



Editorial Environmental Education and Educational Quality and Relevance: Opening the debate

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This edition of the Southern African Journal of Environmental Education (SAJEE) tackles a critical issue being debated across the world today, namely the question of educational quality and relevance. In 2005 the UNESCO Education for All Global Monitoring Report entitled *Education for All: The Quality Imperative* (UNESCO, 2004) was published. This global monitoring report drew attention to issues of educational quality, and raised the problem that physical access to education does not necessarily lead to epistemological access to knowledge or to relevant education being offered to learners. In the foreword to the 430-page assessment of educational quality issues, Koïchiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO, stated that ‘although much debate surrounds attempts to define educational quality, solid common ground exists ... Quality must be seen in light of how societies define the purpose of education’ (UNESCO, 2004: Foreword). He went on to explain that there seem to be two mutually agreed upon purposes for education in the world today: cognitive development of learners, and creative and emotional growth of learners to help them acquire values and attitudes for responsible citizenship. He also pointed out that ‘quality must pass the test of equity’ (UNESCO, 2004: Foreword), emphasising the importance of equity of opportunity to access and participate in education and learning. Relevant to the field of environmental education, is the inclusion of educational quality as a major thrust of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) (UNESCO, 2004).

While most of us would agree that improved educational quality is desirable, there is little discussion in the environmental education community as to what this actually means, and *how* environmental education may be seen to be improving educational quality, since we seem to by and large (somewhat uncritically) simply assume that what we do *will* improve educational quality and relevance. Early agreements such as the Tbilisi Declaration on Environmental Education, emerging out of the 1st International Conference on Environmental Education (UNESCO-UNEP, 1978) indicated the need for holistic, integrated and inter-disciplinary approaches to environmental education, and the development of critical and problem solving skills as key ‘features’ of environmental education which would (it was assumed) contribute to educational quality. The NGO Forum Principles on Environmental Education (developed alongside Chapter 36 of Agenda 21) at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 had similar yet different principles for environmental education which were more strongly oriented towards social transformation. This set of principles emphasised critical and innovative thinking, individual and collective learning, cultural interchange, systemic engagement with issues, indigenous knowledge, local culture and community participation. When considered in relation to

environmental education's possible contribution to educational quality, these principles paint a different picture to what was proposed by the Tbilisi Principles in 1977. As can be seen in the recommendations of the 4th International Conference of Environmental Education produced at the Ahmedabad Conference in India in November 2007 (30 years after Tbilisi, published in this edition of the EEASA Journal), this trend towards seeing environmental education as potentially focused on social transformation objectives continues. The Ahmedabad declaration and recommendations are far more focused and clear about influencing the *purpose* of education than were the other two sets of principles outlined above. They state that education needs to be oriented towards equitable and sustainable living, which requires a 'fundamentally different enlightenment' to the one established under modernity. The Ahmedabad Recommendations state:

We no longer need recommendations for incremental change; we need recommendations that help to radically alter our economic and production systems, and ways of living. We need an educational framework that not only follows such radical changes, but can take the lead. This requires a paradigm shift. The roots of our present education paradigm the world-over can be traced to the Enlightenment era, which gave birth to science as we know it today and influenced all areas of human thought, activity and institutions. This Enlightenment paradigm is based on the ideas that progress is rooted in science and reason, and that science and reason can unravel the mysteries of nature. It encourages us to 'know' nature in order to use, transform and consume it for our insatiable needs ... Today, we need a new Enlightenment to redefine our notion of progress. Since we have rapidly exhausted or polluted nature in pursuit of such progress, this new paradigm needs to recognise that we must live within the limits of nature's systems and that that we need to 'know' nature in order to transform societies to live sustainably in happiness, peace and with dignity, amongst themselves, and in relation to Planet Earth. (This edition, pp.201–202)

If we consider this statement from the 4th International Environmental Education Conference (along with the range of historical conference outputs, policies and international implementation schemes, etc. that have emerged since 1997 to guide educational re-orientations towards sustainability), in relation to Matsuura's statement above about quality being defined in the light of how societies define the purpose of education, it is possible to see that environmental education has a critical role to play in not only *contributing to* educational quality (i.e. improving the practice and efficacy of educational interventions), but also in *re-defining* educational quality. A question we could consider here is: If educational systems are developing learners' cognitive skills, and their values and attitudes in such a way that these are not contributing to a wider re-orientation of society towards equity and sustainability, would such education be considered *quality education*? With this in mind we could ask Koïchiro Matsuura, UNESCO and others concerned with educational quality whether quality should not also pass the test of future socio-ecological resilience and sustainability. My reading of the Ahmedabad Declaration and Recommendations (this edition), and other similar documents being produced in society such

as the Statement by the 1st International Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in African (MESA) Universities Partnership Conference held in Nairobi in November 2008 (this edition) is that it may be time that we, in our discussions on educational quality at the start of the 21st century clearly state that: 'An education system that does not take full account of the critical threats to future socio-ecological resilience and sustainability is not fulfilling its mission.' The authors in this journal all have various contributions to make to this discussion.

In 2007 the SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme, sister organisation to EEASA, commissioned a research project to explore the relationship between environmental education and educational quality, involving five universities in southern Africa (Rhodes University, the University of Zambia, the University of Zimbabwe, the University of Botswana and the Mauritius Institute of Education). A number of the papers in this edition emerge out of the research undertaken to address this question, and the wider question on educational quality, educational purpose and educational transformation raised above. The papers from authors working in this research network included in this journal (see papers by Hogan, Namafe, Shumba *et al.*, Nsubuga, Ketlhoilwe & Maila) are joined by others, also concerned with different facets and dynamics of the broader questions of educational quality, relevance and re-orientation. Each of the papers raise interesting questions related to issues of how environmental education might contribute to and/or help to redefine educational quality questions in a southern African context.

The journal opens with a paper by Moraig Peden who argues that education for sustainable development (ESD), through its interest in integrated knowledge devalues a knowledge base, particularly in relation to the natural environment. Drawing on a social realist view of knowledge, she argues for a way out of the traditionalism of 'content-based' education, and the progressivism of ESD, by proposing a disciplinary knowledge base to underpin environmental education. This she regards as being 'foundational' in teacher education and schooling, and suggests some ways of addressing what she sees as a critical problem with contemporary interpretations of ESD which appear to be relativist. Her paper forms part of a wider discussion in educational sociology on the nature and role of knowledge in education, which is in the process of rejecting social constructivist, relativist models of curriculum (Moore & Muller, 1999; Young, 2008) which became popular in democratisation processes that sought to oppose oppressive knowledge regimes of the past. Such social realist arguments are aiming to 'reclaim' knowledge as being foundational to education, while recognising that knowledge is emergent and ever-changing. Social realists argue therefore that it is not tenable to relegate knowledge defining in education to 'voice discourses'. Here we can read that the voices of communities alone are not adequate for defining educational knowledge. Moore and Muller (1999) state that giving too much attention to 'voice discourses' only serves to assert the power of some groups to claim that their *experiences* should count as *knowledge*. Moraig Peden's paper and its antecedent arguments therefore provides a useful opening paper, to be read in relation to all of the other papers in this edition of the EEASA Journal.

Eureta Rosenberg's paper deliberates the possibilities and problems of the Eco-Schools programme in South Africa, drawing on the findings of a recent evaluation of the programme. She reflects on the 'swathe' of policies that have been adopted in South Africa since 1994, and

on some of the complex and historically rooted implementation failures surrounding these policies. In particular, she provides a useful overview of some of the more recent findings related to quality failures in the South African education system, and proposes that this backdrop of quality failures is a significant influencing factor for the Eco-Schools programme. Through an evaluative analysis of the Eco-Schools programme activities and portfolio's she points out that the current practices of educational support projects such as Eco-Schools can further exacerbate the 'quality crisis' if they fail to adopt a reflexive approach in relation to the contextual quality crisis issues. Through the paper, she argues that programmes such as Eco-Schools ought to consider issues associated with educational quality in their conceptualisation and implementation, and proposes that Eco-Schools has multiple possibilities to contribute to educational quality improvements in South African schools since it addresses issues of poverty and learner motivation, whole school management and planning, it provides resources to support teaching and learning, and it enhances teacher motivation and teacher competence, as well as curriculum management and delivery. This paper provides a wide view of educational quality issues confronting schools and environmental education programmes, with interesting empirical observations.

The papers by Rose Hogan (from Tanzania), Charles Namafe (from Zambia) and Overson Shumba and his colleagues Raviro Kasembe, Cecilia Mukundu and Consolata Muzenda (from Zimbabwe) all tackle the problem of quality differently to the way that Moraig Peden and Eureka Rosenberg do. These authors, writing and researching in their respective countries (Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe) seek out how an engagement with the voices and strengths of communities, learners and local knowledge resources can help to address questions of educational quality through *contextualisation* of learning in spaces and discourses that are relevant to and valued by communities. Perhaps this is because they were all working together in the SADC REEP research programme which sought to probe how environmental education could contribute to educational quality and *relevance*. Embedded within this framing is an assumption that relevance (or the voice discourses that Moore and Muller refer to) *do* matter in education and learning, and that there is significant value in mobilising these voices in relation to educational processes and practices and more widely available knowledge. Hogan's paper seeks out a *pedagogical approach* to enhancing epistemological access (to the formal curriculum) through participation and contextualisation of knowledge and learning. Her argument is that such pedagogical processes have intrinsic value since they affirm learners' and community experience, culture and knowledge, enabling *meaningful connections* to be made between the academic and social life of the students. Drawing on the work of Basil Bernstein, she argues that 'an over-rigid curriculum [such as the Tanzanian curriculum] is a constraint to contextualisation, and presents a challenge to environmental educators'. Her paper, when read against the Peden argument, raises an interesting question for arguments that favour the reclaiming of 'foundationist' forms of knowledge, since like others before her, she argues that while wider knowledge exists in society (as Muller and Moore argue), it is the *selection* and *representation* of this knowledge which is problematic, since schools in Tanzania seem to be presented with a 'one-sided' knowledge experience through the formal curriculum. Her paper therefore provides a subtle challenge to Peden's paper, but cannot be relegated to the relativist

camp, so to speak, since she also presents a (subtle and differently framed) interpretation of social realist views of knowledge. It presents an interesting paper for those involved in Eco-Schools research programmes too.

The paper by Charles Namafe is interesting from two points of view – it challenges orientations to environmental education research that are ‘risk’ and ‘problem’ centred, and seeks out an agency-centred/strengths model for considering the question of educational quality and relevance. Namafe presents a framework for early research to examine this question, and proposes that participatory, service-learning orientations to research in universities may also be needed to fully develop such insights into educational quality and relevance. The future outcomes of the research and some methodological critiques will no doubt provide further insight into the actual contributions of this orientation to enhancing educational quality and relevance. For now the methodological thinking is an interesting opening for possible ways of reframing thinking about educational quality more broadly.

Overson Shumba and his colleagues in Zimbabwe develop a ‘voice discourse’ for communities living in poverty, within an action research framework that shares assumptions of the service learning research role outlined in the Namafe paper (a view also shared by Hogan). Their paper shows clearly what the link is between quality of education and quality of life and how a decline in opportunities for enhancing livelihoods has affected educational quality in a Zimbabwean resettlement community. Through participatory research and pro-active engagement with communities in the research process, some changes were realised that had potential to improve quality of education. Thus, like Eureka Rosenberg, Rose Hogan, and Charles Namafe, their argument is supportive of an approach that *contributes to* quality improvements through a better understanding of the *status quo* and existant conditions and challenges in schools and school communities. Research and researchers, in this context, have a real and material contribution to make. Significant in the Shumba *et al.* paper are the insights into *collective agency* as a critical factor in enhancing educational quality. This decentres the discussion on educational quality from being knowledge centred (as in the Peden paper), towards a holistic, community-integrated orientation to educational quality.

The paper by Yvonne Nsubuga refocuses our attention on questions of knowledge and quality. She investigates the way in which natural-resource management knowledge is integrated into the Grade 10 Life Sciences curriculum in South Africa. With careful empirical and analytical tools, designed from Bernstein’s sociological concepts of the pedagogic device, classification and recontextualisation, she shows how breakdowns between different pedagogical fields occur. Her research shows that the National Curriculum Statement has included high levels of natural-resource management knowledge and that this is strongly represented in official pedagogic discourse, but that this is not translated into the practice of teachers. Her research draws attention to the need to not only consider educational quality from a knowledge perspective (i.e. what knowledge is represented), but also how this knowledge is translated and contextualised (or not). The contribution of this paper is also methodological, in that it shows the need for developing carefully thought through tools for analysis of educational quality issues that are theoretically informed and empirically rigorous.

Following the cluster of papers discussed above, which all essentially deal with educational quality issues in schools and school communities, a second cluster of papers is included in the journal, this time dealing with questions of how environment and sustainability education should be integrated, conceptualised and included in higher education curricula and teaching programmes.

The paper by Justin Lupele explains that unless one takes account of the underlying causal mechanisms affecting environmental education course development activities in higher education, such initiatives might not be effectively institutionalised. This research draws attention to the structural dynamics of initiatives aimed at improving educational quality and relevance in institutions. Drawing on a similar critical realist theoretical framework, Muchaiteyi Togo deliberates how one might identify and assess the incorporation of environment and sustainability knowledge and pedagogies in university departments. Her research highlights interesting dynamics at play between existant knowledge disciplines (reflecting the social realist view that knowledge exists already), and constructivist processes of introducing new knowledge into education systems (evident in the introduction of ESD, as also discussed by Peden). Her research shows that not all disciplines are equally responsive to integrating new knowledge or new trends, and that this is sometimes related to the nature of the discipline itself, and other times to structural and agential factors. This research also points to the importance of understanding social realist views of knowledge, underlying structural and causal mechanisms, and emergence processes in thinking through environment and sustainability education contributions to education system change and improvement.

The paper by Kethoilwe and Maila considers educational quality and relevance in higher education curriculum development differently, in that they use a consultative research process to draw out stakeholder discourses to conceptualise what might count as educational quality and relevance in a new masters degree in Environmental and Sustainability Education in Botswana. Their reference point is the stakeholders who might benefit from the programme, not only the existant knowledge in the field. Their social realist view of knowledge, like that of Hogan, is 'wider than the books', so to speak, and considers *all* knowledge existing in society, not only that which is scientifically produced and represented in scientific texts (which is the most widely used form of knowledge represented in schools and universities).

Moore and Muller (1999) however, suggest that voice discourses (e.g. the discourses of the communities and stakeholders in the Kethoilwe and Maila paper), might just be experience dressed up as knowledge, and they argue that experience is an unreliable basis for deciding whether something is true. One can then extrapolate that experience on its own would be an unreliable basis for education and learning, hence Peden's argument for foundational knowledge and environmental literacy courses in teacher education programmes. For that reason, Kethoilwe and Maila's point that this might enhance existing knowledge and discourse on what might be a quality curriculum, is an important one, and their commitment to both local *and* global or wider discourses indicates that they share a social realist knowledge framework with Peden, although they are not as explicit about the form of activities that they would implement as Peden is. Michael Young (2008), one of the authors that Peden draws on to make her argument, argues for a form of epistemology which he calls *social realism*. He

claims that this addresses the educational dilemma of a curriculum being given in its entirety, or a curriculum based only on voice discourses and experience. He argues that social realist accounts of knowledge take the emergent properties of knowledge into account (i.e. how experience, context and such factors influence knowledge) *as well as* the wider social basis of knowledge (i.e. the longer term existence of knowledge, its disciplinary structure, etc.). Thus, through the Ketlhoilwe and Maila paper, we return to the opening question on educational quality provided by Peden.

The last research paper in the journal is a paper by Jan van Ongevalle and his colleagues Huib Huyse, Steff Deprez, Peter van Petegem and Iris Jane-Mary Chimbodza from the Zimbabwe Secondary Teacher Training Environmental Education Programme. Their concern is how evaluation and monitoring can enhance participation and therefore quality-relevant outcomes in an environmental education programme. They deliberate a new strategy for such evaluation work that they have been working with, namely Outcome Mapping. Like the Namafe paper, there is still more to learn from the start-up work that they report on in this methodological paper; particularly interesting might be how these methodologies contribute *to* enhanced quality of learning in environmental education.

The journal wraps up with two Viewpoint papers. The first is a short paper by Lesley le Grange, who discusses the nature of environmental justice as an environmental discourse. He draws on an earlier paper by Noel Gough who raised questions around educational 'quality' as an 'order word' (both Gough and Le Grange draw on Deleuze and Guittari (1994) to frame their arguments on 'order-words', which are words that are linked to social obligations with implicit presuppositions implicit in them). Gough (2007:97) argues that order words such as 'quality' have performative effects, and influence practice. We should therefore not ask 'what quality *means* but ask how it *works* and what it *does* or *produces* (or prevents) in specific locations'. Le Grange debates environmental justice in this way, as an 'order word' with performative effects. He sees it relevant to do so because environmental justice has been included in the South African National Curriculum Statement, which implies that it ought to become part of the discursive terrain of all subjects, influencing the purpose and outcomes of education. Although he does not explicitly state it, his discussion could potentially contribute to thinking about how educational quality comes to be defined through the concepts and 'order words' that are privileged in framing what education *ought to* promote (e.g. environmental justice). What is also interesting to do from the perspective of educational quality, is to examine Nsubunga's empirical findings on recontextualisation of policy in the light of Le Grange's claim that teachers 'analyse policies rhizomatically' (this edition), and Peden's view that there is a need for foundational environmental literacy in teacher education, and Hogan, Namafe and Shumba's arguments for contextualised forms of enabling educational quality. This makes for a rich terrain for debating the relationship between environmental education and educational quality, which is why this Editorial is titled 'Opening the debate', and why the sub-title of this journal is 'Educational Quality on the Agenda'.

The last Viewpoint paper is a short paper that I produced as an introductory note to the two sets of conference recommendations that are published in this edition of the journal. The paper deliberates the value and 'unstated purpose' of conference recommendations within

a broader trajectory of social change. It argues that such conference outcomes are useful for tracking changes in a field, and for 'marking out' the terrain for guiding transformative thinking and practice, and as such are critical tools for new social movements such as the environmental movement to understand their praxis within an historicised frame.

The two sets of conference recommendations that follow this short Viewpoint paper are: the conference declaration and recommendations from the 4th International Environmental Education Conference in Ahmedabad, India, produced in November 2007, and the Conference statement and recommendations from the 1st International Conference on Mainstreaming Environment and Sustainability in Africa Universities Partnership (MESA), produced in November 2008. These two sets of conference recommendations are published in the journal to enable environmental educators in southern Africa (and elsewhere) to review the field of environmental education in the light of new developments. As indicated in the opening paragraphs of this editorial, they are also useful for thinking through the question of how we should be contributing to and re-defining discussions on educational quality in a southern African context, and in Africa and the world more widely, at the start of the 21st century.

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