

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.

So welcome to our Earth Charter podcast. Today I have the pleasure to host Leonardo Garnier for a conversation on the theme we are most interested in, which is education.

For nearly 20 years we have been quite interested in the efforts to reimagine education, especially from the point of view of transforming education practice and rethinking the purpose of education with a particular focus on how to cultivate the values of sustainability and global citizenship in this major endeavor. So don't Leonardo Garnier, thank you so much for joining us today. No, it's a pleasure. I have been your fan, as I had told you, since you were a minister, because I think you were not only a very charismatic minister, but also you brought a unique energy and ideas to this huge mission of leading the education policies and agenda that are necessary in a country.

So I have really great admiration for you. Our first encounter happened during the first six months of your first year as minister back in 2006 when we co-organized together with the Minister of Education in UNESCO, Latin American Conference, to launch the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development. And we had the opportunity to have a close collaboration since then with your minister. So let me briefly introduce you to our audience. Leonardo Garnier was the minister of education of Costa Rica for two periods, between 2006 and 2014.

And currently is special advisor on the Transforming Education Summit and efforts the UN Secretary General is undertaking to reimagine education for the future and spark global efforts to align education with what I think is the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 agenda. But let's start our conversation today with your experience as the minister of education here in Costa Rica. During that time, when you were in the minister, you introduced a very interesting new program on education for life called ethics, aesthetics and citizenship to be implemented in the education centers all over Costa Rica.

So would you mind sharing with us what was your objective of that program and what is your learning from that? Of course, more than a program, it was like a vision. I was worried that education sometimes is understood as an academic endeavor. And of course it is, you have to learn the basics and you have to learn to communicate and the math and the science and the history. Those things are an essential part of education. And sometimes we fail badly at those things. But education is much more than that.

And I remember just weeks before starting my work as a minister, I was reading a book by my fellow Spanish philosopher Fernando Sabater. And he, in this book, he was asking himself in this so complicated world we're living in, where criteria for what's good and bad is like ambiguous, what could guide us in such difficult times. And he gives an answer in the book that for me was like, of course, he says that what should guide us is exactly what has guided humanity along for oral history, which is ethics and aesthetics.

And I read that and I said, of course. And then we wanted to have that as the vision we would bring into the ministry. And later someone suggested us that yes, ethics, aesthetics were like the two key principles but that we should add something which is much more the active side of living in a society with its citizenship. So that was the beginning of that process. And our idea, as I was telling you, is not that this is a subject matter, but it would affect all parts. Of course, we started with the arts, with the physical education, with civics education.

But then we tried also that this vision was included in all kinds of social studies, in science projects, education for sustainable development, promoting activities, extracurricular activities like the students festival of the arts, which is a magnificent event every year. Thousands and thousands of students participate and it always has a topic which is either environmental or social equity or human rights. But the students basically have to produce art and not just in the traditional form of doing art like painting and sculpting and things like that, but modern dancing.

So you have a hip hop, you have reggaeton, you have graffiti, you have rock, garage bands and whatever. So it really was very important for refreshing the ministry and understanding that education mainly has to do with learning to live our lives fully and enjoy our lives and to learning to live with other people and to learning to live in this planet. And that was like the center of the program. Maybe to round up this question, when we were discussing for the programs of civics education, how to teach ethics.

And I remember one, a philosopher, a professor Rosa Margarit from the University of Costa Rica, she said something that for me was like the key she said, usually people try to teach ethics through sermons and it doesn't work. You have to teach ethics confronting the students with ethical dilemmas. And those dilemmas can be in the newspaper, it can be in a movie, for example, you can watch the merchant of Venice with Kenneth Branagh and ask the students, well, is it right to cut a piece of flesh from a man because the contract says that he doesn't pay his debt, they can cut a piece of his flesh.

Is that ethical or not? And she insisted, don't give them the answer. The important part is the process of discussing the ethical dilemma. There is never a single answer to those dilemmas. So that was like the spirit of the reform. And I enjoyed it fully. It's such a huge, was a huge program. And it's so important that you really envision that from the outset that ethics, teaching ethics or incorporating values in education is not limited to theoretical conversations in a classroom, right? In the beginning, you had that very clear that it has to do with linking reflection, questioning regarding real life situations.

Okay. So, do you know if this program continues to exist? Well, I think in many of the important aspects of the program, it's still there. The student festival remained. I understand that there was one year in which they didn't do it and the students demanded the festival. So it's still there. The curriculum transformations, for example, in the introduction of education for sex and affectivity is still there. This approach of learning how to live together of citizenship, global citizenship, yes, those things remain in the ministry.

And of course they change. I mean, you should never try to imagine that some reform you made remains as when you made it. It's not a new model and it has to improve and some

things didn't work as planned. But yes, I think that the spirit of the reform is very much there. And mainly because we were very careful in trying to include the teachers in the application of the reforms. So it doesn't matter if you go later. Many teachers will keep that spirit alive. And I think it was quite fascinating that you envision incorporating ethics, values, aesthetics as a cross cutting theme, not as a separate subject that should be seen.

Absolutely. Yes. I mean, you can discuss ethics in the math class. How about your challenges as a minister? If you could share with us from your experience, what were the challenges and opportunities you have had as a minister in terms of designing and implementing an education agenda or policy at the national level and how to address some of these challenges? Yeah. Well, ministries of education are huge, are very control oriented, very pyramidal organizations with a lot of layers of command. It's difficult.

And then of course you have a million students. So it's difficult to introduce changes. That's one thing. What helped me to understand our goal there was to read about the history of education in Costa Rica. And just at the beginning of my term, and what I found when I was reading about, from the 19th century to about this education system, I found something that I hadn't thought about it before. Usually you think in politics about debates between left and right or things like that. And what I found was that in education, there was a historical confrontation in Costa Rica, and this is true in many Latin American countries, between two visions of education.

One vision, which is the vision that understands education as obedience, learning how to obey, learning how to follow commands. A good student is the student that always does what the teacher says he or she should do. In Spanish there is a saying, and it comes from Spain, from Franco, Spain, *la letra con sangre entra*, that you learn with pain. So that's one view, which as you can imagine is not my favorite one. And then there is the other view, which is much more humanist centered in the students for which the role of education is to build autonomous human beings.

In this history there were advances and setbacks, and because sometimes you worry that you introduce a reform and then it's discarded and I said, no, this is a long history. So some of the things we tried to do were things that other humanist thinkers had tried to do in the past. And I'm sure that some of the things we did that didn't remain will again be tried in the future. So it's something that you have to look from a long term perspective and that gives you a lot of ease not to feel like you think an impossible mission.

Said that, the other two things that I think are very important when you work in such an institution is one, you have to work with the people from the ministry, not against them. It's crazy when you try to force your ideas on an institution, especially an educational institution, which is so, it has a culture that is embedded in the ministry. So if you want to do something to change that culture, but you have to have many of the people from the ministry sharing that view, at least in part. So we spend a lot of time, had meetings for the eight years all around the country with thousands of teachers discussing our view and listening to them because they have a lot of experience.

So that we also did that with the students, of course, a lot of meetings with students. So that was one thing, do it with the people from the ministry. And the other, which is much

more early, my former experience as planning minister, be very careful with the details on how you execute a policy. Because many times we will have this vision or this fantastic idea. And if you don't take care of the details, it will not happen. It doesn't matter if you're talking about infrastructure or if you are talking about changing the math program, you have to follow all the steps.

The phrase that devil is in the details is really true in a ministry of education. So yes, we put a lot of attention to those details. And still, we didn't succeed in everything. And years later, you feel well, we could have done this differently. So that advice you could give to any new leadership at that level to address the gap of education, agenda, and policy and what happens in the classroom is pay attention to details and make sure you work with the people of the ministry. Yes, and have a vision.

You have to know where you're going. You might get further or not further, but don't do things without knowing the reason for doing those things. Absolutely. So let's come to what's happening now at the UN level when it comes to education. So in November, 2021, UNESCO launched the report, Reimagining Our Futures Together, a new social contract for education.

Until then, many people were referring to the law report. But as I understand, this report that was launched in November, 2021, has a focus on rethinking the role of education, learning, the focus and the role of education, learning, knowledge, and looking at the challenges and opportunities of the current time.

And in September this year, September, 2022, the UN organized the Transforming Education Summit, which took place at the UN General Assembly.

So what is the most important message or purpose of these summits in this report?

I think that when you look at education in the world, or in most of the world, education is going through a crisis, which is like a triple crisis. You have a crisis of equity. Millions of children remain out of school, especially in less developed countries. You have a crisis of quality, because even those who are in school are not learning properly. Even the basics, you have this, lots of evolutions where kids are not reading properly, they don't understand what they read, they cannot operate in math. They don't have this, the basic ideas of what scientific thinking is. So we're failing in how well we teach.

And then there is a crisis of relevance, because in many parts what we are achieving in terms of learning is not that relevant for the world in which these young people are going to live in. So I think addressing those three crises was the purpose of the summit. And of course the UNESCO document, which I like very much. In fact, as we were talking about ethics, statistics and citizenship, when I read the UNESCO report, I felt like so validated. I said, well, yeah, that's exactly what we tried to do. Yeah, the report is very aligned with the program that you learned here.

Yeah, I was surprised. It felt good, I'll be honest.

The report is part of the summit. I mean, the vision statement that comes for the Secretary General in the summit is very much eliminated by the UNESCO report, but also by the discussions of a lot of people that work during the summit. And I think we look at it from the UNESCO report, probably the biggest emphasis is on the relevance. What is the kind of education that young people in the 21st century need?

This is really a complicated world. We have a climate crisis that is not getting better and could mean that heart-grandson will live in this topic world.

We have a crisis in terms of human relations and social and political relations. The setbacks in human rights in many countries are really something we should worry about, the weakening of democracy, the inability to have a discussion and understand each other in a discussion. Now we live in these bubbles that become tribes and we don't care about the others' argument. We only care that our team wins the debate, even if it's with lies. So I think that the challenge of the UNESCO report is how do we learn to live together in this planet?

Those two things are essential. It's living together and living together in this planet. And I think that has to do with the content of the curriculum, but also it has to do with how we understand the learning process, how is it that we humans learn. And again, one of the things that is very frustrating, but at the same time very important, is that in a way we can say we are not saying anything new. I mean, I remember when I started teaching at the university and with a group of friends, we were very scared of teaching without knowing how to teach.

So we read Dewey, we read Piaget, Montessori, we read of course Paolo Freire.

And they were all saying similar things. Of course. I mean, the most modern things we're saying in education is what Paolo Freire said in the 60s. Absolutely. So when you see those two things, at least from my point of view, you have to ask yourself why if we said that in the 60s, it didn't happen.

Because if you don't ask that question, it will happen again. We will say now, like the Dewey report, learn to learn, learn to do, learn to live together, learn to. And that was in 97 and still it's not happening. So I think it is very important and that was part of the discussion in the summit, understanding why these things are so difficult. And to this now you have to add the digital challenge and using digital technology as a learning resource. So maybe let me give you one example of how we fail to understand these things.

We would say, okay, if you want a new education for freedom, as Freire would put it, you need to transform teachers. Fantastic. So you train them and at the university, they make them read big old skimp, they're afraid and all the modern things.

And then they go to school and they teach in the old fashioned way. So what happens? The theory is detached from the practice. Exactly. And in the discussions for the summit, I was talking especially with my friends at UNESCO, why is it that this happens? This is crazy. And usually the answer is we need more training. I said, yeah, but that's not enough.

And at least my hypothesis is that education, which should always be transformative, is always very conservative because it has to preserve culture and values and whatever.

So those two things changing and remaining are there. Teachers are also conservative and this is a hierarchical institution. Everybody wants to have control. The minister, the base minister, the national advisors, there is a very hierarchical institution. And teachers, they need to feel they have control of their classrooms, that they have authority, that they are in command. And in the past, that command came because of their dominion of knowledge. They have students who didn't know and they knew and they were transferring that knowledge to the students.

Then comes someone like Pavarro Freire and says, no, you have to promote an autonomous learning in the students.

Let's add Google. So now students can Google everything their teacher says. And you have teachers that even if ideologically they believe in what Freire said, they feel that if they do that in the classroom, they will lose the respect, the authority, the power they have in the classroom. And I think that's the biggest challenge. So we have not just to train the teachers, but to make them understand that their authority should come not from having more information than their students, because that's never going to be true again.

But from being the person that is capable of guiding them in this learning process, because learning is complicated, how to look for information, how to dissect an argument, I know what part of the argument is valid or is not valid, how to discuss, how to internalize those things. So that's the new role of teachers. But there is fear in that transition. And if we don't address the fear, the transition will not happen.

I think there is a lot of generally a perception that education has to take place in a vertical way of transmitting information rather than in a horizontal and more participatory way. And that is difficult to make that shift from. The shift is difficult. And also it takes more work. When you have a course and you have the PowerPoints ready from last year and from last year and from last year, that's very easy. Each year you just repeat your course. If you are a non-vertical teacher, each year is different because students are different.

So you have to work a little more. Yes, absolutely. Now that report, this new UNESCO report that is very important, I suppose the summit was a space to give visibility to the report, raise awareness about that and it will continue to happen. But that report makes us a call for a new social contract for education. What is that social contract?

I think it means two or three things. One, and that was a very specific purpose of the summit, is to put education back at the top of political priorities. Because what we saw that was happening, and the Secretary General insisted very much, was that with the pandemic and with the economic crisis that was coming as a result of the pandemic, but also because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and because of the crisis in the containers in China, what was beginning to happen was that educational budgets were shrinking and education was not a priority because education is a long term and when you have emergencies, very short-term emergencies, everything that is long term can wait.

And we think that education was in an emergency. So I'd say that one thing is that to bring it back into the discussion, I think the summit in that respect was very successful. We had the Presummit in Paris, we had 150 ministers of education together, which was amazing and all the mobilization for the summit was also very important. Around 130 countries send their statements of commitment for transforming education, of course with very different views, but they did the homework. So that's one thing.

The other was, and this second one relates very much with the UNESCO report, to share this vision with the people. The problem sometimes with this report is first that nobody reads them.

They are very long, they're very academic. And very few people get to know it or hear it. And they preach to the already convinced, which is good. I think you have to do that, but that's not enough. So the idea was to bring this more to the practitioners of education, to the minister, vice ministers, to the civil society. That's why the vision statement from the secretary general is short, simple. It has the vision of the UNESCO document, but in a much more simple way of saying it. In fact, it mentions the lore for healers of education, which I think are very important.

That's the second thing. And this has to do with all the issues about content we have mentioned, with the sustainable development, with the gender equality, with human rights, with this ability to live together, but also with foundational learning, this problem that we have a really a learning crisis in the world.

There was a level of work in which we said, okay, there are in order to have this transformed education, you need changes in the schools.

The schools have to change. They have to become inclusive places, safe places for students with no discrimination, with no harassment, carrying healthy environment. So we have to think and school is like a brief word for the space and time of education. Whatever it is, it can be formal, informal, but it has to be transformed in that way. Second, we already mentioned was the teachers. Teachers have to become agents of change. And of course here the teacher will say, and I agree with them that they are under trained, under valued, under paid.

Yes, that's true. So if you want to bring the best out of teachers, you have to recognize their work. You have to pay them well if you want to have a good teacher that's a lesson from successful countries in education. And offer training, professional development. Exactly, the professional, constant professional development. And one thing that I think is very important, education should learn from health. The way in which people in the health profession learn professionally, they spend a lot of time not in the classroom, but in the hospital.

And they keep learning through their careers, practicing. I think that learning how to be a teacher or a professor should have a lot of classroom experience, not just the theoretical elements of how to teach, which by the way, sometimes we traditionally teach teachers on how not to teach traditionally, which is like crazy.

So changing teachers. And the third element here was that, and this is interesting because in any productive process that you can think of, we usually, let me talk also on economists, the production function, you have the workers and their capacities or what some people call human capital, a term that I'm not very fond of, but let's say that their capacities. And then you have the tools, the machines, the all the capital that goes into the productive process. And the quality and the productivity of this process depends both on the capacities of the workers and of the tools you give them.

It's not the same to work with a machete than to work with a tractor.

Well, in education, it should be exactly the same. You have the teachers that need their capacity, their training and all those things. And the resources and the resources they have had for centuries were blackboards and textbooks. And now we have not the same case now. No, you have a digital revolution, but and the teachers are not slower than the students.

Absolutely. And really, this is a pedagogical problem.

But it's also an economic and a political problem because digital products are what we economists call public goods, which is they require effort and investment to produce. But once they are produced, they can be freely used by everybody. I mean, once the software is out there, everybody could use it. But if you if you just leave this to the market, what happens is that they become private commodities, very scarce, very expensive, and only those who can pay for them can use them, which is a risk in education.

So one of the things in which the summit insisted very much and there is one initiative, the gateways for public digital learning resources by by UNESCO and UNICEF, is to make sure that these digital learning resources are freely available for students and teachers all over the world, that countries will not use intellectual property rights to close the doors to the access of these resources. So you have to change schools, you have to change teachers, you have to change the learning and teaching resources.

And finally, you have to understand that all these things are expensive.

A good education is not cheap. It requires investment. Public investment. And here the situation in the world is is really crazy. When when you look at the numbers, countries are shrinking their national budget on not just that, but the inequality in the world. Imagine I'll give it just two numbers.

The higher income countries account for 63 percent of global investment in education, 63 percent, and they have 10 percent of the students of the world. On the other hand, lower and middle lower middle income countries, they have 75 percent of the children of the world and 8 percent of the investment. So when you look at that, you say we are trying to teach 75 percent of the kids with 8 percent of the budget. So that's really dramatic. One of the big strongest calls from the summit was to make everybody understand. And that's why it is very important.

The follow up is very important, but they have to understand that. Because you just said that this is an investment and they have to understand three things. We have to invest more in education because the total amount we're investing is not enough for all the students we should have. So we have to invest more. But just not in more education or the conventional education. Exactly. We have to invest more equitably because rural areas, indigenous populations, poor families are not receiving the same education. And of course, we have to invest efficiently. We cannot waste the money we put into education. So the summit makes a very strong call for those three things that countries have to invest more per school age person. And of course, this means things that people don't like.

This means that you should revamp your tax system because the money for education can only come from taxes. And people hate to talk about taxes. And if you look at successful countries, what you see is that more egalitarian societies are able to have this idea that we all pay taxes and we all receive social services and good education from our taxes.

When you have a very unequal country with a lot of poverty, the upper half do not want to pay taxes for the children of the lower half. So this is a political economy problem. And it's very difficult to solve. But if you don't solve this, you don't solve the economic crisis. In the case of Costa Rica, what has been the percentage of the annual budget that is dedicated to education in general? Well, according to the constitution, we increased it to 8%.

But as in every part of the world, with the pandemics and the crisis, now it's lower. We're not doing what the constitution says we should be doing. And that's very dangerous. And the ideal would be at least 8% for more. No, I think we should...

Two things. The percentage of GDP or the percentage of public expenditures gives you an idea of the relative effort a country is doing. But you should also look at another number, which is how much are you investing per school-age person?

And I found this because sometimes people say, listen, how come that Costa Rica invests more than Finland in education? And we have very bad results when we compare with the results of Finland. And yes, of course, we invest a higher percentage of our GDP than Finland. But when you look at the numbers, how much does Finland invest per student? And how much Costa Rica invests per student?

Finland invests three times more than Costa Rica per student. And when you look at this in poorer countries, I'll give you... This is a number that I just cannot handle. The poorest countries are investing, in average, \$50 a year per school-age person.

That's \$1 per week. What kind of education can you achieve with \$1 per week? Developed countries invest like \$8,000 a year, in average. And when you look at the most successful one, they invest \$20,000, \$25,000 per year. But the poor countries, \$50,000. That's nothing. And that certainly can... We can see the reflection of that or the impact of that in the society as a whole. That reproduces inequality. So there's no question that UNESCO and the UN, and now at the level of the UN Secretary General, are really putting a lot of interest in raising the visibility and the central role education plays in the transformation of our society.

So I think there's no question because UNESCO and the UN are really putting together this report and then the summit and we'll continue. But as part of this report, there is a notion of the importance of redefining the purpose of education. You talked a little bit about that before, but can I ask you again to amplify your views on what does it mean? What could be the purpose of education for the current times? And how does the report emphasize this idea? I think that it's very much what we said before. It's understanding that education should prepare the young, and not only the young, should prepare everybody to live in the current times we are living. It should prepare people for democratic life.

It should prepare people for respecting human rights. It should prepare people for confronting the climate crisis. It should prepare people for living with gender equality and respect for this difference. And I mentioned this specifically because it's one of the topics that generates more controversy in this UN meetings. But for the craziest reasons, I mean, for example, let me do this like a parenthesis.

Some countries have objected the use of comprehensive sexual education. And I said, what's the problem with that term? Oh, that the word comprehensive has been used by those who want to promote gender ideology. And you have all this crazy discussion between the most conservative and most more liberal or human views. So yes, education should prepare every person to live in this world. And one of the things that the UNESCO report emphasizes, and this is very important because we are in a strange world, is that we have to understand about the history of cultures and the diversity of cultures, that we humans are different.

We are diverse. And that diversity is what makes us unique. I mean, I remember a book by the famous writer, I mean, Malouf, and he starts this book saying something that I found lovely. He says, and I paraphrase, that he's from Lebanon, so he has that in common from all people from Lebanon. But he's a Christian, so he has something in common with Lebanese Christians, but not with other that are not Christian. But he left Lebanon, so he's a migrant. So he shares that with all other migrants, and he now is French.

So he has something in common with the French. And what he says in the end is, I am the unique combination of all those identities that make me be myself. So we should understand that each person is exactly, is the synthesis of all their identities. And of course, we are all different. And that's the nice part about it. Going back to our program in the Ministry of Education, we were discussing these things, and the word traditionally used, a very UN word, is tolerance. We have to teach tolerance and this and that.

And but if I say that I tolerate you, that's not very nice.

So what we said at the ministry, and I think that... It's like I can very deal with you, I tolerate you, right? Yeah. So the right word to put it, and I think that the UNESCO document moves in this direction, is say, no, we have to enjoy diversity. I don't have to tolerate diversity. I have to enjoy that's what is nicest about human beings, our unity in the diversity. Yeah. In the other chapter, we talk about celebrating the cultural diversity. Exactly. In our human willingness at the same time.

For me, that's the main thing about that report, the celebration of human diversity and the respect for human rights.

Okay. In terms of pedagogical approaches to the futures of education, the report, this report highlights some aspects of pedagogical approach and makes visible the importance of pedagogies of collaboration and solidarity. Can you speak to that in terms of why and what does that mean? Pedagogies of collaboration and solidarity, which is something that this report emphasizes. I told you before, when I read those things, I go back to Paulo Freire. I mean, what's new is that we haven't done it.

We learn through questions, not through answers. And in fact, there is a lovely project in France that we copied, and several Latin American countries copied, that is La Mena La Pat.

What this French scientist says is, don't teach science, given the students the answers of what science discovered. Teach science by giving them the questions and teaching them how to do their research and how to be inquisitive about this thing. So learning through questions, I think it's exactly going back to Freire, the questions that generate learning. Collaboration, of course, we don't learn alone. Every student knows that you study with other classmates and we teach each other and we discuss, but that shouldn't happen by chance.

That should be part of the pedagogical process. Teachers have to create the environment for their students to discuss those problems, whatever problems, it can be science, it can be about reading a novel. Could teachers have always done that? But now, with this report or with this long health vision of innovative education, the idea is that learning is a collective process. And this has become much more clear in today's world, because I don't know, 200 years ago you had the single scientist inventing something that doesn't exist anymore.

Knowledge is produced by human collectives. And one of the problems of property rights is that they make it very difficult to use other people's knowledge to build a new piece of knowledge and then it becomes a commodity. And then what matters is how much you can charge for the property rights or the copyright or whatever, which is really crazy.

So yes, the pedagogy is much more active. Learning, and I always remember, and I know probably psychologists would tell me that this is passé. But this simple idea that when you're a teacher, your students are not a blank slate. They have their visions, they have their thought schemes, and for them to learn, you have to help them to transform their schemes. So every new knowledge transforms the learning schemes and then they can learn new things. And yes, that's a very active process. And the teacher, and this is something very important from this report and many related reports, the teacher has to know the student. Not all students are the same. They are not in the same place. They don't have the same interests. They don't have the same capacities. And this is a big challenge.

Again, digital technology can be of great help if we use it correctly, to have a much more differentiated approach to working groups, to let students advance at different paces. So

yes, that's part of what this report says. And again, I would go back to the same question. How do we make sure that these things go from a report in Paris to a classroom in Tanzania or in Colombia or in Mexico? That's the big challenge.

And sometimes I feel and I fear that the intellectuals of education, we tend to build such complex discourses without, I mean, if we were really good educators, we would ask ourselves, how do I translate these things into tools that can be used in the classroom? Because if not, someone will say that in the beginning of the 21st century, there was a very good report by UNESCO and nothing happened the same that 40 years ago. Yeah. I was very happy to see that the report underlined this notion of interdisciplinarity.

And there is a section there, I think, on ecological, intercultural and interdisciplinarity learning. Can you share with us a little bit about what is your thinking and why do you think interdisciplinarity and ecological learning is important? Well, I started with ecological. I think that this, it took us centuries to understand that we live in an environment and that we have an impact on that environment. So this awareness of our impact in the planet should go together with our awareness of our impact in other people's lives. I always have fun, I teach economics and usually when people talk about Adam Smith, they talk about the selfishness of this and that and the invisible hand. I said, no, but when Smith wrote about the theory of moral sentiments, his frame of mind is, how do I relate with the others?

How is, he calls it sympathy. Now we call it empathy.

But how do my actions affect other people? And finally, his conclusion is that for the invisible hand to work, you have to have empathy and institutions. Those and liberal economists usually forget those things. So when you talk about this ecological frame and this human rights frame is basically understanding that what, it's the same that the reference to Malouf, what makes us human is this strange thing that we are at the same time individuals and part of a society. And we cannot escape that. And that means that yes, we need individual respect and freedom.

But freedom only exists in the context of living in a society. I usually have a phrase that I like for mentioned that freedom is always conditional freedom because we always live in the others. A single individual is not a concept. The concept of individual is a social concept. So I think that's one thing. The other is the interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or all those things. And here I have a nuanced position. Yes, I think learning and science in general should lead us to this holistic vision where you confront a problem from the different angles of that problem.

If we're talking about climate change, it has to do with natural sciences. It has to do with economics. It has to do with politics. And you need to combine all those different theoretical tools that we have to understand a problem. And we don't have a unified theory. And that's a weakness of our knowledge. Even in natural science, we haven't been able to build a unified theory of everything like in the Hawkins book. That's still waiting for us to have that. And when you put natural sciences, social sciences, psychological or sciences, we still struggle to put those things together. So yes, we have to understand that. We need our students to understand that. But there is a problem.

And I put it to you this way because in some places like in Finland, or I heard about the GS suites in Barcelona, they are doing away with subjects in the school.

So let's eliminate subjects and we will teach through problem solving. And someone asked me, I was not minister already. This was a few times ago. Someone asked me why in Costa Rica don't we do the same and we eliminate the subjects. And what I told them is okay. When we have the Finnish teachers or the Barcelona GS suites, we can do that. But teaching without subjects, it's terribly difficult. In less developed countries, the training of the teachers in many cases, hardly prepares them to teach math if they are math teacher or science if they are science teacher.

So if I take one of those teachers and tell him or her, now you have to teach everything, they will not know how to do it. So we have to start slowly generating learning projects where teachers work together with the students. And you have the math teacher and the science teacher.

In fact, what you asked me at the beginning about ethics and aesthetics, it was very interesting to see the students bringing together their science teacher and the arts teacher, because they had to do an art project that had to do with climate change. So they needed both teachers to do that. So that's the direction in which I would work, putting teachers together to confront learning challenges from a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approach. But I would be very careful because we could end up with students neither learning one thing nor the other.

A lot can be done in terms of interdisciplinary processes or approach within disciplines, but it's just creating bridges and having some sort of cutting things. Exactly. That would be my approach. So this report and this effort has several references on values, and especially on the importance to bring values to education. I was of course very happy to see that and the report does highlight not only in primary and secondary school, but also in higher education. The report says that higher education must foster ethics and values and awareness and etc. So again, why do you think values are so much referenced throughout this report and what does that mean to the actual teaching practice in the classroom?

First, let me add a problem here. Because when you or I say values, we are thinking in something very different from those people that want to eliminate sex education from high schools because of values. And we are both talking about values, but very different. So that's a problem. So you have the values coming from the more conservative side and that don't mess up with my children, the family values are the ones, the traditional values. And you have all this discussion about traditional values and many traditional values were terrible values. So this discussion is very complicated in political terms because the same word means different things.

So now go into your question and not just the report, but what we were discussing before in the ethics teachings in Costa Rica and what I was telling you about obedience or humanist education. I think that the difference for me is this. I would like my students to learn to do things because they feel that's the right thing to do. Maybe they don't agree

with what I see as the right thing to do, but what I want is that their motivation to act is to think they are acting in the right way.

And then you have to define what's the right way. And that's why human values and ecological view and those things are important. But from the other point of view, the way in which they try to teach values is basically through fear. You do the right thing because if not, you'll be punished.

And that's not ethics. That's exactly the opposite of. So when education is based on obedience, you don't have the concept of freedom and you don't have the concept of responsibility and you don't have the concept of ethics. You just obey orders. It's like when a military does something terrible and say, I was following orders, blame my general. I'm not to blame. Okay, that's the opposite of what I understand as teaching values. And that's why this is not something that you can teach. As we were talking before, as a definitive answer, this is good and this is bad. It's something that you, it's like a framing of your decision process. Students have to learn that in every time they have to make a decision, they should ask themselves, what are the consequences of my decision? Who am I affecting?

Am I improving the life of someone? Am I harming someone? And then taking those things into account, you should make that decision. What we are seeing in the world today is that people are making decisions that are terrible decisions, basically by not asking them the question, which is easier because once you ask yourself the question, you feel bad about doing these things. And this goes to long philosophical discussions about good or evil and adding and the Nazis and all these discussions of who is bad and who is good. Well, I think when talking about values, the important thing is to ask yourself, what are the consequences of your actions for other people or for the planet? And then act as you think it's right.

But don't don't do it because someone is going to give you a prize or someone is going to punish you because when you do it in that way, it's a vertical learning.

Yes. And they basically they learn how to cheat. I mean, I will act in the wrong way if no one is looking. And it shouldn't depend on whether someone is looking. It should depend on how you value your actions. Yeah. Well, in our work here, we have done quite a lot of work and research on values, education and looking at ethics and values, incorporating ethics and values in education as an instrument of social transformation. But there is certainly a misperception that teaching ethics and values involves a vertical process, a non transformative process. But from our perspective is the opposite. No, it's really opening a space that invites people to examine their values, to clarify their values and to ask constantly ask the consequences of the decisions they make. So absolutely.

And it involves something that it's easy to say and we almost never do it.

You should always ask yourself in this ethical discussions, or you should think, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe my position is wrong and the other guy's position is the right one. I should listen to the other guy's arguments and treat them with some respect because in these debates, everybody assumes your values are the right values. And these are very

difficult decisions. I mean, the discussions on the death penalty or discussions on abortion or discussions on war or are complex. And when you go through history, I mean, you had cultures that had human sacrifices as part of their culture and that was ethical and moral and that's what I didn't. And for us, that looks strange.

But you have to have that discussion and understand and understanding doesn't mean that you have to accept that just because that's another culture. It's okay. No, you can from your own value say, well, I think that what some societies are doing to their girls, I mean, not allowing girls to go to classrooms in Afghanistan, you cannot defend that by saying, it's a different culture. So respect me. No, I don't respect you because we are a human society in the world and we have this idea of human rights, which has been built by human society with all the diversity. And some things are just not acceptable.

Yeah, the reality is that we make a lot of decisions every day. And those decisions are informed by our beliefs and values quite significantly. So we are coming to the end of our conversation today. And I have one last question is what's next with regards to this report and this UN efforts on transforming education? Okay, there is a follow up process and well institutionally UNESCO of course is the institution in charge of the follow up there is a committee called the high level steering committee for SDG for, which is a big committee in charge of following up. How do we really reach the SDG for goals?

And it's funny, I mean, it's so difficult to talk in this acronym that UN loves to use, but basically, how do we get quality education for everybody through their lives in the world? That's better than saying SDG for nobody knows what's it for. So this high level steering committee will work on that. UN teams will work with governments in making sure that their commitments at the summit will become policy and not just a paper written for the summit, but really go to the classrooms and specific initiatives from the summit will also have a follow up. It will be different in each case. For example, UNICEF and UNESCO agreed in these gateways for digital learning resources, so they will work creating this platform. There was an initiative on girls education and gender equality.

There is an initiative on financing of education, which again is followed by the high level steering committee. But you here you have to work also with, I think the UN economic commissions in the different regions of the world, I have already talked with the head of SEPAL for Latin America to see how can we bring together ministers of education with ministers of finance so that we see at this problem from a development perspective and not from an expenditure perspective. So basically that's the idea to keep looking for SMRs in two directions. One, this shooting for the summit of the futures and that will come next in the UN that will be negotiated in countries and whatever. So we want education to be part of that.

We want these initiatives which are global initiatives to move and we want at the national level decisions actually to transform educational systems in their countries. And in the end what we are trying to solve are the three crisis I mentioned at the beginning. The access everybody should be in, everybody who should be in school should be in school. The quality people who are in school should be really learning. And what we have spoken more in this blog, the question of relevance. What's the reason? What's the purpose of

education? Which is creating better persons and the better society? Well thank you so much, Don Leonardo Garnieri.

Such a pleasure and inspiration for me to talk to you today. Thank you for joining us. No, it was a pleasure for me. I enjoyed it.

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