

CHAPTER 3

THE POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF THE KZNDEC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES

3.1 THE STATUS OF KZNDEC's ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES

The KZNDEC Environmental Education Centres may be seen to serve a twofold purpose: *environmental* and *educational* (Van den Berg 2003). In the concern of many environmental educators for environmental issues, however, “the educational context has been taken for granted and too widely ignored” (le Roux 1997:49; Robottom 1987:199; cf. Wade 1996:14; own emphases).

The Heads of the KZNDEC Centres hold the opinion that whilst the environmental component of their programmes is a *sine qua non*, their centres should be perceived as places from where “curriculum enhancement” is facilitated (meeting of KZNDEC EE Centre Heads, 3 March 2003; cf. Sguazzin 2002:2; KZNDEC 2002; Janse van Rensburg and Taylor 1993:6). In other words, the Centres should be instrumentalities for educational advancement for the Department’s learners, students and educators.

3.2 OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF THE INSTITUTIONAL STATUS OF KZNDEC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES

3.2.1 Recognition of the EE Centres as the Legal Equivalent of Schools

The EE Centres are not specifically mentioned in the SA Schools Act 84 of 1996 Section 15.

This situation applies also to the KZNDEC's "Education Resource Centres" and "Education Development Centres" (pers. comm., S Govender, Durban South Education Development Centre, 8 October 2002). "Education centres" are referred to in KwaZulu-Natal Education Act 3 of 1996 Section 5 (KwaZulu-Natal Legislature 1996), but the KZNDEC EE Centres are recognised by the Education Department as "educational institutions" (pers. comm. Acting RSM: KZNDEC Ukhahlamba Region, 22 April 2003), the legal equivalent of other schools or colleges that it controls (Dundee EE Centre 2003b:1).

3.2.2 Recognition of the Centres' Governing Bodies

Following discussions in 1999 (KZNDEC Environmental Education Unit 1999:18-21), the Heads of the KZNDEC EE Centres were permitted to organise the election of Governing Bodies for their Centres (in terms of SA Schools Act 84 of 1996). The tacit recognition of these governing bodies by the Superintendent-General of the KZNDEC is *de jure* acceptance by the Department of the Centres' status as "educational institutions."

3.2.3 Recognition of Dundee EE Centre as by the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal

In 2003, the KZNDEC announced its intention "to utilise the [Dundee EE Centre's] building as a District Office under [the] Ukhahlamba Region" (KZNDEC 2003 a). The Centre Head protested: if the Department had taken over the Centre for office accommodation, "the Centre, being reliant on its boarding facilities, would have to be abolished" (Burge 2003 a:2).

The Centres, having been granted the "semi-independent" financial status of "Section 21" schools by the KZNDEC (Burge 2003 c; KZNDEC 1998:1; vide Section 3.3.4), depend for their income on the "boarding fees" of visiting school and educator groups. The Department pays only the salaries of Centres' personnel (pers. comm. C Lancaster, 1 September 2003;

KZNDEC 1998:1). The Eshowe and Dundee Environmental Education Centres, especially, have too few schools that are able (a) to utilise their facilities on a day-visit basis or (b) pay for such amenities (pers. comm., R Gaisford, 18 August 2003). With the removal of boarding revenues, the Centres would find it almost impossible to continue paying for municipal services, etc., and, therefore, to service educational groups.

In response to a letter asking for his advice (letter from D Durham, 6 March 2003), KwaZulu-Natal Premier Dr L P H M Mtshali wrote, however, that “We applaud the service the Dundee Environmental Education Centre has over the years rendered to the community” (Mtshali 2003). He exercised his ministerial right (as the then Acting MEC) to maintain the Centre and its functions (under KwaZulu-Natal Education Act 3 of 1996 Section 5 {2}). KZNDEC officials forthwith arrived at “another perception on [its] usage...” (Dundee EE Centre 2003 a:1; cf. Dlamini 2003:15) and abandoned plans for the Centre to become District Offices.

In “no longer... pursuing the issue of taking over [the] Dundee EE Centre” (Dundee EE Centre 2003 a:1), and not challenging the Premier’s decision, the Department reaffirmed the “educational institution” status of its Environmental Education Centres (cf. South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 Section 12 {1} and {2}; also Educators’ Employment Act of 1994 Annexure A Section 1).

3.3 THE ENVIRONMENTAL PURPOSE OF THE KZNDEC EE CENTRES

As has been stated, it is the view of the KZNDEC EE Centre Heads that the environmental element of an “environmental education centre” is irreducible.

An environmental education centre administered by a provincial education authority may be interpreted to be an environmental function or mechanism of an “organ of state” (*Ibid.*;

Chambers 2003 a). As such, the three (3) Environmental Education Centres are legal agencies that further the educational goals of the Department. In addition, they help execute the Department's responsibility to "significantly affect the environment" (National Environmental Management Act No. 107 of 1998, Section 2 {1}), as they "serve [the] physical, psychological, *developmental, cultural and social* interests" of people (i.e. learners and educators; Ibid. Section 2 (2); own emphases).

These points will be elaborated upon in Chapter Four (4).

3.4 REFOCUSING AN EE SERVICE IN A TIME OF POLITICAL CHANGE

On 27 April 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections. This signalled widespread changes in governmental and provincial administration in South Africa (Haw 1995:100-101).

The transformation of KwaZulu-Natal's education system is requiring enormous effort:

"The implementation of Curriculum 2005 took place in an environment characterised by enormous infrastructural backlogs, resource limitations, inadequate supply of quality learning support materials and absence of common national standards for learning and assessment" (Department of Education 2002a:l; cf. KZNDEC 2003 c:4).

When the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture came into being in early 1995, many of its officials were ignorant of "environmental education." The ex-Natal Education Department had been the only one of the five (5) amalgamating education departments to administer environmental education centres (Haw 1995:81; Van den Berg 2003).

In this time of great change, the EE Centre Heads decided that pro-activity was preferable to inactivity. In future, they would be informed by two (2) understandings: they began to recognise (and to be influenced by) a broader notion of the concept “environment”; and they would become active contributors to the curriculum development process.

3.4.3 The EE Centre Heads recognise a Broader Concept of “Environment”

The interpretation and teaching of environmental matters by the KZNDEC environmental educators “[could] no longer be concerned with ecological issues only, but should be broader in approach so as to achieve education for sustainable living and sustainable development” (Shongwe 1997:53; KZNDEC Environmental Education Unit 1999:2; cf. Opie 1986:1).

“The political economies of social life have developed as an environment of practices and activities that are full of prejudices, injustices and risks. These degrade the capacity of the environment, our natural / cultural surroundings, to sustain life” (O’Donoghue 2000:3).

Environmental educators came to understand, that it was in “engaging change” through learning processes, as problems and risks developed in the wider environment, that learners “might explore and develop sustaining alternatives for future generations” (*Ibid.*).

3.4.4 The EE Centre Heads as Part of the Curriculum Development Process

The KZNDEC Centre Heads also decided that they would be part of the educational processes that were accommodating democratic realities in the “new South Africa” (Preamble to South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996; also Department of Education 2000:2). They were involved in the development of the new Curriculum that “educationally

affirmed” learners and students in the revitalised socio-political environment (KZNDEC Environmental Education Unit 2000:10-11; Department of Education 2002 b:9).

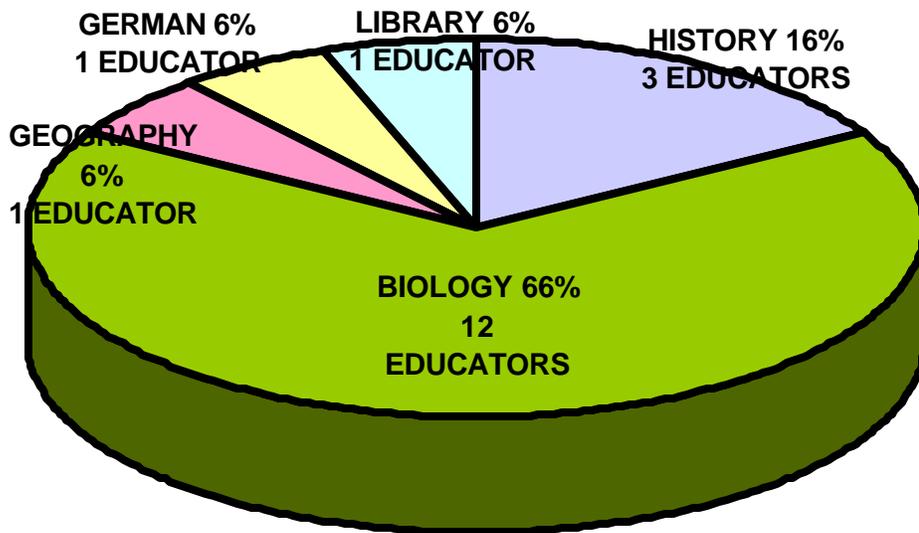
3.5 THE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES AS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

3.5.3 The Educational Training and Experience of the Heads of EE Centres

From 1984 to 2001, there were eighteen (18) Environmental Educators appointed in the NED/KZNDEC (Keegan 2002; Van den Berg 2003). Although such educators had varied interests in environmental matters (Van den Berg 2003), those who appointed them appear to have had a biophysical understanding of “environment”: twelve (12) are/were trained in Biology (**GRAPH 3:1**; op. cit. Head A interview 2003).

One former Environmental Education Centre Head “[specialised] as a Biology teacher... [and] had had experience in running youth groups with an environmental basis... He also ran survival courses, was an avid hunter, ran cadet courses with the SA Defence Force, and worked with the SA Council for Conservation and Anti-Pollution...” (Head B 2003).

On appointment, another, an historian was perturbed: “I... knew very little about ‘bugs and beetles, trees and grasses,’ and I felt inadequate for the task of guiding school groups in wilderness areas” (Head C 2003). He continued: “We need intelligent, skilled citizens (with a head start because of our educational system) who preserve and improve on their (total) surroundings.” Reflected in this response is the comprehension of the universality of the concept of “environment”; and of the necessity to pragmatise environmental learning.



GRAPH 3:1 – SUBJECT DISCIPLINES OF KZNDEC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS 1984-1993

The training and previous teaching experience of ± 83% of the NED/KZNDEC Environmental Education “Unit” has been for and of the FET band (**FIGURE 3:1**). As almost 78% of school groups visiting KZNDEC EE Centres in 2002-2003 came from the GET band (**FIGURE 3:2**), this training does not reflect present educational requirements of visiting school groups, and they have been obliged to adapt their methodology.

DEGREE-LEVEL TRAINING	TRAINING FOR PRIMARY-SCHOOLS	TRAINING FOR HIGH SCHOOLS
14	5	13

FIGURE 3:1 – PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF KZNDEC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATORS FROM 1984 THROUGH 2003

Currently, in 2003, there are three (3) Heads of KZNDEC EE Centres:

3.5.3.1 Dundee Environmental Education Centre:

The Head holds a Natal Teachers' Senior Diploma in "Primary School and Literature" from Durban Teachers' Training College, a BA majoring in Psychology, History and English from UNISA, and he is completing an M Ed specialising in Environmental Education. He has taught in secondary schools in Empangeni, Pietermaritzburg, Somerset West and in Dundee, and was principal of a primary school in Durban.

3.5.1.2 Durban Environmental Education Centre:

The Head holds a Natal Teachers Senior Diploma in "Biology" from Natal Teachers' Training College and a Diploma in Specialised Education. He taught in primary schools in the Durban area and he was an acting principal.

3.5.1.3 Eshowe Environmental Education Centre:

The Head holds a BA majoring in Bantu Languages [sic] and History from the University of the Witwatersrand and an HDE from the University of Zululand. He has taught at Eshowe High School.

CENTRE	DUNDEE		DURBAN		ESHOWE		TOTALS	
	No. of groups	% of total						
Primary Schools (GET)	23	54.8%	45	78.9%	30	78.9%	98	71.5%
High Schools (FET)	11	26.2%	12	21.1%	5	13.2%	28	20.4%
Educators' Groups	8	19.0%	0	0%	3	7.9%	11	8,0%
TOTAL	42	100%	57	100%	38	100%	137	100%

FIGURE 3:2 – NUMBER OF (ACCOMMODATED) EDUCATIONAL EXCURSIONS/WORKSHOPS AT KZNDEC EE CENTRES DURING 2002

3.5.2 The Educational Methodology of the Heads of KZNDEC EE Centres

Being part of the Curriculum development process has helped to develop the EE Centre Heads' strengths in curriculum design and execution – and to underscore their inadequacies:

“As I have learned more about education and educational methodology, so I have enjoyed

helping not only the visiting learners gain in knowledge and working skills for life; but I know that I have successfully used most tours to up-grade teachers in *their* methodology, too, in however small a way” (Head C 2003).

One Head had not only to adapt to “primary teaching,” but also to the “outdoor classroom.” He strives to make his teaching an addendum to indoor learning: “The teachers are offered a menu of activities and I may offer them things which may work particularly well, because it fits in well with classroom activities, with our excursion learning” (Head B 2003).

His attitude towards outdoor teaching may not always coincide with that of his classes. Asked whether he enjoyed his job, he replied in the affirmative. Then he qualified his answer when he spoke of not enjoying “[acting] as a tour guide to disinterested, badly behaved learners and educators (especially where it’s merely seen as a fun outing with no or little educational importance or interest or perspective).” (Ibid.).

Another EE Centre Head admitted: “It’s a challenge to get [learners]... to appreciate the environment” (Head A 2003). The fact that he added, “Attitudes are the biggest thing” (Ibid. 2003) appears to indicate a desire to change mind-sets; that “‘environmental education’ [is] a transmissive communications process that causes awareness and changes in behaviour” (O’Donoghue 1986:18). Most groups visiting the Centre of Head A are from Grades 5-6, and their itineraries are virtually identical. Teaching and learning occurs in an “outdoors Chalk and Talk” milieu: “[we] take them to the top of Nedbank Building – I’ve got a worksheet with it all laid out [to study the layout of a city centre]...”

The researcher attempted to plumb the importance of such a quasi-deterministic tool as “worksheets” in teaching. “[A certain colleague who is] outstandingly good in her presentation of worksheets – she’s had a look at my things. She was happy with about 60%

of it [sic].” This colleague offered the opinion that he [Head A] demonstrated “insufficient links with the curriculum and cross-curricular links; too much Biology; not enough English. Take the harbour: too much emphasis on Geography at the expense of Art, History, and Languages...” (Ibid.). His frequent use of old-style “subjects” terminology is as, perhaps, revealing, as his presentation style.

Head B retorted that (especially when dealing with learners from independent schools where “bringing home the goods” to parents is seen to be evidence of learning), “being worksheet-driven becomes an end in itself.” Pragmatically, he commented that, “During marine studies, they’d disintegrate.” Artificial visual aids can be problematic for an outdoor educator!

He appeared to hearken back to “awareness raising” formats: “If what the learners are exposed to is of a high enough standard, it’ll make an impression on them,” but he followed with tangential approach, using pictures as a recognition aid: “I give them [the learners] plasticised [picture] sheets. I might use “crabs” as a focus and question them on what we see, or on what adaptations have taken place...” (Ibid.).

In a structured questionnaire administered to the EE Centre Heads, all three (3) rated the response, “I give a basically similar programme to all of my groups,” highly (Question 7 in **APPENDIX 2B**; two ratings of “3” {good/strongly agree} and one of “2” {OK}). It would appear to conflict with their response – equally highly rated – to the concept that “Each school is unique; so are its learners; so they need learning that reflects their needs” (KZNDEC d. 2003:3).

Shongwe’s research rings true: “most environmental centres are run according to set programmes, issues addressed are limited in scope and available opportunities to explore

issues more widely may not be fully realised and utilised. [The] needs of the visitors are often not considered and in fact may be poorly understood" (1997:54).

3.5.3 Evaluation of the Educational Programmes provided by the Centres

It is accepted academic practice that "assessment and evaluation serve as valuable bases for establishing meaningful goals as part of each [person's] development progress and demonstration of proficiency" (Fortier et al 1998:xi).

There exists an enigma for centre-based educators who wish to see results for their labours: "Experience at the centres is usually irregular and brief without further consolidation. Follow-up mechanisms between the centre and home situations are necessary" (Shongwe 1997:54). One Head admitted: "You've no way of assessing such a short-term programme. When I visit schools, I sometimes hear from teachers... Maybe we'll only see a pupil once... Then kids write me letters and generally comment on those aspects which made an impression. It may [only] be the food or the [story about the] ghost in the forest" (Head B 2003)!

Moreover, as will be perceived, systematic assessment of the educational quality or effectiveness of programmes presented at the Centres – whether via "external validation" or internal evaluation (Barton and Bruder, 1995:10) is minimal. Educators appear to gravitate to "rule of thumb"/"gut-feel" evaluations that would, in a classroom situation, be insufficient (de Beer 1998:357).

Head A "[relies] heavily on teachers for feedback. Immediately after a lesson, I ask them what they thought of it; where I could improve; if it was satisfactory. I must say, they are

pretty honest: the worksheet was too long; not enough spare time; please cater for the average child; too much higher-order questioning.”

He also quizzes the learners: “The questions that I ask... and the answers that I receive gives me a reasonable indication as to whether they have absorbed anything; understood the messages that I’ve been trying to get across, and whether there was any interest or not.” Such assessments reveal to him “on occasions... my lesson was an exercise in futility because the kids haven’t grasped my message.” This could be, he feels, because “I was way above them; even some of the teachers. So I realise I need to re-evaluate my methods. It’s not their fault; they’ve never had this sort of thing before.”

This attitude conflicts somewhat with the EE Centre Heads’ reaction to evaluation methodology. When asked whom each one would prefer for an assessment of their “activities and programmes” [Question 9 in the structured questionnaire; see **APPENDIX 2:B** and **FIGURE 3:3**], all three (3) rated “I can quite well judge my own Centre’s progress” as their lowest response (i.e. least viable option) from a series of possible evaluators. From the consistently low ratings (registered from 1 {no/weak} through 2 {simply OK}), it would appear that two of the Centre Heads were reluctant to have outsiders observe (and thence assess) what transpires at and through their Centres.

If evaluation of my Centre and of its activities and programmes must take place, I would prefer...

- a. a neutral, objective outside expert (or experts) to come in to confirm the effectiveness of my educational programmes. ① ② ③
- b. neutral, objective experts can come in to determine aims, methodology, and outcomes of our programmes – but I want to be part of that process, discussing the issues as we go along. ① ② ③
- c. that as our programmes evolve, so we determine how effective they are, and change them if needs be. ① ② ③
- d. I can quite well judge my own Centre's progress. ① ② ③

**FIGURE 3:3 – CENTRE HEADS' QUESTIONNAIRE
(ASSESSMENT OF CENTRES' ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES)**

If it is concluded that they find difficulty evaluating their own programmes and activities, the question may be asked, “Whom [then] would you consider the fairest judge of your programmes?” [Question 8 in the structured questionnaire; see **APPENDIX 2:B** and **FIGURE 3:4**]. Almost unanimously, the Centre Heads agreed that, on occasion, outside experts (perceived to be neutral and objective) could assess their “performances” (unanimously, all had ratings of “2”). In the follow-up structured workshop held with the Centre Heads (see Section 1.8.3), it was determined that behavioural and other “outcomes” of a programme could be measured – such as those norms established in the *Strategic Plan 2000-2002* (KZNDEC Environmental Education Unit 2000) – by a trusted “outsider.”

One Centre Head noted that the person/s [who evaluates our programmes] “must be someone/s who knows what we’re trying to achieve and ‘what goes on,’ and what our challenges are.” Being rated by their fellow EE Centre Heads was, understandably, uppermost (unanimously, a “3” rating). That Drs O’Donoghue and Taylor were ranked

second as assessors (also with a unanimous “3” rating) was an indication, the Centre Heads said afterwards, that they were perceived to be “honest brokers” who recognised the special circumstances under which the “academic, curriculum-enhancing programmes” undertaken at (and through) the centres take place (KZNDEC 2002a).

Whom would you consider the fairest judge of your programmes? –			
a.	<input type="checkbox"/>	KZNDEC Curriculum Advisors	① ② ③
b.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Representatives from a respected NGO e.g. WESSA	① ② ③
c.	<input type="checkbox"/>	A sub-committee of the EECF	① ② ③
d.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fellow KZNDEC EE Centres’ Heads	① ② ③
e.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rob O’Donoghue and/or Jim Taylor	① ② ③

FIGURE 3:4 – CENTRE HEADS’ QUESTIONNAIRE (ASSESSMENT OF CENTRE HEADS’ PRACTICES)

All three (3) EE Centre Heads placed evaluation by a team of “KZNDEC Curriculum Advisors” lowest on the scale (with confidence rankings of 1 {no/weak} or 2 {simply OK}). For those who are, with the NEEP-GET teams, helping to empower Curriculum and Subject Advisors in environmental education, this is a telling lack of confidence in their colleagues.

The questionnaire also explored openings for constructivist, “fourth generation evaluations” (Guba and Lincoln in Lotz 2001:28). Such evaluations recognise that as evaluation outcomes are always *social* constructions, they cannot be the work of a “neutral instrument” (Ibid. 2001:28). The question was therefore asked, “If evaluation of my Centre and of its activities and programmes must take place, I would prefer...” [Question 9 in the structured questionnaire; see **APPENDIX 2:B** and **FIGURE 3:3**].

All three (3) EE Centre Heads asserted that “neutral, objective experts *can* come in to determine aims, methodology, and outcomes of our programmes – but I want to be part of that process, discussing the issues as we go along” as their prime response (Question 9b; with two ratings of “3” and one of “2”). This may be interpreted to be a positive shift, but the choice of, “as our programmes evolve, so we determine how effective they are, and change them if needs be” (Question 9c) ranked second lowest (with ratings of “2” in all three {3} cases). This reaction might appear to conflict with the notion that “environmental education should be a process of social change in response to the environmental crisis” (Lotz 2001:29; Robottom 1987:35; see Sections 6:1 and 6:2).

Participants in an educational programme also may be legitimate evaluators of their own work – “evaluation *in* environmental education” (Stake 1975, *in* Lotz 2001:28) – as they are indeed perceived to be reflective (i.e. deeply evaluative and responsive) of the environment (which impacts, here, on the educational processes) of which they are a part (Lotz 2001:29). When a certain Centre runs basically the same programme, week in and week out, year in and year out, for almost all visiting groups (Head A 2003), can it be said to “[seek] to involve pupils with a view to understanding and mounting a critique of the arguments, evidence and value positions at work in respect of those issues” (Robottom 1987:35)?

In an examination of the rationale for evaluation [Question 10 in the structured questionnaire; see **APPENDIX 2:B** and **FIGURE 3:5**], all three (3) EE Centre Heads ranked the response “it might attract new school groups, if they go away with a good report of our activities” lowest (all with ratings of “1”). Highest rated, however, was, “...we need to generate professional respect for our centres’ work” (with two {2} ratings of “2” and a third of “3”). It might be argued that these responses are contradictory:

- Unless a school group is using excursion time as time away from “reality” (i.e. from

classroom-based studies), a return to the Centre on another occasion for another “tour” will be a positive evaluation of the productive (educational) activities undergone there.

- An environmental educator who pursues worthwhile, curriculum-based endeavours will “generate professional respect” – but such recognition should not be an end in itself.

In response to the suggestion that “too few of our ‘senior colleagues’ in Head Office know what we actually do,” the overall ranking was second lowest, with two (2) ratings of “2” and one of “1.” That this might indicate a welcome lack of official observation was not settled in the follow-up workshop.

Evaluation of our Centre by a respected person or body could strengthen our standing in the Department		
a.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Because we need to generate professional respect for our centres’ work ①②③
b.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Because it might attract new school groups, if they go away with a good report of our activities ①②③
c.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Because too few of our “senior colleagues” in Head Office know what we actually do ①②③
d.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Because we would be drawn into the curriculum process, thus increasing our “professional standing” ①②③

FIGURE 3:5 – CENTRE HEADS’ QUESTIONNAIRE (POSSIBLE REASONS FOR EVALUATION OF A KZNDEC EE CENTRE)

If, as findings indicate, there is sparse evaluation of learning programmes conducted in and through the centres, the researcher might enquire:

- How are the environmental educators (as educators) being “key contributors to the transformation of education” (Department of Education 2002a:9)?
- Can a visit of up to five (5) days to a Centre “play [its fullest] role in creating awareness of the relationship between human rights, a healthy environment, social justice and inclusivity” (Department of Education 2002a:10; Ibid. 2002 b:9; Ibid. 2002c:3)? Can learners (and educators) truly experience “planned processes which enable [them] to explore the environment, to investigate recognised concerns and to take action to make the world a better place for all living things,” in such a brief period of time (KZNDEC 2002b; Janse van Rensburg and Taylor, 1993:6; Ledermann 1998:1-2; see Chapter 4 Section 4.3)?
- Might not empowering the educators to be confident and competent in environmental education techniques, to teach their learners at their own pace, be a more satisfactory method of passing on environmental learning? And,
- Do demands for the confirmation of the competency of the centres’ educational programmes reflect the Biology-based, Tylerian “scientism” from which much of the EE Unit is derived (Lotz 2001:27; vide Chapter 3 Section 3.5.1)?

3.5.4 The KZNDEC Environmental Education Centres and INSET

“The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture Environmental Education Unit will seek opportunities to provide Environmental Education skills to students in training (PRESET) and to support educators through INSET, that competence and confidence in implementing cross-curricular Environmental Education in the classrooms and in the field (experiential Environmental

Education) might be developed and enhanced” (Item 5 of the *Strategic Plan 2000-2002*: KZNDEC Environmental Education Unit 2000:3).

In February 1996, the Environmental Education Unit recommended to the Committee of Heads of Education Departments of KwaZulu-Natal “the ‘repositioning’ of EE within Advisory Services/ Educational Programmes within the KZNDEC” (Müller 1996:2). They also threw their weight behind curriculum development in the developing OBE process (KZNDEC Environmental Education Unit 2000:2).

Motivation was made for the Centres to stand alone, financially, (i.e. where only Centre staff salaries would be met by the KZNDEC; KZNDEC 1998:1; vide Section 3.2.2). This move was designed to ease the Centres towards official recognition as educational institutions of the Department. It would grant them the “semi-independent” status of “Section 21” schools (where “in terms of [the South African Schools Act] all functions with regard to a school fund are vested in the governing body”; Department of Education 2001). It would also relieve Centres’ staffers of frustrations caused by slow payment by Regional administrations of grocery bills, rates, etc.

With funds generated from visiting groups’ accommodation charges, the EE Centre Heads took upon themselves non-formal “outreach” initiatives for Environmental Education within the KZNDEC’s Regions (see **MAP 5:E**):

- Dundee EE Centre was destined to help in the Ladysmith Region [now part of the Ukhahlamba Region] and Vryheid Region [now part of the Zululand Region];
- Durban EE Centre was destined to help in North Durban and Durban South Regions [now part of the eThekweni Region];

- Eshowe EE Centre was destined to help in the Empangeni and Ulundi Regions [now part of the Zululand Region]; and
- colleagues from the KZN EECF helped Port Shepstone and Pietermaritzburg Regions [now part of the Umgungundlovu Region] (Ibid. 2000:12).

This was evolutionary for the Centres to be moving into “curriculum support facilities” (Joubert *et al* 1994:28) by

- helping with learning programmes in schools,
- working with school communities, and
- running principal and educator workshops i.e. INSET, especially with the School’s Environmental Policy programme (KZNDEC Environmental Education Unit 2000:11).

However, within the extra work involved in serving the communities, a quandary arose:

- “those involved in Environmental Education cannot expect to evaluate [and, thus teach], with any validity or effectiveness, unless they identify with or create a framework for the growth and functioning of a community of meaning” (O’Donoghue 1986:19); and
- for some years, there was no formal “environmental” component in the curriculum; and the EE Centre Heads have had little training in Environmental Education.

In October 2000, the EE Centre Heads recommended to the KZNDEC that, with the demise of colleges of education in the Province, positions should be internally advertised to “redeploy” former lecturers as Regionally based KZNDEC Environmental Education “co-ordinators” (KZNDEC 2000 a:7-8; KZNDEC 2000b:4). Since such Co-ordinators were

appointed in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and in Ladysmith, school visitations became quite commonplace, carrying out the mandates of the NEEP-GET programme.

Unfortunately, such co-ordinators' posts were discontinued as from 1 April 2003, with the restructuring of the KZNDEC (KZNDEC 2003 b; KZNDEC 2003 c). The onus would appear to be, once more, upon the Centres to provide Region-wide support for Environmental Education.

Significantly, on 16 April 2003, the Acting Regional Senior Manager: Ukhahlamba Region, proposed that "Environmental Education must apply to all learners in Grade 9 and below, and become an integral part of their curriculum" (Dundee EE Centre 2003b:1) He said that the Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) of the District and of the Region would work closely with the Centre's Head to effect these moves." Such an alignment with curriculum-based advisory services, if followed by other Regions, may hold benefits – and potential for restructuring – for the EE Centres.

3.5.5 The EE Centres as Educational Institutions reflecting Political Transformation in KwaZulu-Natal

Recurring repeatedly in KZNDEC EE Unit documents is the expression of the need to "reflect the demographics of KwaZulu-Natal" in learners accommodated:

"Equal access to the services and facilities offered by the KZN DEC EE Unit and its Centres will be available to all schools, learners and educators in KwaZulu-Natal" (*Strategic Plan 2000-2002: Goal 1 (Representivity)*).

Based on 2002 “bed nights” (i.e. occupancy rates; not on individuals attending Centre programmes), numbers of “Black”/African learners/educators range between 45% and 63% of where they should be, if they reflected the demographics of the Province (Department of Education 2001:1 & KZNDEC 2002; see **FIGURE 3:6**). (In other words, if 81.7% of all residents of KwaZulu-Natal are “Black”/African, this could perceivably be the target figure for the accommodation of “Black”/African learners and educators.)

	Demographic Profile: KZN	Dundee EE Centre	Durban EE Centre	Eshowe EE Centre
Bed Nights 2002		7 447	7 899	4 309
% African/Black	81.7%	51.8%	36.8%	41.1%
% Coloured	1.4%	2.6%	4.57%	4.9%
% Indian Asian	9.4%	9.76%	8.73%	9.6%
% White	6.6%	35.84%	49.9%	44.3%
% Unspecified	0.8%	?	?	?

FIGURE 3:6 – DEMOGRAPHICS OF EDUCATIONAL GROUPS UTILISING KZNDEC EE CENTRES IN 2002 (Department of Education 2001:1 & KZNDEC 2002)

This situation is not for want of advertising. EE Centre Heads run “adverts in newspapers and magazines... [publicise] the Centre at advocacy meetings... [pay] personal visits to schools... [distribute] leaflets and booklets advertising the Centre... [write] articles published in local newspapers...” (Head B Interview 2003). The Centres’ charges are relatively low: approximately R200 per person per week for full board and bedding and for the educator to instruct the group. Most “historically disadvantaged” groups claim that they can still not afford such fees (Ibid.).

The real expense is probably in hiring buses (or other means) to get to and from the Centre, and travel to places of interest when there. Expensive transport can make the Centres “inaccessible to their main clients” (Aitcheson, 1990:2 in Shongwe 1997:54). It is the “minority” groups in the population, who are historically better financially endowed, who are best represented as visitors to the three KZNDEC EE Centres (see **FIGURE 3:6**).

Hence, “funding is ... sought from commerce” (KZNDEC 2000b:2) or from service organisations (Head B Interview 2003) to run day outings or week-long excursions; “cross-subsidisation... by charging higher rates to groups from outside KZN” (KZNDEC 2000b:2); and by “[granting] groups discounted accommodation” (Ibid.).

In 2002, the Dundee EE Centre sponsored two (2) “previously disadvantaged” schools for a full week, each; the Durban EE Centre sponsored one school for one week; and the Eshowe EE Centre arranged Rotary funding for a one-day excursion for learners, and three (3) day excursions/workshops for educators (KZNDEC 2000). In the first six (6) months of 2003, the Dundee EE Centre had sponsored four (4) learners’ groups and two (2) educators’ groups.

The Centres are in a “Catch 22” situation: requiring money from boarding fees to survive financially; yet being morally obliged to cater for the section of the population least able to

afford their services. Indeed, the numbers of former “Model C” schools, “independent Schools” and “out of province” and even foreign schools accommodated may bear testimony to the need to attract “paying schools” to afford to sponsor others (**FIGURE 3:7**).

CENTRE	DUNDEE		DURBAN		ESHOWE	
Ex-Model C Schools	22	64.7%	30	56.6%	25	69.4%
KZN Independent Schools	7	20.6%	10	18.9%	8	22.2%
Out-of-Province/Foreign Schools	3	8.9%	9	17%	1	2.8%
Any other KZNDEC Schools	2	5.9%	4	7.5%	2	5.6%

FIGURE 3:7 – TYPES OF SCHOOLS UTILISING KZNDEC EE CENTRES IN 2002

An investigation into the EE centres of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife concluded that "the only common sense way to maintain viable centre-based services is to charge sustainable rates and to provide a quality service that is supported by paying clients" (O'Donoghue, Gcumisa, and Taylor 2000:33). This may not be an entirely viable solution to the KZNDEC's Centres' moves towards "representivity" (KZNDEC Environmental Education Unit 2000:3).

3.6 TOWARDS IMPROVING THE FUNCTIONALITY OF THE KZNDEC EE CENTRES AS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

There were originally five (5) Centres serving approximately 116 000 NED learners

(KZNDEC 1996) and in 2003, there are but three (3) Centres serving approximately 2.6 million KZNDEC learners (Department of Education 2001). Most of these learners will not be able to afford to visit the Centres.

It is incumbent upon the KZNDEC, in conjunction with the governing bodies of the Centres, to devise creative ways of providing genuine “curriculum enhancing” programmes for as many learners, students and educators as possible (interview: D Duncan, Delta EE Centre, 25 November 2002). Solutions aiming towards “valid” environmental education, where environmental concerns are addressed in a practical and contextually meaningful manner (Russo and Lupele 2003:1; Terwel 1999:195; see Chapter 6 Section 6.2) may include:

- The Centres keeping costs low, so that as many learners as possible can take advantage of the programmes;
- The Centres sponsoring and cross-subsidising groups of learners from impoverished areas;
- The Centre Heads re-arranging the daily or even quarterly programmes so that Centres’ facilities are made available to educators and educator groups, in order to “cascade” environmental education through to as many learners as possible.
- The Regional KZNDEC authorities refocusing education policies, programmes and practices that the Centres may become capacity building centres for educators (cf. Fien 2002:44), “nodal points” supplying resources and further training for the educators of up to sixty local schools (O’Donoghue and Taylor, 4 December 2002). As such, they could provide a “home base” for subject advisors for their school Districts. This may involve doing away with residential facilities for learners.

- The Regional KZNDEC authorities entering into agreements with other Provincial departments and organisations that would allow the Centres to become “multi-sectoral resource centres” that service the community through health, welfare, education, etc. (O’Donoghue and Taylor 4 December 2002; cf. Dundee EE Centre 2003c).

In the current time of change and evolutionary strides in the education systems of South Africa, the Centres should develop more fully into the environmentally-impactful pedagogic institutions they purport to be – or prepare for extinction. Their society requires educational expertise, coupled with a holistic relevance of “environmentalism” that encompasses socio-economic needs:

“Education... is the most effective means that society possesses for confronting the challenges of the future. ... While [it] is not the whole answer to every problem, in its broadest sense, education must be a vital part of all efforts to imagine and create new relations among people and to foster greater respect for the needs of the environment” (UNESCO 1997:38 in Fien 2002).