EDITORIAL

This edition of the *SAJEE* focuses on EEASA's conference-and-workshops held in July 1995, at Kearsney College in Kwazulu Natal, South Africa. In the 1994 issue we invited readers to explore *Progress & Paradox*, as a conference theme reflecting a new perspective on education and environment. We received a very positive response and the conference featured an excellent range of papers. From amongst the many worthy contributions the reviewers selected those papers that addressed the theme most directly, for publication in this, arguably EEASA's best journal yet.

Although EEASA '95 was very well attended, some members were concerned that the conference theme was 'too theoretical'.

The value of discussing 'theory' in environmental education has been argued here before (see eg. the 1994 editorial, and O'Donoghue's appeal, also in that edition, for clarity on the theories underpinning proposed new curricula). Yet many teachers, teacher educators and others appear unconvinced. The issue relates to the debate, carried into 1996, as to whether EEASA meets the needs of members who are school teachers, and whether such members should now re-group as a distinct teachers / curriculum association.

Whereas the papers in this volume all explore aspects of environmental education through the lens of *Progress & Paradox*, I will therefore introduce and link them through the way in which they comment on some of the many reasons for 'theory' being seen as separate from and irrelevant to 'practice'[1].

One such reason relates to the perceived **appropriateness of particular theoretical perspectives.** In his paper, for example, **Danie Schreuder** (like most other authors in this volume) outlines a need for 'radical' changes in the formal curriculum, but also wonders whether such changes will be acceptable to others. Will radical propositions cost local environmental educators the trust of black South Africans newly liberated to economic progress? Will the EEPI lose its precarious foothold among old-style curriculum developers in the government of national unity, if we propose challenging ideas? In arguing the toss, Schreuder alternately juxtaposes conventional forms of education with 'socially critical education for the environment', and the post-modern "international debate" with what is "acceptable and practical" in South Africa.

According to **Jaap Kuiper** a post-modern perspective may not be relevant anywhere in Africa. The lack of choices facing the majority of Africans, he argues, means that they do not live post-modern lives. He also points out that most forms of formal education in Africa have been embraced, with little critique, from European contexts, as constituting progress. This fits the picture sketched by **Malcolm Plant** in his recollection of teaching in East Africa. Plant, however, regards a post-modern perspective as a very useful one from which to understand, reflect and improve on educational practice, in Africa as elsewhere.

Plant's paper, along with the descriptions of reflexivity by **Heila Lotz,** and of post-modernism and post-modernity by **John Huckle**, provide *SAJEE* readers with a useful introduction to ways in which these conceptual tools can enhance understanding and practice in a world of environmental 'risk'. These perspectives cast doubt on

[1] Whether the distinction between theory and practice made by the majority of authors in this volume is a valid or useful one, is a topic for another day, but not unrelated to some of the issues touched on here.

popular notions of progress, development and what counts as good education; they highlight the risks of the "excesses" of modernity; and they value diversity.

As Huckle, Lotz and Plant note, post-modern and reflexive perspectives are also useful in airing the limiting critical pedagogy underpinnings of some models of socially critical environmental education. Among these are the assumptions of rationalist change, the limitations of which are highlighted in one way or another by every contributor. Both Huckle and Plant grapple with/in the interface between rationalist critical theory and post-rational theories of change. They differ about the relationship between the 'socially critical' and the post-modern. Plant locates socially critical theory within a post-modern scientific perspective (chaos theory). Huckle, on the other hand, sees political ecology (aligned with socially critical environmental education) as situated somewhere between modernism and post-modernism, overcoming the narrowness of the former and the relativism of the latter. When Huckle comes to describe (as does Lotz) how critical practice can "reproduce the very social relations of domination which it seeks to counter", a more 'modest' critical pedagogy is the result.

A reflexive orientation enabled Lotz to see how she was "still acting from a positivist view of the change process, disguised by the rhetoric of critical theory and an assumed emancipatory orientation". Lotz values the perspective on her own practice (research) which reflexivity afforded her, and claims that within this reflection on her practice, she was able to improve that practice.

It seems irresponsible to advocate that these conceptual tools, proving so valuable to the practitioners (ex-teachers, teacher educators) writing in this volume, should be shunned by those other practitioners, who may not

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practice (theory) with others.

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Kathy Stiles' research report, for
shows the irony of teacher educ
researchers bringing constructivist r
teaching to Zimbabwean teache
largely ignoring the teachers' invol
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of the danger of 'just explaining it
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authors argue that educators ar
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Grand Plan for social change
Karen Malone raised
participatory research in t
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A clear example comes from **Kate Emmons**, who uses a case study to refute the linear "behavioural models" for environmental education so prevalent in North America, where she worked. She proposes instead a cyclical relationship between learning and action, similar to the action research models promoted elsewhere for working with adults.

A reading of this volume will confirm that Participatory Action Research remains a popular model for resource and teacher development, but also that it should be approached with circumspection.

For example, 'participation' often assumes the involvement of a 'community' of others. Arguing from a South African context, **Nelleke Bak** refutes simplistic notions of a homogenous community (and that such a group will act for the "common good", should they be given the opportunity to do so).

Further, from within their strong 'socially critical' practice, both Lotz and Taylor caution against rationalist (modernist) assumptions within participatory 'models' for change. Both authors also show that proposed differences between 'top-down' and participatory processes are not as clear-cut as we often assume. Taylor's more 'modest' view of 'participation' involves opportunities for all parties to invest their ideas in some form of mutual action, in this case resource development. His research of Share-Net led him to believe that productive action is a crucial aspect of successful 'networking'. In such investment and collaborative action, existing ideas may be challenged and change may result.

In the final contribution to this edition, **Debbie Heck** provides an addendum to her paper on the Australian *Landcare* programme, which she described in Volume 14. Here she specifically acknowledges the collaboration between the educators who initiated this successful professional development opportunity.

In summary then, new theoretical tools provided by reflexive and post-modern perspectives seem to have much to offer environmental educators in Africa. The ways in which new ideas are shared are crucial. Joint action is a productive way forward. This involves teachers and learners, as well as collaboration within networks of educators.

The 1995 EEASA conference provided excellent opportunities for such cooperation, opened up by the political settlement in South Africa. For the first time EEASA could invite friends and colleagues from elsewhere in Africa and abroad, to share experiences and insights at our annual conference. Linking ECOSA's all-Africa meeting to EEASA '95 further contributed to an exciting exchange of ideas and resources between more than 400 delegates from as far as Mali, Madagascar, Malawi, Zanzibar, Zimbabwe, Namibia, the UK, Australia and the USA, to name but a few countries of origin.

'Networking' was the focus of many an activity at the conference. Taylor's paper cautions that whereas networking is important, it only 'works' if it happens around and within shared action, and not as a tool for affirmation and legitimation. When frequent meetings start replacing action for environmental and educational change, a paradox results. It is one that is imminent, given the tremendous progress in environmental education, internationally and in southern Africa. In recent years the educational response to the environmental crisis has grown into a *field* of study and specialisation, a 'thing with a life of its own', to quote Kuiper. This meant more money and more meetings, and a process becoming an institution. A danger of the institutionalisation of environmental education is that its practitioners are

increasingly pressured to defend their 'territory' within the 'field'. This is clearly in opposition to the idea of working together for social change.

Finally, while we need to heed the reification of environmental education, we should also refrain from reifying theories - conceptual tools or orientations - into overarching models, the 'isms' of modernism. When a post-modern perspective becomes 'post-modernism', it can become a paradox and lose its value! We tend to attach ourselves or others to certain theoretical positions as if these are fixed and fixing. Attachment to our favourite ideas, projects or positions can harm collaboration for better education and a better environment. Networking and collaboration need never create the sense of a 'loss of kudos for personal action' which Taylor encountered in the Share-Net network.

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