The Earth Charter's Integrated Ethical Approach to Learning to Live Together Sustainably: An Example of an International Master Course

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The challenge of learning to live together sustainably

Currently, humanity is facing a number of shared crises and challenges, where the global becomes local and the local becomes global.

- widespread poverty,
- violation of human rights,
- the climate change caused by unsustainable practices,
- the threat posed by economic globalisation
- social injustice

The consequences of these crises include

- increasing degradation of environment;
- the exacerbation of social and economic inequality;
- the undermining of national sovereignty and peoples' decision-making power

What is the role of education?

Can be either:

• a driver for replicating an unsustainable world, Or,
• a driver for personal and social change, leading to a sustainable world.

Given this, there is an urgent need to address these crises and challenges and facilitate a transition to a more sustainable world

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as a new paradigm for revising and reorienting today's education

ESD generates new forms of knowing, learning and being that can lead people to transform themselves and society (cf. Wals, 2010).

This new paradigm of education driven by transformative approaches to teaching and learning aims to deconstruct the perception of education for productivity to education for creativity and change (Makrakis, 2012).

This transformation necessitates what Sterling (2001) stated: the integrity of the spirit, heart, head and hands.

What is required…

The transformation required to shift towards a sustainable world will entail the following ESD-related learning processes and skills stated by Tilbury (2011):

1. to ask critical questions;
2. to clarify one's own values;
3. to envision more positive and sustainable futures;
4. to think systemically;
5. to respond through applied learning; and,
6. to explore the dialectic between tradition and innovation.

A response to the challenge: The ICT-enabled ESD Programme

Our state-of-the art review

1. focus on the environmental pillar of sustainable development, neglecting the other three pillars (social, cultural and economic);
2. do not exploit the potential of ICTs in addressing sustainability issues, especially Web 2 technologies and use of open education resources (learning objects) available in the Web; and;
3. employ techno-centric approaches, meaning that curriculum is developed by experts without the end-users' inputs.

What is needed?

There is, thus, a need of Master Degree programmes that are:

participatory, holistic, interdisciplinary and contextual,

making use of ICTs both as learning pedagogies and means of delivering at a distance or through a blended mode.

The M.Sc. Study Programme

PROGRAMME OF STUDY	ECTS
Year 1 Semester 1	30
Sustainability Theory, Systems Thinking and Transformative Change	10
Approaches to Educational Research for Sustainable Development	10
ESD Pedagogy and ICT	10
Year 1 Semester 2	30
Appropriate Technology, Active Citizenship and Education for Sustainable Development	10
Action Research and Participatory Action Research for Sustainable Development	10
ICT, Instructional/Learning Design and Education for Sustainable Development	10
Year 2 Semester 1 (to be chosen 3 out of 6)	60
Educational Policy and Planning for Sustainable Schooling	10
ICT, Climate Change and Geo-spatial Tools	10
Bio-cultural Diversity and Education for Sustainable Development	10
e-Learning, Virtual Worlds and Education for Sustainable Development	10
Teaching to Live Sustainably through the Earth Charter	10
Sustainable Leadership, Inter/Cross Cultural Communication and Planning for Sustainability	10
Year 2 Semester 2	30
Dissertation	30
Total for the Master degree needed	120

A vertical and horizontal approach

Vertically, the Earth Charter has been integrated as a course; and

Horizontally, its concepts have been integrated across a number of courses within the programme.
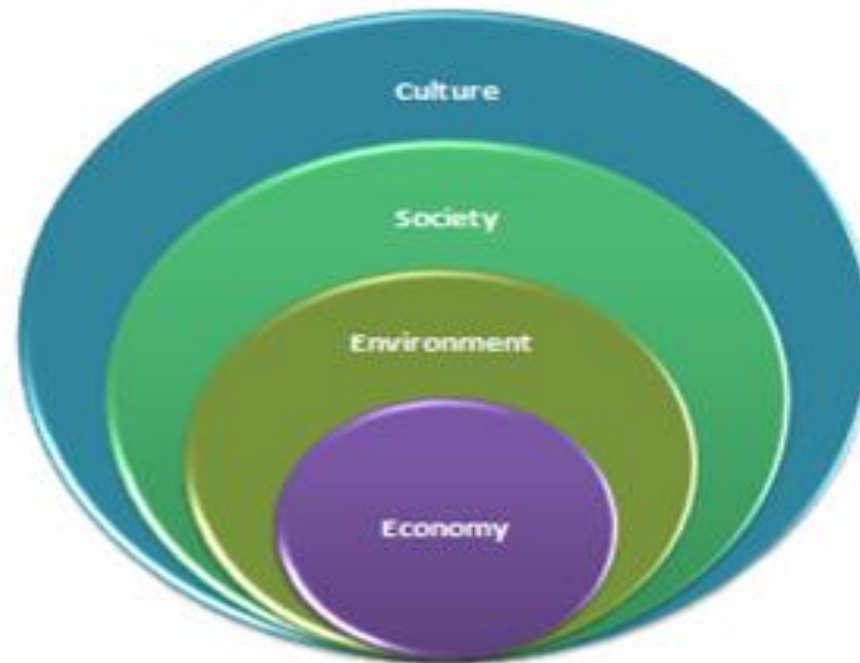
Why the Earth Charter?

The Earth Charter provides a very broad perspective on learning to live together sustainably and thus is helpful for educators who wish to develop a comprehensive approach to education for sustainability (Harding et al., 2010).

Why the EC?...

It looks holistically into the four pillars of sustainable development:

In this sense…

.... it bridges issues such as social justice, non-violence and peace, which are often overlooked in educational frameworks for sustainable development, where environmental and issues dominate.

Learning to live together sustainably

The Earth Charter course modules structure

Module 1: Understanding Self and Others

- Unit 1.1: Why self understanding
Unit 1.2: Understanding others by understanding the self

Module 2: Introduction to the EC, Ethics and Values

- Unit 1.1: Origin, history and development of the Earth Charter

- Unit 1.2: The Earth Charter and eco-pedagogy

- Unit 1.3 The 4 principles of the Earth Charter, their ethics and values

- Unit 1.4 Personal Ethics and Values

Modules 3 & 4

Module 3: The EC in political discourse, EU educational policy and citizenship education

- Unit 2.1: The EC in political discourse
- Unit 2.2: The EC and EU educational policy
- Unit 2.3: The EC and citizenship education

Module 4: The Earth Charter as an Ethical Framework for Learning to Live Sustainably

- Unit 3.1: Values education and learning to live sustainably
- Unit 3.2: The EC as an ethical framework for learning to live sustainably
- Unit 3.3: Learning to reflect on personal values and practices

Modules 5-7

Module 5: The Earth Charter as a Pedagogical tool for learning to live sustainably

- 4.1   Using the EC as a teaching and learning tool
- 4.2: A four-dimensional model of EC as a teaching tool

Module 6: Good Practices of EC in teaching and learning for sustainability

- Unit 5.1 Case 1
- Unit 5.2 Case 2

Module 7: Developing EC-based lesson plans transforming the world

- Unit 6.1: Learning technologies, transformation and the EC
- Unit 6.2: Steps to developing quality lesson plans
- Unit 6.3: Applying the EC in the teaching/learning process enabled by ICTs.

Key learning approaches

- Knowledge is personally and socially constructed

- View the others and the world from multiple perspectives

- Learning is inherently a social-dialogic process leading to praxis

- Contextualise knowledge and learning

Knowledge is personally and socially constructed

The course modules provide space for the students to control their learning process in order to construct their own understanding and knowledge on self and nature. In the course modules the learners can negotiate a study topic, either from a suggested list or from their own research enabled through ICTs (e.g. Blogs, Wikis)

View the others and the world from multiple perspectives

The course modules provide learning experiences which encourage students to look beyond their own view. Multiple lenses and perspectives are being facilitated through engaging students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds enabled by social networking tools to discuss issues related to using Earth Charter resources and tools for learning to live together sustainably.

Learning is inherently a social-dialogic process leading to praxis

Social networking through the learning environment and the activities provided in the course modules is a key feature not only because of the nature of the Masters programme but also of the fact that students are expected to be geographically isolated. Through social-dialogic processes driven by reflective practice and enabled by ICTs, students can experience personal change, that collectively can lead to social transformation towards sustainability.

Contextualise knowledge and learning

Contextualisation of learning occurs when the content of the curriculum, the methods and the materials used are related directly to the experience and environment of the learner.

Students in dealing with ESD are involved in a) **reflective practice**, where they are reflecting on their own practice and b) **reflexive practice**, where they are reflecting, reviewing and changing in response to contextual factors and improved understandings of their practice.

Reflexivity as praxis

In that sense, the concepts of 'reflexivity' is seen as 'critical reflection' that is underpinned by critical pedagogy principles and competences.

- Reflexivity (Mead, 1921) is described as an interactive process that takes into consideration the relationship between self, the other, and the context (and thus, the interaction within a given time, space, and situation).

- Freire's (1970) notion of Praxis: "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it." (p.234). Liberatory pedagogy.

- Critical reflective knowing is neither behavoural nor technical, not truth establishing, nor captured by a discipline. It critiques al other forms of knowledge, and in so doing, it moves beyond merely reproducing what is (Habermas, 1978).

Critical reflective questions

- What are my implicit assumptions and how do they differ from my explicit ones
- How can I use this awareness to change my practice?
- How do I influence what I see?
- How does what I am looking for influence what I find?
- What does my practice imply about my fundamental values? What am I assuming about the nature of human beings? Society? power and conflict?

Thank you for your attention