

# The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia



## Churchill Fellowship Report

**Peta White**

**2003 Churchill Fellow**



**“Investigation of best practice environmental education programs in schools and communities.”**

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Signed: **Peta White**

Date: **21<sup>st</sup> March 2005**

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## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Churchill Memorial Trust for making this scholarship possible. Travelling with a Churchill Fellowship was an amazing experience providing great opportunity and adventure. I would like to thank the executive officers with the Trust for being incredibly supportive and a pleasure to work with.

I acknowledge and thank the Department of Education and Training, Western Australia for providing me with leave, support and most of all: a reason to research. Special thanks to my Managers, Frank Pansini and Linley Kemeny. Without their support and encouragement I would not have applied or been able to proceed with the Churchill Fellowship. Thank you to Linley for the provision of technical support.

I would like to thank my parents (Dick and Sue White) for providing me with a home base and support whilst "on the road". Their job descriptions included: International Fiscal Manager, Financial Institution Liaison Officer, Travel Consultant, Research Assistant, Photographic Editor, Life Councillor and (my favourite) Personal Assistant.

To my friends, both old and new, serendipity pulled us together for our mutual benefit... thank you for your support and kindness (a few words, an email or a hug brightened each day).

Specifically, I would like to thank:

- Lyndel Taylor (superior navigator and in-flight service provider) and Dimity Wehr (for daring to dream and then enjoying the journey). Your strength and support is delightful, always.
- Special mention to Sally Madden and Dr Liz Erickson for providing me with a home-base in the States and support and advice when needed.
- And finally "The Waifs" for making my road trips an exemplary audio experience and allowing me to share a little of my home with my new friends.

This journey has been amazing and new ideas, opportunities and possibilities continue to unfold...

## Introduction

In my role as the Environmental Education Officer with the Department of Agriculture Western Australia, I developed and coordinated a national study tour, funded by the Soil and Land Conservation Committee. The "Interstate Landcare Educators Study Tour" was conducted in 2001 where fourteen environmental education practitioners from across Western Australia, representing a range of organisations, travelled to the eastern states of Australia to investigate what resources were available and how they were being utilised.

The findings were that New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria had a variety of programs that were funded by the State Government (approximately \$5 million each). The like Western Australian State Government comparable contribution was approximately \$250 000. This inequity seemed unwarranted as Western Australia is the largest of the Australian states or territories and home to the largest diversity of environmental issues. See Appendix 1: [Executive Report](#)

The study tour results were presented at the State Landcare Conference (2001) and tabled at a special meeting with the Department of Premier and Cabinet Sustainability Unit where the information was utilised in the development of the State Government's [Sustainability Policy](#). Additionally, an [Environmental Education Policy](#) has just been launched by the Western Australian Government (November 2004).

I felt confident that these policies were a move in the right direction, however I wanted them to be more than just rhetoric, so what could I do? As an experienced practitioner I felt that I had already developed opportunities to become aware of the national strategies and actions within the environmental education field, now was the time to look wider, to the international arena. I decided to apply for the Churchill Fellowship to continue my research into how other states, territories and provinces were approaching similar issues which would hopefully facilitate finding a path to provide additional support and influence to progress Western Australian environmental education.

My project was described as:

**"Investigation of best practice environmental education programs in schools and communities."**  
This investigation will include visiting sites, discussing methods, maintenance, funding arrangements and motivation for these programs with the view to develop similar programs across Western Australia. Programs are to support schools and communities to implement the recently released Government Sustainability Policy. Results may lead to the development of a sustainability policy for the Department of Education and Training Western Australia that is in line with the current Sustainability Policy.

I selected Alberta, Canada as an appropriate province to visit as I knew they had a similar education system to ours. I also wanted to visit many states in the United States to gather a diversity of state governments action and support processes.

I was fortunate to time my trip so that I could leave Australia via Adelaide to attend the Australian Association or Environmental Education (AAEE) biennial conference. Additionally, I attended the North American Association of Environmental Education (NAAEE) annual conference in Biloxi, Mississippi. Attending both conferences resulted in many opportunities to consider current research and thinking and to network extensively.

I received my Churchill Fellowship in 2003 and delayed taking it until 2004 to coincide with the maturation of my long service leave and the imminent completion of my most recent contract with the Department of Education and Training Western Australia. Thus I had the luxury of being able to commit additional time to my Fellowship travel. I arranged the leave, sold my house, stored my furniture and moved in with my parents in preparation. I planned to be in North America for six months and to extend this opportunity by visiting environmental education programs in England, Scotland, Europe and Asia on my way home.

I interviewed past Fellowship recipients and their key message was to leave my itinerary open providing time to explore additional opportunities as they arose. I flew to the initial countries and major cities and travel by hire car in Canada and then to purchased my own car in the United States. I arranged some meetings prior to leaving Australia and made detailed and additional plans as I travelled. I took a laptop, provided for me by the Department of Education and Training Western Australia, which facilitated my planning, communicating and writing while on the road.

I was excited about the prospects of focussing on environmental education for a whole year, however I was also prepared to use this time to conduct some personal reflection. I had been preparing for this journey for two years and I was determined to maximise on every aspect that this amazing opportunity. This adventure was about research and reflection: professionally and personally.

## Executive Summary

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### **“Investigation of best practice environmental education programs in schools and communities.”**

After years of being an environmental education practitioner in Western Australia and then developing an opportunity to investigate current policy and practice in the field nationally, I felt that I still did not have the answers necessary to facilitate appropriate continued support. I applied for the Churchill Fellowship to provide me with an opportunity to change my perspective, which in hindsight seemed quite limited as I have now revised many of my initial beliefs and ideas as my understandings developed and broadened.

I was in a position to attach long-service leave, timed with the completion of my most recent contract with the Department of Education and Training Western Australia, to my Churchill Fellowship and I travelled to Canada and the United States of America for six months. I will also visit some sites in England, Scotland, Europe and Asia on my way home.

I chose to visit Canada, Alberta as they utilise a similar education system to Western Australia and the United States of America as this provides a variety of policies and practice implementation. Additionally, my journey was timed so that I could attend the Australian Association of Environmental Education (AAEE) biennial Conference in Adelaide as I left Australia and the North America Association of Environmental Education (NAAEE) in Biloxi, Mississippi. For information regarding my journey see [progress reports](#).

Attending both conferences afforded me with a research focus within the field of environmental education and a realisation that I had a desire to investigate further. Consequently I have applied to participate in a doctoral program with the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. Dr Paul Hart is a renowned researcher and I am excited about the prospect of working with him although I plan to utilise this opportunity to research Australian environmental education practice with a plan to return to Australia and implement appropriate support to our schools resulting in environmentally informed and responsible citizens and an increase in student achievement.

I also found both conferences provided exceptional networking opportunities and I was able to develop numerous contacts that resulted in opportunities to visit and investigate programs across North America. Additionally, the conversations with key environmental educators facilitated the development of my thoughts and ideas and consequently I was able to reconsider five key issues and find actionable paths for the future.

1. I devised my Churchill Fellowship application with the passionate belief that the Department of Education and Training Western Australia needed to be the lead agency in providing environmental education support to schools.

North America does not seem to have the level of support provided to schools from their government departments and consequently there is a plethora of non-government and not-for-profit organisations providing appropriate support. These programs and resources are varied and many of them are exceptionally well regarded and resourced. I see an opportunity for the development of such an organisation in Western Australia and I plan to utilise my research to provide the background information necessary to design an appropriate and strategic model.

I still believe that the Department of Education and Training Western Australia has a role to play and I have arranged to present my findings to department staff and the recently convened Environmental Education Advisory Council. I will discuss current research about improved student achievement with participation in whole school environmental education programs, the need for addressing social justice issues with awareness and developing an individuals environmental responsibility and action.

2. The next AAEE biennial conference will be held in October 2006 in Western Australia and as a member of the coordinating committee I felt that I was in a position to be able to offer my opinion about many issues that could be useful when planning this conference.

Attending both conferences allowed me to consider deeply what actually comprises a great environmental education conference. Consequently I wrote a report comparing the two and making suggestions for the coordinating committee of the 2006 AAEE conference to be held in Western Australia. I was asked to write an article for the “Ozee” newsletter about my findings at the AAEE conference. I accepted a position on the NAAEE International Commission and as such I am currently negotiating the development of a memorandum of understanding between the executive of NAAEE and AAEE that will directly benefit all

members with joint affiliation. The initial work will be conducted via email however, I am attempting to arrange a meeting in Zurich, Switzerland for May. I also plan to return to the USA to attend the 2005 NAAEE conference and I am currently submitting an application to present in the "global" strand of this conference.

I will be attending four other environmental education conferences in 2005 (Banff – Alberta, Canada; Esbjerg – Denmark; Melbourne – Australia; Albuquerque – New Mexico). During these conferences I hope to continue to add ideas and suggestions to the conference coordinating committee of the AAEE 2006 conference. I have already made the offer to coordinate a pre/post conference tour encouraging North American delegates to the AAEE Conference in 2006.

3. The AAEE Association, as demonstrated at the 2004 Conference, is becoming increasingly focussed on supporting tertiary and non-formal environmental education, I perceived this as a mistake as the real practitioners were the K to 12 teachers who were "on the ground" addressing student achievement.

I now see that the teachers are the direct recipients of the outcomes of the association as it supports the environmental educational professionals to produce resources for utilisation by classroom teachers. I will hold discussions with the executive of the Western Australian chapter of the AAEE Association and hopefully influence the strategic direction of the association. Similarly, as a member of the conference coordinating committee for 2006 and I can support the design of next conference to reflect these thoughts.

4. Teachers are the key to implementing appropriate whole school environmental education programs but how are they supported if they are not the target audience of the professional association AAEE?

I plan to research current practice in Western Australian universities and then explore Eastern Australian universities with the hope of eventually being in a position to action change towards developing strong pre-service teacher training in appropriate environmental programming/curriculum delivery to improve student achievement. The networks developed during this initial research will hopefully be utilised further throughout my pending PhD research.

5. Upon leaving Australia I was concerned about the lack of apparent connection some people have with their environment. I believe that this leads to the general apathy that pervades our society about being environmentally friendly in how we choose to exist. However, I considered this to only effect the minority. My findings from the Churchill Fellowship now lead me to believe that this is a broad issue. Citizens are choosing to enjoy a high-density lifestyle and consequently they are losing their connection to the environment. How can I be involved in reconnecting individuals with the environment?

I have collected numerous ideas and contacts that will support the implementation of some programs in Western Australia. They fall into the following categories:

Time in the outdoors – providing students with physical connections to the earth via outdoor experiences. I hope to provide advice and support to facilitate schools offsite activities in the environment.

The Arts – provide a wonderful vehicle for encouraging this connection and can be utilised in any location to suit every learning style. I hope to work with colleagues in Western Australia to develop similar programs for schools to access across the state.

Technology – is a tool that can provide specific learners further opportunities to explore a connection with the environment. Specifically I will support Skid Crease from the Earth Rangers Centre in Toronto, Ontario, Canada to assist him by updating his environmental awareness slide presentation into a web-based program.

Interpretation – provides many opportunities for the wider community to develop an understanding about particular aspects of the environment. I plan to support the development of additional interpretive signage around Western Australia.

#### Self Development

I gained much from the past six months and it seems that I am on a continued journey of self discovery. Some of the more important things I have focussed on are: the importance of journaling used as a tool for reflective thinking and providing an opportunity for close investigation, the environmental literacy ability circle which can provide ideas and advice about how to live more lightly, patience with life and everything in it and an ability to enjoy the journey and appreciate. I am determined to hold focus on these elements as I continue along my path, what ever it may hold.

I have been challenged and extended by this adventure, yet I have also come to a place of understanding about the world and my place within it. I have gained an inner serenity and an excitement for the future. Possibilities abound.



**4 November 04 Thursday**                      **Canada, Calgary/Calgary International**  
4 November 04 Thursday                      Mississippi, Biloxi/Gulfport

**Attend:**

- **North American Association for Environmental Education Conference, 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference, "Casting a wider net for Environmental Education", Biloxi, Mississippi, USA 5<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> November 2004**

**12 November 04 Friday**                      **Mississippi, Biloxi/Gulfport**  
12 November 04 Friday                      Colorado, Denver/Denver International  
**12 November 04 Friday**                      **Colorado, Denver/Denver International**  
12 November 04 Friday                      Wyoming, Laramie/General Brees

**Purchase a car** and continue to travel utilising this transport.

**Visit:**

1. Wyoming, Jackson – **Teton Science School**. Environmental education programs: Journey School, Graduate Program, Outreach Program and a Wildlife Expedition Program.
  2. Wyoming, Laramie – **Paul Taylor**. An Australian using the arts to engage American students in developing extended culture and environmental understandings.
  3. South Dakota - **Mount Rushmore** and **the Badlands**. Education and community extension.
  4. Wisconsin, Stevens Point – **Centre for Environmental Education**. The WCEE works to improve environmental education throughout the state of Wisconsin.
  5. Wisconsin, Madison – **Arboretum**.
  6. Wisconsin, Milwaukee – **University of Wisconsin**.
  7. Indiana, Gary – **Race Relations Council of NW Indiana**.
  8. Ohio, Cleveland – **Cuyahoga Valley National Park**. Creating an education facility for the broader community.
  9. New York - **Central Park**. Well utilized and managed (and famous) park with an environmental education centre in the middle.
  10. New York - **The Natural History Museum**. A huge collection with a variety of themes and a well resourced discovery centre. Staff outreach to the community by supporting many programs including a student conference with international delegates.
  11. New Hampshire – **Antioch New England**. A graduate school with a professional interdisciplinary environmental program.
  12. Vermont - **Ben and Jerry's Ice-creamery**. A small company, a great idea, a yummy product and an environmental ethic!!
  13. Vermont – **University of Vermont**. A successful university program that is broadening the community environmental ethic.
- Travel back into Canada: Montreal and southern Ontario (Ottawa, Toronto, Niagara Falls) with awareness of community education programs (via interpretation, local newspapers, conversation and posters).
14. Toronto – **Earth Rangers**. A wildlife rehabilitation centre with an excellent student and community education program.

**2005 – the trip continues...**

Crossing back into USA and returning to Ohio, resting here to write reports etc. Then continuing on... South to Florida, West to California and then North to exit USA and enter British Columbia, Canada. I will continue to travel for three weeks, attending the GEOEC Conference in Banff , Alberta in late April and finally leaving North America via Vancouver late April.

Then I head to England, Scotland and Europe continuing to travel to meet with environmental educators discussing issues, ideas including attending a conference in Esbjerg, Denmark in May "Capacity Building and Empowerment Education for Sustainable Development".

Finally returning to Western Australia via Malaysia and Indonesia in June 2005.

## Fellowship Findings

For a comprehensive description of my Churchill Fellowship travels and research findings please see my [web site](#). I have learned about many wonderful programs, visited some excellent interpretation and education sites, met with some great thinkers and practitioners and attended two conferences that were incredibly worthwhile. The resources collected and contacts made are described in detail in the progress reports on the above mentioned website.

Following is a synthesis of my research findings and plans for action that result from my participation in the Churchill Fellowship program. I have divided these findings into three sections that describe my conclusions and how I perceive a future role for myself: research, net-working, and continued self development.

### Research

*"The ultimate goal of environmental education is the development of an environmentally literate citizenry. Environmentally literate individuals understand environmental issues and how environmental quality is impacted by human decisions. In addition, they use this knowledge to make informed, well-reasoned choices that also take social and political considerations into account."* From the Introduction to the North American Association of Environmental Education (NAAEE) Non-Formal Guidelines for Excellence. [www.eelink.net](http://www.eelink.net)

This definition describes how environmental education is teaching the development of understandings about the environment however, as indicated, this practice also moves beyond awareness raising. It takes the learner to another level where they investigate their role in the environment and to determine exactly what they (personally) can be responsible for doing or changing in their daily lives to have a positive impact on their immediate environment by "living more lightly" on the earth.

Currently there is much conjecture regarding the definitions that are utilised to title this field. Is the term environmental education passé? Is environmental literacy or ecological literacy a more relevant title? I met with environmental educators who described environmental education as the state of knowing while environmental literacy is the state of doing (Carey Booth - Fish Creek Education Centre, Calgary, and Jeff Reading - Calgary Board of Education, Alberta Learning, Canada).

There are the more recent titles of education for sustainability, education for a sustainable future or education for sustainable development. These terms are often described as being "all encompassing" and inclusive of the social and economic issues with the environmental. Is environmental education a subset of the others or visa versa? I have held many discussions with key environmental educators across North America and I remain undecided as to the correct answer, if there is one.

This issue seems to be current and concerning to many environmental educators who are engaged in the field at many levels. Reports, planning and policies are being devised using a variety of terminology.

- The Western Australian Government's *Environmental Education – Strategy and Action Plan* which is an action plan for environmental education that builds on the previous document *Environmental Education: A Discussion Paper* and the subsequent public submissions and input (November 2004).
- The *Educating for a Sustainable Future: A National Environmental Education Statement for Australian Schools* which is currently in draft form (February 2005).
- The *Australian Research Institute in Education or Sustainability (ARIES)*, based at Macquarie University, which is the first national institute devoted to research in Education for Sustainability.
- The *United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005 – 2014)*.

I have found these discussions stimulating and as the Scholarship progresses I have become aware of a personal desire to investigate these and other environmental education issues more closely. Therefore as a direct consequence of my Churchill Fellowship I have decided to continue researching and furthering this investigation by participating in a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) program. I have applied to Regina University, Saskatchewan, Canada with the Faculty of Education to research environmental education. I hope to be studying with Dr Paul Hart, a well regarded environmental educator (who currently works at the Regina University), with a full scholarship basing my research on Australian environmental education observations.

Meeting Dr Hart at the NAAEE Conference and spending considerable time discussing, contemplating, researching and considering environmental education with new and engaging colleagues as I have travelled across North America has resulted in my desire to enrol in this postgraduate program. I am currently waiting for an offer and I plan to begin this program in the Fall semester (September) 2005.

### Net-working

I left Western Australia determined about five notions, all of which I have since reconsidered (upon reflection they were probably rather naïve notions, however it took the Churchill Fellowship to provide me with the opportunity to step away from my current perception).

1. I devised my Churchill Fellowship application with the passionate belief that the Department of Education and Training Western Australia needed to be the lead agency in providing environmental education support to schools.

In my opinion the political leaders of Western Australia have an appropriate understanding regarding the current environmental issues however, do they know how to take appropriate action to address these issues? I have developed a deeper understanding about how bureaucracy operates via appropriate political leadership and devised policy which is a direct reflection of a perception of the needs of the constituency/community. So where in this system does change begin? How can I offer any input or influence? I had tried to work from within bureaucracy prior to beginning my Churchill Fellowship and now I understand that I can be just as effective utilising alternative strategies. I have been exposed to examples where non-government organisations offer support and leadership roles successfully and can do so by integrating many different strategies of support.

For example the Teton Science School (Jackson, Wyoming USA) operates as an organisation with four major divisions each supporting the other. The Journey School runs a specialised K to 12 program with an environmental ethic for local students. The Kelly Campus is a residential school that caters for school visits offering a science research program and an outreach program that visits schools across the state. These programs are facilitated by the students of the Graduate program who are attending the Kelly Campus to gain a post graduate degree in environmental education. And then there is a wildlife expeditions program for community members (that makes a considerable profit and supports each of the other divisions). [Progress report](#)

I believe there is capacity for a similar organisation to be developed that is adapted specifically to the Western Australian environment and education system. I will continue to research and investigate this opportunity with the charter to develop an organisation to provide support to schools in the form of personal contact, advice, professional development, student programs, resources (in school activities and offsite locations with authentic learning opportunities), funding arrangements, web based support and programs to link international students and issues (etc). I also believe in the need for pre-service teacher training and non-formal teacher education and both of these components could be easily woven into the design of this organisation.

I plan to use the research opportunity provided by my pending PhD program to facilitate the collection of the necessary background information required to structure such an organisation. There are many examples of relevant and successful organisations that will be appropriate case studies. Additionally, there are partnership opportunities to explore, including the government departments in Western Australia who are currently involved in supporting schools with environmental education. Finally, it is important to research exactly what it is that schools require to be able to implement a strong environmental education program.

I do, however, still believe that the Department of Education and Training Western Australia has a significant role to play in supporting schools to assist teachers who encourage our future generations to become environmentally informed citizens making appropriate decisions economically, socially and environmentally. I will continue to foster relationships that mutually benefit the achievement of this goal to connect schools and students to the environment.

Current research, conducted in the state of Washington (paper pending), concludes that there is a significant disparity in student performance of similar schools (based on socio-economic data) between schools participating in environmental education programs and those not. The results indicate that students achievement in standardised tests (literacy and numeracy) in schools currently participating in whole school environmental programs achieve greater success in both areas than students in schools without such programs. This research is paramount in providing evidence supporting the need for whole school environmental education programs. [Progress report](#)

Additionally, awareness of social justice issues determines the need for individuals to be considerate of the environment in which they live as potentially harmful industry by-products and practices can and do cause significant health issues. Many low socio-economic families are forced to live in areas close in proximity to such industry. School based education programs can provide information encouraging future generations to make more informed choices about these aspects of life. Louisville, Kentucky is one of the most

industrialised cities in the world and has a significant history of social justice issues. Dr David Wicks, Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, manages the Centre for Environmental Education where he supports schools to implement environmental education programs using a variety of strategies encouraging the engagement of students, teachers and administrators. He claims that his role is about improving student outcomes and he uses environmental education as the medium for achieving these results. So here is an example of a government department taking responsibility for environmental education, as a pathway to improve student achievement. So it can happen... [Progress report](#)

Jerry Lieberman heads up the State Environmental Education Roundtable (SEER) organisation from San Diego, California. This program provides schools with a process establishing whole school environmental education programs that result in significantly improved student achievement. Many of the states in the USA are involved in this program. Additionally, some states have developed environmental education standards [Progress report](#)

The federally funded Sustainable Schools Program which is being successfully implemented in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria and just beginning in Western Australia, is a step in the right direction in my opinion. However, it is yet to be seen as to how effective this program will be in providing the necessary support to all schools to ensure that environmental education programs are implemented and that these programs actually sustain a significant improvement in cross-curricula student achievement. I plan to utilise this language, argument and current research to continue discussions with the Department of Education and Training Western Australia in the hope that suitable and sustainable school support programs are developed and maintained as a way to improve student achievement.

I have been requested by the Director General to present my Churchill Fellowship findings to the Department of Education and Training staff and I have recently been asked to present to the newly formed Department of Environment - Environmental Education Advisory Committee upon my return. These opportunities could be significant in providing key bureaucrats with information, ideas and thoughts about the possibilities that exist for Western Australian Schools. I also hope to develop strong networks within these organisations which will facilitate my future research, thus ensuring that the relationships continue and hopefully result in action.

So, although I have changed the focus from working explicitly within the government system I feel that I can still affect action, support and change for the students of Western Australia. I believe that I can influence our government agencies to take positive action to develop sustainable environmental education programs in our schools resulting in improved student achievement and informed and active citizens.

2. The next AAEE biennial conference will be held in October 2006 in Western Australia and as a member of the coordinating committee I felt that I was in a position to be able to offer my opinion about many issues that could be useful when planning this conference.

At the conclusion of the AAEE Conference I wrote an article for the OZEE News – the Newsletter of the AAEE about my thoughts on the conference. See [article](#)

I attended both the AAEE and the NAAEE Conferences in 2004 and this provided me with the opportunity to compare and contrast these events from the perspective of a national and international delegate. I enjoyed each conference and found them stimulating, well attended and excellent networking events. I recorded my thoughts and collated a report that has been offered to the Coordinating Committee. See [report](#)

I joined the NAAEE International Commission in the hope that I would be in a position to facilitate talks that may increase the international links between this association and AAEE. I am currently negotiating a meeting between the current executive of each organisation to establish a memorandum of understanding focussing on opportunities for mutual organisational and member support. This meeting is planned to occur in Zurich, Switzerland in May 2005.

By attending additional conferences in the environmental education field I am able to gather further ideas for possible keynote speakers, themes and topics and special features which may be considered appropriate for the AAEE conference. I plan to attend the following conferences in 2005:

- Global Environmental and Outdoor Education Committee (GEOEC) Conference in Banff, Alberta, Canada in April to learn how a provincial organisation provides support to its delegates.
- One of the first celebrations for the UN Decade of education for sustainable development; a conference in Esbjerg, Denmark titled "Capacity Building and Empowerment Education for the Environment". At this conference I hope to broaden my international network and to develop an understanding of environmental education with a European context.

- International Thinking Conference - Melbourne, Australia in July were I hope to meet many educational theorists and form networks that will provide continued consideration about how to support environmental education pedagogy. Additionally, I will utilise this travel opportunity to meet with environmental educators operating in the Eastern States of Australia.
- NAAEE Conference - Albuquerque, New Mexico in October (upon my return to North America to begin my PhD program).

I have written a proposal offering a presentation/poster for the next NAAEE which is to be held in October 2005 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I will present my findings from the Churchill Fellowship and resulting world investigation into current environmental education practices and policy.

Finally, I have proposed a pre/post conference tour for North American delegates to travel to Western Australia, visit some significant environmental education sites and attend the 2006 AAEE Conference. There appears to be a significant appetite for such a trip from the new colleagues I am currently visiting and I have begun to negotiate this concept with my travel consultant.

3. The AAEE Association, as demonstrated at the 2004 Conference, is becoming increasingly focussed on supporting tertiary and non-formal environmental education, I perceived this as a mistake as the real practitioners were the K to 12 teachers who were "on the ground" with their students.

I have revised this opinion and I now believe there is a need for research to determine if the classroom environmental education practitioners, the non-formal support and the recently developed resources are actually successful in supporting environmental awareness and action in our students. Thus, if there is to be a thriving professional association, such as AAEE, then maybe this is where the non formal educators and resource creators meet formally with the researchers to ensure that they are coevolving to support student achievement. I now see that teachers are the resulting beneficiaries of the outcomes from this association and as such are not the target audience. This clarifies understandings regarding many issues I was having with the association and I feel I am able to engage in discussion with colleagues who are the current executive of the Western Australian chapter of the association and in a position to focus the associations strategic direction. Similarly, these same colleagues are involved with coordinating the AAEE Conference in 2006 and such conversations will result in a well designed and appropriately targeted conference.

This realisation caused me to consider the role of the researcher in environmental education more closely and consequently I participated in the NAAEE Research Symposium prior to the NAAEE Conference in November 2004. It was here that I met Dr Paul Hart and realised that I was developing a desire to be involved in environmental education at a deeper level. I was intrigued and engaged and as a result I made my career changing decision to return to research. I also felt that the concept of the Research Symposium was excellent and a process that could be replicated in the 2006 AAEE Conference. I will work with colleagues to develop this concept further.

4. Teachers are the key to implementing appropriate whole school environmental education programs but how are they supported if they are not the target audience of the professional association AAEE?

I was beginning to appreciate the need for pre-service teacher training in environmental education. I am not aware of any universities currently offering pre-service teacher environmental education training in Western Australia. At present the individual teacher chooses to be proactive and enrolls in some of the many professional development programs offered by a variety of government departments, agencies and organisations. This is an ad-hoc approach that could be significantly improved.

Upon my return to Australia in June 2005 I will visit the four Western Australian Universities to discuss what opportunities currently exist for environmental education in pre-service teacher training. I hope to use this opportunity to create networks with the key faculty members that I will be able to further utilise during my PhD research. As a result of the exposure I have received during the Churchill Fellowship I now consider pre-service teacher environmental education training to be an important process in ensuring students are offered environmental education programs during their school career, resulting in improved achievement and future active citizenry.

I will also be travelling to the eastern states of Australia to conduct similar interviews with key environmental education faculty. I believe that meeting these professionals will greatly benefit my forthcoming research. I hope to collect information and ideas and to be able to put names to faces of published research. I also hope to be able to utilise these meetings to engage environmental educators across the nation to be involved in the 2006 AAEE Conference as conference trips to Western Australia require significant pre-planning.

5. Upon leaving Australia I was concerned about the lack of apparent connection some people have with their environment. I believe that this leads to the general apathy that pervades our society about being environmentally friendly in how we choose to exist. However, I considered this to only effect the minority. My findings from the Churchill Fellowship now lead me to believe that this is a broad issue. Citizens are choosing to enjoy a high-density lifestyle and consequently they are losing their connection to the environment. How can I be involved in reconnecting individuals with the environment?

I have experienced and discussed many programs addressing this very issue and I believe that I am in a position to share this information or to initiate some exciting programs and activities addressing this issue in Western Australia.

#### Time in the outdoors

It may seem as though it is not always practical to provide students with an outdoor experience. However, students in Calgary, Canada do not use weather as an excuse and they are regularly supported to participate in outdoor activities throughout the year (even in winter). The Calgary Board of Education has spent considerable time and energy developing outdoor and environmental education curricula and supporting teachers to use it appropriately. Additionally, they have a comprehensive permission assessment protocol that supports schools to feel confident in their preparation for such activities (important in these days of potential litigation). [Progress report](#)

Initially I considered that the answer in re-connection lay in providing outdoor experiences, and I still think this is important, however there really are times when this is just not an option. Costs, time and of course finances can be seriously limiting factors. I have become aware of many alternatives to actually being outside (although I passionately believe they do not replace the need for outdoor experiences).

#### The Arts

Utilising the arts (drama, fine art (journaling), media, music, dance, performance, impromptu, puppets, plays, simulations, games) students can be compelled to consider the environment and specific aspects and perspectives with in it. I have seen many programs achieving this such as Peter Lenton – Puffin Productions (Alberta, Canada) and Paul Taylor – the Didgeridoo Man (Wyoming, USA). I am very interested in introducing these wonderful resources to Western Australia and ensuring that I encourage local talent to fill this necessary niche.

#### Technology

The use of technology can operate in a similar way to the arts for a different sub-set of our youth. Activities such as: web searching, international interaction, the presentation of ideas and information and data driven assessment can be utilised to engage students in developing environmental understandings and actions. I have encouraged the Western Australian Millennium Kids organisation to communicate with the coordinator of the New York Students' Environmental Conference in the hope that some students could participate bringing a diversity and richness of issues and opinion to this conference. Many other opportunities for linking students internationally exist and I will endeavour to establish these connections.

Additionally, I met with Skid Crease from the Earth Rangers Centre in Toronto, Ontario, Canada and I have negotiated to assist him by updating his environmental awareness slide presentation into a web-based program that can be more effectively utilised reaching a wider audience and hopefully persuading its audience to have consideration for the environment.

#### Interpretation

I discovered much about North American history as I drove through many of the states and provinces by reading interpretive signs. I found this method of sharing information to be extremely useful and I will continue to support community groups and government agencies to develop similar interpretation around Western Australia. I am able to write letters requesting signage or work with community groups to apply for funding to develop interpretation. Similarly, I visited some wonderful interpretive centres: such as Mount Rushmore, The Badlands and Head Smashed in Buffalo Jump and I am eager to look for opportunities to be involved or promote and facilitate the appropriate development of these centres. I stress appropriate as some concepts I have experienced are not, in my opinion, appropriate.

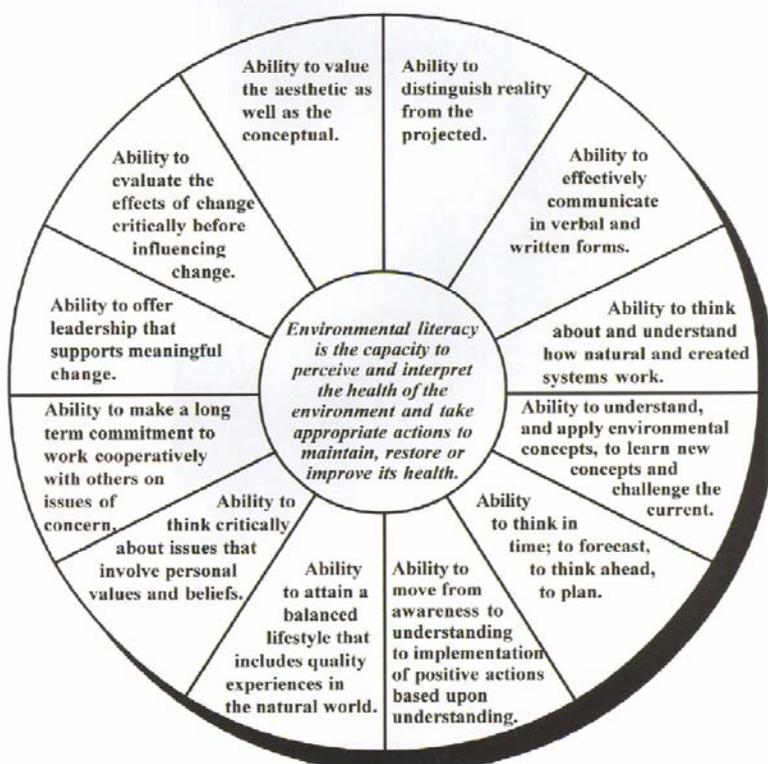
#### Self Development

I gained much from the past five months and it seems that I am still on a journey of self discovery. Some of the more important things I need to focus on are:

*Journaling* is a tool utilised by many of the practicing environmentalists that I met. So many that I decided there must be something significant about it. I purchased a nice book and began with a New Years resolution to maintain this practice. I feel more reflective and purposeful using this strategy, an excellent outcome considering the major decisions I have had to make recently. I am even beginning to utilise drawing and sketching as an additional tool to writing. This is a wonderful process to be more reflective in my life and to investigate issues more closely.

*The Environmental Literacy Ability Circle* provided me with opportunities to reflect about how I was living my life. I have a desire to “walk my talk” however I had always struggled to achieve a comfortable balance. I felt that this diagram could be integral to facilitate my achievement of that balance and it now takes pride of place in my journal.

## ENVIRONMENTAL LITERACY: ABILITY CIRCLE



Jeff Reading (2004)

*Patience* in coping with people especially colleagues, family and friends; traffic and car issues and the little things that present themselves as challenges in daily life.

*Enjoying the journey* was my New Years Resolution last year and I now believe that I am able to do exactly that. Life is worth living and living well. I have been fortunate to meet many people who work and play with intention. I look forward to being able to emulate this during the rest of my life.

*Appreciation* for the amazingly supportive parents I have, the wonderful friendships I have managed to create and maintain and for the awareness that I am so fortunate. I have created many wonderful opportunities for myself and I appreciate them constantly.

Although, I am not returning to Western Australia to take a position in a classroom where I can implement any of these programs, which was a distinct possibility at the time of application to the Churchill Fellowship. I have decided to return to North America to participate in a research program based on Australia that will ultimately provide me with the background necessary to effectively implement many of the significant findings I have made during this scholarship. I feel that I have just discovered the tip of the iceberg and am looking forward to taking the next three years to explore the depths.

## **Conclusions**

The Churchill Fellowship has provided me with an opportunity to explore environmental education across North America and eventually England, Scotland, Europe and some parts of Asia. I have participated in two excellent conferences (one Australian and one North American) and I will participate in four more this year. I have developed significant networks and met many contacts and I have a variety of plans to action. I have also gathered an array of new friends and been on a significant journey of self discovery. In conclusion, my Churchill Fellowship journey has resulted in changing my career and life course significantly.

### Research

I have decided to return to North America to begin a post graduate program of study in environmental education with a renowned researcher from Saskatchewan, Canada with a research focus on Australia. I hope to be offered a full scholarship and to start in the 2005 Fall Semester (September). My most profound future action.

### Net-working

I will utilise this research opportunity to gather the background information necessary to develop an appropriate organisational model of support to develop school environmental education programs, social justice awareness and student achievement. I will present my Churchill Fellowship finding to staff from the Department of Education and Training Western Australia and the recently formed Environmental Education Advisory Council.

As a member of the AAEE 2006 conference coordinating committee who plans to return to North America later this year, I can offer limited support. I have written a report that compares and contrasts the two conferences I attended highlighting ideas for the Western Australian conference. I have offered to coordinate a pre/post conference tour encouraging North American delegates to the conference. I am working with the executive from both the AAEE and the NAAEE organisations to development of a memorandum of understanding supporting joint affiliation for members. I am currently submitting an application to present my findings at the next NAAEE conference in 2005.

I will support the strategic direction of the Western Australian chapter of AAEE to consider its target audience as the professional environmental education body and not to focus on teachers who are the direct beneficiaries of these professionals.

I plan to investigate the current situation with regard to teacher pre-service environmental education training in Western Australian universities and compare it to those in eastern Australia. Developing contacts that will be further utilised during my research.

I can also begin to develop opportunities for specific program implementation. I have gathered many ideas for programs and projects to facilitate the re-connecting of people to the environment. These fall into the following categories: time spent outdoors, the arts, technology, and interpretation for the wider community.

### Self Development

I have been on a journey of discovery about myself as well. I have gathered some useful tools and reflections. They are: journaling to facilitate reflective thinking and close examination, the use of the environmental literacy ability circle providing information regarding living more lightly, and the personal qualities of patience, enjoying the journey and appreciation.

I have really enjoyed my adventure and although I have changed direction significantly I remain passionate about my belief in environmental education and definite about my ability to be an active practitioner.