Lesson Planning and Education for Sustainable Development: Strategies for the Introduction of the SDGs in Traditional, Blended, and Online Learning Environments

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INTRODUCTION

The Importance of ESD

A recent global survey suggests that the Sustainable Development Goals are not very well known. **Global SDGs awareness is below 50%**[1]. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is therefore crucial and more concerted efforts are needed to increase people's understanding of Agenda 2030.

ESD in different learning environments

To date, the most rigorous efforts to embrace ESD have been seen in K12 classrooms and, more marginally, in traditional college settings. This approach is not reaching VET learners, individuals that have already completed a course of studies and entered the job market, and the unemployed. **It is crucial to find ways to introduce ESD to non-formal learning environments**.

Online settings should also be considered. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous institutions shifted to online learning. This change is likely to persist even in the post-pandemic future, especially for adult learners. **Strategies are needed to create both synchronous and asynchronous online ESD learning activities.**

ESD Teaching Strategies

Regardless of the learning setting, effective ESD should be characterised by three key features:

1. It should be **participatory** and **student-driven**;
2. It should underline both global and local dimensions: be "**glocal**";
3. It should be **collaborative** and foster connections between learners located in different geographical areas.

The Role of Educational Technologies

Educational technologies have a huge potential to facilitate ESD and the strategies listed above. In both online, blended, and traditional settings, they offer ways for students to participate and share ideas, even when large class size limits the time educators can dedicate to class discussion. It is also particularly beneficial to introverted students who may otherwise not join the debate. Furthermore, they make the connection of learners located in different geographical areas possible.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

Step 1: Warm Up

First, invite students to discuss in pairs: "What are the world's biggest problems?". Then, each learner writes one problem on the blackboard and briefly explains why he/she chose that issue.

Possible variations:
- For young learners, the question can be simplified by inviting students to think about problems in their community. Prompts can also be given.
- For learners in non-formal contexts, for example, a corporate training, participants can be invited to think of problems affecting different stakeholders involved in their work.

EdTech tools and resources:
Instead of writing on the blackboard, students can share their responses online. Mentimeter[2] can be used to submit responses live with the use of a computer or mobile device. Padlet[3], on the other hand, can be used to conduct online asynchronous discussions.

Step 2: Introduce the SDGs

Explain that the international community addressed the same question and chose 17 goals to solve the world's largest problems: they are the SDGs. Show students the SDGs grid and briefly introduce them.

EdTech tools and resources:
To introduce the Global Goals, teachers can find ready-to-use resources on the World's Largest Lesson website[4] and on the Teach SDGs website[5].

Step 3: Spark a Discussion

- Invite students to compare the problems they identified in step 1 with the SDGs, have students identified the same problems the international community did? For each of their problems, is there a related SDG? If not, why do they think that issue is not addressed in Agenda 2030?
- Suggest that perhaps each community is facing different problems, for example, rural and urban areas struggle with different challenges. Different countries may also face different problems.

Step 4: Explore and Map the SDGs Locally and Globally

To make the best out of this activity, before you start, make sure to find another educator, preferably located in another geographical location, who is holding a similar activity[6].

- First, students identify a problem in their community and find the SDG(s) that most closely relates to it.
- Second, students take/choose a picture that represents the problem.
- Third, with the facilitation of the educator, students add their picture to a shared online map that is used by the other educator as well.
- Lastly, students explore the map to understand how different communities face both similar and different problems.

Possible variations:
- Instead of taking pictures of problems in their community, young students can draw a problem.
- If not every learner has a mobile device available, this task can be done cooperatively in pairs, or as a group during class time.
- If it is not possible to wander around the community to take pictures, images can be chosen from the Internet.
- If it is not possible to cooperate with a class located in a different geographical area, the educator can assign a country/area to each student.

EdTech tools and resources:
To create a cooperative map of "glocal" issues, Padlet[3] can be used: students can drop a pin on the map, and add the chosen picture/drawing with a brief explanation of the issue and the SDGs their problem refers to.

Contact Information

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References and Resources

1. Report of Results. Global Survey on Sustainability and the SDG. Awareness, Priorities, Needs for Action. Hamburg, January 2020.
2. Mentimeter, a software to facilitate online synchronous discussion: www.mentimeter.com
3. Padlet, a software to facilitate online asynchronous discussion: www.padlet.com
4. The World's Largest Lesson website, with resources to introduce the SDGs: www.worldslargestlesson.globalgoals.org
5. The Teach SDGs website, with resources to introduce the SDGs: www.teachsdgs.org/resources
6. Teach SDGs Ambassadors who are available for collaboration can be found here: www.teachsdgs.org/our-ambassadors