Early Childhood Education :
the Foundation of ESD and Global Citizenship

Global contexts in the 21st century are presenting new challenges and new possibilities for young children. What goes without saying, though, is that children are the most vulnerable whether this be because of war and displacement, disease, poverty, inadequate food or, on the other side – symptoms of 'affluenza' including obesity and mental health issues. With respect to climate change, UNICEF (2015) reports that over half a billion children live in extremely high flood zones and nearly 160 million live in high or extremely high drought zones across the globe. On the other hand, possibilities for many young people seem endless especially with respect to the rise of digital technologies, social media, and other global processes such as travel. How to alleviate and eradicate the worst, and to equitably accentuate the best of what this century offers, is surely one of humanity's greatest challenges.

Central to young children thriving and surviving now and into the future is Early Childhood Education (ECE). Today, research is showing: 1. Quality pre-primary education sets a strong foundation for learning; 2. Universal pre-primary education helps make education systems more efficient and effective; and 3. Equitable pre-primary education is an effective strategy for promoting sustainable development.

The youngest age group in our education systems is therefore vital to take seriously in all education. As the *Gothenburg Recommendations on ESD* (2008) states: "It is imperative that Early Childhood Education (ECE) is recognized as the starting point for lifelong learning within education for sustainability" (p.27). However, more of the same kind of education that has contributed to our current (un)sustainability challenges will not best equip our young people into the future. Working out how to empower and excite children, particularly girls, from an early age to contribute to a sustainable world and to be creative problem solvers and solution seekers, especially through play-based learning rather than in more formal, structured learning environments, is a great challenge for us all in Education.

ECE inclusion is also imperative within research agendas, not the least where the natural sciences intersect with the social sciences. This is because incorporating children's perspectives and ideas might just help shift what we do as adults from anthropocentrism towards eco-centric approaches where strong and often impenetrable disciple boundaries prevail.

There are many examples of ECE learning communities breaking new curriculum and pedagogical ground. This might be through, for example, creating learning places and spaces that honour and respect intergenerational learning, embedding Indigenous perspectives into kindergarten programs, extending nature play so that it engages deeply with ideas about stewardship, using new technologies to enhance learning about natural and social worlds, or creating artistic spaces that help children articulate their thoughts and feelings when words may not yet be available.

In line with a view of young children as already active and empowered with citizenship rights, we invite contributions on topics such as:

Children in changing landscapes in the 21st century
Challenging taken-for-granted beliefs and practices in ECE
What might curriculum and pedagogy for agency and empowerment look like in ECE
Exploring sustainability in ECE through arts-focused pedagogies
How to harness digital technologies sustainability in ECE
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