

Working with Australian church youth to respond to climate change: improvisational drama as an educational tool

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1.0 Abstract

There is increasing evidence that in Australia we are faced with a climate change crisis that is pressing, urgent and must be resolved in our present generation. As Christians, we can no longer afford complacency and endless debate. Love for God, our neighbours and the wider Creation, as well as our passion for justice, compel us to “urgent and prophetic ecological responsibility”.¹

The hypothesis behind the present work is that *Improvisation drama is an effective teaching tool that can influence the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of Australian youth attending church youth groups and encourage them to take action on the issues of climate change.* The study involved improvisational drama workshops, combined with pre- and post-workshop questionnaires and a post-workshop focus group discussion. Thirty-one young people from three different evangelical church youth groups participated in three separate workshops. The intent of the study was to provide data specifically in relation to their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours on the issue of climate change in response to the improvisational drama workshop. Based on these results, there was evidence that the use of improvisational drama was an effective educational tool to explore and challenge church youth on issues related to climate change.

Keywords: Improvisational drama; Australian church youth; climate change; behavioural change.

2.0 Introduction

The focus of the research was on Australian young people, the future generation who will need to cope with the consequences of climate change. It needs to be noted that this research occurred at the time of a Labour Government in Australia which had recently introduced a Carbon Tax. However, soon after this project was completed a Liberal (conservative) government was elected. Tragically this new government holds sceptical views regarding climate change and as a result they aim to repeal the carbon tax, and replace it with what they call a Direct Action Policy. This

policy will pay polluting industries to reduce their carbon emissions but is considered ineffective in comparison to trading systems and broad-based carbon taxes that the United Kingdom (UK) and other countries have put in place. These latter approaches are believed to be the most economically efficient policy tools to mitigate climate change.²

This study involved an improvisational drama workshop, combined with pre- and post-workshop questionnaires and a post-workshop focus group discussion (FGD) with Australian young people from three different evangelical church youth groups. The intent of the study was to provide data specifically in relation to their knowledge, attitudes and behaviours on the issue of climate change in response to the improvisational drama workshop. The motivation and rationale for this research was based on literature, in particular Australian, that revealed the Church's apparent limited concern for climate change and the deepening ecological and environmental crisis that is affecting not only humankind, but all of life. The reasons for this attitude, however, are complex.

Literature on the science of climate change is extensive and the overwhelming majority of climate scientists consider this to be a very serious global issue, affecting weather patterns, the environment, livelihoods, economy and agriculture, especially for people living in developing countries.³ Moltmann believes 'this is a crisis of the whole life system of the modern industrial world'.⁴ Conradie would agree and suggests that 'what is required is a fundamental change of orientation, i.e. of lifestyle, *a metanoia*'.⁵ This is true both for the Church as a whole and for the individuals who are part of the Church. The science of climate change challenges the Christian belief that developed at the time of Galileo that science and scripture are no longer 'equal authorities', with science viewed either with suspicion or distrust.⁶ As a result, many Christians fail to accept the strong scientific evidence that clearly indicates that climate change is largely caused by human activities.

Historical evidence also shows that the Church in general has been acquiescent to cultural and societal whims.⁷ Global Christians have demonstrated inspiring leadership on many issues, but many have remained silent on climate change. The reasons for this reveal a mixture of conflicting historical and theological influences. For evangelical and Pentecostal Christians, these have been that of 'saving souls' (soteriology) with less concern for people's livelihood and the environment; the doctrine of Jesus' future return and a New Heaven and New Earth (eschatology); and the encouragement of 'inner realities' to the exclusion of social justice issues.⁸

Climate change has been interpreted as one of the numerous catastrophes described in Mark 13:8, 24-25. The Earth is therefore looked upon as degraded, while Heaven is seen as the place where God lives and will take us to be with him. A number of prominent Christian scholars have challenged these beliefs, describing them as having been strongly influenced by Greek philosophies, especially Platonic dualism.^{8,9}

Even though the global Church, at least the evangelical church, appears to have forgotten its true missional calling to care for humankind *and creation*, attitudes are changing. In Australia, Micah Challenge includes a recent environmental campaign, *Hope for Creation*, and holds an annual national 'Voices for Justice' conference.¹⁰ In November 2012 I was invited to represent Australia at a Lausanne Creation Care and Gospel consultation which involved an international group of evangelical Christians. The aim of this consultation was to develop a deeper biblical understanding of creation care and indicate how the global evangelical church can respond with the seriousness and urgency required.¹

World Council of Churches and Catholic documents demonstrate concern and action regarding climate change.¹¹ However, to date there has not been sufficient momentum to translate these beliefs into realistic and serious action. The Earth Bible Project, spearheaded by the Australian Norman Habel, has had a significant impact on theological and public debate in international circles, but due its academic style and its Earth-based perspective, it has not found a place in evangelical circles.¹² In addition, Habel's 'Season of Creation' liturgy is gaining popularity internationally; however, evangelical congregations tend to exclude this style of liturgy from their church services.¹³

Climate change is not just a controversial issue for the Christian Church; it has become a sensitive and divisive issue for people in developed countries confused by an intense political and media tirade. Evidence from the Australian Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) surveys between 2010 to 2012 shows that people in Australia still see climate change as an important issue, but over the last few years this has become less of a priority.¹⁴ In Britain, The Guardian/ICM poll (June, 2012) found that interest in climate change fell from 80% in 2006 to 62% in 2012.¹⁵

Dealing with controversial issues is never easy and educational institutions, including the Church, often turn to the more traditional didactic forms of teaching. They could benefit from creative

educative approaches, such as theatre, which have been shown to be effective in producing persuasive messages when dealing with sensitive topics, such as safer sex for reducing the spread of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). These creative methods have the ability to bypass the cognitive domain, reaching instead the affective domain, often in powerful ways. Published studies demonstrate that these approaches are an effective educational tool for adults and young people.¹⁶ A number of research studies demonstrate that creative educational tools have successfully encouraged people, including youth, to adopt pro-environmental behaviours.^{17,18,19}

It is well recognised that adolescents have an ‘omnipotent’ stage of development which could be used to advantage.²⁰ The Australian Youth Climate Coalition (2009) have empowered young people in their local communities to create change on a national scale for a healthy sustainable environment in which to live.²¹ Schreiner & Sjøberg agree that empowerment is pre-requisite to action and that ‘empowering young people to deal responsibly with environmental issues should be a principal concern of all types of education’.²²

My review of published literature did not find any studies specific to the use of creative educational approaches involving *church youth* and specific to issues related to climate change. This research therefore makes a small but important contribution towards filling this gap as I believe it is vitally important that church youth are engaged in responding to such issues.

3.0 Research methods

The aim of the improvisational drama workshop was to challenge the Australian church youth to reflect on their attitudes, behaviours, feelings and knowledge regarding what might happen by 2032 if action, or no action, was taken on climate change. This challenge aimed to encourage them to consider developing pro-environmental actions.

Pre- & post workshop questionnaire

A short self-administered pre-workshop and post-workshop questionnaire was completed by each member of the youth group who had consented to the workshop. The pre and post-workshop questionnaire had exactly the same eleven questions. Some of the questions were adapted from existing questionnaires while others were specifically written for this research project.²³ The questions related to behavioural discrepancies, values, Christian faith, commitment and response

(knowledge, attitudes and behaviours) to climate change/environmental issues. Themes embedded in the questions were:

- Encouraging the church congregation to engage with environmental issues as part of my church's mission
- Connection between a loving God, neighbour and self when considering action on climate change
- God being in control and Christians not needing to act on climate change
- Church congregation responsibilities for environmental issues
- The place of God and the Christian in the climate change issues
- Whose responsibility for climate change – God's or Christian's?

The questions were designed with a 5 point Likert scale response. A Likert-type scale assumes that the strength or intensity of experience is linear, i.e. on a continuum from strongly agree to strongly disagree, and makes the assumption that attitudes can be measured. The participants in this research project were allowed to express how much they agreed or disagreed with a particular statement by being offered a choice of five pre-coded responses with the neutral point being neither agree nor disagree.

Data were analysed for individuals, for each youth group and for all youth groups combined. This was done by converting each response to its corresponding numeric value (1, 2, 3, 4 or 5). Any changes between the pre- and post-workshop participant's individual scores were noted. For each youth group, the number of people responding to each response was multiplied by the numeric score for that response and the pre- and post-workshop totals were then compared to identify questions with the greatest change, some change or no change. For the combined youth groups the same process and comparisons were made. This data was analysed using basic descriptive statistics by calculating the frequency distributions for each variable. The results were presented as a bar graph for all 11 questions with columns for the pre- and post-workshop scores. Graphs were prepared for each youth group and all 3 youth groups combined (Figure 1).

Initial drama activities

The workshop initially involved a number of drama activities to assist participants to work together, to build trust and practice making improvised images. Landy defines improvisational drama as 'an unscripted, unrehearsed, spontaneous set of actions in response to minimal

directions from a leader'.²⁴ The focus was on identifying with characters and enacting roles. It did not need pre-determined knowledge, script or story.

Visioning exercise

The participants were asked to imagine their lives in 20 years time from dual perspectives: a world in which positive action has been taken to curb climate change, and a world in which no action has been taken. The exercise aimed to encourage them to move away from the present and to imagine their future life in as realistic a way as possible, but also to encourage them to create as positive a vision as they could for both scenarios. To aid them in their thinking I asked them to include aspects such as housing, transport, clothing, food, goods, natural environment and other people. Their ideas did not involve any discussion. A volunteer was then asked to write their ideas on a whiteboard using three categories:

1. What the world would look like in 20 years time if actions are taken to curb climate change
2. What the world would look like in 20 years time if no actions were taken to curb climate change and
3. Actions the participants would take personally to curb climate change.

Only ideas that were not relevant to the three categories were discarded. The lists were photographed and recorded.

Making Still Images activity

This exercise was derived from the work of Boal.²⁵ I initially asked the participants to choose one idea from each category in the visioning exercise and to make an image of it. The idea was to encourage them to find 'the essence' of the idea, in other words the intrinsic nature or indispensable quality of something, especially something abstract, which determines its character. I encouraged the participants to think as much as possible for themselves, echoing what Moyer-Gusé said, 'that participants do not come with a blank slate, they bring pre-existing values, norms and attitudes that influence their motivations and the outcome of the drama piece'.²⁶

I then asked them to speak out the thoughts and feelings of their image (for example trees dying or growing vegetables) by answering the questions: What do you want? What are your desires? What are your feelings? My observations were written up within one or two days of the workshop for record purposes.

Focus group discussions (FGD)

The FGD provided an opportunity to consult with the young people in order to learn about their ideas, values and feelings regarding the different exercises in the workshop. I used the following questions to guide me in preparing the focus group:

- How will the information from the focus groups be used?
- What will it be used for?
- Who will use the information?
- What new information, if any, do I want to get from the focus groups?

The FGD questions explored whether the youth had developed new ideas about their future lifestyle; how they would put these ideas into practice as well as relate to them in their Christian life; and how did the workshop encourage them to put their ideas into practice in their community and their church? Finally, what feelings and enjoyment did they get from the workshop; whether it gave them a deeper awareness of climate change and whether they thought it was a helpful way to learn about these issues.

I followed the basic outline of the *Toolkit for Conducting Focus Groups*.²⁷ I was able to tape record, with permission from the participants, all the conversations that took place. Shortly after the focus group I transcribed the information in order to record major themes, areas of consensus and significant dissenting views.

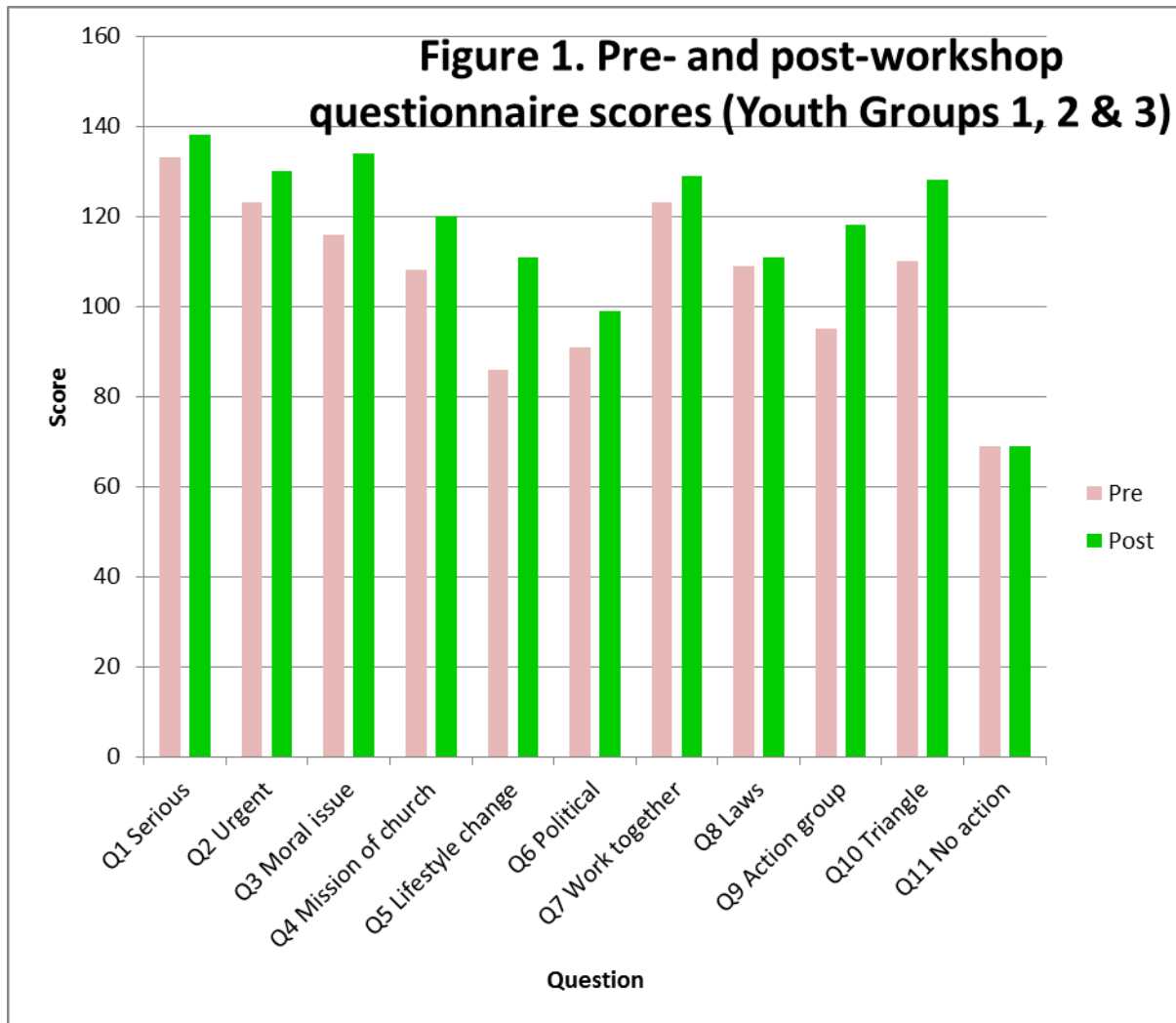
Sample selection

Around 40 evangelical church youth groups in the Adelaide metropolitan area were invited to be involved in this study. Despite much follow-up only three church youth groups (two groups comprising 11 youth each and the other with 9 youth) were able to be included during the 12 months allocated for the study. A random selection methodology therefore was not appropriate or feasible as a representative sampling frame was not able to be constructed. All individuals, males and females, in these three youth groups participated in the full workshop and provided prior informed consent (or their parental consent).

This research project was approved by the Tabor Adelaide Research and Ethics Committee.

4.0 Findings

Pre- and post-workshop questionnaires



The difference between the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires scores showed significant changes to some of the 12 issues (Figure 1). Due to the small number of responses I am using the term ‘significant’ in its more general sense and not in the statistically significant technical sense. While the coding method did enable me to compare individual participant’s results, in most cases this did not produce additional important data. The most significant changes were noted for Statement 5 (‘I am changing my lifestyle to help address climate change issues’), where there was an increased score from 86 to 111; Statement 9 (‘I would like to be part of a Christian environmental action group’) which showed a considerable change from 95 to 118; and Statement 10 (‘There is a connection between loving God, neighbour and self when considering action on climate change’) where there was a change from 110 to 118. However, Statement 11 (‘God is in control so Christians do not need to act on climate change’), produced no changes

because the majority disagreed with the statement both before and after the workshop (score of 69 for both).

Warm up drama activities

I observed that the warm up drama activities did encourage the participants to have fun, act in spontaneous ways and use their imagination. However, in some cases it was the young women who participated more readily than the young men.

Visioning exercise

All three youth groups noted that if in the next 20 years no action was taken to curb climate change then there would be the likelihood of hotter temperatures (greater need of air-conditioning, lighter clothing); more pollution (need to buy clean air, gas masks); drier land (creating deserts, resulting in less land for agriculture); health issues (asthma, mould in houses, skin cancer); less natural environment with vegetation and animals dying; food issues (less available, ration packs/instant food and more expensive food); population growth, including more refugees; living and fuel costs increased (more poverty, difficulty getting jobs, people retiring earlier); land and houses destroyed from flooding from excess rain and rising seas; lack of natural water causing conflict and wars; and an increase in desalination plants.

If action was taken, all 3 youth groups noted that there would be more recycling; increased use of solar panels and other renewable energies; food grown locally; use of electric/hydrogen cars; underground houses/people able to live in the desert; and better education on environmental issues and more efficient lifestyles.

For actions that could be taken, all 3 youth groups included the need to reduce, reuse, recycle and revalue all types of materials; use solar panels; walk, use bicycles and public transport more; grow/eat more organic food (no pesticides and not buy fast foods), have worm farms and make compost; protect endangered animals; use renewable energies; buy energy efficient cars; use less electricity; do not waste things (buy op-shop clothes, biodegradable clothing and packaging) and use less power and paper.

Still images activity

A number of participants found this exercise challenging due to some of the visioning exercise ideas being difficult to create. For example, making an image of 'packaged foods', or 'greywater

systems' or 'greater demands for sunscreen' proved too hard. But ideas such as 'summer clothes' or 'people and/or animals dying' were much easier to use for this exercise. Expressing how they felt (*I wish, I want, I am sad or happy...*) while in their still image was difficult for some but fun for others. Making a noise proved easier. One participant felt her image of being 'an increased temperature' very unpleasant. She expressed this with the word 'yuck!' She said this activity helped her realize the seriousness of temperatures becoming extremely hot. Another said, 'I liked acting out the feelings – got me into the character (of trees being destroyed) and helped bring out how I was feeling; it made it all more real'.

Some examples of images and noises participants chose were forests destroyed (screaming); health issues (groaning); people dying (crying); less variety of food available (moaning); buy expensive deodorants (unhappy); electric cars (moving quietly around the room); naturally-friendly clothing (happy); solar panels (quietly humming); recycling (happy); riding a bike (happy); clean air with no pollution (joy); growing fruit and vegetables (yummy); protesting deforestation (yell); turn off power points (happy); recycling, reusing or designing items such as clothes or furniture (happy); and driving an ethanol fuelled car (excited).

Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

The FGD were animated with active participation. In one youth group the young women, the minority, answered most of the questions despite much encouragement given to the young men. Interestingly a number of participants said they had found the FGD the most stimulating and informative part of the workshop.

My findings indicated many agreed that even though they knew about climate change, they found all aspects of the drama workshop empowering, helping them to think in new ways, made the issues of climate change real and personal and was "much more enjoyable than listening to a 'boring' school teacher!" It also helped them realize that they need to think not just about their life now, but also how climate change could affect their future life. One participant said: 'It made me think about this life, it all looks fine but I know it's not. It's going to change and be difficult'.

Many of the participants spoke of new ideas for their future lifestyle which they would put into practice, as well as encourage in their community. Examples included plant more trees, promote recycling, advertise about eco-friendly businesses, clean-up waste, catch the bus and buy less. Many felt caring for the environment was part of God's plan and that Christians should be more

aware of the importance of caring for the earth. A number liked the way they could speak freely about what was on their mind and the fact everything they said was accepted as “right”. There were no dissenting views, but some participants only contributed a small amount.

5.0 DISCUSSION

Pre- and post-workshop questionnaires

The majority of participants agreed in both the pre- and post-workshop questionnaires that the global environmental crisis, including that in Australia, is serious. This fits with the results from Australian surveys conducted on adults as well as those conducted with young people.^{14,28,29} The scores for participants who agreed in the importance of the moral, spiritual and missional aspects of environmental action increased in the post-workshop questionnaire. This is consistent with the results from the 2011 National Church Life Survey that showed climate change had a degree of urgency amongst the Australian church population, but that this degree of urgency was apparently similar to that of the non-church population.³⁰

There was a large increase in the scores of participants who agreed in the post-workshop questionnaire that changing one’s lifestyle to respond to climate change was important. This is similar to Chatto’s 2008 survey results of young people in the Northern Territory who had learnt about the importance of taking action such as recycling, switching off lights and walking or catching a bus to school from television and their school.²⁸ However, this differs from Fielding’s 2009 survey among young people in Queensland which found, despite relatively high levels of environmental concern, less than 10 percent of those surveyed were very committed to acting in pro-environmental ways.²⁹ In comparing the pre- and post-workshop questionnaire scores, there was no change in the question related to political influence.

There was minimal change among participants in response to collective action and stronger laws. A large number of the youth surveyed by Chatto (2008) recommended the use of monetary incentives, awards and prizes, and a slightly smaller number recommended laws and regulations, to encourage people to reduce their impact in response to climate change.²⁸ I did not find any literature on collective action with which to compare this finding, but Gardner and Stern did conclude that government laws can be effective for changing behaviour, provided they occurred in conjunction with other interventions.³¹

There was a significant change between the pre- and post-workshop questionnaire scores for being part of a Christian environmental group. An interest in being part of an active Christian group is consistent with the findings of Cook who found that UK Christians were initially using secular sources of information on environmental issues but “then ‘searching out’ Christian sources for confirmation”.³² Unfortunately there are currently few Australian Christian environmental groups, in contrast to the much larger number in the United Kingdom.³³

There was some change in the participant’s scores related to the connection between loving God, neighbour and self when considering action on climate change. This compares somewhat with the findings of Allchin, Wallis, Prior & Rometsch who found people who believed in human-induced climate change were more likely to see it as a faith, poverty and/or justice issue than people who did not believe in human-induced climate change.²³

The majority of the participants disagreed with the statement that God is in control so Christians do not need to act on climate change and this did not change from the pre- to the post-workshop questionnaire. This result reflects the belief of Christians in mainstream Protestant churches who, while acknowledging that God is in control, do see the need for Christians to take action.

I observed that, for some participants, completing a questionnaire in a youth group setting was not a ‘cool’ thing to do, and as a result some ticked the boxes appearing to give little attention to the statements. However, perhaps surprisingly, the majority responded more diligently to the post-workshop questionnaire.

Future vision lists

Lehtonen states ‘Future Visioning exercises are a missing dimension in education’, hence today’s young people are apparently not often asked to think in this way.¹⁶ As a result this exercise initially proved difficult as the participants struggled to imagine what their life (home, clothing, transport, food and environment) would look like in 20 years time. Once they grasped what was required their ideas were extensive and insightful, demonstrating a considerable degree of knowledge regarding what things would need to occur in order to mitigate climate change. This links with the views of Hartig et al that future visioning is able to promote active participation and empowerment as well as encourage hope; this can ‘create a feeling of well-being and lead to positive action such as pro-environmental behaviour’.³⁴

Improvisational drama

The participants demonstrated active engagement in the improvisational drama activities, which contributed to their active participation in the FGD. This links with the work of Lehtonen who stated that ‘there is much evidence that creative art forms, especially participatory theatre, can stimulate and give confidence to those involved, encouraging them to speak out on ‘confronting’ issues’.¹⁶

The participants also demonstrated the ability think intuitively and critically, use their personal knowledge and enjoy the experience. This is consistent with Landy who states ‘improvisational drama encourages both logical and intuitive thinking; personalizes knowledge and yields aesthetic pleasures’.²⁴ Others, such as Amuseghan, and Moyer-Gusé agree that participatory theatre’s success comes from its emphasis on the importance of working with and from people’s own realities.²⁶⁻³⁵ I believe this was achieved in this research study, but limited due to the fact the study had a short time frame.

The findings of the ‘still image’ exercise are similar to those of Boal who advocates that image building aids participants in being able to explore, with their bodies, various everyday issues, including problems that can be difficult to put into words.²⁵ Image building also can assist participants in ‘being present in the moment’ and help them to ‘think on their feet’ and enhance their critical and creative thinking skills. Kincaid advocates that the still image must include an emotional message in its shape, as this plays an important role in persuading and influencing attitudes and behaviour, as frequently found in advertisements.³⁶ Kaiser et al state ‘it is the feelings of personal responsibility towards caring for the environment that bridge the gap between rational knowledge and action’.³⁷ One participant demonstrated this when they were asked to find a noise that related to his image of trees being destroyed. His noise was screams. Later in the FGD he said: ‘Acting out the “feelings” [noise] got me into the character [of the image], and made me want to care more for the environment, especially trees’.

As noted, there is much literature on the value of using improvisational drama with young people. Ideally a drama facilitator would, over a period of time, work with considerable flexibility and adaptation according to the participant’s needs and abilities. This, however, was not possible with this research project, due to the necessity of ensuring, as much as possible, that each workshop was run consistently according to the constraints of the methodology. Despite this I do believe that the findings support my research hypothesis.

Focus Group Discussions

There was clear evidence from the FGD that the workshop challenged the youth to think in new ways in relation to climate change issues, for the present and the future. This lends further support to my hypothesis.

The participants in the different youth groups did vary with their degree of participation. In one group the young men were much more reticent than the young women. While my sample was small, there may be some parallels with Chapman whose findings suggested that the age group that showed the lowest level of environmental concern was young men aged 18-29 years.¹⁹

I had no expectations of what the youth would suggest when it came to changing their lifestyles. Some found it hard to imagine what their life might look like in 20 years' time. Deciding what exactly constitutes pro-environmental behaviour is complex.³⁸ Added to this is the challenge of dealing with the disconnect people feel between the immediate benefits of unsustainable lifestyle, for example South Australians escaping the cold winter months by flying [excess carbon miles] to the warmer climate of Queensland in northern Australia, and the longer term negative impacts on the environment, society and themselves.^{16,17} However, as one participant said, 'even if we only do something little to help the environment, if everyone does it, it will eventually have a big effect'.

A number of the youth commented that even though they knew about climate change it was not until the drama workshop that they realized just how serious it is and that they can be responsible to take action to help with mitigation. This finding is similar to the results of a survey conducted by Fielding.²⁹ Strazdins and Skeat suggested 'people tend to build a simplistic picture of climate change; this is because their idea(s) tends to be based on their immediate experience of weather. They struggle to understand too the future impacts of climate change and how it can relate to their personal lives'.³⁹

I found the youth, known today as 'Gen Y' or 'Me Generation', a challenging group with which to work; the young men in one youth group found it hard to concentrate, listen to instructions, felt uncomfortable creating images and did not contribute much to the focus group discussion. This however, was not the case for the males in the other groups. Fielding found that environmental views and behaviour are not homogenous in a group and are likely to be shaped by gender, socio-economic status, cultural background and geography. In addition, youth are strongly influenced

by their peers, societal norms and are dependent on technology.²⁹ They are thus unlikely to change their behaviour unless their peers are doing the same. This is one of the reasons why youth associations, such the Australian Youth Climate Coalition are so successful.²¹ Their youth ‘culture’ is able to promote, in their case, pro-environmental behaviours.

General discussion on the workshop

It is difficult to quantify how much these findings support my hypothesis. While the results clearly indicate a degree of effectiveness, this can only be measured by using a larger sample, addressing limitations and using more comprehensive quantitative and qualitative surveys before the workshop, immediately afterwards and at least 6 months later. Assessment of the effectiveness of these methods would be difficult due to possible confounding influences (for example, an increased emphasis on climate change at school during the follow-up period). It would also be challenging to follow up all the youth who attended the initial workshops due to the fluidity of church youth group members.

From my observations, and from the focus group discussion, I concluded that the improvisational drama part was enjoyed by all the participants, although those who had done some improvisational drama at school participated more enthusiastically than those who had done none or very little. Using this creative tool, improvisational drama, for addressing a controversial issue such as climate change proved valuable. This is consistent with Kincaid who believes improvisational drama is able to create a trusting and fun atmosphere which is necessary for dealing with controversy.³⁶

6.0 Limitations and Challenges

This research study has identified a number of limitations, some of which were not anticipated. The most important and frustrating limitation were attempting to find enough ‘suitable’ youth groups. A suitable youth group for this research was one that had youth aged between 15- 25 years and had a mix of young men and women, of whom at least 10 -15 had provided written consent to participate prior to the workshop.

My original aim was to contact four church youth groups with an average of 12 participants in each group. Unfortunately this proved to be much harder than I had envisaged. Despite intensive

efforts to contact over forty youth group leaders, only three were able to be involved during the study period. I believe there are a variety of reasons for this: the topic 'climate change' has become a taboo topic in some evangelical churches; the influence of peers as to whether they would or would not attend the youth group meeting each week; and some youth leaders who found organising something 'different' from the normal Bible study session too challenging. A number of youth leaders did express interest but could not assist due to their group being too small, too many under 13 year olds and the leader moving on to another job.

Individual selection bias is another possible limitation for this study. As it was necessary for parents, and/or the youth leader, to give permission for youth under 18 years of age to participate in the workshop, those who felt uncomfortable with the topic may have not given permission.

It needs to be noted that the workshops were conducted under the constraints of research methods. This of course is appropriate, but it did restrict me, as it was necessary to run each workshop following exactly the same methods with no degree of flexibility. I had hoped to run a series of introductory improvisational workshops with each youth group before running the research workshop, but this proved impossible due to the above constraints. In recording the findings, some details of the drama session may have been missed. However, I am confident that what I have presented in these findings is accurate and valid.

I am aware that the total sample size was relatively small and therefore the changes noted from the pre- to post-workshop questionnaire were only indicative of trends.

7.0 Conclusion

I am confident that the findings of this research support the hypothesis that: *Improvisation drama is an effective teaching tool that can influence the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of youth attending church youth groups and encourage them to take action on the issues of climate change.* However, it is important to note that each component of this workshop had an important part to play in challenging not just the knowledge (which a number of the youth already had) but also the attitudes, feelings, and the behaviours of these youth. I do not think that any one component would have worked successfully on its own.

Even though there are many ‘grass roots’ eco-pedagogy projects around the world using the arts, I am not aware of any research findings specifically related to climate change. I am therefore hopeful that my findings may encourage others working in this area to do further studies on the best ways of using improvisational drama and other creative arts. Further research will also support advocacy for these approaches to bring about positive behaviour change among church youth on climate change issues.

While this has been a small, and necessarily limited research project, it does have potential wider benefits. Those who read this article, or who are made aware of its findings, including church leaders, youth leaders and teachers, may be challenged on how to address climate change with youth and church congregations. This is especially relevant in Australia since the Liberal government came to power with policies on climate change much weaker than the previous Labour government.

Today there is a large amount of evidence supporting the argument that, unless we radically change our individual lifestyles (values and behaviour) and institutions, the world we presently enjoy is going to be drastically different in the near future due to the effects of climate change. This will create enormous tragedies, especially for those in the developing world. For Christian believers, committed to love God’s creation and love one’s neighbour, responding to the serious issue of climate change needs to be an important part of our lives. I believe that this improvisational drama approach is a valuable tool to challenge Christian youth to take action to ensure that God’s creative earth remains sustainable for themselves, their neighbours, locally and globally, and all future generations.

8.0 Biography

Sally Shaw has recently completed a Master of Education at Tabor Adelaide, a Christian tertiary education institution in Adelaide, South Australia. She and her husband, Doug, spent many years working in Cambodia. She is originally from East Yorkshire. Sally is on the steering group for Friends of A Rocha in the hope we will one day establish A Rocha projects in Australia. She is also involved in Transition Initiatives in the Adelaide Hills and presently working on teaching materials for churches on *Why Christians need to care for God’s creation*.



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The *John Ray Initiative* promotes responsible environment stewardship in accordance with Christian principles and the wise use of science and technology. JRI organises seminars and disseminates information on environmental stewardship.

Inspiration for JRI is taken from John Ray (1627-1705), English naturalist, Christian theologian and first biological systematist of modern times, preceding Carl Linnaeus.

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