

The Heart of the Matter: Infusing Sustainability Values in Education

Experiences of ESD with the Earth Charter



Celebrating the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development



United Nations
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UNESCO Chair on Education
for Sustainable Development
and the Earth Charter



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Edited by: Alicia Jimenez and Douglas F. Williamson

Copy-editing: Melanie Gracy and Stephanie Hickel

Translations: Melanie Gracy, Andrea Zubialde, Gloriana Lara and Stephanie Hickel

Layout: Adriana Molina V.

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Earth Charter International and Center for Education for Sustainable Development at UPEACE C/O University for Peace

P.O. Box 138 - 6100

San Jose, Costa Rica

Email: info@earthcharter.org

Website: www.earthcharter.org

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Creative Earth Charter Challenge for Youth, A European Experience with the Earth Charter

Éva Kálmán and Howard Curtis

In a European Union Comenius Region Partnership project, Bournemouth Borough Council's Local Education Authority (England) and Eger's Small Region Multifunctional Municipality (Hungary) worked together. The project was funded by the European Union.

Schools involved: Avonbourne College (Bournemouth, UK), Andrassy Catholic Business Academy (Eger, Hungary) and Fignedy Primary School (Noszvaj, Hungary)

Partners: Earth Charter UK, Shadows Professional Development Ltd., Creative CliC, Bükk National Park Directorate, Városgondozás Eger Ltd.

Introduction

The aim of this project was to implement Earth Charter principles into the whole school curriculum and thereby develop students' skills to enable them to make responsible decisions to support sustainable development and find solutions to global problems. The main focus was on two of the four main Earth Charter (EC) principles: all forms of life are interconnected and everyone deserves equal opportunity.¹⁰ Avonbourne students and teachers were already familiar with the EC principles. However, for the Andrassy and Fignedy students and teachers they were completely new.

Avonbourne College was founded in 1908 and the Executive Head Teacher is Mrs. Debbie Godfrey-Phaure. It is part of the Avonbourne International Business and Enterprise Trust and became an Academy in 2012.

The Trust has almost 2,000 students in it with an age range of 11-18. In 2014, it opened its Primary school, making the age range 4-18. Avonbourne College is situated in Bournemouth on the south coast of England. Bournemouth was the first town in England to endorse the Earth Charter and has played a major role in encouraging sustainability in education. The College is renowned for its enterprise ethos and community spirit and has won awards at the National and local level for social enterprise activities. Its motto is 'Inspiring 21st Century Thinkers'.



The College holds this and its mission statement, which says that its students will grow into confident, courageous, and caring citizens, close to its heart. This is because it believes that all schools are educating for the future and as such this is a significant responsibility. The College aims to nurture the qualities of determination, curiosity, resilience, imagination, disciplined thinking, love of genuine debate, and a generosity of spirit in its students. Why? Because it knows that this is what will make students successful creators of a future world that is prosperous and happy and that embodies the principles of the Earth Charter.

10 Eva Kalman– Howard Curtis et al: CECCY booklet. Eger, 2013. p.1.

Andrassy Catholic Business Academy is located in Eger, Hungary, and its head teacher is Ms. Eva Rozman. The school's history goes back to 1921, and is rich in traditions. Keeping these traditions and watching the development of the world, the school is constantly aiming for innovations. As a community, Andrassy is open to new educational experiences. Being a Catholic school, the values are based on the values of Christianity. The school respects the students' personalities, and faculty and staff pay close attention to finding and developing their special skills. Andrassy educates its students for freedom while respecting human values. The school's aim is to teach students to take responsibility for their actions. Andrassy focuses on co-operation instead of individualism because we think this is a crucial part of character development. Andrassy hopes that its students will be decent and responsible citizens, who are capable of self-development, are confident enough to stand up for themselves, and are brave enough to live their dreams.

The school believes that adults are responsible for maintaining the quality of life on Earth and its ecosystems for their children at a standard of quality they inherited from their grandparents. By Earth, the faculty and staff at Andrassy do not only mean the natural wonders of the planet, but also products made by humans in accordance and balance with nature, and also the possibility of a harmonious coexistence of different peoples and nations. Teachers have privileged roles to educate not only their own children but the upcoming generation of a country. They set good examples with their personalities. Through the subjects, they teach and encourage young people to respect life and be conscientious citizens. 80 % of Andrassy students are from nearby villages, many of which belong to areas heavily stricken by unemployment. Motivating these students needs imagination and creativity. However, Andrassy students were ready to initiate and participate in programmes meant to raise awareness of these issues. They organized a "Green Day", a cleaning day; they collected plastic bottles and decorated classrooms to introduce the cultures of different nations. They painted human figures depicting the traditional folk costumes of various countries. On Earth Day these were used to adorn the outside walls of the school building. In the last two years, the school has started thinking more consciously about how to contribute to fulfilling the noble principles of the Earth Charter. Andrassy community members are grateful to all the committed and enthusiastic Hungarian and English colleagues and partners, who have taken part in this wonderful project.¹¹

Implementation

Among all three schools, a group of teachers formed a team and began to collaborate. First, the team structured a questionnaire to see what skills and knowledge the students already had about the issues covered by the EC principles. This revealed the first problem. The issues Hungarian students were not very familiar with differed from those of the English students. Examples of these differences included environmental problems such as how to save energy, selective waste collection, etc. So, after a section of common questions, students from both countries were asked questions on subjects that the teachers regarded as important and relevant issues in the given country.

The second task was examining the curricula to look for matches with the EC principles, so that the team could concentrate on the areas where no references were found. Thirdly, a table of skills evaluation was structured. It was a very difficult task for the Hungarian teachers, as this kind of evaluation was not in their teacher's training programme. Then, the team planned to find ways in which project partners could help to fill the skills gaps.

To mention some examples (without listing all of the activities), the Bükk National Park Directorate offered lectures and

11 Eva Kalman – Howard Curtis et al: CECCY booklet. Eger. 2013. pp. 4-11 (Introduction of schools, and a speech by Ms Rozman)

forest school experience. Varosgondozas Ltd. (responsible for the maintenance of public utilities – processing waste, park maintenance, etc.) offered a competition on selective rubbish collection and the manager of the company was the jury leader, adding considerably to the students' existing experience.

Finally, students planned projects around the EC issues. Another problem was the new centralized curriculum in Hungary which allows only 10% of teaching time for what the teachers decide to teach. The Hungarian teachers had to be very careful to find spaces in the curriculum where EC principles could fit.

To complete everything the team had planned, the teachers had to meet several times. The Hungarian teachers studied the Earth Charter and learned about the principles. With the help of the English colleagues and especially with the inspiration given by Mr. Jeffrey Newman (Earth Charter UK), slowly and gradually all members of the Hungarian team understood the principles and Andrassy endorsed the EC.

For the students, an adapted version was created. All classes displayed the EC principles on the classroom walls and were given a country, which either in a positive or in a negative way an EC principle could be referred to. These references were demonstrated in the classrooms and were spoken about in class. Teachers of both countries organized demonstration lessons in which they showed their colleagues how EC principles could be used as basis of a lesson even if it is in Chemistry or Religious Education. Several out-of-class activities were initiated by the students including Green Day, Peace One Day, and EC day. On these days, the communities of all schools wore green to show awareness, formed a huge peace sign to show their concerns about war, and constructed a Rubik's cube to display how EC principles are being violated in their respective environments.

During the two years, different methods were used including: questionnaires; evaluations; lectures; visiting real companies; meeting working people; taking photos; watching films; and making lesson plans using Pictures of Success¹². As a result of this cooperation, a Creative Earth Charter Curriculum for Youth (CECCY) booklet was created to serve as a guide for teachers as to how to use EC principles in their lessons.



Lessons learned

For Avonbourne College students the project has had a major impact in that the EC is now the focus of lessons in a wide range of subjects and especially in their pastoral tutor time lessons. Each month an EC principle is chosen and students learn about it; they then prepare presentations on it for House Assemblies and they can win achievement points for demonstrating their knowledge of the particular principle. In this way the entire EC is now covered and every student in the College has detailed knowledge of the principles.

Jeffrey Newman stated, "The Earth Charter has one over-riding hope: a just, sustainable and peaceful global society. It recognizes that it is because we so often view disjointed elements that many of the most embedded issues of our times emerge. The CECCY

Project was a way to test if young people and their teachers could begin to grasp those 16 inter-related principles and 61 sub-

¹² <http://www.picturesofsuccess.org>

principles and could provide an intellectually coherent way of thinking and acting that could bring fundamental changes both to them and to our two different societies, in England and Hungary.

At the root were the three themes that are of great importance both to young people and to our world at this time: that we need to find ways to live sustainably; that we must live in justice; and that increasingly we live in a global society. However, there was one other necessary consideration, that the teaching of the CECCY Project should be academically irreproachable, providing possible ways of thinking and understanding, but not as propaganda.

My role has been as an advisor and consultant, able to bring to bear on the Project knowledge of the Charter, its history, and current global developments. The success of the Project has far exceeded my expectations. Not only have the two Schools demonstrated that the Charter has value and meaning in every part of the curriculum and that it can bring about coherence in approach, but the imaginative involvement of business and other partners, in issues such as waste and recycling, tourism, and environment, has been of major importance. This has, for example, provided for young people greater understanding of their locality, of potential involvement, and of employment. The greatest joy of the Project is how much we all have to learn and that far from being finished, this may merely be one stage in the development of a long term relationship.”¹³

Debbie Godfrey-Phaure offered the following, “The Project has far surpassed the initial objective of developing and producing a curriculum framework which promotes creative and innovative attitudes to sustainable development. As with most European projects the additional ‘golden’ benefit has been the formation of productive and generous relationships between staff and students in two different countries. The opportunity to learn from other European colleagues and explore cultural contexts is in itself the very essence of the Earth Charter in that it produces harmonious relationships. Moreover we are united in the concept of developing young minds so they take the duty of European citizenship seriously; exploring it as a means to promote a vision of a sustainable life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally. The Project has been successful in raising young people’s awareness of environmental and human rights issues. The evidence has been observed in several extra-curricular initiatives inaugurated by the young people themselves.

It has also been evident in the assessment framework and the outcomes therein. Lessons observed demonstrate the development of appropriate pedagogical approaches to the Charter, content informed by the principles, and the students’ ability to understand and apply their learning. We have been pleased to note that their learning experiences enhance and develop their personal knowledge and within them the skills needed to create innovative solutions to world issues. When we began the project we were also anxious that we develop entrepreneurial skills in our students so that they felt galvanized into contributing to their local and global community, thus reducing the need for services that are no longer sustainable. The Project coordination is excited by the ways in which the students have interpreted this. Examples include working with Waste Recycling Plants, introducing energy saving measures, and campaigning for the incorporation of Earth Charter principles into the Millennium Development Goals. Local businesses have been particularly struck by how committed the students are and the project has attracted the involvement of global businesses such as ‘Lush’ in the UK. In addition, we have been fortunate to be involved in the ‘Pictures of Success’ project spearheaded by CarbonSense, a company committed to sustainable solutions that is eager to be involved in the next stage of the project. The next stage will be, we hope, an application for a Multilateral Comenius project. We already have additional partners interested in joining us. One example is in Costa Rica, the home of the Earth Charter! We are hoping to develop training modules for teachers so that the initiative gains Europe-wide success and enjoys accreditation.”¹⁴

13 Eva Kalman – Howard Curtis et al: CECCY Booklet. Eger. 2013. pp. 2-3 (Speech by Mr Jeffrey Newman)

14 Eva Kalman – Howard Curtis et al: CECCY Booklet. Eger. 2013. pp. 4-5 (Speech by MrsGodfrey-Phaure)

Finally, here are some of the students' and teachers' opinions:

"Nowadays, when we are facing global environmental problems and issues, it is extremely vital to teach future generations how they will be able to solve those menacing problems." Ms. Krisztina Hajdúné Molnár, Andrassy Catholic Business Academy

"I think it is important to follow the Earth Charter because it makes the world a better place for everyone." Phoebe G., Avonbourne College

"It is important to speak about pets because we have to treat them very carefully." – Nóra Csábi, Figedy Primary School, Noszvaj

"I think it is important to learn about the Earth Charter because we need a good understanding on how to keep our earth healthy and to make it a better place to live." Laura W., Avonbourne College

"I liked the lesson as we worked in teams, the atmosphere was good, and everybody enjoyed what they were doing. We made a mock-up, which had a positive and a negative side. On the negative side we showed water pollution, on the positive side we presented what the Earth would be like without water pollution." Csenge Fodor, Figedy Primary School, Noszvaj

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Contact information:

Eva Kalman
Hungarian Project Leader
Deputy Head Teacher of Andrassy
Catholic Business Academy, Eger -
Hungary
kalmaneva62@gmail.com

Howard Curtis
British Project Leader
Head of Internationalism & Global
Citizenship, Avonbourne College,
Bournemouth - UK
howard.curtis@avonbournetrust.org

Links:

<http://ekszi.hu/index.php/palyazataink/ceccyfoeldcharta> - Andrassy's official website. All materials are only in Hungarian.
<http://www.avonbournetrust.org> – Official website of Avonbourne College
<https://sites.google.com/site/ceccyproject/home> - official website of the project. All photos, the poster and the CECCY Booklet can be publicly used. All materials are in English.
http://issuu.com/tka_konyvtar/docs/teljes_issuu - official information about the Award in English
<http://english.tpf.hu/> - Official website of Tempus Public Foundation in English

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Earth Charter International and Center for Education for Sustainable
Development at UPEACE C/O University for Peace
P.O. Box 138 - 6100 San Jose, Costa Rica
Email: info@earthcharter.org
Website: www.earthcharter.org

