

Educating for Transforming Our World: Revisiting International Debates Surrounding Education for Sustainable Development

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In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution titled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The notion of “transformative education” is being mainstreamed in the work of UNESCO within the new framework of the SDGs, which officially succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA). This article briefly outlines the shifting international discourses surrounding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), now enshrined in SDG Target 4.7. The meanings of ESD have shifted in relation to other education movements, including Environmental Education, EFA, and more recently, Global Citizenship Education (GCED). By reviewing how ESD and GCED – as currently defined and promoted by UNESCO – approach climate change and the question of securing a sustainable future for humanity, the article delineates how the recent marriage of ESD and GCED in one target of the SDGs is weakening, rather than reinforcing, their transformative potentials. It concludes by pointing out the limitations of global policy initiatives for education and proposing ways forward to ensure that education contributes to shaping a more sustainable world.

Introduction

Addressing business leaders at the World Economic Forum four months after the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon (2009) remarked: “We can choose short-sighted unilateralism and business as usual. Or we can grasp global cooperation and partnership on a scale never before seen.” The idea that we are at the crossroads and must choose between the “business as usual” or the alternatively better way of doing development, has been repeated in many UN reports and speeches since the financial crisis (see, for example, UN Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Global Sustainability, 2012; UN Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, 2012). In the frenzy over the “post-2015” development agenda, as the 2015 target year of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA) approached, policymakers, politicians, scholars, educators and community activists alike pursued

agendas for change. “Business as usual” has become something to be overcome to mitigate climate change, avert a financial breakdown, or to achieve education for all¹.

The year 2015 saw the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and an accompanying set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015) as well as the signing of the Paris Agreement, which was self-congratulated as a “historic agreement to combat climate change and unleash actions and investment towards a low carbon, resilient and sustainable future” (UNFCCC, 2015). Against this backdrop, the notion of “transformative education” is being used more often, not only in terms of delivering the “unfinished business” or “broken promise” of EFA but also of promoting the kind of values-based and action-oriented education that aims at changing attitudes, values, and behaviours. In the roadmap for implementing the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development, UNESCO (2014) characterizes Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as “holistic and transformational education,” which “achieves its purpose by transforming society” (p.12). In its guidance document on global citizenship education, UNESCO (2015b) writes: “Global citizenship education aims to be transformative, building the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that learners need to be able to contribute to a more inclusive, just and peaceful world” (p.15).

Among 17 goals and 169 targets, the Target 4.7 of the SDGs speaks to the international recognition of the importance of values-based, transformative education:

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, 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, p.17)

But is it time to celebrate that transformative education finally found its way into mainstream development thinking? This article warns against the current celebratory mood to “roll up [our] sleeves and start implementing” ESD (Jickling & Wals, 2008, p.6), as though we knew exactly what needs to be done to educate for transforming our world. First, this article briefly outlines the shifting international discourses surrounding ESD, now enshrined in SDG Target 4.7. It then delineates how the recent marriage of ESD and Global Citizenship Education in one target of the SDGs is weakening, rather than reinforcing, their transformative potentials. The article concludes by pointing out the limitations of global policy initiatives for transformative education and proposing ways forward to ensure that education contributes to shaping a more sustainable world.

EE/ESD and ESD/EFA Debates

As a global initiative backed up by UN General Assembly Resolution 57/254, ESD is rather unique in that there has been a continuous debate over its origins, definitions, scope, and goals². The beginning of the UN Decade of ESD (DESD, 2005-2014) was dominated by the Environmental Education (EE) stakeholders and the EE/ESD debate (McKeown & Hopkins 2003; 2007). As González-Gaudio (2005) observed at the beginning of the DESD, "One de facto problem that the implementation of the [DESD] faces is that apparently only we environmental educators have become involved in debating its pros and cons" (p.244). This was a natural development given that the World Conservation Union's Commission on Education and Communication (IUCN-CEC) was leading the international discussion on ESD before the launch of the DESD, and much effort was dedicated to discussing the relative meanings of EE and ESD (see Fien & Tilbury, 2002; Hesselink, Kempen & Wals, 2000).

At the outset, ESD was often positioned – both by UNESCO and international experts who acted as advocates for (D)ESD – as an overarching label for existing 'adjectival educations' including EE, Development Education, Peace Education, Human Rights Education and so on. For example, Bhandari and Abe (2003) characterized ESD as holding "the prominence of more coherent, far-reaching and integrated responses than other adjectival educations" (p.15). The well-intentioned positioning of ESD as something more "advanced" than EE has at times contributed to fuelling environmental educators' resistance to ESD, especially in Latin America, where "EE builds on environmental movements which struggled for democratic freedom under military dictatorship, simultaneously questioning environmental degradation and social inequalities" (Trajber & Mochizuki, 2015, p.46).

Adding to the EE/ESD debate, UNESCO's effort to align ESD with the forerunning global initiatives of EFA and the UN Literacy Decade (2003-2012) further complicated the purpose of ESD. Although there were explicit efforts on the part of UNESCO's ESD section to link ESD and EFA conceptually (see, for example, UNESCO 2005a; 2008a), ESD has been considered largely irrelevant to countries that are struggling to achieve universal access to basic education. In the EFA Global Monitoring Reports (GMR) published during the DESD (2005-2014), there was not a single mention of ESD in most reports (UNESCO 2007; 2008b; 2010; 2011; 2012; 2014). At the beginning of the DESD, the 2006 GMR focusing on literacy made a reference to the DESD in "Box 4.11 Windows of opportunities through UNESCO-led initiatives" (UNESCO, 2005b, p.131), and the 2007 GMR mentioned "education for sustainable development" once in the context of the role of UNESCO in global EFA coordination (UNESCO, 2006, p.100). This extremely limited and perfunctory mentioning of ESD in the most authoritative reports on EFA clearly speaks to the low visibility and priority of ESD in UNESCO's work until very recently.

Whilst the ESD section of UNESCO, as the lead agency of the DESD, struggled to enhance the visibility of ESD in the field of international educational development, ESD has often been discredited as diluting the transformative purpose of education for sustainability due to its association with narrowly-defined development. Reflecting on the DESD, for example, Huckle and Wals (2015) have concluded that it was “business as usual in the end”. Jickling and Wals (2008) have mournfully viewed ESD as “a product and carrier of globalizing force” (p.18). Among criticisms levelled against ESD over the DESD, the harshest ones characterized ESD as being complicit with predatory neo-liberalism. For example, Carlos Alberto Torres (2009) has identified UNESCO as a key agency promoting “neo-liberal globalization” (p.15). For Selby and Kagawa (2011), ESD is ‘striking a Faustian bargain’, to exert influence over educational directions at the expense of transformative goals.

In an effort to enhance the profile of ESD, in the second half of the DESD, UNESCO launched a programme on Climate Change Education for Sustainable Development as its flagship ESD initiative (see Mochizuki & Bryan, 2015; UNESCO, 2015c). The programme aimed at developing concrete ESD interventions in developing countries that are vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change, in particular, Small Island Developing States (commonly referred to as “SIDS” in UN documents) and African countries, with a focus on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR). This, in turn, contributed to better alignment between EFA and ESD, but the programme largely fell short of addressing the transformative aspect of ESD as it aimed at developing capacities of vulnerable populations and countries to adapt to climate change threats rather than tackling its root causes. In addition to climate change, biodiversity and DRR were included in the Strategy for the Second Half of the DESD (UNESCO 2009) as key action themes of ESD, thereby emphasising ESD as a means of implementation for sustainable development. This trend of highlighting the instrumental role of ESD in addressing sustainable development is continuing after the adoption of SDGs in 2015, and UNESCO is currently developing a guidance framework for achieving SDGs through ESD.

ESD and Global Citizenship Education

During the latter half of the DESD, UNESCO’s focus on climate change, biodiversity, and DRR as strategic entry points to ESD somewhat served to raise the profile of ESD in the global policy platforms. In the meanwhile, a new emphasis on Global Citizenship Education (GCED) was introduced by the UN Secretary General’s Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) launched in 2012. This initiative put forward three priorities: (i) put every child in school; (ii) improve the quality of learning; and (iii) foster global citizenship. Whereas the first two pillars echoed the EFA movement and the education goal of the MDGs, the third pillar of preparing global citizens made a clear departure from the MDG tenets of reducing poverty, improving health, and securing livelihoods. With the international community’s agreement to launch a process to develop a set of SDGs at the

2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development or Rio+20, the final years of the DESD saw reinvigorated debates on the need for educational transformation to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

In the post-2015 development agenda discussions, an international aspiration to go beyond the MDG education goal's narrow focus on access to education (see, for example, Global Compact for Learning, 2011), coupled with various critiques of ESD over the course of the DESD as discussed earlier in this article, prepared a fertile ground for welcoming GCED as a new transformative education agenda. For example, in their article dismissing the DESD as "business as usual", Huckle and Wals (2015) have coined a term 'global education for sustainability citizenship (GESC)' to refer to the kind of education needed to support transformation towards sustainability and welcomed UNESCO's new emphasis on GCED by noting that it "may lead to GESC being a stronger profile within UNESCO's advocacy and promotion of ESD" (p.502). Much like the way ESD was conceptualized as "a new vision of education" (Fien 2004, pp.80-89) at the beginning of the DESD, GCED has been conceptualized as a "new narrative about education"³ (Torres, 2015, p. 11).

Given that the introduction of GCED to the international education policy circles was not until the autumn of 2012, its mainstreaming into the SDGs was rather quick and smooth. In the Education 2030 Framework for Action adopted in Incheon, Korea, UNESCO (2015d) interprets the aforementioned SDG Target 4.7 as being dedicated to ESD and GCED as overarching labels. This recent marriage of ESD and GCED under one target in the SDG framework seems to be reinforcing ESD as education that addresses human-nature relationships and GCED as education that addresses inter-human relationships. Ideally, both ESD and GCES should ask fundamental questions about transforming how we relate to each other and to ecosystems that support our lives and livelihoods, leading to a more integrated approach to education for peace and sustainable development. UNESCO's current promotion of ESD and GCED as two mutually reinforcing yet distinctive and parallel movements is having a digressive effect of recreating a demarcation between justice and human rights issues and sustainability issues.

The current GCED advocacy by UNESCO is positing global citizens as heroic activists who fight prejudice and human rights violations, like the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai⁴. I see two problems in highlighting the most extreme cases of human rights violations and Malala's action as illustrative of the kind of action to be encouraged by GCED. First, it reinforces GCED as a straightforward—and quite dramatic—fight against prejudice, discrimination, human rights violation and violence. This may encourage learners, especially in the developed countries, to see problems to be solved as existing in a distant locality apart from their daily life. It also runs a risk of promoting global citizenship as some heroic action. Second, precisely because there is no question

about the horrendous and evil nature of what these “global citizens” are fighting against, it leaves the ethical dilemmas, contradictions and uncertainties in ‘sustainable development’ largely unaddressed. This point will be further discussed in the next section.

Simply put, GCED is presented as efforts to address undesirable dispositions and negative emotions such as intolerance, hatred, and xenophobia, while ESD is presented as efforts to tackle environmental sustainability challenges. Furthermore, to accelerate this trend, UNESCO is increasingly promoting GCED in association with efforts to prevent violent extremism, in light of a recent rise in concerted international efforts to mitigate the terrorist threat⁵. At the beginning of the implementation of the SDGs, the divide between ESD as a mere extension of narrowly defined EE – the perception UNESCO worked so hard to overcome over the DESD – and GCED as addressing direct and immediate threats to human dignity seems to be compromising the transformative potentials of both ESD and GCED. The next section further explores the implications of UNESCO’s GCED advocacy in light of how it approaches climate change.

What divides us and what connects us: The limits of the GCED advocacy?

The anticipated state of emergency is no longer national but cosmopolitan. The belief that the risks facing humanity can be averted by political action taken on behalf of endangered humanity becomes an unprecedented resource for consensus and legitimation, nationally and internationally. ... if anyone or anything at all, it is the perceived risks facing humanity, which can be neither denied nor externalized, that are capable of awakening the energies, consensus, the legitimation necessary for creating a global community of fate, one that will demolish the walls of nation-states borders and egotisms – at least for a global moment in time and beyond democracy. (Beck, 2008, Section 2, para. 1-2)

Instead of viewing climate change as a fatalistic path to an apocalyptic future for humankind, Ulrich Beck (2008, Section 2, para. 12) has seen climate change as providing a “moment of hope, of unbelievable opportunities – a cosmopolitan moment”. Beck has argued that climate change opens up the opportunity to overcome the bounds of national politics and paralysis. This idea that ecological threats allow the humanity to unite is nothing new. When concerted UN effort for the environment was initiated with the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm, the then UN Secretary-General U Thant hoped, according to the account by Mische and Ribeiro (1998), that “the threat of planetary pollution would unify member states in a way that a quarter century of UN peace and economic efforts had not”, overcoming “the divisiveness between member states that often blocked effective UN action” (p.323).

Although the adoption of SDGs and the signing of the Paris Agreement seem to be signalling a much anticipated advent of a “cosmopolitan moment,” it may still be a long way for a ‘global community of fate’ to emerge⁶. Whereas there is certainly more awareness about existential threats to humanity posed by climate change, UNESCO’s guidance document *Global Citizenship Education: Topics and Learning Objectives* cites climate change as one of many themes that can be addressed by GCED if so wished along with topics like “animal cruelty, bullying, discrimination, racism, violence” (UNESCO 2015b, p.43). While these are important topics in their own rights, UNESCO’s GCED guidance material’s treatment of climate change reduces it to an optional, add-on environmental topic, instead of treating it as a cross-cutting issue essential for understanding and improving global governance systems and structures, challenging social and environmental injustice, and demonstrating ethical and social responsibility – all of which are important goals of GCED. Although “taking climate justice perspective” is recognized as a key principle of climate change education in the context of ESD (Mochizuki & Bryan, 2015, pp.14-15), the GCED guidance cites “human rights violations, hunger, poverty, gender-based discrimination, recruitment of child soldiers” as “[r]eal life examples of global injustice”, failing to recognize climate change as a social justice issue (UNESCO, 2015b, p.39).

I find UNESCO’s (2015b) diagnosis about what divides us (e.g., extremism, sexism, racism, homophobia), along with its assumptions about what connects us (e.g., respect, tolerance and understanding, solidarity, ICT) in its GCED advocacy somewhat limiting to qualify as a “new narrative about education”. To put the current GCED advocacy in the historical context, in 1971, invited by UNESCO to deliver the inaugural lecture of the International Year for Action to Combat Racism, Claude Lévi-Strauss shocked the audience by arguing that the fight against racism had proved ineffective because the initial diagnosis, which was at the heart of UNESCO’s programme, was flawed: racism was not a result of “false ideas” about race but was used to camouflage tensions that resulted from “demographic saturation of our planet” (Stoczkowski, 2008, p.6). Echoing this frustration expressed by Lévi-Strauss, I argue that transformative education today must rise above the conventional – and often ineffectual – approach of combating “false ideas and attitudes.”

One of the difficulties of climate change education lies in that climate change is not a consequence of intentionally malicious acts such as violence, discrimination, bullying, harassment, and other forms of abuse. Tackling climate change is about “build[ing] a movement against yourself” (McKibben, 2012, n.p), questioning and changing “the behaviours and practices that contribute to climate-related harm, such as driving a car, travelling abroad, watching television, using a computer” which are “considered ‘normal’ and are taken for granted by many of those who live in consumer capitalist societies” (Mochizuki & Bryan 2015, p.11). UNESCO’s current characterization of GCED reinforces it primarily as education to prevent intentional, direct, and immediate threats to human

dignity. GCED conceptualized as such is essentially an extension of what UNESCO has promoted since its inception over 70 years ago to build “defences of peace” in people’s mind.

While it is not difficult to understand the ludicrousness of the idea of living humanely as an active member of the Nazis, it is still difficult to understand the hypocrisy and absurdity of the idea of living responsibly and ethically as a citizen of a carbon-intensive society. To take a radical example to illustrate my point, when scientists writing on global citizenship ask a provocative question “Can people everywhere (especially in resource-gobbling rich countries) understand that having more than one child is highly immoral?” (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2015, p.19), very few ESD and GCED advocates would respond by affirming that ESD and GCED aim to empower learners to act responsibly and ethically by having only one child or even no child at all. In many cultures having children is perceived as an indispensable part of having good and appropriate lifestyles. Whereas demanding—or even encouraging—this level of self-restraint in major life choices may shock many believers in transformative education as an ill-conceived solution to the global ills, others may consider it a reasonable solution on a planetary scale in the face of an existential threat to humanity. If educating for transforming our world is not only about educating to prevent intentional, direct, and immediate threats to human dignity but also about educating to avert unintended, indirect, and long-term threats to humanity, what should transformative education look like?

Imagining transformative ESD and GCED

A basic question – perhaps the basic question – is what general approach should be taken to greatly accelerate the needed mass transition toward global citizenship? Perhaps the best approach would be the technique pioneered by Mahatma Gandhi (and employed by Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela) that Gandhi christened ‘satyagraha’ – non-violent persistent opposition to an evil system. Since the current growth-maniac, neoliberal system is heading society directly toward a dissolution that could result in the deaths of billions, it seems reasonable to consider it an evil system. (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 2015, p. 20)

Like fighting slavery, colonialism, apartheid, and more recently, violent extremism, can we fight neoliberalism? The critics of ESD have cautioned against “de-radicalization” of ESD and envisioned transformative ESD to be challenging neoliberalism, providing deep insights into the structural causes of unsustainable development, critically analysing global capitalism and associated forms of global governance, and linking unsustainable consumption and production to the structures and processes that shape consumer capitalism, which are linked to the causes of environmental and social injustice (see, for example, Huckle & Wals, 2015).

One way of fighting neoliberalism is building a movement against ourselves, by choosing “voluntary simplicity” or a way of life that rejects high-consumption lifestyles based on the recognition that they are unethical in our world of increasing human need (see, for example, Alexander, 2009). Another way is to take collective actions to fight the “growth-maniac, neoliberal system”. What is conspicuously absent from the current ESD and GCED advocacy is a call for direct action against what Ehrlich and Ehrlich see as “the evil system” (2015, p.20). There seem to be at least two reasons for this absence.

The first reason is ideological. GCED has gained traction in the post-2015 agenda partly because GCED has deep resonances not only with the founding philosophy of UNESCO but also with efforts by various stakeholders to nurture globally aware and globally competent citizenry and workforce for the 21st century. Many multinationals have renamed their corporate social responsibility sections as “global citizenship program” (e.g., Samsung) or “corporate citizenship” program (e.g., Accenture). UNESCO’s GCED and ESD advocacy stops at mentioning corporate social responsibility and emphasising the importance of fostering partnerships with the private sector. Multinationals are seen as potential donors and promoters of ESD and GCED, not the enemy to be targeted by them. Given the overlaps between the kinds of competences required to compete in globalized markets and to qualify as “global citizens”, ESD and GCED can be easily diluted to become their “feel good” and “soft,” as opposed to “radical,” versions (Andreotti, 2006) and co-opted by the very enemy they are trying to fight against.

The second reason is practical. There is real difficulty in answering the question “what does direct action on the financial system look like,” which preoccupied the ‘Occupy Wall Street’ movement (Appel, 2014, p. 603,620). Drawing parallels between ridicule and cynicisms directed at participants in Occupy Wall Street (“But don’t you like your iPhone? Twitter seems to be working pretty well for you.”) and those directed at abolitionists (“But you wear cotton clothing; you put sugar in your tea.”), Hannah First Name Appel points out that people cannot imagine “the possibility of producing useful commodities or technological innovation without predatory finance,” just like “commodities central to nineteenth-century life – cotton, sugar – were unimaginable without enslavement” (2014, p.602).

In other words, students of elite universities calling for rejecting a lucrative career in the financial services sector—a phenomenon observed in conjunction with Occupy Wall Street (Roose, 2011)—offers only a very partial solution to combating neoliberalism. We need more than a small number of enlightened individuals accepting a lower income in pursuit of non-materialistic sources of satisfaction and meaning in life. Eventually, transformative ESD should enable massive-scale lifestyle changes and drastic adjustments in our perceptions of good and appropriate living while respecting cultural diversity.

Perhaps, equally and even more importantly, transformative ESD should enable people to start imagining the real possibility of producing and consuming valuable commodities and technological innovations *without* committing ecological and social injustice.

How can we start imagining such possibility? Here what ESD and GCED have emphasised in common takes a renewed significance. First and foremost, both ESD and GCED are context dependent and need to be addressed in all types, forms, and settings of learning at all levels. It requires some serious *unlearning* and *relearning* on the part of decision makers in all sectors and expert in all disciplines, including academics, business leaders, UN officials and educators, to start imagining and exploring the possibility of transforming our world. In the context of monitoring progress towards achieving SDGs, however, ESD and GCED are narrowly defined as education that takes place in formal education. The global indicator of SDG Target 4.7 is “extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment” (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2016). While this provides an unprecedented opportunity to integrate ESD and GCED into school education, it leaves the transformative possibilities of inter-sectoral and multi-stakeholder learning for sustainability largely untapped.

Second, both ESD and GCED aim to foster critical thinking, understanding of the interconnectedness of global challenges and a sense of responsibility emanating from such awareness, deep respect for and appreciation of bio-cultural diversity, and collaborative and innovative problem-solving abilities. Although it goes beyond the scope of this essay to spell out what pedagogy is needed to foster these competencies, it is useful to identify different dimensions of ESD/GCED as a general guidance to design transformative learning interventions.

Huckle and Wals (2015) have identified four dimensions of what they call “global education for sustainability citizenship”: (i) scale (understanding of “global society and the ways in which personal and collective decisions have impacts on distant human and non-human others”); (ii) ethical (recognition of “sustainability as a normative notion” which encompasses “respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace”); (iii) relational (understanding of the socially constructed nature of notions and discourses of sustainability, citizenship and globalization); and (iv) political (exploration of “structural causes” of social and environmental injustice and “reformist and radical solutions” dimensions (pp.494-495).

The current advocacy surrounding SDG Target 4.7 emphasises scale and ethical dimensions, but not necessarily relational and political dimensions. To make a departure from moralistic and didactic approaches and to empower learners to imagine alternative

futures, it is imperative to address relational and political dimensions, which resonate with the notion of “transgressive learning” or learning that is disruptive of hegemonic norms (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015).

Conclusion – Promises and challenges of SDG Target 4.7

Talking of changing attitudes, values, behaviours and action-oriented learning, it is not easy to achieve new understanding for reflexive intervention, which leads to a more peaceful and sustainable world. There are risks in having high hopes in advancing policy-driven education initiatives like ESD and GCED on a worldwide scale to become a proactive force in steering humanity towards a more enlightened, if not homogenized, perspective on what constitutes good and appropriate lifestyles and living. Promoting global initiatives always runs a risk of masking enormous differences in human resources and ignoring diversity of human desires. One permanent question is who decides desired change and how desired change can be produced. It is also critical to keep in mind that many people today are not in a position to defend their legitimate interests, let alone their inalienable human rights.

This article discussed the ramifications of colluding ESD and GCED under SDG Target 4.7, which is considerably lacking in the current global advocacy on transformative education for sustainability. It goes far beyond the scope of this essay to delineate what genuinely transformative learning looks like, as there are neither shortcuts in transformative learning nor recipes or strategies that can ensure that transformative learning occurs. ESD and GCED are at best vaccination against capture by ideology and narrow interests. They do not guarantee immunisation against capture by extremism, exclusionary populism, or plutocracy taking the world by storm today. Immunization against such capture can happen only when each learner can understand the root causes of the global illness and liberate oneself from being trapped in the system that perpetuates the “business as usual.” As long as the SDG Target 4.7 can stimulate dialogue and reflection on what transformative education should look like, it continues to serve its purpose. To fulfil the transformative potentials of ESD and GCED, there is a need to carefully design a global monitoring framework for Target 4.7. The monitoring framework should contribute to reorienting education systems around the world towards peace and sustainable development, rather than encouraging the superficial inclusion of ESD and GCED related themes in the already overburdened curricula.

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¹ For example, UNESCO interpreted the findings of the report *Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All* (UNESCO Institute for Statistics and UNICEF, 2015) as showing “why ‘business as usual’ won’t lead to universal primary or secondary education” (UNESCO, 2015a).

² This is partly due to the contested notion of “sustainable development” itself, but it lies beyond the scope of this article. In this article, “sustainable development” and “sustainability” are used interchangeably.

³ Carlos Albert Torres supports GCED as a UNESCO Chair in Global Learning and Global Citizenship. See <http://ampersand.gseis.ucla.edu/carlos-alberto-torres-appointed-inaugural-unesco-chair-in-global-learning-and-global-citizenship/>

⁴ Malala was often invoked as a model global citizen in various interventions made at the UNESCO Forums on GCED in Bangkok, Thailand (December 2013) and Paris, France (January 2015). Every two years UNESCO organizes a global forum on GCED bringing together key educational stakeholders to review trends and good practices in the field. The third forum is planned in March 2017 in Ottawa, Canada.

⁵ UNESCO convened the International Conference on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in September 2016 in New Delhi, India, further to the adoption of UNESCO 197 EX/Decision 46 (October 2015) on “UNESCO’s role in preventing violent extremism through education” and in line with the UN Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/70/674, December 2015).

⁶ Over the past 40 years, the hope that a common global enemy of ecological threats would unite countries has been repeatedly defeated. In the lead up to Stockholm+20 or the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Summit) in 1992, an initial goal to produce an Earth Charter to complement the UN Charter was defeated in the preparatory meetings. Twenty years later, at Rio+20 in 2012, the proposal by the European Union to upgrade the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) into a specialised agency, a World Environment Organization, was also defeated.