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Using live animals in teaching

Are live animals used in teaching at your institution? Professor of Biology Rob Wallis chairs the Animal Ethics Committee at Federation University and explains the codes and support available the codes and support available for looking after fauna in educational settings.

The use of live animals in teaching and research in universities and TAFEs is not so common these days. Awareness of animal rights and animal welfare has led to rigorous and concerned community oversight of animals used in universities. Past practices were once hidden from view and largely unregulated. There has been growing pressure from the public to respect the rights of animals and reduce harm to what many now regard as sentient beings. The use of animals in training and professional education has declined and been replaced by activities

such as instructional videos, models, and interactive, on-line programs.

Some university courses such as veterinary surgery, animal behaviour studies and training in ecological surveys, still require the use of live animals. Teaching that uses live animals in universities and TAFEs must be approved by an animal ethics committee (AEC). These committees operate under the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals in Research, which also specifies AEC membership and terms of reference. Typically, universities have their own AEC with most members being external to the institution. The Code stresses approvals be guided by the *Three Rs*: Replacement, Reduction and Refinement. Is it possible to replace the use of live animals? Can we reduce the number of animals used? Can the

teaching or research activity be refined in order to reduce stress and discomfort to the animals?

These principles can provide useful discussion topics for students who might challenge the need for animals to be used at all, whilst also considering the benefits to student learning in studying live animals under appropriate humane and welfare-based conditions. The Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching (ANZCCART) has some excellent materials to guide these discussions, as well as training materials for teachers and AEC members.

Given it is still essential that some student learning activities involve the use of live animals in the classroom or the field, what are some of the important things that need to be considered?

The first is potential reluctance by students to accept the need for using *any* live animals in their professional training and development at all. Such views are to be respected but students should be presented with case studies where using animals is considered essential, such as in wildlife research, caring for farm animals, surgery and species-specific research. It is also important for students to familiarise themselves with laws, agencies and organisations that work to prevent animal experimentation that is cruel, unnecessary, or illegal; such as testing for cosmetics.

The ANZCCART link below describes some useful examples that justify the use of live animals. There is a free, online module for teachers that not only covers legislative requirements and roles of AECs, but also how teachers can write a good application for approving their intended work. Other organisations have curriculum materials that develop critical thinking in, and ethical understanding of, animal welfare. Many have free, online resources. The Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) offers appropriate materials for higher education at the link below.

anzccart.adelaide.edu.au/compassawionline.org/content/teaching-resources