

Environmental Justice Education: How We Can Change our Planet and Society One Classroom at a Time



BACKGROUND:

- There is a lack of awareness around the relationship between environmental issues and social issues.
- Environmental injustices are often faced by minority groups.
- The lack of awareness and action results and will result in these issues persisting.
- Environmental justice education is necessary, but most programs do not adequately address it. (Fig.1)

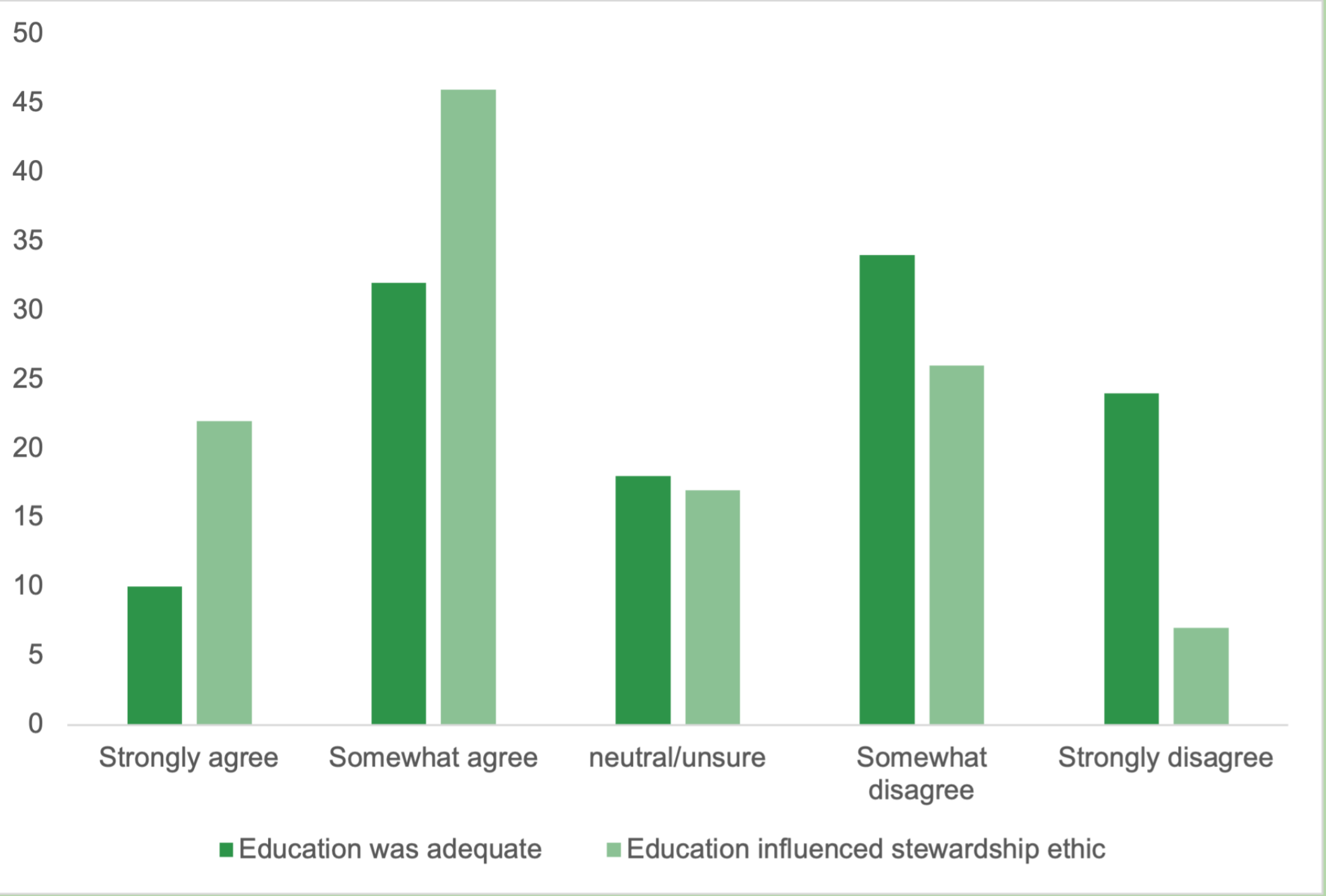


Fig 1. Over 50% of respondents said that their K-12 education has impacted how they behave toward the environment now, and that they felt they were not adequately educated about environmental issues.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

What are the opportunities and challenges in teaching K-12 children about environmental justice issues?

INTERNSHIP AND METHODS

Internship:

- Virtually Co-hosting Common Caws for Sustainability Podcast which involved interviewing environmental and education experts. (Fig 2.)

Other Methods:

- Online survey to UW PoE students.
- Literature review.



Fig 2. Spotify QR code to Common Caws for Sustainability Podcast.

RESULTS:

CHALLENGES



Environmental justice topics are often hard to grasp at a young age and can be very sensitive.



An increase in use of technology has led to less outdoor time for kids and has exposed children to topics they may be overwhelmed by or scared of.



Educators are not adequately trained to teach about environmental justice topics.



Barriers to accessing environmental education include high cost, lack of green space in cities, unsafe areas, weather, and low priority of environmental curriculum.



Environmental justice education implementation may require added curriculum, which may deter educators and children from interest in participating.

OPPORTUNITIES



Immersing children in nature can lead to environmental stewardship, which can be implemented in environmental curriculum to stem interest and care.



Discussing topics frequently with children can make them more comfortable with them.



Community-based learning and activities in the classroom and the community can also be very motivating for kids.



Instilling a sense of hope in children can be very motivating.



Tangible incentives can be another motivating factor in teaching children about sustainable practices and environmental topics.

IMPLICATIONS & NEXT STEPS:

- Create easier access to environmental education in general, and take advantage of methods that are more accessible like podcasts (Fig 3).
- Frequent discussion must take place in the correct mannerisms for certain ages to stem interest and open doors for discussion in the future.
- More immersion in nature for children.
- Augmented training for educators specifically around environmental justice topics.
- Use motivators for children such as community-based activities, hope, and tangible incentives.



Fig 3. My podcast co-host and I recording in the studio. Podcasts are a very accessible form of learning, as they are almost always free, do not require reading, and are something that can be listened to anytime on multiple platforms. Communication about environmental topics is critical and something like a podcast is a great way to spread awareness.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- We can teach children about these topics at any age, so long as it is approached properly.
- Some challenges can also bring opportunities.
- We cannot rely solely on children to fix our planet, but we can make a positive impact with their help.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Eli Wheat, Stephan Classen and Rachel Luther, and my family and friends. You have all been very supportive and helpful throughout the entire Capstone Process.