

Engaging Hearts & Minds

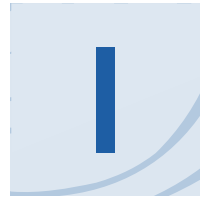
Leaders in Education for Sustainability

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In the following triple case study you'll meet [Noah Zeichner](#), award-winning high school social studies teacher at Chief Sealth International High School in Seattle, [Jing Fong](#), inspiring storyteller and manager of *YES! Magazine*, a non-profit and subscriber-supported independent media organization, and co-founders of The SEED Collaborative, [Stacy Smedley and Ric Cochrane](#), two architects focused on transforming schools into exceptional environments for learning. What do they all have in common? They know that the challenges and opportunities we currently face and will leave the next generation are complex, interdependent and dynamic, so they are devising ways to reflect that reality now in how, what, and where we teach and learn.

In my view, educating for sustainability, by its very nature, demands that we offer our K-12 students hands-on, inquiry-based, interdisciplinary curricula that build core academic knowledge, as well as skills in critical-, creative-, and systems-thinking. It obliges us to offer safe and healthy spaces in which students can grow meaningful service-learning projects, and out-of-school experiences where they are responsible and accountable to themselves and others in positive and empowering ways, and where they have opportunities to engage with appropriate community stakeholders in government, industry, higher education, and civil society. Educating for sustainability also demands that we respect and value our educators, nurture their

passion and professionalism, and provide them with the tools and support they need to successfully apply student-centered, democratic, and evidence-based teaching methodologies and best practices inside and outside the classroom.

Before you read about the stories of Noah, Jing, Stacy and Ric, I'll share one context for educating for sustainability: global issues, and suggest a tool to help students and teachers engage in robust discussion and take on action projects using the world as community.

GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

Global sustainability education describes the concurrent and

intentional use of global issues, which are interconnected issues that persist across time and boundaries such as poverty, climate change, migration, food, water, health and energy; and sustainability, which is the balancing of social, economic, and environmental interests, as the framework for learning across all academic disciplines and at all levels of schooling. Global sustainability education encourages educators and students to engage together in developing the skills and knowledge needed to understand 21st century challenges, envision effective and equitable remedies, and implement positive solutions that serve the common good and the planet upon which we all rely. While an essential hallmark of educational programs promoting sustainability is a focus on place (most often local and regional), global sustainability education advocates the inclusion of a wider context. It requires diverse international and cultural perspectives to strengthen our ability to understand, work, and live cooperatively and productively with people across the street and around the world.

Today, education for sustainability (with emphases on global, national, regional, and local issues) is growing among U.S. K-12 educators, schools, and districts, as evidenced in national programs such as the U.S. Department of Education's Green Ribbon Schools program,

the Center for Green Schools, a myriad of state and national conferences in both K-12 and higher education, and through numerous regional and community initiatives. The roots of this growth are deep. Global summits in the 1980s and 1990s focused the world's attention on environmental degradation, human rights, and equity in economic aid and development, and towards a more critical examination of the impacts of globalization. Principles of sustainable development emerged from gatherings including the 1992 Earth Summit's Agenda 21, the 1995 Beijing Declaration from the 4th World Conference on Women, and the UNESCO ratification of the Earth Charter in 2000. In 2005, the United Nations declared the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development as a means to renew education, teaching and learning and promote the values and principles of sustainable development. Currently, the Sustainable Development Goals (built upon the Millennium Development Goals), will serve as the UN's 2016+ development agenda. Each of these global summits, and dozens more, offer students an opportunity to learn about the trials and triumphs of the democratic process, the art of negotiation and collaboration, the wisdom of learning from history, and the power of envisioning and working towards a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world.

A TOOL TO EXPLORE THE WORLD AS COMMUNITY

“As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace.”

— Preamble to
The Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is a ethical statement and declaration of 16 principles created in a nearly decade-long, raucous, global grassroots process by thousands of organizations, cities, and associations representing millions of people across 80 countries. It was ratified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2000. The four major pillars of these principles are:

- ▶ Respect and Care for the Community of Life
- ▶ Ecological Integrity
- ▶ Social and Economic Justice
- ▶ Democracy, Nonviolence and Peace.

The Charter is a powerful and provocative primary document that calls for interdependence and universal and differentiated responsibility for creating a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world.

It is ideal for educators and students to discuss how it was created and what it proclaims, and to debate its vision and values. The basics, in the wise words of elementary teachers everywhere are “be responsible, be respectful, be good to yourself, the earth and others, clean up your mess, share your stuff, play fair, everyone deserves to be heard, and shake hands and make up.”

At right is a more specific example of the Charter’s vision and values. You can see how rich (and at times difficult), this discussion could be, yet we know that compelling, real-world, global issues — such as poverty — get students’ hearts and minds engaged and often lead students to take positive action for change at the local level through community-learning projects.

Teachers and students can also use the 16 principles of the Charter (available in dozens of languages), to learn about other complex topics and perplexing tensions, such as independence and interdependence, individual action and structural change, mitigation and adaption, and the role and value of certain realities often missing from discussions in our particular culture of surety and rugged individualism: realities of limits, doubt, forgiveness, empathy, fragility, insecurity, and impermanence. Teachers can find hundreds of educational resources, lesson plans, readings, action projects and case studies of teachers and

The Earth Charter

PILLAR III, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC
JUSTICE, PRINCIPLE 9 AND ITS 3
SUB-PRINCIPLES:



Eradicate poverty as an ethical, social, and environmental imperative.

- (a) Guarantee the right to potable water, clean air, food security, uncontaminated soil, shelter, and safe sanitation, allocating the national and international resources required.
- (b) Empower every human being with the education and resources to secure a sustainable livelihood, and provide social security and safety nets for those who are unable to support themselves.
- (c) Recognize the ignored, protect the vulnerable, serve those who suffer, and enable them to develop their capacities and to pursue their aspirations.

students working with the Earth Charter (and writing their own!) at the website EarthCharter.org. Students can explore youth projects and join young people around the world through the Earth Charter’s Youth initiatives.

“Life often involves tensions between important values. This can mean difficult choices. However, we must find ways to harmonize diversity with unity, the exercise of freedom with the common good, short-term objectives with long-term goals. Every individual, family, organization, and community has a vital role to play. The arts, sciences, religions, educational institutions, media, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and governments are all called to offer creative leadership. The partnership of government, civil society, and business is essential for effective governance... Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”

—The Way Forward from The Earth Charter

Let’s move forward now with three examples of educational leaders working to transform how, what and where we teach and learn so that we may better prepare the next generation to shape a world with thriving societies, flourishing economies, and healthy environments.