

Welcome to Turning Conscience Into Action, the Earth Charter podcast. Join Mirian Vilela, Earth Charter International Executive Director, in her fascinating conversations with great thinkers, scholars and activists from around the world who are working in the fields of sustainability, ethics, education and social transformation. Our purpose is to generate new insights on how to face current global challenges and inspire informed action.

Hello, welcome to our Earth Charter podcast. Today we have the pleasure of receiving and having a great conversation with Douglas Bourn.

Thank you for joining us today, Douglas. Thank you. Thank you for inviting me. So let me introduce you to Douglas, he's Professor of Development Education and Director of the Development Education Research Center at UCL, the University College London in the UK. He's the author of several books including Theory and Practice of Development Education, which was published in 2015, Understanding Global Skills, published in 2018. And today we are going to have a conversation with Douglas, more focused on his latest book entitled, Education for Social Change, which was published in 2022.

Thank you so much, Douglas, again, and I look forward to this conversation and bring to the audience the vast work that you have been doing. And among other things, Douglas is the convener, founder, among others, of ANGEL, the academic network on global education and learning, which I had the pleasure of getting to know more earlier this year. So, Douglas, let's start with a conversation around your latest book, which is called, Education for Social Change, published in 2022. Can you share with us some of the key ideas that we can find, our audience can find in it, and what you've been drawing to write that book?

Yes, thank you. Thank you, Mirian. I suppose the book was a way of bringing together lots of ideas, experiences that I've had in my academic career and all prior to my academic career, I'm working for NGOs in the UK. And that is that I've been in a very fortunate position, and lots of my academic work has been around the role of education in changing society. And it took me back, and it's taken me back to when I did my doctorate in the UK a long, long time ago, which is looking particularly at the British Labour Party and how education came to be seen as a central role in terms of achieving a new society in the early 20th century.

So, what I was finding that when I was starting to think about writing this book, there were a number of ideas that I had from my recent experiences, but also it took me back to my PhD. And also when I was doing my PhD, I had the pleasure of just by chance when I was at the University of Alsace in England of meeting the great Brazilian educationist, Paulo Freire, who came to England once. And just meeting him inspired me to think about forms and approaches to education that were challenging the dominant theories of the time.

So, all those things have been in the back of my mind, and through my working in NGOs and also setting up the different education research centre, what would come back to my mind? How can I bring all these things together in one book that demonstrates the potential transformative role of education to in terms of achieving a more just and sustainable world

and a more transformative approach to education? And so, that's what led me to write the book also because I've been involved in my teaching at University College London on a master's programme we have on global education and also supervising a number of doctoral students.

These themes kept appearing, yet I couldn't find an obvious book that brought them all together. So, I produced this book as a way of bringing a lot of these ideas and theories and examples of practice together in a book that seemed to be quite aimed at students and teachers and young researchers. It's not a heavy academic book. It includes in each chapter questions for discussion of further consideration. So in your book you include some examples of how education has been a vehicle for social change.

Yes, so I include some examples, some case studies of organisations that I think put some of these things in practice, and of course I mentioned the Earth Charter within that. And I think that what I'm trying to do is a lot of my work is how you connect theory to practice using the fair in term of practice. So in the book I have chapters on relationship of education to achieving new society, relationship to democracy, to liberation, what's meant by education for liberation, and then try to apply what those ideas and theories might mean to different sectors of education, learning what's in schools or former areas of education and in higher education.

And then I suppose what I try and do is bring that together and the two sort of dominant things that influence a lot of educational work in this area, which is education for sustainable development and global citizenship education. And to me what I try and do in the conclusion of the book, which is my sort of things I've been writing about a lot recently, was to talk me back to Freire ideas and that in the context of the challenging times we now live in, there's dangers of a sense of despair and fears of the future that we need as an educationalist to promote a pedagogy of hope and that hope that change is possible.

And that's about how as educators we prevent the sense that people can themselves play a role in changing the world. So those are all the things that brought me together to write this book. Thank you. And highlighting the importance of pedagogy of hope is really so important nowadays when if we follow the news and the reports on the climate change and biodiversity laws and even social injustices, it's very hard to keep hope. And therefore the young generation might easily be found in despair. So I'm glad you highlighted that importance of education to expand our views of the current challenges, but also to see the possibilities of change.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And I think the discussions I've had at my university about this is that there's been this emergence of what has been talked about as eco anxiety that a lot of young people have this sense of being anxious.

But what we talked about in my institution, we said what's really happening with lots of young people is not a sense of anxiety, it's a sense of anger, that actually they feel that they're not being listened to or that politicians and policymakers are not taking the current climate change seriously enough, climate crisis seriously enough. And that's happening

in the world that is not leading to greater consideration of how to achieve a more just and sustainable world. And I find that quite interesting.

So just think about moving from a sense of anxiety to anger and how you use that sense of anger as an educationist and channel that in a positive way is I think one of our major challenges at the present time. Absolutely. I'm glad I'm hearing this from you because lately I have been feeling also that it's more a sense of anger than anxiety. What I have been here. So let me ask you about development, education and global education. You have been writing and talking about these themes and educational approaches.

Are they the same development, education and global education? What does that mean? And if you can share a bit about the theory and practice of course. I think that a danger that people get to hang up by the terms really to me that a lot of these terms are being used for developed both specific political reasons or policy reasons in a particular context. OK. And so to me it's not about what does the term mean. It's about how people are interpreting the term and what's the underlying principles behind it.

Because in some countries people might use development, education, some might use global citizenship, education, some might use education, sustainable development. In many cases they're talking similar things. OK. But what's important to understand is to find out what are they meaning by it and what's the particular context.

So the reason I, you know, my centre was initially called Development Education Research Centre was that in the UK the term had a particular political and educational meaning from the 1980s and 1990s up to I would say about 2010, which was that the UK government and international NGOs were talk about how to build greater understanding and learning about international development issues and how to apply that learning and understanding to achieve to combat in global poverty and inequality in the world.

So it had a particular roots. In some countries it was a very passive role about understanding development issues without, in an uncritical way, in other countries and certainly in the UK it had a more critical role. In other countries they would use different terms because of linguistic differences and so on. But that was the root of the term. But it then became linked to, again, the influence of Paulo Freire and others to have a more radical context in particular countries. So it's more about saying, well, what does development education mean in this country in this context and you need to look at particular policies or programmes at a point in time to see how they interpret it.

Whether my research centre is still called Development Education Research Centre, I don't know. Possibly whoever succeeds me as director of the centre might want to change it. But that's, you know, that I and I use that term because it locates where the centre was founded and it was funded for the first six years of its existence by the International Development Ministry in the UK. So that connection was quite strong. But development education and global education is the same? And not necessarily.

Pain can be and in some countries might be the same thing.

But global education can often be meant to be learning about global issues, about understanding the wider world.

In some contexts it's often seen as an umbrella term incorporating development education, human rights education, peace education. Other contexts in some countries, particularly in Germany, is often seen as an educational response to the challenges of globalisation. OK. And then in a lot of international policy discourse, global education is just sometimes seen as education around the world. All right. So it's again about you need to go beyond this term. What do you mean by this term? How do you interpret it?

And what's the most appropriate terminology in dialogue with people that you can come to with some common understanding of what it means? So to me, it's a way of opening up some conversations rather than to say, well, I don't understand what this word means. Or rather than saying, well, this term shouldn't exist anymore. There's a new term that overtakes the old term in this kind of fight. Yeah. Yeah. And for example, global citizenship, global citizenship education is probably in many, in certainly amongst a lot of NGOs and civil society organisations around the world, often the term that a lot of people might use.

Now, it's very similar in terms of interpretation to develop education, global education, where you use the term global citizenship often possibly emphasises a greater form of a connection between your roles and individual and the sense of some form of social action. OK. So global citizenship often implies that, but that again can be open to different interpretations. Yeah, that's a good point. And I liked also the fact that you mentioned the linkages with policy. So education approaches and policymaking and agenda, depending on the country or you went.

So one influences the other. Yes, yes, yes, because because the roots of these terms often go back to the influence of policymakers, particularly in a European context and possibly also in a North American context to 1970s and 1980s. OK, where in Europe particularly and also happened in one to other countries, which is as government starts to develop aid programmes in their own country, then there was a recognition they needed to ensure that the public were aware of what development was and were supportive of aid.

Right. So initially, some of that work was seen about in a rather passive and critical way of support for international development. OK. So for example, in the UK, even in the late 90s, 1990s, the first international development strategy on development education was called building support for international development. OK.

So and that can come out in a rather uncritical way.

But it's about how you use that and open it up for for a debate and dialogue. And other countries you might use slightly different terms, but it's about understanding the particular context. Yeah. So now we hear a lot of education for sustainable development, ESD, global citizenship education and development education. Can you share what you think are the linkages, the synergies, the differences or even complementarities between them? And if we can align these approaches, because I understand these emerge out of policies,

but when it gets to the school or the university, it's not very easy to change from one day to another book to the other and focus on A or B.

So can you give us some ideas of what are these linkages, synergies or differences among them? Yes.

As an education, I'm obviously not going to give you one answer because there are many different ways you could respond to it.

Some people talk about education for sustainable development and global citizenship education is two sides of the same coin. OK, so that's sort of connected with possibly a common goal, but at facing outwards and slightly different ways.

Some people talk about education for sustainable development as the goal. And global citizenship as the process. Right. Some people would talk about it the other way around.

So to me, I think it is about recognising that education for sustainable development is much more than just being concerned about environmental matters. It includes quality of life. It includes social justice. It includes making connections to a whole number of themes and areas like a lot of the current discussions around post-colonialism, for example. It's about building a new and better society. So to me, that's how I would see education and sustainable development. And I would see global citizenship as possibly the goal in a way that to achieve that.

We have to have that sort of mindset, that global outlook that sees ourselves as being globally responsible citizens. So that they interconnect and interlink in what ways will depend on your starting point and what specific thing you were trying to achieve and who with. So I might use different terms. I would use different terms depending on who I was talking to.

Yeah, it's similar here. I could use different terms depending on where on the context. But I also see them very similar, but each one with their special focus. See, so let's talk a little bit about your views on the Earthshatter.

Can the Earthshatter be used in these different education approaches? Have you used it? And if you can share with us, if so, how you have used the specific example. But coming back to what is the role you think the Earthshatter can play in these different approaches to education? Well, and I've known about the Earthshatter for quite a long time, and I've always found it a very valuable tool as a way to engage in these conversations, what you've just been talking about, because I think it provides a good sort of ethical framework, a good overarching way of seeing the connections of some of the things we've just been talking about.

And to me, it provides that that values base to some of these conversations and that sometimes those things can get lost. All right, you can have debates about whose values and on what terms. But to me, it becomes a tool for engaging these issues, because one of the challenges I have always found and continue to find is that the things that you were concerned about can often give importance of little separate silos where they don't talk to

each other. So learning about global issues goes in one pot and environment and another one human rights and another piece and another, for example.

So to me, what the Earthshatter does and provides a way of saying all these things are interconnected and interlinked. And that, to me, is what I think is particularly valuable. And there's increasing recognition of this, what people are talking about, interdisciplinarity, about interconnections and so on, which is a challenge, particularly if you're working with informal education because things are very often in schools, particularly subject specific, though it's quite difficult, some countries to break those things down.

But to me, the Earthshatter provides that framework to get people to think about these things and interlinked with a common purpose and they're not something that go off in different directions.

Can you give us a specific example of how have you used it? So I've used it. We had a project I was involved with, it's called Pictures of Success, which was around us using a series of photographs. Unfortunately, that was also no longer available. But what was important about that was how by using some of the themes within the Earthshatter can be used as a way of getting dialogue and discussion. So I have used the Earthshatter as a way when I've been giving presentations to students about stable development and global citizenship by saying I use this towards the end of a workshop.

This is a practical example. So have a look at the Earthshatter and start to think about if you're a teacher or an educator, how would you use some of these terms and concepts? And then if you took just an example of a photograph of something, which is what Pictures of Success does, how does the principles of the Earthshatter connect? So to me, it's about how you demonstrate the underlying values of space and principles to issues that you see in front of you, that you go beyond what the image that you're seeing.

And to me, the Earthshatter provides a framework of helping you to go beyond what's in front of you to look at what's behind it and what it actually means.

Thank you so much. I just want to mention that Pictures of Success is certainly was a very interesting, invaluable project that I have also used for many years because it helps to move beyond some of the abstraction of some of Earthshatter principles and just by looking at an image, a photo, a beautiful picture of a given context and situation.

And then behind these cards, there was a story and looking at the story and then connecting with the principle of Earthshatter. So it makes this theory become very practical, very concrete through the image and through this story. So I want to just express or say congratulations for this beautiful idea and project. Now, you have written about skills for the 21st century. Yes. And obviously, the skills for this century are not the same of the skills of 50 or 100 years ago. What do you think are the most important skills that universities and schools should foster in their day-to-day job, skills that are really necessary, that we need to foster for the 21st century?

Yes. Thank you for that. I think to me it's about what I write about in my book on global skills is that is to when we talk about some people talk about sort of softer skills, whether

it's creative thinking or collaboration, cooperation, what is often missing in some of the initiatives that talk about that is the lack of context. So in other words, when you talk about cooperation or collaborative forms of learning or teamwork, that to what does that what particular context and the reason I in touch with my global skills is that important context is the global nature of that.

So that so many things are influenced by by global forces. So when we talk about teamwork, the understanding ways in which people communicate and interact with each other.

So because in recent years, there's a lot more teamwork takes place virtually, you know, so people work together in a whole number of different ways. So it's about recognising what are the influence of global forces on those on those questions. And within that context, to note particularly that what globalization has brought to us all is this instant access to knowledge and information. And that the danger the equal danger of just accepting what's in front of us through what's on the internet or social media.

And therefore, one of the critical global skills, therefore, is to develop a sense of looking at issues critically from a range of perspectives and voices to not to look at just one thing. All right, you know, and and to me, that has become so important recent years, you can see it politically in a number of countries where what people are told and informed is taking as the truth, you know, and to me, their sense of getting people to look at things from different viewpoints and to look at things critically.

And that reminds me that some of the skills that were seen to be like 21st century skills that were developed in North America, what I found was missing from some of those discussions was not recognizing what the impact of global forces and globalization has meant in terms of how what people learn, how people learn and what they do with that learning. Okay, so to me, those skills need to be that needs to be brought into that. So it's not just about how you pick up that learn what you do with that, you know, and that requires some development of skills that may be challenging, dominant orthodoxies and so on.

So it's a way of recognizing that the skills that we need to develop have to recognize that because in my book, I talk about the skills we need in 50 years time have yet to be invented. Okay, so but there's a sense in which things are rapidly changing. 40 years ago, you know, the skills that we use then, many of them we no longer need or use and how we now communicate, how we use certain things, the role of ICT and so on and how we use the internet, those things didn't exist. And how rapidly changing that has been means we need to think about these things in different ways.

Yeah, so critical thinking I hear from you that you think it's one of the key skills that needs to be nurtured through education approach, critical thinking, because we do receive a lot of information from different sources and we do not necessarily have the being going through a process to evaluate it from different point of views as you might rightly said. And then I from what I heard you said is being able to always be open, adapt to the new context and therefore developing skills. We're walking and new things emerge and we need to adapt in the open to that and therefore yeah, I would say skills to adapt quickly to

different contexts. Exactly, exactly. So in many countries, about 30 or 40 years ago, when you've got a job, your first job, you may think that's a job for life.

No one has a job for life anymore, right, in the same way, because the skills require that you might have about when you've got a job when you're 20 or even 25, wherever it might be, whether age 20 years later, they may well be redundant and you may need new skills and whether you adapt to those skills or you may need to move on. But also the other downside of all that is that the whole influence of changing our economies and people's less secure forms of employment and the whole influence of neoliberal economic forces and the ways in which things have become much more individualized has meant that the skills required about not just about how you challenge that but how you adapt to that and if you want to change that and clearly a better way, you've got to understand them, you know, you can't ignore them.

Hmm. It seems that the capacity or the skill also to collaborate with different people from different areas and culture. Yes. So culture understanding, you know, is an important part of that, but that culture understanding has got to be put in the context that cultures are always porous, always changing. So it's about recognizing that how people adapt and how people adapt within their own cultural context and how they change in that. And I'll also add the question about dialogue and listening to others, you know, and to me the ongoing process. So when you're dealing with people from different cultures, how you dialogue with them and how you work together to find areas of commonality and things you can share and work together on.

Fully agree with that. Now, higher education, if we put our focus here on the work of higher education, academics and administration in higher education, if you're looking at also the future and the needs to adapt to change, is sometimes many people sometimes say that well, higher education is becoming too slow to adapt to the change and what is really needed to in the current times. So considering this pace and the current challenge we have, in which way do we think higher education academics and administration should rethink what they're doing and how they're doing rethink or maybe change, adapt the education approach and pedagogy specifically in higher education. Do you have any thoughts on that? Yes, I do.

And there's a constant debate within higher education around the world about whether higher education is there to help people get a better job or whether it's there to prepare them for life. To me, it's not either or, it's both and it's how you connect the two that to me is often missing. So, you know, you may do a degree that has a very professional focus and related to training to be a doctor or an engineer or something like that. But what can often be missing in some of those training to be in those professions is a sense of how your role, future role in your profession, connects to your sense of social responsibility and understanding society. So if you're going to be an engineer, you have an impact on society and our economies and on cultures.

And if you understand that, what your role is socially responsible with, then you're not going to be very effective or very good as an engineer. The same about in health professions. So to me, there's a connection between if you're doing a more professional and entire degree to broader societal questions and will I, you know, I write, I talk about

what's the social purpose of higher education, what's its societal role. Okay. And if you're doing a degree in a more generic subject, which could be in literature or the arts or something like that, that doesn't appear to have a direct, in many cases, a direct professional outcome. Then it's part of your personal development who you are as an individual. But at the same time, what you also have to show is what's its societal relevance and what does this mean.

So to me,

I think something I've written, I talk about real world context. So if you're teaching someone about mathematics or wherever it might be, the most effective way is situating the skills I need to know or particular things need to know in a real world situation that makes it real. Yeah. So to me, it's about how to ensure that what students are learning and what university you're about is what's its societal relevance. So if you take the two possible dominant issues that are influencing many higher educations, particularly in the global north at the moment, and also in the global south in some context, one is sustainability and the climate change.

And the other one is the impact of decolonialism and combating, you know, and how institutions have to rethink their place and their role and how they're ensuring that indigenous voices and perspectives are reflected.

And so I'm aware of in many universities around the world, those things are very relevant. And to me, they demonstrate those questions. So for example, in my own university, I've been involved in initiatives on promoting how to, how sustainable sustainable development could be more embedded within university courses. And I also managed a research project on decolonization and the extent to which in academics research, they're addressing these questions. And whereas in both cases, you get, we would colloquially term the usual suspects of the usual in departments and academics who are engaged or interested in those areas. And you get some and that wouldn't just be some of the natural sciences or might be from a whole number of areas.

So right, someone who might be running a philosophy course or a literature course, and they will say what sustainability got to do with me or what decolonialism got to do with me. All right. So those to me are, that's where I would say we have a role and responsibility. And it goes back to I think some of the principles behind the Othiata. How do we use those things as a way of starting those dialogues to show those connections?

Because, you know, it's not just about that subject, it's about the connection of that subject to society. And, and if you want to achieve a more just and sustainable world. So, so for example, many universities are now talking about the sustainable development goals in terms of how they are embedded in our institution. Yeah. My problem is that too many institutions just see that the tick box exercise, while we've done sustainable development goal for this week in our institution, and not thinking of the bigger picture about what is the what are the goals trying to achieve? What are they really about? And I think that's where, to me, too many universities have lost their sense. What is their social purpose?

What's their contribution to achieving a more just socially just world, a more sustainable world, a world that is great concern for human rights and see us make a great contribution? And that could be key. They're the key thing.

So it's by asking those questions. So the key could be really in rethinking their role.

It's not only to help the students, the learner to have a better job, to have the opportunity to have a better job, or to have a better life, both, but also this key role for the higher education institutions to contribute to the betterment of society. And that society is not only limited to the neighborhood that is very close by, could be the global society.

That's very good. Thank you. And it's the interconnections of what's happening locally to the global, okay? Because sometimes the local condominator sometimes in some places, but not making that connection back home. Okay. And I think that that interconnection is quite key, you know, because some universities can see quite elite and remote from their local community, so they need to think about that connection. Others are very, almost too focused on the locality and don't think about the wider world. So it's about understanding where they connect and interrelate is to make key. Well, let's see in vision here that we have in our audience, including myself, you are having a group of university presidents or leadership, various leaders of a university.

And then we are giving you the floor to ask you to please, can you give your key advice or your advice for the leadership of this university in terms of how to reorient its work to fully embrace education for change, such as ESD, Education for Sustainability and Global Seasonship Education. What would be your key advice to make that happen to this audience of key leaders of a university that are already convinced it needs to take place? Yeah. And how they could foster that or make it that happen? I think it's not about, it's not a quick fix answer to that. It's about encouraging a culture, a way of teaching and learning within an institution that's constantly asking itself these questions. And how that discussions and dialogue interact with what's happening in society around them.

So it's not saying setting a goal, we're going to do this and achieve this by this date. It's about the ways in which people engage with these questions and where are the spaces for these things to happen. And so in my institution, I'm aware of other institutions posing problems or encouraging sense of dissonance or where there's areas of disagreement and debate that can open up these things for discussion. So it's about creating those spaces. I write a lot about where are the creative spaces for people to move and their thinking on these issues. So once those things happen, there's that space for creativity, then I think almost naturally and organically these questions were posed and people wore themselves start to identify ways to move forward.

So, and I'll give you a very practical example. One of the things I do at my university, I chair, there's a number of what are called grand challenges that are like key objectives in the university, which are like big things and there's funding set aside to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration on these things. And I chair the initiative on cultural understanding.

So and what that is all about is actually encouraging dialogue and debate across different faculties and departments across the university and some of these themes and funding is made available to academics to work together on projects to collaborate. So to encourage people in law to work with philosophy or natural sciences on a particular initiative or in my case education to work with natural sciences to identify a project that can open up some of these questions for debate. And that to me is not in a way that doesn't it moves away from being a top down process because one of the challenges in higher education is that academics jealously protect their freedom and their autonomy. So if your task in academic or certainly bring professors to do something or more likely refuse or ignore it. Okay.

What's important is that people feel some sense of ownership and engagement with that. And that and that goes back to the things I talked about earlier. The principles of forms of learning influenced by Ferrari about liberation about emancipation about dialogue. You work together and you learn together from each other and to look at things from different work different voices and different perspectives. Great. So I take that your advice is that the leadership of this university should not try to go through the door of imposing a new policy and new education agenda but engage the education community in higher education in a process of dialogue looking at the challenges and possibilities and more to look at ways in which to create a sense of ownership of the process.

And they should come up with their own I mean the different actors inside the university. So probably actually what I have I think here thought about and written the key role for leadership in higher education is to orchestrate a process, articulate different voices, bring different actors in different segments of the university.

So if I give you one example, right, that I recently involved, I often get asked to do sort of keynote addresses a whole range of universities, UK and internationally. And I was asked to give a keynote address about six weeks ago to a relatively new university in the UK that focuses on training farmers and agricultural workers. It's called the Royal Agricultural University. And they just asked me to give a keynote address around the things I've been writing about pedagogy of hope and education sustainable development. And what was interesting and that was aimed at those leaders within the university, senior academics, about 50 of them. And what was interesting, I just, what I did was pose these sorts of questions, right, that we just been talking about.

And they said there's some examples where some of these students understand and engage with these issues and some who do not. So I just said, well, it's opening up the spaces of finding the ways and ways they do connect with these issues, and then seeing it as a long term process. And it may need a bit of rethinking what they do. I thought they're doing some great things. They have this course on social activism. I thought that's a great course to have for agricultural workers and farmers, you know, and I thought, you know, and I mentioned that as in a way in which how is starting that sort of process of dialogue and engagement. So to me, though, it's about finding where those starting points are and how you work with them to find it.

And I said, you know, I haven't come here with a tick box or a toolkit that you should be using. It's about you've got to construct it yourself.

Well, thank you so much. We came to the end of our conversation today. I really want to express my gratitude to Dope for taking your time to share with us a bit about the vast work you have done and especially the gist of your latest book on education for social change. But also want to say thank you for highlighting again, the importance of constantly asking ourselves the role of education, education institutions, and bringing back or reminding us in this importance of pedagogy of food. So thank you so much. Thank you for inviting me. I enjoyed it. Thank you.

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