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Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

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Introduction

Teaching students about the United Nations' (UN) 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been shown to enhance their academic skills, foster their mental and moral development, boost their motivation and improve their future employment prospects (British Council, 2015; Think Global and British Council, 2011). By learning about SDG 4, students become familiar with why we need to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning. This seems essential in the light of the following disconcerting figures.

- Despite the fact that enrolment in primary education in developing countries has reached 91 per cent, around 57 million children remain out of school (UN, 2016).

- More than half these children live in sub-Saharan Africa, and it is estimated that 50 per cent of out-of-school children of primary school age live in conflict-affected areas (UN, 2016).

- Worldwide, 103 million young people lack basic literacy skills, and more than 60 per cent of them are women (UN, 2016).

SDG 4 comprises ten targets that constitute ways in which quality education can be made universally accessible by 2030. For example, aims state that 'all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education' and that 'all youth and a substantial proportion of … both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy' (UN, 2015: 17). An emphasis on inclusion and gender equality runs through these targets, aligning this goal with some of the targets of SDG 5, which is aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. One of the targets of SDG 4 urges countries to 'eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations', (UN, 2015: 17). Quality education is conceived of as an inclusive and equitable force and this makes SDG 4 a means by which to achieve some of the targets of SDG 10 too, which is aimed at reducing inequality within and among countries.

In 'The World's Largest Lesson', an animated film that can be used to introduce students to the SDGs, much emphasis is placed on how young people's creativity can be tapped to solve some of the world's problems. This chapter focuses on how English language learning and teaching can harness creative activities as a means of targeting the fourth sustainable development goal.

In this chapter, creativity is conceived of as a democratic phenomenon that all teachers and students can access and which may involve the reconfiguration of already existing elements rather than merely the creation of something out of nothing (Xerri and Vassallo, 2016). Moreover, creativity is seen as something that 'is born of discipline and thrives in a context of constraints' (Maley, 2015: 6). The harnessing of creativity in the classroom is deemed fundamental, given the paradox of it being 'at the heart of learning but not at the heart of education' (Maley and Bolitho, 2015: 435). Through a series of activities that seek to mobilise students' creative thinking, the chapter describes how the English language classroom can serve as an incubator for an awareness of the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Activities

The activities outlined below seek to tap into students' creativity in order to identify ways of achieving some of the SDG 4 targets. The activities are designed for intermediate to advanced (B1–C1) second language students in secondary schools in high-resource environments. Each activity aims to raise awareness about the importance of providing quality education to all boys and girls, and men and women in the developing world. The activities encourage students to contribute creatively to the attainment of SDG 4.

Activity 1: Identifying original and effective solutions

This activity encourages students to identify original and effective solutions to some of the challenges to quality education highlighted in video case studies from different contexts.

Aims

- To enable students to listen for detail

- To enable students to understand the challenges that prevent children in different contexts from receiving a quality education

- To discuss ways of overcoming the challenges mentioned in the videos and identify original and effective solutions to each challenge

- To enable students to present their solutions persuasively to their peers

- To enable students to evaluate the different solutions and select the winning ones.

Language focus

- To developing students' listening and speaking skills

SDG focus

- All ten targets forming SDG 4 were written to address the challenges to quality education around the world. This activity raises students' awareness of some of these challenges and enables them to formulate solutions that would help to achieve several of the targets.

Creative focus

- Enabling students to identify original and effective solutions to some of the challenges to quality education

Level   B1 and upwards
Age   12–18 years of age
Time   60 minutes

Preparation

- Three video case studies produced by UNICEF and UNHCR serve as the basis for the activity. The first video (goo.gl/hihw0R) focuses on girls in Madagascar who do not complete their education because of early marriage, while the second video (goo.gl/AY2MOH) is about a child forced to stop her schooling because of the conflict in Syria. The third video (goo.gl/VXwZdT) presents some of the challenges that children in South Sudan face on a daily basis in their efforts to receive a quality education.

Procedure

- Play the three videos. Ask students to note down all the challenges mentioned in each one. Pause after each video and replay if necessary. Students compare answers with a partner. Check answers with the whole class at the end.

- Ask students to form groups of four. Provide them with a brief definition of the criteria of originality and effectiveness. You can either use the following or devise your own in consultation with students:

  o an idea needs to be unusual, novel and unique, as well as possessing value and usefulness (Runco and Jaeger, 2012).

- Ask each group to identify solutions to the challenges mentioned in the videos in line with these two criteria.

- Each group nominates a representative to present the group's solutions to the rest of the class.

- While listening to each presentation, students individually award points based on the criteria of originality and effectiveness.

- Ask students to pair up with a partner from a different group and discuss the respective points awarded.

- Together with the class, count the total number of points awarded to each solution and announce the winning solutions.

Follow-up

- For homework, ask students to research some of the solutions that UNICEF and other international organisations have come up with in order to address challenges to quality education (see below for resources).

- Once these solutions are presented in class, students can analyse them using the same criteria of originality and effectiveness they used to evaluate their own proposed solutions.

Additional resources

UNICEF's YouTube channel

- This provides a useful resource since it contains a number of video case studies from different contexts illustrating solutions to the challenges affecting children's quality education: http://goo.gl/y4EBW5

Activity 2: Transforming texts, transforming problems

This activity enables students to use a multimodal approach in order to transform a reading text about the future of children affected by the crisis in Syria. Multimodality involves the skilful combination of different modes of communication so that a text is transformed into something with enhanced communicative potential (Xerri, 2016). This activity provides students with the means to transform a printed text into a multimodal one in order to communicate how problems affecting children's education need to be transformed into opportunities. The activity described below can take place after a number of pre-reading activities, where necessary.

Aims

- To enable students to skim through the text, highlighting the parts referring to children's education

- To enable students to check the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by means of a dictionary

- To enable students to summarise the highlighted parts of the text using their notes

- To enable students to plan the content and organisation of a video presenting the information contained in their summaries

- To enable students to negotiate content and organisation through discussion

- To enable students to create a storyboard of a brief video clip presenting the summarised information

Language focus

- To develop students' reading, writing and speaking skills

SDG focus

- Two of the ten targets constituting SDG 4 underscore the importance of providing vulnerable children with access to quality education by providing a safe and non-violent learning environment. This activity develops students' understanding of the problems such children face on a daily basis and enables them to consider how the relevant targets might be achieved.

Creative focus

- This activity enables students to engage in the necessary preparatory work for them to harness their digital literacy for the creative reconfiguration of information in a written text.

Level   B2 and upwards
Age   12–18 years of age
Time   60 minutes

Preparation

- The core text of this activity is a brief UNICEF (2014) report entitled No Lost Generation. This is the name of a strategy aiming to engage in sustainable measures to increase displaced children's learning and skills, providing them with a protective environment and broadening their opportunities.

Procedure

- Ask students to read through the text quickly and highlight all the parts referring to education. Ask students to pair up and check that they have identified all the relevant parts.

- Ask them to read the highlighted parts and use a dictionary to check the meaning of any unfamiliar words.

- Then students work in pairs and make a note of the most important information in each highlighted part of the text. The notes should be in their own words.

- Ask them to write a 100-word summary of the highlighted parts of the text. They should do so using only their notes, without referring back to the original text.

- After completing their summary, students compare it with the original text to check that they have noted the ideas it contained accurately and in their own words.

- Ask them to form groups of five and read each other's summaries, thus ensuring, through repeated exposure, that they have all focused on the most important information about education in the original text.

- In groups, students discuss the content and organisation of a video they will make. Their video will present the information they summarised. By means of a storyboard they agree on choice of images, film, text, music and voice-over. Students can use either a printed or digital storyboard (e.g. www.storyboardthat.com). Explain that the aim of the video is to highlight the problems and required resources identified in the original text, both of which should have featured in the students' summaries.

Follow-up

- In a subsequent lesson encourage students to present their storyboard to the rest of the class, or else the video they have created in groups for homework. To produce their videos they can use applications such as Movie Maker and iMovie. Ideally, these videos should be published on the class's YouTube channel.

Additional resources

Syria: No Lost Generation

- UNICEF has produced a set of teaching resources that you may use in subsequent lessons or for homework purposes. These resources are centred on a student magazine which explores how children's education is being affected by the conflict in Syria. There are also supplementary activities that engage students in an analysis of photos, videos and numerical figures: https://teachunicef.org/unicef-act/syria-no-lost-generation

Activity 3: Mediating an effect

This activity enables students to condense the data presented in an infographic about girls' education into a poster consisting of visuals and a brief slogan. One of the disadvantages of some infographics is that they contain too much data. This activity encourages students to comb through the data and selectively focus on what is the most important message at the heart of an infographic.

Aims

- To enable students to identify and describe the purpose or content of each part of an infographic

- To enable students to read the data in the infographic

- To enable students to discuss what they regard as the most significant piece of information in the infographic

Language focus

- To develop students' reading, speaking and writing skills

SDG focus

- Seven of the ten targets in SDG 4 refer to the importance of ensuring equal opportunities in education for girls (and women) as much as for boys (and men). This activity develops students' understanding of the challenges posed to girls' quality education around the world and enables them to think about how the relevant targets can be achieved through effective awareness-raising.

Creative focus

- The activity facilitates the use of students' creativity in order to communicate a succinct and compelling message about the importance of nurturing girls' sustainable education. Through their negotiation and collaborative design of a poster, students show their ability to think about what is involved in producing an incisive, memorable message that has a lasting effect on its audience.

Level   B1 and upwards
Age   12–18 years of age
Time   60 minutes

Preparation

- The infographics used in this activity were produced by USAID: http://goo.gl/oK32Mb, Global Partnership for Education: http://goo.gl/m0LqwY, UN Women: http://goo.gl/t5I4wg, UNICEF: http://goo.gl/oAiuyP and Intel: http://goo.gl/18pdgo.

Procedure

- Ask students to form groups of four and provide each group with a different infographic.

- In groups, students discuss the layout of the content and the possible purpose of each part, as well as how it corresponds to other parts. Ask one student from each group to relay this information to the rest of the class.

- Ask students to read the data in the infographic and individually determine what they consider to be the most important piece of information.

- Students share their views in groups of four and justify their choices. Encourage them to reach agreement about the most significant fact.

- In groups, students plan the visual aspect of a poster and write a brief slogan or message, which should be based on the most important fact they have identified.

Follow-up

- For homework, each group produces a poster by using either software like MS Publisher or websites like www.canva.com or www.fotor.com.

- In a subsequent lesson, they present their poster to the rest of the class and it is evaluated in terms of the effect it is likely to have on an audience. Each poster is hung in the classroom and published online.

Additional resources

If you would rather use fact sheets instead of infographics, there are a number of these on girls' education published by UNESCO: http://goo.gl/PsF1XZ, Circle of Sisterhood: http://goo.gl/XJoqlw, malala.org: http://goo.gl/2KzTLq, The World Bank: http://goo.gl/JKhDsq and USAID: http://goo.gl/ljz3hs.

Activity 4: Empathising for inclusion

This lesson offers activities that enable students to understand the difficulties experienced by children with disabilities and to empathise with them in their efforts to access a quality education. The latter is conducted through poetry writing, which has been shown to help galvanise students' empathy for vulnerable people (Xerri and Xerri Agius, 2015).

Aims

- To enable students to describe photos of children with disabilities learning in different global contexts

- To enable students to understand how disability might affect children's education

- To enable students to identify the problems, causes, consequences and solutions associated with the education of children with disabilities

- To enable students to understand the poem's main ideas by watching the video and reading the transcript

- To enable students to draft a poem written from the point of view of the child with a disability

Language focus

- To develop students' speaking, reading, listening and writing skills

SDG focus

- Inclusion is an integral part of quality education as conceived of in SDG 4; two of its targets address the need to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to education and training. The activities forming part of this lesson enable students to gain an understanding of the difficulties that children with disabilities have to face in their efforts to receive a quality education.

Creative focus

- These activities encourage students to use their imagination to develop a clearer understanding of the challenges experienced by children with disabilities. The act of poetry writing enables them to adopt the point of view of such children and thus increase empathy.

Level   B2+
Age   12–18 years of age
Time   90 minutes

Preparation

- Parts of this lesson are based on a Flickr album entitled 'Education and Disability': https://www.flickr.com/photos/gpforeducation/sets/72157633448398454/with/22413001278/, which was compiled by Global Partnership for Education, which also authored the text on the education of children with a disability that is used in this lesson: http://www.globalpartnership.org/focus-areas/children-with-disabilities . The last activity is based on the spoken word poem 'Every Time I Step Outside': https://youtu.be/psa9IpuGPNc

Procedure

- Provide each student with a photo from the album 'Education and Disability'. In pairs, students describe their photos to each other. Ask them to identify what the photos have in common.

- Encourage students to discuss how disability might affect children's education. Elicit some ideas from them.

- Ask them to scan the overview section of the webpage 'Children with disabilities' and identify the number of people living with a disability in the world at present.

- Ask them to read the overview and look up the meaning of any unfamiliar vocabulary using a dictionary. If necessary, help with words like 'discrimination', 'marginalised', 'implications', 'stigma', 'constrained', 'transition', 'unconducive' and 'mainstreamed'.

- Using comprehension questions, ask them to identify the problems of children with disability experience with respect to education, as well as the causes and consequences of and suggested solutions to these problems.

- Encourage them to think about how they would personally cope with a disability as part of their daily school routine and to discuss this with their partner.

- Encourage them to predict what the video 'Every Time I Step Outside' will be about. Play the video and ask them to confirm whether their predictions were correct.

- In groups of four, they discuss and identify the main ideas the speaker is trying to communicate in the spoken-word poem. Play the video again and, finally, provide them with its transcript. Draw particular attention to the last four lines.

- Using the photo you provided them with at the beginning, ask them to imagine what the child in their photo would say if they had to write a poem entitled 'Every Time I Step Outside'. Ask them to write a draft of the poem, and provide feedback.

Follow-up

- At home students revise and polish their poem and, if they wish, learn how to recite it or perform it as a spoken-word piece.

- Encourage them to either video record themselves performing the poem or else produce an audio recording of their performance which will overlay a video made up of a sequence of images related to the poem's content.

Additional resources

Global Partnership for Education has produced a number of blogs about how children with disabilities in Eritrea (http://goo.gl/uqZMQX, Zanzibar http://goo.gl/Ry36yY) and Cambodia (http://goo.gl/5j0dxv) are being supported in their efforts to receive a quality education. If you are interested in exposing students to the perspective of a young person with disabilities, you might wish to show students a video called 'Disabled and living in the real world (http://goo.gl/afNk3u). Robyn Lambird's YouTube channel (http://goo.gl/1mvTA5) is a good resource for spoken-word poems and other videos related to disability and young people. One of the best-known poets with a disability is Jim Ferris, some of whose poems are found online, e.g. 'Poems with Disabilities' (http://goo.gl/jhmsDH).

Further resources

Video – The World's Largest Lesson – Part 1

- This video serves as a good introduction to the SDGs, with the first part providing information about the goals and the second part illustrating how creativity is being used to solve some of the problems targeted by these goals: https://goo.gl/lbSDhF; Part 2: https://goo.gl/CYgGVF –

Teach UNICEF – Sustainable Development Goals

- This website contains lesson plans, activities and videos that can act as an introduction to the SDGs: https://goo.gl/Kvx6G4

Practical Action – Global Goals

- A number of different materials designed to help students understand the SDGs are found on this website: https://goo.gl/NGa2Pz

British Council – Voices

- This magazine article describes how and why to teach the SDGs, as well as indicating some of the resources you could use to do so: https://goo.gl/Y2ilCi

Oxfam – Sustainable Development Goals

- This website is made up of a selection of teaching ideas on the themes of the SDGs, including education, skills and jobs: https://goo.gl/b3tTwD –

Send My Friend to School – Resources

- A large variety of resources are found on this website, all of them dealing with barriers to quality education: https://goo.gl/Oj0Jsp

World's Largest Lesson – Quality Education

- A number of resources are available on this website if you are interested in learning more about how to promote creative engagement with the Sustainable Development Goal of quality education for all: https://goo.gl/YX76tA –

Global Dimension – Quality Education

- This website contains a number of lesson plans and other resources designed around SDG 4: https://goo.gl/Y673de

British Council – SchoolsOnline

- If you are interested in establishing a partnership with another school as a means of enriching your students' understanding of cultural diversity and sustainability, this is a good website to access: https://goo.gl/8Cccv4

British Council – Quality Education for All Children

- Project templates are available to facilitate collaboration between schools and these are based around the SDGs, including one on SDG 4: https://goo.gl/d3081Z

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