The Earth Charter: an eco-systemic approach to education for sustainable development

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ESD is …fundamentally about values, with respect at the centre: respect for others, including those of present and future generations, for difference and diversity, for the environment, for the resources of the planet we inhabit...

...Along with a sense of justice, responsibility, exploration and dialogue, ESD aims to move us to adopting behaviours and practices which enable all to live a full life without being deprived of basics...

...Values-driven: sharing the values and principles underpinning sustainable development and promotes Critical thinking and problem solving: leading to confidence in addressing the dilemmas and challenges of sustainable development¹

¹The International Implementation Scheme for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.
Earth Charter as an ethic for Sustainable Development

- The Earth Charter has been endorsed by UNESCO as an important resource for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

- The Earth Charter Initiative has two offices:
  1. Earth Charter Centre for Education for Sustainable Development at UPEACE, Costa Rica
  2. Earth Charter Centre for Strategy and Communication in Stockholm Sweden

And, a governing Global Council
The Earth Charter is a declaration of shared values and principles for a more just, sustainable and peaceful world.

**Preamble; 4 main themes; 16 primary principles; 61 supporting principles; Way Forward**

Core sustainability values + Differentiated responsibilities to act =

I. Respect and Care for the Community of Life

II. Ecological Integrity

III. Social and Economic justice

IV. Democracy, Nonviolence and Peace

- Protect ...
- Care ...
- Transmit ...
- Adopt ...
- Support ...
- Reduce ...
- Require ...
- Eliminate ...
- Honor ...

Way Forward
Examples of key Earth Charter themes

The concept of sustainable development continues to evolve. In pursuing education for sustainable development, therefore, there must be some clarity in what sustainable development means and what it is aiming at.¹

The Earth Charter reinforces core sustainability messages:
- Critical challenges and choices
- Universal responsibility & differentiated responsibilities
- Interdependence of social, economic and environmental domains
- Partnerships

And, brings fresh perspectives on critical concepts:
- Ecological Integrity as foundational principle for global governance
- The Community of Life for whom we are morally responsible
- Peace and Nonviolence as the outcome of ‘right relationships’

¹The International Implementation Scheme for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.
Contribution of Earth Charter to DESD

- Provides a focus, universal ‘shared’ ethical content, and models a process, for meeting the vexed challenge of dealing with values in contemporary education systems.

- Provides a holistic curriculum framework for organising the myriad and complex elements that must be brought together when addressing sustainable development.

Two common axes of debate around education for sustainable development

The influence of these axes is apparent in the foci of different sustainability orientated courses:
But, these two axes, and their elements, are in reality both necessary threads of ESD.
Earth Charter provides a holistic, eco-systemic curriculum framework that integrates both axes/threads; like the double helix structure of a gene, it is a blue print enabling evolution and transformation...

www.pitt.edu/~hpdsdept/underordcfm.html
Eco-pedagogy

Earth Charter education activities promotes ESD guided by an agreed set of pedagogic principles consistent with UNESCO DESD pedagogy:

- Transformational education (*cw* more education)
- Open, participatory and inclusive education processes
- Locally-developed materials
- Experiential learning
- Trans-disciplinarity
- Promoting ongoing global & local dialogue on sustainability ethics
• Earth Charter provides a framework for exploring content within the three components of eco-knowledge…

...& from a cross- and trans-disciplinary perspective.

Sources for images:
http://www.60lgreenbuilding.com/
http://news.bbc.co.uk/media/images/38237000/jpg/_38237226_einstein300.jpg
Earth Charter can be used to facilitate three necessary (and related) education objectives for addressing the eco-justice dimension of sustainable development:

1. **Consciousness – raising**
   - Understanding of complex problems of society-environment & global-local connections

2. **Critical evaluation**
   - Identifying shared values & guiding principles to analyze situation and possibilities

3. **Call for action**
   - Catalyze action & formation of creative partnerships between community, business & governments
Case studies of Earth Charter framed ESD activities

Four case studies illustrate the ways in which the Earth Charter is being used to frame ESD programmes in both formal and informal educational settings:
Case studies (cont’d)

**Costa Rica**

*Educating for a Sustainable Lifestyle with the Earth Charter*

- 35,000 teachers and 100,000 students of the selected schools received the materials and training. The following partner organizations were directly involved in the project, which was funded by the Japanese Embassy:
  - The Earth Charter Initiative Secretariat
  - The Children’s Museum
  - The National University
  - The University for Distance Learning
  - The Ministry of Education
  - The UN affiliated University for Peace
  - The Ministry of Environment
  - Fundacion Omar Dengo
Case studies (cont’d)

Brazil
The Earth Charter and Education for Social Change
(The Paulo Freire Institute)

- PFI-coordinated movement to develop a pedagogy based on the principles and values of the Charter—a Pedagogy of the Earth. It has since published a book on eco-pedagogy (inspired by the Earth Charter) and formed a network of educators interested in putting into practice the Earth Charter’s values and principles.

- The fundamental theme of eco-pedagogy is the future. Its goal is to empower people and develop globally-conscious citizens.

- It is also a pedagogy of affection, that starts from a declaration of love to the planet, and continues with a personal engagement to take care of the planet with tenderness.
Guillem Ramis was an elementary school teacher on the Mediterranean island of Mallorca, Spain for most of his life. When he came upon the Earth Charter, he felt he held the blueprint to address these issues, as well as many more. Guillem’s work in his classroom and school attracted the attention of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Balearic Islands, that decided to set up the *Vivim Plegats* (Living Together) programme.

The goals of the *Vivim Plegats* programme is the promotion of understanding, tolerance, peace, and cooperation in the face of growing xenophobic and racist sentiments due to immigration to the Balearic Islands.
Case studies (cont’d)

**Mexico**
*Educating for Sustainable Living with the Earth Charter*

- The goal of this project in Mexico has been to provide community leaders and the communities themselves with information and training concerning the fundamental principles of sustainable development and how to blend these into decision-making processes. The Earth Charter is being used as a primary teaching instrument in this process.

- A National Committee for the Earth Charter created for implementing this partnership: representatives from the five Regional Councils for Sustainable Development, the National Council, the Centre for Education and Training on Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Public Education, and interested non-governmental organizations. Also, there are focal points by state, municipality, and educational institutions, among others.
Future Earth Charter DESD initiatives

New Earth Charter Centre for Education for Sustainable Development at UPEACE
The Earth Charter Initiative has been re-structured, including formation of a new Centre focussed on ESD co-located with UPEACE, San José, Costa Rica. Contributing to the Decade will be a major focus of the new Centre’s activities.

The Latin American Meeting: Building the Education for Sustainable Development
This event took place in San José, Costa Rica from October 31st to November 2nd, 2006, and was organized by the Earth Charter Center for Education for Sustainable Development at UPEACE & UNESCO. One of the main objectives of this Meeting was to develop a Latin American Strategy to promote education for sustainability regionally and reach the DESD objectives; also it aimed to strengthen the links between the Decade, the challenge of HIV AIDS prevention through education and the search for alternatives to reduce the regional rates of illiteracy.

Advancing transdisciplinary links through ethical dialogue
There is a need to build upon connections between the Millennium Development Goals, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, and international commitments on environment & development such as CBD. One avenue will be through a collaborative project with IUCN to develop a Code of Ethics for Biodiversity Conservation, informed by the Earth Charter.

ESD in business sector
An ongoing challenge is to bring transformational education to the business sector that helps them understand both their responsibilities regarding sustainability and the opportunities provided by sustainable development. Towards this end, the Earth Charter is working with sustainable business initiatives such as GRI.


- The text of the Earth Charter is available on-line in 32 languages at http://www.earthcharter.org.