

BEYOND BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

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BACKGROUND

Sustainability education plays a key role in addressing the sustainability crisis: it supports an empowered and informed citizenry who actively negotiate, create, and implement solutions. However, to achieve this, sustainability education must do more than transmit knowledge: it must empower and motivate students to take action. This raises key questions for sustainability educators: (1) how can we design units that change behaviours (and/or the antecedents of behaviours) so that students can be informed and active agents for sustainability in their communities; and (2) are units that have been designed to facilitate such changes successful in doing so? Despite considerable investment of resources in sustainability education, few units are evaluated rigorously for impact. Thus, gaps exist in our understanding of the contextual and pedagogical determinants of effectiveness, and the complexities of students' perceptions and responses to the competing values inherent in sustainability challenges. This study seeks to expand knowledge in this field through a case study of a unit offered via the University of Tasmania's Diploma of Sustainable Living: *Living with Fire* (LwF).

AIMS

This study aims to understand how LwF impacts student attitudes, self-efficacy and behaviours related to bushfire, and generate learnings for sustainability and bushfire preparedness education.

DESCRIPTION OF INTERVENTION

LwF is a fully online undergraduate diploma unit, targeted primarily at non-traditional adult learners. Its design is based on personally relevant, authentic experiential learning, grounded in global sustainability concepts and a transdisciplinary perspective on wildfire. The unit encourages critical reflection and assessment of bushfire risk in one's own home and community through practical activities and assessments, and contextualises bushfire risk reduction through a sustainability lens.

DESIGN AND METHODS

We address our research questions using a before-after mixed methods approach. This combines: (1) a survey capturing bushfire related attitudes, perspectives and behaviours, applied at course commencement, course completion, and twelve months after completion; and (2) online focus groups. We will apply these methods initially to three cohorts in 2023 (approx. 90 students/cohort), with multivariate quantitative analysis and qualitative thematic analysis used to assess the data.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The first tranche of data collection is currently underway with Semester 1 2023 students. This presentation will present preliminary results from this initial cohort, providing quantitative and qualitative insights on the impacts of LwF on the perspectives and behaviours of this group. These initial findings will provide insights into the capacity of a fully online unit, based on experiential learning, to assist students to build capacity to engage with complex sustainability challenges such as bushfire.

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