Tool 3.1

Belonging to nature

CLARITY Competence Area:

Embracing values that sustain the lives of all living beings

GreenComp Competence Area:

Embodying sustainability values

Why use this tool?

This tool can help learners feel one with nature and take responsibility towards individual, collective and planetary health and wellbeing. Healthy ecosystems are critical to limit the effects of climate change and build long-term resilience. They are also critical to biodiversity, which is the foundation of life on Earth as we know it. Our lack of connection to animals, plants and fungi plays a part in our acceptance of the damage and destruction that ecosystems suffer from in the name of growth, progress or development. This tool helps re-connect learners to animals, plants and fungi, even in contexts where taking them to natural areas may be difficult.

Activity 3.1.2

Giving a voice to plants

Overview

Each learner brings a plant or a mushroom with them when discussing certain topics with the group. The learner can speak in the name of the plant or mushroom, as custodian of nature, or as a defender of the principle of reciprocity with nature. This activity gives an opportunity to reflect on the needs and rights of the more-than-humans in relation to day-to-day issues or concerns expressed in the classroom or among the group.

Curriculum linkage

Civics & Social Studies, Citizenship & Democracy and Natural Science (Biology), or student parliaments or other students' dialogue spaces where all the learners come together to discuss specific issues related to the group.

Competences built

Perspective-taking, interconnectedness thinking, empathy, exploratory thinking

Competences/activities to practice first by the teacher:

Tool 3.3: Listening

BASIC INFO

Age range:

6+

Duration:

45-60 minutes, with some homework done beforehand

Group size:

Flexible

Level of difficulty:

Basic

Materials/space required:

Some living plants or images of plants

Location:

Flexible

Engagement of external stakeholders:

None

Steps in the activity

1. Research
2. Experience
3. Reflect

Step 1: Research

1. Before engaging in the activity in class, give your learners some homework. Ask your learners to find a plant or a mushroom they like and would like to speak for at the gathering. The plant or mushroom should preferably be a living plant in a pot that they can move easily. An alternative would be a photo of an image of a living plant they would like to speak for. Ask learners to do research about the conditions that their specific plant or mushroom needs to thrive. For younger learners, this may require that they ask their parents. For older learners, research could include identifying which needs of the plant cannot be met in nature because of the current rate of pollution, biodiversity loss or because of climate change.

Step 2: Experience

1. When in school, have learners sit in a circle with their plant/mushroom or the image of their plant/mushroom next to them, so that the plants/mushrooms are part of the circle as well. Have a first round of introduction with learners introducing the name of the species of the plant/mushroom, where it comes from and what it needs to thrive in a few sentences.
2. If you are doing this activity as part of a regular 'Student Parliament' activity, engage in discussing current issues with learners and invite them to bring in the perspective of the plant or mushroom they speak for when relevant. If the learners struggle to bring in the plants' or mushrooms' voices, you could ask 'What would your plant/mushroom say to this?'.
3. If you are doing this activity as standalone, you can invite the plants/ mushrooms and the learners to discuss the school's policy in relation to climate change and/or the environment (e.g. the school policy on food/food waste, how to get to school, what to do in the playground…), and suggest that they share the views of the plants/mushrooms on it, as well as suggestions for the health and wellbeing of the plants/mushrooms.

Step 3: Reflect

1. At the end of the conversation, invite learners to reflect on the experience of speaking for a plant/mushroom, as well as on the new ideas that emerged through the discussion. Was something unexpected? Are they inspired to further understand the needs of plants/mushrooms and better take them into account? Do they feel less separateness and more belonging to their ecosystems after the activity?
2. Optional: Repeat this activity throughout the year and/or at the change of seasons, to dive deeper into the needs and lives of plants/mushrooms, as well as into the functioning of the local ecosystem.

Dos and don'ts

Do:

- Encourage learners to speak up for their plant by modeling the assignment and bringing a plant yourself when sitting in the circle.
- Encourage learners to ask you questions about their own plant/mushroom anytime, so that they can clarify the needs of the plant/mushroom before they speak, while they intervene, or following the intervention of another learner.
- Answer questions that learners may have about their plants/mushrooms on the spot, if you can, so that they can also learn more about the needs of the plant and the functioning of the ecosystem.

Don't:

- Don't interrupt the discussion to correct an incorrect statement about the needs of the plant during the discussion. Correct any mistakes or approximations at the end of the discussion.

Adaptations:

We invite you to adapt this activity to the specific needs of your learners, including by taking into account their neurodiversity. When adapting tools and activities for neurodivergent learners, please note it is not about treating others how *you* want to be treated, but how *they* want to be treated. Ask, listen, and stay open to different ways of learning and engaging.

References

This activity was designed by One Resilient Earth.

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Morón, Carlos, et al. "THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ETHICS OF CARE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: A PROPOSAL THROUGH PLANTS." *ICERI2020 Proceedings*. IATED, 2020.

Radliff, Charlotte. "Teacher Perspectives on the Effect Caring for Classroom Plants has on Adolescents." (2020)

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Some inspiration for costumes or masks can be found here.

Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.