

## *Inside the Life of a Sustainability Educator*

The field of Sustainability Education (SE) or Schooling for Sustainability (SfS) is quite broad, and there are several opportunities for careers within. According to the Cloud Institute for Sustainability, “Education for Sustainability is defined as a transformative learning process that equips students, teachers and school systems with the new knowledge and ways of thinking we need to achieve economic prosperity and responsible citizenship while restoring the health of the living systems upon which our lives depend” (2010).

***[Intro introduces topic: sustainability/environmental education, and offers a broad definition]***

*Description of field*

***[Notice how headings are used at each section! Follow formatting instructions]***

Within the field of sustainability education, there are several different careers. A recent job search on Indeed.com yielded many positions. The first was a Sustainability Coordinator position at Pike’s Peak Community College, as well as another at Colorado State University. The role of a sustainability coordinator is essentially to actively promote sustainability on campus, collaborate with students, faculty and other committees, and work to implement programs encouraging sustainability. The search also included a Director of Sustainability position at Washington University, which provides a similar role to a Sustainability Coordinator. Another result was for a Professor in Sustainability Science at Florida Gulf Coast University. While many of these opportunities are at universities, there are others, such as working as a Farm and Wilderness Guide at Hidden Villa, a non-profit organization that uses their farm, wilderness and community to teach about the environment, social justice and sustainable living. There was also a position at the non-profit Second Nature, which assists colleges and universities implement programs to become environmentally sustainable. Finally, there was a position listed for a

***[Introduces various positions offered in the field]***

Director of Education and Research at the Cloud Institute for Sustainability, which requires the person to essentially oversee and evaluate all of the company's sustainability curriculum designing and implementation.

The professionals I interviewed all had very different positions, some of which were similar to those listed above. Carol McQuillen is a first grade teacher at Orchard Elementary School in South Burlington, Vermont. She works to implement sustainability into her classroom and the school as a whole, and has created the organization SLIMY (Sustainable Living Initiatives Motivating Youth). "The mission of SLIMY is to promote and support lifelong learning that will develop understanding, skills, values and behaviors consistent with sustainable living practices (Vermont Standard 3.9). Through an interdisciplinary approach, meaningful connections will be made to the environment, which foster appreciation for the critical relationship between natural, social and economic systems." (*Sustainable living initiatives motivating youth*, 2006). Specific goals for the future include completing an ecological footprint assessment for the Orchard School, sustaining the compost project, and continuing to involve children in SLIMY as much as possible. Carol essentially has worked from the inside to implement sustainability at the school-wide level. I also interviewed Tom Hudspeth, who is a professor at UVM and teaches a course in Sustainability Education, among others related to environmental studies. Sarah Kadden works for Shelburne Farms and the Sustainability Academy at Lawrence Barnes in Burlington, Vermont, as the Sustainability Outreach Educator. Sarah works three days a week at Barnes, where she meets with teachers and the principal in order to oversee curriculum development and implementation. The other two days she spends at Shelburne Farms, teaching a preschool class and working on professional development for classroom teachers. Anne Tewksbury-Frye is considered to be a Sustainability Coach at the



*[Describes some of the careers of people interviewed]*

Barnes school, and holds the only position with this title in the United States. Some of Anne's responsibilities include working in the classrooms, leading retreats for teachers, meeting with parents, presenting about the Barnes school at various conferences, and working with small groups of leadership students. Each career is quite different, but they are all within the realm of Sustainability Education. They actually could be separated into two different categories: formal education, namely classroom teachers or non-formal education, including sustainability coordinators and coaches, sustainability curriculum developers and promoters, or educators at the non-formal level working at aquariums, camps, zoos or environmental education centers.

### *Issues*

According to my interviewees, the biggest issue in the field is that most people struggle to correctly articulate exactly what sustainability is. Anne Tewksbury-Frye remarks that "people still don't know what sustainability is, and not enough people are focused on sustainability daily". This leads to problems because in effect, people are unsupportive and don't understand the importance of implementing sustainability education in schools. If there is not enough support, it will not be possible to implement successfully. So a goal in schools is to educate parents, committees, and other teachers. According to Carol McQuillen, one of her biggest problems is that some teachers are unresponsive and ignorant to SLIMY's goals. While most of the teachers are competent in sustainability, and its importance, there are some that simply don't care. This in turn creates a disconnect for the children, where they recycle and compost in their classrooms from K-3, and then enter grades 4 and 5, where teachers choose not to recycle and compost. Carol is currently working to implement a required school wide sustainability initiative that teachers must abide by, helping to improve consistency for the children.

***[It is important to use both citations from journals/webpages/books, but also a large portion from your interviewees]***

Another aspect of the issue just presented is highlighted in an article published by Tom Oswald at Michigan State University. He presents the fact that just about everyone supports sustainability: cutting down on energy use, and keeping the Earth “green”. The accepted definition of sustainability is “meeting human needs in a socially just manner without depriving ecosystems of their health”. While this is fairly explicit, the ethics are not represented. Should we exploit ecosystems as little as possible so that they can thrive because they are valuable? Or, should we exploit ecosystems as little as possible so that future generations can still exploit them? The issue that he presents is that because people don’t understand sustainability, we cannot teach it, and thus, cannot achieve it.

#### *Work Conditions and Lifestyles*

The first type of work condition would be working in the traditional setting as a classroom teacher. Teachers are able to work in many different locations: small towns, urban areas, overseas, essentially anywhere there are children and a school. Sustainability education can easily be worked into any curriculum.

Some of the rewards of being a classroom teacher are working with students and being able to see them grow, learn and mature. The general activities would be developing a teaching plan or curriculum, developing meaningful assignments, evaluating student progress, and accommodating different learning styles (DeGalan & Middlekauff, 2001). One limitation of being a classroom teacher is being mandated to align activities with the statewide curriculum in order to prepare students for standardized testing. However, according to Anne Tewksbury-Frye, integrating sustainability to a rigid curriculum is simple. A great benefit of being a classroom teacher is having a summer vacation and other vacation opportunities, which is important for

***[This section separates the two types of work conditions; those of the traditional teacher, and that of the non-school educator. This in turn, leads to more focused, clearer paragraphs]***

someone planning on juggling a career and a family. There is generally some work at home required, though you are able to take as much time as you would like to improve your classroom and curriculum as you deem necessary. It would be fairly simple to work part-time, as many schools offer programs such as job-sharing or positions with fewer hours. The average earnings for an entry-level educator is \$22,000 to \$30,000, with top salaries up to \$80,000. Here, Carol McQuillen and Tom Hudspeth reap the benefits of job security and teacher's salaries, which is better in comparison to the salaries custom to non-traditional careers.

The non-traditional working condition encompasses those careers dealing with sustainability education, though not in a formal classroom. This includes, but is not limited to; people who work in nature centers, aquariums, camps or zoos (Ginsburg, 2004). This sector is also comprised of those professionals who aim to make sustainability education more available, including those who develop sustainability curricula or work in offices of sustainability on campuses to implement programs encouraging sustainability. With these positions, the location is similar: essentially anywhere a college or school is found, or wherever a natural reserve, zoo, aquarium or museum is located. This can range from a small town, to a city, to international locations. People in non-formal education would most likely work for a non-profit organization, work for themselves running their own business, or work for a college or university's office of sustainability.

Some job rewards could potentially be the opportunity to work outside, teach in a non-formal environment free of standardized curricula, and watch children explore and experience the natural world. A limitation might be the need to be flexible for many different audiences such as the general public, children from school field trips, children from camps for summer learning, or adult professional development for educators (DeGalan & Middlekauff, 2001). It would be

difficult to work at home for this career, as most of your work would be in the field working directly to educate people. Though, if you are a professional working in an office of sustainability, many organizational tasks could be completed at home. There is potential for weekend and evening work, especially if working at a museum, aquarium, nature reserve or zoo. Travel is not necessarily expected but there is potential as you move up. Sarah Kadden, the Sustainability Outreach Educator at Shelburne Farms doesn't do any international travel, but sees that the potential is there as she moves up on the ladder. Jen Cirillo, the director of Professional Development at Shelburne Farms does do some international traveling in order to support partnerships the farm has with communities in China, Japan and the Dominican Republic. This would be a decent career choice for someone hoping to balance a career and family, however, there aren't as many vacations (or a summer break) that the classroom teacher benefits from. So, there would most likely be less time spent with family, unless the employer is flexible or you run your own business.

**Comment:** Use good examples from your interviewees!

Expected incomes in this field for someone working at a non-profit are unfortunately generally less than that of a classroom teacher, ranging from \$11,700 to \$35,000 (DeGalan & Middlekauff, 2001). However, salaries of sustainability curriculum developers or sustainability coordinators are typically higher. Sarah Kadden from Shelburne Farms complains that her salary is so low (lower than an entry level classroom teacher's) that she will eventually be unable to afford to continue working at Shelburne Farms doing the job she loves. She states that, "People think I have the dream job. And to some degree I do. I get to work with children and do what I love, but with two Master's degrees and an undergraduate degree to pay off, it is impossible to afford". There are other complications as well. Anne Tewksbury- Frye, the sustainability coach at Barnes is on a teacher's salary and contract, which is beneficial so she makes decent pay.

However, complications arise with current budget cuts, making her job insecure because she is not a typical classroom teacher. This is especially unfortunate because to the school as a whole, Anne is considered the glue that holds the program together.

### *Career Paths*

Again, there are different educational requirements for the two separate sectors, formal and non-formal. In general, a bachelor's degree in education, environmental studies or natural sciences is required to enter the field. However, to teach in a public school a teaching certificate is required, and to work in a non-formal setting, emergency training in CPR/First Aid may be required (Ginsburg, 2004).

The best way to enter the field of sustainability education may well be as a general classroom teacher, according to Anne Tewksbury-Frye. She says that her 25 years of teaching in K-5 classrooms taught her the system: how a classroom works, how a school system works, how children learn best, and how a curriculum is designed. Her various experiences have led her to be successful in her current position of sustainability coach, and she doesn't think that an entry-level professional could take on her position easily.

Another way to enter the field is as Sarah Kadden did. As an undergraduate, she studied Religion and Sociology, and then a Masters in Environmental Ethics. She is currently working on a Master's in Education for Sustainability, though she doesn't exactly recommend two Master's degrees. She first worked as an apprentice to get the "in" at Shelburne Farms.

Tom Hudspeth's viewpoint is that it is not exactly necessary to have a teacher's certificate to teach and that in some states you can petition to teach based on taking classes in human development or learning theory, curriculum development, literacy, in addition to having

***[This section is divided into different paragraphs in order to describe the different career paths and what sort of educational background is necessary]***

student teaching experience. He recommends that if you want to become a teacher after completing a Bachelor's in Environmental Studies, you should enroll in a 5<sup>th</sup> year certificate program to become certified. After that certification process, you are only a few classes away from a Master's and a pay raise, but the benefit is that you will be more marketable for an entry-level classroom teaching position.

There are several graduate programs in sustainability and environmental education offered at various colleges and universities around the United States, and a wide variety of attainable certificates and degrees. For example, it is possible to obtain a Master's of Science, a Master's of Arts or a Master's of Education simply based on your interests (*Graduate programs in sustainability and environmental education*, 2010). At the University of New Hampshire, for example, it is possible to obtain a MA in Environmental Education in two to three years. The areas of coursework in the program are: curriculum and instructional methods, environmental science, and environmental values, policy and planning (*M.A. in environmental education*, 2010). If sustainability is more of a focus, there are several sustainability graduate programs, though not necessarily directly focused on education. The program that Sarah Kadden is currently enrolled in is at Prescott College, a liberal arts school based revolving around the environment and social justice. Here, you can gain a Master's degree in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Sustainability or Environmental Education. Environmental education focuses on education, natural sciences, human-nature interactions, and environmental stewardship, where Sustainability can be focused on several topics: sustainable community development, environmental justice, education for sustainability (which is Sarah's focus) and participatory research, to name a few (*Areas of study*, 2010).



***[Detailed several potential opportunities for furthering education]***



Another viable choice for achieving a Master's degree would be to do a program with the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps offers Master's International programs as well as USA fellowship programs. The Master's International Program is essentially gaining a Master's degree for free with one year at the college or university setting and two years in the field, gaining credits through experience. The fellowship program offers Peace Corps volunteers the option of reduced tuition for affiliated graduate programs. There are several degree programs relating to Education, Environmental Education and the Environment (*Resources: peace corps, 2010*).

Most entry-level positions in sustainability education are as classroom teachers. After gaining experience in a school system, there will be more opportunities for becoming a sustainability coach or coordinator. After teaching for a while, it would be beneficial to take advantage of a Master's program related to sustainability and/or education in order to better understand new materials and skills as well as gain a raise in pay.

#### *Networking/Communication*

There are literally endless ways for sustainability educators to network and communicate in this age of technology. Sustainability educators network and communicate through various conferences, events, listservs, journals, newsletters and websites.

Tom Hudspeth subscribes to several journals specific to sustainability education, including the *Journal of Environmental Education*, the *Journal of Sustainability Education* and *Green Teacher*. He also attends different conferences, specifically NAEE (North American Association for Environmental Education), which has grown significantly over the years. As Tom stated, it is important to stay current with issues in environmental and sustainability

***[This section aims to educate the reader about how one in the field networks and communicates with their peers. It is important here to list some pertinent articles and report on what sorts of articles are published there. Again, using sources from interviewees is helpful here]***

education, and this is easily possible through the Internet, being on various listservs, and submitting to listservs on UVM's campus.

“*The Journal of Environmental Education* invites submissions of unpublished articles about research; program evaluations; review articles; critical instruction, theory, methods, practice of environmental education (EE)” (*Journal of environmental education*, 2011). The journal also publishes articles dealing with various levels of education; from elementary to higher education. The most recent issue of the *Journal of Environmental Education* has lots of interesting articles including ones titled “Elementary Teachers’ Beliefs About, Perceived Competencies for, and Reported Use of Scientific Inquiry to Promote Student Learning About and for the Environment”, a book review of *Place-and Community-Based Education in Schools* by David Sobel, and “Students of Action? A Comparative Investigation of Secondary Science and Social Studies: Students’ Action Repertoires in a Land Use Context”. “*The Journal of Sustainability Education* (JSE) serves as a forum for academics and practitioners to share, critique, and promote research, practices, and initiatives that foster the integration of economic, ecological, and social-cultural dimensions of sustainability within formal and non-formal educational contexts” The JSE is free, peer-reviewed and accepts submissions regarding elementary education through higher education (*Journal of sustainability education*, 2010). It’s current publication contains several articles, including “Sustainability, Happiness and Education”, “Sustainability Education in K-12 Classrooms”, and “Transforming Higher Education: A Practical Plan for Integrating Sustainability Education in the Student Experience”. These two journals offer various articles of importance to sustainability educators, helping to keep them current and in touch with research and issues.

Anne Tewksbury-Frye also subscribes to journals, such as the *Educational Leadership Journal* and stays current with publications from Shelburne Farms. She also finds it useful to stay connected with other people in the field, and she is in regular contact with other “coaches” in Burlington, including coaches in literacy, math and science. Anne also attends various conventions, including the Youth Services Learning Convention and the Vermont Area Social Studies conference. It is easy for her to stay connected because she also remains associated with the St. Michael’s community through teaching a class on curriculum development. A large part of Anne’s job is to attend conferences and events to present about the Barnes school as a model for others to use, which also keeps her current and connected in the realm of sustainability education.

Teacher workshops and professional development is another good way to connect with other educators and stay current. Facing the Future offers several teacher workshops on various issues including: “Bridging the Achievement Gap through Global Education”, “Connecting Your Classroom to the World through Service Learning” and “Using Systems Thinking to Educate Effective Global Citizens”. Workshops range from an hour to multi-day sessions, and offer classroom teachers the opportunity to expand their knowledge on sustainability topics and current issues, but also how to implement these topics in the classroom (*Facing the future*, 2010).

#### *Methods of Inquiry in the Field*


Sustainability Education requires much research and experimentation to create good curricula and activities that students will respond well to, which is an ongoing process. According to Anne, she considers her methods of research to be informal, including reading

about studies and working to improve and design new curriculum activities to implement at Barnes.

There are several companies that design and produce sustainability curricula available for purchase, and these have generally been field tested and researched to determine their effectiveness. Facing the Future has also researched and collected data from teachers and students to represent the success of their company. “86% of teachers surveyed observe an increase in student engagement when using *Facing the Future* resources in their classroom, and 75% of students showed improvement in their knowledge about global issues and sustainability from the pre-test to the post-test” (*Facing the future*, 2010). The Cloud Institute for Sustainability is a consulting company that works with clients to design customized education for sustainability curriculum activities and lessons that are effective and meet state standards. To be a successful company, they have also had to research and field test to determine whether or not their curriculum is valuable. This research is done through pilot studies, in school facilitation and studies, and learning about education in communities throughout the world (*Cloud institute for sustainability*, 2010).

*Personal Reflection*

The field of Sustainability Education is imperative to the future. In fact, the children are the future, and through educating them about important matters such as sustainability and the environment, we are working to create a better world and future. While I already had a general understanding of the field, I have found this experience to be quite rewarding and thoroughly enjoyed interviewing and taking advice from professionals in the field.



***[The personal reflection is one of the most important parts of the L & L assignment. Up until the reflection, the paper should be very forward, just stating the facts. The personal reflection should be a critique: whether or not this career is right for you, what you learned, what you like/dislike about what you learned, etc. What are your future plans after doing this assignment??]***

I am encouraged by interviewees who remarked that sustainability education is considered to be a growing field, with many upcoming job opportunities and growth. I am also inspired by the work that some of my interviewees have done. Through her role as classroom teacher, Carol McQuillen has accomplished so much and has influenced Orchard Elementary School as a whole. I also thought that Sarah Kadden's job sounded rewarding, and would be something that I would definitely like to pursue. Anne Tewksbury-Frye's job is also quite enticing, with the balance between time spent with children, teachers, committees, and attending events. While Tom Hudspeth's job is interesting, I feel I would be more successful working with younger students.

Some of the things I discovered about the field of sustainability education were not so glamorous. One of the biggest issues is that people still don't understand what sustainability is and don't understand why it should be taught. Not too many people are aware of and respect the field, which is discouraging. I was also a bit disappointed by the majority of my interviewees suggesting Master's degrees and further education. After working to complete a Bachelor's degree, I think I will need some time off before taking on graduate school. This is especially unfortunate because of the generally low salary that is expected. Sarah Kadden struggles to make ends meet because she has to pay off so many college loans and receives a seemingly unfair salary. I do worry that I will end up working at a non-profit organization without a way to pay off my thousands of dollars in student loans. Though, I was motivated to learn about Peace Corps programs to help you attain a Master's degree for free or at least at a discount.

Overall, I think that I will continue to take the field of sustainability education into consideration, because I believe it is where my greatest interests lie. As long as you are passionate and happy in your career, everything else will hopefully fall into place. I am definitely

going to aim for the Peace Corps after college and see where it takes me. After looking at different careers in this field, I am still not sure which would be the greatest fit for me. Working as a classroom teacher is appealing because I would like to have a family and children one day, and a great career for balancing a family. I also love the idea of working with children everyday. However, I'm not sure that I could effectively accomplish all of my goals by working in one classroom. I would eventually need to take on a different or additional position. Anne Tewksbury-Frye's job would be ideal, because she has the opportunity to regularly interact with children, as well as play a more powerful role in the field of sustainability education. However, the step to getting to Anne's job is to first be a classroom teacher. It seems like first becoming a classroom teacher would make sense, though I have not come to the conclusion that this is necessarily my dream job. I am certain that I will at least apply for the Peace Corps and try to attain a Master's degree through their program, and see where it leads me.

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***[Reference list should be in APA, and is usually divided by Personal Contacts (interviewees), References Cited (those sources cited in your paper), and Additional Sources (used in your annotated bibliography, or briefly reviewed, but not included in the paper)]***

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#### *Additional Resources:*



***[Additional resources should essentially be an annotated bibliography]***

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*Education for sustainability.* (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.ecoliteracy.org>. Provides information defining what “education for sustainability is” as well as offers guides and curriculum guides for teachers.

*Education for sustainable development.* (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.gaiaeducation.org/>. Website provides resources and trainings for educators.

*Education for sustainable development.* (2009). Retrieved from [http://www.ias.unu.edu/sub\\_page.aspx?catID=108&dd1ID=54](http://www.ias.unu.edu/sub_page.aspx?catID=108&dd1ID=54). Provides information on the education for sustainable development program, and what its goals are and how its programs can be implemented to obtain sustainable development.

Hale, M. (1993). *Ecology in education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Discusses roles of ecology and the environment in education, specifically internationally.

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