

Best practices

There are different approaches to education that offer room for weighing up different and conflicting perspectives on what a sustainable future could mean. They allow students to practice formulating personal, critical, and nuanced points of view and making decisions on sustainability issues without clear guidelines. The educational approaches that are discussed are:

1. Ethical language play
2. Corner debate/line debate
3. (Panel) debate
4. (Class) discussion
5. Roleplay
6. Forum game
7. Combination exercise: Discussion and role-play (> 1 day)
8. Combination exercise: Research assignment and discussion (1-course unit)

Ethical language play

Title: Ethical language play
Sources: (Öhman J. a., 2007) (Öhman J. a., 2008)

How does it work?

Various educational approaches offer room for consideration. The ethical language game focuses on practicing ethical reflections.

Step 1: Theses with an ethical dimension: The teacher makes statements about the ethical significance of the environment. These statements are, for example:

1. Man and animal are of equal value; it is always wrong to kill an animal.
2. No life should be sacrificed as a result of environmental pollution.
3. Everyone has the right not to sort their waste.

In formulating these statements, the teacher makes use of what could be called an ethical language game. The characteristic of these statements is that they do not refer to the moral reactions of a specific human being or the norms of a specific community. Instead, the statements are formulated as if they apply to everyone in every activity, without any concern for the circumstances. This ethical language play becomes clear in the way the teacher uses phrases such as 'It is always wrong to kill an animal', 'No life should be sacrificed', and 'Everyone has the right'.

Step 2: Taking a position: The students then take a stand on each proposition (by standing up or remaining seated).

Step 3: Discussion: The students defend their points of view in the subsequent discussion.

Step 4: Finalization of the discussion: Process evaluation (How did it go? What are your feelings?) and synthesis (conclusions are summarized).

Added value?

- Students learn to reflect ethically on what are 'good' values and the 'right' way to act, without necessarily having to come to a solution or a decision.
- The ethical reflections can then later serve as justification or arguments for moral actions. **Points of attention?**
- The statements should be formulated in such a way that they seem to apply to everyone in every situation, regardless of the circumstances. Inspiration can be found in the ethical principles formulated by UNESCO.

Corner debate/line debate

Title: Corner debate

Sources: (Andersson, 2019), (Steunpunt GOK, 2008), (Steunpunt GOK, 2008)

How does it work?

Step 1: presentation of the statement or question: The classroom is arranged in such a way that there is space to move between the different corners. The teacher presents a controversial thesis or asks the students a question. The teacher invites the students to take a position and choose one of the four corners of the classroom. Each corner represents an opinion or an answer, three corners are pre-formulated by the teacher and the fourth corner represents an 'open choice'. The teacher states that it is okay to change angles later if they change their minds. A variant of this is that students do not have to choose between 3 pre-formulated options and 1 free option, but can position themselves on a physical line between disagreeing at all and completely agreeing with a given statement.

Step 2: corner of choice: The students make their choice without any prior discussion and are then asked to physically move to one of the corners. To minimize the risk of students acting according to peer pressure, everyone must think silently (they may have to write down the choice) and can't move until everyone has made his or her choice.

Step 3: talking and listening: The teacher encourages students to express their choice from the corner, respecting the students and emphasizing that it is okay to just take a stand without explaining why. If necessary, the choice can be discussed in pairs on beforehand and arguments can be sought.

Step 4: changing corners: When all students have had the opportunity to develop reasons for their choice of a particular angle, the teacher asks if there is anyone who would like to take a different angle to respond to what emerges from the other students' reasoning. Pupils who want to change angles do so, and the teacher allows them to work out what made them change their minds. It can



be extra to add an element of competition: which group can attract the most defectors?

Step 5: Pupils go to their seat and write down the most important arguments for each option.

Added value?

- Students listen to different perspectives
- Students think critically and explain their perspective orally
- Different conflicting perspectives on sustainability issues are clarified
- Polarizing the approach to sustainability issues

Points of attention?

- Controversial or difficult questions: The exercise is more fruitful when students choose different angles. The alternatives should emphasize or point to complexity and not be seen as 'clearly right or wrong'. What this means may differ between different groups of students, so the formulation or refinement of the alternatives is something the teacher is responsible for.
- Create a safe climate: It is also important for the teacher to contribute to a situation where everyone feels safe to express his/her thoughts and opinions without being treated disrespectfully. This can mean clarifying the rules about listening to and not interrupting each other or making irreverent comments. This also means being attentive to and responding to opinions that may harm others. Pupils standing alone in a corner can be particularly exposed and are therefore worthy of specific attention.

Examples?

Statement: A company should inform customers about sustainability and strive to change their behaviour to become more sustainable:

1. Yes, companies have an important role in influencing customer behaviour.
2. No, a company should not impose values on customers.
3. No, a company should only strive for high profits.
4. Open corner



(Panel)debate

Title: Panel debate

Sources: (CVO Panta Rhei, 2019), (Persregio Dender, 2019) **How does it work?**

In a debate, arguments for or against controversial issues are discussed in detail, so that a well-founded opinion can be formed. A panel usually consists of a group of participants (or invitees) who take distinct but divergent positions. It is not the intention to reach common decisions or agreements. As a result, a debate mainly has an informative value.

Step 1: Gathering information independently: The participating students have to gather information independently before the debate to 'substantiate' their position.

Step 2: Debate: The panel members sit at the front of the class facing the other students, with an (impartial) chairman in the middle. First, each panel member

gets the chance to win the favour of the audience by expressing their core idea in a witty way. Each participant will try to score as many "goals" as possible. While listening to arguments and counter-arguments, the listeners get information about the pros and cons of various opinions.

Step 3: Discussion:

Process evaluation (How did it go? What are your feelings?) and synthesis (conclusions are summarized).

Variant 1: The students can each be assigned a specific role in the discussion (see also role-play).

Variant 2: external speakers are invited for a debate. Students can ask questions during and after the debate.

Added value?

- Students get the opportunity to independently look for knowledge, but also for their own opinions, values, ... regarding a controversial subject and to express this explicitly.
- In a debate, things are often exaggerated and distorted. This can be very instructive for the students to take a critical look at it.

Example?

- Political debates on climate: Local representatives of different parties are brought together on an afternoon or evening for a political debate. Various propositions are presented to the representatives who can explain their party's point of view and formulate the necessary arguments. Students follow the debate. Possible interaction with the public consists in that real live polls are held via the smartphone (e.g. with Kahoot or Mentimeter) so that the general opinion of the public about certain propositions becomes clear. Questions during the entire debate can be asked via smartphone. Positions and questions from the audience can also be shared after each round of debate around a specific proposition.





Class discussion

Title: Class discussion
Sources: (Rudsberg & Öhman, 2019) (KU Leuven, 2020) (CVO Panta Rhei, 2019)

How does it work?

The class discussion is a purposeful conversation between students, led by the teacher or a discussion leader, about a specific topic. The focus is mainly on formulating arguments and exchanging opinions. Insights, ideas and opinions are pooled with the aim of solving a problem, formulating decisions or drawing up an action plan. Group discussions help students in situations where consultation, teamwork and joint decision-making are emphasised.

Step 1: Introducing the subject: the moderator introduces the subject by outlining it and placing it in a larger context. The subject must lend itself to discussion, possibly by making bold statements.

Step 2: Organisation of the discussion: The moderator appoints the discussants and observers, lays down a number of rules for the discussion and adapts the class arrangement.

Step 3: The discussion is carried out: this is done in three steps: 1) Forming an image of the problem, 2) Drawing up alternatives and assessing their feasibility and prioritising them, and 3) Decision-making (optional: the aim is certainly not always to reach a consensus). Here, the teacher has an important role to play in enhancing the quality of the discussion (see points for consideration). The discussion leader also provides structure to the discussion.

Step 4: Concluding the discussion: process evaluation (how did it go? airing the feelings) and synthesis (conclusions are summarised).

Variante: the students can also each be assigned a specific role in the discussion (see also roleplay)

Added value?

- During class discussions, students learn to improve the quality of their arguments in terms of validity, complexity, and nuance (see 3.1). They also learn to formulate their arguments more clearly. They learn to make their thinking explicit to each other and the teacher, or to build up an argument that reveals their thinking process.
- Knowledge plays a crucial role in carrying out such class discussions, especially in justifying the claim made. It is therefore important that the students have sufficient prior knowledge. The following functions of knowledge are distinguished:
 - o emphasise the complexity of the problem
 - o emphasise conflicting interests
 - o provide evidence in a counter argument
 - o clarify and/or correct previous statements
 - o predicting the consequences of a claim
 - o further support a previous claim.
- The progress of students' learning is strongly linked to their interaction with peers. It makes them respond to other students' arguments in their own argumentation, or further develop and/or criticise them.
- Students also have to dig deeper into their own knowledge and re-actualise it. Thus, students learn to put previously acquired knowledge to good use in practice, to link their knowledge to value judgements in an argument and to contextualise their already acquired knowledge in a new context, the posed problem.

Points of attention?

Sustainability often leads to consensus-oriented discussions. When students strive for a consensus in a discussion, which hinders the diversity of opinions, etc. in the conversation, it is the teacher's task to counter this by questioning the consensus or bringing new alternatives and opinions into the conversation.

The teacher thus plays an important role in increasing the diversity and quality of (class) discussions. This role has already been described in detail in 4.4.3, with a general focus on ethical aspects. In this way, teachers work towards differences so that students can really



express their own, personal views, confront these with each other, be critical of each other and discuss conflicting ideas.

Role play

Title:	Role play
Sources:	(KU Leuven, 2020), (Steunpunt GOK, 2008), (Klimaatopschool, 2020), (11.11.11, 2012), (Oxfam, 2020) How does it work?
Step 1:	All students are presented with a situation and a short description of the roles. Each player is given a more detailed description of his role, the goals he has to achieve and possibly some personal background information. They are given the task of finding a solution to a problem or deciding within a given time.
Step 2:	The players take up their roles and the rest of the class observes (the whole process or particular players).
Step 3:	The game is first discussed with the players and then with the class. Did a good solution/decision emerge? Why or why not? Added value?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students get to know different perspectives on a given theme and discover dilemmas or contradictions that are otherwise difficult to illustrate. - Students 'experience' the specific role of an actor involved - A role-playing game creates awareness of one's own assumptions and values, and can even lead to changes in students' attitudes to an issue. - Students learn to listen to and respect the views and perspectives of other actors - The topic must be in line with the learning objectives of the subject and the world of the students. - Provide a clear goal in the description of the situation: what needs to be solved, what decision needs to be made? Choose a goal that really requires the players to consult and cooperate with each other. - Use realistic roles, but by creating 'jammers' (with a personal agenda) you can make the situation more complex. - Give clear instructions for playing the game: the pupils must fully empathise with the person they are playing, but they must not be rude or insulting. - When evaluating the role-play, always indicate the roles with the names from the game and not with the names of the pupils. - Make a list of observation points for the pupils who are observing. - Climate Challenge@school: organisation of a climate challenge conference, a climate summit at school. The students represent in groups a country in the international climate negotiations. Their country is part of one of the five major power blocks in the climate negotiations (industrialised countries that want to take measures for the climate, industrialised countries that want to take little or no measures for the climate, OECD countries, developing countries and emerging countries). They debate about three resolutions (bills): theme CO2 reduction, theme food, theme Global Climate Fund. This way of working gives students insight into the climate problem, the challenges at an international level to reach a climate agreement and how to deal with different positions and interests of countries in the climate negotiations. - 11.11.11 Developed a role-playing game on the theme of climate change for 2nd and 3rd grade secondary school students, in which they are present at the international climate summit and are each assigned a specific role (politics, companies, individuals & groups, NGOs). See Module 4 and Annex 10 (11.11.11, 2012) - Oxfam Solidarity organises introductory workshops for groups of young people from 16 years of age and for adults on themes such as (Oxfam, 2020): - Climate change, globalisation, access to food: What impact does climate change have on Bolivian farmers? - Decent work, globalisation: What conditions do Cambodian garment workers work in (globalisation, decent work)?



- In groups, an interactive course is followed, and the participants put themselves in the shoes of a Bolivian farmer or a Cambodian garment worker. By taking on a specific role in a particular sustainability problem, students learn new perspectives and experience the consequences.

- An online role-playing game (Digital didactics, 2004)



Forum play

Title: Forum play

Sources: (Andersson, 2019), (Steunpunt GOK, 2008)

How does it work?

Forum Play can be described as a role play aiming to solve injustices and conflicts between individuals and groups. The audience is invited to participate actively and to reflect on the possible alternative reactions of different individuals. The aim is to investigate how suppressed individuals can influence certain situations.

Step 1: Background knowledge and inspiration: Background knowledge on sustainability can be gained by working with real or constructed cases, by reading media reports or by watching a documentary on sustainability issues.

Step 2: Preparation of the game: Students prepare a short piece (5 minutes) with an 'unsustainable' ending. Situations from documentaries or case studies can provide inspiration for certain situations and strategies to go deeper into the subject matter. In order to guide students in practising situations that could be particularly relevant in their future, students could be assigned specific roles to be included. For example, in the context of business education, these could be roles such as subcontractor, business manager, sustainability officer, prevention advisor, employee, etc. The preparation of the play considers students reflecting on their roles: Who am I? Where am I? What do I want and why? What could make me change my behaviour? **Step 3:**

Performing the play: A stage is created in the classroom with a surrounding space so that fellow students can easily see and enter the stage. The play is performed once, without interruption, in the classroom with classmates as the audience. The role of the teacher here is to be a facilitator. This means that he or she takes responsibility for the overall process, that the rules are explained, that the spectators are helped to solve the problem in a plausible way, and that he or she ensures that all suggestions are respected and that everyone gets the chance to participate. After the game, the teacher asks questions to the students to clarify what happened in the game. What happened? What was 'unsustainable'? What would be (more) sustainable? Which of the characters could or should try a different strategy?

Step 4: Replaying the play: The play is re-enacted with the difference that the audience can now say 'stop' if something unsustainable happens or if someone thinks that someone could act differently. The audience can then either suggest different actions for the actors on stage to perform in an attempt to change the outcome to something more sustainable, or come on stage in the actor's place to perform their own interventions. This step is repeated with the aim of exploring as many strategies as possible. When creating an intervention, the student can choose where to start and can try out the new strategy with the audience without interruption. After the intervention, the teacher asks the actors involved in the 'unsustainable situation' what they thought of the new strategy and thanks the spectator who contributed a new strategy. If no spectator says 'stop' or if the spectators find it difficult to suggest a strategy, the teacher can say 'freeze' to give time to think about the situation, individually or in pairs, before continuing. The aim of this step is to find as many strategies as possible. When there are no more suggestions, it is time to step out of the roles.

Step 5: Less or more sustainable? Analysis of the strategies played out: The teacher leads the process of discussing and analysing or assessing the strategies played out (making different decisions) in terms of less or more sustainable. In addition to the students' personal feelings regarding sustainability, the Human Rights Declaration, the Children's Rights Convention and/or the Sustainable Development Goals could be used to specify sustainability criteria that may be useful in assessing the strategies.

Step 6: Ethical reflection of strategies played out: For further reflection on the strategies played in the forum game, the suggestions and situations where the spectators said 'stop' can be further analysed and reflected upon. What were the guiding principles or ethics behind the suggested strategies? For whom and when was the suggestion more or less sustainable? The principles for teaching ethics and morality presented in 3.4.3 could be useful here.



Added value?

- The forum play facilitates a space where students can experiment and explore different strategies or decisions to transform something that is unsustainable into something that is more sustainable.
- The content roles help students develop certain skills.
- The students learn to cooperate and communicate effectively and they explore a range of (hierarchical) relationships.
- By performing a role, the students are actively involved which increases the chance of successfully acquiring new information.

Points of attention?

- The topic must suit the learning objectives of the subject and the world of the students.
- Use realistic roles, but by creating 'jammers' (with a personal agenda) you can make the situation more complex.
- Give clear instructions for playing the game: the pupils have to fully empathise with the person they have to play.

Examples?

Management students used a variation of the forum play to explore situations in which they had to make business decisions. The focus was on difficult situations in which certain aspects were considered 'unsustainable' by (some) students. For example, an executive manager of a factory producing clothes for H&M, who was doing environmental damage, was in a difficult position because of conflicting expectations from shareholders, employees, NGOs and the sustainability manager. The workers' representative had convincingly described the dangerous working conditions and the environmental organisation representative had pointed out the damage the production process was causing to the water source on which the entire community depended for its livelihood.

Combination exercise: discussion and role play (> 1 day)

Youth Service Globelink organises a school-wide discussion and role-play game "KRAS" on global themes (Globelink, 2020). Across Flanders, some 600 (!) young people in the third grade come together for a year in leisure time to debate with their peers on the cutting edge of such issues. Discussion and their own opinion are central to this. Each school year, a new annual theme with a global slant is used to introduce the young people to the wonderful world of democracy and debating. In 2019-2020, this was around the theme "Hot climate, heated debates". Empathy and discussion are central. From the point of view of people and organisations involved in the topic, young people (in groups) get the best view of often tricky global issues. That is why young people put themselves in the shoes of a political party, a young person from another country, the government of a country, the press, an interest group, etc. They defend their voice with verve and are able to make their point. They experience at first hand the tensions that exist between the different parties.

The course focuses on the many climate-related themes from the perspective of three groups of social players: governments, businesses and citizens. Who bears the major responsibilities? Who should bear the burden? Where is the great innovation? Who will take the lead? And above all: who will come up with the solutions and make sure we meet the deadlines?

Step 1: Introduction: During the introduction session, the theme, the roles and the other participants are introduced in a playful manner. In a role, the debating techniques of the participants are tested for the first time. At the end of this session, each participant is assigned a role in which they can commit themselves during the rest of the year, together with a group of other participants.



Step 2: Role-playing: In order to get a broader view of the theme and the viewpoints on the theme, each participant takes the role of a political party, a company, an NGO, the government of a country, the press, an interest group, etc. The participants empathise with their point of view and look for good arguments to convince the other roles of their rightness. Good proposals and strong arguments increase the chance that their own proposal will be approved.



FIGURE 1: ROLEPLAY DURING KRAS-PROJECT.

Step 3: Debate: Expert session and local closing session: After the role-playing sessions, the assigned role is abandoned, and each participant can express his or her own opinion on the topic. The preparation for the local closing session is done by inviting experts from the field who will debate with the participants about which topics to raise locally and which questions to ask. In the Local Final Session, we cross verbal swords with the local politicians. How can things be different in your town, what influence does the theme have on your town or, conversely, what influence does your town have on the theme?



FIGURE 2: EXPERT SESSION OF KRAS-PROJECT.

Step 4: Plenum: Forum discussion: In a third pronouncement session, at Plenum (b)XL, all participants of all scratch groups are invited to occupy the Chamber, the Senate and the Flemish Parliament in Brussels to formulate policy recommendations for the (inter)national politicians. This results in a "young decision" in which they formulate policy recommendations for the politicians on the Flemish, Federal and European level.



Combination exercise: Research assignment and discussion (1 course unit)

In the course 'Thinking about sustainability' at the Centre for Sustainable Development (Ghent University), the path consists of teaching students to approach a complex sustainability issue from different perspectives. They explore the complexity, the ambiguity, and the controversial nature, but without lapsing into relativism. Thus, they can experience those experts from exact sciences usually have a different perspective than social scientists, that the knowledge of academics, policy makers, business leaders, representatives of NGOs, etc. often differs (but can also be complementary), that some are more concerned about the limits of the ecological carrying capacity, others about poverty and social exclusion, that sometimes a global perspective prevails, sometimes a local view, etc. In short, the students learn to look at sustainability from different perspectives. In short, it becomes clear to the students that complex sustainability issues can be framed and approached in different ways, leading to different definitions of the problem and different choices of solutions. This course unit introduces students to the multi- and trans-disciplinary nature of sustainability issues and to the multi-perspectivism that makes these issues exciting and 'political'.

Step 1 : Introductory lectures: (1) the basic concepts of sustainability, (2) a short historical sketch and the most important perspectives on sustainable development (e.g. Brundtland, UN/Rio Conferences, Ecological modernization, Limits to growth, Factor four, Ecological Economics, Environmental justice, Degrowth, etc.), (3) the distinction between multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary approaches (incl. Mode 1 versus Mode 2 science) and (4) transition thinking: how can we look at socio-technical changes? Can sustainability transitions be influenced? What perspectives and methods exist in this regard?

Step 2: Group Work: To demonstrate that complex sustainability issues can be approached from multiple perspectives and that a transdisciplinary approach is relevant, the students work together in small groups of minimum 4 and maximum 6 members to produce a paper. Using specific techniques and methods, they immerse themselves in a current sustainability issue. During two interactive tutorials, the lecturers will help the different groups on their way with the foreseen techniques, such as carrying out a discourse analysis, developing normative or exploratory scenarios, applying a dramaturgical approach, an analysis using the multi-level perspective, 'student-led education', etc., and provide intensive guidance. Customisation is foreseen as each group will work with only one technique or method. The groups have to complete the group work independently and write a final paper (max. 6000 words). The groups all work on the same theme that is suggested by the teachers and that will change every year. Themes can be: sustainable consumption, sustainable urban mobility, circular economy, the commons, etc.

Step 3: Interactive guest lectures: One or more experts on the annual theme (e.g. from academic circles, the policy world, the business world, the NGO sector, etc.) can be invited to contribute during an interactive guest lecture.

Step 4: Final seminar with discussion: The final results of all group works are presented and discussed by the students at an open/public (final) seminar.

Added value:

- The approach is fully in line with the pluralistic approach, where students are allowed to focus on a sustainability issue in a trans- and multi-disciplinary way - a good example of problem-based education.
- The issues are formulated as local issues, closely linked to the living environment of the students. This has a motivating effect.
- Through lectures and guest lectures, students come into contact with different perspectives and approaches to the issues.
- Students search (in groups) for various alternative solutions, but they also have to make decisions and cut through knots. This cannot be done solely on the basis of rational arguments, and so they also investigate the ethical and political dimensions of the issues. They need to prioritise these issues to arrive at a proposal, position and/or decision.

