

.....Klimawandel.... ilmastonmuutoksen..... klimæændringer.....
loftslagsbreytingar..... изменение климата..... le changement climatique.....
cambio climático..... klimaatverandering zmena klímy..... klimatsànîgîo....

Climate change in the classroom: can psychology teaching help us save the planet?



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Aim of workshop: to share ideas & views on the relevance & potential benefits of ecopsychology in the classroom

- how can psychology contribute to environmental education and education for sustainable development in Europe?
- how can we teachers use the relatively new area of our subject – ecopsychology – in our own teaching?
- in the face of global impacts of climate change and environmental degradation, what is the role of psychology education in equipping our students to combat and cope with these threats?

International & national contexts

- General environmental concerns have a long history; an important milestone was Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' (1962)
- More recently climate change has become the KEY concern
- The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was established in 1988 and is the 'leading international body for the assessment of climate change'. It provides 'rigorous and balanced scientific information to decision-makers'.
- United Nations also hosts Conferences on Sustainable Development, eg Rio 1992, Rio+20 in 2012.
- Many national governments commit to actions based on IPCC recommendations



**Earth
Summit**

1992



RIO+20

United Nations
Conference on
Sustainable
Development

2012

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
20 - 22 June 2012



The Stern Review (2006)

Independent report
commissioned by the UK
Government, on the impact of
climate change on the global
economy.

*‘There is still time to avoid the
worst impacts of climate change, if
we take strong action now’*

Environmental education / Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

- The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), 2005-2014, is a global effort to raise public awareness of and wider participation in [Education for Sustainable Development](#).
- ESD emphasises 'the critical role of education in promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns in order to change attitudes and behaviour of people as individuals, including as producers and consumers, and as citizens'
- Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCE-ESD) have been set up around the world, including several in Germany, England, Spain, Russia, Scotland (possibly!)



Teaching / learning about climate change & sustainable development

Examples of specific teaching methods from the research literature include:

- Outdoor education
- Storytelling style for younger children
- Computer /online games
- Traditional board games
- Botanic garden visit

What are the aims of the GLP?



- The GLP is intended to be a whole school programme. Global learning principles should be apparent in the curriculum, pastoral work and in the wider life of the school. It is not just about global learning being delivered through geography or any other single subject, or about the occasional assembly. The GLP aims to:
- help young people understand their role in a globally interdependent world and explore strategies by which they can make it more just and sustainable,
- familiarise pupils with the concepts of interdependence, development, globalisation and sustainability
- enable teachers to move pupils from a charity mentality to a social justice mentality
- stimulate critical thinking about global issues, both at a whole school and pupil level
- help schools promote greater awareness of poverty and sustainability
- enable schools to explore alternative models of development and sustainability in the classroom.
- Guidance and support for embedding global learning across the whole of your school can be found throughout the GLP website.
- <http://globaldimension.org.uk/glp/page/10807>

Ecopsychology – some themes from the literature

- Values and beliefs (eg Ding et al, 2011)
- Connectedness to nature (eg Gatersleben, 2008)
- Social norms
- Social dilemmas, eg 'tragedy of the commons' (Hardin, 1968)
- Barriers to action, eg 'dragons of inaction' (Gifford, 2011); 'just world' beliefs (eg Feinberg, 2011)
- Models explaining pro-environmental behaviour
- Paul Stern (2011) Contributions of psychology to limiting climate change. *American Psychologist* 66:4

Ecopsychology / Climate change in the psychology classroom - questions:

- Are you / your school involved ESD / DESD / climate change projects, in any subjects in the curriculum?
- Should ecopsychology be included in psychology courses?
- Can psychology contribute to an interdisciplinary approach to ESD in a school?
- **Which topic areas of school psychology may be relevant to ecopsychology?**

Some (eco)psychological topic areas

..self-concept ... attitudes values & beliefs ..
defence mechanisms ... *metacognition*..
... coping strategies ... social influence
persuasion social norms resilience ...
cultural differences... denial... *altruism* ...
evolution.. cognitive dissonance ... motivation
...attitudes & behaviour.... moral reasoning...
pro-social behaviour impulse control...
learned helplessness *perceptual bias*...
...inter alia!

Moral aspects

- 'environmental justice', 'climate justice'
- 'we're toast' (Will Self, 2013)
- optimism / pessimism
- ecocide?
- 'climate scepticism' replaced by 'strategy scepticism' (Kenis & Mathijs, 2012)
- students' wellbeing (eg Ojala, 2012)

Political aspects

- 'we begin to recognise that governments, the media and most businesses have no intention of seeking to avert the coming tragedies' (George Monbiot, 2014)
- 'in a new market-state formation the pursuit of short-term goals is tied to the global free-market economy over which any attempt at democratic control has been relinquished. At a time when humanity worldwide faces increasing change in the ecology that sustains it, this is considered to be 'ecocidally insane' and the opposite of any sort of learning from experience to alter behaviour in the future' (Patrick Ainley, 2008)

Ecopsychology education for action


- adaptation / mitigation
- community responsibility v. individual behaviour change
- collective lobbying
- UN 'Take Action!' list
- think globally – act locally
- government policy & legislation



A red t-shirt is centered against a white background. Overlaid on the t-shirt is a blue speech bubble with a white border. Inside the bubble, the text "the optimism of the action is better than the pessimism of the thought" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. The speech bubble has a tail pointing towards the bottom right.

the
optimism
of the
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UK Government example

 Cabinet Office

Behavioural Insights Team

- ❑ testing impact of incentives to encourage up-take of energy efficiency products (eg tax rebate)
- ❑ testing impact of community rewards and discounts for people who agree to collectively purchase energy efficiency products
- ❑ testing how behavioural feedback, including comparisons of how much energy you are using compared with a similar person, can help consumers to save energy; based on the fact that people are influenced by what (they think) those around them are doing (social norms)
- ❑ under a new 'Responsibility Deal', UK businesses, non-governmental organisations and other organisations are encouraged to make public commitments to reduce energy use.

Example of use of psychological principles in a 'quit smoking' campaign at a Scottish college

west lothian
college

**80% of students
who do smoke
would like to quit**

80% of students at
West Lothian College
who do smoke
would like to quit

*Information about E-cigs and vaporisers is available in the
college foyer on Wednesdays 12 - 1pm*

Based on a survey of West Lothian College students commissioned by NHS Lothian

Web references & further info

- <http://ipcc.ch/organization/organization.shtml>
- <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>
- http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/sternreview_index.htm
- <http://www.desd.org/About%20ESD.htm>
- <http://www.eosd.org/en/main.html>
- <http://www.visionsforsustainability.net/>

Please contact me if you too are interested in promoting the role of psychology teaching in learning for sustainability in Europe -
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