



Sustainability and
Environmental
Education

SEEd Change Makers – Learning for Sustainability Course

Review of Action learning during the course – March 2021

The Process

The course is designed around a core action learning project that the participants choose and describe in their pre-course forms. A list is described below in Table 1. We have categorised them into changing thinking, changing practice and changing places as they first describe their project and their need.

During the course, Action Learning is modelled and explained at every opportunity with many opportunities to reflect, theorise and plan how to do activities again.

The participants then conduct their project between the two major weekends of the course. The beginning of the last weekend involves a feedback session when each participant reports back and reviews their own learning. This is run as an Action Learning Set with feedback from the whole group to encourage ongoing learning and networking.

Adapting to COVID 19

This year, 2020-2021 during COVID, we took the opportunity to build more mentoring at the pre-course stage and between the 2 major weekends. This led to a very full set of action learning projects which were captured on Zoom and is summarised in Table 2, along with other examples from previous years.

The design of their action learning projects was also noticeably much clearer, with less people stating they were unclear or did not know what Action Learning was.

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Learnings from the process

It should be noted that many change their project idea as they progress and their thinking and learning deepens. Examples of this occur every year.

We have also noticed over the 12 years of the course, that although many participants start by thinking they need to learn more or develop new skills, because we address change, socially critical thinking and systems thinking, they often realise that their real goal was a more ambitious change in their organisation. During the mentoring process these emerge and can change the end goal of their project, which may have gone through 2 or 3 action learning cycles.

Many review their approaches and previous behaviours and change them using interdisciplinary tools and skills we have helped them developed. These include:

- behaviour change models,
- understanding how to influence,
- addressing 'pushback' or difficult behaviours,
- understanding power relations in organisations,
- understanding motivations/ values
- understanding change – cycles, individual, societal
- addressing worldviews and assumptions

It is this interdisciplinary approach covering many subjects not just sustainability and learning, that participants comment on as being transformative.

Table 1: Examples of Action Learning Projects 2018 – 2020

Change in practice	Youth survey design plus using Open space technology/participatory approaches in youth workshops
Change in thinking	Checking my own ethics and learning in order to put into practice in my business
Change in practice	Lead and be more active and confident in Green Party politics
Change in practice	How to develop 'actions' for adult groups visiting facility in outreach visits, which they can commit to in their communities.
Change in practice	Refocus/re-employ my skill sets as a joiner/sculptor/campaigner to help society face the reality of climate breakdown and engage with the practicalities.
Change in place	Need to lead the team towards embedding sustainability in the school
Change in practice	Learn how to make a school's network more useful and constructive in a structured way
Change in practice	Embed LfS and SD principles into the MA course classes with advertising students so they would be in a position to make a connection between the theoretical and practical.
Change in practice	Facilitate organisations and groups to help them find sustainable solutions
Change in practice	Engage with other staff whose remit doesn't include sustainability/environmental issues and better communicate complex ideas to whole school community
Change in practice/place	Set up internal workshops to create list of positive conservation behaviours to drive messaging and interpretation across the zoo.
Change in practice	Speak effectively to businesses and in public meetings to persuade to be more sustainable and lead a group of volunteers to also do this.
Change in practice	Embed ESD pedagogical approaches into workshops and public engagement activity
Change in practice	Improve group facilitation skills and identify new opportunities
Change in practice	Create more engaging classes and workshops – using curriculum plus for all ages, so people feel inspired
Change in thinking & practice	Learning about action learning itself as eventually will be a freelancer in creative arts/environmentalism
Change in practice	Understand how to action and manage project work with a sustainability agenda
Change in practice	Deliver effective, structured sustainable education courses
Change in place	Activate ESD in the University by engaging staff and students with new strategies
Change in practice	Develop a project in a sustainability space that I could use as practice and expand my service offering.
Change in place	Tackling some of the barriers and difficulties to driving change in the organisation within her work. Climate Action at Uni / Community workshops for smart energy system / Train the trainer for Carbon Literacy / Supporting local Council on climate emergency.
Change in place	Whole School Approach for the school. By setting up the school as a whole, then leading a retreat in Feb half-term to come up with next steps
Change in practice	Disseminating his environmental education framework for schools
Change in practice	Exploring use of online community as collaborative space to engage and reach students for ESD work. Citizens assemblies for achieving net zero carbon
	Presenting to primary school leadership that adopting a whole-school sustainability approach aligns with their interests, vision and the issues that face us today and coming generations.
Change in practice	Young Changemakers at School
Change in places	Disseminate Whole Institution Approach to Sustainability in business
Changing Places	Providing students at university with tangible ways to make a difference in environmental sustainability and to act on ideas in this area.
Change in practice	Integrating the techniques wherever possible at work.

Table 2: Some examples of the outcomes of the action learning projects

Type of Institution	Pre- or mid-course Action Learning Project Idea	Participant Review of their Action Learning
Higher Education	Tackling some of the barriers and difficulties to driving change in the organisation within her work. Climate Action at Uni / Community workshops for smart energy system / Train the trainer for Carbon Literacy / Supporting local Council on climate emergency.	Approaches to leadership and governance within a highly rated 'sustainability-led' University examined and developed to work even better than before. Addressing the issue of whether there is a need to have more formal structures to push the boundaries of the whole institutional strategy. Examined possible approaches that could be taken using the wisdom of the group to overcome perceived complacency, her own motivation and achievable outcomes.
School	Whole School Approach for the school. By setting up the school as a whole, then leading a retreat in Feb half-term to come up with next steps	Creating a new way to schooling beyond the Waldorf/Steiner approach; building capability within the team and community. A range of beliefs emerged through visioning – guiding principles and pedagogy – but still need to agree pathway forward. School now functioning, but pressing need to develop a clear, shared philosophy. VM examining her own values and approaches – need for clarity on learning pathway, team cohesion and engagement from community of parents. A team retreat is planned where VM will use techniques learned on the course to address firmly-held belief systems and build a new approach to future sustainability in education.
School	Disseminating his environmental education framework for schools	Whole Institution Approach framework/curriculum targeted at Welsh schools developed in first lockdown. Pilots in primary schools in train. Personal action learning involved moving toward a campaign for dissemination rather than developing a business based upon the curriculum. Much examination of personal motivation and a new determination to promote sustainability through his school's work. Building a campaign from zero is the next stage of development – many ideas of how to do this shared by the course Action Learning Set.
Higher Education	Exploring use of online community as collaborative space to engage and reach students for EfS work. Citizens assemblies for achieving net zero carbon	Citizens' assemblies with students at University to work toward net zero carbon by 2030. Need support of all the staff leads across the institution in driving this forward. New approach worked on beyond the creation of a discussion paper and adoption of a top-down method. Voluntary bottom-up approach suggested – pilot to build evidence is now being implemented. Deliberative democracy approach over the next ten years to be explored – honest and across the board engagement beyond the echo chambers of sustainability experts.
School	Presenting to primary school leadership that adopting a whole-school sustainability approach aligns with their	Working in a primary school to persuade the head and governors to become a sustainable school adopting a whole-institution approach.

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	interests, vision and the issues that face us today and coming generations.	Kirsten used the principles of persuasion and other techniques learned on the course. As a result she was asked to take a whole school approach forward. The programme involved the whole school, seeking consensus on ways forward. Success following previous push-back – now Governors need more work to develop totally inclusive approaches. Far better understanding of the nature of power and control mechanisms in place within the institution and within herself and how these can be harnessed to approach sustainability effectively.
School	Young Changemakers at School	Early engagement with the group before starting – took much longer than expected due to lack of critical and systems thinking skills and young people being vested in ‘traditional’ approaches to education. Realising that there is a need to devote more time on building confidence in the group and motivating them to embrace the approaches. Next steps outlined beyond COVID lockdown.
Business	Disseminate Whole Institution Approach to Sustainability in business	Working in a small business (financial advisors) to explore the nature of good and effective leadership – particularly confronting a top-down style of leadership that was borne from anxiety and lack of confidence that he had adopted over 30 years. As a result of the self-reflection gained on the first part of the course, he has developed a new tone with team members, involving listening and properly engaging with colleagues. The first steps to a deep change/more open style has been achieved with tangible results. Meaningful conversations around sustainability within the company now have a greater chance of success.
Student	Providing students at university with tangible ways to make a difference in environmental sustainability and to act on ideas in this area.	Development of a new student society on campus at University on sustainability. Early engagement with existing groups to ensure minimal overlap. Development of an idea of a ‘green office’. New approaches for the creation of a sustainable group through facilitation by having staff as well as students involved (to overcome student turnover issue). Project moving forward despite COVID. Moved from wanting to ‘teach people’ to ‘I want to facilitate’.
Business	Integrating the techniques wherever possible at work.	Integrating learning from the course in her energy and carbon reducing consultancy work. Action planning to get to net zero carbon with local authorities including retrofitting. Various problems arising including addressing push-back from elected members caused by poor briefing from officers – understanding audiences highly important. Now developing better structures and the confidence to create and run effective facilitated sessions.
University	Activate ESD in the University by engaging staff and students with new teaching and learning strategies	ESD pedagogy and purpose embedded across led modules, engaging students from multidisciplinary backgrounds. Staff development ESD workshops held. Working groups recently formed to revalidate all

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		modules to explicitly include ESD in all 3 programmes' learning outcomes and associated feedback criteria. Six 'pedagogies of purpose' facilitation sessions for staff to support this work.
University	Embed LfS and SD principles into the MA course classes with advertising students so they would be in a position to make a connection between the theoretical and practical.	Ran a facilitated workshop using World Café approach with MA Advertising students which got them to apply different models of sustainable consumption and theories of change to a group identified problem that they needed to propose solutions to. They had to present ideas around how to encourage consumers to adopt sustainable lifestyles and they all learnt from each other. This was what I could manage in the time between the two stages of the course, and it worked reasonably well but I felt more could be done. Next year, I will make a more fundamental change to the assessment on the course so that students engage in their own AL projects and reflect on their identity as consumers throughout the term.