Three Decades of International Guidelines for Environment-Related Education: A Critical Hermeneutic of the United Nations Discourse

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Abstract

The UNESCO-UNEP International Environmental Education Program (1975-1995) provided impetus for developing, legitimizing, and institutionalizing environmental education. More recently, UNESCO was mandated by the United Nations to carry out a worldwide shift towards education for sustainable development. As international organizations' recommendations and guidelines often act as beacons for the conception and implementation of national formal and nonformal education programs, it is necessary to critically appraise their content. Our hermeneutical analysis of United Nations documents concerning environmental education, which is now subsumed to sustainable development, highlights an instrumental view of education, a resourcist conception of the environment, and an economicist view of development. Such a worldview needs to be discussed.

Résumé

De 1975 à 1995, les activités et productions de l'UNESCO-PNUE dans le cadre du Programme international d'éducation relative à l'environnement (1975-1995) ont contribué à légitimer, à institutionnaliser et à développer ce champ d'intervention éducative. Plus récemment, l'UNESCO a été mandatée par l'Organisation des Nations Unies (ONU) pour opérer un virage vers une éducation pour le développement durable. En raison de l'influence souvent déterminante des recommandations et lignes directrices des organisations internationales sur les politiques et programmes nationaux et locaux, tant en milieu d'éducation formelle que non formelle, il importe d'en faire un examen critique. Notre analyse permet de mettre en lumière les conceptions de base véhiculées par les discours élaborés dans la « filière » ONU : l'éducation y apparaît comme un instrument au service d'un programme politique, l'environnement est conçu comme un ensemble de ressources à exploiter et le développement correspond à la croissance économique. Une telle vision du monde doit être discutée et mise à distance critique, historicisée et déconstruite.

Keywords: environmental education; education for sustainable development; international guidelines; national policies; educational reform

Introduction

After almost 30 years of formal international efforts to promote environmental education, mainly through the UNESCO-UNEP International Environmental Education Program (1975-1995), environmental education has entered a new phase of institutionalization with the recent or ongoing educational reforms throughout the world and at a time when it tends to be subsumed to a so-called "broader" frame of reference, that of education for sustainable development. The institutionalization of environmental education or any form of "environment-related education" (following Hart's expression, 2003, p. 3) has been and remains an important issue, considering the crucial need to improve personal and social relations with the environment. On one hand, institutionalization is seen as the main lever of promoting environmental education (as stated since the *Belgrade Charter*, 1976 to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014); on the other hand, institutionalization is considered by many authors and educators as being problematic when it corresponds to a top-down strategy (for example, Speller, 2000), when it promotes a "culturally-blind isomorphism" (Chan-Tiberghien, 2004), when it reifies socially constructed knowledge that fosters and reproduces domination (Berryman, 2007), when it uncritically supports or imposes certain ways of thinking and doing, and when it does not offer concrete strategies and means of implementation.

In any case, the introduction of an environmental dimension into school curricula or into nonformal education programs is a demanding task for people and organizations working at a national level. The recommendations and guidelines emanating from international organizations have been and are, more than ever, important in the current context of globalization, particularly because of the need to legitimize initiatives and find strategic or financial support. It thus becomes crucial to analyze the content of the international proposals in order to clarify their ideological foundations, to characterize their underlying conceptions, and to examine the epistemological, ethical, and pedagogical aspects of their guidelines. With the objective of characterizing such proposals and tracing their influence on national initiatives, we have undertaken a research program focusing on these proposals as institutional "products" (charters, declarations, reports, etc.). The social processes leading to the production of this type of international document could be the object of another research program.

In the first phase of our research, the text of more than 30 international proposals (from UNESCO, World Bank, OECD, IUCN, etc.) concerning "environment-related education" were analyzed (via content and discourse analysis) to highlight the specificity of each document and to identify common elements which can be considered as core components of globalized representations of education, environment, and development, and how these social constructs are articulated. In this paper, we present some results of our

analysis, those pertaining to international documents emanating from the United Nations "apparatus" (Table 1).[1]

YEAR	PLACE/ ORGANIZATION	RELATED EVENT	DOCUMENTS
1972	Stockholm UN	United Nations Conference on the Human Environment	*Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment*
1975	Belgrade UNESCO-UNEP	International Environmental Education Workshop	*Belgrade Charter: A Global Framework for Environmental Education*
1977	Tbilisi UNESCO-UNEP	Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education	*Conference Report & Tbilisi Declaration*
1982	New York UN	General Assembly – 48th Plenary Meeting	*World Charter for Nature*
1987	Moscow UNESCO-UNEP	Environmental Education and Training Congress	*International Strategy for Action in the Field of Environmental Education and Training in 1990s*
1992	Rio de Janeiro UN	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development	*Rio Declaration & Agenda 21 (Chapter 36)*
1994	Cairo UN	United Nations International Conference on Population and Development	*United Nations Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development*
1997	Thessaloniki UNESCO	International Conference on Environment and Society – Educating for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Vision for Concerted Action	*Final Report & Thessaloniki Declaration*
1998	UNESCO (International Bureau of Education)		*The Adaptation of Content to the Challenges of the Twenty-first Century*
1999	UNESCO		*Education and Population Dynamics: Mobilizing Minds for a Sustainable Future*
2002	Johannesburg UN	World Summit on Sustainable Development	*The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development*
2005	UNESCO	UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014	*Report by the Director-General on the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: International Implementation Scheme and UNESCO's Contribution to the Implementation of the Decade*
2005	Vilnius United Nations Economic Commission for Europe - UNECE	High-level Meeting of Environment and Education Ministries	*Vilnius Framework for the Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development*

Table 1. International "environment-related education" documents reviewed in this paper.

Kincheloe's (2005) presentation of critical hermeneutics and Ricœur's (1986) discussion of tensions and paths between hermeneutics and the critique of ideology provide insight into our research meaning and its procedures. Ricœur (1986) sums it up nicely:

> The question is not anymore to define hermeneutics as an inquiry into the psychological intents that would be hidden under the text but rather the clarification of the being-in-the-world shown by the text. What is to be interpreted in a text is the proposition of a world, the project of a world I could inhabit. (p. 58)

Thus, we first highlight what the proposals tend to focus on when they discuss education, environment, and development. This appears in the first column of the various tables presented in this paper. Second, to render United Nations' "proposition of a world" even more clearly, we identify elements that their "project of a world" overshadow. This appears in the second column of these tables.

Main Results and Elements of Discussion

Summarizing results can sometimes lead to reductionism. Still, major general assertions emerge from our analysis of UN documents' perspectives on education, environment, and development:

- education is an instrument to support a political and economic agenda,
- environment is reduced to problems of resources, and
- development is mainly associated with sustained economic growth.

Each assertion is a nucleus that will be further explored in the forthcoming sections, in which we identify and compare some of the ideas that the international documents generally highlight and some of those they generally neglect.

Let us recall here Bateson's (1984) observation: "Zero, the absence of any indicative element, may bear a message" (p. 53). The frequently overshadowed aspects are sometimes just the opposite of the dominant general assertions. At other times, the neglected aspects are samples of some of the other views that exist in the field of environmental education. Our presentation of neglected aspects does not claim to be exhaustive, but aims to shed some light in the shadow of the international guidelines in order to uncover some possible pitfalls and orphans of the dominant discourse.

While recognizing the major importance of the United Nations' involvement in promoting worldwide responsible development and acknowledging the issues they try to address through their proposals, our critical appraisal shows that international proposals promote the sociocultural mega trends which characterize our contemporary Western civilization.

Education as an Instrument

Defining education is not an easy task and it could tend to freeze and reify certain ideas that must remain dynamic and open. However, not defining education can also lead to other, undesirable results. It can be observed that most of the documents reviewed do not address definitional issues and do not propose a clear conception of education that is coherent with their main discourse. Instead, they identify an end, an urgent one, and then affirm that education must be urgently reformed to serve such an end. Basically, education is thus an instrument to achieve a predetermined goal. In the documents we analyzed, education is essentially at the service of environmental resource management and problem solving; more recently, education has become a strategy for promoting sustainable development (UNESCO, 2005). Nations are invited to find so-called contextually adapted strategies to implement education for sustainable development, but most often, no invitation is made to discuss the relevance of this end. All the educational systems around the world are expected and urgently pressed to be reformed for such a purpose.

Whenever the documents do define education (generally without references or by adopting the United Nations' auto-referential style), they usually provide a short, humanistic definition, which is then countered by pages and pages of prescriptions on how to educate people in order to act on an environment mostly reduced to problems of resources that need to be better managed. As an example, *Agenda 21* asserts that "education … should be recognised as a process by which human beings and societies can reach their fullest potential" (UNCED, 1993, paragraph 36.3). However, it is difficult to reconcile such a humanistic definition of education with the *Agenda 21*'s more than 230 action principles that form the heart of this instrumental proposal. In fact, the chapter on education (Chapter 36) is embedded in a broader section entitled "Means of Implementation" that also contains chapters such as "Financial Resources and Mechanisms," "Transfer of Environmentally Sound Technology, Cooperation and Capacity-Building," "Science for Sustainable Development," and so on. How can one coherently bridge such a training program for predetermined instrumental actions with a humanistic view of education? Education becomes a specific tool (means of implementation) of a global instrument (the *Agenda*).

The final report from the Thessaloniki conference also focuses on such a view of education as a means to pursue prescribed goals:

> Education was no longer seen as an objective in and for itself but as a means to bring about changes in behaviour and lifestyles, to disseminate knowledge and develop skills, and to prepare the public to support changes towards sustainability emanating from other sectors of society. (UNESCO, 1997, p. 1)

In the perspective of *Education and Population Dynamics: Mobilizing Minds for a Sustainable Future,* UNESCO's anonymous authors (1999) state that

"knowledge, more than labour or raw material or capital, has become the key resource in modern economies" (p. 46).

The instrumental trends are most evident in international documents prescribing the training of people reduced—or elevated, depending on one's vision—to the status of "human resources" (UNCED, 1993; UN, 1994; UNESCO, 2005) and "human capital" (UNESCO, 1992; UNCED, 1993):

> In fact, in a globalized world, it has appeared necessary … to update national curricula in order to take into account the important progress made in knowledge in recent years, particularly in the field of science …. In this way, every child may acquire the knowledge, the skills and the attitudes necessary for his/her individual personal development in a global society, and become an active member of a market in fast evolution. (International Bureau of Education, 1998, p. 11)

Through economy (the fuel of "development"), globalization influences education, in close relation with the economization of the political and cultural spheres of societies (Clark, 1997; McLaren, 1998; Porter & Vidovich, 2000). In the documents we analyzed, the existence of such a globalization process appears or is presented as unavoidable and unquestioned. The globalization of education, which becomes a sub-sector of the economy, is marked by an anthropocentric, resourcist, and neo-liberal ideology; the mission of educational systems is to increase productivity and competitiveness (as highlighted by Petrella, 1996; Carnoy, 1999; Laval & Weber, 2002; Olssen, 2004).

Because educational practices reflect societal choices, but most of all because education is also a crucible for social change (Legendre, 2002), actors in the field of education should be strongly preoccupied by this growing trend. Li (2003) observes how the current curricular reforms do not support critical inquiries into the causes and consequences of globalization, and into its underlying assumptions. Such observations are not new: they can be found throughout the long and rich history of educational critical theories and practices. However, they find no echo in United Nations' proposals.

Another main feature of the international recommendations and guidelines, in the context of the current "security crisis" identified by Jonas (1984), is the legitimate call for changes, for reforms, for problem solving, and for worldwide mobilization. The successive official documents, each one produced as a result of an international event (e.g., a conference, seminar, colloquium), mostly adopt the same historical view to assess the situation, taking into account the progress made since the last event. The pattern is fixed in the following manner: *there have been good efforts made; however, the results are not sufficient; the situation is degrading; there is thus an emergency.* From there on, it is easy to understand that the proposals tend to fidget with impatience for environmental changes. This could explain why the proposals tend to focus more and more on actions, indicators, results, competencies, and behaviour changes (more of the same types of solutions), while

neglecting to encourage reflexivity and critical thinking (for example, examining the roots of the ruptures and seeking for better ways of being humans on Earth). The Declaration of Thessaloniki thus stresses that to "achieve sustainability, an enormous co-ordination and integration of efforts is required in a number of crucial sectors and rapid and radical change of behaviours and lifestyles, including changing consumption and production patterns" (UNESCO, 1997, principle 6). However, these urgent calls overshadow the need for prudence when undertaking radical changes, and neglect to consider the existence of legitimate forms of resistance which have emerged in reaction to exogenous prescriptions in various social and educational contexts. Such prudence should be associated with reflexivity and critical thinking.

While the international proposals tend to focus on education as a tool to achieve predefined goals, what remains in the shadow is the necessity of reflecting on the environmental and developmental realities that are viewed as problems. An even greater omission is the idea of an education, which reflects upon the notion of environment itself, and upon the notion of development. With the constant assertion of the need to learn how to act urgently on critical problems, the idea of an education which involves reflexivity is neglected. As an example, the word "reflexivity" or the expression "critical thinking" are completely absent from *Agenda 21* (UNCED, 1993).

Also, while the international guidelines acknowledge the importance of social issues, they rely heavily on sciences and more specifically on environmental sciences and technological transfers, coupled with sustained economic growth, as the key solutions to environmental problems and thus as a core learning in "environment-related education." Even when they do stress the importance of taking into account the integration of society, environment, economy, and development, the documents do not dwell at length on this and especially on how the integration can be operationalized. Social and psychological sciences are mostly seen as means of mobilizing people.

Finally, we observe that in the more recent international documents promoting sustainable development (as in UNESCO, 2005), the word "education" (narrowly defined as a traditional process of school instruction) tends to be replaced by "learning," which mainly encompasses knowledge and skills. Examining such a shift, Biesta (2004) argues "that the main problem with the new language of learning is that it makes possible the re-description of the process of education in terms of an economic transaction; the learner is the consumer, the teacher the provider, and education becomes a commodity" (in Le Grange, 2004, p. 136). Le Grange (2004) states that addressing socio-ecological issues needs much more than learning knowledge and skills; it calls for the mediation of socially and pedagogically involved teachers.

Table 2 synthesizes the main results of the analysis of the notion of education in the documents we reviewed.

EDUCATION	
International proposals generally highlight the following aspects:	International proposals generally neglect the following aspects:
Education is an instrument.	Education is a process towards human development.
Education calls for action to solve real-life problems.	Education calls for reflecting on realities, including reflecting on action.
There is a need to adhere to a consensus.	Critical thinking (without the limits of a predetermined framework) is of major importance.
The whole educational system must be reformed, and the proposed perspective can mightily contribute to the renewal of the educational system.	We should build on the lessons of the past and as such recognize, preserve, and promote relevant educational experiences and initiatives.
Education is learning.	Education is a critical engagement.
The most important learning is scientific and technological knowledge.	A dialogue of different types of knowledge is necessary to fully apprehend socio-ecological realities.

Table 2. The perspective on education in international documents addressing issues of education, environment, and development: Pairing highlighted elements with some neglected ones.

Environment as a Problem of Resources

The scarcity of definitions for education is compensated by some references as to what is meant by "environment." However, as for education, the notion of environment is subsequently reduced. At first, we usually find a very large and total definition of the environment such as those found in the *Belgrade Charter* (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976) or the *Tbilisi Declaration and Final Report* (UNESCO-UNEP, 1977): "Environmental education should consider the environment in its totality—natural and man-made, ecological, political, economic, technological, social, legislative, cultural and aesthetic" (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976, p. 4). But no matter how large of a scope is used to define the environment initially, the rest of the discourse reduces it to a set of problems to be solved and a pool of resources to be managed in more efficient ways. Facing the post-war economic boom and the associated preoccupying environmental emergencies and risks, the 1976 *Belgrade Charter* states the following pragmatic goal:

> … to develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its *associated problems,* and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually *and collectively towards solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones.* (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976, p. 3, italics added)

A resourcist approach to the environment can be observed as early as in the Stockholm conference's Declaration: "the non-renewable resources of the earth must be employed in such a way as to guard against the danger of their future exhaustion and to ensure that benefits from such employment are shared by all mankind" (UN, 1972, principle 5). Such an approach can also be found in the *World Charter for Nature* (UN, 1982) where, even though its title and general principles strongly suggest a conception of the environment as nature, its statements tend to underline a utilitarian conception of the natural environment. The resourcist trend is central to *Agenda 21*, which asserts "the crucial role of the environment as a source of natural capital and as a sink for by-products generated during the production of man-made capital and other human activities" (UNCED, 1993, paragraph 8.41). In the conceptual framework of sustainable development, the environment is reductively defined as a set of resources (UN, 2002; UNESCO, 2005). The following definition of resourcism provides an insight into the dangers of relying on such a worldview:

> Resourcism is a kind of modern religion, which casts all of creation into categories of utility. By treating everything as homogeneous matter in search of a use it devalues all. Yet its most dangerous aspect is its apparent good intention. By describing something as a resource we seem to have cause to protect it. But all we really have is a licence to exploit it. (Evernden, 1985, p. 23)

The *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* states that "peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible" (UNCED, 1992, principle 25). This Declaration and *Agenda 21* (UNCED, 1993) contain no less than 150 mentions of "environment and development." In the 3600 words of Chapter 36, "environment" is linked to "development" 36 times; that is once in every 100 words. Within the French version of the Declaration that came out of the World Summit held in Johannesburg (UN, 2002), the word "environment" and its derivates (for example, "environmental") appear four times, while "sustainable development" appears 21 times. It is stated that "economic development, social development and environmental protection" are "pillars of sustainable development" (UN, 2002, principle 5). It is mentioned further that "protecting and managing the natural resource base for economic and social development are overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for sustainable development" (UN, 2002, principle 11). The environment is thus limited to a natural resource base for economic and social development.

Moreover, it can be observed that the notion of environment recedes in the latest United Nations documents. From a major conference on the human environment in the 1970s in Stockholm, we passed along to a conference on environment and development in the 1990s in Rio and then, in 2002, to the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. In the *Vilnius Framework for the Implementation of the UNECE Strategy for*

Education for Sustainable Development (UNECE, 2005), for example, the word "environment" is rarely mentioned; it is diluted into the plurality of the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development. The environment, conceived as a set of problems and as a reservoir of resources, progressively became deliberately and explicitly subsumed by development. In the context of an emerging global market, the environment is reduced to being a condition and an unavoidable constraint to economic growth, while such growth is virtuously presented as the solution to poverty (itself seen as a problem instead of a consequence of developmental practices).

Yet, stepping back to reflect upon educational practices that take into account the surrounding world, it is clear that environment and development can and should sometimes be dissociated. It is essential to explore environmental realities and issues in depth and from diverse perspectives. Why should the developmental perspective be predetermined and privileged at the outset?

Shouldn't international proposals open up to other possible representations and experiences of the environment, such as environment as nature (understanding nature's inherent right to exist by and for itself; recognizing ourselves as being part of nature), environment as a place to live and dwell (*Oïkos*, as a shared house of life), or environment as a community project to be conducted in a critical and political perspective (Sauvé, 2005)? Shouldn't one of the first objectives of an "environment-related education" be to explore and critically appraise the various ideas about the contemporary notion of environment? From where does this notion "environment" come from? What are its different representations and significations? Who says what and who acts how? Why?

Numerous dimensions of relating to the environment are thus overshadowed by an economic approach to our relations with the surrounding world. Some of these approaches stress the importance of not only focusing on working on an environment "out there," but also working on relationships between people and environment (including the inner landscape of this relationship), which is at the basis of human development and action. Some insist on the critical investigations of the deeper causes of socio-ecological problems, on the deconstruction of the "development" agendas, and on the creative search for alternatives. The international proposals reviewed, while often acknowledging in a sentence some of these dimensions and some of the alternative approaches, tend to downplay them and focus on the need to manage resource-based environmental problems. There is none or very little consideration of the epistemological, philosophical, spiritual, psychological, or physiological aspects of our relations to the world. In some regards, this is not really surprising since international conferences (producing declarations, charters, strategies, and so on) convey delegates of nations who often have a highly economic and political outlook on the world. However, part of the problem is that such a worldview, which

is largely socially constructed within a political and economic sphere (notably through state delegates' negotiations), is directly passed on to the field of education. Too often, such a construct is taken for granted, remains unexamined, and becomes the basis for uncritically building educational theories and practices.

Finally, the ethics adopted by the United Nations "apparatus" are essentially anthropocentric: the biosphere is destined to serve us, and is destined for development through ensuring the sustainability of its resources (UNCED, 1993). There is a need to increase the productivity of nature as a source of capital (UNESCO, 1992). Furthermore, in a UNESCO document signed by Morin (1999), the Earth is not only destined to serve us, but must be humanized. Other ways of relating to the earth, such as Leopold's land ethic (1974), Næss's deep ecology (1989), Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis (1991), Bookchin's social ecology (1980), Esteva's and Prakash's grassroots postmodernism (1998), or the different, non-dualist visions of the world developed in the field of political ecology (as those highlighted by Whiteside, 2002) do not seem to be considered. Anthropocentrism becomes a sort of "new ethical order."

Anthropo-ethics demands that we take responsibility for the anthropological mission of the millennium by:

- striving to humanize humanity,
- taking in hand the double piloting of the planet: follow life, guide life, [and]
- accomplish planetary unity in diversity. (Morin, 1999, p. 57)

The dystopic corollaries of this global anthropocentric project should not escape the critical attention of educators. Numerous tensions and issues related to the differences within and between classes, age groups, cultures, and nations are subsumed in a global occidental anthropocentrism encompassing the whole humanity. Such a global view may deny differences and reduce diversity, even if calling for "unity in diversity."

Table 3 presents the main features of the perspective on the environment in the proposals we reviewed.

ENVIRONMENT	
International proposals generally highlight the following aspects:	International proposals generally neglect the following aspects:
A general and broad definition of the total environment is appropriate.	A contextually and culturally significant, and operational definition is necessary.
The environment is a set of problems and is approached for its resources.	The environment has its own intrinsic value; it should be apprehended through its diverse dimensions such as nature, home, or shared community project.
The environment needs to be acted upon. There is a need to manage the environment.	There is a need to reflect about the environment and our relations to it. There is a need to manage our uses of the environment.
The main strategy is the economization of the environment: From nature to capital.	The main process should be the ecologization of economics: From capital to nature.
Anthropocentrism is the legitimate ethical posture: the biosphere is destined to serve humans.	Different ethical postures (such as ecocentrism and biocentrism) are worth exploring.
The focus is on the relations between society, environment, and economy, for development.	The many dimensions of human-environment relationships need to be considered.
Environment is not dissociable from development.	The approaches to the environment can sometimes be dissociated from developmental issues.
Development and growth will solve environmental problems.	Development and growth could worsen environmental and social problems.
We can rely on environmental sciences and technological transfers.	There is a need to value different approaches to the environment, not seen only as an exterior object to be investigated and managed. Philosophical, holistic, experiential, literary, or artistic approaches should be considered.
Children must engage for the environment.	Child development needs appropriate environments. Children can find their ways to engage in the world.
Up to now, the results are unsatisfactory. There is an emergency.	Some results are promising. There is a need to proceed energetically but with prudence, rigor, circumspection, and precaution.

Table 3. The perspective on the environment in international documents addressing issues of education, environment, and development: Pairing highlighted elements with some neglected ones.

Development as Sustained Economic Growth

The integration of environmental concerns into development issues was strongly put forward by the 1987 report from the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland, 1987). This preoccupation was, however, already present in previous documents, as in the *Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment* (UN, 1972). In 1974, the United Nations' *Declaration on the Establishment of a New*

International Economic Order came out of a "General Assembly to study for the first time the problems of raw materials and development, devoted to the consideration of the most important economic problems facing the world community" (UN, 1974, p. 1). Such a statement translates a view of the biosphere as a reservoir to serve economic growth; the environment, referred to as "problems of raw materials," is closely linked to development; they are both subsumed as "most important economic problems."

The concept of sustainable development was already clearly and explicitly put forward as early as 1980 when the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources launched its *World Conservation Strategy,* subtitled *Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development*. This subtitle closely resembles the previously mentioned title of *Agenda 21*'s section focusing on the environment: "Conservation and Management of Resources for Development" (UNCED, 1993).

As for the previously examined concept of education, the notion of development is generally ill-defined in the documents we analyzed. Rarely is there a formal definition. In the same way that the humanistic conception of education and global vision of the environment put forward by the proposals tend to collapse respectively under the weight of an instrumental conception of education and a resourcist view of the environment, the notion of development tends to bear the weight of an economic growth imperative. The *Belgrade Charter* explicitly calls for new patterns of development:

> The recent United Nations Declaration for a New International Economic Order calls for a new concept of development—one which takes into account the satisfaction of the needs and wants of every citizen on earth, of the pluralism of societies and of the balance and harmony between humanity and the environment. What is called for is the eradication of the basic causes of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, pollution, exploitation and domination. The previous pattern of dealing with these crucial problems on a fragmentary basis is no longer workable. (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976, p. 1)

However strong this call "for a new concept of development," the *Belgrade Charter*'s following paragraph asserts that "the resources of the world should be developed in ways which will benefit all of humanity and provide the potential for raising the quality of life for everyone" (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976, p. 1). Such a virtuous goal nonetheless bears the weight of an economic and resourcist view of development. What does "quality of life" mean? What is meant by "developing resources"? Because of this vagueness, there is a strong appeal to gauge development with the quantitative indicators of economic growth.

The approach used to focus the actions of entire populations, including children, towards the newly revamped and urgent agenda is to simplify the situation: the proposals identify the root of the problem (poverty) and propose a total solution (development and economic growth). Once again, a thread

runs from the Stockholm conference to the World Summit on Sustainable Development: "In most developing countries, regardless of the region to which they belong, the basic problem is one of dire poverty, which in turn leads to deterioration of natural resources" (UNESCO-UNEP, 1987, p. 5). The systemic causes of poverty are rarely identified, nor is the notion that development and economic growth could be leading factors of the socio-ecological problems at stake (as analyzed by Lapeyre, 2006). Every proposal calls for some sort of economic growth to solve environmental and social problems. The *Rio Declaration*, for example, asserts that "states should cooperate to promote a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries, to better address the problems of environmental degradation" (UNCED, 1992, principle 12).

In the majority of the documents we reviewed, economic growth appears as a major and total solution. For example:

> … we will work together to assist one another to have access to financial resources, benefit from the opening of markets, ensure capacity building, use modern technology to bring about development, and make sure that there is technology transfer, human resource development, education and training to banish forever underdevelopment. (UN, 2002, principle 18)

The logic all too easily becomes the following: there is a need for economic development in order to eliminate poverty and sustain human development. A drift can occur from that point on, and the belief becomes that human development is based on economic growth, and since, within this discourse, environmental and developmental issues are not dissociable, a sustained economic growth can solve the environmental problems of resources. However, this "new form" of development is poorly characterized, if not with the language of sustainability, which is itself open to different interpretations. References to endogenous (or local, or alternative) development are overshadowed by the preoccupation of managing the environment as a global warehouse of "raw materials." Even more eclipsed is the idea, put forward by Esteva and Prakash (1998) or Sachs (1999), for example, that development in itself is a problem and should be discarded in the perspective of a post-development era.

Once again, the perspective on development and economy in the international documents is not historical, critical, or contextual. Despite the unavoidable limits to continuous growth and the complexity of inequitable situations, economic growth becomes a key element for resolving the different problems of development. Furthermore, international organizations call for the integration of all countries into the international trade system and world economy: "Economic integration processes have intensified in recent years and should impart dynamism to global trade and enhance the trade and development possibilities for developing countries" (UNCED, 1993, paragraph 2.8).

Subsuming environmental and developmental issues with sustained

economic growth appears even more bluntly within the *United Nations Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development* (UN, 1994). In this document, calls for "sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development" or for "sustained economic growth and sustainable development" appear more than 20 times.

> With the growing recognition of global population, development and environmental interdependence, the opportunity to adopt suitable macro- and socio-economic policies to promote sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development in all countries and to mobilize human and financial resources for global problem-solving has never been greater …. Nonetheless, the effective use of resources, knowledge and technologies is conditioned by political and economic obstacles at the national and international levels. (Preamble)

Development, which is strongly associated with economic growth, is thus presented as a right and an obligation. Such a view fails to see development as an option, as a choice. At the very least, the notion of development and its different meanings should be critically explored. Would there not be a fear that endogenous or alternative visions of development could represent "political and economic obstacles" to the global sustainable growth solution?

In an educational process, the critical exploration of the contemporary and polysemic notion of development should be envisioned (as it should be for the notion of environment). Where does this notion of development come from? What are its different meanings for different people? Why are these meanings different? Examining these questions in an educational context does not seem to be encouraged. Even worse, education is defined as a fuel for development, and both are evaluated with quantitative and economic indicators:

> The relationship of education to development—usually defined as growth in national or per capita income—has been extensively documented over the past three decades and is universally accepted …. Indeed, the "discovery" by economists in the 1960s that education is an investment in development, not a drain on the economy as previously considered, has had a powerful impact on both educational and developmental policy. It has made individuals as well as governments more generous in funding education, but also more exigent in evaluating it: they want to know what it is, exactly, that they are "buying," and what is its content, its quality and even its rate of return. (UNESCO, 1999, pp. 45-46)

This assertion is unsettling: something that can pose a problem—economic growth and an economic worldview that affects people-environment relationships—is now transformed into the ultimate solution. Even more disturbing is the assertion that education directly serves economic growth. The equation can thus be read as follows: *education = development = economic growth = solution to all problems*. Education, as part of a larger economic system, is now supposed to drive economic growth. The fact that increased education has, up to now, been associated with increased growth in national

or personal income levels and that it strives for such a view of development needs to be critically appraised.

Finally, another important characteristic of the international proposals is the call for co-operation, solidarity, and interdependency. However, overshadowing this pursuit of fraternity between the delegates of nations striving towards a common goal are the notions of autonomy, self-management, and self-reliance. It would be interesting to question the seemingly inherent idea of solidarity in the sustainable development worldwide project in light of the assertion found in the President's Council on Sustainable Development document (1997) which presents sustainable development as a means to increase national competitiveness in the global economy.

DEVELOPMENT	
International proposals generally highlight the following aspects:	International proposals generally neglect the following aspects:
Economy is an autonomous force field outside the society, which determines the relation between society and environment.	Economy is part of the social sphere, is an aspect of social reality: it results from responsible choices.
Development is a requirement, an obligation, a destiny.	Development is an option, a choice. The requirement is to reflect upon the notion of development and justify a particular conception.
Development is economic growth.	Development is the deployment of the whole spectrum of human potentialities in a specific context.
Poverty is the key problem, the main cause of social and environmental problems.	Poverty is a symptom of deeper forms of alienation. Contemporary poverty is caused by the appropriation of the economic resources, and environmental and social abuses by the privileged minority.
Development is a global affair for world management.	Development is an endogenous project.
Development is the solution.	Development is a possible problem.
Importance of co-operation, solidarity, and interdependency.	Importance of autonomy, self-management, and self-reliance, at the basis of real co-operation and solidarity.

Table 4. The perspective on development in international documents addressing issues of education, environment, and development: Pairing highlighted elements with some neglected ones.

Conclusion

There is consistency in the documents we analyzed. The views on education, environment, and development do not vary much in these official texts over a 30-year time span. The same recommendations are repeated, albeit under a new label, as a "new" path for the salvation of humanity. There are obviously certain variations and nuances between the texts. For example, compared with other United Nations documents, UNESCO's documents seem to carry a view of education somewhat less instrumental, a view of the environment slightly less reduced to problems of resources, and a view of development that is open to dimensions other than economic growth.

The trends we observed in earlier documents correspond to the conceptual scheme of sustainable development, which became more and more explicit and determinant as of the mid-1980s. This scheme is most often illustrated with three interpenetrated circles of economy, environment, and society. The economy is considered as an autonomous entity existing outside of society, rather than as a dimension of the social sphere. Its "rules" determine society-environment relationships, on both collective and individual levels. The environment is reduced to a pool of resources for economic development. Society is defined by its activities related to resources (the environment as "natural capital"), and their extraction, transformation, and consumption for the "welfare" of human populations. Sustainable development, initially conceived as a relevant strategy to initiate reconciliation between the politico-economic and the environmental "worlds," has inflated and become the universal project of a new global civilization. Education is seen as the main strategy to "mobilize minds" towards the achievement of sustainable development. Education for sustainable development is prescribed as the central dimension of all educational projects. Such an enormous ethical and cultural mistake, such an invasion of the whole human field of signification, is nevertheless rarely detected and contested within the reviewed documents.

Although it should be considered as a core dimension of basic education, environmental education or "environment-related education" is subsumed by the huge tidal wave of the globalized and globalizing politico-economic project of sustainable development. Environmental education finds its specific and essential "niche" in one of the three interrelated spheres of interaction at the basis of personal and social development: the self, the others, and the environment. In relation with the sphere of relations with oneself (locus of the construction of identity), and the sphere of relationships with other humans (locus of the development of human alterity), the sphere of relationships with *Oïkos*, our common house of life shared with other humans but also with other-than-human beings, corresponds to the field of environmental education. In relation with the political dimension of the social sphere (where is constructed the web of relations with others), we find here *eco-logical* education (defining and fulfilling our human niche on Earth, as part of the ecological

world), *eco-nomic* education (responsibly and creatively using the common resources of our shared house of life) and the practice of *eco-sophy* (searching for the meaning of our being-in-the world, constructing our own cosmology). Such a core dimension of the educational process, of the ontogenic dynamics of persons and societies (Berryman, 2003), cannot be confined into the frame of sustainable development. Instead of enlarging the relationship between humans and the environment, as stated by its advocates, sustainable development reduces the environment to a set of resources for the sustainability of economy (growth), thus atrophying the human being to producers and consumers.

In the context of the current United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014, it becomes ever more crucial to reflect upon and investigate the integration of environmental education as "environment-related education" into the school curricula and into nonformal educational initiatives and programs in the various regions and countries of the world (some results of our observations are presented in Sauvé, Brunelle, & Berryman, 2005). While the international documents we analyzed can act as beacons, providing some guidance to envision the human situation and the issues of education, environment, and development, they should not be taken as educational credos. The international proposals appear like menus elaborated by some delegates of nations, to guide all the nations' choices concerning "environment-related education." Adopting these proposals literally as menus to feed children and everyone on Earth about the environment and development is disturbing to say the least. Ricœur's (1986) shrewd observations on the links between text and action can certainly inspire researchers and educators, and any analysts or authors of texts pretending to guide action and educational action, if not to direct such actions:

> … the hermeneutics of texts turns towards the critique of ideologies. The properly hermeneutic moment, it seems to me, is the one where the inquiry, transgressing the fence of the text, moves towards what Gadamer himself named "the thing of the text," that is, the kind of world opened up by the text. (p. 407; free translation)

This observation reinforces the necessity of inviting educators to take a critical distance from institutional proposals or guidelines and to question their theoretical foundations and the educational practices they inspire and support, "the kind of world" they open up and the one they close off. If environmental education has failed in contributing to social change with regards to the relationship of people to the environment, as suggested in certain international documents, could it not be that the quality and narrow use of environmental education "menu" choices are at least partly to blame? In fact, maybe environmental education has contributed more than its share to such a goal of social changes.

The debate needs to remain open and nourished through exploration of

the various ways of conceiving and practicing environment-related education, in the crucible of different contexts and cultures (Sauvé, 2005). In our critical hermeneutic of three decades of United Nations texts advancing recommendations and guidelines for environment-related education, we read a troubling "project of a world" or an unsettling "proposition of a world" whose contours appear sharper and sharper in each subsequent text. It is a paradoxical project where, in a somewhat emancipatory or liberatory language, couched in terms of the well-being of all humans, education is nonetheless reduced to an instrument for preparing "human resources" to solve environmental "problems" through a reformed notion of development mainly associated with sustained economic growth. The current "Decade" for education for sustainable development now promises more of the same, with more intensity, pressure, and dedication. Educators must be aware of this phenomenon. The idea is to seize the best possibilities of this major institutional strategy—in terms of promoting responsible development—while keeping a critical and reflexive distance towards its hyper-modern tendencies. Despite the attractiveness and legitimizing authority of international guidelines and the influence of what is presented as a general consensus, especially for educators often lacking social recognition, education is and must remain a space of liberty, a space where we can and need to critically explore the many dimensions of "being humans on Earth"[2] or, stated differently, what it means to be, environmentally.

Notes

[1]   The process and results of the whole research program are presented in the following website: http://www.unites.uqam.ca/ERE-UQAM/observatoire/

[2]   *Être humains sur la Terre* ("Being Humans on Earth") is the title of a book by Berque (1996), where the author focuses on the ethical relationship to the Earth "as the place of our being" (p. 12).

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