

## Chapter 68

# The Place of Concerns for Posterity in the Global Education for Sustainable Development Agenda: The Case of UNESCO

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### ABSTRACT

*Education is a powerful tool to alter unsustainable values and mindsets. But in order for it to be used most efficiently it is crucial to have a clear understanding of what values should be advanced, changed, or developed. This chapter aims to clarify some conceptual difficulties with the value of future generations in education for sustainable development. Future generations are embedded in the definition of sustainable development and can be reasonably expected to be at the heart of education for sustainable development. This chapter explores this assumption and analyzes how future-oriented concerns are formulated and advanced in the global educational agenda put forward during the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) led by UNESCO. This analysis compares conceptual foundations of ESD against key developments in climate and environmental ethics on the treatment of posterity. This chapter can contribute to the disciplines of environmental education, philosophy of education, and to climate ethics.*

### INTRODUCTION

Climate change and global environmental degradation are challenges that call for interdisciplinary approaches and innovative solutions. Some aspects of these challenges can be improved with new technology, some require political will, and some can benefit from applying market mechanisms. However, at the heart of these challenges are people who choose to engage into or turn a blind eye to unsustainable

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practices and lifestyles. The world is running out of resources because someone is using them, and this “someone” is not just governments or businesses that are often blamed for their inefficiency to deal with the problem. At the end of the chain of responsibility for global environmental crisis there are individuals that collectively contribute to the crisis through their unsustainable choices, lifestyles, and behavior. These are people from developed states caught up in a collective action problem who, for various reasons, are unable or unwilling to do what is morally right in this situation.

Dealing with people and social processes in a non-coercive manner is an endeavor much more unpredictable than dealing with chemical substances or monetary flows. Predictability might be a reason why decision-makers prefer to focus on financial and market mechanisms, as well as technology and science, in a quest for climate change solutions. Changes in values, norms, attitudes, and behavior of the general public through awareness raising efforts and through education are processes too long-term to look appealing to policy-makers who operate within election cycle timeframes. Insufficient attention to education and awareness raising leads to the reinforcement of old unsustainable practices by the new generation which undermines technology and market developments. This is a vicious circle that can only be broken if education is treated as an equally important solution to climate change as any other economic, technological or political measures.

This book offers a timely contribution to an on-going discussion among academics and educational practitioners on raising awareness about climate change through education. Along with offering accounts of various practices, including collaborative experience and youth-based environmental programs, this book addresses issues that emerge in the work of international and global programs promoting education as capacity building. This specific chapter focuses on how an international organization, UNESCO, is transforming the global educational agenda based on work done during the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). It aims to contribute to the discussion on education for sustainable development (ESD) at an international level, at the level of global vision of sustainability. Climate change and sustainable development are closely intertwined. ESD means including key sustainable development issues (such as climate change, biodiversity, sustainable consumption, etc.) into teaching and learning and “allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to shape a sustainable future” (UNESCO, 2014a).

Discussions about ESD started soon after the concept of sustainable development was formulated in the Brundtland Report (UN, 1987) and recognized at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 (e.g. Jickling, 1992; Tilbury, 1995). The concept was endorsed by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) which was appointed to be the lead UN agency in facilitating a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014).

Although environmental education (EE) is conceptually different from ESD, EE is recognized to contribute greatly to ESD (McKeown, Hopkins, 2003; 2007). One important thing the two have in common is a set of values they advance and are based on, environmental values in particular. Scholars and practitioners from different disciplines, including philosophy and social psychology, agree that a value shift is an important part of a transition towards sustainability. Environmental problems are rooted in the exploitative practices and attitudes that dominated industrial societies for the past two centuries (Jamieson, 1992). The system of values that drove humanity to a global environmental crisis is unsustainable and needs to be changed. EE and ESD contribute to changing the paradigm and enabling a value shift through education.

Among different values that should be developed as part of a transition towards sustainability there is one which is central to the concept of sustainable development. According to a widely accepted defi-

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