



Sustainability and
Environmental
Education

Evaluation report of The SEEd Facilitation for Learning for Sustainability course

Research undertaken by SEEd

Evaluation report prepared by Dr Katy Wheeler (University of Essex/SEEd Trustee)

March 2021

The SEEd Facilitation for Learning for Sustainability has been running for 12 years. In this time, it has directly reached 117 participants and, because it focuses on training leaders, it has a potential reach into the thousands. It has been run in the UK and Europe, and has attracted international participants. The groups are varied with educators, teachers, university staff, lecturers, young people, people in businesses.

The course offers participants an in-depth exploration of how they can bring about change in their thinking, their practice and in their workplaces using ESD methods, facilitation skills, action learning projects and social learning. Through four intensive days of training, the course is aimed to make them become change makers and leaders. The course covers learning and facilitation and all aspects of sustainability – human, environmental and economic – and the SDGs.

This evaluation document reports on the impact of this course on participant's learning and practice. A questionnaire was sent to previous participants and short interviews were also conducted with a selected number of participants. The results reveal that the course has been transformative and impacted on many people in institutions.

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SEEd - Putting sustainability at the heart of learning, and learning at the heart of sustainability

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Executive summary

- A short survey was distributed in 2020 and again in 2021, and 10 in depth interviews conducted with previous course participants in 2021.
- People attend the course to learn about how to get sustainability initiatives started and to sustain their motivation through the networks of support the course provides.
- The course aims to facilitate competences in people through action learning so they can go on to develop sustainability initiatives. It is therefore a course in education *for* sustainability rather than *about*.
- Participants engage in a range of action learning projects as a result of the course, which reveals the transformative nature of this learning experience.
- Participants have reported on the ways the skills they learned and networks they developed through the course have given them more confidence and led to transformations in their workplaces and communities.
- 84% of those surveyed have applied the techniques learnt on the course within their work, and 36% have applied the techniques within another setting (such as a community group).
- Participants are satisfied with the quality of the course and participants in 2021 praised the efforts made to expand mentoring and asynchronous learning materials.

Data Collection

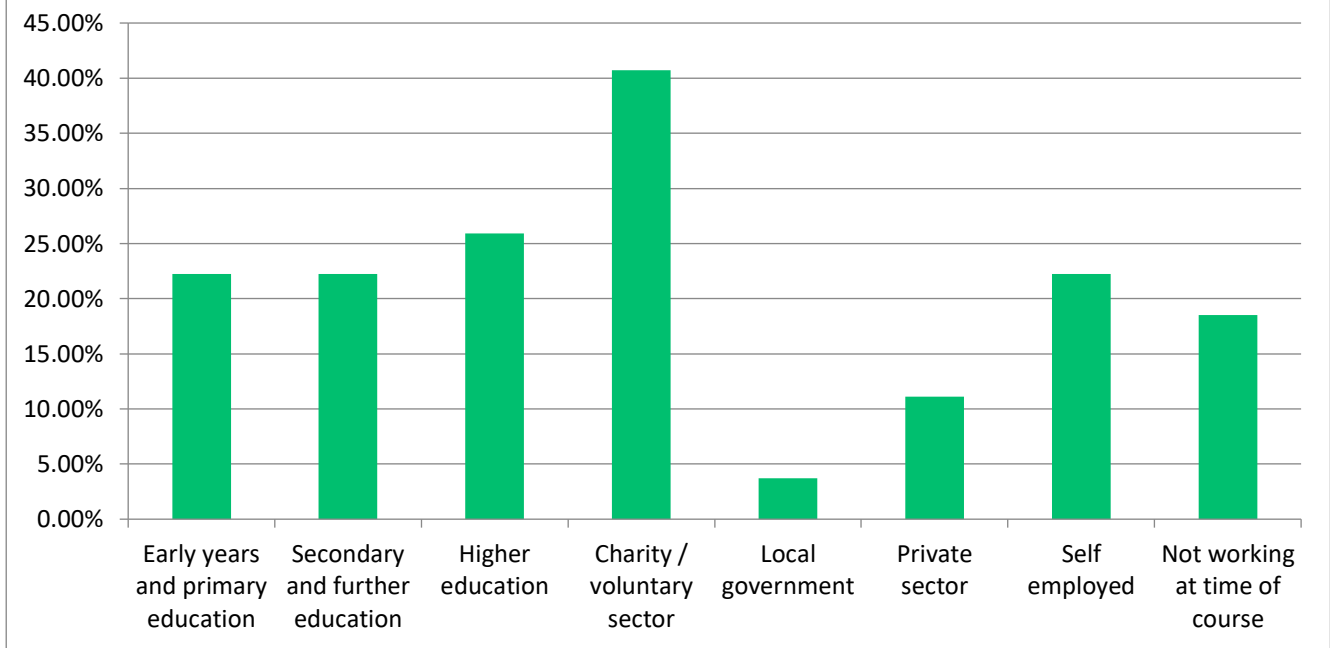
The survey

The survey was designed to explore why people wanted to attend the course, what they feel they got from the course and how they have used the learning in their everyday practice within their workplace and personal lives. It consisted of mostly open-ended questions to gather detailed responses of participants experiences. A copy of the survey is available in Appendix 1.

The survey was developed in Survey Monkey and was originally distributed via an email invitation in 2020. In 2021, the survey was sent to course participants from 2020/21. The survey was sent to (117) previous participants and received responses from 28 people (response rate of 25%). Respondents from the earliest courses were difficult to track down but responses were received from participants from the 2015, 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2020 cohorts. This enables us to reflect on the impact of the course over time.

Those who completed the survey were mostly women (82%), from a White background (78%), with degree-level qualifications (91%). The majority of participants were aged between 25 and 54 with a small number aged from 18-24 years. People attend the course from a range of different work backgrounds (see Figure 1 for survey responses), with those in the education and the charity sector being the most frequent participants. A third of participants worked in large organizations that employed over 200 people, and a third of participants worked in small organizations with 25 employees or less.

Figure 1: Background of course attendees
(n=28)



Records kept of course participants reveal that the survey sample gathered is broadly comparable to those who attended the course. Table 1 shows the breakdown of backgrounds of the 117 participants who have attended the course since 2010.

Table 1: Background of all course participants since 2010

Type of organization	Number	Percentage
School (early years and secondary)	9	7.7
Higher Education	13	11.1
Charity/Voluntary sector	66	56.4
Local authority	7	6.0
Private sector	18	15.4
Students	4	3.4
Total	117	

The interviews

Short follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 people to talk about how the course changed their practices and to provide more in-depth feedback on their experiences of the course. These interviews were conducted via Zoom by Ann Finlayson in 2021 (the questions used are available in Appendix 2). Participants were sent the questions in advance and interviews lasted between 10 and 20 minutes.

Course evaluations

Feedback is sought from participants before they undertake the course, after they have completed the first 2 days and after they have completed the whole course. Much of this feedback was handwritten so earlier responses are not complete, but the last 3 years are complete (2018/2019/2020). Where course feedback was available, it has been used to complement the findings from the surveys and interviews. In particular, this data allows the evaluation to comment on the longitudinal impact of the course.

Key Findings

Why people attend the course

Many of those who attended the course were looking for opportunities to learn more about sustainability in the context of their current role. The course offered an opportunity for professional development and many were attracted to the facilitation skills. Participants reported feeling uncertain about how to get started or sustain sustainability initiatives and were looking for a support network to help them in this aim (see Box 1).

Box 1: Why did you attend this course?

To develop skills around working with different groups at school and developing our school's sustainability policies

I saw it as a great opportunity to work on my fear of leadership and to feel empowered to work more towards environmental sustainability.

I wanted to become better at: being heard, recognised with regards to sustainability activities (or those contributing towards them), plan activities with other people, inspire and persuade. Also get a support network. I wanted to learn from experts and was impressed by SEEd and its work.

Learning outcomes

The key aims of the course are to encourage participants to think about how to make sustainability changes happen through group participatory approaches and action learning within organisations. In addition to educating about the sustainability challenge, this course aims to build competences to enable people to put their ideas into practice. This is achieved through close attention to the unique skills and expertise that people bring to any group learning project and how to facilitate groups so they can achieve creative and collaborate working for change. The key distinction is between learning *about* and learning *for* sustainability, with this course focusing primarily on the latter.

To explore whether people achieved these learning outcomes, the survey asked participants to indicate how far they agreed/disagreed with a range of statements about education for sustainability. Figure 2 reveals that most participants disagreed with statements that represent a thin or superficial understanding education for sustainability. Whilst Figure 3 shows that participants identified strongly with statements which recognize the importance of team working and critical systems-thinking approaches to education for sustainability.

In future evaluation projects, it would be useful to gather participant responses to these statements before and after their attendance.

Figure 2: Thin understanding of Education for sustainability (participants asked to what extent do you agree with the following statements):

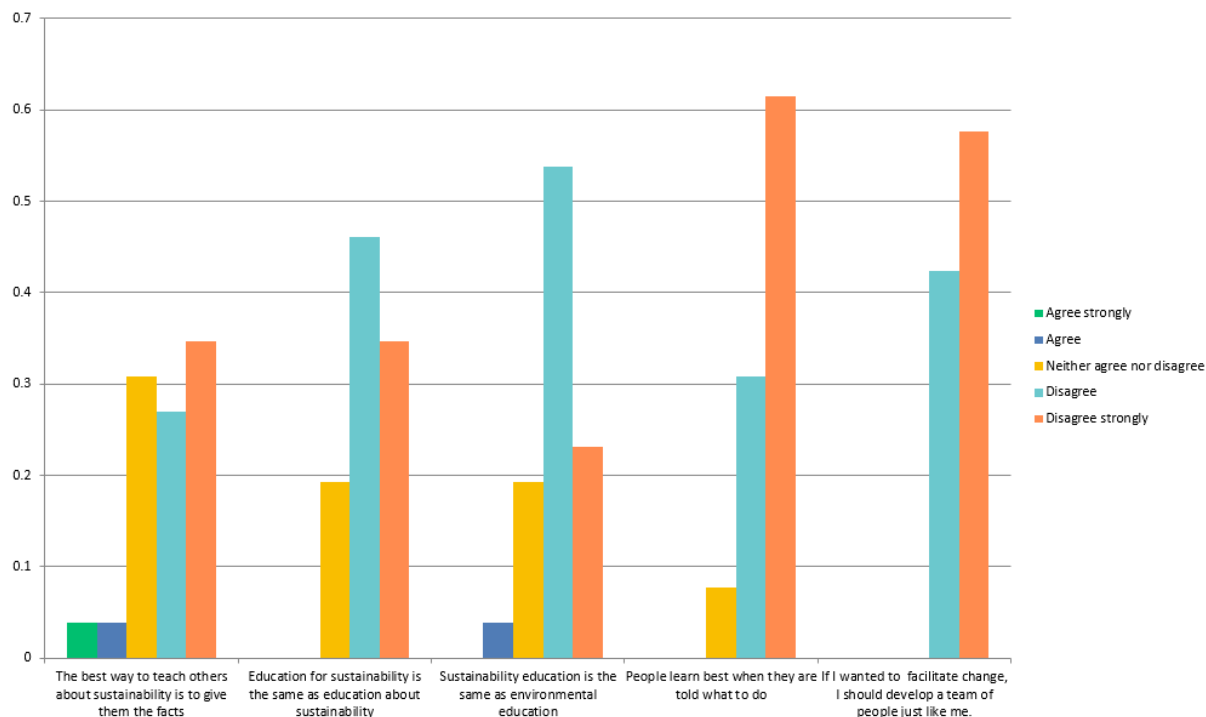
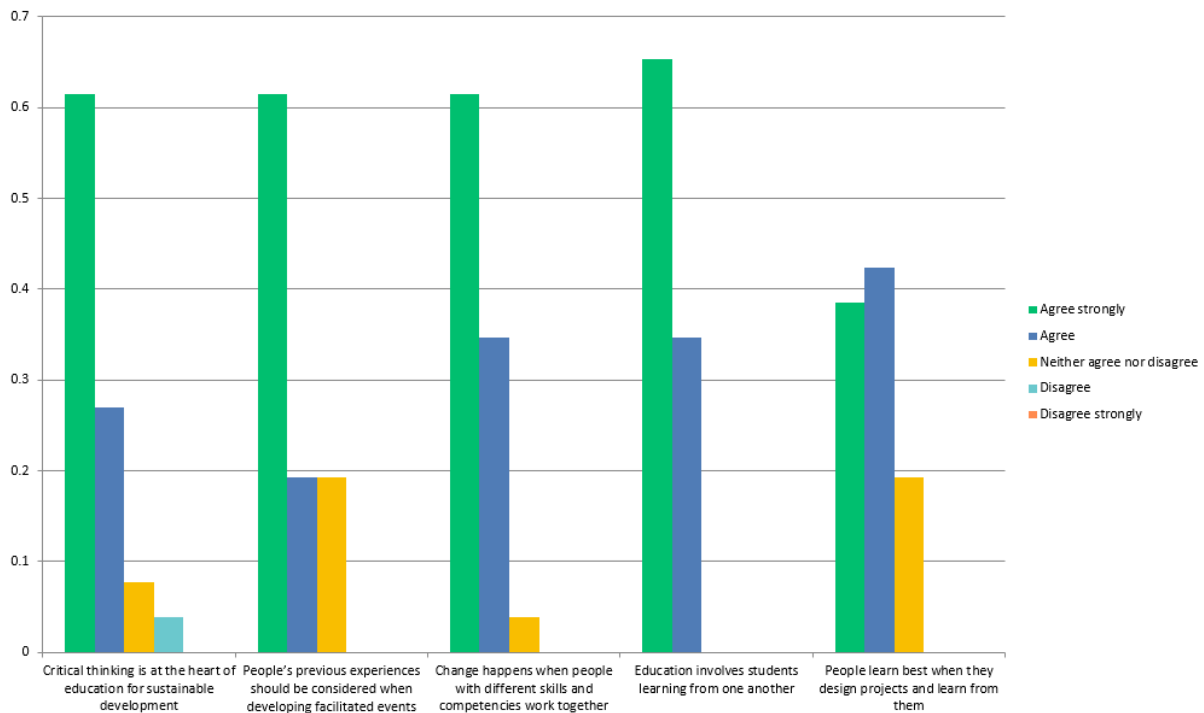


Figure 3: Critical understanding of Education for sustainability (participants asked to what extent do you agree with the following statements):



Action Learning

The main way the course evaluates the achievement of its learning outcomes is through the action learning project that participants are encouraged to undertake. This a central feature of the course design which enables participants to put the ideas and skills they have developed into practice. Participants are told at the outset of the course that they will undertake an action learning project and during the first stage of the course, they develop their ideas and are asked to make a start on the project to report back on during the second stage of the course.

Participants reported a wide range of different action learning projects which included setting up citizen assemblies on sustainability within a university, developing a whole school approach to sustainability within primary and secondary school settings, developing a space for young people to discuss their hopes and fears about their lives and the future, making sustainable calls to action more accessible to people in the context of a zoo, developing young people to become sustainability ambassadors and writing a sitcom.

In Box 2, two detailed case studies of these action-learning projects and their impacts are provided.

Box 2: Case studies of Action Learning Projects

Case study 1: Professor Zoe Robinson is a Director of Education for Sustainability at Keele University. She attended the SEEd course to improve her skills in facilitation so she could run Climate Action consultations between students and staff, develop a train the trainer program for the Carbon Literacy scheme, and support Staffordshire council's work on climate emergency. After completing the first weekend of the course, she facilitated a workshop within her university to help them to develop a sustainability road map and action plan. She described this workshop as *'one of the best things I've run - entirely due to that weekend. Great to have had the opportunity to put things into practice so soon'*. She continues to apply these skills through other events and training she leads. She told us that the *'facilitation course is genuinely the most directly useful course I have ever done'*. She continues *'It made me question my career trajectory and where I want to and can have most impact. I got out of it far, far more than I could ever have hoped, particularly for someone who is already supposed to be 'an expert' in the field.'*

Case study 2: Kerstin works in a primary school and attended the course to learn how to act on sustainability within her workplace. Her action learning project was to work with her school governing body to recognize the benefits of adopting a 'whole-school approach' to sustainability. She describes how attending the course gave her skills to put this project into action. She says *'I am constantly reflecting/adapting how to drive things forward with others, being careful about the negative 'chatter', seizing opportunities that align with my ALP - understanding and checking myself on the kinds of attitudes I convey to other people about sustainability'*. She undertook a survey with her school to find out the different perspectives and ideas from a variety of people in different roles and departments. She describes how *'this helped form a consensus of our role as a school, what actions we take, who might want to help, and how.'* The process is ongoing (as many action learning projects on sustainability will be) and was stalled by COVID-19 but the course directly led to personal and organizational changes. Kerstin reflects on how the course *'gave me more confidence in my personal learning and work styles i.e. it was the first time an organisation had put these styles into context so they actually have real meaning and relevancy'*. As a result, Kerstin has also felt empowered to get involved in local community sustainability initiatives as a change maker.

What people do with this course

Given the strong focus on practical application of key skills through the action learning project, most participants report applying what they have learned in their working and personal lives. 84% of those surveyed agreed that they have applied the techniques within their work, and 36% have applied the techniques within another setting (such as a community group). Therefore, the potential reach of the course is far greater than the number of participants who attend - as the scope and scale of the different action learning projects highlights.

Many participants described how they had use facilitation skills in their working lives to organize group activities (e.g., to bring citizens/workers/students together to develop sustainability strategies) and facilitate events within their schools, universities and community groups. For example, one participant told us:

'I used the facilitation planning exercise to design a session in collaboration with my line manager; I used a carousel and feeding ideas back to feed into a roadmap and enable participants to agree actions they would take away; I set ground rules and created a bike rack; I used metaplanning to group individual ideas and feed them forward into creating options that different participants could vote on. I am also planning to use these and other techniques for future workshops, including a workshop that I am designing for 2 weeks-time for one of the campus Students' Union officers to explore how they can embed the SDGs/sustainability into their work.'

One participant described how the skills developed on the course helped her to decide what she wanted to do in her career and how these are applied in her everyday working life and practice.

'Back to France, I now work as a consultant in 'concertation': as a part of my work, I facilitate workshops during which citizens are asked how they can improve a project (especially in urbanism or for wind turbines projects), so I use a lot of the skills I learned during this course (I even used the De Bono hats to facilitate a reflection on a project). As I was a student at that time, this course also helped me to choose my actual work'

Another participant described how the course had given her more confidence in different areas of her life:

'I think it helps me at work and in my personal life to be more confident, and effective in problem solving, in situations where someone is being unpleasant or when we talk about controversial topics. It has given me a huge confidence boost as I am able to pursue things I didn't think I was capable of and that then gives me even more experience and confidence'.

Participants have highlighted the useful facilitation techniques and the ongoing supportive networks the course provides and have taken these forward into their working and personal lives.

Transformative learning

This evaluation research has highlighted the transformative learning that the SEEd Facilitation course enables. Most participants had a story of change to share with us, whether this was change in their working practices which led to broader transformations within the larger organisations they are part of, or changes to their own understandings of education for sustainability and confidence in supporting this. The case studies in Box 2 and the quotations in Box 3 provide evidence of these transformative experiences.

Box 3: Transformative learning

I had particular concerns about dealing with awkward participants and pushback, and knowing how to counter people questioning facts or knowing more than me. One of the biggest things I take away from this is that as a facilitator, I don't have to be the most knowledgeable person in the room - I need to know how to bring people together to share THEIR expertise and work collaboratively to create a plan and devise a way forward to achieve the goal(s) the group is working towards.

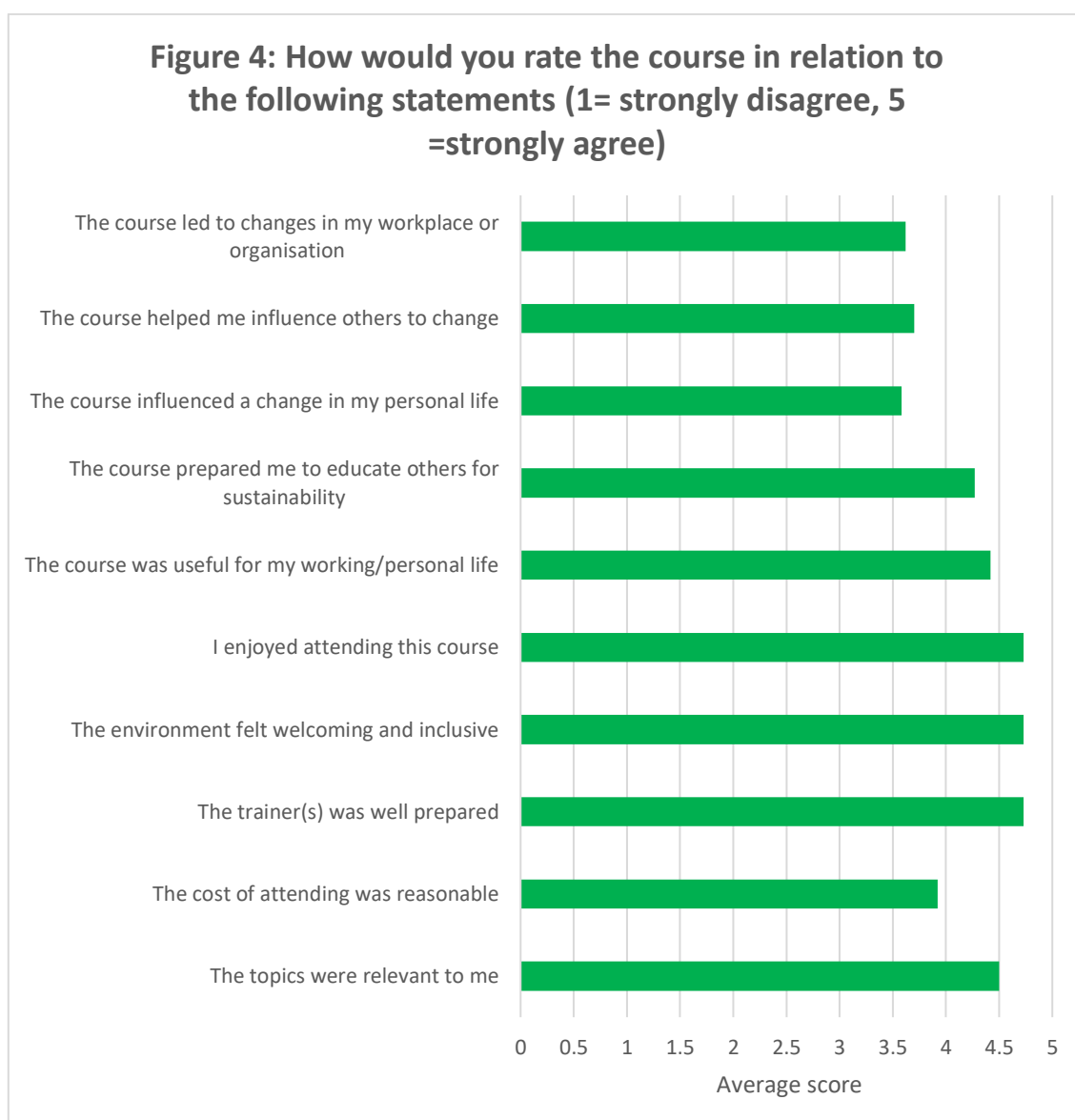
I never thought I was at all interested in "education" because I had too narrow a view of it. Actually, I realise my whole job is about education!

Gave me more confidence in my personal learning and work styles i.e. it was the first time an organisation had put these styles into context so they actually have real meaning and relevancy. Prior to this, everyone I knew would shrug the understanding of these styles off. Thank you for this! I have been able to encourage others who struggle to understand why they "can't work a certain way."

These responses give a real sense of the transformative nature of this learning course. Participants feel more confident to deal with different types of people to facilitate change and are given the skills to support others to work together for change.

Evaluation of course strengths and weaknesses

Most people agreed that the course covered relevant topics for them, that the trainers were well prepared and that the course was useful to them. 88% of participants agreed with the statement 'the course prepared me to educate others for sustainability'. The transformative potential of this course is also evidenced through the 54% of surveyed participants who agreed that the course had helped them to influence others to change and the 50% who agreed that it had directly led to changes in their workplace or organisation. Figure 4 shows the average score for the Likert scale questions (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree), with high levels of agreement across all areas.



There were some areas for improvement identified, with participants on the earlier courses reporting feeling slightly overwhelmed by the amount of information and the number of new concepts/ideas. Participants also reported wanting more support with their action learning projects between the first and second stage of the course.

These were areas that were addressed in the 2020/21 course through an extended course, with mentoring. Online resources have always been provided so students could revisit concepts, but in 2020 secure personal action learning folder with copies of their ideas, reflections and mentoring videos were created. This led to better use of the time within the active learning sessions and more in-depth action learning projects. There were also online support and mentoring sessions introduced between the first and second learning weekend.

Key takeaway messages

To close this evaluation report, a selection of the key takeaway messages that our participants shared with us are provided. These statements highlight the transformative potential of this course.

Box 4: Key takeaway messages

It's OK to feel uncomfortable as there will likely always be difficult participants in a space - having the techniques to move them through activities can bring them round to be allies and be valued as change makers, and that gives me hope.

Learning is more than about facts - it's also about a journey of change

The primary one of these was that awareness isn't action. That you have to go that step further to actually help and ensure people can participate.

Good facilitation is simply good practice...what teaching should be and rarely is. That good facilitation makes people feel good about themselves.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey questions

Reflections on the course impact on your work and personal life

We are undertaking an evaluation of our 'Learning for Sustainability: facilitation and leadership course', which you attended within the past ten years. Your thoughts and experiences of this course, and how useful it has been to you in your working/personal life are of great interest to us. We ask that you complete the following short survey which includes a selection of free response and tick-box questions. We understand that it can take greater effort to complete free response answers, but we feel it is important to capture your ideas fully through these questions and hope that you are willing to spend a few extra minutes completing them. We expect that the survey will take no longer than 20 minutes to complete.

Your participation in this research is voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to. You are free to withdraw from the survey at any point.

Your answers will be kept confidential and all data will be stored in a password-protected electronic format. Although we do ask for your name, we will not include any identifying information in any reports that are written as a result of this survey. Only SEEd employees will have access to the data.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Isa Clee:
(isa@se-ed.org.uk)

1. Please confirm that you consent to take part in this survey by ticking the boxes below:

- I have read the above information
- I voluntarily agree to participate
- I am at least 18 years of age

2. In what year and where did your SEEd 'Learning for Sustainability: facilitation and leadership course' start?

- Select from drop down menu

3. Why did you attend this course?

- Free answer box

4. At the time of the course, what type of organisation(s) were you working with?

- Early years and primary education
- Secondary and further education
- Higher education
- Charity / voluntary sector
- Local government
- National government
- International agency
- Private sector
- Self employed / runs own business
- Not applicable (not working for an organisation at time of course)
- Other (please specify)

5. How many people were employed at this organisation?

- less than 10
- 10-24
- 25-49
- 50-99
- 100-199
- 200-499
- 500 or more
- Don't know
- Not applicable

6. Did you use or apply any of the techniques you learnt about on the course within your work?

- Yes
- No
- If Yes please tell us what you did.

7. Did you use or apply any of the techniques you learnt within another setting (e.g. personal life, community group)?

- Yes
- No
- If Yes please tell us what you did

8. How would you rate the course in relation to the following statements:

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	N/A
The course prepared me to educate others for sustainability						
The course led to changes in my workplace or organisation						
The environment felt welcoming and inclusive						
The trainer(s) was well prepared						
The cost of attending was reasonable						
The course influenced a change in my personal life						
The topics were relevant to me						
I enjoyed attending this course						
The course was useful for my working/personal life						
The course helped me influence others to change						

9. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:

	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know
People's previous experiences should be considered when developing facilitated events						
The best way to teach others about sustainability is to give them the facts						
People learn best when they are told what to do						
People learn best when they design projects and learn from them						
Education involves students learning from one another						
Change happens when people with different skills and competencies work together						
Critical thinking is at the heart of education for sustainable development						
If I wanted to facilitate change, I should develop a team of people just like me.						
Education for sustainability is the same as education about sustainability						
Sustainability education is the same as environmental education						

10. Were there any unexpected outcomes from attending this course?

- Yes
- No
- If Yes please specify what they were

11. What was the key takeaway message or stand-out learning outcome for you from attending this course?

12. What was your action learning idea or project?

13. Would you be willing to be contacted by SEEd to talk further about how your current work or your action research project was influenced by the course?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable
- If Yes please supply your email address so we can contact you

14. What did you like most about the course?

15. What did you like least about the course?

16. Do you have any suggestions for improving the course?

17. Are you ...

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

18. To which of the following ethnic groups do you consider yourself to belong to?

- English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background (please specify below)
- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Asian
- Any other mixed / multiple ethnic group (please specify below)
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi

- Chinese
- Any other Asian background (please specify below)
- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black / African / Caribbean background (please specify below)
- Arab
- Any other ethnic group (please specify below)
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

19. What is your age group?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

20. What is your highest level of educational qualification you have received?

- Degree level qualification (or equivalent)
- Higher educational qualification below degree level
- A-Levels or Highers
- ONC / National Level BTEC
- O Level or GCSE equivalent (Grade A-C)
- GCSE grade D-G or CSE grade 2-5 or Standard Grade level 4-6
- Other qualifications (inc. foreign qualifications below degree level)
- No formal qualifications
- Prefer not to say

21. So we can identify you from our course list, and register your completion of the survey, please can you provide your name? Of course, if you wish to remain anonymous, please leave this question blank.

22. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. We will be preparing a short summary of the report findings which will be posted onto the SEEd website in due course. Please feel free to add any further comments below. We will use your answers to develop and improve our course further.

Appendix 2: Interview questions (2021)

1. What is your name and job title?
2. Do you work with students, work colleagues, teachers, community members?
3. How many people do you work with?
4. In what way did the course change your thinking?
(Prompts; critical thinking, futures thinking, systems thinking, about learning, about change, about influence, the SDGs etc)
5. In what way did the course change your practice?
(Prompts; action learning, socially critical thinking, futures thinking, systems thinking, facilitation skills, understanding about, learning, understanding change, influencing, etc)
6. In what way did the course and your work lead to a change in your workplace or the workplace of others?
(Prompts: alliances, partnerships, allies/colleagues, governance, collaborative working, sustainability plans, unblocking barriers etc)
7. Where there any surprises for you during the course or afterwards?
(please describe...)
8. Can you share a story of a change/transformation that happened as a result of the course?



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