

Louise Erbacher, Ben Glass, and Kendon Glass, Australia. [An Earth Charter project descriptive essay which speaks to Principle 14 on education for sustainable development and sustainable living](#)

Taking it to the Brink: The Story of the Brink Expedition



Louise Erbacher has always incorporated global issues into her work as a primary school teacher. She was inspired upon discovering the Earth Charter at the Asia Pacific Conference in Brisbane, Australia in 2001. She then joined the local Queensland Earth Charter Committee (QECC). Since 2002, she has worked with QECC while simultaneously volunteering as the Education Co-ordinator for the Brink Expedition. These roles continually remind her of the empowering nature of the Earth Charter – how the story of one person trying to make a difference can inspire others to take action to create a more sustainable future.



Ben Glass is a young Australian adventurer and student of film and television. He is Media Liaison Officer for the Brink Organisation and has travelled on the Brink Expedition from 2002-2004 before returning to Australia to organize the final leg of the Expedition through Australia. Like his older brother Kendon, Ben has a keen interest in social and environmental issues and his honours thesis explored how the media could be used as a tool to motivate young people to take action on such issues. He plans to use some of the experiences to produce a documentary to raise awareness of the issues of social and environmental concern.



Kendon Glass is a young Australian adventurer and media professional. He is the Project Director for the Brink Organisation and will be cycling and sailing around the world as part of the Brink Expedition until the end of 2006. It is a worldwide journey that spans over thirty countries in a quest to highlight a range of social and environmental issues, or Hotspots. The Brink Expedition provides Kendon with an opportunity to combine his love of travel and adventure with his instructional technology skills in the form of an interactive website that tracks the story of the journey. While developing a curriculum that would give schools an opportunity to share the adventure, Kendon discovered the Earth Charter.

The challenges that lie ahead for our planet and its people are many and varied. The future will depend on our ability to equip the next generation with, in the words of Principle 14, “the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.”

There are many educators in our world who are passionate about issues of peace, justice, democracy, and the environment. Their philosophy reflects the values and principles of the Earth Charter and their curriculum provides the opportunities for students to play an active role in developing a sustainable way of life. There are many more educators, however, who lack this same

motivation and who struggle to find a catalyst for change, a stimulus to inspire them when integrated into the formal education system.

So how do we empower educators and their students to contribute to the realisation of an optimistic future vision? How do we truly engage educators and their students to take up the responsibility of becoming more active global citizens? How can we create a model for learning that will excite, entertain, inspire, and transform both students and educators alike?

During 2002, a group of like-minded volunteers came together to create a project that would soon capture the hearts and minds of educators and students, promoting “the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life” (Principle 14). The Brink Expedition (<http://www.brinkx.org>) has proven itself to be an inspirational model for learning. It is an unpredictable journey across land and ocean, made all the more challenging by the Brink Expedition Team’s determination to travel using natural sources of energy. A powerful example of human agency, the Brink Expedition is a global odyssey of epic proportions, exploring the Earth’s amazing diversity of culture and environment. It is the spirit of the Earth Charter in action around the world.

When the Brink Expedition Team visits a community, they communicate the message of the Earth Charter and spend



time in schools to discuss the Earth Charter and the Brink hotspots. All schools registering with the Brink School Room receive a school pack, containing the Earth Charter, a children’s adaptation of the Earth Charter, and the UNESCO CD Rom – *Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future*, as well as other Brink Expedition materials.

Using the Earth Charter as a framework for the creation of environmental and social justice curriculum modules, the Brink project provides educators and students with a real life adventure that energises the learning process. Teresa McNamara, a teacher from Toowong, Brisbane, Australia, used the Brink Curriculum and the Earth Charter to help her students to examine the way in which they had an effect on the Earth. She writes, “After exploring the principles of the Earth Charter, the students engaged in serious discussion about the extent of their ecological footprint and what that might mean for their future” (Personal communication).

Now in its fourth year, the project continues to grow, with new social and

environmental issues to investigate and new lands to explore. The journey continues through Europe as the Brink Expedition Team focus on the issue of global warming, before it continues on to the Middle East to look at understanding cultures. Across Asia, the Brink Expedition Team will investigate fairer trade and endangered species, and the final leg through Australia during 2006 will provide an opportunity to consider the issues of disappearing forests and indigenous Australians.

The boundless adventures of Brink’s various expedition members are presented on the World Wide Web through intimate personal accounts and breathtaking photographic images. These provide a looking-glass through which young people can view a world rarely seen within mainstream media. Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Brazil, Venezuela, Barbados, the Atlantic Ocean, Spain, and the Isle of Mallorca are some of the places that have been cycled and sailed, so far on the Brink adventure, and shared online with a global audience. Educators and students have been able to connect with the Brink

Expedition Team through school visits and satellite phone calls, providing them with a global perspective. The Brink Expedition is a live adventure across space and time that breaks down the barriers of formal education to enhance students’ learning experiences and to assist educators to meet the challenge set out in Principle 14 of the Earth Charter.

Emails sent to the Brink Expedition Team from students around the world Australia describe a fascination with the journey and many have expressed a desire to travel the world themselves one day, to see everything with their own eyes. From Rio Grande, Argentina, Liliana says “I’m browsing the Brink website and it’s so interesting! I admire you for taking on this task!”

While it can be said that the essence of the Brink Expedition is the Earth Charter in action, it is the Brink “Hotspot” issues of social and environmental concern, as presented in the online Curriculum Modules, that truly reflect the values and principles of the Earth Charter. The introductory module explores the inspiration

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



behind the Brink Expedition and the Earth Charter and investigates the role of media in raising the profile of social and environmental issues. Each of the curriculum modules provides students with an opportunity to take on the role of media presenter to raise awareness of each particular Hotspot issue.

Perhaps the most telling evidence of the success of the Brink Expedition is the interaction with the students themselves. Kendon Glass, Brink Expedition Team Member and the inspiration behind the whole project, described a visit to school in Mallorca, Spain, where a group of sixteen-year old students remained captivated for over an hour as they listened to the experiences of the Brink adventure.

Similar situations have occurred in Australia with students who have interacted with the Brink Expedition Team via satellite phone. Here are some comments from students in Brisbane, Australia:

"I was really excited the first time we called the Brink Team on their satellite phone. I couldn't believe that we were talking to them while they were in the Amazon Jungle." (Brigette, age 10)

"I remember when Ben came in to see us at school and he talked about the Tasmanian tiger and how it was extinct and how we needed to do everything that we could to stop that from happening to other animals. These guys really care about what they're doing – they're fighting for Planet Earth." (Kelly, age 9)

"The Brink Expedition Team is travelling without using fossil fuels, so we had to make a support vehicle for them that would use a fuel that was safe for the environment. I made a model of a solar-powered bus to help carry all their supplies. I can't believe that they carry everything with them on their bikes!" (Rebecca, age 9)

"I think the Brink Expedition is so cool. These guys are risking their lives to use environmentally friendly transport to travel around the world. Riding their bikes is so much harder than driving a car, but they are doing this so that they can help people to understand the issues. If we don't take care of our Earth, there will be nothing left! I think the Brink Expedition Team have the best jobs in the world!" (Mary, age 10)

Children from all around the world are excited by adventure. If we can inspire them with the story of the Brink Expedition, then they will begin to think of ways that they can make a difference in their own lives and contribute to the creation of a better future. They will begin to understand how everything is connected and how their actions today will impact upon tomorrow. They will begin to transform the values and principles of the Earth Charter into action. •