

Greening services: Practical sustainability

Rachael Kinsella



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Registered for posting as a publication—

PP232100/00036

ISSN 1440-5148

ISBN10 1-921162-16-3

ISBN13 978-1-921162-16-9

Printed by Goanna, Canberra

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About the author



Rachael Kinsella has a Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood), a Diploma of Children's Services and formal training in fine arts. She has worked in the early childhood field for seven years with children birth–five years from families of diverse cultural backgrounds.

She is passionate about education for sustainable development and its role in daily practice. She has presented seminars on a range of topics related to the early childhood field including visual arts, social justice education, inclusion, working with refugee families and good environments for learning.

Rachael teaches at Carinya Children's Services Centre, a 40-place long day care centre situated on the Newcastle TAFE campus. Centre staff believe in the importance of the physical environment as a teacher and have created an inspiring and beautiful space over many years, both indoors and out. Social justice, good relationships and inclusion of visual arts and education for sustainable development are the cornerstones of their practice.

Early Childhood Australia Global Warming e-Group

Early Childhood Australia has established a Global Warming e-Group to highlight the ways in which issues of climate change and sustainability are central to the early childhood field. Visit www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/sustainability to access helpful links, articles and resources.

Introduction

The burning of fossil fuels to sustain our societies' rapid growth causes the increased emission of greenhouse gases. This is the main cause of global warming and climate change worldwide (NSW Government Department of Environment and Climate Change, 2007).

The effects of climate change include altered weather patterns, higher temperatures, erosion, loss of habitats, damaged ecosystems and dwindling resources.



There has never been a more important time to act for the conservation and sustainability of the planet and for the survival and protection of precious species and ecosystems. Our children have a right to a sustainable future. They will be the policymakers and leaders of the future, so what we teach them now about the environment will directly influence the long-term health of the planet.

The United Nations has declared 2005–14 to be the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. This initiative promotes learning and understanding of how we can grow in greater harmony with the planet, through a range of policies developed in many countries at all levels of government (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005).

Sustainable development can be defined as:

'Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'
(World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 8).

Children and sustainable development

There is mounting evidence that connecting children to the natural world through early education programs and environments enhances and enriches learning, and is essential for healthy development.

Richard Louv warns of the problems linked to children becoming disconnected from nature, in particular 'nature deficit disorder'. The symptoms of this include: *'physical and emotional illnesses, attention difficulties and diminished use of the senses ...'* He believes the disorder can affect individuals, families and communities (Louv, 2005, p. 14).

'... experience in the physical environment is only one of many ways we can teach education for sustainable development.'



What services can do

A number of early childhood services across Australia are already incorporating sustainable practices into their programs—including composting, worm farms, gardening and providing natural play spaces—and these experiences successfully engage children. However, experience in the physical environment is only one of many ways we can teach education for sustainable development.

Davis and Elliott (2003) believe we need to go much further than simply providing natural spaces for children. They describe this as being only education *in* the environment—not education *about* and *for* the environment, which requires a move towards a more politically active position: one which views education for sustainable development as an integral component of curriculum and closely interwoven with social justice (pp. 6–7).

Davis and Elliott also argue that embedding sustainability principles into day care, preschools, schools, colleges, universities and other educational settings involves much more than amending existing programs and practices (p. 4).





' ... early childhood educators have the responsibility to make education for sustainable development a part of everyday practice—not merely a separate subject or theme to be considered for a given time, but an integral part of curriculum, underpinning daily practice.'

This means early childhood educators have the responsibility to make education for sustainable development a part of everyday practice—not merely a separate subject or theme to be considered for a given time, but an integral part of curriculum, underpinning daily practice.

While some regulatory bodies acknowledge the importance of education for sustainable development, we still have a long way to go regarding its inclusion in pre-service training and everyday programs—this requires leadership, planning and a shift in thinking and values.

Successful early childhood education is a complex and unique fusion of leadership and organisation that requires the management of a wide variety of roles and responsibilities (Culkin, 1997). Moral, visionary and transformational leadership styles, best described by John MacBeath (2004), are what will realise these changes.

This book provides a practical approach to formulating a sustainability management plan, to guide your service's daily practices and, in turn, to develop programs and learning opportunities with children and families.

At the end of this book is a collection of print and internet resources, as well as a list of books about sustainability and climate change you can read with children.

Sustainability management plans

Education for sustainable development can be more easily integrated as a core component of our early childhood programs through a management plan, which provides a starting point to motivate action. A management plan can even increase community involvement by utilising parents' assistance in achieving goals, such as through working bees to build gardens or to plant vegetables.

A management plan will formalise targets, goals and practices in a simple and easy-to-follow format which guides staff through the process of embedding education for sustainable development into early childhood programs at family day care, children's services and schools.

Management plans provide direction in the process of change and are useful for ensuring a group's commitment to the cause because goals and strategies are clearly set out and broken down into manageable parts. Your plan will evolve along with your centre, guiding you towards sustainable practices.

'Management plans provide direction in the process of change and are useful for ensuring a group's commitment to the cause because goals and strategies are clearly set out and broken down into manageable parts.'

Developing a plan

- ◆ Review your service philosophy and reflect on how it relates to the environment in terms of relationships, occupational health and safety, families and education. How can you incorporate education for sustainable development into your service philosophy?
- ◆ Consult children about what they think should be included in the plan.
- ◆ Conduct a parent survey to find out what families want and what they can offer and hold a staff meeting to brainstorm ideas.

Greening services: Practical sustainability

The children we are educating and caring for will be the policymakers and leaders of the future and what we teach them now about the environment will directly influence the long-term health of the planet.

Author Rachael Kinsella is an early childhood teacher with many years of experience assisting staff and directors in making education for sustainable development central to their services' planning and practices.

This book provides practical advice for educators and carers as well as activities that involve families and inspire children.

- Developing a sustainability management plan.
- Making your service water-wise and energy efficient.
- Working with children and communities to develop recycling and waste management systems.
- Introducing green cleaning at your service.
- Creating gardens and outdoor spaces that nurture and teach.

There is mounting evidence that connecting children to the natural world through early education programs enhances and enriches learning, and is essential for healthy development—we owe it to our children, our planet and ourselves to work towards a sustainable future.

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Volume 14 No.3 2007

ISBN10 1-921162-16-3
ISBN13 978-1-921162-16-9



9 781921 162169