

## Applied Theatre and Drama Methods in HE Sustainability Education

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Our aim in this stream is to better understand, reinforce and extend the use of pedagogy informed by applied drama in the teaching of sustainability in higher education (HE). The cross-disciplinary field of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) links directly to building the capacities to achieve the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including quality education (SDG4), climate change (SDG 13) and partnership working (SDG 17) (United Nations, 2023; see also UNESCO, 2016). In practice, however, sustainability is a challenging interdisciplinary topic for both teachers and students, not least in addressing content that is complex, emotive, unsettling and value-laden. How can we introduce, explore and assess students in HE teaching related to sustainability?

From our own pedagogical experience and our research, we have found that drama and other arts-based teaching methods can inspire hope, 'cathedral thinking' and action in the face of the complex and often overwhelming challenges of climate change. Such pedagogical approaches remain unusual in most HE subject areas. That this is especially the case in the business school sector challenges our capacity to educate and inspire organisational leadership for sustainability.

The assumption that more scientific and technical knowledge leads to better behaviour also still guides many environmental educational programmes, despite what Stoknes (2014) described as the 'psychological climate paradox' that knowledge of climate science and action do not break down the negative emotions that impede action. Education for Sustainable Development remains limited, and most frequently relies on disciplinary content rather than deeper pedagogical experiences which directly influence emotion, values and beliefs (Leal Filho *et al.*, 2019). Læssøe (2010) emphasises the need to work with dilemmas and deliberative communication, describing attempts to approach ESD as unproblematic and consensus oriented as 'societal self-deception' (2010, p. 51). Successful ESD needs to acknowledge that 'we have to attend to the value judgements before we can attend to the facts' (Lundegård and Wickman, 2007, p.14).

To counter students' heightened psychological defences triggered by anxiety about climate change, a growing body of both research and practice endorses arts-based pedagogy across the HE curriculum. Clark and Button (2011) developed a model for sustainability education which integrates community, science and the arts. Ojala (2012) identified the need to instil hope and encourage students to visualise potential solutions to encourage action, rather than to focus on possible disasters. Leal Filho and Pace concluded that, rather than the transmission of knowledge, we need '*spaces for pedagogical transformation* that support transformative and transdisciplinary learning' (2016, p.3, italics in original; see also Mezirow, 2000). As part of defining their own drama- and narrative-based workshops, both Pässilä (2021) and Suvi-Jonna Martikainen *et al.* (2021) cited Haiven and Khasnabish's definition of the potential to evoke 'radical imagination' which enables adults to 'imagine the world, social institutions and human relationships otherwise' (2010, p.3). Caracciolo promotes 'the creative use of the resources of storytelling' (2021,

p.179) as part of an 'econarratology' which understands and builds on the 'power of narrative form to chart the ecological crisis', including its impact on 'human–nonhuman relations' (Caracciolo, 2021, p.4). The convenors' own research explores applied drama and roleplay (eg Österlind, 2018; 2020; 2022), work-integrated and arts-based learning (eg Wall and Hindley, 2018; Wall, Österlind and Fries, 2018), collaborative, aesthetic and embodied pedagogy (eg García De la Cerda, Kernan and Holtham, 2022; Lehtonen, Österlind and Viirret, 2020) and ethics and inclusivity in the management curriculum (eg Wall et al., 2023). Boal (2008) and Freire (2017) are among the key authorities whose work informs our approaches.

Our aims in the **Applied Theatre and Drama Methods in HE Sustainability Education** stream include to share and extend the outcomes of an international 2022-23 project funded by the Swedish Research Council which focused on how to use applied drama to teach sustainability across HE curricula, with a shared commitment to teaching sustainability issues in a creative, ethical and inclusive way. Over the course of an academic year, the project's 20 participants met first to workshop arts-based teaching methods drawn from applied drama before applying them in their own teaching. The project's 20 participants included academics and researchers from Sweden, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Turkey and the UK. We teach across a range of disciplines, including undergraduates and postgraduates in sustainability, business and management, leadership, engineering, economics, drama, educational studies, environmental studies, and both cross-curriculum and interdisciplinary programmes. The workshops aimed to equip HE teachers from across these disciplines to pilot teaching methods informed by performative practices, including process drama, imaginative role-play, shared storytelling and living statues. An immediate impact of the project was to enrich our own learning and practice, and to gain confidence in reframing our own roles as teachers in HE (Leal Filho and Pace, 2016). We also debated the ethics of such approaches to teaching in HE, and piloted ways in which such outcomes can best be analysed, enhanced and shared.

We look forward to building on this project with you in Nancy, and welcome aligned proposals for workshops or academic papers on themes including art- or artist-led performative explorations of drama-based methods in sustainability teaching or projects.

Please submit a 750-word proposal, as a Word.doc, wherever possible, in size 12 font, Times Roman, outlining the context for your thinking and up to three research questions that you plan to address. Literature pertaining to the topic should be folded into the body of the text. Proposals are due by 02<sup>nd</sup> December 2023 and should be sent to [aomo2024nancy@gmail.com](mailto:aomo2024nancy@gmail.com), copying [stephan.sonnenburg@icn-artem.com](mailto:stephan.sonnenburg@icn-artem.com), [maryann.kernan@city.ac.uk](mailto:maryann.kernan@city.ac.uk), [eva.osterlind@su.se](mailto:eva.osterlind@su.se) and [t.wall@ljmu.ac.uk](mailto:t.wall@ljmu.ac.uk). Direct any inquiries to [jenna.aomo@gmail.com](mailto:jenna.aomo@gmail.com).

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