

Essential Elements of Sustainability Education Template

Jay Roberts
Earlham College

Jay Roberts is Associate Professor of Education and Environmental Studies and Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs and the Director of the Center for Integrated Learning Earlham College. He has led several off-campus study programs including Southwest Field Studies (2003) and New Zealand (2008; 2011). He is Teagle Pedagogy Fellow with the Great Lakes College Association and currently serves on the editorial board of the Journal of Experiential Education. roberja@earlham.edu

Learning Outcomes
Enduring Understandings/Big Ideas: Systems thinking Ethics “Critical sustainability”—race, class, power, identity issues. Multi-perspectival thinking. Adaptive thinking Individuality, sociality, and agency Design thinking
Content Knowledge : Education and curriculum theory Economics- micro and macro Public Policy Cultural studies Ecology Resource management Organizational and individual change management Resilience
Skill Sets: Quantitative literacy Community-based research methodologies Consensus and collaborative facilitation Geographic Information Systems and other forms of digital literacy Public speaking, written communication Grant writing
Attitudes: True “liberal” thinking- considering the possibility that you may be mistaken and the ability to change your mind. Anti-racist and keenly aware of privilege (yours and others) Capacity to have “hope without illusion” Pragmatism
Behaviors and Actions: Allowance that we all live lives of contradiction while simultaneously acting as ethically as possible SPICE—Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Equality

The Classroom or Educational Setting

Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment Practices Aligned With Learning Outcomes:

Yes? Not sure what you want here but this should certainly be the case.

Characteristics of Authentic Engagement:

Intrinsic motivation

Holding contradictory evidence in tension with one another

Listening to and learning from others

Ability to critique and also to act

Expression of emotions while learning- joy, laughter, sadness, anger, frustration, etc.

Schools/Institutions

Favorable Conditions—Organizational Policies and Practices:

**Institutional alignment toward “everyday” sustainability
“Blended” approaches—both top-down and bottom-up
Sustainability aligned with mission and vice versa
Evolution from petty “legalism” (recycling) to holistic, values-based action
Long term and creative financial modeling (beyond 1 year out cost-benefit analyses)
Student-driven learning**

Communities

Characteristics of Institution-Community Partnerships:

Community engagement targeted at capacity building (beyond the one-off project to longitudinal work)

Dedicated positions focused on partnerships and networking (constituent relations)

Co-generated, long term goals and objectives between community and institution

Asset-mentality and not deficit mentality (community not seen as something to “fix” or “help” but rather as an equal partner with knowledge and skills to share.

I organized it the way that I did based upon my own values and ethics as a practicing Quaker as well as what I have seen that works and does not work in the educational contexts where I have worked. I believe there is too much simplistic idealism in much of EfS at the moment and not enough careful consideration of alternative points of view. “Environmental Folklore” such as localism, organic, free-trade, etc. predominates without interrogation as to the possibilities and limitations of these so-called “solutions.” Students appear to be taught to critique “the system” without a fuller understanding of what that system entails and how to go about making actual change at local, regional, national levels. Students also appear to lack the strong quantitative literacies necessary to be taken seriously by policy makers and societal leaders. Many of my students start out volunteering on a farm in the summer, for example, only later to realize they have to

get serious about economics, law, policy, etc. If you want to be a farmer as your life-project I think that's great. Really. And, we also need students willing to go into politics, econ, industry, etc.

As an experientialist, I am also a firm believer in authentic, problem and project-based curricula that occurs in context while placing this activity in dialogic relationships to more theoretical and conceptual orientations. It's curious, by the way, that this form did not ask about pedagogical approaches—these are intimately connected, in my view, to content and skill sets.

The literature that informs my perspective philosophically is American pragmatism (John Dewey, Richard Rorty) as well as Critical Theory (Habermas, Freire, Maxine Greene). In terms of educational approaches, David Orr, David Sobel, David Greenwood are strong influences. On the environmental side, Aldo Leopold, Thoreau, Will Cronon, Rachel Carson, Ramachandra Guha, R. Louv, and Scott Russell Sanders have been influential.

What distinguishes the approach? Trans-disciplinary thinking, the fact that it is a “Crisis Discipline”, the ethical imperative, the action orientation—these things come to mind. How do we know it is happening? This is where evaluation and assessment are really tough. We are after transformation. How do you assess a “turned soul”? This is difficult. And, especially when the change must be permanent and long-term. How do we assess this longitudinally? Is it just about behavior change? These are difficult questions that I continue to wrestle with.