

Is it already too late for climate education?



Click on images to see examples

Ben Ballin and Richard Dawson have, for the past three years, been working on a European project called 'Change the Story'.

We asked them to reflect on the experience.

In the project, pupils explore processes of change – past, present and future. They then create climate stories about the future they want, which are shared with others. Resources and stories from the project can be freely accessed at <https://www.changethestory.eu>

In July, we had a final project partnership meeting in Monza, Italy. At the meeting, thoughts inevitably turned to what partners might next do together. Some playful and child-friendly ideas started to emerge.

However, the next three years also take us to the point that most scientists believe to be the 'cliff edge', the point beyond which meaningful action to mitigate the climate crisis becomes near-impossible.

That striking time-line throws our playful ideas into stark relief, and causes us to ask if it is already too late for climate education? Would another three years of enthusiastic exploration and investigation be something of an indulgence or – worse - an evasion of responsibilities? Is radical citizenly action the only remaining option? We are clearly well past the point where 'business as usual' is worth countenancing.

The following day, as if in agreement, the thermometer in Monza hit 40°C. Two weeks later, temperatures in Southern England and the Midlands also hit an unprecedented 40°C.

Some commentators, such as the Nigerian writer Bayo Akomolafe, argue that it is not only too late for education, but even for activism. We need to prepare ourselves (and by extension, young people) for a future where runaway climate change and species collapse are realities:

"The sooner we confront our situation and realize that there is nothing we can do to save ourselves, the sooner we can get down to the difficult task of adapting, with mortal humility, to our new reality."

In this scenario, we are all a little like the inhabitants of the shtetls in Jonathan Safran Foer's brilliant novel *'Everything is Illuminated'* (2002), deluding ourselves that we can keep on living the way we always have done, even as the panzer tanks inexorably close in on our villages.



A big YES to ...

- ❑ Understanding that while education cannot bring about the level of carbon reduction currently required, it does need to prepare young people with the skills to create - and live with - a very different future.
- ❑ A recognition that managing fears and anxieties – our own and those of young people – is something that we need to take very seriously. It is a safeguarding issue.
- ❑ Teaching the basic science and geography of the greenhouse effect and challenging common misconceptions, **provided that we swiftly move on to ...**
 - ◇ Thinking about change and the future [and radically re-imagining what they could be like – framing values that question dominant world-views]. Making sure young people are not led by the nose into unquestioning acceptance of outdated ‘solutions’;
 - ◇ Continuously upgrading our own knowledge - to keep rethinking and re-imagining how the climate crisis is taught – knowledge, resources and pedagogies can become obsolete very quickly;
 - ◇ Recognising that the climate crisis requires thought and action at every geographical scale, from local to global;
 - ◇ Recognising that the climate crisis is not [and never has been] an environmental issue - by necessity, it is a political, cultural and economic matter.

Ben & Richard highlight some key challenges.
How do you see them?

We are not sure that this is quite where we are, yet, though it sometimes feels that way.

So, where might we as schools, teachers and educators need to be in order to act effectively during this three-year-prequel to a runaway climate crisis that young people are visibly inheriting?

Based on what we have learned from the **Change the Story** project, we offer a big NO and a list of things we say YES to.

A big NO to ... business as usual – educationally, systemically, economically and politically. For example, the new DfE strategy comes about twenty years too late.

For our **big YES** please see stimulus opposite. **What are the implications as you see them?** For us they raise issues of personal and institutional responsibility. In short we see schools as a springboard for fresh thinking and citizenly mobilisation, that enables young people to hold decision makers to account.

Visit - [Stories for Change](#) to review young people's work [9-14] from Austria, Hungary, Italy, Turkey & the UK.

The images on p9 link to selected stories on the website.

Stories

Here is a list of stories created by the Change the Story project

Filter by country : [Austria](#) | [Hungary](#) | [Italy](#) | [Turkey](#) | [UK](#)

 Kiraz & Rosa	 Conscious Everyday Life	 What Can We Do for the Earth?
 Komşum Kirlanlık		 SİHİRİ YOLCULUK

Ben is UK project worker for
'Change the Story'
Richard is Director of [Wild Awake](#).

[More about the project ...](#)



Learning for People & Planet

References

- Akomolafe, B. (n.d.) 'What climate collapse asks of us'. The Emergence Network.
http://www.emergencenetwork.org/whatclimatecollapseasksofus/#_ftn1
- Foer, J.S. (2002). 'Everything is Illuminated.' London: Penguin Books.

