

2019 Harmony with Nature – Theme: Earth Jurisprudence

By Namrata Sharma – Education

1. What would the practice of Education look like from an Earth Jurisprudence perspective? How is that different from how Education is generally practiced now? And, what are the benefits of practicing Education from an Earth Jurisprudence perspective?

The Earth Jurisprudence perspective mandates an urgent action and concern for Mother Earth as world citizens. Further, such action must draw from the vast repository of human wisdom, from different cultures and traditions, such as considered during the drafting process of the Earth Charter which is a values-based framework for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful global society (see Vilela and Corcoran 2005). The importance of paying attention to different values-based perspectives is that it can bring forth diverse and creative solutions to global issues, such as, environmental degradation and climate change. Further, it can propel people and communities to take part in local, national, regional, and global solutions as engaged citizenry whose values inform their action for positive personal, social and environmental transformation.

In the realm of education, one of the core challenges of fostering youth as future world citizens needs to be a focus on the values, beliefs, and interests of the individual learner. The Earth Jurisprudence initiative can facilitate a dialogue between different perspectives that promote a broader engagement with the human/personal dimension. This is necessary for the success of education for global citizenship which is part of the United Nations (UN) 2030 agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which “seek to eradicate extreme poverty and strengthen universal peace by integrating and balancing the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental” (UNESCO 2018: 3).

2. What promising approaches would you recommend for achieving implementation of an Earth-centered worldview for Education? (Note: depending on the discipline, approaches could also be theoretical, although practical approaches should be prioritized).

A shift in perspectives from a mechanistic view of life and education promoted through the scientific-industrial revolution, to a holistic Earth-centered worldview can have a significant bearing on the praxis and the three domains of learning within the global citizenship education conceptual dimensions of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – the cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral (UNESCO 2015: 14–15). These correspond to the four pillars of learning described in the UNESCO (2001) report *Learning: The treasure within*, that are, learning to know, to do, to be and to live together.

For example, an acknowledgement of one’s common humanity would give emphasis to perceiving the divisiveness and alienation that is present within modern societies. That is, it would place a strong emphasis within the curriculum to tackle stereotyping and foster the socio-emotional capacity of compassion toward all inhabitants of the Earth whilst also

recognizing the nature and forms of power structures in an increasingly globalized world and the unseen perpetuation of colonial perspectives. The behavioral response to solve global issues would be rooted in a non-dualistic belief system that through an intuitive examination of the depth of human life subscribes to the view that an attitudinal change within each person can impact upon their environment (see Ikeda 2003: 106). The educational environment will be developed to foster meaningful life-to-life connections among people – between students and teachers, schools and communities, and so on (see Sharma 2018 for suggested themes and approaches for practice).

3. What key problems or obstacles do you see as impeding the implementation of an Earth-centered worldview in Education?

Education has been a priority for UNESCO both as a SDG as well as the means for attaining all the other SDGs. While maintaining its focus on and giving agency to the individual human being, Education based on an Earth-centered worldview must also not get trapped in promoting individualism which has often been the hallmark of education informed by a neoliberal paradigm. In this context, an Earth-centered worldview in Education can have a substantive role in promoting dialogue between people and perspectives that aim at nurturing individuals who can lead contributive lives through education for a global and sustainable world.

Facilitating such discussions across communities and their leading to a consequential change within the educational curricula and standards across the UN member nation states is a daunting and costly project.

Further, the political climate of nations moving towards narrow nationalism, the denial of climate change as a reality by various political groups, and other ramifications of neoliberal capitalism are obstacles to the realization of an Education based on an Earth-centered paradigm.

4. What are the top recommendations for priority, near-term action to move Education toward an Earth Jurisprudence approach? What are the specific, longer-term priorities for action? (Note: give 3 to 10 priorities for action).

PROMOTING DIALOGUE: Enhancing dialogue between different education stakeholders. There are several lessons to be learned from a study of alternative ways of thinking about ourselves, society, Nature, and the universe that can add to the intercultural dimension of the 17 SDGs and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Further, students can benefit from the opportunity to discuss issues around existential questions (Ikeda 2010: 103–104).

PROVIDING A CONCEPTUAL TOOLBOX AND RESOURCES FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS THROUGH AN OPEN-ACCESS ONLINE REPOSITORY: Challenging epistemic assumptions that deny rights/legal personhood to Nature and offering suggestions for practice in ESD based on an Earth Jurisprudence approach. Moving beyond a cognitive approach, on how to create a learning environment that can cause a socio-emotional response in students to develop a reverence for Nature, and care and responsibility as citizens of this Planet. Further, such

tools and resources can help develop a critical understanding of the causal relationship between human strife and suffering, and the destruction of Natural and other forms of life.

FROM INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT TO BOLD COLLECTIVE ACTION: There need to be more discussions from non-anthropocentric perspectives facilitated by an Earth Jurisprudence approach that expands the current focus on individual empowerment (see UNESCO 2015: 16) to develop the process of building relationships and enable bold collective efforts as inhabitants of Mother Earth.

References

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