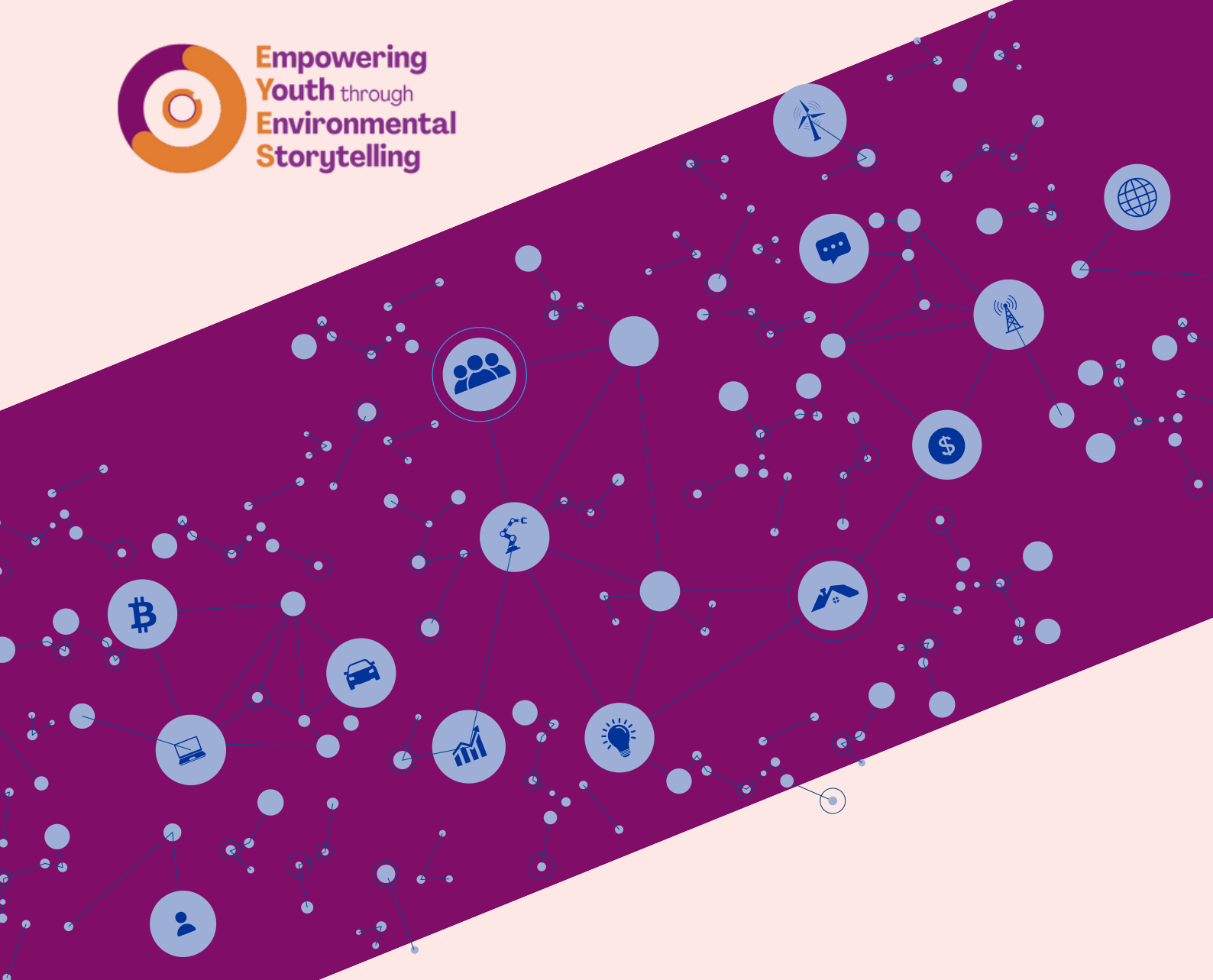




The EYES Educators' Guide to Teaching Systems-Level Climate Change



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

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The purpose of this educational resource made by educators for educators is to provide a deeper understanding of how to teach the climate crisis through systems and justice lenses.

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1. Introduction

This guide has been created from the collective work, reflections, and notes of fourteen educators from across Europe who took part in the EYES Educators' Workshop on Climate Storytelling in October 2025 in Brussels.

Over three days, we educators explored a wide range of approaches and challenges to climate change education, each session offering new tools, perspectives, and ways of better equipping young people to understand current crises and shape their future.

The EYES workshop covered:

- Systems thinking in climate education;
- The use of storytelling and journalism as learning tools;
- The foundations of climate change science;
- The complexities of climate injustice;
- Alternative economic thinking such as Doughnut economics and degrowth;
- The biodiversity crisis and its interconnections with the climate crisis;
- The role of frameworks such as GreenComp in building sustainability competences.

We also reflected on our trajectories as changemakers in the professional, civic and personal spheres of our lives, and experimented with practical exercises – from playing Pathbreak Biodiversity Jenga to interviewing one another as journalists and deliberating about shaping sectors in the economy.

This guide is the result of that shared learning process. Throughout the three days, we gathered in smaller groups to reflect on the workshop's content and to share our challenges and ideas, based on our professional experiences and on the innovative content of the workshop.

This guide brings together our main insights on teaching climate change, climate justice, systems change, degrowth, and fostering student engagement through storytelling. This guide is the culmination of the Empowering Youth through Environmental Storytelling (EYES) project, an Erasmus+ co-funded collaboration between The Environment and Human Rights Academy, News Decoder, and the Young Educators European Association.



As part of this project, we have co-created a full curriculum in climate storytelling, now available at <https://eyesonclimate.org/resources/>.

The curriculum is a set of comprehensive, off-the-shelf units that are both modular (it can be taught in smaller units) and immediately implementable (it's ready to be used by teachers with minimal effort – teacher notes and slides are included!).

We hope that the reflections and practical tools gathered here will support educators in a) using the EYES curriculum and b) helping young people connect with climate issues, make sense of the world around them, and develop the agency to shape a more just and sustainable future.





2. Climate justice and systems thinking as pedagogical lenses

Issues of social justice and the climate crisis are deeply interconnected. The EYES units aim to help students recognise these links by offering educational resources that go beyond siloed climate science to explore the economic, social, and moral dimensions of the crisis through a systems-thinking lens. Climate justice and systems thinking are not only addressed in dedicated units but woven throughout the entire set of materials.

Climate justice isn't just a topic; it influences method (discussion, systems thinking), relationships (student agency, empathy, lived experience), and purpose (equity, participation, responsibility).

The conversations which led to this section have been inspired by a session on climate justice and systems thinking by Anka Stankovic and Andreea Pletea from The Environment and Human Rights Academy, and a session on the challenges of teaching about climate change and how to overcome them through systems thinking by Matthew Pye (Founder of The Climate Academy and Philosophy teacher at the European School of Brussels II).

2.1 *Why teach climate justice and systems thinking in schools?*

Our students are growing up in a world shaped by the climate crisis. They are already hearing about climate change from school (e.g., Geography - mainly the causes/effects/responses), social media, and the news, but often in ways that focus on CO₂ and distant disasters, but not on justice, power, or their own agency. As Tom Roderick argues, climate education should not only be *about* climate change, but *for* a habitable planet, for a just transition, and for climate justice¹. In other words, students should be equipped with the knowledge and tools that will help them navigate and think of different and innovative solutions for the current environmental crisis.

Linking environmental, economic, social, cultural, political and moral dimensions means looking at different systems and asking how they influence one another. It is not enough to treat lesson content as a list of facts. Instead, we invite students to explore interactions, question assumptions and develop critical thinking skills. By widening the frame beyond e.g., "carbon footprints", students are encouraged to explore solutions that address the root causes of the problem, not just its symptoms.



Systems thinking also helps students "connect the dots" between climate change, environmental degradation, colonial histories and social inequalities. By seeing how changes in one part of a system can create ripple effects elsewhere, and where leverage points for change exist, students can begin to identify where they might act, especially at the local level.

When viewed through a systems lens, climate justice becomes not an add-on but a way of understanding how power, resources, risks and opportunities are distributed across societies. It helps students analyse who benefits, who carries the costs, and why these patterns persist. This approach encourages them to move beyond guilt or blame towards agency, solidarity, and a clearer sense of their own place within interconnected local and global systems.



2.2 What makes learning about climate justice engaging?

When "climate change" comes up yet again, there can be eye-rolling and disengagement from students. They feel they have heard it all before. Often, the message is narrowly framed and doesn't speak to their lives, identities or emotions. Throughout the workshop, we highlighted several ways to make climate justice more engaging and meaningful:

1. Start from students' realities

Climate injustice and its multiple layers – global, local, generational – can offer students a new lens, but the term needs to be unpacked carefully. Give space for students to discuss:

- What does justice mean to them?
- Who is affected by climate change, and in what ways?
- How are they and the people around them affected, directly or indirectly?

Ground discussions in stories from the countries and communities your students know. Explore how climate change (e.g. hotter days, flooding, droughts) has shaped their own lives and family histories, or those that live nearby. Help them link local experiences to broader global patterns. This "micro to macro" work is not easy, but it fosters critical thinking and helps young people make sense of the world around them.



2. Frame justice as an active pursuit

Rather than treating justice as an abstract idea of "fairness", present it as something we actively work towards. Ask:

- What do you want to change in your school, neighbourhood or city?
- Where do you see unfairness or unequal impacts?
- What forms of action feel possible and acceptable to you (including, but not limited to, activism, volunteering, community projects, creative work)?

Encourage students to explore different forms of agency – from small everyday choices to collective campaigns. This can also open up rich discussions about civil disobedience, advocacy and different strategies for change.

3. Connect emotion to action

Learning about climate injustice can trigger eco-anxiety, anger or sadness. Rather than avoiding these emotions, acknowledge them and explore how they can be channelled into constructive action. Action can become a tool for reducing anxiety and a way of "practising hope": something we do together, not something we passively wait to feel.

Stories of youth activism can make agency tangible – for example, the Pacific Islands students who brought their case to the International Court of Justice (described in the dedicated EYES unit), influencing international law. These stories show that young people can play a real role in shaping responses to the climate crisis.



Climate Injustice

Analyse how the causes and impacts of climate change are unevenly distributed across regions, and how these injustices manifest in different forms and scales

See more ➔



Climate Justice Case Study

Learn about the possibilities of student voice in leveraging the law and creating change

See more ➔



2.3 From learning to action

Learning about climate justice can translate into action at different levels: in the classroom, in the school community, at home, and beyond.

In the classroom

Classroom activities can help students move from abstract concepts to concrete possibilities:

- Unpack the term “climate justice”: Who is affected? How? Where do students see injustice in their own context?
- Discuss real-world cases: Use stories, articles, videos or non-fiction literature to explore climate justice struggles and the wider “ecosystem” of activists, communities, researchers and organisations (e.g. Causes - Natural/Human (especially ‘Big Oil’ and the lobbying power of fossil fuel companies)).
- Use systems-thinking tools: Mapping exercises, cause-and-effect chains, or “ripple effect” diagrams help students see how decisions in one area (e.g. energy policy, transport, tourism) influence others.
- Invite critical questions: Encourage students to challenge assumptions, think about trade-offs and explore multiple perspectives rather than searching for one “correct” answer.

You might draw on resources such as [This is Not a Drill](#) (Extinction Rebellion's handbook), the “Collapse” game from [Pedagogies of Collapse](#), nature-based activities (planting, observation, outdoor learning), or documentary clips (for example, [Patagonia's films](#)) to bring these issues to life.





Within the school community

Discussions about climate justice can inspire students to see their school as a site for real change:

- Proposing more sustainable practices (e.g. rewarding low-carbon travel to school, improving recycling, adding plants to classrooms).
- Conducting small research projects on school energy use, waste or food, and presenting findings to school leadership.
- Interviewing local stakeholders (staff, parents, local businesses, councillors) about environmental and justice issues.
- Exploring school exchange or partnership projects to see how other schools and communities are responding to similar challenges.

These activities empower student voices and show that their ideas can shape the places where they spend much of their daily life.

At home and in everyday life

Linking climate justice to everyday choices can help students understand their own role in wider systems without placing blame solely on individuals:

- Reflecting on energy use (e.g. heating, air conditioning, appliances – how is it organised and why).
- Discussing how family histories and local environments have already been affected by climate change.
- Exploring how lifestyle choices in one part of the world can contribute to impacts elsewhere.

Working as a group, students can examine their actions and their consequences, while also recognising the limits of what individuals can do in the absence of structural change.





Beyond school: volunteering, research and campaigning

Finally, climate justice education can open pathways for students to engage beyond the classroom. Here are some examples:

- Collecting and analysing local environmental data (e.g. air quality, temperature, biodiversity) to develop data-handling skills and see that their work can contribute to real knowledge.
- Connecting learning with other projects, volunteering with local organisations, or supporting community initiatives.
- Designing awareness campaigns in partnership with community groups, NGOs or local businesses.

These experiences show students that there are people working on “wicked problems” and that progress is possible, even if slow and partial, because there are so many people who DO CARE.



2.4 How to engage with systems thinking

Many teachers already touch on elements of systems thinking when they talk about cause and effect, or balance environmental, economic, social and political aspects. Systems thinking builds on this by:

- Putting more emphasis on the big picture – how a change in one system (like energy or transport) influences others (health, jobs, inequality, ecosystems).
- Highlighting ripple effects – how small shifts in behaviour or policy can cascade through a system.
- Emphasising that every piece matters – even actors or processes that initially seem minor can become important leverage points.
- Encouraging students not to see lesson content as a set of isolated facts, but as interconnected stories, asking: “What happens next?” “Who else is affected?” “What assumptions are we making?”

Systems thinking also invites students to connect theoretical knowledge with real events. It is most powerful when linked to concrete cases in their communities, rather than remaining purely abstract diagrams in a textbook

2.5 Challenges, and how to handle them honestly

We teachers highlighted several challenges:

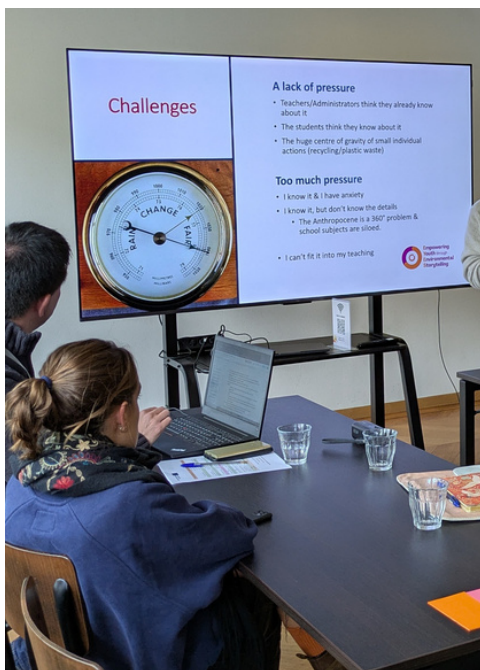
- It can be hard to get students to think beyond straightforward answers, especially if they are used to being told “the solution”.
- Complex, multi-layered problems are frustrating; students may push for a simple fix that doesn't exist.
- Thinking in systems can be abstract in a traditional classroom – it often works better through hands-on experiences, local investigations and real-world projects.
- Many students are tired of hearing about “climate change” in the same way and will disengage if the topic feels repetitive or moralising.





To respond to these challenges:

- Relate everything back to students' lives and contexts. If an issue feels distant, connect it to something concrete and familiar.
- Be honest about complexity. Acknowledge that there is no single answer, and that even experts disagree. Emphasise that there are many small contributions to broader solutions, and that students can be part of these – both now and in their future studies and careers.
- Avoid forcing advocacy. Offer opportunities, not obligations. Students should not feel pressured into particular forms of action, but invited to explore what feels meaningful and safe for them.
- Practice hope together. Hope is not naïve optimism or a feeling we wait for. It is something we do through learning, connecting, creating and acting with others, even when outcomes are uncertain.
- Show real-world examples. Use examples from around the world in classrooms to highlight the 'successes' to show that 'people power' CAN and DOES lead to change.





3. Using storytelling in climate education

In one of the first sessions of the workshop, Maria Krasinski (Managing Director at News Decoder) spoke to us about the pedagogical value of journalism and storytelling, both in relation to climate change education and citizen education more broadly.

Krasinski broke down how climate change information can be complex and data-heavy, emotionally overwhelming, and taught in isolation. Using storytelling and journalism as a pedagogical tool can help students connect dots between climate change and other areas of life, inspire their own interest within the complexity of the topic, and share their own perspectives.

Something News Decoder notices in its work with students around the world, is that when students are given the tools of journalism, and a platform for their voice, they become experts of

different perspectives and nuances within complex topics, while communicating the topic in a way that both they and their audience can understand.

Why storytelling matters

As Brené Brown says, “stories are data with a soul,” and this resonated strongly with us educators. While data gives students the factual grounding they need, storytelling provides the context, emotion, and meaning that make information relatable and memorable. We also recognised that storytelling helps students access and understand data more easily; it turns abstract numbers and facts into human experiences.

When we were introduced to the News Decoder Schools programme, we were struck by the flexibility of the journalistic approach. We realised that journalism can be woven into any subject, giving students a way to interpret information, find meaning, and feel a sense of agency in responding to what they learn. At the same time, we acknowledged that rigorous research and fact checking are essential parts of the process - and that these skills can be challenging for students.





Using storytelling in the classroom
We saw journalism as an engaging alternative to traditional research-and-presentation tasks. Instead of simply gathering information and producing a slideshow, students could interview people, write articles, record podcasts, create video reports, or engage in roleplay as reporters. These formats feel more dynamic and aligned with real-world communication, and allows students to dive deeper into niche topics of their choice (or of curriculum importance).

We discussed activities such as starting with headlines: presenting students with a selection of current news titles on a given topic and asking them, in pairs or small groups, to choose a headline and follow their own investigative direction. This is a task we completed ourselves with Krasinski, which gave us a feel for how simple yet effective "finding a story" can be. In this activity, students can ask questions that interest them or identify angles that connect the issue to their local context.

Many of us felt that storytelling provides a natural bridge between subjects – for example, linking geography content with English literacy skills. Journalism becomes the interdisciplinary tool that helps connect knowledge and communication.

3.1 Challenges we anticipate

We identified several challenges in implementing storytelling approaches. Students' confidence can be a major

barrier – many may feel nervous about speaking to people outside their immediate circle, and interviewing strangers can feel intimidating. There are also practical concerns: finding reliable information, learning to ask strong questions, managing time, resisting the temptation to overuse AI, and ensuring access to appropriate resources.

One issue we highlighted was helping students develop the freedom to ask questions. Some may believe there is only one "right" answer, so encouraging them to explore multiple perspectives is key. As one group put it, "good questions are perhaps more important than the answers." Encourage a range of perspectives to give 'balance' which can come from a rich variety of stakeholders.





3.2 How we can overcome these challenges

We recognised that making tasks locally relevant is one of the strongest ways to engage students. Using headlines from local or regional outlets – on heatwaves, biodiversity loss, flooding, or other recognisable issues – helps students see climate topics reflected in their own lives.

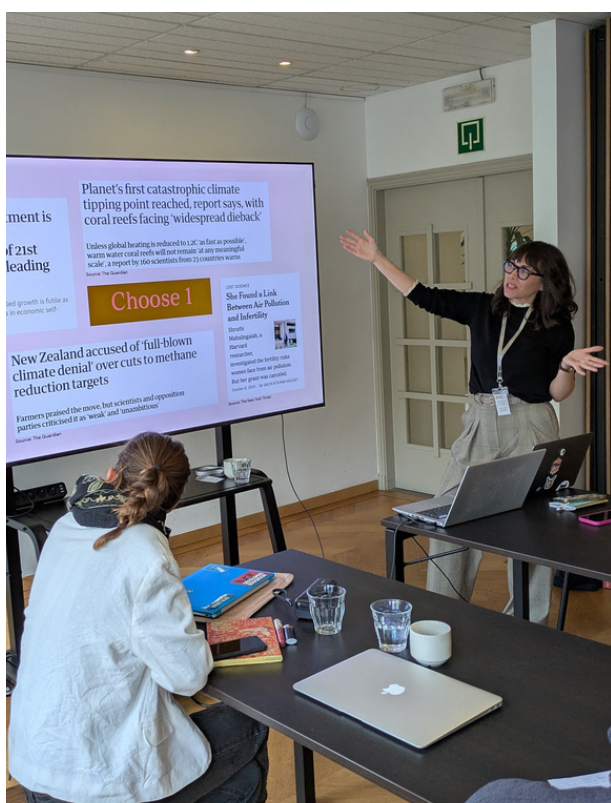
We also discussed the importance of allowing students to make mistakes. As one group reminded us, "education is about learning from mistakes," and journalism naturally encourages iteration and improvement.

For students who lack confidence with interviews, we can start small: surveys with friends or family, short conversations within the school community, or peer-to-peer interviews to help build skills gradually.

3.3 Combining climate topics and storytelling

Across the groups, we agreed on the importance of localising global issues. Climate justice becomes more meaningful when students can connect it to personal stories or local case studies. In Geography for example, this can involve local fieldwork (on the school site or in the local area) using various data collection methods (environmental quality bi-polar scoring, traffic counts, air/noise/visual pollution measurements etc.). Journalism offers a structure for finding or creating these connections: students can research, interview, observe, and report on examples that reflect wider global patterns.

Some educators noted that in International Baccalaureate's Environmental Systems and Societies course, students already need to explore a case study on environmental justice – and journalism could be an engaging alternative format for communicating about it. We also liked the idea of challenging students to write for the school newspaper, magazine, or website, giving them the sense that their work has an authentic audience and real value.





By integrating storytelling with climate topics, we can help students see themselves not just as learners, but as communicators, investigators, and active participants in understanding and shaping the world around them.

The EYES units each include a journalism or storytelling project to activate the concepts laid out in the unit. These include getting students to write a pitch on the topic, interview an expert or a local, produce an explainer or report, connect two topics together to find a story, and to visualise data. Separately, units on various elements of journalism are included in the overall curriculum – journalism principles, how to interview, how to navigate misinformation, and how to write an article and produce a podcast.



The Principles of Journalism

Journalism basics: media ownership, the role of a journalist, framing, and storytelling

[See more](#) ➔



Misinformation and Fact Checking

Misinformation, the doubt around climate change, greenwashing, and how to fact check

[See more](#) ➔



Interviewing

Guide to interviewing: why people matter for storytelling, where to find them, and how to talk to them

[See more](#) ➔



How to Write a Pitch

How to write a pitch: what a pitch is, what makes a good pitch, and how to find and use data

[See more](#) ➔



How to Write an Article

Learn how to write an article and the basic structure for any journalistic product

[See more](#) ➔



How to Make a Podcast

Learn how to make a podcast

[See more](#) ➔



4. Degrowth: An educator's perspective

In this session, Diego Marin (Senior Policy Officer for Raw Materials and Resource Justice at the European Environmental Bureau) introduced us to degrowth. Marin framed the economy as operating within a finite planetary system, constrained by planetary boundaries, and highlighted the accelerating rise in global material consumption. Marin clarified what degrowth is – and is not – before guiding us through the policy measures, cultural shifts, and social changes required in the context of the failures of our current economic model on both environmental and social fronts.

4.1 *Is it important for students to learn about degrowth?*

Yes, and for some of us, a resounding yes – students should engage with the idea of degrowth. But most of us agreed that how we introduce it matters just as much as whether we introduce it.

Rather than beginning with the term itself – which can sometimes trigger misunderstanding or resistance – we'd find it more effective to start with small, relatable examples and clear cause-and-effect relationships. By exploring resource limits and carbon budgets, consumption patterns, and the shortcomings of current economic models, students naturally begin to question "business-as-usual." Degrowth can then be offered as one possible future pathway, in contrast to the SDGs or the circular economy.

Many of us noted that students often respond strongly to ideas of radical change, especially when connected to youth culture. Themes like protest, revolution, activism, and even historical countercultural movements (e.g., protest music, anarchy movements) can make the topic feel relevant and energizing. Activities such as the EYES shrink/transform/grow exercise from the EYES Degrowth unit also help spark rich discussions about what we value in society and what we might want to redesign, reduce, or expand. A structured pro/anti-degrowth debate can give students space to test perspectives, challenge assumptions, and practice informed argumentation.





At the same time, we agreed on the need for careful framing. The term “degrowth” itself can provoke strong reactions - sometimes before the underlying ideas are even understood. Introducing the principles first, and naming the concept later, can help avoid knee-jerk resistance and keep discussions open.

We also reflected on our role as adults navigating a rapidly shifting information landscape. Many students draw heavily on social media influencers, often more than on formal education, and these online spaces can be strongly gendered with some girls gravitating toward feminist or left-leaning spaces, and some boys toward right-wing or reactionary channels. Add to this the layer of socio-economic inequality, and educators may feel we are

“competing” with online narratives that shape students’ worldviews long before we enter the conversation.

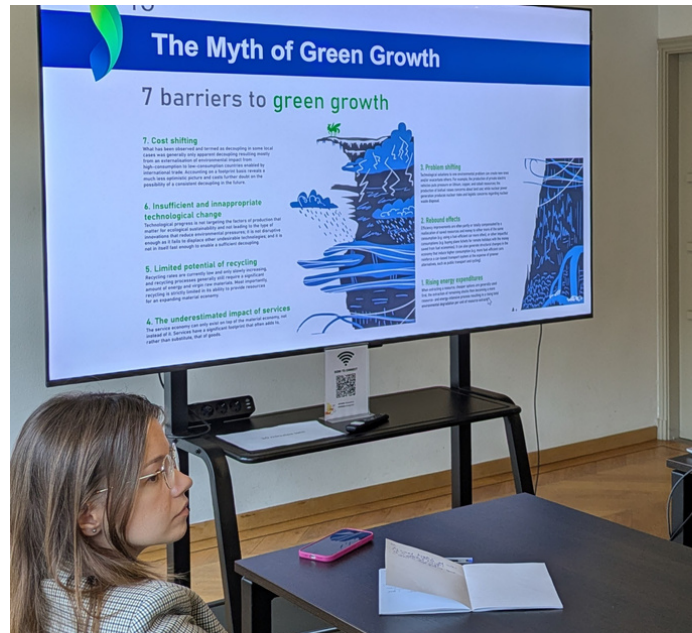
Despite these challenges, most of us felt that offering students alternative visions of the future is essential. Whether or not they ultimately embrace degrowth, giving them the tools to explore multiple pathways - critically, creatively, and with agency - helps them make sense of a rapidly changing world. Indeed, it is THEIR vision of the future that they want for themselves and perhaps their children and children’s children.

4.2 How could we introduce degrowth in our subject?

Introducing degrowth will work best if it grows out of what we already teach. Many of us noted that it doesn’t need to be added as a new or separate topic, but rather woven into existing units where questions about sustainability, fairness, and the future naturally arise.

In the International Baccalaureate (IB) Environmental Systems and Societies (ESS) course, for example, the curriculum already includes Doughnut economics, making degrowth a logical extension. In the IB Geography course, the curriculum includes the circular economy, resource stewardship and the UN SDGs. Educators can link these by exploring for example what happens when societies operate outside the doughnut’s safe and just space, and by examining different economic pathways to stay within planetary boundaries.





In English, teachers can approach degrowth through literary and textual analysis, using fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and media texts to explore themes like consumerism, growth, collapse, justice, and utopian/dystopian futures. These explorations can naturally lead into debates or structured discussions where students evaluate arguments and question assumptions.

At the same time, we acknowledge that there are barriers: many students get their news primarily from social media, often without fact-checking, and some have a deep distrust of mainstream media or traditional authority that we, as educators, may represent in their eyes. This makes it harder to introduce unfamiliar economic concepts or encourage critical reflection. Strengthening media literacy becomes essential - helping students ask where information comes from, whose interests it serves, and how online platforms shape their worldviews.

Several teachers among us expressed uncertainty about discussing degrowth at all: *"We're not equipped to teach this!"* or *"Rationally the data makes sense, but how much of an 'influencer' can we really be?"* This reflects a tension for educators between wanting to ground discussions in scientifically-informed evidence and recognising the limits of our influence in students' algorithm-driven information ecosystems.

One helpful approach is to start from a place of curiosity, not judgment. Rather than presenting degrowth to students as a finished idea, many of us suggested first exploring their realities:

- What do they already know?
- Where did they learn it?
- What do they think a fair or thriving future looks like?



Building from their answers – working in partnership with them – allows for deeper, more meaningful conversations without triggering defensiveness.

We also suggest using familiar media formats to bridge into students' worlds. Examples include:

- asking students to create a TikTok or reel explaining a concept in a way their peers would actually watch and engage
- analysing the conventions of TikTok and other platforms to understand how ideas spread
- using a Louis Theroux-style interview structure, encouraging open, respectful dialogue with people who hold different or surprising views

These tools help create non-confrontational spaces where students can engage with degrowth critically and reflectively, rather than feeling pressured to agree with a particular narrative.

Ultimately, introducing degrowth isn't about persuading students - it's about giving them the tools to question, explore, analyse, and imagine. When approached through existing curriculum content, strengthened media literacy, and student-led inquiry, degrowth becomes an opportunity to think deeply about the kind of future they want to help shape.



4.3 Imagining a degrowth world

Helping students imagine a degrowth future works best when activities are creative, hands-on, and exploratory, allowing them to build understanding step by step rather than confronting the entire concept at once. Many of us emphasized the value of breaking the topic into small, manageable areas, almost like puzzle pieces. Students can work on one piece at a time - food systems, the fashion system, working hours, housing, community life - and then assemble these elements into a broader vision of what a degrowth society might look like. This helps reduce the sense of overwhelm that often accompanies big-picture futures thinking.



One effective strategy is to let students research topics independently - local transport, shared resources, energy use, wellbeing indicators - and then, after they present their findings, help them connect their ideas back to the broader principles of degrowth. This approach validates their curiosity and makes the connection feel organic rather than imposed.

We suggest a wide range of activities, including:

1. Everyday experiments with consumption

With younger students especially, simple real-life activities can open up deep reflection about needs, wants, waste. For example:

- Shopping while hungry vs. after eating: Students create a shopping list while hungry, buy the items, and track what gets eaten, unused, or wasted. The following week, they repeat the exercise after they've had lunch and compare the lists.
- Students can keep a consumption diary for a week, tracking what they buy, use, waste, or share.

These activities can integrate data collection, graphs, debates, reflective writing, or storytelling, turning everyday observation into structured inquiry.

2. Scavenger hunts for sustainable solutions

A scavenger hunt - on campus, where they live or online - encourages students to identify existing examples of low-impact living or future-oriented solutions (e.g., repair cafés, car-sharing, community gardens, circular design, mutual aid networks). This playful format helps them explore alternatives without feeling pressured.

3. Interviews about future lifestyles

Students interview parents or other adults about how daily life might change under degrowth principles - for example, what a three- or four-day working week could look like, or how communities might reorganize transport, childcare, or leisure more communally. They can then debate the positives and negatives, sparking nuanced discussions about work, wellbeing, and societal values.





4. Structured debates and team challenges

Debates on the benefits and drawbacks of initiatives like shorter working weeks or reduced consumption can prompt critical thinking. Team-based simulations can model the transition from our current economic system to a degrowth one, requiring students to negotiate priorities, trade-offs, and shared goals.

5. Game-based learning

Designing board games, card games, or collaborative problem-solving challenges allows students to represent economic systems in accessible ways. They might create:

- a board game where teams try to stay within planetary boundaries - there are many that exist already (see www.boardgamegeek.com - type 'climate' into the search box. One excellent example is SOLUTIONS (2022) which is a collaborative, discussion-based game using the framework of climate solutions proposed by 'Project Drawdown')
- a resource allocation challenge where winning requires cooperation rather than growth

Game-based learning supports creativity and systems thinking.

6. "Colonise a New World" Scenarios

A popular activity involves imagining the colonisation of a new Earth-like

planet, but with today's technology and resources. Students must design the societal structures, economic principles, and rules of life. Without prompting, many students naturally design systems aligned with degrowth - such as shared resources, slower living, or community-centred decision-making - offering a powerful way to connect imagination with real-world possibilities.

These activities all share a common thread: they allow students to build understanding from the ground up, using inquiry, creativity, and play to imagine different futures. By letting them explore first and name the degrowth connection afterward, we can create a sense of discovery that empowers students rather than overwhelms them.





4.4 Challenges in teaching degrowth

We identified several key challenges in helping students engage meaningfully with degrowth.

A first hurdle is addressing the common misconception that degrowth simply means “having less.” Many students initially interpret it as deprivation or sacrifice. Helping them understand that degrowth is about redesigning systems, not just reducing individual consumption, can take time – and requires careful framing.

Another significant challenge is managing the feelings of doom, overwhelm, or futility that can surface when students confront the scale of societal transformation required. Many quickly recognise the benefits of degrowth – improved wellbeing, stronger communities, healthier ecosystems – yet simultaneously observe the lack of political will or large-scale action. This tension can lead to frustration or disengagement unless teachers intentionally create space to process these emotions and emphasise collective agency, imagination, and stories of change.

There is also the delicate task of prompting students to reflect on their own resource use, habits, and comforts. Some students may be unwilling to examine their lifestyles honestly, while others may struggle to imagine living differently – especially if they do not identify with climate-conscious peer groups. We noted that this kind of reflection should be invitational rather than accusatory, as students may feel personally attacked or guilty.

Compounding this, many adults – including teachers – do not model degrowth behaviours in everyday life. Students may therefore see few real-world role models, making the concept feel abstract, unrealistic, or hypocritical. Acknowledging this openly can build trust, but it also reveals a broader structural challenge in teaching the topic.

Finally, we emphasised the difficulty of finding credible, accessible data to support classroom discussions. While platforms like Our World in Data provide simplified and visualised information, students often need more digestible resources that bridge scientific accuracy with clear communication. Without reliable data, it becomes harder to build scientifically informed conversations or counter misinformation circulating on social media.



Together, these challenges highlight the need for thoughtful pedagogy: grounding discussions in evidence, supporting emotional resilience, and creating learning environments where students can question, imagine, and reflect without fear of judgment.

4.5 Overcoming these challenges

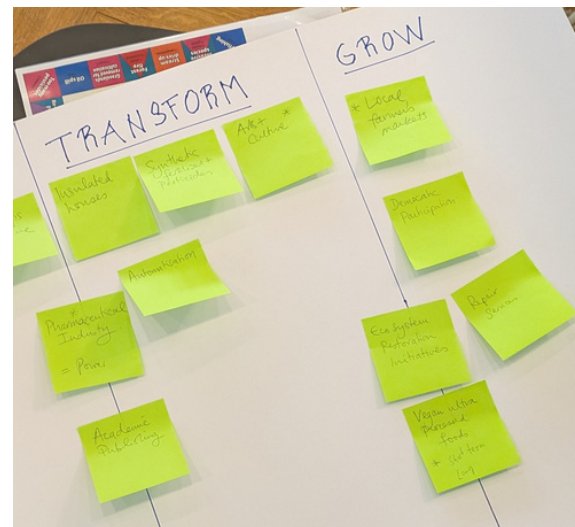
We identified several approaches that can help students move past common difficulties and engage more openly with degrowth.

One effective strategy is to begin with fictional, game-based, or hypothetical scenarios, which allow students to explore ideas without confronting their own habits too quickly. These “safe” environments - board games, imagined societies, or speculative futures - help reduce defensiveness and can later be transferred into real-life reflection. Starting with fiction also helps minimise cognitive dissonance, making it easier for students to consider alternatives without feeling personally criticised.

Across subjects, we emphasised the value of activities that deepen language awareness and critical thinking. Creative writing, research projects, and vocabulary-building exercises on lexical fields related to climate, economics, and sustainability all strengthen students' ability to articulate their thinking. In English, investigations into greenwashing can reveal how advertising, branding, and political rhetoric shape public perception. This helps students recognise the power of

words and the unconscious influence of language on their beliefs - an excellent foundation before introducing more complex economic ideas.

A recurring challenge is helping students move beyond an individualistic mindset when imagining the future. Focusing on values - community, fairness, wellbeing, shared responsibility - can offer a more accessible entry point than abstract economic frameworks. Values-based discussions help shift the conversation from “What do I have to give up?” to “What do we want our world to look like?”.





Students often need substantial guidance as they navigate these ideas. Many of us found that solutions-based learning offers a structured way forward. Grounding activities in local case studies, community initiatives, or school-based projects empowers students to see themselves as part of real change. Giving them choice over their roles - researcher, designer, communicator, storyteller - encourages ownership and reflects approaches like the Lab School We Resist project, where multi-disciplinary collaboration fuels deeper engagement.

Bringing parents or other adults into the learning process can widen perspectives and strengthen the sense that degrowth is not an isolated school topic but a community conversation. Organising a student-led event, exhibition, or roundtable can help bridge generations and reinforce the social dimension of imagining alternative futures.

Throughout this work, it is crucial to keep providing examples of hope, success, and tangible progress. Stories of communities that have reduced consumption while increasing wellbeing, cities that prioritise sharing economies, or movements that successfully challenge growth-driven assumptions can counter feelings of doom and highlight that different futures are possible.

When these strategies work together - creative exploration, critical language awareness, values-led reflection, and solutions-based learning - students can move beyond initial resistance and begin to imagine degrowth not as sacrifice, but as a viable, hopeful, and collectively shaped future.



4.6 Using storytelling to teach degrowth

Storytelling offers a powerful and human-centred way to introduce degrowth. By grounding abstract concepts in lived experience, it helps students connect emotionally, imagine alternatives, and see that degrowth is not only theoretical but already unfolding in diverse communities.

We highlighted the impact of sharing real-life stories of people and communities from around the world who have embraced elements of degrowth, by reducing consumption through sharing, prioritising community, or reorganising their working lives. These stories demonstrate that degrowth can look different depending on one's starting point, resources, and motivations.

Students can take this further by becoming story collectors themselves. Interviewing people in their own neighbourhoods - family members, shop owners, neighbours, community organisers - allows them to explore local attitudes toward degrowth. Are there people already practising aspects of it, knowingly or unknowingly? What motivates them? What challenges do they face? This approach not only builds research skills but also deepens students' understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of lifestyle change.

To support this work, educators suggested photo essay or citizen-journalism projects, where students document local examples of repair culture, sharing systems, frugal innovation, or low-impact living. Community members might even upload photos or micro-stories to a shared class platform, creating a collaborative visual archive of "degrowth in action."





Storytelling can also bring the topic closer to home. By encouraging students to map out their own future material and economic choices, teachers invite them to reflect on what truly matters to them. Through brainstorming, reflective writing, or speculative fiction, students can imagine a future shaped by wellbeing rather than consumption, and explore how their values might influence their careers, lifestyles, and community roles.

Ultimately, storytelling makes degrowth personal, relatable, and emotionally resonant. It invites students to explore not just the facts but the feelings, values, tensions, and possibilities of imagining different futures. Through stories – both told and discovered – students can recognise that change is already happening around them and that they, too, can be part of shaping what comes next.





5. The GreenComp Framework: An educator's perspective

In this session, Sophia Queckenberg (Policy Assistant at the European Commission / DG EAC) introduced us to GreenComp, the European sustainability competence framework and its twelve interconnected competences. Queckenberg walked us through each competence, shared practical resources for educators, and emphasised that GreenComp is a flexible guide that must be adapted to local contexts. Queckenberg also presented findings from recent studies on how GreenComp is being implemented across school curricula, and highlighted additional materials teachers can use in their classrooms.

5.1 *The value of a framework like GreenComp*

We see significant value in having the GreenComp available to us. It can give students guidance for developing their own local sustainability projects. It also strengthens our engagement with local stakeholders – from councillors to ministries to school leadership – by showing that our teaching aligns with an established, credible structure.

The framework reinforces the idea that there are people actively working on climate issues and solutions, which helps counter feelings of helplessness. It's reassuring to have a central place where we can access resources, and it contributes directly to our ability to teach effectively. Clear, embedded materials make a huge difference – a well-equipped teacher is a confident teacher.





5.2 How GreenComp connects to other topics we've covered in the workshop

We can see GreenComp working seamlessly with the themes explored in this project. The EYES course adds depth to problem framing, political agency and collective action, futures thinking, and other competences emphasised in the GreenComp framework.

GreenComp helps us synthesise different concepts and approaches from the EYES course – from planetary boundaries to doughnut economics and degrowth – and gives us a structured way to connect them.

The competences help us frame discussions and build the skills students need either before or alongside the core topics. Because GreenComp is endorsed by the EU and based on solid data, it lends credibility to our teaching plans and goals. Importantly, it can be used across disciplines, offering a shared foundation for cross-curricular collaboration.

5.3 Are we already using some of these competences?

Yes – many of us are already integrating GreenComp-aligned competences into our curricula. We see this in museum-based projects focused on nature and sustainability, and in the International Baccalaureate Geography course, where sustainability runs through topics such as tourism, climate, and population dynamics. Schools in the Netherlands



have sustainability weeks, and many of us work with local organisations on events like "Warm Sweater Day."

We also emphasise future possibilities and sustainable solutions in our teaching. In the International Baccalaureate Environmental Systems and Societies, systems thinking is central, and in broader school projects on waste management, climate change, or Erasmus+ initiatives, the EU's documents and frameworks already guide our work. These competences are present – even if not always labelled explicitly as "GreenComp."



GreenComp Visualisation
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5.4 Which competencies are missing?

While much of GreenComp is reflected in our current practice, there are areas where we see gaps. Some schools are not strongly engaged in envisioning sustainable futures or fostering political agency, and these competences could be strengthened. Futures literacy in particular was new to all of us and feels like an important area to develop.

We also recognise that the framework itself could be a tool for pushing change within school structures or curricula. It gives us a language and rationale to advocate for developments that support deeper sustainability learning.

5.5 Fostering futures envisioning in the classroom

Futures envisioning is already an integral part of subjects like IB Geography, where "possibilities" appear directly in the syllabus. For others, we see great potential to integrate it more intentionally, especially by ensuring that future-oriented discussions include hopeful and imaginative elements rather than solely focusing on risks.

Degrowth and storytelling can play a major role here. They allow students to approach the future creatively and critically, as mentioned in earlier reflections. Debate or roleplay can be powerful: one group might imagine an optimistic future scenario while another explores a more realistic or pessimistic version. Having students position themselves physically – moving left or right according to whether they agree with a given statement – keeps discussions active and embodied.

Interviewing local politicians or organisations can help students understand real-world visions for the future, grounding their thinking in their community. Exploring utopian concepts through art and literature – from *The Island* to *Brave New World* – can further expand their sense of what futures are possible. Together, these approaches help us nurture a future-literate mindset in our students.



6. **Engagement and changemaking**

In this session, Sabrina Tacchini (psychologist, career counsellor, and PhD researcher at the University of Lausanne) explored how socio-ecological issues can shape personal engagement, civic action, and career choices. Tacchini examined climate-related emotions, reframing eco-anxiety as a valid and understandable response to the state of the world, and as a potential catalyst for engagement.

Using a card-based activity, we then explored practical ways to identify meaningful pathways for action at the intersection of our personal interests and skills, societal needs within planetary boundaries, and alternatives to current economic systems.

6.1 *Our main takeaways*

Sabrina Tacchini's session focused on how we can help young people see themselves as potential changemakers – something that resonated strongly with us. We learned how important it is for students to explore their own characteristics and strengths as a foundation for meaningful climate action. When students recognise personal qualities that feel authentic to them, they are more likely to engage in ways that suit their identity, confidence, and interests.

We also found the use of props, games, and interactive methods incredibly valuable. These tools help students surface their emotional reactions to climate change and give them a structured way to reflect on their “superpowers,” especially when thinking about their future studies or career paths. They also support students in telling their own stories and understanding why their experiences matter.

One idea we discussed was using digital narratives – for example, asking students to collect symbolic objects from the past or future and build stories around them. This approach helps broaden imagination, connect emotions to learning, and make abstract ideas more tangible.





6.2 What we could take into the classroom

We identified several practical tools we would like to use with our students. One is the interactive tool hosted by the University of Leeds, which compares countries based on their performance to meet human needs within planetary boundaries. This has strong potential for inquiry-based learning and cross-curricular exploration.

We also agreed that the card game from the session could be extremely powerful in the classroom. Its flexibility means it can be adapted for different topics, ages, and learning objectives, making it useful across disciplines. Whether used for storytelling, reflection, or group discussion, it offers students an accessible way into complex ideas.





7. Teaching biodiversity

This section is inspired by a session held by Anka Stanković from The Environment and Human Rights Academy (TEHRA) which outlined the scale of the biodiversity crisis, how interconnected it is with climate change, and how we can work with nature to overcome climate challenges.

7.1 Keeping students motivated

When teaching the biodiversity crisis, we've found it essential to focus not only on the alarming data but also on the successes. Highlighting real conservation wins – from recent news stories to long-term recovery projects – helps students see that change is possible. Creative activities such as role-playing the life of a bee or a wolf allow them to empathise with other species, making the topic engaging rather than overwhelming.

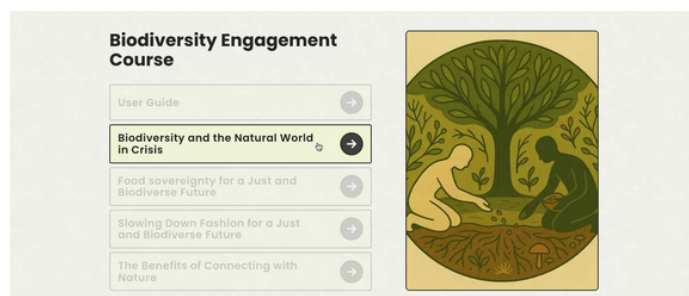
7.2 What surprised us

Even though we were familiar with the issue, the session revealed just how deep the biodiversity crisis truly is. The hard data was more alarming than we expected, and it reinforced the urgency of bringing this topic into our classrooms with care, accuracy, and emotional awareness.

7.3 The importance of local biodiversity

We strongly believe that engaging students with local biodiversity can support pro-environmental behaviour and help relieve eco-anxiety. Fieldwork is essential. When students observe species, habitats, and ecosystems firsthand, the learning becomes real and personal. This direct experience creates a sense of connection and responsibility that simply cannot be achieved through classroom theory alone.

If you would like to dive deeper into biodiversity issues with your students, visit the [Biodiversity course for educators](#) where you can find online courses, prepared lectures from primary to secondary students, as well as activities that you can bring to the classroom. Each topic in the course gives you and your students ideas for action. TEHRA has developed these resources as part of the [PLANET4B](#) EU project.





8. Conclusion: connecting the dots of the climate crisis through education

When we imagine combining the main themes of this seminar – climate justice, systems thinking, degrowth, storytelling, and changemaking – a powerful vision emerges. Storytelling becomes the thread that ties everything together: students learn to interview others, articulate their own experiences, and envision futures that feel meaningful and possible. Through this process, they begin to understand their place in the world and the agency they hold in shaping what comes next.

Systems thinking and degrowth add the structural understanding students need. They help students see that the future can change, and that they do have power – individually and collectively – to shape the systems they inhabit. Climate justice reminds us that this work is ultimately about people and lived experiences. At every stage, human connections matter: conversations, community relationships, shared stories, and collaboration build bridges across differences.

If we brought all of this into our schools or organisations, we can imagine a learning environment where interdisciplinary, project-based work grows naturally from student interests and knowledge, and extends outward into the local community. It would look like an achievable and just future – not abstract or distant, but built drop by drop, like an ocean formed from billions of raindrops. A future where youth feel genuinely empowered to create the world they want.

Of course, time and planning remain challenges. Embedding these ideas into the curriculum, rather than adding them on top, will make this work more sustainable. Sharing resources, experiences, and networks from the EYES seminar can help us take the next steps together. And who knows, perhaps even the playful “card game” approaches we explored could evolve into something like a climate-education version of *Cards Against Humanity*, sparking honest discussion, creativity, and joy in learning.

By combining these approaches, we can cultivate classrooms where systems change, justice, imagination, and personal agency all come alive, and where students see themselves as central to shaping a better future.



Endnotes

1. Roderick, Tom. Teach for Climate Justice : A Vision for Transforming Education, Harvard Education Press, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/oxford/detail.action?docID=7271561>



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