

Editorial

Elizabeth Rushton & Lynda Dunlop

School of Education, Communication and Society, King's College London

Department of Education, University of York

The recent gathering of world leaders, negotiators and activists from across the globe for the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow prompted a renewed focus on the role of education in the context of anthropogenic changes to the climate system. For example, during COP26 the UK government published a draft strategy for the involvement of the education sector in meeting the goals for climate action and environmental sustainability (DfE, 2021). Young people have long been calling for changes to the education they receive about climate change and the environment, which they view as insubstantial and inadequate (Teach the Future, n.d.; UK Student Climate Network, n.d.). While this renewed attention from policymakers on the value of education in environmental sustainability may be welcome, it remains to be seen whether the new strategy will meet the demands of both young people and those who teach them. For example, the draft strategy stresses the importance of science, geography and citizenship as contexts for teaching about climate change (DfE, 2021, p. 12) and yet, youth and teachers frequently call for sustainability to be integrated across school subjects, so that all students are able to learn about this vital concept (Howard-Jones et al., 2021; Teach the Future, n.d.).

Researchers engaged with education for environmental sustainability (EfES) have argued that formalised knowledge systems, such as education, are failing humanity when seeking to respond to challenges such as climate change (Fazey et al., 2020). For example, in England, environmental education in schools has persistently focused on knowledge *about* the environment, rather than education *for* the environment (Glackin & King, 2020). Rousell and Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles (2020) have argued for a move away from didactic approaches to climate change education and toward participatory, interdisciplinary and creative approaches which focus on the involvement of young people in responding to climate change. At the same time as acknowledging the current challenges for enacting EfES it is also important to note that it is understood, described and enacted in a variety of ways depending on the research and educational context. For example, researchers also draw on a range of theories and approaches when considering EfES including environmental justice (Schlosberg, 2013), action competence (Læssøe, 2017) and critical pedagogies grounded in the work of Freire (2017). In our work for the BERA Research Commission to create *A Manifesto for Education for Environmental Sustainability* (2021), we sought to provide spaces for young people and teachers to work together (Rushton et al., in press) and to include the voices of those less frequently heard in conversations about education and the environment. We saw education as a space in which constructive and supportive dialogue can reach across generations and the four jurisdictions of the UK.

This special section of *R/I* spotlights four themes that are important in advancing research in EfES. The first relates to the approaches taken. **Andrea Bullivant**, **Jacqueline Ayre** and **Amanda Smith** discuss the importance of participation and co-creation in manifesto-making in the context of EfES. In their contributions, **Jane Essex** and **Judy Ling Wong** highlight the need for collaborative and inclusive approaches to EfES, and **Tanisha Allen** challenges white scholars to confront uncomfortable truths about the composition of the field – and what this means for the knowledge created within it.

The questions of whose voices are recognised and who participates in environmental decision-making relate to the second theme of environmental justice. Contributions from

Haira Gandolfi and **Maddie Stanford** explore the sociopolitical dimensions of environmental education and challenge educators to examine how environmental problems can be tackled through education in a more socially just way. They draw attention to the connection between local and global approaches, and to confronting the inequitable distribution of environmental and social justice.

The third theme – participation and activism – includes a contribution from climate activist **Molly Hucker** on the importance of conversations between youth and teachers, and from **Cyrus Nayeri** on how writing can function as a form of activism. Central to arguments from **Claire Ramjan** are expanded notions of environmental citizenship and activism, and **Smriti Safaya** considers the place of experiential learning in bridging the values–action gap in relation to environmental issues.

On the final theme – collective action – **Melissa Glackin** highlights the need for political leadership which values education *for* the environment through curriculum, assessments and inspections. And **Molly Hucker** discusses how constructive conversations and actions in school can empower educators and young people to make changes demanded by the urgency of climate change.

The perspectives included in this special section demonstrate the energy for collective action across sectors and generations. We look forward to further conversations and invite colleagues interested in forming an environmental education special interest group to get in touch.¹

¹Elizabeth.rushton@kcl.ac.uk Lynda.dunlop@york.ac.uk

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