

Chapter 4

Integral Ecology and Educational Policies: Axiological Convergences With SDG4

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a major role in enabling us to become more active in the building of a better society, attacking the structural causes of inequality that creates an inhuman culture of waste and—from an ecological point of view—generates a unacceptable negligence with the care of our common home, causing environmental degradation and other disastrous consequences. This chapter explores integral ecology and education policies through axiological convergences with SDG4.

INTRODUCTION

“What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?” (Pope Francis, 2015, n.160). This is one of the most unequivocal questions raised by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*. It is undoubtful that today, first and foremost, “we are faced with an educational challenge” (Pope Francis, 2015, n. 209). For these reasons, education achieves its purpose if it succeeds in forming people capable of walking together a path of honesty, mutual respect and esteemed acceptance.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9562-5.ch004

In this way, it is possible to grow not only in humanity but also in intelligence and values, giving rise to new processes of social transformation. In light of the *United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals* all components of society are called to offer their specific contribution toward an integral development. Education plays a major role in the building of a better society by forming a holistic learner, while addressing the structural causes of inequality that creates an inhuman culture of waste and – from an ecological point of view – generates a unacceptable negligence with “the care of our common home”, causing environmental degradation and other disastrous societal consequences.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) had already brought new life to the Church’s social teaching with a more pragmatic and ecumenical vision headed for the age. As it clearly states in the declaration *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965), an intensive educational effort is required to reach these goals. Education is not only a fundamental right of every human person, with a view to her or his own personal aim, but is also, and above all, the means by which everyone can contribute to building up the *common good* of our societies, thus promoting unity and peace on earth.

In an epoch of great technological change, there is the responsibility for the development of all peoples, says the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967), in which Paul VI places a strong emphasis on the universal destination of resources and goods directed at individuals as a prerequisite for universal advancement: “[the] development of the individual necessarily entails a joint effort for the development of the human race as a whole” (Paul VI, 1967, n.43). More than fifty years later, this encyclical can be read as prescient in its ability to anticipate the relevant issues of poverty and wealth and of technological disruption and social development, all of which are earnestly discussed today.

INTEGRAL ECOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

These aforementioned premises open the doors to an educational approach that has its roots in an integral vision of the person. In this way, the *educating community* does not fall into the trap of exclusivity but overcomes obstacles and goes beyond the walls of the class and integrates itself into society. A partial education – purely based only on technocratic skills – would be the cause of further fragmentation and confusion since it would educate one aspect of the person, sacrificing a more holistic development of the students. On the contrary, an all-encompassing pedagogy is based on *life skills education* that is – simultaneously – “personal, social, interpersonal, cognitive, affective, universal” (World Health Organization, 1999, p. 3).

An *integral education* cultivates curiosity and imagination as well as resilience and self-regulation and develops “a person’s full potential, preparing him or her

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