

“Response–Able” Education for Sustainable Employability Aligned With Sustainable Development Goals: SOARing to Success

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

‘The SOAR model’ (as it has come to be used in the UK and abroad) is in effect a conceptual metamodel that scaffolds pedagogy, andragogy, and heutagogy in its design and delivery of response-able, equitable, and empowering learning for all students. SOAR invokes personally meaningful interconnections within and between the dimensions of self, opportunity, aspirations, and results through inbuilt requirements for self-reflection, action and interaction, research, analysis, and synthesis. It is inclusive while it values diversity, and its practical methodology enables all learners to become response-able while developing employability and sustainability for effective functioning in the diverse contexts of learning, work, and life in a changing, challenging world. This chapter shows how SOAR integrates and implements an ‘inside-out’ systemic approach that teachers can adapt to deliver several key and currently siloed strategic agendas under one umbrella, thereby encompassing the much broader agenda of response-able transformational education that is sorely needed in contemporary times.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers have a responsibility to teach.

Learners have an equal responsibility to learn.

Teachers can and should enable students to response-ably develop employability skills and attributes for transfer to sustainable global futures.

Some of the complexities inherent in the three fundamental statements above are unravelled and explored in this chapter, with reference to ‘the SOAR model’ or framework, as it has come to be known and used in the UK and abroad, and hereafter referred to in this chapter as SOAR, for brevity. **SOAR** is a simple and positive acronym that offers teachers and students a way of animating the recursive interconnections between *Self*, *Opportunity*, *Aspirations* and *Results*. These universal interrelationships are innovatively interpreted by the author into a pedagogy and an andragogic process of personalised learning, enabling students to develop their skills, knowledge, attributes, and experiences in a broad holistic frame, and to do this with more intrinsic motivation, sense of direction and destination. The author’s implementation of SOAR is not to be confused with other uses of the same acronym in other contexts.

The SOAR process and praxis of personalized development is implicitly underpinned by the conceptualization of ‘responsibility’ as ‘response-ability’ – the unique human metacognitive ability to reflect and choose responses mindfully and purposefully in relation to both external demands and personal needs and aspirations. *SOARing to Success* methods and resources have been tried and tested with diverse cohorts of students, at different levels and programmes of study, including mature and international students. Evaluations consistently show positive benefits in terms of integrated personal, social and employability development, broadly defined as the behavioural competencies that are needed for individuals to be effective and productive in our challenging times. The concepts and methods are comprehensively described and available in a series of publications by this author¹ for teachers to implement in their own context (also see references and footnotes later). This chapter provides further clear and explicit understanding with reference to the SOAR methods as a novel application in relation to response-able education for sustainable development.

‘Responsibility’ is a term that implies an external imposition, such as in job descriptions which itemise the responsibilities a jobholder is expected to undertake in performing certain tasks at a particular level of ability, whereas ‘response-ability’ is the intrinsic creative and critical decision-making power of a jobholder in response to performance demands. A key power of teachers lies in the response-ability to decide what to include and what to exclude in the design of curricula and how best to deliver it. Teaching the knowledge and technical skills content of subject disciplines must take priority. Additionally, successive UK national agendas have called for teachers to develop employable graduates with transferable personal and professional skills. At the time of writing, a combination of personal, social, academic and career development capabilities are needed by everyone – staff and students – in response to complex intersecting contemporary challenges. For instance, education for sustainable development is a new agenda that is rapidly gaining ground in the UK, requiring teachers to respond with innovative pedagogies. This raises the question for all in educational roles: how are we responding to these urgent and important needs and challenges?

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