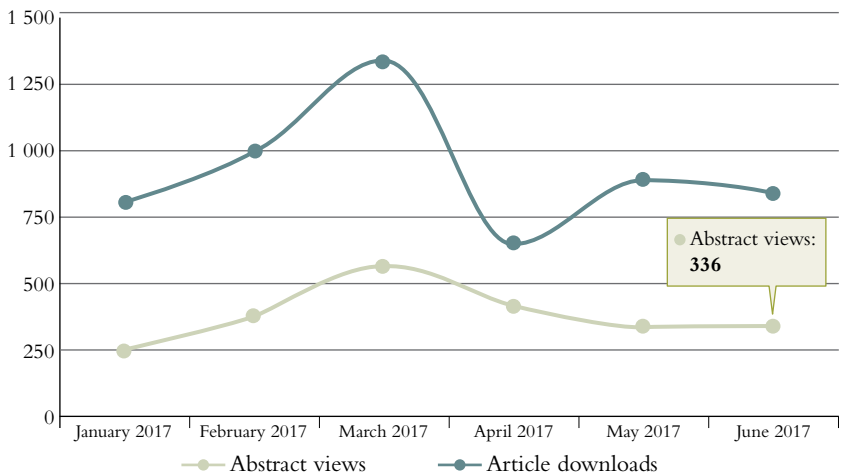
Journal Development, Scholar Development and Quality

Eureta Rosenberg, Rhodes University, South Africa; and
Mucha Togo, University of South Africa

Journal Development, Scholar Development and Quality

Recently, the 33-year journey of the *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education (SAJEE)* was the subject of reflection during an Open Access Publishing week convened by Rhodes University Library Services. Two former and current editors-in-chief shared the *SAJEE*'s story of publishing 'from the margins into the centre'. In the early 1990s, the Journal was mailed to the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA) membership from the foyer of the Rhodes Education Department (which had the floor space for stuffing and stacking A4 envelopes). In the first decade of this century, the Journal arrived at a symbolic 'centre' with digital distribution, first on the EEASA website and then from the Open Access platform provided by African Journals Online (AJOL). The digital move was vital for sustained and increased distribution in a time of shrinking budgets and growing costs. The results, shared with the EEASA Council earlier this year, were nothing short of spectacular: In March 2017, the *SAJEE* received more than 1 250 article downloads (www.ajol.info/index.php/sajee), and the number of downloads have stayed above 500 each month subsequently (Figure 1). Views and downloads are recorded around the world including,

Figure 1: Abstract views and article downloads by month for the *SAJEE*, January–June 2017



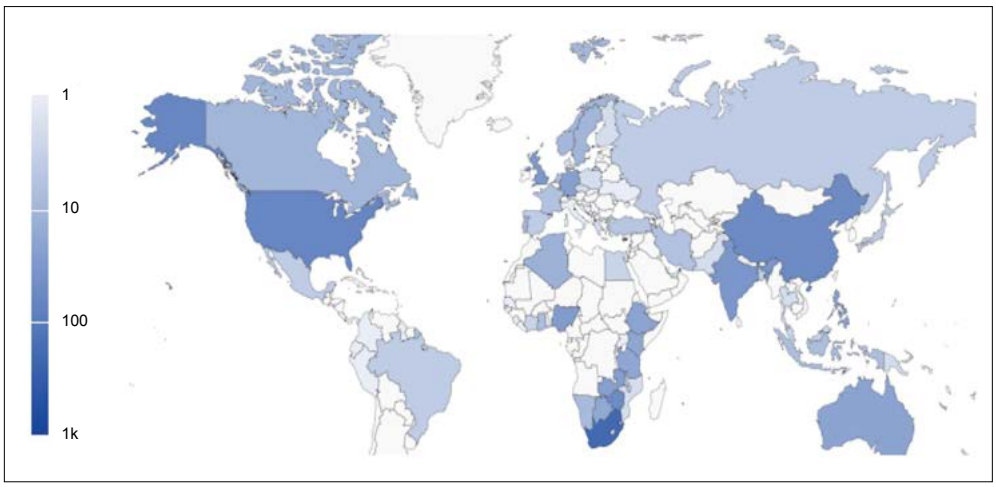
Source: www.ajol.info, visited July 2017

 DOI 10.4314/sajee.v.33i1.1

ISSN 2411-5959 | DOI 10.4314/SAJEE.V.33I1.1

vitally, in English-speaking Africa, with a high percentage in the entire Southern African Development Community (SADC) region (Figure 2).

Figure 2: *SAJEE* article downloads from AJOL, June 2017



Source: www.ajol.info, visited July 2017

Online publishing is, however, a double-edged sword. It gives greater access to research findings and scholarly ideas and reduces the cost of reaching readers, educators, policymakers and fellow researchers. But, precisely because the limitations of physical publishing – printing, paper and postage – are removed, online publishing also has a dark side: the potential for poorer quality. It is easier to publish more papers and to cut corners in the processes that maintain the rigour of academic publishing, which are the very foundation of the reputation and value of scholarly work. Thus, at a conference on The Future of Scholarly Publishing in Stellenbosch, in October 2017, a contributor to a forthcoming report on scholarly publishing by the Academy of Sciences in South Africa (ASSAf), Prof. Johann Mouton, spoke of a 'crisis of quality'.

The *SAJEE*, as a government-accredited journal, adheres to strict policies to safeguard the quality and rigour of the works published. In this process, the contribution of the time and intellect of reviewers and editors is a critical component that needs greater recognition. Another contribution to quality is investing in the writing skills of the incoming scholars in the field. In 2016, EEASA invested in a development initiative for the research students among its members. The initiative resulted in this, the thirty-third volume of the *SAJEE*, which is dedicated to student publishing. With the exception of the Viewpoint by Prof. Chris Reddy, and the Editorial, all the other contributions, which are all research-based, have a student as first author. How did this wonderful situation come about?

For the EEASA's 2016 Conference in Johannesburg, the Gauteng Local Organising Committee raised funds to make an award for the Best Student Paper presented at the event. The award went to Inonge Milupi, a PhD candidate in Environmental Studies at the University of Pretoria, with

Sikhulile Msezane, a PhD candidate from the University of South Africa's College of Education the runner-up. The remaining funding was then used to provide professional writing support to help Milupi and Msezane to prepare papers for review and possible publication in this volume. The other authors published in Volume 33 who received writing support are Nondumiso Dumakude (University of the Free State), Mubanga Kapuka from the Copperbelt University, and Mapaleng Lekgeu (University of Pretoria). Congratulations to these students, their research supervisors and co-authors, and to EEASA for this worthwhile investment in the quality of future scholarship in our field. The level of interest was high: in total, 11 student papers from three countries in the region were reviewed. This bodes well for the future of the *SAJEE* and for African scholarship in environmental education, ethics and action.

Two other student authors are published in this volume. Both are from Rhodes University in South Africa, albeit from different faculties. Presha Ramsarup conducted her PhD studies in Education, while Siseko Hudson Kumalo was, at the time of producing his paper, a third-year student in Anthropology and Political & International Sciences.

Overview of the Contributions in Volume 33

Kumalo opens Volume 33 with a critical reflection on the content of university curricula, drawing on literature on sustainability and (de)coloniality. In South Africa, the years 2015 to 2016 were characterised by fierce calls for the transformation of higher education, starting in March 2015 with the #RhodesMustFall protests, directed initially at the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the University of Cape Town campus, then more broadly at other colonial symbols and university curricula. These important debates continue and, in October 2017, the South African Education Research Association (SAERA) will dedicate its annual conference to 'education in an era of decolonization and transformation' (saeraconference.co.za).

Are discussions about 'decolonising' curricula relevant to environment and sustainability education?

Kumalo argues that, through socially responsive pedagogical and congruent conceptual frameworks, educators will validate the lived experience of learners and achieve epistemological or epistemic justice, which he sees as a critical dimension of sustainability education. Drawing on the work of Wolfgang Sachs and Amartya Sen, he troubles mainstream definitions of 'development' and explores an African ethical position for advancing sustainability objectives. As such, he joins a line of authors like Tsepo Mokuku and Soul Shava who have, over the years, published in this Journal and have maintained that bringing a new, African focus to school and higher-education curricula would also create openings to focus more strongly on sustainability and environmental justice.

Milupi, Somers and Ferguson remind us of the rich heritage of ecological knowledge still held by many on our continent, and of its role in helping Africans manage the natural resources that are so vital for the well-being of households and economies. Much has been written about the value of local, indigenous and situated knowledge in past editions of this Journal, and a 2018 edition (with Guest Editors Soul Shava from the University of South Africa and Rosa Guadalupe Mendoza-Zuany from Universidad Veracruzana) will again focus on this important

ISSN 2411-5959 | DOI 10.4314/SAJEE.V.33I1.1

topic. Currently, it would seem that indigenous and local environmental knowledge receives much more attention as a scientific curiosity than as substance for curriculum reform. The authors of this paper argue that there is a policy gap related to how local ecological knowledge can be mobilised.

Questions about what knowledge we teach shaped the research conducted by **Msezane** on the environmental content of the Grade 12 curriculum for South African schools as it appears in policy documents and in examinations. The study found that topics related to environmental impacts feature significantly only in three of the subjects examined in the final exit examination. Even in these subjects, the author is concerned that the content is too limited and inconsistently examined from year to year, compared with the policy.

In their study on the perceptions of climate change among Grade 11 Geography learners in two South African schools, **Lekgeu and Davis** explore the impacts of the environmental content in the curriculum, but also other influences such as social media. They note that the methods teachers use may also be responsible for differences observed between schools. They find that, while a percentage of learners in both schools are very knowledgeable about climate change and are positive about their ability to make a difference, another percentage have little hope that anything can be done.

The study from the Copperbelt University, by **Kapuka, Shumba and Munthali**, also illuminates the impacts of the curriculum. In this case, the focus is on the university, and not the explicit or policy content of the curriculum, but the 'hidden' curriculum of the educators' actual practices. They explore the impact of the introduction of electronic course materials on students' behaviour: Are the students reducing printing? Do they understand the connections with climate change? The authors conclude that educators need to model the kinds of behaviours they teach about in sustainability-related courses.

In his Viewpoint paper, **Reddy** from Stellenbosch University, puts the spotlight on teachers' ability to teach environmental education. As a curriculum specialist, Prof. Reddy gives attention to the body of research conducted on the nature of the knowledge and teaching practices that would most appropriately achieve the desired objectives of environmental education in schools. He notes that the particular nature of the 'subject' matter of environmental education, and its objectives, requires special approaches to teaching environmental education, for which, he argues, the national policy context in South Africa does provide adequate spaces that should be taken up by teacher educators.

One of the epistemological features of environmental and sustainability education that Reddy and other authors in this volume highlight is that the content is never 'complete'; more than most other subject areas, it is always under construction.

Dumakude and Graham propose that people learn not just by receiving information, but also by participating in knowledge creation. They investigated the testing of a scientific tool for assessing the state of wetlands, a tool that has been adapted so that people without specialist knowledge (citizen scientists) can determine and track the health of wetlands, thereby not only contributing to the pool of knowledge, but also increasing their own understanding and ability to act.

What happens to that percentage of learners who leave school where they have been exposed to environmental content and enabling teaching methods, and then decide that they

want to do environment work, like wetland management or environmental law? How does one become an environmental specialist? In the final paper of our student edition, we learn that, in South Africa, environmental career pathways can be diverse and fluid, causing the authors to employ the term 'boundaryless' occupations. **Ramsarup and Lotz-Sisitka's** contribution on environmental engineers' work and learning pathways identifies the challenges of progression within and between work and learning environments, which is of much interest to the South African Qualifications Authority and Quality Councils, and relevant across the SADC region. This is a pioneering paper which opens up a new field of scholarly study for the environment and sustainability community: the field of 'green skills' or work-related skills for sustainability.

In December 2017, South Africa will host researchers from around the globe at RWL10, the biannual conference of the Researching Work and Learning Community. Several EEASA members will present papers on research into green work and associated learning, and a future EEASA journal will also be dedicated to this theme.

Closing Reflection on Using the SAJEE

In reflecting on the contributions to Volume 33, it is evident that a variety of theories about learning and social change inform the scholars in environmental education, ranging from behaviourist, to social behavioural, constructivist and social constructivist learning theories, social and critical realism, and more. What unites these papers is a shared concern about learning in relation to the future well-being of the planet and its people. New scholars entering the field of environmental and sustainability education have the task of mastering not only the social–ecological subject matter of the field, but also their chosen learning theories. In this regard, drawing on the back copies of the *SAJEE* can be of great value. Much research and writing has already been done on curriculum, education and learning inside and outside of formal institutions, yet many more questions remain. The field is best advanced by noting and building on, challenging and advancing past studies and existing scholarship. The fact that all 33 Volumes of the *SAJEE* are available online, just a 'few clicks away' from any student or supervisor with Internet access, is therefore an enormous boon. We encourage readers and future authors to draw on the work in this and other environmental education journals as they conceptualise, design and reflect on their own studies.