



CHANGE

Envisioning
sustainable futures

Co-creating sustainability with busy upper secondary students

At a Finnish upper secondary school, teachers were determined to engage students in environmental and sustainability issues, but they faced a common challenge: upper secondary students have very tight schedules and little time or interest in extracurricular activities. Despite challenges in raising interest among students in climate action, teachers established their own team. Collegial support among teachers and administration and sharing responsibilities helped teachers to remain active and committed. They defined a collective mission of making sustainability more visible and integrated into everyday school life activities in order to shift students' attitudes toward a more sustainable future, and to reduce the school's environmental footprint.

Through several years of process of trying out different activities and time-slots, and learning from experiences, teachers managed to find motivated students and create a student group. Face-to-face contacts, surveys and interviews have been conducted to map students' interests and possible motives to sustainability action. Understanding of potential various interests people can have in sustainable life-choices through motivation profiles, helped to acknowledge how teachers' values differed from students and consider the issues and activities that appeal to students. Currently, students and teachers have planned together yearly activities and a credit system.

The group has organized a variety of initiatives, such as:

- A “Green Career” panel discussion featuring representatives from sustainability-oriented companies.
- Recycling stations and collection boxes for refundable bottles and cans to collect money for excursions.
- A Preloved Ball Gown Sale, promoting reuse and circular economy thinking.
- Visits to elementary schools to talk and hold workshops about fast fashion for younger students
- Campaigns to promote vegetarian lunch options and reduce biowaste, in cooperation with the school's lunch provider.

In addition, the school's digital screen has been actively used to share environmental data, spark reflection, and communicate sustainability messages.

The success of these activities has been made possible by the school administration's support—especially the headmaster's positive and encouraging attitude, and the allocation of resources to sustainability work. It has been important to understand that developing a school's culture, system and practices is a slow time-taking process, but not impossible. It is advisable to set goals with a 10-year perspective, try out and learn from experiences.