



Educators Toolkit

ACTION-ORIENTED PEDAGOGIES

for

Education for Sustainable Development

AOP for ESD





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This toolkit has been developed with support from the Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research (KAKENHI) program and the Ministry of the Environment of Japan.

“Students do amazing projects, but they rarely leave the classroom.”

“There’s no time to teach sustainability with everything else I have to cover.”

“My students just don’t seem to care about climate change.”

Educators often face challenges and run out of ideas when teaching sustainability or fostering environmental awareness. By integrating action-oriented pedagogies, they can empower learners to develop empathy and actively participate in creating positive change within their classrooms, schools, communities, and beyond.

“I feel like I’m working alone—there’s no one to collaborate with on this.”

“Teach students to feel for the planet, not just lecture about it.”

“I want to do more hands-on projects, but I don’t know where to start.”

This Toolkit is for you!

This toolkit is for educators like you who want to create more **inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable learning experiences**.

Whether you're designing lessons for your classroom, school, or broader community, this resource offers practical guidance and inspiration. We've laid out a step-by-step process to help you rethink your teaching approach, deepen student engagement, and foster real-world impact.

At the heart of this toolkit are **7 key components of Action-Oriented Pedagogies for Education for Sustainable Development (AOP for ESD)**:

	Problem-Based & Real-World Issues		Community Engagement
	Collaboration		Interdisciplinarity
	Learner Participation		Empathy
	Regional & Cultural Relevance		

In this toolkit, you'll find:

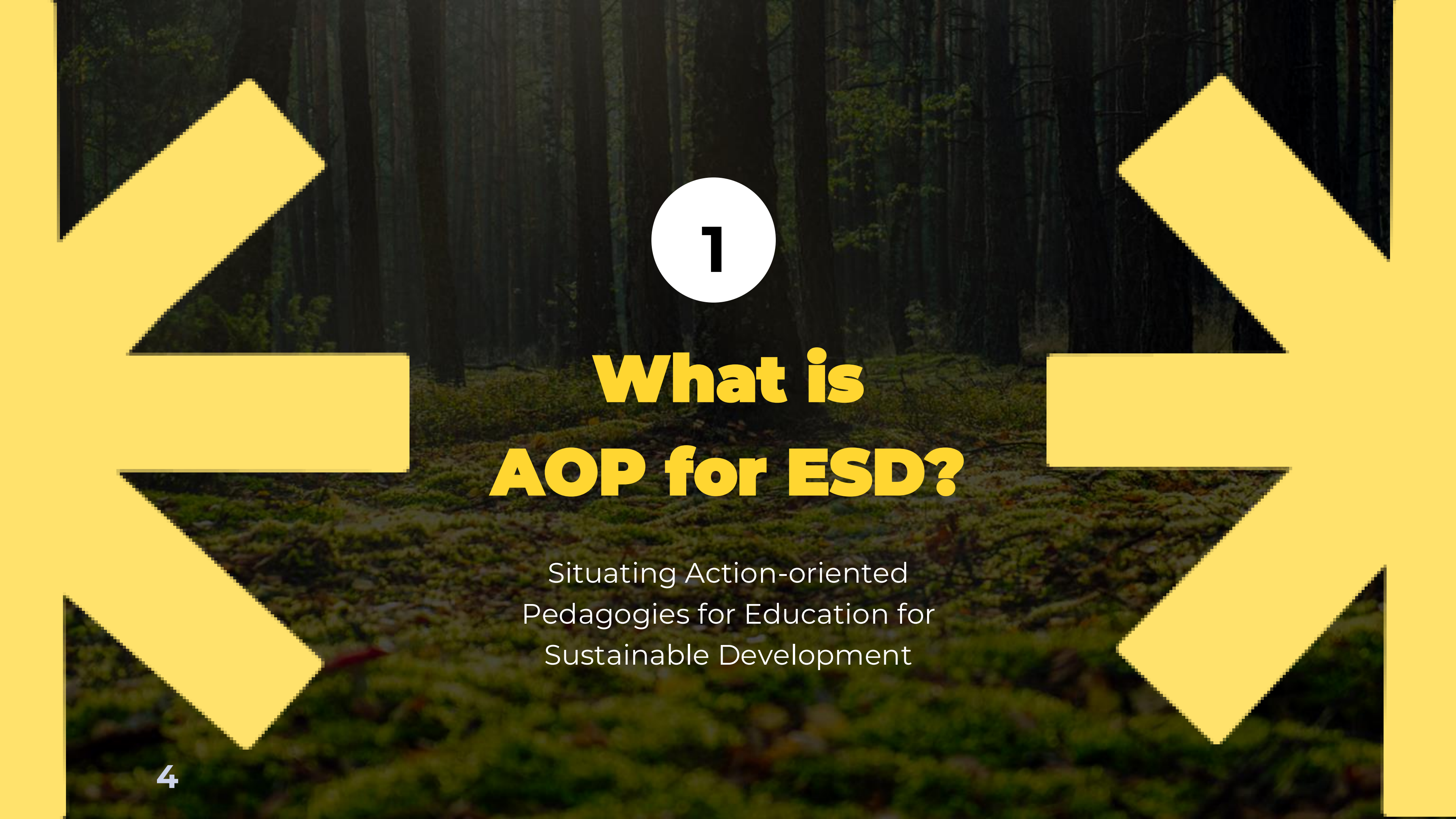
- A clear framework to guide your lesson planning
- Steps to design action-oriented activities
- Templates and idea cards to help generate creative, context-driven solutions

Let's co-create learning experiences that inspire action, foster empathy, and build a more sustainable world!



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1

What is AOP for ESD?

Situating Action-oriented
Pedagogies for Education for
Sustainable Development

Let's define AOP for ESD...



Action-Oriented Pedagogies for Education for Sustainable Development (AOP for ESD) are teaching approaches that put learners at the center of learning. Instead of just learning facts, learners **explore real problems in their communities, work with others, and take meaningful action.** AOP for ESD focuses not only on knowledge, but also on building important skills like empathy, teamwork, and problem-solving. It includes **seven key components**: Problem-Based & Real-World Issues, Community Engagement, Learner Participation, Collaboration, Interdisciplinarity, Empathy, and Regional & Cultural Relevance.

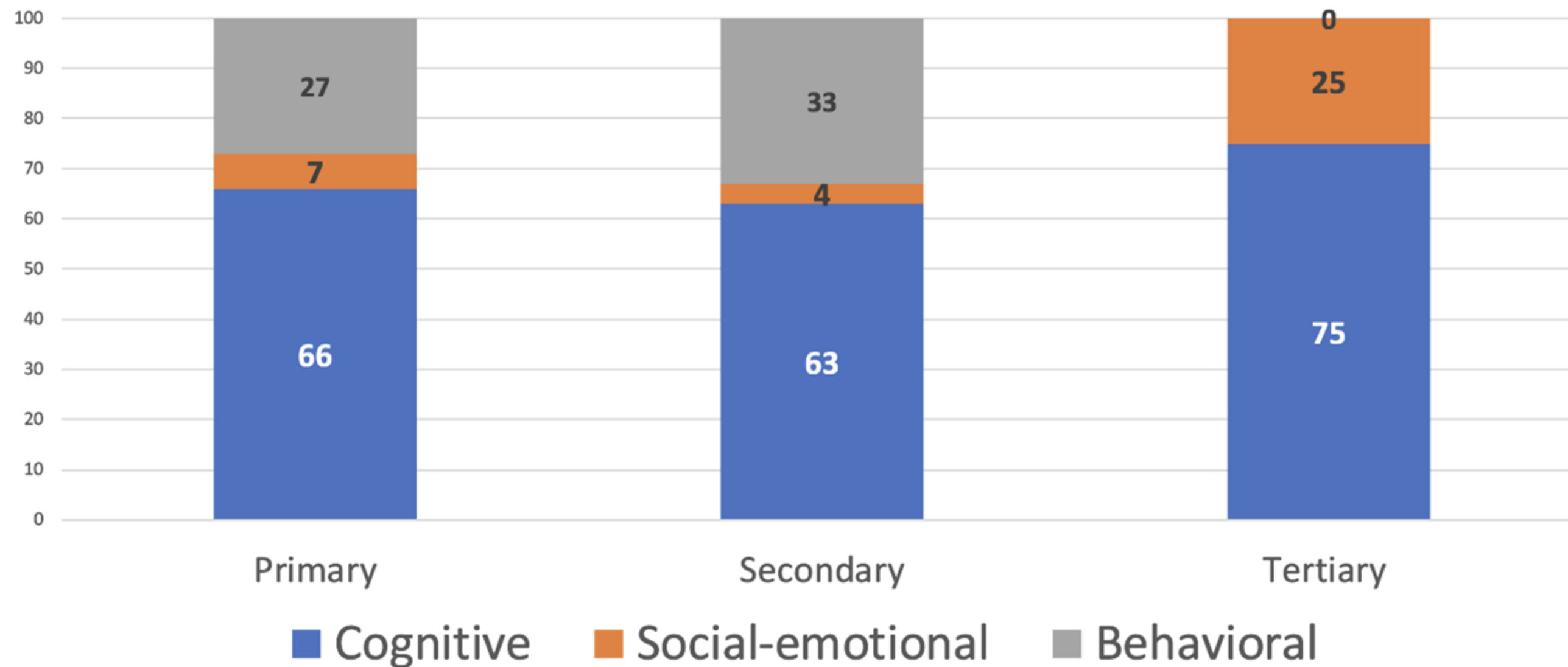


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02

Why AOP for ESD?

Why do we need to incorporate
AOP for ESD in our teaching and
learning?



Overemphasis on cognitive learning in climate change education!

Adopted from UNESCO. 2019. Country progress on Climate Change Education, Training and Public Awareness

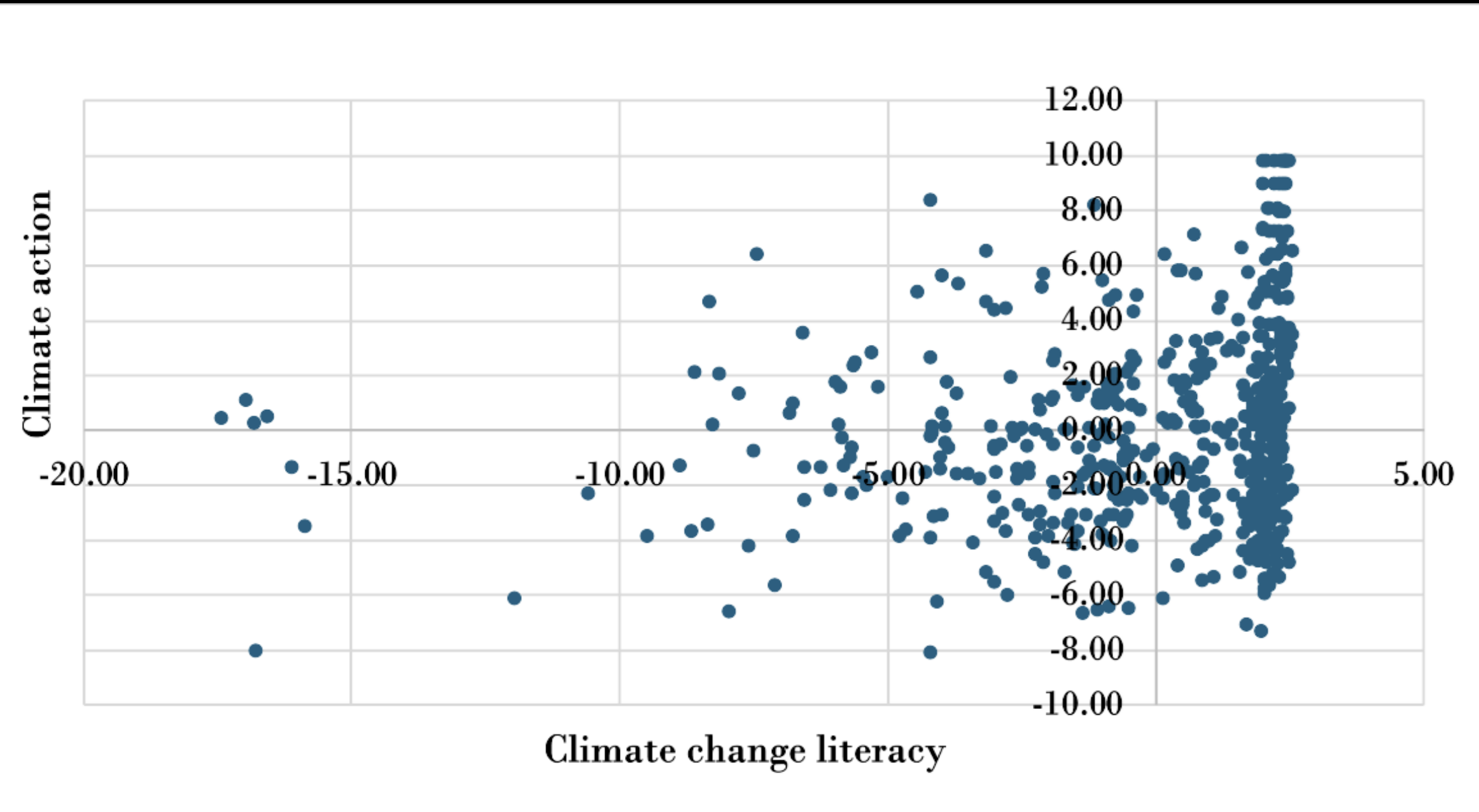
Too often, climate change and sustainability education focuses heavily on definitions, facts, and frameworks—"What is climate change?" or "What are the SDGs?" While cognitive knowledge is important, it's not enough. Research shows that to cultivate environmental identity and long-term commitment to sustainability, learners must do more than memorize—they must feel, act, and experience. Most traditional approaches neglect the social-emotional and behavioral dimensions of learning. This leads to passive understanding, not active participation.

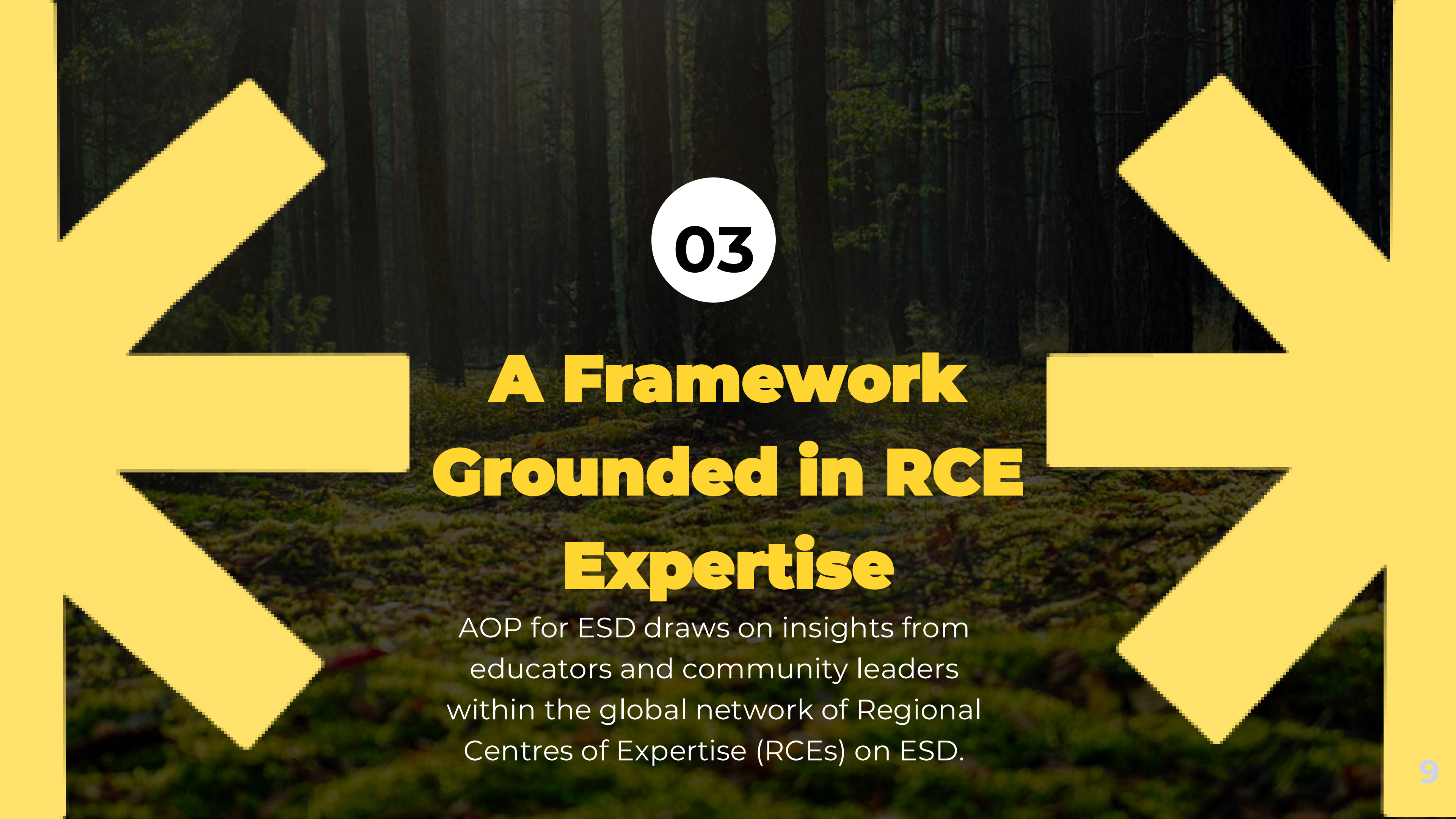
Climate change literacy vs. Climate actions

Sato & Park, 2024. Does Climate Awareness Lead to Climate Action? A Study on Adults in Malawi. WIMAYA 5(1).

Research shows that simply increasing climate knowledge and awareness does not lead to meaningful pro-environmental behavior.

Without opportunities to engage emotionally and act meaningfully, learners may understand the issues but feel powerless to make changes or disconnected from solutions.



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03

A Framework Grounded in RCE Expertise

AOP for ESD draws on insights from educators and community leaders within the global network of Regional Centres of Expertise (RCEs) on ESD.

(as of May 2024)

ESD for 2030

2025: **200** RCEs

Global Action Programme on ESD

2015: 146 RCEs

2019: 169 RCEs

UN Decade of ESD

2005: **7** RCEs

2014: 135 RCEs



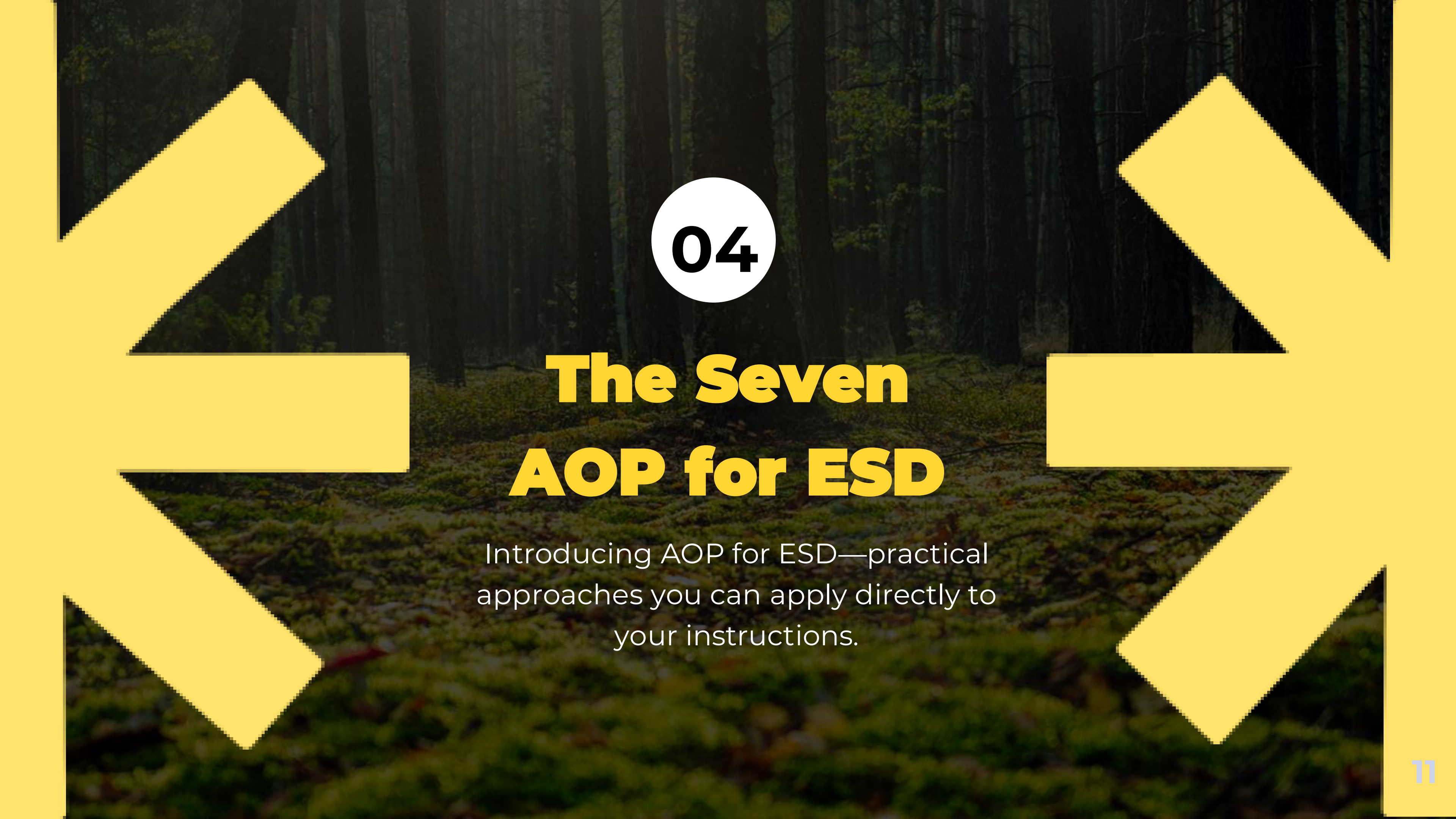
Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development



The RCE Network

The seven components of AOP for ESD were developed from insights gathered through focus group interviews with 27 RCE members across five continents.

RCEs, or Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development, are multi-stakeholder networks recognized by the **United Nations University**. Each RCE brings together educators, local governments, civil society, youth groups, and businesses within a specific region to collaborate on sustainability education. Since 2005, RCEs have worked to localize the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through community-based, lifelong learning—making them living laboratories for action-oriented education.

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04

The Seven AOP for ESD

Introducing AOP for ESD—practical approaches you can apply directly to your instructions.

7 AOP for ESD components



Problem-Based & Real-World Issues

Root learning in authentic, local, or global challenges.



Community Engagement

Connect learners with the people and places around them.



Learner Participation

Empower learners to take ownership of their learning journey.



Collaboration

Encourage teamwork and shared problem-solving.



Interdisciplinarity

Blend knowledge from multiple subjects to address complex issues.



Empathy

Help learners understand and care about others, including the environment.



Regional & Cultural Relevance

Ground learning in local identities, values, and ways of knowing.

*AOP for ESD begins the moment you as educator choose to embrace it!
You're not just a teacher—you're a facilitator and a co-creator.
Whether you're in a classroom, a library, a community space, or online,
your role is to support learners as they tackle real-world problems—by
connecting with peers, engaging with the community, and taking part in
meaningful, action-driven learning.*

Educator... yes, YOU!

AOP for ESD



Start with real problems... Focus your lesson on real-world issues because sustainability challenges are real and happening now. When students tackle actual problems, their learning becomes more relevant to them. ↗

Educator... YOU!

AOP for ESD

Problem-based and Real-world Issues



Educator... YOU!

AOP for ESD

Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Community
Engagement



Community members are your partners!

*They bring useful ideas, local knowledge,
and support that help make learning more
meaningful. By involving them, your
learners can design solutions that truly fit
the needs and culture of the community.*





Educator... YOU!

AOP for ESD



Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Community
Engagement

Learner
Participation

Learners take the lead!

*They work together to find
and solve real problems in
their communities. When
students are actively involved,
learning becomes more
meaningful and connected to
their lives.*





Educator... YOU!

AOP for ESD



Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Community
Engagement

Learner
Participation

Collaboration

Learning is better together!
Collaboration means students
work in groups, share ideas, and
learn from one another.





Educator... YOU!

AOP for ESD



Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Community
Engagement

Learner
Participation

Collaboration

Interdisciplinarity

Sustainability isn't one subject, it's many!

Design lessons that let learners connect ideas from a wide range of disciplines or collaborate with people from diverse perspectives. This approach helps them build a deeper, more holistic understanding of complex sustainability challenges.



Educator... YOU!

AOP for ESD



Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Community
Engagement

Learner
Participation

Collaboration

Interdisciplinarity

Empathy



When you design class activities that allow learners to empathize, they begin to understand and share the feelings of people / animals / the environment affected by real-world problems. This emotional connection encourages learners to see issues from multiple perspectives and develop more thoughtful solutions.





Educator... YOU!

AOP for ESD



Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Community
Engagement

Learner
Participation

Collaboration

Interdisciplinarity

Empathy

Regional
and Cultural
Relevance

*Look for regional and cultural
relevance, or better yet, co-
create with the community!*

*Design lessons that connect to
learners' own lives, cultures,
and communities to make
learning more meaningful and
grounded in real experiences.*



05

Example of an AOP for ESD lesson

We look into Chulalongkorn University and Banthatthong Community in how they applied AOP for ESD in their lessons.



Designing Liquid Waste Disposal Filter for Street Food Vendors

Chulalongkorn University and Banthatthong Community
Bangkok, Thailand

About the class

This undergraduate class at Chulalongkorn University explored the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as its central theme, examining key dimensions of sustainability from both local and global perspectives. Over 16 weeks (3 hours per week), students engaged in critical discussions, collaborative group work, and hands-on, project-based learning. They investigated real-world social and environmental challenges, designed innovative solutions, and developed tangible interventions to promote sustainable change.

In this example, the targeted learners are Thai undergraduate students who may not have prior knowledge of sustainability, but are curious, open-minded, and eager to explore real-world issues.

Targeted Learners

Thai undergraduate students who are curious about sustainability and want to make a real-world impact.



Here are the Learning Objectives from this class...

Learning Objectives

01

Identify environmental or social challenges within the university's area.

02

Engage with local stakeholders or community members to understand diverse perspectives and root causes of the issue.

03

Design and propose a solution that addresses environmental or social challenges.

Topic /Real-world Problems: **Food Waste and Urban Waste Management in Banthatthong**



Located just a 5-minute walk from Chulalongkorn University, Banthatthong is one of Bangkok's busiest street food destinations. Learners identified a key challenge in the area: the poor management of liquid waste, which causes clogged drains and unpleasant odors due to a lack of accessible, user-friendly disposal systems.

This real-world issue allows learners to explore themes of food waste, overconsumption, and urban waste management through investigation and community-based problem solving.

This guiding question supports the educators in facilitating meaningful learning experiences for students in collaboration with members of the Banthatthong community.

How might we engage Thai undergraduate students on food waste and urban waste management in Banthatthong so they can explore local sustainability challenges, collaborate with community members, and co-create meaningful solutions.

In the Thailand example, the instructor decided to use: Group Projects, Community Interviews and Fieldwork, Hands-on Building and Prototyping, and Co-Design with Community Members as her AOP for ESD Instructional Activities

AOP for ESD Instructional Activities



Group Project

Learners work in teams to investigate problems, design solutions, and co-create final interventions to foster collaboration.



Community Interviews and Fieldwork

Learners conduct interviews and on-site observations with street food vendors to build empathy, gather insights, and ground their solutions in real-world problems.



Hands-on Building and Prototyping

Learners engage in iterative design: sketching, constructing, testing, and refining their ideas using accessible materials

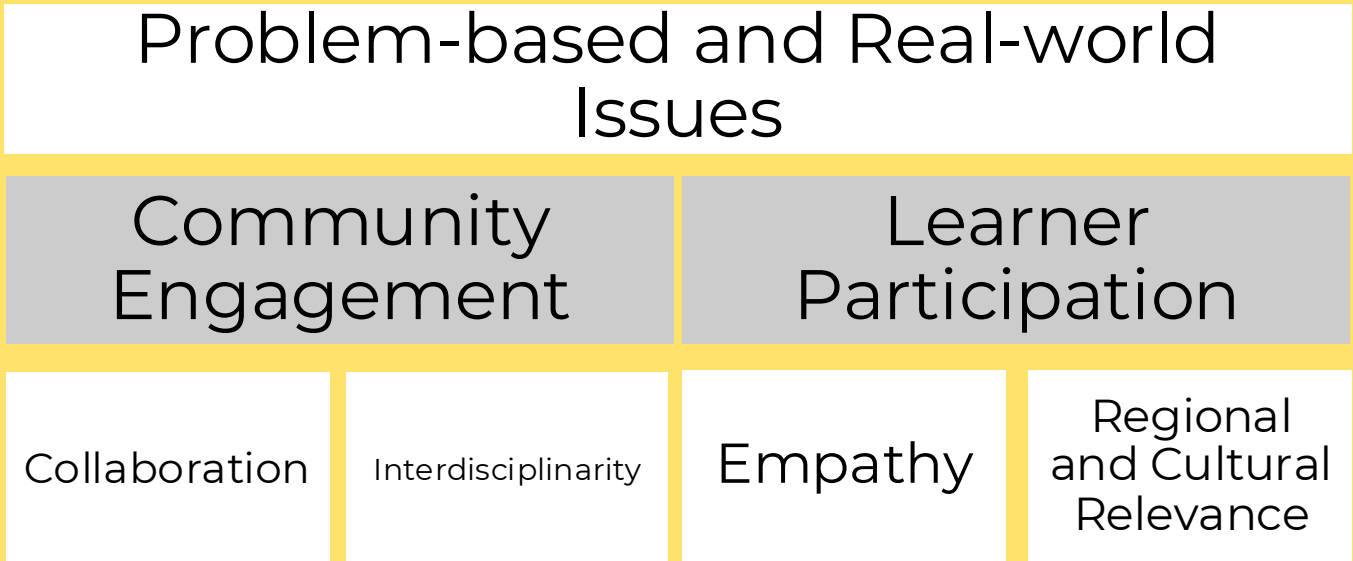


Co-Design with community members

Learners collaborate with local vendors to ensure their designs are culturally relevant and responsive to actual community needs.

Co-designing solution with community

Street food is more than just a meal—it's a reflection of Thai culture, identity, and daily life—making Banthatthong an ideal setting for problem-based learning. In this lesson, learners collaborate directly with local food vendors to co-design a waste disposal tool that is simple, affordable, and culturally appropriate. The process involves active learner participation and collaboration—from initial problem exploration to sketching, prototyping, testing, and refining solutions based on real feedback from the community. This hands-on, community-based approach strengthens empathy, promotes regional and cultural relevance, and fosters collaborative problem-solving, core to AOP for ESD.



Sketch

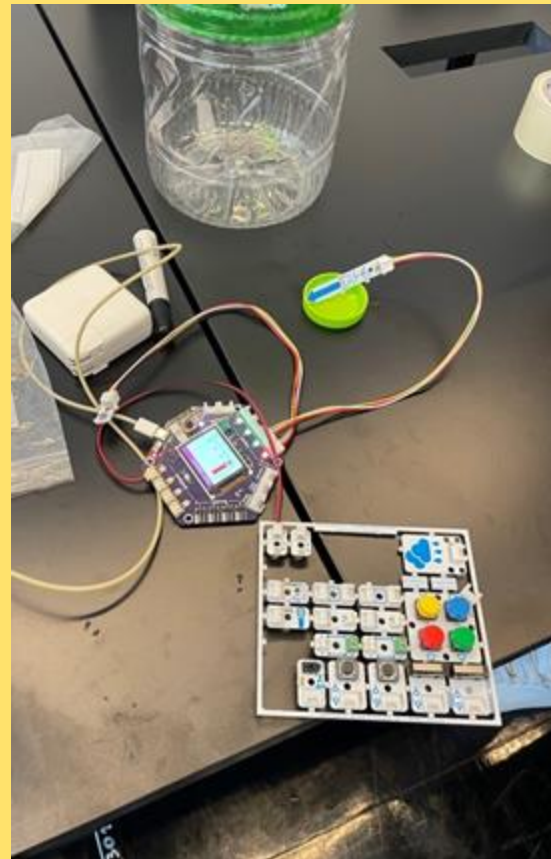
Prototype

Final



Collaborate with peers from diverse interdisciplinary knowledge and backgrounds.

Big part of this AOP for ESD learning process is for students to collaborate. To make the project successful, they combine their expertise from various backgrounds, such as design and programming, to develop solutions for the liquid waste disposal problem.



Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Community Engagement

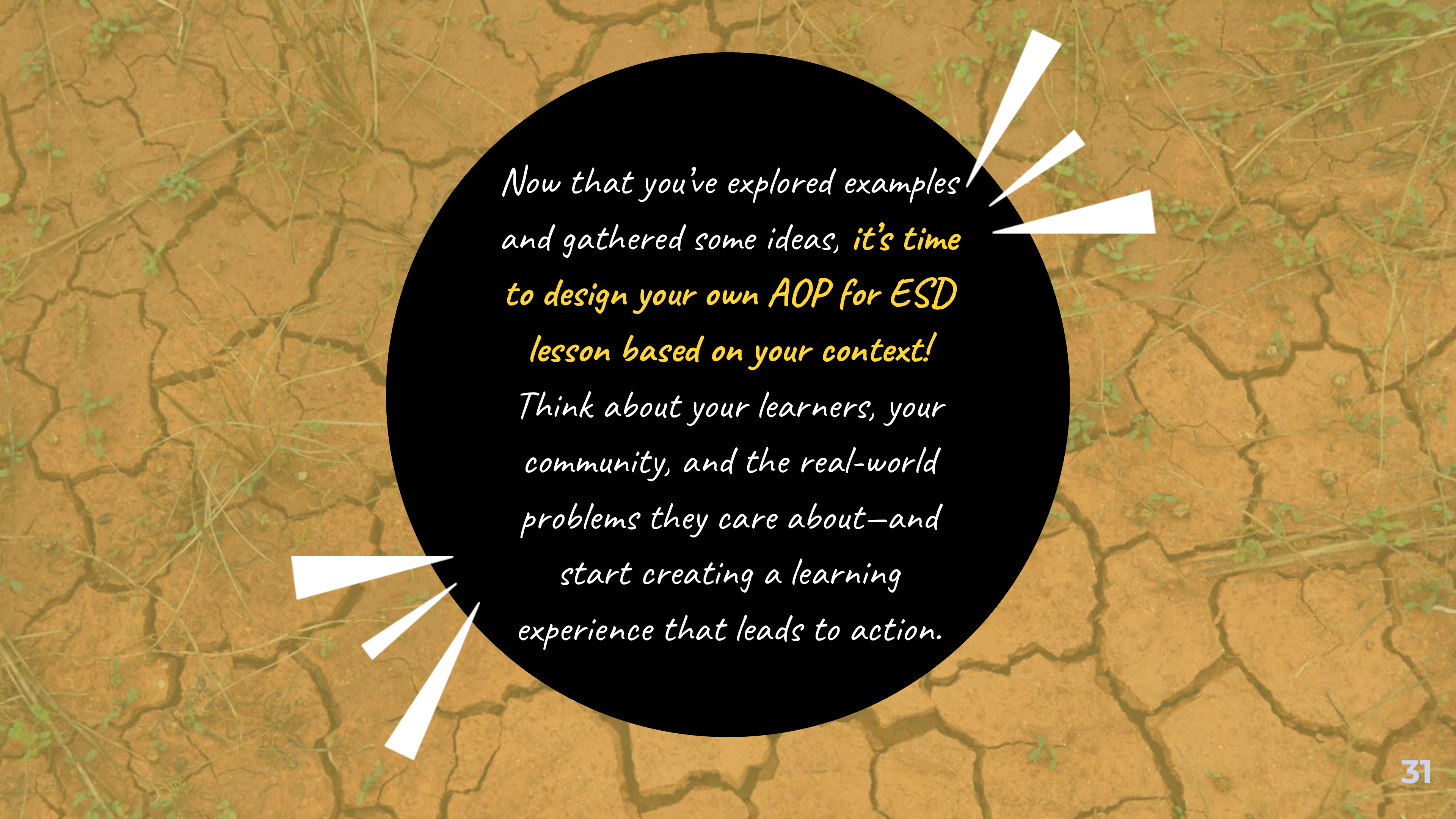
Learner Participation

Collaboration

Interdisciplinarity

Empathy

Regional and Cultural Relevance



*Now that you've explored examples
and gathered some ideas, **it's time
to design your own AOP for ESD
lesson based on your context!***

*Think about your learners, your
community, and the real-world
problems they care about—and
start creating a learning
experience that leads to action.*

06

Designing your AOP for ESD lesson

Your turn to think about your
AOP for ESD instructions

To begin, you can **download this AOP for ESD lesson plan** to create your own lesson.

It’s even better if you work together with your colleagues!

Noted that each educator should use one planning sheet to design their own AOP for ESD lesson.

This will help you focus your ideas clearly—and make it easy to share and discuss your plan with others later.

Ready to get started? Let’s design for action!



UNU
IAS

AOP

lesson plan

ESD

Targeted Learners:
Who are you teaching? Use nouns.

Topic/Real-World Problem:
What is the focus of your lesson, and how does it connect to a real-world issue? Use nouns
• Example: "Improving food waste sorting at the campus cafeteria."

Learning Objective/s:
What should students learn or achieve by the end of this lesson? Use Verbs
• Example: "Identify three causes of water pollution and propose one solution."

How Might We? Statement
Fill in the blanks based on your Targeted Learners, Topic/ Real-world Problem, and Learning objective(s).

How might we engage _____
Targeted learner(s)

on _____
Topic(s)/Real-World Problem(s)

so they can _____
Learning Objective(s) _____?

AOP for ESD Instructional Activities
Think about the activities your learners will engage in. Try to incorporate as many of the 7 AOP for ESD components as you can. Once you have completed your brainstorming, review the AOP Idea Cards to identify any activities you might apply or adapt to enhance your lesson.

Problem-Based & Real-World Issues

Learner Participation

Community Engagement

Collaboration

Interdisciplinarity

Empathy

Regional and Cultural Relevance

Reflection Checklist
Read through all the AOP for ESD Reflection Checklist questions. Reflect and set clear intentions for how you plan to facilitate your lesson. Note how you might enhance or more effectively address specific areas of your lesson plan.

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Who Are Your Learners?

Before designing your lesson, start by thinking about who your learners are.

In this section, briefly describe **the group of learners you're designing for**. Knowing your learners helps you plan activities that are relevant, engaging, and appropriate.

Let's think about:

- Age group or education level (e.g., elementary, high school, university, adult learners)
- Background knowledge or experience (e.g., beginners, mixed-level, prior exposure to sustainability topics)
- Specific needs or interests (e.g., climate action, community engagement, creative thinking)

Targeted Learners

Targeted Learners:
Who are you teaching? Use nouns.

How to choose Topic/ Real-world Problems?

Make sure your topic is specific and actionable. A broad issue like climate change is important—but it's often too big and overwhelming for learners to tackle in a short lesson. Instead, narrow it down to something learners can see, explore, and act on in their own community.

For example:

- Electronic waste disposal on campus
- Food waste at a local market
- Single-use plastics in school cafeterias
- Water use in the dormitory showers

Choosing a local, real-life issue helps learners stay motivated and see the impact of their actions.

Topic/ Real-world Problems?

Topic/Real-World Problem:

What is the focus of your lesson, and how does it connect to a real-world issue? Use nouns

- Example: "Addressing waste management in urban areas."



How to choose Topic / Real-world problems?

✗	Climate change	✓	Heat reduction strategies for school buildings in Jakarta
✗	Waste management	✓	Improving food waste sorting at the campus cafeteria
✗	Sustainable consumption	✓	Reducing single-use plastics at local food fair
✗	Water pollution	✓	Tracking detergent use in dorm laundry and its effects on drainage
✗	Air pollution	✓	Measuring and addressing traffic-related emissions near campus
✗	Food systems	✓	Promoting plant-based meal options in the university canteen
✗	Deforestation	✓	Advocating for green space preservation at community library

Here are some examples of how to narrow down a topic or real-world problem! Breaking down broad issues into specific, actionable challenges makes it easier for learners to engage meaningfully and design practical solutions.



Setting your Learning Objectives

What should your learners **know, feel, or be able to do** by the end of the lesson?

Learning Objective/s:

What should students learn or achieve by the end of this lesson? Use Verbs

- Example: "Identify three causes of water pollution and propose one solution."

Use **action verbs** (like explore, analyze, design, reflect, collaborate) to clearly state your goals. Learning objectives help you stay focused and ensure your activities lead to meaningful outcomes.

Tip: Keep it simple and aligned with your learners' level and the real-world problem you've chosen.

Now think about the learning objectives—what do you want your learners to get out of your lesson?

“How might we?” Statement

Once you’ve identified your **targeted learners**, **topic/real-world problem**, and **learning objectives**, you’re ready to craft a **“How Might We?” (HMW) statement**. A HMW statement is a tool to help you **consolidate your thoughts** and frame your challenge in a way that’s open, actionable, and learner-centered.

It guides your AOP for ESD lesson planning by focusing on possibility rather than limitation, encouraging creative thinking, collaboration, and real-world solutions.

Think of it as the starting point for designing a meaningful and engaging learning experience.

*This question helps
frame the real-world
problems in a way that’s
open, actionable, and
learner-centered!*

How Might We? Statement	
How might we engage _____	Targeted learner(s)
on _____	Topic(s)/Real-World Problem(s)
so they can _____	
_____	Learning Objective(s)
	?

“How might we?” Statement

Remember the **Banthatthong street food vendor** example? Here's how the example case HMW statement came together. Use this **simple structure to create your own HMW statement**. Just fill in the blanks based on your targeted learners, real-world problem, and learning objectives.

How Might We? Statement

How might we engage Thai undergraduate students
Targeted learner(s)

on food waste and urban waste management in Banthatthong
Topic(s)/Real-World Problem(s)

so they can explore local sustainability challenges, collaborate with community members, and

co-create meaningful solutions ?
Learning Objective(s)

Now, it's **your turn** to write your How Might We? Statement

How Might We? Statement

How might we engage _____

Targeted learner(s)

on _____

Topic(s)/Real-World Problem(s)

so they can _____

_____?

Learning Objective(s)

Think about how students will explore the problem, engage with others, and take action.

Let's Brainstorm!

Using your How Might We statement, it's time to start brainstorming how you might **design instructional activities** for your learners and bring your lesson to life. Use the 7 AOP for ESD components as your guide.

Think big, think bold—come up with as many ideas as you can! You don't need to be perfect at this stage—just explore what's possible for your context

Let's think of AOP for ESD teaching methods that match your learners, your context, and the kind of learning you want to create!

AOP for ESD Instructional Activities

Think about the activities your learners will engage in. Try to incorporate as many of the 7 AOP for ESD components as you can. Once you have completed your brainstorming, review the AOP Ideas Card to identify any strategies you might apply or adapt to enhance your lesson plan.

Problem-Based & Real-World Issues

Learner Participation

Community Engagement

Collaboration

Interdisciplinarity

Empathy

Regional and Cultural Relevance



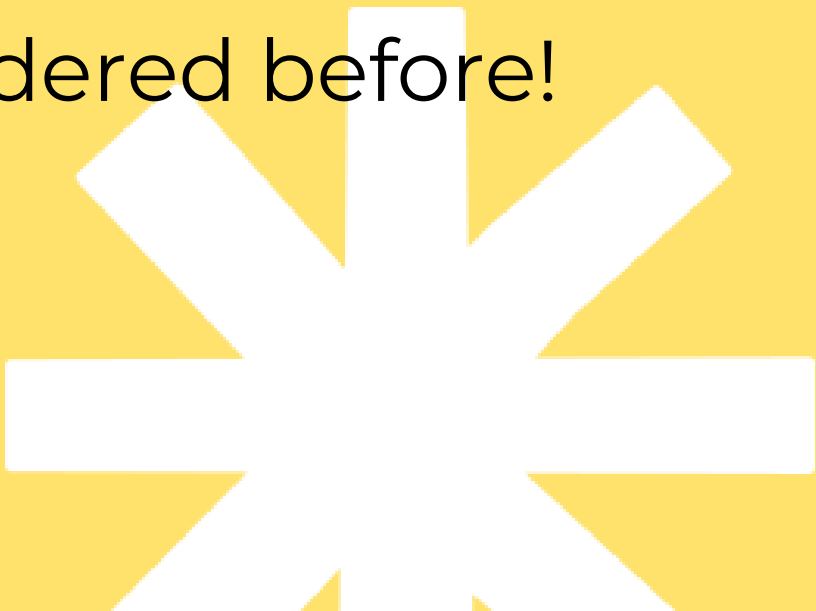
Pro Tip: Turn on your favorite song while you brainstorm! Let the music set the mood—and challenge yourself to come up with as many ideas as you can before the song ends. It's a fun way to spark creativity and keep the energy flowing!



Once you've finished brainstorming, take a look at the **AOP for ESD Idea Cards** to see if you can apply or adapt any of the suggestions to strengthen your lesson. Jot down any new ideas you discover in the boxes provided.

Working on AOP for ESD with colleagues?

That's even better! **Explore the Idea Cards together, have a conversation, share your thoughts, and offer feedback to one another.** Collaboration often sparks new perspectives and more creative lesson ideas—you might uncover insights you hadn't considered before!



Keep in mind that not all Idea Cards will fit your specific context—and that's okay. You are the expert in your learning environment, and you know your students best.

The **AOP for ESD Ideas Cards** are designed to inspire you with practical instructional activities that bring the seven AOP for ESD components to life in your classroom. Use them alongside your lesson plan to **spark ideas, adapt strategies, and design engaging, action-oriented learning experiences.**

Use the cards as inspiration, not instruction. Often, they'll spark new ideas of your own that go beyond what's on the cards!

Problem-Based & Real-World Issues

Idea Cards

Problem-based & Real-world Issues



COMMUNITY SCAVENGER HUNT

Learners observe their surroundings to identify sustainability issues (e.g., waste management, energy use, or water scarcity) and document their findings with photos or notes.

Problem-based & Real-world Issues



NEWS ANALYSIS ACTIVITY

Assign learners to research local or global news articles on sustainable development issues and present the problem in class.

Problem-based & Real-world Issues



COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS OR SURVEYS

Learners conduct interviews with community members or distribute surveys to understand the community's most pressing sustainability challenges.

Problem-based & Real-world Issues



CASE STUDY EXPLORATION

Provide learners with real-world case studies from the local area or similar contexts to analyze the connection between the issue and the community's needs.

Problem-based & Real-world Issues



FIELD VISITS OR IMMERSION

Organize visits to local sites (e.g., recycling centers, water treatment plants, or farms) to observe issues firsthand and engage with stakeholders.

Problem-based & Real-world Issues



GUEST SPEAKER

Invite local community members or experts to share their experiences and challenges related to sustainability.

Problem-based & Real-world Issues



ROLE-PLAYING SCENARIOS

Learners role-play as community members or stakeholders to understand the issue from different perspectives and practice problem-solving.

Problem-based & Real-world Issues



MEDIA

Provide resources such as videos, articles, or interactive simulations to help learners build foundational knowledge about the problem.

Learner Participation

Idea Cards

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Learner Participation



GOAL-SETTING WORKSHOP

At the beginning of the lesson or project, have learners brainstorm and propose learning objectives based on their interests and understanding of the topic.

Learner Participation



LEARNER LESSON CO-DESIGN

Present the lesson framework, and let learners choose how to explore topics.

Learner Participation



LEARNING JOURNALS

Have learners maintain personal logs to document their progress, challenges, and reflections on their learning journey.

Learner Participation



SELF & PEER ASSESSMENT

Encourage learners to evaluate their own and their peers' contributions to the project. Provide clear rubrics for guidance.

Learner Participation



LEARNER-LED CONFERENCES

Arrange sessions where learners explain their learning outcomes to teachers, peers, or even parents, showcasing their ownership of the process.

Learner Participation



VISION MAPPING

Learners create individual or group vision boards illustrating what they want to achieve in the lesson or project. Combine their visions to outline shared objectives.

Learner Participation



TEACH BACK

Learners research a part of the topic and teach it to their peers, taking full ownership of their learning and presentation.

Learner Participation



LEARNING MARKETPLACE

Learners brainstorm mini-project ideas related to the topic and "pitch" their ideas to peers. The class votes on which ideas to pursue, encouraging buy-in.

Community Engagement

Idea Cards

Community Engagement



COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Guide learners to conduct surveys, interviews, or focus groups with community members to identify their most pressing sustainability issues.

Community Engagement



COMMUNITY WALKS

Organize a community walk or field visit where learners observe and document challenges faced by affected populations in real contexts (e.g., waste management in urban areas).

Community Engagement



PHOTO VOICE

Ask learners to take photographs during community interactions to visually capture the lived experiences of affected populations and use them as prompts for discussions and reflections.

Community Engagement



INTERVIEW & OBSERVATION

Conduct interviews and observations. Include exercises where learners ask open-ended, empathetic questions to community members.

Community Engagement



FOCUS GROUPS

Teach learners how to organize and lead focus group discussions with community members to better understand their perspectives.

Community Engagement



FEEDBACK LOOPS

Encourage learners to present their initial ideas or prototypes to the community and gather feedback to refine their solutions.

Community Engagement



SOLUTION PITCH WITH COMMUNITY INPUT

After designing their solutions, learners must explain how their understanding of the affected populations influenced their choices. Include a component where community members can validate the solutions.

Community Engagement



USER PERSONA

Ask learners to develop user personas based on their interactions with community. Their solutions must directly address the specific needs and challenges outlined in the persona.

Collaboration

Idea Cards

Collaboration



COMMUNITY CO-DESIGN WORKSHOPS

Facilitate workshops where learners and community members collaborate to identify problems and brainstorm solutions.

Collaboration



GALLERY WALKS

Groups display their work, and peers move around the room to provide constructive feedback using sticky notes.

Collaboration



SHARED WHITEBOARDS

Use collaborative tools like Miro or Jamboard for brainstorming and planning in real-time.

Collaboration



ESCAPE ROOM CHALLENGES

Develop an "escape room"-style activity where learners solve interdisciplinary puzzles collaboratively.

Collaboration



REAL-LIFE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Learners collaborate with industry professionals to develop a tangible product or service addressing a community need.

Collaboration



THINK-PAIR-SHARE

Learners think about a question or problem individually, discuss their thoughts with a partner, and then share their ideas with the larger group.

Collaboration



FEEDBACK IS A GIFT

Pair learners to review each other's work and provide constructive feedback.

Collaboration



ROTATING ROLES

Rotate roles within the group, such as leader, notetaker, or timekeeper, to ensure everyone gains diverse skills and perspectives.

Interdisciplinarity

Idea Cards

Interdisciplinarity



THEMATIC PROJECTS

Assign projects that require learners to apply concepts from multiple disciplines (e.g., combining engineering and social science to design sustainable housing).

Interdisciplinarity



STEAM INTEGRATION

Incorporate STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) activities, such as designing eco-friendly art installations that promote environmental awareness.

Interdisciplinarity



CROWDSOURCING

Combine ideas from multiple groups into a single, unified project, with each group contributing a different component.

Interdisciplinarity



MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Pair learners with mentors from different disciplines to guide them in their projects, offering insights from varied perspectives.

Interdisciplinarity



SYSTEMS MAPPING

Have learners create systems maps showing the interconnected elements of a sustainability issue, such as the relationship between climate change, economics, and social justice.

Interdisciplinarity



RIPPLE EFFECTS

Assign learners to analyze the ripple effects of a sustainability challenge (e.g., how deforestation affects biodiversity, local economies, and climate).

Interdisciplinarity



DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Have learners create digital stories that require research and creative input from various disciplines.

Interdisciplinarity



BUSINESS PLANNING

Learners create business plans for sustainable products, integrating economics, environmental science, and marketing.

Empathy



STORY EXCHANGE

Pair learners and have them share personal stories. Each student then retells their partner's story as if it were their own.

Empathy



DIVERSE GROUP WORK

Create teams with varied perspectives and assign them a shared task that requires understanding and cooperation.

Empathy



BOOKS AND FILMS

Use literature and documentaries that showcase diverse perspectives. Follow up with discussions or reflective journaling to deepen understanding.

Empathy



EMPATHY MAPPING

Learners create empathy maps or visual representations of another person's emotions, needs, and challenges based on interviews or research.

Empathy



LETTER WRITING

Assign learners to write letters from the perspective of someone experiencing hardship or social injustice.

Empathy



SHADOWING

Have learners spend a day with someone in a different profession, socioeconomic class, or cultural background to understand their daily experiences.

Empathy



EMPATHY DIARIES

Learners document daily acts of empathy they observe or practice themselves.

Empathy



REFLECTION PROMPTS

Use reflective prompts such as:

- What surprised you most about their story?
- How would you feel in their situation?
- What actions could you take to help?

Regional &

Cultural Relevance

Idea Cards

Regional and Cultural Relevance



CULTURAL CONTEXT MAPPING

Have learners research and map the cultural values and traditions of the community involved in their project. Discuss how these values influence local practices and decision-making.

Regional and Cultural Relevance



TRADITIONAL PRACTICES EXPLORATION

Ask learners to explore and document traditional practices related to the topic, such as water conservation, food preservation, or communal resource management.

Regional and Cultural Relevance



INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE RESEARCH

Assign learners to investigate and present how indigenous knowledge is used to address sustainability issues, such as herbal medicine, sustainable farming, or natural disaster mitigation.

Regional and Cultural Relevance



CULTURAL FIELD VISITS

Arrange visits to cultural sites or museums to help learners understand local cultural practices and their relationship to sustainability.

Regional and Cultural Relevance



MULTILINGUAL LEARNING MATERIALS

Provide learners materials in the local language or include translations to make them more accessible to the community.

Regional and Cultural Relevance



CULTURAL ART INTEGRATION

Use local art forms, such as music, dance, or crafts, as part of the learning process to contextualize sustainability issues within the community's cultural framework.

Regional and Cultural Relevance



CROSS-CULTURAL GROUP WORK

Pair learners from different cultural backgrounds and have them share how their cultures address similar sustainability challenges.

Regional and Cultural Relevance



LOCAL ARTISANS

Learners create art works with local artisans to understand how cultural values align with sustainable practices.

**Jot down any new ideas
you discover or feel
inspired by—whether
from the Idea Cards or
your colleagues—in
the boxes provided.**

AOP for ESD Instructional Activities Think about the activities your learners will engage in. Try to incorporate as many of the 7 AOP for ESD components as you can. Once you have completed your brainstorming, review the AOP Ideas Card to identify any strategies you might apply or adapt to enhance your lesson plan.		
Problem-Based & Real-World Issues	Learner Participation	
Community Engagement	Collaboration	Interdisciplinarity
Empathy	Regional and Cultural Relevance	



You've just created AOP for ESD instructional activities that you can use in your own lessons!

Before you put them into practice, **take a moment to reflect.** Use the **Checklist Questions** to consider a few key questions and make sure your lesson design supports an inclusive, engaging, and learner-centered classroom. As you reflect, jot down notes on how you might improve or better address certain areas in your plan.

Problem-Based & Real-World Issues



Checklist Questions

Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Do the learners get to identify a real-world problem/issue related to sustainable development?



Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Do the learners have prior knowledge and skills to understand the issue and identify solutions? If not, what prerequisite lessons are required?



Problem-based and Real-world Issues

Is the problem/issue coming from the real needs of the community members?



Community Engagement

✓ *Checklist Questions*



Community Engagement

Is the problem/issue coming from the real needs of the community members?



Community Engagement

Is the learning activity engaging the community members?



Community Engagement

Does the learning activity give special attention to underrepresented groups in the community? Is the programme inclusive?



Learner Participation

✓ *Checklist Questions*



Learner participation

Do the learners
participate in designing
the learning process?



Learner participation

Are there any mechanisms to
ensure the ownership and
responsibilities of learners for
their learning outcomes?



Learner participation

Do the learners
participate in setting up
the learning objectives?



Collaboration

✓ Checklist Questions



Collaboration

Does the learning programme facilitate meaningful interaction and dialogue between learners and external stakeholders, such as community members or industry professionals?



Collaboration

Does the learning activity involve collaborative projects where learners work with stakeholders from different academic backgrounds to solve sustainability problems?



Collaboration

Does the learning activity leverage everyone's strengths to achieve common goals?



Interdisciplinarity

✓ Checklist Questions



Interdisciplinarity

Does the learning activity involve experts from different disciplines to provide interdisciplinary views on sustainability issues?



Interdisciplinarity

Are the learners provided with opportunities to practice systems thinking to understand the interconnectedness of the sustainability issues?



Interdisciplinarity

Are the learning activities designed to integrate knowledge and methods from multiple disciplines to address sustainability challenges?



Empathy

✓ Checklist Questions



Empathy

Does the learning programme include a profiling activity or on-the-ground interaction to understand and share the feelings of the affected populations (or community members who face the sustainability issues or climate change impacts)?



Empathy

Are learners trained to use participatory methods, such as interviews or observations, to authentically understand the lived experiences of community members?



Empathy

Does learners' understanding of the affected populations reflected in the solutions?



Regional & Cultural Relevance



Checklist Questions

Regional and cultural relevance

Do the entire learning process and activity acknowledge and respect the cultural values of the community?



Regional and cultural relevance

Do the learning activities provide learners with the opportunity to look into the Indigenous knowledge and culture of the community in solving sustainability issues?



Regional and cultural relevance

Do the learning activities leverage the cultural and linguistic strengths of the community? (e.g. providing the learning materials in local language)



Take a moment to think about how you want to run your lesson and set your intentions. Use the space below to jot down how you might improve or better support certain parts of your plan.

Reflection Checklist

Read through all the AOP for ESD Reflection Checklist questions. Reflect and set clear intentions for how you plan to facilitate your lesson. Note how you might enhance or more effectively address specific areas of your lesson plan.



Time to Practice!



Take your lesson plan into the classroom and try it out with your learners. Pay attention to what works well and where you might make adjustments. Every class is a chance to learn and improve!



Congratulations on completing this guidebook!

You've explored the principles of AOP for ESD, reflected on your own teaching context, and begun designing meaningful, learner-centered lessons grounded in real-world problems.

Whether you're teaching in a classroom, leading a workshop, or working in your community, remember:

You are not just an educator, you are a changemaker.

Start small, stay curious, and keep learning with your students. And don't forget to connect with fellow educators—share your ideas, swap stories, and grow together.



Action-Oriented Pedagogy Checklist

AOP Elements		Check Box	
		Yes	No
Problem-Based and Real-World Issues			
1	Do the learners get to identify a real-world problem/issue related to sustainable development?		
2	Is the problem/issue coming from the real needs of the community members?		
3	Do the learners have prior knowledge and skills to understand the issue and identify solutions? If not, what prerequisite lessons are required?		
Community Engagement			
4	Is the problem/issue consulted with the community members?		
5	Is the learning activity engaging the community members?		
6	Does the learning activity give special attention to underrepresented groups in the community? Is the programme inclusive?		
Learner Participation			
7	Do the learners participate in setting up the learning objectives?		
8	Do the learners participate in designing the learning process?		
9	Are there any mechanisms to ensure the ownership and responsibilities of learners for their learning outcomes?		

Action-Oriented Pedagogy Checklist

Collaboration			
10	Does the learning programme facilitate meaningful interaction and dialogue between learners and external stakeholders, such as community members or industry professionals?		
11	Does the learning activity involve collaborative projects where learners work with stakeholders from different academic backgrounds to solve sustainability problems?		
12	Does the learning activity leverage everyone's strengths to achieve common goals?		
Empathy			
13	Does the learning programme include a profiling activity or on-the-ground interaction to understand and share the feelings of the affected populations (or community members who face the sustainability issues or climate change impacts)?		
14	Are learners trained to use participatory methods, such as interviews or observations, to authentically understand the lived experiences of community members?		
15	Does learners' understanding of the affected populations reflected in the solutions?		

Action-Oriented Pedagogy Checklist

Regional and Cultural Relevance			
16	Do the entire learning process and activity acknowledge and respect the cultural values of the community?		
17	Do the learning activities provide learners with the opportunity to look into the Indigenous knowledge and culture of the community in solving sustainability issues?		
18	Do the learning activities leverage the cultural and linguistic strengths of the community? (e.g. providing the learning materials in local language)		
Interdisciplinarity			
19	Are the learning activities designed to integrate knowledge and methods from multiple disciplines to address sustainability challenges?		
20	Does the learning activity involve experts from different disciplines to provide interdisciplinary views on sustainability issues?		

Learning for a Sustainable Future: RCE Stories of Action-Oriented Pedagogy

A collection of 10 exemplary cases from RCEs that illustrate the successful implementation of AOP-ESD in diverse educational contexts.

<https://go.unu.edu/aop-esd>



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