



The Earth Charter and the Educative Principles of Sustainability

Summary of Guidelines and Suggested Pedagogies

Based Upon the 2002 "Synthesis Report" of an
Online Discussion Forum Among Education Experts

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SILA

I would like to thank the organisers of this seminar for this very special invitation to attend the Healing Earth, the Wisdom of Nature and Sustainable Communities. It is an honour and indeed also a pleasure to be here and enjoy the hospitality of the Italiens.

Before going into details of my presentation on the Earth Charter and the Educative Principles of Sustainability, I'd like to explain about my roots and where I come from.

I come from the Greenlandic Inuit. Why would I tell about the Earth Charter to you, some may wish know.

When we heard that an international document concerning the environment was under drafting we thought that it was important that our views as a hunting people, who lived off from the environment directly was heard and also attended that process. And then when I had an invitation to join in, I was supported from my people.

We, the Greenlandic people are Christian protestants. But we have a strong culture and traditions, that are now endangered, not only by ourselves but also by climate change.

This winter when I spoke to the French about the Arctic and climate change I told them about our Inuit word of Sila –

Sila has four significances in all the Inuit dialects I know. 1. weather 2. intellect 3. universe and 4. the spirit of sila. As we are talking about the climate change and weather conditions, and as we are indeed dealing with what to do as humanity and have to appeal to our intellect in order to do something together as greenlanders and as Europeans, I found it appropriate to call my presentation just that, sila.

I come from an old culture, both my grandparents were hunters and lived a very traditional way of life. We are big family I am the oldest of 8 sisters and brothers. The Inuit culture practically sewed kajak's to the body size, just like you Italiens are famous for making wonderful shoes, we build the kayak's so it fits your body. This way the kayaker could beat the biggest waves in the Arctic seas. Our culture is practically a superb adaptation to the environment. Our kamiks, boots and our clothing were the skins of the animals we eat, most of the utilities organic, therefore, archaeological findings are usually only stones and some few bones.

I have heard that the general perception of the Inuit in Europe is that we are pitisome people. That is not our perception of us. We are proud. We are strong. We have a knowledge of survival in an area of the planet where man normally will soon die... We learned to read and write in the 1850's practically everybody knew how to read and write. Hunters who, as a matter of sickness were unable to go out on their kajaks wrote; wrote down stories, our myths and legends to the joy of the coming generations. Still this day we have a knowledge that mankind should care about and save as an integral part of the diversity of the cultures in the world.

Hunters in the Disco Bay express often their observations in the national radio and TV. Their observations concern change of wind, unpredictable winds, because previously you could read on the clouds when the weather was changing for a day or two. Now water currents in Disco Bay have also changed, the resources, the fauna is changing too.

The landscape, the mountains, the rocks, the sea always remained.

Thus, the hunters are having hardship because they are in a transforming period, and according to some we need a paradigm shift in dealing with hunters situation. A paradigm shift is needed, and a common language and research manners are under development so the way you study at the university and become a researcher through books is to cope with the knowledge of the people living in the Arctic. Hard core science should be put a drop of what hunters have to say.

Well, I think that we all have to change our way of living to be sustainable. But how do we do that? It is not easy.

Our traditional network is a good thing and we must not lose it. The relationship between the generations and respect for our elders must be re-established. The older generation can hand on traditional values and norms to the younger generation. Our traditions with the responsibilities of the extended families should prevail.

Culture is the way we are together, and we all contribute actively in creating this. Culture is memory and the reminiscences of old and new traditions. Culture is also the memories that our forefathers have left behind in the landscape and which we find in the museums and in our myths and legends. Culture is experiences, ideas, performances and belief. To cherish our culture is the duty of all in society.

An important aspect of our culture, which gives perspective beyond the boundaries of our country, is the concept of sustainability. If our culture is based on sustainability, this will be a positive signal to the outside world. This new cultural policy must be expressed in terms of the spirit of sustainability and must seek support in art and science in the aiming of society at a sustainable future.

We must recognize and preserve our culture's traditional knowledge and spiritual wisdom as it contributes to the protection of the environment and the welfare of mankind. The culture of the hunter with its rules for the utilization of nature and its resources, with documentation in literature. The culture of the hunter keeps alive good traditions, not least when there is a question of just distribution of the resources of nature.

That is our challengealso for you, the Italians.

For the Decade of Education for the sustainable Development I encourage both the Greenlandic and Italian teachers to use the EC. It is a good tool for that, and many, many countries have now good experiences in doing so.

1. Educational Functions of the Earth Charter

There are two broad educational functions of the Earth Charter:

a) Education for sustainable living - As a global ethic for a more sustainable way of living, the Earth Charter can be used to achieve three educational objectives:

- **Raise consciousness** - 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
- **Apply values and principles to local and global problems** - 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 its ideals.

This kind of analysis in turn provides the basis for identifying action goals for bringing about positive transformations; and

- **Make a call for action and partnership amongst all sectors and actors** - 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 of collaboration aimed at promoting justice, sustainability and peace, consistent with the Charter's values.

b) Promoting a global dialogue on ethics for sustainability - In addition to its function as a global *ethic* for a more just, sustainable and peaceful world, the Earth Charter has an important educational role to play in the ongoing dialogue about global *ethics*. The Earth Charter can be used to help catalyse a global "Socratic" dialogue in both formal and non-formal educational settings - an ongoing, open dialogue that acknowledges the tensions involved in global ethics discourse and respects the differences in opinion that emerge amidst the search for common ground.

2. Key principles and suggested pedagogies for developing Earth Charter educational materials and programs

Earth Charter educational programs, activities and materials should involve:

- a) **Open, participatory and inclusive education processes**
- b) **Transdisciplinary exercise spanning sciences, humanities and creative arts.**
- c) **Experiential learning** - Use of experiential learning activities to bridge between espoused values and real world actions.
- d) **The unique themes and perspectives offered by the Earth Charter.** These are:
 - An overall framing of critical challenges and choices
 - Universal and Differentiated Responsibility
 - Interdependence of social, economic and environmental domains
 - The community of life
 - Partnerships
 - Peace and Nonviolence
 - Ecological Integrity

Together, the above themes provide a frame of reference for individuals, communities and organizations to help them discern the implications of development and to compare the "being" dimension with the "having" dimension.

3. Guiding principles for developing Earth Charter educational programs

- a) **Avoid proselytizing.** Respect the individual's learner's right to hold independent views and values.
- b) **Focus on The Earth Charter 's valid claim** that it reflects a broad, multi-cultural convergence on universal, shared values for sustainability.
- c) **Use the Earth Charter within existing educational programs.**
- d) **Promote integration of the Earth Charter** into existing student texts.
- e) In promoting the use of the Earth Charter in higher education, **focus on courses that already aim to enable learners to clarify, challenge and extend their value systems**, and programs that address the challenges of "big picture" issues such as international relations, globalization and peace.

4. Summary of the Earth Charter's Unique Role in Education

The Earth Charter responds uniquely to three critical educational challenges:

- a) **Advancing the understanding** of our shared global problems and the need to act with a sense of universal responsibility
- b) **Providing people with a framework** for critically evaluating their situation and identifying action goals for bringing about positive change
- c) **Fostering a culture of collaboration** that facilitates new partnerships between civil society, business and governments.

Thank you for your attention and please also look at the Italian version of the Earth Charter at www.earthcharter.org and find there the Teachers' book, The Earth Charter Handbook and other materials you are free to use in making your curriculae, adjusted to your own teaching traditions in order to for the new generations to deal with Sustainable Development.