

## PARTICIPATION: AN UNDER THEORISED ICON IN RESEARCH AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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This paper reviews participation as an emerging moral imperative in a democratising South Africa. Historical tensions in environmental education are probed to explore participatory turns and a rapid popularising of action research into the late 1980's. Recent cases of participatory research and curriculum development are then briefly examined before a review of processes shaping theory within emerging participatory perspectives. Socially constructed to resolve uncertainties and to steer activities in developing institutional enterprises, participatory theories are found to emerge from technicist amalgams of descriptive typologies. Trading on the promise of experts facilitating the sustainable development of 'The Other', participatory theories underpin environment and development ideologies which compete for economic and political influence. Some sensitising texts for the difficult task of probing features of these ideologies are discussed and a sketch of developing social processes provides a sense of the open-ended tensions shaping participatory hegemonies in institutional settings in South Africa. Participatory theories in the form of strategic narratives for sustainable development emerge from this review as self-validating ideologies that may, paradoxically, be defeating their own ends. Critical insights suggest that institutional agendas and the steering hand of rational theory inhibit emergent, contextual meaning making struggle which shapes sustaining moral orientation. The logical trap here is that moral orientation is not open to rational steering without frameworks imposing in ways which actually subvert the moral enterprise. This problem does not preclude continued attention to participatory imperatives but it does suggest that participative processes be narrated in socio-historical context as emergent struggles of interactive meaning-making. In line with this finding, the question of explicit theory to steer participatory processes must be left open-ended amidst sensitising concepts to illuminate developing contexts of continued sustaining struggle.

### BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

This paper developed in response to a comment that participatory research and curriculum development processes of environmental education are 'under theorised' (see Hughes, 1999).

To begin to understand and research this question, participatory imperatives are reviewed and evidence of shaping axes of tension within environmental education are examined. Diverse cases of participatory resource and curriculum development are critically examined and emerging patterns of theory noted. The emerging story is then reviewed against a backdrop of developing social processes and sensitising concepts to inform sustaining imperatives of participatory research and curriculum development 'in' rather than 'for' developing contexts of socio-ecological risk.

To ensure a balance of contextual insight and critical reflection, the narratives and developing models of process informing the research are drawn from contexts in which the author either has been

or is involved. Evidence from wider perspectives in the region are derived from colleagues involved in the then Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) participatory environmental education research project. I am particularly grateful to contributors at the EEASA research symposium and to Heila Lotz and Eureka Janse van Rensburg for supportive reviews and critical insights as the project was written up for publication.

An abstracting impulse simply to articulate better theory is avoided as the paper examines historical shaping tensions to shed light on participation as emerging moral imperative within the social politics of a post-apartheid South Africa. The shaping of moral imperative and steering theory are, after critical review, left in the arena of sustaining social struggle within the region with sensitising perspectives which may enhance our collaborative endeavours.

## A START IN PARTICIPATORY STREAMS APART

'Participation' has been synonymous with environmental education since early notions of sharing nature with children. The process has also been apparent amidst a popularising of orientating 'fun-and-games' like ice-breakers and role-play. Since then participatory meaning-making experience has been a prominent feature in environmental education activities. It is thus ironic that this perspective and the South African liberation struggle, another key participatory process, did not 'find each other' until the post-apartheid era in which we are now 'up to our ears' in processes of participatory meaning-making.

Within both these imperatives 'participation-freedom' (being together/with/amongst) developed as moral imperatives, now seemingly subsumed within a flood of post-liberation participatory activity and emergent global initiatives around sustainable development. Here one finds:

- \* The Environmental Education Policy Initiative (EEPI) and numerous other participatory policy initiatives on an apparently liberated landscape, all in search of new ways forward together amidst the problems in/of the day and the marginalising injustices of the past
- \* A coordinated national Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) with ideals of civic participation in reorientation and development to rectify the neglect and discrimination of apartheid
- \* Participatory environmental education resource development (Share-Net and many others) and curriculum development projects (Environmental Education Curriculum Initiative) and several research projects on resource and curriculum development
- \* The Rhodes - Gold Fields Participatory course in environmental education and a spate of participatory training frameworks like Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) or more recently Participatory Learning Action (PLA) in the development arena
- \* Numerous action research and community problem solving (AR&CPS) activities and participatory research initiatives like the HSRC Environmental Education Research Project mentioned above.

The evidence here points to an habituating deluge of participatory imperatives within the fabric of

South African society and environmental education activities, suggesting that some attention to developing theory is both timely and necessary. Participation has emerged as a somewhat obsessive imperative that has seemingly shaped a merry-go-round of consultative inactivity (Human, 1998). To understand this emerging focus on participatory processes, one has to look at developing axes of tension in environmental education. These have shaped people-centred imperatives which on the one hand resist any form of determinism, whilst on the other, impose community participation as a more relevant form of determinism in a democratic South Africa.

## CLARIFYING STRUGGLE IN/FOR PARTICIPATORY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

At least four intermeshed clarifying struggles are evident, all of which have influenced prevailing narratives of environmental education and shaped participatory turns. These were accompanied by a levelling of power gradients within the post-apartheid democratic state.

### Participatory Evaluation Research

An evaluation of the Conservation Awareness Programme in the Umgeni Valley in 1977 was one of the earliest sources of tension. A panel of experts was critical of, amongst other things, a lack of structure and clear objectives in the field centre programmes. The evaluation by outside experts (Downing, 1977) contributed to the collapse of the programme and its restructuring under new management by teachers rather than conservation field staff. As the new cohort of staff looked back on the old ways and talked to the old guard it was realised that a lack of staff participation in the evaluation had privileged a particular perspective. In this evaluation process, an expert fixation with instructional objectives and measured behaviour change was favoured over developing the experiential and child-centred meaning-making ideals which are more prevalent today.

Following this negative experience with outside-expert evaluation, imperatives to evaluate the programmes were resisted for many years, until the late 1980's when a participatory process of evaluation was enacted amongst staff working in cooperation with outsiders (Wright, 1988). The success of this programme was picked up in a widening interest in cooperative evaluation and a manual of participatory evaluation techniques was

developed for field centre staff (O'Donoghue & Taylor, 1989).

### Participatory Resource Development

Another early tension was a lack of teacher participation in resource and curriculum development. Although participation was a key perspective in environmental education, emerging experts began to write curriculum materials and to disseminate these to teachers. *We Care*, one of the first resource packs for primary school teachers, was amongst those noted for a lack of consultative participation with teachers. A developing clarification of this issue was resolved with the establishment of Share-Net as a resource development network interacting with teachers as partners (Taylor *et al.*, 1988). Teacher and community participation was soon a key feature of a changing resource development game (O'Donoghue & Taylor, 1988; O'Donoghue & McNaught, 1991).

### Institutional Communication Perspectives

At about the same time there was protracted criticism of the top-down, target-group perspectives of state communications (O'Donoghue, 1987). At this time, the intellectual terrain was dominated by 'communication by objectives' theories selectively co-opted and published in rational communications texts. Intellectuals in the more liberal universities had a running battle with the communications bastions of the apartheid state. The issue developed as an extended theme in environmental education where the rationalist communication strategies of conservation agencies sought to create awareness and behaviour change. Target group communication perspectives were contested by consultative and participatory alternatives (O'Donoghue, 1993), but at the time, these were not emotionally satisfying to the rationalist and 'at arms length' interactive dispositions in prevailing institutional world views.

### Participatory Curriculum Development

The most wrenching and divisive axis of tension was, however, at the sharing-and-caring nature-experience heart of environmental education during the Environmental Education Policy Initiative curriculum development process. The Council for the Environment, which had adopted an 'Earth Love' perspective (O'Donoghue, 1994), contracted the development of a national environmental education curriculum for teacher education

(Council for the Environment, 1993). Whilst on the one hand ascribing to the consultative EEPI process of the Department of Environment Affairs and EEASA, it implemented a seemingly subversive strategy to have the earth-love curriculum in place before the elections and the advent of the democratic state. The lack of open processes of participation was hotly contested at a time of much fear and frenzy around 'third-force' subversion of democratic process. The outcome was not only a rejection of the proposed curriculum framework and its implementation as 'non-participatory' (Taylor *et al.*, 1993), but an exposure of conceptual flaws in the research and narrative underpinnings of the 'Earth Love Education' perspective (O'Donoghue, 1994).

Axes of tension and shifts such as these in evaluation research, resource development, communication processes and curriculum development sedimented a passion for participation and freedom in/as processes of getting together, getting in and getting to a new clarity in the 'New South Africa'. Developing hegemonies of participation seemingly silenced all else amidst notions of action research emerging around socially critical perspectives seeking liberation/emancipation, a notable intellectual narrative being that of Paolo Freire.

It is of note that intellectual struggles on similar issues developed in the North American Association of Environmental Education as 'alternative paradigms' narratives (Mrazek, 1993). These were passionately contested but more pragmatic without the icon-like participatory turn apparent in South Africa.

### A RAPID POPULARISING OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

A 'participatory' turn is evident in an almost instant popularising of action research and community problem solving as a 'method' which came to envelop research, curriculum development and the field as a whole. Participatory orientations to resource and curriculum development are evident in O'Donoghue (1990) and Lotz (1996), for example. People-centred perspectives and participation were key dimensions of the emancipatory education hegemonies in/of the time and since environmental education entered the more mainstream debate within the EEPI, environment has become a 'phase organiser' in the post-apartheid curriculum framework (Lotz & Janse van Rensburg, 1998).

The Rhodes-Gold Fields Participatory Course in Environmental Education is notable for including the notion of 'participation' in its title and for evaluation research which began to clarify participatory perspectives (Janse van Rensburg & Le Roux, 1998). This participatory orientation was carried into the HSRC environmental education curriculum research project (Hughes, 1999), an outcome of which, as mentioned earlier, was the challenging realisation that participatory research and curriculum development is 'under-theorised' (Wickham in Hughes 1999).

In developing a theorising imperative to address this problem, the initial concept was to do it together and to probe the participatory perspectives, arising from the HRSC project, in each of the research and curriculum development initiatives in the project.

#### HSRC PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROJECT

A clarification of the participative nature of the entire project has been undertaken in the meta-research report (Hughes, 1999). The supporting task undertaken here is a probing of participatory theory either articulated by, or implicit within, many of the projects in question. This was to be undertaken with research partners sharing materials and perspectives for the development of a draft paper which would then be edited for presentation at the EEASA conference. Needless to say, not all of the materials arrived in time and the paper was left for a few months before a draft was finally written up. The EEASA '99 Research Symposium became a forum for further interaction on the vexing question of theories of and for participatory environmental education processes of research and curriculum development.

The task of probing reports and drafting a paper on participation was not an easy matter as the complexities of the case dynamics showed perspectives in each participatory research project to be somewhat unique. The projects involved included:

1. Outcomes Based Education (OBE) to Cape teachers using environmental education materials and case studies - Lesley and Chris as university facilitators working with teacher participants (Le Grange & Reddy, 1998)
2. Issue-based curriculum resource materials developed in a Cape fishing community - Glenda as consultant facilitator with teachers and community partners (Louw, 1998)

3. Collaborative research with institutions and teachers to develop OBE Environmental Education modules for Further Education and Training in the Northern Province - Mapula, Willy and Shibu as education department curriculum institute specialists developing modules for and testing these with teacher educators and teachers (Mojapelo *et al.*, 1998)
4. Collaborative science and technology resource and curriculum development research project - Neil as NGO project facilitator working with teachers and learners
5. Cooperative action research evaluation and resource development within a B.Ed. module using Share-Net School Environmental Education Policy Packs and materials - Jim as NGO resource network manager with B.Ed. students (Taylor, 1998).

All of the cases but one (No. 3), specified a participatory approach in their research and curriculum development activities. In each case, once specified, a participatory imperative was simply taken as read without much further clarification beyond a clear disposition to work with and not to impose on or co-opt, manipulate and exploit 'The Other'. What all have in common is a moral imperative to work in the company of others in enabling ways. At some point in the review process it dawned on me that we were not dealing with a simple issue of under-theorising as a methodological question alone but with an underlying and somewhat undifferentiated ideology of wanting to be with and for 'The Other' after years of authoritarianism, separation and a history of marginalising injustice. Intermeshed within these diverse processes was a widening rejection of authority and determinism amidst feelings of alienation, and a rejection of past and external authority.

As participatory processes of environmental education took shape and participation became the name of the developing game, I remember noting that it is not easy to conceptualise non-participatory education processes. Extreme forms of mental illness and death are the only non-participative social conditions that I could come up with but this logic did not dissuade any of us from an enthusiastic co-option of the term. The idea was particularly useful for a narrating of personal and case-experience dispositions in working with others. It was also central to a dialectic politics critically rejecting curriculum and social conditions of the past and seeking more relevant co-shaping interactions amongst collaborating partners.

A concern of the theory-seeking project at hand thus became the illuminating of steering models of process (theory) for participatory imperatives so that we might better foster meaning-making in the company of others. The social terrain in South Africa seemed to be rich in case and personal experience ideals which had impelled the developing participatory focus without narrating sufficient orientating theory to satisfy the academic research community.

#### PATTERNS OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND CASE STUDY THEORISING

A comment passed to me at the HSRC Colloquium at Rhodes University was that my work in participatory resource and curriculum development meant that I was well placed to coordinate a clarifying initiative. This comment pointed to a need to revisit early notions of participatory resource and curriculum development.

In examining this work, what I found was an intellectual co-opting of Lewin's notion of action research, a developing scepticism of 'socially critical' perspectives and a somewhat undifferentiated faith in cooperative interaction with teachers contributing to clarity and localising adaptation of innovative methods and materials (O'Donoghue, 1990). In later work by Lotz (1996) one finds the beginnings of a more definitive engagement with participation. She noted that conditions for 'authentic participation' were not an easy matter within 'contextual realities', and similarly brought key assumptions in socially critical perspectives into question.

Commenting on her 'participatory' community-based curriculum development project Louw (1998) noted, with some frustration, disappointment and a developing pragmatism, that once the fishing community had interacted with pictures and text on local issues, they dropped out of the participatory processes and left matters of curriculum development to teachers. In experiences such as this one finds a narrating of categories and levels of participation. These processes of differentiation seem to be, in part, shaped amidst tensions and disappointment, as ideals of participation fail to measure up to expectations. An amalgam of emotional tensions is seemingly managed amidst codified levels and categories which foster further steering hope in technique and developing steering narratives for participation.

Jenkin (1999), amidst similar frustrations and tensions, derives categories of participation from PLA training processes as a rational framework to facilitate community participation in waste management. Here participatory ice-breakers and interactive fun and games of earlier times have given way to co-opted theory-laden typologies, levels of participation and guiding principles for meaningful learning within participatory action in context.

#### THE EXPERT IN WEBS OF PERPETUATING AMBIVALENCE

Developing patterns of theorising towards a facilitating of more meaningful participation are characterised by case experience differentiation and a co-opting of popular theory to narrate and steer continuing participatory interactions in more satisfying ways. Participatory narratives, like the above, embody a process-reducing techniquing, abstracted and reconstituted in idealised sequences of/for more relevant capacity building, empowerment and liberation. Within processes such as this (and in my paragraph that follows), tensions and emotional disappointments are managed within theory-seeking narratives that shape the differentiation of further categories, revised orientation, supporting justification, rational explanation and thus more functionally satisfying steering theory in developing institutional settings.

Emerging narrative (theory) is not simply a more objective framework but borne of wishes, frustrations, fears and insights within a developing institutional social politics amongst education and development professionals. Popkewitz (1995:227), citing Bourdieu (1988), reveals how merging narratives provide security and a sense of progress in self-perpetuating games which place "The supreme classifiers in the net of their own classifications". Beck (1992) in his *Risk Society* had earlier examined self-perpetuating processes such as this in scientific institutions where expert research, in resolving the ambivalence of the present, ferments further uncertainties which keep the engine of the developing enterprise in demand. Bauman (1995:80) illustrates that figurations of experts are not only subject to narrative struggle amidst developing uncertainties but that ambivalence

generates the demand for expertise; lack of orientation attracts experts in road-finding. Experts tend to promise a once-for-all, secure escape route from uncertainty, but what they offer in practice is a decision how

to 'settle' the present dilemma without in the least reducing its ambivalence.

The cases which follow exemplify many of these shifting processes amidst the institutional social politics of environment and development where research narratives have shaped a facilitatory turn for an increasingly participatory game in an emerging democracy.

#### SOME EXAMPLES OF 'CASE EXPERIENCE' THEORISING PROCESSES

##### Participatory Rural Development

Through Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning Action (PLA) theory, Pretty *et al.* (1995) have developed as a typology of participation and participatory techniques. Their text convincingly outlines a rational history of the idea of participation, its principles and categories. Theory is narrated within a 'myth-picking' oppositional differentiation which explains away failings in past development perspectives owing to non-participatory imposition with little relevance. The emergent theory of participation for 'The Other' is methodologically instrumentalist with 'techniqued' processes, developmental progressions and hierarchical categories. Sequence-based recipes such as this are emerging as strategic amalgams of imperative and ideals to facilitate and empower 'The Other'. These are associated with international funding agencies and are developing as a participatory training business on a global scale. Their popularity has accompanied rational economic perspectives as an ideology for steering processes of sustainable development.

##### Participatory Community-Based Conservation

Other features of a developing institutional social politics in participatory narratives became apparent when I was asked by the World Wide Fund for Nature-SA to comment on a community-based conservation text (WWF-SA, 1997). The WWF-SA reports a participatory process where a specialist workshop on case-based theories shaped a rationale for a state of the art perspective on community-based conservation. The strategic proposal reflects an appropriating institutional monopoly that seemingly does as much to secure jobs for the facilitating expertise of the assembled specialists as to illuminate participatory processes. Notable is an African history of the idea and a rationale for

displacing the non-participatory development processes of old, similar to the PLA example examined above. Of particular note is a developing ambivalence where the facilitating expert as 'development professional' is seemingly free of accountability with everything being community-based and open-ended. This is apparent in meaning-making and action taking being down-loaded to community processes and open-ended time-frames amidst calls for long-term investment and faith that the human spirit will prevail, with professional facilitation, in community-based conservation processes for sustainable development.

##### Participatory Professional Development

A less troubling perspective is narrated in the Australia-South Africa Institutional Links Programme, (Aus-links, 1999), within a synthesis around case study experiences on participatory approaches and professional development. Theorizing here is towards orientating principles as 'theory' for good practice, a frame of reference to guide moral propositions for enabling 'The Other' to narrate steering perspectives within developing context. This opens the way to the notion of meaningful learning becoming a matter of steering action and the contextual narrating of a rationale for this.

A problem with this case experience theorising is a blindness to the conditions within which the emerging ideals and steering frameworks have developed.

Characterising the above examples one finds:

- \* A disembedding and process-reducing 'techniquing' amidst institutional monopolies as models of process for training and empowering 'The Other'
- \* A similar case of a developing hegemony which both differentiates theory and secures community facilitation as a sustaining business opportunity; and
- \* A seemingly more benign framework of guiding principles for facilitating the contextual voices of others to freely articulate what is rational and good in their developing context

The last does not appear to suffer from the same process-reducing blindness of the first two examples. It does, however, exhibit a curious inversion where 'The Other' in context becomes expert and self-facilitating narrator under a benign, encourag-

ing and seemingly non-judgmental eye of the expert educator looking in, helping out and joining in as partner where possible.

The critical point here is, however, that our developing case experience perspectives on participation are somewhat blind to the shaping influences amidst individualising turns, institutional monopolies and the politics in/of everyday social life. One thus needs perspectives which might shed light on or disrupt an uncritical absorption of what presents as common sense in developing context. Sensitising texts for probing shaping underpinnings in developing contexts are examined here in the hope that these might enable a firmer 'theory' for a grasp of developing ideals and interpretative experiences in/of everyday life.

#### PROBING CONDITIONS SHAPING OUR EXPERIENCES

A sense of processes shaping developing participatory ideologies is not an easy matter. Conventional wisdom is an underpinning habit of mind. This tends to encompass generalised and utopian assumptions of and for 'The Other'. These are strongly held in idealising narratives amidst uncertainties and risk so are seldom open to review or rational critique. Texts that can be useful for disrupting naive, narrow and erroneous assumptions and impositions such as this are:

- \* Giddens's *Modernity and Identity* (1991), which exposes the shaping of self within the contours of modernity;
- \* Elias's, "Scientific Establishments" (1982) and "On the Monopoly Mechanism" (1989), texts which complement much of this with a sense of institutional processes and developing rationality as a means of sustaining monopolies to which we are, in the main, blind;
- \* Popkewitz's *A Political Sociology of Educational Reform* (1991), which explores a developing social politics of knowledge creation;
- \* Heller & Feher, *The Postmodern Political Condition* (1988), probes a depth of history and developing figurations of individualising reflexive politics; and
- \* Bauman's *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), which examines developing ambivalence and struggle as processes necessary in the shaping of a human moral condition of being for 'The Other'.

These texts, significant in my own reading, were selected since they disrupt and have the potential to sensitise us to narrowing perspectives in individualising turns and case-experience narrative as a basis for theorising reflection. They might thus open the way for critical review of the peculiar ideological power of participation as an icon of hope and freedom on a terrain of risk, alienation, separation and social conflict.

#### LONG-TERM DEVELOPING PROCESSES SHAPING PARTICIPATORY IMPERATIVES

In earlier times people had a secure sense of knowing 'what' to do and 'when' with little need for 'why' in close contexts of community solidarity. These were followed by developing experiences of colonial and apartheid appropriation which shaped diverse groups in subverting solidarity and protracted social struggle for freedom and local autonomy throughout South Africa. These struggles were accompanied by emerging institutional monopolies of disembedded knowledge about and for 'The Other'. The shift from knowing in everyday life to institutions of experts knowing more than 'The Other' gave rise, for example, to imperatives to educate 'in', 'about' and 'for' the environment so as to create awareness and change the conservation behaviour of entire communities. (See O'Donoghue, 1996 for a detailed overview of these social processes.)

In developing institutional contexts, environmental education emerged as an imposing rational imperative to create awareness and to change behaviour. Early perspectives were implemented within strategic and objective institutional programmes. Top-down intervention perspectives, as we have seen, were contested amidst a rapid levelling of power gradients in the 1980's and early 1990's to be displaced by participatory imperatives. The social politics, shifting power relations and historical baggage of this developing game seemingly shaped participation as an undifferentiated icon into the present day.

In a post-apartheid South Africa uncertainties escalated as participatory processes were characterised by a rejection of all forms of determinism barring those to emerge in developing community struggles for resource and narrative control. Notable is a moral rhetoric of black empowerment and strategic imperatives of restitution and transformation in tension with the democratic ideals of the post-apartheid state. Here one finds diverse

imperatives to steer processes of change amidst idealised notions of participation for freedom, justice and empowerment.

The latter ideals proved elusive and the processes were increasingly ambiguous and unproductive. Institutional perspectives which communities 'would certainly ascribe to once they had the necessary participatory experience to realise these' were seldom clear-cut, whether in matters of scientific fact or notions of communities critically freeing and empowering themselves. Thus, neither positive imposition nor critical emancipation were realised and hope in the latter diminished as it was revealed to be a tyranny of imposition not dissimilar to that which it had hoped to displace.

Faced with increasing ambivalence and uncertainties amidst the shifty relational dynamics in/of developing processes of participation, facilitatory turns increasingly down-loaded steering imperatives to contexts in/of community interaction and sought theory to steer this. Processes such as this are currently shaping idealising community-based, self-facilitated interaction as the ultimate ideal for the most relevant and empowering meaning-making. Within this trajectory, developing theory is narrating a resonance amidst democracy and participation as these have become synonymous and 'participatory meaning-making' the moral imperative that needs coherent steering theory (see Vahamaki, 1999 for example).

These processes are currently accompanied by uncertain socio-economic conditions which have state departments, NGO's and community-based structures competing for resources and opportunities both against and with academic institutions. Researchers narrate social processes and monopolise developing games within participatory moral imperatives, facilitating and mediating the amplitude of all voices, seemingly freely emergent in inter-subjective meaning-making in diverse contexts of social reorientation.

#### A INSTITUTIONAL TYRANNY OF STRATEGIC PARTICIPATORY THEORY

From a certainty in simply intervening to influence the awareness of 'The Other' so as to change behaviour, institutional environmental education narratives have shifted to facilitating imperatives where the Other participates to clarify needs and issues, to find solutions to these and, in doing so, develops capacities and competencies. This is

seemingly a useful turn were it not accompanied by case experiences theories that have come to narrate participatory imperatives as techniques applied in sequential facilitative faith within a sustainable development economy that is seemingly stacked in the favour of a new cohort of development professionals. On moral crusades amidst the under-developed (made possible through funds solicited from state, multinationals and the developed nations), development professionals offer the promise of facilitating the Other to develop and empower themselves through participatory processes under their benign mediating hands, given the necessary cash appropriate to the level of their expertise.

Caught up in the involving ideals of participatory emotions and economic constraints in/of the day, we may have lost our way in facilitating postures increasingly down loaded to and thus imposing on 'The Other' as education for sustainable development. Here, somewhat paradoxically, rational processes of community participation develop in ways that are frighteningly similar to imposing tyrannies we had hoped to leave behind as the emancipatory ideals of participatory research and curriculum development were narrated in and for the 'New South Africa' in the 1990's.

Bauman (1993:11) sheds some light on this developing paradox that rational steering theory can subvert processes shaping the moral impulse of being for 'The Other'. He noted that:

the impulse to care for the other, when taken to extremes, leads to the annihilation of the autonomy of 'The Other', to domination and oppression; yet no impulse can implement itself unless the moral actor earnestly strives to stretch the effort to the limit. The moral self feels and acts in context of ambivalence and is shot through with uncertainty. Hence the ambiguity-free moral situation has solely a utopian existence of perhaps indispensable horizon and stimulus for a moral self, but not a realistic target of ethical practice. Seldom may moral acts bring complete satisfaction; responsibility that guides the moral person is always ahead of what has been and what can be done. All the efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, uncertainty is bound to accompany the condition of the moral self forever. Indeed, one can recognise the moral self by its uncertainty whether all that should have been done, has been.



It seems that with the steering hand of rational theory come imposing processes that can subvert the moral enterprise. It thus may not be a bad thing that participatory processes of environmental education are under-theorised, leaving the shaping of moral self to struggle amidst uncertainty in context. The disrupting ambivalence that has dogged institutions in the rational steering of moral imperatives might seemingly best be engaged 'in context' rather than be rationally mapped out 'for contexts' of developing socio-ecological risk.

Clarifying this problem may not be an easy matter since we are dealing with institutional enterprises which favour rational dispositions and specialists subjected to institutional monopoly mechanisms (Elias, 1998) and processes of self-validating reduction (Weston, 1978). Institutions are sustained in co-operative and competing interactions and specialists endeavour to secure their 'donor economy' along with a conceptual edge and the moral high ground. All of these have emerged as the engine in a moral enterprise to facilitate the sustainable development of 'The Other'.

It is ironic that the developing story might not only have been under-theorised for participation to develop as an ambiguous icon but it could well have become somewhat 'mal-theorised' within an institutional den of thieves whose socio-economic interests and utopian ideals have shifted moral imperative into immoral enterprise. This may have been shaped by monopoly and self-validating institutional processes amidst an ethical inversion where, for example, engaging intent to foster sustainable living emerges as rational strategy for sustainable development.

Here I wish not to question the ethics of organisations and individuals but simply to point to processes that have shaped developing narratives in such a way that we are caught up in institutional political economies and personal/case experience perspectives which are shaping the games in ways that might subvert the best of moral intent.

#### SENSITISING CONCEPTS AND CONTEXTUAL MEANING-MAKING

In engaging processes such as this one cannot rely on re-researching within institutional and personal/case experience without sensitising concepts to reveal sedimented interpretative orientation and to probe shaping processes in context. In this way one may disrupt disembedding ideals and

review utopian assumptions which can develop as blockages or barriers to more object-congruent narratives for steering meaning-making in developing social context.

Once again I have selected useful texts, this time clustered as sources of diverse orientating 'tools' or perspectives for critical insight in/on participatory processes. Put simply, one may need perspectives on participation which note that: people make meaning in interaction, together amidst creative experiences. We may be somewhat blind to underlying habit, but this is open to being brought out and can be probed for a sense of how it came about, what it is made up of and what we might usefully make of it all.

Note that the apparent sequential order here is simply a relic of intellectual narrative amongst contemporary thinkers. In this case perspectives noted include symbolic interactionism, the social construction of reality and the narrative turn, spanning structuralism, poststructuralism and a developing postmodern condition. The apparent sequence in the overview that follows does not preclude a critical focus on one cluster of ideas or an engagement with any sensitising concepts in open and diverse ways.

More explicitly then, for open-ended sensitising theory, one may need a sense of:

#### 1. *How language and story are central in human meaning making.*

Theories of socialisation and historical social processes (Bauman, 1993; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Charon, 1995; Elias, 1994) are useful sources of concepts which enable us to paint and trace humans as creators and manipulators of symbols in developing social contexts.

#### 2. *Sedimented habit as opaque conventional wisdom.*

Of note here is that much of the meaning we have and make becomes sedimented in/as social *habitus* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Elias, 1991), a conventional wisdom taken for granted until disjunctions might prompt processes of inter-subjective objectivation (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) within a continuing social politics of knowledge creation (Elias, 1994; Popkewitz, 1991).

#### 3. *Open-ended creative processes of contextual*

*meaning-making*

Also useful is the observation that contextual clarifying emerges amidst metaphorical play (Black, 1962; Baudrillard, 1996) and that the symbolic capital of our meanings has open-ended intergenerational origins within language and social processes that maintain steering meaning in the signifying images in/of developing narratives (Elias, 1994). This may manifest for example in increasing affect control and self-restraint in widening conservation imperatives.

#### 4. *Retracing and deconstructing perspectives and processes*

Historical artifact can be examined and text probed for the underpinning sediment of orientations in language (deconstructed) to reveal perspectives at the root of a fabrique of myth we narrate in making meaning within our developing worlds in/of words (See the works of Foucault & Derrida).

Clustered to open and scope useful dimensions of human social space and for thinking about participatory meaning-making, this brief overview is not intended as much more than a scan of some useful literature. The intellectual narratives present as a developing sweep of seemingly useful, deepening and complementary perspectives rather than radical shifts with clear ruptures and breaks that have shed past error to usher in new steering theory. Perspectives in narratives such as this are, however, often set against each other as new paradigms which consign all that came before to the baggage of history. Seen together as somewhat complementary *oeuvres* which differentiate and reorientate developing stories, they may be useful sources of sensitising perspective for illuminating environmental education processes in participatory contexts of developing risk.

For sustaining processes of social reorientation, one may need participants who narrate our stories, clarify developing risk and come to illuminate sustaining possibilities. The above sensitising concepts suggest that humans have language which signifies ideas, that interactive struggle amidst disjunctures can foster inter-subjective meaning-making to bring a conventional wisdom of sedimented habit into critical review and that accompanying metaphorical play may open new ways of seeing things.

## VOICES OF EQUAL AMPLITUDE AND A PRIVILEGING OF SUSTAINING NARRATIVE

Today, many disembodied intellectual narratives have seemingly lost sight of how humans absorb and construct steering orientation in open-ended ways amidst signifying symbolic fabric of open-ended intergenerational story. Meaning-making processes such as this are, as we have seen, notoriously fickle and may, in the present day, be experienced by many as matters of individual interpretation and thus as multiple narratives. Associated with an intellectual acknowledgement of multiple narratives is an emerging democratic perspective that all voices must be given equal amplitude and that one cannot privilege one narrative over another.

Despite the added ambivalence created here, and with participation developing with icon-like prominence, the notion of giving voice to ideas in contexts of risk amidst engaging patterns of meaning-making interaction, implicit in many notions of participatory meaning-making, merit closer scrutiny. Quite simply, grounded intersubjective talk-in-context can open and shape reflexive steering perspectives and thus, sustaining social change.

Beneath the troubling political economies of participatory narratives in South Africa examined earlier are patterns of inter-subjective activity that, for example, foster the social construction of timelines, time-trends, transect-walks and spatial maps. These activities seemingly enable people to articulate risk in intersubjective narratives which can mobilise and foster an engaging grasp of local matters. Here the social interactions around history, time and space might well foster meaning-making processes of differentiation and orientation necessary for sustaining developments, enabling, at the same time, a developing solidarity amidst agreed conservation constraint with the necessary affect control for a corresponding self-restraint.

It would seem that rational, external imposition might well shape a conservation rhetoric (symbolic capital) and yet, paradoxically, subvert the social processes necessary to shape affect control for an ethical steering of daily life in more sustaining way.

This synthesis should not be seen as theory of or for participation but simply as open-ended models for sensitising one to developing social contexts of

human interaction. As processes of change arise and are given substance and shape in developing context, so meaningful steering orientation and ethical imperative might develop in intermeshed ways as a sustaining fabric in/of everyday human social life.

#### SOME CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In South Africa, at the moment, it seems that all is fair in love, war and participatory research and curriculum development, whether these are impelled by collaborative impulse, moral imperative and institutional strategy, or contesting amalgams of these, competing to narrate the developing games.

In clarifying participation as a moral imperative, the question of under-theorising remains an open challenge. This review has looked at case experience narrative rationalisation, reviewed some sensitising perspectives on processes shaping us in/and our surroundings, and returned to developing story out of the long-term with sensitising concepts for continuing clarifying struggle. On this winding path I was fortunate to meet Bauman (1993:247) in whose company there is reassurance that

moral issues cannot be 'resolved', nor the moral life of humanity guaranteed, by the calculating and legislative efforts of reason. Morality is not safe in the hands of reason, though this is exactly what spokesmen of reason promise. Reason cannot help the moral self without depriving the self of what makes the self moral: that unfounded, non-rational, un-arguable, no-excuse-given and non-calculable urge to stretch towards the other, to caress, to be for, to live for, happen what may.

This challenging perspective gives us good 'reason' to engage an under-theorised icon in our midst, probing its origins and exposing it to searching questions, as has been attempted here. It also challenges an all too prevalent 'eyes wide shut' attitude of mind in our country, leaving open imperatives to be critically clear in continuing searching struggles in/for the sustaining company of others lest we are on the one hand, unwilling to allow diverse voices equal amplitude and on the other, unable to differentiate and privilege sustaining narrative amidst these.

Great care has been taken to leave open and to

question the notion that we need better theories to steer participatory processes of environmental education. This is not to deny the steering of reason but simply to note that clarifying discourse may need to be both about as well as located, informed and critical in developing contexts of research and change. The intellectual challenge may thus be a matter of balance and resonance amidst interacting perspectives.

Social imperatives have seldom been amenable to the rational hand of theory, more often than not being impelled to shrug off, challenge and reshape prevailing perspectives. It thus appears that, if emerging research imperatives are to shape the search for what matters, the struggle for steering theory must remain open in the turmoil of what comes to matter in developing context. One is thus not simply looking for better frameworks of theory on participatory research as a rational epistemology for more ethical research practice. What may be more appropriate are perspective, sensitising concepts and models of process which might both shed light on and shape steering struggle in developing context; an emergent epistemology in struggle shaping developing ethical practice.

The human condition of creative struggle amongst others must remain an open and participatory meaning-making enterprise. Within developing interactions risk, discontinuities, and ambivalence challenge and shape sustaining balances of constraint and self-restraint amidst steering myth that we inherit and construct as symbolic capital for reshaping struggle in the company of others. Continued participation appears to mean that all narrative and voices must be given equal amplitude in interactions that may help us probe the habitual and pressing risks in developing context. With this comes struggle amidst ambivalence and blinding ideals where sensitising tools might guide a critical eye to shaping processes within stories in tension in developing context. It is seemingly the balancing acts of continuing struggle amidst engaged passions and detouring perspectives that may offer a way forward in engaging struggle which both shapes moral perspective and comes to privilege sustaining narrative in/for steering community life in this continuing game.

Participation as an under-theorised icon, like much else, remains open to steering narrative but we need to be wary of limits lest a zealous quest for definitive steering theory subvert those dimensions of struggle that shape and sediment a developing

and hopefully sustaining humanity.

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