A 4-step model for embedding the goals into curriculum (Part1)

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Introduction

Sustainable development goals or 2030 Agenda without any doubt, is one of the most crucial and humanitarian resolutions of the United Nations after the magnificent success of the millennium development goals. Higher education sector has an essential role in facilitating and supporting to achieve these sustainable goals across the globe. HE has a multifaceted role in establishing a sustainability culture at societies as well as training and producing graduates who equipped with the knowledge and skills that enabling them to take on and tackling the world challenges using sustainable approaches.

Coventry University signed the SDG Accord in 2017, to show the commitment of the university group to sustainable education and social responsibility. This short document aims to explain the chronicle of creating our 4-steps model for embedding the goals into the university curriculum.

CUESD working group

In 2018, we created the Coventry University Education for Sustainable development (CUESD) working group. We invited several academic staff across faculties and schools to share best practice, brainstorming, and taking initiatives in bringing and embedding the goals into the classroom levels.

In the CUESD working group, we designed workshops on ESD at three levels:

1. Awareness
2. Embedding the Goals into the Curriculum
3. Making the Curriculum Authentic

We have been running workshops on the above three levels since 2018 across the University Group (Coventry, CU College, London, and Scarborough). At the first level, we tried to make our academic staff familiar with the 17 UN sustainable goals and its 169 targets. At this level, we provide them with the history of the Millennium development goals and the significant progress, which the governments, NGOs and UN officials have made during those years in the developing and under-developed areas of the world. Our next step was to assist our academic staff in embedding the goals into their modules/courses curriculum. To do that, considering the six pillars of the Coventry University education strategy and socio-cultural, socio-economic and environmental dimensions, we designed a four simple and straightforward model.

The result has been extraordinarily successful. In late 2017, you could hardly find academic staff who were familiar with SDGs and education for sustainable goals. Even among those few members of staff

who were familiar with the goals, only a handful number took the goals into their classrooms. Now, after two years, almost everyone in schools and faculties across the sites of the university group in Coventry, CUC, London and Scarborough are familiar with the goals. Some excellent case studies show brilliant innovations that our academic staff created to embed the goals into the university curriculum. They used the four-step model to create fantastic classroom activities for students in their modules/courses to engage them with sustainable development goals.

The 4-step model

Step 1 – a light touch

Having seventeen SDGs, 169 targets (about ten targets for each goal) makes educators hesitating to go through it and embed them into their learning design for students. We decided to make it easy for them. Therefore, in this step, we asked them to think about the learning objectives/outcomes of their module/course and go at light touch level *pick the goal/goals*, which are, most related to their learning outcomes. Educators at this step needed to read the name of the goals and decide which one of them relates to their module/course. This light touch step was reducing the seventeen goals to maximum two or three goals in many cases.

Step 2 – the targets and indicators of the chosen goals

In this step, we asked educators to read the *targets* of the goals that they picked in the previous step. That means they now need to go through a maximum of 30 targets rather than the total of 169 targets and decide which of them are most related to their module/course learning outcomes. After identifying those specific targets, they are ready for the third step, which is the design of the classroom activities.

Step 3 – designing classroom activities

So far, educators have some specific targets of some of the SDGs for which they need to design some classroom activities for their students. We encouraged them to consider the following three dimensions to create activities for their students:

1. **Socio-cultural**
2. **Socio-economic**
3. **Environmental**

In the above image, we have intended learning outcome (ILOs) and the specific goals and the targets which are most related to those ILOs. By taking those three dimensions, educators can design activities which are addressing the goals fo their students in the classroom. That means the goals are now by taking three simple steps brought own into the classroom level. Now, the educators were ready to map their innovation against the six pillars of the Coventry University education strategy.

Step 4 – six pillars of the Coventry University strategy

At this stage, we asked the educators to map their innovations against the six pillars of transformative education.

1- Research inspired teaching
2- Embedded employability
3- Creativity & enterprise
4- Multicultural and international engagement
5- Community and responsibility
6- Innovation and digital fluency

These six pillars, alongside the activities related to the sustainable development goals, nicely link us with the third level of our approach towards sustainable education as Coventry University, which is making the university curriculum authentic. The CU education strategy pillars designed and created to provide authentic and enthusing students experience for students. Considering the pillars in learning design for students equip them with not only high standard subject knowledge but also skills and proficiencies, they needed to be able to engage and tackle real-world problems.

ESD and authentic curriculum

Considering the six pillars of the Coventry University education strategy for transformative learning alongside with the 4-step model introduced in the previous sections, we noticed that education for sustainable development (ESD) and authenticity in education are very much intertwined. These matching elements led us towards our third level of workshops on ESD at the Coventry University group. In this level, we highlighted the three elements of authenticity in education for staff;

1- Knowledge
2- Skills and competencies
3- Values and attributes