

Chapter 3

Education and youth work for sustainability

This chapter introduces the idea of education for sustainability and includes some practical and methodological advice for running the activities in Chapter 4.

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is about shaping a better tomorrow for all – and it must start today. (UNESCO 2014)

In December 2002, the UN General Assembly declared the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was appointed as lead agency for the promotion of this initiative, and when it came to an end it introduced a new Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development.

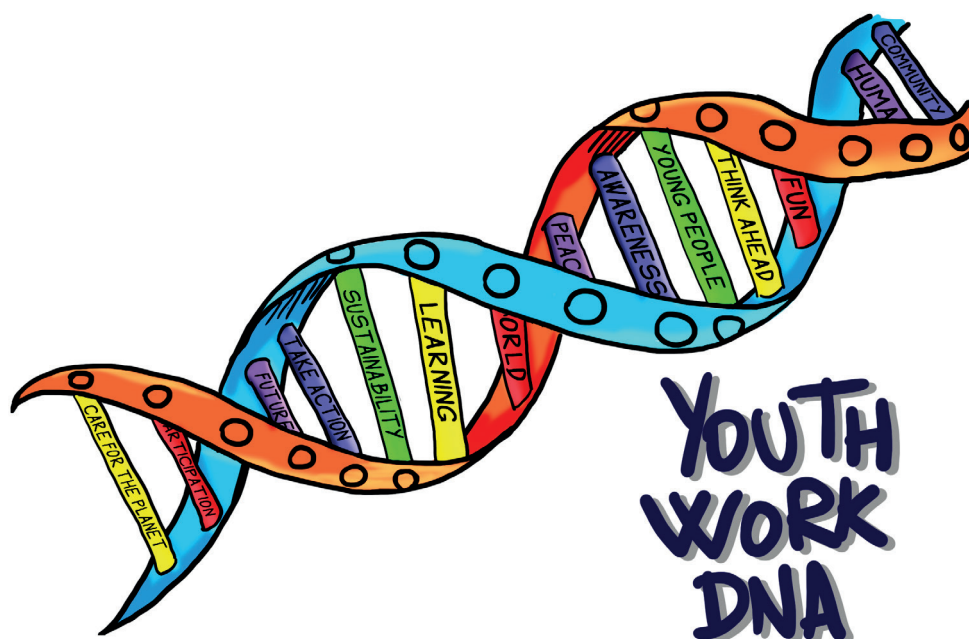
The purpose of GAP is “to generate and scale up action in all levels and areas of education and learning to accelerate progress towards sustainable development” (UNESCO 2014). It has two objectives:

- ▶ “to reorient education and learning so that everyone has the opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development;
- ▶ to strengthen education and learning in all agendas, programmes and activities that promote sustainable development.” (UNESCO 2014)

YOUTH WORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY

One of the core ideas of sustainability is that each generation inherits the earth from those who have come before them. The aim of every generation should be to leave it in better, or at least in no worse, condition than when it found it. Youth work can play an important role in ensuring that this happens: in addition to the family and the formal education system, youth work exerts a strong influence on young people’s transition to adulthood, and it can help in promoting their participation in society.

Youth work has a long tradition of supporting young people’s understanding of the world around them and promoting such values as justice and equality.



The DNA of youth work

There is no internationally agreed definition of youth work or its outcomes, and there are various methods and models of youth work. Some of these include:

- ▶ recreational;
- ▶ personal development;
- ▶ critical social education;
- ▶ radical social change.

Youth workers often engage young people with issues such as citizenship, interdependence, diversity, inter-cultural dialogue and learning, social issues and sustainability, all with a view to affecting the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which govern how people interact with the world around them. These issues are all closely related to sustainability, and anyone working to explore them with young people is already engaging in education for sustainability!

Youth work for sustainability uses many of the issues raised in Chapter 2 to explore the topic in an interactive and non-formal way, including by providing opportunities for young people to participate and even to direct the learning process themselves. The aim of youth work for sustainability is not just for young people to find out about sustainability, but for them to begin to appreciate its importance and engage in promoting it.

Such work can take a practical approach to understanding sustainability issues, and can offer a wide range of options for taking this knowledge forward and “making a difference” – as outlined in Chapter 5. Education for sustainability in a non-formal setting can open up possibilities for young people to learn about and take part in existing local and global movements, and can help them develop their own skills and desire for a more sustainable lifestyle.

Youth work for sustainability can therefore mean a number of different things. The following list offers a few suggestions for ways to engage young people in sustainability and support their learning:

- ▶ sessions, workshops, project visits, group discussions or other educational activities with a sustainability focus, designed to influence young people’s attitudes to sustainability;
- ▶ projects addressing sustainability issues, initiated by a group of young people and supported by youth workers;
- ▶ opportunities for young people to become involved in sustainability campaigns at a local level, perhaps with other members of the local community;
- ▶ improving the sustainability of the youth centre, e.g. by addressing waste or energy use, setting up a repair café, or using land around the centre to grow vegetables;
- ▶ international non-formal exchanges or learning projects in which one or a group of young people take part and learn about sustainability issues (e.g. local or international volunteering projects, youth gatherings, international youth exchanges);
- ▶ encouraging young people to challenge assumptions and actions that are detrimental to an inclusive and equal society, e.g. through local research, conducting interviews, or lobbying or campaigning against unsustainable practices either locally or at national or international level;
- ▶ altering personal habits to become more sustainable or working as a group to increase the sustainability of the youth centre.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY

To create a world that is more just, peaceful and sustainable, all individuals and societies must be equipped and empowered by knowledge, skills and values as well as be instilled with a heightened awareness to drive such change. This is where education has a critical role to play. (UNESCO 2014)

The activities in this manual are designed to support the general aims and objectives of youth work for sustainability. In particular, they are intended to:

- ▶ develop young people’s knowledge of environmental and social issues at local and global level, for example with regard to:

- whether fish sold in the local supermarket have been caught in a way that is likely to endanger future populations (see the activity “Fishing game”);
- where plastic wrapping is likely to end up (see “Waste manifesto”);
- what the impact of our own habits may be on children in other parts of the world (see “Take a step forward”);
- ▶ promote understanding of key concepts and principles related to sustainability, for example:
 - carbon emissions (see “Chain reaction” or “Climate superhero auditions”);
 - sustainable agriculture (see “Chicken sandwich”);
 - pollution (see “The cost of fashion” or “Waste manifesto”);
- ▶ develop critical thinking skills and encourage participants to question prevailing opinions, where necessary, for example:
 - the activity “Greenwashing” encourages participants to look beyond advertising claims made by companies;
 - “A finite planet” is a discussion activity which looks at some commonly held views about common priorities for the economy;
- ▶ encourage active participation in order to promote sustainability, including at the personal, local or global scale:
 - see Chapter 5, “Making a difference”, in particular, but each of the activities contains ideas for action at the end;
- ▶ strengthen values relevant to sustainability, for example: empathy, equality, solidarity, responsibility, concern for future generations, appreciation of nature;
 - all of the activities aim to promote values by giving young people the space to discuss and question what they regard as important. The starter activity “Needs and wants” can be used to spark discussion on what is really important – both to participants individually, and to the planet.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

Learning for sustainability is a process involving the cognitive, affective and psychomotor dimensions. This means that we need to involve participants in a transformative process as individuals, by engaging each of these three elements. We can think of this as involving Head (thinking), Heart (feeling) and Hands (doing). Uniting these three domains helps young people acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed to build a more sustainable, peaceful and just world. Figure 7 indicates the type of questions that might be raised to engage the head, heart and hands.

Example:

Learning about sustainable food production can be approached by learning the principles of organic gardening (Head), sharing our personal motivations for being interested in alternative food production (Heart), and getting one’s hands dirty by sowing seeds and harvesting homegrown organic vegetables (Hands).

To shift participants’ learning from the personal to the local level, we could try activities such as the following:

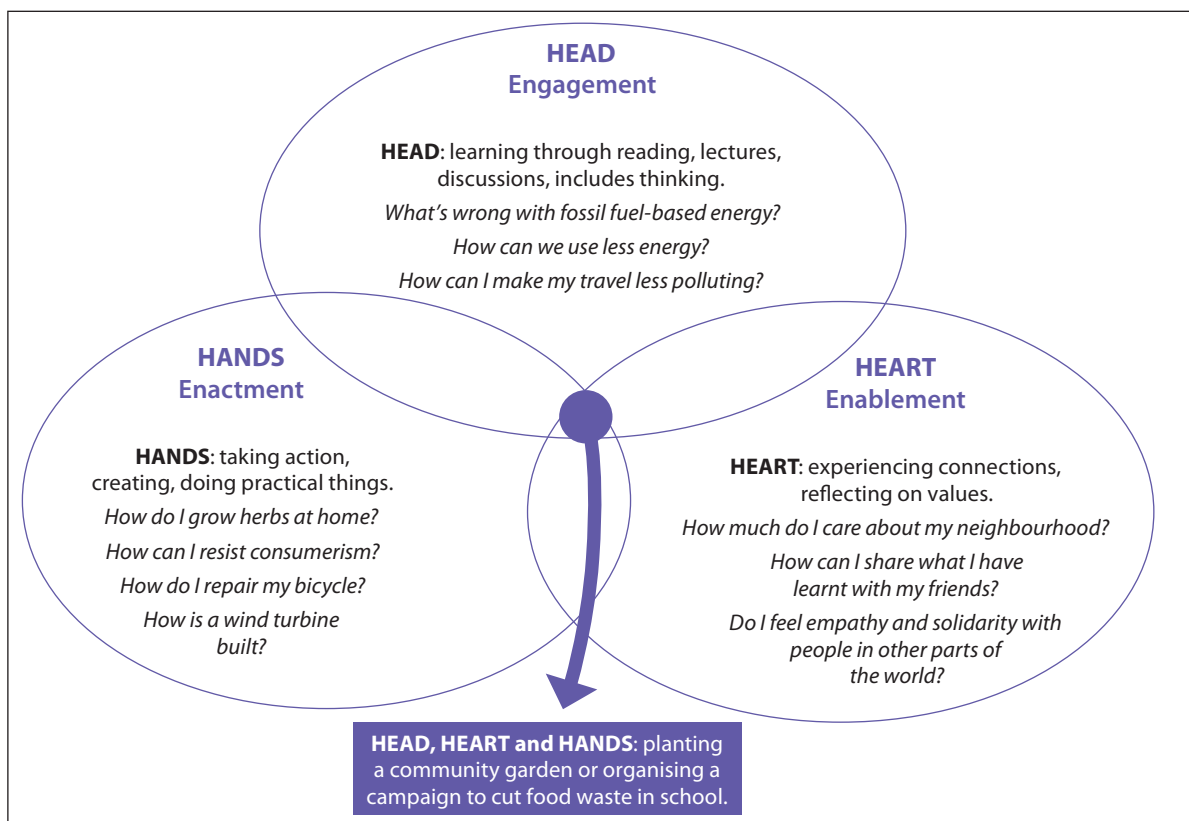
- ▶ introduce them to the local shopping community or community-supported agricultural system, if one exists;
- ▶ organise a local market day;
- ▶ offer help to the local school to help it cultivate a garden.

To move the project to the global level, we could encourage activities such as the following:

- ▶ join solidarity campaigns to support small farmers around the world fighting against large corporations;
- ▶ join a protest against the privatisation of seeds;
- ▶ protest such privatisation by organising a community seed swap project, or starting a local seed bank.

This T-Kit strives to ensure harmony between different learning objectives, and all of the educational activities involve a balance between knowledge (Head), values and attitudes (Heart) and skills (Hands).

Figure 7. Head, heart and hands as learning objectives



Source: adapted from Sipos, Battisti and Grimm (2008)

METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Vision without action is a dream. Action without vision is a waste of time. Vision with action can change the world. (Nelson Mandela)

This section contains practical advice on running the activities contained in Chapter 4.

Group working methods

When working on sustainability, it is important that the way a group works and learns together reflects the values and the change that the learning is supposed to bring about. A group needs to be cohesive and act as a whole, while also maintaining respect for the uniqueness of each individual and for the range of opinions within the group.

The main role of a youth worker or educator is to facilitate the activity or discussion: to ease the exchange of views, thoughts and feelings within the group of young people. As facilitators, it is important to make sure that everyone takes part, everyone is heard, and that the conversation is fluid and interesting. The facilitator aims to hold the space for the group while fading into the background.

Theme-centred interaction

The Swiss psychologist Ruth Cohn described four different elements within a group learning process:

- ▶ I (the individual): the motivations, interests, personal histories and levels of involvement of individual participants, as well as the “luggage” they may bring with them;
- ▶ We (the group): the relationships, dynamics and types of co-operation within the group;
- ▶ It (the topic): the subjects and content of the training;
- ▶ Globe: the training and organisational environment (also partly represented by the participants) (The Ruth Cohn Institution for TCI – International).

This is a useful classification because it helps us to see that most group gatherings tend to focus on the third level – the subject and content of the session. Particularly in formal education, this is generally believed to be the most important element of learning. However, this often results in the “I” and “We” remaining hidden. Unresolved issues at these levels may then distract the group learning process. For example, participants may ask themselves questions such as:

- ▶ am I accepted by the group?
- ▶ does my opinion count?

A sense of inadequacy in individual participants can distract attention from the topic. The “I” needs to feel safe and accepted, and the “We” needs to emerge as a group, in order that the group can focus on the “It”.

Tips for facilitators

Create space at the beginning for “I” and “We”. Start with a round of introductions if participants do not yet know each other (ask them just to give names and say a single sentence about themselves if you are short of time). Allow participants to feel comfortable with each other. Although this will take some time from the issues you are working on, the investment will be worthwhile as the group will be better able to focus on the topic later on and discussions will be more productive.

Experiential learning

Experiential learning means learning through experience or discovery. It is a transformative process during which learners acquire new skills, new attitudes and new ways of thinking. It engages our head, heart and hands, and provides opportunities to take the initiative, make decisions and accept responsibility.

Experiential learning is based on a number of principles that youth workers or facilitators should try to follow when running educational activities or taking action with young people.

The cycle of experiential learning

All the educational activities in the T-Kit are based on the cycle of experiential learning (see Figure 8), which follows the process described below:

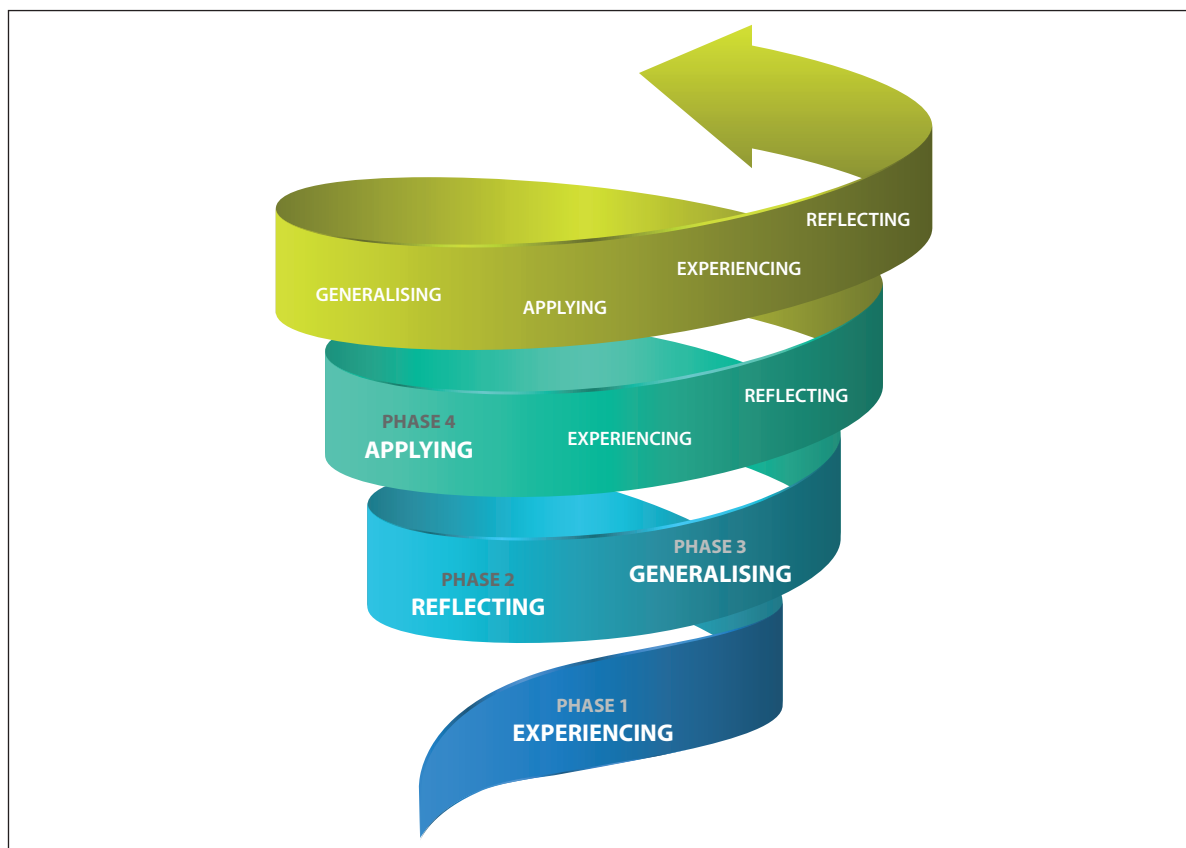
- ▶ the process starts with doing an activity as described in the instructions (Phase 1: Experiencing);
- ▶ this is followed by a debriefing that encourages young people to reflect on what has happened and how they felt (Phase 2: Reflecting);
- ▶ the facilitator then encourages participants to evaluate how this experience relates to the real world, and provides relevant information about the issue they are discussing (Phase 3: Generalising);
- ▶ finally, the young people and the youth worker consider different suggestions for follow-up, so that the learners can apply what they have learned to their reality, and implement an action that might make a difference to their community (Phase 4: Applying).

Taking action as a tool for experiential learning

The learning process continues to progress in a spiralling manner (see Figure 8) even when the young people leave the classroom, youth centre or other learning space. Inspired by experience-based educational activities, young people may decide to take actions to address the issues that are most important for them.

The spiral of experiential learning

Figure 8. The experiential learning process



Principles of experiential learning

Experiential learning draws on the following principles (adapted from Chapman, McPhee P. and Proudman 1995):

- ▶ a mixture of content and process: try to keep a good balance between process-oriented activities and information/theoretical input;
- ▶ absence of excessive judgment: try to create a safe space for learning and abstain from interfering with participants' process of self-discovery. It is important to let young people have their own experiences without feeling they may be judged;
- ▶ engagement in purposeful endeavours: youth workers have to recognise the learner-as-teacher, and acknowledge a group's ability to provide coaching and mentoring to each other. The learning must be personally relevant and meaningful;
- ▶ encouraging the "big picture" perspective: experiential learning provides opportunities for young people to experience their relationship with a broader world. Educational activities should strengthen young people's ability to interact with complex systems and understand the interconnectedness of all things;
- ▶ teaching with multiple learning styles: experiential learning includes a cycle of all four learning styles: experiencing, reflective observation, generalisation (or conceptualisation) and application (see Figure 8);
- ▶ the role of reflection: reflection helps young people to pay attention to their own learning and gain insights about themselves and about their relationship to the world at large;
- ▶ creating emotional investment: the youth worker's challenge is to create a physically and emotionally safe environment where young people can be fully immersed in the learning experience;
- ▶ a re-examination of values: personal transformational growth is at the heart of experiential learning. Young people are invited to re-examine and explore their own values in a safe and supportive environment;
- ▶ the presence of meaningful relationships: experiential learning is not an abstract process, it is experienced as a series of relationships: learner to self, learner to teacher and learner to learning environment;

- ▶ learning outside the comfort zone: young people learn best when they are given the opportunity to explore outside their perceived comfort zone. Learning should not bring discomfort or insecurity, but it should challenge learners to open up to new experiences and step out of their comfort zone.

USING THE ACTIVITIES

Choosing the right educational activity depends on knowing your group and knowing the activities well. There are many which will be suitable for your group, and with a small amount of adaptation, almost any can be made to fit. Look for issues or methodologies which your group is likely to respond to, clarify your objectives for the session, and make sure that your selected activity is at the appropriate level in terms of experience and ability.

Familiarise yourself with the table of educational activities at the beginning of Chapter 4 and use the brief summaries to identify activities that are likely to work for your group.

Level of complexity

The activities have been divided according to three levels of complexity:

- ▶ Level 1: these are short and simple activities. They are useful as an introduction, so participants can get to know each other and you can gain a picture of participants' awareness of and concern about the issue of sustainability;
- ▶ Level 2: these activities are a little more complex and develop a deeper understanding of an issue. They may require more time;
- ▶ Level 3: these activities are longer, require good group work and discussion skills, concentration and co-operation from the participants, and may involve more preparation. They provide a wider and deeper understanding of the issues.

If you are meeting a particular group for the first time, select a Level 1 activity and use this to assess the knowledge, experience and interests of the group.

Time

An estimate of the time needed for the activity is provided in the table of educational activities. This time estimate includes the debriefing, but not the suggestions for follow-up or action. However, you should note that the estimated time allows for some flexibility: often a smaller group will require less time, and sometimes you may find that a lively discussion needs more time either at the end of the session or as a follow-up. The timings should be used as guidance only.

Instructions

The activities aim to be self-explanatory and the detailed instructions guide you through the different stages. You should always read these instructions carefully beforehand – at least twice – so that you understand clearly how the activity progresses and what is required from you as facilitator. You should also take careful note of the section "Preparation": make sure you check that you have all that is needed to run the activity.

Debriefing

The debriefing is an important part of the activity as a whole, and should not be missed out. There are guiding questions to help the facilitator conduct the debriefing and evaluation, but you should feel free to change these questions if others seem more appropriate. Even if you do not use your own questions, do not feel it is necessary to use all the listed questions: select a few, and make sure these are discussed properly by the group.

Tips for facilitators

Some of the activities contain some additional guidance notes which might indicate things to be aware of when running the activity. Make sure you read them carefully.

Suggestions for follow-up

This section indicates other activities in the manual that are related or raise similar points.

Ideas for action

Recalling the experiential cycle, this is an important part of the learning process and you should try to put aside some time to work through suggestions for action, and to debrief these afterwards. Look at the chapter “Making a difference” for further ideas and guidance.

Background resources

Many of the activities contain background information to support the facilitators in identifying the main issues that the activity is likely to raise and gain a better understanding of the topic.

Budapest Go Green

A group of young environmentalists in Hungary made an alternative map of Budapest called “Budapest Go Green”. They gathered information about green living places in the city, including:

- ▶ organic shops;
- ▶ fair-trade shops and restaurants;
- ▶ vegetarian and fair-trade restaurants;
- ▶ second-hand shops and flea markets;
- ▶ farmers’ markets;
- ▶ repair shops (to fix household items);
- ▶ bicycle renting and repair places;
- ▶ environmental non-governmental organisations.

They published and distributed a small booklet in Hungarian and English aiming to help locals and visitors “enjoy the green side of Budapest map indicating these places”.
