

Angela Antunes and Moacir Gadotti, Brazil. [A thematic essay which speaks to Principle 14 on incorporating the values of the Earth Charter into education](#)

Eco-pedagogy as the Appropriate Pedagogy to the Earth Charter Process



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Moacir Gadotti is Professor at the University of Sao Paulo, the Director of the Paulo Freire Institute, and author of many widely-read and translated books, among others: *Education Against Education* (1979); *Invitation to Read Paulo Freire* (1988); *History of Pedagogical Ideas* (1993); *Praxis Pedagogy* (1994); and *Current Issues on Education* (2000). This thematic essay is the fruit of several debates that took place at workshops and congresses, particularly at the Continental Conference of the Americas, in December 1998, in Cuiaba, Mato Grosso, and during the Earth Charter 's First International Meeting on Educational Issues organized by the Paulo Freire Institute in Sao Paulo in 1999. At the Rio Global Forum in 1992, Dr. Gadotti with others produced the "Treaty on Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibilities". This thematic essay also re-examines ideas discussed in the book *Earth Pedagogy* (2000).

Several decades of debates about "our common future" left some "ecological footprints" not only in the economic field, but also in the ethical, political, and educational ones, to guide us on a possible path to face the challenges of the twenty-first century. Sustainability has become the dominant issue in the beginning of this century, with impact not only on our planet

but also on the ability to re-educate our thinking and all our senses, with further possibility to rekindle our hope of a future with dignity for all. The Earth Charter is found among these footprints.

The sustainability values promoted by the Earth Charter have terrific educational potential: the preservation of the environment depends on an ecological conscience and shaping this conscience depends on education. It is here that eco-pedagogy, or Earth pedagogy, comes into play. It is a pedagogy to promote learning as the "meaning of the things from everyday life," as stated by Francisco Gutierrez and Cruz Prado.¹ We develop this sense as we go, experiencing our context, and in this process we open new trails – we do not merely observe the journey. It is then a democratic and understanding pedagogy, a pedagogy for everyday life.

Education is connected with space and time where relationships between the human being and the environment actually take place. They happen primarily at the emotional level, much more than at the conscious level. Thus, they happen much more in our subconscious; we do not realize them, and many times we do not know how they happen. So, eco-education is necessary to bring them to the conscious level. And eco-education requires a pedagogy. As emphasized by Gaston Pineau,² a series of references are associated with this: the Bachelardian experience; studies on the imaginary; the trans-versatility, trans-disciplinarian, and inter-cultural approach; as well as constructivism and alternative pedagogy. These days, we need an eco-pedagogy and eco-education. We need an Earth pedagogy precisely because without this pedagogy to re-educate men and women, we can no longer speak of Earth as a home, as a burrow for the "animal-man", as Paulo Freire said. Without a proliferation of sustainable education, Earth will be perceived as nothing more than the space for our sustenance and for technical-technological domination, the object of our research, essays, and sometimes of our contemplation. But, it will not be a living space, a space giving us "solace" and requiring from us "care".³

It is in the context of the evolution of ecology itself that eco-ped-

Principle 14. Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.

agogy appeared – and is still in its infancy today – having been initially called “pedagogy for sustainable development,” but which has now gone beyond its initial purpose. Eco-pedagogy is in development either as a pedagogical movement⁴ or as a curriculum approach. Eco-pedagogy implies redirecting curricula to incorporate values and principles defended by the Earth Charter. These principles should guide content, concepts, and the preparation of didactic books. Jean Piaget taught us that curricula must reflect what is important for students. We know this is correct, but incomplete. Curricular contents must also be meaningful for students, and they will be only meaningful to students if their contents are also meaningful to the health of the planet and to a context greater than that of the individual student.

Understood in this light, eco-pedagogy is not just another pedagogy among many other pedagogies. It not only has meaning as an alternative global project concerned with nature preservation (Natural Ecology) and the impact made by human societies on the natural environment (Social Ecology), but also as a new model for sustainable civilization from the ecological point of view (Integral Ecology), which implies making changes on economic, social, and cultural structures. Therefore, it is connected to a *utopian project* – one to change current human, social, and environmental relationships. Therein lies the deep meaning of eco-pedagogy, or the *Earth pedagogy* as we call it.

Eco-pedagogy is not opposed to environmental pedagogy. On the contrary, for eco-pedagogy environmental education is a premise. Eco-pedagogy enables environmental pedagogy with strategies, guidelines, and means to make it a reality. It was at the Rio Global Forum in 1992, during which environmental education was much discussed, that the importance of eco-pedagogy was underlined as a sustainable development pedagogy. This Global Forum was one of the most important events in the last days of the twentieth century. Since then, the debate about the Earth Charter has become a significant factor in the creation of a planetary citizenship. Any pedagogy designed outside of globalization and the ecological movement will have serious problems with legitimacy.

The sustainability culture presumes that sustainability pedagogy can handle the great task of educating planetary citizens. This is an on-going process. Education for planetary citizenship is taking root thanks to numerous experiences. Even though many of these experiences are local, they succeed in educating us to feel not only like members of Earth, but also beyond that – to live as cosmic citizens.

Classic pedagogies were anthropocentric. Eco-pedagogy is based upon a planetary understanding of gender, species, kingdoms, formal, informal, and non-formal education. Our point of view is more comprehensive – from man to planet, beyond genders, species, kingdoms – evolving from an anthropocentric vision to a planetary understanding, to practicing planetary citi-

zenship, and to a new ethical and social reference—planetary civilization.

Eco-pedagogy is a fitting pedagogy for these times of paradigmatic reconstruction, fitting to a culture of sustainability and peace, and, therefore, adequate for the Earth Charter process. It has been gradually growing, benefiting from much input originated in recent decades, principally inside the ecologic movement. It is based upon a philosophical paradigm supported by Paulo Freire, Fritjof Capra, Leonardo Boff, Sebastiao Salgado, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and Milton Santos; arising from education and offering an ensemble of interdependent knowledge and values. Among them, we would like to mention the following: educate to think globally; educate feelings; teach about the Earth’s identity as essential to the human condition; shape the planetary conscience; educate for understanding; and educate for simplicity, care, and peacefulness. In the midst of that, we consider the Earth Charter not only a code for planetary ethics – it is also a call for action.⁵ In this sense, we would like to mention some of the real examples where the Earth Charter was used as an instrument for real action.⁶

With the support of the Paulo Freire Institute, Sao Paulo City (2001-2004) used the Earth Charter to train education managers for the Unified Educational Centers dedicated to developing educational, cultural, sport, and leisure activities. Education leaders were trained on the principles of the culture of peace and sustainability so that they can incorporate them in their educational projects and in their decision-making. The Earth Charter was submitted as an educational project during this process. Training education, in the fullest meaning of the words, is a very fertile field to promote the principles and values of the Earth Charter.

The preparation of social studies teachers is another strategy to practice the principles and values of the Earth Charter. Some examples include: the “Youth Peace Project,”⁷ which took place in three cities of the state of Sao Paulo and included 225 social studies teachers; the “Citizen School Project,” which used the “reading of the world” methodology of Paulo Freire and addressed co-existence principles based on the Earth Charter’s values for developing the Political-Pedagogical Project of the schools⁸; the “MOVE-Brazil” adult education project which purpose is to teach literacy to forty thousand young people and adults in six Brazilian states within three years, and includes the Earth Charter as a reference for education; the “Budget for Participating Child”; and, “Exercising Citizenship from Childhood,” which involved all children of elementary education in the Sao Paulo city network schools of five hundred educational units, promoting child and youth participation and a direct participation in priorities for education and for the city. The Paulo Freire Institute was responsible for the direct education of 2,500 teachers and ten thousand children involved in the project. The Earth Charter was one of the documents used as a basis for reflecting on education and on the city, and it also guided the education of

children. The project to develop as many as five hundred people as social leaders was included in the Participating Budget for the city of Guarulhos, a municipality which also used the Earth Charter as a reference. Based upon the Earth Charter, social and environmental issues related to the city were discussed as well as priorities for the budget, which included the direct participation of the population.

Eco-pedagogy is a pedagogy centered on life: it includes people, cultures, *modus vivendi*, respect for identity, and diversity. It understands the human being in evolution, as an “incomplete, unfinished, and non-conclusive” being, as stated by Paulo Freire – a being in continuous development, interacting with others and the world. The prevailing pedagogy is centered on tradition, on what is already concluded, on what oppresses students by the way they are tested. With eco-pedagogy educators must welcome students. Their welcome and care are the basis for sustainability education.

The Earth Charter has contributed to the development of sustainability initiatives in schools and, principally, in communities. But, we still need to broaden the Earth Charter’s recognition and acceptance around the world as a mobilizing force toward a culture of peace and sustainability, as a way to celebrate diversity. As a call for unity, it can be used to develop the meaning of responsibility with respect for quality of life and to become a force to fight terrorism based on a global consensus.

Faced with the possibility of planetary extermination, the Earth Charter presents alternatives based on a culture of peace and sustainability. Sustainability does not imply only biology, economy, and ecology. Sustainability has to do with the relationship we have with ourselves, with others, and with nature. Pedagogy should begin, above all else, by teaching how to read the world, as Paulo Freire taught us – a world which is the universe, because the world is our first teacher. Our first education is an emotional education, which places us before the mystery of the universe, in close contact with it, producing in us the feeling of being a part of this sacred, living being, in continuous evolution. ●

Notes

1 Prado, F.G. *Eco-pedagogy and planetary citizenship*. Sao Paulo: IPF/Cortez.

2 Pineau, G. *De l'air: essai sur l'ecoformation*. Paris: Paideia.

3 Boff, L. *Know how to care*. Petropolis: Vozes.

4 The Movement for Eco-pedagogy gained force in particular after the First International Meeting on the Earth Charter and Education Perspectives, organized by the Paulo Freire Institute, with the support of Earth Council and UNESCO, between August 23-26, 1999 in Sao Paulo and the First International Forum on Eco-pedagogy, which took place at the School of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto, Portugal, between March 24-26, 2000. Guiding principles for this movement came from these meetings enclosed in the “Eco-pedagogy Charter”

5 In terms of real action, an important victory in Brazil was the intro-

duction of the Earth Charter among the 21 action goals for *Brazilian Agenda 21* and the creation of an “Earth Charter” Workshop during the *Brazilian Forum for NGOs and Social Movements for the Environment and Development*. In addition, the Minister for the Environment, Marina Silva, adopted the Earth Charter as an ethical guideline for her environmental policies. Moreover, the inclusion of the Earth Charter in the agenda of the Global Social Forum and the Global Education Forum was very important. In January 2003, more than 5,000 people participated in two workshops on the Earth Charter, in Porto Alegre. These workshops had the participation of Angela Antunes, Peter Blaze Corcoran, Moacir Gadotti, Mohit Mukherjee, Leonardo Boff, Rick Clugston, among others.

6 In a small article such as this it is impossible to list all the good experiences which are taking place in Brazil connected with the Earth Charter. We would like to point out however the School of International Education in Salvador (Bahia), which centers its entire school curriculum on the Earth Charter, and the “Earth Harmony” Project in Florianopolis (Santa Catarina), which created its own educational material following eco-pedagogy. The Earth Charter guides the entire work of that group in educating teachers. At the University of Sao Paulo, an Eco-pedagogy Workshop Group was established at the Education School of USP (GRUTEUSP). This Group has been giving seminars and conferences on the Earth Charter. The Blue Planet NGO (Sao Paulo) has been developing projects with public schools, having among its references the Earth Charter. Its director, Professor Luiz Carlos de Oliveira, defended his master’s thesis at the Sao Paulo Catholic University on “Eco-pedagogy in the school work.”

7 This project has the purpose of educating teachers and social studies teachers (youth and adults) to build a culture of peace and sustainability. By getting together virtually and physically present with “culture circles” twice a month, participants discuss theoretical ideas and experiences based on three basic underpinnings: 1. Culture for peace and sustainability; 2. The Earth Charter and Agenda 21; 3. Culture, communication, and politics. In addition, they receive information on community radio, school newspaper, and student union. This project was concluded in 2004 with the publication of a book containing its results: *The Education of Social Studies Teachers*.

8 Series of books from the Paulo Freire Institute under the title “Guide for a School Citizen” guides the implementation of this project which began in 1992. In 2004, Elisabeth M. Ferrero and Joe Holland’s book was translated and published in this collection: *Earth Charter: Thoughts for Action*.