

## STUDENTS AS TEACHERS: A STUDENT POINT OF VIEW

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It all started for us when we applied to lead a new course named “Sustainable development in Education” at the University of Helsinki in autumn 2014. The reward for course leaders was 5 ECTS but that did not act as a spur for us. Leading our own course sounded attractive, because the advertisement promised a multidisciplinary leader team and free hands to improve higher education pedagogy in the direction that would seem right to us. The Unit of Chemistry Teacher Education, which was also responsible for the course, selected candidates from applications to interviews. Eventually the leader team comprised of two teacher students from the Faculty of Science with different majors; Chemistry and Mathematics, together with one student from the Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences with the orientation of Environmental Change and Policy and Adult Education.

All of us had different expectations regarding the course and the learning goals for ourselves in terms of the planning and teaching process. We thought that the expectations depended highly on our backgrounds. Our reasons to plan and run this course included to inform the development of sustainable development education and furthermore influence citizen actions towards sustainability, and to learn more about

sustainable development itself and both improve and create something new in terms of the common pedagogical approaches in higher education. Then there were the shared goals of learning about how to create – and teach – an entire course, learning about multidisciplinary work and the role of creativity to critically cover sustainable development.

It did not take long to realise what multidisciplinary work really required. We had many discussions on what the course content and the pedagogical background for the course should be. During the process our leading team diminished from five to three people. After a series of meetings and a bundle of background work and hours of virtual communication we had created a course that focused on goals and themes that we, as students, found attractive and problematic. We decided to use a mixture of student-centered, student-driven and inquiry-based learning approaches as the pedagogical frame of our course. Moreover, what could be more interesting than to settle on subject areas that respond to our cognitive gaps and the need for practical skills that we think we will encounter and need in the future?

The course schedule is presented below. The two intensive study weeks were divided into theme days built around the questions and topics we, during the planning process, and the students, in their applications, had presented as topics of interest. The second part of conducting the course was to carry out project work.

Ultimately, we found that the course fulfilled our expectations and even exceeded them in many cases as the co-learning process bore fruit in unexpected ways. The positive feedback we got from the students and other participants such as peer

*Table Course schedule*

Day	Topic or theme
1	What is sustainable development (SD) and why is it a topic? History and future
2	How could we teach about SD?
3	Wicked circumstances, diverse actors
4	Who is consuming the most? The global context
5	How is SD visible in (our) city? A field trip
6	How I and we can make a change?
7	How is SD present in our schools and academies?
8	Why and how should we teach about SD?
9	Independent work with projects
10	Presentation of the student projects

observers, keynote speakers and panelists supported the feeling that our course was a success and encouraged us to continue working on the course even after it was finished. Not only did our own learning processes continue after the course, but also the process itself and its outcomes have been noted and developed further by other actors in the field of Sustainability and Education.

In the end we also discovered that we had become active “sustainability agents” as a result of the process – it broadened our actions from the course planning and execution to presenting ideas and experiences, co-developing, participating in workshops and mentoring new course-leaders. We found the learning outcomes from the process to be much more profound and varied than those we had experienced on any other university course and we could see them building our academic competence.

We learned about working in an academic context as peers in groups for a common goal with different perspectives and values. We experienced empowerment as sustainability pedagogues, and in our action capacity. Furthermore, we noticed that we were able to transfer similar experiences and learning outcomes to the students without the typical student-teacher setting. We found out that sustainability as such is a value that can be taught but which requires equality, commitment, critical and investigative learning and a sense of communality, to say the least, in order to emerge as an individual growth outcome.