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Online Conference

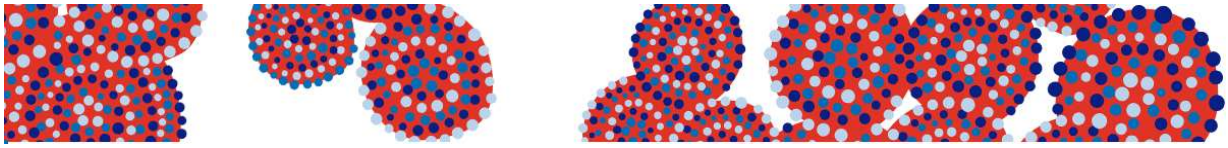
Disaster Risk Reduction Education:
Pathways Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Place

Abstract

Australian children are growing up in a context of rapidly escalating disaster risk. Climate change is exacerbating the frequency, intensity and magnitude of natural hazards, such as bushfire, drought, cyclone, heatwave and flood. At the same time, population growth, urban development, and increasing social and economic inequality are exposing increasing numbers of people to hazard impacts. While children are highly vulnerable to those impacts, they are also recognised as agents of change who have unique capacities for reducing disaster risk in their households, schools, and communities. A key mechanism for harnessing children's capacities is through disaster risk reduction (DRR) education. While a recent surge in school-based research has begun to identify the various benefits of DRR education for children and youth, there is an ongoing need to identify pedagogical frameworks that can guide the design and implementation of rich, meaningful learning experiences that effectively position children as agents of change. Historically, DRR education in Australian schools has tended to adopt what Paulo Freire referred to as the 'banking model' of education, whereby children are treated as passive receptacles to be filled with information. It has also tended to rely on standardised activities that decontextualize learning from the socio-environmental contexts in which children live. Research has found that these approaches to DRR education are not particularly effective and, in some cases, they actually do more harm than good. More recently, however, educators and emergency management practitioners have begun to experiment with more critical, place-based pedagogies and have done so to great effect. This presentation will draw on findings from recent empirical studies of bushfire education in three Victorian primary schools to demonstrate how a 'Critical Pedagogy of Place' can serve to enhance children's understanding of natural hazards and disaster risks and support their active participation in effective action for DRR. It will then explore the numerous barriers and enablers to the implementation of this approach and identify some promising pathways for scaling up.

Speaker Profile

Briony Towers is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Urban Research at RMIT University. Her research interests include child-centred disaster risk reduction (CCDRR), disaster risk reduction



education (DRRE), school emergency management, and climate change adaptation in the education sector. Briony's multi-disciplinary approach to research is grounded in socio-cultural theories of human development and informed by theory and practice in child participation, critical pedagogy, place-based education and community-based disaster risk reduction. Her PhD in socio-cultural psychology at University of Tasmania involved an in-depth qualitative investigation of how children living in bushfire prone areas of south eastern Australia understand and manage bushfire risk. She has since conducted research on CCDRR and DRRE for emergency management agencies around Australia, including the NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW Fire and Rescue, the WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Victorian Country Fire Authority. She has also conducted research on CCDRR for Plan International and Save the Children in Indonesia and the Philippines. For her current research project, funded by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre, she is collaborating with children, youth, educators and emergency management agencies to develop effective and sustainable models of school-based DRRE for the Australian context. Briony is a member of the Commonwealth Attorney General's Disaster Resilience Education Strategy Group, the Triple Zero Australia Working Group, and the Victorian Country Fire Authority's 'Schools in Fire Country' Working Group.

Website links

→ **https://www.rmit.edu.au/contact/staff-contacts/academic-staff/t/towers-dr-briony**