

A CLIMATE CHANGE ASSEMBLY

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Henry offers a plan for an interactive assembly on climate change designed to promote and motivate pupils into positive action for the future.

I was invited to Torriano Primary School in Camden, London, to deliver an assembly about climate change through my work as a mentor to the School on the Less CO₂ programme. The school places an emphasis on education for sustainable development; therefore, on arrival, I encountered a huge display on the UN's Global Goals. Torriano Primary School is an expert centre for the Global Learning Programme and Head teacher, Helen Bruckdorfer, explained that it was central to the school's ethos.

It was no surprise, therefore, to find that, during the assembly, the key stage 1 pupils were thoughtful and well-informed on a topic on which many adults have no clear understanding. As a former secondary school maths teacher who left full time teaching in 2015 to set up the Green Schools Project (which helps schools to set up and run a student-led environmental programme), I have delivered many assemblies about climate change, mostly to teenage audiences. It is a completely different challenge getting the attention of early primary pupils, so I enlisted the expert assistance of a primary teacher friend to adapt my method of delivery.



Figure 2: Climate change could be considered a challenging concept for 5-7-year-olds, but a few props and some willing volunteers make the task a lot easier. For such a serious topic, we used the back of the inflatable sun.

I introduced myself, explaining my background. I love the reaction I get when I ask the pupils to put up their hands if they like maths; few keep their hands down at this age. When I ask the same question of a room of 14-year-olds there is often a very different response!

Questions and props

After a few introductory questions to assess what the pupils already knew about climate change and how we can protect the environment, I got to the heart of

my explanation. Climate change could be considered a challenging concept for 5-7-year-olds, but a few props make the task a lot easier. I invited one volunteer to hold up an inflatable globe (Figure 1) and point out where we were located, demonstrating our place on the planet. Another volunteer held up a large inflatable sun (Figure 2). The best one that I found online has sunglasses and big smile on one side, so after displaying this side, we agreed that for such a serious topic the volunteer should hold it the other way around to be more realistic.

I explained that without the sun being the 'right' distance away, our Earth would just be a big, cold rock with no life on it. We enthusiastically thanked the sun for giving us the heat that enables us to live. The next prop was a blanket, which the pupils pointed out helps to keep you warm. This was placed over Earth and I explained that the blanket, which represents a layer of gases called the atmosphere, is just the right thickness to keep our planet at the best possible temperature for all the plants and animals on Earth (Figure 3).

Using images

We then moved on to some photos. The first three (a power station, a traffic jam and a forest being cut down), demonstrated the activities that people are doing that increase the amount of greenhouse gases being released, making



Figure 1: Showing our place on the planet.
Photo © Sean Flannery.



Figure 3: I represented Earth's atmosphere with a blanket and globe. Photo © Anna Grandfield.



Figure 4: The assembly asked pupils to make a promise to help tackle climate change.

the blanket around Earth a little thicker. The pupils were quick to point out that if the blanket gets thicker, Earth will get warmer.

The next set of photos (showing a polar bear on melting ice, a farmer standing on parched land and a row of houses flooded up to the first-floor windows) made it easy for pupils to understand that with Earth getting warmer the ice is melting at the North Pole, which is a problem for polar bears. Similarly, forests being cut down has led to many other animals becoming endangered. I also explained that not only do rising

temperature make it warmer, but they also make our weather more extreme, leading to periods of drought where farmers cannot grow food, and floods that result in people losing their homes or being killed.

Staying positive

Up to this point it is not a happy story, but I explained to the pupils that – unlike many big global problems – every individual can help to tackle climate change and therefore feel good about the fact that they are part of the solution. The final set of photos showed wind turbines and solar panels, a city centre that has been

pedestrianised and fresh vegetables grown locally. These indicated a few of the things that we can do to help to reduce climate change. I explained to the pupils that, along with tackling this big problem, the photos showed other benefits to using less non-renewable energy include cleaner air, a more active lifestyle and eating more healthily.

Coming up with ideas

To finish I suggested things that the pupils could do in school such as a 'switch off' campaign, by growing vegetables, by ensuring that the school recycles as much waste as possible and by encouraging each other to walk to school. When pupils were asked to think of a promise they would make to help tackle the problem of climate change (Figure 4), one pledged 'I'm going to walk or get the bus instead of asking my mum to drive' and another pledged 'I'm going to play on my Xbox less'. Getting pupils to make these kinds of sacrifices made me sure that the message had hit the mark!

The reaction to the assembly was very positive. Amy Williams, the teacher co-ordinating my visit, said 'The pupils absolutely loved it. It was interactive and visual and everyone was motivated to think of a promise at the end'.

Ending with pupils leading

Any teacher could deliver this simple assembly with the help of a few props and photos (mine were sourced online). The assembly can be used to motivate pupils to take personal action and to encourage them to become part of a School Eco-Team – whereby pupils are given the opportunity to lead projects on environmental issues. Forming an Eco-Team committee and enabling them to run campaigns can help pupils gain important skills as well as improving the environmental performance of the school (Figure 5). These activities encourage young people to live in an environmentally responsible way and help drive the transition to a sustainable society. What could be more important than that?

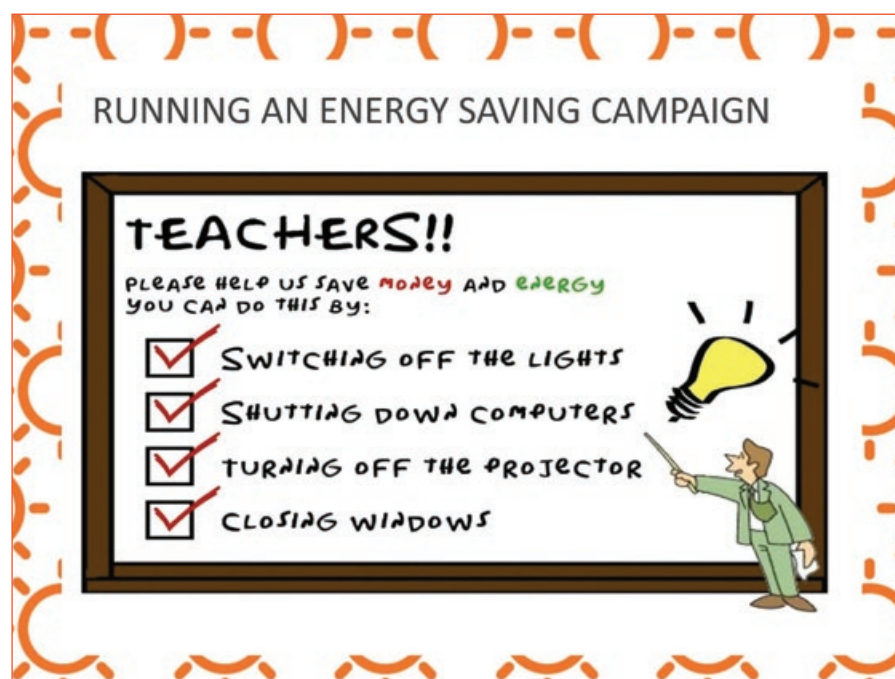


Figure 5: Eco-campaigns can help pupils gain important skills.

WEB RESOURCES

Global Learning Programme: <http://glp.globaldimension.org.uk/>
 LESS CO2 Programme: www.lessco2.org.uk/about-us
 Young Geographers Go Green CPD unit: www.geography.org.uk/Young-geographers-go-green-online-cpd

Henry Greenwood is a mentor to schools that are taking part in the LESS CO2 Programme.