

Book Review

Review of Rolf Jucker's *Our Common Illiteracy: Education as if the Earth and People Mattered*. Peter Lang, 2002.

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For Rolf Jucker, educating for a sustainable future is the major challenge facing all of us—regardless of our cultural group. Whether we need to take on this challenge, from his well informed perspective, is not the issue that should be the focus of debate as it now is among many educators. Rather, the debate should focus on how western educational institutions contribute to the widespread ignorance about how to live more sustainable lives. Jucker's book, *Our Common Illiteracy: Education as if the Earth and People Mattered*, makes an especially important contribution to this debate.

Jucker's recommendations for educational reform are based on a broad-based analysis of how the high status knowledge promoted in western universities contributes to the ongoing globalization of capitalism, technological dependency, and a consumer-driven lifestyle. Evidence of the widespread "pathology of denial" about the role that high-status knowledge plays in contributing to the ecological crisis can be seen in the fact that university graduates staff the institutions that promote the neo-liberal myths visually reinforced through today's media, encoded in the anti-democratic organizations such as the World Trade Organization, and sustained in a political discourse that represents alternative discourses as the voice of the enemy. Jucker's contribution to clarifying the degree of illiteracy about the double binds inherent in the myths surrounding the market place, and the Promethean role of western science and technology, is in the thoroughness of his treatment of the evidence and insights presented by environmentalists. Indeed, his book provides a comprehensive and clearly articulated basis for understanding how western educational institutions contribute to the industrialization of everyday life—and by extension, to the ecological crisis. For citizens and, especially, educators concerned with how educational institutions are complicit in deepening the ecological crisis, the book is essential reading.

The importance of Jucker's analysis goes well beyond his comprehensive treatment of the cultural forces now pressuring non-western cultures to adopt the digital phase of the industrial system of production and consumption. As indicated in the title of his book, educational reform is a primary concern. Jucker weaves the insights of educational critics such as David Orr, Ivan Illich, and Edmund O'Sullivan into both his own critique and well thought out recommendations for reform. For the reader who is not familiar with these educational critics, Jucker's skilful integration of their key ideas into his own analysis and recommendations provides an important introduction to an emerging discourse that goes well beyond the current reduction of environmental education to environmental management. It also provides a basis for recognizing Jucker's own distinctive contribution to this emerging discourse.

His chapter on "Educating for the Future" addresses the roots of resistance to adopting reforms that contribute to ecological literacy—or what I would prefer to call eco-justice. The chapter also includes a list of practice steps for initiating change, along with a discussion of the consequences that are likely to follow if the state of denial persists in our universities and public schools. Of special importance is Jucker's recommendation that sustainable solutions to the various manifestations of the ecological crisis should be based on "transdisciplinary knowledge," rather than on specialized disciplines that marginalize how systems (both cultural and natural) are nested in ever more larger and complex systems. Jucker also makes a special case for the role that the study of the humanities should play in educating for a sustainable future.

Jucker's concern with action rather than entering into the seemingly endless debate over what is meant by education for sustainability led him to conclude his book with a list of 28 practical strategies for reforming educational practices and curricula. The strategies range from having university graduates sign a pledge to consider the ecological impact of their future careers (now a practice at several universities), exposing professors who use their courses to promote ecologically destructive and reactionary ideas, presenting students with examples of ecologically-centred cities and cultures, to making sustainability the central focus of all courses. While the list of practical strategies cannot by itself overcome the conceptual resistance and existential indifference that leads most faculty to think within the pre-ecological categories that were the basis of their own graduate school experiences, it nevertheless provides an overview of the many approaches that can be taken to educational reform. And they are reforms that can be undertaken without the aid of governmental grants or the achievement of consensus

within the department faculty that there is an ecological crisis that has important educational implications.

Our Common Illiteracy should be considered as essential reading for anyone concerned with how public schools and universities reinforce a way of thinking and individual lifestyle that is ecologically unsustainable. It is a book that provides a basis for understanding how to help ensure that future generations are not left a legacy of environmental destruction that diminishes their prospects of living in morally coherent communities. For example, Jucker's book leads to asking what needs to be conserved that enables individuals and cultural groups to live less consumer dependent lives. Similarly, it leads to considering how the modern ideology of development is undermining the ability to conserve linguistic diversity, which is critical to conserving biodiversity. And *Our Common Illiteracy* provides the conceptual framework for giving serious consideration to the forms of intergenerational knowledge and place-based experiences essential to democratizing technologies that, when left to the decisions of experts and corporate planners, further undermine the self-sufficiency of individuals and cultures. In short, Jucker's analysis and recommendations moves our understanding of the educational reforms that must be undertaken at a new level.

