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Editorial

Situated Culture, Ethics and New Learning Theory: Emerging perspectives in environmental education research

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Celebrating the 8th International Invitational Research and Development Seminar

This edition of the EEASA Journal celebrates the hosting of the 8th International Invitational Research and Development Seminar on Environmental and Health Education in South Africa in March 2005. The International Invitational Research and Development Seminars are 'special events' in the field of environmental and health education research. They are characterised by their democratic, deliberative nature, and by their intent to scope innovation and methodological issues. First established some years ago in Copenhagen, Denmark, these seminars have provided an evolving international forum for researchers interested in research methodology to meet and frame new themes, trends and issues arising in the field of environmental education and health education research.

More specifically, this edition of the EEASA Journal profiles some of the insights and perspectives introduced and deliberated at this Invitational Seminar, notably *situated culture, ethics and new learning theory*. It opens a conversation on the significance of these themes for environmental education research at the start of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainability. Of the 11 feature articles, five were presented and discussed at the 8th International Invitational Seminar in March 2005, with an additional paper making its way into the journal from earlier deliberations at the 7th International Invitational Seminar, hosted in Alaska in 2004. Of interest, however, is the way in which the other papers in the journal (not presented at the Invitational Seminars) also reflect encounters with *situated culture, ethics and new learning theory* in different ways.

The first paper in the journal, a 'Reflection Paper' by Paul Hart, synthesises the themes and some of the deliberations of the 8th International Research and Development Invitational Seminar. He discusses postcolonial and relational perspectives of inquiry, noting the potential inherent in relational epistemology (see Volume 21 of the EEASA Journal) for certain forms of poststructural methodological analysis, particularly those pertaining to the performative and political ordering effects of language. Hart reflects on how various sessions at the seminar 'chipped away' at some assumed relationships between language and experience, and the distinctions between the constructed and real aspects in environmental education research. The re-inscribing of methodology as pedagogy is identified by Hart as a 'must follow-up' issue of the seminar, and he draws attention to an arising question, deliberated with Rob O'Donoghue, inherent in the idea that methodology can choreograph pedagogy. Action research seemed to be at the core of these deliberations. Hart's observations surrounding the re-inscribing of action

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inquiry as participatory learning process opens a discussion on broadening views of learning in environmental education, and he notes that learning is increasingly viewed in socio-cultural terms, and in terms of the social relations of production. Hart (this edition) argues that socio-cultural theories of learning may be 'both enlightening and encouraging' for environmental educators. Paul Hart's reflections on the 8th Invitational Seminar provide a useful mapping of the 'rapidly changing landscape' of environmental education research, making many of the complex insights and deliberations of the seminar visible and accessible to all in southern Africa (and beyond).

Situated Culture and Ethics

As highlighted in the 8th International Invitational Seminar, ethics and situated culture are closely intertwined, particularly when ethics is viewed as an everyday activity, and when ethics stories 'do work'. In his paper on the subject, Bob Jickling tells a story of how he sees environmental education research as 'doing ethics'. His paper explores a re-imagining of ethics, situated in everyday culture and context, allowing ethics stories to do work. He argues that ethics can be imagined as a series of re-constructive experiments in the everyday, and his paper encourages environmental educators to engage in terms of 'ethics research' (in the everyday). In this paper, Jickling (this edition) introduces us to ethics as an '... open-ended process with the potential to expose new challenges and generate new possibilities', and it is this challenge which is most exciting and creative for readers in southern Africa, as they face the many multi-dimensional facets of re-orienting societies in post-apartheid/post-colonial globalisation contexts.

It is in such a context that southern Africans have had to turn to deeper understandings of research, and the way in which research is conducted. Lesley Le Grange's paper draws attention to the situatedness of language and its meaning, through reference to Guitarri's geophilosophy-based inquiry methodology for exploring the effects of language and metaphor in specific situations. Through a careful analysis of Guitarri's work and its implications for environmental education (particularly the more recent discourses of education for sustainable development), Le Grange (this edition) points out that that new ways of living are not to be achieved through macro-political consensus (as proposed by integrated world capitalism) but rather through '... micro-political dissensus – vectors of dissent open up possibilities for substantive change in serendipitous ways'. Of interest to the theme of 'situated culture' discussed at the 8th Invitational Seminar is Le Grange's point that:

... if Africans are to transcend ways of living configured by dominant discourses on sustainable development then (re)singularisation of sustainable development/sustainability will be crucial and, further, (environmental) educators should invigorate the lines of escape – the answer does not lie in abandoning the term but in how it could become uniquely imagined and expressed by individuals and institutions. (This edition)

As reflected in earlier SAJEE papers, and in a number of papers in this journal, southern African environmental education research appears to be exploring the meaning/s of *situated culture*,

influenced in part by the works of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bourdieu (1998) who drew attention to the social *habitus*, and its culturally embedded nature, and the works of Beck (1992) and Latour (1999) who drew attention to the way in which science (and educational practice) tends to abstract knowledge from the contextual fabric of social life. These deliberations are most visible in research surrounding indigenous knowledge (see for example O'Donoghue & Neluvhalani, 2002; Mokuku & Mokuku, 2004; Namafe, 2004), which reflects how indigenous knowledge in African settings has, over the years, become marginalised as 'situated culture' in educational work. In this edition of the journal, three authors take the ongoing research into indigenous knowledge in southern African environmental education further.

Rob O'Donoghue reviews environmental health educational programmes associated with a recent outbreak of cholera in northern KwaZulu-Natal. His rendition of the story reveals an institutional governmentality in the educational approaches most favoured by health education officials. Examining institutional processes, he probes discontinuities between the health education message and the complex social ecology of cholera, and uncovers how a '... post-apartheid institutional rhetoric of participation, empowerment and social transformation is playing out in communicative interventions to instil healthier practices amongst the rural poor', which are '... rooted in an institutional legacy of appropriation and control' (O'Donoghue, this edition). The consequences of this institutional governmentality visible amongst newly appointed health officials ironically results in a marginalisation of indigenous ways of knowing, and associated possibilities for dealing with health risk in rural areas, and O'Donoghue argues that it is essential for those confronted by environmental problems to '... look to what others might have to bring to a problem. Both the intergenerational/experiential constructs of communities and those of modern social institutions need to be reconciled in the somewhat harsh and unforgiving realities of the world' (*ibid.*).

Soul Shava's concern is for the way in which indigenous knowledge research is/can be applied in ways that can benefit communities. Working with indigenous knowledge of wild food plants, Shava proposes possible ways in which this information can be applied in school and community contexts. Mandla Mlipha, in his Viewpoint paper, like Soul Shava, argues for the potential value of exploring and applying indigenous knowledge concepts in African environmental and health education. Mlipha writes his Viewpoint paper in response to indigenous knowledge discussions held at the EEASA Conference in Zambia, and through a gentle critique and opening discourse, proposes an extended vantage point for considering traditional cultural configurations that can potentially create new spaces for HIV/AIDS education.

Leigh Price, working within a critical realist frame, opens up a number of ethical questions embedded in much indigenous knowledge research, and through playing 'musement games' with retroductive analysis techniques, she introduces the concept of musement (retroduction or abduction) as an '... appropriate alternative to deduction and induction, both in indigenous knowledge (IK) specifically and in social science generally'. She argues that the result of accepting retroduction as a valid logic is that '... we allow IK to be dynamic and non-reified. It also allows a previously ignored aspect of IK, its spiritual/non-empirical beliefs, to be validated through ethical outcomes experienced in our lives, rather than through the previous criteria of

empirical validity' (Price, this edition). In making these methodological moves, Price reclaims indigenous knowledge from research spaces which are either empirical and/or reified.

The paper by Justin Lupele, Mweru Mwingi, Felistus Kinyanjui, Joyce Kimani and Christine Kisamaba (all PhD scholars in the social sciences) draws attention to the relationships between situated culture and research. In describing methodological innovations/contextualisations in their research, they argue for the space to contextually apply and shape research methodology in response to African social and cultural experience. In a similar, but different way, curriculum scholars Justin Dillon, Mphemelang Ketlhoilwe, Presha Ramsurup and Chris Reddy argue for contextually situated understandings of the multi-faceted dimensions of curriculum research in their Viewpoint paper, while making the point that it *is* possible to establish 'meeting points', or points of 'fuzzy generalisation' across different curriculum research contexts.

Teacher and Learners' Knowledge and Experience

Whilst not explicitly theorised in this way, a number of other papers in the journal reflect a concern for situated learning, culture and context, which is exposed through the emphasis placed on learners' and teachers' prior knowledge and experience. This emphasis signals a stronger concern for socio-cultural approaches to learning and teacher professional development, and, as highlighted by Hart in the opening Reflection Paper in this journal, these developments have potential to both surprise and interest environmental education researchers.

In her paper Ingrid Schudel reflexively reviews the way in which learning theory is 'taught' in a post-graduate course at Rhodes University, South Africa. Drawing on Bourdieu's work on culture, capital and institutionally framed scholastic reasoning that have come to characterise teaching in universities and formal institutions of learning, she asks questions about the practical appropriateness of applying scholastic reasoning approaches to a 'teaching' of learning theory. She provides an account of the way in which students (most of whom are practising educators) encounter learning theory in the course, and through a carefully scaffolded series of activities with students, Schudel experiments with constructivist and situated approaches to learning in a teacher education context. Through these approaches, students explore how theories of learning, when not presented *a priori*, can be drawn on to provide more in-depth and grounded insights into their observations and experiences of learning.

Also working with in-service teachers in South Africa, Cheryl le Roux considers how teachers' expectations and experiences of In-service Education and Training (INSET) influence the design of teacher education support programmes. She argues that through monitoring participants' expectations and experiences of INSET, presentation processes can be adapted and implemented to suit the specific context within which these programmes run, showing a concern for culture and context in planning and facilitating teacher education programmes. In Swaziland, Mandla Mliphha and David Manyatsi also pursue the theme of teachers' knowledge and experience, and in their research, they indicate that differences exist in teachers' knowledge of environmental issues and environmental education which are related to teachers' prior knowledge and experience, gender, and their professional training.

This concern for learners' knowledge, and learning in context, and for 'connecting' with experience, prior knowledge and culture, is also reflected in the research presented by Bram Mabelis, writing from the Netherlands, where he investigates children's opinions about the loss of nature. His findings suggest that culture is a key shaping influence in how children experience and view nature, and that this may be an important shaping influence in environmental education programmes.

Are these research projects indicative of an emerging interest in socio-cultural approaches to learning? Future editions of this journal are likely to reveal the direction in which this work may grow.

New Learning Theory

In his Reflection Paper, Paul Hart notes that 'socio-cultural perspectives of learning, placed alongside conceptions of situated culture and situated ethics' allow us to question the contexts and discourses in which teaching and learning are located. He argues that there is a need for more discussion here, and that we need to broaden our notions of what counts as evidence of learning as socio-culturally conceived. At the same time, he warns that privileging discussions on ethics, culture and socio-cultural approaches to learning may '... serve to focus some issues, while silencing others'. We might also want to be mindful of Rob O'Donoghue's advice that there is need for us to consider different perspectives in times of struggle and change.

This edition of the EEASA Journal opens the spaces for dialogue on the significance of ethics, situated culture and new learning theory in environmental education research in southern Africa. We thank our international colleagues and our local friends and colleagues for the rich contributions to these deliberations. In his Reflection Paper, Paul Hart reports on processes in the South African Seminar that allowed a deepening of understandings through critical reflection, critique and a conceptualising of generative actions for reconstructive work that does not assume consensus. These pointers may be the most useful perspectives to take forward from this edition of the EEASA Journal. We are also mindful of the points made by Mandla Mlipha and David Zandvliet in this edition of the journal, which draw attention to the serious nature of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in southern Africa, the 'elephant in our midst', which, it is argued, needs all our attention.

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