



Book Review

Sustainable Development, Education and Learning: The Challenge of Inclusive, Quality Education for All

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Introduction

Sustainable Development, Education and Learning: The Challenge of Inclusive, Quality Education for All by Victoria W. Thoresen offers an in-depth exploration into the critical role and challenges of education in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4), amidst a world marked by complexity, contention, and change. Thoresen structures the book into three insightful parts, beginning with *Key Issues Related to SDG4* (Chapters 1-3), where she discusses education's potential as both a societal conscience and a catalyst for sustainable development. This section delves into the significant yet daunting task of leveraging educational advancements to address pressing global challenges, emphasizing the need for transformative change. The narrative then transitions into *Barriers Impeding Educational Reform* (Chapters 4-5), examining the complex educational landscape and recurring problems within diverse systems and practices worldwide, highlighting the struggle against entrenched methodologies and systemic inequalities. In the final segment, *Efforts to Improve Education* (Chapters 6-9), Thoresen presents a series of 'Significant stepping-stones' towards redefining the essence and approach of education, underscoring initiatives for



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inclusive and transformative learning. The book culminates in a powerful conclusion, advocating for increased momentum and strategic actions to fulfill SDG4's aspirations, painting a vision of education that fosters caring, sharing, and serving across humanity. Thoresen's work serves as both a mirror and a roadmap for global educational reform, calling for a unified movement towards inclusive, high-quality models capable of preparing learners for the intricacies of a rapidly evolving world.

Specific Chapters of Interest

Chapter 8, *Vital Means*, and the conclusion of the book under scrutiny present an ambitious yet nuanced exploration of transformative learning within the context of SDG4. While the aspiration to shift from traditional transmission models to transformative learning processes is commendable, the execution and practical application of these concepts in real-world educational settings raises critical questions and concerns. Chapter 8's reliance on Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory as a cornerstone for educational reform underscores a sophisticated understanding of adult learning processes. However, the extrapolation of these principles to broader educational contexts, particularly for younger learners, necessitates a more critical examination. The analogies used, such as comparing educators to bakers, creatively illustrate the need for a conscious approach to teaching methodologies. Yet, this simplification risks oversimplifying the complex dynamics of educational ecosystems, where factors such as systemic inequalities, resource limitations, and cultural variances play significant roles. The advocacy for "*Transformation instead of transmission*" (p. 151-152) sets a high bar for educators and learners alike, emphasizing the necessity of navigating unknown realms and fostering a deep-seated change in perspective and understanding. This approach, while ideologically appealing, faces practical challenges in implementation, especially in under-resourced settings or within rigid educational frameworks resistant to change. The discussion on "*Expanded consciousness*" (p. 152-153) and the critique of transmissive education highlight a shift towards more holistic learning experiences. However, the critique could benefit from a deeper analysis of how these ideals can be systematically integrated into curricula and teaching practices across diverse educational landscapes.

The conclusion of the book, *Gaining Momentum* (p. 187-191), synthesizes the overarching themes with a call to action that is both inspiring and daunting. The reference to John Ruskin's ideals serves as a poetic encapsulation of the book's vision for education. Yet, the path from the current state of global education to the realization of these ideals is fraught with systemic obstacles and challenges that require more than just aspirational rhetoric. The emphasis on leadership, interconnectedness, and the principles outlined by UNESCO sets a directive for future educational reform. However, a critical perspective would demand a more nuanced discussion on the feasibility, scalability, and adaptability of these principles across global educational systems with varying degrees of readiness and resources. In critiquing these sections, it's

evident that the book positions itself as a beacon for transformative educational reform. Yet, a more grounded and critical analysis of the steps required to actualize these reforms, considering the diverse global educational landscape, would enhance its contribution to the discourse on education for sustainable development. The journey towards inclusive, quality education for all, as envisioned by SDG4, is undoubtedly a complex one. This book shines a light on the path forward but could benefit from a more critical examination of the obstacles and practical strategies needed to navigate this journey successfully.

Reflection as a Japanese Reader

As a Japanese reader, reflecting on the entirety of this book and its implications for transformative education offers a profound resonance with Japan's ongoing educational reform journey. The book's holistic approach, emphasizing inclusivity, quality, and sustainability, mirrors Japan's efforts to innovate within its esteemed education system, traditionally celebrated for its high academic achievements but critiqued for its lack of emphasis on creativity, emotional intelligence, and global citizenship. The emphasis on transformative learning and interdisciplinary approaches speaks to the heart of Japan's current educational challenges—how to balance the rigorous standards that have defined its system with the need for a more holistic educational experience that prepares students to navigate and contribute to a rapidly changing world. This dialogue is particularly pertinent as Japan seeks to foster not just academic proficiency but to cultivate learners who are empathetic, creative, and capable of thinking critically about global issues, including sustainability, social justice, and technological advancement. The book's exploration of barriers to educational reform and the detailed examination of initiatives aimed at revamping education for sustainable development offer valuable insights into the complexity of educational change. These discussions are reflective of Japan's own struggles and aspirations to create an education system that not only maintains its high standards but also embraces the values of inclusivity, interconnectedness, and lifelong learning. The conclusion's call to action, advocating for a global movement towards more inclusive and relevant education, underscores the shared challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Japan and the global community. It reinforces the necessity of leadership, collaboration, and a commitment to redefining the purposes of education in a way that aligns with the needs of contemporary society and future generations.

Conclusion

To sum up, this book stands out as a thought-provoking exploration of the complexities of educational reform in line with SDG4. This book adeptly tackles the multifaceted challenge of transforming education to be more inclusive, high-quality, and sustainable. Through a detailed examination of transformative learning and the critical need for interdisciplinary approaches, Thoresen not only critiques the current state of

global education but also offers a hopeful outlook for the future. It's a compelling read for educators, policymakers, and anyone invested in the evolution of educational practices. Engaging with this book offers the opportunity to engage with forward-thinking ideas and be part of the global conversation on educational reform.