

EDITORIAL

Courage! Cross-Disciplinary Connections & Boundary Crossings in Environmental Education and its Research

Dorothy: Your Majesty, If you were King, you wouldn't be afraid of anything?
Lion: Not nobody, not nohow!
Tin Man: Not even a rhinoceros?
Lion: Impossorous!
Dorothy: How about a hippopotamus?
Lion: Why, I'd trash him from top to bottomamus!
Dorothy: Supposin' you met an elephant?
Lion: I'd wrap him up in cellophant!
Scarecrow: What if it were a brontosaurus?
Lion: I'd show him who was King of the Forest!
All Four: How?
Lion: How?
Lion: Courage! What makes a King out of a slave?
Courage! What makes the flag on the mast to wave?
Courage! What makes the elephant charge his tusk, in the misty mist
or the dusky dusk?
What makes the muskrat guard his musk?
Courage! What makes the sphinx the seventh wonder?
Courage! What makes the dawn come up like thunder?
Courage! What makes the Hottentot so hot? What puts the "ape" in
apricot?
What have they got that I ain't got?
All Four: Courage!
(*Baum, 1900*)

This special issue is a product of the 2012 Australian Association for Environmental Education national conference, entitled 'Creating Our next Courageous Steps'. The intention of the conference was to exemplify and inspire courage in environmental education. From the outset it is important to acknowledge that courage is a highly idiosyncratic virtue. Winston Churchill notably once said 'courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities ... because it is the quality that guarantees all others'.

This issue brings together an eclectic assortment of academic contributions that have been written by authors working across and between disciplinary spaces. There is

much courage in such work as it is increasingly difficult to do what Dillon (2008, p. 257) describes as ‘crossing boundaries, making connections, moving and relocating ideas’. He adeptly depicts the process as ‘a pedagogy of connection’ and ‘boundary crossings’. While the research represented in this special issue does not proclaim to make large leaps or steps forward in environmental education and its research, perhaps what it does do is push, tug or possibly antagonise one to further contemplate the ‘current’ and ‘next’ disciplinary connections, crossings and thresholds in environmental education. Let’s begin ...

Wilks and Rudner begin the issue with a thoughtful article capturing children and young people’s voices in the urban planning process. The authors bring to the fore the inherent and problematic nature of the decision-making process in urban planning whereby consultation is lacking and devoid of children and young people’s civic participation. The authors reiterate Corkery et al. (2006, p. 8) charge that ‘to ignore the voice of young people in the creation of the built environment risks ignorance in pretending to know what is meaningful and relevant to them ... [thus] we must be conscious of involving and empowering young people in the creation of their world’. Through the guise of several case studies, the authors generate creative dialogue about the urban design process and the nexus between researchers, practitioners and children and young people in doing so.

Hill follows with an exploration of the intersections and tensions between sustainability education and outdoor learning. He problematises experience, place, wilderness and outdoor education as modes of sustainability education. The article is informed by Hill’s doctoral research where he worked with eight educators in Aotearoa New Zealand to critically examine and re-envision school-based outdoor education through sustainability perspectives. He concludes that ignoring local places in lieu of more remote, pristine and exotic places as sites of outdoor learning disrupts efforts for meaningful learning in sustainability through presenting a dichotomous view of ‘nature’.

The remaining articles in this special conference issue focus on higher education or the ‘university’. As a prelude, Thomas and Matthias discuss the role of capabilities and their articulation in universities, and highlight the tensions between what is sought by industry and what is needed to embed sustainable development actions into industry through the change agents graduated from our universities. Sidiropoulos, Wex, and Sibley bring focus to tertiary international students and the impact of sustainability interventions on their environmental views and attitudes. The next two articles offer a unique student voice, where Sloan, Davila and Malbon report upon their respective experiences as three students employed as tutors in teaching sustainability within The Fenner School of Environment and Society at the Australian National University. And the final article by Wahr, Underwood, Adams and Prideaux present the academic transformative experiences of three of the authors in a sustainability curriculum change process as part of a Bachelor of Arts (Textile Design) degree program. The latter four articles engage with sustainability in higher education from different disciplinary vantage points; their research typically works from or within a ‘sustainability current’ as Sauv  (2005) identifies. Sauv  (2005) classifies fifteen different orientations or ‘currents’ of environmental education whereby sustainability is but one, arguing that:

An overview of the literature in the field of environmental education shows that, despite their shared concern for the environment and their recognition of the central role of education in enhancing human-environment relationships, various authors (researchers, professors, educators, facilitators, associations, organizations, etc.) adopt widely differing discourses on environmental education, and propose diverse ways of practicing educative activity in this field. (p. 11)

Sauvé's (2005) work is a timely reminder of the existing, different and emerging discourses that currently constitute environmental education, and indeed the difficulties inherent in making pedagogical connections and crossing boundaries which the authors of this special issue certainly endeavour to do; albeit with courage.

References

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