

In Conversation with Caren Trafford

Environmental Educator of the Next Generation



Caren Trafford is a successful children's book writer and publisher, whose environmental books have reached over 100,000 children world-wide. After completing her Masters of Environmental Studies at Macquarie University, she became infamous as *the worm POO lady* when she landed a job which entailed selling thousands of tonnes of Worm POO to anyone that would buy it. In South Korea she is known as "the Australian protector of worms".



We asked Caren, "How can we encourage our children and the next generation, to tackle critical environmental issues in a way that will have a lasting effect on their future?"

"Teaching kids about anything can be a challenge, but teaching them about the environment has never been so important. As a professional communicator and educator, I knew that the most effective way to teach—particularly youth, is to do it so they can absorb the facts without feeling lectured to."

Caren explained how she tackles the problem by creating readable and accessible science books that engage not just kids, but their parents and teachers. Unfortunately Caren found that publishers were not interested in humorous, factual books with bright illustrations and quirky characters. The conservative publishers claimed this was a new genre that didn't fit into the prescribed forms for publishing.

"I was convinced that the publisher's were missing a crucial part of student education. Why shouldn't there be educational books that read as stories so that students do not feel intimidated? Modern research has identified many different learning modes in what appeals to boys and girls.

It's not the science that is the problem. It is the way it is presented."

Caren has written and published six titles - all tackling current environmental issues: soil health, water management, sewage, waste and recycling & Climate Change and Renewable energy. She regularly speaks at schools to students on many environmental issues.

In 2007 and 2008, a copy of her book on climate change was donated by the *Purves Environmental Fund*, to every primary school library in NSW & QLD, Australia.

Caren was also the author-in-residence for the Miles Franklin Literary Camp 2007 where she gave a series of lectures and presentations on climate change and what students can do to make a difference.

POW! Meet the Renewables, completes the 6 title *Environmental Education... Serious Fun*, enviro-library - an essential resource for all schools, students, teachers and parents — in fact everyone interested in managing today's environmental issues.

Caren is clearly passionate about what she does. *"Educating our children is never easy. Motivating them to think about the environment and our impact on the planet is even harder. I want to inspire the next generation of leaders.*

I was determined to create a world class, high quality book that would not just sit on the shelf. I also realised that teachers need materials, so I created resource notes that they can download free from my web site."

It is Caren's passion and an unyielding practical determination in the face of traditional barriers that has slowly built success. All the books are listed in the Premier's Reading Challenge and the NSW Education Department's reference lists.

But technical recognition doesn't get the books into the hands of readers. Distributing the books and getting them in front of kids has been a huge challenge.

"I thought writing would be hard. But breaking into the distribution and retail system has been harder. Book stores didn't know where to shelve them and when they did they were invisible in the back corner.

I have had to use traditional and predominantly non-traditional methods and outlets. My primary goal is to have the books in all school and public libraries. Other important outlets are Museums such as The Australian & Powerhouse Museums & Questacon. I use the same model with leading institutions in the UK. Environmental associations are an important global channel.

I am staggered by the popularity of the books in South Korea {over 60,000 copies of the worm book}. Their translation and adaptation is beautiful"

Creating books and resources would be enough for most people, but not Caren. Caren is the founder of the **Australian National Environmental Art Competition**[®]. This Art Competition has been supported by the Ministry of the Environment and Education in NSW and QLD and the competition is open to all Australian Students aged between 6-14 who, each year, are invited to design an poster on an environmental topic.

Caren continues the work of other great environmental educators and we wish her every success.