

Good morning,

It's an honour to be up here speaking to you today. I look around and see many people who I have been influenced by in my life and work. We really have a very inspiring community.

Today, I'm going to talk about sustainability education- that's why we're all here. But I want to look more closely at what it means? What does it look like? I hope to explore some of these questions by sharing some of my experiences and people who have influenced my belief in the importance of sustainability education and then getting into some examples of how Antigonish Sustainable Development is proposing we use sustainability education to create a shift in our community.

So let's start with the basic term- sustainability education.

I have a confession to make and I want to get it out in the open immediately. Even though I love sustainability education, it's at this basic level of language, just saying it, that I start to cringe. You say the term sustainability education, almost anywhere, and it seems to act like a rapidly wilting wildflower, a term that leaves the speakers' mouth or writers' pen alive with ideas that become this vague, melting jargon. All these ideas go limp to anybody listening who doesn't immediately connect the term with an experience or a vision. But sustainability is a term we continue to use time and time again because it's really hard to find another with the same integrated, holistic meaning. So let's break it down, make sure we're still on the same page- this is where our lovely volunteer comes in.

I need a volunteer – please start hopping, you hop, I'll talk.

Last year in NB, I spent my time in and out of classrooms teaching kids about “Sustainability.” I wanted them to understand it, to be able to break it down and take a critical look at a term they will see countless times in their lives. This was our first activity. What does the word sustainability mean? Is our volunteer's hopping sustainable? Why not? Limits?

So on a basic level, sustainability is our capacity to continue in time, throw in finite natural resources and a good quality of life for everybody and the definition gets complex very quickly.

But that's okay- complexity is not bad, quite contrary- it's wonderful, triumphant, revolutionary. It's actually not complex, but more complete. By looking at the world and its future through a sustainability lens, we are actually starting to see the whole picture and the beautiful web of interactions that make up how we live our lives, interacting with each other and the world around us. Instead of looking at the state of the economy, the deteriorating ice-caps, the assimilation of many aboriginal cultures, we can start looking at how one issue relates to the next, peeling away the layers of boxes we think within.

Sustainability education is exactly this- it's a challenge to open up our closed boxes. A challenge to understand what is happening around the world and to the world, a challenge to dream of a more socially equitable and environmentally sound way to live, a challenge to courageously make this shift happen. As St. Francis of Assisi says, "Start by doing what is necessary; then do what is possible, then suddenly we are doing the impossible."

So where am I getting all this idealism? My belief in a deeply interconnected world and my call to action for everybody who believes they can make a difference. From my teachers, my sustainability educators (see what I mean that term really needs a new name). I want to talk about a select few teachers who have marked my life, teachers I aspire to be like and who really get what sustainability education means. I've narrowed it down to 4. I hope this will inspire you to think of your sustainability teachers.

Mom- recycling, innovation and creativity

Billy MacDonald- Redtail Nature awareness camp, connection with nature

Bill Timmons- global village, "think global, act local"

Caleb Lawrence- grade 3 student council, justice and leadership, passions and point of view is not only important but can help shape the way we act.

Would anybody else like to add a teacher who made sustainability education come alive to them?

To finish up, I want to talk a little bit about Antigonish. I'm new on the scene and come-from-awayer, I've lived here on and off for almost 25 years. But my shift has been in returning to Antigonish and seeing it through new eyes. Things aren't as easy to do as I imagined in youth (the town is not likely going to put a chocolate fountain on Main st) but I am learning how we can and are achieving some of our goals.

I am very pleased to be working with Antigonish Sustainable Development. Taught me a lot about that jump from dream to action and patience to take the necessary steps and build the important relationships within the community.

How ASD sees sustainability education? I want to explore this through our four strategic goals.

Level of businesses- They raise the bar with environmental performance and community stewardship, and serve as a model as well as educator to their consumers

What we've done and would like to continue to do?

We've been trying out the adopter concept, starting with a small amount of organizations and building on their successes and lessons learned to reach out to more organizations until it becomes mainstream.

We have 20 in the early adopter phase and 25 in the early minority phase.

The challenge has been the time commitment necessary to make this transition. It takes a lot of work and willingness on behalf of many people to make this work.

ASD sees our role in sustainability as being able to bring in guest speakers on really specialized topics of interest so that people can learn about real specifics that apply to action. We recently brought in the eco-efficiency centre to talk about eco-efficiency. It was very well received but I realize that we needed to offer even more specifics- net-metering, solar water heating, reducing demand – in order to cater to different audiences and have the workshops very action oriented.

We also have a role to play in coordinating a network of people who want to share their successes and challenges. A peer-to-peer education.

Level of municipality- it is our role as citizens to let our political representatives know about the actions we are taking and would like to be taking so they can best represent us. On the other side, it is our role as citizens to understand how municipal government works, what they are capable of, so that we can build collaboration, not finger pointing.

What we've done – ICSP for education on citizen engagement, bringing sustainability education into municipal newsletter, inspiring leadership for earth day

Level of community- wow! Here is really where the action side of education can take huge leaps and bounds.

What we've done- community info session, nine so far.

Another point that I should bring up is the Heat poverty initiative. Going into this winter a group of social organizations foresaw a real issue with people being able to pay for their heat- we took quick action on establishing a fuel fund, an educational sheet on heat rebates and the piece that I was involved with – home winterization, this was a way to learn about the living conditions of many homes in the area and to teach about some simple solutions to patch up leaky windows. These are solutions that made an immediate difference.

Dreams- practical tips show on eastlink, new library packed with hands-on displays and demos of the green technologies they are using so it isn't something hidden behind walls but something they can see and feel to understand.

In closing, I'm going to go back to my teachers and share a little story about another 10 year old in NB, Andrew

As part of an activity in which I assigned students to take pictures of their environment, Andrew asked if he could take a picture of his friend. When asked why, he answered, "My friend is part of my environment"

This answer indicates a shift towards understanding that our environment is not static and separate – it's something we live by and with everyday – it's about relationships.

Friendships, society, how we live together and support each other, teach each other that we are going to find solutions to the sustainability challenge.

I believe that it's really in this social realm that we need to put in a huge effort, continuing to challenge and celebrate the way we work and live so that we can constantly improve

I want to end with a quote from Donella Meadows in the introduction to the publication "Beyond the Limits": "The idea of limits, sustainability, sufficiency, equity and efficiency are not barriers, not obstacles, not threats. They are guides to a new world. Sustainability, not better weapons, or struggles for power or material consumption, is the ultimate challenge to the energy and creativity of the human race."

Thank You