

Sustainability

Project Title	Seachange and Ecological Sustainability
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Description

[↑ Top](#)

If the idea of sustainability as inter-generational equity of access to valued natural communities is to have any meaning, we need to recognise the importance of the next generation of potential coastal inhabitants – we need to engage and prepare for the role that our current school-age children will play, and to understand the factors that will shape these roles.

With rapid social/environmental change now part of the physical and conceptual landscape for children in coastal areas, it is particularly important and appropriate in this international Decade of Education for Sustainability that research focuses on the relationships between local curricula and learners' evolving constructions of local sustainability issues in fragile coastal environments.

This project explored a current regional and rural situation to generate baseline data, insights, and ideas for future directions to improve science and ICT.

It developed case studies of three participating local schools to provide accounts of the ways teachers and students construct the issues of coastal sustainability and the forms of teaching and curricula that have been developed in these schools. In particular, it explored the views that young people (as members of the next generation likely to inhabit coastal areas) hold on these issues and the factors that shaped these views. Surveys were utilized to establish what ecological underpinnings inform the children's views and whether these are affected/enhanced through IT connections with other children experiencing similar coastal upbringing.

The project methodology included: interviews with three teachers relating to their understandings and practices in education for sustainability; three focus group interviews with approximately 30 students relating to their understandings of what environmental sustainability meant and how much they perceived this was present within their curriculum; and a questionnaire to all participants – interrogating some key ideas relating to the three pillars of education for sustainability.

Participants

[↑ Top](#)

- Kelly Wise, Oberon South Primary School
- David Pace, Torquay Primary School
- Drew Stevens – Barwon Heads Primary School
- Approximately 60 students

Findings

[↑ Top](#)

The data collected (through interviews, questionnaires and focus groups involving teachers and students) have shown that environment-related education is valued in the schools, that the dominant interpretation of 'education for sustainable development' is largely 'environmentally sustainable development', that 'sustainability' is largely interpreted as 'preservation', and that the driver of environment-related work tends to be the committed teacher rather than a new policy. These outcomes have implications for environmental science programs in rural and regional areas experiencing the current 'seachange' phenomenon.

Outcomes

[↑ Top](#)

3 case studies were developed.

Page Index

- [Description](#)
- [Participants](#)
- [Findings](#)
- [Outcomes](#)
- [Impact](#)
- [Related Documents](#)

Quick Links

- [Download Infosheet](#)
- [Download Report](#)
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Published chapter

- Campbell, C., & Robottom, I. "What's in a name? Environmental Education and Education for Sustainable Development as Slogans". In E. Gonzalez-Gaudiano & M. Peters (Eds.) Environmental Education: Meaning and Constitution – A Handbook. Sense Publishers (in print).

Conference presentations

- Robottom, I. (2007, June). Seachange and Sustainability. Paper presented at the Deakin University conference on education for sustainable development. Deakin University Warrnambool Campus, Vic.
- Waters, A., & Campbell, C. (2007, November). Education for Sustainability – what's in a name. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Science Teachers Association of Victoria.

Research grant proposal

- ARC Linkage Grant application (Seachange and Sustainability: Implications for local government, community and 'Education for Sustainable Development') submitted in 2007 and being reworked for submission in 2008.

Impact

[↑ Top](#)

The main benefit of this project is a greater understanding of the perspectives on sustainability held by teachers and learners along the south-east coast. In a sense, national and international policy development has to an extent become disjoined from established practice in local regional and rural communities. In national and international policy statements, education for sustainability stresses the social and economic aspects of environmental issues. In local communities along the coast at least, there is evidence that the focus remains on preservation of a highly valued national environment. This outcome may shape approaches adopted in professional development for teachers in coastal regions.

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[↑ Top](#)

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[↑ Top](#)