

## **Resolution of the Oceania Roundtable**

The Oceania region is blessed with immense cultural, linguistic, epistemic, and ecological diversities, from the perspective of which we approach Human Education. Many things in the draft Declaration document resonate with many things that come to our minds when we think about the current situation and about the next generation, future teachers. The whole document spoke to us and resonated with our commitments and work. Now is the time for educators and society at-large to reflect on what we want to carry forward, and what aspects of collective living no longer serve us. This pathway towards a better future society is at the heart of the progressive education movement. We believe that Education has the potential to dramatically shift societies globally and create lasting positive change: increased climate consciousness, a more ethical integration of technology within the human experience, increased care for the social emotional well-being of individuals and communities, and more socially just forms of democratic governance. We hope that this declaration, once it's improved, will be used as some kind of document that reflects what educators from different universities in the world think about the challenges we face in education and how it should be different in the future.

Society is the most serious stakeholder in education. From this point of view, the words 'humanizing education' and 'human education' are two different things. 'Humanizing education' refers to what is present in current education while adding on elements of interpersonal and connectivity to humanize it. However, 'human education' refers to something bold, and transformative that can open up to potential new initiative and should be presented in the declaration. Its meaning is to have society in education.

We really agree with the idea of collective responsibility in this document. We think that along with the collective responsibility, there should be relational ethics. Because our cultures are highly relational, relationality comes with its own set of ethical principles and behaviors.

We do support the general ideas that are there in preamble, but possibly the choice of words to present it to public can be criticized for the negative accent on the words, like *failure* and *deprive*. Also we think that since the document is a bit long, it would be difficult for any policy makers or any large number of people to grasp the preoccupations, concerns and the proposed solutions. One solution to this issue of lengthy document is to prepare a 1 or 2 page version of the document. In addition, even though the document appears comprehensive and well put together from the first page, the latter part of the document especially on sections about the early years, school, tertiary education and adult education, are not as well elaborated. The recommendation is for these sections to be expanded perhaps by having a more collaborative effort by small groups of scholars/educators from these levels working together to elaborate on these sections.

While we recognise numerous challenges that require change in education across the world, we believe our challenges are even more strong and direct when it comes to climate change. We live in times of triple crisis: Climate crisis, loss of biodiversity and air pollution. Oceania is a particularly affected region. Due to rising sea levels and coastal erosion, our Pacific Island nations face the threat of climate change migration and significant risks of inundation and increased flooding that would result in the loss of lives, loss of agriculture, and loss of drinking water. In Australia, the 2019-2020 Black Summer bush fires, the death of 95% of Tasmanian Kelp forests, and the mass bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef (the largest living organism on earth), are examples that show the deep impact of climate change in our region. Indigenous people in our region are most vulnerable to effects of climate change.

Education should be relevant to the lives of people and their environment. There is no neutral and value-free education. We also believe education should play a significant role in addressing societal

problems. However, our education systems are not sufficiently preparing our people to respond to the challenges they are facing. Education is very much influenced and maneuvered to a certain extent by politicians. Educators and learners are hindered to be active producers of educational content and be active community 'leaders and builders'. Education system and the transformation of education system should consider, acknowledge and support educators as agents of change. This would create a sustainable, resilient and equitable curricula for human education in the new Millenia.

When we address what it is to engage in education for democracy, we need to pay more attention to the question, "What does it mean to be a democracy?", and to the concept of post-democracy. Deliberative democracy is certainly the main ideal in Oceania. But students have to learn active citizenship through hands-on activities, not just in a non-activist environment. An agonistic education that prepares to grapple with different opinions and different views is also important for fostering active democratic citizenship. Critical education that gives clear insight into the root causes of the complex problems, their causes, and possible solutions is crucial. Such solutions should include honest perspectives that could enable students to impact social change.

Cultural democracy is very important to citizens of Oceania who need their indigenous knowledge systems, their cultural values to be respected and legitimately included into education systems, curriculum, teaching, textbooks, resources, in all aspects. Much work of this kind is happening at the moment in projects in a number of Pacific countries where they are reworking curriculum. For learners in the Oceania Region, culture and religion are particularly influential in shaping their identity, values and outlook in life. In addition, educational courses are needed to help develop students' moral autonomy, not only in terms of individual responsibility and accountability, but to help them develop into independent and critical thinkers.

Indigenous peoples across Oceania have millennia old cultures that have lived sustainably in their islands and have centuries accumulated wealth of wisdoms and experiences that protect, nurture and sustain the region's unique diversities. Indigenous ways of being and belonging transcend the colonial division between human and non-human life. We think it's time for us and we have to bring those indigenous knowledge systems within and alongside science, technology and other knowledge systems. It is transmitted across generations through indigenous cultural and spiritual institutions, and the cultivation of communal values and identities that promote caring, empathy, sharing, community, and belonging. We believe that Oceania has much to offer this shift in consciousness because of a number of our unique geographic and cultural traits (e.g. histories of living sustainably on geographically isolated islands, indigenous epistemologies centered on humans' connection with the environment, the legacy of Pacific voyaging, multiculturalism, just to name a few). As the document states, it is time to shift from the Global North to new predominant paradigms.

At the same time, we acknowledge the need to question the way of privileging indigenous ideology of education in which 'indigenous' itself seems to be providing some kind of an answer against other forms and methods of education. We are concerned that this might eventually develop into a myth. We shouldn't ignore the fact that education, whether you're looking at the current institutions or the traditional indigenous institutions, they all end up to being very exclusive.

Since education should aim at nurturing and supporting every aspect of our diversity, language is a key component that determines the relevance of education. In our region in particular, indigenous languages are critical for the sustenance of millennial indigenous knowledges. Along with this, in today's interconnected world, multilingual education is important, especially for such a linguistically, culturally, ethnically diverse group as the Oceania, where many students are attached to not just one ethno-cultural identity and often do not accept binary opposites of west-east, foreign-native, etc. In this context we need to also address the global/cosmopolitan worldview that some bicultural or multicultural youth living within the Oceania eco-system may bring into the classroom.

We believe that the goal of Education is to cultivate students as a whole person. This aim includes all contents in the draft and is highly related to human rights and democracy. We need ecological education to save our planet; ethical education to improve the humanity; aesthetic education to beautify the world; human rights education to protect basic rights; democratic education to prevent autocratic intervention in schools and universities. We can use curriculum, instruction and evaluation in all stages of schools to implement the many dimensions of educations, in order to reach our ideal and to build a beautiful world. Education should be holistic in the sense that it should prepare students for the many roles they play in life. The prioritization of economic outcomes and schooling as preparing future workers over schooling as preparing future healthy individuals, families, communities, and nations is of great concern. Graduates' lives are not just 'workers', engineers, doctors or teachers. They are also fathers, mothers, voters, drivers, tourists, customers, believers, and so on. A programme of study that seeks solely to prepare graduates for a technical employment fails to properly ready students for the many other roles they need in a changing world in public and private life.

We are also concerned that we may be dehumanizing our own students in the manner by which we measure their achievement and the methods used in education that are very terrorizing to a lot of students, many of whom break down because of so much pressure. We propose the modality of nonviolence in teaching.

We need to address practical problems in our education systems. Our learners are inundated with resources to the extent that they don't know how to sift the truth from untruth. And also excessive focus on exams and meeting school standards at the exclusion of other forms of intelligence such as relationality and education of the heart could lead towards dehumanizing our own students.

Being a teacher is not limited to our office, it extends to our home, family, and community and we need to think about how we should incorporate all these activities. The little headway can be made in the various courses we introduce which students may need. In addition, we can also apply similar approach when we take students out in the field to collect research data and provide mentorship to make sure that they not only comprehend the 'what' of knowledge, but also understand the *why* of learning something. We need to add values, add humanistic aspect to our students' education and teach them to be real problem solvers. In case of a 'human education' we need to push for the universal acceptance of at least 30% of a student's learning assessment based on personal character, attitude and good citizenship (cultural/environmental sensitivity, etc). This 30% or more should be built into the students' assessment for all levels of education.

In a complex and changing world, we are placed at a uniquely privileged position where we can create opportunities for a collaboration of practitioners towards a more just and sustainable future in the field of education. For the future development of the initiative, we propose to make a collection of good/balanced humane education examples /stories/approaches/ methods/syllabus that educators use with some degree of success from their own institutions, that would strengthen the declaration's drive and sense of direction.