

Sustainability Education in Early Childhood

If you are thinking a year ahead, plant a seed.
If you are thinking a decade ahead, plant a tree.
If you are thinking a century ahead, educate the people.
(Chinese proverb)

THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABILITY

DROUGHT in many parts of Australia, rising carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, the poor health of the Murray-Darling River system, concerns about forest clearing, and the growing list of threatened and endangered non-human species are all indicators that we are overextending the capacity of the Earth's ecosystems for renewal and repair. This has implications not only for 'the environment' but also for humans, because the health of human populations and the health of global ecosystems are inextricably linked. The need for fundamental changes in how we live is becoming impossible to ignore. McMichael (2003), a leading international (and Australian) epidemiologist, comments that we are already seeing increasing health impairments from chronic health problems as a result of modern ways of living and it is children - the most vulnerable of humans - who are most at risk. This is because their exposure to the effects of life choices and life circumstances occurs for longer, and as conditions worsen.

Furthermore, the impacts of unsustainable living are not evenly distributed. While some are enjoying the benefits of global development, others are disproportionately bearing the risks and costs. Stern (2006) reports, "The poorest developing countries will be hit earliest and hardest by climate change, even though they have contributed little to causing the problem (p. xxvi).

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you think the current situation in relation to environmental/sustainability issues are untenable, don't despair! There are positive things you can do!

1. Soon, you will be able to join (or rejoin!) the Qld Early Childhood Environmental Education Network (QECEEN). This is a network for individuals and organisations who are already practising or wishing to achieve positive changes in early childhood settings in relation to sustainability issues - be this at home, in childcare, kindergarten, a prep or school classroom, or another early childhood service. The network is for people who are interested in applying education for sustainability at the early childhood level, and want to advocate for this emerging field. QECEEN has recently become an auspiced group of Early Childhood Australia Qld which gives the network the advantages of being part of a larger organisation, while enabling its members to focus on core activities.

2. Join the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) <http://www.aeee.org.au/about.htm> (ask to be part of the e-list for the Early Childhood Special Interest Group, run by Sue Elliott from Victoria).

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Julie has been working with a small group to get QECEEN up and running again.

This has taken longer than expected but, if you are patient a little longer, it is anticipated that the new network will be operational soon. In the meantime, you can contact Julie by email at j.davis@qut.edu.au.

Julie is Senior Lecturer in the School of Early Childhood, QUT. As well as holding a teaching diploma, Julie has a B. Sc. (Envir. Studies), Master of Envir. Ed., and a PhD that focused on whole school curriculum change through environmental education. Julie was co-founder of QECEEN in 1996, is a member of ECA's e-group on young children and climate change (see http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/resource_themes/sustainability_global_warming_and_climate_change.html) and was invited to attend the 1st ever international meeting on early childhood education for sustainability held in Sweden in May 2007.

Written by Dr Julie Davis, School of Early Childhood, QUT

References

McMichael, T. (2003). *Sustainability, health and wellbeing. Paper presented at the Australia 21, Nature and Society Forum, In search of Sustainability, Online conference, www.isoconference.org.au.*
Stern, N. (2006). *Executive Summary. In The Economics of Climate Change (pp. i-xxvii). London: British Government.*



Early Childhood Australia is concerned about carbon emission targets

MARGARET Young, National President of Early Childhood Australia recently called on APEC leaders to set binding targets for the reduction of carbon emissions.

Children, the most vulnerable humans, are at the greatest risk from our unsustainable practices—even more so because they face greater, and longer, exposure to the worst of the consequences.

As a world and a nation we need to do things differently.

If you are interested in Slow Food in Schools projects, take a look at;
http://www.edibleschoolyard.org/alice_message.html to learn about Alice Waters, Slow Food, Slow Schools: Transforming Education through a School Lunch Curriculum