

EDITORIAL

"Environmental Education in Retrospect and Prospect: Lessons from the 80's for the 90's"

1990 as a Vantage Point in Environmental Education

The year 1990 is important for a number of reasons. It is the beginning of a new decade in which there is undoubtedly a more serious and hopefully more sustained concern for the health of the environment; for example, there are signs that in the ensuing decade environmental education will become a significant part of the political fabric of our culture in a way that has not been seen before. And our own Australian Association for Environmental Education is now in its decade year, having proven not only its ability to survive and grow, but also an increasing capacity for shaping policies and practices at a range of levels. The Association's first major international conference this year represents an opportunity to confirm its presence and influence on a broader stage.

As Australian environmental education adopts an increasingly international perspective, it is appropriate to consider our own environmental education activities in relation to developments in other countries. What are some of the international perspectives on environmental education? What do people from other countries see as the important environmental education achievements in the '80's? In environmental education, what are seen as important educational issues to be addressed in the '90's?

The approach adopted in this special international issue of the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* was to invite prominent environmental educators in some seven different regions of the world to comment on the theme "Environmental Education in Retrospect and Prospect: Lessons from the 80's for the 90's" from their own geographical vantage point. More specifically, the commission to authors was to prepare manuscripts which aim to describe some of the key developments in environmental education in their countries over the past decade, and to point from this experience to issues which in their view need to be addressed in environmental education in the 90's. The resulting articles all address this theme, though naturally there are differences in the balance between description of programs and projects on the one hand and identification of trends and issues on the other.

Lessons from the 80's for the 90's

We frequently hear that environmental education is "interdisciplinary" and that it should be a pervasive presence in existing school curricula, in a sense imbuing the curriculum with a needed touch of green. Critics of this approach claim that this is a way of ensuring that environmental education remains a peripheral, politically weak (even if well-intentioned) force in curriculum practice. Certainly the relationship of environmental education with other curriculum imperatives needs to remain the the subject of debate. Several of the contributors to this special issue point out that environmental education as a curriculum endeavor cannot afford to insulate itself from the practical experiences of curriculum workers in other fields. And a number of other contributors emphasise the need to address and re-appraise the role of teacher education in environmental education.

John Disinger and Don Floyd, in presenting a perspective on Environmental Education in the United States, suggest that "Science-Technology-Society" (S.T.S) is one field which environmental education ought to be keeping an eye on. They claim that "many environmental educators have continued to pursue traditional priorities and interests in nature study, outdoor education, and conservation education" (p.11) and suggest that it is important that advances in fields like S.T.S – with its broader scope and reconception of the relationship of science and society – "do not pass the environmental education community by" (p.11).

Peter Fensham reviews environmental education in the context of post compulsory curriculum reform in the state of Victoria in Australia. The Victorian Ministry of Education recently embarked on a radical reformation of post compulsory education; Fensham's paper examines the resulting new curricula for the extent to which they are "keeping pace environmentally" (p.16). Fensham urges environmental educators to communicate with educators in other subject areas as new courses are developed so that "environmental extensions" can be recognised and conceptualised.

Monica Hale describes a number of recent environmental education developments in Britain within the context of formulation of the National Curriculum in England and Wales. She stresses the need for teacher education, and outlines a "novel approach" to professional development for environmental educators, one which aims to "encourage discussion between teachers on ways in which environmental education can be introduced into their school, rather than to 'tell' teachers how to teach" (p.40).

Paul Hart's account of environmental education developments in Canada outlines the context of Canadian education and describes some of the more prominent environmental education programs and projects taking place within that context. Hart then identifies some of the tensions and contradictions in the theory and practice of environmental education, in teacher education in particular. He points out that personal development and curriculum development in Canada have occurred within the scientific/analytic paradigm so favored by the academic community in America: "not only do we as Canadians stand witness to power-coercive models of change in environmental education, we willingly subject ourselves to the contradictions embedded in such approaches, thus reducing the professional status of our practitioners not to our own academy, but to that of another nation" (p.57).

Teacher education also figures strongly in the account of environmental education programs in Latin America provided by Gus Medina. Each of three major environmental education programs described by Medina incorporates teacher training workshops, which, in Medina's view, depend for their long-term success on the "establishment of local teacher support systems that will function after the trainers leave" (p. 74).

Peter Posch's article focuses on the current major OECD-funded project in Western Europe, the "Environment and School Initiatives" project. This project is coordinated by Posch, and has two important dimensions: a substantive environmental education emphasis on participatory, action-based environmental enquiries; and a "procedural", professional development emphasis on systematic reflection on action by participating teachers (action research).

The OECD's "Environment and School Initiatives" project coordinated by Peter Posch reports the environmental education activities of a number of European countries, including Italy. Sandro Sutti provides a case study of a single specific instance of Italian environmental education, the "Water Analysis Project" (WAP). This project is one of the more sustained and successful examples of environmental education, having been in operation now for 13 years.

Emerging from this collection of international perspectives on environmental education is a recurring concern with the role of teacher education. Hart and Posch, in particular, urge us to examine the assumptions -- the particular kinds of 'rationality' -- informing professional development in environmental education, with a view to enacting alternatives to the dominant technocratic rationality of traditional approaches. The OECD "Environment and School Initiatives" project in Europe may well lead the way in addressing this issue in the early 90's.

In accord with the international theme of this issue of the *Australian Association for Environmental Education*, reviews have been conducted on recent two overseas publications – material which may well have relevance in the Australian setting. Noel Gough has reviewed the 1989 issue of the British *Annual Review of Environmental Education* which reports on a range of developments and trends in environmental education policy and practice, including specific programs and research. Robyn Muhlebach has reviewed the U.S. publication, *Environmental Education and the Visual Message*, which addresses current and potential roles of visual communication in the field of environmental education.