

# An ecological overview of a career in environmental education



Dr. Paul Hart

As a faculty member since 1979, **Dr. Paul Hart** has witnessed 38 years of the Faculty's 53-year history. His association with the University extends longer because he was also an undergraduate student at the U of R, achieving his Honours BSc in Biology, and a B.Ed. Then, after teaching a couple of years, (Moose Jaw Central Collegiate and Regina Grant Road School) he did his M.Ed. at the University of Regina.

Environmental Education has been the passion and focus of Hart's career. As the first Canadian to do a PhD in Environmental Education (SFU), Hart has done much to contribute to the development of the field of environmental education. Hart says his, "entire career has focused on human identity and environment education, and to finding educational ways to challenge taken-for-granted beliefs and values." Hart's multiple publications and awards bear this out.

**As a biologist, it is not surprising that Hart describes his career progression in ecological terms: "Everything is connected to everything else. One thing led to the next: from local to provincial, to the national, and then to international work."**

His local work included his 8-year role as Director of Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit (SIDRU). From this role, Hart learned much from the staff about the time and effort involved in publishing research. He applied business skills learned from his father to develop research contracts, and thereby enjoyed the success of building a strong financial base for the unit. Through this role, he made new connections with stakeholders in the

field of education. Those connections led to the publication of the Instructional Strategy Series, developed in partnership with Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit (SPDU).

Provincial connections also developed out of his SIDRU role. One of the highlights for Hart was his work with the Ministry of Education. "I was seconded to write the background papers for the new K -12 Saskatchewan science education curriculum, and this became the framework for the pan-Canadian science education curriculum." But one of his most significant accomplishments, he says, "was having environmental education institutionalized into the core program in our Faculty."

With experience writing grants developed through his work in SIDRU, Hart began to receive SSHRC grants in which he was Principle Investigator: three, 3-year grants in succession (and he was a researcher on several others). With the grants, work began to flow "from multiple directions"; for instance, he was invited by SSHRC to sit on Adjudication Committee 12 (psychology and education grants), which he did for three years, and chaired for two years. Hart also sat on the boards of several environmental education journals, and eventually took on the role of Executive Editor with the *Journal of Environmental Education (JEE)*. In the beginning, research in environmental education was quantitative, but Hart and his colleagues argued that "for the kind of pedagogy in which environmental education was engaged—interdisciplinary work—the action research collaborative relational epistemological model" was better suited to the questions being asked in the field. Qualitative methods were eventually accepted in environmental education research.

As a founder of the now federally funded EECOM, Hart was invited to do international work with UNESCO, which included trips to Malta, Egypt, Japan, and Korea. After UNESCO, Environment Canada invited Hart along with several others to write a document the Minister would take to the UN Johannesburg conference.

**Hart emphasizes relationships and connections as key to successful academic careers.** He mentions as significant his relationships with the five faculty who were in science education with him in the early years such as Evelyn Jonescu, and colleagues such as the late Lyle Benko and Brian Selinger as well as his relationships with Biology department faculty such as Dave Shepard, George Mitchell, and Roy Cullimore. He has also enjoyed developing relationships with undergraduate and graduate students. While a faculty member, he supervised interns and enjoyed hearing from them about how the Faculty could improve their internship experience through practical education. Attending environmental education and research conferences led to international connections and work with key thinkers in the field, such as Charles Hopkins, Milt McClaren, and the late Bill Stapp. He was invited by Bill Stapp to be on the board for the expansion of the North American Environmental Education Association, which then included Canada and Mexico.

Hart retired in June 2017, but he says not much has changed since retiring: He is still on 15 graduate student committees; he continues to do research seminars with grad students in Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, and China; he is a section editor for the methodology section of a new handbook on ChildhoodNature; and as one of the Editors of *JEE*, he is writing an historical piece for the upcoming 50th anniversary.

His advice to the Faculty is to keep a balance between theory and practice, and to "be careful who you put on search committees; it's crucial. Hire the best people you can."

By Shuana Niessen



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