

“Learning to Care: Education for Compassion”

Griffith University Research Project April 2007

The knowledge and attitudes of teachers and students to animal ethics and its inclusion in the school curriculum: For the purposes of curriculum and resource development

Project Director: Dr Gail Tulloch BA (Hons) Dip Ed MA PhD

Researcher: Ms Joy Verrinder BA Dip T MBA

The following is the Executive Summary (with selected graphs as supporting evidence) and Recommendations. If you are interested in a copy of the full report, please contact Joy Verrinder Ph 0417788063.

Executive summary

The increasing emphasis in education on values such as care and compassion and the growth in attention to animal ethics (how humans should treat other animals) in philosophy (Francione, 1996; Singer, 1999; Cavalieri, 2001; Bekoff, 2003; Armstrong & Botzler, 2003; Sunstein & Nussbaum 2004; Singer, P & Mason J. 2006) and science (Griffin, 1976; Rollin 1995; De Waal, 1996; Ford, 1999; Wise, 2002; Allen, 2003; Turner, 2003; Fraser & Preece, 2004; Friedland, 2004; Duncan, 2005; Brown, Laland, & Krause, 2006; Croney, Gardner & Baggot. 2004; Turner & D’Silva, 2006) suggests that animal ethics should be included in the school curriculum.

This research investigated the knowledge and attitudes of teachers and students in a Queensland urban environment to animal ethics issues; and to what extent these issues are currently included in the primary and secondary school curricula. Year 7 students and teachers and Year 10 students and secondary humanities and science teachers were included in the study.

Teachers and students showed a strongly compassionate ethos in relation to animals generally. (Fig. 1)

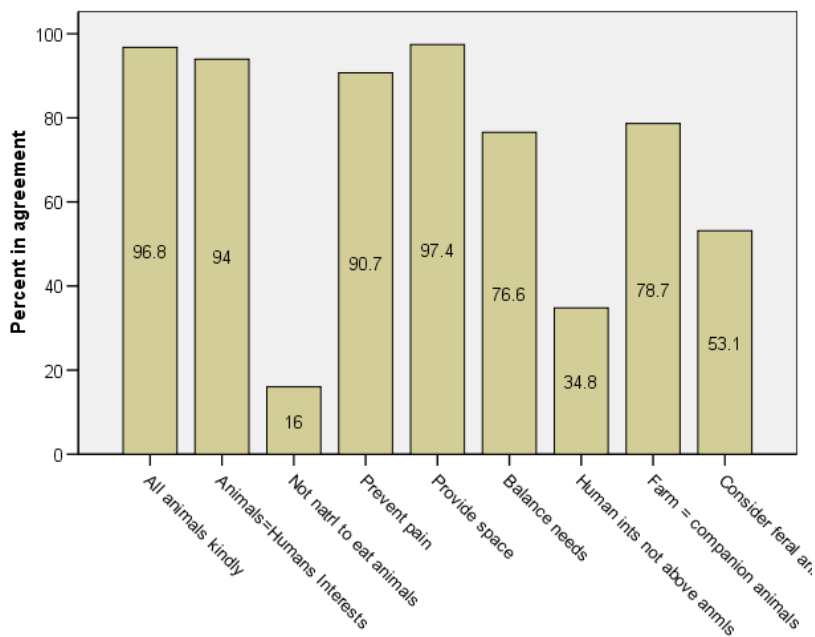


Figure 1. Attitudes to treatment of animals in general - items reframed in terms of a consistently compassionate ethos

However, a significant proportion showed strong inconsistencies and contradictions in attitudes, particularly when applied to specific uses of animals. (Figure 5.1)

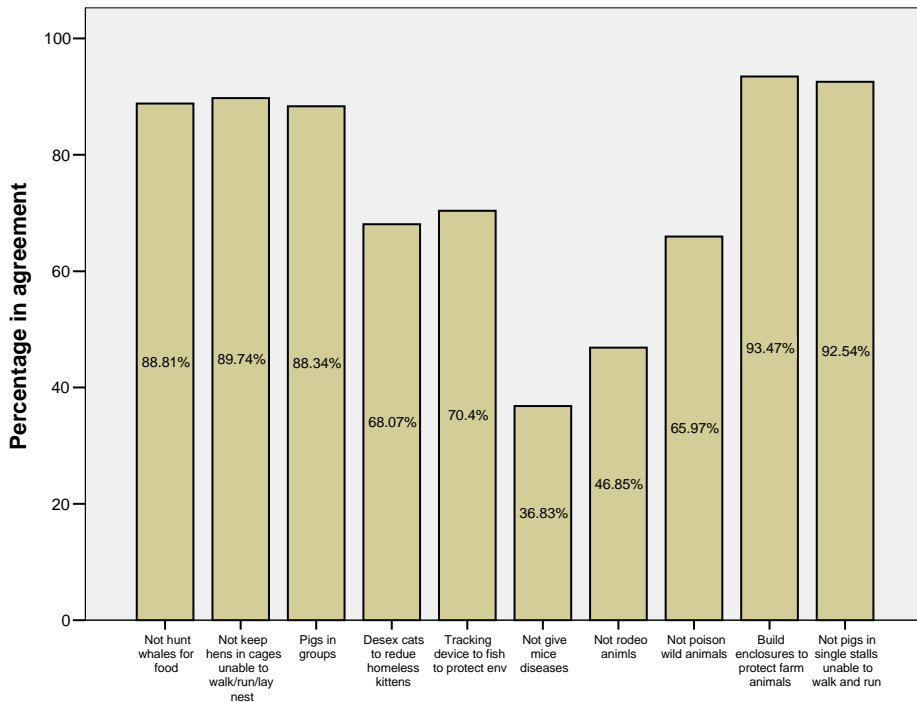


Figure 5(i). Attitudes to treatment of specific animals (items reframed in terms of a consistently compassionate ethos)

These attitudes reflected the inconsistent and contradictory treatment of animals in our Australian culture eg. the contradiction between strong agreement that it is natural to eat animals and the strong disagreement with hunting whales for food. (Figure 6)

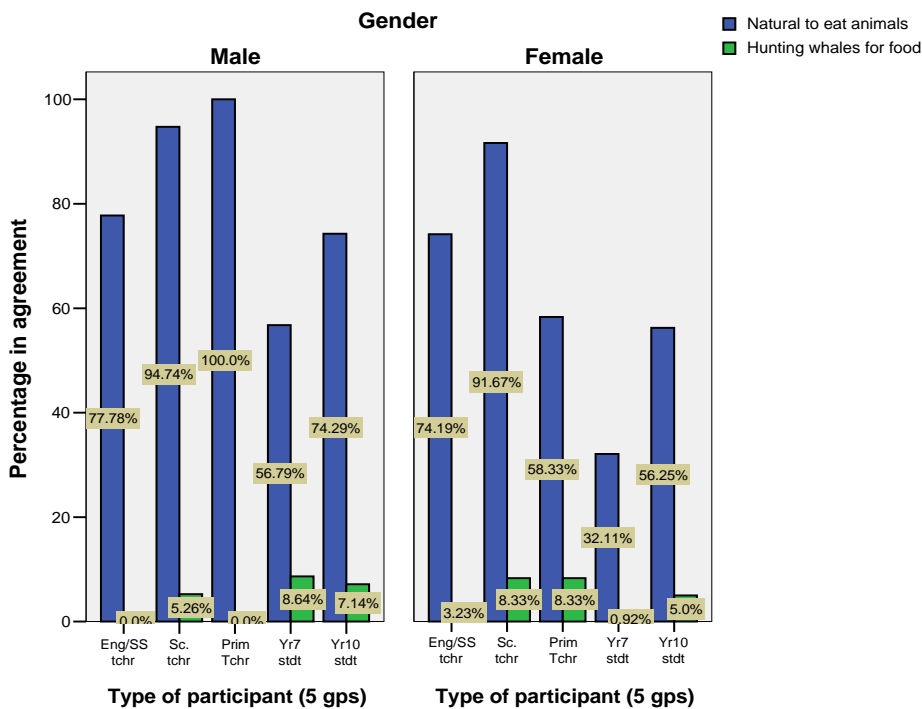


Figure 6. Inconsistency between “natural for humans to eat animals” and “hunting whales for food”

Female teachers and students demonstrated a more consistent and compassionate ethos than males. (Figure 2)

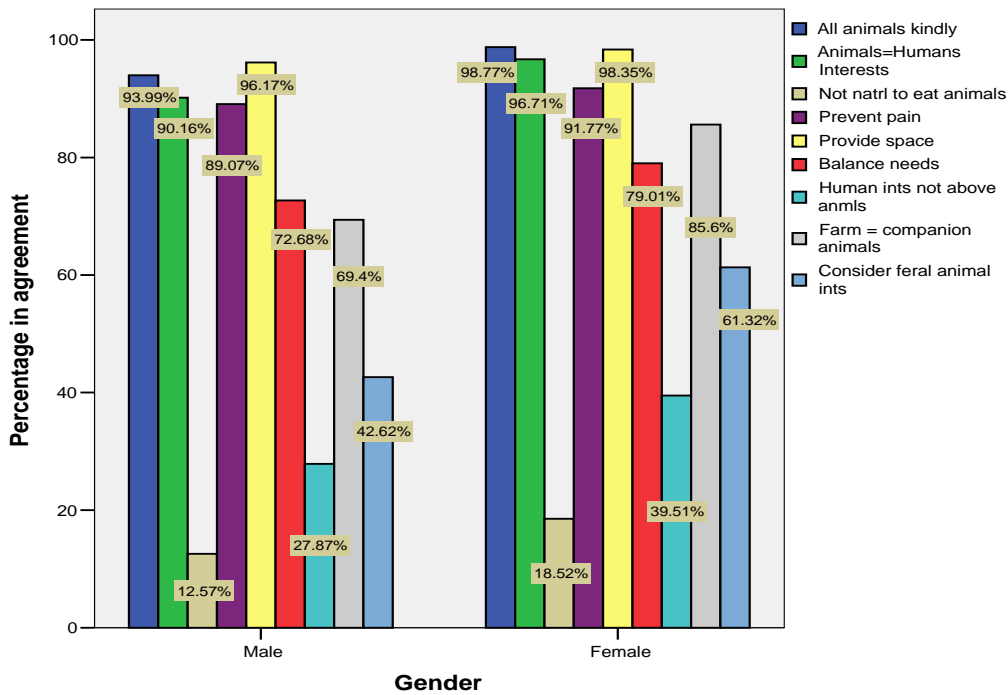


Figure 2. Gender differences in attitudes to the general treatment of animals

Students demonstrated a more consistent and compassionate ethos than teachers; and younger students more than older students. There were also differences in levels and consistency of compassion between teachers in different disciplines. (Figures 3, 8, 9, 10)

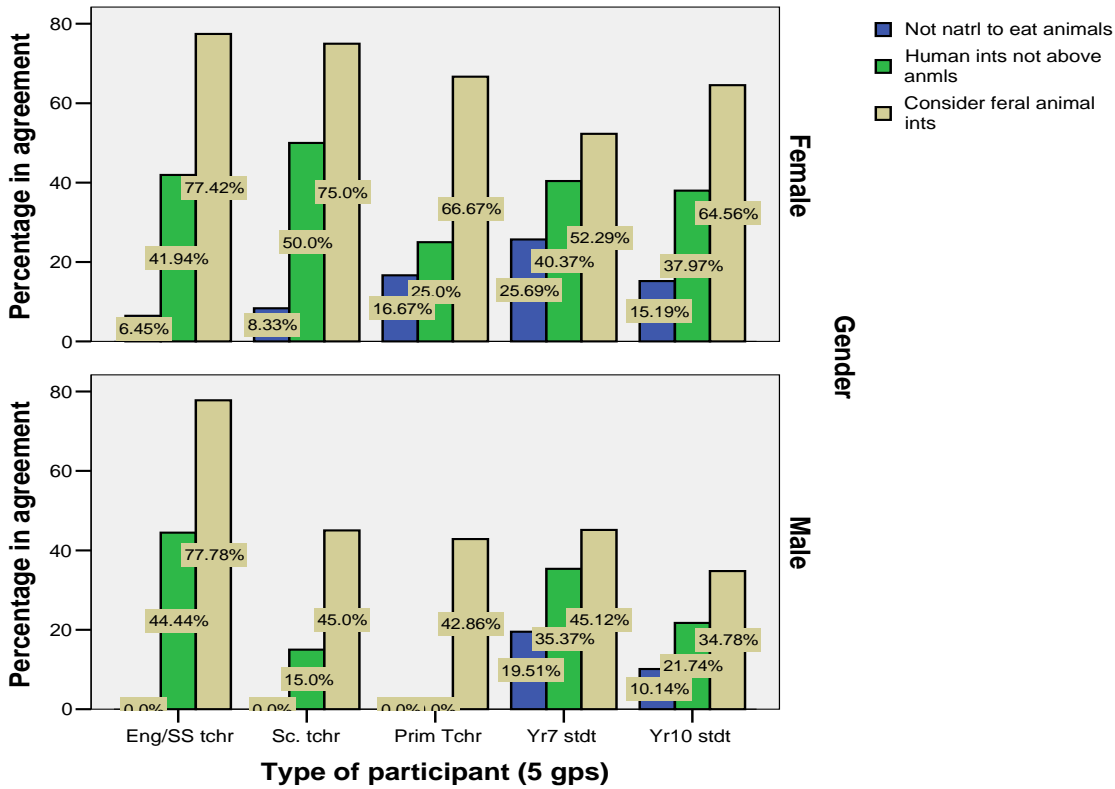


Figure 3. Gender differences between teacher and student types in attitudes to the general treatment of animals

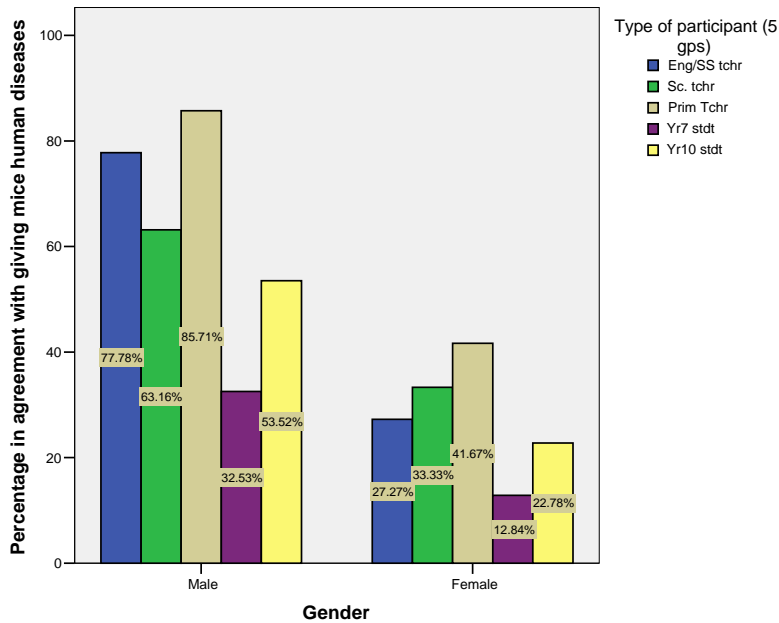


Figure 8. Comparison of males and females within teacher and student groups regarding agreement with giving mice human diseases

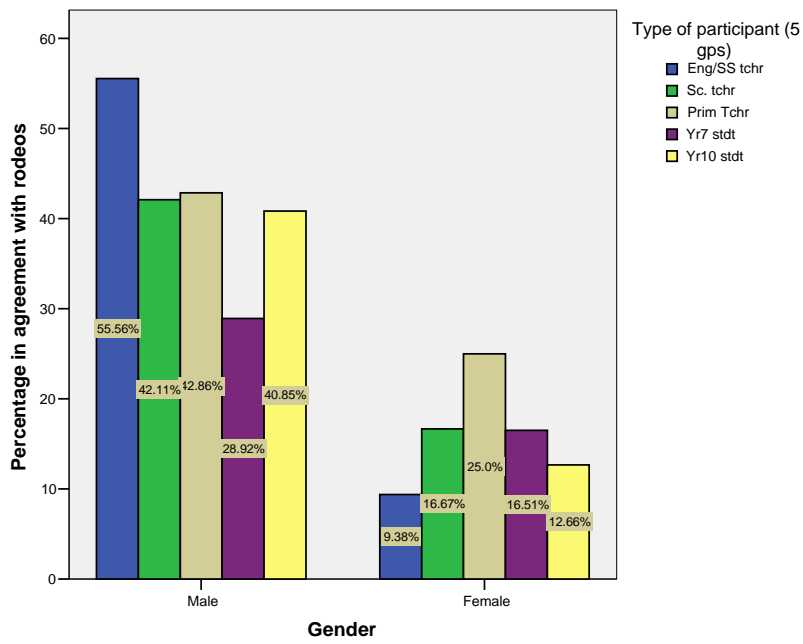


Figure 9. Gender related attitudes to the use of animals in rodeos

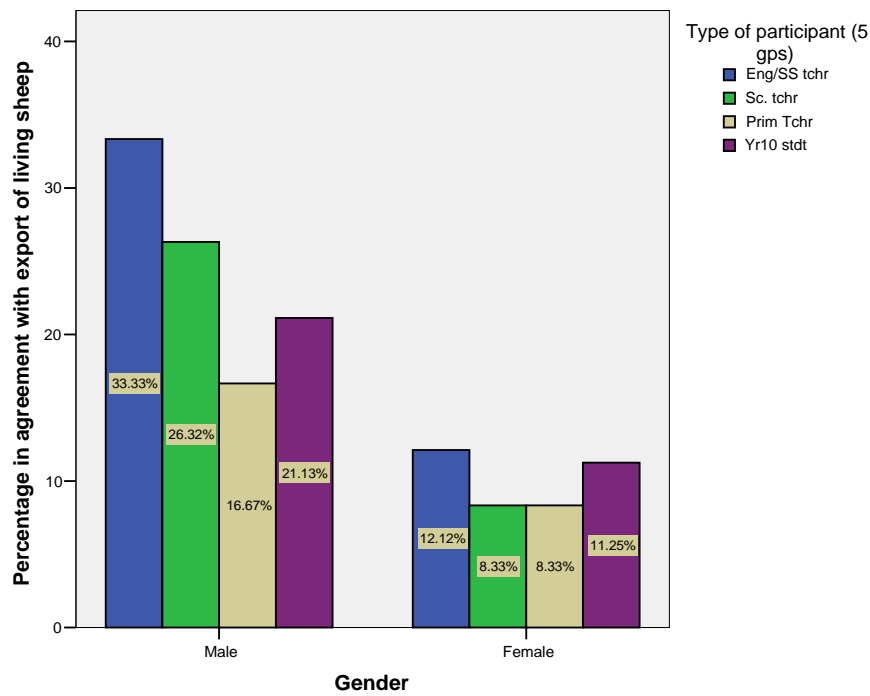


Figure 10. Gender related attitudes across teacher and student types to live export of sheep

Teachers and students identified considerable gaps in their knowledge of animals' abilities and how animals are treated. (Figure 12)

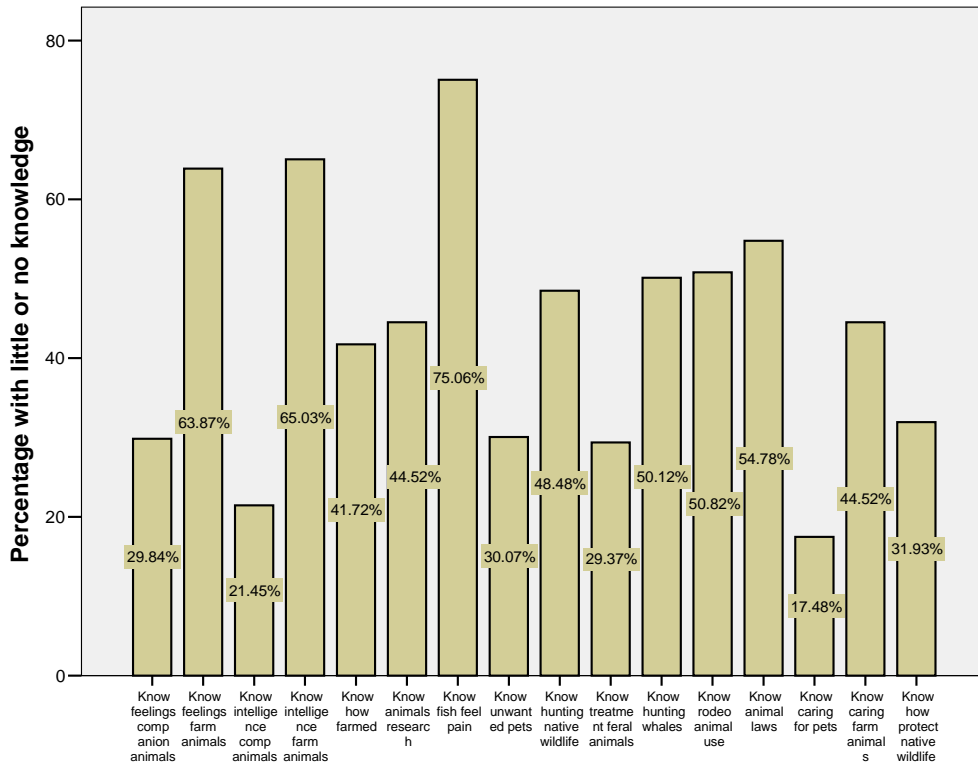


Figure 12. Little or no knowledge about animal abilities and how humans treat animals

The majority of teachers and students were interested in learning about the treatment of most animal types. (Figure 14)

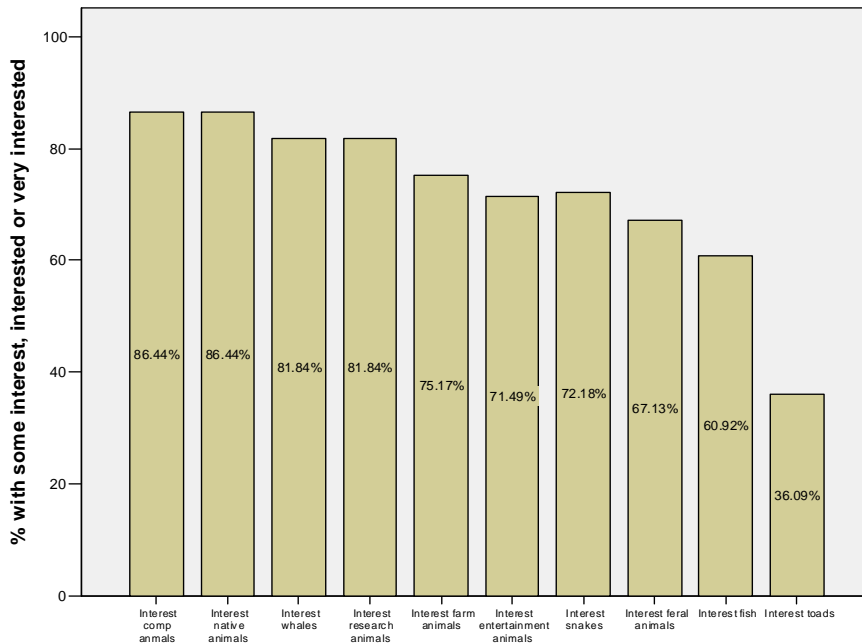


Figure 14. Interest in learning about how animals are treated by humans

The majority of teachers agreed that it is important to include animal ethics in the school curriculum. (Fig. 21)

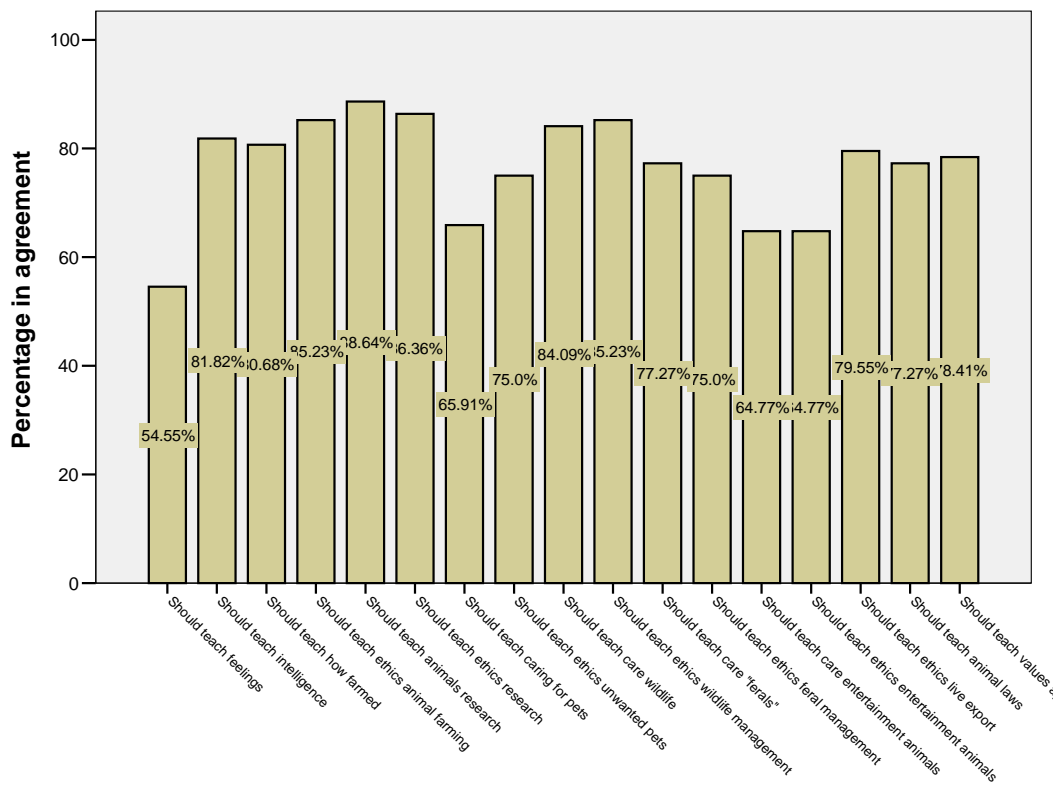


Figure 21. What teachers agree should be in the school curriculum

A very high proportion of students (90%) agreed that they should learn about the abilities of animals so that they can understand their needs. 90% also agreed that they should learn how animals are treated so they can look after their interests.

The majority of students indicated that they are taught little or nothing about most animal ethics issues. (Fig. 23)

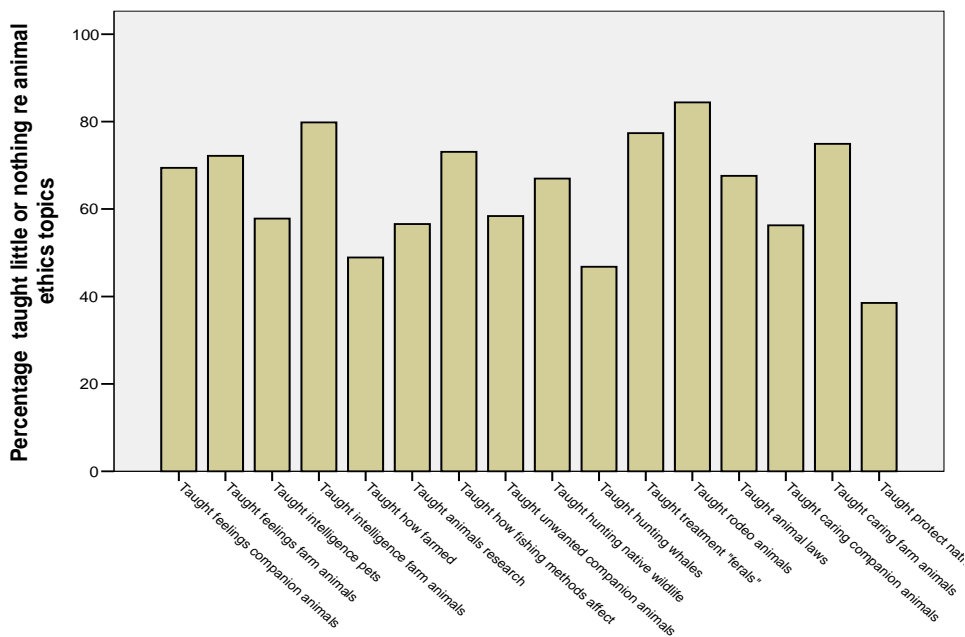


Figure 23. Students' beliefs about the coverage of animal ethics topics

Teachers responses reflected this lack of teaching of animal ethics topics. Between 46% and 73% of teachers indicated they had not included a range of animal ethics topics including the feelings and intelligence of animals, the treatment of animals used in farming, research, entertainment, and live export, the treatment of unwanted companion animals and wild animals, how to care for farm and companion animals and the laws related to animals. (Fig 24)

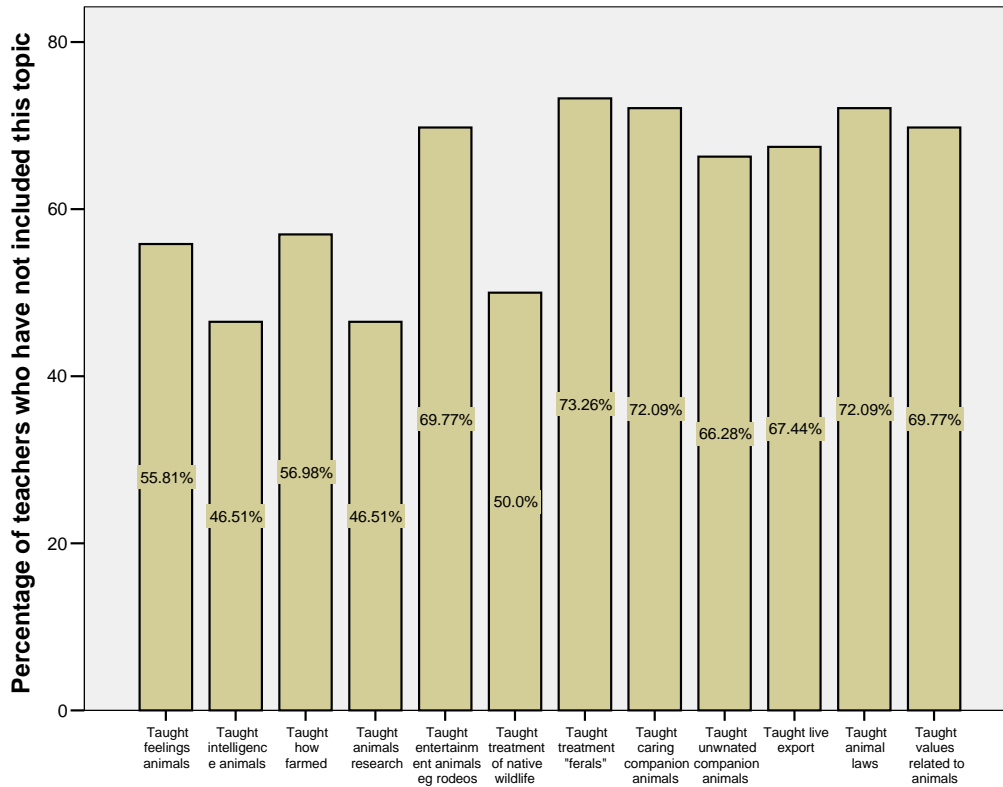


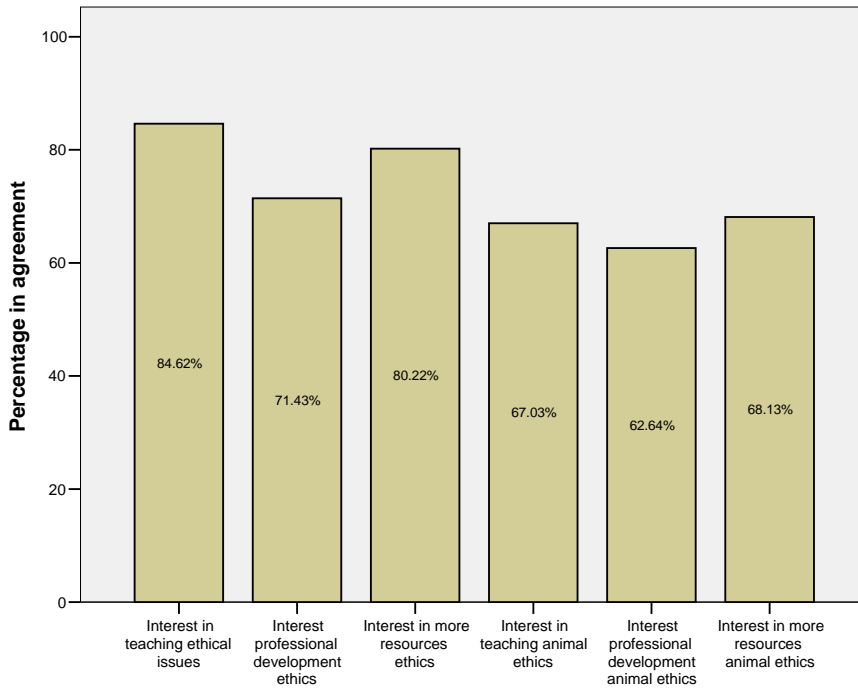
Figure 24. Teachers’ inclusion of animal ethics topics in the curriculum

Although the majority of teachers believed that the “Values for Australian Schooling” such as care and compassion, which have been officially recognised by the Australian Government as a core part of the Australian curriculum since 2002, should be applied to animals as well as people, the majority of teachers were not applying these values to the treatment of animals. (Fig 24)

The study revealed a limited range of, and limited exposure to, living animals in schools, despite the majority of teachers and students agreeing with the inclusion of living animals, particularly to help animals.

Approximately half of teachers and students agreed with the use of non-living animals for dissection in the secondary curriculum, despite the principles of reduction, replacement and refinement of animals in the Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes.

The majority of teachers were interested in teaching ethics in general and animal ethics in particular. (Fig. 33



(i)
Figure 33 (i) Interest in teaching, professional development and resources related to ethics & animal ethics

However only 35% - 60% of the different teacher groups agreed that they had teacher training and access to useful resources to explore ethical issues with students. (Fig 32)

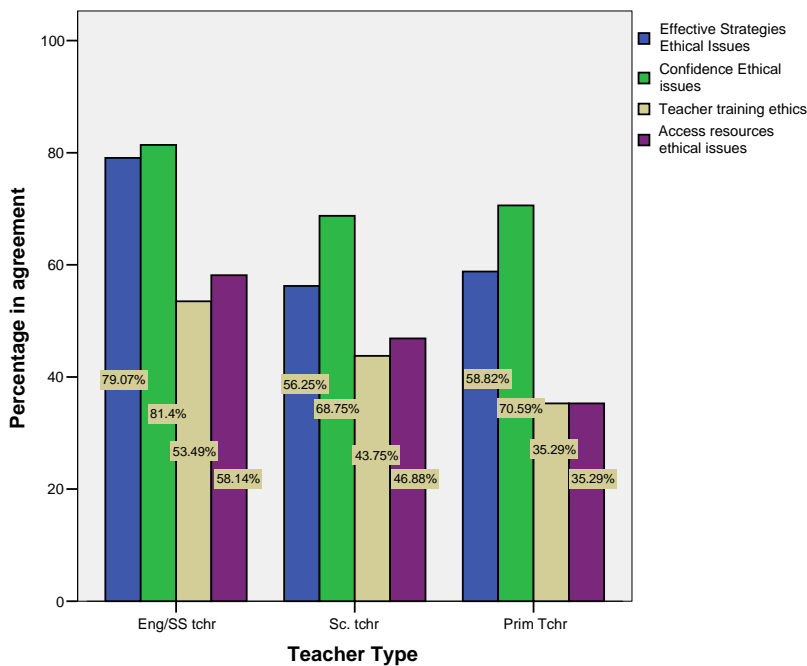


Figure 32. Current skills, training and resources for teaching ethics

This research leads to the recommendation that the Queensland primary and secondary curriculum and teacher training needs to be developed to include animal ethics issues, to increase knowledge of animals' capabilities and how they are treated and to address the inconsistencies and contradictions in attitudes and behaviour

towards animals in the Australian culture. The “Values for Australian Schooling” statements and resources should be broadened to include all animal species, not just humans. Strategies are needed to address the influence of the less compassionate ethos of males, particularly male science teachers, which might reduce or minimise the development of a consistently compassionate ethos. Opportunities need to be developed and supported for teachers and students to have contact with living animals for the purpose of helping animals, rather than observing them or using them as scientific teaching resources or and for entertainment.

Similar research with teachers and students in primary and secondary schools in regional towns and rural communities and other states, and with more independent schools, and more teachers, is recommended. Follow-up interviews with small groups would enhance understanding. Research into ethics and animal ethics courses and resources worldwide would assist ethics and animal ethics course development. Comparative research needs to be conducted on the effect on compassionate ethos of schools involved with animal ethics education, and to develop effective strategies that convert compassion to altruistic action.

This Griffith University research project “Learning to Care: Education for Compassion” has demonstrated that "Education for Compassion" should be regarded as an area of high priority. It has examined existing knowledge of, and attitudes to, issues of animal ethics among representative groups of students of different ages and in different subjects, and teachers at different levels and across different subject areas. It has identified needs for improvement in both student and teacher knowledge and teacher training, suggested room for inclusion of animal ethics issues in key curriculum areas, and has demonstrated how "Learning to Care" might occur, and play a key role in the curricula of the future.

The following are the full recommendations from the research report.

Recommendations

1. The Queensland primary and secondary education curriculum needs to be developed to include animal ethics issues, to increase knowledge of animals’ capabilities and how they are treated, and to address the inconsistencies and contradictions in attitudes and behaviour towards animals in the Australian culture.
2. Curriculum guidelines need to assist teachers in the development of a more consistent and compassionate ethos towards animals in different Australian cultural settings. Since compassion is a thinking process involving making several judgements, which then need to be translated into compassionate behaviour, it is important that teachers understand how compassion is developed. Curriculum guidelines also need to include how to engage students in ethical decision making and creating solutions to ethical issues concerning how humans treat animals.
3. Animal ethics needs to be incorporated into Science (particularly Biology and Agricultural Science), Social Science, and English curriculum documents and teacher training courses.
4. Curriculum documents need to broaden the application of compassion to all animals including farm animals, research animals, feral animals, and fish, not just focus on native wildlife and companion animals.
5. Curriculum documents need to encourage student involvement with living animals in the primary and secondary school curriculum, provided the purpose is to help animals, and caters for their needs and interests.
6. The Values Framework for Australian Schooling needs to be broadened to include animals and to include animals in the relevant core value statements of the “Values for Australian Schooling” document.
7. Teaching and learning resources on animal ethics issues, suitable for upper primary and secondary students, need to be developed.

8. Professional development workshops on how to develop ethical decision making and behaviour need to be readily accessible to teachers of primary and secondary students.
9. To avoid contradictions in their demonstrated values of care and compassion and possible negative influence on the development of compassion, teachers need to be made aware of, and take into consideration that, Year 7 students demonstrate a more compassionate ethos than teachers. This will be of benefit to teachers, knowing that inclusion of animal ethics in the curriculum will be welcomed by the students.
10. Curriculum documents and teacher training needs to address the significant gender differences in attitudes to animal ethics, i.e. males less interested, with a less compassionate ethos and a distinctly more “for human use” view of animals than females between Year 7 and Year 10 and into adulthood. Priority should be given in curriculum focus and resources to try to reverse this fall away effect and develop ethical consistency in the treatment of animals.
11. Gender differences and subject-related differences between teachers’ compassionate ethos and attitudes to animals, need to be addressed by Principals and Heads of Departments (particularly in primary and the science teaching area, and where there is a predominance of males) to ensure children’s more consistent compassionate ethos is not negatively affected.
12. Education of science teachers in the compulsory *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* and its application to the use of animals in teaching is needed so that teachers understand their obligation to reduce, replace and refine the use of animals in teaching.
13. Consideration needs to be given to the balance of males and female teachers in various subjects, in secondary and primary teaching areas, to the balance of male and female students in a school or class, and the balance of males and females in positions of policy making authority, which may influence the climate of compassion and the development of a consistently compassionate ethos.
14. Ethics and animal ethics education needs to be incorporated into the training of scientists and teachers, particularly science teachers, during their professional formation to address the gender differences and subject-related differences in compassionate ethos and attitudes to animals.

Areas for further research

1. There is a need for further research with curriculum developers to determine why the curriculum is largely devoid of animal ethics topics and address this disparity between what teachers and students believe should be included in the curriculum and what is included.
2. While 36% of the city suburban participants in this survey indicated they had lived in a farming community, and these participants showed no significant variations in responses, it is recommended that similar studies in regional and rural areas and in other states need to be conducted.
3. Due to the small number of independent (non-state) schools involved, further research in independent schools is recommended.
4. Further research involving focus group interviews with teachers and students would be helpful in providing more detail on reasons and motivations for attitudes and the inclusion of animal ethics in the curriculum.
5. Further research with greater numbers of teachers from each relevant subject area e.g. English, Social Science, Science (including Biology, and Agricultural Science) should be undertaken.
6. Research into ethics and animal ethics courses at primary, secondary and tertiary levels developed since 2000 in the United States and in other countries would be helpful to inform the development of ethics courses in the Australian context.

7. There needs to be ongoing research to compile a comprehensive up-to-date list of education resources applicable to the Australian curriculum as they are developed.
8. Research to compare the impact on teachers' and students' attitudes and behaviour of animal ethics education programs in schools is needed.
9. Research needs to be done into ways of converting compassion into altruistic action in relation to animals, similar to community environmental actions such as Clean up Australia Day and tree-planting.

J. Verrinder
27 August 2007

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