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A process for transition to sustainability: beginning.

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A process for transition to sustainability: Beginning
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Abstract
In this paper we describe the background and first cycle of an action research project on the South West campus of Edith Cowan University (ECU South West) in Western Australia. The project was designed to reorient curriculum, teaching and learning to embed principles and practices of sustainability. The first action cycle ran for three months (following a three month reconnaissance period) and involved a series of meetings with campus staff, the writing of a grant application and inception report, a conference presentation, an art project and a collaborative writing endeavour for this paper.

The planning, activities, observations and reflections of Action Cycle One are presented with reference to the literature on action research and Education for Sustainability as applied to tertiary teaching. The findings illustrate the importance of a process approach to sustainability transition through: building community resilience; exploring the meaning of sustainability; understanding the dynamics created by communicative strategies; and learning the practical skills of Education for Sustainability. They also suggest the planning framework for the subsequent action cycles for this transition to sustainability project.

Introduction
This paper describes the beginning of a project aiming to transition one higher education faculty toward sustainability, which is a concept with dissonance at its core. A brief overview of the literature pertaining to the meaning of sustainability and its application in our local context is provided. Highlighting the complexity of meanings around sustainability facilitated the emergence of a local, process-based understanding of sustainability transition.

The paper also provides a short literature review of Education for Sustainability (EfS) in the tertiary education milieu and an introduction to the action research methodology, a process-based approach which has provided the theory-practice link. After situating the project, we describe the nested projects in Action Cycle One, four observations and then the reflections on these, concluding with the implications of the project so far.

The purpose of the project has been to address an overarching research question: Social change for sustainability planning at a small, regional university campus: How do we do it? Specifically, the goals of the project have been:
1. To plan the reorientation of the faculty to sustainability in terms of the content (curriculum) and processes of teaching and learning.
2. To use an action research methodology to achieve ongoing learning and professional development, and to frame and report on the project findings over time.

The implicit hypothesis (Smith, 1975) underpinning this project is that a resilient community of practice can be a multi-disciplinary facilitator for a transition to sustainability on a small, regional university campus. Notions of community of practice (Al-Hawamdeh, 2003) and community resilience (Folke, Berkes & Colding, 2003; Suzuki, 1997) are being used increasingly in the literature to describe a strengthening of individuals and groups to prepare for rapid and unpredictable social and technological changes, such as those likely to be brought about by peak oil and rapid carbon emission reductions necessitated by international agreements (and/or the demands of a global civil society) to address climate change (Hopkins, 2008).

There are a number of contextual factors which explain “Why now?” and “Why ECU South West?” in relation to this project. At a national level, the Australian Government has released a National Action Plan (NAP) for Education for Sustainability (Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, 2009). “Reorienting education systems to sustainability” is one of the four strategies of the Plan and it “focuses on achieving