

Although these materials are very sound content-wise, and provide a very useful resource for teachers and students of this new subject, as an environmental educator I believe that there is an element of cognitive distancing from the environment in much of the materials. Students learn a lot about the environment and its problems—and how these problems may be resolved—but they collect data and intellectualise about the problem resolutions rather than actually do something for the environment. Perhaps this is difficult at a senior secondary level, but it is not an impossible aspiration for a subject that claims to be environmental education. However, as I mentioned previously, this is on the borderline of blaming the materials where it is the study design that should be blamed. Despite this reservation, *Monitoring Ecosystems Units 1 & 2* and *Issues of Sustainability Units 3 & 4* are great resources for teachers and students interested in teaching and learning about Environmental Science. They are highly readable, well presented and well illustrated. Even if you do not have a senior secondary subject like Environmental Science in your state or territory you could find some useful ideas and activities for teaching the topics covered in these materials. ☺

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David Yencken, John Fien and Helen Sykes (eds) (2000) *Environment, Education and Society in the Asia-Pacific: Local Traditions and Global Discourses*. Routledge, London and New York.

Think globally. Act locally. These familiar exhortations have circulated within the slogan system of environmental education for nearly three decades. Usually they are invoked as a pair, but environmental educators have not necessarily translated them into practice in comparable or commensurate ways. Many educational programs incorporate local action on environmental issues (often very effectively) but evidence of 'thinking globally' is more elusive and problematic. We can readily observe learners performing a school energy audit, participating in a recycling project, propagating locally indigenous plants to revegetate a degraded site, and so on. But what constitutes compelling evidence of learners, teachers and curriculum developers 'thinking globally'? In practical and performative terms, what do environmental educators mean when they say they are 'thinking globally' and, perhaps more importantly, what *should* they mean?-

The concept of 'thinking globally' is represented in a number of implicit and explicit ways in *Environment, Education and Society in the Asia-Pacific: Local Traditions and Global Discourse*. This book brings together some of the significant findings of a comparative study of attitudes to nature and ecological sustainability, particularly among young people, in twelve countries in the Asia-Pacific region (namely, Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, South China and Thailand). Some of the key questions explored in this study concern the relative influence of, and relationships between, local traditions and practices and global environmental discourses. Indeed, Yencken begins chapter 1 ('Attitudes to nature in the East and West') by restating—and then inverting—the familiar maxim:

To protect the planet, we have long been told to think globally and act locally. But we can readily see that there are as many reasons to think locally and act globally. If we do not think locally, we may ignore rich sources of environmental knowledge and devalue local understanding and experience of environmental problems. If we do not act globally, we will never solve the big issues of the global commons: atmospheric and

ocean pollution and the impacts of environmental degradation across national boundaries. Sustainability has many local and global dimensions (p. 4).

Yencken's chapter provides a thoughtful and culturally sensitive review of the various attitudes toward nature that can be found in both the Eastern and Western nations of the Asia-Pacific region. He focuses not only on contemporary ecopolitical positions in the countries studied but also reviews the history of Western engagement with the environmental philosophies of Eastern cultures.—Yencken's judgements on the philosophies he compares are circumspect and, very largely, descriptive rather than evaluative (his critical comments are mostly directed towards other Western academics' appraisals of Eastern philosophies). Nevertheless, the conclusions towards which he draws reveal his hopes for 'the emergence of a global ideology of nature that transcends individual cultures' (p. 23):

The environmental problems now facing the world are global problems stemming from the process of industrialization and capitalist development that has been taking place in every country, albeit at different speeds and intensities. We therefore need contemporary concepts to help frame both the nature of the problems and their likely solution, together with simple, widely applicable models for analysing and approaching environmental problems. These concepts (sustainability, ecology, biodiversity, natural capital, intergenerational equity, precautionary principle and the like) and working models and techniques (metabolism, ecological footprint, natural step, environmental space, industrial ecology, etc.) need to gain widespread international acceptance. They should be developed cooperatively by scientists, environmental thinkers, local communities and others working hand in hand, with contributions from all cultures (pp. 24-5).

Although Yencken clearly respects 'contributions from all cultures', he nevertheless privileges (albeit implicitly) Western science as the prime source of the 'contemporary concepts... working models and techniques' that 'need to gain widespread international acceptance'. Many of the concepts, models and techniques that Yencken lists as examples—ecology, biodiversity, metabolism—are already foreclosed to a considerable extent by their production within Western scientific discourses, and so I find it difficult to imagine how they could be 'developed cooperatively by scientists, environmental thinkers, local communities and others'.

I am troubled by Yencken's apparent belief in the *possibility*—and perhaps even the *necessity*—of a unitary and universal understanding of nature that 'transcends individual cultures' and his equally apparent acceptance of Western science as the best approximation to such an understanding that humans have imagined to date. Yencken and his coeditors elaborate their position on Western science in chapter 2 ('The research'), in which they are at pains both to recognise and respect feminist, postcolonialist and multiculturalist critiques of

modernist Western science. Nevertheless, they maintain the position that a culturally transcendent environmental science is possible—that what they name as 'science' provides the key to both thinking and acting globally. For example, Yencken, Fien and Sykes assert that: 'It is generally accepted that most scientific research takes place within global theoretical assumptions' (p. 30). This is a very curious statement, because many of the feminist, postcolonialist and multiculturalist critiques that these authors claim to respect do *not* accept that the 'theoretical assumptions' within which 'most scientific research takes place' are 'global'.

I firmly believe that Yencken, Fien and Sykes are sincere in their respect for non-Western cultures. Nevertheless, and in spite of their undeniably good intentions, these authors maintain a culturally imperialistic view of science through the use of rhetorical strategies that privilege Western scientists' representations of 'reality' and reproduce the conceit that the knowledge Western science produces is universal. For example, one way in which they privilege Western science is to stipulate its uniqueness—'we depend on science for the formal analysis of the physical world and the monitoring of environmental change (p. 32)'—and to insinuate that its unique object ('the physical world') somehow renders it acultural: 'While science is culturally shaped..., environmental science is *nevertheless* dealing with physical reality' (my emphasis). The authors clearly intend the word 'formal' to signify something special about Western science, since they repeat and amplify this claim: 'we rely on science for the formal analysis of environmental conditions and change. We have no more informed source to depend upon' (p. 33).

Yencken, Fien and Sykes imply a universal 'we' but their assertions are culture-bound. Are they suggesting that non-Western knowledge traditions *ignore* 'the formal analysis of the physical world' and do *not* '[monitor] environmental change'? Or are they merely saying that non-Western analyses of the physical world and environmental change are 'informal'? What difference are they implying between what is 'formal' and what is not? What rhetorical work are the words I have emphasised in the previous paragraph ('While...*nevertheless*') doing? What has 'dealing with physical reality' got to do with the cultural shaping of knowledge traditions? In what sense is Western science an 'informed source'? 'Informed' by what (and/or by whom)? I fear that Yencken, Fien and Sykes overstate the uniqueness of Western science. We cannot depend on Western science alone because environmental science deals not only with physical reality but also with culturally shaped representations of this reality. Pretending that these representations are acultural is an imperialist act—an act of attempted intellectual colonisation.

What these first two chapters demonstrate, for me, is the enormous difficulty and complexity of 'thinking globally' and I am indebted to the authors of these chapters for stimulating the critical reflections I share here. The remaining nine chapters were, for me, much more straightforward, perhaps because I found them to be informative rather than

provocative. Chapters 3-8 focus less on 'global discourses' than on 'local traditions' (and practices), dealing respectively with environmental education and relevant social issues in China, Japan, India, South East Asia, Australia, and the South West Pacific. Each chapter provides a judicious selection of qualitative and quantitative data and material drawn from literature reviews. Together these chapters present a fascinating overview of the richness and diversity of environmental education in the Asia-Pacific region.

Chapters 9-11 share a focus on young people and the environment, with chapter 9 considering interrelationships among attitudes, knowledge and behaviour, and chapter 10 drawing out some implications of the research for environmentalism. Chapter 11 suggests some implications for environmental reform of 'listening to the voice of youth'. The research that underpins these chapters is extensive and comprehensive and, because much of the data is drawn from large-scale survey research, there are few 'feel good' stories or victory narratives. But these same data underscore the immense significance of incremental systemic change. As, John Fien writes at the end of chapter 11, 'reorienting education for sustainability is powerful rhetoric and a wonderful aspiration' (p. 275), and what the book as a whole tells us is that acting on such an aspiration is highly complex and, given the inertia in educational and social systems, will take considerable time. Yet at no time does the book give way to pessimism. Rather, it demonstrates through the detail of its national and transnational surveys and reports that small (and slow) changes in desired directions should be treasured for their contributions to realising the 'wonderful aspiration'

Rupert Maclean's writes in his Foreword to the book that it is 'an important book on an important subject', that it 'has much to teach us about young people, environmental issues, environmental education and much else besides', and that it 'deserves to be widely read' (p. xvi). I agree, but as my discussion of chapters 1 and 2 demonstrates, I also believe that it will prove to be an even more important book if its stated and unstated assumptions about 'thinking globally' are rigorously deconstructed and widely debated. 🗨️

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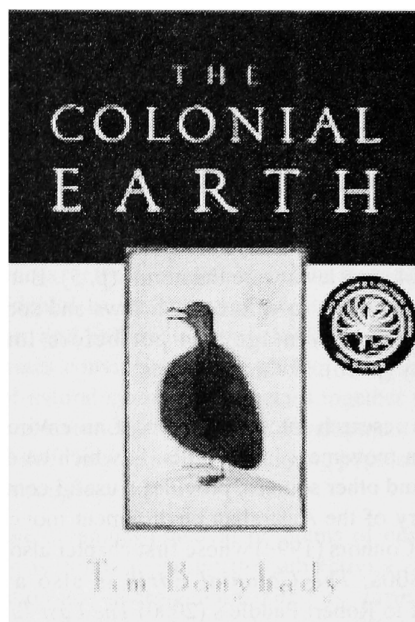
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Tim Bonyhady (2000) *The Colonial Earth*. Miegunyah Press, Melbourne. ISBN: 0-522-84915-6

A book that has won both the 2001 NSW Premier's History Prize and the 2001 Queensland Premier's Literary Award for Non-Fiction—as well as being shortlisted for the Douglas Stewart Prize in the 2001 NSW Premier's Literary Awards, the 2001 Victorian Premier's Literary Prize, the 2001 The Age Book of the Year and the Harper Collins Publishing Best Designed Fiction and Non-fiction Book in the 2001 APA Book Design Awards—must be doing something right! And this one is.

The Colonial Earth is an extremely well written challenge to the conventional wisdom that Australia's colonists not only viewed their adopted land with incomprehension and distaste but also were blind to their own destructiveness. Through twelve extensive chapters he explores how issues such as the preservation of endangered species, the protection of forests, the maintenance of public rights over the foreshore and even the likelihood of climate change already loomed large in colonial Australia. For example, he draws attention to the concerns voiced about the rapidly deteriorating state of the environment within a short time of the arrival of the First Fleet:

The settlers' attachment to the colonial landscape was matched by their desire to preserve it. The protection of the continent's native flora and fauna, pollution of its rivers, degradation of its pastoral lands, planning and improvement of its cities, preservation of beauty spots, retention of public reserves and access to the foreshore were all major issues in the colonial era. Even climate change—perhaps the environmental issue most thought of as modern—excited attention as early as 1795, when the magistrate Richard Atkins speculated that the weather was changing 'in consequence of the country opening so fast'. (p. 4)



This is not well known information, and Bonyhady continues to surprise the reader as chapter by chapter he unearths interesting and challenging perspectives and documents. He draws on a great range of sources—from paintings and poems to reports of public meetings and parliamentary debates over the period from the arrival of the First Fleet until Federation—to argue that 'the environmental aesthetic is as deeply embedded in the culture as is resistance to putting environmental ideals into practice' (p. 11).

For many, Bonyhady's standpoint will be extremely controversial, but his research is comprehensive and the