

Kindness in a Pedagogy for Sustainable Development Goals

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Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires new approaches to education appropriate to local circumstances. This paper describes a 'pedagogy of SDGs' from a practitioner's perspective using personal teaching experience with undergraduate students in the British higher education sector, where I lecture in Intercultural Communication and Spanish. A 'pedagogy of SDGs' is grounded in the principles underpinning Article 2.2 of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2011. Article 2.2 states that human rights education and training encompasses:

- education about human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;
- education through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners;
- education for human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.

The essence of each of these three components is encapsulated in the use of the prepositions *about*, *through* and *for*. Education *about* human rights answers the question of what content should be covered; education *through* human rights answers the question of how it should be learnt and taught, whilst education *for* human rights is concerned with linking the theory (the content that is learnt) and the practice (the real world where the learning is to be applied). These three components are interconnected and complement each other. Importantly, they must all be present. A key factor in this pedagogy is finding sustainable solutions to specific problems using the power of 'kindness'. Recent research suggests that kindness in education may benefit the social and emotional development of young people with a positive influence on a range of academic, health and social outcomes. Given that the students I teach complete modules in intercultural communication, the focus of the pedagogy lies in redefining the concept of 'kindness' from an intercultural perspective. To this end, students may use conceptual frameworks, such as the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture to identify the intercultural competences that are required to be 'kind'. Some of these competences comprise valuing diversity, equality and justice, empathy, respect and cooperation skills, which are then applied to specific issues of global concern in order to find innovative solutions.

A 'pedagogy of SDGs' starts with the students selecting one of the SDGs to complete an intellectual task. A range of options can be provided, which may include students critically analysing an image that they have encountered in the media, developing a business plan or attending a training package to become a volunteer in a charity organisation. The provision of options is one way of responding to diversity and embedding equality of opportunities in the teaching and learning process. The pedagogy continues with students linking academic knowledge with service learning, whereby they apply their research to community work (e.g. volunteering, awareness campaigns, internships, festivals, fund-raising, etc). Engaging with non-academic audiences is the 'action phase' of the pedagogy, which is followed in turn by students bringing the knowledge gained as a result of their service-learning back to the classroom. What follows is an examination of the themes, ideas and experiences that students bring to the classroom based on their personal experiences. Teaching practices are introduced that focus on developing the students' potential to make a difference to their society, to their personal growth and to their academic enhancement.

In partnership with teachers, students use a selection of ideas, concepts and theories coupled with their own faculties of self-reflection, critical thinking, imagination and creativity in an attempt to find sustainable solutions to specific problems. Efforts should be made to involve those affected by the issues under discussion in the problem-solving phase, bearing in mind that all solutions must be based upon 'kindness', which is the core pillar of this pedagogy. In summary, a 'pedagogy of SDGs' combines teaching, learning and assessment in ways that provide opportunities for students to act differently in the world as a result of their new learning. It seeks to transform lives and it should be adapted sensitively to different cultural contexts.

Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

Volume 1: Context, concepts and models

<https://rm.coe.int/prems-008318-gbr-2508-reference-framework-of-competences-vol-1-8573-co/16807bc66c>

Volume 2: Descriptors

<https://rm.coe.int/prems-008418-gbr-2508-reference-framework-of-competences-vol-2-8573-co/16807bc66d>

Volume 3: Guidance for implementation

<https://rm.coe.int/prems-008518-gbr-2508-reference-framework-of-competences-vol-3-8575-co/16807bc66e>