



Headmasters and teachers as enablers of engagement

“A school is like its leaders.” - A Finnish principal’s reflections

A leader is the key to make changes happen in a school. Regular reminders and interventions by the principal are crucial so that the topics stay active in the everyday life of the school. There are always several important topics simultaneously. You have to choose what you want to concentrate on. Focus on the issues you can change. It’s important to have a good long-term plan as “Well begun is half done”.

How to engage employees who do not find sustainability important or interesting? Don’t let the critique take you down! It’s a part of the process. Get and stay in touch with like-minded colleagues. Network!

-Vice Principal, Juhannuskylä School, Finland

Both headmasters and also teachers play a key role in engaging the whole school, fostering students’ interest and engagement in sustainability actions, this was noted in all the partner countries. But also students’ initiatives and attitudes can inspire and strengthen motivation among teachers. The competences of communication, facilitation discussions and have dialogue with students were seen as important somehow in all the interventions in demonstration sites. Here are Finnish teachers’ advices other teachers how to proceed from interest and willingness to do something to action:

Dear teacher, be brave!

There is a strong justification and clear reasoning for you to implement sustainability education in school. You are a wise, capable and experienced adult. Take time to get to know where you stand: How do you feel? What are you willing to do? What are you willing to give up? What do you want to learn and what is important to you? You are allowed to disagree but, please - acknowledge the facts, about e.g. climate change. Make time and opportunities for

discussion with students, both during lessons and breaks, and with colleagues, formally (planning and meetings) and informally (coffee breaks and lunches). Be positive! That in itself is valuable and will start moving mountains!

-Teachers from Juhannuskylä School, Finland

In one Spanish school the principal noticed and seized the opportunity to act as part of the Eco-schools network and receive support from the ECF4CLIM project for the development of environmental activities. The school received help from many organizations. Together, with support from organizations like CIEMAT, ARBA, Ecoescuelas, and CENEAM, they learned about clean energy, recycling, and biodiversity conservation, how to save water, trees, forests and how nature is important. They understood better what and why actions for sustainability are important.

What helped them most in engagement was enthusiasm and effective planning. When everyone wanted to do something good for the planet and by working together, they achieved things. They also created a network of environmental friends and invited other schools to participate and shared their ideas. To make it all work, it was important that the principal appointed one teacher as the official program coordinator. Finding time for activities was challenging as it was difficult to fit ECF4CLIM activities into regular classes. They managed to use recess for their activities, art classes to make posters and to include special time in the school schedule for project activities.

What can we learn from these experiences? Individual attitudes, emotions and initiatives are very important to succeed in engaging others in collective action. Intrinsic motivation, peer influence, and an emotional connection to nature are key drivers of engagement. Also collaboration, planning and inclusive facilitation were key to sustaining participation. Students' commitment deepened when they felt their voices mattered. Hands-on learning and basic sustainability knowledge formed the foundation, while personal reflection and open dialogue enabled wider inclusion. However, sustainability values were not always prioritised, often being challenged by academic pressures and inconsistent role-modelling. Strong pedagogical leadership was essential for fostering meaningful whole-school engagement.