

- 1. Resilience 2:1 is currently seeking partners and funding to conduct a survey of Canadian post-secondary students.** We need to know what they know about climate change, adaptation and resilience. We are not particularly interested in those who have already self-selected into environmental programs. They will already be informed and will learn more. No, it is the vast majority of Canadian post-secondary students who can graduate without any further knowledge about the context of their future lives who concern us. Recently, I, Cheryl started asking about what we already know and how do we know it. What work in this area have post-secondary institutions done already? Many post-secondary institutions have memberships in AASHE - The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (<https://stars.aashe.org/>) begun in 2005.

AASHE provides a number of resources on the idea of sustainability. It also has a self-reporting program called STARS for post-secondary institutions to gain credits - literally stars - for promoting sustainability within the institution. What does that look like? Well, many post -secondary institutions have Sustainability offices. These offices often engage in some student outreach, education and initiatives. But their primary focus is more often on how facilities are managed and resources utilized by the campus. This is meant to model right behavior to students and demonstrate the institution's commitment to sustainability. It becomes part of the institutional branding. Frequently, there will be a sustainability literacy survey of programs. And a push for professors and instructors to include reference to the UN Sustainability Development Goals into learning outcomes and classroom materials. Sounds great! Is it? Watch for my next post on the subject when I explain my concerns about this approach.

- 2. Now that we know what is happening on campuses across North America let's look at some results and alternatives.** My first concern is the use of the term 'sustainable'. Right from the get go, this is a problem. Because it is a lie. Nothing is sustainable at this point. To understand this, we must go back to the history of these words and thinking. This most recent understanding of 'sustainability' comes from environmental disciplines. It is based on an old understanding of ecological systems where they were thought to be stable and sustainable. It then became a big idea in agriculture and forestry, that if we would just change our ways in terms of food production and resource management, we could sustain those practices for a long time.

Forever? We now know that ecological systems are not static but dynamic. They are constantly shifting around depending upon forces that act upon them. And right now, lots of forces are acting on every ecosystem on the planet. Every system is in flux. Every place is being driven by change. We can see this in real time. Wildfires of new intensity and size all over the world are a sign of increasing aridity in the landscape driven by new climate parameters. This aridity is pushing these systems to be dryer and more desert like. It is a major shift. The life that was supported in the old landscape will have to move or die. We can see this happening all over the planet right now. So, what is sustainable? What can be planned or executed for the long term? **Nothing. Absolutely nothing.**

Sustainability by many post-secondary institutions is a form of green-washing. It is a lie. It tells students all is well. If we just conserve fuel and add native plants to our landscape, then all will be fine. And that is certainly not true. And I would contend, it is immoral. We have no right to lie to these young people. They will cope with climate change all their lives. We need to prepare them for reality and give them every tool possible to adapt. More in a third post.

3. **What do young adults need to know moving forward?** How do we prepare them for a context, that at least for some time, will be in flux? How should they live when long term planning becomes very difficult, especially when we have trouble imagining the impacts of climate change? We need to acknowledge that indeed, climate change, challenges our imaginations. Why did people stay in Port aux Basques in Newfoundland during Hurricane Fiona? Because they could not imagine the storm surge. It took them by surprise. It had never happened before. Why have people raced to evacuate any number of western towns due to wildfires? Because they had not imagined the fires could get so intense or move so quickly. Over and over again, a disaster occurs due to extreme weather (which will not be extreme soon) and people are taken by surprise.

The first task is to help young people imagine a future in a climate chaos world. And I don't mean that in a gloom and doom way. We have every tool we need right now both to mitigate the direst scenarios and to create a high quality of life in the midst of the change. First task is to acknowledge reality. Second task is to imagine how to achieve best outcomes. Post-secondary students need every skill possible in critical thinking, community organizing, and rational decision-making. They will have to dispassionately evaluate context and situations.

Think of all the communities on PEI and Newfoundland that must make difficult decisions right now about the future. There are still options available but those windows are closing.

What does managed retreat look like in those places? Move the critical infrastructure uphill? Move people out of vulnerable homes? Buy them out? Who pays? How much? Abandon locations as too pricey to maintain? Relocate agriculture? Imagine new means of food production? Rethink the energy grid so it can recover more quickly? It has been seen as too expensive to bury lines. Is it? Really? After a while the costs of constant repair due to storms will become untenable yet power companies refuse to refocus. Hard decisions have to be made on individual and community levels going forward.

Every person has to be ready to think critically about how we engage with our dramatically shifting context and how we respond to it. Are we getting young adults ready in post-secondary institutions? Students in post-secondary education are a captive audience. It is our last possible moment to prepare the vast majority of them for a future of climate challenges. Are post-secondary institutions doing what they should? All that they should? And is a focus on ‘sustainability’ sufficient? Or has it become an obstacle to what needs to be done and taught?

What do you think? Let us know in the comments.

Cheryl Bradbee, October, 2022