

Educating for Sustainability through the ACT Curriculum



Units of work to educate for an environmentally sustainable future

Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative-**ACT**



Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative
A Partnership of the Australian Government, the States & Territories

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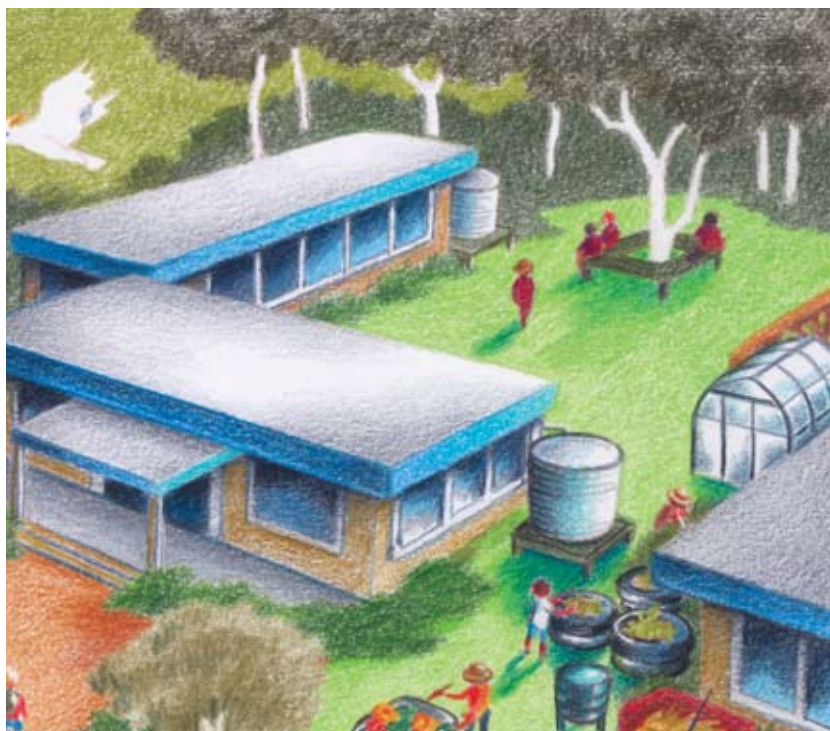
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Educating for Sustainability through the ACT Curriculum has been developed to support the Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative (AuSSI). The AuSSI is a partnership between the Australian Government and the States and Territories to support schools to work towards a sustainable future.

The initiative encourages a whole-of-school approach to improve the management of facilities and resources including energy, waste, water and biodiversity.

Becoming a sustainable school goes beyond awareness raising. It is action learning, supported by the development and implementation of sustainable practices that are embedded in the school curriculum and management plan.

In 2006, twenty ACT schools participated in a pilot of the AuSSI. An evaluation of the pilot recommended the development of curriculum resources to support education for sustainability and the new ACT Curriculum Framework, in particular the Essential Learning Achievement, **‘the student acts for an environmentally sustainable future’**.

In January 2007 a group of classroom teachers began the process of writing units of work aligned to the draft ACT Curriculum Framework, *Every Chance to Learn*. As the framework has progressed, developed and changed so have the units of work. The final documents are aligned to the curriculum framework released in November 2007. It is expected that schools take the documents and adapt them to their own school curriculum organisers, formats and class groupings.

This document contains units of work for the topics: energy, water, waste, biodiversity and climate change. Each topic contains a unit written for the bands of development, Early Childhood P-2, Later Childhood 3-5, Early Adolescence 6-8 and Later Adolescence 9-10. The units of work focus on current environmental issues (local and global). Students are encouraged to assess their own actions and put in practice strategies to become more sustainable at school and home.

The units address the following issues:

- the resources we consume are finite
- human activities are having a detrimental impact on the environment
- we can take actions to reduce our consumption of resources

All teachers have a role to play in supporting education for sustainability through the curriculum by:

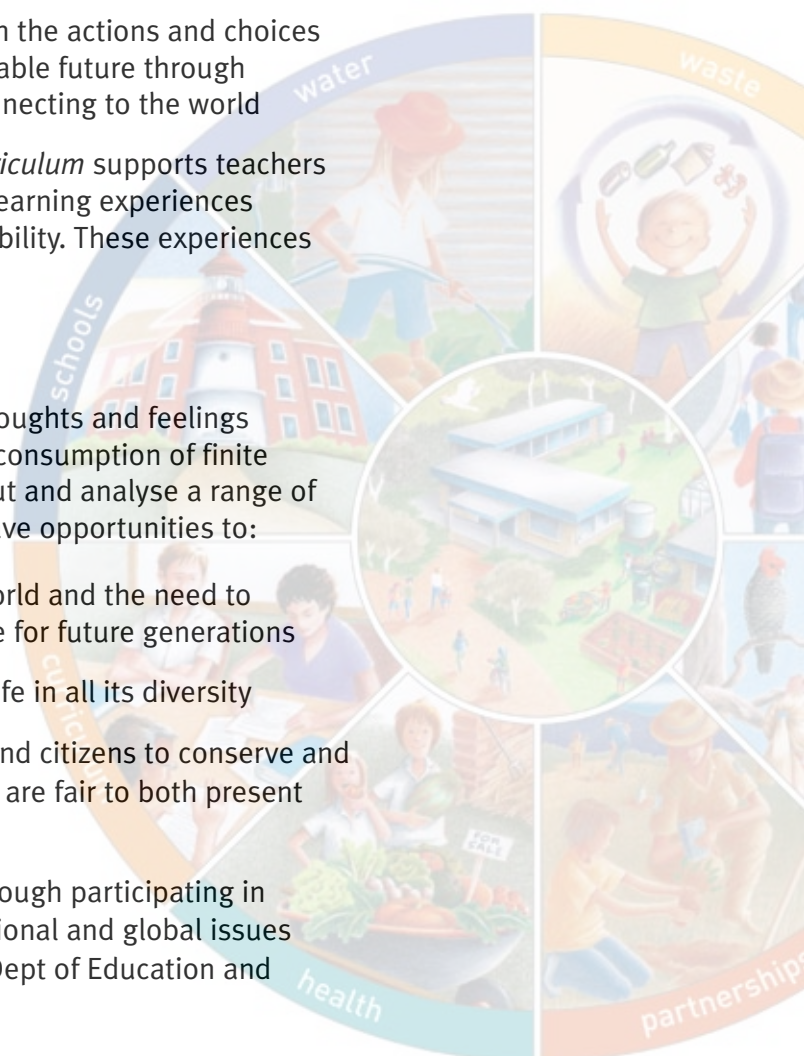
- engaging students with realistic and optimistic actions for the environment
- providing opportunities to develop deep knowledge and understanding about contemporary issues, such as climate change. Using teaching that promotes engagement in high-order thinking, problematic knowledge and sustained communication of their learning
- providing a learning environment where students are developing awareness, understanding and appreciation of the natural and built environments. The expectations of the students are explicit, the work engaging, and students are able to self regulate their own learning
- providing opportunities that support change in the actions and choices students make for an environmentally sustainable future through understanding of background, culture and connecting to the world

Educating for Sustainability through the ACT Curriculum supports teachers in this role. It provides a wide range of effective learning experiences that promote and support education for sustainability. These experiences include:

Values clarification and analysis

Students are encouraged to analyse their own thoughts and feelings about an environmental issue e.g. the excessive consumption of finite resources within the school. Students think about and analyse a range of perspectives in relation to their own. Students have opportunities to:

- appreciate the intrinsic value of the natural world and the need to preserve the environment and natural heritage for future generations
- develop an attitude of respect and caring for life in all its diversity
- appreciate their responsibility as consumers and citizens to conserve and manage environmental resources in ways that are fair to both present and future generations
- develop a sense of optimism for the future through participating in informed, positive action to address local, national and global issues relating to environmental sustainability (ACT Dept of Education and Training 2007)



Inquiry learning

Through active investigation students are encouraged to build on their knowledge associated with a particular environmental issue. This process involves planned, direct and indirect experiences, where students are encouraged to pose questions and gather information. They collect and analyse data in order to reach their own conclusions and decide upon appropriate courses of action e.g. students could conduct a survey of the school community to get their opinion of the school grounds. Students analyse data, draw conclusions and determine a course of action, such as creating habitats. After implementing the changes the students reflect on the outcomes of their actions and use the information to further plan.

Learning experiences in the units of work have been grouped under the following broad headings:

- tuning in
- finding out
- sorting out
- going further
- taking action
- making connections
- sharing discussion and reflection



(Murdoch 2002; Wilson & Wing Jan 2003)

Educating for Sustainability through the ACT Curriculum supports the use of **experiential learning** where students have the opportunity to participate in hands-on activities such as conducting environmental audits in the school, growing and selling vegetables and going on excursions to local natural and built environments.



Your operational guide to becoming a sustainable school

Implementing *Educating for Sustainability through the ACT Curriculum* is further supported by *Your Operational Guide to Becoming a Sustainable School*. This provides ‘hands on’ step-by-step actions schools can take to become more sustainable. The guide includes Walk-Through Audits and Best Practice Guides for water, waste, energy, biodiversity and education for sustainability curriculum.

Schools are encouraged to conduct the Walk-Through Audit and implement the Best Practice Guide for the curriculum unit of work they are completing. The activities complement the units of work and there are opportunities for your students to achieve curriculum requirements.

To obtain a copy of the Walk-Through Audits and Best Practice Guides contact the ACT Sustainable Schools Coordinator, Department of Territory and Municipal Services. www.sustainableschools.act.gov.au

References

ACT Dept of Education and Training Curriculum Framework, 2007. *Every Chance To Learn*.

Murdoch, Kath 2002, *Classroom connections: strategies for integrated learning*, Eleanor Curtin Publishing, Prahran, Vic.

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