

Focus Group Transcript - Sustainable Education for Development: Forest Fire Pedagogy

Transcriber & Creator: Diana Krasnova

Project Title: Fireproof the Future

Consortium: Fireproof the Future

Date of Interview: 05.11.2024. and 06.11.2024.

Duration: 75 Minutes (including video material presentation and introductory explanations by the moderator)

Language: English

Participant Overview

To maintain anonymity, participants are coded by numbers.

- **Participant 1 (P1)**
- **Participant 2 (P2)**
- **Participant 3 (P3)**
- **And so on (in total 14 people excl. the moderator)**

Experts and teachers from 4 organizations have attended the focus group interview (13 in-situ, 2 using Google Meet video call function)

Transcript (condensated when feasible)

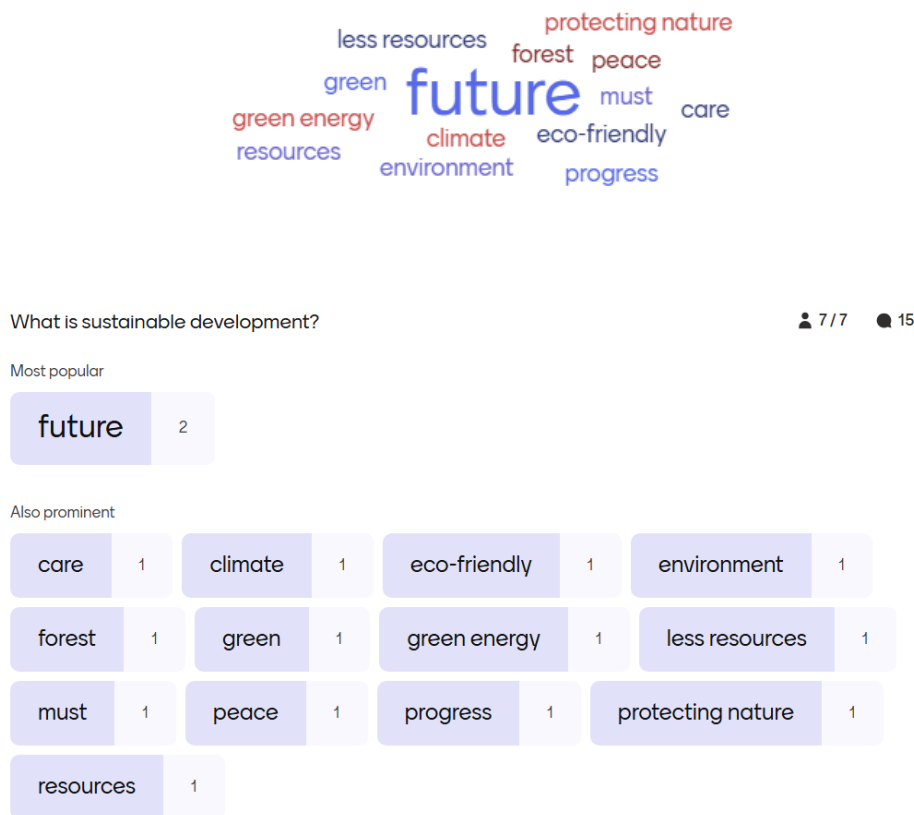
[00:00 - 07:00, 05.11.2024.] Introduction and Current Practices

Moderator (D.Krasnova): Welcome, everyone. We are discussing how to teach about forest fires effectively. First, I will introduce you to some common concepts and methodologies of Education for Sustainable Development, I will introduce you to the terminology also. Then we will proceed to video material presentation, where, step by step, concept by concept, we will discuss effectiveness and possibilities of using certain methodologies in your teaching process, as well as you will be able to share your experiences.

However, first and foremost, before we start our discussion, please fill in menti survey on sustainable development and education for sustainable development. You can work in pairs if you wish. Please follow the instructions and share your ideas.

[the results of the first Menti survey]:

What is sustainable development?



[07:00 - 15:00]

Moderator: Thank you for your answers and activity, would anyone like to share their term choice?

P5: I think, first and foremost, that we need to be aware to protect our future. I think sustainable development (SD) is all about future and knowledge of what we have to do today to secure environment for the next generations.

P1: Yes, I profoundly agree. We, as adults, have to think of the future, but we, as educators, as teachers, even more have to care about how we act, what habits we have, to show a good example to our students. Children is future. For example, we have to show them how to recycle, how to manage resources and so on.

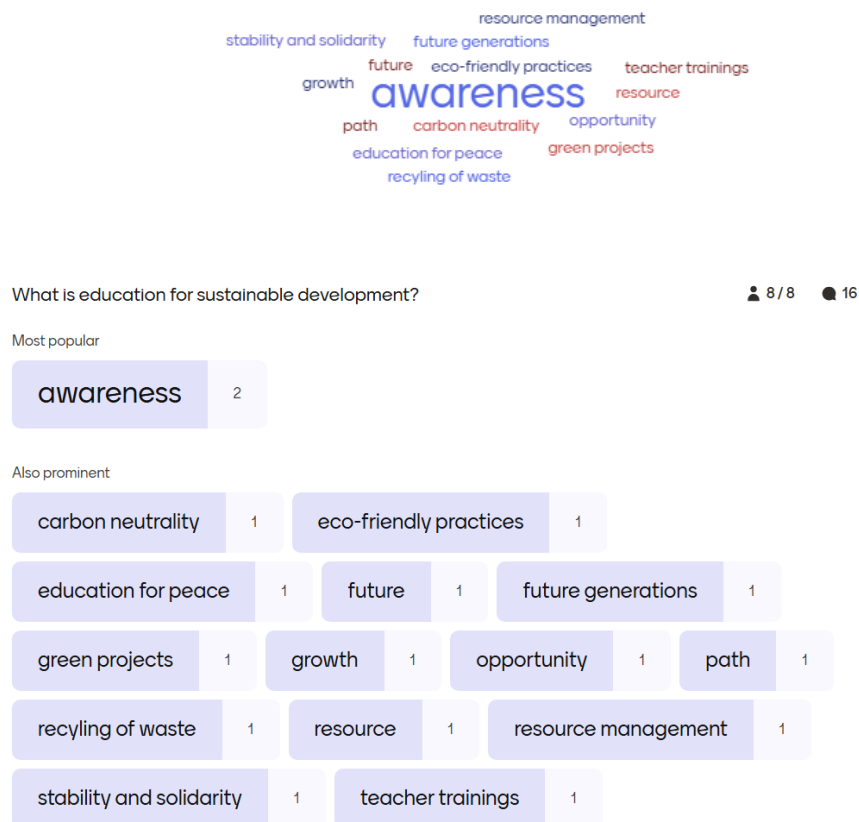
P12: sustainable development is something green, something ecological, something that will not harm nature. Also it will not harm climate.

P7: It is forest, of course! The aim of our project.

Moderator: Alright, thank you very much for sharing your thoughts. Now let's see what results we have for the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) survey.

[the results of the second Menti survey]

What is education for sustainable development?



Moderator: Anyone wants to start?

P1: Here I mentioned everything that I also mentioned before. Resource management is very important because if we use too many of them then we will finish them very soon.

P2: When I think of students and children in general, I think we need to teach them peace. We see all these terrible wars...Peace is very important for SD. Stability and solidarity is very needed in the world of today.

P14: I like what my colleagues have shared, however, I think we, as teachers, first and foremost, need training to understand fully what SD is. If we are not sure, we do not know how to teach kids about it. We can just keep guessing. For example, I chose “growth” and “Opportunity”. I think it very well resonates with teacher education – a chance, an opportunity to grow for both kids and the educator.

P8: I see ESD as a path to knowledge that we need to respect today so we can live tomorrow. Easy as that.

Moderator: I think you did a very good job, now let’s see the “official” sustainable development and education for sustainable development definitions.

[presenting Learning to change the world! What is Education for Sustainable Development? (video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUFqamr78Xkv>]

[15:00 - 20:00]

Moderator: Obviously, forest fires is a big problem nowadays, due to climatic change and other related issues, anthropogenic fires are very common. Could you please elaborate why forest fire education should be an important part of ESD in your school?

P14: In School, we integrate forest fire cycles into our biology curriculum. We do not have a separate ESD focus. However, we focus on how the ecosystem recovers after a fire. The students find it more engaging when we look at the "rebirth" of the forest rather than just the destruction. I also noticed some emotional engagement during in such approach.

P12: In the geography department at School , we look at the human impact. We use local maps to show where the fire breaks are located around our town. It makes the risk feel real to the students because they recognize the landmarks.

[20:00 - 35:00] Challenges in Implementation

Moderator: what challenges do you encounter when you try to teach children about forest fires? They can be both methodological and administrative.

P3: The biggest challenge for us in primary and secondary education is the emotional weight. Children are often scared of fire, many of them have experienced it in real life. We have to find a way to teach "sustainable development" and prevention without causing "anxiety".

P11: Watching the UNESCO video, I realized that my current methodology is too narrow. I usually just teach the "how" of fire, but the video's focus on "interconnected global challenges" makes me think we should link the "Forest Stories" from our Padlet to global poverty and resource management, as mentioned in the Menti results."

P8: Building on what P14 said about "rebirth" previously, we find that with younger students, we have to be very careful. If we only show the destruction, they shut down emotionally. We use the "Forest Stories" approach to frame the fire as a character in a larger cycle of nature. It shifts the focus from a "disaster" to a "transformation", which is a key part of our Sustainable Thinking pillar.

P4: In our ethics classes, we look at the "Global Fire" map. We discuss why certain regions have more anthropogenic fires than others. It's not just about biology; it's about social justice and development. This is where ESD becomes really powerful - when students realize that their local actions and global climate trends are totally interconnected.

P2: I agree with P3. Also, time is a major factor. Our curriculum is very rigid. We only have a few hours a year dedicated specifically to environmental disasters, so we have to be very efficient. Also ESD is a very new concept, I think, so not every country implement practices from it.

P6: That is why the consortium resources are helpful. By sharing materials between our schools, we don't have to "reinvent the wheel" every semester. Especially, if they are digital – it's so easy to share and of course – no paper usage.

Moderator: Dear teachers, but what about psychological aspects of education? Administrative limitations is an important issue, however, do you see the change in childrens' behaviour? Knowing does not mean doing, do you use any specific approaches to make sure children change their habits and behaviour?

P2: Yes, of course, no matter the age. I think it is more related to the idea that kids are not use to sustainability practices. It comes from family.

P11: kids might also get bored quickly...they need practice – outdoors, excursions, trips...even games. It is hard to teach about nature if some younger kids have not been to a real forest. City's parks are not enough here.

P13: I agree, children have to be given an opportunity to see the practical side of the protection of forests. Perhaps an excursion to recently burned forest?

Moderator: before we continue our discussion, I would like to show you some videos on different methodologies used in the ESD. I think you will get many new insights. Some, theoretically, approve of what you just mentioned.

What I would like to highlight here is, as I said before, just knowing does not mean doing – that's the main issue of ESD. perhaps, a new science to you – C4D or communication for development – how we can change people and not just inform them.

[presenting What is C4D? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOeRG1pGGoo> ; Applying a Communication for Development (C4D) approach <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MuR6txN31M>]

Moderator: what are your thoughts of this? Could this help you in your education process?

P14: To be completely honest, the C4D approach really challenges the way I've been teaching. Usually, I just provide the "input" of facts about fire breaks, but as the video suggests, we need to move toward "outcomes" where students feel a personal stake in the forest. For example, in our language or arts lessons, we could have students create their own "Forest Stories" for their families. This moves beyond just "knowing" to actually influencing their home environment, addressing the "family habits" that P2 mentioned earlier. It could also beneficially influence other kids in the family.

P3: I find the "Theory of Change" methodology very useful because it forces us to look at our "assumptions". We often assume that if a child knows a fire is dangerous, they won't play with matches, but C4D shows that change requires social support and dialogue. I would love to see students design a "community fire-watch" project. It's a practical step that turns them into the "stakeholders" of their own local safety, which is exactly the "doing" part of ESD the moderator highlighted.

P4: Building on the idea of "mentoring" from the video, we could have older students who have visited a burned forest - like P13 suggested - mentor the younger ones. This "peer-to-peer" communication is a core C4D strategy to break the "boredom" P11 mentioned. When a child hears about the "rebirth" of a forest from another child, the emotional weight shifts from fear to a shared responsibility for the future.

P6: Methodologically, this “Applying a C4D approach” video shows that we, as teachers, need to be “messengers” who facilitate dialogue, not just lecturers. If we want to change behavior, our “Learning Box” needs to include more than just biological samples; it needs tools for community engagement. It gives us the “opportunity” I mentioned before to grow into “communication for development” specialists rather than just science teachers.

Moderator: I am glad you will find use of this. To make this idea a bit more practical, I would like to introduce you to the Theory of Change.

[presenting Theory Of Change https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zRre_gB6A4]

[35:00 - 60:00, 06.11.2024.] Theories

Moderator: Dear educators, welcome to the second part of our session. Today I would like to start with presentation of several theory-grounded videos, based on your references from yesterday, and later we can discuss their applications.

[presenting John Dewey’s 4 Principles of Education

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3fm6wNzK70> ; Bio-empathy: Learning from nature <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BrSFEMUOy4> ; Can literature evoke empathy for nature? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBov0tolnmQ> ; When Kids Find a Dead Animal in Nature | Tips for Building Empathy and Care <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0yiSHiMrlo> ; Critical theory as a philosophy of research https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHJ_3uesiDQ ; 10 Ways to Empower Students With Choice <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L08wNizulOY> ; What Is an Inclusive Classroom? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-AWPB8adE4> ; Inclusive Practices in Your Classroom https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00sRVmZa_zg ; *The project-based learning method* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2Oa4OkkTtw>]

[60:00 - 75:00, 06.11.2024.] Conclusion

Moderator: Based on all the videos that you just saw, if you could change one thing about how we teach ESD topic, what would it be?

P9: More outdoor learning. Taking students to a controlled environment or a forest station helps them respect the environment more than a textbook ever could.

P8: I would like to see more digital simulations where students can see how a fire spreads based on wind and terrain. It combines technology with environmental science, I think it very well adapts to the immersive learning ideas shown in the videos.

P13: I agree with P9 and P8. If I could change one thing, it would be to integrate the “Literature for Empathy” and “Bio-empathy” concepts, also story-telling into a long-term Project-Based Learning strategy. Instead of a single lesson, students could follow a specific forest area’s recovery over a semester, using both digital simulations to predict growth and outdoor visits to see the “rebirth” in person. This marries the “Theory” we saw today with the “Practice” we need in our schools.

P10: I think we need to shift our role as teachers to be more like facilitators in an Inclusive Classroom. We should provide students with the choice to express their findings through different formats - whether it’s a technical report, a concept map, or a narrative story about the forest - to ensure every student feels they belong in this scientific and ethical discussion.

P11: Exactly. By moving toward these “emancipatory” practices, we move past the “administrative limitations” and “rigid curriculum” that usually hold us back. We are not just teaching them about fire; we are helping them construct their own knowledge and values to become the “messengers” for a more sustainable future.

P2: I agree with P9 about the forest station. If I could change one thing, I would implement the Project-Based Learning method as a long-term idea. Instead of one-off lessons, students could spend a semester “engineering” fire-resistant miniature villages. It moves them from being “passive recipients” of facts to active discoverers of solutions.

P4: Adding to that, I would focus on making our classroom more inclusive by offering multiple ways for students to express what they discover in their projects. Not everyone is comfortable speaking in a group about their “eco-anxiety”. We should let them choose their format - some might write a “Forest Story” from the perspective of an animal, while others might prefer building a digital simulation. This “Universal Design” ensures every child feels they belong in the discussion.

P1: I would change our assessment style. Following the Inclusive Classroom tips, we should use “Active Learning” techniques like anonymous polling or concept mapping during our project. It gives students the “time to think” without the pressure of being called on immediately. This helps build the “classroom community” and self-esteem needed before we ask them to solve complex environmental challenges.

Moderator: Thank you all for your time. It is clear that moving from “knowing” to “doing” involves creating a space where students are empowered to discover, fail, and try again in a supportive environment. These insights will be invaluable for our research article and guidelines book. Please find all the summaries in our Padlet folder.

End of the interview transcript.