EDITORIAL

Ian Robottom

At its annual conference in Quebec City in 1987, the North American Association for Environmental Education held a symposium in which 14 environmental educators presented their perspectives on the topic of "how environmental education fits, may fit or should fit, into school curricula" (Disinger, 1987).

As is likely in any discussion on such a fundamental curriculum question, a number of issues emerged. Some of these were:

* prescriptions ranging from "infusion" of environmental knowledge, skills and attitudes into existing discipline-based or core courses in the curriculum for the purpose of enriching or extending that curriculum, to the mandating of non-discretionary environmental education instruction through legislation;

* the role of the teacher vis-a-vis central materials-producing agencies in organising for improved environmental education;

* environmental education as a developing, if still peripheral, subject in the curriculum.

New, developing subjects have been described as typically exhibiting such features as a primarily utilitarian interest in matters of concern to learners, a lack of trained specialist teachers, and a certain missionary enthusiasm. It could be argued that these characteristics may in fact serve environmental education very well in its brief of adopting an interdisciplinary, committed (passionate?) critique of the relationships between society and environments. However, developing subjects have historically been susceptible to a shortage of resources, and participants in the Quebec symposium suggested that environmental education is no exception. Sometimes environmental education is forced into a hegemonic relationship with other, established, subjects in the school curriculum in order to ensure adequate resources provision.

The Quebec symposium focused on primary and secondary environmental education and it is an open question as to whether similar issues apply in tertiary education. In this issue of the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, four of the papers describe environmental education courses at tertiary level and shed some light on the fit of environmental education in the tertiary curriculum, as well as raising other specific issues.

As **Andrew Brookes**' paper describes, environmental education in Bendigo College of Advanced Education's teacher education program takes place in an outdoor education course. Brookes considers the relationship of outdoor education and environmental education, and in particular argues that environmental activities in genuine outdoor education can be free of, and throw into clearer relief, the kinds of institutional constraints experienced by conventional school-based environmental education.

Another teacher education course is outlined in the article by **Ian Robottom.** This free-standing environmental education course is offered at a distance, and some of the issues of distance education in environmental teacher education are discussed. A lesson from distance education that may have currency in conventional on-campus environmental teacher education concerns the counter-productive power relationships built into text-based forms of instruction.

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Ian Thomas' account of case study research in an environmental science program at Monash University reflects another approach to environmental education in the tertiary curriculum. It also presents a justification for case study as a form of educational enquiry in the appraisal of environmental education.

Another image of environmental education as environmental science is presented in **Peter Newman's** *"Reflections"* article. Written in biographical style, the article provides an historical account of the developments that have shaped the Murdoch University program. Some of the educational questions that can be asked about this and similar environmental science courses are:

* what is the nature of the debate about "environmentalising" an otherwise heavily scientific course -- whose arguments tend to win the day and why, and whose vested interests are served by calling the course "Environmental Science" rather than "Environmental Education";

* what are the different educational justifications for an "integrated" course (in which environmental concerns are considered alongside disciplinary science subjects) *versus* an "end-on" course (in which an "environmental year" is added to a "straight science degree");

* what teaching and curriculum issues are associated with the conduct of an Environmental Science course (especially one conducted at a distance.)

The remaining feature article draws some parallels between health education and environmental education in school curriculum. Among the points made by **Derek Colquhoun** is the need to avoid a "Blame the victim" mentality. He points out that strong contemporary concerns with individual health adopt a "healthist" perspective that values individual control over health in the absence of engaging and critiquing the social, political and environmental contexts within which images of health are constructed. An outcome of such "healthism" in health education is to ignore (and hence reinforce) the social, political and environmental factors that in fact constrain individual health. As Colquhoun suggests, the current concern in environmental education with developing "environmentalist" attitudes and actions may similarly reinforce an environmental individualism that allows the social and political structure of environmental problems to escape critical scrutiny.

In this time of increased visibility of and activity by "Green Politics" in the community at large, in which environmental action groups are succeeding in influencing directly the outcomes of state elections, it is perhaps appropriate that the subject of the book review in this issue is "Standing up for your local environment: an action guide". The review is conducted by **Steve Malcolm**.

Reference

Disinger, J. (ed.) Trends and Issues in Environmental Education: EE in School Curricula. ERIC/NAEE, Columbus, Ohio, 1987.

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