

EDITORIAL

The 1993 edition of the *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education* reaches readers at a particularly exciting time in EEASA's history. Processes of reconstruction are finally leading to a first fully South African election. The new year will no doubt bring trauma, but hopefully also triumphs. High on the agenda is a new education system and a reconstructed curriculum.

Local environmental educators have long regarded environmental education as a sadly neglected aspect of the school curriculum, either because it could teach about environmental concerns which are not adequately addressed in current curricula, or as a process of social transformation, or both. As a result members of EEASA, including a representative of the Department of Environment Affairs, late in 1992 initiated a process aimed at broad and democratic participation in the development of policy options for environmental education in formal schooling.

This process, now known as the EEPI - Environmental Education Policy Initiative - might be one of the more significant developments in the history of environmental education in the country, and it is the focus of this issue of the *SAJEE*. Some of the background to and details of the EEPI, particularly the model of policy development chosen, are discussed by Clacherty in the first paper featured.

As he points out the EEPI has been productive in several respects.

Firstly, it brought to the country two renowned international environmental educators, Dr John Fien of Australia and Peter Martin of the United Kingdom. Sharing a sensitivity to South African history and a reluctance to take on the role of 'outside-experts', they contributed to the EEPI in both national and regional workshops. Both have reworked their national key note addresses especially for the *Journal*.

Secondly, the EEPI has been stimulating environmental educators to reflect critically on their practice and its theoretical underpinnings. Rob O'Donoghue does exactly this in the fourth article published here. Earlier drafts of the paper were circulated in an attempt to foster reflection on practice. In some cases, however, it raised only concern that certain more conventional approaches to environmental education were being summarily

dismissed, rather than critically reviewed. It would seem that the very reflexive stance to environmental education which the author argues for, was absent from many readers' orientation to the paper. It is hoped that the reworked version published here will allow for a more positive engagement with the issues raised. In this regard it is worth noting the similarities in the way Fien, a moderate and eminent educator and advisor to UNESCO, and O'Donoghue, deal with aspects of child-, experience-, message- and nature-centered approaches to environmental education.

A third and probably the most valuable outcome of the EEPI thus far is that environmental education was raised as an issue for consideration among active new shapers of the future education system. It has stimulated the engagement of many who had until now not been part of the environmental education community - which does not mean that none of them had been aware of the need to address environmental issues before. The Congress of South African Students (COSAS), for example, is currently organising a youth conference on sustainable development. The first national gathering of the EEPI, at Dikhololo, saw a broad range of education representatives talking about common concerns in a situation which even allowed for the agenda to be challenged in public. Meetings of this kind are much needed in South Africa, and the Department of Environment Affairs deserve credit for sponsoring the event, as does EEASA for hosting it. We would like to feel that this is how government resources should be applied!

The very positive results of the Dikhololo meeting were reported in country-wide follow-up workshops. They included a decision to mandate a more broadly representative Steering Committee to stimulate and strengthen ongoing processes to broaden the support base for environmental education in the regions, perhaps leading to a national policy options workshop in 1994.

It was also at the Dikhololo workshop that the meeting was briefly and unexpectedly introduced to a draft syllabus which has subsequently been published by the Council for the Environment, a governmental committee not to be confused with the Department of Environment Affairs. This "framework for local reinterpretation [of

environmental education]" is currently being circulated among senior educationists, as a working document to "become a national resource document for the development of local environmental syllabuses and programmes". Serious concerns have however been raised about the document. In various responses to the Council for the Environment (the final two items in this journal) a number of authors point *inter alia* to similarities between the proposed syllabus and the orientations of structural-functionalism, fundamentalism and behaviourism. The introduction to the Council's curriculum document, which links it to the EEPI, has some of those involved in the EEPI concerned about being mistakenly associated with what seems to be a pseudo-consultative but essentially one-sided attempt at reform and/or resource appropriation. The weaknesses of behaviourism and liberal-individualism and expert-driven curricula, respectively, are explored in Fien's key note address and Clacherty's introductory piece, both of which had been written before the release of the Council's document.

"We live in interesting times ...", the saying goes. We also live in a country racked with social and environmental disintegration and many are mustering goodwill and know-how in attempts to address the issues in the period of political transition. We also live in what has been referred to as late modernity, a time of transition towards 'reflexive modernisation' as conceptualised by Ulrich Beck (see reference in article by O'Donoghue in this issue). Beck argues that the multi-dimensional environment crisis is rooted in modernistic assumptions - which O'Donoghue then goes on to link with apartheid. These underpinnings need to be addressed through fundamental changes to reconstruct. This is clearly the position taken by Fien, in his article, and from this position a number of questions arise. We need to ask whether teaching/communication strategies aimed at "environmentally responsible behaviour" can bring about such deep changes. How do "nature encounters" contribute? And who could be so arrogant as to suggest that they know exactly how and where to in the complex challenges of the environmental crisis?

The fundamental transitions the political and ecological dilemmas in South Africa call for, involve contestations around the control of knowledge, value systems and resources. These same contestations are right now evident in environmental education circles. How will those who have recently joined us in the EEPI react to the debate outlined here? Will they see it as a polemic over narrow self-interests, or will they perceive clashes between the vanguard who boldly propose new directions which carry no guarantees, and those who are more secure within dated ideas and conventional wisdom? Or will they discern, more deeply, conflict between ideologies of, on the one hand, environmental change through expert-driven behaviour change and management and on the other, collaborative transformations towards social justice and ecological sustainability?

Beck's excellent sociological account of environmentalism in the late 20th century suggests ways in which to negotiate these clashes and the uncertainties inevitably arising from processes of curriculum and policy contestation. Engagement with the issues, with due recognition of the history and context within which they arise, interaction and dialogue, even between different epistemologies - these are some of the paths towards the reflexive learning which might enable us to really reach those elusive ideals of modernity - peace and progress for all, meaningful development, equality, useful knowledge with which to construct a sustainable future.

The role of the *SAJEE* is to foster just this kind of dialogue. We offer an open invitation for contributions, but particularly to those who wish to comment on O'Donoghue's critique of current South African practice, to the Council for the Environment to respond to the reactions to their recent publication, and to overseas readers, to comment on the EEPI and related processes. We hope that, by giving rise to productive processes and policies, this initiative will continue to contribute positively to our country's long-awaited transition.