

Integrating Sustainable Happiness in pre-Service Teacher Training Enabled through the Earth Charter Lenses

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Abstract

The complex nature of our global sustainability crisis is increasingly evident, locally and globally, hampering human wellbeing and happiness. Given the multi-faceted nature of well-being and happiness, one should not neglect the role of education in building what can be called 'sustainable happiness'. In this paper, we will explore how sustainable happiness can be enabled through the Earth Charter lenses. It will be argued that the Earth Charter has unique potentialities to incorporate a pedagogy of happiness. Particular emphasis will be given to: (a) discuss the concept of happiness in its relation to sustainability and the extent to which it can be integrated into teaching and learning; (b) provide a review of the Earth Charter lenses; (c) put forth arguments as to the possibility of promoting a pedagogy of happiness through the Earth Charter lenses; and (d) give some examples from pre-service students' experiences to the issue.

Key words: sustainability crisis, emotional, state, ecosystem, harmony, trust, participation

1. Defining happiness in the context of the sustainability crisis

We are living in a planet that faces a crisis which threatens its very existence. The crisis the planet faces reflects not only the degradation of the ecosystems and the extinction of most of natural living and non-living creatures, but also extends to social, economical and cultural issues. In other words, it reflects the four pillars of sustainable development. The complex nature of the planet's sustainability is increasingly evident, locally and globally, hampering human well-being and happiness.

Webster's online dictionary defines happiness as: a) a state of well-being characterized by emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy and b) a pleasurable or satisfying experience. In this definition the concept of well-being is a key to the state of happiness. However, the concept of happiness cannot be seen, solely, as a personal emotional state but also as a virtue and the ultimate meaning of human existence that extends to include an interconnection with the four pillars of sustainable development. In this sense, we can talk about the concept of "sustainable happiness", a new concept defined by O'Brien (2005) as happiness that contributes to individual, community and/or global well-being without exploiting other people, the environment or future generations (cited in O'Brien, 2010). O'Brien (2012) argues that sustainable happiness underscores the interrelationship between human flourishing and ecological resilience.

Thus, sustainable happiness and well-being are integral to building sustainable futures, and positive psychology could be increasingly influential in embracing and promoting sustainability and happiness. Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life most worth living, that is, increasing the level of human well-being. A number of scholars (e.g. Boniwell & Ryan, 2012; O'Brien, 2012; Brown & Kasser, 2005) argue that positive psychology will realize its most significant and far-reaching impact when it is applied to sustainability efforts, locally, nationally and internationally. Such application may accelerate shifts in attitudes, policies, practice and most importantly to sustainable behaviour that will ultimately lead to sustainable happiness. Such a conceptualization of happiness gives particular emphasis on sustainability and our interdependence with all forms of life on the planet as well as to the fact that each of us may contribute positively or negatively to the well-being of others and the natural environment.

However, we have not yet fully understood the meaning of happiness and its relationship to well-being, which is the ultimate force that may direct the path towards happiness and sustainable behaviour (Awasthi & Saxena, 2013). Taking into consideration McDonald's (2008) argumentation on sustainability and happiness, it seems that reaching consensus is largely constrained by the way happiness is defined by western and eastern philosophies. From a western perspective, happiness is seen mostly within the individual person and through this it fails to appreciate the inherently inter-connected nature of well-being. Contrary to that, happiness from an eastern perspective driven by collective cultural ideals, it is defined in a more holistic

way, giving due importance to the social and non-social worlds around us. As pointed by McDonald (2008, p. 44), "to see happiness as a merely emotional state that is somehow separable from other aspects of being is singularly naive. Happiness exists as a complex attainment that depends utterly on the cultivation of a wide range of integrated capacities".

The World Happiness Report 2012 has recognized that "Sustainable Development" combines human well-being, social inclusion, as well as environmental sustainability and have aptly stated that happiness is intimately linked to the quest for sustainable development. Similarly, the 2015 World Happiness Report aims to influence the UN adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The development of Happiness Index provides a comprehensive measurement of progress that incorporates economic, social, health, cultural and ecological dimensions. At the same time, the concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) contrasted to Gross National Product (GNP) has been seriously considered as a measure for sustainable development, first initiated by the government of Bhutan for over three decades designed to directly enhance people's happiness (Rosly & Rashid, 2015). Bhutan's happiness criteria encompass economic, environmental, physical social, mental and spiritual wellness (ibid). Brooks (2013) argues that the ideal of maximizing Gross National Happiness (GNH) exemplifies Bhutan's commitment to holistic development and links with arguments about the shortcomings of approaches that emphasize economic growth. However, as Brooks assumes while Bhutan's standard of living has increased, the country faces challenges, among them, their ability to manage rising consumption levels.

There is an increasing body of literature that shows the growing awareness and interest among governments and economists that Gross National Product (GNP) and other traditional metrics of economic progress have not fully succeeded in measuring the kind of progress that reflect the ultimate goal of making life happier and taking care of people's well-being. Hargens (2002) argues that Gross National Happiness (GNH) can be regarded as the next evolution in indicators for sustainable development, as GNH goes beyond measuring merely material values such as production and consumption, and instead it incorporates all values relevant to happiness. As McDonald (2010) argues, Gross National Happiness, in its classical formulation, rests upon four interdependent pillars, the so-called Four Pillars of GNH, namely:

1. Happiness is achieved through living in harmony with a thriving ecosystem that is valued in its own right.
2. Happiness must be in coherence with a vibrant and grounding culture that conveys on-going wisdom and an ethical sensibility to the nation.
3. Happiness depends on material economy as it provides for basic necessities and eases burdens.
4. Happiness needs good governance which provides a transparent and dedicated civil service that acts to harmonise all of these ends in the most practical way.

2. Educating for sustainable happiness

Mahatma Gandhi stated, “If we are to reach real peace in the world . . . we shall have to begin with children” (cited in Weil, 2015). This implies that school education is of the most critical social institutions that would propel us towards building a more sustainable world. Michalos (2008) has posed the question: ‘Does education influence happiness and if so, how and how much?’ His answer was that it depends on how one defines and operationalizes the ideas of ‘education’, ‘influences’ and ‘happiness’. So, if ‘happiness’ is understood in the robust eudaemonist sense of overall human well-being, then education evidently has an enormous impact. Veenhoven (2010) has not found any significant pattern among the two variables - education and happiness, within developed countries. He provides two explanations: 1) the effect of education attainment on happiness may be not linear and it loses significance after some threshold and 2) education entails a cost in subjective well-being terms that eventually exceed benefits. Almost a decade earlier, Helliwell (2003) also found that education attainment was not clearly associated with life satisfaction. However, he went further and noted that education does actually affect life satisfaction indirectly through income, health, perceived trust and social participation. In general, there is contradictory evidence regarding this relationship.

Contextualizing education for sustainable happiness, where the criteria combine both subjective and objective measures, could give us a better idea of this relationship. O' Brien (2010) argues that sustainable happiness can be incorporated into any area of the curriculum as well as school policies and practice. I could argue that if education for sustainable happiness is learner-driven in learning environments that encourage deep reflection and transformative pedagogical conceptions, the relationship of education and happiness, might be more meaningful and rewarding. To educate for sustainable happiness is not solely to educate the individual to further

his/her own happiness, but to see individual life satisfaction with collective happiness. Such a kind of connectivity can enable individuals to see themselves as global active citizens for building sustainable happiness. This also necessitates the need to see education and learning not only from the formal education perspective, but in connection with all form of learning, especially social learning.

A re-orientation of teaching and learning practices towards transformative pedagogy is often called as the most needed to make an impact on people's lifestyles and behaviours and help build a sustainable future (Cloutier & Pfeiffer, 2015; Sterling, 2001). Transformative and critical constructivist learning inherent in radical views of sustainable education entails a shift of consciousness that can change one's unsustainable way of thinking, being and acting. Such a shift involves an understanding of one's self in the world; of relationships with other humans and the natural world; of the relations of power; of alternative approaches to living; and of the possibilities for social justice, peace and personal joy (O'Sullivan, 2003). In this context, a transformative learning model, I have developed and practised in my teaching with pre-service teachers at the Department of Primary Education at the University of Crete, has been found beneficial to education for sustainable happiness, especially if it uses the Earth Charter as an ethical and pedagogical framework.

The transformative learning model depicted in Figure 1 consists of four interactive stages: 1) getting started (reflection, activation, problem identification and problematisation, disorienting dilemma); 2) de(re)construction (reflection, reformulation, reassessment); 3) getting involved (reflection, knowledge construction, transformation); 4) learning-based change (learning by action, change). Following a radical sustainability perspective, the person is viewed as an active agent in a change process. In this process, participants were engaged in discourse and critical self-reflection, using some activating events and disorienting dilemmas, through which they come to critically examine their personal views, teaching practices and learning theories, open themselves to alternative views and practices and consequently drive them to change the way they view curriculum, teaching and learning (Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2013). According to Mezirow (2000), it often follows some variation of a number of phases, such as: 1) a disorienting dilemma; 2) self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, shame; 3) a critical assessment of assumptions; 4) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared; 5) exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions.

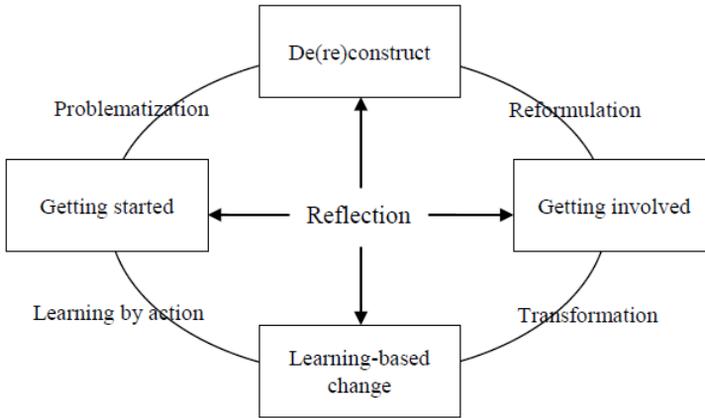


Figure 1. A methodological approach to infuse a radical view to education for sustainability (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2010, p.21).

This model is underpinned by our attempt to bring together the main principles of the experiential, constructivist and transformative learning theories abbreviated as ExConTra learning paradigm (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2012) depicted in Figure 2.

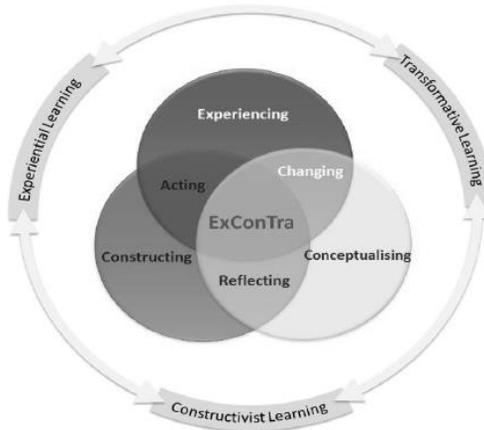


Figure 2. The ExConTra learning paradigm (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2012, p.596)

Beginning with experiencing, learners identify a realistic and authentic task associated with a sustainable development issue, and start collecting the information needed for their analyses, using various inquiry-based methods. Through reflecting, self and/or social, as well as through further reading and observing, learners organize and examine the collected data for the new experience from a variety of perspectives in order to find and make meaning. For learners to make meaning, either individually and/or shared, they need to reflect on their own experiences, leading them to develop more abstract understandings of their experiences (conceptualizing). Arriving at individual and shared meaning (constructing), learners need to get involved in a meaningful learning and shared inquiry enriched through continuous reflection, re-conceptualization and active experimentation. Constructed knowledge and meaning is meaningful when it opens up opportunities for action. Merging knowledge and meaning with action (acting) leads to a change agency and active citizenship. Acting as agents of change, learners are empowered to transform experience through critical reflection and active experimentation. When critical reflection is transformed into an action it becomes praxis that turns learners able to transform oneself and society (transforming). To facilitate transformative learning, educators must help learners become aware and critical of their own and others' assumptions. Learners need practice in recognizing frames of reference and using their imaginations to redefine problems from a different perspective. In this sense, learning is a social process of effecting change in a frame of reference composed of real life habits of mind and a point of view (Mezirow, 2000; 2003). Frames of reference (cognitive, conative, and emotional) are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences (ibid.). In summary, the ExConTra teaching and learning approach in the field of education for sustainable happiness attempts to turn experience, meaning making, knowledge construction and critical consciousness into praxis through critical reflection.

3. The Earth Charter: Connecting education for sustainable happiness and the 3Hs

The Earth Charter (<http://www.earthcharterinaction.org>) is an ethical framework for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society in the 21st century. It seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the whole human family, the greater community of life, and future generations. It is a vision of hope and a call to action. The Earth Charter project began as a United Nations initiative, but it was carried forward and completed by a global civil society initiative. In fact, the Earth Charter is a product of a

decade-long, worldwide, cross-cultural dialogue on common goals and shared values that provides a very valuable educational instrument for sustainable happiness. It encourages us to search for common ground in the midst of our diversity and to embrace a global ethic based on the following principles:

I. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity

II. Ecological Integrity

III. Social and Economic Justice

IV. Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace

In a previous article (Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2012) I attempted to connect the Earth Charter Preamble with Delors' (1999) four pillars of learning for 21st century. Thus, The Earth Charter Preamble lays out the critical environmental, social and economic challenges that confront humanity, highlights the choices we must make in order to build a more just, sustainable and peaceful world and stresses that “we must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more” (learning to be). The Earth Charter draws attention to the additional responsibility, understood as a capacity to respond effectively, that derives from possessing greater power, wealth, knowledge and freedom. Those in more privileged situations must assume greater responsibility for promoting sustainability, including assisting those in less privileged circumstances (learning to be). This implies that education processes, drawing upon the Earth Charter through critical reflection, can help discern ways in which human potential can be realized. This is a ‘caring’ lifestyle orientation that education processes can help to clarify using the Earth Charter as a tool for critical reflection and for responsible action (learning to do). Many other principles have specific educational implications. For example, Principle 8 calls for the need to “advance the study of ecological sustainability and promote the open exchange and wide application of the knowledge acquired” (learning to know and learning to do). The Earth Charter, according to McDonald (2008, p. 60), “speaks to the need for all to engage wisdom, compassion, self-restraint and generosity in our personal and professional lives in order that a collective, inter-related thriving can be secured”.

In my courses, the Earth Charter is being integrated as a pedagogical tool that matches well with the above described transformative learning methodologies. Bringing the dimension of education for sustainable happiness in this framework

proved a very fruitful and highly rewarded experience. Educating pre-service teachers to deconstruct the "business as usual" conception of viewing education mostly as a uni-dimensional abstraction, is separating the head, the heart and the hand. My assumption is that such a kind of separation could partly explain the contradictory evidence of the education and happiness relationship. Educating for sustainable happiness enabled by the Earth Charter is all about merging the 3Hs, that is the Head, the Heart and the Hand. Merging the Head, the Heart and the Hand responds to the need for adopting a holistic approach to teaching and learning to live together sustainably. The head is about cognitive function and being logical, while the heart is about affective functions, ethics, values, emotions, and feelings, and the hands are about human agency, that is the disposition and ability to act as agents of change. I have conceptualised the Earth Charter with the 3Hs, as it is depicted in the following Figure 3.

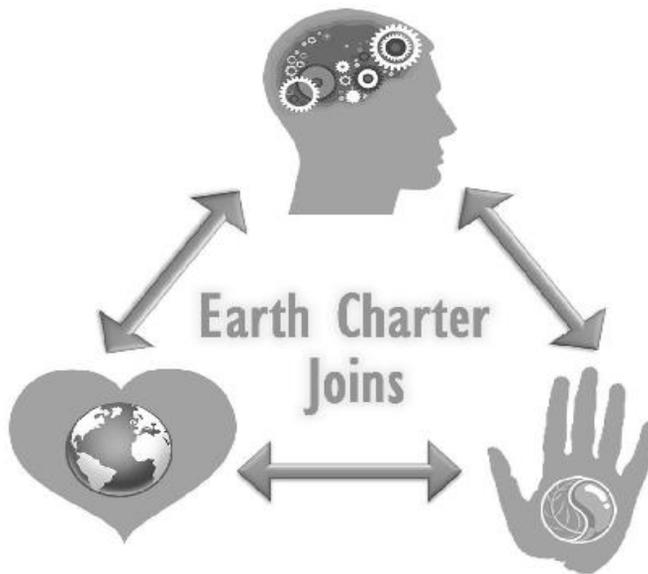


Figure 3. The Earth Charter joins the 3Hs (Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2014, p.92)

Such a merge gives due emphasis on learning to clarify one's own values that necessitates the process of introspection to critically reflect upon inner values and

knowledge constructions, which in turn are reflected in outer practices and behaviours. My teaching experiences show that when pre-service teachers are encouraged to expose their own values, assumptions, insights and biases, articulated and critically discussed in a humane and non-judgmental atmosphere, they are more prone to start a learning journey that integrates students' intellectual, moral, emotional and motivational potentials. When such learning spaces are created, pre-service teachers display meaningful insights for values clarification contrasted with external practices and behaviours. Through this process it is possible to deconstruct unsustainable constructions and their underpinning values that lead to unsustainable practices and create new constructions that are more appropriate to sustainability (Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2010). Introspection gives people the chance to identify and evaluate their inner thoughts, feelings and desires through critical self-reflection. It is of particular importance to bring the heart in the fore as pre-service teachers explore their fears and hopes for the current state of the planet and start reflecting on their inner and outer worlds. The more challenging issue, involves asking pre-service teachers to examine the extent to which their own daily lives reflect the ideals and values possessed. A meaningful question to ask is: Are we personally acting in accordance with the ideals we espouse, or is there a considerable gap between how we act in everyday life and what alternatives exist if a happier future is to be achieved? There are many ways of asking such a kind of questions that demand both learning to know (Head), learning to give and share (Heart) and learning to act (Hand). One way of engaging pre-service teachers in critical reflection is to encourage them consider those who are excluded, marginalised or voiceless from the advantages of an affluent society and to express compassion, empathy and an attitude for giving and sharing. Such a critical reflective process is fuelled by the 'Head' driven by the "Heart" and actualized by the "Hand".

In this context, envisioning alternative futures seems to play a very critical role. It is of particular importance to get pre-service teachers involved in building the proper cognitive structures in their heads through reading and critique. I have found that a particularly valuable way to deepen understanding is to allow pre-service teachers to get engaged in inter/cross disciplinary approaches to the sustainability themes chosen for study. Envisioning a more inclusive, peaceful and just society as well as how we can reach such a society is very critical to education for sustainable happiness. Thus, when examining sustainable happiness through the Earth Charter lenses

and critical pedagogy, a number of specific questions are posed to students, in the beginning of the course, such as (Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2014):

- ✓ What would you like society to look like in the future? Thinking about the idea that you have no control over who, where, or what you may become. Imagine the type of world in which you would like to live.
- ✓ How this imagined world differs from the current world you experience, locally and globally? Now, take some time and think “Who is responsible for building this world you are living in? Reflect also on your personal contribution to it.
- ✓ What actions, personal and collective are needed to make that preferred future a reality?

4. Concluding remarks

Given the multi-faceted nature of well-being and happiness, one should not neglect the role of education in building what can be called 'sustainable happiness'. In this paper, the attempt was directed towards an emphasis on sustainability and our interdependence with all forms of life on the planet as well as to the fact that each of us may contribute positively or negatively to the well-being of others and the natural and social environment. Sustainable happiness can be incorporated into any area of the curriculum as well as school policies and practice, but its success depends largely on the educational philosophy that drives the teaching and learning process. My pedagogy derives from a transformative learning paradigm (Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2013) and the Earth Charter directed to the following four educational objectives: (a) helping students deal with the world's complexity of sustainability issues; (b) overcoming the dominant compartmentalization of knowledge into discrete entities that prevents interdisciplinary curricula; (c) helping students deconstruct their unsustainable perceptions, beliefs, and actions applying values clarification and critical reflection; and (d) promoting experiential and constructivist learning. Such educational objectives appear particularly relevant for education geared towards sustainable happiness. The best route to happiness is through active human involvement in building a more sustainable society for all people worldwide and all forms of life. The Earth Charter - an inspiring and visionary set of widely endorsed values and principles provides a comprehensive framework on how to build a just, happy and sustainable global society.

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