

Special Issue of Australian Journal of Environmental Education

Call for Papers

Meeting Global Challenges through Families and Community Environmental and Sustainability Education: Generating Action Competence

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Timeline:

- Call for papers: May 2025
- Abstracts due: 15th June 2025
  - Email abstracts (400-500 words) to l.bouakaz@ajman.ac.ae
- Full Manuscripts due: 15th November 2025
  - Submit to AJEE (See author instructions, 6 – 7000 words)
- Publication of Special Issue: Volume 42 (manuscripts published on FirstView asap)

It is important to both discover and develop effective ways in which school-community partnerships can flourish to produce effective potentials for sustainability and addressing ways of meeting global educational and political challenges of policy development and engagement, democratic action and communication as a basis for action competence are essential components. This is the focus of the present call for papers, from the perspective of families and community involvement. We invite contributions from multiple disciplinary and multi-disciplinary fields including *environmental / sustainability education, climate change education, sociology of education and curriculum, curriculum innovation, social psychology, psychology, philosophy, sociology and politics of global sustainability, global studies, community studies, and sociology of families*. Our ambition is that the special issue will be timely, cutting-edge and distinctive, and will include research from diverse perspectives and methodologies, including but not restricted to policy research, research on practices, meta-analyses and action research. We anticipate and invite papers accordingly of both methodological, theoretical and substantive-empirical character in relation to four thematic areas of education. Namely: Education for Empowering Communities for Change through Climate and Cultural Heritage; Families and Communities Educating for Sustainable Futures; Interdisciplinary Approaches to Education for Building Resilience in the face of Environmental Complexity and Uncertainty; and Integrating Methodologies for Researching and Developing Action Competence for Environmental and Community Sustainability through Education. Interdisciplinary commitment toward family development can help to forge communities that can cultivate a sustainable future. One that is both achievable and inclusive

1. Empowering Change through Climate and Cultural Heritage Education

Families and communities play a crucial role in promoting the competence of environmental action, particularly when facing the complexities that surround climate change (cf. Payne, 2010). This competence is a vital component of education for sustainable development from pre-primary to higher education (Åberg-Bengtsson et al., 2015; Scott, 2016). Engaging with heritage values, families

and communities can cultivate an active commitment for environmental management, which thus underlines the protection of social, cultural and economic sustainability through education for climate change (Reid, 2019; Tali Tal, 2004). However, despite the growing recognition of the challenges of climate change and environmental and community sustainability and recent shifts in public and policy discourse around how to understand and address these issues, complexly layered analyses of important familial considerations are not yet established in climate change education (Trott et al., 2023). The reality of anthropogenic climate change and the willful forgetting of its material relations and histories of exploitation of families and spaces is well known (Payne, 2010). So perhaps it is now time for empowering communities from the bottom-up for action change in the interests of sustainability and changes to the formal education curriculum can play a key role in this (cf. Beach & Öhrn, 2023; Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2019). Climate change education may be more powerful when it is inclusive of the perspectives, knowledge and heritage values of families in local communities (Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles & Rousell, 2018; Rap & Bodas, 2024). It is important therefore to both discover and develop effective ways in which school-community partnerships can flourish to produce effective potentials for sustainability (DePetris & Eames, 2017).

Climate change education is essential to instil a sense of responsibility for the environment (Mochizuki and Bryan, 2015; Payne, 2010) and promote values that give priority to environmental care and toward which Trott (2020) highlights the importance of helping children to recognise their potential agency in this process. When families are involved in the educational process, children benefit from the transfer of intergenerational knowledge regarding environmental assistance and resilience. Williams, McEwen and Quinn (2017) articulate the effectiveness of intergenerational learning based on the action in promoting understanding and proactive measures in relation to multiple and various environmental challenges.

In the same way, communities contribute to this educational framework by creating collaborative environments that emphasise shared values and cultural heritage (Tali Tal, 2004). Jorgenson, Stephens and White (2019) say that the actions of climate change based on the community can be effective when they encapsulate local knowledge and socio -cultural narratives, promoting a sense of belonging and responsibility. This perspective resonates with Rieckmann (2018), who suggests that educational initiatives must understand key skills that allow students to transform their communities through sustainable practices.

The cultural context is an integral part of the message delivered through education (Åberg-Bengtsson et al., 2015). Heritage, as a critical component, informs the values that families and communities pass to younger generations. De Vreede, Warner and Pitter (2014) indicate that education between peers can facilitate these processes. The use of participatory approaches, as discussed by Lara, Crispín and Téllez (2018), underlines the involvement in dialogue and shared experiences that strengthen the collective action towards sustainability within the community. Haynes and Tanner (2015) illustrate that participatory methods centred on youth, such as video -based narration, can improve resilience allowing young people to articulate their concerns and solutions related to climatic challenges. This empowerment connects to social justice, as indicated by Teixeira and Krings (2015), and can support a framework of environmental justice.

The interconnection of education, heritage and action competence also speaks of the need to deal with systemic vulnerabilities (Beach & Öhrn, 2023). Muttarak and Lutz (2014) identify education as a key factor to reduce vulnerability to climate catastrophes, highlighting the meaning of adaptation of inclusive educational methods. Meanwhile, Zikargae, Woldearegay and Skjerdal (2022) provide empirical tests that show that non-formal environmental education initiatives contribute to sustainable practices in rural contexts through efforts directed by the community, particularly when enhancing the competence of youth action (cf. Olsson et al., 2020). Self-perception is crucial to promote a proactive mentality towards environmental issues, opening the way for present and future generations to adopt sustainable lifestyles (Rieckmann, 2018).

By underlining the assets, values and empowerment, the interested parties can cultivate a critically aware and resilient society capable of effectively facing and mitigating the impacts on climate change (Reid, 2019; Sanson & Burke, 2020). This multifaceted approach requires a greater critical focus on sustainable development and a strengthening of the idea that learning is a common effort, which intertwines education with lived experiences (Payne, 2010; Reffhaug et al., 2024).

2. Families and Communities Educating for Sustainable Futures

The importance of environmental sustainability emphasising the essential roles that families and communities play in promoting the competence of action has recently gained substantial attention connected to the ability of individuals and groups for taking informed and responsible actions regarding the challenges of sustainability (Reffhaug et al., 2024; Roczen et al., 2014; Tayne, 2022). Interaction between families and communities is fundamental to cultivate this competence, as it helps to mix individual consciousness with collective action, allowing a more substantial impact on environmental sustainability.

Families serve as the main social units where environmental values and practices are cultivated. In the family context, children begin to develop their environmental identities as they observe and engage in ecological practices modelled by their parents (Chawla, 2020; Davis & Elliott, 2023). Moreover, educational initiatives in families are fundamental to shape the understanding and proactive behaviour of young people in relation to environmental sustainability, reflecting a need for families to integrate sustainability into their daily lives (Klein et al., 2021; Payne, 2010).

Communities amplify environmental efforts started in families through collective actions such as community gardens and local cleaning initiatives. These initiatives simultaneously serve educational purposes and promote civic involvement, promoting a sense of shared belonging and responsibility for the environment (Krasny et al., 2017). The development of community programs improves the social learning environment and the skills necessary for sustainable practices (Rieckmann, 2018). These programs provide contexts for the application of sustainability education, creating synergies between theoretical learning and practical action (Mont et al., 2014).

The long -term impact stems from effective engagement strategies that reinforce collaboration between families and communities. A strategy involves promoting participatory approaches that enable families to decide the environmental actions that resonate with their values and goals (Caniglia et al., 2021). Community involvement through initiatives such as Citizen Science allows families to contribute to significant projects, improving their knowledge and environmental agency (Ballard et al., 2017). Collaboration between several stakeholders, including educational institutions and government agencies, plays a key role in ensuring that families and communities receive the support and resources needed to make changes (Klein et al., 2021; Wals & Benavot, 2017).

Educational structures also provide essential tools for integrating sustainability in community practices. The development of a validated competence structure for sustainable entrepreneurship, for example, can provide practical information on how families and communities can engage in collaboration in sustainable practices (Ploum et al., 2018). In addition, the integration of relationship -centered learning environments in schools can improve emotional intelligence and a spirit of cooperation among stakeholders, promoting even more sustainable initiatives (Ferreira et al., 2020).

In general, the intertwined nature of families and communities in promoting the competence of action for environmental sustainability highlights the need for strategies that support engagement and collaboration. By adopting participatory approaches leveraging educational structures and promoting emotional connections with the environment, it is possible to nourish and sustain sustainable practices over time and generate combined efforts from families and communities to encourage significant and lasting transformative changes (Debrah et al., 2021; Gholami et al., 2016; Laurie et al., 2016). However, although there has been research on the influence of environmental education on children, their parents and communities for decades (Vaughan et al., 2003) there is less research in

the other direction relating to the influence of children, parents, and communities on the goals and content of environmental education.

3. Interdisciplinary Approaches to Education for Building Resilient Futures

There are multiple sources of challenge toward community sustainability. They include global climate change, economic disparities, and social injustices, and meeting them requires interdisciplinary strategies and an understanding of resilience, defined as the ability of individuals and communities to adapt and thrive between adversities (Southwick et al., 2014). Social work, public health and education are among the sectors that carry out fundamental roles in facing these complex issues by promoting the competence of action within the communities (Kemp et al., 2015). There are multiple wide-ranging perspectives about ecological crises and their resolutions, which underscores the need for interdisciplinary approaches that bridge the gap between subject-specific interpretations in sustainability research, politics and education (Noy et al., 2017) and create inter-connectivity of various disciplines such as environmental science and social psychology. The integration of these fields can inform the development of effective strategies that face not only the ecological aspects but also the social and emotional dimensions of the challenges of the community (Riemer et al., 2020). This multidisciplinary approach acts as a basis for innovative solutions that meet the unique needs of communities in the face of global changes (Tittonell et al., 2016).

Research indicates that focusing on families strengthens the social fabric necessary for resilient communities (cf. Henry et al., 2015; Sanders et al., 2022) and the need for policies that support families as a fundamental unit of sustainable development (Edwards, 2021). This type of research incorporates the commitment of the community, ensuring that the solutions are simultaneously relevant and widely supported. Appealing to the values and aspirations of the community helps in mobilising resources and the involvement of crucial elements to promote resilient communities. Collaborative efforts therefore become essential to achieve sustainable development objectives.

Promoting stable and sustainable communities through the competence of action and family development requires a holistic and collaborative approach to education in various academic sectors. As communities face growing environmental and social pressures, the integration of interdisciplinary strategies becomes indispensable. By connecting the strengths of different fields, we can face the complex network of challenges to sustainability, improving not only the resilience of the communities but also the general quality of life for their inhabitants (Zylstra et al., 2014). Through interdisciplinary commitment and commitment for family development, communities can cultivate a sustainable future, which is both achievable and inclusive.

4. Forming and Integrating Methodologies for Researching and Developing Action Competence for Environmental and Community Sustainability Education

The integration of various methodologies is essential to improve the understanding of global sustainability challenges. Education plays a central role in training perspectives on sustainability, as evidenced by Kopnina (2020), who pleads for a change in educational paradigms which emphasises sustainability compared to environmental concerns only. The field of sociology offers critical information on how companies are failing to address socio-ecological problems, as shown by Hannigan (2022) and Yearley (2014), which highlight the interaction between social structures and ecological practices. In addition, psychology contributes to our understanding of individual and collective behaviours to sustainability (Harper & Snowden, 2017). Communities' commitment to sustainability initiatives promotes innovative solutions, as discussed by Ferguson, Taofe and Cook (2021). Annan-Diab and Molinari (2017) defend interdisciplinary approaches to achieve the objectives of sustainable development, and Reid (2019) identifies the potential challenges of climate change education. Finally, Jegstad and Sinnes (2015) offer an education model in chemistry that aligns for sustainable development, highlighting the need for integrated methodologies to meet the global challenges of education for sustainability.

Prioritising 'agency in the Anthropocene' (White et al., 2023) illuminates ways science education might adapt to address contemporary socio-ecological challenges. While connecting education and planetary health goals through relational agency (Riley & White, 2020) encourages education practices to align learning with Country/Land. A significant theme is the need to promote the consciousness and resilience of eco-anxiety among students, as highlighted by Pihkala (2020). Eco-anxiety can prevent involvement, thus requiring educational structures that promote the agency and active participation in environmental administration (Taylor, 2020). White et al. (2020) also emphasise the benefits of blue spaces in the improvement of well-being, which supports the notion about environmental and health awareness as intertwined (Xu et al., 2020). The integration of STEAM methodologies can reinforce innovative approaches to environmental education, particularly in areas such as waste management (Syahmani et al., 2021). Literature suggests that place-based pedagogies enrich students' connections to their communities, promoting a sense of responsibility for local environments (Yemini at al., 2025). However, critical evaluations of sustainable development education reveal challenges in the fulfilment of global goals (Kopnina, 2020). Thus, addressing eco-crafts, agency's improvement and the promotion of health-conscious practices through external and placed education, educators can significantly impact planetary health and enable future generations (Debrah et al., 2021). These findings emphasise the importance of integrating interdisciplinary approaches into scientific education to cultivate a resilient and informed population capable of navigating the complexities of socio-ecological challenges.

In Conclusion

The interconnected dynamics of sustainability theory and action is a complex matter that requires serious analysis into ways of exploring both the means to become more sustainable and the rewards, or alternatively seriously potentially negative consequences, of doing or not doing so. Our aim is to intervene positively in this complex situation by publishing research that engages with individuals and groups to promote sustainability frame discussions about sustainability and family and community engagement to generate interventions that are relevant, educational, and successful. This special issue will contribute to a conceptual framework for education that will promote transformational effects and engage practitioners, community leaders, scientists and grassroots activists in finding and sharing effective, comprehensive tools and resources that facilitate sustainable families and community development.

The Invitation

We therefore invite contributions relating to research and development about ways of promoting stakeholder interest and assessing community educational needs and resources for sustainability. We seek and invite however also contributions about ways of creating community vision and participation and designing and facilitating strategic planning and carrying out of interventions to improve the future planetary environment for all. We invite contributions from multiple disciplinary and multi-disciplinary fields including *environmental education, information systems, sociology of education and curriculum, curriculum innovation, STEM/STEAM subjects, social psychology, AI, psychology, philosophy, Law, sociology and politics of global sustainability, global studies, community studies, and sociology of families*. Our goal is to address ways of meeting global challenges to community and environmental sustainability in education for developing action competence.

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Guest Editors

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