



T. Teaching Impact

Transformative and emancipatory pedagogies in education for sustainable development: The integrative experience of individual reflective notes.

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Abstract

The topic of this paper relates to pedagogical innovations mobilizing the personal level of student experience in education for sustainable development (ESD). Seeking to stimulate self-awareness and critical thinking, transformative and emancipatory pedagogies complement the repertoire of transmissive and instrumental pedagogies typically deployed in the ESD curricula of higher education institutions. A device comprising an individual reflective note (IRN) on personal consumption was deployed in an international marketing course on four groups of students at Master's level. The pedagogical feedback from this first wave of IRN writing suggests that such devices can be easily constructed and proposed in training curricula to create an integrative experience capable of articulating the contributions of the four main pedagogies of ESD (transmissive, instrumental, transformative and emancipatory).

Keywords: Education for sustainable development, conscious consumption, transformative and emancipatory pedagogy, critical-reflective stream, individual reflective notes.

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1. The problem: Consumer awareness

UNESCO (the lead agency for education for sustainable development, ESD) has high expectations of higher education institutions because of their ability to play a central role in the global transition to sustainability. In the 5th ESD report, the skills of self-awareness and critical thinking are identified as having particular importance for thinking and acting for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2018).

The teaching context of the marketing transition for sustainable development is particularly well suited to working on these two skills simultaneously. First, consumerism is a field of activity practiced by everyone, especially young people who are clearly targeted by brands for their present and future potential, whereas the other disciplines taught in management prepare students for a profession that they will most often only experience once they have entered professional life. Secondly, the exercise of self-awareness and critical thinking is a valuable learning tool for marketing students (but not exclusively) if they are to become agents of change once they are in their jobs. Finally, while the social critique of marketing is not really new, overconsumption by some (the rich and the middle class, in both mature and emerging economies) most often occurs in automatic mode (Kahneman, 2013; Fisher et al. 2017) where marketing information is often too poor, sparse, and even deceptive (by intention or omission) on the part of brands (greenwashing, asymmetry of "distributed" information between producer-merchants and consumers, to the disadvantage of the latter.)

Thus, deep, rich information providing a source of greater insight is rarely accessible without efforts to seek it out, and consumption has become a largely abstract phenomenon despite (or rather because of?) its ubiquity as a societal pillar of the Anthropocene ("Ask the fish what water is, and he won't know how to answer"). The development of mindfulness, and the consciousness that comes with it (James, 1880), are individual prerequisites for dealing with mindless consumption (Fisher et al, 2017). It is all the more necessary as screen culture systematically eats away attention (Brown, 2017). A significant amount of reflective mindfulness work must therefore pre-exist any transformation in consumption behavior (Chatzisarantis and Hagger, 2007).

2. How? The critical-reflective stream

The question of what pedagogy to deploy to raise awareness of consumption is really essential given the urgency and complexity of the combined challenges posed to all

stakeholders by the disorganization of the Earth system as a whole: climate change, destruction of biodiversity and explosive social inequalities created by the neo-liberal economic system where the externalization of the costs borne by the environment and society blinds consumers to the real costs of their consumption. In an unexpected (and undoubtedly un hoped-for) way, the Covid19 crisis has made the situation conducive to reflection by everyone on the impacts of consumption patterns when these have been interrupted (provoking "the presence of absence"), as well as on the knowledge necessary for the education of the future (Morin, 2020; Latour, 2021).

In higher education management institutions, the first two waves of ESD over the past 15 years or so have led professors to prioritize the necessary exposure to the "foundations" of sustainable development (particularly the circular economy paradigm) through pedagogies with which these professors are naturally (and culturally) familiar (Papenfuss *et al.* 2019): transmissive (knowledge is assumed to be known by professors and will be learned by students) and also instrumental (knowledge is targeted to equip students with skills for the future of their profession via their majors).

Papenfuss *et al.* (2019) observe the emergence of the third pedagogical wave, where this initial repertoire should be complemented by pedagogies that directly address students' transformation or emancipation by exploring how they experience the world (subjectivity, contextuality) and the relationship to power (who knows what?). These pedagogies can stimulate transformation and emancipate students so that they are in the position of innovators capable of changing existing systems. Among the main streams of transformative learning theory, here we are situated in the critical-reflexive stream (Mezirov, 1978) which develops the concept of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives or general frames of reference, worldviews or personal paradigms composed of a series of meaning schemes. The critical-reflective approach is based on experiential learning where one seeks not only to have an experience, but to have one whose purpose is to "transcend what is 'given', 'ordinary' and often a routine of action to create new dynamics and different ways of seeing and doing" (Wals and Blewitt, 2010, p. 66).

The new experience elicited by writing an IRN must fit the "active perspective" of the student, who can either reject the experience (not doing it if it is optional, or being less engaged if it is mandatory) or engage in transformation. Mapping one's consumption in a factual and rigorous way inevitably leads to "moving" the lines, at least cognitively, of the initial active perspective (updating new factual knowledge). The exercise also allows for an experience of awareness that is conducive to the emergence of the problem of congruence between self-perception and action: whatever cognitive and emotional reactions are expressed, good or bad, they can only broaden the student's perspective on his or her consumption as a result of this new insight ("it will not be possible to say that we did not know").

In the field of education for sustainable consumption, while experiential training in product life cycle assessment has been shown to be effective (in declarative before-and-after measures) in changing students' attitudes, for example using serious games (e.g. Bascoul *et al.*, 2013), the IRN approach shifts the analysis towards oneself by contextualizing the product life cycle analysis in a personal setting to allow a further updating of students' sense-making schemes about their individual consumption with respect to sustainable development.

3. The IRN pedagogical design put in place

The setup is as follows: the IRN is a post-purchase evaluation activity, asking students to conduct an in-depth and synthetic research for themselves: a) on the life cycle of a product they recently purchased for themselves (in one of 3 categories: textile/fashion, food and

beverages, or electronics) and b) to reflect on the different impacts (carbon, water, slavery, ecological) of their own consumption style on the planet and society.

Since the beginning of the Covid19 crisis in Europe (Spring 2020), 4-page IRNs on the transition of consumption towards more sustainability have been successively written by 120 international master's students from 3 comparable programs. The work done in the IRN was valued in two ways: either as a component of the individual part of the course (25% of the total), or as an optional activity that could earn a bonus in the exam (between 0.5 points and 2 points).

The activity opens with simple, directive instructions: "We want to develop awareness of our own individual impact on the transition to environmental and social sustainability resulting from our lifestyle and especially our consumption. This learning is seen as a condition for unlearning and then imagining a more sustainability-oriented consumption style". The evaluation grid applied to the IRN is provided to the students and has been built on five educational themes, each described by four dimensions evaluated on a 3-level point scale for a possible total between 0 and 40 points (dimension not addressed - zero points; half addressed - 1 point; fully addressed - 2 points). The five themes are: (1) description of facts, (2) interpretation of facts, (3) emotions and feelings, (4) future actions, and (5) overall presentation of the note.

4. Feedback from IRN from the perspective of ESD pedagogies

The pedagogical feedback from this first experience of IRNs, which is original for the student as well as for the teacher, can be done from this twofold point of view. We present here the feedback from the pedagogical point of view on the contribution of IRNs to ESD. Thus, echoing the Papenfuss *et al.* (2019) typology, IRNs are activities that can be easily constructed and integrated into a variety of curricula to create an integrative learning experience (see Table 1), i.e., one that is able to articulate the contributions of the four main pedagogies of ESD (transmissive, instrumental, transformative, and emancipatory).

Overall, the student is led on a (unconscious) journey, simultaneously following two paths (quadrants 1->2->3, and quadrants 1->3->4) where the experience starts from quadrant 1 (which is the basis of everything, learning what one needs to know). In the first path, the experience of uncovering facts evolves to quadrant 2 (into a rational, critical and rigorous approach to gathering and interpreting facts, complemented by contextualization in one's personal life), and then to quadrant 4 (when the student is able to provide more or less in-depth feedback resulting from awareness of his or her knowledge gaps and emotions). In the second path, the experience still starts from quadrant 1, then moves to quadrant 3 (reflexivity by comparison to others) to touch quadrant 4 again.

Table 1: Individual reflective notes and their integrative pedagogical capacities

PEDAGOGIES	INSTRUMENTAL Individuality, structure, pre-determined outcomes	EMANCIPATORY Collaboration, agency and self-actualisation
TRANSMISSIVE Knowing: content focus	1 What should we learn? The IRN requires the analysis of the life cycle of the product purchased for myself and thus owned, the calculation of the various individual footprints and their comparison with standards	2 What can we learn? The IRN stimulates self-directed inquiry, seeks to learn from the existence of facts, learners become self-taught
TRANSFORMATIVE Being: process focus	3 How might I see the world? The IRN requires reflexivity, and is also prescriptive by seeking comparisons that allow the student to situate his or her context in relation to others (notably national)	4 What can we become? The IRN engages students in commenting on the results of their research on the life cycle of a material possession and its ecological and social footprints. It allows for the expression of emotions, both negative and positive, and engages in the need to take action to reduce dissonance

Source: adapted from Papenfuss *et al.* (2019), p. 8.

5. Extensions and progression pathways

The pedagogical device described above is the subject of an ongoing research project that lies at the crossroads of two key areas of sustainability research: (a) Sustainable Consumption Research (SCR), which seeks, among other things, to know how to get consumers to adopt more sustainable behavior (White *et al.*, 2019; Fisher *et al.*, 2017), which implies making consumers who have a particular need for information eco-literate (Laroche *et al.*, 2001); and b) Education for sustainable development (ESD) where, despite the transmissive and instrumental pedagogies dynamically implemented over the last 15 years, it is not certain that behavioral change (e.g., in consumption) will occur in light of the increasingly alarming indicators of the unchecked and unconscious use of the earth's resources for consumption of products, throughout their life cycle.

This first study (Prime and Verzat, 2021) focuses on whether and how writing this IRN provides students with a meaningful experience of awareness of the social and environmental impacts created by their consumption, due to the cognitive and emotional reactions that emerge from the objectified assessment of their lifestyle. Two "input" variables could be selected (the absence or presence of previous, more or less recent, and convincingly displayed pro-ecological values and habits; the perception of footprint values as being above or below average depending on the chosen points of comparison), which influence: the intensity and nature (cognitive, moral, resonance shock) of their reaction, and the type of action that results (ranging from more or less hypothetical general lessons, to

more or less precise and planned declarations of behavioral changes, and to broader professional and/or civic orientations).

A second phase of the research will be developed according to a longitudinal approach (Albinsson et al., 2020) aiming to evaluate the IRN learning activity from the point of view of its effects on actual changes in consumption behaviors, serving to align pre-existing pro-environmental and pro-social attitudes-values with more sustainable consumption behaviors (reflection on loyalty towards the studied brand according to its sustainable performance identified in the IRN, and on the reduction of personal footprints). Before-and-after measures can be used, and they can be quantitative (questionnaires) and/or qualitative (interviews). The axis of emancipation strongly underlying the problems of overconsumption could also be the subject of an in-depth analysis, revealing that the transition to a more sustainable consumption implies the (difficult) simultaneous exercise of several freedoms: economic (desire to pay for an offer with enlarged environmental and social value), political (in a market economy, consumers can "vote with their feet or their clicks"), ethical (choosing an ethics where one fundamentally understands the principle of interdependence) and finally liberation (realization of the illusions of overconsumption).

Finally, this work, on a combination of pedagogical approaches for an integrative ESD experience, invites practitioners to imagine the use of fourth-wave pedagogical methods or contemplative pedagogies: "We crave material pleasures, which drives us to consume. We assert our right to the continued availability of non-local goods, which leads to the relocation of food systems, carbon pollution, and social exploitation. In contrast, empathy, compassion, cooperation, and creativity, all of which are fruits of contemplative practices, can lead to more just and effective forms of social and ecological responsibility ("stewardship"), and are considered competencies of sustainability. For this reason, many scholars consider contemplative practice to be an essential component of the pursuit of a sustainable future" (Papenfuss et al., 2019, p.12).

Be they meditative, creative, regenerative or based on the mobilization of the body, the learning principles of contemplative pedagogies are close to transformative and emancipatory approaches because of the focus placed on taking care of the person, who learns from his or her subjective realities and from his or her rediscovered relationships with the self, others, the rest of the living world and even the greater than oneself. They are also able to revive resonance with the world (Rosa, 2018) and allow one to engage oneself in an "ethic of consideration" (Pelluchon, 2018), that all-encompassing attitude on which we can rely to become more sober and to take pleasure in doing good, instead of being constantly torn between happiness and duty.

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