

I am an Associate Professor of Education at James Cook University, Cairns. My research and education specialty is in sustainability education and climate change education. I have directly experienced a number of cyclones including Larry and Yasi. Like many middle aged women, the approach of Yasi scared the pants off me. People in north Queensland were very fortunate that Yasi did not hit either Cairns or Townsville directly. If it had, the university would have been closed for many month with great costs to these communities. The stresses of large cyclones cannot be overestimated. Yes, people cope because they have to, but the repeated occurrence of large cyclones takes its toll over people's lifetimes.

Overwhelming evidence for climate change is rapidly accumulating but when evidence is ignored, this is a very great cause for concern. As an educator I daily have to deal with widespread denial, the lack of support for sustainability and climate change education programs from state and federal governments, the slowness of educational institutions to respond properly to the contemporary situation and the unwillingness of curriculum developers to look to the futures and actually deal with educating for the climate emergency. I find these barriers to effective practice very frustrating and depressing.

I am an optimist in that I still think that people can respond reasonably and rationally and with some urgency to the mess we have gotten ourselves into though our social, economic and political arrangements. I still think that we can have a good life and protect our environmental assets - which include stabilising climate conditions. There is a great deal that can be done to support climate change education and communication for mitigation and adaptation. I am also convinced by the evidence for extreme feedback loops that time is running out. However, I am not yet at the point of despairing of the human condition, because so much work has actually already been done.

We do have access to a myriad of already developed small and large scale solutions, we know a great deal about what effective climate change education looks like. Many small scale successful programs have been implemented. But whenever budgets need to be cut, education programs make easy targets. The federal government seems unwilling to target cutting billion dollar subsidies for excessive carbon use to certain sections of the economy, but is willing to make small and (in my view) mean-minded cuts to science and sustainability education programs. This is very disappointing, and as an educator I really worry. We are not serving young Australian well by ignoring or disguising or obscuring the truth of our present condition.

At some stage, as a nation, we are going to have to face the truth, preferably now and not later, when it really will be too late to do anything but scramble to adapt and acclimatise. Carbon molecules in the atmosphere and ocean are immune to human ideologies. We cannot wish away the heat trapping realities of gaseous carbon.

You can understand from my position as an educator, that I see a very great need for a greater percentage of effort to be put into properly funded climate change education and community communication programs. Education is one very strong capacity building strategy to enhance resilience and adaptive capacity from small to large scales of human social organisation. Climate change is upon us, the fact that this is still a debatable topic is only a result of a collectivised wishful imagination on the part of some sectors of the Australian community. The Australian and State and Territory Governments can protect the Australian population by getting real about climate change and acting on multiple levels and through multiple ways to address these (historically) new and frightening conditions.

To summarise this brief submission, please accept that climate change is real, and please start to think about the role of formal and community education in more fully addressing that reality.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Hilary Whitehouse