LEAD FOR ECO JUSTICE

school leaders' key competences

This publication is one of the outputs of the Lead for Ecojustice project, which aims to develop school cultures based on ecojustice values by building the capacities of education stakeholders and school leadership teams with the professional development programme for developing diverse and democratic school cultures focused on what is fair to all living beings.

Coordinated by:

Network of Education Policy Centers

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INTRODUCTION

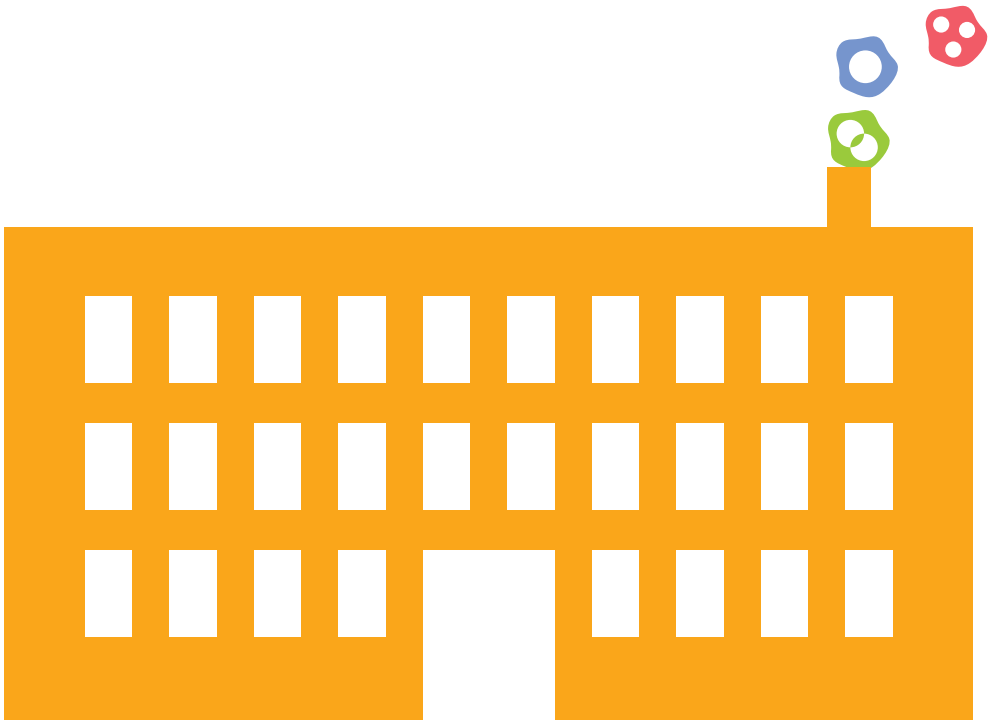
Lead for EcoJustice – school leaders' key competences addresses the critical need to support school leadership in facilitating educational shift toward environmental sustainability and ecological justice. Ecojustice education demands a paradigm shift from leadership solely focused on learning outcomes to a transformative model integrating humanistic and ecological priorities. This document can be used to empower school leaders to promote a comprehensive, whole-school approach integrating ecojustice principles into all aspects of school life. Its utility extends to building governance frameworks, curricula, school environments, and community relationships towards ecological values and sustainability. It is focused on strengthening the relationship between school leaders and policy-makers, educators and community members, to instil ecojustice values at their school's core. Doing so ensures future generations are capable of confronting urgent environmental challenges with empathy, capability and dedication to protect and sustain the planet.

A fundamental aspect of ecojustice education refers to recognising the importance of promoting:

→ **Nature Connection** by emphasising the interdependence between humans and natural phenomena, including land, air, water, and other species with whom we share this planet

→ **Alignment with planetary bounderies** by critically exploring and reacting to the patterns of hyperconsumption and commodification that have led to the exploitation of natural and human resources

→ **Polycentrism** that embraces multiple perspectives and highlights the distributed nature of authority and interaction, which can be essential for fostering environmental and social equity.

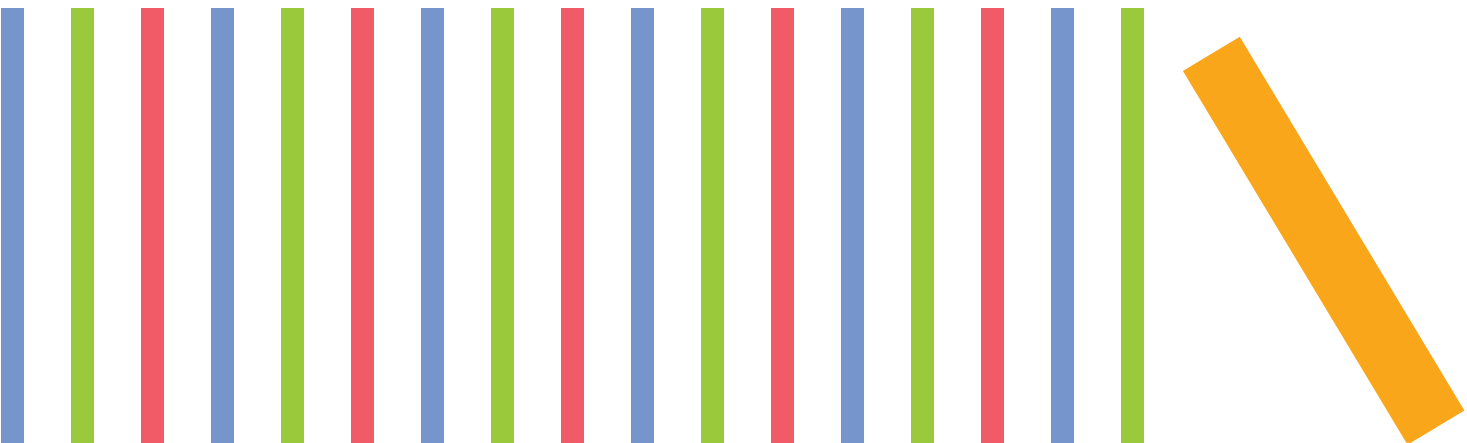


This document outlines the competences necessary for school leaders to act as catalysts of school transformation, fostering a planetary stewardship culture within schools:

→ a **mindset** that respects diverse ecosystems and fosters a profound interconnectedness with nature;

→ the **capacity** to implement school practices aligned with ecojustice principles, ensuring respect for all living beings and ecological systems.

The document is part of a broader 'Lead for EcoJustice' programme which aims to empower school leaders to incorporate ecojustice principles in their schools. The Program consist of a six-day professional program for school leaders, the EcoJustice Assessment Tool for School Leaders, articles, podcasts, and other video materials, all developed within the *Lead for EcoJustice* project financed by the European Union. For more information please contact project partner organizations.



school leaders' competences focused on

NATURE CONNECTION

As a fundamental aspect of ecojutice education nature connection refers to the ability to recognise human interconnectedness with nature, including an individual's closeness to nature, the enjoyment of its beauty, the significance of nature in their life, a sense of belonging to nature, and the level of respect towards it. This dimension reflects a leader's personal and emotional relationship with the natural world and the ways they incorporate this connection into their everyday life and leadership. On the school level, this area examines the capacity of school leaders to foster a relationship between students and the natural environment that encourages empathy, and an emotional connection to nature.

School leader mindset that respects diverse ecosystems

→ Develop and promote empathy for all living beings while fostering a deep awareness of the interconnectedness between humans, animals, plants, and the environment.

→ Recognise and communicate the physical, emotional, and cognitive benefits of maintaining a strong connection with nature.

→ Willingness for self-reflection and exploration of personal values related to nature, guiding leaders towards responsible environmental stewardship.

School leader capacity to take steps to implement school practices in line with ecojustice principles

→ Foster a culture where the school community regularly engages with and connects to nature, embedding this into daily practices and routines.

→ Lead initiatives that transform the school community to support biodiversity.

→ Integrate environmental awareness and pro-environment behaviours into a whole-school approach, leading initiatives that transform the school community to support biodiversity and sustainable planetary well-being.

→ Ensure that all aspects of school governance, curriculum, environment, and community partnerships reflect respect for all living beings and ecojustice principles.

school leaders' competences focused on

ALIGNMENT WITH PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

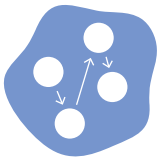
This area is focused on competences related to the alignment of the school leader's lifestyle choices and leadership decisions with the ecological limits that define a safe operating space for humanity, such as climate change, biodiversity, and pollution. Also defined within this area is the capacity of school leaders to take steps to implement school practices in line with ecojustice principles practices and curriculum with the concept of living within the Earth's ecological limits, addressing issues such as waste, energy use, and carbon footprint.

School leader mindset that respects diverse ecosystems

→ Familiar with the science behind critical environmental issues such as climate change, deforestation, biodiversity loss, pollution, and the worldwide impact on ecosystems and cultures.

→ Able to recognise and address emotional responses to climate change, understanding how these feelings can affect their and others' overall well-being and engagement.

→ Demonstrating sustainable behaviours such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and supporting eco-friendly initiatives based on understanding how individual behaviours and organisational practices, including producing and consuming goods and services, influence societal values and have varying impacts on the climate and environment.



School leader capacity to take steps to implement school practices in line with ecojustice principles

→ Promote and implement comprehensive school-wide policies and practices that prepare students to understand climate challenges.

→ Foster educational experiences that prepare students to respond effectively to climate challenges, emphasising sustainability and ecological limits.

→ Advocate for a shift in school values and practices from focusing on growth to prioritising planetary well-being, aligning with the principles of ecojustice and respect for planetary boundaries.

school leaders' competences focused on

POLYCENTRISM

Polycentrism reflects the idea of decentring human or dominant cultural perspectives to include diverse ecosystem interests and embracing multiple perspectives. This dimension evaluates how much a school leader challenges human-centred, Western-centred, or Eurocentric viewpoints by embracing diverse, decentralised perspectives and ecojustice values that prioritise marginalised voices and ecosystems. On the level of school operations, competences are described as the capacity of the school leaders to take steps to implement school practices that acknowledge and integrate diverse ecosystem perspectives, decentring human-centric or dominant cultural views to embrace broader ecological justice.

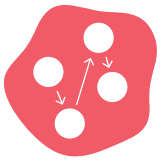
School leader mindset that respects diverse ecosystems

→ Understand how environmental issues are connected with social justice concerns, such as racial and economic disparities, and how different forms of oppression overlap.

→ Exhibit respect for cultural diversity, understanding that different cultures have unique relationships with the environment and varied approaches to sustainability and conservation.

→ Understand how language influences perceptions of the environment, nature, and ecological systems.

→ Critically analyse and communicate ecological issues in a way that promotes sustainability and justice.



School leader capacity to take steps to implement school practices in line with ecojustice principles

→ Promote active participation in school policies and practices, strengthening community bonds and resilience through solidarity and shared responsibility.

→ Ensure that all ecosystem actors are “heard“ and valued by promoting inclusive and transparent language in interactions, curricula, learning materials, and decision-making processes.

→ Use an understanding of ecojustice concepts to guide the transition from anthropocentric to polycentric school practices, shaping policies and educational programmes accordingly.

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