Critical School Geography

Education for Global Citizenship

John Huckle

Text copyright © John Huckle 2020
The moral right of the author has been asserted
This chapter was downloaded from the author’s website at
http://john.huckle.org.uk
Curriculum Unit Six

Urban farming in Chicago, Nairobi and Bristol

Roosevelt Square youth farm, Chicago

Students explore the stories (discourses) we are told about food and hunger. Those told by the corporate global food industry are contrasted with those told by small scale urban farmers.

Three case studies of urban farms are used to explore the contribution of such farms to food sovereignty, food justice and sustainable development. Students suggest ways in which community based and cooperative urban farming reflects Earth Charter principle seven (patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard the Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being) and compare such farming with the type of farming associated with the corporate global food system. The focus is on SDG 2 Zero Hunger and citizenship education topic 2: issues affecting interaction and connectedness of communities at local, national and global levels. The unit seeks to develop students’ sustainability citizenship in the context of the food they and others eat or fail to eat.
Unit plan

Key idea

The stories (discourses) we are told and tell each other about food shape our diets, health, body image, and beliefs, values and actions as citizens. The dominant discourse of hunger, promoted by the corporate global food industry, focuses on food scarcity. It is challenged by critical discourse that focuses on food sovereignty and food justice and is promoted by many urban farmers.

Inquiry questions

What is the contribution of urban farming to reducing hunger and increasing food sovereignty and food justice?

In what ways is urban farming more sustainable than the type of farming associated with the corporate global food system?

Should UK agricultural policy give more support to urban farming and agro-ecology?

Key understandings

The Earth Charter is a set of ethical principles agreed by people around the world for building a just, sustainable and peaceful future. Principle seven recommends the adoption of patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard the Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being. This principle should be applied to food systems.

The right to food is a fundamental right contained in many declarations of human rights including UN Declarations on Human Rights and the Rights of the Child. It has not been incorporated into UK domestic law and the restructuring of the welfare system over the last decade has resulted in a marked increase in food insecurity among low income families.

Urban farming is the growing of crops and the raising of animals within and around cities. It provides a wide variety of vegetables, fruit, herbs, meat, eggs, fish and non-food products. Its produce is often sold in weekend farmers’ markets.
Urban farming gives low income residents access to fresh produce, greater choice, better prices, healthier diets, and food security. Garden plots within cities can be many times more productive than land outside the city. Urban farming can contribute to food sovereignty (the democratic control of food systems by farmers and consumers) and food justice (everyone having a right to food that is recognised in law and reflected in government policies).

Much urban farming applies ecological concepts to the design and management of food production. It is an example of agroecology and is more sustainable than the energy and chemical intensive farming encouraged by corporations and many governments. Generally it is labour intensive, recycles nutrients, encourages biodiversity, involves minimal transport of inputs and outputs, improves community wellbeing and can increase climate resilience. It can however carry health and environmental risks: contaminated land and water, misuse of pesticides and raw organic manure, etc.

Urban farmers often have problems in acquiring land as more and more is being used for urban development and commercial farming. The FAO supports its integration into local and national agricultural development strategies, food and nutrition programmes, and urban planning. It helps member countries develop the sector’s contribution to food security and provides technical support.

Urban farming in African countries like Kenya offers a form of sustainable development at a time when the numbers of young people are still rising and many are migrating to the cities. In Chicago it offers employment and training for marginalised youth and in Bristol it is innovating with vertical farming.

The global corporate food system supplies most of the food eaten in the UK. It produces food as a commodity using energy and chemical intensive methods. The food is generally processed; transported long distances; and heavily promoted through advertising. This system is not sustainable and its social and environmental costs fall most heavily on farmers and communities elsewhere in the world. It benefits from government policies and contributes to food insecurity among low income families.

Community groups have shown that urban farming is one solution to food insecurity and malnutrition in the UK. As elsewhere digital devices and platforms are aiding its development in the form of co-operatives and...
community enterprises. Reform of agricultural policy should shift subsidies to small scale producers and agro-ecology.

**Key concepts** Food supply, commodity chains, food miles, food shortage, hunger, malnutrition, obesity, food sovereignty, food justice, human rights, welfare benefits, austerity, food banks, urban farming, agroecology, sustainability, sustainable development, community development, cooperative enterprises, sustainability citizenship, global citizenship.

**Key values** Earth Charter principles and especially principle 7, patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard the Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being

**Key skills** Discussion, debate, questioning, discourse analysis, media analysis, values clarification, political literacy

**Learning objectives** Students will evaluate the potential of urban farming to increase food sovereignty, food justice and sustainable development. They will compare urban farming systems to those that are part of the corporate global food system and supply most of their food. They will consider the implications of their learning for their diets, local food production, and their roles as global sustainability citizens.

**Learning activities** Discussion, evaluation of diets and farming systems, case study videos. Other activities suggested by Unesco guidance.

**Assessment task** Completion of a table comparing three urban farms in relation to Earth Charter principle seven.

**Links to Unesco guidance on ESDGC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDG 2 Zero hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</th>
<th>Selected learning objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive learning objectives</td>
<td>The learner knows about the amount and distribution of hunger and malnutrition locally, nationally and globally, currently as well as historically. The learner knows the main drivers and root</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural learning objectives</td>
<td>causes for hunger at the individual, local, national and global level. The learner knows principles of sustainable agriculture and understands the need for legal rights to have land and property as necessary conditions to promote it. The learner understands the need for sustainable agriculture and malnutrition and knows about other strategies to combat hunger, malnutrition and poor diets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-emotional learning objectives</td>
<td>The learner is able to create a vision for a world without hunger and malnutrition. The learner is able to reflect on their values and deal with diverging values, attitudes and strategies in relation to combating hunger and malnutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture. The learner is able to feel empathy, responsibility and solidarity for and with people suffering from hunger and malnutrition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CE topic 2 Issues affecting interaction and connectedness of communities at local, national and global levels.</strong></td>
<td>Key themes (12 – 15 yr olds)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess the root causes of major local, national and global issues and the interconnections of local, national and global factors.</td>
<td>Shared local, national and global concerns and their underlying causes. Changing global forces and patterns and their effects on people’s daily lives. How history, geography, politics, economics, religion, technology, media or other factors influences current global issues. How decisions made globally or in one part of the world can affect current and future well-being of people and the environment elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suggested topics for SDG2 include:

Global food – import, export, cash crops, international taxes, subsidies, trading systems, merits, risks and challenges of utilising genetically modified organisms (GMOs)

Institutions and movements related to hunger and sustainable agriculture like the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Foodwatch, Slow Food, community based agriculture, the international movement via Campesina, etc

Concepts and principles of sustainable agriculture, including climate resilient practices, organic farming, permaculture and agro-forestry.

Examples of learning approaches and methods for SDG2 include:

Perform role plays with small-scale producers versus big enterprises in a global market that is influenced by taxes, subsidies, tariffs, quotas, etc

Organize excursions and field trips to places where sustainable agriculture is practiced.

Follow food from farm to fork – growing, harvesting and preparing food eg. in urban or school growing projects. Conduct a Life Cycle Analysis of food.

Preparation

Familiarise yourself with SDG2 zero hunger and note the WFP’s fact that one in nine of the world’s populations still goes to bed hungry.

Read Lucy Jarosz’s chapter on discourses of hunger. It suggests that urban farming systems can contribute to zero hunger by providing food sovereignty and food justice for poor urban residents including young people.

Download the ppt presentation on the Earth Charter. Edit this so that it communicates the principles of the charter in a form appropriate to the interests and abilities of your students. Slides 4 – 8 are the key slides.

Download the FAO report Food Security and Nutrition in the World (2018) and read the key messages on page xii. Note that undernourishment is increasing; that one out of every nine people in the world is undernourished; that more complex, frequent and intense climate extremes are threatening to erode and reverse gains made in ending hunger and malnutrition; and that considerable additional work is needed to ensure we leave no one behind on the road towards
achieving the SDG goals on food security and nutrition. 20% of the population of Africa is undernourished (p. 4).

The current UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016 – 2025) links with the SDGs (p. 14) and a key message on the links between food insecurity and malnutrition is that food insecurity contributes to overweight and obesity as well as undernutrition. High rates of these forms of malnutrition coexist in many countries. The higher cost of nutritious foods, the stress of living with food insecurity, and physiological adaptations to food restriction help explain why food-insecure families may have a higher risk of overweight and obesity (p. 26). Figure 13 (p. 28) shows countries affected by multiple forms of malnutrition while figure 14 (p. 30) shows pathways from inadequate food access to multiple forms of malnutrition. Part two deals with the impact of climate on food security and malnutrition.

Preview three short videos that explain urban farming and contain case studies of urban farming in Chicago, Nairobi and Bristol: Why we should be urban farming; Urban Farming in Nairobi; and Grow Bristol, pioneering UK vertical farm. Research these urban centres sufficiently to be able to outline their similarities and differences to your students. Compare cities allows you to compare Nairobi and Chicago.

Read the editorial and two articles in issue 35 of the Urban Agriculture magazine: Youth Corp, Growing food and farming literacy in Chicago pp. 22-23 and Agricultural Coops pp. 40 – 41..

Download the Human Rights Watch report Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, Welfare Cuts and the Right to Food in the UK. This documents the lives of families in the UK living on the breadline, the work of voluntary organizations stepping in to help, and identifies areas where the UK government is falling short in ensuring people’s right to food. Read the summary and recommendations. You might also refer to the Childrens Future Food Inquiry.

UK food banks faced record demand during the coroavirus lockdown of 2020 and the government launched an obesity strategy in July as it became clear that obesity was a contributory factor in coronavirus deaths

Read Ethical Consumer’s report on the Heinz-Kraft company, part of the corporate global food system.
Familiarise yourself with the Incredible Edible network in the UK, agroecology and its role in future agricultural policy.

Countryside Classroom links teachers to farmers and ideas for growing food locally. Eco-schools suggests that growing food links to its school grounds and healthy living topics.

**Suggested procedure**

Begin by introducing stories (discourses) we are told about food and hunger. How are we encouraged to think about food and its impact on our health, body image, and wellbeing? Who tells us these stories and what are their interests in telling them? Use advertisements and topical news items to explore the influence of the corporate global food system and its resistance to regulation over such issues as the sugar content of food. What other interests tell us stories? The health lobby, the environmental movement, the fashion industry, the charity sector, social media, etc. Consider making a wall display of advertisements and students’ artwork / posters.

Now explore students’ perceptions and understandings of hunger? How many people in the UK and the world go hungry? How is hunger, malnutrition and obesity defined and distributed? How do the media and charities seek to influence our understanding of hunger? What is the mainstream story (discourse) on hunger (too little food for a rising population, so increase production and food aid) and how is this challenged by critical discourse (enough food for everyone, hunger the result of unfair distribution, hunger the result of economic and social marginalisation and impoverishment). Introduce the concepts of food sovereignty and food justice.

Next explore people’s rights to food. Should food be a basic human right guaranteed by governments? Introduce the UN Charter on Human Rights (article 25) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (article 27). Why do students think that governments fail to deliver these rights to citizens? Who would support / oppose these rights being adopted in domestic law? Mention the main findings of the Human Rights Watch report and the reactions to this report of politicians across the political spectrum.

Turn to the Earth Charter. Use slides to explain what it is, how it was developed and how its principles can be applied to all aspects of our lives as global citizens, including our diets. What do students understand by a ‘planet friendly
diet’, food miles, carbon footprints, ethical food consumption, eating as a sustainability citizen, eating as a global citizen? Why is vegetarianism and veganism increasing amongst young people? Explain Earth Charter principle seven and explore students’ understanding of what it would mean if applied to food production and consumption. In this and the next procedural step there is continuing scope to use advertising to aid discussion and draw out ideas.

Introduce the corporate global food system as that which supplies most of the food in our supermarkets. It is dominated by private corporations; produces and distributes food on a global scale; is energy and chemicals intensive; and is accused by environmentalists of being unsustainable: degrading the environment (failing to reproduce ecological capital), exploiting its workers, and contributing to hunger (by for example, enclosing land formerly used by poor farmers) It argues that it provides cheap and healthy food and has enabled food supply to keep pace with a rising population. You might illustrate the case against the corporate global food system using the case study of the Heinz-Kraft company from Ethical Consumer.

Now use the key ideas to introduce urban farming as a more sustainable alternative. Locate Chicago, Nairobi and Bristol and inform students of similarities and differences between these three urban centres. Show the three videos over a series of lessons drawing out their key messages in terms of ecological, economic, social and cultural sustainability. What are the similarities and differences with regard to urban farming in the three locations? Draw on the articles from Urban Agriculture magazine and stress the value of urban farming in supplying worthwhile activity, employment, training, safe spaces, and resonance (chapter two) for young people. What role does cooperative / community ownership of land and tools play in ensuring the success of urban farms? In summary ask the students to complete Activity Sheet 6.1 to compare urban farming in the three cities. Discuss what they might write in the different boxes before inviting them to individually complete an enlarged copy of this sheet as an assessment exercise.

In conclusion discuss the implications of what students have learnt for their locality and school. What stories should we telling others about food? Should we be changing our diets? Should we be obtaining more of our food from local growers? Is there a local urban farm we might visit? What do we know about the food served in the school canteen? Should our school become an eco-school growing some of the food that students eat?
Possible extension

The RSA Food, Farming and Countryside Commission was set up in 2017 to think afresh about where our food comes from, how we support farming and rural communities and how we invest in the many benefits the countryside provides. It reported in 2019 suggesting that farmers much be enabled to shift from intensive farming to more organic and wildlife-friendly production, raising livestock on grass and growing more nuts and pulses. It also advocated a national nature service with opportunities for young people to work in the countryside.

The report linked cheap food to a public health crisis, suggesting that the next ten years were critical to restoring the health and well-being of both people and the planet. Decades of government policy aimed at making food cheaper had fuelled rising obesity and degraded the environment. The UK had the third cheapest basket of food in the developed world but also had the highest food poverty in Europe in terms of people being able to afford a healthy diet. Agriculture produced more than 10% of UK’s climate-heating gases and was the biggest destroyer of wildlife. The abundance of key species has fallen 67% since 1970 and 13% of species are now close to extinction. The commission recommends agroecology practices such as organic farming and agroforestry, and calls for a planetary health diet. The Government must develop a plan to put the countryside and its communities at the centre of the green economy.

Debate over the future of UK agriculture took on increased significance in the wake of Brexit. You might develop a curriculum unit on the future of farming and the countryside by drawing on the Commission’s report together with DEFRA’s policy proposals in Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit; the 2020 Agriculture Bill; and Agricology’s response. The unit might also draw on the IPCC’s report on land use and the response from the IPPC’s critics (see page 266).
### Activity Sheet 6.1  Comparing urban farming in three locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main features. What are the main features of the farm? What food does it produce? Who does it employ?</th>
<th>Nairobi</th>
<th>Chicago</th>
<th>Bristol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human rights. Does the urban farm make it more likely that people will realise their right to food? How?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth’s regenerative capacities. Does the urban farm restore waste land, improve soils, recycle plant nutrients and increase biodiversity? How?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community wellbeing. Does the urban farm improve people’s physical and mental health and extend the network of friends who are prepared to help them? How?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>