ABSTRACT

In September 2000, a moderated email discussion list was established under the aegis of the Conservation Education Network of Vietnam in order to enhance the exchange of ideas and information among environmental educators. Since its establishment, nearly 500 messages have been exchanged and the number of subscribers has expanded to over 50 individuals and organizations in Vietnam, the United States and Australia. These exchanges have facilitated a compilation on the status of conservation education in Vietnam, including a listing of protected areas, projects, and organizations, as well as education resource materials. Sharing of information on grants, fellowships, institutions and initiatives via the email discussion list has led directly to the elaboration of a proposal for corporate sponsorship of the network, identification of a website host for the network, and attendance of a Vietnamese network member at an international environmental education conference. These observations suggest that the email discussion list has furthered the goals of conservation education in Vietnam, while helping to fulfill the objectives of the Conservation Education Network.

Several thematic debates between practitioners have likewise been promoted by the email discussion list. These debates have provided a format for the frank exchange of diverse ideas about such topics as the relationship between conservation education and law enforcement, underscoring the need for better dissemination of laws and regulations at all levels. Other topics have included the connection between religion and conservation, as a basis for building on traditional environmental ethics. An important question that emerged from the discussion list concerned the issue of awareness versus action in conservation education. While there is some recognition that the environmental education movement in Vietnam has helped to raise the level of awareness among target groups of the importance and need for conservation of Nature and natural resources, can we be sure that this heightened awareness is being translated into appropriate action? Are those who have been reached by the conservation education message changing their behavior and that of those around them, so that formerly destructive behaviors are diminished and positive behaviors are reinforced and multiplied? Although this issue remains the topic of considerable debate, experiences were exchanged by project personnel engaged in monitoring and measuring changes in levels of awareness, and one contribution concerned a method of monitoring impact which could be called "the systematic use of anecdotes" or "monitoring without indicators."

Email discussion list participants however raised concerns about the long-term viability and effectiveness of the list itself. In particular, virtually all messages have been posted in English rather than Vietnamese, so a question surfaced about what could be done to ensure that all people working in conservation education in Vietnam are able to make maximum use of the discussion? The more fundamental issue regarding access to email also remains problematic, as does the dissemination, standardization and use of Vietnamese-language fonts for email transmissions. An analysis of the origin of posted messages also highlights the pivotal role of the moderator, and demonstrates how conservation education networking can be advanced with minimal resources.