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# GLOBAL GOALS IN LOCAL CLASSROOMS

**17 Goals to Transform Our World: the big #TeachSDGs opportunity!**



**T**he United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have such an urgent appeal that teachers around the world are actively promoting engagement with them in the classroom. The SDGs, as the global goals have come to be known, are gaining ground since September 2015.

There are many initiatives, policies and organisations pushing for greater awareness of the 17 SDGs aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all. Some drivers originate from the United Nations itself (e.g. UNESCO policy such as the recent 'Education for Sustainable Development Goals'), others created collaboratively by global education NGOs such as the World's Largest Lesson, whilst others are emerging organically amongst teachers through international social media movements such as #TeachSDGs.

#TeachSDGs ([www.teachsdgs.org](http://www.teachsdgs.org)) involves taking a pledge to

teach SDGs and sharing practice and ideas with global educators around the world. It directly works towards SDG Target 4.7:

Higher education and research organisations old and new also exist to support the theory, practice and research associated with the idea of global learning, #TeachSDGs and Target 4.7, e.g. the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development.

The SDGs have a lot of potential to unite such a wide variety of voices, ideologies and stakeholders. I have identified (Marshall 2017) a number of reasons why teaching and learning about the SDGs has so much potential as an

**4.7 by 2030 ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development**

**1. Teaching the SDGs bridges subject divides** – it is not simply an interdisciplinary theme, but a topic that requires us all to wear different hats and to appreciate those that wear other hats more comfortably than we do. To understand the causes of poverty (#SDG1) we need to be both sociologists and historians, for creating ways of deliver clean energy and climate change (#SDGs 7 & 13) we need to be geographers, engineers and scientists and so forth. #TeachSDGs can be a powerful tool for encouraging collaboration and mutual appreciation across disciplines.

**2. The SDGs can be a unifying, golden thread for schools** – the SDGs have at their heart a set of values, knowledge and skills that can help schools reflect upon why they do everything that they do. The SDGs places human rights values, human responsibility and human progress at the very heart of learning.

**3. Teaching about the SDGs** can be an excellent way of addressing controversial and complex local, national and

educational theme for schools passionate about supporting young people to become active, responsible and employable citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

international issues. In the UK we have seen examples of global learning support moral, social, personal development and citizenship education programmes. From healthy living and wellbeing, to gender inequality and conflict, the SDGs are proving to be a useful 'way in'.

4. **Learning about the SDGs is ageless and provides opportunities for reverse - mentoring-** the Global Goals are as relevant and new to teachers as they are students. Teachers and students are discovering the goals in partnership. Learning about the SDGs is an empowering form of CPD for teachers and emphasises the need for everyone to engage in life-long learning.
5. **There has to be collective ownership of the SDG** agenda necessitating intergenerational and local-national-global, and cross-organisation partnerships and understandings. No one person or organisation owns the agenda, we are all the stakeholders. No one person knows all the answers, everyone has to work together

in order to achieve (and monitor) these goals for a better world.

6. **The SDGs are a useful tool for supporting school/ stage.** Schools are taking the opportunity to do global learning themed transition projects, such as global weeks where secondary school students visit primary and vice versa, to share their learning and discoveries.
7. **Communicating learning about the SDGs offers opportunities to engage parents, communities and businesses-** some schools that have been actively involved in #TeachSDGs have taken the opportunity to have pupils present their learnings to parents and the wider community who may never heard of the global goals before.
8. **Teaching about the SDGs** is becoming a global trend on social media and is connecting teachers and schools around the world. Whether it be through the World's Largest Lesson or #TeachSDGs, a growing number of teachers are organically collaborating and connecting across the

world to discuss pedagogy, resources and innovation in teaching about the SDGs.

9. (a) Teaching about the SDGs requires creativity and innovative practice in school curricula and pedagogy. It invites young people to engage in inventions and enquiries with real-world applications, especially in the #STEM subjects. Project based learning approaches work well, and there are ample opportunities for deeper learning and critical literacy. This links to point 9
  - (b) Space for creativity and innovative practice can be motivational for teachers and provide respite for a perceived performance, exam and target-based culture.
10. **Engaging with the why, what and how of SDGs** maps onto core 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of importance to schools. These skills and competences also link to the OECD/PISA Global Competences framework, about which a growing number of educational institutions world-wide are becoming aware and working towards.

In presentations I provide examples and models of successful practice in #TeachSDGs work, often referencing schools involved in the Global Learning Programme ([www.glp-e.org.uk](http://www.glp-e.org.uk)). Although there is not time to go into this in much detail, it is worth highlighting three features of successful practice (there are more of course).

The first is the useful idea of a global learning journey. Recognising that a journey or

change rarely happens in a linear way, an important feature of a journey is the process of reflection and 'taking stock' of where we are at. In strong SDGs-related projects there is often an inbuilt idea of a journey from awareness-raising, to embedding and action, where all goal-setting and measurement of progress relates to this idea.

The second relates to the way schools map current practice, priorities or curricular to the SDGs so that it is not seen as a bolt-on.

Successful engagement with the SDGs in schools usually involves linking the SDGs to pre-existing wellbeing, sustainability and human rights education activities. Finally, the correlation between critical thinking skills and any form of global learning such as #TeachSDGs is important. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests critical thinking in both business and in schools is an essential 21st century skill that needs to be actively supported. ●