

BEST PRACTICES ON INTEGRATING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

SDG 4: Ensure Inclusive And Equitable Quality Education And Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities For All

Prepared by

- [Marilyn Fowler, MA, PhD., Department of Consciousness and Sustainable Development, John F. Kennedy University, Chief Editor
- [Dr. Maia Kincaid, PhD., Founder of the Sedona International School for Nature and Animal Communication
- [Robert Wheeler, UN Representative of the Global EcoVillage Network
- [Jill Lauri, MBA, MSW
- [Joan Kehoe
- [Lisinka Ulatowska, MA, PhD., Coordinator Commons Cluster of the UN NGO Major Group

Endorsers

- [John F. Kennedy University
 - [Commons Cluster of the UN NGO Major Group
 - [South Eastern Peoples
 - [California Institute of Integral Studies
 - [The Federalist Movement of the Netherlands (WFBN)
 - [Madjulla Association (Australia)
 - [The Sedona International School of Animal and Nature Communicators
 - [The Institute for Planetary Synthesis
 - [The All Win Network
 - [The Association of World Citizens
- [Contact: Lisinka.Ulatowska@gmail.com

BEST PRACTICES ON INTEGRATING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SDG 4:
Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Executive Summary

This report proposes specific steps to implement inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all, with the imperative to do this in harmony with Nature. To implement an educational perspective that promotes respect for the natural world and honors the lessons we can learn there will require nothing less than a paradigm shift in how we view Nature and how we understand our relationship to other species.

To that end, the document discusses the role of Government in achieving this shift while keeping the cost of education down and leaving no one behind. It also explains the type of curriculum needed to help human beings revive their inborn capacity to interrelate with Nature and live in harmony with both our human and non-human communities.

The information examines a number of targets from the perspective of how they can be implemented without harm to Nature, how Nature can help to inspire human creativity and innovation, and how people can become both more sensitive to Nature, recognizing that we are an integral part of the natural world. Specifically:

- [Target 4.1 examines the ethics involved in ensuring both boys and girls can benefit from complete free and equitable quality primary and secondary education, incentives to make the necessary changes, and how to produce effective learning outcomes.*
- [Target 4.2 discusses how to bring about the necessary shift to ensure that all boys and girls have access to early childhood care and preprimary education.*
- [Target 4.3 stresses the importance of providing universal access to the Internet and explains how the mass media can be used to inspire those involved in tertiary education to learn from Nature.*
- [Target 4.5 explains how appreciation of Nature and regard for human diversity is a parallel learning process to that of eliminating gender and other disparities in education.*
- [Target 4.6 details how ensuring that all attain literacy and numeracy is also a first step to achieving Nature literacy and numeracy, an essential skill set that will enable us to come to grips with climate change. This section shows how this can be achieved.*
- [Target 4.7 deals with education in sustainable development and a shift from hierarchical to horizontal relationships characterized by appreciation, ongoing*

attention and what can be achieved by spending more time in Nature.

[*Target 4c discusses increasing the amount of qualified teachers in developing countries, emphasizing South/North cooperation whereby Nations with large indigenous populations can contribute much needed learning in living in harmony with Nature.*

Goal 4. Ensure Inclusive And Equitable Quality Education And Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities For All

From Domination to Learning from Nature

Nature exemplifies ongoing life-long learning. In this natural ongoing learning process, species strengthen one another and also keep one another in check. This creates diversification and enables all aspects within the natural world to work together harmoniously. The greater the diversification, the stronger all aspects of Nature become. This increases human beings' ability to thrive sustainably, with clean air, and an abundance of safe drinking water, food and shelter.

Species develop and strengthen themselves naturally through the inherent challenges involved in living with other species. Human beings are the only species that entirely eradicate other species, currently around 140 each day. If we are to live sustainably, this disastrous downward spiral must be reversed and people must learn from Nature. This will require becoming conscious of the ongoing relationship and communication between human beings and natural phenomena.

Shifting the Paradigm

To move into a more positive relationship with Nature, it is essential that we *clearly* step away from the past and envision new ways to create partnership with the natural world. As a first step, this will require taking responsibility for past our actions and acknowledging the disastrous consequences we have wrought on so many other species living on this planet. To create something new, fresh, and freeing, we must first rid ourselves of the old, dark, and confining thought processes that have dominated our actions to date.

Most of the crises we face today are produced for two reasons. First, humanity is out of step with the natural order and thereby at war with creation. Second, humans forfeit the powerful help Nature can give us. All living species and aspects of the Earth System empower one another to diversify and thrive, while at the same time keeping one another in check. Together, they stabilize planetary boundaries, within which the human species can also thrive.

To rebuild a healthy relationship with the natural world, we must be able to observe, listen and respond to the ongoing communication that Nature provides. This relational communication with Nature is our birthright, a basic skill that all of humanity has possessed from our evolutionary beginnings. Our current educational systems must empower all people to use and practice *conscious* communication with Nature. The specifics on how to do this can be learned from those who are already using this inborn capacity.

Many Indigenous Peoples have maintained ongoing conscious communication with Nature through their own cultural practices. In Westernized societies, the number of “Nature and/or Animal Communicators” is growing as the overwhelming need for such

skills becomes increasingly apparent. This skill must be learned through practice. Many Nature Communicators teach via the Internet and can thus reach people worldwide. It is possible to make such resources available to people everywhere through universal access to the Internet. Nations such as Rwanda have achieved universal access despite severe financial and other constraints.

The Role of Government in Achieving this Shift

Where Governments empower their people to engage in online education, including Nature communications classes, they will be enabling their people to work in conjunction with Nature's powerful systems to achieve a sustainable future.

The UN Specialized Agencies, especially with the help of UNEP, UNESCO in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples, and other Nature and Animal Communicators could help to jump-start education in how to consciously use this inborn communication capacity.

The cost to governments of making learning available to all of their people would consist mainly of:

1. Ensuring that potential teachers in each Nature communication field can attend the courses being offered by UN Special Agencies *in collaboration with those offering classes* at the global level.
2. Translating these courses into their national language(s).
3. Employing those who have attended the courses offered internationally to train their training. By making all this education available through the Internet, the costs of training large numbers of teachers can be substantially reduced by eliminating costs for travel, board, lodging, seminar space and much more.

Forms of Education that Can Promote Learning in Harmony with Nature

Article 26 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights must be implemented: Education to empower students to develop their unique potential throughout their lives must be student centered to enable them to relate to local, national and global levels in ways that are relevant to them.

Such education must mobilize the inner capacities of students as an essential tool to develop their full capacities. In this process, the conscious use of one's intuition is a vital tool. Some teaching approaches that can help actualize a student's inner capacities and potential include the following:

1. Assignments that encourage students to internally reflect on their personal feelings related to topics of interest to them.
2. Lessons that present ways in which other individuals are participating in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in their own lives, with assigned projects that require students to take action on one Sustainable Development Goal of their choosing. This will enable students to integrate their actions as part of the worldwide effort.

3. Language classes in which students are asked to write a few sentences about their own interests in the language they are studying. This will help to reflect on what truly interests them and develop the vocabulary to discuss it.
4. Geography and Sociology classes that include consideration of natural environments where students themselves live, places they visit, and environments in the world they would like to explore. This will encourage personal involvement in their own natural communities and those that interest them.
5. Biology classes that create a forum that invites students to practice their capacity to communicate intuitively with animals and plants.
6. All courses, including Art, where students are asked to write essays, create works of art, or develop projects that deal with the implementation of relevant SDGs and the role they can play.

Creating a Collaborative Learning Environment

A shift in how students and faculty relate to one another is imperative, if human beings are to bring about the changes we must make in our relationships to one another and to Nature. To support students in their growth, they need a teacher or advisor that they trust, chosen by the students of their own free will and without pressure.

Collaboration in which all participants share the responsibility for decision-making and benefit equitably from the results is important in the full development of people's personalities and unique potential. This is often referred to as a commons approach, which, in this context, addresses how people can work together for the good of all, while at the same time maintaining the respect of their personal integrity and privacy.

Project learning is one form that collaborative learning can take. It provides a useful vehicle for implementing the SDGs in students' individual lives. If executed in a spirit of mutual support and appreciation, it can contribute to individuals' potential development, as they receive praise from both faculty and peers. What is learned through this process can then be brought to bear on an individual student's inner development in sessions with their advisors.

Abuse of power among counselors must be discouraged using very strong measures. Students could anonymously evaluate their teachers/advisors, with a reasoned explanation, to be followed up by more widespread inquiries if abuse is cited. Confidential investigation could be held to determine malpractice.

4.1 By 2030, Ensure that All Girls and Boys Complete Free, Equitable, and Quality Primary And Secondary Education Leading to Relevant And Effective Learning Outcomes

It is deeply saddening that at a young age, many children are performing adult tasks instead of attending school. Poverty and the lottery of birth force too many girls and boys to be denied education in order to survive.

If we are able to intervene by providing them access to education, they can develop to their full potential to contribute to future generations in a substantial way. We can accomplish this by changing the system that gives privileges to few and burden to many. To help create a new educational system, Governments can offer incentives for boys and girls to go to school and make it attractive for parents to focus on education for their children—for example, by giving free meals to those who attend school, as has been done in Brazil.

Additionally, governments must ensure that the quality of the education is excellent and is truly equitable amongst *all* people, including girls and boys, women and men. They can also make systemic changes in educational outcomes by directly and consistently rewarding dedication to education as a student or a teacher by means of increased economic security so that education is valued and leads toward being of service to others.

To complement changes in the educational system itself, a marketing campaign that is inspiring and engaging (similar to some popular products) could be a good way to quickly introduce and popularize this new education model.

Effective Learning Outcomes

Developing effective learning outcomes depends on the ability to tailor outcomes to what is needed for the individual child's learning and growth. This would involve:

1. Creating curriculum that allows latitude for boys and girls to discover and follow their interests.
2. Establishing learning skills appropriate to each child's age and level of development.
3. Encouraging boys and girls to develop skills appropriate to their environment. As this will change over time as they learn to relate at the family, local, national, and global levels, Universal access to the Internet is extremely important.
4. Building in to the curriculum direct contact with Nature in the child's formal and informal education, beginning with a pet or-plant in the home, or plants around the settlement.
5. Creating curriculum that includes applied use of their intuitive faculties.
6. Focusing on the importance of natural phenomena both to human beings and other species. Using a process of appreciative inquiry, children can learn to value all aspects of the natural world and their relationship to humanity and other aspects of Nature.
7. Developing report cards that focus on student strengths and acknowledge children's relationship to Nature.

Effective learning outcomes also require that elders (parents, teachers, those in government) be educated to see the importance of this education. This can be achieved by international and national sharing of best practices via the UN, governments at all levels, and schools.

4.2 By 2030, Ensure that All Girls and Boys Have Access to Quality Early Childhood Development, Care and Preprimary Education So that They Are Ready For Primary Education

Above we have described how to approach the necessary paradigm shift to involve learning from Nature. A similar shift must take place in the quality of education as follows:

Excellence and equality come from new beginnings where materials and procedures of the past are set aside. Our educational systems have served us in the past, but they fail to align with our current human vision of equality and excellence for all. We can build a more evolved foundation if we start anew and create from the awareness that we are human beings, with new possibilities and new understandings that were not available when education began.

We are now ready to create a new and expansive foundation for education based on what we wish to provide for *every* child on the planet. History has taught us that we have capacities that are not acknowledged before they are called into play. Attachment to the educational structures of today—which are of the past—can block insight into what would help us achieve the highest and best potential for all.

How to Bring about the Shift

In Nature, young mammals stay within the "family" to learn initial skills from siblings and adults. In today's fast changing world, preschoolers would benefit from being allowed to find their own paths. This could be done by allowing them supervised time to explore and learn from their peers, in the home, village or community, and in Nature.

This supervised time could include activities organized in the community that encourage the development of skills appropriate to their age group, as determined by the culture of the settlement or family. While requiring time and caring adult supervision, it will foster self-directed and passionate human beings who are capable of being at home in a fast-changing, global world. Once preschoolers have experienced this form of education, they will find it easier to include supervised preschool exploration in their family and community life when they are adults.

4.3 By 2030, Ensure Equal Access for All Women and Men to Affordable and Quality Technical, Vocational and Tertiary Education, Including University

Affordable quality education is available through the Internet. Those enjoying this type of specialized and higher education are the future shapers of our societies. The more this

level of education takes into account a respect for Nature, the more responsive and sensitive whole societies will become to Nature's dictates and wisdom.

Once those in specialized and tertiary education see the extent of our interdependence with Nature, they will understand the importance of learning from Nature and use their insights in their studies and work.

With merely a few world leaders, including grass roots, this process of learning from Nature can be jumpstarted, using the mass media to publicize its effectiveness. These leaders could include key people, such as experts from UNDP, UNESCO and other UN Specialized Agencies, Ministers of Education, teachers, and Nature Centers. These can make the understanding of our interdependence with Nature relevant to their diverse contexts, including those in vocational and higher education.

4.5 By 2030, Eliminate Gender Disparities in Education and Ensure Equal Access to All Levels of Education and Vocational Training for the Vulnerable, Including Persons With Disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and Children in Vulnerable Situations

Everything in nature, including individual human beings, has a value and a unique role to play. Some people have a purpose that may not be initially evident, yet provide qualities in society that are essential. For instance, children with Down's Syndrome are known to elicit feelings of warmth and love. This helps strengthen social cohesion.

With the awareness that each person has undiscovered and immeasurable value, we can motivate all members of society to ensure that those most vulnerable get the education that honors their individuality.

People tend to be inspired by those who make a difference against all odds. In our new paradigm, we can empower all children by teaching them that they are an invaluable part of the precious future of our species.

4.6 By 2030, Ensure that All Youth and a Substantial Proportion of Adults, Both Men And Women, Achieve Literacy and Numeracy

On no account may we forget the importance of literacy and numeracy with regard to our ability to relate to Nature. We have described above in some detail how this can be achieved. Nature literacy and numeracy are absolutely essential when it comes to human survival.

By *Nature literacy and numeracy*, we are referring to accurately reading and interpreting the combinations of signs Nature gives us, and recognizing our impact on Nature. Examples are reading the signs that Spring is arriving through patterns of migration of birds, tracking changing weather patterns, and intuiting pending earthquakes in the same way that animals do. For instance, elephants moved to higher ground before the tsunami

hit. Similar capacities can be reawakened in human beings. For instance, we can use Nature literacy and numeracy to recognize possible consequences of fracking, such as earthquakes.

The crises associated with climate change, global warming, dwindling fish stocks, desertification, deforestation, acidification of the oceans, and lack of clean drinking water have developed because we did not accurately read the signs Nature was giving us in time. As a consequence, our actions and inaction are threatening human survival.

To date, we have used scientific approaches and instruments to measure natural phenomena. Another valid method is to be in ongoing intuitive communication with Nature. Here we learn to read what Nature is telling us in the here and now.

Means of Developing such Learning:

To develop such learning, we could engage Indigenous Peoples and those who have experienced Nature survival courses as teachers in each school. Young people could regularly be encouraged to be with Nature to relax and also as a way of gaining "Nature literacy and numeracy." They could spend alone time in Nature alternated with times in consultation with peers and teachers. Indigenous Peoples living in natural environments like those in Ecuador can provide international internships. The Internet under UNEP can help with the necessary training.

4.7 By 2030, 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

Education for sustainable development requires a fundamental shift in how we relate to the world around us—the Earth, the plants, the animals and their interacting systems. We must shift from hierarchical relationships with Nature, where we operate as if human beings dominate, to a horizontal relationship characterized by appreciation. This will require ongoing attention to changes in Nature and a willingness to respond with respect to her rhythms.

A more sensitive relationship will come about naturally as people are encouraged to spend more time in Nature. Nature produces profound emotional and spiritual experiences in people who take the time to experience their natural surroundings. At the same time, Nature thrives when people express care and gratitude for what she provides. Indigenous Peoples offer current examples of this. Governments can help their people create more of these opportunities, using some of the approaches mentioned above. This can only be successful if the integrity of what Indigenous Peoples and Nature Communicators have to offer remains intact.

4c. By 2030, Substantially Increase the Supply of Qualified Teachers, Including Through International Cooperation for Teachers Training in Developing Countries, Especially Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States

Nature is the ultimate teacher about sustainable behavior. In this respect, teachers are mediators who create learning situations whereby students learn through direct experience of Nature. These "Nature Teachers" may not necessarily originate from technologically advanced nations. They may come from nations with large indigenous populations, where people live close to nature, far from the industrialized world.

Developing countries can contribute to worldwide learning in the context of sustainability by sharing these teachers with the rest of the world. UNEP and UNESCO can help make these teachings more widely available. UNESCO has representation in many nations and UNEP may have listings or information on useful projects. UN Agencies and Governments can keep track of teachers and initiatives, and how their expertise can be made more widely available without distorting what they have to offer. They could list the courses and how people can participate.