

Environmental and sustainability education in Finland

Current state and future directions

Dr. Essi Aarnio-Linnanvuori

Tampere University
Faculty of education and culture





In this presentation

- Environmental sustainability in Finnish school curricula
- Current challenges in ESE
- Model for holistic climate change education
- Ideas for fresh ESE implementation

Finns tend to have a close relationship to nature – or at least so we think

- Most Finns appreciate outdoors and nature, especially forests, lakes, and the Baltic Sea
 - In a TSN Kantar survey in 2021, 87% of adult respondents declared that they consider nature to be an important part of their lives
 - 78% said they were worried about the state of nature
- Urbanization in the country is relatively recent – many people in cities still have connections to countryside



Characteristics of schools in Finland

- Voluntary early education
- Preschool for 6 years old children
- Basic education 7-15
- Secondary education 16-18 (vocational or upper secondary)
- Highly educated – and trusted – teachers
- Independent lesson planning, based on national curriculum guidelines
- Relaxed atmosphere – first name basis between pupils and teachers
- We still do have school subjects!



Ecological sustainability in Finnish curriculum

- EE in curriculum guidelines since 1985
- Environmental responsibility integrated into the underlying values (2016 guidelines)
- More school subjects mention sustainability than before
- Ecological sustainability can and ought to be integrated in all subjects
- However, social sustainability has more emphasis than ecological (Mykrä 2021)



Challenges in Environmental and Sustainability Education (ESE)

- Wide and interdisciplinary content
- Value-laden content
- Lack of time
- Lack of expertise
- Lack of support from headmaster
- Post-Covid issues



Children and young people are worried – and this worries educators

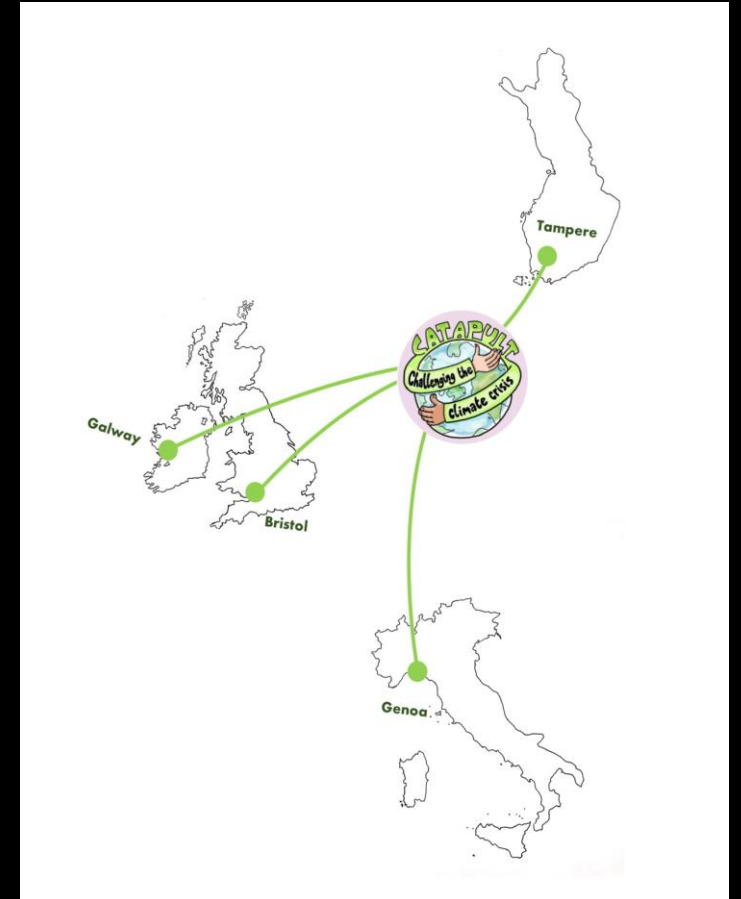
- 75 % of young people consider the future to be scary because of climate change (Hickman et al. 2021)
- Educators are worried that they might cause environmental anxiety to children and young people, if they discuss climate change in classroom (Aarnio-Linnanvuori 2019)



The CCC-CATAPULT Project

<https://ccc-catapult.org/>

- A three-year international research project, working across Bristol UWE, University of Genoa (Italy), Tampere University (Finland), and NUI Galway (Ireland).
- The project has developed research through the 'eyes and ears' of young people, teachers and other supporters of learning to understand how:
 - The climate emergency is being experienced and felt by young people across different cultural contexts
 - How young people can be empowered to help challenge the climate emergency and become ambassadors for the future



86% consider the loss of natural habitats and animal species to be important

83% consider global inequality to be important

83% consider reducing waste to be important

79% consider climate change to be important

74% consider rising sea levels and flooding to be important

Most important environmental issues for young people

Although 78% of young people are interested
in getting involved in climate action

53% of them have not previously been
actively involved in climate action

European youth's concern of environmental issues in CCC-Catapult survey

A statistically significant difference:

Respondents in Tampere region are less concerned of environmental issues than their peers in other case locations

Young people tell that they are bored with hearing the same sustainability content over and over again

	M	SD	N
Finland	2,8395	0,71	536
Italy	3,2735	0,57	385
Ireland	3,2951	0,62	501
UK	3,2648	0,64	332
Total	3,1454	0,67	1754



Is our implementation of ESE not working?

According to European young people, a good CCE learning environment would...

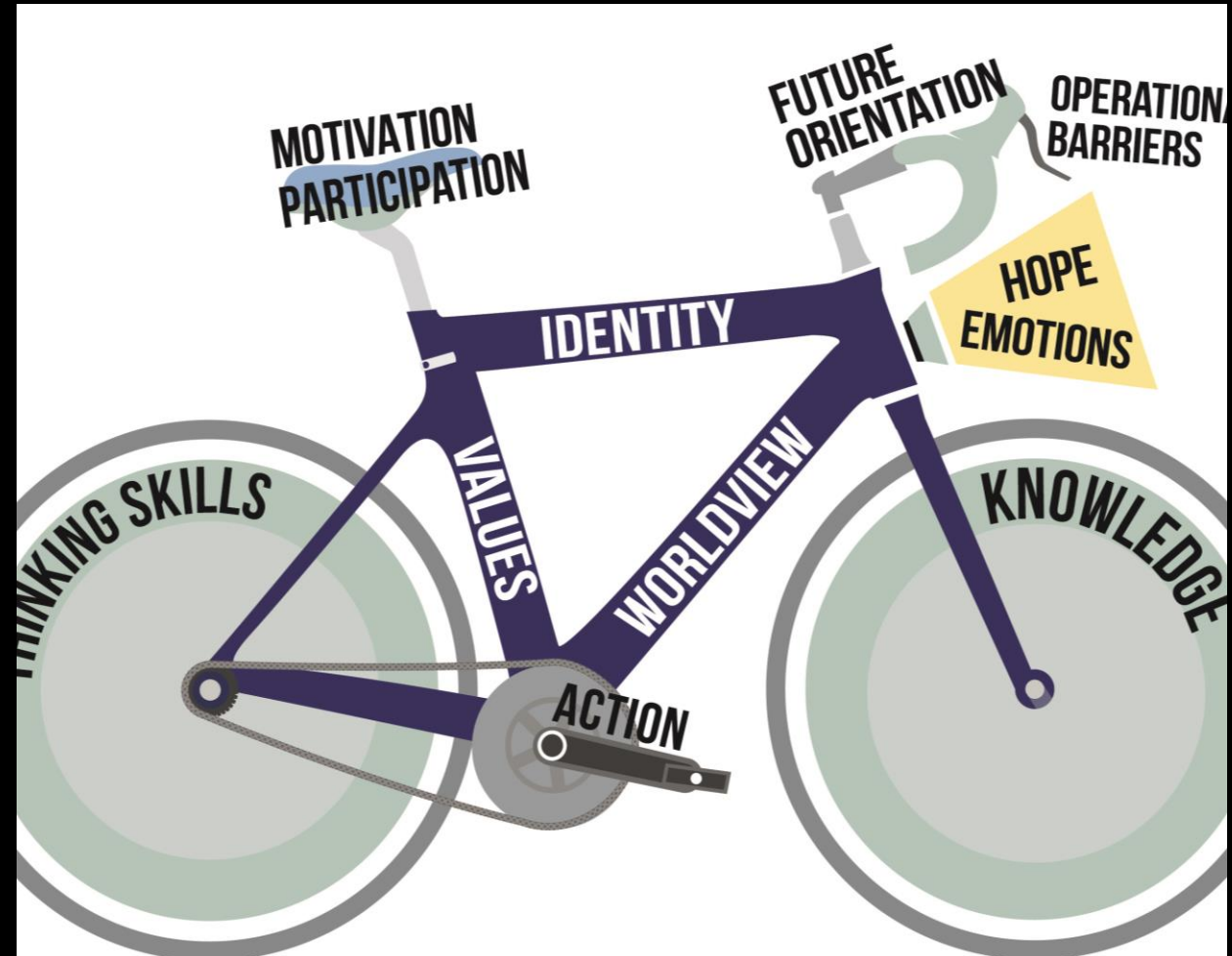
- Allow discussion and asking questions
- Offer relevant/meaningful information
- Offer information about solutions and strategies, not just about the global problems
- Offer possibilities to art-based methods
- Include natural and other nonformal environments



Holistic climate change education model

Sakari Tolppanen, Essi Aarnio-Linnanvuori, Hannele Cantell & Anna Lehtonen (2017): *Pirullisen ongelman äärellä – Kokonaisvaltaisen ilmastokasvatuksen malli*. *Kasvatus* 48:5.

Hannele Cantell, Sakari Tolppanen, Essi Aarnio-Linnanvuori & Anna Lehtonen (2019): *Bicycle model on climate change education: presenting and evaluating a model*. *Environmental Education Research*.



Inventing fresh ways to teach ESE

- Learning path from early education to adulthood
- Solution-oriented information & education
- Reaching also those not interested – connecting ESE to young people's own lives and worldviews
- Including outdoor learning environments
- Cooperation between formal and nonformal learning
- Regular training for in-service teachers



Conclusions

- Finnish curriculum documents give a good basis to implement ESE – but implementation has not reached desirable level
- ESE should be developed to directions of
 - Ascending learning paths
 - Worldview and cultural awareness
 - Focus on strategies and solutions instead of problems
 - Connected to learners' own lives
- Nonformal learning environments present fresh opportunities to make these issues interesting again

