

Editorial

Annette Gough
Managing Editor



This is the last volume of the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* to be produced by the editorial collective from Deakin and Griffith universities – Annette Gough, Noel Gough, John Fien and Debbie Heck. In preparing each of our three volumes we were mindful of feedback on the content of previous issues of *AJEE* and we have tried to have sections that will appeal to a variety of audiences interested in innovations in both research and practice. Although having an Australian refereed journal in environmental education that stands in high regard internationally is important for many of us, we agree that the journal should also provide a venue for stories from practice, for the dissemination of new developments, for viewpoints and for resource reviews. We hope we have accommodated these interests.

This issue contains five major sections – letters to the editor (a first!), refereed articles, stories from practice, viewpoints and reviews. We also have a feature on the 2002 finalists for the NSW EPA Allen Strom Eureka Prize for Environmental Education Programs. The authors of these articles, stories and reports come from several states of Australia, the UK and the USA, and they have occupations ranging from classroom teachers to public servants to academics from various discipline backgrounds. Environmental education is definitely multinational, multidisciplinary and multi-occupational!

The refereed articles in this issue can be grouped into two broad categories, although these are not mutually exclusive. The first group report on their respective empirical research studies into a range of environmental education practices at tertiary, school and community levels. Gary Brierley, Mick Hillman and Liz Devonshire discuss their use of a 'situated learning' activity in a class at Macquarie University. Jonathon Howard reports on his investigations into government sector programs in environmental education. Manfred Lenzen, Christopher Dey and Joy Murray focus on climate change in a follow-up to a previous article in *AJEE* 15/16 (by Lenzen and Smith). In this issue they discuss the findings of their investigation into the use of a personal greenhouse calculator in a university teaching program. Deirdre Slattery and Alison Lugg investigate the role of national park rangers in school programs.

The second group is concerned, in various ways, with reconceptualizing different aspects of the field of environmental education, and each draws on their own

empirical research studies in framing their critical reflections and reconceptualisations. Glenn Abblitt reflects on his research journey through his M.Ed studies and beyond. Justin Dillon looks at Rachel Carson's arguments in her *Silent Spring* and argues that her original message has been lost. Noel Gough examines 'blind spots' and 'blank spots' in environmental education research and appraises some strategies to address distortions in this work. Hilary Whitehouse discusses 'landshaping', a theoretical tool she has found useful in her research into people's environmental stories, which she also discusses.

Internationalisation and/or globalisation in/of environmental education are the themes for the *Stories from Practice* and *Viewpoint* pieces. In the *Stories from Practice*, John Fien and Steve Passingham report on community theatre as environmental learning in Vanuatu. Michael Schaper takes a very different approach in his story – he reports on his quantitative investigation into the levels of environmental concern of business students in Australia, France and Singapore. The three *Viewpoint* pieces discuss different facets of international agendas. Peter Blaze Corcoran advances his position on the values of the Earth Charter in education for sustainable development. Justin Dillon, Stephen Gough, Bill Scott and Kelly Teamey provide a critical commentary on the recent United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children from the perspective of their recent work for the UK Department for International Development. In the third piece, Noel Gough spells out his position on the importance of critical appraisals of globalisation at this moment in world history by linking a book review with experiences of 11 September 2001.

In reflecting on our experiences of editing *AJEE* we are delighted that we have succeeded in being both a national and international journal. The articles in the issues have reflected the divergent nature of environmental education scholarship and activities, and sampled the work of environmental educators from many different countries as well as states of Australia.

The board of advisory editors also reflected a breadth of interest and experience as well as the international nature of environmental education, and many of them have made significant contributions to the refereeing of articles over the past 3 years. We would like to publicly thank each of them for their support.

In the editorial for Volume 15/16 we signalled our interest in making *AJEE* part of the domain of public knowledge by making it an electronic journal (like the *International Journal of Education & the Arts* at <http://ijea.asu.edu/>). This has not happened during our editorial tenure, but as more and more journals go online we hope that *AJEE* will become part of the public knowledge space and provide the opportunity for Australian environmental educators to make contributions to international discussions in the field. We wish Roy Ballantyne and his new team all the best for their task ahead. Contact details for Roy can be found inside both the front and back covers. 🍷

Letters to the Editor

From Sean Walsh, Environment Protection Authority, Victoria

I am writing to express my disappointment in the latest issue (Vol 17 2001) of the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*. It contains an article by Narelle Chambers (pp. 111-113) which makes unfounded accusations against EPA Victoria and its litter campaigns. The article appears to have been written with scant regard for the very basics of good debate, namely the researching of information prior to making statements.

I am a member of the AAEE, and an EPA employee. In my spare time, I clean up litter in local parks. I am also a volunteer leader for Clean Up Australia Day. Like my colleagues, I am very aware of the fact that achieving a clean environment requires more than just punishment by fines. That is exactly why I am a member of AAEE. I consider myself to be an environmental educator and I take this role very seriously.

The article accuses the EPA of founding its entire program on a punitive approach, when this is not the case. EPA has been working hard to promote awareness of issues around litter (e.g. impact on marine wildlife). The author asserts that 'the EPA is attempting to "mould the public mind"... to suit its own agenda'. In truth, the EPA exists to serve the public. If it were not for the EPA there would be a lot more death and serious illness resulting from mishandling of pollutants and toxins, and our ecosystems would be in far worse shape than they are. If this is not serving the public, then I don't know what is.

The article states that 'EPA...as an authority, as an expert, it must consider that the views and protective measures it promotes are the right/correct ones for all Victorians'. This is simply untrue. EPA researches the issues, then promotes draft policy, which is extensively reviewed by the community, and debated in parliament. Environmental policies are in fact the wishes of the Victorian community.

The article also raises the question of 'why is it that the EPA continues to enforce such a punitive measure'. The answer is simple – achieving a clean environment requires both education (effective for those willing to listen) and enforcement (effective for those who are not). In arguing that punitive measures are outmoded, the author appears to desire a new kind of world in which all human beings are informed and responsible. However history has proven again and again that there will always be a spectrum of people ranging from highly responsible to totally irresponsible. All members of a community have a responsibility to build community, show compassion and educate each other. This fundamental responsibility cannot be simply shovelled off to governments and police. When we see someone wrecking the world we

live in, if we walk on by we can hardly call ourselves citizens. Action is required. This is precisely why EPA runs a campaign requesting people to do better in littering.

Of course, positive education works better than negative education. However, we can hardly expect all the members of the public to rush over to a litterer and give them a 'positive educational experience', although this would be ideal! Perhaps this is an area that we might all explore further, namely how to deal with environmental offenders in a way that transforms their world-view from carelessness to compassion for other beings. Maybe repeat offenders could be ordered to spend a day as a council litter control officer (ie someone who has to spend all day cleaning up the messes left by others).

I am surprised that a respectable journal would allow the publication of such an article, which makes numerous unsubstantiated assertions, and criticises without suggesting better alternatives.

Narelle Chambers responds

The fog was thick and the air crisp as I waited to catch the tram early one morning. After a short time, the iconic green tram came hurtling over the rise and pulled into the stop. There, on the front-most advertising panel of the vehicle, was stamped a highly prominent word:

'GUILTY'

Also featured on the panel were three people lined up as if they were criminals about to have their photos taken at the local police station, yet they were wearing pig masks to conceal their identities. Finally, in one corner of the panel was the Victorian EPA logo and the hotline telephone number for the EPA's Litter Report Line.

It was 'powerful stuff', with its impact seemingly heightened by the initial speed of the tram moving towards me. Although I had only a passing glimpse of this piece of advertising, it impressed me, and indeed on the front of the tram it would have had broad public visibility.

It is the use of the highly emotive word 'guilty' that is of concern to me. I recognise that this ad is probably targeted at 'irresponsible' people who litter our urban and natural landscapes. But the anti-littering message the EPA wants to convey is undermined by the use of such negative language and stereotyping. The use of guilt is a standard and often-used technique in society, yet the idea of labelling people in this way does not appeal to me. I would like to think that all people are valued and have their role to play, and that there must be a better way to help the 'irresponsible' become responsible.

So, although Sean Walsh's response to my published paper is well-structured and indeed welcomed, I still cannot by-pass my experience of this ad and the style of advertising that the EPA seemingly sanctions when it comes to its litter campaigns. I, too, wish to advocate 'positive educational experiences' about littering. I am currently employed in a job where I witness the negative accumulation of litter in Melbourne's wetland systems. This motivates me to think about environmental management and community education.

Moreover, in publishing my paper, I am not criticising the fundamental benefits of much of the EPA's community educational work. Perhaps I have just not noticed this work being advertised in as prominent a way as that tram ad. I will, however, stand by my belief that if we do not attempt to occasionally 'look outside the square' in order to criticise and evaluate our 'comfortable worldview [epistemology]', we (society) run the risk of remaining stuck in our ways. My paper was a valid intellectual and academic attempt to do this.

In conclusion, I will continue to learn and expand my insights into the *environmental problematique*, and indeed hope that in the future I will see an advertisement on a tram that attempts to 'deal with environmental offenders in a way that transforms their worldview from one of carelessness to [one of] compassion for other beings'.

Frank Fisher, Monash University (coordinator of the Systems Thinking and Practice section in AJEE 17), responds

Thanks to the editors for the right of reply and to Sean Walsh for generating a further opportunity to discuss some important matters. I will first respond to Sean's letter and then provide some context for Narelle's piece.

Sean's point about the extensive basis of legitimacy for the EPA's actions is well taken. Narelle could have recognised it. Nevertheless it is only legalistically true, i.e., it is true within the practicalities of democracy to say that the EPA's 'policies are the wishes of the Victorian community'. In practice there will be a large proportion, perhaps a majority, of Victorians who feel uninvolved and may not wish to do or be dobbed.

Yes, education and enforcement are both necessary in the current climate of community awareness. However, both are weak approaches when compared with structural adjustments such as container deposits or, more substantially, the general transformation of social/industrial processes to avoid the generation of litter in the first place. At present not even container deposits are politically viable, let alone more general structural change. Nevertheless it is not simply that the public is not 'mature' enough to permit these avenues but that the culture of comprehensively seeking out and redirecting perverse incentives is still in its infancy. And, for its part, the EPA does not have a high profile in assisting the public to more readily assimilate structural approaches; indeed it would

not even see it as its mandate and indeed few authorities would, yet.

Sean's proposal that repeat litterers be ordered to spend a day as a litter control officer is a good idea and reflects understanding of some of the social constructs from which litter arises. To accord with what Narelle and I are striving to do, however, it would not be done as punishment but, rather, it would be done by all of us as part of, say, civil defence training.

The context of Narelle's article was an essay for an introductory course in recognising and defining the social structures that enable the world we know. Narelle and her five colleagues in *AJEE: 17* were looking for systemic or social structural adjustments that could obviate the concerns they identified or, transform the generative situation by suggesting how to climb out of the contexts that they isolated as causal. In practice, in the big picture and in the political real world this may seem unrealisable, but in the small scale it is quite doable.

The Monash graduate students are diverse in background and age and at commencement, almost to a person, are unaware that such general structures exist, can be defined, tested and acted upon. The essay is their first major attempt to isolate social structures and to suggest actions upon the structures they find. Narelle could have focused upon many topics such as the nature of the advertising that first drew her attention to the issue. She could have focussed on the complexity of community education in general; the complexity of engaging in rapid community education aimed at behavioural change or the limitations of the educational tools available to the budgetary, bureaucratic and political resources of a government instrumentality. She didn't do this in part because she wouldn't have been able to. Despite that, my experience with well over a thousand such essays is that her attempt was good, indeed better than most, and after just 13 weeks quarter-time. Moreover, in taking up my exhortation to publish, she has been quite brave and will have learned much from the process and in particular from this exchange.

In the article preceding Narelle's I provided this background. Although the editors could also have provided additional explicit editorial context for the features, my article did provide this context and so it is unfair to suggest that the journal ought not to 'allow the publication of such an article'. A retort might be that such a heavy-handed (with EPA imprimatur) proposal is good stuff in newspaper letters' columns but not in the columns of an academic journal that strives to permit the open and free exchange of ideas generated in good faith.

The Editors have the last word!

We write to express our disappointment that the only letter to the editors we have received in three years of editing the *AJEE* is one that begins: 'I am writing to express my disappointment

in the latest issue...'. We can readily understand why Sean Walsh might disagree with Narelle Chambers's judgments on the EPA, but not why his displeasure extends to the entire issue.

We are surprised that any reader of *AJEE* would want either to disallow the publication of Narelle's article or to censor it. Indeed, we would have thought that employees of the EPA might welcome the frank feedback that such an article provides. Narelle's personal standpoint was made quite explicit: she sought to describe 'how I see the EPA working in today's society'. Neither she nor the editors deserve to be condemned simply because her perceptions do not match the way that (some) EPA employees might prefer the organisation to be seen.

Narelle's article was not submitted to the refereed section of *AJEE* and was thus subjected only to minimal copy editing. As Frank Fisher explained in his introduction to the Systems Thinking and Practice section, he presented his students' work as supporting evidence for his 'insights from a twenty year experiment' and we stand by our decision to publish them. 