

Empowering Educators: Building Competencies for Sustainable Futures

AIESEP Specialist Seminar:
Future Matters: Reimagining Physical Education for a Changing World, Lausanne, Switzerland, 05 February 2026

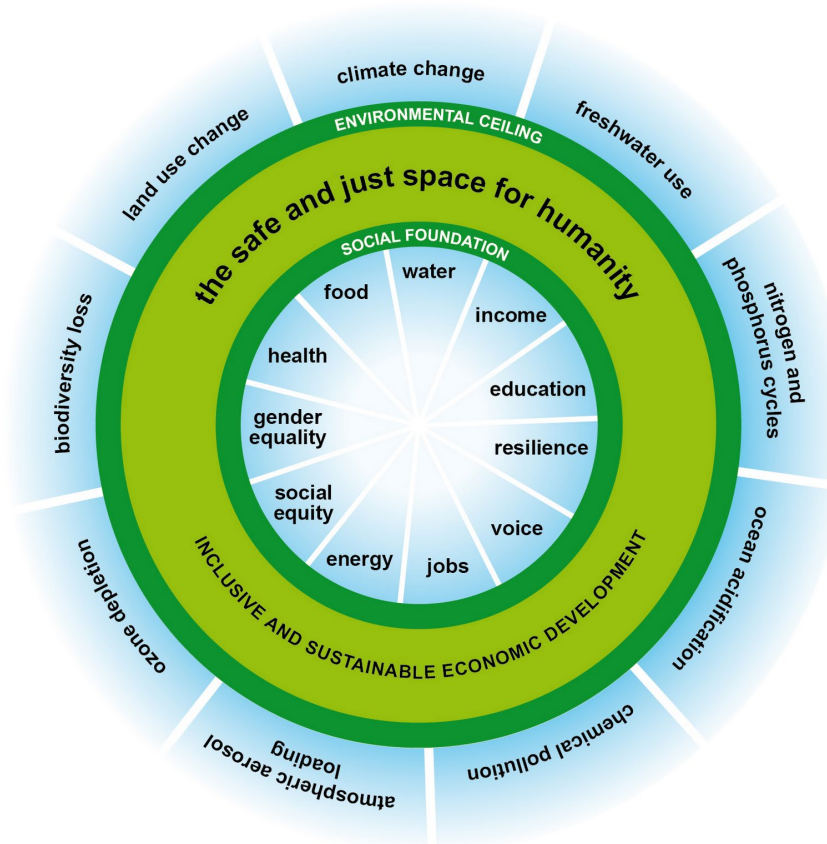
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Universität Vechta
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Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development



Raworth 2017

Sustainable Development Goals

- 17 goals
- 169 targets
- Published by the UN in 2015
- SDGs concern development in all countries of the world





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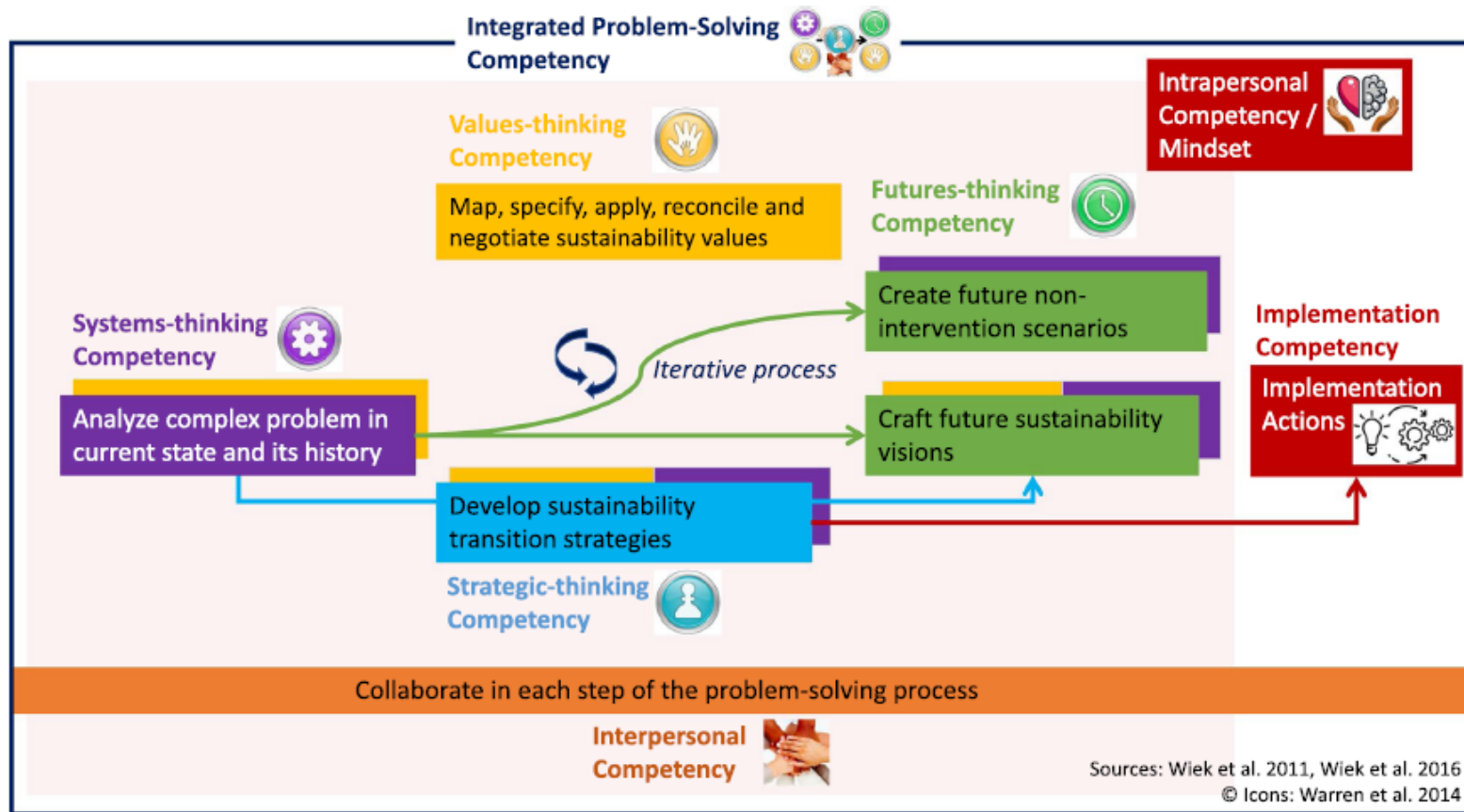
Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development...

- ... makes one's own *future* a meaningful moment in educational processes through the goal orientation towards the vision of a sustainably developing society
- opens up the discourse on *social values* and does not extend to following accepted social norms, but includes learning how to deal with many, even contradictory, value concepts.
- ... supports and promotes the development of very demanding *competences* - competences that are highly deficient in the current generation of adults. Without these competences, the educational goals outlined above cannot be achieved.

Rost 2002

Sustainability Competencies



Brundiars et al. 2021

Transformative learning / value orientation

- Conservation of natural resources
- Human dignity
- Justice

- Contribution to value clarification and a critical discourse on values
- Suggestions to reflect on one's own values and to take a stand on them
- Broadening the learners' horizon of values

- *Conceptual change*: changing fundamental orientations (values and attitudes) through transformative education.

Rieckmann 2018, 2020

ESD as citizenship education

- "The aim of ESD must be to empower citizens in their critical political agency, to elevate them from their role as mere consumers, and to motivate them to participate in shaping their surroundings." (Fedorchenko 2021, p. 35)
- ESD should be political; contentious issues should be presented as controversial, but the teacher can take a stance (cf. Weselek & Wohnig 2021)
- Not only addressing individual (consumption-related) issues, but also structural issues
- Enhancing the agency of citizens ("sustainability citizens")

Rieckmann 2020; Schank & Rieckmann 2019

Action-oriented transformative pedagogy

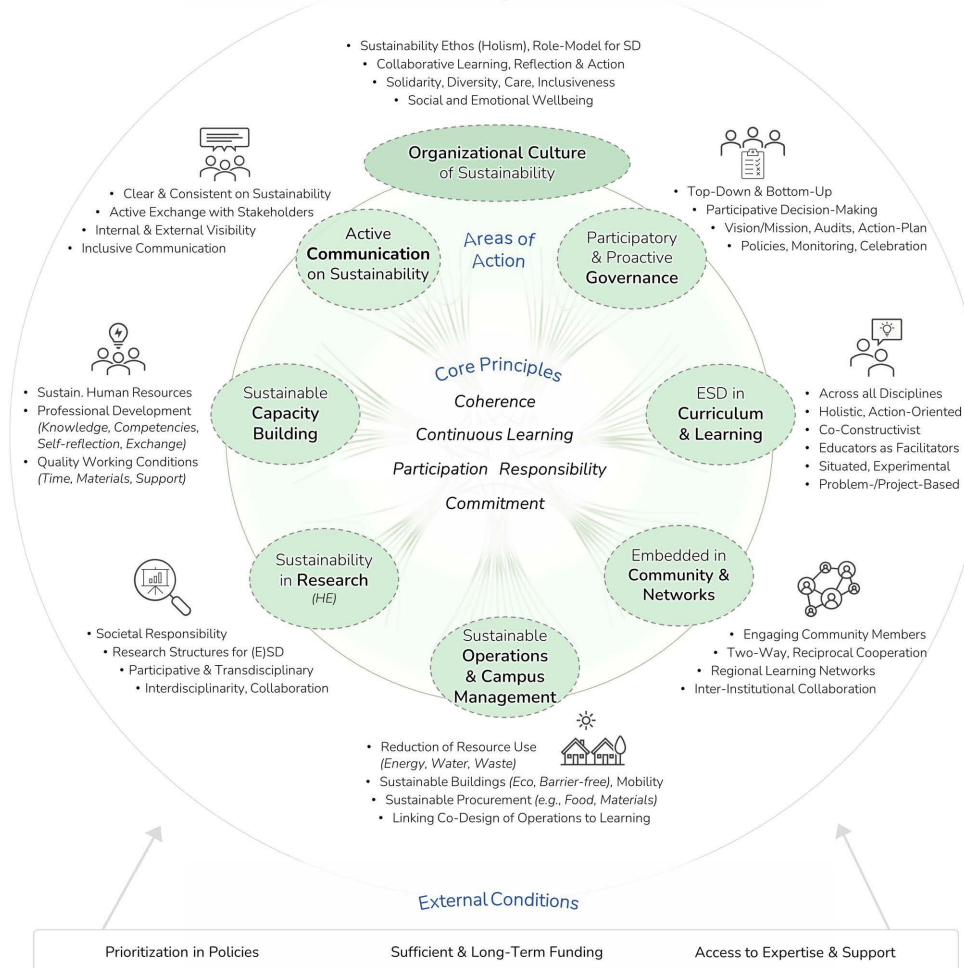
- Learner-centredness and accessibility
- Action and reflection orientation
- Transformative and transgressive learning
- Participatory orientation
- Discovery learning
- Networked learning
- Vision orientation
- Combining social, self-centred and method-oriented with subject-based learning

Rieckmann 2018; UNESCO 2017

Whole-Institution Approach

- „For educational organizations, Whole Institution Approaches (WIAs) to sustainability emphasize that **all learning is embedded within its socio-physical contexts.**“ (Holst 2023: 1015)
- „Integrating the socio-physical context into sustainability learning, WIAs imply that particular **attention is put on the informal learning processes within organizations**, regularly described as “non-formal”, “hidden”, “shadow”, or “living” curriculum.“ (Holst 2023: 1018)

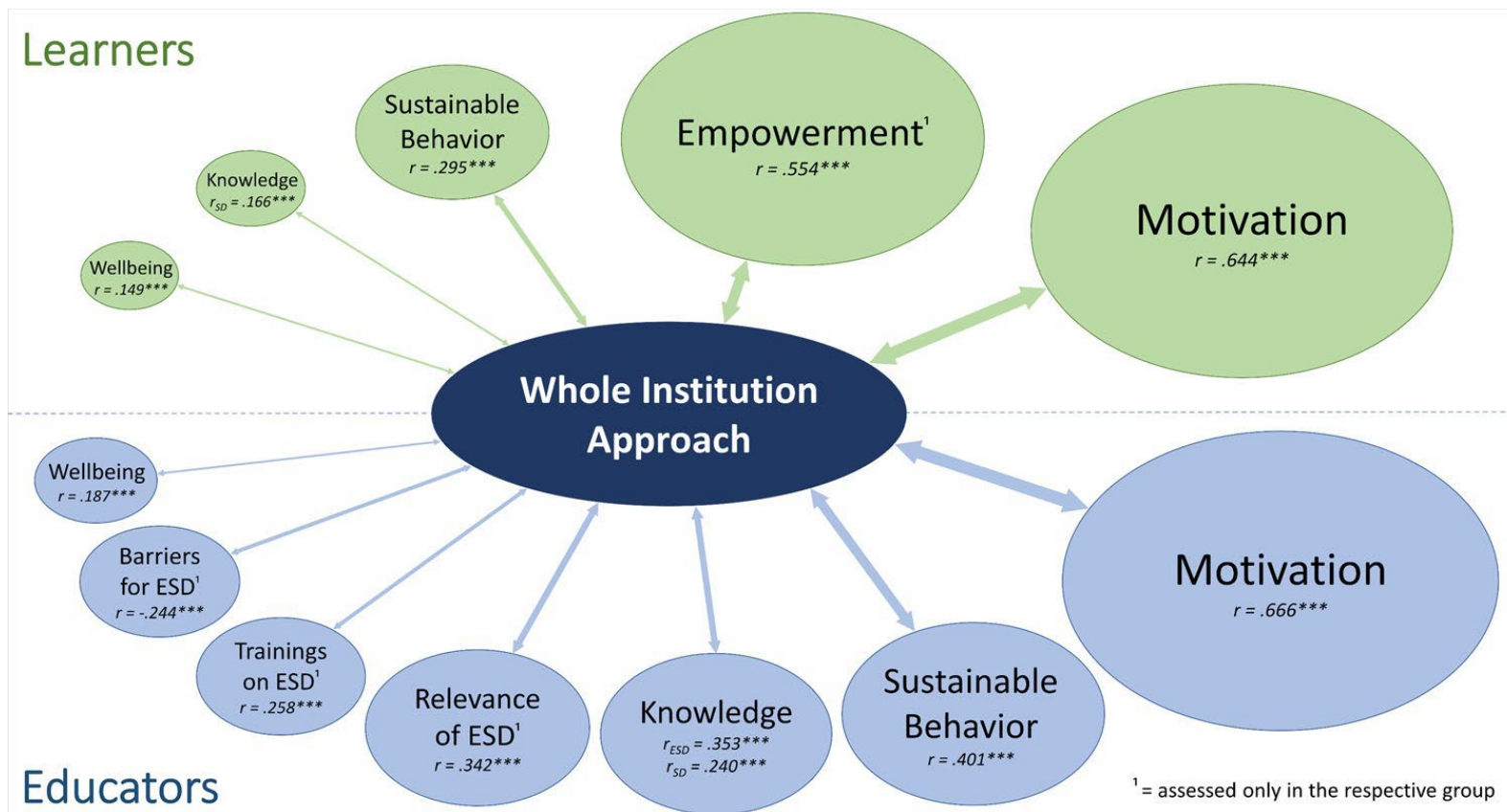
Whole Institution Approaches to Sustainability in Education



Holst 2023: 1025

Research question: “To what extent is the experience of sustainability at educational institutions (WIAs) related to key aspects of effective sustainability learning (e.g., empowerment, behavior, knowledge)?”

Survey: “large-scale assessment in Germany (school education, vocational education and higher education; $n = 2,985$)”



Holst et al. 2024



ESD Competencies of Educators

RSP framework for ESD competencies

The educator needs to have:

- a critical understanding of sustainable development and ESD
- a grounding in the pedagogy of education for sustainable development (ESD)
- ability to practice an action-oriented, transformative pedagogy

<https://arundersenseofpurpose.eu>

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Millican 2022

RSP framework for ESD competencies

Thinking Holistically	Envisioning Change	Achieving Transformation
Integration:		
<p>Systems</p> <p>The educator helps learners to develop an understanding of the world as an interconnected whole and to look for connections across our social and natural environment and consider the consequences of actions.</p>	<p>Futures</p> <p>The educator helps learners to explore alternative possibilities for the future and to use these to consider how behaviours might need to change.</p>	<p>Participation</p> <p>The educator helps learners to contribute to changes that will support sustainable development.</p>
Involvement:		
<p>Attentiveness</p> <p>The educator helps learners to understand fundamentally unsustainable aspects of our society and the way it is developing and increases their awareness of the urgent need for change.</p>	<p>Empathy</p> <p>The educator helps learners to respond to their feelings and emotions and those of others as well as developing an emotional connection to the natural world.</p>	<p>Values</p> <p>The educator develops an awareness among learners of how beliefs and values underpin actions and how values need to be negotiated and reconciled.</p>
Practice:		
<p>Transdisciplinarity</p> <p>The educator helps learners to act collaboratively both within and outside of their own discipline, role, perspectives and values.</p>	<p>Creativity</p> <p>The educator encourages creative thinking and flexibility within their learners.</p>	<p>Action</p> <p>The educator helps the learners to take action in a proactive and considered manner.</p>
Reflexivity:		
<p>Criticality</p> <p>The educator helps learners to evaluate critically the relevance and reliability of assertions, sources, models and theories.</p>	<p>Responsibility</p> <p>The educator helps learners to reflect on their own actions, act transparently and to accept personal responsibility for their work.</p>	<p>Decisiveness</p> <p>The educator helps the learners to act in a cautious and timely manner even in situations of uncertainty.</p>

<https://arundersen.seofpurpose.eu/framework/table/>

Millican 2022



Vare et al. 2022



ESD Research Projects

Project Senatra

- Senatra – Service Learning and Sustainable Transformation in Higher Education (2022–2025)
- *Funding:* German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) within the program “Transformation Pathways for Sustainable Universities”
- *Partners:* University of Bremen, Otto von Guericke University Magdeburg, Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Netzwerk n, University of Vechta
- *Research question:* To what extent can the implementation of service learning in higher education teaching contribute to a whole-institution approach to sustainable transformation?
- *Research design:* Multiple case study
- <https://senatra-projekt.de/english/>

Project Imp>Act

- Impact Assessment for Action Competence (2024-2027)
- *Funding:* EU Horizon
- *Partners:* Utrecht University (Coordinator, NL), Karlstad University (SE), University of Antwerp (BE), Masaryk University (CZ), National Institute for the Evaluation of the Education and Training System (IT), Center for the Promotion of Science (RS), German Association for Sustainability in Higher Education, University of Vechta
- *Research question:* How can actual learning outcomes in sustainability and climate change education be effectively assessed?
- *Research design:* Development and validation of an assessment framework (focus on action competence); case studies; surveys with educators
- <https://impactforaction.eu/>



Conclusion

Conclusion

- Competence and value development need structural embedding
- (Higher) education institutions must cultivate agency, reflection, and hope
- Educators need to be enabled to facilitate ESD

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Thank you very much for your attention!



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