

Ghosts in Australian Environmental Education

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The *Australian Journal of Environmental Education (AJEE)*, first published in 1984, is a rich source for investigating the history of environmental education in Australia, as it has sampled research and writings in the field since the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) was established in 1980. The journal captures some of the ghosts that haunt our field; as Mrs Alving says in Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* (Act II):

It is not only what we have inherited from our fathers and mothers that exists again in us, but all sorts of old dead ideas and all kinds of old dead beliefs and things of that kind. They are not actually alive in us; but there they are dormant all the same, and we can never be rid of them. Whenever I take up a newspaper and read it, I fancy I see ghosts creeping between the lines. There must be ghosts all over the world ... (Ibsen, 1881/1964)

Within many of the articles published in the *AJEE* there are dormant ghosts that the authors may not even necessarily acknowledge, and there are vestiges of old ideas and beliefs there too. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as we can learn from the past in order to plan for the future.

In this article, I selectively trace some of the ghosts in Australian environmental education as part of a history of the field as reflected in the *AJEE* over the past 30 years.

Early Ghosts

In the first issue of *AJEE*, Russell Linke (1984), the second president of AAEE (1982–1984) and now one of the field's actual ghosts, having died much too young in 1995, reflected on past developments and future concepts in environmental education. In his article, which was based on his concluding comments to the Second AAEE National Conference in 1982, he summarised some of the key research and curriculum issues facing the field, many of which remain as ghosts on our agenda today:

- the nature and objectives of environmental education — either as a movement or individual activities or programs;
- the need to distinguish between the outcomes that environmental education seeks to develop and the theoretical and inevitably simplistic models of those processes by which those outcomes are achieved;
- adapting curriculum resources to local community needs;
- practical issues of timetabling and administrative inconvenience, as well as academic territoriality and the demarcation of traditional disciplines;

- systematic research on curriculum and teaching strategies;
- the need for specific environmental studies courses in universities and for all universities courses to include environmental awareness and understanding;
- identifying the level of environmental awareness in TAFE courses;
- researching the nature and extent of present environmental emphasis in non-formal education;
- finding the most effective ways to promote throughout the whole community a sound environmental ethic;
- finding more effective ways of reaching the educationally disadvantaged community (women, certain migrant groups, Aboriginal people, and those generally from rural and from lower socio-economic areas);
- strategies for teaching of values and attitudes, the resolution of conflicting views and for taking action, which are so different from teaching by precept and rational discussion;
- strategies for assessing students' attitudes and behaviours.

In the second issue of *AJEE*, Annette Greenall (1985), the then current (third) president of AAEE (1984–1986), provided an update on the development of environmental education in Australia, and particularly referenced the National Conservation Strategy for Australia (NCSA; Department of Home Affairs and Environment, 1984) as providing a new direction for the field. AAEE, through the incumbent president, Russell Linke, and other representatives had been party to the consensus that developed the NCSA; and the AAEE had high hopes for the prominence given to education in the strategy leading to more attention and funding for environmental education.

The next review of the status of, and challenges for, the field of environmental education in Australia came from Peter Fensham (1990), the first president of AAEE (1980–1982), in his discussion of developments and challenges in Australian environmental education. However, while Linke was wide ranging in his reflection on the past and future of the field, Fensham focused on the place of environmental education in the Australian school curriculum, and specifically at the Year 11 and Year 12 levels in Victoria. Fensham provided a useful analysis of the politics surrounding the survival of Environmental Studies as a separate subject in the Victorian senior secondary curriculum and the opportunities for the inclusion of environmental education in other senior secondary science subjects.

The first analysis of articles published in *AJEE* was undertaken by Andrew and Malone (1995) in what was called the journal's 10th year, but was actually the 12th, with a review of approximately 80 articles from the first 11 years. These articles were organised into seven categories, with many articles appearing in more than one category:

- Community Participation and Education;
- Conservation Education;
- Literary/Book Reviews;
- Philosophy/Policy;
- Professional Development;
- Research/Evaluation;
- Teaching Practice.

As perhaps reflects the emerging nature of the field and the broad brief for the journal outlined by the first and second editors (Carter, 1984; Robottom, 1987), the categories with the most articles were 'Philosophy/Policy' (37 entries) and 'Teaching Practice' (44 entries) followed by 'Research/Evaluation' (21 entries).

A Ghost We Should Not Forget

Although he was never directly published in *AJEE*, Bill Stapp (with his wife Gloria) wrote a summary of environmental education in Australia for the AAEE newsletter in 1983 (Stapp & Stapp, 1983). He addressed the 1970 Australian Academy of Science conference on Education and the Human Environment (Stapp, 1970) where his 'presentation helped to provide both a political and an educational impetus for the development of environmental education in Australia in the early 1970s' (Gough, 2001, p. 20). He also addressed the 1982 AAEE conference, which provided many of the first articles in *AJEE*. Most significantly, he led environmental education developments at UNESCO during the formative years (1974–1977), and influenced many environmental educators in Australia and elsewhere.

Newer Ghosts

The emergence of education for sustainability created a new impetus for clarifying what the field is about, and this is reflected in a range of articles in the *AJEE* by, for example, Fien (1997, 1999/2000), Tilbury (2004) and Gough (2006). Although these discussions took the field back to debating its nature and objectives, and in many ways created an identity crisis, other themes continued to be pursued through the pages of *AJEE*: case studies of practices; early childhood, primary, secondary, VET and higher education; community education; program descriptions; teacher education; attitudes and behaviours; viewpoints; curriculum planning and politics; to name just a few.

What is obvious is that the field has moved away from some of the ghosts of the early days, such as seeing a tension with science education, and it is now exploring a range of disciplinary relationships. There is also an increasing acknowledgment of Indigenous and other perspectives being published, as well as a range of educational research methodologies being reflected in research reports.

A Final Reflection

It would be an interesting exercise to attempt to categorise the first 30 years of articles in the *AJEE*. Would the spread reflect the first editors' intentions for a breadth of writing from the field, or has the journal become more oriented to just publishing research articles in more recent ERA (Excellence in Research for Australia) times? What ghosts would we find 'creeping between the lines'?

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