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Meeting summary for webinar, 9th September 2024

This summary generated by AI, lightly edited by Stephen Sterling

***'Learning and Sustainability in Dangerous Times* – reflections on context and challenge'**

The recording is now live at: https://youtu.be/hxvwKzASEps

Quick recap

Stephen Sterling introduced his new book on sustainability education and learning which argues for a fundamental shift in consciousness and educational approaches to address current global challenges. After his presentation, the conversation touched on the closure of Schumacher College, the importance of transformative learning, and the need to train teachers for a rapidly changing world. Participants explored ideas including implementing regenerative education and creating a global citizenship network to promote lifelong learning beyond traditional institutional settings.

Summary

Addressing Existential Threats through Education

Ian Roderick from the Schumacher Institute introduced Stephen Sterling, an emeritus professor of sustainability education at the University of Plymouth, who discussed his new book, *Learning and Sustainability in Dangerous Times.* Stephen focused on the role of education in addressing the current existential threats facing humanity, such as the climate crisis and ecological degradation. He emphasized the need for a fundamental shift in consciousness and in the way

education approaches learning. Stephen also touched on recent developments, including the closure of Schumacher College and the passing of Stephan Harding, he saw collectively as marking the end of an era.

Addressing Global Issues and Education Transformation
Stephen addressed the interconnectedness of global issues and their implications for education. He expressed concern that educational discourse was behind the curve, and not keeping pace with the world's current challenges. He commended UNESCO's work on sustainability and education both in the past and currently and noted that UNESCO's 2016 Global Education Monitoring report was the first to focus on sustainability. Stephen echoed UNESCO's view in emphasizing the need to transform the educational system in order to address the challenges facing society. He also highlighted the upcoming International Forum on the Future of Education, in Korea which aims to renew and transform education for a sustainable future. Whilst welcome, he was concerned that this discourse appeared to lack sufficient depth to drive the necessary changes in mainstream educational thinking, policy and practice.

Integral Model – in relation to Education and Sustainability
Stephen discussed the implications of Ken Wilber's integral model for education and sustainability. He emphasized the importance of collective culture, worldview, and paradigm, and the need for a shift from mechanistic, reductionist thinking to a more holistic, ecological, and systemic approach. Stephen also presented a model illustrating how different levels of perception and conception influence values, norms, assumptions, ideas, theories, and actions. He stressed the importance of examining these deeper levels to build a more solid and supportive educational culture. He then discussed the purpose and potential repurposing of organisations in light of the sustainability crisis, and the need for a transformative (rather than accommodative) response from educational institutions.

A Radical Approach to Education
Stephen discussed the impact and relevance of Schumacher College's radical approach to education. He highlighted the development of critical and systemic intelligence through the use of key questions and inquiry questions. Stephen also shared his experience as a co-editor of a special issue/e-book on 'Re-purposing universities towards sustainable human progress' which has now received over 160,000 hits, indicating a significant rising interest in sustainable education. He emphasized the importance of learning and education in bringing about necessary transformations, this being the rationale behind his new book – which is part anthology of previously published work, and part new writing.

Transformative Learning at Schumacher College
Stephen discussed his experiences with transformative learning at Schumacher College and his research on what makes the college conducive to such learning experiences. Elvira, a student at Schumacher College, expressed interest in learning more about Stephen's teaching methods for creating transformative learning. Andy raised a question about the challenge of scaling up these initiatives quickly given the urgency of climate and nature crises.

Preparing Future Generations for a Changing World

Andy initiated a discussion about the need to train and educate teachers to prepare future generations for a rapidly changing world. Stephen spoke about the negative influence of neoliberalism on education and the need to reclaim older progressive educational values. He also emphasized the importance of making universities accountable for putting their often laudable mission statements into action. Jaimie expressed disappointment with the lack of progress in pre-service education in the US and asked for advice on encouraging more institutions to join the learning revolution. Stephen suggested that policymakers should focus on addressing young people's concerns and needs to prepare them for an uncertain future.

Education Shift and Overcoming Barriers
Stephen shared his insights on shifts in education, highlighting the positive developments and initiatives he encountered during his research. He emphasized the importance of recognizing and addressing the barriers to change, particularly the paradigmatic issues. Steve agreed with Stephen's points and added that the message needs to reach the decision-makers in the education system. Ann raised a question about the use of language and whether a new narrative is needed, to which Stephen responded that while labels are important for communication, it is the values and assumptions behind them that are critical.

Regenerative Education and Transformative Learning
Stephen was supportive of a "regenerative education" approach that emphasizes integrative community, biodiversity, and economic regeneration, and mentioned the importance of critical questioning for deeper understanding. Paul raised a question about how educators can navigate bottom-up change when managerial forces prioritize marketization paradigms. Stephen advised to look for opportunities to do something different and innovative, even if it's just for a few minutes in the lecture hall or class, and to find allies to make an impact across an institution. Virginia raised questions about established methodologies in primary and secondary schools, and Stephen supported these methods, arguing they offer a more holistic view of the learner. Ian proposed the idea of a global citizenship network to promote lifelong learning and transformative education beyond institutional settings. Stephen thanked everyone for their attention and emphasized the importance of the work agenda he had presented. He was looking forward to further engagement with everyone in the future and wished them well with their endeavours meantime.

Next steps

- Stephen Sterling to share his website with attendees for resources on educational initiatives and organizations.
- Attendees to explore the Great Transition Initiative's "Pedagogy of Transition" forum for innovative ideas and practices.
- Attendees to review UNESCO Japan ESD Prize winners for examples of effective sustainability education practices.

• Educators to seek allies within their institutions to collaborate on innovative sustainability education initiatives.
• Educators to look for opportunities to gain external recognition and awards for sustainability initiatives to leverage support from senior managements.
• Attendees to review Stephen Sterling's book "Learning and Sustainability in Dangerous Times" for deeper insights into transformative education.

• Virginia and the Waldorf Learning Foundation to continue efforts to persuade the Department for Education to increase state funding for alternative education models.
• Attendees to explore the PG Dip course at Bath Spa on "Waldorf Education and Creative Pedagogies" for mainstream teachers interested in alternative teaching methods.