

Mindfulness, Citizenship & Engagement

Executive Summary

Youth today have the most at stake when it comes to the climate crisis, as they will inherit the consequences of today's actions and inactions. To build real engagement on climate change among youth, it is critical to cultivate both mindfulness and a sense of citizenship. With global progress on the SDGs lagging, eco-anxiety is placing an ever-tightening grip on young minds. The term eco-anxiety emerged in social media in 2008 (Pihakala, 2020). Eco-anxiety is a chronic fear of environmental doom or the generalized sense that the ecological foundations of existence are in the process of collapse (Pihakala, 2020). A major impact of eco-anxiety is distress, worry, fears, and anxieties generated by human inaction towards climate change. Anxiety activates us to learn more and makes people reflect more and focus (Ojala, 2013). Without these emotions, we will not be motivated to think critically to find a solution (Ojala, 2013). However, these negative feelings must be acknowledged first (Ojala, 2013). If so, how do we acknowledge these negative feelings and transform them to positive climate action through informed pedagogical approaches in the non-formal, informal and formal spaces. Therefore getting connected to oneself and being mindful of our actions is a big part of being climate advocates.

This webinar will help us to gain insights on the importance of educating mindfully. Mindfulness as both an ontology and practice—supports youth in developing an awareness and understanding of one's thoughts and surroundings—helping youth better understand the scale and urgency of the climate challenge in a direct, visceral way. At the same time, fostering a sense of citizenship, where youth see themselves as active participants in society with a responsibility to others, gives them a sense of agency and motivation to take action. By combining mindfulness of the problem with a sense of citizenship and responsibility to act, youth can become a powerful force for driving climate solutions. We will also learn about philosophies about the links between sustainability and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and that has shaped this field. The participants will learn about pedagogical techniques to incorporate educating mindfully in classrooms and in the community.

This brings two academic fields sustainability and mindfulness together. Coming to terms with “earth emotions” as Glenn Albrecht refers to. In this session, we will hear spiritual perspectives, psychological perspectives and how they interact with mindfulness and sustainability. The essential question that the panelists will discuss are:

- Being mindful is a skill that is taught in schools with a Social-Emotional lens - in what ways is it linked to the environment?
- How are communities and schools addressing eco-anxiety? What are some of the gaps?
- What are some tools that will help to translate “earth emotions” to being positive and motivational?
- What are some pedagogical tools that will help to translate positive emotions towards education for sustainability.

Panelists



Yishin Khoo is a Chinese educator and researcher with a Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies and Teacher Education. Her passion lies in integrating Eastern wisdom traditions into modern education for personal and planetary healing. Her research focuses on West-East reciprocal learning and collaboration in global citizenship and sustainability education. She conducts inquiries with preservice teachers in a permaculture garden to explore the role of

mindfulness in K-12 environmental sustainability education. Trained in the Buddhist mindfulness tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, Yishin values building regenerative communities and fostering deep connections with nature through practicing mindfulness, Chinese medicine, and gardening. She is grateful to do this work in Peterborough/Nogojwanong, on the traditional territory of Michi Saagiig Anishinaabeg within the context of the Rice Lake (#20), Williams, and other Treaties.



Barnaby Spring has been a student, practitioner, teacher & advocate of mindfulness in public/social & private spaces for over 40 years. His personal/professional mindfulness journey has included mindfulness re: childhood trauma, institutionalized youthcare, public & private education K-16, related public service agencies & as a professional actor & writer. His exit thesis from Cornell University's undergraduate College Scholar Program was on the relationship of technique in the creative arts & the experimental sciences. He has recently retired from the New York City Public Schools where he taught & led (as teacher, dean of students, principal & citywide student services director) for 26+ years. He has been highly active in establishing & cultivating

secular, non-sectarian mindfulness & yoga programs in the New York City, Department of Education & throughout the United States.



Kirsti Norris blends her experience facilitating transformative group work with her 22 years as a sustainability practitioner in the corporate and the UK further and higher education sectors to offer workshops so needed at this time of

climatic and ecological emergency. How do we, as sustainability practitioners, remain inspired and effective whilst truly acknowledging what we know about the state of the world? Kirsti is currently Carbon & Energy Manager at the University of the West of England, leading a team of passionate energy and sustainability professionals on a mission to reduce the university's carbon emissions. Alongside this role, she runs Action for Sustainability Ltd, offering large group facilitation, as well as offering empowerment workshops to organizations and individuals, based on Joanna Macy's *Work That Reconnects*.

Moderator



Professor Wendy M. Purcell's, PhD FRSA, purpose lies in transforming lives through education and research in pursuit of social equity, the knowledge economy and sustainable development. She is a full Professor with Rutgers University Biomedical and Health Sciences, joining the university in Fall 2022 from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health where she was an Academic Research Scholar 2016-2022. She remains with Harvard University as Lead Faculty Instructor with Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences Division of Continuing Education and Affiliate Research Scientist with SHINE Human Flourishing Program at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Wendy is also a Visiting Professor with University College London Global Business School

for Health and leads the MBA Health module in change management.

Wendy is Emeritus Professor of Biomedicine and was President of a UK university (2007-2015) leading the university to be among the top 1% of world universities and first 'green' UK university. She was awarded the Queen's Anniversary Medal for Excellence in Higher Education. She is a Council Member of the United Nations University, Governing Board Member EELISA European University and Member of the American Association of Universities and Colleges.

Wendy is Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Merits*, an international journal focused on contemporary research issues related to enabling people at work to thrive and is editing a Special Issue on 'People – The Next Sustainability Frontier' now open. She is also Series Editor for a suite of 17-books on 'Higher Education and the Sustainable Development Goals' for Emerald Publishing. Her most recent book 'The Bloomsbury Handbook of Sustainability in Higher Education' was published in February 2023.

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