

REVIEWS

Joy A. Palmer 1998, *Environmental Education in the 21st Century: Theory, Practice, Progress and Promise*, Routledge, London.

'This is not a recipe book', Joy Palmer announces in the opening sentence of her Preface (p. ix), yet much of its contents seem to contradict her assertion. For example, Part II presents the 'subject knowledge' of environmental education in a form that resembles a list of ingredients, and the models Palmer presents in Parts IV and VI suggest ways of assembling, blending and transforming these ingredients into an environmental education curriculum. I must emphasise here that I see nothing wrong with using the term 'recipe' as an analogy for much curriculum work: a curriculum is first imagined as a possibility and then specified in such a way that it can be subjected to experiment. Like a recipe, any curriculum that is offered publicly is in one sense a report on the experiment, yet it also remains hypothetical and allows—and indeed encourages—variation by others who try it out for themselves. Palmer's book may very well be most useful if it is read as a collection of recipes of this kind, and to assert otherwise seems to me to be both disingenuous and misleading.

The token millennialism of the title, *Environmental Education in the 21st Century*, also is misleading since this book is anchored firmly in the 20th century. Indeed, in some important respects it barely even ventures into the 1990s, with the leading-edge research of a number of well-known scholars being represented by publications from the 1980s and early '90s rather than by their more recent work.

Although *Environmental Education in the 21st Century* is presented as a single-author volume, about a third of its contents are actually written by people other than Palmer. The quality of the reports and case studies provided by these other authors varies considerably, and the overall result is somewhat patchy, not the rich tapestry that may have been intended.

The book is divided into six parts. Part I, History and Development of Environmental Education, traverses very familiar territory. The emphasis here is on the international mega-events—Stockholm, Belgrade, Tbilisi, the Brundtland Commission and *Agenda 21*—and the British scene (Palmer is based at the University of Durham).

Part II, The Global Agenda, makes the rather curious claim that the 'subject knowledge' of environmental education can be equated with the global environmental issues identified in *Agenda 21* and other international policy documents. Much of this section consists of topic headings (e.g. 'Food and agriculture', 'Tropical forests') followed by long lists of dot pointed propositional statements (many quoted directly from *Agenda 21*).

Part III, Perspectives on Theory and Research in Environmental Education, is one of the more readable sections of the book, and provides brief reviews of the literature of sustainable development, approaches to environmental improvement (a brief comparison of 'conservative' versus 'radical' reform agendas), the so-called rhetoric-reality gap in educational practice, and trends in environmental education research. These brief literature reviews are useful as far as they go, but have two limitations. First, as noted above, the trends in theory and research represented here rarely go beyond the early 1990s (e.g. one list of research approaches that might broaden the base of environmental education research is supported by a number of citations, none of which is dated later than 1991, despite several of the authors listed having produced much more recent work; see p. 122). Secondly, Palmer tends to report debates rather than participate in them; she calls sustainable development 'a political minefield' but takes no political stance on this issue herself (this sense of self-effacement is amplified by Palmer often referring to herself in the third person, and by her persistent use of the passive voice).

Part IV, Environmental Education: Structure and Practice, presents what Palmer calls 'an integrated model' for planning environmental education programs. The model is prescriptive, but its justification is provided for the most part by exhortatory statements ('environmental education should provide experiences of... etc.') and taken-for-granted assumptions (such as assumed 'natural linkages in the learning process'). Palmer's presentation of this model is followed by four case studies of 'good practice' (from four different countries), written by other authors, that she calls 'applications' of her model—although the sense in which these case studies can be construed as 'applications' (or even illustrations) of her model is nowhere made explicit.

Part V, The Global Scene, consists of descriptions of environmental education practices by invited contributors from 15 countries. The two reports from the countries with which I am most familiar—Australia and South Africa—are too idiosyncratic and selective for my taste: both omit significant developments in curriculum and research (and, in the case of South Africa, ignores any practical—as distinct from policy—developments in the wake of this country's transition to majority rule).

Part VI, Towards Progress and Promise in the Twenty-First Century, begins with a review of contributions to what Palmer calls a 'radical rethinking' of environmental education. Two major difficulties with this sub-section are that (i) some of work Palmer cites is not particularly 'radical' and (ii) genuinely radical authors are, again, not represented by their more recent work. This partial account of 'radical rethinking' in the field is followed by a number of instances of 'small steps to

success', mostly written by other authors. Part VI concludes with Palmer's exhortations to use a further iteration of the model she introduced in Part IV as a another step 'towards progress and promise in the 21st century'.

My overall impression of *Environmental Education in the 21st Century* is of a cut-and-paste exercise in which there is too little evidence of a rationale for a great deal of either the cutting or the pasting. Much of what the reader seems to be expected to understand as a rationale does not stand up to close scrutiny. For example, Palmer begins by asserting that environmental education is 'a field characterised by a paradox: Few would doubt the urgency and importance of learning to live in sustainable ways... Yet environmental education holds nowhere near the priority position in formal education programmes around the world that this suggests' (p. ix). Palmer then presents the book as an attempt 'to unravel some of the causes of and tensions involved in this paradoxical situation' (p. ix). There are at least two major difficulties with this formulation. First, what is the book's purpose if we do not accept (as I do not) that there is anything 'paradoxical' about the circumstances Palmer describes? I find nothing absurd about an apparent lack of correspondence between social and educational priorities; such mismatches are commonplace and explicable with even a rudimentary understanding of the politics of educational decision-making. Secondly, Palmer's formulation positions environmental education as a mere instrument of environmentalisms—a 'technology', as it were, for achieving particular measures of sustainability and conservation. If environmental education is to enjoy high priority status in 'formal education programmes' its *educational* merits need to be explicitly demonstrated and valued, but these are the very qualities that receive only scant attention in *Environmental Education in the 21st Century*. 🌀

Noel Gough

Deakin University, Melbourne

Canadian Journal of Environmental Education, vol. 4, 1999

Education for sustainability is an increasingly important concept in environmental education, both nationally and internationally. The latest issue of the *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education* (vol. 4, 1999) draws together competing arguments in the debate over the nature and purpose of education for sustainability and its role in contemporary environmental education. The articles in this volume are drawn largely from the on-line colloquium hosted by the journal in 1998. The *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, now in its fourth year, continues to make an enormous contribution to the field. The current volume presents 15 papers in either English or French (with abstracts in both languages). English language articles, however, predominate. The journal also includes a book review section (6 books

reviewed in this volume) and concludes with a 'News and Notes' section that details forthcoming conferences, new journals, web sites, and so on.

The first three papers in this volume (by Lucie Sauvé and John Huckle and a rejoinder by Lucie Sauvé) show that education for sustainability is contested both as a concept and as a focus for environmental education. While the discussion between Sauvé and Huckle could be seen as one over the relative merits of competing principles, other papers in this volume address some concerns about the implementation of education for sustainability. For example, Berryman argues that we need to be wary of and indeed move away from what he sees as totalising concepts such as education for sustainability. They may, he feels, do more harm than good. Four papers in this volume, by Smyth; Courtenay-Hall and Lott; Hart, Jickling and Kool; and Selby, also look at the barriers to and possibilities for implementing education for sustainability at the national and international level. The links between education for sustainability and biodiversity, consumption and tourism are also explored in papers in this volume. The final three papers, while not dealing specifically with the topic of sustainability, do, through their discussion of the notion of voice, address the issue of sustainable research practices. For example, Rixecker explores the role of academic voice in a cross-cultural context; Malone the voice of the community and Payne & Riddell the voice of teachers in professional development. I would like to focus here, however, on the debate between Sauvé and Huckle.

The most recent United Nations conference on environmental education was held at Thessaloniki in Greece in December 1997. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) conferences on environmental education have in the past been very influential in setting directions for the field (see, for example, Belgrade 1975, Tbilisi 1977, UNCED 1992). It is, therefore, not unreasonable to argue that the Thessaloniki conference will most likely have a similar impact on the field. At Thessaloniki the focus on education for sustainability or education for sustainable development, initially raised by the Brundtland Commission in 1987 and clearly outlined in Chapter 36 of Agenda 21 at UNCED in 1992, was reconfirmed. Indeed, Sauvé argues that UNESCO has, through its support, legitimised the concept of sustainable development. 'Without further analysis, and at great expense', she argues, 'UNESCO is now placing sustainable development at the heart of the project of planetary education, considering it to be the ultimate 'goal' of human development' (1999, p. 10).

Sauvé's paper argues that sustainability and/or sustainable development is not an appropriate goal for environmental education because of the problematic nature of the notion of sustainable development. For Sauvé, a principal problem with the notion of education for sustainability is the ease with which a variety of competing positions have managed to use and co-opt the term. It is not only used by environmental educators but by governments, industry/business and economists. She