Inviting Non-Human Stakeholders

Including more-than-human perspectives in a project

RELATING | Empathy and Compassion

What you will need:

- 3-20
- Workshop
- 1.5 hrs preparation
- 1.5 hrs execution
- Cards

Related Tools:

- Deep Listening
- Purposeful Storytelling
- The Power of Storytelling

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"This tool allows students to empathically engage with non-human beings and entities. To embody a different perspective, students get to work in a creative manner, using imagination."

—Anke de Vrieze

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I. Overview

Typically, individuals view a particular problem or case study solely from a human-centered point of view and prioritise anthropocentric values, requirements and goals. However, acknowledging non-human perspectives is essential for achieving social and ecological harmony. Humans are not the only inhabitants of the planet, and our actions and decisions impact the entire ecosystem.

To achieve sustainable and harmonious relationships with other species and the environment, we need to understand and respect their perspectives and needs. This tool invites students to incorporate 'more-than-human' viewpoints. It encourages students to embody the perspectives of specific non-human entities, including animals, plants, rivers, forests or mountains, related to the issue or case study being discussed.

Learning outcome

- The student is able to empathically connect to non-human perspectives

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II. Learning Activity

This activity invites students to embody non-human perspectives when working on a case or project.



1. Setting the Scene

10 mins

Introduce the case to the students, using elements of storytelling.

Read the story of the case and invite the students to listen with their senses: “What do you hear, see, smell, taste and feel?”

End the story with a future-oriented question: “What future do you envision for this place?”

Tip: see sample cases and tips for storytelling.



2. Presenting Non-Human Perspectives

10 mins

Start by presenting several cards to the students, each representing a different non-human character or entity relevant to the case. Include characters and entities with different time perspectives, e.g., a bird, a tree, a river or a mountain.

Then, invite the students to select one of the ‘characters’ by choosing a card and reading the description of the character’s contributions to the local ecosystems and culture, as well as their needs and wants, on the back of the card.

Tip: see tips on how to create example cards.

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3. Embodying Non-Human Perspectives

20 mins

Give the students some time in silence to imagine themselves “in the role” of their chosen character. Encourage them to focus on sensory aspects, such as how the chosen character feels, what they notice, what they smell or taste and how they move.

Next, ask the students to reflect individually on their character by jotting down descriptive words, creating drawings or engaging in other forms of expression.

Tip: you can assist the students in this process by providing guiding questions.



4. Embodying your character

30 mins

Form groups of 3 students and provide them with the following instructions:

- Individually, take a look at your free writing or drawings from the previous step. Write down an opening question that will help you engage in a conversation with your chosen character.
- Once everyone is ready, take turns embodying your characters. When a student is ready, the other students in the group will ask the opening question and continue the conversation by asking follow-up questions related to the character’s emotions and experiences. Encourage students to connect the conversation to the chosen case.

Encourage students to address each other as their characters instead of their names.

Please note, as part of assessment *as* learning, students answer reflective questions in Step 4 or 5.

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5. Bringing Perspectives Together 20 mins

Invite the student groups to share the insights they gained from embodying a non-human perspective.

Considering the totality of the perspectives, ask students to write one sentence or statement collectively to summarise their wish for the future of the given case.

Please note, as part of assessment *as* learning, students answer reflective questions in Step 4 or 5.

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III. Assessment

To assess the ability of students to connect to non-human stakeholders in an emphatic manner, students write a brief reflective journal entry, answering reflective questions. *You can choose to include the assessment in Step 4 or 5 of the learning activity.*



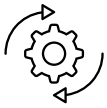
Purpose

Assessment *as* learning aims to strengthen the learning process and the development of metacognitive skills. It empowers students to direct their own learning and to become independent, critical self-assessors.



Roles

Self-assessment



Characteristics

Self-regulated learning



Materials

Reflective questions

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Assessment

Reflective questions

Answer the following questions in a brief reflective journal entry:

1. How was it to empathise with a non-human perspective? What was easy, and what was difficult? What emotions did it invoke?

2. What insights did you get from embodying a non-human perspective? What did your 'character' teach you?

3. What did you learn about your own human perspective?

4. How did embodying a non-human character change your perspective on the given case?

5. What do you think could be the value of including non-human perspectives in your own work or project?

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IV. Key Advice

Sample cases and tips for storytelling (Step 1) can be downloaded below and found on:

- https://www.reimaginary.com/resources/city-centre-case
- https://www.reimaginary.com/resources/abandoned-farmstead-case
- https://www.reimaginary.com/methods/storytelling

Tips for creating cards (Step 2):
Prepare a set of cards with non-human characters, relevant to the case study – e.g., animals, rivers, and trees. You can find royalty-free images on Pexels.

Guiding questions (Step 3) can be downloaded below.

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Key Advice

Case and Story
Two example cases, specifically focused on including more-than-human perspectives can be found on www.re.imaginary.com:

- New City Centre: Inviting more-than-human stakeholders https://www.reimaginary.com/resources/city-centre-case
- Abandoned Farmstead: How is a farm like a church? https://www.reimaginary.com/resources/abandoned-farmstead-case

These cases were built around archetypes of regeneration challenges. The stories we crafted were based on the principles of storytelling. For each case, natural elements and beings were given a central role in the story, in line with a shift to a more-than-human perspective.

If you choose your own case to work with, we invite you to adopt principles of storytelling and highlight natural elements and beings in the way you narrate the story.

Characters
The characters chosen should reflect the type of thinking you want to inspire (e.g., characters with different lifespans to inspire long-term thinking or characters that are important to the relevant ecosystems or cultural heritage of a specific case).

Example Card



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Birch Forest

We are many and we are one. While you might experience us as quiet and peaceful if you come out of the city for a visit, beneath your feet a superhighway of information flows. We communicate feelings and even share nutrients through our roots and symbiotic fungi networks. You might notice our beauty and grace as we mark the seasons with dazzling colours – our bright green leaves appear in early summer and turn into spectacular displays of colours in the autumn, falling and baring our luminous white bark in the winter. But not only are we beautiful, we also give more practical gifts to all who dwell near us. We provide home and shelter to many and we store carbon from the atmosphere as we grow. We gift humans with materials to build with and to burn for energy and we support the lives of those beings that you have hunted for food since the dawn of your history. We have many lessons to teach – could a human city ever match the beauty and bounty of a forest?

Source: reimaginary.com

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Key Advice

Guiding questions

Please note, the "you" refers to the character you embody.

- What are the most important needs and priorities for your species in this ecosystem?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about recent changes in this ecosystem?
- How do you communicate with fellow inhabitants of this ecosystem and what messages do you share with them?
- What do you think humans could do differently to improve their relationship with you and promote coexistence in the ecosystem?
- What are the benefits and challenges of living in this ecosystem, and how do you balance them?
- What do you wish for the future of the place?
- How do you contribute to the overall health and well-being of the ecosystem?

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V. References

Inviting Non-Human Stakeholders. (n.d.). Re Imaginary.
https://www.reimaginary.com/methods/inviting-non-human-stakeholders

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