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**Education for Sustainable Development based on *the Earth Charter***

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## **The Earth Charter, educational change and pedagogy**

### **Introduction**

This is an essay of hope in humanity's moral and intellectual capacity to envision, jointly plan, and carry-forth a concerted effort to meet the historically unique challenges we face and also to create opportunities for fulfilling the potential of our evolutionary heritage.

It assumes that to achieve the above, it is imperative to strengthen the effectiveness of education, training and information sharing guided by common values and principles that buttress and foster ways of living in an integrally peaceful way. This will entail protecting and promoting fundamental human rights and freedoms, particularly the Right to Education.

The essay will start by stating basic assumptions concerning the concepts of 'integral peace' and "sustainable human development". Bearing in mind the main internationally mandated education action movements related to the United Nations, the case will be made that the *United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development* offers a critically needed opportunity for a worldwide educational and cultural movement that can harness the wonderful qualities of humans to meet our challenges and fulfill our evolutionary potential, which if achieved will manifest an integral way of living peacefully, in three fundamental dimensions: persons living peacefully and sustainably as members of the web and community of Cosmos, Earth and Life; with one another as equal members of the human community; and on the personal level, as a self-appreciative and self-directed personal evolutionary unfoldment.

Such a process can be carried-forth if humans develop a common vision of a desirable and possible world and an understanding of the path required to achieve it by transforming reality wisely and intelligently, on the basis of shared values, norms and principles. This is expressed as a soulfully deep commitment to a shared covenant with

one another and the community of life, that is, a cosmopolitan ethical covenant. The *Earth Charter* is an international document that is now a core instrument of the *United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development*. It already has been adopted as a covenant of this nature by myriad individuals and organizations around the world and it also provides a framework that contributes key elements for an educational philosophy and pedagogy adequate to fulfil these tasks. Explicating these elements is the main import of the essay.

### **Culture of peace**

The forging of a global movement for a culture of peace has become an urgent pursuit of humanity, as acknowledged by the United Nations in various declarations and programs of action. In its *Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace*<sup>1</sup> it defines a culture of peace as "...a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behavior and ways of life based on..." a set of principles and calls for actions by governments, inter-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations. These principles are:

- (a) *Respect for life, ending of violence and promotion and practice of nonviolence through education, dialogue and cooperation;*
- (b) *Full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States and non-intervention in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law;*
- (c) *Full respect for and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;*
- (d) *Commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts;*
- (e) *Efforts to meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations;*
- (f) *Respect for and promotion of the right of development;*
- (g) *Respect for and promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and*

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Declaration and program of action on a culture of peace, Resolution A/53/243* (New York: United Nations, 1999), 2-3.

*men;*

*(h) Respect for and promotion of the right of everyone to freedom of expression, opinion and information;*

*(i) Adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations, and fostered by an enabling national and international environment conducive to peace.*

These actions, according to the 1999 plan of action, are to be pursued in eight domains of action:

- 1. Actions to foster a culture of peace through education*
- 2. Actions to promote sustainable economic and social development*
- 3. Actions to promote respect for all human rights*
- 4. Actions to ensure equality between women and men*
- 5. Actions to foster democratic participation*
- 6. Actions to advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity*
- 7. Actions to support participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge*
- 8. Actions to promote international peace and security.<sup>2</sup>*

Elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> the author of this essay has argued that this educational action framework has been considered a failure and proposes explanatory hypothesis of why on the basis of geopolitical, ideological, and psychological considerations. The crux of these hypothesis is the predominance of the security paradigm over an integral and positive approach to peace. In these essays, Brenes also argues that the concept of sustainable human development offers an alternative approach to fostering a global culture of peace by

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, pp. 5-11.

<sup>3</sup> See: (1) Abelardo Brenes-Castro, "An Integral Model of Peace Education," in *Educating for a Culture of Social and Ecological Peace*, ed. Anita L. Wenden (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 77-98 and (2) Abelardo Brenes, "Personal transformations needed for cultures of peace," in *Handbook on Building Cultures of Peace*, ed. Joe de Rivera (Cambridge: Springer, 2008, in press).

tapping into the positive dimensions of an integral peace concept in which the imperatives of the human rights framework are subsumed within a broader shared ecological imperative towards the integrity of Earth and the community of life. This concept is the cornerstone of the *United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development* (2005—2014) and the *Earth Charter* constitutes a normatively-based integral explication of it.

Sub principle 16f states the *Earth Charter*'s concept of peace. It is the last of the sub principles of the document and was inserted in that position to serve as a synthesis of the whole vision that the Charter is proposing:

*16f. Recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part.*

This principle opens significant potentials for developing a holistic integrative pedagogical rationale, through which the positive psychological potentials and needs of learners for a sense of belongingness to a vital community of life, can provide the direction and energy for reaching a common understanding of the implications of living with a consciousness of respect and care for the community of life.

### **The broader international context: the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005—2014)**

The vision of education that gave rise to the Decade is:

*Education as the foundation of sustainable development was reaffirmed at the Johannesburg Summit, as was the commitment embodied in Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 of the Rio Summit, 1992. The Plan of*

*Implementation establishes the linkages between the Millennium Development Goals on universal primary education for both boys and girls, but especially girls, and the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All. The creation of a gender-sensitive education system at all levels and of all types – formal, non-formal and informal – to reach the unserved is emphasized as a crucial component of education for sustainable development. Education is recognized as a tool for addressing important questions such as rural development, health care, community involvement, HIV/AIDS, the environment, and wider ethical/legal issues such as human values and human rights.*<sup>4</sup>

### Goals of the Decade

The primary goal for the DESD is laid out in the United Nations General Assembly resolutions 59/237 in which the General Assembly ‘encourages Governments to consider the inclusion...of measures to implement the Decade in their respective education systems and strategies and, where appropriate, national development plans’. Furthermore, the General Assembly ‘invites Governments to promote public awareness of and wider participation in the Decade, *inter alia*, through cooperation with and initiatives engaging civil society and other relevant stakeholders, especially at the beginning of the Decade’.<sup>5</sup>

The **subgoals at national levels** are to:

- Provide an opportunity for refining and promoting the vision of and transition to sustainable development—through all forms of education,

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<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, Portal for Education for Sustainable Development, United Nations Decade, “Concepts,” [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=23292&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.htm](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=23292&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.htm).

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014): International Implementation Scheme* (Paris: UNESCO, 2005), 6.

public awareness and training.

- Give an enhanced profile to the important role of education and learning in sustainable development.<sup>6</sup>

The **objectives** of the Decade's Action International Implementation Scheme are to:

- Facilitate networking, linkages, exchange and interaction among stakeholders in ESD;
- Foster an increased quality of teaching and learning in education for sustainable development;
- Help countries make progress towards and attain the millennium development goals through ESD efforts;
- Provide countries with new opportunities to incorporate ESD into education reform efforts.<sup>7</sup>

This is to be achieved through **four major thrusts** of education for sustainable development:

- Improving access to quality basic education
- Reorienting existing education programs
- Developing public understanding and awareness
- Providing training<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the *Implementation Scheme* proposes seven **interdependent strategies**:

1. Vision-building and advocacy
2. Consultation and ownership
3. Partnerships and networks

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

4. Capacity-building and training
5. Research, development and innovation
6. Use of information and communication technologies
7. Monitoring and evaluation<sup>9</sup>

### **The importance of *The Earth Charter* in the context of the Decade**

The *Earth Charter*<sup>10</sup> is an international document developed through the broadest international consultation process undertaken for any contemporary soft law document, which presents a set of ethical principles for orienting human action to face the challenges for sustainable development in the 21st Century by building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society. It seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the wellbeing of the human family, the larger living world, and the integrity of Earth. It is an expression of hope and a call to help create a global partnership at a critical juncture in history.

The *Earth Charter's* inclusive ethical vision recognizes that environmental protection, human rights, equitable human development, and peace are interdependent and indivisible. It provides a new framework for thinking about and addressing these issues. The result is a fresh, broad notion of what constitutes a sustainable community and sustainable development.

The *Charter* integrates concepts from various NGO declarations; scientific worldviews; major religions; and social movements that promote human rights, democracy, gender equality, civil society, disarmament, and peace. In addition, it distils recommendations and goals set by seven of the key United Nations summits and conventions of the 1990s: *Convention on the Rights of Children* (New York, 1990), Environment and Development

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp.17-23.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.earthcharter.org>

(Río, 1992), Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), Social Development (Cairo, 1994), Women (Beijing, 1995), and Habitat (Istanbul, 1996).

The *Earth Charter* was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 2003 as a significant framework for *United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development* (DESD)<sup>11</sup> which is effective from 2005 to 2014, and is being coordinated by UNESCO. In a resolution of the UNESCO Executive Board of 2005, it was further determined that:

*At the same time, UNESCO's undertakings in the context of the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development will offer another opportunity to further promote the principles of the Earth Charter. In this regard, the text of the Charter will be made available and distributed to all stakeholders, including individuals, organizations, businesses and governments, involved in the implementation of the Decade on Education for Sustainable Development.*<sup>12</sup>

### **The fundamental ethical principles of the *Earth Charter*: universal and differentiated responsibility**

The principle of universal responsibility, stated in paragraph five of the 'Preamble' of *The Earth Charter*, is of fundamental importance in meeting the critical challenges of the 21st Century. It provides a necessary complementation to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*'s recognition of each person as a global citizen worthy of equal respect and dignity on the part of the universal community of nations. From an ethical perspective, 'universal responsibility' can be interpreted as having two key implications: a) each and every person is equally responsible to the whole Earth community and b) the scope of our

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<sup>11</sup> See [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=27234&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=27234&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

<sup>12</sup> UNESCO Executive Board, "Report by the Director-General on the Follow-Up of Decisions and Resolutions Adopted by the Executive Board and the General Conference at their Previous Sessions, 174 EX/5", <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001390/139029e.pdf>.

ethical responsibility impinges on our relationship to the Universe as a whole.

In principle 2b the *Charter* states as an imperative the principle of ‘differentiated responsibility’: “Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge, and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good”. How can responsibility be common yet differentiated? On face value, it seems contradictory. The intended meaning of ‘responsibility’ in this context seems to be ‘capacity to respond’, given that the sub-principle states that the basis of differentiation is freedom, knowledge, and power. This meaning is different from the shared ethics approach of the *Preamble* of the Charter.<sup>13</sup>

These two meanings, moreover, are complimentary and of equal importance within the rationale of *The Charter* for it to have practical utility in a world confronting the current ‘global situation’ (paragraph three of the *Preamble*) and the ‘challenges ahead’ (paragraph four of the *Preamble*). They pose, however, distinct implications, particularly from political and educational points of view. In particular, the political dimension of differentiated responsibility poses the challenge of transmuting ‘power through domination’, which is culturally hegemonic in the world system, to generative power. Education for cultural transformation can play a key role in achieving this fundamental transformation. The *Charter* proposes a principle which suggests a pedagogical approach appropriate for education to fulfil this role:

*“Principle 2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love”<sup>14</sup>*

Elsewhere<sup>15</sup> the author has developed pedagogical implications of this principle following Buddhist science of mind approaches for cultivating a lifestyle based on

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<sup>13</sup> For more on these principles see Abelardo Brenes, “Universal and Differentiated Responsibility,” in *Toward a Sustainable World: The Earth Charter in Action*, ed. Peter. Corcoran, Mirian Vilela, and Alide Roerink (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2005), 35-37, available at <http://earthcharterinaction.org/pdfs/TEC-ENG-PDF/ENG-Brenes.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Principle 2 of *the Earth Charter* (see [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)).

<sup>15</sup> Abelardo Brenes-Castro, Op. cit., 2004; Abelardo Brenes, Op. cit., 2008.

simplicity in recognizing and meeting legitimate needs and flourishing of one's potential for love, compassion, and tolerance as members of the community of life and Earth.

### **Educational applications of *The Earth Charter*<sup>16</sup>**

The *Earth Charter* can be used for at least four interrelated educational purposes that can be considered as fundamental to meet the goals and objectives of the U.N. Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. These are:

(1) *Consciousness-raising*. The first educational challenge is to motivate people to act in more environmentally and socially responsible ways. Here the *Earth Charter* can be used to help raise people's consciousness about the massive environmental, social and economic problems facing the world, their interdependencies, and the overarching need to live with a sense of global responsibility;

(2) *Personal Development*. Consciousness-raising needs to be manifested in life goals based on values and principles such as those of *The Earth Charter*. This can entail developing an awareness of our legitimate needs and satisfiers to lead a healthy and dignified life as a basis for the fulfilment of one's mission. It also implies cultivating those virtues and character strengths consistent with a sustainable way of living, as well as the knowledge, competencies and skills for an ethics of universal responsibility. This purpose also serves to give meaning to the concept 'sustainable human development', thus highlighting the conviction of the author that the murky concept of 'sustainable development' does not refer to a

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<sup>16</sup> Purposes 1, 3, and 4 were agreed upon in the discussion forum of the Earth Charter Education Advisory committee held in 2001 (see Brendan Mackey, "Synthesis: Summary of the Earth Charter Education Advisory Committee Inaugural Online Forum," *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, IV, no. 1 (2002): 84. Purpose 2 is an additional one proposed by the author of this essay.

common interpretation of development as economic growth, but rather to the development of each and every person's human potential and life purpose.

(3) *Application of values and principle.* The main body of the *Earth Charter* is action orientated and functions as a guide to more sustainable ways of living. The Charter can serve as a framework for people to critically compare their reality with their ideals. This kind of analysis in turn provides the basis for identifying action goals for bringing about positive transformations;

(4) *Call for action* - The *Earth Charter* concludes with a call for action through, among other things, new partnerships between civil society, business and government at all levels. The educational challenge here is to help foster a culture and networks for collaboration aimed at promoting justice, sustainability and peace, consistent with the Charter's values.

### **The *Earth Charter's* potential role in the strategies of the *Decade of Education for Sustainable Development***

Bearing in mind the seven strategies of the *International Implementation Scheme* of the *Decade of Education for Sustainable Development* which were described earlier, it is proposed that the *Earth Charter* can be used to fulfil key educational and public awareness tasks.

#### **1. Vision-building and advocacy**

Visioning in relation to preferred, probable, and possible futures is a key pedagogical approach. Following the rationale of the *Preamble* of the *Earth Charter*, it is proposed that in diverse educational and communication contexts and through various means activities be conducted to foster awareness that:

- We live in a critical time in the history of the Planet
- We are a single human family and Earth community with a common destiny
- We must unite to create a global sustainable society
- Dominant patterns of production and consumption are devastating
- Benefits of development are not equitable
- We need fundamental changes in our values, institutions and ways of life
- Once basic needs are met, human development is about being more
- We need to live with an ethics of universal responsibility, guided by
- The principle of differential responsibility

## **2. Consultation and ownership**

Educational institutions can contribute to activities of multi-stakeholder consultation and public-awareness campaigns for creating the momentum required for the goals and principles of the DESD to be adopted by governments, civil society constituencies, and private sectors. The *Earth Charter* provides a set of normative principles, derived from diverse international and nationally adopted policy frameworks, which can be used to strengthen processes of democratic participation and governance towards sustainable development.

## **3. Partnership and networks**

Educational institutions can contribute to international, regional, national and local networks and partnerships, acting as bridges and spaces for collective reflection, involving national and local governments, other educational institutions, communities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The *Earth Charter*, given its broad thematic structure, fundamental ethical principles which have been derived from consultations between diverse cultures and interest groups, and its basis in agreed-upon policy frameworks, offers a promising framework for creating and strengthening

partnerships and networks. Moreover, there already are many networks at these different levels which have in common a recognition of the Charter's value for these purposes.

#### **4. Capacity-building and training**

In this strategic area, educational institutions can make substantial contributions to educational, social, and cultural change through sustainable development education. Programmes should be designed to enable citizens to effectively engage in such an education at all levels and modalities, from the design of educational policy to the development of effective and culturally relevant programmes, to the actual skills of teaching for sustainability both in and out of the classroom. By providing learners with the practical skills and knowledge needed to make positive impacts on formal and nonformal educational systems, service-learning and outreach programs, educators can contribute to educational development and reform within broader social and cultural contexts. People should be inspired to act as leaders for local and national educational reform for Sustainable Development Education—formal, non-formal and informal. A useful strategy is also to design pre-service and in-service training activities to meet the goals of the DESD. The *Earth Charter* movement, through the activities of the *Earth Charter Initiative*<sup>17</sup> has already accumulated valuable experience in these areas.

#### **5. Research, development, and innovation**

Educational institutions, in particular institutions of higher learning, in which research and outreach are integral to their activities, should be committed to the development, implementation, and evaluation of those pedagogies, contents, methods, and learning materials that can provide effective learning and cultural sharing in Education for Sustainable Development. Cooperation within broad networks of universities, schools, and organizations are important for this purpose, given that the challenges of creating

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<sup>17</sup> For educational resources see <http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/resources/>.

sustainable futures are planetary and the contributions of diverse cultures are critical for mutual learning and creating a global learning community. Thus local learning communities can benefit from and also contribute to this broader challenge by creating organic linkages with other learning communities.

## **6. Use of information and communication technologies**

The sharing of knowledge and exemplary practices of sustainable living and participating in the global discussion of how we can create sustainable futures is critical. For this purpose it is recommended that continuous exchanges of information be fostered, utilizing multiple channels and technologies, to reach populations living in diverse cultural and educational contexts. Such sharing includes acknowledging the value of diverse cultures that demonstrate the values and principles of sustainable living, as well as the academic knowledge necessary to the achievement of the Decade's goals.

## **7. Monitoring and evaluation**

It is of utmost importance that we rigorously and continually assess and evaluate all of our activities and support communities in doing so, thus contributing to the monitoring and evaluation that is necessary for the fulfilment of the DESD's goals with efficiency and efficacy.<sup>18</sup>

### **Strategies for educational reform**

In this section, these seven strategy areas will be explored in an attempt to propose a more systematic approach leading to a planetary social learning model for sustainable development.

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<sup>18</sup> *Earth Charter International* has already developed tools for use of the Charter for assessment. See [http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/2007/06/ec\\_assess\\_pictures.html](http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/2007/06/ec_assess_pictures.html).

Within the context of education, there are many pedagogical developments and paradigms of educational change that can contribute to create the needed vision and strategy for the policies and practices needed for education to live up to the extraordinary challenges and opportunities of our time. Many of them are converging in a relatively new family of approaches to education for sustainable development that are called ‘social learning’ or ‘societal learning’. Wals and van der Leij make the case for social learning in the following way:

*...After two decades of talk about sustainability and sustainable development, it appears easier to identify what is unsustainable (i.e., ecologically, socially, economically, ethically, culturally and environmentally) than to identify what it is to be sustainable. What is clear by now is that to break deeply entrenched, unsustainable patterns (assumptions, behaviours and values) requires a new kind of thinking inspired and informed by powerful learning processes that simultaneously lead to individual and collaborative action and transformation...The nature of sustainability-challenges seems to be such that a routine problem-solving approach falls short, as transitions towards a sustainable world require more than attempts to reduce the world around us into manageable and solvable problems. Instead, such transitions require a more systemic and reflexive way of thinking and acting with the realization that our world is one of continuous change and ever-present uncertainty...<sup>19</sup>*

The past record of substantial large-scale educational change does not provide sufficient theoretical guidance for the development of the policies, strategies, and pedagogies that are needed to fulfil the goals and objectives of the *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*. According to Goodson the international historical record of

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<sup>19</sup> Arjen E. J. Wals and Tore van der Leij, Introduction to *Social Learning Towards a Sustainable World*, ed. Arjen E.J. Wals (Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2007), 17.

successful educational change initiatives demonstrates that:

*Educational change proposals resemble political parties. They represent a 'coalition' of interests and projects brought together under a common name at a particular point in time. When these separate segments of projects and interests are harmoniously organized, the social movement behind the political party or the educational change gains direction and force.”<sup>20</sup>*

Goodson distinguishes three key segments of educational change processes which need to be harmonized for effective educational change: a) the internal change agents working within schools who promote change; b) an external framework, such as educational laws, policies and mandates, which often are imposed top-down; and c) the personal life missions of the individuals involved in the change. He believes that in the 1960s and 1970s, internal change agency was more dominant, followed by a period of dominance of external interests—many of them linked to economic and political dimensions.

Educational change in our time, if it is to meet the requirements of the *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development*, entails that learners (teachers and students as learners in dialogue) can find meaning in dedicating their personal life missions to the kind of education required for the great work at hand. The challenge is to reach a harmonization of life missions with the internal qualities of educational communities and the external societal interests and policies that compete for influence in the other two segments. One implication of these considerations is the importance of emphasizing emancipation and empowerment of educators to find meaning in and creatively learning how they can devote their life missions to the quality of educational reform that is needed.

To achieve this, it is of paramount importance to develop effective processes to synergize

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<sup>20</sup> Ivor F. Goodson, “Social Histories of Educational Change,” *Journal of Educational Change* 2 (2001): 45.

formal, non formal and informal education as complementary dimensions of a planetary social learning approach in which, ultimately, all humans should have the opportunity and means of participating. How can this be achieved?

Hargreaves<sup>21</sup> makes a good case for bearing in mind seven strategic geographies in the planning of educational reform. These distinctions are relevant to the arguments of this essay. They are:

**Market geographies**, which "...define and distribute differences of status and opportunity between schools through complex processes of consumer choice."<sup>22</sup>

**Network geographies**. "...Social and professional networks connect people through complex webs of interaction and relationship in ways that develop shared knowledge as well as professional support over time"<sup>23</sup>These can be virtual and electronic as well as face to face.

**Virtual geographies**. "Virtual geographies harness the power of computer and other technologies to vanquish the tyranny of space. Virtual geographies...open up access to knowledge far beyond the set curriculum and its recommended texts."<sup>24</sup>

**Geographies of Scaling Up**. "The intensity of interest in educational reform at the turn of the century, and in 'scaling it up' so it affects very many schools, not just an innovative few, has created new governmental geographies of educational change (as well as resurrecting some older ones)...Geographies of scaling up have received mixed reviews in the literature."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Andy Hargreaves, "Sustainability of Educational Change: the Role of Social Geographies." *Journal of Educational Change* 3 (2002): 189-214.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 203-204.

**Standardized geographies.** “In response to the problems of scaling-up, impatient governments have imposed a “new orthodoxy” of educational change on their schools, insisting on widespread and wholesale compliance with detailed national, or state-wide curricula, tightly prescribed performance standards, and closely aligned, high-stakes assessments on which the futures and even survival of teachers and schools depend...”<sup>26</sup>

**Differential geographies.** “The differential approach to school improvement takes the strategic geography of educational change beyond the unenforceable voluntarism of networks and scaling on the one hand up, and beyond the inflexibilities of enforced standardization on the other. But in doing so, it underpins social division with educational differentiation. It offers freedom to change to the affluent and fear of failure to the rest.”<sup>27</sup>

**Geographies of social movements.** “All of the social geographies of educational change described so far encounter serious difficulties in achieving large-scale success, especially in relation to goals and principles of social justice and equity as well as sustained standards... Social movements are an especially creative strategic geography of social and educational change... [they] have a wide-ranging repertoire of strategies incorporating informal networks, lobbying, protest marches, media campaigns, lifestyle choices, sometimes formal organizational bodies and much more. Relationships are at the heart of them... they are rooted not in self-interest but in a clear moral purpose which ultimately benefits the universal good of all... What better candidate for a social movement than public education? When governments remain under the sway of market fundamentalism and have minimal commitment to public education and public life—then teachers and others can by-pass governments, and capture the public imagination about education and teaching today, on which governments and their electability ultimately depend.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 205-206.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 206-208.

Paul Hawken has attempted to count the number of social movements in the world today and reached the conclusion that there are currently over one million organizations working for ecological sustainability and social justice. A key passage conveys how he characterizes this unique movement:

*The movement has three basic roots: the environmental and social justice movements, and indigenous cultures' resistance to globalization—all of which are intertwining. It arises spontaneously from different economic sectors, cultures, regions, and cohorts, resulting in a global, classless, diverse, and embedded movement, spreading worldwide without exception. In a world grown too complex for constrictive ideologies, the very word movement may be too small, for it is the largest coming together of citizens in history.*<sup>29</sup>

The relationship between cultural change, the role of education, and social movements is of critical importance in determining the viability of arresting the critical unsustainable patterns<sup>30</sup> we are currently involved throughout the planet and fulfilling the aspirations of a sustainable and integrally peaceful world in which all humans can flourish as part of a grander evolutionary process. Hawken makes an interesting analysis concerning the chronologies and differential rates of change in nature and human organizations, distinguishing in the latter three key domains of our globalized present situation: international capital flows and commerce, culture, and governance.<sup>31</sup> He believes that “...Nature has the greatest inertia but the most resilience.”<sup>32</sup> Commerce has the most rapid pace of change, followed by governance, and culture. He also believes that

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Hawken, “To Remake the World. Something Earth-changing is afoot among civil society,” *Orion Magazine*, May/June (2007) <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/265/>.

<sup>30</sup> A valuable historical analysis of our current situation is given by Patrick Hossay, *Unsustainable. Global Environmental and Social Justice* (London & New York: Zed Books, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest. How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming* (New York: Viking, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

“...Sustainability is about stabilizing the currently disruptive relationship between earth’s two most complex systems—human culture and the living world. The interrelation between these two systems marks every person’s existence and is responsible for the rise and fall of every civilization.”<sup>33</sup> If these assumptions are valid, then educational reform for deep cultural change, even if effective, will require that local, national, and global citizen movements find ways of synergizing their struggles for human rights and Earth imperatives through democratic participation.

Hawken believes that this global movement cannot be characterized in the traditional ideological sense: “Ideologies exclude openness, diversity, resiliency, and multiplicity, the very qualities that nourish life in any system, be it ecosystem, immune system, or social system.”<sup>34</sup> He adds that

*“...It is a body of thought that coheres into a values system but not a belief system; it is a confluence of evolving ideas that never ceases; a creator of choice, actions, and solutions that confront suffering and degradations visited upon people and the earth... Just as **life organizes with information**, the most powerful instrument wielded by the movement is an unimpeded flow of information, for that directionless communication is the only way the whole of humanity can reorganize itself.”<sup>35</sup>*

Hawken also believes that there is a common core ethical intent that drives this movement: “...First is the Golden Rule; second is the sacredness of all life. Whether it be a creature, child, or culture.”<sup>36</sup> These are nurtured, Hawken believes, by the goodness of the human heart: “...Compassion and love of others are at the heart of all religions, and at the heart of this movement.”<sup>37</sup> It is relevant to note that this is essentially the same

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 172

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 176-177.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

point that the *Earth Charter* is stating, particularly in what this author considers to be it's foundational ethical and pedagogical principle, namely, Principle 2, already quoted above.

Is it possible to harness the collective will, wisdom, and expertise of scientists, policymakers, informed citizen movements, educators, and communicators to design a planetary social learning system and movement to synergize this global citizen movement into an effective governance for Earth? The *Earth Charter*, if approached as a living document which is itself the fruit of a vast social movement and which collects the essence of the ethical consciousness of civil society organizations and governments, has the potential to provide the architecture needed to integrate the moral consciousness of humanity with transformative action through deep democratic participation at all levels of governance.

This approach assumes as important learning goals understanding how the Earth Charter principles and sub-principles were distilled from agreed-upon ethical and policy commitments by governments in the main U.N. international conferences and conventions of the 1990s and to appreciate their ethical and legal power. Specifically, the author is proposing that the international educational community committed to the goals and objectives of the *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development* create a social learning model and system that uses *The Earth Charter* as a framework for a multi-stakeholder participatory educational strategy. Many of the key Charter principles and sub principles can serve as categories and be linked to the ongoing follow-up policies and action frameworks to which diverse U.N., other INGOs, NGOs (at different levels), universities, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders are committed to within a broad understanding of what is sustainable development (SD). Educators and learners need easily accessible updated information on the status of these policy frameworks, have opportunities for forums, and for sharing educational resources and experiences, particularly of those peoples and organizations who are modelling sustainable ways of living. This rationale can provide a framework for the strengthening of the international

multi-lateral governance framework, through dialogic participation of these diverse stakeholders.

Strategic networking and virtual geographies for educational change can constitute a key component of a planetary social learning model, provided that vigorous policies are set in motion to overcome the digital divide in the world. There are already in operation valuable portals based on social networking principles that are partially fulfilling these needs. A noteworthy example is <http://www.wiserearth.org/> developed by Paul Hawken's *Natural Capital Institute*, which currently has 108,842 organizations.<sup>38</sup> In 2007 Hawken<sup>39</sup> announced two other websites that would complement this one, WiserBusiness and WiserGovernment. To date these have not been developed. Moreover it is telling that these were foreseen as separate portals. The argument being made in this essay is the need for civil society-based networks, including educational ones, to have linkage capacity to governmental and inter-governmental sources of information.

Specifically, the author is arguing for the creation of a broad website based on the *Earth Charter* as its architecture. It could explicate how most of the principles are based on ongoing mandates emanating from major U.N. international conferences, conventions and declarations. In this way, its use as a 'living document' could take on a very concrete, dynamic meaning. The website could host multiple forums, have all kinds of linkages to orient educators on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and be a dynamic space for cycles of visioning, monitoring, evaluation and revisioning in relation to the diverse policy domains of SD and ESD. People need to know not only what these policy commitments entail, but also have the means of understanding their on-going status, the reality of the situations they are meant to address, and how they can participate as citizens in democratic ways to assure effective governance at local, national, and international levels.

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<sup>38</sup> Accessed on May 31, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest*, Op. Cit., p. 193.

Given the complexity and dynamism of Earth processes, the critical thresholds that emergent trends have reached or are being reached—for example climate change, loss of biodiversity, peak oil, food scarcity—all pertinent knowledge needs to be shared and opportunely applied at all Earth System dimensions and levels to attempt to mitigate and reverse these and other interrelated trends.

This proposal is also justifiable by the goals, objectives, and strategies of the DESD. Earth system sustainability, human development, and education/learning for sustainable living are intrinsically related. Shared fundamental values, knowledge, and policies for action are required for Earth system governance, which requires maximum ecocentric synergy between human political entities and all members of societies. As stated in the *DESD International Implementation Scheme*:<sup>40</sup> “Governments and civil society should maintain a permanent dialogue in which issues are aired and where common agendas are forged through ongoing conversation, debate, and mutual learning.” Further-on it states that the DESD is about building momentum: “...such momentum will be built and maintained to the extent to which stakeholders at every level create and own the vision for ESD.”<sup>41</sup> And further-on, it adds: “...The effectiveness of the DESD will depend on the strength and inclusiveness of the partnerships, networks, and alliances that develop among stakeholders at all levels.”<sup>42</sup>

The inclusive quality of the DESD implies that all humans, all members of the community of life, and all Earth systems are stakeholders in sustainable human development and have a role to play in Education for Sustainable Development. Visioning, planning, acting, monitoring, evaluation, and revisioning are cyclical cognitive and connative processes all stakeholders are continuously engaging in at multiple levels and time scales. As stated by the *DESD International Implementation Scheme*: “Ownership by stakeholders depends on consultation and wide participation in visioning,

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<sup>40</sup> Op cit., p. 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

policy formulation, planning, and implementing.<sup>43</sup>

Given that the *United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development* is an educational policy action framework that has been agreed-upon by governments and is not mandatory, it is vulnerable to the will of often divergent and competing interests of nation-states. Therefore it is pertinent to ask if a planetary monitoring and learning system should be centralized by governments and the United Nations? Or should the system be fully participative and multi-centred such as [www.wiserearth.org](http://www.wiserearth.org)? The position of this essay is in favour of the latter approach. Ethical principles, such as those espoused by the *Earth Charter*, if given a foundational position in such a system, can provide the link required between shared values, policies, and action. This is also the import of the DESD:

*A world in which the values inherent in sustainable development are integrated into all aspects of learning in order to encourage changes in behaviour that allow for a more sustainable, economically viable and just society for all, a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learn the values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.*<sup>44</sup>

In sum, this is a challenge and opportunity for all those individuals and organizations who identify and feel a commitment to the four main principles of the *Earth Charter* to come together as one human family, in deep respect and in resonance with the greater community of life, to:

- 1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity.*
- 2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love.*

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

3. *Building democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful.*

4. *Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations.*<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Earth Charter*, Op. Cit.

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