

Building our Capacity – National Professional Development Initiative for Sustainability Educators

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Abstract

Note: this paper is updated from one developed and presented at Enviro 10 at the launch of the National Professional Development Initiative for Sustainability Educators.

For a long time now, many working in Environmental Education/Education for Sustainability have been crying out for enhanced professional development (PD) courses of one to two days duration to help improve their capacity to deliver effective programs. Successive National Action Plans have indicated this need and a number of projects at State and Territory level have demonstrated the relative lack of short-course modules available and the lack of a National framework for PD.

A number of educators have been working behind the scenes to translate this need into reality, and extensive collaboration and planning between four associations – the Waste Management Association of Australia (WMAA); the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE); the Marine Education Society of Australasia (MESA); and the Australian Water Association (AWA) has now come to fruition through the *NPDISE* project.

Following a long gestation period, the four Associations submitted an application for funding to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) to identify, recognise, and facilitate the delivery of endorsed short course professional development modules for those who design, deliver and/or evaluate sustainability/environmental education. WMAA was the applicant on behalf of the group. This application was successful and the project commenced in September 2009, and Phase 1 is expected to be completed by October 2010. The project is entitled the: *National Professional Development Initiative for Sustainability Educators*

Early in the project, the Project Management Group (PMG) conducted a survey of sustainability educators and this gave them information about current short course modules and the needs of educators for future PD modules. The results of this survey are available on the WMAA website (www.wmaa.asn.au).

The members of the Project Management Group include Pat Armstrong (WMAA) and Grahame Collier (AAEE) (Joint Project Leaders), Phil Smith and Colin Hocking (AAEE), Trish Dames/Clare Porter (AWA) and Angela Colliver/Michael Burke (MESA).

This paper will tell the story of this exciting journey – so far.

1. Introduction

What indicators would you use to find out the extent to which your work sector was mature, sustainable and responsible?

The premise upon which this paper is built is that, among other things, you would look for both of the following measures:

- Is there a vibrant Professional Association/s that most professionals in that sector belong to?
- Is there a Continuing Professional Development Model used by the Association/s to ensure that members regularly update their professional knowledge, skills and networking opportunities?

This paper chronicles the journey of the four associations for educators for sustainability in moving towards a more comprehensive and professional approach to professional development.

2. Setting the Context

There is substantial evidence of both the need and policy drivers for capacity building for those delivering Education for Sustainability.

The policy context is best articulated by the following quotes from the National Action Plan¹. They indicate that there is significant need for high quality capacity building.

Strategy 4 of the Plan is:

'Harnessing community spirit to act' emphasises collaboration with the many diverse providers of education for sustainability to help improve community and practitioners' access to knowledge and tools. It also supports research to better understand issues, attitudes and behaviour.

Action 4.2.1 is:

Capacity building for local government in partnership with relevant bodies, initiatives will be developed to enable local government to provide best practice community education for sustainability. The focus will be on increasing opportunities for training and mentoring, providing access to case studies and resources, and coordination and networking.

¹ Australian Government (2009). *Living Sustainably: the Australian Government's National Action Plan for Education for Sustainability*. Australian Government.

Other relevant quotes from the Plan are:

Given the scale, complexity and immediacy of issues such as climate change, water security and pollution, a strengthened and better coordinated national effort on education for sustainability is now needed.

Underlying this Plan is an emphasis on a whole-of-government approach and setting up partnerships and links within and between the government, industry and community sectors.

Similar statements are made in plans and other relevant documents in several States and Territories. For example in the NSW plan [2006]² one of the seven intended outcomes is:

Enhanced training, professional development and other support for those developing and delivering environmental education.

In NSW, the now Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water conducted a substantial needs assessment of educator needs and their views about what capacity building should be provided. This informed the development of a project colloquially called 'the capacity building hub'. Despite being launched formally in September 2007 (by one of the authors of this paper) this on-line self assessment tool has not yet been made available to educators across NSW or nationally. It will be welcome when it becomes available

In Victoria, the draft 2005 *Learning to Live Sustainably Strategy*³ emphasised the importance of continuous improvement and capacity building in one of its guiding principles for Victoria's approach to learning-based change for environmental sustainability:

*be based on a strong commitment to best practice and continuous improvement in learning for sustainability, **guided by effective research and evaluation**. A key input will be consideration of the impact and effectiveness of the range of activities undertaken to date under the umbrella of education and behaviour change for environmental sustainability;*

Similarly in the 2009, *Victoria Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Strategic Plan*.⁴ there is reference to capacity building:

The MWMG, in conjunction with local government and other agencies, is well positioned to build capacity in this area and ensure that educational approaches, programs and tools are consistent across the metropolitan area.

Collier G and Smith P (2007) indicated in a paper for the World Environmental Education Conference that:

² Department of Environment Climate Change and Water (2006). *Learning for Sustainability: NSW Environmental Education Plan 2007-10*. New South Wales Government.

³The State of Victoria Department of Sustainability and Environment, (2005) *Learning to Live Sustainably, Victoria's approach to learning-based change for environmental sustainability*, Draft - September 2005. The State of Victoria

⁴The State of Victoria Department of Sustainability and Environment (2009). *Metropolitan Waste and Resource Recovery Strategic Plan*. The State of Victoria

Unlike other professional groups we do not have a ready and mandated set of standards that drive our practice. While engineers and other professions have agreed professional standards - we do not. We lack an educator accreditation system and, in a sense, we promote the idea that 'anyone can do EE/EfS'. While that is clearly not true, the significance of the lack of professional standards cannot be understated. It is one of our biggest limiting factors. Imagine working in public health (doctor, nurse, physiotherapist) without having undertaken some sort of ongoing registration process.

3. Research into the Needs of Educators

Early in the project, Transcend-Ability was contracted to conduct a specific online survey of sustainability educators across Australia with the following two purposes:

1. To identify the professional development short courses currently available to educators in environmental areas and the providers of these courses; and
2. To shed light on the needs of educators in environmental areas for professional development especially within areas where short courses that are currently not available.

The survey, which was conducted in August 2009, resulted in a total of **352** responses and has shed further light on the needs of educators and the context of the project.

Survey Results - Summary

The key results of this survey⁵ were:

1. The two most common employee types of the respondents were:

- A state government agency 94 (28.7%)
- Councils (local governments) 89 (27.2%)

More than half (56%) of the total respondents were employed by either a State government agency or council (local government).

2. The two most common sectors in which respondents work are General Sustainability and Water. It was clearly evident that respondents work in more than one sector.
3. When comparing employer types with sectors in which respondents worked:
 - Of the respondents employed by a (Council) Local Governments, 49.4% indicated that one of the sectors in which they mainly worked was General Sustainability and 46% indicated they worked in the Waste and Resource Recovery sector.
 - Of the respondents employed by a State Government agency, 50% indicated that one of the sectors in which they mainly worked was Water and 39% indicated they worked in the Biodiversity sector.
 - Of the respondents employed by schools, a university or TAFE a significant number indicated General Sustainability as a sector in which they worked.

⁵ Transcend-Ability (2009). *Review of educators in environmental areas professional development short courses.*

4. Within the past 12 months 193 (55.1%) respondents indicated they had undertaken a professional development short course. The top five responses to the question ‘What topics for short course professional development would you attend if available?’ were:

Suggested topic	Number of responses
Program design and evaluation	42
Facilitation skills	41
Behaviour change	37
Climate change	29
Community engagement	27

5. When asked about preferred style of workshop presentation 171 (57.8%) indicated A mixture of workshop and didactic styles and 169 (57.1%) indicated a Workshop style – highly interactive, group work, structured by the facilitator who is progressing content.
6. Suggestions to help guide the PMG in considering Professional Development short courses included: consider cost, ensure PD is delivered by respected facilitator, include practical examples of delivering effective sustainability education, provide opportunities for networking, ensure the location is accessible, ensure courses are based on research and follow action learning principles resulting in behavior change, ensure course relevance and follow up, consider learning styles of participants, course recognition is of high importance, consider timing, communication, promotion of course and exploit the use of online/communication technologies delivery.
7. Almost 45% of the respondents to the survey had not attended a short course in the previous 12 months. When taken across the board, it could be assumed that the figure is an underestimation, because many educators who had not attended a training module would have chosen not to respond to the survey.
8. It would seem that educators need modules in the following generic areas:
- Facilitation skills
 - Education for behaviour change
 - Promoting sustainability in schools – facilities management and curriculum
 - Design and evaluation of education programs
 - Engaging the community
 - What is sustainability/pedagogy of sustainability?
 - Project management and EfS
 - Obtaining funding – grants etc.
9. While there is some indication about what content specific modules are required, this is of a general nature and has not been of much assistance. The four associations will need to identify relevant modules for people in their relevant sector of interest.
10. There seems to be a lot of diversity in training needs – from people who are starting out as educators, to those who are experienced and who are looking to add to their skills and be acknowledged for existing skills.

11. Delivery Issues that were reported on included - Interactive delivery is highly important – with a splash of didactic presentation as well. Respondents don't want too much theory, but lots of hands on activities and practical work; Accreditation is important and needs to be articulated with VET/university sector, so that it can be a part of a broader program

In designing the *National Professional Development Initiative for Sustainability Educators Project [NPDISE]*, this research and the significant National and State policies that are available guided the project's development.

4. Project Overview – Vision Aim and Key Elements

The Strategic Plan for the NPDISE program identifies the following vision for the project:

Educators enabled to deliver high quality programs that bring about change for sustainability

It also identifies the following statement of purpose:

To coordinate, develop and implement an effective professional learning program for sustainability educators by:

- *identifying/developing short-course professional learning modules for educators*
- *providing recognition of selected modules from the four associations that are sponsoring the program*
- *linking these modules to EfS courses in the VET/university sector to promote pathways for ongoing accredited professional development and/or formal education*
- *promoting the ongoing delivery across Australia of the recognised modules.*

The project's aim is to build the capacity, skills and knowledge of environmental educators who are responsible for the design, delivery and evaluation of sustainability education programs and projects to help facilitate changes in individual, business and community behavior and practices.

This collaborative project brings together four professional associations to identify, endorse and facilitate the delivery of short-course professional development modules for sustainability educators which:

- enhances their capacity to plan and deliver quality education
- increases the impact of education on the behavior of people at home, at work and at leisure
- improves the evaluation and reporting of education programs
- contributes to the achievement of national sustainability outcomes.

The key elements of the project are:

- Recognition and delivery of professional development short-course modules endorsed by the consortium and assessed by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). The consortium will identify a partner to determine how to best align the short-course modules within the VET and/or higher education framework.
- Certificates that will be issued to participants upon successful completion of recognised modules.
- Modules that meet identified educator needs and enhance a range of education, technical and delivery capacities. Recognised modules would be conducted throughout Australia, under the auspices of one or more of the Associations.

The project is being delivered in two phases. Phase 1 has received some funding from the Department of Environment Water, Heritage and the Arts and runs until October 2010. Phase 2 needs to be self sustaining and will commence in October 2010.

5. Current Status

The funding from DEWHA enabled the project to engage some expert help. Three contractors have been engaged to assist with the project: a research project contractor (Transcend-Ability, on a project basis July August 2009); a project manager (Hazel Storey, the Storey Agency, for six months from November 2009 to April 2010); and a registered training organisation (RTO) (terra cordis, Kerry Hides-Pearson, June 2010 to November 2010 with an option to continue).

In summary, the following activities were undertaken:

1. **Needs Research.** The first task undertaken was the contracting of a Research Project Contractor who was engaged to survey existing professional development modules and the needs of educators for future Professional Development professional development. Over 350 educators across Australia responded to this survey. (Refer to previous section)
2. **Module themes, criteria and seeking providers:** the findings from this needs' research were used to identify module themes required by educators and existing professional development providers. A set of Education for Sustainability criteria were developed to assist the PMG to select modules and providers and to guide delivery of an integrated program of substance
3. **Recognised Providers and Modules:** Using the above information, the Associations have sought expressions of interest from providers who are currently delivering professional development workshops. Eight providers were subsequently recognised, offering a total of 14 different modules in the following theme areas:
 - design and evaluation of education programs
 - facilitation
 - behaviour and organisational change
 - strategic planning and project management.
 - community engagement

We are very lucky to have been supported by some of Australia's best Education for Sustainability trainers and workshops. The following table provides the list of trainers whose workshops are currently recognised.

Provider	Facilitators	Module
Australian Institute of community practice and governance (Our	Patrick Moriarty	Intensive Winning Grants Seminar

Provider	Facilitators	Module
community)		
Awake	Tim Cotter	Cultivating Sustainability
Clear Horizons	Carolynne Wilson	Change Management Toolkit
Clear Horizons	Carolynne Wilson	Reporting by Outcomes
Enabling Change	Les Robinson	Motivating Community Action
Enabling Change	Les Robinson	Proactive Community Engagement
Enabling Change	Les Robinson	Enabling Change
Ecosteps	Carole Young	Sustainability Answers
Know Hands	Phil Smith	Knowing that it works
Local Government and Shires Association (NSW)	Darryl Rubiolo	Dynamic Presentations
Local Government and Shires Association (NSW)	Darryl Rubiolo	Creative Training Skills
Victorian Association for Environmental Education	Colin Hocking, Pat Armstrong and Sarah Houseman	Facilitating Learning-based Behaviour Change
Victorian Association for Environmental Education	Colin Hocking, Pat Armstrong and Sarah Houseman	Strategic Planning and Program Management
Victorian Association for Environmental Education	Colin Hocking, Pat Armstrong and Sarah Houseman	Evaluating Programs and Action Learning Cycles

For the project to be successful, it is essential that it is marketed effectively (a marketing plan has been developed) and that local host organisations are found to promote and organise delivery through the RTO. Roll out is currently commencing and the following principles are guiding delivery in Phase 1:

- Delivery of modules must occur on a competitive cost recovery basis.

- All module costs for participants are in the order of \$400 excluding GST, per day. Non-members of the Associations will pay more than members. Costs will be the same Australia wide for all delivery of all modules.
- All modules recognised so far by the PMG will be recognised by the four associations. Each provider will include an assessment process in the module delivery and a certificate of completion will be issued by the Associations to each participant who completes a module.
- Each module will be facilitated by highly credible facilitators. The program has attracted the “best of the best” as providers.
- Each workshop will have a minimum number of 15 participants, but many providers can take more than this number in a workshop.
- If a local group hosts a workshop, it will receive 7.5% of the overall income from the workshop to reimburse it for the effort. For a workshop of 25 participants this will be in the order of \$555.
- For a reduced cost an agency/organization can sponsor a workshop. Costs per head can be reduced to in the order of \$240 per participant, if funds can be paid up front and venue and catering costs are met in house

6. The Future

Phase 1. (June 2009 to October 2010)

Phase 1 of the project has established a significant working base for the future. It has demonstrated that the four Associations, whose members comprise a significant number of sustainability educators across Australia, can work collaboratively to establish a joint project of depth and value. It has established contractual arrangements with providers and RTO and the PMG has worked effectively in managing the project. Phase 1 has dealt with significant challenges including budget and management scenarios and secretariat arrangements and functions. In a sense, it has been a highly effective and detailed pilot for the ongoing activity.

Even at the outset, Phase 1 was never seen as the end of the Project. At all stages of the project there was a common view of a continuing future for professional development activity by:

- authors of the early documentation that preceded the grant
- authors of the grant proposal that DEWHA funded
- all of the members of the current PMG

Phase 2. (November 2010 to November 2012)

At the end of Phase 1, the PMG will undertake a review of the project to take the Initiative into its second phase which runs to November 2012, at which time the program will be once again reviewed to ensure continuous improvement and that suitable professional development is available for educators.

This future of the project is characterised by the following vision:

Educators enabled to deliver high quality programs that bring about change for sustainability through:

- *Ongoing delivery of professional development provided under the national training framework – where participants receive formal recognition for training that can be articulated with other courses.*
- *The development of a framework for offering (and potentially requiring of members’) continuing professional development (CPD) in the areas pertaining to the profession of sustainability education. (Hence providing links to both CPD and further education)*

In order to achieve such a vision an ongoing commitment is required by all four associations and other stakeholders to extend the *NPDISE* Program.

In Phase 2 of the project, the PMG will initiate discussions with each of the member Professional Associations to consider how the *NPDISE* Project can form the basis of a Continuing Professional Development model for the future.

In addition the PMG will be actively seeking sponsorship so that the cost per participant at each workshop can be reduced substantially.

7. Conclusion

What a journey so far!

A journey characterised by close partnership between four Associations, each of which has its own needs and agendas, but have worked magnificently in partnership to get this far

A journey characterised by good will and a willingness to get involved – involvement from the fantastic training providers out there. Involvement from local groups and individuals who are prepared to work to host workshops, involvement from the four associations.

A journey of the highest level of professional competence and commitment. To date members of the Project Management Group have contributed the equivalent of over \$60,000 worth of in-kind support to the delivery of this project (costed at \$50.00 per hour).

A journey delivering so much for so little – funding of \$35,000 is a tiny investment for such a significant project with huge and potential outcomes

A journey on the edge of delivering the highest quality professional development to sustainability educators all over Australia

A journey that will continue until the Associations have vigorously explored and perhaps set in place a Continuing Professional Development Model for the future

If you want to host a workshop at your place, contact: Kerry Hides Pearson (terra cordis) on 02 9453 1396 or kerry@terracordis.com.au

References

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