

SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATOR PERSPECTIVES OF IMPACTS, POTENTIAL AND BARRIERS OF SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION

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BACKGROUND

Sustainability education has been identified as a way of providing people with the knowledge, skills, motivation and attitudes to live more sustainably, improve wellbeing and help reverse global trends of climate change and biodiversity decline. Despite sustainability being part of the Australian curriculum for over 20 years, many metrics of sustainability are not improving in Australia. For example, Australia still has the worst rate of mammalian extinction in the world and scores poorly for biodiversity conservation.

Sustainability education is recognised as a lever that can lead to improved environmental outcomes and there are calls for education to be recognised as a pillar of sustainability. However, the impact of sustainability education programs is understudied and there is little evidence base for how to create programs that support students to translate knowledge into action. In the study we are presenting, we consulted with sustainability education practitioners to understand their perspectives on current impacts of sustainability education and how to expand those impacts.

AIMS

The study aims to understand these key questions:

1. How does sustainability education influence attitudes and behaviours around biodiversity conservation and sustainability?
2. What pedagogies support impactful sustainability education?
3. What barriers and opportunities are there for education to help create more sustainable communities?

DESIGN AND METHODS

Sustainability education practitioners and advisers were consulted through semi-structured interviews, in a mixture of telephone, virtual and face-to-face modes. The interviews were coded for anonymity and transcribed. Transcripts were uploaded to *nVivo* and autocoded. Transcripts were also manually coded; both methods were explored in tandem to develop final codes and themes.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Nine people accepted the invitation for interview and returned the completed participant information and consent form. Six of the participants were from higher education institutions, the other three participants were from local and state government agencies, and one from a private organisation. Three participants were internationally based. Preliminary analysis suggests that practitioners see the potential of sustainability education to create behaviour change for more sustainable communities. Themes emerged around the importance of experiential, and personally meaningful learning that supports student agency to overcome barriers to behaviour change (e.g., student perceptions of costs and challenges of sustainability action). Better integration of sustainability concepts into formal and community-based education was identified as a lever to expand the impacts of sustainability.

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