

## An evaluation of the educational impact of the EarthWise teacher training project

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### ABSTRACT

The EarthWISE geoscience project has dual objectives: To host workshops for science educators, and to offer concurrent *road shows* for science learners and the community. The workshops are specifically meant to provide training in the section of the National Curriculum Statement, called “The Planet Earth and Beyond”, which includes knowledge in the fields of astronomy, geography and geology. Workshops are presented by knowledgeable individuals in these fields to ensure quality training. The road shows include interactive exhibitions of various scientific fields to increase science awareness among the learners and the community as a whole, and to provide information of possible career opportunities as motivation for their performance in science at school. The main focus of the project is on rural areas, although workshops are also offered in the major cities.

In 2006, the EarthWise office was moved to the University of the Free State. In 2008, funds were made available from the Inkaba phase 2 budget to partially finance a part-time manager for the project, and at least one training workshop, with road show, per year. The 2008 activity was presented in Prieska, in the Northern Cape Province, and was attended by 18 educators. The road show attracted 225 visitors. General consensus of the education department involved, as well as the Prieska community, is that it was a very successful event.

The study that will be reported on was instigated to investigate in a more rigorous way the educational impact of these workshops held in rural areas. To determine whether the project has been beneficial to the community, some aspects need to be evaluated, including the increase of the teachers’ subject knowledge and the change of attitude of the learners and the teachers towards science. This is done by means of pre- and post-tests, discussion groups, questionnaires and personal interviews. Both the response of the teachers concerning their experience of the workshops and the results of the evaluations were positive. This is evidence of the necessity of training programs like the EarthWise project. Some very enlightening comments and ideas were also obtained and will be implemented to improve the quality of future workshops.