

The influence of literature on the pro-
environmental attitudes of environmental
educators.

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Hey Mum, Dad, I did it!

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to better understand the potential influences of fiction on environmental educators. Current research into pro-environmentally active people indicates that youthful exposure to the natural environment is the main motivator for pro-environmentalism. As urbanisation continues in our society, this exposure could become less available to many children, thus potentially leading to less pro-environmental behaviour. As many young people consume large amounts of television, books and internet, this presents the opportunity for utilizing these media as an alternative method of encouraging pro-environmental behaviour.

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews of 31 environmental educators from environmental education centres on the east coast of Australia to address the possible influence of fiction on their pro-environmental attitudes. It revealed that the participants recall predominantly fictional material from childhood, especially from the age ranges of 8 – 11 years, adolescence and early adulthood. There is a high recall of stories by J R R Tolkien, Enid Blyton and J K Rowling, and the highest number of listed books is from the category of Fantasy/SF and stories involving social issues.

This study is different from previous reports into the influence books have had on environmental educators' pro-environmental values, as it is concentrating on the potential influence of fiction rather than factual or scientific texts.

While stories will never replace authentic childhood experiences in the natural environment for influencing pro-environmental attitude formation, they are a valuable element in teaching strategies as audiences often accept information from stories. Stories are important as they are an aspect of previously recognised pro-environmental influence that can be manipulated by children's teachers and carers and may reduce the reported increasing occurrences of Eco-phobia and Nature Deficit Disorder.