



EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AND THE EARTH CHARTER

EDITED BY

DOUGLAS BOURN • NAMRATA SHARMA • MIRIAN VILELA



EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Our planet and its inhabitants urgently need education and educationalists with inspiration to act responsibly as the book editors Douglas Bourn, Namrata Sharma, and Mirian Vilela write, and I fully agree. They have invited authors to share their rich knowledge, essays, and debates for inspiring us readers to collaborate in transforming education guided by the Earth Charter. The chapters offer diverse perspectives on the ways education is and can be transformed with a common value basis of shared humanity, social justice, planetary wellbeing, interdisciplinarity, and creative engaging pedagogies. Be inspired and join the collective action.

—*Elina Lehtomäki*, Professor Global Education
and Learning, University of Oulu

Education for Sustainable Futures: Global Citizenship and the Earth Charter is a timely and unique contribution to the ongoing discourse on the role of education for just and equitable futures. Driven by a united sense of urgency, this edited volume brings together a wealth of perspectives from scholars and practitioners worldwide, demonstrating how the Earth Charter continues to inspire transformative approaches to education. Through insightful analyses and practical case studies, this book highlights the vital role of shared values underlying education for sustainability that fosters ethical leadership and compassionate global citizenship. The authors urge action, reminding the reader that the interconnected challenges of today require holistic, transformative, yet values-driven responses. As someone deeply engaged in Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), I highly recommend this book to educators, policymakers, and all those dedicated to advancing sustainability through learning and collaborative action.

—*Charles Hopkins*, UNESCO Chair in Reorienting
Education toward Sustainability, York University, Canada

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To all those who believe that education is a key driver in shaping a sustainable future. To those who believe in the power of fostering sustainability and global citizenship values and are actively working toward it – who dare to think outside the box, and whose hope and belief fuel their agency and action. For those who have the courage to stand up to human shared values and look beyond our cultural and national border, and those who are willing to contribute to social change and remain steadfast in their commitment to the common good.

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CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xvii
1 Introduction <i>Douglas Bourn, Namrata Sharma and Mirian Vilela</i>	1
Part I Theoretical Debates	
2 Preparing the Ground, Weaving a Tapestry, Writing a New Story: Three Metaphors Describing the Essential Role of the Earth Charter in 21st century Education <i>Sam Crowell and Mirian Vilela</i>	11
3 Democracy, Non-violence, and Peace: The Earth Charter Cultivating Its Seeds, a Perspective from Brazil <i>Daniela Carvalho Piaggio and Rose Marie Inojosa</i>	23
4 The Earth Charter and the Development of a Planetary Consciousness in Brazilian Higher Education Institutions <i>Silvia Elizabeth Moraes, Josefina Moraes Arraut, Eduardo Moraes Arraut and Pedro Rogério</i>	35
Part II Intersectionality	
5 Being Present: Intersectionality, Critical Global Citizenship Theorizing, and the Earth Charter <i>Mostafa Gamal</i>	49
6 Bridging the Gaps with the Earth Charter: GCED and ESD Policies and Implementation <i>Alicia Jimenez and Laura Engel</i>	63
7 Integrating ESD and GCED in Higher Education Curriculum: Perspectives from Kenyatta University, Kenya <i>Mukirae Njihia, Damaris Kariuki and Wilson Mutuma</i>	75

- 8 Traditional Chinese and Earth Charter Values: Building an Ecological Civilization Through Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship 87
Shuang Ma

Part III Value-creating Education

- 9 Pedagogical Implications of Framing Sustainability and Global Citizenship Through the Earth Charter and Value-Creating Education 99
Namrata Sharma
- 10 The Contributions of the Soka Amazon Institute to the Earth Charter in the Brazilian Amazon 113
Tamy Kobashikawa
- 11 The Earth Charter and Value-Creating Education: From the Perspective of Global Citizenship Education 125
Hiroko Tomioka
- 12 Teacher Competency Development from Value-Creating Education 137
Ana B. García-Varela and Alejandro Iborra Cuéllar
- 13 Education for Environmental Justice and Actions for the Era of Climate Emergency: Through the Earth Charter and Value-Creating Education 149
Michiyo Kakegawa

Part IV Evidence from Research

- 14 The Role of Empathy-based GCE Pedagogy in Earth Charter 163
Natalya Hanley
- 15 The Earth Charter and the Practice of Education for Sustainable Development 173
Qudsia Kalsoom
- 16 Climate Change and Just Transition Through Earth Charter Lenses 185
Akpezi Ogbuigwe, Adesuwa Vanessa Agbedahin and Joe Gachanja Macharia
- 17 Peace Education: Praxis Through the Arts 199
Alexis Stones

Part V From Policy to Practice

18	The Dance of the Rhizomes: Learning Processes Inspired by the Earth Charter <i>Waverli Maia Matarazzo-Neuberger and María de los Ángeles Vilches-Norat</i>	215
19	The Earth Charter, Ethics and Educating for Climate Change <i>Kartikeya V. Sarabhai, Prithi Nambiar and A. S. Meena</i>	227
20	Education for Sustainability and Global Citizenship with the Earth Charter, a Propeller Toward Transformative Action in Educational Systems and Institutions: A Perspective from Argentina <i>Carla Sabbatini</i>	239
21	Global Social Justice and Transformative Education for Social Change <i>Douglas Bourn</i>	255
22	Conclusion <i>Douglas Bourn, Namrata Sharma and Mirian Vilela</i>	267
	<i>About the Editors</i>	271
	<i>About the Contributors</i>	273
	<i>Index</i>	281

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FOREWORD

The collection of essays assembled in *Education for Sustainable Futures: Global Citizenship and the Earth Charter* explores critical issues facing schools and universities in the 21st century. The volume is being published in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the launch of the Earth Charter in 2000. A declaration of global interdependence with ethical principles for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful world, the Earth Charter has been endorsed by thousands of organizations, including UNESCO, and its ethical vision helped to inspire the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In keeping with the Earth Charter initiative's concern to mobilize worldwide cooperation in support of a sustainable way of life, the essays are by educators from a diversity of nations and cultures and present a range of perspectives.

There is good reason to celebrate the Earth Charter with reflections on its contribution to education. A society's educational system provides the basic foundation for human development and social progress. In addition, over the past 25 years, the Earth Charter International Secretariat, which is based at the University for Peace in Costa Rica, has focused much of its work with the Earth Charter on K-12, higher education, and nonformal education. The global situation in 2025 is quite different from what it was in the 1990s, but the vision in the Earth Charter is as relevant as ever and the Charter remains a vitally important educational instrument.

When reflecting on the discussions regarding the Earth Charter and education in this volume, it is instructive to keep in mind the relation of the Earth Charter to two highly significant movements that emerged in the second half of the 20th century. First, one of the most important developments since World War II is the progress humanity made in its search for a unifying vision of widely shared

ethical values. This search to formulate fundamental ethical guidelines for human development and international relations began with adoption of the United Nations Charter in 1945 followed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and continued with a steady stream of declarations and international treaties on a wide range of topics with a special emphasis on human rights.

The movement was initially inspired by a concern to prevent ever again the horrors of World War II and to build a global legal order that provides a foundation for world peace. It also was a response to the emergence of the increasingly interconnected global human community taking form under the impact of modern science, technological innovation, and economic development. Freedom and a stable world order require respect for the rule of law, and the foundation of a community's legal system is its shared moral values. Every great civilization has produced its own distinctive ethical and spiritual vision. The Earth Charter is part of the late 20th century quest for a unifying vision of universal values that are keys to building a flourishing, interdependent, planetary civilization. The formulation and wide support of a positive, transformative ethical vision does not, of course, ensure unanimity or compliance, but it is an essential step toward building a better world.

At the UN Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, protection of the global environment was officially recognized as a critical international issue like poverty eradication, economic development, and peace building. Environmental ethics, a relatively new field of inquiry, became part of international deliberations about core shared values and global ethics. Moreover, a growing number of environmental philosophers and activists came to view the root of the environmental crisis as a moral and spiritual crisis. They saw the major obstacle to restoration and protection of the environment as the beliefs and attitudes associated with the anthropocentric world view that has dominated thinking in modern civilization and is especially influential in most governments and among business leaders. From this perspective, the larger natural world is assumed to lack inherent worth and to exist as just a collection of resources for human exploitation.

Influenced by the new science of ecology, environmental philosophers adopted a more holistic world view arguing that Earth's

biosphere with its community of life forms one great interconnected ecological system, of which the human community is an interdependent part. Humanity is dependent on the healthy functioning of this ecological system for its survival and flourishing. In addition, they argue that unless human beings respect the greater community of life and accord it moral standing in its own right quite apart from its utilitarian value to people and work to balance biocentric concerns with anthropocentric interests, there is little hope of generating the major changes in human behavior needed to reverse the massive degradation of Earth's life support systems currently taking place. This call for an expanded, global ethical consciousness that supports respect and care for the greater community of life, as well as human rights, social justice, and peace, is the seed that would over time produce the Earth Charter.

In 1982, the United Nations did adopt a path-breaking document, the World Charter for Nature, that affirms that protection of all life forms should be given moral consideration quite apart from their utilitarian value to people. However, with few exceptions, governments chose to ignore this critical ethical principle, and the World Charter for Nature was sidelined in UN forums.

With the publication in 1987 of *Our Common Future*, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, the concept of sustainable development became a new, big organizing concept in international debates over environmental conservation and economic development. With regard to restoration and protection of the environment, *Our Common Future* emphasizes intergenerational responsibility and an ethic of respect for the rights of future generations. It also calls for a new charter with principles to guide the global community in making a transition to sustainability. This recommendation inspired discussions to begin about drafting an Earth Charter as preparations were being undertaken for the 1992 UN Rio Earth Summit. However, government efforts at Rio failed to produce an Earth Charter largely due to an unwillingness to build on the ethical vision articulated in the World Charter for Nature.

Nevertheless, with the growing recognition that achieving sustainability requires commitment to a new, shared, ethical vision, the call for an Earth Charter intensified. As a result, following the

Rio Earth Summit, the drafting of the document was taken up by a civil society initiative. The aim was to create the Earth Charter as a people's treaty that gives expression to the ethical vision for a just, sustainable, and peaceful world taking form in international law and in the planet's emerging global civil society. Both contemporary science and the teachings of the world's great spiritual traditions were an important influence. An unprecedented, worldwide, cross cultural dialog and consultation process supported the drafting process. Understanding that the planet's biosphere is one, great, interconnected system, of which humanity is an interdependent part, the Earth Charter recognizes the moral standing of all life forms and views caring for people and caring for Earth as two interrelated aspects of one great task. The 20th-century quest for a unifying vision of universal values for the emerging global community culminated in 2000 with the launch of the Earth Charter at the Peace Palace in the Hague and the adoption of the UN Millennium Declaration, which affirms "respect for nature" as a fundamental guiding principle.

The search for universal values and the related debates are ongoing. The adoption of the SDGs by the United Nations in 2015 followed by the Paris Agreement on Climate Change can be viewed as major steps toward implementing the Earth Charter's ethical vision. However, advancing the goals of these initiatives requires new levels of international collaboration, and the reemergence of old Cold War divisions, the spread of violent conflict and war, a backlash against economic globalization, growing economic inequality, impassioned controversies over immigration, and rising support for authoritarian nationalism are among the many problems that are making international cooperation ever more complex and difficult. How to present the Earth Charter in these turbulent times requires fresh thought, but the core vision in the Earth Charter identifies inescapable moral and spiritual challenges and remains a force for positive change.

In addition to keeping in mind the place of the Earth Charter in the global ethics movement, it is also important to appreciate the relation of the Earth Charter to the growing support for education of the whole person – mind, body, and spirit. The objective of this transformative movement in K-12 and higher education is

to integrate academic learning with social, emotional, moral, and spiritual development in age-appropriate ways as essential to a balanced approach to the wellbeing of both the individual and society at large. Support for education of the whole person is not a new idea. Over the centuries in both the East and the West, spiritual leaders and philosophers have promoted education of both the heart and the mind as essential to human liberation, development, and fulfillment. The dominant influence in modern secular societies is reason, science, and technology, and this has created a problematic imbalance in education and human development. Social, emotional, moral, and spiritual development are all too often marginalized and neglected.

The contemporary movement in support of education of the whole person is made up of a diversity of initiatives including the holistic education movement, character education, social and emotional learning, and the promotion of mindfulness-based meditation practices designed to reduce stress and nurture kindness and compassion. Out of concern to address the widespread mental health crisis among young people involving depression, addiction, despair, and suicide, and guided by new scientific research on the protective benefits of spiritual development, special attention is being given to spirituality in education. The healthy spiritual growth of young people provides an essential foundation for their overall development and pursuit of wellbeing. All human beings are born with a natural capacity for spiritual and moral development, and this capacity can be nurtured both within and apart from religion.

When schools and universities support and nurture the spiritual and moral development of their students, they are not only promoting individual wellbeing; they are also helping to shape the awareness, attitudes, values, and beliefs of the world's future citizens. This is another fundamental reason why a holistic approach to education, including spirituality in education, is vitally important. Our deeply divided, war torn, and ecologically endangered world urgently needs a new generation of caring, engaged citizens, and strong visionary leaders who are spiritually awake and ready to work together across ideological divides to build a free, equitable, and truly sustainable world. In this connection, there is often a direct link between efforts to revitalize civic education

and initiatives designed to promote education of the whole person. With regard to civic education, it is important to make clear that the Earth Charter respects cultural diversity and that it endeavors to identify as universal ideals the values essential to individual well-being, the thriving of free, pluralistic, democratic societies, and the effective functioning of the international institutions essential to maintaining a just, sustainable, and peaceful world order.

As the Preamble and Principles of the Earth Charter indicate, the Charter is fully supportive of education for the whole person, heart and spirit as well as mind and body. It affirms “faith in ... the intellectual, artistic, ethical and spiritual potential of humanity” and “the importance of moral and spiritual education for sustainability” (Principles 1.b. and 14.d.). Among the spiritual values cited in the Earth Charter are reverence for the mystery of being, respect for nature, compassion, love, non-violence, and peace. The Charter emphasizes the fundamental importance of spiritual and ethical development when it states in the Preamble: “We must realize that when basic needs have been met, human development is primarily about being more, not having more.” If schools and universities took that statement as a basic guide, it would lead to a transformation of education and society.

By using the Earth Charter and its inclusive ethical vision as a guide, the authors of the chapters in this volume are expanding and deepening the meaning of education of the whole person and “being more.” They share how in a diversity of cultures educators are using the Earth Charter to develop an understanding of the interdependence of all peoples and of people and nature. They explain how the Earth Charter is serving as an instrument for exploring and nurturing the spiritual and ethical values at the heart of the new planetary consciousness that supports the building, both locally and globally, of just, sustainable, and peaceful communities. Given the current state of the world, the Earth Charter’s vision may seem like a distant possibility, but commitment to it is fundamental to healing, reconciliation, and realizing the full promise of life on Earth.

Steven C. Rockefeller

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Thank you to all chapter contributors to this volume and also to those who have indirectly been involved by being part of the reflection and research of book chapters. We also acknowledge the fact that many chapter authors are not English native, and therefore, this has represented an extra step. Deeksha Aggarwal helped with the English translation and editing of Chapter 3.

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The world of the 21st century has been dominated by concerns about the very future of the planet because of climate change, levels and speed of biodiversity loss, re-emergence of conflicts in many regions of the world, continual challenges to human rights, and increased divisions between the rich and the poor. The awareness of these issues has been heightened by people who have instant access to information around the world and the influence of social media. What happens in one country can have an impact elsewhere. The global pandemic is perhaps the most recent example of this. From an outbreak in China, COVID-19 rapidly spread to engulf all regions of the world and for a brief period brought the world almost to a standstill.

These events have led to an unease among many communities on how to make sense of the future of the planet. People may have easier access to knowledge or information, but as the rise of “fake news” has shown there are dangers of misinformation and clearly

the simple fact that more information does not necessarily translate to knowledge or action. There are countries around the world that have witnessed a resurgence in support for more nationalistic and xenophobic views that have questioned climate change, human rights, and a sense of global social and environmental responsibility. In addition, it is important to recognize that there is a significant apathy and widespread lack of interest probably of most people worldwide to understand the current challenges humanity faces and engage in seeking solutions or in contributing to addressing them positively and effectively. Hence, the role and importance of education have never been greater to enable people of all ages to be able to look at issues critically from a range of perspectives, enhance their willingness and capacity to engage in processes of social change, and contribute to the common good and the building of a more just and sustainable future.

The United Nations (UN, 2015) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a valuable reference point for identifying and addressing these challenges alongside the 2023 UNESCO Recommendation on education for peace and human rights, international understanding, cooperation, fundamental freedoms, global citizenship, and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2023). Policy-makers, academics, and practitioners around the world are searching for inspiration, a values base, and guidance on how to take forward these policy initiatives and to do so in a way that can empower learners of all ages. If education is to play a role in addressing today's global challenges, it has to do so with an "attitude that values inclusiveness and sustainability and, ultimately, values the individual, society, humanity and the environment at large" (Elliott et al., 2012, p. 1). Of the many initiatives that could provide this inspiration and that seek to contribute with social change and the betterment of relationships in a global society, one stands out that has been a global movement since 2000 and remains an important framework and vision for a more peaceful and sustainable world and that is the Earth Charter. Central to the Earth Charter's philosophy is the promotion of an ethics of care, compassion, social justice, concern for human rights, and care for the environment and the community of life.

The idea of an Earth Charter emerged out of the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission)

Report, where recommendation was made in 1987 on the need to develop a new charter to guide states toward a more sustainable world. Initial consultations and dialogue on this idea took place as part of a preparatory process toward the 1992 United Nations Rio Earth Summit. Subsequently a broad, participatory multicultural and multisectoral dialogue and consultation process took place to draft the Earth Charter throughout most of the decade of the 1990s. The guiding question was what are the shared values and principles that could serve as the foundation for a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world? As a result, The Earth Charter was launched in June 2000, at the Peace Palace in the Netherlands, offering a comprehensive ethical framework with 16 principles organized in four parts: I Respect and Care for the Community of Life; II Ecological Integrity; III Social and Economic Justice; and IV Democracy, Non-violence, and Peace ([Earth Charter International, 2010](#)).

Since its launch, the Earth Charter has become an important reference point for the themes of environment, peace, human rights, and global citizenship with a distinctive ethical and values base. It has served as a valuable educational instrument to raise awareness, clarify and examine the values and principles underlying the sustainability challenge, and inspire action. According to *A Guide for Using the Earth Charter in Education* (2009), “The Earth Charter can be used to support a variety of educational goals” such as:

- Raising awareness and understanding of critical global problems.
- Promoting dialogue on the values and principles for a sustainable way of life.
- Assisting educational institutions and systems in reorienting their teaching and operations toward sustainable ways of living.

The idea for this publication arose from conversations we had at the Academic Network of Global Education and learning conference held at UNESCO in Paris in June 2023. This book, with a collection of 22 chapters from authors from diverse backgrounds and cultural contexts, offers a range of reflections and examples on how the Earth Charter has been and can be used in different contexts.

It also offers ideas on the importance and linkages between the Earth Charter, SDGs, global citizenship education, and education for sustainable futures.

This book explores the role of education for sustainable futures using the inspiration provided by the Earth Charter to inform new ideas, research, and worldwide examples of practice relevant to education for sustainable development and global citizenship. It gives not only a valuable illustration of the contribution the Earth Charter has been making to Education for Sustainable Futures but also to Global Citizenship education and other education for change efforts.

The main aims of the volume are as follows:

- Showcase the ways in which the Earth Charter can inform, inspire, and influence approaches within education that promote a just, sustainable, and peaceful world.
- Demonstrate the importance of understanding different social, economic, and cultural contexts where the aims of the Earth Charter are applied to educational practice.
- Outline examples of practical ways in which the principles of the Earth Charter can and have informed education around the world.
- Promote examples of research and practice that reflect the values of the Earth Charter and other values-based perspectives for sustainable futures.
- Demonstrate the ways in which the Earth Charter can contribute to the educational aims of the SDGs.
- Explore how the Earth Charter can contribute to discussions around intersectionality, particularly between the themes of sustainable development and global citizenship.
- Examine the contribution that higher education institutions can offer in promoting the connections between the aims of the Charter and the SDGs.

Building on these goals, this volume has five main themes within which the book sections and chapters are arranged:

1. Theoretical debates.
2. Intersectionality.

3. Value-creating education.
4. Evidence from research.
5. From policy to practice.

BOOK STRUCTURE, THEMES, AND CHAPTER CONTRIBUTIONS

Steven C. Rockefeller, Earth Charter Commissioner, who led the Earth Charter drafting committee, sets the tone of this book through the foreword.

The first theme and section of this volume is *theoretical debates*. The first chapter in this section, co-authored by Mirian Vilela and Sam Crowell, discusses the Earth Charter and education for the 21st century. In the next chapter, Daniela Carvalho Piaggio and Rose Marie Inojosa offer a perspective how the Earth Charter can contribute as an education reference and source of inspiration particularly Pillar IV: Democracy Non-violence, and Peace in specific contexts in Brazil. Silvia Elizabeth Moraes, Josefina Moraes Arraut, Eduardo Moraes Arraut, and Pedro Rogério complement that in their chapter providing examples of their own research and teaching experiences across different Brazilian higher education institutions, showcasing how the Earth Charter principles can serve as inspiration for curriculum across different knowledge areas for the development of a planetary consciousness.

A major theme of this volume is *intersectionality* as the Earth Charter itself is an interdisciplinary document that brings together proposals from peace, human rights, social justice, environment, development, and culture. Mostafa Gamal in his chapter argues for the need to reimagine the Earth Charter as an ethico-political document, exploring the ways in which critical variants of global citizenship theorizing and intersectionality can reorient our thinking and enable a sustained engagement with some of silences and elisions in discourses of sustainability and sustainable development that underpin the Earth Charter. The next three chapters in this section argue that the Earth Charter as a critical resource can be helpful to bring together issues related to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED or

GCE) which are often taught and practiced in separate silos. Alicia Jimenez and Laura Engel in their chapter discuss the relevance of the Charter to policies and the implementation of the UNESCO-led initiatives of ESD and GCE for the enhancement of quality education worldwide. Mukirae Njihia, Damaris Kariuki, and Wilson Mutuma through their research studies conducted in Kenyatta University (KU), Kenya, find the lack of integration of ESD and GCE components across different university course disciplines and make recommendations to build sustainability consciousness as enshrined in the Earth Charter. MA Shuang discusses the concept of “ecological civilization” enshrined in the Chinese constitution that aligns with traditional Chinese philosophical concepts and the Earth Charter arguing for the relevance of these values orientations for education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

The next section of the book is *value-creating education* that brings together chapters around a strong values base, with an emphasis on the ideas of the Japanese educator and Soka progenitor, Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023), who has also been an advocate of the Earth Charter since its inception (Ikeda, 2002). As showcased across various chapters, the Earth Charter and the SDGs as global ethical frameworks have a bearing on sustainability initiatives within Soka and non-Soka institutions and practices that are influenced by Ikeda’s ideas. Sharma (2025) builds on her previously published works that link together the differing themes of education for sustainability and global citizenship and relates them to Soka or value-creating education, as discussed in her chapter. Tamy Kobashikawa shares her research study of the Soka Amazon Institute, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that utilizes the Earth Charter as an educational instrument within its activities for sustainability and global citizenship while working with a range of diverse stakeholders. Hiroko Tomioka discusses the commonalities in the values base outlined in the Earth Charter and value-creating education for global citizenship. Ana Belén García Varela and Alejandro Iborra Cuéllar share outcomes from a cross curricular subject taught at the University of Alcalá, Spain, that is inspired by value-creating education, with aims similar to the Earth Charter, discussing the relevance of their study for teacher education. Michiyo Kakegawa further shares the outcomes of a university-wide sustainability effort at Soka University Japan.

The fourth theme is *evidence from research*. In this section, Natalya Hanley locates the impact of the role of empathy-based pedagogical approach (EBPA) and the Earth Charter to promote justice, sustainability, and peace. Reflections are shared by Qudsia Kalsoom in the succeeding chapter on the use of the Earth Charter as a foundation to make ESD a transformative education practice, sharing examples from the case of teacher education in Pakistan. Akpezi Ogbuigwe, Adesuwa Vanessa Agbedahin, and Joe Gachanja Macharia's chapter discusses climate change and the need for a just transition through the Earth Charter lenses and the relevance of including African countries within global efforts to build harmonious co-existence and global social equity. Alexis Stones summarizes her research from her practice within museum education and with primary school teachers in the UK on how peace education and themes of global social justice, critical pedagogy, and decolonization can help us assess paintings.

The final section is *from policy to practice*. Waverli Maia Matarazzo-Neuberger and María de los Ángeles Vilches-Norat use the metaphor of the rhizome – an underground stem that grows horizontally and intertwines with its environment – to discuss the importance of learning within both the visible and hidden realms, while sharing their individual teaching experiences within higher education in Brazil and Puerto Rico that are inspired by the Earth Charter. Kartikeya V. Sarabhai, Dr. Prithi Nambiar, and Meena A.S. discuss their long-term engagement with the Earth Charter at the Center for Environment Education in India and educating for climate change and sustainability inspired by a confluence of values from the Earth Charter and Indian spiritual ideals. Carla Sabbatini's chapter shares experiences of transformative action at her university and other examples in Argentina, aiming to advance education for sustainability and global citizenship. Douglas Bourn discusses the relevance of the Earth Charter in discussing policy debates and practices within civil society organizations in the United Kingdom, building hope through his chapter that showcases themes around global social justice and transformation that already exist through initiatives around fairtrade and children's rights.

This volume concludes with the editor's reflections on the challenges of current times and how new approaches to education can

help address them. It also presents suggestions for future research on the Earth Charter and global citizenship for a more sustainable world.

It is expected that, with the collection of perspectives and examples this book brings, it will shed light on how the Earth Charter provides a unique educational and ethical framework for global citizenship education, education for climate change, holistic education, and education for sustainability. The importance of these perspectives has grown in importance and relevance with the intensification of wars and conflicts, growing concerns about denial of human rights in many countries, the threat of climate change, and the rise in xenophobia and nationalism.

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