

EDITORIAL

The 1998 EEASA Conference-and-Workshops meeting was a sound success. The Botswana organisers must be congratulated on convening such a convivial and stimulating event.

The conference gave exposure to some of the environmental education research in progress in the region. While there is an exciting level of regional research activity, this is not adequately represented in the Southern African Journal of Environmental Education, or any other published forum for that matter. The SAJEE receives a rather small number of research papers from southern Africans for review; in addition the journal's referees and editors judge an even smaller number of these as suitable for publication. What this reflects, *inter alia*, is the need for environmental educators in the region to write more vigorously about their research.

It also indicates the need for what has been termed 'capacity-building' in social research. The latter was identified as a priority in the reconstruction and development of intellectual institutions in South Africa by the Centre for Science Development, who conducted a national survey to determine research capacity-building needs in 1997. Regular interactions between and support for researchers, particularly beginners, have also been identified as an important factor. At the 1998 EEASA conference, participants in a session on research rigour suggested that a regional network be set up for researchers to share their experiences and derive support from each other, particularly in the context of the proliferation of research methodologies, some of which are contested or unfamiliar to donors or research supervisors. Should any readers wish to participate in this network they are welcome to contact Eureta Janse van Rensburg who undertook to produce a newsletter and has drafted a database of recipients.

A directory of all environmental education research in southern Africa (theses, published articles and reports) has been compiled by Pat Irwin of the Faculty of Education at Rhodes University. In addition to information on author, title, date and source, each of the approximately 270 research items included, contains data on methods and content, using keywords, and a summary/abstract. This first edition which will be extended and updated on an annual basis also contains a simple index of keywords. The main aim of the document is to facilitate research in environmental education in southern Africa by

making this primary data easily available and accessible and thus saving considerable time and cost in 'tracking down' what has been done. Readers/users are invited to comment on the document and to suggest additions or changes for future editions. Copies will be available at cost price from Pat Irwin directly, by the end of 1998*.

Other research initiatives that address the issues of capacity-building, support and communication are:

The HSRC (Human and Social Research Council) in South Africa in partnership with the EECI (Environmental Education Curriculum Initiative) support a curriculum research project in which experienced and beginner researchers address issues of mutual concern in regular colloquia and collaborative papers (see Hughes in this issue).

A number of South African universities and colleges collaborate with Deakin and Griffith Universities in Australia in a project to strengthen the capacity of tertiary institutions to, *inter alia*, conduct research. The first outcomes related to this project are starting to appear in the literature (see Gough and Lotz & Robottom in this issue). The project also aims to produce a research methodology text based on southern African case studies, thus strengthening the call for researchers to write up their work.

One of the issues which need to be addressed in research capacity-building is the range of methodological approaches now being applied to educational research (see Janse van Rensburg & Hughes, paper presented at EEASA 98 and available from Eureta). The question 'What counts as research?' now has a more complex answer than it may have had when positivist traditions dominated the social sciences more extensively. The range of research papers in this volume of the SAJEE illustrates the broadening understanding of what constitutes research.

In two more conventional research papers Chacko Chacko and Eureta Janse van Rensburg present findings from surveys they conducted in urban and rural educational settings in South Africa. Vivien Willers & Fred van Staden draw on a review of the empirical research in their field, including their own, to construct a model for environmental attitudinal change. Jenny Andrew and Ian Robottom use a review of Australian print media to argue that environmental

education has an important role to play in enabling more critical public engagement in environmental discussions.

In an example of new developments in educational research Noel Gough argues for a re-reading of some of the discourses South Africans are applying to their work in a research paper in which, he argues, "ideas about narrative and textuality are the instruments and apparatus with which I produce 'data' in my conceptual laboratory".

The case study of contextual curriculum development presented by Heila Lotz and Ian Robottom is based on empirical data collected during fieldwork praxis. So is the paper by Peter Raine, in which the author focuses on the conceptual framework for his field of study, traditional environmental knowledge, with reference to his extended case study in Fiji. Bridget Hughes contributes a meta-research paper in which she explores research-related issues arising from the above mentioned HSRC-EECI curriculum research project. Finally this issue features two short contributions: Jane Burt reflects on the research and other studies she conducted over the past two years, while Ally Ashwell's preliminary analysis of the organisational context of environmental education and transformation forms the platform for an extended study she is about to embark upon.

Readers' comment on this rich array of articles and the various methodological perspectives they reflect can contribute significantly to the process of research development in environmental education currently gathering momentum in the region. We would like to encourage such comment, and therefore call for contributions to a correspondence and debate section we hope to feature in the next issue of the *SAJEE*.

The Editors

* Pat Irwin can be contacted on edpi@croc.ru.ac.za (preferred mode of correspondence) or (+)46-6228028 (fax).