Editorial
Methodology, Context and Quality

Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Rhodes University, South Africa

Note: This edition of the Southern African Journal of Environmental Education (SAJEE) is a 'double volume' and contains papers submitted in 2012 and 2013. The production of a double volume has been necessitated by administrative problems experienced by the journal production team in 2012, which affected the successful publication of a 2012 edition. However, the Council of the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA) agreed to respond by producing a double-volume edition for 2012/2013. Journal readers are reminded that the production of this journal is voluntary and depends heavily on voluntary administration and other systems. The patience of authors and readers in the 2012/2013 years of production is much appreciated.

The 2012/2013 double-volume *SAJEE* is richly textured with two think pieces that open the journal, thirteen research papers and three viewpoint papers. The papers in the 2012/2013 double volume include papers by authors from Sweden, the United Kingdom, India, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, Lesotho, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Kenya, showing that the journal is attracting not only southern African authorship, but also authorship from across the continent and internationally.

The present edition of the journal is also interesting in that three different perspectives stand out, namely *methodology*, *context* and *quality*, perspectives which permeate the journal papers in various ways. The journal opens with a methodology think piece by Price. In this think piece, she challenges us to avoid 'methodolatry' in an environmental education context, noting that this requires us to resist hegemonic methodological assumptions – she suggests that positivism, post-structuralism and participatory methodology may all have such 'hegemonic status' and calls on us to critically and reflexively challenge the assumptions that inform and shape our methodologies and methodological commitments. She explains how she herself navigated this problem via the use of critical realist research approaches. The paper can therefore serve as a useful reflexive tool for authors who have contributed to the journal to review their methodological assumptions and practices and to 'think deeply' about the role of methodology in the research that we undertake.

Other papers that bring methodological questions to the fore are the two papers on the Supporting Urban Sustainability (SUS) Project by Westin, Hellquist, Colvin and Kronlid, and, from India, the paper by Bharti and Bansal. These papers deliberate ways of working with multistakeholder groups in urban sustainability settings and they report on the methodology and approaches adopted in the SUS Project, showing also how methodological choices can enhance and contribute to learning and practice outcomes. The paper by Mukute also raises questions

of methodology and process, not only in research, but also in ways of facilitating co-learning, this time not in urban settings but among rural farmers in Zimbabwe. Similarly, the paper by Muchanga shows how survey research can be used to develop insights into people's perceptions of climate change in a Zambian context, showing a different perspective on methodology, but also raising questions about the use of survey research for fully understanding such questions. The paper by Kasembe, Mukundu and Nyamukunda shows how the use of an action–research approach helped teachers to improve their responses to children affected by HIV/AIDS in their schools, broadening their views of what counts as quality education in their schools.

Following the think piece on methodology is a think piece on educational quality, provided by Lotz-Sisitka. This think piece synthesises and discusses some of the theoretical work that emerged from a five-year Southern African Development Community (SADC) Regional Environmental Education Programme (REEP) research programme focusing on the potential contribution of environment and sustainability education to educational quality and relevance. The think piece shares deliberation on the meaning, or meanings, of educational quality and how this has come to be constituted and influences southern African education. It proposes a reframing of educational quality discourses to be more inclusive of social–cultural and social–ecological perspectives via a 'learning as connection' perspective that allows for meaning-making and epistemological access in education. The paper also points to implications for research and teacher education, contouring some of the research that is emerging in southern Africa that is beginning to articulate ways of thinking more deeply about the meanings of educational quality and relevance and the role of environment and sustainability education (also called 'education for sustainable development' or 'ESD' by various authors) in enabling and strengthening learning and change.

This think piece on the conceptualisation of educational quality provides a backdrop for a number of the papers in the journal, including papers by: Ketlhoilwe and Jeremiah; Chikunda; Shumba and Kampamba; Namafe and Chileshe; Kasembe, Mukundu and Nyamukunda; Kilian and Ferreira; Mokuku, Ramakhula and Jobo; Dessie and Tadesse; and Kariaga, Kariaga, Ogemah and Nyando; as well as the viewpoint papers – all of which address this question in some or other way. Ketlhoilwe and Jeremiah deliberate the emergence of women's capabilities and agency via social-learning processes in the *Kgetsi-ya-Tsie* Project, while Chikunda deliberates the use of a capabilities approach to enhancing the quality of teacher education so that it takes greater account of the full participation of girl children especially, but of gender issues more broadly, in science, mathematics and teacher education subjects. The paper by Shumba and Kampamba also deliberates how to achieve improved quality and relevance in teacher education programmes for science and technology subjects, and their research with students shows that ESD approaches that foreground 'learning as connection' are offering positive experiences for student teachers that broaden their experiences of teacher education and enhance their teaching capacities. Namafe and Chileshe, who are working on documenting local cultural artefacts as a basis for curriculum contextualisation and enabling stronger relevance to curriculum activities, argue that such approaches provide a strong foundation for the learning of related concepts and are an underutilised approach for enhancing quality and relevance in schools. Mokuku and his colleagues from Lesotho, Ramakhula and Jobo, through their research, are seeking ways of

supporting quality and learning outcomes by means of peer-teaching approaches, while Killian and Ferreira in South Africa report on how the use of different methods can help to engage learners more effectively in learning via influences on their attitudes. These papers therefore also bring pedagogy and method into focus in educational quality discussions.

The discussions on educational quality and relevance are not, however, limited to schools and teacher education, and/or community education (which are covered by the bulk of the papers in the journal), but are also relevant to discussions on epistemology and curriculum change in higher education. Kariaga *et al.* at the Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology in Kenya, and Dessie and Tadesse from the Wondo Genet College of Forestry and Natural Resources in Ethiopia, also deliberate on how ESD can improve the quality and relevance of university education and forestry education respectively. In the case of the Kariaga *et al.* paper, they assess current ESD practices in their university and identify where new forms of practice can emerge. In the case of the paper by Dessie and Tadesse, they analyse the current status and relevance of forestry education with regard to the current context of forestry in Ethiopia using ESD lenses and conclude that there is a need to reorient the epistemology and approach to forestry education at a broad meta-level, but also at local praxis levels.

An important question that threads its way through all of the papers is how context affects and shapes our thinking about environment and sustainability education. In the Supporting Urban Sustainability case study in India reported on by Bharti and Bansal, for example, we see that urbanisation poses particular threats to ecosystem services, which, in turn, affects livelihood options in India, and this has implications for urban education and change practices. In the case of the Zimbabwean farmers reported on in the Mukute paper, we see that there is a need to accelerate practice-oriented changes in agriculture towards more sustainable, climate-resilient agricultural practice, and this influences the kinds of methodological approaches that may work best in such a context. In the case of the women's groups seeking to learn about sustainable livelihood practice in Botswana, we see that it is the women's dependence on natural resources and their need to escape poverty that has shaped their learning and agency.

In the case of the Lealui Basic School in Zambia, reported on by Namafe and Chileshe, we see that local cultural artefacts are rich in knowledge, yet remain neglected in school curriculum development. In the case of engagement with high-school teachers in the 'growth-point' community reported on by Kasembe, Mukundu and Nyamukunda in Zimbabwe, we see that HIV/AIDS issues are severe and have impacts on teachers and learners alike. In Ethiopia, the seriousness of deforestation concerns, urbanisation patterns, the perceived lack of opportunity for students in rural areas, and the predominance of international influences on the curriculum for forestry education all influence how forestry education for sustainable development is being, and can be, practised in Ethiopia. The three viewpoint papers also highlight how context influences educational practice, as is shown in the paper by Ferreira on the Kids in Parks Programme in which the rich biodiversity resources of the South African national parks play a key role in defining the kind of environmental education that is possible in the various park contexts. In Mozambique, Monjane suggests that contemporary issues such as water quality and climate change can shape pedagogy in teacher-education classrooms, and Jobo suggests that local cultural references and metaphors are helpful in framing ESD practices

and approaches. The papers all highlight various perspectives on context and how context influences education and training. However, they all also show how educators and learners are engaging and responding to these contexts, mobilising their and others' agency for change in the process, with various social innovations emerging.

So where does this richly textured journal leave us? Ought we to be reviewing our methodologies more critically, as outlined by Price's challenging paper? And how would this change the way in which we have approached our research? Would stronger emancipatory change outcomes emerge via methodological changes?

And how do we take further our reframings of educational quality into the mainstream of education and training systems? So many of the papers appear to point out that, based on the research concerned, this would be an important 'way forward'. Perhaps seeing the papers presented as a whole may help us to make stronger cases and to expand our own research beyond the single case-study context and into wider forms of meta-research in which the methodological reorientations proposed by Price may also be helpful.

And what of the context–agency relationship that shows through in all of these papers? Are we clearly thinking through how structures and contexts influence agents, and how agents in these contexts can mobilise themselves and others to engage more critically, collectively and substantively with the concerns of the day? What does, and can, our educational research point to?

As editor of this journal, I have placed these open-ended questions on our research landscape following a collective reading of these papers in the 2012/2013 double volume. The year 2014 is the penultimate year of the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD), which ends in 2015. We invite readers and authors to take up the challenge of 'synthesis readings' of our collective research and to submit, for the 2015 edition of the *SAJEE*, synthesis papers that reflect critically and constructively on the last ten years of environment and sustainability education research during the UNDESD.