

# Care and compassion as a foundational organizing principle of sustainable education in ECEC

Professor Lasse Lipponen  
University of Helsinki  
The Nordic Network Days for Preschool  
Lahti 19.09.2024

**Earth Overshoot Day (EOD)** is the calculated illustrative calendar date on which humanity's resource consumption for the year exceeds Earth's capacity to regenerate those resources that year. In 2024, it fell on August 1st

**The calendar date on which humanity's resource consumption for the year exceeds Earth's capacity to regenerate those resources that year**

**Anthropogenic effects, processes, objects, or materials are those that are derived from human activities, as opposed to those occurring in natural environments without human influence**



**The concepts of sustainability and sustainable development have become ambiguous - they are understood in different ways by different scholars and policymakers**

**Eco crisis, sustainability crisis, polycrisis**

**Sustainability and sustainable development**

**Planetary civilisation**

**Planetary well-being**



## **Education in a time of crises**

**How education is linked to the state of the world?**

**How can we people learn new things/practices and grow in our humanity, and within the limits of our planet?**

**How can we move from the pursuit of material goods towards more immaterial sources of being and well-being?**

**How can we create more caring world, one capable of sustaining and nourishing all forms of life?**

**What kind of a role education plays in the worsening eco crisis?**

**How to be an educator in an era of eco crisis?**

**What can or what we early educators need to do?**

**How make small children aware of eco crisis?**

**Education for sustainable education: gives learners of all ages the knowledge, skills, values and agency to address interconnected global challenges including climate change, loss of biodiversity, unsustainable use of resources, and inequality (UNESCO, 2023)**

**Very 'rational' approach**

**What really matters is what humans (children) will do with everything they have**



**it is not enough to talk to children about climate change, environmental awareness and protection, and recycling as long as our basic beliefs about the world do not change**

**We have to change our human-centered relationship with nature. We have a tendency to think that we own trees, seas, mountains, minerals and animals, and can ruthlessly exploit and consume**

**The role of education is not to moralise, but to lead children to examine their own desires**

**Is what I want desirable?**

**What does my desire, what I want, mean for my own life, for other people's lives or for the planet as a whole**

**Example: Toy day**

**Continuous economic growth – we are living on a planet with limited resources**

**Consumption**

**How can we breakaway from the current ways of living?**

**Care and compassion as a foundational organizing principle of sustainable education ECE**



**We are encouraged to feel and act like hyper-individualized, competitive subjects who primarily look for ourselves**

**Independence vs interdependence**

**Care and compassion are increasingly positioned as a core for global citizenship and sustainable living which should be fostered in education**

**Not only 'rational' engagement but also emotional engagement**

**The climate crisis is not just changing the planet - it is changing children**

**Not only how we take care for children but how children care for**

**We do not know as much about children and young people and sustainability as we know about adults**

**Can small children be climate 'activists'/active citizens? Should they be?**

**What should they be responsible of? What should be their contribution?**

**Care: a deep concern, attention, or responsibility for someone or something**

**It involves actively attending to the needs, well-being, and safety of another**

**Care can manifest in various forms**



**Relieving suffering/pain  
Responding to others' unmet needs**

Unpleasant subjective experience:  
physical and emotional pain, distress,  
worry, annoyance, sadness or similar

Meaning making  
beliefs, experiences, rules, norms

Observation

Empathic concern

Compassionate/Caring  
acts

Helping  
Sharing  
Including  
Comforting  
Protecting

Lipponen, Rajala & Hilppö, 2018; Worline, Dutton & Sisadia, 2017

17

**In a time of eco crisis, care and compassion:**

**should not be limited to humans, we need to expanding the circle of compassion and care**

**should cover non-human reality: animals, plants, the atmosphere and soil, and the ecosystems they form, on whose vitality human life on Earth depends**

**Recognizes the interdependence of all living beings and the environment – the well-being of humans, animals, and the natural world which are interconnected and mutually dependent**

**Expansive forms of care – caring communities**

**Responsibility to act – responsibility to others**

**Caring for: physical, hands-on care**

**Caring about: emotional engagement**

**Caring with: how we mobilise (politically) to transform the world**

**In what kind of activities can caring communities  
in ECE engage?**



**Local Food Initiatives:** Children can participate in community gardens, farmers markets, or food banks to learn about food systems, sustainability, and social justice issues

**Service Learning:** Engaging in volunteer work or community service can help children develop care, compassion, and a sense of civic responsibility

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**Environmental Cleanup:** Organizing or participating in local cleanup efforts can help children understand the impact of human activity on the environment and foster a sense of care

**Planting green plants and eradicating invasive plants**

**As an other oriented activity, compassion and care can be seen as part of what Biesta calls world-centred education.**

**From child-centred education towards world-centred education**

(Biesta, G. (2021). World-centred education. London/New York: Routledge

**Education children into the world but not at its centre”: I am for the world the world is not for me to utilise**

## **Horizon of hope**

**Education and hope for the better go hand in hand**

**The role of education is to create hope: the ability to imagine and act to build a better world**

**Early education and care is the key to make a world better place**

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