

HOW CAN SCHOOLS ADDRESS **CLIMATE CHANGE?**

AN EDUCATION EXPERT DISCUSSION

HOW CAN SCHOOLS ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE?

On 10 March 2023, the Global Independent Schools Association (GISA) hosted a global call, bringing together education experts and teachers from around the world to discuss how they can address climate change. GISA global calls bring together school leaders from the independent sector, education experts, and business representatives to promote meaningful discussions on key issues affecting the education sector.

THE ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS TAKING PART ▾



Nicholas Piachaud
Advocacy Consultant
GISA



Leonora Dowley
Head of Partnerships
Learning Planet Alliance

EXPERT TEACHERS



Selçuk Arslan
Computer Science Teacher, Ataturk Vocational and Technical High School, Ankara, Turkey



Souad Belcaid
STEM Teacher, The Fessenden School, Massachusetts, United States



Marj Brown
Consultant, Jakes Gerwel Fellowship, Sandton, South Africa



Leonardo Durante
Automatic Systems Teacher, 'Enrico Fermi' Industrial Technical Institute, Rome, Italy



Phuti Ragophala
Principal, Pula Madibogo Primary School, Mankweng, South Africa



Ken Silburn
Science Teacher, NSW Department of Education, Sydney, Australia



David Swanston
Deputy Principal, St. Vincent's School, Liverpool, United Kingdom



INTRODUCTION

An education expert discussion

Leonora Dowley introduced the discussion by telling our panel how the Learning Planet Institute is helping to boost environmental issues in schools and put teachers at the centre of the climate response. Through its Teachers for the Planet programme, the Learning Planet Institute attempts to bridge the gap between busy teachers in the classroom and high-level leaders or policymakers who are taking key decisions. It does so by inviting climate-interested teachers to share their initiatives at events such as the Schools 2030 Conference this June in Portugal, the UN General Assembly in New York in September, and the 28th United Nations Climate Change conference (COP28) being held in November and December in Dubai.



TOP TAKEAWAYS

1 Climate change impacts are being felt right now

Our experts emphasised that the effects of climate change were being seen close to home. **Leonardo Durante**, an Automatic Systems teacher in Rome, told the panel about studies showing snow cover loss and increased vegetation productivity in the European Alps, “dramatically accelerating” annual temperature rises in his native Italy, and a [UN weather report](#) published in November 2022 which spoke of “a chronicle of chaos”.

2 Students need a powerful voice

To make a difference in the climate conversation, young people first need ways to express themselves. **Marj Brown** told us how her own students in South Africa had become involved in the climate issue by participating in Model UN debates, helping draft the City of Johannesburg’s Climate Action Policy, and using children’s literature as a template for creating worksheets on climate action. High school students are then using these resources to teach inner-city primary school students about climate change, while simultaneously boosting literacy.

3 Climate issues become real with local examples

The challenge of climate change becomes more real when linked to local examples that children can engage with concretely. **Souad Belcaid**, who teaches science near Boston in the US, described her project to teach fourth-grade students about how the Colorado River is drying up. To make the issue come alive for them, she invited guest speakers (including engineers) to the school to present on the topic: as a result, her young students developed their own prototypes to save water at home.

4 Sharing knowledge is paramount

If teachers are to be at the centre of the climate response, they need to share knowledge and learn from each other. **Leonora Dowley** outlined how teachers can access the community and resources of the Learning Planet Alliance to share ideas with other schools. Teachers can also post their solutions to a wider collection based on the four pillars of UNESCO’s COP27 Greening Education Partnership: greening learning, greening schools, greening capacities (teacher training) and greening communities. Teachers around the world are now submitting their solutions – the best being those designed with students.

5 All groups should benefit

For conservation projects to fulfil their potential, their benefits need to be extended to the wider community. **David Swanson**, who teaches at Liverpool’s St. Vincent’s School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, explained that amplifying the voices of disabled people and disabled young people was essential. While his own school sees pupils participate in a wide variety of green projects that are shared with the community, including the growing of plants and trees, UK schools currently control green space equivalent to an area twice the size of Birmingham: improving access would deliver considerable health and social equity benefits.

6 The importance of practical lessons

Children learn best about environmental issues from their own direct experience at home and in the community. **Phuti Ragophala** described her activities helping children to start their own backyard gardens at home, use organic compost rather than chemicals, plant trees in the community, and get involved in initiatives to clear the streets of litter. Together with educational material on the dangers of deforestation, this was an all-encompassing programme to teach children about environmental issues. Students in urban South Africa were also offered the chance to link up with others to pursue climate change goals through the Learning Planet Alliance’s Youth Fellowship programme.

7 Could we code our way out of climate change?

Technology can help us manage resources and fight climate change – if used creatively. **Selçuk Arslan’s** students have used coding to generate environmental solutions around hydrogen fuel cells, carbon footprint reduction and nature protection, helping them win a range of international prizes including the European Training Foundation’s Green Skills Award. Similarly, Selçuk’s More Coding for Girls project aims to develop robotic solutions to environmental problems, and his Code for Nature project allowed students from a village school in İzmir province to learn coding and robotics for the first time in their lives.

8 Teachers at COP28

Leonora Dowley emphasised that teachers would be in attendance at COP this year, allowing policymakers to hear first-hand from them on their experiences and climate initiatives. Politicians would also benefit from seeing which initiatives are being developed in their home regions and then “translat[ing] those small pockets of excellence into something that is supported on a country-wide level [...] having that spark at COP28 would be a big win for us.”

ABOUT GISA

The Global Independent Schools Association represents, co-ordinates, and gives a voice to the global independent education sector - which educates 350 million children around the world.

We want to showcase the impact of the global independent education sector, and become a resource for the world's governments and international institutions to tap into, talk to, and, in times of crisis, lean on.

As a member of this association, you will join our network of educators, executives, public policy experts, faith leaders, philanthropists and more. You will be able to participate in GISA Advocacy Initiatives, Global Alliances, Working Groups and Events. As a leader you can help to shape our global agenda, gain access to influential decision makers and leaders, and strengthen your global and local networks.

For more information, visit www.gisa.global/join

