

Environmental Education in a Time of Crises

Here is an invitation to write for the *Southern African Journal of Environmental Education*, in reflection on the global spread of a new virus. What do scholars make of the Covid19 pandemic and the reactions to it? What does it mean for the practice of environmental education? For whom, how and what we teach, and research?

As soon as online teaching took off, in response to the need for physical isolation, the digital divide came starkly into play. The impacts of the pandemic vividly threw up the inequalities in our various worlds. There are those, for example, who can sit out the 'lockdown' in the comfort of a spacious home stocked with food, TV to entertain and inform, internet-based lessons and meetings to continue school and work. Others are cramped in close quarters without running water, limited access to transport and shops, unable to buy in bulk, losing social connections which used to entertain and inform. Abruptly, what school and work was available, come to an end.

Whom should we reach to teach, in such a time, and how? Many students and their families are in remote areas, with few information sources, but visited by eco-tourism travelers who bring the risk of infections picked up *en route*. How do we reach into these corners of our world? And what does education mean for those students who have abundant information sources, are indeed bombarded by messages and memes? What tools do we have to help them judge the veracity of information, with sense-making and emotional processing? What have our research over the decades taught us in this regard?

Environmental educators are familiar with the challenge of teaching about topics that are new, not yet scientifically proven, and contentious. And so it is with the 2019 coronavirus. Scientists are not yet clear on how exactly it is transmitted, for example, making it hard to tell whether healthy people should wear masks or not. Other questions are not of a scientific nature. What should the role of government be in times of crisis? Should it take full control over individuals in the interest of the majority, or should it inform citizens and then refrain from curbing their freedom to decide for themselves? In parts of Africa the poor have taken to the streets to protest against restrictions on movement and the real risk of hunger in confinement. They argue that while they *may* die of COVID 19, when confined to their homes, they *will* die of hunger.

Ethical questions emerge, including who should receive protection or treatment, and why we are experiencing this threat in the first place. Some blame Nature for spreading disease, while the World Health Organisation notes that the virus is not manmade, but the conditions that allowed it to move, are. Many think of a crisis as a message, from Nature or God, or both. The very nature of the virus - a tiny bit of dead genetic information that needs a host to spread - lends itself to metaphorical interpretations. Are there lessons to gain from this, and how do educators ethically approach them?

How do we personally and professionally respond? Some choose to react on political lines, or to set themselves up as being different from other groups. Many have witnessed a wave of solidarity among nations and neighbours. Some are looking to the future, and whether

we should 'return to normal', or grasp an opportunity to transform to a new normal, that is fairer to all humankind and the more-than-human on the planet.

Educators also need to think about the kinds of work for which we should be preparing and reskilling learners. While the notion and nature of work has been changing for some time, it is likely to be profoundly reconfigured in a post-pandemic period.

In thinking about the Covid19 outbreak it is also worth developing insights that may help us deal with this crisis, *and* with others. For the world is experiencing multiple crises. Many communities have recurrent and devastating experiences of floods and droughts, which are predicted to become more severe and frequent due to climate change. In the global South this exacerbates the struggle for food, water and sanitation, and to curb the many diseases that people live day to day: malaria, tuberculosis, HIV-AIDS, E. coli that kill hundreds of thousands every year. Some have lived through the horrors of Ebola outbreaks.

Now, a new virus is spreading like wildfire. How is this new crisis similar to other crises, like climate change? How is it different? What does it teach us?

Write for the SAJEE. We are launching a special edition on *EE in a time of crises: Insights for and from environmental education scholars*.

Kinds of Contributions

Viewpoints - Put forward an argument or proposal that is well supported with verified facts, sound reasoning, and contextualization in actual situations as well as literature. This is a short contribution that can be speculative, but still of scholarly value. In particular, it needs to make a *new* point that has not been published before. Length: Up to 3500 words.

Think Piece - This is a substantive academic piece ideally building on work done over several years, the authors' own and/or the wider scholarly community's. It picks up existing debates and long-standing issues of scholarly interest. No recent research is necessary, but the paper needs to refer comprehensively to the scholarly debates relevant to the chosen topic. Length: Up to 6000 words; can be extended on approval of editor.

Research and Review Papers - Field work is now more difficult! How do we still do research? Some university educators have started to study their new teaching practices, which could be published as research papers. But we also encourage you to experiment with research methods like document analysis and meta-reviews. What can we learn from the research on EE and ESD approaches published over the years? Many journals now have open digital platforms from where to access the existing works in the field, so as to more strongly situate as well as make known our own contributions, whether we are in Cairns or Cape Town; Lusaka or Leuphana. On the *African Journals Online* platform (www.ajol.info) you will find 35 volumes of the SAJEE, a wealth of research and deliberation to review. Does this body of work equip us to do EE in times of crises? Or does the notion of crisis, or multiple crises, suggest we do very different research in future? Length: Up to 6000 words.

SAJEE's General Author Guidelines can be found [here](#).