

## EDITORIAL

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

The articles chosen for this issue of the *Journal* form a collection which purposely move away from focusing on environmental education in natural environments. This has been done to facilitate breadth of discussion about environmental education.

Irwin shows clearly that for the last 20 years the central debates in environmental education have been from a stance which sees that an understanding and resolution of environmental problems requires a framework which includes sociopolitical and cultural concepts alongside biophysical, ecological relationships. He explores the concept of 'realconserve' which is a realization that working with development issues of poverty, political power and war are central to resolving the world's environmental problems. (The recent environmental fiasco of the Gulf War illustrates this point clearly.)

His paper then traces the relatively limited perspective taken by environmental education in South Africa until recent years. However, the growing awareness of the potential for environmental education within new educational and development planning is a heartening and positive aspect of the current transition taking place within South African society.

Two other papers take up the challenge of exploring new paradigms for environmental education. McNaught, Taylor and O'Donoghue consider how the methodology of action research ties in with the development of participatory work with teachers. In order to move away from mere rhetoric about democracy and empowerment to a genuine cooperative network of teacher action, we need to examine the dominant paradigm of traditional, reductionist research. In this framework, the researcher attempts to reduce people and complex social interactions to clearly defined variables which can be manipulated. It is suggested

that a more useful approach is offered by critical theory. Within a critical perspective individuals reflect themselves, and with others, on the dynamics of their own situations and plan future action in a cooperative fashion. Sharing ideas and inviting constructive criticism is very important within a critical paradigm. The methodology of action research lies within a critical framework.

Naidoo, Kruger and Brookes explore how a reductionist and mechanistic world view perpetuates our current environmental crisis because, within this world view, people assume they have the right to dominate and exploit the environment. They advocate a proactive approach to environmental education where we stop putting all our energy into focusing on specific problems and possible solutions, and rather work towards developing programmes with teachers and pupils which seek to bring about new ideas about the relationship between knowledge, power and environmental conditions.

These ideas are exemplified well by Clacherty and Clacherty in their paper on urban environmental education. They present the framework for an urban study which spans an affluent white area and an apartheid created urban desert. They discuss strategies which can be used to develop critical skills in children as they study urban environments. The development and discussion of curriculum modules in environmental education which attempt to take the theoretical ideas of critical, participatory networks and translate them into educational activities is essential for the future development of environmental education.

The next issue of the *Journal* will contain papers which explore: **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IDEAS FOR SOUTH AFRICA IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL TRANSITION.**