

Action to combat climate anxiety



When West Australian teacher Geoff Holt got students involved in a waste management project the number of rubbish bins at Busselton Senior High School dropped from 40 to 10.

Rubbish began to be disposed of correctly and students were given small rewards for doing the right thing with their litter.

Experts from Waste Wise Schools and Clean Up Australia visited to provide input.

Behind the waste wins was another important outcome. The students involved were among the most at educational-risk in the school, with low literacy levels and little interest in science, says Holt.

The project made them responsible for bins in particular areas. And, as part of the science curriculum, data was gathered and tallied and reported on by the students.

Holt said that for many of the students the project led to a rise in self-esteem, engagement, and a sense of empowerment.

The waste project is just one that Holt has introduced to lift student climate change engagement via experiential-based learning.

“For the past 10 to 12 years I have been trying to form partnerships with environmental and community groups in the area and getting students to do a variety of environmental recovery projects, conservation projects, and trying to engage them in volunteering to continue to undertake these kinds of activities,” he says.

He then ties the activities back into the curriculum: “For example, when we were doing biomes, rather than focusing on food security we focused on climate change threats to a forest biome that’s quite a biodiversity hotspot.”

The related project covering anti-erosion and anti-dieback measures was more technical and involved higher pathway students learning about pathogens.

“That was extremely successful, and we were invited back to design some habitat shelters for endangered species resulting from loss of habitat,” says Holt.

This year the class involved in the waste project also cleans the school with tongs and sacks. Year 9 and 10 students are planting native trees for a wildlife corridor.

In developing the projects Holt has embraced the principles of education for sustainable development derived from the United Nation’s 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). He’s completed seven hours of professional development to become a global schools advocate and leads an Education for Sustainable Development committee developing a holistic approach across the curriculum, so all students undertake climate action.

“My biggest concern is not to create alarm and anxiety around climate but to give students the agency to do something about it,” he says. “Otherwise, it just makes everyone feel profoundly depressed about the future.”

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