

A whole school approach

A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY



Whole School Approaches to Sustainability: Exemplary Practices from around the world
Illustration by Nicolette Tauecchio (Nicniq)

Last year, I contributed a WSA report which collected green school examples from all over the world. Edited by Rosalie Mathie and Arjen Wals.

The report includes 17 critical examples from different countries.

These schools have similarities and differences. They present inspiring examples that put sustainability at the heart of the school system.

To review these examples [see website](#).

Güliz Karaarslan Semiz

reflects on an International Collaboration Project

Over the past few years, young people have initiated and taken action to counter global challenges all around the world. They are worried about their future and they express their demands to change our story and combat the climate crisis.

In a changing world, education should not be part of the crisis, we need to reconsider the purpose of education to contribute to a sustainable world as David Orr emphasized years ago (Orr, 1992).

A whole school approach (WSA) to sustainability could be a response for changing our habits in education and enabling young people to find ways for a sustainable living. WSA brings the idea as embedding sustainability in all aspects of school education and creating opportunities for learning and living sustainably (Tilbury & Galvin, 2022).

In order to incorporate a whole school approach to sustainability, **schools need to reconsider their curriculum, their learning and pedagogy, creating a holistic vision, developing authentic participation opportunities for students and creating a shared, distributed leadership as teachers and students participate in designing, planning and taking action for sustainability at school** (see Tilbury & Galvin, 2022; Wals & Mathie, 2022).

Also, there should be a **focus on outdoor learning** and place-based education to develop students' connection with nature and sense of place.

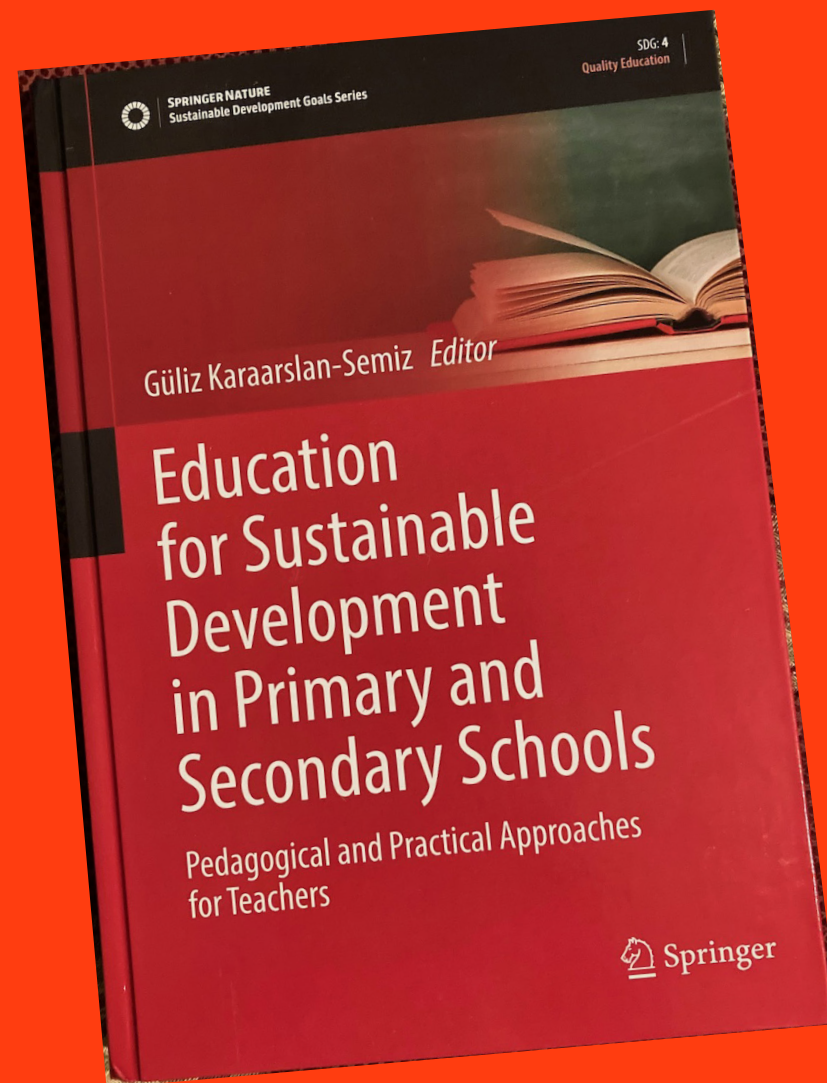
Moreover, **schools can reduce their carbon footprint** and could be a model for a sustainable society. For example, using renewable energy sources, treatment of waste water, reducing food waste at the school canteen, sustainable material use and increasing biodiversity in the school grounds could be some tangible actions that schools can take.

Last year I conducted an international post-doc project together with Stockholm University with the purpose of investigating green schools' ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) approach and implementation through a whole school approach lens.



“Most schools are designed by architects oblivious to the fact that architecture is a kind of crystallized pedagogy. Instead, they should be designed to mirror the sustainable world we wish to create, giving hope a form and substance at a comprehensible scale.”

David Orr, 2022



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She has recently edited

[‘Education for Sustainable Development in Primary and Secondary Schools’.](#)

It involves contributions from twenty two authors who are teachers, researchers and educators from different countries.

The book includes conceptual frameworks, pedagogical methods, case studies, research examples and assessment strategies to guide teachers to teach sustainability in their classes.

We will revisit this book later in the ET series.

I have visited ‘green schools’ from Sweden and Turkey to examine their implementation.

I interviewed teachers and principals working at these green schools. Our aim is not to provide the best green school examples but to show strengths and weaknesses in terms of implementation. Although there are some contextual differences in the two countries’ education policy, I have observed some common features in these schools. For instance, all subject teachers teach sustainability themes based on their curriculum, they develop extra-curricular activities and allocate time for cross-curricular collaboration. **Cross-curricular teacher teams are common in Swedish education system** because the national curriculum supports cross-curricular teaching in order to teach complex sustainability issues (Sund, Gericke & Bladh, 2020).

However, in **the Turkish context, we have limited cross-curricular collaboration** because of intense curriculum content and limited time for teachers to collaborate. In these green schools, I observed that students are active and take responsibility in planning and designing environmental projects in their schools. For example, in one Turkish school, students built a permaculture garden together with their teachers and they have started to grow some vegetables.

In the Swedish examples, the student council or student eco-teams choose and decide which sustainability issues they want to work on in their schools. Students collaborate with the municipality while designing their playgrounds. In these green schools, an active and long term leadership play an important role.

In one of the Swedish schools, vegetarian food has started to be made available in the school cafeteria once a week after consultation with students. **All schools focus on some environmental practices such as reducing energy and water consumption, recycling, gardening and offering vegetarian school lunch.** These green schools I have observed are trying to build a sustainability culture step by step. However, it is still the case that a few committed teachers push the sustainability activities. In order to provide a continuous sustainability-oriented education, the whole school staff needs to be encouraged and supported.

For references - see individual article on Tide~ website



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