Empowering Students to Become Change Agents

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Session Question and Learning Goals

How can we empower students to lead change for sustainable development in a variety of contexts?

• Explain why empowering students to participate in social change is a key element of ESD.
• Identify one or two tools or strategies for equipping students to be change-makers that you can incorporate in your SDG teaching.
ESD empowers learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to take informed decisions and make responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society…

ESD is recognized as a key enabler of all Sustainable Development Goals and achieves its purpose by transforming society…

UNESCO 2021
What do we mean when we say “empower students to be change agents”?

Now, as students

In their future workplaces

As community members and citizens
Why engage students in social change-making?

“In all my years of teaching I have never before seen students as pessimistic as they are right now. When we discuss climate change and dig into COP26 negotiations they say they have no faith at all that governments can work together to solve the climate crisis.”

Georgia Tech Professor of Computing and International Affairs
HOW can we help students see that change is possible and that they can be change-makers?

Share stories of change that engage and empower.
What story of change does this image tell?

Chat storm: Please share your response in a single word or short phrase
How about this one?
What kinds of stories will empower our students to become change-makers?
Three Key Ideas

• Social change happens in many ways, at many levels (family, community, region, nation-state, global networks).

• There are many kinds of roles people play to advance positive change toward the SDGs, and most are “behind the scenes.”

• Everyone can—and should—contribute.
Share stories that show there are many ways to work for social change.
Help students imagine what their role could be.

Often the most visible

Weavers: I see the through-lines of connectivity between people, places, organizations, ideas, and movements.

Experimenters: I innovate, pioneer, and invent. I take risks and course-correct as needed.

Frontline Responders: I address community crises by marshaling and organizing resources, networks, and messages.

Visionaries: I imagine and generate our boldest possibilities, hopes and dreams, and remind us of our direction.

Builders: I develop, organize, and implement ideas, practices, people, and resources in service of a collective vision.

Caregivers: I nurture and nourish the people around me by creating and sustaining a community of care, joy, and connection.

Disruptors: I take uncomfortable and risky actions to shake up the status quo, to raise awareness, and to build power.

Healers: I recognize and tend to the generational and current traumas caused by oppressive systems, institutions, policies, and practices.

Storytellers: I craft and share our community stories, cultures, experiences, histories, and possibilities through art, music, media, and movement.

Guides: I teach, counsel, and advise, using my gifts of well-earned discernment and wisdom.

Credit: Deepa Iyer (Solidarity Is and Building Movement Project)
Share stories of change at different scales

Real Food Challenge: Student Activists Help Campuses Eat Smarter

Institutional food systems are typically too high for food activists to crack, relying as they do on economies of scale and mass logistics. But the current trend toward slow eating has a hungry, well-fed slant.

In 2008, the Real Food Challenge organization has brought together students, farmers, consumers and workers to leverage the power of youth and universities today, fair and green food system,” according to the mission statement.

Truly Living Well Center for Natural Urban Agriculture / Photo credit AJC

A march by La Via Campesina (Ian MacKenzie / Creative Commons)
How can we empower students to become change-makers?

- Share stories of change that engage and empower.
- Connect students with change-makers and groups working for change.
Community-Engaged Teaching: Start small
Introduce students to resources and opportunities:

- Campus Student Organizations
- Community-Based Organizations
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)
- Student & Youth Networks
- Electives in Social Change
- Student participation on standing university committees

"First Lady Frances Wolf Visits the Lion's Pantry, Discusses Need to Increase Pennsylvania's Outdated Minimum Wage to Help College Students Meet Basic Needs" by governor.tomwolf is licensed under CC BY 2.0
How can we empower students as change-makers?

Share stories of change that engage and empower.

Connect students with change-makers and groups working for change.

Provide resources and opportunities.
Reflect and Connect

- Can you identify a story of change to incorporate in your course?
- What local change-makers could you invite to share their story with your class?
- What campus groups, campaigns, or governance opportunities might interest your students?
Thank you!

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