

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

A frog's place makes an ideal classroom

Professor Margaret Somerville, from the Centre for Educational Research (CER), has been awarded funding to investigate how a hands-on wetlands project, studying frogs, birds, weeds and water quality, might foster school children's interest in caring for their local environment. The study, funded by AGL Upstream Investments, will also help to prepare teachers for the introduction of sustainability as a classroom focus.

'Learning to live sustainably is one of the most important educational needs for 21st-century students, but teachers say progress is hampered by a crowded curriculum, little knowledge of sustainability and a lack of guidance about how to implement the priority of sustainability in the Australian curriculum,' says Professor Somerville.

Wetlands provide an important service to the environment as cleansing filters and as rich resources for plant and animal life. Typically, they are threatened by urban development encroaching on rural and wilderness areas. The system of waterways of the upper Nepean River, which feeds into Warragamba Dam, is also important to the health of Sydney's water supply, yet creeks and wetlands are used as dumping grounds for rubbish.

Professor Somerville's study will pursue a program of "place-based learning" to foster an attachment between students and the wetlands within walking distance of their south-western Sydney schools. In partnership with community organisations, students and teachers will learn to integrate care of their wetlands into the curriculum using art, literacy and language, science and Aboriginal studies.

The research will involve children aged between 6 and 16, in a Love Your Lagoons conference and planning day and then in a relevant wetlands project.



A number of schools will be involved from each local government area of Campbelltown, Camden and Wollondilly, with the intention to collaborate in ongoing activities after the project has ended. The Macarthur Sustainable Living Centre, for example, hopes to involve primary school children in the regeneration of a small creek affected by weeds and pollution.

With increasing community interest in environmental issues and the need to engage young people, this project will provide valuable information for curriculum development and success. CER researchers will work alongside teachers and students to offer inspiration and insight into the relationship between students and the wetlands close to their classroom. They will learn that their wetlands, creek or lagoon is part of a larger system and must be cared for to maintain the health of the planet.

Project Title: Love Your Lagoons: Place-based learning and environmental action in south-western Sydney

Funding has been set at: \$150,000

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