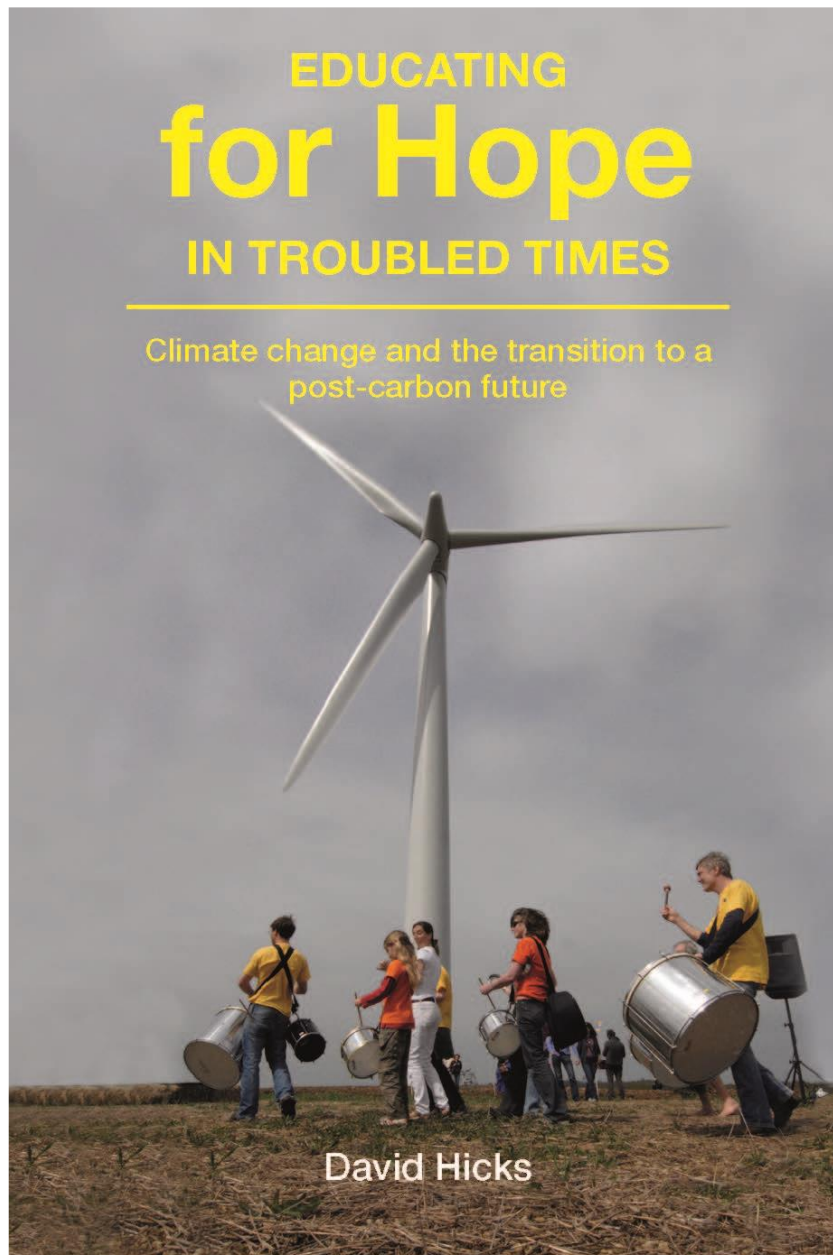


Educating for Hope in Troubled Times: Climate Change and the Transition to a Post-Carbon Future



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For many years one of the themes which has been at the forefront of many teaching conferences and debates devoted to the learning process is the aims of education. These discussions still seem to cover – insufficiently – the aspect of the general goal of education, i.e. how should we teach young people to prepare them well for a self-reliant and satisfying adult life in society? Progressive globalization, and the escalation of several unwanted environmental and social changes seem to be additional reasons for the statement that one of the biggest challenges to the present educational system is to equip the student (in addition to a variety of skills) with an attitude of openness, and a readiness to undertake activities that lead not only to improvements in the quality of life of the individual but also of the whole society, and a feeling of responsibility for the future of the Earth (from the micro to macro scales). In brief, a crucial area of modern education is global education and education for sustainable development, both meant as preparing people with a view of themselves as global citizens, and also deep involvement in shaping the future of the Earth. These targets seem to require a change in the way we understand education in general, from education aimed at the “mental” side (intellect, intellectual rationalism), which refers very little to new paradigms of development, to an education that presents a broad approach to its role, scope, and tasks in the present and future world. Thinking and acting in categories of responsibility for the present and the future require the shaping of “warm” values (i.e. empathy, effectiveness, optimism). These attitudes and actions cannot be acquired without a belief that they are important, necessary and accessible. Therefore I opened the book by David Hicks entitled “Educating for hope in troubled times. Climate changes and the transition to a post-carbon future” with great interest, because the title promised that it would be devoted to the issues that I find especially important, i. e: education and environment perceived in a new way: in the context of hope.

The book focuses on three important global issues: climate change, peak oil, and the limits of growth. It’s worth asking why Hicks decides to discuss these topics when each of them has been carefully considered among scientists for many years. In answering this question, we need to admit that, firstly, these problems are still not totally recognized, and are often not treated with great seriousness. Even in the 21st century, when we have a long list of their crucial influence on the present, we can point to numerous examples where their role in shaping the present and future of the Earth and its inhabitants has been neglected or minimized. Secondly, issues of global changes still seem to be taught and discussed in a superficial, fact-oriented way which does not inspire the development of reflective and future-oriented thinking.

The book is visibly interdisciplinary and reflective. It contains both scientific and didactic material, which is exposed both in the structure and the content of the book. I wish to emphasize that this dualism – in my opinion – is a significant virtue of the book, because in this way it provides an interesting theoretical and practical background for integrating various groups of readers. Therefore, it is addressed first of all to teachers representing all levels of education and tutors in pre-service teacher training who want to prepare students – through focusing on feelings, creating appropriate attitudes, and planning appropriate actions – for a satisfying life in an uncertain future. It is also valuable reading for all who are interested in reflective thinking about global changes on the Earth.

With regard to the structure, the book comprises 202 pages and is divided (apart from the introduction and epilogue) into 4 parts. Each part has a slightly different structure, but the common feature is frequent, sometimes long quotations from various scientific papers, books and documents. The quotations accurately illustrate some of the author's statements and are a valuable source for the reader's individual reflection. This is another of the book's virtues because firstly, it "releases" the reader, namely her/his thinking about the issues presented in it. Secondly, it creates additional opportunities – in parallel to the suggestions listed in the book – for teachers to use these parts of the book as source material for their lessons.

Part one comprises three chapters devoted to climate, easy oil, and growing limits. Each consists of two blocks: one explains the problem from various points of view with particular emphasis on the principal tasks that need to be undertaken to face these problems. The second block is a kind of teacher's toolkit/guide, which will help them practically in the process of planning and providing lessons on these topics. For example in chapter two, the author presents the use of oil in various spheres of human activity and its negative influence on climate, and asserts that it is not the end of oil that is inevitable but the end of "easy" oil, and the search for zero carbon energy sources. Then, he lists four areas and concrete proposals for reducing this problem in a post-carbon world. These are: buildings, transport, food, and renewable energy. In the "educational" block we find concrete proposals for teaching ideas and simple suggestions concerning activities/things which should be undertaken at schools (as an institution), such as: "every school should have its own policy document on energy-saving and this should be monitored and have a named person to supervise its implementation" (p. 48).

Part two is devoted to a deeper understanding of our attitude to climate change in general. In it, Hicks underlines the meaning and role of our emotions, such as anxiety and denial, in shaping the way we think about the environment. He also explains why thinking about and questioning the future should nowadays play the key role in environmental education. The asymmetry in thinking about the world's global changes, i.e. being more attached to the past and present situation, which is to be found in education in general, results in gaps in these aspects of the discussion and fosters pessimistic images of the future. I find this to be an especially accurate and very valuable statement. In Polish schools

it also results in a very stereotypical and superficial way of thinking and learning about the future. Hick supports the importance of thinking about the future with Toffler's opinion that our vision of the future shapes education in general.

Then, in the last chapter in this section, he explains (with several examples) why people have to be conscious and accept the fact that all these climate changes and peak oil will bring them severe and inevitable transitions. According to the book, the awareness of the need, and possible ways that schools can contribute to transition initiatives and real involvement in this process, should be the educational answer to these challenges.

Part three is focused on the role and importance of deep hope in preparing society for facing the future appropriately and effectively through positive responses to future challenges. A natural link in this process is also despair, which can neither be neglected nor perceived only as dangerous and useless, but should also be seen as the "dark place that transformation can begin" (p. 106). The question which automatically appears during this reflection is how to maintain a sense of hope while teaching and learning about global changes. Finally, Hicks lists his suggestions on how teachers can build a sense of hope among students through thinking about hope, gratitude and well-being, and widening circles. According to this book, a significant role in building this deep hope is played by true success stories which tell us about positive change. Another crucial source of hope is future scenarios, which are the final effect of deep analysis of past, present and possible future trends. In education these should be used to inspire discussion and attempts to envision the future.

Part four presents four scenarios (business as usual; techno-stability; energy crash; sustainable transition) which can be used to discuss post-carbon future options during lessons. Examples illustrate how society might change as a result of climate change, peak oil and limits on growth over the next forty years. Then Hicks presents key tasks for educators. These certainly include reimagining education and learning, i.e. building responsibility in students (from small children to adults) for global climate changes. The way to achieve these goals is to stimulate knowledge of sustainability and push the boundaries in the way young people perceive the world "...both in the conceptualization of the field and the way in which this relates to the worlds..."(p. 167.) Through "education for transition". This means that education should comprise key elements/themes, such as: energy descent, psychology of change, positive visions, cultural stories etc.

To conclude, I need to underline that my perception of this book bears a clear relationship to the fact that I provide teacher training for future science, geography, civil sciences teachers at a pedagogical university, and that I live and work in Poland. For historical and political reasons, modern teaching about issues devoted to environmental protection are relatively new and, unfortunately, modestly represented in core national curriculum. The compulsory topics are mainly devoted to the present situation and the protection of the environment, especially the reasons for and effects of the pollution of the

Earth, such as: the hole in the ozone layer; the greenhouse effect; deforestation; and overproduction of waste. Although such issues, by their very nature, provoke reflection and promotion of appropriate attitudes in students' nearest environments (for example sorting waste, rational water use), they are rarely the subject of deep thought about the future and thought free from dark, catastrophic and pessimistic visions of the World in decades to come. One of the most significant reasons behind this situation seems to be the lack of books/handbooks focused on these problems addressed not only to scientists but also to school teachers. This book – in my opinion – can fill this gap. The book certainly provides excellent and universal material for study by students of earth sciences and those preparing for the teaching profession, as well as teachers taking post-diploma courses. In the case of non-teacher students, it can inspire them to a more reflective and emotional way of thinking about global changes. For present and future teachers, the book is appropriate for reflecting on the current philosophy of environmental education in the light of the dynamics and directions of changes in the world, with a particular emphasis on the role of people in its present and future shape.

Before I present the list of key advantages of the book reviewed, I would like to indicate one doubt concerning it. In my opinion, the general implementation of the idea of hope presented in the book in schools is a big challenge. Hicks states that it is possible and desirable to shape hope in students through appropriate teaching about global changes. However, we have to remember that, in general, attitudes are the most difficult learning outcomes, both in terms of acquisition and verification. Building hope is even harder because it is anchored in personality features of character. I find the shift from pessimism to optimism which, according to Hicks, creates the proper space for HOPE perceived as a motor of proper attitudes and actions in the post-carbon future to be an ambitious, interesting but sometimes unfeasible plan.

I recommend this book to all readers who foster modern environmental education. Firstly, because it provides a fresh proposal for education for sustainable development, presenting a balance between theoretical and practical points of view. Secondly, it gives an ambitious approach to the practical goals of education. Thirdly, it can be both an inspiration for holistic reflection on global and local changes taking place on the Earth, and planning educational activities at home and at school. Fourthly, it provokes the reader to rethink their attitude to global climate changes; the role of critical and creative thinking about the future (based on the example of global changes and peak oil); and the current goals of education understood as a process of reflective thinking, learning, teaching and self-development.