

ESD and Global Citizenship Education

Launching the Education First Initiative in September 2012, the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon highlighted the connection between education and development: ‘Our internationally agreed development goals are a complex tapestry and education is the indispensable thread.’ The initiative aims to ensure quality, relevant and transformative education for everyone. Its three priorities are to ensure that every child goes to school; the quality of learning is such as to be transformative; and that it inculcates a sense of global citizenship.

The Education First Initiative recognizes education, throughout the document, as a major driver of change towards environmental sustainability, sustainable living, gender equality, economic opportunity, health and in inculcating a sense of being a responsible global citizen. As sustainable development goals evolve, the Education First Initiative gives an opportunity for education for sustainable development (ESD) to be integrated into the strategies and work programmes as a key driver to achieve these goals. At a recently held UN DESD Reference Group meeting, during a session to discuss the ‘Advancing Policy on ESD’, one of the major components of the proposed framework on ESD post 2014, the group noted that

the DESD has promoted the use of ESD, built capacity in governments and in NGOs, created a global network of individuals and institutions and has generated several projects that in turn have built a rich base of experience on ESD. This experience needs to be documented and communicated to the relevant policy makers at the local, national and international levels in order to build the necessary credibility for ESD to be used as one of the key tools to achieve sustainability. ESD not only supports quality education at school and higher education levels, but also supports nations in implementing their Sustainable Development strategies and plans, as well as contributes to achieving the goals of the climate change, biodiversity and desertification conventions and the Marrakech process.

Education in the context of ESD is very broadly defined and consists of formal, non-formal and informal learning. It is inclusive of training, capacity building and public awareness. It recognizes many other training initiatives including those by corporate bodies. It is for this reason that the way education is used and the experience which exists is not always labelled as ESD. However these experiences need to be captured as part of the overall knowledge on ESD. In the formal system ESD thinking has often entered the system through environmental education or subjects such as geography or natural science. This experience also needs documenting.¹

The Earth Charter arguably gives one of the best reasons for the need to consider the concept of a global citizen. Its preamble starts with:

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations. [...] We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The Way Forward requires a change of mind and heart.²

Nigel Dower, writing on the subject, makes a case for seeing

the Earth Charter and global citizenship as complementary to each other.... at one level, one provides the content—the Earth Charter as a global ethic—and the other, the form—the motivating sense of being a citizen of a global community. At the same time, the juxtaposition of the two rather different ideas—both in general thinking and in education—provides the context of critical debate, discussion, and dialogue about both, and thus generally strengthens commitment to each.³

Two recent conferences held by UNESCO capture/articulate the current debate and issues.

The discussions at the meeting at Korea defined Global Citizenship Education (GCE), confirmed the critical need for such an education and identified ways to support and promote it at a global level. Global challenges, whether social conflicts/tensions or an environmental problem such as climate change, demand responses and 'collective action at the global level as well as at the local level'.⁴ GCE as defined by the outcome document 'is transformative, gives learners the opportunity and competencies to realize their rights and obligations to promote a better world and future. It draws upon learnings from other transformation education including human rights education, education for sustainable development, education for inter-national/inter-cultural understanding, and education for peace'.⁵ For such an education, children, youth and adults can be engaged in lifelong learning through formal, non-formal and informal education. However, it is essential to address the issue of 'idea of universality versus respecting individuality' while promoting GCE. It is suggested that GCE be integrated in curricula and that education managers and educators be trained to start teaching this concept. Sharing of knowledge using various platforms (including ICT) among various stakeholders and new approaches will enrich the learning process.

Strengthening a sense of global citizenship is an essential part of ESD, but one needs to be careful as we load the system and especially teachers with emerging concepts without reference to ones that are just about being understood.

Competencies identified with GCE, in many ways, are similar to ESD. It is seen as something to be delivered as an integral part of existing subjects. The UNESCO outcome document of the Technical Consultation on Global Citizenship Education suggests reflecting these concepts 'in countries' curricula as one of the most urgent tasks'.⁶ It calls for the translation of globally accepted concepts into local contexts.

Notes

1. Unpublished report, Discussion on the major components of the proposed framework (1), Advancing Policy on ESD, UNESCO Reference Group for the DESD, 9–10 April 2013, Paris, France.
2. The Earth Charter Initiative. (2012). *The Earth Charter-Preamble*. Retrieved 17 February 2014 from <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html>
3. Dower, Nigel. (2005). The earth charter and global citizenship: A way forward. In Peter Blaze Corcoran (Ed.), *The Earth Charter in Action: Towards a Sustainable World* (pp. 178–179). Amsterdam: Royal Tropical Institute (KIT).
4. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2013). Outcome document of the Technical Consultation on Global Citizenship Education–Global Citizenship Education: An Emerging Perspectives. Retrieved 17 February 2014 from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002241/224115e.pdf>
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

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