

Are different areas of life included?



The Transferability Finger

“Earth and sky, woods and fields, lakes and rivers, the mountain and the sea, are excellent schoolmasters, and teach some of us more than we can ever learn from books.” This quote from the British anthropologist John Lubbock dates back to the 19th century and is yet very up-to-date. In this text we want to explore the connection between learning from different areas of life – natural and non-natural - and how they are related and transferred to our actions in a real world context.

The research on education generally agrees that transfer is one of the most important fields in pedagogics (Klauer 2010, p. 14). Although they do not always agree on what transfer is: is it already happening in the learning process itself, or is it “the effect of previous learning on new learning or problem solving” (Mayer 2003, p. 19)? In the Real World Learning project it means considering different areas of life in your activities or programmes and relating them to positive actions for sustainability.

Why is this important?

When different areas of life are involved in a learning process, it increases the possibility that learners will then act in respect of them. Positive emotions play a big part in learning. Transferring knowledge into different areas of life can connect learners more emotionally with a certain topic. If you feel that a principle is important in all areas of life, because you know how it affects nature, the community in which you live and yourself, it is more likely something you won't forget again, and will try to keep in mind in your actions.

We think that learning in different areas of life enhances the chance of transferring the experience of the learning into the learners own actions, because it anchors the experiences into their own lives. The Professional Standards for teachers in Scotland already ask for such teaching didactics: They highlight the need for teachers to “connect learners to their dependence on the natural world and to develop their sense of belonging both to the local and global community“, as well as to “engage with the ways in which natural, social, cultural, political and economic systems function and are interconnected” (The General Teaching Council for Scotland 2012:10).

What are the different areas of life?

- ➔ **The global society** – this term is widely used as referring to the world society in the age of globalisation. We define globalisation as ‘the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’ (Giddens 1990:64). This has economic, political, cultural and social dimensions, on which we have an impact through, for example: the choice of products we buy, where we buy them, and how much we buy. It includes what we eat or where we spend our holidays; what we do with our savings or how we choose to involve ourselves with worldwide issues of the present and future. In the work with learners it means for example to look at issues of global justice or the ways that different cultures deal with global problems.
- ➔ **The learner’s communities** – in comparison to the global society the smaller, local society: the place in which we live and the people that form this place, our families, friends and neighbours. The well used saying “Think global, act local” can serve as a guideline for your work with the learners. On this level the individual has the best chance to take actions for sustainable development.

- **The non-natural environment** – this is the technical environment which humans have created which includes buildings, roads, aeroplanes in the sky above, hydro power plants in rivers or the light-pollution in densely populated areas like Western Europe. Take into account in your work where you can see the effects of humans on the environment or what the drivers behind these inventions are.
- **The natural environment** – everything that is around us and which has not been made by humans: our planet, its elements and organisms, plants and animals. Allow your learners space and time to explore nature, learn in and about it and understand the principles behind, for example the cycling of nutrients to other areas of life.
- **The learners themselves** – this involves the thoughts, emotions, knowledge, actions and physical being of the individual person. It is important that the learners understand themselves as part of the natural world. Most natural processes can be experienced in their own body, in society and in the non-natural world – all of which have an influence on the individual.

What does it mean in theory to consider these areas?

Our vision is that through examples or discussion it would be possible to get the learners thinking about transferring what they have learned to other contexts. If they learn that trees have a circular life-cycle which ensures that nutrients are reused, this understanding could also be seen to be relevant in a non-natural environment. Here production is often in a linear model, but would be much more sustainable on all levels if a closed loop or circular model like the tree's was adopted. Therefore,

- ensure that learning experiences are related to many different areas. From the self to the natural and technical world around us, and from the local to the global level of society.
- encourage an active transfer to the learners own life and community and to the natural world/ global issues/ the non-natural environment during and after the learning experience.
- allow the learners to see that things are interdependent and connected on an economic, social and ecological level.

There is no expectation that learners have to experience all areas as a core part of every activity, just as many as are relevant and meaningful.

What does this look like in practice?

Example 1: Guided tours on the topic of sustainable consumption and globalisation

Let's picture it through an example of an outdoor learning activity which touches on many of the areas of life. You are probably already aware of the fact that at present 20% of the world population uses approximately 80% of the natural resources. That is primarily the Western world, therefore, we should be the first to consider our lifestyle in relation to sustainability and global justice. This is where the idea of "guided tours about sustainable consumption and globalisation" starts. In over 50 cities in Germany different groups organise guided tours (ranging from 2 hours to one day) about these topics in their cities. Similar to city tours for tourists, guides help learners to discover specific places and monuments in the city – only that they have a link with consumption and globalisation. From this perspective the learners re-discover their favourite shoe shops, clothes brands, mobile phone shops or supermarkets, exploring questions such as: do the people producing my shoes earn a fair salary? How much water is needed to produce the jeans I am wearing? What has my new smartphone got to do with the conflicts in Congo? Why does it make a difference to the rainforest in South America if I eat a hamburger or not?

How does this activity relate to different areas of life?

Apart from looking closer at and understanding processes of global injustice (**global society**), the learners can reflect upon their own consumption habits (**themselves**), learn about the impacts for the environment (**the natural environment**) and investigate how the work of people and the structure of their cities have

changed (**community**). This can of course be deepened and followed up with the learners by transfer activities like measuring their own ecological footprint and exploring ways to reduce it (**themselves**), doing small projects in their home city/town e.g. interviewing their families/neighbours about changing lifestyle and work. It could involve making a small exhibition of their findings (**community**) or camping in a natural environment with a focus on processes of fair exchange between organisms (**the natural environment**) as a basis to reflect how we are dealing with it.

Example 2: Making a fire without matches

As another example, take a half day programme about learning how to make a fire without matches; the ability to make a fire was essential and elementary for people's lives until not so long ago. During such an exercise learners can work together and bring in their different abilities in a team, acknowledge their own skills and what nature provides. Through fire-making learning can occur in two areas of life: in **the natural environment** through learning about basic physical concepts, and about **themselves** through experiencing their physical body and their emotions and attitudes from being in a natural setting away from non-natural distractions. The aspect of **the non-natural environment** can be explored through the change that the invention of lighters and matches brought to our lifestyles, or the topic of heating with coal and the effect it has on global warming. This connects, last but not least, to issues of global justice and environmental problems (**the global society**), which can be discussed over a hot tea around the fire they've just made.

Keep in mind...

We would like to encourage you to play with the areas of life. They "should give orientation and inspiration but should not be confused with 'performance indicators' or the like" (Breiting et al 2005). We don't see every single one of them as a must-criteria for your education programme or activity, but it can be beneficial. Making the learners aware of interconnectedness will give them food for thought and reason to act in other areas of life related to the area with which your programme is dealing.

Resources used:

Breiting, S., Mayer, M., and Mogensen, F., (2005) *Quality Criteria for ESD schools. Guidelines to enhance the quality of Education for Sustainable Development*. (Online resource available at <http://www.ensi.org/media-global/downloads/Publications/208/QC-GB.pdf>)

Giddens, A., (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press

Klauer, K. J., (2010) *Transfer des Lernens. Warum wir oft mehr lernen als gelehrt wird*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag

Mayer, R.E., (2003) *Learning and Instruction*. Upper Saddle River: Merrill Prentice Hall

The General Teaching Council for Scotland, (2012) *The Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning: supporting the development of teacher professional learning*. (Online resource available at <http://www.gtcs.org.uk/web/Files/the-standards/standard-for-career-long-professional-learning-1212.pdf>)

Weblinks

Brochure on "Konsum Global – the guided tour of the topics sustainable consumption and globalisation": http://www.konsum-global.de/files/Pixiheft_english-version_klein.pdf