

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Elly suggests how the Sustainable Development Goals can allow us to formulate positive possibilities for our pupils’ futures.

Geography is the junction of people, place and planet: what’s not to love! Never has the world been changing faster and our role as educators been more challenging, especially in terms of preparing our pupils for an undefined future. Another way of saying this is that sustainability is a fundamental pillar of geography: one that refers to the continuation of systems and processes, with the aim of allowing people to thrive while maintaining a healthy planet.

Our understanding of sustainability comes from *Our Common Future*, the 1987 (Brundtland) report, which included the most widely-recognised definition of sustainable development: ‘that which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. Sustainability can be represented as the balance between the environment, society and economy; or of society and economy located within the environment (Figure 1).

Looking at Figure 1, think about the following questions: which model best fits with your understanding of sustainability? Is the environment equally weighted alongside economy and society? Is the environment the most important factor on which we all depend? Which model do you see in your school communities and society?

Sustainability can only be realised if we develop our lives and lifestyles in a sustainable way. For me, education is key. As Craig Jones (2016) says, ‘sustainable development is the pathway to sustainability’. On 25 September 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations (Figure 2). They constitute 17 global goals, with 169 underpinning targets to be met by 2030, and are the descendants of the Millennium Development Goals. The SDGs are intended to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change. They are not without their critics: some say they are unachievable while others have labelled the SDGs unambitious.

The SDGs allow us to formulate a positive possibility for our pupils’ futures. They form a set of targets around which we can plan and deliver action, as well

as being a mechanism we can use to hold governments and the international community to account.

Here’s how you might use the SDGs to inspire and activate your learners, based on work carried out with pupils at Northwick Manor Primary and Nunnery Wood Schools in Worcester.

Needs versus wants

We started with a card sort activity designed to engage pupils in identifying what we need to survive/thrive (Figure 3 and web panel).

Food	Water
Bed	Winter coat
House	Entertainment
Sports facilities	Shower
Bath	Transport
Hospital	Internet
Phone	Toilet facilities
Books	School

Figure 3: Needs and wants statements.

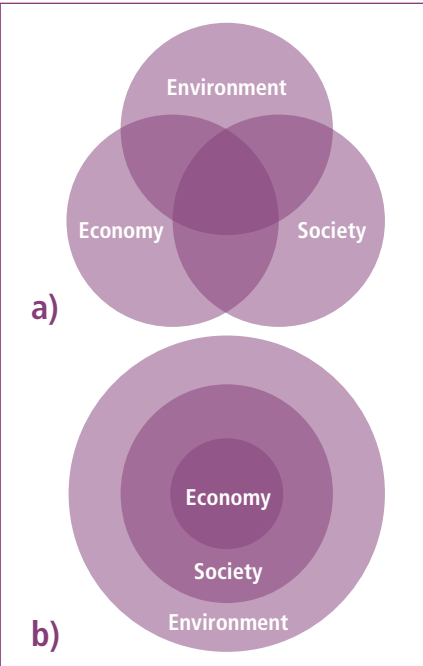


Figure 1: Sustainability can be represented as: a balance (a) between the environment, society and economy, or (b) of the economy and society situated within the environment.



Figure 2: The Sustainable Development Goals. Source: UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015.

This was followed by the big question: 'What do you want for our world?' Some pupils shared initial responses and we tried to shape a class consensus on the board. Pupils also considered what the rest of the world might want for our shared future.

Introducing the SDGs

We displayed the UN logo and asked the class whether they had seen it before? Did they recognise it? What did the logo show? What did it stand for? We introduced them to the United Nations and the SDGs using the excellent introductory video *The World's Largest Lesson* (see web panel).

We gave each pupil a sticky note to write on their feelings about and impressions of the SDGs. Their responses varied widely from 'sad' and 'overwhelmed' to 'hopeful' and 'enthusiastic'. One pupil wrote 'I did not know anything about this. I feel bad.' And another: 'What can I do?' These proved an excellent point to consider the meaning of 'sustainable' and 'development', explore pupils' prior knowledge and share what they had gleaned from the video. We created a shared definition of the key terms, which then led in to working in small groups to develop answers to big questions including, 'Can the SDGs be achieved?' and 'Why/Why not?'

To engage older pupils with a more critical approach I shared some social media comments from different organisations. (A sample can be downloaded via Tide~ see web panel.) We then focused on discussion points:

1. Can/should one/some of the SDGs be prioritised?
2. Are any goals more important than others? Which one(s)?
3. What are the obstacles to achieving the SDGs?
4. What is our role in meeting the SDGs? What can we do?

(In order to discuss these points, pupils might benefit from being given more detail on what each of the SDGs means.)

After pupils had spent ten minutes getting their teeth into these questions, we used a tally chart to collate their feedback on the achievability, priority and importance of each of the Goals and whether any clear favourites or challenges had emerged. We created a list of pupils' ideas on the role of young people, schools and their own countries in meeting the SDGs, and what actions might be needed to help make them happen. We tried to recognise pessimism that arose at this point, which we would balance with a practical sustainable development activity later. It was important the pupils

understood that for the SDGs to succeed we all need to play our part and take action; therefore, we must all be aware of what they mean.

A team game, which required everyone's participation and co-operation, helped illustrate this point. The 'Newspaper Game' involves small groups taking a ripped up 'newspaper' (made up of articles/adverts linked to the SDGs) and reassembling the paper in the correct order in 15 minutes.

Afterwards, we reviewed and evaluated the activity:

- How did the group divide the tasks?
- How did they communicate?
- Did everyone in the group speak?
- Did everyone in the group take part?

This activity encouraged pupils to propose practical solutions to the activity and recognise the different roles in a team. They also recognised that an outcome was achieved best by those teams that communicated and co-operated well.

This was followed up by a practical session: pupils looked at one development problem and created a solution. Year 6 pupils created their own water light bulbs based on the 'Litre of Light' project and produced plasticine models of a fuel-efficient stove design. The latter was being championed by a charity local to the school, Concern Universal, who are currently using the stoves in Malawi. Pupils left for home with something to help them start a conversation about the SDGs with their relatives, and the feeling that there are simple solutions in their hands. You could introduce pupils to simple sustainable technologies that have the potential to change lives (e.g. solar chargers, LuminAID, edible cutlery).

Eco Ambassadors

As pupils from an Eco-Schools Ambassador school (see web panel), Nunnery Wood pupils were determined to highlight the role of schools in embedding sustainability within our communities. They delivered a conference workshop to peers on the actions of Eco-Schools in Germany, France and Australia, as well as projects from their own school. The pupils created the resources necessary to teach their peers how to make their own hanging garden from a recycled plastic bottle. Their presentation was in the form of a video tutorial and an illustrated step-by-step guide (downloadable via Tide~, see web panel).

This SDGs work helped pupils to broaden their horizons, skills and knowledge. They were motivated to step outside of their comfort zones to become film-makers and photographers, presenters and activists. The pupils now know that

they have the power to make a difference, and to find and share solutions.

Introducing your pupils to the SDGs is about more than being 'green'; it offers learners the chance to develop skills such as leadership, communication and management, as well as a sense of empowerment over their global future. It creates an opportunity for all those involved to appreciate what we have here on Earth, and engenders a respect for using the finite resources of our planet more responsibly. As Nelson Mandela so succinctly put it, 'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world'.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to staff and pupils at Northwick Manor Primary School, Worcester. Much of this work formed part of the EU-funded project 'Young people on the global stage', which is led in the UK by Tide~ global learning.

Reference

Jones, C. (2016) *What is sustainability?* Available at: www.circularecology.com/sustainability-and-sustainable-development.html#U-S6BfldWSp (last accessed 28/11/2016).

WEB RESOURCES

Download the Needs and Wants statements: www.geography.org.uk/pg
Global Learning – Lenses on the world: www.tidegloballearning.net/secondary/young-people-global-stage-their-education-and-influence
Litre of Light project: <http://litteroflight.org>
Our Common Future ('The Brundtland Report'): www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf
The World's Largest Lesson video: <https://vimeo.com/138852758>
More information on the SDGs:
• Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_Development_Goals
• 'The World We Want: A future for all': www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SDGs-child-friendly.pdf

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