

Young Children and the Environment: Early Education for Sustainability

Davis, Julie M. (2010).
Melbourne, AU: Cambridge University Press; 305 pages. \$52.00. ISBN 0521736129 .

Davis, an ardent and long-time expert in early childhood environmental/sustainability education, has put together a most useful book. Early childhood teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers can use this collection of chapters on theory, research, practical application, and ethics. Davis and the nine chapter authors are from either Australia or New Zealand; while their chapters are based on their work there, they have wide applicability to other countries with early childhood infrastructures. My quick U.S. perspective is that Australia and New Zealand are way ahead of the U.S. in sustainability education.

In the introduction Davis urgently makes the case for environmental education in this era of climate change and rapid urbanization. She identifies three types of environmental education—education *in* the environment (e.g., children playing outdoors), *about* the environment (e.g., the water cycle), and *for* the environment (taking actions to meet the numerous crises of our era). The last—*for* the environment—is the controversial part, as traditional early childhood has held young children to be both incapable of dealing with contemporary problems and too vulnerable to anxiety about them. Yet, as Davis points out, to keep children from understanding and acting on problems is unethical, as it is their futures that will be most impacted by deteriorating environmental conditions. Furthermore, young children in Australia and elsewhere are already aware of local environmental crises—how could an Australian preschooler not know about the sustained drought and wildfires there, or a child in Louisiana not know about the BP oil spill? The book provides many examples of children's interest in and reasoning around such problems, and useful actions taken. Education for Sustainability (EfS), with its ethical stances of caring, listening, participating, and being hopeful, resonates with early childhood practice, according to authors Lesley Robinson and Sue Vaealiki.

Classroom teacher Robert Pratt has an excellent chapter describing the extensive sustainability practices tested over many years at his university nursery school. A reader will be encouraged by this account to try some or all of them. A chapter by Margaret Lloyd on information and communication technologies (ICT) and sustainability points out that most children are familiar with ICT when they come to school, so we should figure out the best

ways to these technologies educationally. Lloyd gives a category system for planning uses, and information on current best websites.

Other chapters concern leadership, "green schools and communities," the process of systemic change, and the need to combine social justice with sustainability education (i.e., specific to Australia, to take into account the Reconciliation process begun by the Prime Minister in 2008 when he acknowledged the damage done to the Indigenous peoples by the incursion of the British and others). This chapter would have some lessons for the United States, which shares a history of colonial oppression and dislocation of native peoples.

The book is chiefly designed to be a textbook for teacher education programs, and it would certainly be very useful there. "Provocations" sidebars are inserted frequently, engaging the reader to link personal experience and thought to analysis of and reflection on the text. This is a strong teaching feature. Examples of children's writing and drawing illustrate several points. The cover provides the only color; various shades of gray enliven the text pages. At about 300 pages including a thorough index, the book is very readable.

Early childhood education for sustainability is a new and current field. The North American Association for Environmental Education has just spent a year developing and now publishing "Early Childhood Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence" (2010). These guidelines carry out the first two missions of environmental education identified by Davis—education *in* and education *about* the environment. Environmental education in the U.S. has very often been controversial, especially if it has engaged children in action. Leaders, however, have finally achieved a good level of respect for the practice, obtaining NCATE recognition of teacher education programs. As climate change and urbanization intensify, however, the need for more young people to participate knowledgeably in solutions for crises ought to increase the recognition that education *for* the environment must, both ethically and practically, begin with early childhood and permeate the whole education establishment. *Young Children and the Environment: Early Education for Sustainability* gives a superb foundation for this process.