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Article

# Reconfiguring Education for a Post-Growth Society: Pedagogical Pathways Toward Degrowth and Ecosocial Justice

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## Abstract

The intensification of the ecosocial crisis has revealed the structural limitations of economic paradigms based on growth. In this context, degrowth emerges as a transformative framework that proposes the deliberate reduction of production and consumption, prioritizing well-being, equity, and ecological sustainability. However, the role of education in the transition toward post-growth societies remains insufficiently developed. This article analyzes how formal educational systems reproduce growth-oriented subjectivities through human capital frameworks and neoliberal governance. Based on a critical review of the literature and a conceptual analysis, both the structural limitations of the dominant educational model and the emergence of alternative pedagogies grounded in sufficiency, care, and the commons are identified. This article proposes a reorientation of educational aims, contents and practices favouring ecosocial literacy and collective agency, with implications for educational policy and systemic transformation.

**Keywords:** degrowth; education; critical pedagogy; sustainability; post-growth; ecosocial transition; curriculum

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## 1. Introduction

The expansion of capitalism has historically been linked to a logic of permanent economic growth sustained by the intensive extractivism of energy and materials (Antmann, 2025; Brodie, 2025). GDP growth has been presented as an almost exclusive indicator of progress and social well-being. However, growing scientific evidence demonstrates that this model has generated profound ecological and social contradictions (Meadows et al., 1972; Rockström et al., 2023). Even technological improvements in efficiency have ultimately been neutralized by the rebound effect derived from the aggregate increase in production and consumption (Kallis et al., 2025).

Indeed, humanity is experiencing a multidimensional ecosocial crisis. Seven of the nine “planetary boundaries” (Rockström et al., 2009), which are fundamental processes for an environment compatible with human life and planetary habitability, have already been exceeded. This is compromising the conditions that sustain human and non-human life, creating a situation of systemic risk for the stability of the biosphere (Findlay et al., 2025).

Not only have multiple critical ecological thresholds been exceeded with respect to climate change, the alteration of biogeochemical cycles, and biodiversity loss (Rockström et al., 2024), but, simultaneously, global social inequalities continue to intensify: capitalist economic growth has guaranteed neither the equitable redistribution of wealth nor the universal satisfaction of basic needs. The richest 1% of the world’s population possesses more accumulated wealth than the remaining 95% of the planet (Maitland et al., 2026). Furthermore, affluent economies consume a disproportionate share of materials and energy, externalizing environmental and labor costs to the Global South (Khalfan et al., 2023).

This has called into question the viability of the model of continuous economic growth. Nor has so-called “green growth” provided an adequate response, since it is impossible to absolutely and

globally decouple economic growth from the use of resources and energy at the speed required to avoid ecological collapse (Hickel, 2020; IPCC, 2024; Kallis, 2018; Parrique, 2019; Rockström et al., 2024). Ultimately, unlimited economic expansion is incompatible with planetary boundaries (Kronenberg et al., 2024).

In this context, degrowth (Latouche, 2009; Muraca, 2013) emerges as a transformative framework that proposes the deliberate reduction of material production and consumption in overdeveloped economies according to criteria of sustainability and social justice. It is a political, economic, social, and cultural proposal that advocates reducing by democratic means the superfluous or ecologically destructive production and consumption in affluent economies—such as the fossil fuel industry, advertising, planned obsolescence, or certain forms of luxury consumption—while redistributing resources, strengthening socially essential sectors such as education, healthcare, care work, public transportation, and agroecology, and then reorganizing social priorities around collective well-being, sufficiency, care, and the common good (Hickel et al., 2025; Savin and van den Bergh, 2024).

However, despite the theoretical development of degrowth in fields such as ecological economics, environmental sociology, and political philosophy, the role of education in the transition toward post-growth societies remains insufficiently developed and relatively marginal (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2024; Tannock, 2025). This gap is particularly significant, given that educational systems play a central role in shaping the values, expectations, cultures, and subjectivities of present and future generations.

From this perspective, a just ecosocial transition requires profound cultural transformations related to conceptions of well-being, time, consumption, cooperation, and collective aspects of life. Yet many contemporary educational systems remain deeply embedded in and articulated around productivist, meritocratic, and competitive assumptions and conceptions linked to the neoliberal logic of human capital, which prioritizes employability, productivity, and competitiveness and therefore the training/instruction of subjects adapted to the paradigm of growth, capitalism, and neoliberal rationality (Kompanets et al., 2026; Sairmaly, 2023; Verger et al., 2024).

At the same time, education in sustainability and the environment has gained prominence in contemporary educational reforms (Rana et al., 2026; Tafese & Kopp, 2025). However, this approach tends to provide only a superficial “green” veneer to educational processes, while its proposals fail to question capitalism and the structural foundations of the dominant economic model that causes the ecosystemic crisis and sustains social inequality (Kopnina & Bedford, 2024).

The issue is therefore not merely the incorporation of environmental content or “green” activities into school curricula, but rather the rethinking of the very aims of education, the forms of knowledge that are legitimized, the pedagogical relationships, and the institutional structures that organize educational systems from a post-capitalist stance (Brand & Wissen, 2021). From this perspective, education becomes a strategic terrain for contesting the subjectivities, imaginaries, and social practices necessary for a post-growth society (Kallis et al., 2025; Edwards et al., 2025).

It is therefore necessary to consider the strategic lines required for a profound reconfiguration of education: a reorientation of educational aims, contents, and practices, with implications for educational policies and practices and for the transformation of educational systems toward a post-growth educational transition that articulates radical democracy, post-capitalist sustainability, and social justice.

In terms of methodology, Methodologically, this article is based on a critical review of academic literature (Engler et al., 2024) from critical pedagogy, ecology, critical environmental education, and studies on degrowth pedagogy (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2024; Hickel, 2020; Kallis, 2018; Parrique, 2019).

## 2. Education in Late Capitalism: Reproducing the Growth Paradigm

Contemporary educational systems have increasingly been reorganized under neoliberal parameters since the late twentieth century and they have aligned with the demands of economic growth. Curricula prioritize productive competencies, while the expansion of accountability policies, curricular standardization, international comparative assessment and managerial governance in

education has reinforced an instrumental conception of learning linked to economic productivity (Ball, 2024; Verger et al., 2024).

Human capital theory has played a decisive role in this process (Buba et al., 2026). According to this perspective, education fundamentally constitutes an investment aimed at increasing individuals' competitiveness and employability. The value of educational systems is thus measured primarily according to their contribution to economic growth and meeting market demands. Dominant thinking has established a direct relationship between economic growth (more production, more consumption) and development and prosperity. Competitiveness has become a mantra systematically repeated as the pathway to economic and social advancement.

Global educational policies promoted by international organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank and the European Commission have consolidated an educational paradigm oriented toward competitiveness and global growth. The centrality given to standardized indicators, international rankings, and employability competencies reinforces an economic vision of education regulated by logics of competition, efficiency, and measurable results (Sharma, 2026; Verger et al., 2024).

These dynamics have contributed to the production of new forms of subjectification based on competition, performance, and self-exploitation (Ball, 2024). The contemporary educational subject is interpellated as an "entrepreneur of the self," permanently compelled to improve competencies, maximize performance and to adjust to uncertain labor markets (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2025).

From an ecosocial perspective, this educational model reproduces anthropocentric and productivist imaginaries based on unlimited growth. It promotes forms of competitive individualism incompatible with the cooperative dynamics necessary to confront the ecosocial crisis. It also renders invisible the material and ecological dimensions that sustain social life (Herrero, 2022). The subordination of education to the needs of economic growth further implies a profound reduction of its emancipatory, justice-oriented, and socially cohesive potential. Critical, ethical, and democratic education is displaced by an emphasis on market-oriented instrumental competencies (Sharma, 2026).

Consistent with this logic, schools and universities pay little or no attention to consumerism and planned obsolescence, neoliberal economic globalization, the planet's biophysical limits, the consequences of ecological footprints, ecological and care debt, the unequal distribution of domestic labor, the role of mass media in the production of consumerist desires, the reduction of value to monetary terms only, predatory capitalism, the structural inequality generated by this economy, the rise of ecofascism, the patriarchal culture sustaining it, the power and control imposed by transnational corporations and Big Tech, North-South exploitation, unjust international relations, the climate crisis, collapse, and so forth (Allman, 2019; Giroux, 2020; Ruuska, 2023; Toruño-Arguedas, 2021).

Few educational initiatives within schools and their surrounding communities seek to denounce this unjust system—capitalism—or to promote resistance, social struggle, and collaboration with social movements committed to social transformation. It is as though schools and the world were separate. As though learning in school was intended only to pass examinations rather than prepare for life. Indeed, schools appear to have become privileged spaces for learning and teaching the rules of capitalism. Educational approaches tend to limit themselves to promoting individual responsible consumption, personal recycling practices, or ecological awareness activities, without questioning the economic and political structures of capitalism that generate the ecological crisis (Amin et al., 2026).

Therefore, a pedagogy of degrowth requires not merely adding ecological content, but radically questioning the neoliberal rationality that organizes contemporary educational systems (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2024).

### 3. Educating for and in Degrowth

Creating, consolidating, and grounding a culture of degrowth requires an entire process of liberating mentalities and decolonizing the dominant mental attitudes /. It requires both collective and personal transformations in thinking. Educational systems play a crucial role in this transformation. To promote it, a “pincer strategy” is needed, advancing simultaneously along two complementary lines of action.

On the one hand, it is necessary to deconstruct the way societies have been taught to perceive reality through the beliefs and tenets of neoliberal capitalism, which is leading humanity towards the abyss and the extinction of both species and planet. In other words, it is necessary to unravel the “ecosocial illiteracy” that has normalized desire and consumption as forms of fulfillment and happiness, and the plundering of the planet as the means to achieve them, without considering present and future consequences.

At the same time, and simultaneously, it is necessary to teach, pedagogically and systematically, another way of engaging with the planet, human relationships and life by approaching these through the lens of the common good and human rights, solidarity and mutual aid, while recognizing the interdependence and ecodpendence that characterize us as a species and as an ecosystem (Herrero, 2022).

We must educate citizens to be conscious of and capable of committing themselves to ecosocial justice, equality, and the care of others and the planet. Cultural transformations must be promoted within educational institutions and consolidated through the participation of the entire community over time. This must become a collective task. It should take place through formal education, certainly, but also through non-formal and informal education: the family, the media, cities and towns, social collectives, organizations, and neighborhood movements.

It is true that knowledge alone does not necessarily lead to an ecosocial ethic or to the mentality and practice of degrowth, care, respect, mutual aid, and solidarity. However, while knowledge may not be a sufficient condition, it is unquestionably an indispensable one, without which these foundations cannot be established.

There is no doubt that admirable practices already exist in certain educational centers and among segments of the teaching profession that make highly valuable contributions (Pozzebon et al., 2026). Nevertheless, the issue concerns the educational system as a whole. It is not enough for some committed teachers or schools to engage in these much needed practices. What is at stake is the educational model itself. Every student has the right to receive an education grounded in knowledge and values that teach them to care for collective life and the planet, to prioritize the common good of present and future generations, and to ensure a more just and better society than the one they inherited. Education has the obligation to prepare people for a world capable of responding to the social, economic, ecological, and political problems we are currently experiencing (Giroux, 2020).

It is here, in the cultural battlefield of education, in this terrain of permanent dispute, that one of the essential strategic struggles is taking place. The question therefore becomes: how can current and future generations be educated in another way of thinking that is not colonized by the hegemonic ideology of capitalist growth and consumption? How can we educate for and in degrowth?

#### 3.1. Educating for Degrowth (EFD)

Many educational communities already propose concrete actions to implement values of environmental respect and care in everyday school life, such as fostering contact with nature and the local environment, incorporating sustainability principles into school management (energy efficiency, self-consumption through solar panels, circular economy practices, material reuse, classroom recycling, reduction of plastics, etc.), or promoting cycling and walking routes as forms of school transportation (Pozzebon et al., 2026).

However, it is necessary to go further. The capitalist “normality” that permeates the school curriculum—which is biocidal, patriarchal, colonial, and leading humanity toward inevitable

collapse (Herrero, 2022)—must be unlearned, while simultaneously introducing content critical of our forms of production and consumption. The glorification of growth and the omission of the planet's physical limits must be removed from curricula. A radically ecosocial curriculum must be put in place, and ecological literacy developed, including alternative experiences that demonstrate that it is possible to live well with less in a just and equitable society (Pozzebon et al., 2026).

This new learning cannot be peripheral, occasional, or confined to sporadic moments. Rather, the philosophy of degrowth must be mainstreamed throughout the entire educational curriculum, across the content of all subjects, in all educational spaces (schoolyards, cafeterias, infrastructures, etc.), in all educational activities (extracurricular activities, complementary activities, field trips, excursions, etc.) and at all educational levels (from early childhood education to university).

Simultaneously, educational institutions themselves must embody these principles in their everyday dynamics by substantially reducing consumption: replacing planned obsolescence through repairing, recycling, and reusing school materials and technologies; questioning unnecessary consumption and advertising; promoting bioconstruction and environmental audits of buildings; and so forth (Tannock, 2025).

The following sections develop the main axes of what education for degrowth would entail.

### 3.1.1. Teacher Education for Degrowth

Educating for degrowth first requires educating current and future teachers, who hold in their hands the forming of future generations. The education future generations receive in schools and universities will depend to a large extent on teachers' own visions and conceptions of reality and life, as well as of science, knowledge, and truth.

It is essential to incorporate "degrowth pedagogy" into both initial and continuing teacher education programs in ways that can be applied and connected to the specific fields teachers have studied (Herrero, 2022), thereby laying solid foundations for an ecosocial transformation and a culture of cooperation and mutual aid that fundamentally questions capitalism (Díez-Gutiérrez and Palomo-Cermeño, 2022). To achieve this, specific training in degrowth is required for all university faculty members, beginning with those teaching in Faculties of Education.

Ultimately, the aim is to transform all teacher education—both initial and ongoing—opening up other possible ways of conceiving the world beyond capitalism and growth, and creating possibilities for social transformation through a critical pedagogy in and for degrowth, as part of a broader struggle for rights and social justice.

### 3.1.2. The mainstreaming of a Degrowth Curriculum A Curriculum Transversalized by Degrowth

School content and the hidden curriculum are shaped by a profoundly anti-ecological vision (Díez-Gutiérrez & Jarquín-Ramírez, 2025; Kinchin, 2024).

In school curricula, embodied in textbooks—which unfortunately still occupy most school time and work—certain environmental problems appear only in decontextualized and isolated ways. There is no discussion of capitalism or growth and their consequences, nor of devastated cultures; nor of women's contributions to social and labor struggles, to alternative movements, uranium use, the loss of food sovereignty, the imposition of junk food, seed patents, and many other crucial forms of knowledge that are silenced and concealed (Ecologistas en Acción, 2006; Herrero, 2022).

Students are led to believe that the New York Stock Exchange has nothing to do with the destruction of tropical rainforests, concealing the fact that interdependence is a key dimension of life itself. The relevant causes behind processes of ecosystemic destruction and social devastation are not unravelled; the threads that move the world are ignored or hidden; education fails to prepare students for sustainable life on a sustainable planet. In short, current curricula propose a worldview that not only legitimizes the organization and operation of the capitalist productive system and neoliberal ideology, but also deepens unsustainability while placing faith in a hypothetical and unrealistic technological future as the solution (Díez-Gutiérrez & Jarquín-Ramírez, 2025).

Historical narratives presented in textbooks place little value on human activities related to care, maintenance, attention, and rebalancing. Events associated with colonization, war, and power are overvalued and presented as “historical milestones,” despite the fact that life in our world is far better explained through everyday practices of sustaining and caring for life—cultivating medicinal plants, feeding babies during famines, mediating violent situations, creating affective bonds, solidarity, and mutual aid—than through struggles for power.

This school curriculum profoundly shapes the categories and mental frameworks through which generations are socialized and through which they understand, interpret, and act upon the world. It validates and presents the essential academic knowledge through which our culture understands and conceives reality (Ecologistas en Acción, 2006; Herrero, 2022).

Therefore, educating for degrowth would require “reconstructing” the educational curriculum in two ways/directions: (a) revising and reformulating traditional content from a degrowth perspective; and (b) prioritizing content aimed at better aligning human activity with the cycles and flows of the biosphere, care, and mutual aid.

Such a curriculum would make visible the ecological crisis and its real responsibilities: production and transportation policies, agribusiness, market rules, multinational corporations, the media, irresponsible consumption, capitalism, and neoliberal ideology. It would connect ecological deterioration to economic growth. It would name development as destruction and show that the foundations of life’s wealth are grounded in territory and its capacity to sustain life, rather than in monetary indicators. It would introduce the concept of limits and explain their consequences. It would displace the economic vision of life and history in favor of a vision centered on ecological wealth (Pozzebon et al., 2026; Toikka et al., 2026).

Likewise, educational curricula should incorporate the philosophy of simplicity and sober living, teaching how to reduce and limit desires and even needs—from the possibility of living without television to becoming accustomed to cycling as transportation. Yet this should not be framed solely as an individual transformation, but rather from a political perspective capable of being generalized to society as a whole and to economic, social, and environmental policies in order to become truly effective (Gilbert et al., 2026).

### 3.1.3. Educating for Ecofeminist Degrowth

Degrowth poses the need for a profound depatriarchalization of society, recognizing feminism as an indispensable axis for sustaining life and the planet against the market logic of capitalism (Zhukova, 2026). Capitalism depends on invisibilized labor and subordinated subjects to sustain itself, especially care work and the reproduction of life, tasks carried out predominantly by women and criss-crossed by inequalities of class, race, and origin. Tasks such as feeding, caring, healing, and accompanying remain outside the dominant economic logic, even though they are essential for human and ecological survival (Herrero, 2022; Puleo, 2019).

From this perspective, educating for degrowth entails dismantling the commodified vision of existence and making visible both unpaid care work and the free services and resources provided by nature. It involves recognizing that human beings are vulnerable and interdependent, and that social co-responsibility constitutes a basic condition for democratic citizenship committed to collective well-being.

Sustainability requires politicizing and dignifying care, removing it from the private and domestic sphere in order to transform it into a public and collective responsibility. This implies defeminizing and deracializing care work, questioning the sexual and racial division of labor and promoting an equitable distribution of life-sustaining tasks between men and women (Puleo, 2019).

The educational system plays a central role in this cultural transformation. Schools, universities, media, and community spaces must foster an ethic of care grounded in empathy, cooperation, mutual aid, and co-responsibility. Educational communities should become practical examples of these relationships, teaching how to care for oneself, others, and the planet. In this way, a pedagogy of care

contributes to educating subjects committed to protecting all forms of life and aware of their belonging to a shared planetary community (Zhukova, 2026).

### 3.1.4. Educating in and for Ecosocial Democracy

A society based on degrowth and oriented toward the common good can only be built through the conscious, active, and committed participation of citizens. Educating in and for ecosocial democracy therefore constitutes a fundamental condition for promoting profound social transformation. Participation in the commons and in political life must become a central learning process within educational institutions, since democracy is not learned merely as theoretical content but primarily through everyday practice. The best school democracy is the one experienced daily in schools themselves (Giroux, 2020).

In this regard, it is essential to reconstruct authentic democracy through educational processes that foster the effective participation of the new generations. Educating for democracy means providing real spaces in which students can deliberate, decide, and assume collective responsibilities, thereby restoring trust in a social organization grounded in equity, transparency, and the democratic distribution of power. Citizens must have not only the right to participate in solutions, but also the right to collectively debate and define common problems and priorities.

This political education requires institutionalizing mechanisms of direct democracy in schools and universities, such as classroom and school assemblies where decisions are made horizontally by the entire educational community. Furthermore, democratic participation must transcend the school setting and promote active engagement with local, national, and international institutions and decision-making bodies, fostering citizenship involved in the shaping of public policies.

An ecosocial project of educational democracy entails building educational communities based on dialogue, negotiation, and consensus, where teachers, families, and students participate under conditions of equality. Only a radically democratic educational experience can reactivate the collective engagement necessary to advance towards a degrowth society sustained by organized, critical, informed, and common-good-oriented citizens (Toikka, 2026).

### 3.1.5. Educating for Cooperation, Not Competition

A society based on degrowth requires a model of coexistence grounded in cooperation and mutual aid, in contrast to the competition promoted by capitalism and neoliberal ideology. On a planet with limited resources, it is impossible to guarantee a dignified life for all without a culture oriented toward sharing, solidarity, and the common good. Competition encourages accumulation and selfishness, whereas cooperation involves thinking about collective needs and sharing resources, knowledge, and responsibilities.

Various scientific studies support this cooperative understanding of life. Biologist Lynn Margulis (Margulis & Sagan, 2026) demonstrated that biological evolution is not primarily explained by competition among individuals, as argued by social Darwinism, but rather by processes of cooperation and mutualistic symbiosis. According to her research, complex organisms emerged through collaborative relationships among living beings, showing that cooperation constitutes a fundamental dynamic of life on Earth.

From this perspective, educating for degrowth means teaching resistance to neoliberal values grounded in individualism and promoting practices of social solidarity. This entails learning to distribute work in order to guarantee dignified employment, sharing knowledge through open models such as copyleft, promoting time banks, and strengthening experiences of social and supportive economy within neighborhoods and communities. It also involves recovering traditional forms of cooperative community labor, such as the Mexican *tequio*, the Castilian *hacendera*, or the Brazilian *mutirão*.

Ultimately, schools must educate in values of mutual aid, cooperation, and solidarity, showing that human and ecological survival depends on recognizing our interdependence and building collective and just forms of social organization.

### 3.1.6. Slow Education Against Acceleration

The logic of capitalist growth has accelerated rhythms of production and consumption beyond nature's regenerative capacities. Resources such as oil, gas, and coal took millions of years to form but have been exploited within only a few decades, generating enormous quantities of pollution and waste. This acceleration turns speed itself into a factor of ecological and social unsustainability.

Against this backdrop, degrowth converges with the slow movement in advocating slower rhythms of life that are aligned with natural and human temporalities. In education, this means promoting slower processes that encourage critical reflection, dialogue, cooperation, and democratic participation, rather than a model based on haste, the accumulation of content, and constant assessment.

Slow education makes it possible to better address diversity and develop inclusive practices by respecting students' different learning rhythms. Hurried teaching, marked by stress and examination pressure, produces superficial and ephemeral learning, whereas slower processes facilitate deep and meaningful understanding.

Recovering slower temporalities in education also means reclaiming spaces for contemplation, play, community life, social participation, and cultural development. Educating in slowness ultimately means forming people capable of living in more conscious, sustainable, and committed ways in relation to others and the planet.

### 3.1.7. Educating for Critical Civil Disobedience

The construction of a degrowth society requires developing citizens with critical capacity and ethical commitment in the face of the destructive dynamics of capitalism and neoliberalism. Education plays a central role in this process, since critical consciousness does not emerge spontaneously but is constructed through the analysis of the social, economic, ecological, and political injustices that permeate the contemporary world.

Educating for degrowth means educating in critical and civic disobedience against models that promote inequality, environmental plunder, sexism, intolerance, and ecofascism (Schoppek, 2026). This entails equipping students with tools to identify anti-democratic forms of power, understand how ideological interests penetrate culture and education, and connect school learning with real societal problems. Indifference and silence in the face of these injustices reinforce the perpetuating of a system based on exploitation and the destruction of the common good.

Critical civil disobedience is understood as the public, conscious, and nonviolent refusal to comply with norms considered unjust for ethical reasons, with the aim of transforming them in favor of the collective interest. Social and youth movements such as Fridays For Future or Extinction Rebellion represent contemporary examples of this form of committed political participation.

However, in order to be considered legitimate in a democratic context, civil disobedience must be oriented toward the common good, exercised publicly and peacefully, refrain from violating fundamental rights, and constitute a last resort in situations of grave injustice, especially when human rights or the continuity of life on the planet are endangered. In this sense, critical disobedience becomes an emancipatory democratic practice consistent with the principles of degrowth and ecosocial justice (Schoppek, 2026).

### 3.1.8. Educating for a Culture of Peace and International Solidarity

A degrowth society requires a demilitarized society radically committed to a culture of peace and international solidarity, one that eradicates genocides such as those in Palestine and Lebanon. There can be no degrowth society without peace. Yet global military spending approaches two trillion dollars annually, while 1.5 billion people live on less than two dollars a day (Hartung & Freeman, 2025).

True peace is the result of justice. Peace is not merely the absence of war, but rather well-being, integrity, health, happiness, and fulfillment for both individuals and society. These are the

components of the right to human security and to living in a safe and healthy environment. The security most needed by citizens is that provided by public policies in healthcare, education, employment protection, access to full citizenship status, prevention of gender violence, feminist-oriented justice, access to housing and social services, and the protection and promotion of biodiversity. Security policies must place at their center the needs of the population, beginning with the recognition of human vulnerability, interdependence among human beings and with the planet, and the valorization of care. This stands in opposition to policies of insecurity and violence promoted by militaristic warmongering and the military industry that profits from death and war.

Degrowth pedagogy contributes to peace education through an ecosocial critique of unlimited growth as a generator of structural and ecological violence, while peace education contributes ethical, democratic, and pedagogical tools for building cultures grounded in care, cooperation, and social justice. There can be no stable culture of peace within an economic system based on unlimited expansion, permanent competition, and global extractivism; likewise, degrowth can only be socially sustained through pedagogies oriented towards cooperation, justice, and the nonviolent resolution of conflicts.

### 3.1.9. Educating for Commitment to the Common Good

Educating for degrowth also entails recognising limits as a key principle for understanding the common good (Almazán & Barcena, 2023): the limits of human beings, of the planet, and of all species. This is our condition of life and existence.

Educating people to recognize biophysical limits is fundamental for imagining and building just societies in which everyone has a place and no one is left behind. It means learning to move from biological selfishness to human and planetary solidarity. This is also an essential task of formal education, of schools, secondary institutions, and universities. Teaching the basic human condition linked to limits and dependence (eco- and interdependence) is essential in order to challenge the individual desire to possess everything and to respect the horizon of sustainability and human and planetary life.

The common good entails mechanisms of solidarity and collective protection, the eradication of poverty and inequality, and respect and care for nature and others. One of the essential purposes of every educational system is to teach active commitment to the defense of these mechanisms that ultimately protect the common good.

The pedagogy of commitment provides educational communities and professionals with the intellectual capacities and ethical norms needed to engage with social justice and human rights, whilst also training students to fight against poverty, ecological destruction, and the dismantling of the welfare state, seeking to develop in them a profound desire for real democracy grounded in relations of equality and freedom and for a society and planet based on genuine sustainability.

For this reason, as Nichols and Berliner (2007) argue regarding the purpose of education: “We should be number one in the world in the percentage of 18-year-olds who are politically and socially engaged. Much more important than our mathematics scores and our science scores is the involvement of the next generation in sustaining a real democracy and building a more just society for those who need it most: young people, the sick, the elderly, the unemployed, the dispossessed, the illiterate, the hungry, and the homeless. Schools that fail to produce politically active and socially useful citizens should be identified, and their failure rates published in newspapers.”

### 3.2. *Educating in Degrowth (EID)*

Everything discussed thus far has focused on laying the foundations for consolidating and grounding an “education for degrowth.” However, it is necessary to go a step further. Educational, social, and cultural policies must also be generated in accordance with the degrowth model in order to contribute to transforming not only educational institutions and their social environments from a degrowth perspective, but also the entire educational, economic, cultural, and social model.

### 3.2.1. Sobriety Against Desire

We live on a finite planet while encouraging infinite desires (Leyva, 2019). Things that are not needed are constantly advertised. Indeed, whenever a need can be satisfied freely, the market tends to sabotage such solutions until that need can instead be met through monetized goods or services.

Capitalism, centered on profit and unlimited growth, has displaced the debate about what is truly necessary to produce and consume on a planet with finite resources. Instead of addressing basic needs, the market promotes unlimited desires through advertising and constant consumption, transforming whims and fashions into supposed necessities. The permanent dissatisfaction of consumer societies thus becomes the engine of production and economic growth.

As opposed to this, degrowth proposes distinguishing between real needs and induced desires. It calls for reflection on which goods and services are indispensable for guaranteeing a dignified life and which respond only to the luxury or excessive consumption of a minority. Needs such as food, affection, education, housing, protection, freedom, and justice are common to all cultures, although each society satisfies them differently according to its resources and contexts.

Education must play a fundamental role in this process by helping people understand that not every desire can—or should—be satisfied. Educating for degrowth means learning to live with what is necessary, fostering self-limitation, and promoting ecologically sustainable and socially just ways of life. The objective is to build a culture grounded in the principle of “only what is fair and necessary,” guaranteeing basic rights for all people within planetary limits.

### 3.2.2. Social Justice and Redistribution

Degrowth cannot accept that what some possess in excess exists because others possess too little; that the wealth of some is built upon the misery of the majority. In this sense, it demands placing limits on wealth and establishing a maximum authorized income. Wealth serves only to accumulate unnecessary resources in the hands of a minority who display them in order to satisfy superfluous and artificial desires (Edwards et al., 2025).

It is possible to dream of an inclusive society or education within an unequal society, but in reality, this is unfeasible. For this reason, it becomes necessary to limit property, maximum incomes, maximum consumption levels, and capital accumulation.

However, it is also necessary to recognize that reducing and progressively eliminating enrichment and the accumulation of economic wealth does not in itself guarantee equity in the distribution of resources. Although it certainly establishes a necessary and indispensable framework that makes such equity possible.

Therefore, the educational model for future generations must be radically transformed so as to teach them to question accumulation and display of wealth, enrichment and ostentation, while educating for social justice and the equitable sharing of the limited resources available on the planet.

### 3.2.3. Working Less to Live Better

Degrowth entails a dual response regarding employment. On the one hand, it seeks to develop and expand employment in sectors of the economy related to meeting unmet social needs and caring for the natural environment. On the other hand, within conventional sectors of the economy that will continue to exist, it advocates the redistribution of work. The combination of these two factors would enable people to work fewer hours, enjoy more free time, enrich their social lives, and reduce excessive levels of consumption.

In an increasingly technologized world such as the present one, where degrowth also means reducing production to what is essential, redistributing available work becomes essential /indispensable. This implies learning to work less so that everyone can work, and learning to live better while reducing ecological footprints to levels compatible with the flourishing of life (Edwards et al., 2025).

The redistribution of work logically requires maintaining wages that cover the needs of a dignified life. Increased productive efficiency, resulting from successive technological revolutions, should be translated into a reduction in the amount of labor time necessary for a dignified and socially sustainable life.

This has two consequences: first, that every person has employment; and second, a reduction in the quantity of work, which would contribute to calmer and more balanced lives, reconcile the demands of work and family life, and recover personal time—a temporality associated with slowness and with dedicating time to activities that help us flourish: neighborhood participation, working with associations, engaging with friends, cultural development, and so forth. Working less to live better must be combined with caring more in order to feel and relate better. Ultimately, it means working less so that everyone can work, and live better lives (Latouche, 2023).

### 3.2.4. Technological and Digital Sovereignty

Degrowth advocates the public and democratic sovereignty of the commons, including digital commons. In a society where much human communication already occurs in digital environments, the internet and data have become essential commodities that should not remain in the hands of private corporations. However, large U.S. technology companies—Google, Amazon, Meta, Apple, and Microsoft—have transformed education into a new space for data extraction and profit generation.

Under the cover of educational modernization, schools and universities have become extractivist “mega-farms” of marketable information concerning present and future clients whom corporations seek to retain. The real business is not digital platforms themselves, but the information generated by students and teachers: habits, desires, behaviors, and predictive profiles managed through artificial intelligence algorithms. It is not simply that these corporations are monitoring our future; they are shaping our present so that, when the time comes, we behave as those designing the future imagine we will.

Big Tech companies thus operate as neo-feudal landlords of digital capitalism, appropriating the new “black gold” of the twenty-first century: our data. Added to this is the enormous ecological cost of the extractivist digital model: excessive energy consumption, exploitation of scarce minerals, geopolitical conflicts, and highly toxic waste.

In response, degrowth proposes recovering digital sovereignty through public infrastructures, open-source platforms, and democratic control of technologies. Educational communities and society must govern digital resources, rather than shareholders of technological oligopolies. If the internet and digital communication are essential commodities, they must be managed as public, common services, advancing towards a digital democracy based on the socialization of data and collective technological democracy.

### 3.2.5. Critical Ecosocial Literacy

To educate in degrowth, the educational system must incorporate critical ecosocial literacy (Herrero et al., 2019). A relocalized literacy linked to territory and to local and community knowledge is needed as another of the major educational axes of degrowth. These principles must also be coherently applied in the educational practices developed within schools, where students are socialized and norms are established, since people learn not only from what they hear, read, or investigate, but also from what they experience and put into practice.

For this reason, territorial policies aimed at reducing transportation needs must be consolidated. People must learn to move using non-polluting means. We need to learn to travel less, reduce energy and oil consumption, and transform transportation models, which logically also implies transforming models of habitat, workplace and life itself. Life must be relocalized. In other words, public and collective policies must make it possible to consider travel the exception rather than the norm in terms of coexistence, work, leisure, enjoyment, and culture.

Human systems need to “recenter” themselves territorially. Proximity must be prioritized. Community self-sufficiency and self-management should be promoted, preventing the large-scale planetary circulation of materials and energy. A sustainable and degrowth-oriented society must learn to feed itself through local or “kilometer zero” seasonal products. Simultaneously, rural areas and local neighborhoods and municipal environments must be revitalized, relocalizing life and social relations.

All these forms of learning must be transferred into formal education and educational institutions, taking advantage of the reality of schools themselves, so as to plant the seeds of an ecovision of the world and society from the perspective of degrowth (Rockström et al., 2023).

This begins with practical measures such as installing low-consumption lighting and using heating and cooling systems appropriately; reusing furniture and computer equipment to avoid planned obsolescence; implementing selective paper and waste collection systems for recycling; banning the sale of bottled water and other unsustainable and unhealthy products; organizing collective transportation plans for teachers; and opening school libraries to the broader community.

It also involves rethinking and recreating schoolyards by transforming them into green and inclusive spaces. Green schoolyards are initiatives designed to reconnect children with nature and mitigate climate change through the presence of trees and plants, replacing asphalt with soil, trees, shrubs, and vegetation, removing metallic structures, and incorporating sandboxes. Such transformations allow educational communities to coexist and interact directly and habitually with nature, stimulating children’s learning and helping mitigate urban heat island effect.

Similarly, ecological school gardens and vertical gardens should be redesigned and recreated. Spaces should be sought where ecological gardens can be installed collaboratively with students and neighbors. Abandoned land should be recovered for agriculture. Vacant spaces can be transformed into community-oriented, educational, and participatory zones/areas, or rural and urban dimensions can be integrated by linking productive, educational, and self-consumption activities with social, cultural, recreational, and even therapeutic community activities connected to the local environment.

Critical ecosocial literacy can extend even beyond schools themselves, beginning with access to educational centers and how students arrive there. School routes should be designed to encourage walking and cycling through the creation of safe, accessible, and non-motorized pathways to schools, eliminating private vehicles from school entrances so as to encourage an ecological and healthy form of transportation.

We need a pedagogy of degrowth capable of projecting a habitable future for humanity and the planet centered on sufficiency and fair distribution (Nolan, 2026).

#### 4. Conclusions and Discussion

The contemporary ecosocial crisis poses unprecedented civilizational challenges (Serrano-Notivoli et al., 2024). Faced with the ecological and social unsustainability of the paradigm of unlimited growth, degrowth emerges as a political horizon aimed at democratically reorganizing societies within the planet’s biophysical boundaries.

In this context, education occupies a strategic place in the transition toward post-growth societies. Contemporary educational systems not only transmit knowledge, but also produce subjectivities, imaginaries, and forms of social relationships deeply connected to the logic of economic growth (Giroux, 2020). Although they currently reproduce the dominant paradigm, they also possess transformative potential. Reconfiguring education through the lens of degrowth is therefore a necessary condition in advancing toward ecosocial justice.

For this reason, the transition toward post-growth societies requires a radical reconfiguration of the aims, contents, and practices of education. As argued throughout this article, it is not enough merely to incorporate environmental content into curricula; it is necessary to question the neoliberal and productivist rationalities that currently structure educational policies.

Degrowth Pedagogy clearly questions the economic foundations of capitalism and neoliberal ideology, unlike other models whose proposals can largely remain within the coordinates of the

capitalist system by accepting its continuity; that is, approaches that do not challenge the foundations of the current system and instead propose measures and actions intended to reform it in order to make it “sustainable.”

Degrowth Pedagogy possesses an unavoidable political dimension. It is an anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal pedagogy. For this reason, it questions Education for Sustainable Development, an approach adopted by supranational organizations and many governments. As García-Díaz et al. (2019) observe, it is significant that the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) contain not a single mention of the forthcoming depletion of fossil energy (Goal 7), nor of the destructive character of the industrial agricultural model and the food crisis associated with multinational control over food security and sovereignty (Goal 2). Ultimately, the SDGs do not represent a substantial change from traditional sustainable development proposals, since they continue to assume that current socioenvironmental problems can be resolved within the framework of capitalism and the paradigm of growth and technological innovation (Tafese & Kopp, 2025).

Moreover, the “energy transition” promoted by institutions is impossible unless accompanied by a drastic reduction in energy production and consumption. Future generations must not be deceived. Current educational legislation and regulations, although they claim to promote climate awareness, do so from the perspective of sustainable development and according to market-oriented guidelines, through a narrative of educational innovation framed by the SDGs within capitalism. This amounts to a form of greenwashing: deceptive strategies of advertising and promotion that create the appearance of sustainability while failing to correspond to actual practices, actions, or policies.

For this reason, pedagogical transformations must be articulated within broader struggles for economic democratization, redistribution, and ecosocial sustainability. Ultimately, educating for and in degrowth means opening collective spaces to imagine and construct ways of life that are more just, more solidary, and ecologically sustainable. Education thus becomes a central terrain of dispute over the possible futures of our societies.

Advancing toward a degrowth society requires an authentic educational revolution and an ambitious program of ethical and political counter-hegemonic education capable of transforming us from neoliberal subjects and societies to ecological post-capitalist subjects and societies. Exiting capitalism is the only way out. It is the only possibility for the survival of the human species and the planet.

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