

Climate change curriculum in secondary schools: a multi-country exploration

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Education is promoted as a key strategy for responding to the global climate crisis. Our research collective representing Australia, Canada (Ontario), Finland, Indonesia, Israel, the UK and the USA (New York), are exploring how climate change is attended to in our national (or representative state/province) curricula with a focus on the middle years (year 7 – 10). Initially we focused on science curricula but broadened to include geography curricula after explorations revealed climate science statements in both. We focused on if and how these curricula enabled learning about climate change or our global climate crisis. We applied our analysis to the mandated national curricula as these documents state what is to be taught in schools.

Our analysis indicates that although most of the researched countries' curricula includes the term climate change, the majority barely mention the topic or list this as just an option; that the trend is for insufficient climate change education in the school curriculum to prepare young people as future informed citizens. Only Indonesia, Israel, and Ontario (Canada) curricula include climate change as an explicit focus. Our findings suggest strategies for positioning climate change education prominently in science and geography curricula, to ensure that all citizens graduate middle school with the necessary scientific literacies or conceptual understandings to comprehend the climate crisis.

In the next phase of our research, we are exploring how the countries' intended curriculum is actually enacted in schools through interviews with science curriculum officers and other key stakeholders. Our preliminary findings indicate climate change education is afforded low status in some curricula.