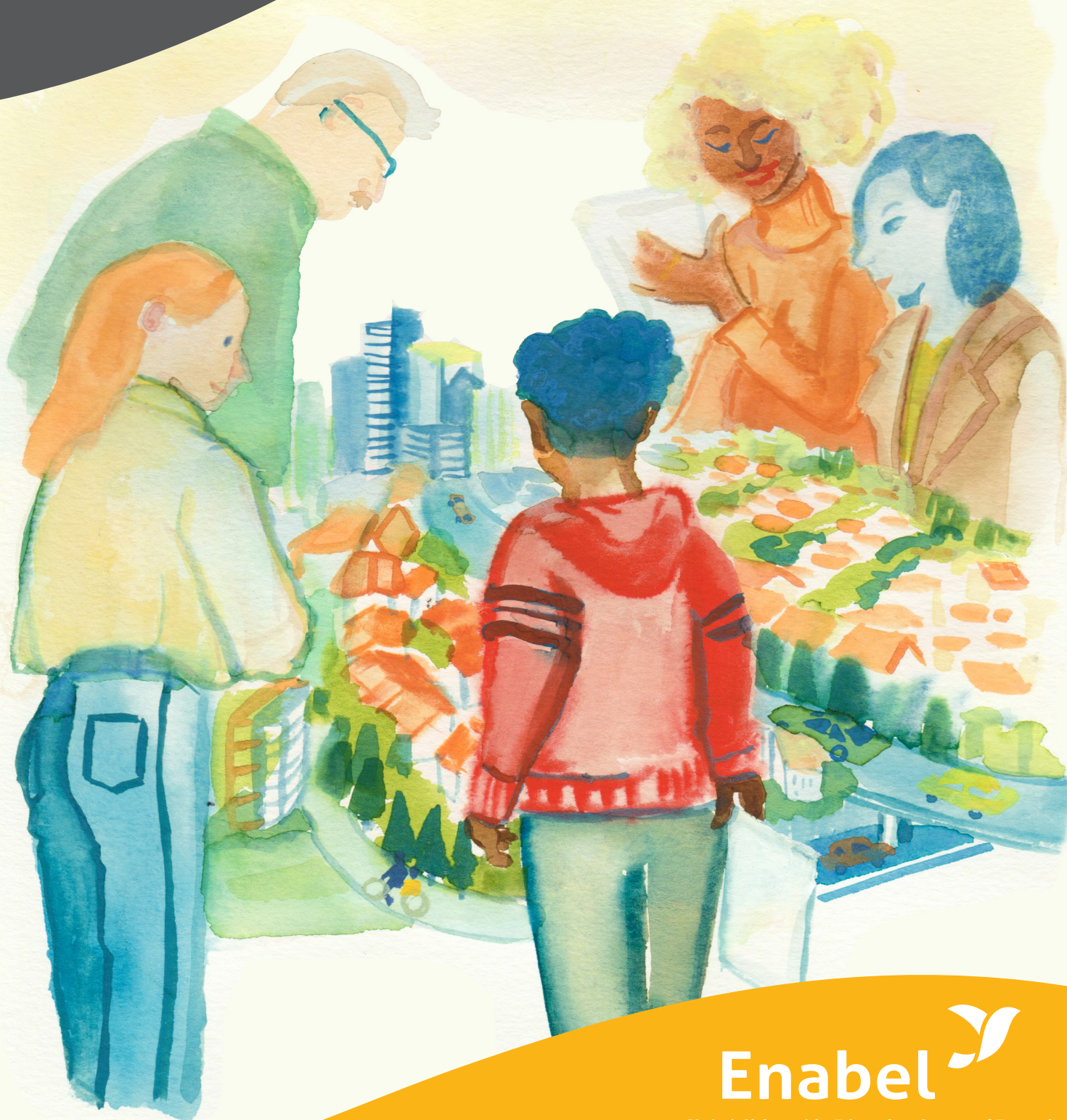


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Global Citizenship Education Centre of Expertise

The relationship between Global Citizenship Education and Education for Sustainable Development

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Attention to both Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is on the rise. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals play a significant role in this. SDG 4.7 advances the embedment of GCE and ESD in the realisation of quality education. Given their distinctly global nature, they are considered to be the frameworks of choice to bring global challenges to school and to enable a more sustainable and just world through education.

However, the SDGs do not clarify exactly how the relationship between GCE and ESD should be understood. In the wake of their growing popularity, there is an increasing demand among GCE and ESD education providers for what exactly connects and distinguishes both educations. This issue paper does not provide a ready-made answer, but does provide a number of insights and clues to this conceptual issue.

Common view: GCE and ESD as two overlapping but separate domains

It is common to consider GCE and ESD as two separate, coexisting domains. We notice so not only in the SDGs, but also in academia and educational practice. Cross-pollination aside, a look at specialised literature shows that both represent their own research tradition with their own research institutes, reference works and publication channels. The importance of (traditions in) funding should not be underestimated. GCE and ESD each strive for a place in the often full education policy agenda, school curricula and projects.

The presentation of GCE and ESD as two separate domains is strongly reflected in UNESCO, the agency that is important in promoting them. UNESCO does not deny the entanglement between the two educations. In an effort to create conceptual clarity, in 2016 it devoted a brochure specifically to the similarities and differences between GCE and ESD (UNESCO, 2016). In the brochure, conceived as a handy guide for teachers, both educations are placed in a complementary yin-yang relationship with each other.

In other words, for UNESCO, GCE and ESD are two stand-alone but equally essential educations that can only be successful if they both receive sufficient attention. Their common goal is to help students become actors who contribute to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive and sustainable world.

According to UNESCO, GCE and ESD share a number of identical starting points for this purpose:

- They focus on global challenges: climate change, conflict, gender inequality, environmental pollution, terrorism, and so on.
- They want to contribute to the same urgent need: trigger the changes in how people coexist with each other and with our planet.
- They take a similar learning approach: a holistic pedagogy that goes beyond specific learning content and outcomes, but also pays attention to the learning processes and environment.
- They pay attention to broader skills and attitudes such as collaboration, communication and critical thinking.
- They serve a transformative purpose: They emphasise action, change and societal transformation "empowering learners of any age, in any education setting, to transform themselves and the society they live in" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 9).

According to UNESCO, GCE and ESD will each work from their own perspectives. Global citizenship focuses on the universal values of human rights, democracy and non-discrimination and focuses on a sense of membership of common humanity, as well as on civic actions that promote a better world and future. The typical themes covered under the heading of GCE are in line with this focus and include peace, human rights, intercultural understanding, respect for diversity, tolerance and inclusion.

According to the UNESCO brochure, the core of sustainable development is mainly the denouncing of social, economic and environmental issues – climate change, biodiversity, disasters, sustainable consumption, poverty, etc. – with the aim of achieving a development model that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Elsewhere, UNESCO summarises the main distinction between GCE and ESD as follows: “Global citizenship education is more associated with global challenges related to peace and conflict, and education for sustainable development with global challenges related to environmental warnings and natural resources” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 3).

Alternative presentation: ESD as part of GCE, or vice versa

However, many in the ESD and GCE sectors do not (anymore) fully agree with this division. They will oppose the assertion that ESD is only focused on ecological issues and GCE would confine itself to the more social-societal issues. Another common feature of both educations is their comprehensiveness.

They are both umbrella concepts. Under the respective flags lies a wide, varied range of themes, ideas and practices. This property sometimes ensures that GCE and ESD are positioned not next to, but among themselves, in certain conceptual representations. Depending on the starting point and who is speaking, ESD is then counted as GCE in such models, or vice versa.

Mannion, Biesta, Priestley and Ross (2011), for instance, show how in the wake of a global curriculum shift in the United Kingdom various learning lines come together in GCE. According to them, it has become the nodal point of significance in which some traditions and more specific educations find shelter. From environmental education to peace education and development education to citizenship education, they all increasingly have a global perspective and seem to be joining forces under the heading of GCE. The authors also consider ESD to be a line that flows into GCE.

Van Poeck and Loones (2010) also describe ESD as a connecting concept, which can be worked on from different perspectives. In their view, it is not limited to nature and environmental education, as is sometimes mistakenly assumed. Other educations such as peace education and global education are also fertile ground for putting ESD into practice.

But the explicit interest for GCE has also increased within ESD. This mainly was to respond to the criticism that ESD would not be able to achieve its transformative ambitions. According to Nambiar and Sarabhai (2015), promoting global citizenship has thus become a specific objective within the broader ESD story.

Substantive and pedagogical convergences of GCE and ESD

The different ways in which the relationship between GCE and ESD is presented may give rise to confusion. Insight into the various causes of the entanglement of both educations can provide guidance. Both in terms of content and pedagogically, GCE and ESD seem to be growing closer together.

Firstly, as GCE and ESD evolve, there is substantive expansion, which increases the overlap between the two. Their development embodies a movement away from one-issue thinking towards a more holistic approach that seeks to do justice to the reality of a globalising, increasingly inherently interconnected society. Even while there are different starting points at their origin. In other words, GCE and ESD have different conceptual roots.

One of the main foundations of GCE lies in development education (Bourn, 2020). Initially, the main purpose of this education was to raise awareness among people in the 'North' about problems in the 'South', in order to create support for development cooperation and a fairer distribution of the burdens and benefits. Today GCE goes wider. It aims to increase insight into global challenges and contribute to global responses to them. It goes without saying that climate change and other sustainability issues are part of these global challenges (Carabain et al., 2012).

ESD is mainly indebted to environmental and nature education (Bonafant & Fontdevila, 2017). Although sustainable development is essentially about balancing three pillars – the environment, the economy and the social – attention has long been disproportionately focused on the ecological and – at a somewhat later stage – the economic (Gough, 2018). Today, however, there is also an increased focus on the third – social – pillar, which refers to concerns such as justice, gender equality and political participation. Themes, in other words, that are usually included in the core business of GCE.

Secondly, not least because of the link with citizenship and citizenship education in both educations, there is also an expansion movement under way in terms of pedagogical approach. Within both GCE and ESD, more and more voices are advocating a critical approach, bringing in multiple perspectives, debate and politics in the broadest sense of the word. The aim is not to steer behaviour in a normative way, but to enable autonomy, well-considered action, personal statements and engagement (see, among others, Franch, 2019; Sass et al., 2020). When classroom practice uses such a pluralistic approach to sustainable development questions, the line between GCE and ESD is paper thin.

Implications for practice

So there are several ways to present the relationship between GCE and ESD. However, any resulting confusion should not thwart initiatives. On the contrary, convergences just help to make visible the common nature of the fight for greater global justice and sustainability. In other words, it is up to GCE and ESD providers to join forces and explore each other's wealth.

In this matter, we already see three possible starting points for education providers in both sectors:

First of all, it is worth leaving one's comfort zone and getting inspired by each other. After all, both GCE and ESD discuss and experiment around many similar challenges, such as the embedment of GCE and ESD through a whole school approach, taking into account decolonising perspectives or stimulating engagement and action in a pedagogically responsible way. Getting to know each other and keeping an eye on each other's information channels can therefore be enriching for both sectors.

A second starting point goes further and implies actually entering into mutual partnerships. Despite the differences that remain between the GCE and ESD sectors, it is worthwhile to explicitly look up the interfaces and develop joint projects from there. After all, with combined forces, GCE and ESD providers are stronger to make global justice and sustainability the learning targets for 21st-century education. Together they can ensure that schools grow into – to put it in Gert Biesta's (2015) terms – training grounds for living in harmony with others on a planet with limited possibilities.

Thirdly, GCE and ESD providers, who are often part of the NGO sector, can also find and strengthen each other in their political advocacy. Thanks to the SDGs, more and more countries are integrating GCE and ESD into their educational vision, policy and practice. This evolution should be welcomed. However, mainstreaming GCE and ESD also involves pitfalls. They both originated from educations with distinctly critical and transformative ambitions, questioning the current social, economic, environmental and political system. If they are embraced by everyone – including governments – there is a risk that these critical aspects will be reduced. It is up to GCE and ESD providers, in other words, to jointly ensure this critical basis.

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