

THE EARTH CHARTER IN MY DAILY LIFE

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The information about the Earth that reaches our senses every day sometimes leads us to perceive the planet as part of an increasingly fast movement towards total chaos. We hear, see and experience war, hunger, disease, abuse, predatory action over nature and people, social exclusion. Nothing, absolutely nothing can justify the continuity of these processes in our world today, given the knowledge, the technology and the wealth that we have built, accumulated and placed at our own disposal. Why, then, do we accept the daily reproduction of all this suffering? Is it because we feel powerless in face of such serious and complex problems? Is it because many of us, having guaranteed our own safety, have become insensitive to the often unthinkable difficulties to which others are submitted? Maybe it is because those values and principles that strengthen our most human aspects have been weakened by our struggle in the consumerism of contemporary society, left to rest at the bottom of our mind's drawers. Anyhow, there is no denying that humanity is deeply disturbed by the current status quo, and this discomfort is erupting violently in a variety of ways. It is also moving responses such as the Earth Charter, aimed at inspiring action that is born from the strengthening of values and principles in favor of a sustainable society.

And we want this to society as soon as possible. Thus, one of the main concerns of the members of the Mato Grosso Earth Charter Committee, in Brazil, is that discussions of the Charter are really translated into concrete actions, going beyond the level of discourse. We are tired of politicians' bla bla, of which little or no result can be seen. We do not trust the ability of the different states and governments to solve the urgent problems that compromise the living conditions of millions of people in our planet. However, since we are volunteers and must divide our time between our personal and professional activities and our participation in the Earth Charter movement, it is hard to design and implement large scale projects as a separate responsibility from our daily routine. Personally, I perform various professional functions and, in order to be able to support the Earth Charter I have found that small actions, integrated in my routine as a teacher, make up the solution that I need. I will say more about this below.

The Earth Charter in my neighborhood

It may seem naive but one very simple way to support the Earth Charter is simply to talk about it to the people that are closer. I don't mean to "convert" anyone, attitude with which I disagree, but simply to inform them. Nothing visible might immediately result from this, but it is possible that someone becomes interested and decides to join the movement due to their own synergy with it. The more the merrier, isn't that how the saying goes?

During a meeting of school representatives in my neighborhood, I suggested that the Earth Charter was adopted as a guide, as a set of values that would provide support and direction to community-projects-to-be. The idea was received with enthusiasm and the

group got together a few more times to study the Charter and discuss it. This initiative led several of the school reps present to introduce the Earth Charter to teachers and students in their schools, thus opening space for the document within curricular activities.

The Earth Charter in my school community

In my school I presented the Earth Charter and proposed that one full day was dedicated to a variety of activities connected to the document and involving discussion and reflection upon the different principles stated there. Some teachers were more open to the proposal than others but it was the students who surprised me. They participated much more actively than I had expected in both the discussions and the production of texts and posters later displayed around the school. Since we specialize in teaching English, all the activities were conducted through that language, which, in some cases, required the adaptation of the text of the Charter to cater for the different ages and levels of linguistic ability. The document thus worked as a context from which genuine communication and interaction in the target language were developed.

The Earth Charter in the wider professional community

On another occasion, I had the opportunity to conduct a workshop for teachers of English during a regional conference where I introduced the Earth Charter as a source of inspiration for communicative activities in English and for cross-curricular projects. Comparing passages from the Charter with other interesting texts such as songs and commercial ads, we created a variety of opportunities for students to learn new vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and structures, while, at the same time, develop an awareness of solidarity, environment and citizenship issues. This workshop brought us so close together that at the end of only three hours we felt as if we had known each other for years! I have successfully used it in other courses for teachers in universities and language schools.

We, human beings, do not change very easily. Sometimes we change our discourse long before we change our habits. However, the use of language is also an activity, and through our activity we have the chance to transform reality. It is worth it, then, to change the things we say. However, if we want a faster rhythm of change, we need to devise and implement concrete, feasible actions, immediately. I hope to have demonstrated some of those. They are not examples to be copied. I am sure people in different professions in different places will choose different things to do. They are only evidences that each one of us can find viable and concrete ways to begin to participate in favor of the society that we want.