

EDITORIAL

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## Education in a Time of Climate Crisis

IZZY LEWIS

On 28 August 2018, 15-year-old Greta Thunberg left her school and staged a climate protest outside the Swedish Parliament. This was the beginning of the global School Strike 4 Climate, which has seen millions of children walk out of school in a desperate attempt to change the world's attitude towards climate change. Over the past two years, the Fridays for Future movement, led by Greta and other young climate activists, has grown into a force to be reckoned with and is changing the way the world sees the youth. Thanks to the stoic determination of Greta and the School Strike 4 Climate, world leaders are starting to realise that they simply cannot avoid taking action any longer.

At the 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit, Greta held the most powerful leaders of the world accountable with her heart-wrenching speech:

How dare you? You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words ... We are at the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!

Greta's speech was inspirational yet sad – it shows a girl who has had to give up her education and childhood for the future of our planet, a girl who has taken it upon herself to make the world a better place and, despite being only 15, has managed to make her voice heard. As a 16-year-old climate activist myself, this speech means a lot; it is a symbol of a changing world where all viewpoints are valid, no matter your status or age, and, on a more personal level, it gives me hope that I too can make a difference. Greta has empowered our generation by giving us the role model we so desperately needed – a person with integrity, morals and the belief that the world can be a better place. To see a child become one of the most influential people in the world is at the same time a tragedy and an inspiration. She is right – she should be in school living a normal life – and the fact that she has had to give up that normal life to make

herself heard is a nod to the scale of the problem we face. Despite the tragedy of her sacrifice, Greta has managed to achieve enough influence to actually make a difference, becoming a figurehead for our generation who inspires many children, myself included.

In early 2019, I led a petition to make climate change a mandatory part of the national curriculum, which gained over 92,000 signatures. I was largely inspired by Greta, although at that time she was not as well known as she is now. Like her, I wanted to make a difference, to be actively doing something, and when I realised that most of the children in my school had little or no knowledge about climate change, I wanted to change that. How are we meant to fix the problem if we aren't taught about it in school? How can we be expected to lead sustainable lives when our greatest role models – schools – function unsustainably themselves? Like Roger Holdsworth, I wondered what it would take for 'education to remain relevant for all young people' and whether by 'equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes', they would be put in a better position to make the changes we need to avoid the ensuing crisis. It seemed so obvious that to fight climate change we had to prepare the younger generations, and yet not enough was being done. I set out to change that. When the petition started to make an impact, a lot of things began to change. First of all, my school began to listen to what we were saying and began implementing changes to make our buildings and use of resources more sustainable and, secondly, I learned that people cared about what we had to say. I would like to think that I gained a small insight into how Greta must have felt trying to balance her passion for the climate crisis with her education and, I have to say, it wasn't nearly as easy or fun as the media made it out to be. Despite it being stressful and exhausting, and although it had a negative effect on my GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) preparation, the petition gave me a sense of purpose and satisfaction – I was making a difference and that was special. Thanks to our work with Change.org, my three friends and I gained the publicity we needed to make our voices heard, giving us access to platforms we never thought we would be able to reach, from radio to newspapers and even television. As I said before, it helped us realise that people genuinely cared about what we had to say, despite our age, and, for me, that was an eye-opener.

When I was approached by Sue Cox in late 2019 to be guest editor of a special issue of *FORUM* that would focus on climate change and its implications for education, I was overjoyed – nervous but mainly excited. This special issue would include articles from people of all ages and be led by a young person as guest editor. I think that that in itself is something truly amazing. It is rare to find an academic journal that has been led by young people, and it is something that I feel extremely privileged to be involved with. It has been an incredible experience to be a part of this project, working with great people and helping them to create a journal issue which will hopefully inspire people to care more about climate change and the future of the education system. I have always wanted to help people make their voices heard and I believe that to build a

better future we must collaborate to value all people's viewpoints, no matter their age or background. My hope for this issue is that it allows some of these voices to be heard and that they will have an impact.

One such voice is that of Lily Dunn, a 10-year-old activist in Sydney, Australia. Lily's article paints a picture of the beautiful Daintree Rainforest in Queensland, which is estimated to have stood there for over 180 million years. Thanks to climate change, the rainforest's diverse inhabitants are under threat, and many species have sadly become extinct. The impact on the natural world is one of the most devastating and unforgivable effects of climate change, and something we cannot ignore. Ahelee Rahman depicts the scale of this effect in Australia, where, in the summer months of December–February, it 'was hit with the most vicious bushfire season in its history. At least 34 people were killed, ecosystems and wildlife were devastated, hundreds of millions of acres were burnt through [and] thousands were displaced'. Such events are becoming more and more common, and it has become normal to scroll past reports on new bushfires, deforestation and mass extinctions whilst eating one's breakfast without any feeling of shock. This normalisation and overexposure has led to a general apathy and lack of action. If you look at the COVID-19 response in comparison to the reaction to the climate crisis, it is clear that we could be doing much more. If a virus can bring the world together in a show of solidarity, then why can't we do the same thing with the climate crisis? Damon Gameau's documentary film *2040* makes it clear that we do have the technology needed; we just aren't using it. What will it take before the world actually begins to listen?

Although we have been aware of the climate crisis for over 30 years and there is indisputable evidence that it is a very real subject, some politicians still deny its existence – in fact, many seem to have little to no understanding of what climate change actually is, with the president of the USA a front runner in this group. As Ahelee puts it, we 'cannot afford – economically, environmentally or ethically – to have future generations of politicians be "agnostic" about climate change'. The only way that we can possibly avoid this is through education. Matt Carmichael presents a detailed analysis of the problems faced by schools in the United Kingdom in relation to climate change, highlighting issues such as mental health and inequality. He suggests 'Five Principles for School Responses', thinking in terms of not only what needs to be done, but how best to go about it. Belmiro Costa, Simon Taylor, Lew Zipin & Marie Brennan, Daisy Coltman, Jude Daniel Smith and 10-year-old Stanley Hibberd shed light on the need for a better climate curriculum, exploring the paradox that is the education system. Their articles look at a curriculum that focuses on the importance of student agency. Costa suggests 'problem-posing education', Taylor, Zipin & Brennan talk of a 'Problems That Matter' curriculum, and Daisy Coltman explores the uses of the Extended Project Qualification. Hibberd also makes some valuable points about how the education system often limits children from making their dreams a reality by focusing on small alterations rather than how to pursue and realise their ideas. Smith, writing on behalf of

the organisation Teach the Future, goes as far as to say that we are in need of ‘a complete repurposing of the entire education system’. Clover Hogan’s article backs this up as she uses her experiences in the Australian, Indonesian and French systems to convey just how many problems there truly are with our education systems.

My own experience of the English curriculum has been less than perfect. The level of climate education at my secondary school was minimal; the majority of my peers had little to no understanding of the severity of the situation and, to be quite frank, didn’t truly understand what climate change actually is. For some of them, it seemed there was no link between themselves and a diagram of the greenhouse effect on a whiteboard and, to be honest, who can blame them? At the age of 16, about to leave compulsory education, they have not been prepared for the uncertain future ahead of them and have not been given the information they need to be fully functioning, ethical members of society, and it is unacceptable. We owe it to future generations to make sure that they have all the information they need to live in a world ravaged by climate change. They deserve to know what their future holds. Sometimes ignorance is easier and, in many ways, I envy the freedom that climate sceptics possess. However, it is unrealistic to allow this to go on happening any longer. It is perhaps one of the biggest mistakes we could make – if we continue to ignore climate change and don’t try to fully educate the younger generations, it is extremely likely that the mistakes of previous generations will be repeated. And if these mistakes are repeated? Well, I think that it is unlikely our planet will ever recover and we will live with the repercussions for generations to come.

Change is possible. Although Hogan depicts the different education systems as somewhat crippled, she also highlights that there are some systems out there that are already putting environmentalism at the centre of education. She praises Green School in Bali as a place which nurtured her love of learning and the world around her. The articles from Roger Holdsworth, Michael Bassey and Tim Jones present ideas on how the education system could be reformed and what this could mean. From Len Greenwood’s Green Career Program, which is already up and running in the USA, to Matt Carmichael’s ‘Five Principles’, it is made clear that there are many ways we can create a new, modern system that will change the face of education for the good. The efforts of Rita Soares Pinto and Sally Grove-White’s Climate Action Group, and Jo Dacombe’s primary course, which uses art to bring children closer to nature, show us that things are already beginning to change for the better. Not only do we have many great initiatives taking place in schools, but we also have an incredible amount of action being taken by students themselves. Like Lily and Ahelee, other young activists are making a stand. Hazel Singh, a 16-year-old activist in Kenya, describes the efforts of the Students for the Environment movement that operates at the International School of Kenya. Articles created from conversations between the student activists Brianna Fruean and Anna Taylor (moderated by Hazel Healy), and between Lucy Gibbons, Shannon

Jackson, Annwen Thurlow, Harry Berry, Phoebe Cookson and Cherry Tucker, provide insight into what some young people are already doing to make a difference. From academics to schoolchildren, all sorts of people are beginning to make a change. Through a shared passion for education and climate action, this issue has united people of all ages and nationalities, from different backgrounds and professions, to create an issue that is focused not on the problems we face, but on the solutions and progression that we can make. I hope that the following articles will be thought-provoking and that the issue will leave you with a feeling of hope. There are so many people who are doing great work and, although the future is uncertain, we have a golden opportunity to create a world which holds comprehensive education, collaboration and equity at its centre.

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