

EDITORIAL / REDAKSIONEEL

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IS A PROCESS OF COOPERATIVE RECONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

It was explained in the last edition of the *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education* that the *Journal* would be a refereed journal where academic debate about central issues in environmental education could take place. The *Bulletin* would then become a publication which focuses on practical suggestions and descriptions of interesting work in environmental education. The difference between the two publications is that material published in the *Journal* will include articulation and discussion of theoretical frameworks at a level which can inform and assist the overall development of environmental education in Southern Africa.

In this edition of the *Journal* there are four articles. The theme which runs through all these articles is that effective learning occurs when people are encouraged to reflect on the environmental experiences they have and then use these reflections to constantly reconstruct the way in which they perceive and understand their environment. This ongoing process of reflection and reconstruction is assisted by critical dialogue within a supportive group.

The meaning of the term 'environment' is central to any debate on environmental education. Khan reminds us that the physical environment around us is set in a sociopolitical context which has been shaped by history - local, national, and indeed world history. She thus provides us with another dimension for broadening our understanding of environmental issues. We should look not only at the data provided by the present environment; we need also to examine historical evidence in order to construct meaningful models.

Khan's paper leaves us with an appreciation of the need to have a holistic view of what constitutes the environment. It is clear that a wide range of activities is likely to be needed by learners in developing useful environmental concepts. This is a valuable starting point for the next paper by Webb and Boltt.

The research done by Webb and Boltt clearly show that many learners do not have a holistic model for food webs. Implicit in their paper is the plea for school ecology to focus on the development of clear concepts.

Clacherty provides us with an example of the sort of approach which can lead to clearer understanding of environmental issues. He describes how a freshwater ecology study can be done in an open ended way. This approach to field work can provide opportunities for reflection, discussion and reconstruction of meaning which may be missed by a more formal approach.

In the final paper O'Donoghue and McNaught propose a model for curriculum development which is based on the growing pool of experience we now have in environmental education and is well exemplified by the three earlier papers. This model places contextual, critical dialogue between teachers in action as the central focus. The role of support staff is to facilitate this dialogue. Part of this facilitation involves the building up of a pool of organized resources and support technology.

In the next issue of the *Journal* we will focus further on this need for a broader examination of what is meant by the environment and environmental education. The theme of this next issue will be:

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IS A CONCEPT WHICH REQUIRES A BROADER SCOPE THAN THAT OF UNDERSTANDING NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS.