Teach For All | A Global Network

Contextualizing Climate Education Resources
Guidance Document

Overview

Climate change and environmental risks are the lived reality of today's students, especially those in disadvantaged communities. No longer a distant threat, climate change is already harming people's health and livelihoods and exacerbating long-standing inequities around the world, with effects expected to worsen over time. While these problems are largely caused by human activities, they can–and must–also be solved by humans, and there is no path to a better future without tackling climate change. Teachers and educators have a vital role in supporting students' resilience, agency and leadership so that they can pioneer the necessary solutions to the climate crisis—now and throughout their lives—by engaging in climate education.

As a global network, we know that effective practices and solutions in one context can be adapted to the realities of other contexts - a principle we can apply to insights and learning resources as well. There is a wealth of climate education resources online that can be accessed through our Teach For All Climate Education Resource Hub. These resources are often generic or developed for a specific cultural, environmental, or societal context (e.g., North America or Western Europe). As a result, the approach and examples in those resources often do not reflect the realities —in terms of language, culture, lived experience of climate impacts— or the relevant solutions to climate challenges for many communities and learners around the world.

In order for all to benefit from great existing resources and not 'start from scratch,' while enabling effective, locally relevant learning for students, we need to take climate education resources and contextualize them. Contextualization can help deepen students' engagement and learning and allows effective transfer of knowledge and skills[1]. This entails reflecting the local realities in the resources and connecting materials with real world situations and their practical application[2]. To support you in this process, this document provides a guide for contextualizing climate education resources to make them applicable to your setting/classroom.

In this guidance document, we are providing ten points of advice for how to contextualize climate education materials to your context, each featuring various resource links for further exploration. We hope this guide will serve as a useful reference point as you engage in tailoring high-quality climate education materials to your learners' realities and context.

Contextualizing Resources

Learn about climate change and climate education

To be able to properly contextualize climate education resources, educators need to, first and foremost, equip themselves with sufficient basic knowledge on the topic. Given the subject matter can feel quite complex and technical, it's advisable to work with materials that support understanding on the climate crisis in very accessible and digestible terms. Below are some accessible training resources and courses offered for free (*all featured in the Resource Hub*):

- UN CC: e-Learn
- Climate Change Education: From Knowledge to Action
- Climate Interactive: En-ROADS
- 350.org Trainings
- MIT Climate Portal

In addition to engaging with training resources, a great (and fun) way to learn about climate change and climate education is to connect with other climate educators (e.g., through the Teach For All Climate Education Community or the Teachers for the Planet program) and learn about their approaches, and to discuss local climate challenges with members of your local community and with experts working on local climate solutions. You'll be surprised how eager people are to share their insights.

Translate resources to local languages

According to UNESCO, the local language or mother tongue of students is important to effective learning[3]. Lessons on climate change can be understood better if communicated through a language understood by the target audience. Using resources in the local language is ideal but these may not always be available, so having them translated is an option. Climate Cardinals is a volunteer group that translates climate materials into over 100 languages; the website includes an AI translation tool and database of translated climate education resources.

Besides it being better for climate science, particularly the causes and impacts of climate change, to be explained using local language, the concepts can even be simplified further with the use of storytelling or images to visually translate materials. Operation Kawayan, a toolkit for disaster and environmental education, did just that through a climate change children's story which is also translated in Filipino. The following are some suggested translation guidelines[4]:

- Before translating a resource, make sure to check whether a version in your target language is available. It's also important to assess the quality and relevance of the material before spending time and resources on translating it.
- Translate for meaning and not word-for-word, taking cultural sensitivity into account.
- Do a "two-way" or "back translation" (English to target language and vice-versa) to verify the accuracy of the translated material.
- Have someone (multiple people, if possible) review the translated material.
- Get feedback about the translated resource directly from the intended audience.

Localize climate change impacts and solutions

Some resources may mention climate change impacts predominant in certain countries or regions, like forest fires in Europe and extreme typhoons in Asia. Similarly, some climate change solutions are more applicable to certain contexts. When using these resources, there is value in learning about climate change impacts and solutions in other parts of the world. The emphasis, however, should be placed on actual impacts and solutions applicable in your/the learners' local context. Likewise, talking about personal experiences and asking students to reflect on and share about their own experiences of climate change, makes the issue more relatable.

When contextualizing a resource, here are some questions that can guide you in localizing climate change impacts and solutions, to engage students in materials and lessons deeply relevant for their environment and lived reality:

- Are the climate change impacts featured in the resource also experienced in your local context / community? Where in the world are these impacts more common?
- What other / additional climate impacts have you specifically experienced or observed in your community? (for this, it is useful to speak with local climate change experts)
- Are the proposed climate change solutions applicable in your local context / community?
- What additional climate change solutions are practiced in your community? (both in terms of local adaptation and building resilience, and in climate change mitigation).
- What other locally applicable climate solutions could you discuss with and engage students in? (for inspiration, you can consult databases like Project Drawdown (a comprehensive set of science-based climate solutions) and speak with local experts).

Use appropriate cultural references

For learners to connect to the subject matter and understand the relevance and applicability of their learning, it should be centered in their context. This can be done by:

- Understanding the context in/for which the resource was originally developed.
- Looking at the similarities and differences of the local context for which the resource was originally developed and your/your learners' context.
- Changing certain aspects of the resource l to match the local context (such as using local places and local names, as well as changing cultural references as needed).

Learn the basics of climate change communication

Climate change tends to be very technical, often making it difficult to understand, abstract and hard to relate to for general audiences. Climate Outreach has a guide to the science of climate change communication and has the following pointers which can be taken into consideration when contextualizing climate education resources:

- Know your audience and tailor your message towards them
- Understand how you are heard and find your authentic voice

- Communicate the uncertainty of climate change and bring the issue to here and now by showing real people, telling stories, and highlighting local impacts

There is also some specific communication guidance for talking to children about climate change - more information and links to such guidance can be found in the Resource Hub.

Decolonize climate education

No longer a distant threat, climate change is already harming people's health and livelihoods and exacerbating long-standing inequities around the world, with effects expected to worsen over time. In many communities, the impacts of climate change are both a result of colonial injustices and structures, and exacerbated by them. The model of education in many countries is based on settler colonialism which does not fully capture the interconnectedness of different issues[5], including (climate) justice. Often, resources disregard indigenous culture and traditions, deeming them as irrelevant. Climate education should deconstruct such worldviews and integrate indigenous knowledge in resources and materials. This also provides an opportunity to explore traditional local solutions to climate change which are often overlooked. Some key elements of decolonizing climate education include[6]:

- Learn about the history of the local place and of traditional knowledge associated with it. For example, it offers rich insights about understanding ourselves as part of nature and living sustainably and in sync with and caring for the natural environment around us (including other people).
- Value cultural heritage and place-based knowledge in the exploration of solutions to environmental issues.
- Implement principles of decolonization, such as healing, empowerment, reflection, and connections to place and community when it comes to climate action discourse.

Connect learning to practical application

Your climate education lesson could start with topics of climate science, the causes and impacts of climate change, and the role of humans. This can be linked to the application of learning, by looking at climate action or climate solutions. For this, project-based learning, case-based learning, or inquiry-based learning can be adopted. That is, developing hands-on solutions to the problem, discussing real-world examples, and making real-world connections[7]. The experiences of climate educators show how such practical, applied learning can greatly boost students' understanding of the relevance of their learning (e.g. physics and chemistry can feel like abstract subjects - until applied to real-world issues that students relate to) and thereby enable connected learning and increase motivation. Below are some resources featured on the Resource Hub that can serve as a starting point of action inside and outside the classroom.

- Tools for Young Climate Activists (Voices of Youth)
- School Eco Group Resources
- Declaring a Climate Emergency at your School

Incorporate an interdisciplinary approach

To gain a deeper understanding of climate change and how it affects learners, several content areas can be combined for a more holistic view. Beyond climate

science, it is important to nurture sociological, political, and economic lenses to identify all obstacles and solutions to a complex problem like the climate crisis. The following are specific resources in the Resource Hub that particularly adopt such interdisciplinary approach:

- Understanding Food and Climate Change: An Interactive Guide
- Climate Generation Resource Library
- Manitoba Emissions, Impacts, and Solutions: Curriculum and Activities for Teachers
- Yale Macmillan Center
- Climate Change Education Across the Curricula, Across the Globe (TOP ICSU)

Use art and creativity

Finding ways to express our emotions and thoughts about climate change increases our sense of agency around the issue. Creative forms of expression, like songs, dance, poems, art, or creative writing, can allow students to engage in deep reflection and expression. Art, in particular, as a universal language, can engage learners in a topic that can otherwise feel abstract, distant, and complex. It can translate climate-related data, or in this case, climate education resources, to a more digestible form. Art can help humanize the issue. It can also expand imaginations, inspire feelings of hope, and contribute to deep emotional learning about sustainability[8]. Artswork is one of the various resources featured in the Resource Hub that promote art and creativity for climate education. You can use those resources as a springboard for creative activities like the following that give students ways of expressing themselves:

- Writing of poems, essays, or journals
- Painting, sculpture, drawing, or mural-making
- Creating stories, comic books, or a dramatic play
- Filmmaking or producing of documentaries or podcasts
- Songwriting workshops or poetry slams where students explore different styles and themes
- Leading social media campaigns

Use existing learning materials as references or models for resource development

Teachers routinely design lesson plans and instructional materials. Remember: you don't have to start from scratch—use the curated materials in the Resource Hub as a benchmark from which to design climate education resources that reflect the local context of learners and local culture (and even language). This can ensure relevance, appropriateness, and deep learning for students.