A process for transition to sustainability: Implementation

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Abstract
This paper reports the outcomes of the second action cycle of an ongoing project at Edith Cowan University (ECU) called Transition to Sustainability: ECU South West which is located in a small, single faculty regional university campus. The overall project has comprised three action research cycles, the first of which was the planning cycle which established the importance of building a community of practice with a learning stance for sustainability transition. It also highlighted the issue of a common definition of the term sustainability; of including cross-disciplinary perspectives; and of working with the local community. The second action cycle which was the first implementation phase, is the subject of this report. In this phase, we found that by not foreclosing on the meaning of sustainability, important aspects of sustainability were included. Although research participants initially expressed some concern about using an open understanding of sustainability, the problem of the meaning functioned to foster involvement in dialogue. In fact, these ongoing discussions around sustainability and the notion of a sustainable future formed the heart of this action cycle. However there were constraints associated with the subject of dialogue. These included problems of site communication, the maintenance of effective networks and issues around power and authorisation. We observed that each of these elements could work together in ways that enrich and/or obstruct a transition to sustainability. Finally, we found that lack of time hinders participation in sustainability transition projects because of its effect on authentic dialogue, thereby impacting upon the development of collaborative ways of working within the university. Our project is distinctively Australian in that it reflects an emerging movement in Australia to create social frameworks for embedding sustainability education activities. In our project, the transition process by which learning and change has been facilitated comprises the action research itself.

Introduction
This paper reports the outcomes of the second of three action cycles of an action research project undertaken at the South West campus of Edith Cowan University (ECU); a small, single faculty, regional campus located in Bunbury, Western Australia. The first action cycle comprised the planning phase, whereas this second cycle was the first

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implementation phase of the research. An earlier paper (Wooltorton, Palmer, Goodwin, & Paine, 2010) contextualised the project in the literature, described the background of the project and presented the findings of the first action cycle. That phase of the project identified the importance of building a community of practice and the significance of developing a learning stance for sustainability transition. It highlighted the need to work to develop a local understanding of the term sustainability; the necessity to engage with the local community and the desire to relate more deeply with the local and built environment. The significance of working in ways which incorporate cross-discipline perspectives was also identified. Whilst the outcome of the first action cycle was the identification of the process and design for the project, this current paper reports on the initial implementation cycle.

The main intention of the project has been to reorient the curriculum to sustainability across the seven program groups which make up the faculty: Business, Computer Science, Creative Industries, Education, Nursing, Social Work and Coastal Environmental Science/Surf Science. Specifically, the goals of the research described here have been to:

- Plan the reorientation of the faculty to sustainability in terms of the content (curriculum) and processes of teaching and learning;
- Use Action Research as a methodology to achieve the necessary ongoing learning and to frame the reports on the project findings; and
- Begin building the social sustainability framework.

Teaching, learning and research in the field of sustainability education have a history of more than a decade at the campus, which has hosted a number of sustainability education research and development projects. The campus is located in a region of Western Australia known as Australia’s only biodiversity hotspot and the university is the custodian of 80 hectares of natural bushland. For these reasons, the Faculty of Regional Professional Studies has been well placed to undertake this research into transition to sustainability.

The key aims of this ongoing project are distinctively Australian in that they are part of a nascent movement in Australia to create social frameworks to anchor sustainability education programs. The project is innovative in that our transformative approach is underpinned by community development knowledge and principles (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). Given the nature and location of our faculty we have had an opportunity to trial sustainability reorientation using a community resilience/community linking approach and in doing so build community among the staff and students. The project has also been based on a learning approach linked to sustainability initiatives in non-government organisations, schools, community networks and government departments in the town, region and nationwide (Wooltorton et al., 2010).

Australian Universities and Sustainability Education

Substantial research in the field of sustainability education has been implemented in universities in international contexts (for example Corcoran & Wals, 2004). There have been regular calls over the years to radically transform higher education in particular universities (for example Reason, 2002) and more generally in international contexts (for example Fadeeva & Mochizuki, 2010) in order to more competently address the sustainability education agenda. In relation to a double learning challenge which he calls “paradigm” and “provision” in higher education, three areas of concern for each university are identified by Sterling (2004). These are firstly that which already exists in relation to paradigm and provision; secondly that which is implied by sustainability in relation to paradigm and provision; and thirdly that which is required to shift...