

Editorial

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Mary Maher's "Feature Article" entitled *The Powers That Be* makes the point that in educational studies of environmental issues, environmental conflict needs to be seen as "a complex interplay of values, power, policy and decisions at the levels of individuals through to the bureaucracy or the corporation", rather than a dichotomous phenomenon comprising proponents and antagonists to (environmental) change. She is not only arguing for a more complex appreciation of what comes to be described as an environmental issue, but also noting that "issues" (environmental or otherwise) are not objectively existing entities to be studied in some detached way, but are social constructions -- interpretations made by subjective human beings. (This is a similar point to the one made about the social construction of "environmental problems" in the last issue of this Journal by Giovanna Di Chiro. The perspective that nature and natural things are substantially social constructs is described by Annette Greenall elsewhere in this issue as "red-green"). From this starting point Maher argues for an alternative to the common "who's for it and who's against it" teaching strategy for dealing with matters of environmental conflict, and provides from personal experience an example of students investigating the issue of the proposed North Stradbroke bridge link. Along the way, she stresses that "there is no way to avoid the fact that environmental education is centrally concerned with political education".

The second "Feature Article" written by **Murray May** questions the grip that traditional positivist philosophy has on our thinking and acting concerning the environment, and reviews a number of alternative environmental perspectives that in his view offer greater promise for reaching a state of

"harmony with nature". May's extensive analysis provides a useful framework for locating personal environmental philosophies.

Elizabeth Beckmann's "Research Article" entitled *School Visit to a Nature Reserve* reports on a pilot study of a school visit to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve in the A.C.T. in 1986. The article points out that these visits are rarely evaluated formally, and itself adopts a pre/post questionnaire design to elicit information about the backgrounds of students participating in the visit, and about the cognitive and affective outcomes of their experiences at the Reserve. Two interesting findings were that 92% of students had had previous exposure to a National Park or similar reserve, and that 82% of the students had watched the 1985 Harry Butler wildlife series on television. One wonders how that figure compares with the proportion of children who watched the Nature of Australia series this year. The article also indicates one of the weaknesses of questionnaire-based research when it points out that "Whether actual behaviour by the students would indeed reflect their stated behaviour, and the extent to which a knowledge base is involved in their behavioural decisions, is obviously important in this context". The article concludes with a statement of some of "the more basic conservation ideas and issues" that may need to be more formally presented as part of the school visit context.

This issue includes two "Reflections" articles. The account written by **Ron Tooth** and others provides a picture of the curriculum at the Pullenvale Field Study Centre. The curriculum is based on a drama theme called "The Settlers", and ties into Year 5 Social Studies. The article describes the curriculum in its current form, and then revisits its development, pointing out the inter-

active relationship of theory and practice in the cyclic process of curriculum improvement, involving cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection. **John Vince's** account of the Somers School Camp provides a personal viewpoint on the history, current experiences and exciting new developments in a 29 year old environmental institution. As well as describing aspects of the curriculum at Somers, Vince provides an example of how the program is responding to

perceived needs in the community -- in particular, with the provision of basic sensory experiences to counteract perceived inabilities in students to utilise their own senses properly.

In the "Book Review" section of this issue of the Journal, **Annette Greenall** reviews the book, *Education, Ecology & Development: the Case for an Educational Network* by Colin Lacey and Roy Williams.