

CHALLENGES OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Moacir Gadotti (*)

I would like to state a few words in order to present myself and my organization. I am a member of Paulo Freire Institute (PFI), a Non-Governmental Organization, located in São Paulo, Brazil, working in the field of education, ecology, and communication, understanding that education is not separable from culture, economics and politics. It a great honor to be a member of the United Nations' Reference Group of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

As a member of PFI, during the 1992 Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, I took part in the **Global Forum**, in which I worked in the elaboration of the **Earth Charter's** first draft and also on the "Treaty on Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibilities". Since then, I have been following the construction of the initiative of the Earth Charter, coordinated by the Earth Council. Paulo Freire Institute has already organized two international meetings under the theme "An education approach to the Earth Charter", one in São Paulo (1999) and another one in Porto (Portugal), in 2000.

The concept of sustainable development has an excellent **educational component**: the preservation of the environment depends of an ecological awareness, which depends of education. And here is the contribution that can be given by the Earth Pedagogy, the ecopedagogy. Is a pedagogy that intends to **promote learning** the "sense of things, departing from our daily lives", according to Francisco Gutiérrez and Cruz Prado (1998). We discover the sense of things within the process, by living the context and opening new paths. That's why it is a democratic and solidary pedagogy.

The research of Francisco Gutiérrez and Cruz Prado on ecopedagogy originates itself in the concern about the sense of daily life. Training is linked to time/space in which relationships between human beings and the environment concretely take place. They occur, above all, within the sensitivity level, much more the within the awareness one. The relationship man/women-nature is also a relationship that occurs in a sub-conscious level. For this reason, we need a **eco-training** to make it conscientious. And ecotraining needs an **ecopedagogy**. As pointed out by Gaston Pineau (1992), a series of references associated to one another in order to achieve this: bachelardian inspiration, studies about the imaginary, the approaches given by transversality, transdisciplinarity and interculturality, constructivism and pedagogy of alternation.

We need an eco-pedagogy and an eco-training today; we need a **Earth Pedagogy** (Gadotti, 2001), because without this pedagogy, which is necessary for reeducating man/woman, specially Western man/woman, who are prisoners of a predatory Christian culture, we may no longer speak of the Earth as the "animal-man's" home, as stated by Paulo Freire. Without a **sustainable education**, Earth will continue to be considered only as a space of our technical-technological domain that provides our sustenance, the object of researches, essays, and at times, of our contemplation. But it shall not be the space of life, of shelter, of "care" (Boff, 1999).

- To educate for a sustainable development or to educate for sustainable living?

- It is not enough to educate for a sustainable development. We need to educate for a sustainable life. **Sustainable Development** is what we call the kind of development that fulfills our current needs without putting at risk the ability of future generations to fulfill their own. It is a concept that had a wide international consensus. Sustainable is an adjective that qualify multiple concepts and processes, that is also a reason for having become a vague concept. It is still not a clear concept, especially when it refers to putting it into practice, to translating its principles and

(*) **Moacir Gadotti**, doctor in Educational Sciences by the University of Geneva, he is professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of São Paulo and Director of the Paulo Freire Institute, and author of many widely-read and translated books, among others: *Invitation to Read Paulo Freire* (1988), *History of Pedagogical Ideas* (1993), *Pedagogy of Praxis* (1994), *Pedagogy of the Earth* (2001), *The Masters of Rousseau* (2004), and *To Educate for Another Possible World* (2007), where he develops an educational proposal, oriented by the paradigm of the sustainability. Translated by Marcia Macedo (PFI).

proposals. In fact, there is not a single country in the world that says its development is sustainable. However, it is a concept that has been mobilizing many people in the fight for a better world.

We call **sustainable life** a lifestyle that harmonizes human environmental ecology by means of appropriating technologies, co-operation economies and individual effort. It is an intentional lifestyle whose characteristics are personal responsibility, commitment to other people and a spiritual life. A sustainable lifestyle is related to ethics in managing the environment and economy, trying to keep balance between fulfilling current needs and guaranteeing the fulfillment of the needs of future generations.

While sustainable development refers mainly to the ways a society produces and reproduces human existence, a sustainable lifestyle is, first of all, related to options people make to their lives. So we cannot pay attention only to educating for development, but also for individual life. Changing the development involves changing people who can change development. One thing depends directly on the other.

The concept of sustainable development is deeply linked to the globalization process. It is a seductive idea, but still with a smaller potential than the movement of the **environmental education**. If the concept of sustainable development is not reviewed nor transformed in a social movement, it will not have the strength to change the *status quo*, which is Unesco's intention (2005).

Today, there is not a single country that considers itself sustainable. And in the context of globalization it seems harder for a country to be sustainable by itself, independently from the others. There is not yet a clear ideal of what this new, sustainable "model" of development would be. It is yet not well defined ideal. Since we do not know what it is, it becomes difficult to say "how", without rethinking the whole concept. That is why it should be a slow process. To walk towards a sustainable world should rely on and consider indicators of health, sewage, population, quality of water and air, use of energy, quality of life, education, employment, etc, because, unsustainable is, first of all, the quality of life generated by our current model of development.

Therefore, sustainability becomes a horizon, a policy-orienting principle. There is not only one way to achieve it. Since it announces a birth that is yet to be given. In the case of **education for a sustainable development**, this one needs to become a re-orientating principle for educational changes, specially regarding the educational curriculum.

The first task is still conceptual. Regarding the concept of sustainability itself as regarding what has to be introduced as sustainability's themes and practices/habits that should be introduced in the curricula. The second task is more restricted to methodology and in regards of how to act in a transdisciplinary way, with institutional projects.

Sustainability is a goal of humanity that points towards a route to a better future. If sustainability is this route, education for sustainable development is the "how", the *mean* that will conduct us to this trip to the future. It is a trip in which the social and the individual are walking side by side. The concept of sustainability refers to a concept of the world regarding different ways of living in it, which proves the importance of associating education to sustainable development and to **education for a sustainable lifestyle**, individually and socially.

In its broad sense, sustainability involves re-thinking the whole civilization. Sustainability points out to a future, for transgenerational solidarity and to a commitment with future generations. This future is a survival demand and an instinct of conservation.

This journey is starting today. Three decades of debates about "our common future" have already left some **ecological footprints** in a number of fields, such as economy, ethics, politics and education. These footprints may show us a route for facing the challenges of 21st century. Sustainability has become a major generating theme since the beginning of this millennium, which makes us think about the planet, a theme that contains a global social project and is capable of re-educating our sight and all our senses, capable of bringing back hopes for a future that will offer dignity for all people.

The **scenario** is not an optimistic one: we can destroy life in the planet within this recently-started millennium, as UN's IPCC reports have been showing. A global action is necessary, a movement as a great civilizing work of everyone is vital for us to put in practice this **other globalization**, this "planetarization", based in ethical principles different from the ones that led us

to economic exploitation, political domination and social exclusion. The way by which we are going to produce our existence in this small planet will decide about its life or its death, and of its sons and daughters. The Earth is not only a geographical phenomenon anymore; it is also a historical one.

The **traditional paradigms**, based on an industrial, predatory and anthropocentric view, are weary and not coping with having to explain the moment we are living today, nor able to answer our future needs. We need another paradigm, based on a sustainable view of planet Earth. Globalism is essentially unsustainable. It fulfills first the needs of the capital to later fulfill human needs. And many human needs which are fulfilled by globalism today are needs that became "human" only because they were produced as such in order to serve the capital.

The greatest challenge of the Decade is still its implementation, how to transform its declaration of principles in concrete demands. The discourse of proclamation is expositive, enunciative, while the discourse of the demand is more communicative, dialogical. It is not enough to define the Decade's mission and main objectives. At this point, the most important thing to do is to create a **participatory movement**, that will show the best ways and create alternatives, in process and horizontally.

It is not enough to know the Decade's objectives and targets. The Decade needs to pertain to a movement in order to change the world, which demands more sensitivity than scientific knowledge. The meaning of the process does not come from knowledge or from the ecological discourse, but from daily- life problems. The **process** needs to make sense to the participants. This way, the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is a true **call**. It is not a program, but a challenge, a philosophy of life for a sustainable existence.

With the Decade, are included in the global agenda themes that are related to education in general, environmental education, and specially, the issue of quality of education as a subjective public right for all people. Education has an important, but limited role compared with the changes that are needed in the model of economical development. Education is not able to revert, by itself, pollution in the atmosphere, 150 years of gas emission that generated greenhouse effect. But it certainly can contribute by stimulating a collective awareness that is able to revert the process of destruction of the planet. The Decade represents an opportunity for educators to know better what they need in order to save the planet.

Education as a long and intersectorial process, therefore, representing a privileged space for **integrations**, one of the biggest objectives of the Decade. And she looks with hope to herself, hope for the 781 million illiterate people in the world. Overcoming illiteracy is a condition for the education for sustainable development.

The **challenges** we have to face in order to reach the Decade's goals are many, and some of them are evident, such as:

1st. Re-think **paradigms**. Knowledge dialogue and ignorance (what do I ignore, what I don't know, what I don't know and I don't need to know), dialogue of civilizations.

2nd. Reconstruction of an **ethics** not as part of philosophy nor religion, but ethics of life.

3rd. An **theleological view** of education: what do we educate for? Re-founding educational processes based on sustainability; If education does not aim at stimulating critical thinking, it will, sooner or later, become training.

4th. **Environmental education** is a social movement and a field of knowledge. Studies and researches are vital in this field in order to have an education for sustainable development.

5th. The Decade as an **opportunity**. We have a broad political and pedagogical capital and we should present it to the ESD Decade.

In order to change the dominant educational paradigm we need to recognize the knowledge crisis caused by the positivist model that reduces the environment to an object of study. This model has promoted environmental destruction. Education for a sustainable development must continue working together with environmental education, which brought a new view of the world, of men's relationship with the environment, not anymore conceived as an object, but as a living creature in evolution that shares with human beings the same destiny. That is why environmental knowledge is an ethical-political one. It isn't only a matter of giving humankind the possibility of being aware of the ecological principles in defense of nature, but also involves a new concept of reality, intimately linked to human beings.

The Decade is also an opportunity for formal education in general. Sustainability can be a fundamental category for **rebuilding educational systems** we have today, which are still based on a predatory view of the world. Environmental education and education for a sustainable development, when associated to human rights, gender rights, democratic rights, peace and sustainability, are fundamental axes to these reforms. That is why, I believe that the Decade's major objective will end up being the construction of a **new quality of education**, a social-environmental quality, and not only the improvement of the same education we have today. Improving the education we have today is to follow the educational model that has been destroying the planet since the 19th century.

- What we need to learn to save the planet?

- The journalist Antonio Martins, from the Paulo Freire Institute, based on a *Greenpeace* report, answers that what we need is a “energetic revolution” (Martins, 2007). We need a **political revolution**, one that sees the future as a problem to be solved and not as something determined by “the invisible hand” of the market, as much as we need an **economic revolution** that is able to multiply alternative sources of energy (solar, windpower, biomass, hydroelectric, geothermal and tidal). Nowadays, 80% of the energy we use come from fossil fuels, 13% come from renewable fuels and 7% from nuclear fuels. We need to increase renewable sources so that we can reach at least 50% use of clean energy, as soon as possible.

The **energetic paradigm** that has contributed to modern industrial development is based on non-renewable sources of energy (petroleum, gas and coal) and on an anthropocentric and individualistic view of humanity's well-being. It is a model that can never be democratic. By means of this paradigm, only a small part of humanity will be able to have access to energy. It is not only “impossible” to make it democratic, its democratization is also “undesirable”, concludes Antonio Martins. The **new energetic paradigm** is based on new values, on multiple sources of energy and on the association of small producers instead of a few gigantic energy companies.

The conclusion is simple: in order to save the planet we need another paradigm that allows everyone to have access to energy one needs. We need a more sustainable relationship with nature: instead of considering ourselves “lords” of the earth, we should consider ourselves part of it. And to create this new mentality the **education for a sustainable development** can give a great contribution.

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