

EDITORIAL

AJEE Special Issue 2016 Australian Association for Environmental Education Conference: ‘Tomorrow Making — Our Present to the Future’

The 19th Biennial Conference for the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) was a wonderful milestone for any national organisation. Our South Australian hosts were very excited to see us all descend on Adelaide in September 2016 to take up their offer of ‘Tomorrow Making’. ‘Our Present to the Future’ was four days filled with considering what we were working on and what we are working towards, both individually and collectively. Youth presentations, collegial collaborations, and sharing of goodwill and thought resulted in a generative conference, just like we have come to expect from environmental educators. Sally and I are pleased to maintain the tradition of guest editing the AJEE Special Issue, showcasing six papers as a representation of the knowledge shared, considered, adapted, and devised at the conference.

The Research Symposium was the first event of the conference and, following suit, our first article in this issue, ‘Participating in Research Symposia: Tales of Re-Inscription, Disruption, and Inclusivity’, by Sally Birdsall and Peta White, drew on some critical reflections from both the AAEE and the New Zealand Association for Environmental Education (NZAAEE) 2016 Conference Research Symposia. The purpose and program structure, and the opportunities for researchers to communicate and share their ideas, as well as build their research community and frame their field, were considered. The findings indicate that while these research symposia called for disruptions and inclusivity, there are still some spaces that are not well taken up in the environmental and sustainability education field. The voices of emerging researchers and Indigenous people could be welcomed into these spaces more successfully. We also used some visual representations to explore the content of each symposia. Recommendations for ways in which the environmental and sustainability research field can be grown through research symposia were offered.

Fortunately for us, the second paper is voiced from one silenced space, as a group of emerging researchers collaboratively wrote ‘Becoming Researchers: Making Academic Kin in the Chthulucene’. Maia Osborn, Blanche Verlie, Sherridan Emery, Kim Beasy, Bianca Coleman, Kevin Kezabu, and Jennifer Nicholls used the hashtag #aaeeer (Australian Association for Environmental Education Emerging Researchers) to consolidate as a group in response to the 2014 AAEE Conference in Tasmania. This article uses Haraway’s notion of Chthulucene as a lens for suggesting new ways of enculturating young academics into the environmental and sustainability education field. Sharing narratives from young researchers, this group used a variety of strategies, including virtual/digital platforms, to build ‘kin’ or community within emerging researchers. They argue for the value of establishing supportive traditions rather than conforming to the reinscription of destructive neoliberalist cultures that currently exist in academia.

From here, the focus shifts to the main AAEE conference. But first we want to pause on a bridge between research for and about researchers, and research for and about

practitioners to include youth as another potentially silenced voice. Many young people were vibrant and active throughout the AAEE conference (unlike the research symposia). Maddi Hegarty (Adelaide High School) presented a morning keynote with enthusiasm on the second day of the conference. She shared a narrative about her activist practice, and an excerpt from this follows:

One day, a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking up and gently throwing things into the ocean. Approaching the boy, he asked: 'Young man, what are you doing?' The boy replied, 'Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them back, they'll die.'

The man laughed to himself and said, 'Do you realise there are miles of miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can't make any difference.' After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the surf, then smiling at the man, he said, 'I made a difference to that one.'

I believe this story captures the essence of creating change. All around the world we hear voices of doubt telling us that global warming is happening too fast for your actions to be of any worth or that there are too many people around the world who don't care about the environment — why should your efforts matter? Or for me personally, 'There are over 900 students at Nuriootpa High School. It's a lost cause trying to implement change in a place where students don't care.'

When I first joined the Youth Environment Council of South Australia (YEC), run by the lovely Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges National Resources Management staff, of whom some are here today, I believed those voices of doubt. I believed those doubts and let them evolve into my thinking. I felt like I was the only one in my school who cared about our impact on the environment ...

I've realised that, rather than the first stages being planning for a project, the first stages need to be planning for a good team. We need to invest in people; for it is only then that change will blossom.

But what we have done is looked at the bigger picture. We're realising that change doesn't happen immediately in a school; that we sometimes need to suppress the feeling of urgency so that we implement effective small changes that have longevity. We're changing a culture; not simply implementing new bins without explanation. Just as the little boy threw starfish back into the ocean one by one, we're changing a culture one student at a time ...

I'd like to end with a quote that I feel sums up my thoughts. Beth Clark so wisely states, 'People who really want to make a difference in the world usually do it, in one way or another. And I've noticed something about people who make a difference in the world: They hold the unshakeable conviction that individuals are extremely important, that every life matters. They get excited over one smile. They are willing to feed one stomach, educate one mind and treat one wound. They aren't determined to revolutionise the world all at once; they're satisfied with small changes. Over time, though, the small changes add up. Sometimes they even transform cities and nations, and yes, the world.'

We are those people. Our actions, whether something seemingly small like implementing a bin system or throwing a starfish into the ocean, have a powerful ripple effect; and together, we can make a huge difference. Thank you.

Maddi is a self-named change maker.... And, if you want to see the presentation as it was delivered, please view <https://vimeo.com/185875529>.

Located well within the conference, the third article addresses important environmental challenges currently taking place and welcomes Indigenous voices (another silenced space) to explore partnerships between formal school and tertiary students and educators, state government officers, and a local tourism provider in offering place-based educational experiences. Hilary Whitehouse, Snowy Evans, Tanya Doyle, Marie Taylor, Juanita Sellwood, and Ruth Zee offer 'A Sea Country Learning Partnership in Times of Anthropocenic Risk: Offshore Coral Reef Education and Our Story of Practice'. They assert that 'Offshore environmental education and higher quality marine education is increasingly important in the Anthropocene, when Australian reefs are subject to the pressures of climate change and other impacts that diminish their resilience.' The learning experiences in situ provide opportunities for all to see and feel the impacts of climate change through coral bleaching and to unpack the implications of our actions through multi-generational and multi-organisational conversations.

The fourth article explores formal education and community partnerships while also including necessary and important Indigenous voices. Written by Thea DePetris and Chris Eames, 'A Collaborative Community Education Model: Developing Effective School-Community Partnerships' describes an approach to environmental restoration by creating new, or modifying existing, school-community partnerships. The Collaborative Community Education Model was used to analyse the successes, enablers, and barriers of a such a partnership in a pilot form. This article identifies key factors that enabled partnership to 'work', yet also highlighted some barriers that need to be addressed. The evaluation of the 18-month pilot project (Kids Greening Taupō) revealed stakeholder insights and perspectives through participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis.

Moving from analyses of some exciting programs to considerations of how and why teachers enact environmental and sustainability education, the fifth article draws on two different PhD research projects. Jennifer Nicholls and Marcia Thorn report on 'Queensland Teachers' Relationship With the Cross-Curriculum Priority Sustainability'. Exploring teachers' knowledge, understandings, and beliefs about curriculum priorities and the situational context of teaching and learning in Queensland schools, this article is important because it highlights a lack of uptake of this cross-curriculum priority: 'Queensland teachers participating in both studies indicated strong support for the inclusion of sustainability within formal curriculum; however, this strong support did not translate into practice in most cases.' The lack of uptake is due to various factors — for example, C2C, NAPLAN, and unsupportive leadership — and identifies that further work needs to be done to integrate sustainability into Queensland school programs.

Along similar lines of teacher enactment, Deborah Bandele-Dada, Chris Eames, and Nigel Calder authored the sixth article, 'Impact of Environmental Education on Beginning Preservice Teachers' Environmental Literacy'. Based in New Zealand, this research reports that confidence to teach environmental and sustainability education increased as a result of student engagement in a course in their undergraduate degree. Perceptions of preservice teachers' preparedness to teach before and after a unit in environmental and sustainability education were measured: 'Increases in the strength of correlations between environmental knowledge and affective dispositions, as well as the emergence of correlation between environmental knowledge and intention to act,

were observed upon completing the environmental education paper.' There was a desire to use this research in future curriculum design, as well as in teaching and learning practice, to promote environmental literacy of preservice teachers.

These six articles reflect much of the conversation at the conference. Our thanks to those researchers who went to the effort of developing their conference presentations into articles for this special issue. Sally and I look forward to taking up the role of AAEE Conference Special Issue Guest Editors again for the 2018 Conference. Please look out for the call for papers that will be coming soon and consider framing a proposal that will lead to the development of a published article.

Best wishes

Peta White & Sally Birdsall