

Experience in value-creating through sowing seeds project: voices of Amazonian people

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Abstract:

Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (goal 4.7.) are essential elements to achieve SDG4, “Quality Education”. Garrison, Hickman, and Ikeda (2014) state that environmental education is key to fostering world citizens through the understanding of “the interconnectedness of humanity and human culture with biophysical systems” (p.151).

Connecting learning to daily life and the environment, Soka Amazon Institute provides a unique experience of creating values through environmental education and planting trees in a holistic approach. Soka Amazon Institute is a non-governmental organization based in Manaus, Amazonas and it is the only endeavor of Daisaku Ikeda in the environmental field. One of the main activities underpinned by the institute is sowing seeds and seedlings to provide the audience with an experience of interconnectedness with nature and to contribute to the protection of the ecological integrity of the Amazon.

This paper aims to investigate the fostering of the world's citizens through environmental education. It analyses the values and perspectives of different leaders who are partners of Soka Institute in terms of community, sustainability, and global citizenship. It concludes that sowing projects contributes to nurturing an environmental awareness and global citizenship education.

Keywords: environmental education, Soka Amazon Institute, global citizenship, sowing projects.

1. Introduction

Adopted in 2015 by the United Nations State Members, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development holds 17 goals, including a global education goal (SDG 4). This goal has seven targets and three means of implementation, aiming to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UNESCO, 2019).

Among many pivotal topics, Target 4.7 – Sustainable development and global citizenship - is about environmental education. It states that “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, 2021). The higher competencies of Target 4.7 are Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCE), which are mainstreamed at all levels: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, (c) teacher education and (d) student assessment (UN, 2021).

1.1. Objective

This paper aims to investigate the fostering of global citizens through environmental education. First, it introduces the value-creating pedagogy in environmental education. Second, it analyses the values and perspectives of different stakeholders who are partners of Soka Amazon Institute in terms of community, sustainability, and global citizenship. For instance, it aims to interview a representative of indigenous communities, scholars, and public corporations.

1.2. Methodology

To achieve these goals, this paper analyses the values and perspectives of four leaders who act in different institutions in the region in terms of community, sustainability, and global citizenship. They have joined the sowing projects of Soka Amazon Institute.

The methodology is a qualitative analysis through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in August 2022. They answered the same questions:

Table 1. Methodology

Focal Area	Questions
Relationship to the local community	How long have you lived in the Amazon? What is your relationship to this place? What is community to you? Which community do you belong to?
Planting experience and sustainability	Have you ever planted a seedling? What are your impressions? Emotions and thoughts when you plant? What is sustainability? What is sustainable development?
Global citizenship	Do you think the community where you live has a global importance? Why? Do you think your actions impact the planet? Could you elucidate it?

Source: made by the author.

2. Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) means education to empower learners to take decisions and actions with knowledge and responsibility for a sustainable society. In other words, it encourages behavior change to create a more sustainable future in terms of sustainable ways of life, climate change, biodiversity, and the greening of the economy (UNESCO, 2019). It is an effective instrument for climate change awareness, disaster preparedness, and reducing climate-related vulnerability (UNDP, 2020). UNESCO (2017) also presents three pedagogical approaches in ESD: learner-centered approach, action-oriented learning, and transformative learning.

“ESD is far more than teaching knowledge and principles related to sustainability. ESD, in its broadest sense, is education for social transformation with the goal of creating more sustainable societies. ESD touches every aspect of education including planning, policy development, program implementation, finance, curricula, teaching, learning, assessment, and administration. ESD aims to provide a coherent interaction between education, public awareness, and training with a view to creating a more sustainable future” (UNESCO, 2012, p.33).

Furthermore, in Global Citizenship Education (GCE), students play an active role and tackle global issues to create a more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, and secure world. It has three dimensions of learning: cognitive, socio-emotional, and behavioral in the SDG framework. The cognitive dimension represents the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking on global issues (and their interconnection/ interdependence between different nations and cultures); the socio-emotional dimension is the development of the feeling of belonging to common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity; and the behavioral dimension refers to the active action of students on a local, national and global scale with responsibility in the search for a peaceful and sustainable world (UNESCO, 2019).

2.1. Global Citizenship Education according to the Value-creating Pedagogy

Global Citizenship Education is one of the main pillars of the Value-creating Pedagogy, which is a perspective that could complement the United Nations framework (Sharma, 2020). Ikeda (1996) states that a global citizen is not determined by the number of languages spoken, nor by the number of countries to which they have traveled, but rather, by the following three qualities that must be nurtured in the individual: wisdom, courage, and compassion. He argues:

“The wisdom to perceive the interrelationship of all types of life and environment; the courage not to fear or deny differences, but to respect and force yourself to understand people from different cultures and grow through contact with them; and the compassion to cultivate an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond the environment around us and extends to other people who suffer in distant places” (Ikeda, 1996, p. 122).

Moreover, compassion means realizing the qualities of those we do not like and enjoying the chance to grow our humanity. Wisdom and compassion are interconnected, therefore, in the desire to contribute to the well-being of others, which provides infinite wisdom (Ikeda, 1996).

Value-based global citizenship is an “important foundation for fostering the wisdom to recognize the mutually interrelated nature of all living beings, the courage to engage fearlessly with different peoples and cultures, and the compassion to empathize with the sufferings of peoples of other countries” (Garrison, Hickman & Ikeda, 2014, p. 148). Ikeda (1996) also presented Environmental Education as one of the four themes to practice Value-creating Global Citizenship Education: first, peace education, in which young people learn the cruelty and folly of war, to root the practice of nonviolence in human society; second, environmental education, to study current ecological realities and means of protecting the environment; third, developmental education, to focus attention on issues of poverty and global justice; and fourth, human rights education, to awaken an awareness of human equality and dignity.

Moreover, they state that the local community of Makiguchi is pivotal because it teaches that the spirit of solidarity and compassion at the local level is the same fundamental spirit to achieve world peace. In other words, the protection of the natural environment is the

starting point to nurture global environmental awareness; and acting at the community level is, in fact, the first step and the foundation for global awareness.

3. Fostering Global Citizens through environmental education: the Soka Amazon Institute case-study

Soka Amazon Institute was founded by Dr. Daisaku Ikeda in Manaus, Brazil. It oversees managing the *Reserva Particular do Patrimônio Natural Dr. Daisaku Ikeda* (Private Reservation of Natural Heritage Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, in English)¹, a total area of 52 hectares of tracks, archeological, and historical sites.

Between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the historic site area was degraded by deforestation and the development of pottery factories. The institute set out to plant trees and revive the forest in a prolonged recovery period that began in 1990. Nowadays, the institute collects seeds of several native species to preserve the diversity of the Amazon biome.

Soka Institute's mission is to spread the humanistic vision of its founder, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, in favor of the ecological integrity of the Amazon. In practice, it develops projects and programs to enhance local socio-environmental development and to create opportunities to connect individuals to nature through partnerships. Its projects are divided into three main

¹ The *Sistema Nacional de Unidades de Conservação* (SNUC - Law 9.985/2000) (National System of Conservation Units, in English) is composed of twelve categories of national, regional, and local conservation units (MMA, 2021). One of these categories is Private Natural Heritage Reserves, private land to conserve biological diversity (ICMBio, 2021). By becoming a Private Natural Heritage Reserves, the landowner is prohibited to intervene in that area to be preserved for future generations. The landowner cannot build or deforest the area and any action done must pursue ecological integrity. There are three types of activities allowed: ecotourism, promotion, and support to scientific research, and environmental education. Regarding Dr. Daisaku Ikeda's RPPN, it was regularized as a reserve through Ordinance 049/95 of 12 July 1995 (Barreto, Marques & Azevedo, 2019).

focal areas: (1) environmental conservation; (2) environmental education; and (3) support for academic research.

Value-creating Pedagogy is the core principle for Soka Amazon Institute's environmental education programs. The vision of environmental education from the perspective of creating value is in the process of evolvement, with constant self-reflections, and deepening of knowledge on the subject.

According to Soka Amazon Institute, everyone who has contact with the institute has the chance to learn about environmental education. The Institute creates opportunities for individuals to connect with the environment in various approaches: on an expedition in the forest, collaborating with "*ribeirinhos*" when planting a seedling, in a class or lecture, and even on a visit to the Private Reserve of Natural Heritage Dr. Daisaku Ikeda.

The purpose of the Value-creating Pedagogy is for each student to find happiness and transform society. The prime point to implement in the environmental education field is the respect for the dignity of life, in which all human beings are the same, and all forms of life deserve to be equally respected. Environmental education does not impose behavioral models but rather spurs the connection of being with the environment, in which beings find themselves through a process of transformation and awareness. Such a process encourages the individual to recognize and understand the environment around them and learn ways to coexist based on respect and environmental integration (Cruz., Melo & Marques, 2016).

Environmental education in a value-based perspective means considering the individual. It does not mean education in favor of individual self-satisfaction (utilitarianism perspective) but rather adapting to the limitations and potentials of each person. It teaches about the relationship between human beings and nature, understanding how a person and the

environment are connected, people's responsibility towards nature, and the impact of their life on the planet.

Sharman (2020) argues that it is fundamental to provide multicultural perspectives to students, including economic, social, and environmental dimensions to the discussion. A Value-creating environmental education should also encourage students to reflect on their values, interests, and perceptions and how they contribute to the classroom to create a learning environment that considers different perspectives. Through multicultural perspectives and critical thinking, students articulate how their values and actions influence and impact climate change.

Besides, environmental education is not limited to formal education; it encompasses formal and non-formal learning. Any age range and any place are appropriate to learn about environmental education. Specifically for Brazil, environmental education is a transversal education, and no subject is responsible for addressing the topic in depth.

Value-creating pedagogy argues that one's behavior transforms the local community, the nation, and even the world (concept of human revolution or inner transformation), through understanding the respect for the dignity of life, and the relationship between an individual and the environment. The approach puts the student first, praising each one as a unique individual considering their socioeconomic-environmental context, in a dialogue with the "*protagonism*" of Paulo Freire.

Humanistic education scholars have investigated the importance of understanding the environment from a holistic perspective. Latin American scholars created the eco-pedagogy approach, which enlighten that education for planetary citizenship assumes an understanding of our life on the planet where we need to live in and the complex interrelations between ourselves and other forms of life, in a symbiosis relationship.

According to Freire (1996), education must strengthen the connection between school knowledge and everyday knowledge. An understanding of collective livelihood is the foundation of individuals who contribute to life preservation (Ferreira, Melo & Marques, 2016). Thus, Freire's ideas also encourage a reflection of the relationship between the individual and the world. Such a value-based perspective advocates transformative environmental education, in which active learning approaches encourage students to be agents of change who can change their local, national, and global environment.

About Education for Sustainable Development, Ikeda argues that education is essential for people to take environmental issues as a personal concern and harmonize their efforts for a common future (Ikeda, 2002), where the dignity of life is fundamental (Ikeda, 2012). Environmental issues are intertwined with global problems, demography, poverty, and human rights. Thus, sustainability is connected to these challenges as well. It is necessary to transform our way of life to overcome them, considering a collective responsibility towards whom we share the planet as well as to the future (Ikeda, 2002; 2012).

The Value-creating Pedagogy explores the idea of the local community as a “*microworld*”, and humans and the environment are interconnected and influence each other. Understanding that individuals influence the local community and vice versa is another broadly discussed concept in the Environmental Education field. Steffen et al. (2018, p. 8254) argue that the emergency requires a “fundamental change in the role of humans on the planet”. UNDP report (2020) points out:

“Changes to the biosphere can affect a place's character and humans' relationship with it since changes to the structure and function of an ecosystem can also affect the symbolic meaning and belonging created by the relationship with that place. These kinds of change can lead to psychological and emotional distress,

including grief and anguish associated with loss of place, biodiversity and nature. Sense of place connected to the biosphere affects how individuals and communities adapt to new conditions, determines whether relocation strategies are used or successful and influences shifts in livelihood strategies. A strong attachment to particular meanings of a place and a feeling of belonging in nature inspire empathy and motivate action and stewardship of ecosystems” (UNDP, 2020, p.32).

By understanding the local and the global, a global citizen develops a planetary citizenship perspective of “think globally and act locally”. Similarly, environmental education in the Value-creating Approach fosters global citizens who “think globally and act locally” and have three main characteristics: courage, wisdom, and compassion.

To achieve education for sustainable development, Ikeda (2002) emphasizes the importance of raising awareness through four stages: first, learning and deepening consciousness of environmental issues and realities; second, reflect on our ways of life, renewing them towards sustainability; third, to empower people to take concrete steps to solve the challenge we face; and forth, leadership.

3.1.Sowing Projects

The Soka Amazon Institute offers opportunities for its visitors to connect to nature from a value-based perspective, in which the individual is part of the whole. The human being is not at the center (anthropocentric approach) but is part of a complex system in which human, animal, plant, and natural resources are all integrated in a common world.

To elucidate, one of the most popular initiatives of the institute is environmental awareness and engagement through the involvement of partners in the sowing process. The act of planting a tree is an unforgettable experience that creates a bond between oneself and

the environment. Planting projects partners are educational institutions, religious institutions, private and public corporations.

Connecting learning to daily life and the environment, the Institute provides a unique experience of creating values through environmental education and planting trees in a holistic approach.

4. Results

4.1. Focal area 1: Relationship to the local community

The Amazon has multiple identities: a legal Amazon with an approximate area of 5,217,423 km² (61% of Brazilian territory); the Amazon biome, constituted of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana; and the state of Amazonas. The Amazon Rainforest is the largest tropical forest in the world, the largest hydrographic basin in the world, it has the greatest potential for water consumption in the world, and it is rich in biodiversity. There are 400 indigenous groups who speaks 300 languages (World Bank, 2019), and in the 2010 Census, a total of 99 indigenous ethnics were registered only in the city of Manaus: Baré, Sateré-Mawé, Tukano, Múra, Tikúna, Kokama, and Mundurukú (Cruz, 2019).

The four interviewees live in the state of Amazonas for more than 20 years. Among them, only one was not born there. They have roots and a feeling of belonging to the region. Amazon is the place where they have grown, fostered they descendants and created bonds of affection, gratitude, and protection to the local community. All of them stated the desire to contribute to their local community. The importance of Nature is more stressed to the interviewee who has an indigenous origin, when compared to others. He states:

“For us, indigenous peoples, Nature is our mother, the Earth is our mother, it is where we live, it is where we are day by day, it gives us health, clean oxygen, quality of life” (Indigenous representative).

Specifically, to this indigenous community, the tribe works in function of the indigenous school. They are organized in a collective system, in which the school is the village, and the village is the school. Moreover, they emphasize the wisdom of the elders as role models in education and appreciate them to protect the communities’ identity, history, and culture. At the school, the elderly people teach customs, traditions, myths, culture, language, etc., to preserve and nurture in the children their identity and proud of being an indigenous person. Therefore, the school is the essence of this indigenous community.

Another interviewee is a “*caboclo*” (half European half indigenous people). *Caboclo* and indigenous people is not the same. *Caboclo* are those who start to explore the land as a peasant. This interviewee household used to produce latex from the rubber tree, and to crop cassava, corn, and watermelon.

4.2. Focal area 2: Planting experience and sustainability

All of them had experienced planting a tree in different stages of life. For three of them, trees are essential for their household survival: a tree feeds them, it is a shelter, and an income source – selling fruits, vegetables, seeds, or arts and crafts. Because they had a close experience with nature, they have learnt its importance from their parents and the family’s tradition is part of their origins, customs, and values. They have emotional connection to nature – a family member has planted that tree at home, they have played games around a tree; or even listened to the nature alerting through animal’s sound or the environment stating when is a good or a bad day to hunt – holistic experiences.

One of them expressed that although have sown seedlings before, only when joined a project at Soka Amazon Institute, has learnt that planting a tree means planting a life; and who will be benefited from it is the future generations and the community. Another interviewee shared that when a tree is planted in the Amazon, this action contributes to the whole - that most of the time affects even the other side of the planet. This means that the person is in a worldwide program without even realizing it. The person is contributing to the planet as a global citizen. In people's minds, they are contributing locally, but they do not realize that this is an action that is contributing to the planet. And when this reflection happens, a feeling of being part of a great movement flourishes.

When asked about Sustainable Development, all interviewees expressed signs of concern to the future and dissatisfaction to the current Government. Sustainable Development will only be possible when the local people be considered – local citizens must be part of the decision-making, receive the benefits and have the responsibilities to the community's development.

The Amazon region is a mosaic where each region has specific needs, features, culture, and hardships. Therefore, partnership is a possible way to achieve Sustainable Development in the region, in which through negotiation and dialogue, it is possible to exchange expertise and experiences. Indigenous knowledge has invented techniques that the white people could not replicate and vice versa.

One of them emphasized that it is only possible to develop the region if education and research is unfolded in the area. There are many knowledge and research to be developed about the forest in a sustainable approach, in which it is created a continuous production cycle without exhausting the natural resources. This interviewee highlighted that up to now, the Amazon rainforest was and still is explored in a predatory perspective: people are cutting

down more trees than planting seedlings. In addition, many enterprises neglect the forest management. It is necessary to reforest the original species according to the biome, in a sustainable compensation – with accuracy, technique and scientific responsibility.

Indigenous people are the great model of sustainability to all interviews – they are the Guardians of the Forest who have a holistic wisdom to the environment. The indigenous representative said that sustainability means respecting and caring for the Nature. They only take from Nature what is needed without harming the forest.

4.3. Focal area 3: Global citizenship

All interviewees believe that the Amazon regional has a planetary importance.

Citizenship means having the right to a shelter, health, education, and dignity. It is not acceptable to a caboclo be deprived for so long years. And the Government must act to provide human rights to all citizens.

The main concern of the Indigenous leader is that the indigenous traditional knowledge is being swallowed by the white-people knowledge through the digital technology. The digital world is influential and if there is no reflection on the purpose and reasons to consume the white-people knowledge, you lose yourself. To tackle this issue, this community has a plan to value first their tradition and culture, and later, according to what and how much it is necessary, they choose what to learn of the white people's tradition and culture.

Moreover, all the interviewees think that education is fundamental – an environmental education that creates global citizens. It is important to give access to the tools, the technology, and the power of choice. It is fundamental to knowledge and access to information be equitably shared and a colonialism approach must be avoided. It is needed an environmental education that nurtures a global consciousness on the individual's rights and

responsibilities, in which the person understands the consequences of his/her choices and attitudes to the ecosystem in a planetary perspective. At first locally, but that affects it globally.

5. Discussion

Documents such as the founder's Peace Proposal, the Earth Charter, and the SDGs are guiding instruments to Soka Amazon Institute and the sowing projects are opportunities to learn about environmental education. Sowing projects gives the opportunities to create a connection between an individual and the environment in a holistic approach.

Although the interviewees have an environmental awareness and appreciation to the local community, they have difficulty in finding a way to develop the region in a sustainable perspective due to the divergent points of view, values, and goals among the stakeholders in the region. The Amazon region is a diverse society in which there are many conflicts and perspectives of sustainable development. To overcome those challenges, SDG17 - Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development - is fundamental.

Thus, the partners interviewed value the Soka Institute's initiatives in bringing together the public sector, private sector, academia, and civil society to dialog and have similar experiences in sowing. The action of planting a seedling is the same for everyone and this is an exciting and touching experience that people get emotional and creates a bond. In addition, the Institute have started volunteering initiatives that had positive outcomes in involving the institute's partners as well.

Not only a lecture, but also sowing seedlings, cleaning a green area, or being a monitor to an exhibition – these are some of the environmental education actions undertaken by Soka Amazon Institute. Because environmental education is a transversal education, it can be studied beyond the wall of a school or university.

One of the main insights of the interviews are the learning after a sowing experience: planting a tree connect an individual to its community and past and future generations. A tree grows in your own time and its benefits are shared among everyone, the community, and future generations. The trees that we enjoy today was planted by the past generations and it is a connection between the current and the future generation.

6. Conclusion

This paper concludes that sowing projects developed by Soka Amazon Institute nurtures global citizens through environmental education. Giving the chance to any person to plant a seedling, explaining the importance of trees, and deepening the understanding on the interconnectedness between beings and the environment in a holistic perspective are important steps to foster an environmental awareness. Therefore, studying environmental education creates global citizens.

Especially to the Amazon region, study environmental education based on a value perspective is fundamental to achieve the sustainable development framework. Respecting the dignity of life, each ethnic group's singularities, providing equal rights and opportunities, access to information and technology; and dialogue are pivotal to develop the Amazon region. Therefore, the Soka Amazon Institute's environmental education projects based on the Value-creating Pedagogy support the development of global citizens and contributes the Amazonian society.

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