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# The affordances of an applied arts intervention for sustained environmental good practice in Wakkerstroom-eSizameleni

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**Abstract**

The Constitution of South Africa guarantees its citizens the right to a pollution-free environment and this guarantee is supported by legislation. School curricula also include content on the hazards of environmental degradation. However, despite legislation and education, littering and dumping remain major problems in many parts of South Africa. This study investigated the possibility of developing environmental awareness, and of bridging the gap between such awareness and environmental action, on the part of children and adults in the village of Wakkerstroom-eSizameleni, Mpumalanga. In an action research project, framed theoretically by deep ecology and eco-feminism, three cycles of multimodal activities, with applied drama at their centre, were planned, enacted and reflected upon in order to establish what affordances these may have, collectively, for changing poor environmental behaviour.

While acknowledging that changes in participants' littering and dumping behaviours were limited, the study revealed that arts-based activities are an appropriate vehicle for raising awareness, developing knowledge and skills and forming relationships which have potential for impacting on environmental behaviour in the long term, given participants' high level of engagement and sustained interest in these activities.

Other key findings relate to the methodology of the study. In order for it to be replicated in other rural areas of South Africa, a thorough reconnaissance of any action research site would be essential since no one village is the same as another, and local champions of the environment would need to be identified in order to promote long-term sustainability of environmental good practices. In the initial cycle of this action research study, only children were involved but it became evident that adults needed to be included in both the arts-based activities and community outreach endeavours, given that children's socio-cultural behaviours are inculcated primarily in the home, and given the importance of understanding both child and adult perspectives on community needs.

A final finding of a methodological nature is that there is value in re-imagining the role of a critical friend in action research. In this project, for much of the time the central researcher was able to reflect on her actions and their outcomes only through post-activity journaling. This journaling was very important, particularly in relation to identifying the possible development of eco-anxiety on the part of both participants and the researcher. However, when a friend was able to facilitate activities planned by the researcher, thus freeing the latter to be a reflective

observer of participants' responses in more nuanced ways, the quality of the researcher's reflections, as 'an inside I', was enhanced.

**Key words:** deep ecology, eco-feminism, action research, critical friend, applied drama, affordances, multimodality, littering, environmental behaviour, eco-anxiety