

ECO-CRITICAL LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Eco-Leaders: Empowering Teachers for a Sustainable Future

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Lead Partner:  Portugal

INTRODUCTION

Schools play a vital role in preparing individuals to respond to environmental, social, and ethical challenges. However, sustainability education should not only focus on ecological facts or isolated environmental activities. It should also encourage learners and educators to critically reflect on systems, values, behaviours, and power relations that shape our relationship with the environment.

The **Eco-Critical Leadership Guide** has been developed within the Erasmus+ project *Eco-Leaders: Empowering Teachers for a Sustainable Future* to support teachers and school leaders in becoming transformative leaders who promote sustainability, critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and ethical responsibility within their educational communities.

The guide combines:

-  ecological awareness
-  critical thinking
-  ethical leadership
-  intercultural perspectives
-  transformative action

to foster sustainable school cultures and empower teachers as change agents.

1. WHAT IS ECO-CRITICAL LEADERSHIP?

Definition

Eco-Critical Leadership refers to:

the ability to lead educational communities through sustainable, ethical, critically informed, and transformative practices that support ecological and social wellbeing.

Eco-critical leaders do not simply promote “green activities.”

They:

- question systems and narratives
 - encourage critical dialogue
 - integrate sustainability into school culture
 - empower communities to take meaningful action
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2. WHY DO SCHOOLS NEED ECO-CRITICAL LEADERSHIP?


Today’s environmental challenges are connected with:

- climate change
- consumerism
- inequality
- unsustainable lifestyles
- misinformation and greenwashing

Schools therefore need leaders who can:

- ✓ think critically
- ✓ act ethically
- ✓ inspire participation
- ✓ connect sustainability with everyday life

Eco-critical leadership helps schools move from:

 isolated eco-events

to

 whole-school sustainable transformation.

3. CORE DIMENSIONS OF ECO-CRITICAL LEADERSHIP

3.1 Ecological Awareness

Eco-critical leaders understand:

- environmental systems
- sustainability challenges
- the interconnectedness of humans and nature

They promote:

- climate literacy
 - biodiversity awareness
 - responsible resource use
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Practical Example

A teacher integrates local environmental issues into lessons and encourages students to explore real-world ecological challenges in their community.

3.2 Critical Thinking

Eco-critical leadership involves questioning:

- environmental narratives
- media messages
- systems of consumption
- power structures

Teachers encourage students to ask:

- Who benefits?
 - Who is affected?
 - Is this truly sustainable?
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Practical Example

Students analyse advertisements using terms like:

- “eco-friendly”
- “green”

- “natural”

and discuss possible greenwashing strategies.

3.3 Ethical Leadership

Sustainability is deeply connected with ethics and responsibility.

Eco-critical leaders:

- promote fairness and inclusion
 - consider future generations
 - encourage empathy and justice
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Reflection Questions

- Is sustainability equally accessible to everyone?
 - How do environmental problems affect vulnerable communities?
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3.4 Intercultural Perspective


Different cultures have unique relationships with nature.


Eco-critical leaders value:


- traditional ecological knowledge
 - cultural sustainability
 - diverse environmental perspectives
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Examples from Partner Countries

 Estonia → forest identity and outdoor learning

 Finland → wellbeing through nature

 Türkiye → traditional sustainability practices

 Portugal → ocean literacy and coastal sustainability



3.5 Transformative Action

Knowledge should lead to meaningful action.

Eco-critical leaders:

- ✓ involve students in decision-making
 - ✓ encourage school sustainability projects
 - ✓ support community engagement
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Examples

- school eco-campaigns
 - student sustainability committees
 - digital awareness campaigns
 - community clean-up initiatives
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4. CHARACTERISTICS OF ECO-CRITICAL LEADERS

Traditional Leadership	Eco-Critical Leadership
Focus on management	Focus on transformation
Top-down approach	Participatory approach
Short-term goals	Long-term sustainability
Information delivery	Critical reflection & action

5. ECO-CRITICAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CLASSROOM

Teachers can promote eco-critical leadership through:

- ✓ project-based learning
- ✓ inquiry-based activities
- ✓ debates and ethical discussions

- ✓ eco-linguistic analysis
 - ✓ interdisciplinary approaches
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Sample Activity

“Whose Sustainability?”

Students analyse:

- fast fashion
- eco-tourism
- renewable energy projects

Questions:

- Who benefits?
 - What are the environmental costs?
 - Is the solution truly sustainable?
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6. WHOLE-SCHOOL SUSTAINABILITY APPROACH

Eco-critical leadership should influence:

Curriculum

Integrating sustainability across subjects

Digital Practices

Responsible and ethical use of technology

Student Participation

Student-led eco initiatives

Community Collaboration

Partnerships with local organisations

7. DIGITAL & ECO-CRITICAL LEADERSHIP

Digital tools can support:

- collaboration
- awareness raising
- environmental action

However, eco-critical leaders also discuss:

- digital waste
 - overconsumption of technology
 - AI ethics and sustainability
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Example Classroom Activities

- ✓ Digital storytelling on climate change
 - ✓ Creating eco-podcasts
 - ✓ Analysing environmental social media discourse
 - ✓ AI-supported sustainable future scenarios
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8. ECO-LINGUISTICS & LEADERSHIP

Language shapes environmental thinking.



Eco-critical leaders help students analyse:

- media narratives
 - advertisements
 - political discourse
 - cultural expressions
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Cultural Eco-Linguistic Elements

- ✓ proverbs
- ✓ songs and folk tunes
- ✓ rituals
- ✓ storytelling traditions

These elements strengthen:

-  intercultural awareness
 -  ecological values
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9. INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHER TRAINING

Activity 1 — Eco-Language Audit

Teachers analyse:

- school mission statements
- classroom language
- sustainability slogans

Questions:

- What environmental values are reflected?
 - Is the language anthropocentric or ecocentric?
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Activity 2 — Designing a Sustainable School Vision

Groups create:

- a sustainable school mission
 - eco-values statement
 - student participation strategy
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Activity 3 — Greenwashing Detective

Teachers analyse real advertisements and identify:

- manipulative language
 - vague sustainability claims
 - hidden environmental impacts
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10. ACTION PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS

Eco-critical leaders should develop:

- ✓ sustainability goals
 - ✓ digital responsibility plans
 - ✓ eco-linguistic activities
 - ✓ student engagement strategies
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Suggested School Actions

- Eco-language awareness week
 - Green digital campaigns
 - School sustainability audits
 - Intercultural sustainability projects
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11. MONITORING & EVALUATION

Indicators

Area	Indicator
Teacher competence	Increased eco-critical awareness
Student participation	Number of eco-projects
School culture	Sustainable practices implemented
Dissemination	Community engagement

Evaluation Tools

- ✓ surveys
 - ✓ reflection journals
 - ✓ observation forms
 - ✓ action plan rubrics
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12. EXPECTED IMPACT

The Eco-Critical Leadership Guide will contribute to:

Teachers

- improved leadership competences
- stronger critical ecological awareness

Students

- increased participation and agency
- deeper sustainability understanding





Schools

- whole-school sustainability culture
 - innovative educational practices
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13. CONCLUSION

Eco-Critical Leadership encourages educators to move beyond traditional environmental education and become transformative leaders who inspire sustainable thinking, ethical responsibility, and meaningful action.

By combining:

-  ecology
-  critical thinking
-  intercultural awareness
-  digital responsibility

schools can become active spaces of sustainable transformation.
