

The Sustainable Living Project

Much of our educational system focuses on individualistic self-advancement, with a promise of material success. The Sustainable Living Project encourages the study of improving the lives of others, taking care of the earth and its resources and how to work together to move humanity forward.

The secondary school's sustainable classes expanded beyond recycling and environmental awareness, they focused on the big issues facing humankind – safety, shelter, food & water security, health, poverty, inequality.

We also tied in a TPP, which was entitled 'Earth – A Good Place To Live?' and focused on humanity's need for shelter. The first part of the study looked at land grabs in history beginning with Native Americans and ending with a study of the Highland Clearances in Scotland.

We secured a partnership with the Environmental Department of Aberdeen University and arranged for a year-long Sustainable Living programme. One of the university's students came to the school once a week to work with the students, which was also part of her course-work.

The modules for the programme included:

- Shelter: How to create low cost environmentally sustainable buildings
- Food: How to grow our own food and avoid buying food with high air miles. Agriculture, new ways of farming.
- Health & Wellbeing: Alternative ways of caring for our physical and mental health.
- Energy: Looking towards alternative energy sources to supply our need for energy.
- Environment: Local, national and international environmental challenges.

The programme was a great success. The students spent a lot of time talking about university life to our weekly visitor, which provided a good insight.

Another area of the Sustainable Living Programme involved the study of how certain people have influenced, or have attempted to influence, how to live sustainably. This was not to blindly agree with the ideas put forward, and many of the students had strong opinions and often disagreed about the ideas.

One of those people was Hans Gosling and his work on making statistics more accessible to understand what was happening in the world, including poverty levels. Discussions about capitalism was a frequent topic within the school, some students saw it as the cause of all evil, others thought it had benefited many societies, and talked about the huge decline in extreme poverty. We studied the book by Rosling, *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About The World – And Why Things Are Better Than You Think*. We also watched his TED video, and explored the gapminder.org website which contains a documentary entitled 'Don't Panic – End Poverty In 15 Years.'

Another person was Jacque Fresco who passed away in 2017, aged 101. A New York Times obituary wrote: Jacque Fresco, a self-taught and passionate industrial designer who envisioned an alternative society where money would be eliminated and resources distributed equitably by computers.

Fresco wrote and lectured extensively on his views concerning sustainable cities, natural

resource management, energy efficiency and the future of technology.

A few of his quotes -

On technology:

With the observable fact that scientific knowledge makes our lives better when applied with concern for human welfare and environmental protection, there is no question that science and technology can produce abundance so that no one has to go without.

On systems:

If our system continues without modification involving environmental and social concern, we will face an economic and social breakdown of our outdated monetary and political system.

On democracy:

You can play a role in the shaping of tomorrow's world by asking yourself questions like, 'What kind of world do I want to live in?' and 'What does democracy mean to me?'

Fresco founded the Venus Project, based around the vision of a “resource-based economy.”

From the Venus Project website:

The Venus Project proposes a system in which automation and technology would be intelligently integrated into an overall holistic socio-economic design where the primary function would be to maximize the quality of life rather than profit.

Another person we studied was E. F. Schumacher (1911-1977). He was a German environmentalist and economist who moved to England before World War II. He worked for the British National Coal Board for twenty years as their Chief Economic Advisor. He also worked for the British government and was sent to Burma in 1955 as an economic consultant. However he soon realised that they didn't need his advice about Western style development. During his time there, he wrote an essay, published in 1966 entitled “Buddhist Economics.” The essay was based on economics from the standpoint of human development. Schumacher was also an author, and his books include, *Small Is Beautiful: A study of Economics As If People Mattered*, published in 1973. It was listed as one of the most influential books published since World War II, by the Times Literary Supplement. An article in The Economist describes the book:

The book's subtitle is the less engaging “A Study of Economics as if People Mattered,” but it is more true to its content. For the book is not a paean to smallness. It is more a polemic against industry's brutality and (among other things) its despoiling of the environment and of the human spirit.

In the book, Schumacher names one of the chapters ‘Buddhist Economics’ and writes:

The New Burma sees no conflict between religious values and economic progress. Spiritual health and material wellbeing are not enemies: they are natural allies.

He also says that Buddhist economics are based on non-violence, renewable resources and self-sufficient local communities. As opposed to, what Hazel Henderson describes in the book, the 'Reptilian Brain Economics,' which are based on fear of scarcity and survival.

In 2011, his daughter-in-law, Diana Schumacher wrote a book entitled *Small is Beautiful in the 21st Century: The legacy of EF Schumacher*. She tells us:

Schumacher understood that the various aspects of human activity had become too divorced from spiritual values and their associated disciplines to be able to effect the behavioural changes that are needed. We must now abandon the long-cherished idols of acquisitiveness, unrestrained growth, power, economic globalization and so forth, and replace them with the more permanent ideals of humility, frugality and responsibility for the wellbeing of future generations and of the environment. The necessary changes in human behaviour still include drastically reducing our expectations as consumers of the Earth's resources, and a willingness to place the needs of the poor and powerless alongside our own.

In his *Small Is Beautiful* book, Schumacher names chapter 6, "The Greatest Resource – Education," and writes:

If Western civilization is in a state of permanent crisis, it is not far-fetched to suggest that there may be something wrong with its education.

A quote written in the book by Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics, David Orr, reads:

Most people now associate Schumacher's name with problems of economics and the scale of technology, not with education. But the most incandescent pages in the book have to do with education because there he probed the origins of the crisis. All of the rest he regarded as symptoms arising from a disorder in our basic convictions propagated by formal education.

We still train far more young people to be technicians in service to that great scam called the global economy than we educate whole persons capable of building the kind of decent and human-scaled world he described.

Schumacher college is in Devon, U.K. I always dreamed of our school (or any school), incorporating the ethos of the college's curriculum and message to young people (more information in Part IV, Chapter 2 under Alternative Education).