



Editorial: Rhizome¹ connections...

Heila Lotz-Sisitka
Rhodes University, South Africa

When writing an editorial for a journal, one is faced with many different questions. What should the focus be? What are the authors saying? What does the journal (as a whole) say? What are the conversations that are emerging amongst the papers? Are there any 'threads', any contradictions, any interesting perspectives, any challenging voices? As you run an 'editorial eye' over the papers with these questions in mind, you realise that yes, there are all of these things – there are threads, contradictions, interesting perspectives, challenging voices – and all of these 'say something' when assembled in one edition.

So what does this edition of the *SAJEE* say? In using 'rhizome connections' as a frame for this editorial I 'imagined' *interactions* as Noel Gough and Leigh Price note in their paper (this edition):

The word 'interact' infers that different components act *on/with* each other, like billiard balls. We prefer to imagine that reality and narrative are *mutually constitutive...*, because *constitution* (as both noun and verb) does not necessarily deny the singularity of *constituents*. (Gough & Price, this edition.)

In writing this editorial, I have found three 'rhizome connections' that threaded and twisted their way across this edition of the *EEASA* Journal. In highlighting and picking up on this frame, I, like Noel and Leigh, '... imagine a multiplicity of realities and narratives mutually constituting themselves like a tangle of rhizomes' (Gough & Price, this edition), and I imagine the journal playing a role in enabling narratives and realities in environmental education to mutually constitute themselves.

In exploring the mutually constitutive potential of these journal papers (and their constituent realities), and to open the possibility of interactive readings of these papers, I shape the rest of the editorial through a discussion of the three 'rhizome connections' that I identified:

- Recuperative, relational epistemologies.
- A deepening criticality evident in re-examinations of assumptions and ideals in postcolonial contexts.
- A heightened awareness of the role of education in sustaining life and livelihoods in contexts of poverty and risk.

I will not therefore introduce each of the papers in consecutive order, as is 'traditional' in journal editorials, but will rather engage some of the rhizome connections that work their way

through this journal. In doing this, I invite you to read all the papers carefully, with intent to engage these and other connections – *as mutually constitutive interactions* – evident in environmental education processes and discourse.

Rhizome One: Recuperative, Relational Epistemologies

There are a number of papers in the journal that reflect a trend in environmental education towards deliberating recuperative, relational epistemologies. In their paper addressing the near-schism between those that appear to be antagonistic to post-structuralism and deconstruction, and those that find them generative in their inquiries, Noel Gough and Leigh Price go right to the heart of human inquiry by questioning the most commonly held assumption in the research enterprise – that the social sciences require a different methodology from the natural sciences. Through giving attention to relativist (constructionist) epistemology and a stratified, realist ontology – which assumes a relational account of ontology – they suggest the same basic methodology for both the social and natural sciences, arguing that ‘... society and humans mutually transform/reproduce each other, just as nature and humans mutually transform/reproduce each other’. In doing this, they address over-simplified dialectics between ‘constructionism’ and realism which has shaped much human inquiry (including environmental education research).

In a similar, yet different way, Tšepo and Chaba Mokuku and Charles Namafe, through their two papers focussing on indigenous knowledge and metaphor, open deliberations on relations between the real and constructed in African cosmologies, and how environmental discourses have come to be constructed in particular ways in African contexts. Tšepo and Chaba Mokuku raise discussion on the limitations of working with oversimplified dichotomies that exist between conceptions of ‘Western’ and ‘Indigenous’ knowledge. At the same time, they illuminate the centrality of relational epistemology and a combination of realist/spiritual ontologies in indigenous ways of knowing as they explore local knowledge on conservation and monitoring of biological resources amongst the Lesotho Highlands communities. Charles Namafe’s paper illustrates the close relationship between the material reality of flooding and the social constructions of this material reality (through metaphor and culture), and how these are mutually constituting amongst the Lozi-speaking people in Zambia.

Daniel Babikwa’s piece on re-conceptualising power relations is particularly interesting as it, through working with a deployment notion of power (drawing on Foucault), articulates the relational way in which power circulates in development projects. His paper considers the material effects of the circulation of power in a rural agricultural development project in Uganda, again illustrating the mutually constituting nature of material reality and social constructions that emerge and change within that reality.

This theme is also evident in the debate opened in the Viewpoint paper by Alistair Chadwick and the two responses provided by Eureka Rosenberg and Johan Hattingh, on how we interpret ‘environment’ and sustainable development, and deploy these constructions in response to the ‘realities’ of various social and ecological issues evident in southern African contexts of poverty and risk. Both Rosenberg and Hattingh point to the epistemological and ontological errors and the risk inherent in recent trends towards ‘separating out’ the social from interacting socio-ecological

processes in environmental education discourse practices. Hattingh links this to a similar trend in sustainable development discourse which ‘separates out’ the social, economic and ecological as three ‘separate’ terrains for practice. The opening keynote paper by Danie Schreuder also addresses this theme, as he, through his autobiographical account, illustrates how environmental education praxis is relational and recuperative – it involves intertwined connectedness between life and society, the world, how we see and describe the world and what we do in the world.

These papers together have the potential to be mutually constitutive of a re-orientation in methodology and thinking in environmental education in southern Africa. However, in considering this fragile emerging trend in environmental education research in southern Africa and elsewhere, we can still run the risk of ‘becoming participants in dubious dialectics between naïve realism and equally naïve constructionism/constructivism’ (Gough & Price, this edition). The scope and the scale of the social transformation challenges and associated methodological and intellectual challenge in environmental education research is alluded to in Gough and Price’s paper, in Babikwa’s paper, in Jackson’s paper and in Hattingh’s illuminative response to Chadwick’s Viewpoint paper (amongst others). Jackson eloquently reflects on this challenge in his paper, in which he describes the seeking of a more ‘effective, realistic Indian environmentalism’. He notes that in this process the object of their quest changed and metamorphosed into something much wider and deeper, notably ‘the need for entirely new ways of thinking about our human situation – globally’. He argues that one of the strategies associated with this re-orientation is working with and learning from community educators, children and community members in local community contexts, and that this requires a deepening understanding of the ‘workings of the cosmic order as it manifests itself in our local ecosystem and community affairs’ (Jackson, this edition).

Rhizome Two: A Deepening Criticality Evident in Re-Examinations of Assumptions and Ideals in Post-Colonial Contexts

A number of papers in this journal show evidence of a deepening criticality in environmental education research. Daniel Babikwa’s paper focusses on the tensions, contradictions and inconsistencies in community-based environmental education programmes, and he considers critically the role of what he terms ‘defective educational theories’ in shaping community-based environmental education programmes. Through detailed descriptions he illuminates the way in which theories and philosophies are rendered defective when applied inappropriately in given contexts. The paper illuminates how critical theories often make sweeping assumptions about power and powerlessness, oppressor and oppressed. He reveals the inadequacy of these dialectical perspectives for describing power-related issues in environmental education processes. His paper presents insight into the ideological nature of education, and he argues that educators should remain critically aware and reflexive of their educational ideologies. This theme is developed in great depth in the keynote paper by Schreuder, in which he illuminates the significance of a critical reflexive stance to educational ideology in environmental education.

This ‘rhizome connection’ is also evident in the papers by Georgina Frölich and Cheryl le Roux, in which they are critically reflexive of the tutoring processes in the Namibian

environmental education certificate course programme, and they argue for a re-examination of the way in which tutoring is supported in the context of the course. The paper by Iris Chimbodza, Jan van Ongevalle and Manasa Madondo working in the St²eep programme in Zimbabwe also reflects an interest in criticality and re-examination of practice. They describe how a participatory action research process, involving ongoing action and reflection in context, has shaped their ways of working together, and they consider the value of this process in enabling ownership and a sense of empowerment. In opening the space for further criticality in their practice, they begin to explore the relationship between project, context and donor and the longer-term sustainability of their programme.

Rahema White, in her paper, deliberates critically on the paradox that arose between the participatory reflective approach promoted by a development project along the Wild Coast in South Africa and the technician ethos of the development programme that was required to 'deliver training to targets'. She suggests a pragmatic approach to resolving the tension, and suggests that in future such tensions should be 'acknowledged and exploited positively', requesting a re-examination of how approaches to education articulate with developmentalist logic.

The Viewpoint paper by Lesley Le Grange seeks to critically engage with a trend in environmental education discourse towards favouring a concept of 'environmental learning'. He discusses this critically in the light of an international trend towards adoption of a 'language of learning', and argues that uncritical associations with this broader 'language of learning' in environmental education creates associations between environmental education and the discourse of performativity characteristic of neo-liberal models of change, which, paradoxically, are contributing to the environmental crisis and increased risk and vulnerability in southern Africa. He argues for a deconstructive re-examination of this emerging trend in environmental education in South Africa.

Like Le Grange, Gough and Price, in their paper, argue for the important role that deconstruction plays in allowing us to ask questions about how our words, among other things, are transforming and reproducing our reality in ways that we might not perceive at first reading. They argue that deconstruction is an important and powerful methodology to enable ongoing self-reflexivity within the research enterprise. Katie Farrington and Kate Davis' Viewpoint paper provides a small-scale case study in deconstruction, in which they explore some of the tools of deconstruction as a strategy for developing increased criticality, arguing for a re-examination of the way in which we read media texts.

Noel Gough presents an interesting 'Review essay' on two books that recently commented in two very different ways on issues of transformation/transition in the past post-apartheid/post-colonial South African context. His review alerts us to the fact that we 'cannot be romantic about [the South African transition]' (Fakir, p.112, cited in Pieterse *et al.*, 2004; see also Gough, this edition), especially in regard to issues of environmental justice, rights-based approaches to development, and the conflicts and/or synergies between conservation and development and argues for a deeper criticality by again drawing on Fakir's argument that 'labelling South Africa's 'compromise with capital' as adopting a neoliberal agenda is 'too superficial, dismissive and unsophisticated in being able to provide an understanding of how domestic and international policies and relations mutually reinforce each other' (Gough, this edition). In his essay Gough raises the potential for further critical framings in environmental education research centred on

‘the unruly phenomenology of memory and identity’ and ‘shifting ideologies of developmentalism’, while Jane Burt’s book review raises questions on how critical (and other) stories are told and recorded in environmental education research.

Rhizome Three: A Heightened Awareness of Life and Livelihoods in Contexts of Poverty and Risk

The third rhizome connection that twists its way across this journal is introduced by Schreuder’s keynote paper. In this paper he emphasises the centrality of ‘life’ in the work of an environmental education practitioner. His story tells how, in a southern African context, ‘life’ cannot be seen without concern for poverty, livelihoods and social change. This deep concern for the social consequences of poverty and social fragmentation is the central theme of the Viewpoint paper by Chadwick, in which he begins to argue for the need to pay attention to the social consequences of modernity as a ‘key focus’ of environmental education. In recognising this consequence of modernity, Rosenberg and Hattingh argue, however, that a consideration of ‘life’ in environmental education involves the *socio-ecological* in its full relational scope and complexity. This theme is, as noted above, is also picked up by Gough and Price, in their analysis of orientations to bioregionalism as a trend shaping environmental education globally, and by Gough in his review essay, where he considers the different fragmentations, framings and representations of poverty, risk and impacts of discrimination in South Africa.

The papers by Daniel Babikwa, Rehema White, Tsepo and Chaba Mokuku, Charles Namafe, Lesley Le Grange, Alistair Chadwick, Eureka Rosenberg, Johann Hattingh, Kate Davis and Katie Farrington are all interlinked through this ‘rhizome connection’ – they all reflect a heightened awareness of life and livelihoods in contexts of poverty and risk. In considering this theme in environmental education, perhaps Jackson’s opening words alert us to the full implications for environmental education processes. He opens his paper by noting, for example that ‘... a critical examination of the way in which environmental problems are described in Indian school textbooks reveals a disturbing lack of relevance to ground realities... textbooks tend to define environmental problems in terms that suggest that they can be solved by purely technical means...’ (this edition). Similarly, Le Grange warns that environment is not ‘in the curriculum’, the curriculum merely provides a starting point for explorations of life, livelihoods and risks in context, and Rosenberg notes that:

Environmental education makes us aware of inter-relatedness: between plants and soils; between people and plants; between people, plants, prosperity and policies; and so on. It helps us understand that our actions are constrained and enabled by socio-ecological circumstances including political history, cultural traditions and economic resources... Environmental education processes must help us develop and deepen our understanding of such wider inter-relationships (this edition).

In closing this ‘rhizome inspired’ editorial, I am reminded of some words found in the seminal *Post Development Reader* edited by Majhad Rahnema in 1992:

Why We Sing...

(Por que Cantamos)

*if each hour brings its death
if time is a den of thieves
the breezes carry a scent of evil
and life is just a moving target*

you will ask why we sing

*if our finest people are shunned
our homeland is dying of sorrow
and the human heart is shattered
even before shame explodes*

you will ask why we sing

*if the trees and sky remain
as far off as the horizon
some absence hovers over the evening
and disappointment covers the morning*

you will ask why we sing

*we sing because the river is humming
and when the river is humming the river hums
we sing because cruelty has no name
but we can name its destiny
we sing because the child because everything
because in the future because the people
we sing because the survivors
and our dead want us to sing*

*we sing because shouting is not enough
nor is sorrow or anger
we sing because we believe in people
and we shall overcome these defeats*

*we sing because the sun recognises us
and the fields smell of spring
and because in this stem and that fruit
every question has its answer*

*we sing because it is raining in the furrow
and we are the militants of life
and because we cannot and will not
allow our song to become ashes*

Mario Benedetti, Uruguay, 1979, Translated by D'Arcy Martin
(in Rahnema, 1992:363)

In my view this edition of the EEASA journal engages rhizomatically, critically and courageously, like Mario Benedetti, and reflects the power in his voice and song. As Gough and Price note (referring to key thinkers) '... All of these authors (and many others) evoke methodologies of relationships and connections, of ways of rewording a world in which humans and non-humans are intimately connected in a "real" way without firm foundations or fixity, a 'reality' that is in constant movement, stratified but not polarised' (this edition).

Heila Lotz-Sisitka
Managing Editor, EEASA Journal

Endnotes

- 1 In using this metaphor, I draw on the paper by Gough and Price (this edition), who discuss the transformative potential of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concepts of rhizomatics for environmental education research. Gough and Price (this edition) note that working with these concepts invites us to 'do things differently'.

References

- Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Brian Massumi, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Pieterse, E. & Meintjies, F. (Eds) (2004). *Voices of the Transition: The Politics, Poetics and Practices of Social Change in South Africa*. Sandown: Heinemann.
- Rahnema, M. (1997). *The Post Development Reader*. Cape Town: David Philip