

**Playing and Learning about Sustainability:
Kids, online media, and the
Little Earth Charter**

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Introduction

From 1 to 8, *The Little Earth Charter*

Earth and Rosie will take you there...

**TWO is everything is interconnected,
for INTERCONNECTED respect and care.**

Everyone is different, we all have a place.

The earth is connected to the whole human race...

You know me, Planet Earth!

Life on me comes in so many forms, it's a rich variety of living beings.

They are a big part of my vitality and my beauty!

And absolutely every one of them is interconnected and connected to you!

Selected lyrics from the animated song, "2 is Interconnected!"

³⁸ Little Animation Inc., Canada

³⁹ Earth Charter Centre for Education for Sustainable Development, Costa Rica

The Little Earth Charter (LEC) is a media education experience for children and teachers that promotes the implementation and endorsement of Earth Charter values and principles through online animation, songs, games, storytelling and sharing, with educational and curricular resources for parents and teachers. The LEC offers a modified version of the Earth Charter for children four to eight years old. The eight principles outlined in the LEC are: Life, Interconnected, Family, Past, Earth, Peace, Love and Future. The content is focused on ethical and environmental values – with a strong message of hope – and can be accessed by visiting: www.littleearthcharter.org.

The LEC was created by Little Animation, Inc. (Little Animation), a Canadian company founded by director and producer JC Little, with the support of Canadian musical artist, Rosie Emery. The company is committed to educating children to work towards a sustainable future and their mandate is to provide meaningful, original audio-visual content for children in a variety of media. Little Animation has developed a programme to fulfill this mandate, entitled “Earth to Rosie!” in which the LEC and its eight principles are a significant part. Little Animation shares the Earth Charter mission, “...to establish a sound ethical foundation for the emerging global society” and believes The Little Earth Charter can help establish that sound ethical foundation in young children.

The purpose of the Little Earth Charter is to help parents and teachers convey the Earth Charter’s universally shared principles to children at an early age, with a view to becoming responsible earth stewards shaping a sustainable future. The LEC seeks to reach as many children as possible – all around the globe – which is why they have translated the original English-version of the Little Earth Charter into Spanish, Catalan, French, Portuguese, Dutch and Russian.

The Little Earth Charter as educational tool and plans for further development

The Little Earth Charter offers educators a ‘springboard’ tool to introduce students to a variety of subjects within

the curriculum. Its content relates directly to learning standards and outcomes for students in pre-school to third grade: earth science, physical science, life science, ecology, environmental studies, geography, history, social studies, citizenship education, and values education.

The LEC has distilled and simplified the sixteen principles of the Earth Charter into eight principles for children. The principles are: Life, Interconnected, Family, Past, Earth, Peace, Love, and Future. The plan for the full development of the LEC programme is to have each principle illustrated by a four-minute animated segment with music. **Each segment will have three parts:**

- (1) An audio-visual presentation of the principle and its meaning
- (2) An animated musical sequence set to the corresponding principle/verse in the song “The Little Earth Charter” (which includes a 17-second ‘speech’ about the principle by the animated character, Planet Earth)
- (3) An audience participation pledge to respect and care for the principle

A teacher’s module will provide a detailed explanation of each principle, accompanied by a complimentary classroom activity that demonstrates how to actively apply the principle. This component will be available on the website for free, and may accompany the animation DVD in printed booklet form. Through this comprehensive material Little Animation intends to make the LEC a common point of reference for young, early school-aged children throughout Canada, and beyond.

The project has completed its early development phase, having produced a pilot version of a four-minute audio-visual animation segment entitled “2 is Interconnected!” which refers to the LEC’s second principle, Interconnected. This segment can be viewed online at the LEC’s website.⁴⁰ Little Animation is seeking to secure funding to produce the other seven segments, one for each of the LEC’s remaining principles. The final product will be made available to educators via DVD.

⁴⁰ <http://www.littleanimation4kids.com/LEC.html>

Although the animation part of the programme is as yet not completed, the text-based programme of the Little Earth Charter has extended its roots. It is being used in many classrooms around the world, including in Canada, the US, Portugal, Russia, Belgium, and Australia. In fact, the Little Earth Charter website programme reached over 16,000 visitors from 81 countries in 2006.

Methodological aspects

Using the Little Earth Charter in class

The LEC was designed to integrate effortlessly into a teacher's workload. Moreover, it was specifically created using Multiple Intelligence learning styles to help assist teachers in addressing their students' varying needs and backgrounds – learning styles, cultural differences, emotional dispositions and socio-economic situations.

One interesting characteristic of the LEC – making it attractive for school staff, administrators, as well as teachers – is that the principles touch on every aspect of human life, at every level. In addition to fitting certain principles into the curriculum of social studies and earth sciences, for example, it can be used to deal with many school-related problems such as bullying. The principles can be applied to teaching children about how to resolve conflict nonviolently, how to work together, and how to care for their bodies by eating a healthy diet.

Although the LEC is targeted for children four to eight years old, teachers of students as old as thirteen years



Students carrying out the pledge activity.

have used it successfully in their classes, particularly in Europe. Teachers may be using the LEC in their English language classes, where the English-as-a-second-language appeal is as important a factor as the LEC itself. Some teachers report using the LEC intensively during class time – talking about the principles, expanding on learning through the enriched play activities, and taking the endorsement pledge – and others report on reflecting briefly on the principles in class within the context of other lessons.

Educational activities included in the Little Earth Charter programme

The LEC's activities utilize Multiple Intelligence theory's learning techniques. **According to LEC creator JC Little:**

Multiple Intelligence techniques have evolved out of the understanding that humans learn and excel in a variety of ways. Therefore it's beneficial to recognize and support children in each of these capacities. The various types of intelligence are described as 'smarts' – picture smart, word smart, body smart, self smart, music smart, number smart, artistic smart and nature smart. The Little Earth Charter addresses many of these types of intelligence by providing visual, aural, manual, narrative, personal and linguistic components to deliver its message.

The following are examples of dynamic, 'smarts'-based LEC programme components and activities used to assist teachers and encourage children to embrace the principles:

The Pledge

The pledge is an interactive component designed to get children physically involved in the commitment to each principle. After learning about the principle, they are invited to 'act out' their commitment by standing up, putting their hand over their heart, and saying the pledge out loud. During trial workshops, children have been eager to participate in the pledge whether they are invited to do so directly by their teacher, or through the animated characters in the video.

Animation

Animation is a powerful tool for educators because it captures children's attention. The two main animated characters, Planet Earth and Little Rosie, were created to appeal to children on an emotional level. "Planet Earth" was created to humanize the earth, give it the expressive attributes of a person, and thereby engage children in caring for it as a living entity. Little Rosie represents the natural curiosity and empowerment of all children. Together, these two characters create the structure of the "Earth to Rosie!" element of the programme. Many teachers have requested the remaining animation clips once they are completed, having seen and/or used the "2 is Interconnected!" clip and other animated features on the website.

Music

Children respond very positively to the LEC song. The chorus is a useful learning-through-repetition feature and kids are able to sing along with the chorus even during the first time they hear the song. The LEC uses music specifically to convey its message, with the assistance of Rosie Emery, a long-time educator of school-aged children. She has a long record of expertise and experience in using the universal and fundamental appeal of music and songs in education.

Enriched Play

The LEC curriculum offers a variety of activities as 'enriched play' as practical ways to enrich and consolidate students' learning by celebrating the principle and applying it in everyday life. The suggested activities include individual and group projects. For example, students can engage in photo projects, putting on an historical play, planting a garden, making peace cards, doing acts of kindness, and raising awareness and funds for endangered species or children in need.

LEC animated slideshow

A slideshow was developed and tested to help educators introduce the LEC to children. It employs an interactive 'call and answer' technique with the

audience, using the animation to support the commentary. The two characters, Planet Earth and Little Rosie, nod and shake their heads as if interacting in the conversation, and children have responded with a high level of empathy and enthusiasm – clapping, cheering, shouting, pointing and laughing. The slide show is approximately fifteen minutes long and focuses on the Earth and our dependence on its resources. This leads naturally to the topic of helping the Earth, and towards the LEC principles. At the end of the presentation, teachers can engage in enriched play activities, and/or watch audio-video segments of any/all of the principles (once they are produced) and encourage students to take the pledge. The animated slideshow was shown in two different situations, a presentation to a large gathering of 400 children (4–12 years old) and to a small group of 25 students (6–8 years old). It was equally effective in each case, getting the children to engage with the subject matter. The slideshow is considered to have great potential helping teachers, and engaging students, and the company is considering how to distribute it more widely.

Results, partnerships and the role of sustainability in the Little Earth Charter

The Little Animation team promotes interaction with end users via e-mail, telephone, in person interviews, website feedback forms and letters of concern or support. They use the information to compile ideas for creating additional animated content for the programme, and to confirm where the LEC teaching modules have been successful. They have received valuable feedback and stories about achievements from teachers, including one educator who showed the "2 is Interconnected!" clip to her class. Directly after the video the whole class went outside to dig the compost in the school garden – and had a fun, physical experience of the principle by examining the worms and small creatures in the soil on which everyone depends for healthy food crops. At Our Lady of the Rosary P-7 School, in Kenmore, Queensland, Australia children and

teachers are also using the LEC. They have uploaded an art show on their website⁴¹ with students' drawings based on the principles of the Little Earth Charter.

"Working Together," is an online project, coordinated by São Monteiro Silva at the Schools of Cacia, in Portugal. It uses the LEC in its work to facilitate the sharing of students' stories, photos, and reports to and from different schools in Portugal, Belgium, Russia, Japan, and Brazil. Throughout the school year, students focus on learning about and taking action on each of the LEC's principles. Each week, students upload their stories, photos, and reports on the website and can share and learn from other students' contributions and see what's happening in other countries. One outstanding example was a group of students who planted a garden to support the principle of "Earth," and tended it to yield vegetables that were cooked into delicious meals shared by teachers and students alike.

During Earth Day 2007, the Schools of Cacia organized a Little Earth Charter/Earth Charter school presentation at the City Hall of Aveiro, Portugal. A wide variety of school and community people attended the event, including students and teachers from other schools, parents, the heads of education and environmental departments for the City of Aveiro, the Association of Environmental Education, and the Portuguese Ministry of Education. The students exhibited their LEC art work and photographs of their LEC activities during the past year and performed the song "2 is Interconnected!"



Students of De Kriebel school, olen, belgium.

The Working Together project facilitators are currently focusing on the principle, "Future," for which the suggested LEC activity is to organize a fundraiser for a good cause. The De Kriebel School in Olen, Belgium has put this principle into action by supporting a little boy named Isuru in Sri Lanka, through an organization called Plan Netherlands. With the help of their teacher, Jef Theys, the students at De Kriebel are creating innovative activities to raise money to help Isuru and his village. One of their fundraisers was a "Used Toy Sale" at the school, an interesting example of both the Little Earth Charter principle of "Future" in action as well as practice good recycling habits.

In addition to promoting and supporting the dissemination and use of the LEC, Little Animation is also putting the principle of sustainability into action through their direct support. In line with their commitment to a sustainable future, the company has invested its financial resources into social enterprise projects that give back to the community. Little Animation intends to divert up to 50% of their profits from the programme towards organizations that support children's education.

Lessons learned

Although the LEC is in the early stages of its development, the production team has observed that children exposed to the programme can recall the Little Earth Charter name and content; it's hoped that this name recognition and basic understanding education of the principles will pave the way for the students continuing to embrace the principles and take what they've learned forward into their secondary education experiences.

Several activities have proven to be especially helpful in addressing sustainability and to make the programme more attractive to students, including:

- Inviting guest speakers from different fields (e.g. farming, energy, transportation, culture, diversity, anti-racism)

⁴¹ http://www.olrkenmore.qld.edu.au/Art/index_art.html

- Encouraging students to get involved with online projects with students in other countries
- Proposing projects that involve performances and public presentations, which allow students to be recognized for having achieved something important and positive in their community – as did one remarkable teacher and his students in Portugal at their City Hall

The LEC provides a simple but effective framework for educators to teach about the Earth Charter principles as well as to educate for sustainability. “We kept it simple on purpose,” relayed JC Little, “so it doesn’t have to compete with the required curriculum. It integrates easily into a teacher’s workload and also complements the mandated curriculum in many subject areas...” JC advises teachers to “...start simple. Take it one principle at a time...go into as much depth as time allows.”

The LEC team believes that it is important to present the values and principles of the Earth Charter and for sustainability to children at their earliest stages of learning – to help them grow up understanding these values and thereby bringing about changes in our societies. According to JC and Rosie, the more society emerges with an integrated awareness of these values, the more likely humanity will be able to make choices for sustainability and peacefulness.

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