Part III
Teachers’ Handbook
8. Mainstreaming YRE in Your School’s Curriculum

YRE is a multifaceted programme offering various entry points into the regular school curriculum: language (native language, and English), journalistic skills, research skills, science, environment, technology, multimedia, civic education, social issues, globalization... the list is endless, and elastic.

With coordination between the teachers of different subjects, it’s not difficult to train students for the YRE programme, whilst contributing to their better understanding of the curriculum.

Often the lesson programme won’t have to change at all. For example, a native language class may include two sessions about journalistic writing, one of which focusing on its specificities and difficulties, the other on a practical writing exercise on an environmental issue. Likewise, a science class or a global affairs class can look into globalization issues through the lens of environmental concerns – e.g. why and how are local and global environmental issues connected?

Undoubtedly, this approach requires teachers to exert some effort in incorporating YRE into the curricula. We contend, however, that once mainstreamed into lesson plans, the process is seamless, non-disruptive, and positively contributes to develop students’ soft- and hard-skills, e.g. critical thought.

This section provides regional knowledge from YRE countries, and a handful of practical student-lead exercises, which teachers may apply to different classes and subjects. This is not meant as an exhaustive list, but practical ideas to demonstrate how YRE can fit into any school programme.

Boots on the ground

While YRE is eminently interdisciplinary, engaging students in a multitude of ways, its strongest component remains the investigation process. There is no replacement for this experience, whether it is a local investigation, a local mission, or an international mission. The programme’s success hinges on getting Young Reporters on the field.
9. Local Knowledge from YRE countries

As an example of how civic education can influence students’ real-life engagement, in Cyprus, some YRE students have initiated a recycling programme in their village.

From France and Malta, however, we hear that YRE participants often submit articles that read closer to a minute of actions undertaken (e.g., recycling bins in the school). Reporting is sometimes insufficient, perhaps because further investigation was needed. This opens up the possibility of practical assignments on a specific issue (e.g. for science classes), which can then be reported in language class.

Right on point, in Portugal, too, YRE has long been understood as an interdisciplinary programme, with its various steps ideally incorporated into various subjects in school (Portuguese and English language, Technology, Geography, Biology, among others.

In Malta, teachers implement YRE as part of their language lessons, including reporting as one of the types of writing students learn, focusing on rules, pitfalls, and common mistakes. YRE is also looked at in media studies and environmental studies classes.

Romania offers further examples of seamless insertion of YRE into the school curriculum. In their Environmental Protection and Ecology classes, Romanian YRE have investigated medical waste; in English classes, students translated their articles; and in Computer Science classes, the YRE interacted online with their French counterparts.

In Slovakia, too, young pupils who had been lecturing their peers and community about recycling, found in Chemistry class the perfect ground to make a large poster with a recycling chart. In Slovak Language classes, they practiced journalistic writing.

Sweden takes the approach that YRE must be as flexible as possible in regards to the curriculum. With many different subjects touching on the YRE programme, Sweden aims to have many teachers approaching it from various angles. It’s a win-win.
10. Sample Activities

Sample Activity #1:
Investigate and brainstorm a local issue in class

To identify environmental problems and issues, teachers can start students off with a small quiz or brainstorming session to narrow down the research scope. This example demonstrates how the quiz helps in understanding an idea and preparing to approach it. Relevant questions on local implications for/of Climate Change:

✓ Is there a motorway near your town? Cycle lanes
✓ Is there public transport in or around your town?
✓ How do people commute in your town?
✓ What is the air quality index in your area?
✓ Where does the food you eat everyday come from?
✓ Are there pedestrians-only areas in your town?
✓ What is your home temperature in winter? (ideal: 19º)
✓ Are buildings efficiently insulated?
✓ What is the performance of your household appliances?
✓ What types of heating do you use?
✓ Etc.

Existing local initiatives:

✓ Are renewable energy used in your area?
✓ Has your Local Council put selective recycling in place?
✓ What are your Local Council’s policies in terms of energy saving and renewable energy development?
✓ Did road transportation diminish in your area lately?
✓ In school trips, is alternative transportation favoured?
✓ Do businesses and public services in your town use eco-friendly transportation or alternatives?
✓ Are there projects to install wind turbines, solar panels, or geothermal wells to use heat off the ground nearby?

This structure can be used to prepare for any environmental subject!

These activities can be used to create an entry for the YRE International competition (criteria in Part IV)
Sample Activity #2:
Report on school/local initiatives and civic engagement

This exercise is a key step in the YRE methodology. Students are encouraged not only to investigate issues, but also to engage with them, and to report on how they are being approached. In a best-case scenario, small-level action may be a way to engage attention:

Micro-action in the global fight against climate change:

✓ Establish a "walking-school bus" system;
✓ Lobby for bike racks to be installed in local buses;
✓ Undertake a survey on energy losses at school/at home;
✓ Use thermal cameras to warn against energy losses;
✓ Tree-planting initiatives to raise awareness about deforestation and increasing CO2 levels;
✓ Calculate the school or rec centre’s carbon footprint;
✓ Promote the consumption of local products by designing together a low carbon, localvore meal at school;
✓ Assess the amount of waste produce by the family;
✓ Organise a day without power supply;
✓ Promote or take part in a waste-reduction week;
✓ Promote or take part in a car-free week.

Sample Activity #3:
Communicate with the community

What media are available to disseminate the reports?

Newspapers (from local to regional):

✓ Secondary school newspaper;
✓ Call the Town Council to offer to include your investigation in your neighbourhood or town newspaper;
✓ Contact the local and regional media (they are often fond of and interested in initiatives by young people).

Internet:

✓ Social media: create a Facebook page, open a Twitter account;
follow International YRE’s Facebook and Twitter;

- Blogs: create your own blog with WordPress or BlogSpot;
- Better yet: create a blog hosted by sustainable development media (national eco-friendly media);
- Create your website free with Joomla, Wix, Jimdo or other platforms and publish your articles and reports;
- Open an account on Daily Motion or YouTube to publish and share your video reports on through social media. You can also use International YRE’s YouTube channel;
- Publish your photographs on Picasa or Flickr and share them on social networks and on sustainable development media pages.

(Note: In some countries, kids younger than 14 years of age may have to open online accounts with their parents’ permission.)

Radio:

- Contact a local community radio;
- Create your own radio in your school.

Television:

- Contact local/regional TV stations;
- Create your own TV channel online on DailyMotion or Youtube, publish your videos free and share your reports on social networks.

Sample Activity #4: Proposing Solutions

The purpose of a journalistic investigation is to get young reporters to focus on and understand the challenges to sustainable development, by identifying a local issue. To maintain a playful tone, we suggest that young reporters conduct this investigation in the form of a role-play. Often resisting at the start, students quickly get into character, and passionately defend a variety of positions. These roles allow students to practice being in the role of a media person (radio, TV, reporter). These are indicative, not exhaustive suggestions. The activity facilitator should assign roles as required by the circumstances, so that students are placed in active and motivating positions, having a mission with clearly defined goals, as part of the collective.
Learning objective: The purpose of the role-play is to get YREs to perform a rigorous journalistic investigation by offering them a fun and supportive environment for cooperation. The roles indicated in the list provided can be distributed according to each participant’s strengths and interests. This method looks to increase the motivation and the commitment of young people who are entrusted with a specific mission according to the role assigned to them. These roles create groups whose skills and goals are complementary. It can also be very productive to ask some students to play devil’s advocate, i.e., to sit in a contrarian position, and oppose their peers.

Tasks allocation role-play:

The “Special Correspondents” Group: this group is sent on a mission on the ground. The group is a privileged witness of the events. Its role consists, for example, in preparing interviews, reporting testimonies, etc.

The “Researchers” Group: this group looks for all the information, on the Internet or elsewhere, likely to back-up an article or a report. It plays a monitoring role within the rest of the team.

“Illustration and artwork” Group: this group designs the newspaper artwork, takes care of the layout and enhancement of information through the use of photographs, graphics, and everything that can emphasise the report or the general overview of the newspaper.

“Internet” Group: this group is responsible for the publication of reports through digital distribution channels such as websites, blogs, social networks (Twitter, Facebook).

“Communication” Group: this group is responsible for the promotion and communication of your news to your network of public and private partners (e.g.: Town Hall, urban communities, businesses, etc.) or its targets.

“Experts” Group: this group backs up the report with scientific evidence; it ensures that the report is supported by scientific evidence and that the sources of information are reliable.