfortable with the critics I express. I just wonder why they keep such a problematic framework for their otherwise interesting proposal.
- Democracy, which is the main value at the core of citizenship education, is an essential part of a critical education agenda.
- I agree that "the duty of critical proponents is to unmask their ideology and reveal the true interest they serve." As Huckle notes, the analysis of the Thessaloniki Conference proposals about sustainability and education for sustainability is disappointing on this subject.

- The concept of responsibility, at the core on any ethical decision, has to be clarified. Philosophical literature offers rich reflexions on this concept, which has to be analysed and discussed in the context of education and more specifically of environmental education. Some avenues of investigation have been identified in my paper.
- The theory and practice of those who advocate “strong sustainability,” based on critical theory and pedagogy, has to be considered: it offers an important and rich contribution to contemporary education. The socially critical education for sustainability proponents are looking for an integrative framework for those aspects of education related to the development (emancipation, transformation) of responsible societies, including environmental education. This quest is of an extreme relevance and importance for contemporary education. I feel we are searching together, confronting our viewpoints.

There are many convergences in John Huckle’s reply and my own conceptions. I wish to continue the discussion, so the following questions could be addressed:

- What are the convergences and differences between the socially critical versions of environmental education and education for sustainability? What is the specificity of socially critical education for sustainability? How could we justify such an assertion as: “education for sustainability gives environmental education a sharper focus on the social construction of nature and of the environment”? What is the “niche” of environmental education in education for sustainability?
- If the “baggage” of environmental education has often been too light, is not the “baggage” of the dominant education for sustainability discourse ideologically and ethically problematic?
- Are there limits to the socially critical approach to environmental education and to what is called education for sustainability (the ones that adopt critical pedagogy)? Is it the only valuable approach? Are there other valuable complementary approaches to environmental education and to what is called education for sustainability?
- How can sustainability be justified as the ultimate value and finality of education?
- Is democracy the “only” condition required to pursue our “common interest in forms of development that are ecologically, economically and culturally sustainable”?

- Does citizenship education, which addresses persons as citizens (in the broad sense), take into account all the dimensions of our relations to the others and to the environment? Can all the dimensions of persons and societies be included in the concept of citizenship? Isn't citizenship education an occidental (culturally marked) concept?

We will probably find interesting responses to these questions in John Huckle's past and future writings. Unfortunately, a virtual colloquium is not appropriate for an informal, comprehensive and friendly conversation.