

Reflections on manifesto-making in the context of education for environmental sustainability

Elizabeth Rushton & Lynda Dunlop

School of Education, Communication and Society, King's College London

Department of Education, University of York

Young people are frequently at the forefront of calls for action and change in the context of education for environmental sustainability (EfES), as demonstrated by campaigns such as Teach the Future (n.d.) and campaigners such as Greta Thunberg and Vanessa Nakate (UN, 2020), who have repeatedly urged political leaders to 'wake up' to the interrelated crises of climate change, poverty and violence. Researchers have underlined the need for educational approaches that empower youth: Glackin and King (2020) have shown that young people need to learn *for* as well as *about* and *in* the environment, and Mackey (2012) argues that youth need to decide and act not just know about the environment. While there are frequent calls to listen and learn from youth perspectives (Nolas, 2021) and to focus on experiences beyond the Global North (Walker 2020a, 2020b) there are infrequent examples of intergenerational conversations about environmental sustainability and the role of education. Such intergenerational conversations afford opportunities to reach back and towards generations known and unknown and to explore the spatial, social and temporal dimensions of EfES.

Our recent work on the BERA Research Commission (2021) aimed to co-create with youth (aged 16–18 years) and teachers an illustrated manifesto for EfES. Through online workshops we established a space where intergenerational conversations could be held about the changes teachers and young people would like to see. A key facet of the project was the opportunity for researchers and participants to work with illustrator Maisy Summer. This approach afforded opportunities for participants to share, discuss and visualise their values, ideas and vision for the future of EfES. Here we share our reflections on three aspects of manifesto-making in the context of the climate emergency: including voices less frequently heard; the place of shared values in the context of participatory workshops; and co-creation.

Including voices less frequently heard

In seeking out partners for the manifesto, we identified those who could enable the project as a whole to include perspectives and ideas from underrepresented groups in the context of EfES. This included providing bespoke pathways for different stakeholders to contribute, to ensure that their views and vision for EfES were incorporated. For example, we were aware that young people with additional educational needs (AEN) and their teachers are far less visible in conversations about EfES and, when they are, the context is often negative. For instance, we noted the criticism Greta Thunberg faced following publicity about her diagnosis of Asperberger's syndrome – which she described as a 'superpower' (Rourke, 2019). Therefore, we worked with partners with expertise in AEN and used 'provocations' – short video clips or written material to prompt discussion in the online workshops (*Routes*, 2021a) – with contributions from those with AEN, including those from members of the Camphill Village Trust Stourbridge community, who wrote and performed their poem 'Our Planet Earth' (*Routes*, 2021b). Working with teachers from school settings with a focus on AEN, we

developed a way for their students to contribute to the project by reforming the online workshop into a teaching resource and encouraging contributions in a way that best suited their needs, for example through posters, pictures and poetry.

The place of shared values in the context of participatory workshops

By implementing participatory approaches to the online workshops, we included opportunities for discussion, debate and conversation in the context of EfES. One way to foster productive intergenerational conversations with participants from across the UK was to have, as a starting point, space to consider values that are shared in the context of EfES. We invited participants to respond to prompts such as, 'For me, environmental sustainability means...', and provided various ways for them to do this to ensure they felt comfortable, such as verbally, through anonymous contributions to a text-based chat function, or via a collaborative drawing tool. Through these discussions we were able to develop a shared set of values which underpinned the manifesto project (BERA Research Commission, 2021). In designing activities within the workshops, we included stakeholders as co-leaders – for example, facilitators were drawn from across our partners, including the artist and NGOs – which demonstrated the value of developing research partnerships beyond academia. During the workshops, we highlighted provocations contributed by both youth and teachers to underline their equal status within the project – both with each other and with the research team.

Co-creation at the centre

The workshops were designed to enable the genuine co-creation of a manifesto for EfES. Our approach began with our desire to bring together a diverse partnership of stakeholders to inform the project during development and implementation. Our project team included people with longstanding networks and expertise within different communities, such as the Black Environment Network, the Centre for Alternative Technology, the *Routes* journal for student geographers and TEESNet (Teacher Education for Equity & Sustainability Network). In inviting provocations, we drew on our project team to develop themes that would speak to a diverse range of communities, including: young leaders of collective action for the climate; perspectives from practitioners and teachers; perspectives from research; intergenerational conversations about the climate; and local/global bridges to an interconnected world. Through the partnerships and resources, we designed workshops and materials in which the questions, resources and activities we considered were themselves co-created. This provided the starting point for participants to share their ideas and vision for the manifesto for EfES as a continuing part of co-creation, where they understood they were contributing as key partners to a collective and collaborative document. We encourage similar – inclusive, co-creative and participatory – approaches in responses to the manifesto.

References

BERA Research Commission. (2021). *A manifesto for education for environmental sustainability*. British Educational Research Association.
<https://www.bera.ac.uk/news/manifesto-for-education-for-environmental-sustainability-efes-published-by-bera-research-commission>

Glackin, M., & King, H. (2020). Taking stock of environmental education policy in England – the what, the where and the why. *Environmental Education Research*, 26(3), 305–323.

Mackey, G. (2012). To know, to decide, to act: The young child's right to participate in action for the environment. *Environmental Education Research*, 18(4), 473–484.

Nolas, S.-M. (2021). Childhood publics in search of an audience: Reflections on the children's environmental movement. *Children's Geographies*, 19(3), 324–331.

Routes. (2021a). BERA: What could the future of education for environmental sustainability look like? [Research project]. <https://routesjournal.org/projects/bera/>

Routes. (2021b, April 29). *BERA Camphill Community* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/ISbS0ZUe-2U>

Rourke, A. (2019, September 2). Greta Thunberg responds to Asperger's critics: 'It's a superpower'. *Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/02/greta-thunberg-responds-to-aspergers-critics-its-a-superpower>

Teach the Future. (n.d.). www.teachthefuture.uk

United Nations [UN]. (2020, September 29). *Vanessa Nakate's full keynote speech at Youth4Climate Pre-COP26: Doha Debates* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/W71eBGN2iSw>

Walker, C. (2020a). 'Generation Z' and 'second generation': An agenda for learning from cross-cultural negotiations of the climate crisis in the lives of second generation immigrants. *Children's Geographies*, 19(3), 267–274.

Walker, C. (2020b). Uneven solidarity: The school strikes for climate in global and intergenerational perspective. *Sustainable Earth*, 3(5), 1–13.