Section III

Analyses of Environmental Education Discourses and Policies

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Introduction

Environmental education is a relatively new discipline. From its origins in the mid-seventies in the seminal projects sponsored by UNESCO with its environmental education project headed up by Professor Bill Stapp, the field has expanded and matured greatly. The profile (both quantitative and qualitative) of its research activity has changed significantly over this time (Robottom, 2005) to the current stage of complexity represented in this handbook. Similarly, as the status of the field and its research (both methodologically and substantively) has changed, the very language of the field of environment-related education has changed as well.

Within the past two decades, the defining language of the field of environment-related education has changed from "environmental education (EE)" to "education for sustainability (EfS)" or "education for sustainable development (ESD)." If we can describe the more patterned, institutionalized form that language may assume within organizations and institutions as a *discourse*, it may be argued that the field formerly known as "environmental education" is now marked by the rise of the new discourse of sustainability. This shift in discourse (and attendant changes in *policies* as the yet more institutionalized, formal, and influential from of language) is the subject of the essays presented here.

There has been some concern that this change in discourse might be a simple supplanting of one slogan with another without any real change in the educational practices that the slogans qualify (Campbell & Robottom, 2008). There is a challenge for research to demonstrate if and how environment-related educational practice conducted within the frame of the "new" discourse of EfS or ESD is qualitatively different from that conducted within the frame of the former discourse of EE. While this point may be explored with reference to the contents of this Handbook as a whole, it is important to illustrate the ways in which the discourse of the field is understood, appropriated, and interpreted at different levels (internationally, nationally, locally) and different geographical locations, and how interpretations of the discourse of the field may be a function of level and location. To what extent does the discourse of this global field remain (explicitly or implicitly) contested across educational systems? What are some of the factors shaping this contestation?

This section includes seven essays on the topic of policies and discourses in environmental education at international, national, and local levels. The essays are written by authors from Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Mexico, South Africa, Taiwan, and the United States, and consequently reflect a diversity of cultural and political influences on education and research. While providing instances of some of the more influential discourses in EE, and the recent shifts in these, the authors also provide insight into ways in which the discourses are or may be appropriated by various constituencies, the importance of social justice issues, and different relationships among discourse, policy, organization, and research. The first four chapters focus on scholarly analyses of different aspects of language and discourse, while the last three focus on research on policies in particular educational sectors (vocational and technical education) or regions (Latin America and China).

Lesley Le Grange's essay deconstructs a component of the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

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discourse that has not commonly been subject to such an analysis. The essay is both an exposition and critical analysis of the concept of needs as a component of sustainable development. It is also concerned with the role and place of sustainability as a relative of environmental education (with some acknowledged controversy over whether "parent" or "child"). In his analysis, the author draws upon an impressive array of scholarship both within and outside the field of environmental studies. In particular, the author refers to literature that addresses the problematic nature of linking sustainability to both present and future needs—a root but contestable concept of the Brundtland Commission's Report of 1972. In addition the author is sensitive to the moral dimensions of the concept of need, and distinguishes it from what he calls the humanitarian dimension. His analysis of the discourse of "needs" suggests that scholarly work could explore further how these specific views of needs may advance our thinking about EE/ESD. At the very least, Le Grange's analysis illustrates that the discourses of environment-related education are susceptible to further critical analysis.

Berryman and Sauvé's essay opens with an argument for recognizing the centrality of "language" (and its more institutionalized variant, "discourse") in environment-related education, and draws on a wide range of literature to demonstrate some of the key influential elements of contemporary environment-related educational discourse. The authors, in asserting the importance of language, gradually engage in a more critical examination of the field, indicating instances where the once-dominant discourses of environment-related education came to be challenged by other discourses in a progressively more open society of scholarly critique. The essay builds on these considerations to mount a critique of the effect of the now-dominant environment-related discourse of Education for Sustainable Development. Finally, they explore prospects for alternative languages by drawing on four sources of inspiration, from Ricoeur's philosophical essays on hermeneutics to Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge and Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography.

Bob Stevenson begins by examining recent developments in educational policy scholarship, specifically the emergence of critical sociological and sociocultural approaches, and what they reveal about recent shifts in policy processes, particularly as a result of globalization. He then draws on these perspectives to analyze international and national policy processes and discourses in environmental education (EE) and education for sustainable development or sustainability (ESD/EfS). His analysis reveals the underlying environmental/sustainability and educational ideologies that are involved in shaping policy formation, including the struggles and negotiations around different values and ideological interests. After highlighting the converging and competing policy discourses in national contexts, Stevenson concludes by arguing that policy discourses and processes should be democratized

and a more dialectic relationship between policy and practice should be constructed.

Ian Robottom discusses some trends in recent discourses in environment-related educational work, arguing that the field is marked by a policy context based on shifting discourses at national and international levels and a language that is slogan-like in effect, creating the conditions for changeless reform. The essay describes some instances of environment-related educational practice, considering these in relation to the recent discourse shift in the field, and presents an approach to professional self-development that takes into account the issues associated with the relationship of discourse to practice within particular educational contexts.

Arenas and Londoño focus on sustainability educational initiatives within vocational education in secondary schools. They address the intersection of the ESD discourse with that of vocational and technical education (VTE) in asserting that vocational educators are becoming increasingly interested in addressing the need to protect the natural environment. They speak of the difficulties in moving from agreement at the level of discourse to institutional policy, organization, and, above all, educational practice. They make the point that moving from agreement in language to effective informed action is less a technical challenge and more a "political" matter of engaging professional contextual factors—especially those with the potential to oppress, shape and constrain classroom practice. Their chapter highlights the limited attention given to the place of sustainability education in vocational and technical education, although its place in universities has been widely conceptualized and examined in and across many geographical and cultural contexts. In contrast, however, the current and potential contribution of sustainability education to the preparation of individuals for technical and trade-related careers has been under-theorized and under-studied.

The contribution of Edgar González Gaudiano and Leonir Lorenzetti focuses on the Latin American region, with reference to Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Chile, Ecuador, and Venezuela. They provide a regional overview of newly evolving policies, discourses, and practices in these developing or newly industrialized countries. Of these, Colombia has adopted an interesting approach to environmental education sponsored by government but retaining a fairly critical academic edge (see Torres, 2010), and Mexico has significant environment-related programs producing and supporting doctoral candidates focusing on EE/ESD. Despite the emergence of ESD as a new regional discourse, the authors report limited progress in other Latin American countries, concluding with an asserted need for major institutional change before more rapid development is possible.

Chinese researchers Lee, Wang, and Yang focus on three Chinese communities (mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) in which there has been little EE research, enabling the authors to draw from research in other

contexts to examine discourse and policy issues. Their essay presents accounts of EE policies and practices in three Chinese community states. The approach identifies a number of interesting issues such as the effect of journal rankings on developments in the field. The authors also point to some absences and silences in EE in the countries embraced in their review.

This diverse range of essays, related through their interest in discourse and policy of the field, illustrate the kind of contestation existing at the level of language within EE/ESD, exposing such diverse issues are:

- the importance of language and the dialectic relationship between policy and practice in particular cultures;
- the importance of context, and within context the effect of cultural, economic, political, environmental, and social justice issues on EE policies and practices;
- the necessity of multiple languages to express encounters and relationships with the environment, given the unlikelihood of an all-embracing metalanguage;
- the ill-defined intergenerational equity "needs" principle that is central to the ambiguous and contested concept of sustainable development and therefore also to ESD;
- the scarcity of sustainability education in policy and practice in the preparation of individuals for technical and trade-related careers in vocational and technical colleges;
- the contribution of the increasingly extensive research on regional perspectives by Latin American and Chinese researchers and research students working or studying in universities in other countries (and the relationship of this with research conducted by scholars actually based in the Latin American and Chinese countries); and
- the potential to inform EE research of environment-related research that is conducted within a social science context that may not be commonly recognized as EE. For example, community forestry management is pushing the boundaries on social learning and participatory extension projects. Such research is not usually viewed as EE but may be part of a broader conception of EE research that encompasses efforts to understand the role of learning and human agency in natural resource management and human-environment relations more generally.

These issues and others identified in the following chapters suggest some future directions for research that might include such questions as:

- What might the theoretical and methodological frameworks employed in environment-related social science fields offer EE research?

- In what ways is the discourse of ESD appropriated in support of a disparate range of environment-related activity and how does this appropriation shape ESD practices?
- What can alternative conceptions of "needs" and alternative languages and discourses contribute to EE/ESD practice and research?
- What is the influence of other common, often competing, educational discourses on EE practices, and how might coherent and compatible policies and practices be established across these discourses?
- Given the historical tendency of discourses in the field of environment-related education to become slogan-like in nature, how may a critical perspective on the relationships among discourse, organization, and practice mitigate the scenario?

These last points relate to a challenge identified at the international launch of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in New York in March 2005, by the UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura who addressed specifically the issues of slogans in educational reform:

The ultimate goal of the decade is that education for sustainable development is more than just a slogan. It must be a concrete reality for all of us—individuals, organizations, governments—in all our daily decisions and actions, so as to promise a sustainable planet and a safer world to our children, our grandchildren and their descendants . . . Education will have to change so that it addresses the social, economic, cultural and environmental problems that we face in the twenty-first century (UNESCO, 2005, p. 2).

As stated earlier, the challenge requires further research on these shifting discourses, but not just in isolation; the relationship among discourse, organization, and educational policy, and practice remains a highly justified arena of research in light of the essays in this section.

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