Education for Sustainability and
Pre-service Teacher Education

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Abstract

Aspects of environment are common topics in Australian primary schools. However Education for Sustainability (EfS), where students actively investigate the underlying causes of unsustainable practices and actively plan for and instigate change, is less well understood and less commonly practised. It cannot be assumed that pre-service teachers have the knowledge, skills and desire to incorporate EfS, as advocated in Australian policies, into their repertoires of practice, or, that they will acquire those skills as they gain teaching experience. Therefore for EfS to become an integral component of the primary school experience, carefully planned rather than ad hoc preparation for EfS is necessary in pre-service teacher education.

This essentially qualitative study describes how a one semester final year pre-service primary teacher unit in EfS was shaped, and reports on how a cohort of pre-service teachers responded, particularly in terms of how well prepared they felt to engage with EfS in future teaching. Although motivation and confidence to engage with EfS varied across the cohort, pre-service teacher education appeared to make a positive contribution to both. In a longitudinal design, five teachers who had participated in the EfS unit became the focus of individual case studies early in their teaching careers. Each case study investigated ways in which the beginning teacher engaged with EfS, linking teaching decisions to pre-service teacher education. The constructivist approach adopted by the tutors was particularly valued by the early career teachers. They appreciated various modes of experiential learning including engagement with the kinds of teaching strategies advocated in EfS and a strong orientation to the curriculum requirements of primary school.

However the extent to which each early career teacher implemented EfS was tempered not only by personal skill and motivation, but also by work situations which did not necessarily support EfS endeavours. Whilst pre-service teacher education has a vital role in the promulgation of EfS in schools, and this study shows that it can be effective in advancing the desires of beginning teachers to do something for the environment, there are broad implications for the institutions that so heavily impact on the capacity of school systems and university systems to act in EfS.
The following refereed publications have resulted from the research described in this dissertation:


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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAEE</td>
<td>Australian Association for Environmental Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum Reporting and Assessment Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADEH</td>
<td>Australian Department of Environment and Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGDEWHA</td>
<td>Australian Government Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARIES</td>
<td>Australian Research Institute in Education for Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AuSSI</td>
<td>Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COG</td>
<td>Connected Outcomes Groups (in teacher programming)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPA</td>
<td>Creative and Performing Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECC</td>
<td>Department of Environment and Climate Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Department of Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESD</td>
<td>Decade of Education for Sustainable Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE</td>
<td>Environmental Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEC</td>
<td>Environmental Education Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEPIC</td>
<td>Environmental Education Programs in Classrooms</td>
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<tr>
<td>EfS</td>
<td>Education for Sustainability</td>
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<td>ESD</td>
<td>Education for Sustainable Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSC</td>
<td>Field Studies Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSIE</td>
<td>Human Society and its Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>KLA</td>
<td>Key Learning Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LfS</td>
<td>Learning for Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>QT</td>
<td>Quality Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEMP</td>
<td>School Environment Management Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMP</td>
<td>School Management Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRC</td>
<td>Student Representative Council</td>
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<td>SSP</td>
<td>Sustainable Schools Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCED</td>
<td>World Commission on Economic Development</td>
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