

Accord on
**Education for a
Sustainable Future**



ACDE

ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN DEANS OF EDUCATION

Accord on Education for a Sustainable Future

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Preamble

FROM: ACDE'S STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT ON THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY (2019)

We, Deans, Directors, and Chairs of Education from all regions of Canada are deeply concerned about the climate emergency and environmental crisis. Local, regional, and global air and water pollution; extractive technologies; accumulation and distribution of toxic wastes; destruction and depletion of forests, soil, and water threaten the survival of the planet, the integrity of the Earth and its biodiversity, the security of nations, Indigenous peoples, and future generations. These environmental changes are caused by inequitable and unsustainable production and consumption patterns that aggravate poverty in many regions of the world.

We believe that urgent actions are needed to address these fundamental problems and reverse the trends. We acknowledge the work undertaken by the world in creating the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, with associated goals and indicators. Stabilization of human population, adoption of environmentally sound industrial and agricultural technologies, reforestation, protection of habitats and ecological restoration are crucial elements in creating an equitable and sustainable future in harmony with nature.

We recognize that our actions as Faculties, Colleges, Schools, and Departments of Education are complicit in this critical trajectory. We have a responsibility and opportunity to make a difference.

We recognize the power of education to transform practice. Faculties, Colleges, Schools, and Departments of Education have a major role in the education, research, policy formation, practices and information exchange necessary to make these goals possible. This is a social and an ethical responsibility. We must act.

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Context

Education for a sustainable future

With the unprecedented crises resulting from climate change, such as melting sea ice, wildfires, desertification in Africa, rising sea levels and extreme weather events, we are running out of time to address the human-linked environmental threats to our planet. As a species we need to review our use of the world's resources to address over-extraction and over-harvesting, and promote regeneration. We have the capacity to enact hope: to make different choices about how we live and work in consideration of our individual and collective environmental footprint. As Canadian Deans of Education,

we have an ethical responsibility for the fate of those at the margins who are more vulnerable to the threats from environmental degradation.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly committed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including goal #4 "Quality Education," that endeavour to end global poverty, improve wellbeing of people and the planet, advance gender equality, and ensure inclusive and equitable educational opportunities across the



“Enough, for all, forever. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is the contribution that the world's education, public awareness, and training systems can make to society's quest for a more sustainable future.

Charles Hopkins, UNESCO Chair for Reorienting Education towards Sustainability, 2009

lifespan. In this context, UNESCO's *Roadmap for Education for Sustainable Development* (2020) states:

ESD empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to take informed decisions and make responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society empowering people of all genders, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity. (p. 8)

We believe that education is a source and reason for hope, inspiration and change.

In the spirit of the reports published by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and associated educational goals, education in Canada requires acknowledgment of and engagement with First Nation, Métis and Inuit voices, experiences, histories, cultures and perspectives, and traditional knowledge. We therefore have and will continue to seek meaningful engagement with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and organisations in the development and enactment of this Accord.

Education must make explicit the goals of learning for a sustainable future and ensure that these goals are infused across

provincially mandated curricula and related educational policies. This position requires a commitment to teaching innovation that recognizes and affirms the value of educating for a sustainable future. Core to this commitment is recognizing and accounting for the interconnections among the global ecological crisis and the continued realities of systemic discrimination, racism, and colonialism on individuals, families and communities. We recognise that education has often contributed to these realities and continues to do so.

Considerations of justice must be central to education for a sustainable future. People who identify as Indigenous, Black and People of Colour have been differentially affected by environmental practices that have put our planet in peril. Social justice is a central organizing theme linking environmental struggles to the struggles for equality and as a means of "mobilizing community wide coalitions built across race, ethnic, and class lines" (Taylor, 1997, p. 42).

The *Accord on Education for a Sustainable Future* should be used in association with other ACDE accords to guide review of programs, inform research initiatives, and influence educational policy and curriculum in and beyond Faculties of Education across Canada.

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Principles

In this section, we summarise some of the principles that guide the thinking found in this accord. The most basic assumption is that education has an important role to play in working for a sustainable future. By education, we mean formal schooling, pre-school and early childhood programs, post-secondary contexts, informal and work-based contexts, public education and information, and learning on the land. Education in whatever form prepares citizens of all ages for the challenges of the future. Faculties of Education have a particular role in educating the teachers of the young citizens in Canada's schools.¹

We have chosen to use the title *Education for a Sustainable Future* to refer broadly to any approach to education that promotes the regeneration and flourishing of the planetary ecosystem. Education for a sustainable future² can draw on many different educational traditions, including Indigenous education, education for sustainable development, environmental education, outdoor education, nature-based education, place-based education, eco-justice education, and ecological literacies, each of which can contribute to a curriculum that promotes a vision for a sustainable future and empowers learners to make a difference.

¹ See, for example, the 2012 Council of Ministers of Education of Canada publication, *Education for Sustainable Development in Canadian Faculties of Education*.

² This title is not one established in the research or policy literatures, in order to avoid aligning this Accord with any specific approach, such as those mentioned in this paragraph.

The principles we set out in this section are supported by a variety of sources (see bibliography).

THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING, BEING AND DOING

In this accord, the term Indigenous is used in alignment with the Accord on Indigenous Education. As such, we recognize, acknowledge and affirm Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island³ as its original inhabitants with millennia of ontology, axiology and epistemology that informs their relationality with the natural world. It is therefore imperative that we embrace partnerships with Indigenous communities to improve our relationship, and thus agency, in working for education for a sustainable future.

This accord values the diversity of Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing and learning, and ways of being in relationship with the natural world. An Indigenous wholistic learning model for environmental pedagogy addressing spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual development will ensure the paradigm shift necessary in education for a sustainable future.

Individual and collective Indigenous efforts to improve environmental sustainability and ecological regeneration are being enacted in local, regional, provincial and

³ Also known as North America.

national contexts. ACDE joins these efforts through its Faculties, Colleges, Schools and Departments of Education.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONALITY

The thinking needed for a sustainable future is fundamentally relational. It is impossible to understand the current ecological crisis without attending to relations and connections in many dimensions. Most basically, life on Earth is a complex web of interrelated and interdependent life forms and non-living constituents which function together as a living whole (e.g. Lovelock, 2010). We are all related. Thinking and understanding life relationally highlights the intrinsic worth of all living forms. A relational perspective has implications for curriculum and leads us to question the common academic hierarchy that places abstract, generalisable ideas above local, situated understanding. A relational perspective on life on Earth implies the need for a living, locally connected approach to education and hence a need for adaptable, non-standardised curricula. One corollary of this perspective is that much more formal education needs to take place outdoors. A second corollary is that an interdisciplinary approach is indispensable; as life is relationally interconnected and interdependent, learning must be too: curriculum cannot be siloed into distinct and disjoint subject areas since such an approach is not relational.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

There is a significant connection between working for a sustainable future and social justice. Just as all life on Earth is related, so are all human beings, and as such all

humans have a right to equity, dignity, respect. Ways of thinking that produce injustice, marginalisation and oppression in society are related to the practices that have produced the ecological crisis. In particular, in both cases, these ways of thinking are based on constructing hierarchies (of greater and lesser worth) to justify practices of domination and exploitation. Colonisation, racism, patriarchy and other forms of oppressive thinking are all based on the construction of hierarchies (between colonisers and colonised, between racial groups, among women, men and non-binary people, between people of different socioeconomic status, etc.). The same kind of thinking is implicated in the practices of domination and exploitation by humans of the planetary ecosystem, in that humans are seen as of superior value to other species, thus justifying the exploitation of other creatures for human benefit. Hence working for a sustainable future necessarily entails working for social justice.

A focus on ethical relationality through a social justice lens can identify how everyday taken-for-granted consumption practices in wealthier nations and regions are profoundly attached to both environmental degradation and the subjugation and marginalization of lives in poorer countries and regions. Education for a sustainable future should highlight the importance of learning and teaching about our own structural locations in an international system of racialized and gendered economic relations that produce these conditions. Neither root causes nor effects are simply in the immediate or local context, but rather in the intersection of race, class, gender, capitalism, and colonialism. A social justice lens also brings hope and invites participation in anti-oppressive practices.

“Education is fundamentally a *hopeful exercise*”

THE IMPORTANCE OF WELL-BEING

The motivation for this accord is a concern for the well-being and flourishing of the web of life on Earth. This principle then extends to curriculum, to teachers and to students. If education is wholistic, with a view to taking care of all our relations, it is also about the well-being—the right to flourish—of each creature, each form of life, and each of our students. There is a connection between practices that promote the flourishing of the planetary ecosystem and practices that promote the social, physical and psychological well-being of individuals.

A focus on well-being can lead us to rethink assumptions about what healthy education looks like. For example, more physical activity and time spent outdoors in biodiverse environments promotes wellness for individuals and an appreciation of wellness in biodiversity.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY

We do not seek for education simply to inform citizens or to be conduits for information. If educators are to contribute to a sustainable future, we must make space for advocacy. In our role as educators of future citizens, enacting advocacy is crucial if education is to contribute to a sustainable future in which life on Earth flourishes. Faculties of Education contribute to the development of public policy and curriculum, and shape the educational landscape through research, teacher

education, early childhood education programs, professional development and graduate education.

Advocacy means building coalitions to enact change and teaching the skills needed for coalition building and change-making. Faculties of Education are well-positioned to take on this role, through, among other things, their cross-sectoral work with different participants in education systems, their preparation of the next generation of teachers, their work in professional development and their contribution to research and development.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOPE

Education is fundamentally a hopeful exercise. Although every day brings more devastating news about how our ecosystem is changing in response to human activity leading to increased environmental and social degradation, educators can do things now that will contribute to regeneration, justice and a sustainable future. Hope must be understood in complex relational terms. It is at once a privilege and a necessary act of subversion—a political declaration that the present conditions will not suffice.⁴ We must believe that we and our students can make a difference.

⁴ “Hope, on one hand, is an absurdity too embarrassing to speak about, for it flies in the face of all those claims we have been told are facts. Hope is the refusal to accept the reading of reality which is the majority opinion; and one does that only at great political and existential risk. On the other hand, hope is subversive, for it limits the grandiose pretension of the present, daring to announce that the present to which we have all made commitments is now called into question.” – Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*.

Responsibilities

In this section, we set out the responsibilities accepted by Faculties of Education concerning education for a sustainable future.



1 | RESPONSIBILITIES TO OURSELVES AND OUR STUDENTS

- a. To highlight the importance and urgency of education for a sustainable future at every level and within each aspect of our work as educators and to build hope in our capacity to create positive change.
- b. To ensure that education for a sustainable future is a central and required component of course offerings in our pre-service, in-service and graduate level teacher education curricula, including in experiential learning placements and extra-curricular activities.
- c. To re-imagine and apply a range of relational pedagogies that support teaching and learning about education for a sustainable future in Faculties of Education. We recognize that these pedagogies may call into question many traditional approaches to teaching and will be less anthropocentric, less hierarchical, less pre-determined, less controlling, more equitable, and healthier for all. These include more uses of land-based outdoor learning pedagogies, experiential pedagogies, wild pedagogies, place based pedagogies, etc.
- d. To include pedagogy that embraces learning about, on, from and with the world beyond humanity.

2 | RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN RELATIONSHIPS

- a. To build coalitions based on ethical relationality with Indigenous wisdom-keepers and knowledge-holders in curriculum and pedagogy development, and renewal activities.
- b. To build coalitions based on ethical relationality with local, regional, and national Indigenous groups in decision making.
- c. To build coalitions based on ethical relationality with existing local and regional organisations, including those representing youth voices.
- d. To build coalitions based on ethical relationality within our institutions to promote education for a sustainable future through interdisciplinary programs and research, and in the policies of our institutions.
- e. To advocate for our universities to sign and implement the *Talloires Declaration* on environmental sustainability in higher education.⁵

⁵ See <https://ulsf.org/talloires-declaration/>

3 | RESPONSIBILITIES FOR OUR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- a. To act in ways that add to the equitable, sustainable, healthy, flourishing future of the planet.
- b. To reduce the environmental impact of our own institutions, including:
 - Revising travel and knowledge mobilisation policies, to require sustainable approaches to travel and reducing expectations regarding international travel
 - Reducing the environmental impact of educational research practices and revising policies in order to reduce such impact
 - Assessing and reducing the environmental impact of our facilities, including carbon footprint, waste footprint, etc.
 - Promoting well-being within our Faculties and in our partnerships.

4 | RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEADERSHIP

- a. To understand, promote and contribute to a socially and ecologically just, healthy, flourishing society with hope, humility and concerted action.
- b. To increase the capacity and depth of research in education for a sustainable future.
- c. To support each other within ACDE to transform our practices, curriculum, and pedagogies in ways that add to education for an equitable and sustainable future.
- d. To advocate for reform in the provincial curriculum and work with partner organisations to embed education for a sustainable future as a key learning area that is prioritized in teaching and learning in elementary and secondary schools around Canada.
- e. To conduct advocacy and work with provincial accrediting bodies for teacher education to ensure the inclusion of education for a sustainable future in teacher education and for this to be reflected in accreditation requirements.
- f. To create mechanisms to track, share and report initiatives and successes in curricular reform and advocacy among ACDE members.

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