

## Chapter 8. VISION in Education

Whilst this handbook is written placing VISION primarily in the context of social work education, the framework is intentionally designed for adaptation and application across educational settings. Grounded in social work's ethical, relational, and critical traditions, VISION nonetheless offers a general-purpose pedagogical approach to developing critical thinking, deep listening, value awareness, and reflective capacities amongst learners more broadly.

As we explained in Chapter 1, the shared focus on core values, coupled with the ideal of objectivity, creates a nurturing and safe environment in which students can explore and discover their own value systems. This reflective process crucially allows individuals to examine how their personal values align or contrast with the values upheld by their chosen profession. Such exploration is vital to developing a strong ethical foundation which guides their future decisions and actions as professionals.

Furthermore, the solid grounding in values VISION establishes benefits the overall learning process. VISION provides students with a reliable framework to lean into, especially in an era characterised by rapid change and uncertainty. In a world where truth often resembles a matter of negotiation and where the continual influx of information and misinformation from various media sources can fragment attention and hinder genuine connectedness, the need for a supportive learning environment becomes even more important.

A supportive learning environment is particularly relevant for young people today, who are navigating not only the complexities of their educational journeys, but also the broader societal challenges impacting their mental health. The pressures of a fast-paced life and a strong emphasis on achievements represent contributing factors to the mental health crisis amongst today's youth, a situation exacerbated by the looming and overarching climate crisis threatening us all outlined in Chapter 2. As highlighted by scholars such as Hartmut Rosa and Wolfgang Endres (2016) in their book on the pedagogy of resonance, along with writings on the achievement society by Byung-Chul Han (2015), these issues are interlinked and underscore the importance of fostering resilience and critical thinking skills amongst students. By engaging in reflective practices through the VISION process, students are better equipped to confront these challenges.

## Teaching for sustainability

To effectively educate agents of change, it is essential to activate their hope, imagination, attentiveness, and trust in response to the challenges confronting young people. Doing so also aligns with the concept of conviviality, presented in Chapter 2, underscoring that enjoying work towards a more sustainable future is acceptable. As pedagogical scholars Häggström and Schmidt (2022) argue in their book, *Relational and Critical Perspectives on Education for Sustainable Development: Belonging and Sensing in a Vanishing World*, it is imperative to address several significant issues within this pedagogical approach:

*How to create a pedagogy of hope when living in a culture of fear? How to regenerate socio-ecological cultures on a dying planet? How to re-imagine the world when our imagination is hijacked by commercialisation? How to be attentive and mindful in times of perpetual distraction? How to build trust when distrust and doubt seem intentionally cultivated? How to find common ground in a polarised and divisive world? (Häggström & Schmidt, 2022, p. 3)*

When employed in educational settings, VISION can be used to create exactly that kind of atmosphere, in which students are encouraged to (re)build their hope and trust, both of which are necessary to become active co-builders of the future. The method allows for deeper reflections on the role of social work vis-à-vis the transition to a sustainable future. VISION works well in educational settings when combined with an emancipatory transformative pedagogy (Freire, 1973; hooks, 1994), focusing on critical explorations of modernity and its social, economic, and environmental implications for an unjust reality. Lecturer in social work Peter Jones (2013, p. 218) asks: *‘[S]hould students be educated about sustainability or for sustainability [...]? The first implies simply adding another content area to the curriculum, the second at least opens up the possibility of exploring new ways of doing things as well as new areas of knowledge.’* Simply adding environmental content to an existing, non-transformative curriculum results in no substantial change, since the very foundation of modernism and growth is sustained (Boetto, 2019; Jones, 2010, 2013; Gray & Coates, 2012; Papadopoulos, 2019).

VISION offers educators a method to use both when teaching *about* and *for* sustainability. As a starting point, if changing the entire curriculum is not currently possible, the method and its tools can be used separately in selected classes, such as courses and lectures on eco-social work, collective methods, social work ethics, or communication, prompting reflections and helping students understand sustainability perspectives as a natural part of education. However, once the aim focuses on changing the curriculum and learning outcomes, VISION can be systematically integrated throughout an extended curriculum because it supports an ethically based and respectful formation process, designed to empower students to discover their own connections to the future and examine their roles within it. Furthermore, as a method, VISION can be utilised to enhance awareness of social work advocacy and the essential contributions of social work in fostering a more sustainable future. VISION also holds the potential to equip students with the competencies necessary to employ it as a method when they serve as facilitators in their future social work practices.

Those interested in learning more about an emancipatory transformative approach to teaching will find inspiration in bell hooks’ (1994) classic *Teaching to Transgress*. Drawing from Paulo Freire and Thích Nhất Hạnh, hooks perceives education as a form of liberation, emphasising that it transcends mere knowledge acquisition. Education fundamentally liberates individuals from oppressive ‘banking’ models of education, where students are relegated to passive recipients of information. Educators are encouraged to cultivate a learning environment characterised as joyful, passionate, and transformative. This approach entails not only inviting their own vulnerability into the classroom, but also creating a space where students feel comfortable sharing their own vulnerabilities. hooks’ (1994) classic serves as a guide for educators who wish to foster critical consciousness and social change. Inspired by such thoughts, employing VISION in educational settings also results in establishing a loving atmosphere in which students can together explore such issues more freely. Many of the exercises from the value catalogue (see Chapter 9) can be used to create such a setting, alongside the techniques for facilitation explained in the previous chapter.

For deeper reflections and an analysis of the use of VISION in educational settings, see our website ([www.urbanurge.eu](http://www.urbanurge.eu)) for further materials.

## How to use VISION in education

In what follows, we provide some concrete suggestions for how to make VISION accessible in educational or training settings, and how it can be employed in social work education.

- Use the preparation checklist in Chapter 5 to prepare both teaching and other transformative group processes.
- Chapters 2 and 3, including the resources in the respective reference lists, can serve as a foundational knowledge base for courses focused on social work advocacy, sustainability, and the development of sustainable cities. In addition, Chapter 7 is useful when teaching facilitation skills employing collective methods.
- A simple way of introducing VISION as a method is to use the speaking card in Appendix B for pair-based work using VISION dialogues focused on values central to a class or a course. The questions can also be useful for an in-depth exploration of any specific topic (e.g., ethics, communication, childcare, and homelessness).
- For an even simpler method, use three questions: one from each of the three spheres (i.e., *'explaining it'*, *'sensing it'*, and *'expanding it'*) in the speaking card as a way to check-in (e.g., for a check-in about social work: How would you describe social work to someone who does not know what it is? How do you know when social work has been there? When is social work good/bad?).
- For a deeper understanding of the method, offer one or several classes about VISION and the background on new protreptic, sustainability, and social work advocacy, with the possibility of demonstrating a group session where the class assumes the role of participants and the teacher serves as facilitator. Then, continue with the above-mentioned steps to explore and refer to the value catalogue (see Chapter 9) for ideas on creative exercises. For example, students can make their own speaking cards by hand in a creative exercise using colours. Throughout the course, students can receive additional practice in groups and pairs using their own speaking cards.
- Examples of adapting VISION to a full course, scaffolding, ready to use PowerPoint presentations, and detailed descriptions of creative pilot tests conducted in the URGE project can be found at [www.urbanurge.eu](http://www.urbanurge.eu).
- The URGE project has also produced teaching materials (podcasts, explanatory films, and an analogue dialogue game) for use in the teaching process both *about* and *for* sustainability, all of which are available as open-source materials via [www.urbanurge.eu](http://www.urbanurge.eu).

### **This chapter was about...**

We outlined how VISION can be used in educational settings:

- VISION serves as a value-based educational method empowering students as agents of change. As such it, facilitates structured reflection through dialogue and exercises which support both individual reflection and shared learning. By centring core values and emphasising a respectful, objective approach, the method creates a safe learning environment in which students can explore what matters to them whilst engaging with others in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

- Value reflection supports ethical formation, professional identity, and resilience in times of uncertainty. In this chapter, we highlighted how examining personal values in relation to professional values enables students to develop a strong ethical foundation for future practice. VISION provides a stable, reflective framework at a time marked by rapid change, information overload, mental health pressures, and the climate crisis, helping students cultivate resilience, critical thinking, and a deeper sense of orientation and connectedness.
- VISION aligns with emancipatory and transformative pedagogies to teach both about and for sustainability. Rather than adding sustainability as a discrete topic, in this chapter we position VISION as a method supporting deeper pedagogical transformation grounded in hope, imagination, trust, and conviviality. Whether used in selected classes or integrated across curricula, VISION supports a learning atmosphere which empowers students to view themselves as co-creators of a sustainable future and equips them with competencies for facilitation, advocacy, and socially engaged professional practice.

## Chapter 8 references

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