

state of the soil, the durability of native flora, and the impact of European farming while justifying his unconventional farming techniques. But he also admitted a love for the land – ‘I see the destruction of this country and I dare say somehow that affects you deeply’. While some storytellers provide arguments of utility to explain their relationship with the land, they all acknowledge the intrinsic value of the environment.

Listen to the People, Listen to the Land provides a weight of stories from people with an intuitive respect for the rights of nature. By identifying with their tales, the reader taps into this intuition. This fosters the development of the environmental ethic that environmental educators see as essential for a sustainable future. 🎧

References

- Charlesworth, M. 1990, ‘Nature’s rights’ in L. J. Webb & J. Kikkawa (eds), *Australian Tropical Rainforests: Science-Values- Meaning*, CSIRO, Melbourne, pp. 176-9.
- Fien, J. 1993, *Education for the Environment: Critical Curriculum Theorising and Environmental Education*, Deakin University, Geelong, Victoria.
- Sinatra, J. & Murphy, P. 1999, *Listen to the People, Listen to the Land*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, Victoria.

Steve Murphy

Assumption College Kilmore, Victoria

Salt of the Earth: Farming and Sustaining the Soil Beyond. Grain Research and Development Corporation 2000. Canberra, Media Associates

Salinity has long been recognised as a major problem facing rural areas and farming communities specifically. For many years farmers and scientists have been working together to try to counteract these problems. Innovative farming programs like laser farming and planting salt tolerant trees were implemented into some rural areas for example, the Goulburn-Broken region (Blake & Cock 1990). In 1987 a community program called Saltwatch was established to raise community awareness about salinity and other catchment issues (Kruger 1996). So it is perhaps not surprising that the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC), formed in 1990, has also joined the fight against salinity by attempting to increase community awareness of this very real ecological problem.

Salt of the Earth is a video resource with accompanying study guide/teachers’ notes sponsored by the GRDC and produced by journalist Maria Taylor (aka *media associates*). The producers claim that the resource is suitable for audiences of senior secondary and tertiary students, graingrowers and the general populace. A broad and ambitious aim to begin with, although one can see how the video can be adapted accordingly.

SALT OF THE EARTH explores three of the main aspects of soil and land degradation in Australia - salinity, soil erosion plus loss of fertility as well as soil acidity in the Australia’s major cropping zones - north, west and south (GRDC 2000, p. 3).

The video itself is 35 minutes long and begins by situating salinity and its ramifications in relation to the urban environment. It goes on to explain what salinity is; how historically farmers have altered the Australian ecosystem irrevocably through large-scale land clearance and European farming methods; and the paleogeographic basis for the fragility of Australian soils and the great store of salt underground.

Finally, the viewer is taken into three case studies where salinity is being combated, one from each of the major cropping zones: Darling Downs, Queensland; Corrigin Shire, Western Australia; and The Coorong, South Australia. Each of these case studies takes

a closer look at aspects of soil degradation, and what is being done by farmers, aided by research, towards sustainable land management and to ‘heal the land’. ...

Various issues ranging from the big questions of sustainability, through the economics of farming and landcare, to ‘who pays’ are raised in the course of the case studies (GRDC 2000, p. 5).

The accompanying notes to the video are 20 pages long (folded A3 pages with no staple and so very easy to photocopy). The notes go through the issues, what the National Dryland Salinity Program is (it’s a collaborative research and development effort that investigates the solutions to the problem of dryland salinity) and then goes on to suggest some teaching strategies for using the video resource. In this section, the notes recommend dividing the film into sections for review, and providing Video-time cued questions and discussion points.

Very clear explanations of the background of the issues are given, e.g. vegetation clearance, wind and water erosion, salinity, acidity, acid sulfate soils and other soil problems. Perhaps most beneficial for Environmental Science teachers is the section explaining the decision making process and the key players and interested parties involved in this issue. Although Taylor does go on to attempt to show how *Salt of the Earth* can fit into an educative curriculum, whether it be Science, SOSE or Technology. Outcomes for each curriculum are provided and related back to the Curriculum Corporation’s publications accordingly.

Finally, further references are provided including a website list and key readings for tertiary students (although these could be used for senior secondary levels).

Upon reflection of the producers claim regarding target audiences I decided to show the video resource to a class of

final year pre-service teachers, who were about to embark on careers in senior secondary teaching (mainly in environmental science). By definition they were the target audience on two (three?) counts. The following discussion was both energetic and enlightening, covering a broad range of issues which, in itself, indicated that the resource was a success in instigating discussion about salinity and its related problems. Many students claimed they learnt a lot from the video. All had something to say about the accompanying resource.

It was generally decided that the use of Roy Slaven as narrator was a clever move. Slaven is a modern icon who captures his audience's attention with his enthusiasm. A major feat given that it is mainly graingrowers (and perhaps geologists) that find soil of interest. Slaven (aka John Doyle) links the issue of soil degradation and salinity back to topics the students can relate to, in this case, foxy ovals.

The video covered real and relevant issues where real people were working out practical solutions, and explaining how they came to these. Again, connections were made to the secondary classroom through examples of students undertaking experiments in the field in conjunction with experimental farmers.

The use of real farmers gave a feel for the issues that confront families faced with the problems of salinity and the resultant soil degradation. This, in turn, gave good view of what some farmers are doing and made the entire problem real to those that are not confronted with the problem on a daily basis.

Further connections were made with secondary students (and the pre-service teachers) through the use of the young female scientist as the 'field expert' who held the authority of knowledge. Video footage of senior school students (overlaid by the narrator discussing the issue) reinforced the connection. This made the issue relevant to their generation and, therefore, made it their problem as well.

The 'current' status of the presentation was given import through the use of the press releases that reflect/indicate that this is a *current* issue and therefore of *current* importance to students/people in general.

On the other hand, the pre-service teachers suggested that if this was targeted at all senior secondary students then the argument should have been urbanised. For example, taking all the products off a shelf at a supermarket that were produced in the affected areas, to represent the potential ramifications land degradation could have for everyone, not just those on the land. This would further enable urban-based students to relate to the problem.

In addition, it was suggested that issues like the population crisis and how this can affect salinity (i.e. Australia is an old and fragile land, to over-populate would lead to major land degradation problems) could have been touched on briefly by the narrator, thereby allowing teachers to explore other relevant issues.

The use of VENN diagrams was beneficial and quite appropriate, enabling a clear explanation of how/why salinity occurs to be covered. Further visual examples along this line would, however, have been appropriate in order to explain these issues at a deeper level.

The video is highly successful in getting across the seriousness of the issue. It is suitable for basing a unit around, although not perhaps for showing as a whole to students. If the video were broken up over a couple of lessons it would be suitable for VCE Environmental Science or for first year agricultural students. Alternatively video sections could be used to summarise lessons on salinity, acidification, land degradation, erosion, etc.

The accompanying manual is an ideal students/teachers manual that offers a good exploration of the history of salinity and provides a useful resource of potential websites and other references to follow up for teachers and students alike. Although the notes are extremely useful and offer a range of potential exercises and activities, it has the potential to lead to lazy teaching. A good teacher will, however, use the resource to build up an interesting and exciting unit of work on salinity for their VCE Environmental Science students. 🍌

References

- Blake, T. & P. Cock 1990, *Salinity and Community*. Awareness and action for salinity control in the Goulburn-Broken region: Towards a community development approach, Environmental Report no 30. Graduate School of Environmental Science, Monash University, Clayton.
- Grains Research and Development Corporation 2000, *Salt of the Earth: Farming and Sustaining the Soil Beyond 2000*. Study Guide/Teachers' Notes. Media Associates, Dickson, ACT.
- Kruger, T. 1996, Saltwatch. *Eingana: A Journal of Environmental Education*, Victorian Association for Environmental Education vol. 19, no. 4.

Leissa Kelly

Deakin University, Melbourne

Overton, J. and Scheyvens, R. (eds) 1999, *Strategies for Sustainable Development: Experiences from the Pacific*, University of NSW Press, ISBN 0-86840-689-9

As indicated by the title, this book focuses on the opportunities for sustainable development, by drawing on the experiences of people from the Pacific region. More particularly, the authors emphasise the importance of local experiences. As they say '... sustainable development seems mostly concerned with ideas which focus on global issues ("think global..."), and translating these into a myriad of small-scale activities ("...act local"), than those which arise from the multiplicity