

Activity 1: Understanding *Learning for Sustainability*

Objective

To explore and understand sustainability in the context of the local community.

To explore the characteristics that will prepare pupils to address the challenges of sustainability.

To build the precursor to a working definition of *Learning for Sustainability*.

Outputs

- A web of factors relating to sustainability in your locality.
- A list of characteristics of effective learners and ideas for better cultivating them in school.

Time

Allow approximately 75 minutes for this activity.

Materials

local post cards or post-card size pictures that reflect your community's diverse landscapes, built features, history, people, etc (up to 20 images, depending on the number of participants)

coloured marker pens

large sheets of paper

postcard-size pieces of coloured scrap paper (four different colours; one piece of each colour for each postcard)

writing paper (preferably scrap paper that has been used on one side).

pencils or pens for each participant

tape or Blu-Tack

Resource Sheet 1.1: 'Characteristics of effective learners' (one A4 copy for each participant)

Background

Sustainability has been defined as the goal of a system of development that recognises environmental limits, respects the tenets of social justice and seeks to meet the needs of current and future generations. Sustainability changes the way we view the relationships between and among traditionally discreet economic, social and environmental aspects of development issues.

At its best sustainability is not imposed on communities or their schools, but is developed as an integral part of community life, by schools working in concert with the community.

Sustainability is not simply about the perpetuation of the way things are or the way they were in the past. In fact, some aspects of past or present community life – no matter how revered – may contradict the basic tenets of sustainability. Understanding those aspects of community life that advance or contradict its aspirations for sustainability is fundamental to developing school-based initiatives that address real-life challenges and offer meaningful opportunities for strengthening school/community relationships.

Although sustainability is locally based, it also needs to be globally placed. Central to responsible global citizenship is a good understanding of how your local community's sustainability initiatives are shaped by and influence other communities' efforts to advance sustainability in other parts of the country or world.

Educators have an important role in articulating and preparing children for a future where, despite its uncertainty, human cultures thrive. By definition, people interested in sustainability are concerned with human well-being. But human well-being depends on living in harmony with the natural environment and with one another.

What pupils learn in schools, and the ways in which they learn, are essential to prepare young people for the complex decisions they must be prepared to make as responsible community members and leaders. Pupils need to be able to construct knowledge, explore and articulate values and attitudes, and practise skills. They also need to recognise that the ways in which they integrate these traditional education outcomes will define both the characteristics by which people will judge them and the personal characteristics that will guide their individual decision-making and actions.

Learning for Sustainability requires the purposeful development of characteristics that will serve pupils now and in the future. Recognising that developing the characteristics of effective learners is an essential purpose of formal education may help shape the ways we approach and integrate knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in core and non-core curricula and in school life.

Process

- 1 Before running this activity, you will need to assemble a collection of images of your 'community'.
 - Your community may be as small as your catchment area or as large as the county in which your school is located. Each school is different and your collection of images should reflect your school's perception of the 'community' it relates to.
 - Try to get a good mix of images that show landscapes, built structures, cultural history, activities and people.
 - Local postcards work well and may be available for purchase.
 - Photographs are a good alternative to post cards, but require a bit more preparation time. Plain paper prints of digital images work just as well.
- 2 Display the post cards or pictures so participants can view them easily.
 - Ask the participants to choose one image that is of interest to them. The image may remind them of a favourite place to visit; it may resemble the place where they live; or it may be a place they feel strongly about changing or conserving. Ask participants to take their selected images back to their seats.

If there are more than 20 participants, or you were not able to collect enough images to provide one for each person, post the images around the room and ask participants to stand beside the image of their choice. This may result in individuals, as well of small groups, standing beside each image. Ask the individual or small groups to remove the picture from the wall and return to their seats. Newly formed groups should sit together.

- 3 Distribute four postcard-size pieces of paper (one piece each of four different colours) and coloured marker pens to each individual or group.
 - Explain that you would like them to examine the picture they have chosen and to identify one social, one environmental, one economic, and one citizenship/governance factor relating to their image. This could be a factor that is represented by the picture, or a factor that influences or is influenced by the picture.

Allocate different paper colours for each or the four types of factors: social factor, economic factor, environmental factor, and citizenship or governance factors.

Ask individuals or groups to record their responses on the specified paper colour.

- 4 Label a sheet of paper with the heading 'Our community'. Display the sheet at the front of the room.

Beginning with one social factor, ask an individual or group to offer their response. Do not evaluate or judge the response. Post it on the large sheet of paper.

Ask for another factor (from any of the four areas) that relates to that factor. Place it next to the first factor and draw a line connecting the two.

Continue the process until the group has no more related factors and no more lines can be drawn.

If the group can find no more related factors, ask for someone still holding a factor to offer a new starting point.

Continue this process until all factors have been shared.

If you created two or more webs, can the group find factors that now connect the separate webs? Draw these connecting lines.

- 5 Ask participants to look at this interconnected web of factors and to think about how they are influenced or how they may influence external factors – regional or global factors outside the community.
 - Ask participants to share their ideas with the group.
 - Record the ideas on open areas of the large sheet of paper. Do not judge the responses.

Ask participants to describe the kind of person who could sort out and respond to the complex relationships that exist among the many factors identified in the first part of this activity and represented in the 'Our community' webbing poster.

- Record participants' responses on the large sheet of blank paper.

Explain that *Learning for Sustainability* is a lifelong process.

- Discuss ways in which primary and secondary education prepares pupils for lifelong learning.

Distribute a copy of Resource Sheet 1.1 to each participant.

Explain that learners develop the characteristics through complex processes that involve the construction of knowledge, the exploration of values and attitudes, and the practice of skills.

- Note that while knowledge, skills, values and attitudes are the attributes of learning that are at the heart of the curriculum, it is the complex interactions among them that define an individual's characteristics, and that underlie individual and collective action and decision-making.

Explain that you are going to briefly discuss each characteristic and make a list of ways they could be cultivated in your school.

- Name the characteristic.
- Read the definition and clarify as necessary.
- Ask, "How is this characteristic cultivated and recognised in our school? If it isn't, how could it be?"
- Record responses. Your list will serve as a touchstone for Activity Two: 'Defining Learning for Sustainability' and Activity 6: 'Action proposals'.

[INSERT ILLUSTRATION 3: CAPTION BELOW]

Example of participants' responses (step 6)

Taking things forward

Discuss whether there are any additional characteristics that should be added to the list.

Adapt this activity for use with students.

- Consider how their responses can inform and advance good practice.

Establish study groups to identify opportunities to advance *Learning for Sustainability* within the context of the curriculum. Note that organisations like WWF-UK and Oxfam have printed (and online) guides that make these national curriculum connections.

Contact organisations and agencies that offer support for integrated and cross-disciplinary approaches through materials developed to address education for sustainable development, development education, global education, environmental education, conservation education, economics education, multi-cultural education and outdoor education.

Form study groups to investigate innovations in learning including brain-based learning, learning styles, constructivism and systems thinking, among others. Invite the groups to report their findings.

Form study groups to investigate the international roots of *Learning for Sustainability* including the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), Convention on the

Rights of the Child (1989), Agenda 21 (1992), Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2015).

Form a study group to investigate the UK-based roots of education for sustainable development including: the 2003 Ofsted report, *Taking the First Steps Towards an Education for Sustainable Development*, the Department for Education and Skills' 2003 *Sustainable Development Action Plan for Education and Skills*, the Panel for Education for Sustainable Development's 1998 report *Education for Sustainable Development in the Schools Sector*, and similar documents from Estyn, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

After you have developed a working definition of *Learning for Sustainability*, examine your school's philosophy or ethos statements.

- Are the characteristics of effective learners you identified, or a similar list, included?
- Does the statement address lifelong learning and articulate the role of your school in the lifelong learning process?



RESOURCE SHEET 1.1: CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LEARNERS

Characteristic	Description
Inquirer	Inquirers are naturally curious. They have acquired the skills necessary to conduct purposeful, constructive research. They actively enjoy learning and their love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.
Thinker	Thinkers exercise initiative in applying thinking skills. They creatively use a full range of thinking skills – critical thinking, systems thinking, dialectical thinking, and others – to make sound decisions and solve complex problems.
Communicator	Communicators receive and express ideas and information confidently in more than one language, including the language of mathematics.
Risk taker	Risk takers have the confidence and independence of spirit to explore new situations, roles, ideas and strategies. They are courageous and articulate in defending those things in which they believe.
Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable learners have spent time in school exploring themes that have both local and global relevance and importance. In doing so, they have acquired a critical mass of significant knowledge.
Principled	Principled learners have a sound grasp of moral reasoning. They have integrity, honesty, and a sense of fairness and justice.
Caring	Caring learners show sensitivity towards the needs and feelings of others, and the ecological needs of plants and wildlife. They have a sense of personal commitment to action and service.
Open-minded	Open-minded learners respect the views, values and traditions of other individuals and cultures. They are accustomed to seeking and considering a range of points of view. They fully consider the rights and needs of future generations and non-human organisms in decision-making.
Well-balanced	Well-balanced learners understand the importance of physical, mental and spiritual balance, and personal well-being.
Reflective	Reflective learners give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and analyse their personal strengths and weaknesses in a constructive manner.
Global	Global learners understand that all development is locally based and globally placed. They support and defend peoples' basic human rights, and are equally prepared to share with and to learn from different cultures and nations.
Civically-engaged	Civically-engaged learners understand and participate in government and civic processes. They are active stewards of their greater ecological communities.

The characteristics used for this activity are adapted from the International Baccalaureate Organisation's primary student profile.