

## **Using Scaffolding to Cultivate Understanding of Sustainable Value Creation in a Highly Unequal Society**

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### **Abstract:**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a blueprint to ensure more sustainable livelihoods for societies globally. These goals are of pertinent importance in South Africa, as the country is highly unequal. Challenges to teaching the SDGs include deep-rooted systemic inequalities and inadequate public education resources. As commerce students are likely to become future corporate leaders and share owners, they have substantial scope to challenge the status quo by contributing to sustainable value creation that can benefit numerous stakeholders.

The scaffolding teaching method is employed in an under-graduate corporate finance module at a South African university to support commerce students to explore corporate finance and sustainability terminology. Key concepts are introduced in a step-by-step manner over 13 weeks. Based on prior teaching experience, it seemed as if several students tended to view lecturing content in silos rather than considering how it fits into the broader context and account for the related implications. As such, the scaffolding teaching method is used. Students are guided to apply their newly gained knowledge by working together on solving real-world problems in a step-by-step manner in group format and individually. After exploring new content, substantial lecturing support is initially offered to solve problems during contact sessions. As the students become more proficient, they gradually require less support and start to work independently. By practically applying sustainability concepts in a group project (comprising two to three students) over the duration of the semester, gaps in their understanding are gradually addressed. Students are required to critically analyse and compare corporate disclosures on financial and sustainability performance of peer companies in integrated reports.

The outlined scaffolding teaching approach requires sound administration, as the number of registered students exceeds 350. As the module coordinator, I deal with the bulk of the admin while I share the teaching load with my colleague. Different learning opportunities are provided, including lectures, solving problems in class, completing the group project, conducting online quizzes and writing closed-book assessments. The success of the teaching method is formally assessed by requesting the students to complete an electronic survey compiled by the university.

Students are thus gradually made aware of critical financial and sustainability considerations in a highly unequal emerging market. They are equipped to contribute to sustainable development, and by implication address pressing inequalities once they enter the labour market. By reflecting on the related opportunities and challenges, students can collectively contribute to ensuring a better and fairer future for the generations to come. A suggestion for future research is to investigate the success of this teaching method by conducting interviews with selected students and lecturers to further enhance the application of scaffolding.

### **Keywords:**

Scaffolding teaching method, SDGs, sustainable value creation, education, commerce students, unequal society, South Africa.