Participating in Research Symposia: Tales of Reinscription, Disruption, and Inclusivity

Sally Birdsall[1] & Peta White[2]
[1]*University of Auckland, Faculty of Education and Social Work, Auckland, New Zealand*
[2]*Deakin University, School of Education, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia*

Abstract   Having participated in both the New Zealand Association for Environmental Education (NZAEE) and Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) Research Symposia of 2016, the authors provide a critical analysis of the opportunities provided during these symposia for researchers to position themselves within the environmental education field. Each symposium is analysed in terms of its purpose and program structure, and the opportunities for researchers to communicate and share their ideas, build their research community, and frame their field. It was found that there were spaces for researchers to reinscribe the structures and practices of the environmental education field, but less space for its disruption. Furthermore, it seemed that there were some voices from the edge who were unintentionally silenced to some degree; for example, emerging researchers, women, and Indigenous people. It is recommended that symposia organisers and delegates give careful consideration to these spaces for disruption and to inclusivity when planning and attending future symposia.

Each year, researchers and practitioners interested in a particular research field make decisions about which conferences and/or research symposia to attend. It would seem that researchers go to these events because they believe them to be 'professionally beneficial' (Meyers et al., 2007, p. 650). Such professional benefits arise because, as Russell et al. (2010) argue, attending a conference and/or symposium allows one to position oneself within their research field. This positioning occurs when researchers 'acculturate' themselves to a research field (Russell et al., 2010, p. 28), and part of this process occurs at a conference and/or symposium. It can involve: (1) sharing and communicating research and ideas; (2) contributing to the building of a research community (e.g., nurturing emerging researchers and developing professional identities); and (3) framing a field in terms of determining methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and beliefs about research (Hart et al., 2004; Meyers et al., 2007).

How are these opportunities to position oneself in a field realised during a conference and/or research symposium? How can organisers of such events maximise the potential

Address for correspondence: Sally Birdsall, University of Auckland, Faculty of Education and Social Work, PB 92601, Symonds St, Auckland, 1150, New Zealand. Email: s.birdsall@auckland.ac.nz

for this positioning? This article analyses the ways in which these reasons for attending a conference or research symposium were realised in terms of how opportunities were offered for sharing and communicating ideas, along with building a community and framing the field of environmental education, were taken up at two Australasian research symposia.

Context of the Symposia

In 2016, there were two opportunities for Australasian researchers in the environmental education field to gather together to reflect upon what Beasy, Page, Emery, and Ayre (2016) argue to be how researchers envisage and execute their research. The first was in early February when the New Zealand Association for Environmental Education (NZAEE) hosted a research symposium entitled 'Making a Difference: Research to Inform Change'. The second was in early October, when the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) hosted their research symposium, 'Why is No-one Knocking at our Door? The Impact of our Research on Tomorrow'. Both symposia were held for one day prior to each Association's main conference. In total, 65 delegates attended the NZAEE symposium and 71 the AAEE symposium, mostly from Australasia, but also from other countries such as Canada and South Africa. Delegates came from varied backgrounds: academics in differing stages of their careers, and masters and doctoral candidates, along with educators and practitioners from the formal and non-formal sectors who have an interest in environmental education.

Some researchers attended both symposia, including the authors. Sally Birdsall was the chairperson of the NZAEE organising committee and hosted the symposium, and also attended the AAEE symposium, whereas Peta White was a delegate and presenter at both. In order to illuminate their perspectives of these two symposia, the authors will compare and contrast the two symposia in terms of their purpose and program structure, their potential for communicating and sharing ideas, the ways in which the environmental education community was built, and the manner in which the field was framed. The article concludes with recommendations for organisers and delegates of future symposia.

Research Symposia Purpose and Program Structure

According to etymology, the word *symposium* has its origins in the Latin word *symposium*, meaning a 'drinking party' and from the Greek *symposion*, which means a 'drinking party' and a 'convivial gathering of the educated' (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d., para. 1). While one purpose of these environmental education research symposia was for educated people to meet and discuss ideas, there was neither imbibing nor a party — at least not till afterwards.

The purpose of the NZAEE symposium was to assess the current state of research in New Zealand and then identify possible ways forward, in the hope that there would be sufficient interest and capacity to hold future research symposia. Interestingly, this purpose was the same as that identified for the inaugural North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) research symposium held in 2005 (Meyers et al., 2007). The AAEE symposium seemed to have had a different purpose — that of examining the impact of the community's research on the future. This purpose was also one recognised as an area of concern in past NAAEE symposia (Meyers et al., 2007).

Delegates attend symposia to either consciously or unconsciously position themselves within a field (Russell et al., 2010) by sharing their research and by being shaped by others' presentations. Additionally, discussing and working together to critically consider current and new research directions in order to advance their field (Hart et al.,

[2004](#)) often occurs. However, there seems to be a tension in this purpose. On the one hand, the symposium structure and people attending can work to maintain existing power structures within the field (Beasy et al., [2016](#)). The maintenance of structures can be achieved through a symposium program structure, as delegates can feel 'labelled' as belonging to a particular group through, for example, their 'place' in the program, such as from giving a particular presentation. Also, a symposium program may be designed to 're-inscribe practices' (Russell et al., [2010](#), p. 32) — for example, presentations by journal editors reflecting on the field and suggesting future directions. While this might be an unconscious occurrence, Russell et al. ([2010](#)) argue that the very act of positioning oneself within a discourse such as that found in a research field does enact a form of control. But, on the other hand, research symposia can offer opportunities for exploring future directions and critical examination of current practices, thus seeking to 'disrupt' and change those existing structures (Beasy et al., [2016](#), p. 11), or what Professor Amy Cutter-Mackenzie referred to in her keynote address at the AAEE symposium as how, 'silences are attempted to be unsilenced'.

There is no doubt that these symposia both reinscribed and disrupted existing power structures present in the environmental education field. Of the two, the NZAEE symposium appeared to perpetuate existing power structures more often with its imposed agenda of peer-reviewed and structured presentations, invited keynote speakers, and panel of 'experts' giving their perspectives of the symposium at its conclusion. Nevertheless, there was an opportunity for disrupting power structures with a round-table discussion session where all were encouraged to participate to share their thinking and reflections on the day.

The AAEE symposium's format was more characteristic of disruption, with 'conversations' rather than structured presentations. The call, which closely aligned with intentions of the first AAEE research symposium held in Hobart in 2014, stated:

> *The Research Symposium is designed to facilitate scholarly conversations about research challenges for those interested in the intersections between the environment, sustainability and education. In line with the value and purposes of the Symposium, conversations will be deliberate, exploratory, creative, collegial and critical, where co-convenors and participants are both enabled and expected to discuss multiple perspectives on a theme. (AAEE Expressions of Interest, [2016](#))*

Despite the fact that proposals for these conversations were peer reviewed, their emphasis was on participatory collaboration, as illustrated by the use of strategies such as fishbowl discussions, learning walks, sharing via object interpretation, and a question-and-answer panel. Rather than an abstract, an 'intention' was written by those facilitating the conversations, along with a format so that delegates were informed of its structure (AAEE Expressions of Interest, [2016](#)). Furthermore, recommended readings were provided, and it could be argued that such provision enabled delegates to participate in a more informed way, adding value and resulting in a more critical, collegial conversation. On the other hand, it could also be argued that this provision focused delegates' attention on the presenters' intentions, thus discouraging more lateral thinking and discussion, and privileging the presenters' epistemological positioning and theoretical perspectives.

In addition, the AAEE [2016](#) symposium utilised a suggestion from the 2014 symposium of hosting a totally unstructured conversation space with no preconceived agenda for researchers to think about and to discuss how to break down currently accepted frameworks and systems in the environmental education field.

The keynote speakers' presentations were thought provoking and future focused. But one of these stood out because its format challenged current practices and

Welcome	
Keynote 1	
Keynote 2	
Concurrent sessions 1 (8 presentations)	Concurrent sessions 2 (8 presentations)
Round Table	
Panel 1	
Panel 2	

FIGURE 1:   Diagram showing NZAEE program structure.

attempted to unsilence Indigenous voice. Professor Amy Cutter-Mackenzie's careful analysis of the 'new' and 'overdone' areas, as well as the 'gaps', in the *Australian Journal of Environmental Education* adopted a non-conformist approach. Not only were confronting images displayed, she also used etymology and her local Aboriginal language to characterise the new areas, overdone areas, and gaps that could have helped delegates view their research in different ways. Words such as *gajuliumm*, meaning thin, related to those bald patches (the overdone or over researched areas). *Bugiri* was used to characterise the bare patches (gaps in research), and *talngai* was used to describe the bright patches (areas of research that were exploring new ideas and practices). In this way, it could be argued that Cutter-Mackenzie was disrupting current practices and giving space to Indigenous voice.

In spite of Cutter-Mackenzie's presentation, most of the keynote speakers did tend to perpetuate existing power structures. But it could be argued that this was an acceptable strategy as it is a common practice when organising symposia to have 'experts' in a field as keynote speakers because of their experience and leadership (Meyers et al., 2007). Moreover, it could have been that the organisers wished to 'bookend' the day, with the first keynote encouraging delegates to think beyond existing ideas and structures to deconstruct the familiar and obvious (and Mark Rickinson's presentation did achieve this) and the final keynote speaker (Aidan Davison — a cultural geographer reflecting back on what he saw from a day within our field of environmental education) reorganising what was discussed in unexpected and thought-provoking ways (Meyer et al., 2007, p. 648). In this way, unexpected and thought-provoking ideas could bring about disruption. And Aidan's presentation did fulfil this criterion with his focus on 'unlearning' — the notion that as education contributes to unsustainability, education needs to change so it can dismantle the certainties of the present, such as the nature-culture binary, so that society can move forward in different ways. This idea is echoed by many in the environmental education field — for example, Sterling (1996).

In terms of program structure, the two symposia differed. As shown in Figure 1, the NZAEE symposium had keynote speakers who began the day's program, followed by presentations about specific research projects offered in short, concise sessions. There was a stipulation that such projects had to be 'in progress' or completed within the previous six months. As mentioned above, this stipulation was made as the organisers wanted to scope the New Zealand field in order to assess its maturity and capacity to hold a research symposium (Personal communication, 2016). Two strands of eight 15-minute presentations were given, and within this time, there were opportunities for asking questions.

To encourage all to participate and share ideas, there was also a session of round-table discussions. Seven groups engaged in discussion about the current state of environmental education practice and research in New Zealand and were asked to identify its strengths and gaps and/or opportunities. The program concluded with a session

Welcome		
Keynote 1		
Concurrent Conversation 1	Concurrent Conversation 2	Concurrent Conversation 3
Keynote 2		
Concurrent Conversation 4	Concurrent Conversation 5	Concurrent Conversation 6
Keynote 3		

FIGURE 2:   Diagram showing AAEE program structure.

about publishing one's research that was chaired by the editors of three prominent journals in the environmental education field. A panel of 'experts' then gave a summary of their reflections about the symposium.

In contrast, the AAEE symposium continued with its 'dialogical, interactive' (Hill & Dyment, 2016, p. iii) format that was conceptualised and utilised at the 2014 event. The day's program, illustrated in Figure 2, began with a keynote speaker and then segued into two concurrent sessions, each with three strands of 'conversations'. Presentations about individuals' research projects were not included in favour of these 60-minute collaborative conversation provocations that aimed to open up spaces for wider engagement and participation by the audience. In this way, the AAEE symposium encouraged everyone to participate in a creative and critical manner.

Between the two sessions of conversations was a keynote presentation given by the editors of three prominent journals in the environmental education field, outlining what research topics had been 'overdone' and where the current gaps in the field existed. The day's program finished with a keynote speaker who summarised the day's proceedings from his viewpoint.

In terms of its purpose, both symposia offered delegates opportunities to position themselves within their field. The NZAEE symposium fulfilled its purpose and revealed that there was sufficient interest and capacity to run such an event in the future, while offering some researchers the opportunity to share their recent research. Whether the AAEE symposium fulfilled its purpose is difficult to ascertain, as it was future focused. Nevertheless, opportunities were given to all delegates to position themselves in terms of their contributions to the conversations. Furthermore, both symposia's program structures offered opportunities for positioning oneself in terms of presentations, round-table discussions, and conversations. However, while these opportunities were available, they also contributed to the reinscribing and disruption of the field's power structures. This will be discussed in more detail in later sections.

Communicating and Sharing Ideas

One reason for attending research symposia is to communicate and share ideas about one's research. In order to analyse the frequency and range of ideas communicated and discussed, a word cloud strategy was used to explore the NZAEE concurrent presentations (but not the keynotes as there were no definitive titles or abstracts required), as well as the titles, abstracts and intentions of the AAEE keynote presentations, and the collaborative conversations. Word clouds are data visualisation tools that emphasise main points, or words in text (Baralt, Pennestri, & Selvandin, 2011). According to Baralt et al. (2011), word clouds can communicate information clearly and assist in understanding of complex ideas. In a word cloud, words of higher frequency are represented through the use of a larger font, and the higher the frequency, the larger the font size. In this way, an analysis can be made of the frequency and range of words present

FIGURE 3:   Word cloud showing the frequency and range of words used in titles and abstracts of the NZAEE presentations.

in titles and abstracts and give an indication of the ideas discussed and/or presented during the symposia.

The first cloud shown in Figure 3 was constructed using the titles and abstracts from the NZAEE symposium's presentations. Figure 3 shows that the words with both lower- and upper-case initial letters — 'environmental', 'education', 'research' and 'sustainability' — are most dominant, as is expected, as these three words encapsulate the field. The word 'change' is also conspicuous, which could reflect the theme of this symposium, that of research informing change. The abbreviation for education for sustainability (EfS) is also present.

The words 'teaching' and 'learning' are also prominent. This could indicate that the NZAEE symposium was focused on research concerning teaching and learning. More evidence of this focus can be found in the words 'students', 'pre-service', 'childhood', 'school', 'teachers', and 'educators' being present. Furthermore, the cognitive dimension of environmental education learning seemed to be present in the words 'understanding', 'knowledge', and 'perceptions'. The affective dimension was also represented with words such as 'feelings', 'attitudes', values', and 'relationships'. The final dimension of learning in environmental education, the kinaesthetic, was hinted at with words such as 'empowerment', 'activism', 'action', and 'student-led' present. It could also be said that there was intimation of indigeneity with the words 'TEK' (traditional ecological knowledge) and 'indigenous' being found. In addition, the word 'climate' was evident, which could suggest a focus on the issue of climate change.

Figure 4 shows the frequency and range of words found in the AAEE keynote presentations. An analysis of this word cloud suggests that there was a narrow range of ideas presented. This can be seen in the way that far fewer words are prominent. As with the cloud in Figure 1, the words 'research', 'environmental', and 'education' dominate this cloud. 'ESE' (environmental and sustainability education) also features, along with 'sustainability'. These words, 'ESE' and 'sustainability', echo the dominance of 'environmental' and 'education' as they are words related to environmental education/sustainability education. The word 'journal' probably refers to the different journals in the field. 'Conversation' and 'Aidan' also feature but can be explained since 'Conversation' most likely

FIGURE 4: Word cloud showing the frequency and range of words used in titles and abstracts of the AAEE keynote presentations.

FIGURE 5: Word cloud showing the frequency and range of words used in titles and intentions of the AAEE collaborative conversations.

refers to the name of the concurrent sessions that ran between the keynotes and 'Aidan' was a keynote presenter who crafted his abstract using the third-person perspective.

But the words 'impact' and 'tomorrow' did not seem to feature strongly in this analysis of the keynote presentations, despite the fact that that these words were part of the stated purpose of the symposium — 'Examining the impact of our research on the future'. Similarly, 'hope' is only presented in the smallest font, which could be interpreted as a disappointing reflection of researchers' perceptions of the field's future prospects.

The frequency and range of words found in the AAEE Conversation titles and abstracts are illustrated in Figure 5. An analysis of this word cloud reveals a wider range of words in a bold and larger font than the cloud in Figure 4, but not as wide a range as that shown in the NZAEE symposium cloud (Figure 3). Similar to the other two clouds, it also illustrates the dominance of the word 'research', which is shown with an initial lower-case and a capital letter. This result is suggestive of the fundamental role of research in these symposia. As with the AAEE keynotes, the words

'environment', 'environmental', and 'education' also feature strongly due to their centrality in the symposia.

Nevertheless, there are differences in Figure 5 when compared to Figure 4. The word 'practice' is prominent, which could be referring to delegates' employment as researchers and practitioners of environmental education. 'Collaboration' also features, both with a capital C and a lower-case c, and as 'collaborative', which could be indicative of the way in which environmental education researchers and practitioners often work together on projects. In addition, collaboration could be viewed as a skill valued by the environmental education field, as it is a skill necessary for mitigating or solving sustainability issues (Gruenewald, 2006). While 'conversation' is also prominent, this is probably due to the format of the symposium being a conversation.

Smaller sized words, such as 'sharing', 'stories', 'groups', 'participants', 'communicating', and 'communication' could hint at the more participatory, collaborative structure of the AAEE symposium. The words 'children' and 'children's' could indicate that learning was discussed, but not to the extent found in the NZAEE symposium cloud. There was also a focus on the role and influence of policy in research, and this focus is illustrated with the word 'policy' being present.

Unlike Figure 4 (the keynote presentations), this cloud does include the word 'impact', a focus of the symposium. But there is no evidence of the 'future' or 'tomorrow' being mentioned. The absence of these two words in both Figures 4 and 5 could suggest a misalignment between the stated purpose of this symposium and the topics of the keynote presentations and conversation sessions that took place.

Interestingly, Cutting and Cooke (2008) carried out a similar analysis of the 161 papers presented at the World Environmental Education Congress held in 2007. After removing the abstracts, keyword lists and references, the frequency of words was analysed. They identified the most frequently used 15 words and there some similarities and differences of note between their findings and those reported here. In terms of similarities, the word 'environment/al' was the most frequently used word, followed by 'education/al' in Cutting and Cook's (2008) analysis; a finding replicated here. However, even though the word 'research' dominated all three word clouds presented here, this word was ranked 11th in Cutting and Cook's findings and also included the word 'researcher'. Five of Cutting and Cook's top-10 ranked words were also prominent in the NZAEE word cloud only, namely 'school/s', 'teacher/s', 'student/s', 'learning' and 'knowledge', possibly reflecting a focus on research in the formal education sector that was not as apparent in the AAEE symposium.

What is concerning is that Cutting and Cook (2008) also analysed their findings in terms of common research words and phrases, such as 'critical', 'evaluation', and 'analysis'. They found that this type of word was minimally used and inferred that such results showed a lack of criticality in the field. Unfortunately, the word clouds presented here also illustrate a paucity of such words and thus also suggest a lack of critical evaluation and/or analysis of the research presented and discussed at these symposia.

While these word clouds (Figures 3, 4, and 5) do show the range of ideas discussed and/or presented, they do need to be interpreted with caution because analysing frequency is a simplistic measure and, more importantly, ignores the context in which the words occur (Cutting & Cook, 2008). Also, it should be noted that the number of words available to construct the word cloud influences the outcome. Because there were 18 titles and abstracts available from the NZAEE symposium, it is logical that there was a greater range of ideas discussed and/or presented. Nevertheless, this form of data analysis does provide a snapshot and useful interpretation for reflection.

Building the Research Community

There is no doubt that research symposia do offer a research field opportunities to build a community. Symposia seem to be particularly important in the environmental education field, as researchers report feeling isolated and marginalised in their workplaces (Meyers et al., 2007). For Australasian researchers, this isolation could be because environmental education occupies a marginalised position in initial teacher education and professional learning programs (Breuing, Murtell, Russell, & Howard, 2013; Stevenson, 2007), resulting in minimal space for environmental education researchers in universities and other teacher education institutions. One reason for this situation could be that environmental education is not mandated in The New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) but instead referred to as a 'future-focused issue' (p. 9). However, in Australia, 'sustainability' has been a cross-curricular priority for many years (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority, 2016). Even with its positioning as an overarching statement, some might argue that little on-ground implementation has followed, as it lacks integration throughout the disciplines. In this way, environmental education might still be seen as no more than a 'little added frill' (Hart, 2010, p. 155) and still not an essential part of teacher education. Even when environmental education is included in initial teacher education, it seems that issues arise, such as a dilution of teacher preparedness for teaching environmental education that then results in a lack of stimulus to practise it (Miles, Harrison, & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2006), or else it is only sporadically included in courses outside of learning about social sciences, science, and technology education (Buchanan, 2012).

Another reason for the importance of symposia is that environmental education is a relative newcomer to education, and given that Hart et al. (2004) have likened a research field to a 'metaphoric glacier' (p. 566) in terms of its progress, researchers need time, some of which is provided by symposia, to construct their field. This has been identified as one challenge facing environmental education researchers (Meyer et al., 2007).

Environmental education research symposia are also crucial for researchers because they support the establishment of personal contacts and international collaborations. More importantly for the growth of a community, they provide a venue and forum for researchers to trial their ideas with their peers, and researchers can engage in discussion and debate about their current ideas, theories, and methodologies — another challenge identified by Meyers et al. (2007). These face-to-face meetings enable researchers to engage in what Hart et al. (2004) refer to as 'boundary questions' (p. 566), where questions about the quality of research can be raised, new directions can be pursued, and also 'blindspots and limitations' avoided (p. 564). Thus, such discussions and debates afford researchers the opportunity to build their professional identities in a 'social learning context' (Meyers et al., 2007, p. 640) and meet a further challenge for the environmental education field.

Furthermore, as noted by Meyers et al. (2007) in their discussion about the NAAEE research symposia, the atmosphere built by a community is crucial. They argue that a community needs to engage in 'generous scholarship across methodological differences' (p. 641) and that such scholarship requires a positive but also critical atmosphere. In addition, this atmosphere can also be enhanced through nurturing new and novice researchers and making a place for them. But, as Russell et al. (2010) note, many researchers at symposia have a high degree of familiarity with each other, making it difficult for newcomers to establish their place.

An analysis of the NZAEE and AAEE symposia shows that opportunities for building a research community transpired. The value of such face-to-face meetings was clearly articulated by a NZAEE symposium panelist when she spoke about the isolation that

she felt working in an institution where climate change was not taken seriously (Personal communication, 2016).

Keynote speakers at both symposia introduced new ideas and methodologies; for example, Dr Alan Reid at the NZAEE symposium spoke about his evaluation of Victoria's Resource Smart schools and the different manner in which this program was evaluated (Rickinson, Hall, & Reid, 2016). At the AAEE symposium, Dr Mark Rickinson opened discussion about the gap between research and policy and encouraged delegates to look beyond their research mindset at what knowledge they were producing and with whom it was being shared.

As previously mentioned, the NZAEE round-table discussions and AAEE collaborative conversations provided spaces for dialogue about research ideas and theories. There was also space for networking and potential for developing collaborations at lunchtimes, breaks, and at the social events that followed each symposium.

When considering how new researchers were nurtured, half of the NZAEE short presentations were given by masters and doctoral students. Also, there was a group of early career researchers who were active at both symposia and are working within the system to carve out their own space.

In terms of building a positive and critical atmosphere, there was nothing overtly enacted at the NZAEE symposium. In direct contrast, at the outset of the AAEE symposium, one of its organisers, Dr Allen Hill, stated that the values that were conceptualised for and then incorporated into the 2014 symposium would be carried over and included:

- *[Having a spirit of] open inquiry;*
- *Asking questions and seeking answers;*
- *Participation;*
- *Generosity, collegiality and inclusivity; and*
- *Critical sensitivity to research, its development and challenges.*

(Personal communication, AAEE Symposium — Welcome, 2016)

But if we are to build our field, it still needs to be asked: Was there sufficient time for dialogue so that delegates became familiar with at least part of each other's ideas, something that Meyers et al (2007) argue is important when building a community? Was there sufficient time to discuss the boundary questions mentioned by Hart et al. (2004) or the new directions to pursue as a community? While it can be argued that opportunities for such dialogue were available, an overarching question might be: Were there sufficient opportunities to build the Australasian environmental education community?

Moreover, were new members of the community nurtured, especially the postgraduate students? This is an important element when building a community in terms of ensuring succession and is identified as a challenge for the field (Meyers et al., 2007). In addition, as Hart et al. (2004) argue, when experienced and novice researchers work alongside each other, value is added to the community. The authors argue that this is an area in which both symposia could improve. There did not seem to be any opening for new and early career researchers to be introduced (without assimilation; Beasy et al., 2016), and there were no spaces for mentoring postgraduate students and assisting them to become 'acculturated' to the field to allow for further development and articulation of new ideas. This is an area that is open for consideration by future symposia organisers.

Framing the Field

Conferences and research symposia also offer the opportunity to frame a field of research; in other words, to communicate and direct, both overtly and covertly, what is desirable and what is not in terms of topics, ideas, theories, and research methodologies.

In this manner, the framing of a field determines whose voices are heard and whose are (unintentionally) silenced (Russell et al., 2010). But, as Hart et al. (2004) argue, ensuring a diversity of voices in a field needs to be cultivated because a research community grows by including that multiplicity of voices (Russell et al., 2010). Meyers et al. (2007) concur, maintaining that inclusivity improves the overall quality of research. Therefore, it would seem that care needs to be taken when planning and running symposia to ensure that all voices are included.

When analysing these two symposia, it seems that there were instances where what is desired for the environmental education field, in terms of ideas, topics, theories and research methodologies, and what is not was articulated, as well as when voices could have been silenced. For example, the organisers of each symposium had particular ideas about the purpose and structure. How these ideas affect symposia can be seen in the New Zealand symposium, where the decision was made to include a keynote presentation about the research carried out for the Advance Education for Sustainability (EfS) Strategy by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) so that delegates heard about an overview of the current state of EfS in New Zealand (see http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/environmental-education-new-zealand-schools) rather than the recent evaluation of learning resulting from engagement in the Enviroschools program (http://www.enviroschools.org.nz). In this way, the NZCER research was privileged and the Enviroschools voice silenced.

The chosen purpose and structure also affected the choice of keynote speakers. Apart from one employee of New Zealand's Department of Conservation, all keynote speakers at both symposia could be regarded as leaders in the environmental education field or associated fields. By inviting these speakers who are leaders in the field due to their experience, intellectual accomplishments, and visibility (Meyers et al., 2007; Russell et al., 2010), the organisers could be seen to be maintaining existing power structures and potentially silencing some voices. Moreover, the AAEE symposium provided short biographies of both keynote speakers and facilitators of the conversations, and it could be maintained that having such biographies reinforces these delegates' positioning in and of the field.

Furthermore, the reviewing of the presentation abstracts and conversation proposals influenced whose voices were present. While the programs made it evident whose voices were heard during the symposia presentations and conversations, there is no way of finding out whose were silenced because their abstracts or proposals were rejected.

Another example of framing the environmental education field was that both symposia had sessions where editors of three of the more influential environmental education journals spoke about the types of articles, reports, and research they were receiving and what they aspired to receive, that is, the gaps and opportunities in the field. In this way, the field is determined by the vision held and leadership provided by these editors. As such, they hold a position of power (Beasy et al., 2016) and can control the directions that a field is taking. While it is important that researchers know the directions in which their field is heading, it could be argued that such sessions might stifle proposed research that was not mentioned by editors, possibly because it is tangential and thus could inadvertently discourage researchers from undertaking research that is markedly divergent.

But a symposium could still be an avenue for such research that is provided by researchers who want to disrupt current structures. However, emerging researchers, such as doctoral and early career researchers, might not feel confident voicing their ideas at a symposium as they are new to the field and can feel fear when encountering the field's 'elders' (Hart et al., 2004). Nevertheless, their voices need to be heard, since

supporting emerging researchers adds value and is a goal identified by Meyers et al. (2007). Emerging researchers were present at both symposia, offering around half of the presentations at the NZAEE symposium and hosting one conversation space at the Australian one.

As well as youth and Indigenous people, emerging researchers' voices are important as they might offer different ways of viewing a field; perhaps because they have yet to be indoctrinated into the currently accepted frameworks and systems that control a field's research decisions and topics, as well as maintaining power relationships. In this way, they can disrupt preexisting power relationships (Beasy et al., 2016). #aaeeer, a group of emerging researchers that was created during their participation in the AAEE symposium in 2014, reflected upon the discussions that resulted from this prior symposium and identified four perspectives on potential directions for our future research; namely, uncertain futures, traditional knowledges for the future, community environmental education/sustainability education, and the rise of the digital age (Aguayo et al., 2016). Such a reflection does resonate with Beasy et al.'s (2016) research focus to generate 'knowledge for change' (p. 11). However, when examining the NZAEE presentations and the AAEE conversations from 2016, it appears that only three would 'fit' in one of these four perspectives. Thus, the outcomes of the 2014 research symposium and influence on the future directions of our research could be questioned, highlighting Beasy et al.'s (2016) argument that environmental education researchers and practitioners continue to be ruled by their 'pre-ordained powers and structures' (p. 11).

When examining whose voices are heard and whose are silenced, one can also investigate the presence of women's and Indigenous voices. In the environmental education field, women do have a strong presence, but it is important to consider the presence of their voice in leadership roles. It seemed that women did have a voice at leadership level in both symposia, as both symposia's organisers invited men and women to be keynote speakers and panelists, with the New Zealand symposium having more women than men in these roles. But women were not as strongly represented when the editors of journals spoke. At both symposia only one of the three editors was a woman — Associate Professor Hilary Whitehouse at the NZAEE symposium and Professor Amy Cutter-Mackenzie at the AAEE symposium.

Moreover, Indigenous voices were not strongly represented at either symposia, even though both symposia opened with an acknowledgement of First People's connections to the land on which these symposia were held. There was only one woman panelist at the NZAEE symposium, Associate Professor Jenny Ritchie from Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, who spoke of the need for more Māori researchers in environmental education research and to embed the key principle of *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship/stewardship) into education. At the AAEE symposium, Professor Amy Cutter-McKenzie framed her presentation using an Indigenous perspective and made mention of the lack of papers that explored Indigenous perspectives in environmental education.

Insights for Future Symposia

This article has analysed the purpose and program structure of two Australasian research symposia and investigated the opportunities offered at these symposia for researchers to position themselves within the environmental education field. By examining the opportunities for communicating and sharing ideas, building the research community and framing the field, it can be seen that while there were spaces for researchers to position themselves, there were also opportunities missed.

Two threads run through this analysis — that of opportunities for reinscribing and disrupting current structures and practices in the environmental education field and inclusivity in the form of whose voices had space and whose were (unintentionally) silenced. Furthermore, it has been argued that if a field wishes to grow, some disruption is required, as is inclusion of the full range of voices within a field. Therefore, the authors recommend that organisers of future symposia carefully consider how they envisage and plan their event to maximise space for disruption and unsilencing, especially to allow for discussion of those boundary questions and critical analysis of current practices, along with inclusion of voices, including those from the edge, such as youth and Indigenous people, as much as is practicable.

In summary, the authors argue that responsibility for what transpires in future research symposia rests on all of our field's researchers. Similar to constructivist learning theory where it is posited that the ultimate responsibility for learning rests on a learner (Skamp, 2015), it is up to us as researchers and to symposia organisers to carefully consider the structure and program of future symposia. It is our choice whether we reinscribe current structures and practices or whether we challenge ourselves to find ways of disrupting these structures and practices as needed and work to unsilence all voices, in order to add further value to our field and move along paths less travelled.

Key words: environmental education, power, equity, research symposia, reinscribing and disrupting the field, inclusivity

References

AAEE Expressions of Interest. (2016). Tomorrow Making — Our Present to the Future, AAEE Research Symposium. Adelaide, South Australia.

Aguayo, C., Higgins, B., Field, E., Nicholls, J., Pudin, S., Tiu, S., Osborn, M., Hashemzadeh, F., Lubuulwa, K., Boulet, M., Christie, B., & Mah, J. (2016). Perspectives from emerging researchers: What next in EE/SE research? *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 32, 17–29. doi: 10.1017/aee.2015.57

Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA). (2016). *Cross-curriculum Priorities*. Retrieved from http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/crosscurriculumpriorities/overview/introduction

Baralt, M., Pennestri, S., & Selvandin, M. (2011). Using wordless to teach foreign language writing. *Language Learning & Technology*, 15, 12–22.

Beasy, K., Page, L., Emery, S., & Ayre, I. (2016). Evolution or revolution in EE/SE research?: A collaborative dialogue from first-year PhD students. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 32, 11–16. doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2016.3

Breuing, M., Murtell, J., Russell, C., & Howard, R. (2013). The impact of integrated environmental studies programs: Are students motivated to act pro-environmentally? *Environmental Education Research*, 20, 372–386. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2013.807326

Buchanan, J. (2012). Sustainability education and teacher education: Finding a natural habitat? *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 28, 108–124. doi: 10.1017/aee.2013.4

Cutting, R., & Cook, R. (2008). The World Environmental Education Congress 2007: A critical appraisal. *Environmental Education Research*, 15, 177–187. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13504620802578491

Gruenewald, D. (2006). Accountability and collaboration: Institutional barriers and strategic pathways for place-based education. *Ethics, Place & Environment*, 8, 261–283. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13668790500348208

Hart, E.P. (2010). No longer a 'Little Added Frill': The transformative potential of environmental education for educational change. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 37, 155–177. doi: http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479465

Hart, P., Barrett, M., Schnack, Dyment, J., Taylor, J., & Clark, C. (2004). Reflections on the 7th Invitational Seminar on Research and Development in Health and Environmental Education: Anchorage, Alaska, USA, October 2003. *Environmental Education Research*, 10, 563–574. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13504620242000317029.

Hill, A., & Dyment, J. (2016). Editorial. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 32, iii–iv. doi: 10.1017/aee.2016.

Meyers, R., Brody, M., Dillon, J., Hart, P., Krasny, M., Monroe, M., Russell, C., & Wals, A. (2007). Towards creating an inclusive community of researchers: The first three years of the North American Association for Environmental Education research symposium. *Environmental Education Research*, 13, 639–661. doi: 10.1080/13504620701659095.

Miles, R., Harrison, L., & Cutter-Mackenzie, A. (2006). Teacher education: A diluted environmental education experience. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 22, 49–59. doi: 10.1017/S0814062600001658

Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum for English-medium learning in years 1–13*. Wellington, New Zealand: Learning Media.

Online Etymology Dictionary. (n.d.). *Symposium*. Retrieved from https://www.etymonline.com/word/symposium

Rickinson, M., Hall, M., & Reid, A. (2016). Sustainable schools programmes: What influence on schools and how do we know? *Environmental Education Research*, 22, 360–389. doi: 10/1080/13504622.2015.1077505.

Russell, J., White, P., Fook, T., Kayira, J., Muller, S., & Oakley, J. (2010). Graduate students lend their voices: Reflections on the 10th Seminar in Health and Environmental Education Research. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 15, 26–37.

Skamp, K. (2015). Teaching primary science constructively. In K. Skamp & C. Fletcher (Eds.), *Teaching primary science constructively* (5th ed, pp. 1–40). Australia: Cengage Learning Australia Pty.

Stevenson, R.B. (2007). Schooling and environmental/sustainability education: From discourses of policy and practice to discourses of professional learning. *Environmental Education Research*, 13, 265–285. doi: https://doi.org/10.1080/13504620701295650

Sterling, S. (1996). Education in change. In J. Huckle & S. Sterling (Eds.), *Education for sustainability* (pp. 18–39). London, England: Earthscan Publications.

Author Biographies

Sally Birdsall is a Senior Lecturer in Science and Environmental Education at the University of Auckland. Her teaching and research interests investigate teachers' beliefs and pedagogies that can promote learning in science and environmental education.

Peta White is a Lecturer in Science and Environmental Education at Deakin University. Her passion for initial teacher education, activist environmental education, and action-orientated research methodologies drives her current teaching and research scholarship.