

Experiential Workshop for Educators on the Earth Charter

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Introduction

Based on the premise that the best way to teach values and principles for sustainability¹⁰ is by putting theory into practice, we have developed experiential workshops with the Earth Charter that are adapted for children, young people and adults.

The workshop was designed to work well for a large number of participants, with the ability to accommodate groups of 24 to 600 hundred people (these are the fewest and greatest numbers of people with whom we have worked).

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Flávio Boleiz Júnior is an Eco-pedagogue, and Pedagogical and Educational Advisor at the Peace Queen College in São Paulo. As Pedagogical Coordinator for Green Life Associations, he is also a collaborator of the Paulo Freire Institute and the Centre of Friends of Infancy and Adolescence (NAIA). He is one of the representatives of the Earth Charter in Brazil.

Guilherme Blauth is an Eco-pedagogue, educator and director of the Harmony on Earth Institute.

Levana Saxon is an Eco-pedagogue and Educational Coordinator of Rainforest in Berkeley, California, USA.

Paulina Christov is an Eco-pedagogue, researcher at the Paulo Freire Institute, collaborator of the Carlos Chagas Foundation and an advisor for Massini Educational Consultancy.

¹⁰ We would like to emphasize that we do not believe in "sustainable development" in the capitalist production sense of the term. Instead, we believe in the possibility of building sustainable communities from production systems that do not exploit the Earth's materials beyond its capacity for regeneration, which we consider impossible in a consumerist society.

The first time we carried out this pedagogical exercise was during the Brazilian Social Forum in 2003, which took place in Belo Horizonte. During this event, nearly 120 people took part in the workshop.

We have repeated the same workshop, with minor changes, several times; the modifications have resulted from evaluations and comments made by the participants. For instance, we successfully incorporated the content into a 600-person training module for Pre-school and Primary Education¹¹ teachers, in Uberlândia (Minas Gerais). In this same city, we offered another workshop for 250 people during a training initiative for educators.

In terms of our work with children, this workshop was delivered to approximately 400 children in the Pio XI College (Colégio Pio XI), in São Paulo; and 600 children in the Albert Sabin College (Colégio Albert Sabin), in the same city. During these activities, we tried to limit the number of participants to 40 students per workshop.

With the support of the Department of Education's Academic Centre, the workshop was also carried out at the University of São Paulo, as part of an Introduction to Eco-pedagogy course involving a group of 50 educators. In the 'Albert Einstein of São Paulo' and 'South Morumbi' Departments, the workshop was delivered in the field of 'Education and Sustainability' to four different cohorts of Pedagogy students, enrolling a total of 153 university students.

The following educators participated in the first workshop design and execution:

- Deucélia Nunes (São Paulo, Brazil/ Paulo Freire Institute)
- Flávio Boleiz Júnior (São Paulo, Brazil/ GRUTEUSP/Green Life/ Harmony in Earth Institute)
- Guillermo Blauth (Santa Catarina, Brazil/ Harmony in Earth Institute)
- Levana Saxon (California, United States/Paulo Freire Institute /Rainforest)
- Paulina Christov (São Paulo, Brazil/ Paulo Freire Institute/Carlos Chagas Foundation/Masini Educational Consultancy)

These five Eco-pedagogues had already been working together on issues related to eco-pedagogy, education for sustainability and the Earth Charter at a range of events, such as the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre and the World Education Forum. Several members of the national network of Eco-pedagogy and Earth Charter also planned to hold a meeting in the Brazilian Social Forum, a self-managed activity, where they could put into practice their experiences and theories.

In a project sponsored by the Institute C and A, and developed by the Paulo Freire Institute, Deucélia launched the Democratic and Participative School Council to offer sustainability-related training to parents, educators and students. She offered lectures, conferences, group dynamics and workshops with a democratic perspective, supported by the Earth Charter Centre on Education for Sustainable Development.

Flávio participated in the Eco-pedagogy and Planetary Citizenship Movement through his involvement with the Paulo Freire Institute. He developed and applied educational projects in collaboration with teachers, students and other stakeholders, using the Earth Charter as an ethical framework for education for sustainability. In addition, Flávio offered lectures in pedagogy departments, where he taught Education and Environment, keeping a similar focus.

Some years ago, Guillermo developed a project with the Harmony in Earth Institute in Santa Catarina State, to sensitize teachers and students about the values and principles of the Earth Charter. The aim was to promote the development of eco-pedagogical work in public and private schools.

In Brazil, about one year ago, Levana studied the inter-relationships between environmental education, social linkages based on a philosophy of liberation, and Paulo Freire's ideas. Her studies started with the observation and practice of community-based participatory management of urban and agricultural problems.

As a collaborator of the Carlos Chagas Foundation and Paulo Freire Institute, Paulina was part of the

¹¹ In Brazil, Pre-school Education is for children 4 and 5 years old, while Primary Education (Ensino Fundamental) is for children from 6 to 10 years old, corresponding to the former 'primary school.'

coordination team for the Jovempaz (Youth and Peace) Project. The project used the Earth Charter as an ethical framework and pedagogical tool for youth training on peace and sustainability culture.

The meeting in Belo Horizonte, during the Brazilian Social Forum (2003), made it possible for these eco-pedagogues to collaboratively develop and design the workshop.

We will now describe the methodology of the workshops.¹² It is important to emphasize that the main objective of this work was to sensitize the Brazilian Social Forum participants about the importance of leading sustainable lives, with the Earth Charter's values and principles as a starting point for personal change. This remained the primary focus of the workshops that would follow suit, as we recognized that this message needed to be spread across all of Brazil's educational sectors.

Methodological aspects

1. Welcoming the Participants

Some posters with keywords related to the Earth Charter are posted on the walls of the conference room. As they arrive, the participants are invited to choose one, two, or as many words as they would like, from the posters. Then, they must write down or draw what the chosen term means to them.

While people are arriving, it is advisable to sing some songs, and play the guitar, for example, to create a cheerful ambiance.

Some keywords for the posters are: Justice, Peace, Democracy, Education, Environment, Earth, Ecology, Citizenship, Conscience, Equity, Respect, and Ethics.

2. Brief discussion about the posters

After the participants have completed this initial task, a brief discussion is held about which words were

selected from the posters. Those who wish to do so can share their thoughts and pictures of the word(s) with the rest of the group.

3. Eco-pedagogical mandala¹³

After this brief discussion, participants are invited to move to a spacious area – if possible, outdoors – where they will form a big circle. Everyone sits down and the new activity starts.

There is a brief explanation (because this is more of a practical than a theoretical workshop), about what the Earth Charter is, and why we should incorporate the Earth Charter values into our daily lives, both in terms of formal and informal educational settings.

In this short discussion, we talk about the importance of working together to build values-based knowledge in order to make positive changes to the society in which we presently live. We talk about the importance of ecological integrity for the sustainability of life, social and economic justice, and non-violence and peace in building a more sustainable society.

In the centre of the big circle, we place the following element-objects: a lit candle – symbolizing the 'fire' element; a cup or jug with water; a bowl with soil or a great rock; and a flower or little plant.

Now, we ask each person to go to the centre, close to the elements placed there, and to donate something of



Activities during the workshop.

¹² For questions or to make comments relating to pedagogical applicability, please feel free to contact Flávio Boleiz Júnior: flavio.boleiz@gmail.com

¹³ Circle

his/her own. The object is meant to symbolize an action that a person can make to contribute to the global mobilization of efforts towards a more just and sustainable world. For example, someone might place a watch next to the elements in the circle to symbolize the time that s/he is donating. Another person might donate a pen, signifying his/her writing and studies. Others might donate a magazine, a ring, or even a song to perform in front of the group. The main point is to objectively and briefly explain the meaning of the donation, if possible, using only one phrase.

After all the participants have introduced themselves and made their donations, we ask them to leave their objects in the centre of the circle until the end of the workshop.

At this point, we speak to the group about the different ways that we can acquire knowledge. We explain that the next activity is designed to demonstrate how knowledge acquisition can take place in very fun and enjoyable ways, such as learning from other people's viewpoints about principles and values, such as those promoted by the Earth Charter.

Then, we move onto the next activity.

4. Face to face

We divide the group into as many sub-groups as needed, making sure that each sub-group has a maximum of 30 participants.



Reading the Earth Charter principles.

Each sub-group must form a pair of concentric circles, so that the inner circle has the same number of members as the outer circle. Each participant of the inner circle must place him/herself in front of a participant of the outer circle, and vice versa.

We start the activity by writing down on poster paper the most commonly selected words from the beginning of the workshop.

We explain to the participants that the objective of this activity is to speak and to listen. The first thing is to choose a word from the posters. Then, each participant of the outer circle holds the hands of the participant in the inner circle and has 20 seconds to say everything that comes to mind regarding this word. The participant of the inner circle only listens, and says nothing. At the end of the 20 seconds, both partners hug and thank each other. Then the outer circle takes a step to the right, changing over to a new inner circle partner. Then, the activity is repeated and the participants select ANOTHER one of the words. But, now, it is the participant of the inner group who speaks, and the members of the outer group only listen. This exercise is repeated until a full rotation of the circles has been made.

Finally, we come back to the big circle and discuss what we learned and experienced from this activity. After a long discussion, we invite the attendees to participate in another one.

5. Artistic performance with multiple languages

The group is divided into 4 sub-groups and then we explain the next activity:

Each sub-group will work with one part of the Earth Charter. (If the number of workshop participants is too large, the group may be divided into 6 sub-groups, with one sub-group working with the Earth Charter Preamble, and the other sub-group working with "The Way Forward").

The sub-groups will have to collectively read the principles in their respective part of the Earth Charter and, within a 30-minute timeframe, prepare a presentation featuring at least two artistic modes of expression to articulate the content of their reading.

After 30 minutes of preparation, each sub-group delivers its artistic presentation in front of the others. At the end of the presentations, the group returns to the big circle to discuss the issues addressed.

After a long discussion, we suggest that each person make a commitment to contribute to building a better and more sustainable world from that moment on. Then, each participant expresses his/her commitment.

6. Circle of Closure

As a closing activity, we stand up and form two concentric circles. The inner circle is smaller than the outer circle. We perform a *ciranda*¹⁴, engage in a big hug with the entire group, and close the session. Then, all of the participants remove the objects they offered to the mandala (circle), and begin to fulfill their commitments to building a better world!

7. Some results

We have been able to establish contact with some of the former workshop participants over the few last years and it is interesting to hear about their contributions to increasing other people's awareness and engaging them in sustainability activities.

Some university students have told us about the work that they have begun to carry out with children (in kindergarten and primary schools) as a result of our presentations and reflections about methodological options with the Earth Charter.

Other students have chosen to focus their thesis on topics related to the Earth Charter, education for sustainability, ethics and eco-pedagogy.

Some institutions (NGOs and local governments) have come to us to request courses and training sessions,

motivated by the positive experiences that their colleagues had in the workshops.

Frequently, we hear stories and receive e-mails from people and organizations that are trying to develop educational work with those methodologies that we are attempting to disseminate, in order to become more in tune with the values of the Earth Charter and education for sustainability.

Lessons Learned

We would like to emphasize a few key lessons that we have learned from this work with the Earth Charter and education for sustainability.

First, we believe that education is only possible through engaging and learning collectively within the context of the reality that surrounds us. It is not possible to develop sustainable methodologies supporting collective relationships – between educators and students – on the basis of individual initiatives. Paulo Freire warns us of this issue, saying that "...nobody educates anybody else, as nobody educates himself: men educate each other in community, mediated by the world" (Freire, 2002, p. 69).

Secondly, we consider it impossible to work collectively if all the involved parties do not have as guiding principles the same ones that define democracy. **And we agree with Vitor Paro, when he states that:**

Democracy... should not be seen only in its etymological connotation of 'people's government' or in its formal version of the 'will of majority,' but, instead, in its wider and more current meaning of mediation for building freedom and social coexistence, including all the means and efforts based on historically constructed values, to reach agreement between groups and people (Paro, 2001, p. 10).

Based on the testimony of their staff members who have participated in our workshops, a range of

¹⁴ A traditional Brazilian dance

institutions (NGOs and local governments) have asked us to offer additional courses and training sessions to their employees. In some cases, these consultations have turned into projects to develop continued training courses for teachers, and pedagogical coordination for formal and non-formal educational institutions.

Finally, we would like to emphasize the importance of the notion of a 'unity of diversity' in our efforts to become planetary citizens. If we believe in the Earth Charter values and principles, then we need to actively contribute to the construction of another world, another educational structure and a fairer, democratic, inclusive and sustainable planetary system.

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