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Chapter 12

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education: Going Beyond Metrics Toward Human Virtues

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ABSTRACT

Education for sustainable development (ESD) initially emerged around the 1990s, and it has opened the possibility to re-think areas such as management education. Although the original purpose of inclusiveness and creativity has been gradually replaced by metrics, while keeping the idea of “development as growth” largely unquestioned, drawing upon the work of organisational researchers like Heather Hopfl, this chapter presents a critique of the evolution of ESD in the UK revealing a rationale that transforms guiding principles into metrics, emphasising “efficiency” over “care.” The researchers relate to the principles of humanistic management, in its consideration of social value generation linked to financial success. The authors propose to enhance the notion of “values” by revisiting the concept of “virtues,” particularly in the consideration of sustainability. Finally, the authors draw upon interest in aesthetics and praxis to propose an “aesthetic education for sustainability,” as a critical and purposeful approach of questioning and imagining hopeful ways of living and learning.

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Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

INTRODUCTION

If we follow educationalist David Orr's assertion in which environmental problems are not the work of ignorant people, "rather, it is largely the result of work by people with BA's, BSc.'s, LLB's, MBA's and PhD's" (Orr, 2004, p. 7), then higher education institutions are also accountable for such problems. This realization has informed discussions in the United Kingdom as well as at the international level concerning the integration of sustainability and environmental practices in curriculums, campuses and relationship with communities (Jamali, 2006; Sammalisto & Lindqvist, 2007; Sterling & Witham, 2008; Filho, 2009; Filho 2012; Gomez, Saez-Navarrete, Lioi & Marzuca, 2014). These changes and ideas have emerged initially from international discussions, prompted by the UNESCO Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2005), and the provision of guiding principles for specific disciplines such as management studies such as the United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education (Wilhelm, 2008; UNPRME, 2019). Quality assurance organizations such as the Quality Assessment Agency for Higher Education (QAA, 2014) in the United Kingdom, has also offered some specific parameters to develop education for sustainable development ideas on three main areas: Knowledge, Skills and Attributes or Values. It is somehow expected that education will translate into actions in enterprises, organisations and corporations, as well as environmental practices at every managerial level.

This initial enthusiasm has allowed the questioning of educational structures and university culture, while assuming responsibilities in addressing the actual causes for current environmental problems and economic crises, based on specific definitions of sustainable development provided by the above-mentioned agencies. On the other hand, there have been some interesting attempts at subverting and criticizing these goals, by introducing alternative frameworks focused on nurturing sustainability stemming from deep ecology, eco-feminism (Di Chiro, 2014, Philipps & Rumens, 2015) and critical systems thinking (Porter & Cordoba, 2009). From initial discussions about what exactly is "education for sustainable development" toward the emergence of experiments and research in this area, it is true to say that this discussion represents an interesting opportunity to re-think some of the underlying causes of the crisis of "business as usual" (Orr, 2004) that can be traced back in the educational approaches (or the lack of) to sustainability.

In general, higher education institutions in the United Kingdom have gradually adopted the principles of education for sustainable development (ESD). For example, the student-led organization People and Planet Green League (People & Planet, 2019) offers a "taxonomy" of universities committed to ESD based on quantitative data, complemented with case studies. Other professional accrediting institutions such as the Institute for Environmental Management Accreditation (IEMA) have drawn a map of "knowledge, skills and attributes" that need to be developed throughout the professional career: from graduate level to senior management and directive levels (IEMA, 2019). Similarly, the "sustainability literacy test" is focused on certain specific numbers and figures to evaluate students' knowledge and attitude toward sustainability (Carteron, Haynes & Murray, 2014). The problem with these leagues and tables is that they somehow reproduce the idea of measuring without questioning what sustainable development. They seem to be happy to "measure" sustainability rather than nurturing it, and this attitude is replicated in the attitudes of graduates and organisations when addressing sustainability.

This chapter is focused on how universities in the United Kingdom and business schools have responded to the integration of sustainability in the educational strategy. It focuses on the dialectic between measuring and nurturing drawing upon the work of organizational and educational scholar (Höpfl, 2000;

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

2001; 2007). In her work on organizational cultures and managerial practices, she identified a tension between “the nurturing” and “the measuring” of certain managerial practices. The notion of purpose-driven organizations suggests a questioning of the practice of “measuring” and “impact evaluation”. Similarly, a focus on measurement reveals the underlying paradigm of traditional management focused on input-output orientation that entails a tendency to objectify human beings as human resources” (Von Kimakowitz, Pirson, Dierksmeier, & Spitzeck, 2010). In this chapter, the authors draw upon this tension in order to examine some of the problems in the discussion about education for sustainable development. The authors argue that higher education institutions and organisations tend to adopt sustainable practices without considering the purpose of sustainability only focusing on quantifying their actions through accreditations and measurements rather than nurturing it. The chapter is organized in the following sections: in the first section, it presents an overview of the discussions on education for sustainable development, with emphasis on management studies. Here, the authors stress the need to distinguish between education for sustainable development (ESD) and education for sustainability (EfS), the former being an extension of the ‘development’ paradox that needs to be questioned if sustainability is going to be achieved. Second, the researchers will go through the categories of “knowledge, skills and attributes” in sustainability as developed by some key educational and professional organizations. The authors argue that albeit these aspects represent a step forward in the consideration of sustainability, still, they miss the point of developing virtues and morals. The authors argue that a potential avenue for resolving these tensions is the consideration of the purpose and virtue of education for sustainability, an approach that can be of interest of managers and organisational consultants and scholars.

LITERATURE REVIEW: EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE “DEVELOPMENT”

At the international level, the discussion about education has inherited the ideas from the Brundtland commission on sustainable development. However, sustainability in relation to development remains a very elusive term, mainly because of its association with an apparently ‘undisputable’ aim of development. Scholars such as Jacobs (1999), criticize Brundtland definition of sustainable development (WCED, 1987) as a ‘smokescreen’ obscuring the conflicts between ecological integrity and economic growth. On the other hand, Robinson (2004) defends sustainable development as an integrative concept promoting political dialogues, partnerships and diverse stakeholder engagement. Many more definitions, criticisms, and variations can be found when discussing sustainability. Carroll (2002), for example, has identified 500 different attempts to define sustainability, which shows the variety of users, values and context in which the concept it is used, and the interests involved (Mebratu, 1998; Robinson, 2004).

However, all these views seem to be comfortable with the presence of “development” at the heart of the new paradigm. Arturo Escobar (1995) has offered a genealogical analysis of discourses on “development” from the 1950s in the context of a geo-political reconfiguration and the emergence of new global powers such as the United States. In this view, development has been promoted as a geopolitical aim through linking development to ‘positive’ ideals such as ‘progress’, ‘future’, ‘modernization’, while representing a rupture with the ‘old’, the ‘traditional’ or with ‘poverty’. But this vision of “development” is actually derived from the modernity ideal of European countries, referring to processes of transformation characterized by the emergence of institutions such as the nation-state, the bureaucratization of daily life based on the knowledge of experts, and the progressive advance of reason and science over religion and myths (Escobar, 2004).

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

Most of the initial optimism in the discussion about sustainability was the appreciation of an opportunity to re-evaluate current narratives on development. Paradigms such as the radical departure from economic and growth proposed by “deep ecologists” (Lovelock, 2000; Capra, 2000; Lovelock 2009) and the anti-globalization approach of eco-socialism (Guha & Martinez-Alier, 1997) became potential routes for this change. Amongst these alternative views, eco-feminism offered a comprehensive approach to *nurture* the “possibility of meaningful, equitable and pleasant lives for all people in the present [that] does not destroy either its ecological foundations or its capacity for social and physical reproduction in the future” (Perkins 2007, p. 227). Many saw in the discussions on environmental issues the need of including cultural aspects while addressing social inequalities and the role of women (Shiva, 1991; Sturgeon, 1997; Warren, 2000).

Notwithstanding, when branching out the discussion on sustainability into the realms of education or policymaking, the core of “development” remains unchallenged. For example, the United Nations Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit (ESDToolkit, 2019) refers to education for sustainable development (ESD), education for sustainability (EfS), and sustainability education (SE), like similar terms. They justify this option as a matter of convenience “(ESD) it is the terminology used frequently at the international level and within UN documents. Locally or nationally, the ESD effort may be named or described in many ways because of language and cultural differences” (ESDToolkit, 2019, para. 3). In the United Kingdom, scholars have tried to adapt ESD to local discussions. For example, Stir offers a comprehensive definition of Education for Sustainable Development as: “a lifelong learning process that leads to an informed and involved citizenry having the creative problem-solving skills, scientific and social literacy, and commitment to engage in responsible individual and cooperative actions.” (Stir, 2006, p. 833). Further, Tilbury and Wortman (2004) and UNESCO (2011) have identified the key traits of ESD to be attained: envisioning; critical thinking and reflection; systemic thinking and participatory cooperation.

Of course, these are all desirable aspects of all aspects of education and business. The problem is that the absolute acceptance of “development” and its inclusion on the allegedly new “educational paradigm” should not be a matter of “convenience”, because at the heart of the definition of “education for sustainable development” remains the tension between an instrumental and regulatory approach and a more critical and radical questioning on education and ‘development’. Following this ease in the consideration of the educational implications of the new ideas, it is not surprising that “education for sustainable development” has been focused on strategies and plans, hence following the traditional business rationale of one-dimensional goal set where aspirations are premised on the “notion that the future will be a progression from the present –once targets are achieved, goals met, rewards assured, promises fulfilled” (Höpfl, 2014, p. 97). Following this view, it is possible to see how the same ‘patriarchal’ order that brought us to the current ecological and social crisis, stemming from old models of regulation and control:

Conventional patriarchal representations ... reduce organization to mere abstract relationships [and] rational actions. Under these constraints, organization becomes synonymous with regulation and control... in other words, by the defining characteristic of the masculine. Under such circumstances, organization comes to function in a very specific sense to establish a notion of what it considers to be good order, and to establish what can be taken for granted in administrative and managerial practice. (Höpfl, 2014, p. 96)

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

Similar appreciations of education for sustainable development are adopted by higher education institutions, as ways of addressing the increasing demand from “customers” (Drayson, Bone, Agombar & Kemp, 2013) and “regulators” (HEFCE, 2009). Business schools in the United Kingdom have been slow in following these ideas (Hopkinson & James, 2010), at the point of describing sustainability as *the stranger at the door* (Springett, 2010). These discussions are crucial for Business Schools and cannot be ignored; considering that Business Schools are the largest component of higher education in many countries, especially in the United Kingdom (Macfarlane & Ottewill, 2013). For many, business and management studies are the cradle for maintaining the goals of “growth”, “employment” and “profit” and in recent years, and universities are accountable for their role in educating those responsible for the financial decisions linked to the crisis and further for their role in the environmental and social crisis (Bowers, 1997; Springett, 2005; Sterling & Scott, 2008).

Higher education institutions have responded in different ways: from the introduction of modules and new courses on sustainability, toward the search for accreditations and ranking systems. In terms of content, business schools, and management studies have adopted sustainable development through three main lenses: firstly, as a traditional strategic management issue (Fleming & Jones, 2012); secondly, by proposing “new” business values, such as Michael Porter’s (Porter, 2013) “Create Shared Value” framework as the successor of ideas on Corporate Social Responsibility (Schwartz, 1997), and thirdly, a minor consideration of the ideas of Deep Ecology (Lovelock, 2000, 2009). One of the easiest routes for business schools teaching this topic, and consequently for business and organizations, has been the adoption of “ecological modernization” as the approach best serving the culture of management in promoting technology, systems and control (Stowell, 2012). Celebrated adopters of this view such as Al Gore (2009) have contributed to the view of “ecological modernization linked to economic development and technological advances within a suitable policy framework.” (Deutz, 2009, p. 274). In this view, better technology, and better systems will “handle” the ecological crisis, technology is the hero, it will bring back order from the chaos:

[this] need for performance measures suggests a fundamental need for reassurance that the organization is, after all, a sustainable erection. Of course, the trajectory of strategic development is not only about an organization establishing parameters of normal expectations but also about improvement: about bigger, better and more. (Höpfl, 2014, p.102)

In this approach, businesses and corporations, including universities, will *produce* solutions to the problems. Sustainability, in this view, becomes the new “crusade” in which the old metaphors of “war” and “strategy” can win the “fight” against climate change (Auderbrand, 2010). In Heather’s words: “Organizations want to create the heroic sublime, and this is inevitably male.” (Höpfl, 2001, p. 100). In fact, even the consideration of Gaia as a potential eco-feminist route has its problems. Albeit Gaia has become an accepted ecological term for Earth, introduced as a way to revert some sort of anthropocentrism in the consideration of ecological aspects, a review of the myth itself reveals the problems of such a stereotyped vision of gender:

Gaia begins as a parthenogenetic initiator, but quickly becomes subservient to her son-husband, Uranus. As soon as the male arrives, the female loses her independence. (Murphy, 1995, p. 59)

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

Heather warned us about the perils of stereotypes in organizational settings. When the dominant patriarchal regime of “order”, “measurement” and “competition” fails to “deliver” or is named as the cause of the chaos, the “feminine” and the “maternal” are brought to clear up the “mess” created by male values of risk-taking and competitiveness. In this new quest for another ranking system, the archetype of the “controlling” Uranus seems to gain power over “nurturing” Gaia, hence the measurement takes over the initial emotionality of climate change; and business and business schools will “fight” it with all their might and (male) prowess!

Measuring vs. Nurturing Sustainability in Business and Management Education

In an attempt at engaging with business schools across the world in the discussion of sustainable development, the United Nations Global Compact (a network of over 350 business associations devoted to pursuing sustainable practices) invited institutions to develop a framework for embedding sustainability across business schools’ activities. The result was the promotion of Six Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) echoing key themes from sustainability and higher education declarations that universities signed in the time period 1990-2000 (Wilhelm, 2008; UNPRME, 2019). The principles are general guidelines that seek a coordinated approach to sustainability, however, they clearly align with the language of management focused on “efficiency” and “value”.

Table 1. PRME principles

Principle 1 Purpose: We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable <i>value for business</i> and society at large and to work for an inclusive a principle of sustainable global economy.
Principle 2 Values: We will incorporate into our academic activities and curricula the <i>values of global social responsibility</i> as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.
Principle 3 Method: We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable <i>effective learning</i> experiences for responsible leadership.
Principle 4 Research: We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and <i>economic value</i> .
Principle 5 Partnership: We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly <i>effective approaches</i> to meeting these challenges.
Principle 6 Dialogue: We will facilitate and <i>support dialogue</i> and debate among educators, students, business, government, <i>consumers</i> , media, and civil society organizations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

Source: UNPRME (2019)

This emphasis on “values” and “efficiency” reflects the influence of the language of management and business, without even considering different dimensions of the educational practice. The origin of the word “management” can explain this preference for efficiency, as it refers to the notion of training, as in urging in a particular direction and in disciplining – the correction of deviation, and to handling and controlling” which consequences are not dismissible (Höpfl, 2001, p. 197). Similarly, international agencies advising on Education for Sustainability such as 50+20 initiative (GRLI, 2019) has collated the ideas and discussions of the World Business School Council of Sustainable Business (WBSCSB), the Globally Responsible Leadership Initiative (GRLI) and The Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) aiming at providing guidelines, benchmarks and indicators.

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

The problem is that with an increasing number of guidelines, frameworks and accreditation systems, the possibility of “enlightened new models” is limited to the criteria and questions of such frameworks. For example, bodies such as the Global Foundation for Management Education (GFME), European Academy of Business in Society (EABIS), Association of Business Schools (ABS) and Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) often develop their own “evaluations”, borrowing from international conventions and furthering their own interests (Fukukawa, Spicer, Burrows & Fairbrass, 2013). In the United Kingdom, the discussion about frameworks have oscillated between general frameworks, as the guidelines provided by the Quality Assessment Audit for Higher Education [QAA], and specific aspects as those enshrined by the Sustainability Literacy Questionnaire (Sulitest, 2019). These latest formal documents have incorporated some of the discussions concerning the different ways in which education can relate with sustainability. Sterling (2010) has distinguished amongst: education *about* sustainability, education *for* sustainability and education *as* sustainability.

Education about sustainability refers to general learning or first order learning. It is linked with change within particular boundaries. For education institutions its emphasis is on content (for example curriculum change) and it is relatively easy to adopt for educational institutions because it does not confront the existing paradigm. Education for sustainability [Efs] equates with second order learning (meta-learning). It involves the learner or learning organization critically examining dominant paradigms, values, and ethics and seeks change if it is necessary. Finally, the third order of change or so-called epistemic learning refers to education as sustainability [EaS]. This transformative change “involves a shift of epistemology or operative way of knowing and thinking that frames people’s perception of, and interaction with, the world. This entails thinking about and evaluating the foundations of thought itself (Sterling, 2010, p. 23).

In this way, the new guidelines of the QAA represent a step forward in the adoption of the Education for Sustainability (in replacement of the old ESD), as well as the inclusion of citizenship and ethical behavior as cross-cutting themes that need to be embedded within the curriculum (QAA, 2014). On the other hand, an initiative funded by Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) named ‘Leading Curriculum Change for Sustainability: Strategic Approaches to Quality Enhancement’ has suggested benchmarking sustainability in curriculum change (HEFCE, 2009). In this new request, the proposed “benchmark” will make sustainability a requirement monitored by official bodies, funding councils and government, with the potential of being a catalyst for embedding sustainability within university structures (Sterling, 2012). Although the new guidelines include some of the previous questions on the notion of development and attempt a shift from the economic to the ethical, the problem remains: it presupposes that a better written document, with better metrics and texts can simply tackle the structural problems of universities and higher education in an increasingly stressful environment. Earlier in 2000, Heather uncannily foresaw the problems of the increasing pressure by questioning the “sustainability of a system subjected to such pressures and so redolent with contraction” (Höpfl, 2000, p. 195). The increasing squeeze on academics to compete in a market-defined environment, the fallibilities of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the need to bring money to fund our own practices, make that “education” and “teaching” are the less important aspects of the agenda. Further, the notion of “benchmarking” celebrates the erection of “metrics” and “competition” without leaving space to creativity, innovation and educational practices of care.

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

By privileging metrics, maternal values such as care and nurture have been set aside in favour of volume and frequency both of which are primarily patriarchal measures. This can be seen in the obsessive commitment to quantification and taxonomic structures for collecting data on virtually everything. (Höpfl, 2014, p.103)

For academics and educators facing the dilemma of the push by senior managers for “accreditations and rankings” and the need for being creative, this is a big issue. Although faculties seem to be happy with “sustainability” being included in the curriculum, they prefer staff and courses to gain accreditations, participate in “competitions” and show numbers and impact. However, the emphasis on monitoring and measuring has replaced any potential discussion, conversation or sharing of experiences:

Of course, this manic obsession with monitoring is all about regulation by male discourse and male reflections, male theorization and male constructions. In other words, it is about the phallus.... The erection alone stands as a symbol of reproduction because it has usurped the site of physical fertility and replaced it with text, hopes, aspirations and rhetoric. (Höpfl, 2014, p. 98)

Opposing this view, it is possible to consider “purpose driven” organizations and new templates as those provided by Humanistic Management, as:

...getting the priorities right from the outset and emancipating the company, firstly, from the restraints of a one-dimensional goal set -profit maximization- and secondly, from the permanent apprehension of being exposed to the harsh public reprove that may follow losses of legitimacy (Von Kimakowitz, Pirson, Dierksmeier, & Spitzeck, 2010, p. 78)

This view of humanistic management goes beyond the one-dimensional goal of “bettering” “improving” and of course, “measuring”. So, it is not about finding a new “green ranking” appealing to the rational and factual culture of business and management studies; but finding ways to “unleash the talent” in higher education (Management Innovation eXchange, 2020). The authors propose challenging the traditional ways of teaching management as “business as usual” by examining the underlying principles of new approaches, such as Humanistic Management, to complement the discussion on what education for sustainability is for. In doing so, the authors consider ideas on virtues, ethics, and aesthetics as guiding beacons in this exploration.

Toward a Humanistic, Beautiful and Virtue-Based View of Sustainability in Business and Management Education

The obsession with metrics in the above-mentioned frameworks and guidelines on sustainability and education reveals the increasing commoditization of nature such that its value is calculated in economic terms and it is acquired and regulated by means of the market (Böhm, Misoczky & Moog 2012). Shrivastava (2010) argues that current practices in teaching sustainability in business and management are focused on scientific facts, analytical tools, optimization models and techniques aimed at the intellectual dimension of students’ learning. While focusing on knowledge, values and behaviors seem to be an inclusive approach; the authors would like to add the dimension of virtues. As discussed by Heather Höpfl in her reflection on the Death of the Heroine (2013), virtues have been overlooked as ancient relics of

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

Victorian times, or as too constraining and prescriptive. Heather demonstrated that this is far from the truth, and that a consideration of virtues may bring up praxis, equality, and beauty.

In saying this, I am defining virtue in terms of goodness, honesty, integrity and morality: nowadays reduced to values that are much praised in rhetoric but perhaps less observable in everyday life. [...] virtues have been replaced by values that are relative and subjective. Any and all positions, desires and demands then become personal preferences that can be and are accommodated and met. (Höpfl, 2013, p. 397)

A consideration of virtues can lead to emancipatory and transformational practices and behaviors. She calls on MacIntyre (1981) book “After Virtue” to argue that virtues are acquired as habitus or dispositions, which in turn, presupposes the idea of being educated in a tradition (Höpfl, 2013, p. 400). This link connects us with the initial idea of education for sustainability and the argument of many authors of enhancing passionate engagement, attitudes and ultimately habits and behaviors that can transform people’s lives and organizations (Shrivastava, 2010; Philips, 2015). In this view, virtues are praxis - everyday habits that come from an emancipated organization. Although the notion of virtue is linked to religious practices, it is important to rescue them within the principles of humanism and purposefulness. The first dimension of humanistic management, recognizes “that unconditional respect for the dignity of every person is the foundation for interpersonal interaction including any interactions taking place in a business context” (Von Kimakowitz, Pirson, Dierksmeier & Spitzeck, 2010, p. 90)

Humanistic Management ideas are worth exploration, and can offer actual transformational practices on education responding to questions such as: how to re-establish the connection between humans and nature; how to encourage an embodied, passionate engagement with the natural environment and social issues and communities? More specifically, how education can challenge those one-dimensional, market-oriented practices of measuring, comparing and defining, toward a more committed, transformative and responsible behaviors? In this consideration the authors would like to add the dimension of aesthetic as part of the equation in any humanistic attempt to redefine management, and management education for sustainability.

Philosophers throughout history have explored the connection between ethics and aesthetics and the links between morality, beauty, and truth (Kersten, 2008). In the Republic, Plato pointed out the link between beauty and excellence (Dobson, 2007). In general, for the Greeks, the ideas of good and the beautiful were not clearly differentiated, it is only when the notion of *eudamania* define ethics in terms of obligation and duty, when that marriage was broken. In modern times, philosophers such as Wittgenstein, Foucault, and Shusterman, have addressed the connection between aesthetics and ethics. In 1916, Wittgenstein claimed, “ethics and aesthetics are one” (quoted in Tilghman, 1991, p. 56). Foucault also proposed the idea of “live our lives as art”, while alerting us to the political and institutional forces which influence what is experienced as ‘beautiful’ or ‘good’ (Ladkin, 2015). In his essay on the “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An overview of a work in progress” Foucault questioned the distance between art and life, and criticise criticize the fact that art is limited to objects rather than living practices (Rabinow, 1984). In recent years, Richard Shusterman (2000, 2008), drawing upon these philosophers’ consideration, suggests that the concern of aesthetics and ethics should go beyond the *theoretical* philosophies of how we think for a more *pragmatic* philosophy how to live. In his view, aesthetics is the bridge that can enhance the power of philosophy in the ways that we live through body, sensuality and emotions, as well as the understanding of individual and social situations.

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

The variety of definitions on the aesthetic can be a problem to establish the connections with education for sustainability. Donna Ladkin (2015) has argued that the overuse of the “aesthetic” risks becoming conceptually diluted to the point of meaning ‘everything and nothing’. Some authors like pragmatist and educationalist John Dewey (1958; 2002; 2004) offers a series of relevant ideas on the topic of education for sustainability that are worth exploring. Dewey argued that the only way to learn was through practice, or in modern terms “experiential learning” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In his view, education needs to be experienced, lived, and be practical in terms of offering skills for transformations and actions. In this experiential approach, he linked with the realm of aesthetics, hence, inaugurating a rich path of potential exchanges in these fields. For him, aesthetic is equated to the “arts” and he offered a rather subversive consideration as the art of equal if not superior to scientific knowledge: “the production of a work of genuine art probably demands more intelligence than does most of the so-called thinking that goes on among those who pride themselves of being ‘intellectuals’ .”(Dewey, 1987, p. 52).

Dewey also challenged the elitist perceptions of art; for him, [art] “is the instrumental aim of improving our immediate experience through socio-cultural transformation, where art would be richer and more satisfying to more people, because it would be closer to their most vital interests and better integrated into their lives.” (Dewey, 1987, p. 52). Dewey did not attack the museum, on the opposite, he demanded more museums and a policy of open doors that connect the museum to the street and the popular taste of his days: “the movie, jazzed music, the comic strip.” He proposed that:

...art should be removed from its sacralised compartmentalization and introduced into the realm of everyday living where it may more effectively function as guide, model and impetus for constructive reform, rather than merely an imported adornment or a wishfully imagined alternative to the real. (Shusterman, 2000, p. 20)

Similarly, humanistic management seems to include radical transformations such as re-distributing power; unleashing talent; bringing in an ethical practice that is both relevant and engaging (Management Innovation eXchange, 2020). This holistic approach is so relevant for current evaluations of educational practices requires the opening of boundaries; the establishment of interdisciplinary approaches, the synergy amongst different ways of knowing, and the consideration of the different values of diverse approaches. As mentioned before, inter-disciplinary and holism are key issues for education for sustainability. In a dynamic and changing society, where there are not established truths but multiple standards, it is relevant to remember Dewey’s words: “the value of ideals lies in the experiences to which they lead” (1987, p. 249).

CONCLUSION

The authors think that the legacy and relevance of the ideas of virtues and humanism is the opportunity to return to the discussion on the fundamental aspects of management and education for sustainability by proposing some paths for exploration:

1. The need for reviewing traditional management education with new paradigms such as those from humanistic management, purposeful management, and virtues in organizational development.

Rethinking Education for Sustainability in Management Education

2. The need to engage with alternative ways of knowing different from a scientific approach that privileges language and reason over emotion and pleasure. There is a lot of potential to learn from less threaded paths such as arts and aesthetics, aiming at a holistic understanding of the complexities of sustainability and its practices at the organisational level (Shriberg, 2002).
3. The emphasis on “praxis” as experience and practice to set the basis for “direct action, conduct and need satisfaction as the standards of truth.” (Dewey, 1987). This can be applied both in education as in management practices, valuing the qualitative daily practices and organizational learning toward sustainability, that eventually can lead to major quantifiable changes.

FINAL REMARKS

At the time of writing this article, we are going through the Covid' 19 pandemic. One of the major lessons of this situation is the importance of care, of courage and community spirit. These are virtues and hardly quantifiable. Further, the great debate has been between the people or the economy. While it is true that both are interrelated, it is clear that human life takes prevalence, and that a humanistic approach fostering virtues, creativity and resilience is the path to follow. Revisiting the work of scholars like Heather Höpfl questioning measurement as the only way to understand sustainability or any other endeavor can be informed by a more nurturing and caring attitude, based on virtues and courage, that consider the human being and our ecosystem as the centre of educational and economic endeavors.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Aesthetics: A branch of philosophy concerned with the relationship between the good and the beautiful. Throughout history aesthetics has, however, become limited to the superficial aspects of art theory and art history, while its potential in relationship with pragmatism and education have been largely ignored.

Education for Sustainability: Is a journey, constantly evolving life-long learning process questioning, critically accessing the existing patterns, practices, and worldviews. It opens up for a new creative, innovate ways of generating knowledge and understanding about sustainability issues, and eventually that contributes towards society transformation.