

## Response to *Exploring the Influence of the ROC Integrated High School Program*

by Michael Elrick

Scott Caspell has initiated a long overdue piece of research regarding integrated programs with environmental themes (see page 20 of this issue). He asked questions all integrated teachers should: What are the long-term educational impacts that integrated programs provide? Did we make a difference in the lives of young people? Did we inspire them to further engage in environmental issues and become more aware of the consequences of their lifestyles? The juicy questions, so to speak.

Scott picked an excellent time frame to interview former students as they had participated in the integrated program between 10 and 13 years ago. Ideally, then, participants would have completed some form of post-secondary education and now be in the work force. Some participants may be married, may have children, and certainly have had significant life experience. With their involvement in the study the participants were able to reflect back and ask: "Did the ROC program influence me in any way?" And, with some clarity, the respondents seem to confirm that, yes, it did.

One theme I noticed running through many student responses was that the integrated program acted as a "wake up call" to community and environmental issues for them. Visually I imagine students generally traveling through our educational system without many wake up calls to our ecological impacts. One student captured this when she stated, "ROC affected the way I think, and the way I spend my time and my resources."

Scott clearly captures another important concept: Integrated programs occur at a critical time in young peoples' lives and the opportunity to help "formulate self-identity" is present. One student also noted that a significant positive factor is the length of time of integrated programs. With these two ideas, I can not help but make an analogy of integrated programs acting as rites of passage. These programs occur at a time when students are transitioning from childhood to adulthood; they challenge students, mentally and physically, in a unique educational setting; and in such programs students are guided by adult figures other than their parents.

My final comment has to do with a phrase that Scott used and also quoted from Wiersma (1997). He concluded from the interviews that the ROC program "blurred the boundaries between ecological and human communities." I simply love that image of blurring and agree wholeheartedly that this is a direction environmental education must go for gaining ideas of sustainability. When the lines between the human and non-human world are fuzzy, the right decisions become clear.

---

*Michael Elrick has been teaching integrated programs for 13 years. He presently teaches the grade 10 Community Environmental Leadership Program (CELP) and the grade 12 Headwaters program in Guelph, Ontario.*

