

# Editorial

Richard Smith



In an article which should have been written after this editorial—an inversion in the time-space continuum I'll return to later—one of Australia's well respected columnists, Philip Adams, has referred to research which points to the primacy of peer group influences, above those of parental ones, in the socialisation of children (Adams 1999). The Theme Section in this issue contains papers discussing several aspects of 'what children believe and talk about'—and, by extension, the ideas they have that will influence the ideas of those around them. Tammy Kwan listened to children talking about their concerns and what they treasured, Philip Payne asked them to record in pictures and words their views about the nature of nature, and Roy Ballantyne and co-workers made some assessment of the extent to which experiencing a short environmental education program affected the kinds of things children discussed with each other and with their parents and other caregivers.

In the same article referred to above Philip Adams writes of "'corporate paedophilia', the attacks on childhood by major marketers" The effects on children and adults of the activities—if not the "attacks"—of marketers and business in general are also the subject of discussion at several points in this issue: John Hillcoat and Eureka Janse van Rensburg's article in the General Section of the journal presents notions of "overconsumption" and "the empty self" as challenges insufficiently attended to in ideas and activities deemed to be environmental education; in Book Review, Roman Orzanski and Delyse Springett separately review Sharon Beder's *Global Spin: The Corporate Assault on Environmentalism* which, although never intended as an environmental education 'text', contains much material deserving thoughtful consumption by environmental educators—and some energetic response from us! She has taken up a more explicitly educational theme in other material (see, for example, Beder 1998) in which she deals with the corporatisation of educational materials. Educational activities of part of the business world are the subject of Peter Dunn's Reading Notes on a 'resources' industry set of materials made freely available to many schools in Australia. Peter acknowledges the application of resources of several kinds which resulted in an educationally very useful—but quite incomplete—kit. Once again, things are perhaps not as they appear to be—and environ-

mental educators need to ask themselves about the extent to which they are assisting their co-learners to deal wisely with polarities such as consumption versus conservation, and responsible corporate citizenship versus intentionally unbalanced accounts of the 'state of things'.

Sharon Connell and co-authors take us from childhood to adolescence in reporting the results of a survey of over 5 000 secondary school students in Australia. Amongst the many ideas and attitudes which the survey attributes to young people it is interesting, given the kinds of notes of caution sounded by the contributions outlined in the previous paragraph, to note that many of the students surveyed considered that business—along with friends and government—"were not perceived as important sources of information". We may wonder whether business was unimportant—or only seemed to be! Michael Cuthill's account of environmental knowledge and attitudes in a group of tertiary students suggests that students and sustainability are far from being on articulate terms with one another, and that translating 'concern' into action is by no means simple. Hugo van Rooyen's reporting of the careful curriculum development for environmental education in South Africa reveals something of the hard work in many arenas—not all of them with complementary agendas—that goes into curriculum planning, and some of the enormous difficulties that South African environmental educators face in bringing the paper curriculum to a reality.

If preparation for responsible environmental citizenship is difficult in South Africa—and it is, across the Earth—uncovering some of the factors important in the bringing of committed environmentalists to wisdom and determination is a similarly hard road according to Mary-Faeth Chenery and Almut Beringer. Their findings appeared unremarkable—which led them to question their assumptions and method in carrying out Environmental Life History research. In considering what might be necessary for adequate preparation of professionals with environmental responsibilities Carrie Sonneborn offers opinions about energy education for engineers, and Ian Thomas and Mary Olsson report results of a preliminary survey of responses made to the environmental education requirements of Environmental Management Systems.

Tammy Kwan's respondents' responses to questions about what they "treasure" raise questions which are similar to those discussed by Jonathon Howard, who calls for a reappraisal of the importance of affective education in environmental interpretation and education, and by much of Ilga Salite's paper which rests on the centrality to human development of a growth in Earth-centredness—on ecocentric approaches to education for the kind of spirituality which leads people to action to improve their environments. People's understanding of the extent to which environments need them to be actively engaged in environmental support is one of the areas considered in Nicki Mazur's report of a survey of zoo visitors.

There are a wealth of examples of people's taking action for environmental improvement in material contained in Stories from Practice and in Reading Notes. Darlene Clover provides some from Canada in an account of a community's attempts to establish more positive links between environment and employment than are sometimes made by detractors of environmental activity and education; Kerry Hudson summarises information about some Australian case studies of community action.

In a completion of the circle Peter Clark and David Larritt describe some of the ways of working, and the positive outcomes, as children and young people are assisted by adult mentors to take responsibility for environmental improvements by their work in Congresses and Councils—and in their commitment to contributing constructively to the futures which someone said we adults only borrow from them.

The issue contains some examples of the wide range of approaches taken to environmental education research:

- from suggestions that its qualitative aspect might usefully listen to the idiosyncratic stories told by individuals to accounts of thoroughly quantitative ways of working with large numbers of respondents
- from reports of educational intentions carefully specified to situations in which even the nature of environmental education and education for sustainability is uncertain ground, and
- from discussion of the absolute individualism of environmental education and each person's spirituality to considerations of the place and face of environmental education in a range of workforce preparations and settings.

Woven in amongst the intended 'themes' of environmental education for young people and communities, and of the explicit and implicit presence in education of corporate ideas and materials, some unplanned support for several ideas appear. You are invited to look in several places in this issue for reference to notions such as life histories, ecological selves, the spirituality of individuals and the Earth, caveats about consumption and corporations, and turning concern into action

And that inversion in space-time? Rather an unsubtle euphemism for acknowledging that this issue is even later than 1997's. My apologies to anyone whom that lateness might have inconvenienced—and my best wishes for successful time management and a tsunami of publishable material to Annette Gough and the new editorial team. Finally, thanks to the paid, and mostly unpaid, people who gave ready assistance in the publishing of volumes 12, 13 and 14 of AJEE.

Adams, P. 1999, 'Jumping off from the peers', *The Weekend Australian: Review*, 23–24 January, p. 32.

Beder, S. 1998, 'The corporate infiltration of science education', *School Science Review*, vol. 80, no. 290, pp. 37–42. 