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To cite this article: Helen Kopnina (2016): Challenging economic development: the case study of teaching alternative cultural values in business education, Journal of Integrative Environmental Sciences, DOI: [10.1080/1943815X.2016.1150300](https://doi.org/10.1080/1943815X.2016.1150300)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1943815X.2016.1150300>



Published online: 22 Feb 2016.



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## Challenging economic development: the case study of teaching alternative cultural values in business education

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### ABSTRACT

Environmental educators distinguish between normative, instrumental and liberal approaches. This article offers anthropological insights into environmental education (EE) involving all three perspectives based on the discussion of indigenous culture within sustainable business course in The Netherlands. The case study described here uses ethnographic insights to illustrate the evolution of thought when western students are presented with philosophies and information that allow them to reflect upon their own cultural positions and ideologies. A combination of normative and instrumental instructional approaches, as well as open and reflexive pedagogical engagement has helped students to learn to appreciate the value of cultural and natural diversity beyond the writing assignments' requirements and socially acceptable or lecturer-desired views.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 17 April 2015  
Accepted 1 February 2016

### KEYWORDS

Environmental anthropology;  
environmental education;  
sustainable development

### Introduction

Environmental education (EE) research journals such as Environmental Education Research (EER), The Journal of Environmental Education (JEE) as well as journals associated with education for sustainable development (ESD), such as the Journal of Education for Sustainable Development (JESD) and to a lesser degree, interdisciplinary journals such as the Journal of Curriculum Development or discipline-specific journals within the areas of pedagogy and education have occasionally paid attention to anthropological research in EE/ESD.

Generally, the interdisciplinary field of EE/ESD appears to take little notice of cultural dimensions of learning (for a review of scarce literature linking EE and anthropology see Efirid 2011; Kopnina 2012a; 2012b). Among the over one hundred contributors to *International Handbook of Research on Environmental Education* (Stevenson et al. 2013), for example, there are no anthropological contributions. As Robert Efirid (2016), an anthropologist working within the field of EE has noted, this lack of anthropological perspectives is a significant loss for environmental learning theory and practice. While EE and ESD strive to link identity, values, and empowerment in order to establish a more ecologically sound and just world,

anthropologists can offer intimate and nuanced perspectives on how the dynamic of learning about and in environment occurs (Efird 2016).

Anthropological research in EE can be significant for yet another reason. Education that focuses on economic benefits of environment, including environmental management, or specific fields, such as geology being employed in the service of extractive industries, have become increasingly dominant. Shiva (1993) reflected that Western education allows market priorities to take precedence over cultural and ecological diversity.

Some authors have argued that education for sustainable development (ESD) is intertwined with economic development and the objectification of nature (LaChapelle 1991; Bonnett 2007; Jickling 2009; Kopnina 2012a; 2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d). Today, such “environmental” education, while providing lucrative opportunities for its graduates, also represents a very different type of “nature” than “environmental learning” used to encompass (Anderson 2012; Efird 2016). The instrumental use of nature as a natural resource or an ecosystem service is a hallmark of modern environmental management as it taught in specialized, professional or business schools (Bonnett 2007; Kopnina & Blewitt 2014; Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015). In this context, anthropologists, in explicating the native, indigenous ways of learning about environment, which reaches beyond its material benefits, could provide a counter-weight to the educational practice that supports commodification of environment and culture (Efird 2011; Anderson 2012).

This article aims to indicate the direction that critical educational courses can take, and suggest some examples of teaching aids, such as films with subsequent writing assignments and group discussions that address both individual reactions and opinions shared with the groups. This article will discuss the case study as an example of how –conceptually, practically and ethically – conceptions of development, as well as implications for raising the critical ability to recognize and engage in alternative discourses of sustainability can be implemented in teaching practice.

## Different approaches in EE/ESD

The normative approach to education implies that certain values, norms, skills and forms of knowledge are passed in a classical manner from teacher to learners. Normative education, or a prescriptive or instrumental approach, has the aim of appraising the values and norms that best fit the overall needs of society.

The instrumental approach to education acknowledges the fact that education can be used to serve certain concrete aims. These aims can include teaching students neoliberal values, and/or about the primal importance of economic objectives in the course of human “development”. However, this approach can be also critical of hegemonic tendencies in industrial economies and be directed towards sustainability (e.g. Isenhour 2010; Lidskog & Elander 2010; Kopnina & Blewitt 2014). One of the examples of constructive critiques of mainstream sustainability instrumental for advancing alternative economic systems is exemplified by McDonough and Braungart (2002)’s “Cradle to Cradle” framework that is based on recognition of cultural and natural diversity.

More open, reflective, and plural forms of education tend to deconstruct normative forms of education in order to avoid indoctrination of any kind, independent of the aims. One of the central areas within plural approaches is the discussion of the values that sustainable development entails, in all their complexity and openness to interpretations (Gough & Scott

2007; Læssøe & Öhman 2010). This direction in EE/ESD is often the closest to the constructivist and critical approach that reflects on its own disciplines' framing and interpretation of this practice.

Within these approaches, there is very little literature that addresses how to get Western educators and students to appreciate alternative – non-Western – worldviews, nor proposals as to how to move beyond the neoliberal values.

### **Culturally variable models of education**

Direct experiences in nature were shown in some studies to aid one's appreciation of the environment (Wells & Lekies 2006). In traditional societies learning in nature is also associated with livelihood or even economic activities. As Rebecca Zarger (2010, pp. 341–342) notes in her essay *Learning the Environment*

Learning to trap birds, or other means of contributing to their household economies, punctuates everyday lived experiences for many children in rural areas around the world. Learning to make a living in any landscape characterizes our human evolutionary history and continues to define humanity in all its diversity and uniqueness as a species.

At first site, learning to trap birds and realizing one's "uniqueness as a species" has little to do with the love of nature. On the other hand, children's experience as a predator within the natural system, and developed skill in handling its prey, speaks for the ability of the native children to realize something that Western children, used to their parents buying a plastic-wrapped supermarket meat, have forgotten – and that is, human dependency upon nature, without its exploitation. To counteract this tendency to ignore human relationship with environment, Goralnik and Nelson (2014) describe the design and experience of an outdoor environmental pedagogy that they call "field philosophy." Their course expands education beyond the classroom and computer-mediated settings to immersion learning in natural environments. The anthropologists attempt to understand native lifeways expressed through myths or highly circumstantial personal memoirs told by more experienced community members, the elders or older siblings (Cajete 2000; Barnhardt & Kawagley 2005; Anderson 2012; Baines & Zarger 2012).

One should be cautious though about just how much contact with nature remains reciprocal, rather than exploitive or extractive. In a lyrical reflection on future choices of her young Balizean friend, Anthony, Zarger (2010, p. 361) reflects: "I wondered if he would still want to cut a plot for his own farm in the fall and whether he would ever teach his own son to trap birds in the nearby woods. Somehow, I think he will." The question remains: will there be enough land and birds to trap by the time young Anthony grows up and has his own children?

### **EE: anthropological methodology**

The research objective of this article centers on the "drop in the ocean" reflecting evolution of thought when western students are presented with philosophies and information that allow them to reflect upon their own cultural positions and ideologies. Within traditional cultural settings, the best way to observe environmental learning has been through general techniques associated with "fieldwork", including participant observation, in-depth interviews, and observations of interaction between people and elements of environment.

One methodological strategy that allows a researcher entry to formal educational settings is partially derived from anthropology, partially from pedagogical studies, and involves a combination of participant observation of students outside of school and classroom ethnography. Classroom ethnographies vary from focused studies using ethno-methodological methods, typically involving prolonged engagement in which the researcher enters the world of his students (Carspecken & Walford 2001). In the case study described below, the researcher was also a lecturer.

This research involved the reflection on current perceptions of students (How do students think about economic development?). Also, this research reflects the Why question addressing and the practical (Why is it happening and How it can be otherwise?) consequences of economic development. Thus, the case study approach including in-class participant observation (with the researcher serving as a lecturer) or “classroom ethnography” was used because it is “the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin 1994, p. 1).

This methodology contributes to measuring – to a degree afforded by qualitative research strategy - the evolution of thought. The expected outcomes, and the framework for interpreting the results, are not a fixed “result” but is a “value” stated in terms of its contribution to education. In this case, the value to education can be expressed in what EE scholars such as Lotz-Sisitka et al. (2015) and Van Poeck (2015) have described as a successful blending of both democratic credentials of “open” and pluralistic education and the concrete aims of sustainability. Particularly, “the enactment of concern and responsibility for a sustainability problem can give rise to educational settings which foster sustained attentiveness to the issue at stake, and a profound exploration of how a multiplicity of actors is jointly caught up in it, through various and often irreconcilable commitments, dependencies, interests, involvements” (Van Poeck 2015). This combination of plural objectives leads to transformative learning which encourages reflexive social learning (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015) by upholding sustainability as one of important educational objectives, such as an ecocentric approach to sustainability (LaChapelle 1991; Bonnett 2007; Efirid 2016).

Below is an example of such classroom ethnography conducted during a course given to the second year Bachelors students of the International Business Management Studies (IBMS) at The Hague University of Applied Science in The Netherlands between May 2013 and December 2014. The study analyzes in-class discussion, students’ written assignments, and tracks the evolution of students’ perceptions, reactions and opinions throughout the course.

The study pays specific attention to the students’ expressed opinions before and after following the program, as discussed below.

## Case study background

The students were all participants in the Sustainable Business elective minor (a specialization course) offered for the duration of twelve weeks. The minor consisted of five modules, taught by three lecturers, including the Introduction to Sustainable Business; Politics, Business and Environment; Corporate Social Responsibility and Global Supply Chain; Business Ethics; and Guest Speakers from green investment firms, companies supporting renewable energy and others. The minor was offered as a specialization within the main business program focused on finance, accountancy, commercial economy, marketing and branding.

Some overarching themes in the minor included the subjects of economic development, sustainable development, sustainable business, and natural and cultural diversity. The overall objective was to help students to develop a critical stance toward some of the tenets of mainstream business sustainability, including its neoliberal underpinnings. Different lecturers discussed the “cult of economic growth” and the current unsustainable cycles of production and consumption; and anthropocentric bias in treating nature as a resource, as well as alternatives. These alternatives were discussed from both theoretical as well as practical business perspectives.

This case study involved thirty-two international students (including Europeans, Asians and Africans), between 20 and 24 years old. The students were asked to participate in this study at the beginning of the course given as one of the five modules of the minor. At the beginning of the course, the students were asked to orally reflect upon the subjects of economic and sustainable development, “developing” countries, and conservation. These responses were collected and represent the “pre-intervention” opinions. Subsequent research has focused on the progression of students’ attitudes due to “intervention,” in this case, the modules described above.

The lecturers were all asked to abstain from giving personal opinions at the beginning of the course, stimulating students to freely exchange their ideas. After twelve weeks of following the five modules, the students were asked to write a series of essays reflecting their views on economic and sustainable development, and western development agencies’ relationship with traditional cultures. The final evaluation focused on any changes in students’ expressed opinions and attitudes on these topics as reflected in the written assignments.

One of the films presented to students were *Schooling the World* directed by Black (2010), shown in order to investigate how students relate to indigenous ways of learning.

### ***Schooling the world***

*Schooling the World* presents the case of development agency-sponsored education in a remote village in the northern Indian Himalayas. The key questions posed in the film are: When people rely on traditional subsistence livelihoods, living on their own land, using their own local resources for food, housing, and clothing, are they more or less comfortable and secure than when they rely on money and jobs in the modern economy? What are the benefits and risks of these two options?

The film’s commentators, Western and native Indian anthropologists and activists, reflect that informal, traditional learning may provide an alternative to “development”. Commentators criticize the role of Western education that initiates children into neoliberal values and consumer culture. In contrast, it is argued that the native knowledge espouses love of nature, and needs to be emanated if environmental sustainability, cultural integrity and social cohesion is to be restored.

*Schooling the World* is premised on the belief that one way to return dignity to local communities is to grant them the freedom to return to traditional values and retain the informal learning processes which have informed generations for many centuries. The film speaks to the loss of indigenous knowledge, as well as criticizes Eurocentric education. As Black (2016) reflected:

The film makers argue that it is essential to closely examine school itself as a Eurocentric cultural construct. The structures, rituals, and assumptions of modern schooling both embed and rapidly

propagate the epistemologies, values, and economic ideologies of Euro-western societies, and may alter Indigenous cultures, livelihoods, and environments in radical and sometimes irrevocable ways. It is likewise essential to recognize that this phenomenon is not just curricular but deeply structural, and its impacts are not easily mitigated at a superficial level.

One of the key arguments of the film is that standard education brands millions of children as failures, as many children struggle with their grades. Even those who indeed graduate, often fail to get decent employment in spawning cities, ending up in the urban slums, employed in the type of industries that at best raise them just above the minimum wage. Through this process, a whole generation of unsuccessful school graduates loses pride in their own tradition and ecological knowledge and simultaneously become the losers in what Western development agencies describe as progress (Norberg-Hodge 1996).

Manish Jain (in Black 2010) states: “One of the things that is most disturbing to me – on a level of justice and morality – is that you have an institution that is in place globally that is labeling millions and millions of innocent people as failures”. In this fashion, inferiority is linked to economic status by local people themselves that see education-jobs-money trajectory as the only way forward, and the only “escape”.

While trying to succeed according to the standards of western nations, the majority of native children are, simultaneously, unlearning their traditional values. In these situations of detachment from native values, philosophies, and lifeways, interaction with environment is no longer a lived experience of interacting with and being dependent upon nature. Rather, nature becomes, at best, a set of scientific facts about the conditions of water, soil, flora and fauna, only abstractly related to the children’s immediate environment. As Vandana Shiva has commented in the film: “We’ve moved from wisdom to knowledge, and now we’re moving from knowledge to information, and that information is so partial – that we’re creating incomplete human beings” (Shiva in Black 2010). This sense of alienation transforms both native cultures and natural diversity into entities that need to be “developed” – as the land needs to become more efficient in producing food, and the people need to learn to be more productive employees.

The discussion guide available from the website of *Schooling the World* provides the following reflection on the film-makers’ interview with a representative of the World Bank:

We asked the World Bank how it accounts for the cash value of having a network of grandparents and aunts and cousins to help with child care, for example, or of living in a place with clean water, clean air, and a beautiful natural environment. The honest answer from the Bank was that it simply doesn’t account for those things. So from the standpoint of the World Bank, a family living on their own farm in an idyllic valley in the Himalayas, with plenty of food, clothing, and a beautiful house, may be ‘poorer’ than a family working in sweatshops and living in a slum in Mumbai. What’s wrong with this view of poverty?

This question, perhaps, needs to be posed to those, undoubtedly out of good intentions, keep insisting on economic “opportunities” for local communities. In replicating neoliberal discourse in branding local communities as poor and undeveloped, do these sympathetic observers not replicate the very fallacy they criticize?

### Findings: “pre-intervention”

Initially, congruence in social, economic and environmental objectives was emphasized by students, as evidenced by frequent reference to the balance between three P’s (People, Profit, and Planet). The students spoke of the need to “sustain” natural resources for future



generations, and the important role that economic development played in this process. The word “management” was often used. As a German male student reflected during the in-class discussion:

Economic development helps people to address environmental problems. With greater money, people can afford to clean up pollution, send children to school to be educated about the best ways to manage natural resources ... I think developing countries are catching up now, and learning to manage their own resources...

The same student expressed his desire to “work in the tropics” and to help “the people there” to manage their own resources. Sustainable development was seen as a “great way to combine social, economic, and ecological objectives”, as an American female student has put it, “especially in the ... poor countries”.

The students closely related nature to natural resources and natural capital. Conservation, as a German female student offered, is about learning to “protect nature as a resource for our children.” A Bulgarian male provided a reflection from his own country:

If we do not conserve the land we live on, there will be none left for the future generations. I can say, coming from the Black Sea coast of Bulgaria that estate-developers only think of their own needs now, they destroy (natural) beauty there, but what will happen in the next 20 years when there is only concrete and no sand? Tourists won't come. We need to preserve the resources to be able to save the economy.

The students mentioned the agents of development, namely “some financial organizations” (when prompted, one student could identify the World Bank and IMF), “donors” and NGO's. As one female Dutch student reflected during the discussion in class:

I think the biggest supporters of development and education are NGO's, they want to make sure that students understand what are the main issues in [the world] and how to deal with them at the local level ... They ... empower [students] and make sure their study contributes to their better future...

The students felt that local communities could be equally “helped” by these agents. One German male reflected that traditional cultures “hold back progress.” He further explained that traditional ways of life block development and thus people are “trapped in poverty” and in “their superstitions.” Another German male reflected that education helps students to “deal with environmental challenges” and to “manage problems in the positive way, like learning how to address climate change.”

Climate change was seen as part of larger environmental problematic that can be targeted by application of technological know-how. A Chinese male student has remarked:

Climate change affects all of us ... It threatens forest life, sea life, and all our (human) progress. We need to conserve the resources we have, we need to conserve what continues ... our life, our economy.

The student was interrupted by another Chinese student who has remarked that our life is not just our economy, so the first student retorted:

I don't mean that our life is our economy, but conservation of resources is conditional on solving the climate change ... Only by knowing how to do it, through learning, we can do it...

Education was seen as one of the most positive things that “Western civilization,” as a Dutch female student put it, can “give to others.” “In a similar way that we can learn to address climate change, we can also teach others how to conserve their natural resources,” a female Chinese student quoted above offered.



**Table 1.** Course materials used in different parts of the minor Sustainable Business.

Name of component of the course	Main literature (listed here in chronological order)	Written assignments	Lectures and in-class discussions (group)	Student-led discussions
Politics, Business, environment (PBE)	Lidskog and Elander (2010); Isenhour (2010); Kopnina and Blewitt (2014), etc.	At the end of the course, students were also asked to write an essay relating their own interest in sustainable business to the literature, films, and excursions offered in class	Weekly lectures. Group discussion of literature; individual presentation of written assignment	Course materials discussion as preparation for the exam: students were assigned individual questions
Introduction to sustainable business	McDonough & Braungart (2002)	An individual assignment per week, linked to films, excursions and literature; Written essay on the subject of own choice using subjects/themes within the course	Weekly lectures alternated with group discussions	Weekly discussion of the assigned articles during the second class of the week, with individual students being assigned the chapter or article to discuss.
Guest lectures and company visits		Guest speaker reports	Active participation	Posing questions to speakers

Students' saw their own education and that in developing countries as leading to "success", "opportunities" or "progress." An Austrian female student reflected that "education helps to lift poor people out of poverty". The Dutch female student echoed her in stating: "Education needs to be truly global to make people successful everywhere." Some students used terms like "knowledge," "competencies," and "future perspectives" to qualify success. Students seemed confident that education would lead to good future prospects both for themselves and the students of developing countries.

When asked what she expects from the course, an Austrian female student reflected:

It's good that we follow such course about sustainable development and business. I think everybody can profit from knowing more about doing things right, about business ... This could help people in [developing] countries to get better jobs, to know how to influence the future...

The lecturer's question "Do you think that they [traditional cultures] have something to teach us?" was met a silent gaze from the class.

### Findings: post-intervention

After following the minor course, discussing literature, films, and guest speakers and excursions, a number of shifts occurred in students' comprehension and perception of issues associated with economic development, environment, and indigenous cultures, as reflected in student assignments (see Table 1). As explained above, though, these shifts cannot be "measured" but exemplify individual contributions to the debate. Generally, judging by student reactions (see Table 2), most felt that the balancing of the People, Profit, and Planet was not always possible when profit is seen as a bottom line.

Instead of evoking terms such as unity, balance and progress, doubt as to ready solutions has been expressed, especially in reflecting on *Schooling the World*.

**Table 2.** Summary comparison statements before and after the course.

Name of component of the course	Before the course	After the course
Politics, Business, environment (PBE)	Progressive vision as to how governments and corporate leaders can work together to combat sustainability challenges, with economic development seen as a panacea for a number of social environmental challenges, ranging from poverty to environmental degradation	Critical thinking about the role of governments and corporate elites in stimulating economic development, which might be responsible for social and environmental challenges, learning to think of alternative which include radical re-orientation of development thinking towards broader societal, cultural and ecological development
Introduction to sustainable business	Students emphasised congruence in social, economic and environmental objectives was emphasized by students, as evidenced by frequent reference to the balance between three P's (People, Profit, and Planet), linking traditional ways of life with poverty. Students saw eco-efficiency and environmental management as effective tools of strategic decision-making	Doubt as to whether the 'Profit' of the triple P's can be indeed successfully balanced with other two objectives. Circular economy and Cradle to Cradle frameworks in relation to production and consumption seen as more viable than conventional modes of sustainability
Guest lectures and company visits	Most students expected to get internship positions as companies that have hosted student excursions or sent representatives as guest speakers	Many students did get internships in companies of the guest speakers, but also developed a deeper understanding of challenges that these companies face

A German male (2) provided insightful reflection on the very process of education, knowledge and information.

For many generations even in today's Europe and North America, education took place in families. Parents were teaching their traditions and values to their children for example how to hunt, how to build a house or how to trade. A quote quite fitting into the discussion is that: "traditional cultures are not perfect but they learn more about their own origins and their own environment than in a school."

One speaker in the film ... claimed that children are being educated in order to fit into "consumer friendly jobs." ... Another theory which came up in the film was that our community is moving from knowledge to information. We simply forget how to do things but we know where to get them, "e.g. I google it!"

The film was really showing two different opinions about this topic. On the one hand there were people saying: "schools are factories where our children are being made into products" while on the other hand "schools do add abilities and values to children which help them." A drawback from the Western schooling system was shown with an example of the USA. The general theory is if there are higher education levels in a country that it creates a huge gap between the "schooled" and "non-schooled" world.

A German female (1) continued on the subject of dichotomies referring to "the abyss between the educational system of highly-developed economies on the one hand and the values of other cultures on the other hand." After that, she explored the issue of poverty and education:

There is the issue Poverty: many people think that education is the key for solving this problem. The movie hints on the monetary aspect of poorness by illustrating that wealth is not only defined by money (as the World Bank does) but by factors like food-supply, family-life and a comfortable space to live. Similar to the broader vision of poverty as impoverishing people by distancing them from their traditions, the same student reflected on Western education's role in distancing the learner from the lived experience in nature. Furthermore they explain the relationship between human and nature. Most impressive for me was this statement: "School rips out people from nature and locks them into rooms for eight hours a day." Personally, I never

thought about this fact. For me a daily routine like that was absolutely normal. Indeed students locked in classrooms learn much about nature and understand it, unfortunately only in a very scientific way. At the same moment they lose contact and connection to it.

Yet another type of separation is noted between the families and between generations. A German female (2) reflected:

Certainly the main reason behind that separation was that these children should lose their own culture and language. And according to this film this is still happening for example in Asian regions where children are brought to schools far away from their home where they also live. They are not allowed to speak their own language but only English and their own values and traditions decline. In the end they are not able to survive in their own environment and move to big cities where they live in very poor conditions.

This dependency is well-described by a French female student:

The colonists think the way the Ladakhis do things is primitive and that they have to improve their life. According to them, "the native must be helped". Indeed, "the American flag has not been planted in foreign soil to acquire more territory but for humanity's sake" ....

But this schooling does not seem appropriate: more of the children don't get a work after they graduated. Moreover, it has repercussions on the indigenous peoples: it increases the age segregation, it separates families, and it creates a sense of inferiority. A Ladakhi woman said: "education is only reading and writing so now we don't know anything". But that woman was wrong: indigenous peoples have a culture, a language, moral values and an incredible knowledge of their local ecosystem, that is not transmitted anymore because of the separation from nature. I think that this diversity needs to be protected and I truly believe that we can live in a world where schooling and tradition do not destroy each other.

The inability to survive in one's own environment without Western "knowledge" is also evidenced in this Latvian male's essay:

Documentary "Schooling the world" is a movie that is representing West influence on East cultures and developing nations in a field of education and influence over consumerism and capitalism ... Movie is trying to represent very contradicting facts of the benefits that Western education schools result in, and directors capture the developing nation youth to reflect on what gains through the educations have been achieved. Beneficially for the viewer, they are not supporting the neo-classicist view where education is a solution to a poverty, but rather looks at the pitfalls of introducing education in regions where public is not ready or is not very likely to succeed with the program applied in Western world.

For me personally this was very mind-opening movie that represent on what scale Western world is trying to remain their influence over the world. It shook me awake and let me see of how regimented is underdeveloped world by large governments and corporations.

A British-Iraqi male also noted that the film made him think of the primacy of money in the Western societies and simultaneously the alienation from one's own tradition that honored other values. "Now everyone is money driven. Everyone wants to become an engineer or doctor and is motivated by material means. These new generations don't have a clue about working on the farm."

Some students have also felt that the superior presumptions of their own cultures has an effect on the exercise of cultural freedoms (or disruption thereof) elsewhere. The appreciation of the power of culture, in general – to influence others, but also to provide a powerful resistance, or an alternative way of life – were readily acknowledged by the students after watching the film and following the modules. As a Danish male has reflected:

This movie gives a clear image of how important culture is around the world. If all the cultures get schooled and thereby become the industrial culture, the world will be a very boring place to be. But it will also result in massive poverty and population problems like we have now because the system is not made so everybody can benefit from it. It really shocks me that the big companies are investing so much in schooling the kids. The ulterior motives are not as good as people are told. It ruins many families because the kids are going to the big cities to find a job and many of them are not going back again. But it also results in that many people do not know their traditional language or traditions.

The same student reflected upon his own schooling and habits:

This movie made me reflect on my own schooling system in Denmark where kids in the 1 grade now gets an Ipad to learn from. Many kids today do not know where the milk, eggs and so on are coming from because they explore everything through an i-pad or computer. It also affects that many kids now are socializing through social media. But the social media is not that social because they never get in physical contact with each other. This means that most kids are not playing with each other or going on adventures in the nature but instead play a Facebook game together through a computer. They are thereby not in real contact with each other or the real world.

When I think back to my childhood I went to a private school where the values were nature and social feeling. Today I am very happy that I can take care of myself and that I do not feel helpless without my iPhone.

Some students were very impressed by the (many) quotes used in the film. A Bulgarian male student wrote:

Several quotes of this documentary made a great impression:

**People who go to school don't know how to take the animals to the land or take care of the crops.**

In my opinion, this quote portrays the perceptions of the Indian society about education. They strongly believe that going to school does not give a practical education about the real world. The Indian society does not clearly understand the modern worlds and what its values are. Indians stick to their old-fashioned way of thinking and do not tolerate the values and living standards of the modern world.

**I'm not educated. I don't know anything.**

Even though, most of the Indians do not tolerate the modern education, for the ones that do, it is very depressing that they cannot communicate effectively in the new individualistic world. In the documentary, a woman tells that she is too old to change her way of thinking, but her grandchildren still have the opportunity to live according to the standards imposed by the modern world. Nevertheless, I think that despite the fact that the woman grew up differently, in an old-fashioned way, should not be considered a disadvantage. Because when she was a youngster, the way that people were supposed to think and behave was totally different from the individualistic and materialistic way of thinking of the modern society. But she hopes that her grandchildren will have the chance to live in the modern way since life is in front of them and they have enough time to be exposed to the changes of the global modern world.

**If we do not speak English, we get punished.**

These words have been said by a school boy. In my opinion, this is a very gloomy illustration of the means they use to impose the modern way of thinking to the children. It is important to encourage the children to speak English, so that they can participate efficiently in the global world, but the measures the society takes are too drastic and are not ethically approved by the modern world.

### **How can we think that reading books inside is going to teach us more about nature than actually spending time in nature?**

This quote is really deep and can be discussed extensively. Its main idea is whether the theoretical education we gain at schools is more valuable than the one we get from practice in the real world. I think that this is very controversial discussion and both sides have its pros and cons. I think that this theory also represents the difference between modern and traditional education. For example, the modern education is teaching us theory and how it can improve practice. But Indians believe that you can learn by doing and practicing without having any theoretical knowledge.

The German male (1) student also detected the complexity of educational aims, one of which is a quest for knowledge. This student reflected on the complex nature of modernity, in which one cannot be expected to return to traditional way of life, despite their own wanting to do so:

But even though there are several negative aspects about Western education I think the film neglects the fact that humans are always trying to improve their knowledge. Otherwise we would still be in the Stone Age, sitting in a cave waiting for a lightning to light up a campfire ... I can't imagine that living a traditional way of live will still be possible during the next centuries. Just give those nations their time and they will develop further like Western countries did during the last centuries.

The Bulgarian male concluded his reflection by reconciling the two types of education:

Both traditional and modern education has their advantages and disadvantages. Of course, it is crucial to keep up with the changes of the today's world, but also this world gives everybody the opportunity to choose how to live their lives because the most important human right is to be happy.

Similarly, the British-Iraqi student reflected on the positive features of globalization:

The essential values in a society have to remain as they are, but the "grey" area, the area where the cultures overlap, should be more explicitly. The reason for this is because of globalization. Because of globalization, the world is "smaller" and we live together.

I am a refugee from Iraq, and I'm convinced that if the United Kingdom didn't colonialize Iraq a century ago, my parents and I would have many difficulties adapt to a society as the Dutch. Due to the changes in education and values in a culture that was caused a century ago, my generation from the Middle East, and my generation from Europe share the basic principles and values. So all in all, I don't think it is bad that people want to get education, become a doctor, earn money, I think it is good that knowledge gets spread.

In the final discussions evaluating the minor modules themselves, the students were asked to give their opinions on what they have learned through reading assigned literature, in-class discussions following the lectures, and watching films. Both despair and hope have been voiced, as some students felt overwhelmed by the challenges; and others empowered by the new sense of direction in which sustainability can be approached. A Chinese female student commented on the overall pessimism that she felt after the course:

I feel I have been lied to ... People who say they are doing something sustainable ... Maybe a lot of it is just green-washing ... it doesn't go deeper than teaching others to do what we do – sustainable development ... But what are we developing? I don't know any more...

A sense of new direction was voiced by the same student, when she added: "I now know I have to look for a different direction ... Maybe in my own career ... I'll need to think more about it and then move on." This was reflected in the Austrian female student's reflection that prior to following the course she felt that sustainability efforts (in the context of talking

about climate change) have “ended nowhere.” After the course, she said she understood why, but still did not know how to approach the challenges. She stated to feel encouraged by the class discussion that suggested that more students felt the same way, but sharing the experience of the minor has also given them some “new ideas”, she offered:

What I like about the course ... is that it feels like, with all of us here we have experienced something ... That we can do it together, we can try not to push our own culture of money on others, but also think for ourselves how we can still do [business], and not harm others, how we can find a way to do well with people in other [countries, cultures, societies], and have respect for nature without using it ... I start to see how business, the way we learn it here, can affect others, but also how it can be different.

Below is the selection of excerpts from students’ written reactions to *Schooling the World*:

–Watching this film was really expanding my personal horizon.

–There’s no doubt, developing Countries need education to reach the standards of the Western world ... but is this the truth? Do they even want to reach the standards of Western life? Do they want to become part of the mainstream society?

–As ‘Heidi’ [a German benefactor in the film] mentioned, the people she met in the Himalaya were happy about their lives, and probably about their educational background, too. So why does she want to ‘help’ these people by collecting donations to support a local school? Why should these people change their way of live? Do they need the ‘western education’ to spend a fulfilling life?

–It seems Western education seems to fit for Western countries but is not adaptive to every part of the world.

–Parents want to enable their kid’s education so they can earn money and live a better life. They sell their houses, live in poverty and get in debt to pay for the education they think their children will need to spend a fulfilling life. Unfortunately only 10% of the children will succeed.

–“If you have to quit a pleased life to send your children to school so they can spend a life they maybe don’t even want to can’t be the proper way, right?” But there’s not only a financial background about the question if schooling all parts of the world the same way is about to work or not.

–“As mentioned in the film many of the children being sent to a school, sometimes far away from home, don’t know anything about their culture or the way of living of their parents or ancestors. Even their parents say that they couldn’t hope for the help of their children in keeping the house because they don’t know how to feed the cows, wash clothes or to live a natural way of life at all. Sometimes they don’t even speak the language their parents are used to speak. What once was a matter of course, for example to keep the water clean, has now to be taught in school.

–Our schools (...) are factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned (...) And it is the business of the school to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down.

–There was also the impression that Western countries want to educate developing countries to expand their business. Business is only possible if there are trained operators to run it.

## Reflection on the case study

As can be glanced from the student reactions above, the students’ responses demonstrate more awareness of the paradoxes and challenges of sustainability, but also awareness of the need to re-evaluate fundamental actions needed to address sustainability. Before the course the students perceived traditional cultures as ‘holding back progress and reflected

on “nature” in instrumental terms. Initially, as appears from the written assignments and discussions, the students tended to link traditional ways of life with economic marginalization.

After the course, the students were more aware of the contradictory relationship between Western agencies and inequality. Some students considered that poverty might be caused by neoliberal “modernity”, rather than by the traditional cultures themselves. The students realized that it is through traditional cultures that we can learn more about sustainable ways of living.

Many students have also attempted to reconcile the divergent or dichotomous categories of western education and indigenous learning, and expressed hope that “schooling” and traditions do not need to destroy each other.

These reflections are remarkable in their attempt to deconstruct major dichotomies between traditional and Western cultures as well as between the “schooled” and “non-schooled” world. Some students were able to identify not only these dichotomies, but also inherent paradoxes (learning how to hunt, build a house or a trade on the one hand, and learning how to read and write on the other hand). As one of the students above has suggested, Western education serves to make students impractical and “unlearn” real life skills, “forgetting how to do things.” This warning concentrates on Western education’s ability to teach specific skills necessary for entering labor force into market but also on its ability to create a sense of backwardness if these skills are not learned.

Closer analysis of student writing assignments also shows that certain dichotomies do persist – but perhaps now in a reversed order. While before the course the traditional cultures were seen as backwards, and contrasted to the developed ones that could offer “help”, the newly critical position counterpoised these traditional cultures with the potentially corrupting Western one. Similar to the observation by Goralnik and Nelson (2014), student reliance on dualistic characterizations of problems betray a problematic understanding of the work necessary for environmental change. The specific dualisms students invoke such as “progress” (associated with Western modernity) vs. “tradition” (associated with holding back this progress) still persist. These dualisms demonstrate student ethical baselines that can help us understand how best to focus curriculum and identify growth in subsequent student writing and thinking.

While it is impossible to generalize, and a longitudinal study is needed to validate the accuracy of these findings, it can be observed that student reactions show the importance of exposure to alternative cultural traditions, and the importance of learning multicultural ways of environmental engagement. Simultaneously, student reactions show that even a short exposure to critical theories of (sustainable) development within the confines of a business school initiates critical reflection. In other words, ironically, while these students became more critical of Western practices – their very positioning as Western business school students- did not prevent them from being critical of “the system” or the supposed colonization of people’s mindset and cultural autonomy in terms of a shift from traditional societies to a capitalist, monetary value system. In fact the very education of Western students, including showing a film made by Western film-makers, has led to critical evaluation of the very education.

Thus, one of the lessons of this case study might be not to reject the Western form of education per se, as it leads to critical self-evaluation, but in developing the ethical awareness and empowerment through pedagogy and curriculum guided by the ethic of care (Goralnik et al. 2012) and a community-focused environmental ethic (Goralnik and Nelson 2014). This



empowerment happens through addressing both hope and despair (Monbiot 2014), as the quest for sustainability, when critically approached, makes students feel both powerless, but also gives them an impetus to search for solutions.

This empowerment comes from both the anger that some students felt (recalling the student's statement: "I feel I have been lied to") and a sense of new direction, which they have not seen before as conventional sustainability approaches seemed to have "ended nowhere", to repeat the student's contestation.

Moving on from classroom assignments and discussion, additional elements of teaching could involve field trips to wild parks, if available, or walks in the woods. Experience in the natural world can provide students with opportunities to transcend the conventional mode of sustainability and towards a more transformative learning (Lotz-Sisitka et al. 2015).

This case study suggests that perhaps dualistic thinking about tradition and modernity, environment and humans, West and the rest is inescapable – and can help students to form the categories by which they can judge the world and position themselves. This positioning can occur in relation to one's culture and/or environment.

The students' opinions have shifted to a certain degree from seeing one's own culture as developed and superior, to seeing it as oppressive, resulted in re-evaluation of their positioning. The students have found a space to reflect on themselves, on their education, and on their culture. This flexibility of the students who might one day form the new corporate leaders offers hope as it shows progress in the most encompassing sense of the word – a progress in knowledge, perception, and care.

This case study also offers potential alternatives as to how the care for culture and nature can be taught. Repeating the quote from one of the students, we may all hope "that we can live in a world where schooling and tradition do not destroy each other." These insights offer hope as to how appreciation of bio-cultural diversity can be practiced.

While it would be impossible to fit all of the analysis of discussions and written assignments in this article, the readers can consult Kopnina (2013a; 2013b; 2013c) and Kopnina and Meijers (2014) for more details on and the analysis of assignments. It needs to be noted that due to certain constraints of qualitative data analysis, it is not the generalization nor the possibility to quantify or measure the "results", but a number of educational outcomes that can be expressed in broad learning outcomes in which glimpses of change in the students' worldview are offered that are of significant here. By recognizing the importance of culture in conditioning one's worldview, including the preservation of cultural traditions and nature as a great intrinsic wealth, it can be hoped that the students will move beyond despair to recognition of alternatives for a more sustainable future. The scope of this article does not allow the detailed presentation of didactic techniques and challenges involved in teaching. As limitations of this small sample study suggest, a larger sample longitudinal studies are needed to further substantiate these reflections.

## Conclusion

This article has indicated the direction that critical educational courses can take, and suggested some examples of teaching that address alternative conceptions of sustainability and development.

Returning to a typology of educational approaches mentioned in the beginning of this article, namely the distinction between normative, instrumental and liberal approaches,

we note that judging by the case study, none of these approaches has to exclude the other. The normative approach to subjects discussed in the five modules allowed students to formulate their values and norms at the initial stage. The lecturers guided the students by selecting literature, films, and subjects of discussion in which the normative conceptions were challenged. In this way, the lecturers' critical stance can be seen as instrumental in prompting the students to rethink the categories that they accepted as normative ("sustainable development is a great way to combine social, economic, and ecological objectives") and directed students towards a more critical and complex understanding of development. Simultaneously, plural, reflexive and open forms of educational practice were used as the students were invited to express, negotiate, contest, and defend their opinions.

Overall, combining different approaches has helped to develop students' critical reflection on normative aspects of sustainable development, and move beyond criticism and doubt into reconstruction of an alternative perception of sustainability. While generalization is impossible, a cautious hope can be expressed that a combination of normative and instrumental instructional approaches instructed by anthropological insights has helped students to better appreciate the value of cultural and natural diversity in the quest for sustainability.

It can be also hypothesized that students can be taught to be critical of their own education, as well as educational practices in traditional societies. This case study offers an example of how international business students can become more critically aware of the paradoxes of sustainable development and conceptions of nature, and the complexity of social and environmental sustainability.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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