

CHAPTER 5

Education

Tuija Veintie and Johanna Hohenthal

University of Helsinki

Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goal on quality education aims to ensure that everyone learns the knowledge and skills necessary for promoting sustainable development and lifestyles, and global citizenship (UN 2015). This chapter begins with an introduction to *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)*, *Global Citizenship Education (GCED)*, and *Education for Sustainability (EfS)*. The chapter then discusses how sustainability is framed locally within national educational policies in two different contexts. First, it examines the *buen vivir* (good living) principle in the context of Intercultural Bilingual Education in the Latin American plurinational, pluricultural, and multiethnic state of Ecuador. Second, it discusses how global issues and sustainability are included in the

How to cite this book chapter:

Veintie, T. and J. Hohenthal. 2021. 'Education'. In *Situating Sustainability: A Handbook of Contexts and Concepts*, edited by C. P. Krieg and R. Toivanen, 63–77. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/HUP-14-5>.

national curriculum in the Northern European welfare state of Finland. Based on these two examples, the article claims that both in Ecuador and in Finland, education is seen as a vehicle for social transformation toward more sustainable futures while the understanding of sustainability is shaped rather differently in these two contexts. Moreover, both cases exemplify the need for more critical perspectives toward global inequalities and power relations within education to foster alternative development paths.

Introduction

The international community has recognized education as a crucial component of a path toward a sustainable future. Investments in designing the content and improving the quality of education increase well-being and the adaptive capacity of societies effectively in the long run (Didham and Ofei-Manu 2015; Lutz, Muttarak and Striessnig 2014). The United Nations has brought the sustainable development path and education together in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, Target 4.7 of the 2030 Agenda, which aims to:

ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

(UN 2015)

SDG 4 is committed to enhancing the quality of education and learning rather than merely increasing school enrolment, which was the focus of the preceding Millennium Development Goals (Didham and Ofei-Manu 2015). At the same time, it addresses the goal to educate responsible and fair-minded citizens for society (O'Flaherty and Liddy 2018). Moreover, quality education is

a cross-cutting means to enhance achievements in several other SDGs (UNESCO 2014b, 2017).

One of the focal approaches for achieving SDG Target 4.7 is *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)*, promoted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The core of ESD consists of the integration of themes related to sustainable development in learning content, lifelong learning, and societal transformation (UNESCO 2017). As a sequel of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005–2014 (Buckler and Creech 2014), UNESCO generated and up-scaled ESD through its Global Action Programme (GAP) in 2015–2019. The two-fold approach of the GAP highlighted ‘integrating sustainable development into education and integrating education into sustainable development’ (UNESCO 2014c: 14). Through concrete support mechanisms, the global network of GAP key partners managed to promote the mainstreaming of ESD in education and sustainable development policies, the integration of sustainability principles into education and training, the increasing of the capacities of educators and trainers to deliver ESD, and the acceleration of sustainable solutions in local communities (UNESCO 2019).

Another approach, *Global Citizenship Education (GCED)*, also fostered by UNESCO, emerged in 2012 as a specific response to the challenges that threaten sustainable futures. According to the current definition, GCED ‘nurtures respect and solidarity in learners in order to build a sense of belonging to a common humanity and helps them become responsible and active global citizens in building inclusive and peaceful societies’ (UNESCO 2018: 2).

A wide variety of pedagogical approaches and tools applied in different fields of studies fall under the ESD and GCED. In general, measuring their impacts is difficult, but there is some evidence that the use of active and participatory learning methods enhances their positive impact in terms of increasing awareness of global issues, understanding eco-social interdependence, and critical reflection (O’Flaherty and Liddy 2018; Springett 2005). The educational interventions based on the ESD and GCED

approaches, however, vary in their depth of criticism toward the prevailing social, economic, and political systems that maintain inequalities and environmental degradation, and some of them can be rightly blamed for not truly challenging the dominant Western neoliberal development patterns (Huckle and Wals 2015; O’Flaherty and Liddy 2018).

The concept of sustainable development itself is also highly contested, for example, due to its liaison with economic growth and the dominance of Western political and corporate perspectives in the discourses (Springett and Redclift 2015). Thus, a division has emerged between those who focus on ESD and those who favour *Education for Sustainability (EfS)*. The latter is more radical in terms of questioning the agendas of the formal curricula that perpetuate utilitarian values toward nature and maintain social inequalities (Springett 2015). Scholars have suggested that EfS should build strongly on transformative learning that aims to alter the learner’s consciousness and way of being in the world, and enhancing their understanding of the prevailing power relations (Sterling 2011).

SDG Target 4.7 and ESD also entail appreciation of cultural diversity and culture’s contribution to sustainable development (UN 2015; UNESCO 2014a). With regard to GCED, UNESCO has recently observed that its core notions resonate with many already-existing local concepts, such as *buen vivir* in Latin America, *gross national happiness* in Bhutan and *ubuntu* in South Africa (UNESCO 2018). Therefore, the focus of GCED is possibly shifting from a global perspective toward understanding the common values found in the local concepts and interconnectedness between the local and the global. The recognition of cultural diversity in education is in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples, which states that Indigenous peoples have a right to education and that governments should take effective measures to guarantee that education is culturally relevant (UN 2007, Ar. 14–15). Indigenous, intercultural, and bi- or multi-lingual education systems already operating in various countries aim to address the cultural diversity of the states

(de Leo 2010; UNESCO 2006). The education system in the ‘inter-cultural’ and ‘multinational’ (Constitution 2008/1) state of Ecuador with a ‘plurinational, pluricultural and multiethnic identity’ (Constitution 2008/380) is a case in point (see also Chapter 7 on *Scales* in this book).

Education for *Buen Vivir* in Ecuador

Ecuador adopted a particular approach toward nature and sustainability in its constitution of 2008 by recognizing nature, *Pacha Mama* (Mother Earth), as a legal entity with constitutional rights (Constitution 2008/71). The constitution introduces *buen vivir* (good living) as a transversal principle. According to this concept, people have a right to live together in diversity, in a healthy environment, and in a harmonious relationship with nature. They also have an obligation to protect the rights of nature, use natural resources in a sustainable way, and restore ecological damage (Constitution 2008/14). In the constitution, the concept of *buen vivir* discusses the well-being of people and nature alike, bringing together political, sociocultural, economic, and environmental dimensions, including social equality and inclusion, intercultural dialogue, ancestral knowledge protection, resource redistribution, nature preservation, and sustainable development.

The constitution of Ecuador notes that education is an essential condition for the *buen vivir* and outlines that:

Education will focus on the human being and shall guarantee holistic human development, in the framework of respect for human rights, a sustainable environment, and democracy; education shall be participatory, compulsory, intercultural, democratic, inclusive and diverse, of high quality and humane; it shall promote gender equity, justice, solidarity and peace; it shall encourage critical faculties, art and sports, individual and community initiatives, and the development of competencies and capabilities to create and work.

(Constitution 2008/27)

The Ecuadorian national curriculum leans on the constitution and the *National Plan for Buen Vivir* (SENPLADES 2013). The construction of a society of *buen vivir* is mentioned in many areas of the curriculum. For example, one of the objectives in chemistry is to learn how to support *buen vivir* by influencing industries and technology. In social studies, the curriculum refers to *buen vivir* as an alternative to capitalism, as a way to reach an equilibrium between human beings and nature. Furthermore, within social studies, students should be encouraged to discuss the concept of development critically, from the perspective of *buen vivir*, with an integral view of nature, humanity, and sustainability. Notably, the sections of the curriculum on biology refer to the sustainable use of natural resources or sustainable development but do not mention the more holistic approach of *buen vivir* (MINEDUC 2016).

The Ecuadorian national curriculum provides a common basis for all the compulsory education programmes in the country, including the intercultural bilingual education (IBE) programmes. Based on the constitution (2008/347), the state guarantees to support the IBE system to provide education in Indigenous languages and with methods of instruction that are responsive to Indigenous peoples and nationalities. To achieve this aim, the IBE system leans on *Modelo del Sistema de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe* (MOSEIB), a policy document that provides further aims, objectives, and pedagogical guidelines, particularly for compulsory education for the Indigenous peoples and nationalities. MOSEIB emphasizes the cultural and linguistic diversity in Ecuador and the importance of involving Indigenous languages, cultures, wisdom, and knowledge in the educational programmes (MINEDUC 2013).

The Ecuadorian law on intercultural education, *Ley orgánica de educación intercultural* (2012), states that all Ecuadorian schools, including mainstream Spanish-speaking schools, should teach at least one Indigenous language, and that all teachers in IBE schools should use the respective language of the Indigenous community as the language of instruction. However, there is little evidence that these decrees would be implemented in practice. In addition, the

schoolteachers rarely receive any in-service education related to Indigenous languages or interculturality (Rodríguez-Cruz 2018). Shortcomings in Indigenous language use inflict marginalization of Indigenous knowledge in schools since language is an essential medium for producing and transmitting Indigenous knowledge (Battiste 2002). By providing opportunities to think and produce knowledge in Indigenous languages, educational programmes could open up spaces for Indigenous epistemologies and alternatives to the dominant knowledge (Ramírez 2001; Veintie 2018) and, thus, promote decolonization of education (López 2017).

A decolonizing and transformative perspective was originally present within IBE when it emerged in Latin America from the grassroots social and Indigenous movements in the 1960s and 1970s. However, much of that radical edge has been lost with the incorporation of IBE within the realm of national government, as a national educational system, with a national curriculum (López 2017). The concept of *buen vivir* within the constitution and the national curriculum is also debatable. The Ecuadorian government did not guarantee Indigenous representation in the processes of writing the constitution of 2008. Therefore, the constitutional concept of *buen vivir* only partially reflects the original Kichwa concept of *sumak kawsay* (Salgado and Morán 2014). *Buen vivir* does not include the holistic and relational onto-epistemologies behind *sumak kawsay*, and its focus is not on collective well-being but on individuals being responsible for controlling their lives, overcoming their personal problems, and conducting their personal educational projects to contribute to *buen vivir* or development (Walsh 2010). Furthermore, the national assessments have evaluated the quality of education for *buen vivir* against Western standards, without acknowledging or supporting local cultural and epistemological diversity. Consequently, the national evaluators have questioned the quality of IBE and Indigenous education initiatives, resulting in the closure of several community schools, IBE teacher education institutes and Amawtay Wasi University, which embraced Indigenous onto-epistemologies (Mato 2016; Salgado and Morán 2014;

Veintie 2018). Thus, using terms of Indigenous origin such as *buen vivir* in the constitution and curriculum does not necessarily produce a shift in the educational policy or alter the understanding of development and sustainability.

Education and Sustainability in the National Core Curriculum in Finland

In the national curriculum reform of 2014, the Finnish National Agency for Education paid particular attention to issues related to global education, EfS and ESD. As a result, global issues and sustainability form an integral part of the core values of the current national curriculum in Finland. The Finnish Basic Education Act (1998/628 §2), as well as the national curriculum, states that one of the goals of compulsory education is to work toward equity, equality, and social justice within society. The core values presented in the curriculum set forth principles of quality education for everyone, democracy, human rights, understanding toward cultural diversities, as well as caring for the environment and a sustainable style of living. The curriculum presents basic education as a ‘driving force for a positive change nationally and internationally’ (Opetushallitus 2014), and states that basic education should teach young people to understand cultural diversity as a positive resource, to cope with a changing society, and to take responsibility for building the future. Thus, education is a vehicle to transform students into tolerant and critical agents who contribute actively toward society and further societal transformation (Wolff et al. 2017).

The terms ‘sustainability’ or ‘sustainable development’ appear in the syllabus of numerous subjects, including natural and social sciences, arts, crafts, health education, religion, and secular ethics. Additionally, the curriculum defines seven transversal competences that should penetrate instruction in all subjects. Issues related to global perspective and sustainability are involved in several of these competences, such as *participation, involvement and building a sustainable future* or *cultural competence, interaction*

and self-expression (Opetushallitus 2014). Through these transversal competences, the instruction in all subjects in basic education should support students' personal relationship with nature, help students to understand that their personal choices and ways of living affect nature and society, and encourage them to protect the environment and be active citizens, building a sustainable future. Moreover, instruction in basic education should encourage all students to build their personal cultural identities, appreciate cultural, linguistic, religious, and philosophical diversities, express their opinion while respecting other opinions, and support students in using their mother tongue and other languages (Opetushallitus 2014).

A recent survey (Saarinen et al. 2019) reveals that schools face challenges in the implementation of the transversal competence areas in the local curricula and in the instruction, as well as in the assessment of learning within these areas. In the national curriculum, the connection between objectives set within the transversal competence areas and those set for subjects is open to interpretation. This ambiguity may produce uncertainty in teachers on how to include the transversal competences into the instruction. Many teachers are also afraid to tackle controversial issues of global inequalities and injustice (Mikander 2016). Teacher education seems to have failed to provide teachers with the conceptual, theoretical, philosophical, and emotional tools to discuss sustainability and cope with the uncertainty and discomfort related to encountering diversities and personal experiences of privilege and power (Lanas 2014; Wolff et al. 2017). Furthermore, expectations toward teachers and teacher education are ambivalent as there is a growing tendency in the educational policy and national curriculum to see education from the viewpoint of economic life and the labour market. Individualized learning and entrepreneurship education goals within basic education relate to the market-oriented discourses of education as a commodity and a field of competition (Tervasmäki and Tomperi 2018), providing a contrast to the goals to foster social equality and caring for the environment.

Education for Global Consciousness and Alternative Development Paths

Themes and objectives related to sustainability and global citizenship are included in the national curricula in both Ecuador and Finland, and thus they promote the achievement of SDG Target 4.7. In both countries, the national curricula lean on core values of democracy and human rights, but their understanding of sustainability and its emphases differ. In Ecuador, sustainability is discussed through the concept of *buen vivir* and the celebration of cultural diversity. In Finland, sustainability is understood more in terms of green growth and personal lifestyles and competences.

In any context, teachers are focal actors in implementing the curriculum, and teacher education plays a crucial role in providing teachers with the crucial knowledge and skills. Recent studies indicate that teacher education in Finland has failed to provide teachers with adequate support in terms of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and preparedness needed to tackle different aspects of sustainability and interculturality (Lanas 2014; Wolff et al. 2017). Also, in Ecuador, initial and in-service teacher education has provided inadequate support for Indigenous languages, knowledges, intercultural dialogues (Rodríguez-Cruz 2018; Veintie 2018), and for values and positive attitudes toward the environment (Medina, Alvarez and Castro 2018).

Moreover, education systems in both countries lack critical perspectives toward global inequalities, privilege, and domination between cultures and social groups globally and locally (Walsh 2010; Zilliacus et al. 2017). An ethical approach to global issues, interculturality, and sustainability would require an understanding of the global relations of power (Sund and Pashby 2018). Decolonial perspectives on education, global issues, and sustainability that challenge these power relations are needed in both the Global South and North in order to cultivate equal dialogue between global discourses and situated concepts such as *sumak kawsay*.

GCED, ESD, and EfS aim to further transformative learning toward global consciousness, solidarity, and understanding of the interconnections between local and global issues. This can

make a significant contribution against the structures of oppression, poverty, and inequality, toward widening justice and, thus, global peace (Torres 2017). Furthermore, local Indigenous movements and educational initiatives that conceptualize education, environment, and sustainability in Indigenous languages, from Indigenous epistemologies, may create conditions for good living in their respective locations and for constructing alternative views of the future (López 2017). Thus, transformative and locally framed approaches to EfS that respect the environment and support diverse epistemologies, languages, and social justice can foster alternative development paths that are detached from the ideologies of efficiency, consumerism, and economic growth.

Acknowledgement

Writing of this chapter was funded from the project ‘Goal 4+: Including Eco-cultural Pluralism in Quality Education in Ecuadorian Amazonia’ (2018–2022); part of the Develop Academy Programme jointly funded by the Academy of Finland and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland [Grant Number 318665].

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