



## Editorial

# A Search for Conjunctions at a Time of Direction-setting Review and Synthesis

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This journal reflects a diversity of environment and sustainability education research and viewpoints alongside two synthesis papers. Read as a whole and within a widely held ideal that diversity reflects resilience, the environment and education for sustainable development landscape in Africa might be said to be healthy and proliferating. But read against the pressure to produce tangible evidence of change on an African landscape of persistent climate variation and poverty, along with a widening gap between rich and poor, the picture remains challenging. These contrasting readings are notable at a time when we are looking towards the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Triennial in February, 2012, the Rio+20 Earth Summit in June 2012 and our own EEASA +30 conference in September 2012.

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is characterised by a proliferation of education imperatives. These emerged as modern education in response to the issues of the day and now a modernity in deepening crisis. The scope of the change is notable in a UNESCO teacher education module that is today called Global Climate Change Learning for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2012). Here, education to address global risk is re-inscribed as learning to mitigate the impact of climate change alongside adaptive learning to change. In the lead-up to Rio+20 there is also an emphasis on learning as transition to a 'green economy' or for a 'green society'. The subtle differences in terms here are provoking as much intense debate as did the advent of education for sustainable development (ESD) over a decade ago.

The diversity in this journal challenges us to have a closer look at the ideals that shape and steer a globalising modernity. Here education, as emergent systems of reason, is orientated to shape citizens so as to mitigate risk that is being produced by the growth-orientated engine room of the modernist project, an issue that still remains relatively untouched by educative practice. To provide perspective on the scholarship in this journal, I loosely draw on aspects of works of Tom Popkewitz. His critical *History of the Present* exposes how the ideals of modernity bind us into education practices that, in response to emergent risk, are named and assume an inscribed rationale for mediating enquiry that raises awareness to steer the citizenry towards making the desired change. Responsive processes of reasoned practice emerge with an implicit 'philosophy of consciousness' that is prone to rhetorical marking and 'movement as an illusion of change' in the progressive trajectories of modernity. It is becoming evident that much of what has constituted the early twenty-first century enterprise of environment and sustainability education has unfolded as an engaging rhetoric for change through education for awareness. Learning to change has seldom engaged the underlying patterns of practice shaping risk.

The proliferation of new social movements and the advent of participatory practices in the 1990s has gone some way to enabling more critical purchase, reflexivity, border crossing and

transformative social learning, to seemingly produce cosmopolitanism landscapes of diverse knowledges and literacy practices to produce change. The research papers accepted through the review process, although not drawing on the analytical tools signified here as a touchstone for a critical reading of this journal, reflect a critical purchase on some of the surface and rhetorical practices in the modernist education project of ESD.

Shava critically examines tensions and contradictions in an appropriating institutional mediation of declining medicinal plant natural resources. Working with Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', the study probes power/knowledge relations around access to and the use of traditional medicinal plants. It tracks how power is distributed and primarily comes to be mediated by medical and conservation science institutions that exert control through the manner in which mediating knowledge is generated, recorded, accumulated and applied in the Western tradition to governing access to and the health-producing use of plant resources. An implicit standpoint design makes the marginalised plight of the traditional healer explicit with an attendant loss of governance, apparent against the commercial harvesting of common areas and the loss of access to heritage resources on land that is now under freehold and conservation agency governance.

In another take on modernity and knowledge, Dalelo probes the challenges of literacy on climate change amongst postgraduate students in Addis Ababa. He questions whether learners get an adequate grasp of climate change. Much of the work is focused on how informed the students are about the projected impacts of climate change in African contexts. It also probes student awareness on the measures proposed to address the problem that is read as climate change literacy. A question that remains open is a critical explanatory purchase on the processes that have produced and maintain a habitable planet.

In a similar search to deeply grasp the integration of environmental issues, Nsubungu probes the lessons of rural teachers. She sets out to develop a tool to review how teachers in rural schools are integrating natural resource management (NRM) issues in their lessons. Her project is orientated to work with educators on how they are able to bring NRM into their classrooms to make a success of the education enterprise in rural contexts where resources are often insufficient. Her note that there is little or no integration of NRM is telling, but her conclusions are positive and the call for further work reflects a confidence that comes with having a tool to probe a concern that was not clearly evident at the outset.

Finally, Muloongo also undertakes research on pedagogical practices, but from the context of museum education in Zambia. As a museum educator, he saw the prospect of expanding into community radio to add impetus to a school and community extension service that was difficult to sustain and was not drawing the community into the museum for necessary environmental information. The study reports a careful and in-depth review of community radio programming practices that attempt to engage social and ecological concerns. The researcher concludes his appraisal with a somewhat cautionary but informed position that will be invaluable to much of the widening environment and sustainability education enterprise.

All of these studies point to the importance of careful, situated work that raises questions or provides an in-depth view, suggesting to me that the southern African research field is rich in critical practice and insights. The challenge that diversity brings is that of knitting the insights derived in this and other research into a coherent perspective for the expanding field. The four

research papers reflect some of the diversifying practices in the region as an interesting backdrop to the two synthesis papers that follow.

Reddy takes up the age-old academic challenge of positioning his intellectual project through an inaugural lecture at his investiture as Professor of Environmental Education. It is interesting that he elected to tackle the vast and contested terrain of curriculum. In a time of continuing curriculum change he gives attention to the academic field and a rationale for some of the contested issues of the day that pose challenges to the academic as custodian of a vibrant and critical field into the future.

Lotz-Sisitka's synthesis paper, focusing on the re-orientation of teacher education towards sustainability in South Africa, brings together policy and practice in a national case study developed to inform deliberations on Education and Sustainable Development in Africa, which is the theme of the 2012 ADEA paper. The paper points to a need to re-think knowledge in teacher education, and highlights some of the more dominant knowledge practices in environment and sustainability education in pilot teacher education settings.

Both papers provide discursive maps for informing and steering a modern education system in transition. They gesture towards future trajectories that invite further research and deliberation in practice. Continuing to draw on Popkewitz for critical purchase here, I note after one of his earlier works, *A Political Sociology of Education Reform*, that education trajectories emerge within the ideological mix of the day, locating environment and sustainability education as both critical fields of research and reflexive modernist projects engaging the tensions and contradictions of the day.

Finally, the journal presents three viewpoints that were offered for review in a forthcoming year of ADEA and Rio+20 that may have all of us pausing to catch our breath and deliberate renewed focus at the EEASA+30 that follows in September. A reading of the research and position papers with a critical purchase on education in the modern state (after Popkewitz) suggests that proliferating categories and clustering of educational endeavour merit careful reflection as the variously named perspectives take the form of a rational enterprise for the common good and function to mediate the social dispositions of child and citizen in a complex of more globally integrated social figurations.

Each of the viewpoint papers reflects a dimension of positioning and critical review that seeks to map out a perspective for better practice to mediate social orientation to more sustainable and just modes of living together in a world of change.

Kulundu develops a view on the creative arts and the agency to change. As an experienced creative artist working in community theatre, she attempts to lift out an informed perspective on social learning in challenging contexts of creative engagement. She conducts a useful and elegant conversation with the literature and attempts to develop perspectives that can be drawn out of interdependent presence in the *mêlée* of collective action, with the critical eye of informed experience.

Zazu opens a conversation on heritage education. He takes a novel approach of clustering three points of contestation (evolving/dissonant; natural/cultural; tangible/intangible) for deliberative engagement with the literature and case examples in southern Africa. His viewpoint discourse claims to be a scoping of the contested conceptions that constitute heritage that might allow him to undertake research on heritage management and education.

Finally Mathibe, a Methodist minister, develops a Christian and African narrative on the stewardship of creation. He works with biblical verse and examples of environmental (socio-

economic and biophysical) risk on God's creation where humans have a stewardship duty. His narrative plays across Christian (biblical) and African (story and practices) ideas regarding creation to take up a standpoint of a caring response to emergent and latent environmental risks. The study is both a personal journey and a mediating piece that invites reflexive conversation.

In putting together this journal as guest editor, I was struck by the richness of the contributions of the reviewers, who critically probed the research claims and depth and detail expounded by authors who had offered their work for publication. In responding to the comments of reviewers, the complexity of the conversation lifted and what had started as a disparate set of papers and perspectives began to fall into place as direction-seeking discourses that all point to continuing change in the field. As EEASA enters a thirtieth year of review and celebration, it is evident to me that we have a resilient community of practice that has been working with a developing and changing range of education practices for enabling the production of more just, equitable and sustainable societies. The discourses have changed and will continue to do so, challenging the journal to maintain its practice of rigorous academic review in a positive way that is inclusive of and in constant search for emerging discourses that might open the way to better education for sustainability in the many evolving epistemologies of a global community at risk. This journal will continue to look to change, as the challenges will only get tougher. This will hopefully be at least as rewarding as the challenge of editing this journal that sets out to reflect and foster engagement on the discourses for mediating change-orientated social learning on pressing matters of environment and sustainability in Africa and beyond.

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### *Note on the Contributor*

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