

CHAPTER 4

THE POLICIES AND PRACTICES OF THE KZNDEC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES

4.1 THE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES AS *ENVIRONMENTAL* EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

As asserted in Chapter Three (3), the KZNDEC environmental education centres are designed to serve a twofold purpose: educational and environmental. It is in the latter context that it will be argued (a) that there rests an obligation on the KZNDEC to provide an environmental education service for learners and educators in KwaZulu-Natal; and (b) that there should be demonstrably effective methods of conveying a participatory environmental ethic through the education services of KwaZulu-Natal (cf. le Roux, Burge and Malose 1998:112).

These two aspects will now be discussed.

4.2 THE DUTY INCUMBENT UPON THE KZNDEC TO PROVIDE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

It is the opinion of Chambers that there is a “positive duty upon organs of the state to provide environmental education” (pers. comm. 21 July 2003). The researcher would suggest that the obligations of the KZNDEC are a legal mandate arising from:

- The environmental right as contained in the Bill of Rights (Act 108 of 1996;

Constitutional Assembly 1996; see Section 4.2.1);

- The tendency in the Constitution to automatically bind South Africa to international law perspectives and agreements (see Section 4.2.2);
- International law obligations to which South Africa has specifically bound itself (see Section 4.2.3);
- The specific provisions of the National Environmental Management Act (Act 107 of 1998; Republic of South Africa 1998; see Section 4.2.4).

4.2.1 The Environmental Right as Contained in the Bill of Rights

Section 24 (a) of the South African Constitution declares, “everyone has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their [*sic*] health or well-being” (Constitutional Assembly 1996:11). Section 24 (b) proceeds to compel positive action to ensure that this right is realised. It requires, for example, that conservation be promoted (Ibid. 24 (b)). Section 24 (b) (iii) calls for the promotion of “justifiable economic and social development” (cf. **DIAGRAM 2:1**; also Fien 1993:3).

Rights do not, however, exist in isolation. They are correlatives of powers and obligations (Chambers 2003b). When the Constitution creates a right it obliges the State, and organs of the State, to see that these rights are upheld in accordance with the supreme law of the land (Ibid; Ballance and King 1999:36).

“Organs of the state” include all departments of the state and administration at all levels of government. This encompasses national, provincial and municipal departments and administrations, all of their subdivisions and agencies (Bray, quoted by Chambers 2003b). They are bodies performing public functions in terms of legislation and which

would be regarded as public organs in terms of the Constitution (Ibid.).

This implies that an environmental education centre of the KZNDEC is an organ of state, because it operates as an educational institution akin to that of an FET college under the auspices of the Department. It carries out the function of promoting environmental education, not only in line with the Constitution, but also in line with policy objectives to which South Africa has committed itself, and to legislation that has been passed to fulfil these policy objectives.

An example of national policy objectives being executed might be in the promotion of a “healthy environment” (Constitutional Assembly 1996:11; cf. Ballance and King 1999:28). An “active learning” programme conducted with other provincial departments (such as Health and Population Development, and Water Affairs and Forestry) through an environmental education centre (as the agency of the Department of Education and Culture) could raise awareness of the hazards of cholera in the community (O’Donoghue 2001:7; Bot, Wilson and Dove 2000:67).

Government departments would be “assisting and supporting one another” so that community members develop an orientation to act when they encounter a specific local challenge (Constitutional Assembly 1996:25). Through the programme, they would “come to [understand] things as they are; encounter experiences in [their] surroundings so that this knowing is meaningful; and [critically reflect] on risks and issues that... give focus to problem solving interactions that might change the way things are” (O’Donoghue 2001:5). In KwaZulu-Natal such learning has become known as the “3 T’s” method: getting in *touch* with the surroundings and *talking* and *thinking* one’s way to solutions through environmental learning in, about and for a better world. This is “environmental education for environmental responsibility” (Robottom 1996:149).

4.2.2 South Africa is Bound to International Law Perspectives and Agreements

As mentioned, the Constitution creates certain indirect obligations for the country to follow trends in international law. Indeed, Section 39 compels any court of law interpreting a Bill of Rights to “consider international law” and also “foreign law” (Constitutional Assembly 1996:23). Section 232 states that “Customary international law is law in the Republic unless it is inconsistent with the Constitution or an Act of Parliament” (Ibid. 1996:130).

There are very many treaties, agreements and conventions concerning the environment contained in international law. Whilst it may be argued that environmental law does not form part of “customary international law,” the stage has surely been reached where no state may disregard environmental concerns with impunity (Chambers 2003a).

In this regard, the provision and effect of Section 233 of the Constitution on South African law becomes important (Ibid. 2003a). It states that in the interpretation of legislation, “every court must prefer any reasonable interpretation of the legislation that is consistent with international law over any alternative interpretation that is inconsistent with international law” (Constitutional Assembly 1996:131). The acts of the state and of the organs of state (such as the KZNDEC) have to be measured against norms and standards extant in the international community. It can be argued that a decision to downgrade or dismantle facilities and resources for environmental education (cf. Chapter 3, Section 3.1.1) may be in conflict not only with the provisions of the Constitution, but also with international law.

4.2.3 International Law Obligations to which South Africa is Specifically Bound

After the democratic elections of 1994, South Africa joined itself with the international community in a number of accords as part of its response to global environmental crises

(Ballance and King 1999:29-30; cf. Section 1.4). Of the “five documents adopted by more than 178 Governments at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992” (DEAT 1998:3), “Agenda 21” is “an action plan and blueprint for sustainable development” (Ibid.).

It is apparent from a study of this international agreement – to which South Africa is signatory – that there is strong compunction on participant governments to promote environmental development through education and other programmes. Chapters 25 (“Children and youth in sustainable development”; DEAT 1998:50) and 36 (“Promoting education, public awareness and training”; DEAT 1998:63) of “Agenda 21” contain numerous calls for governments to “promote environmental education and training.”

In line with the undertaking given by South Africa in signing the document, it is no accident that the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism is compelled by the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA; Act No. 107 of 1998) to prepare a report on the Government’s performance in respect to “Agenda 21.” This is the so-called *National State of the Environment Report* (DEAT 2002).

The promotion of environmental education through a dedicated institution (such as an environmental education centre) by an organ of state would comply with South Africa’s undertakings with regard to the agreement. It would also sit well in such a progress report on the Government’s performance and adherence to the principles contained in “Agenda 21” (Ballance and King 1999:28).

4.2.4 The specific provisions of the National Environmental Management Act

The National Environmental Management Act (NEMA; Act No. 107 of 1998) is a source of more binding obligations on the organs of government. NEMA may be regarded as the kingpin of environmental management in South Africa (cf. Burger 2002:147). It is the

outworking of the sentiments and rights regarding environmental matters expressed in the Constitution as a whole (Chambers 2003a). It is also in line with modern international norms and standards regarding environmental management matters (Burger 2002:147).

When the researcher considers the implementation of environmental education, he notes that in the Preamble to the Act, “the law should establish procedures and institutions to facilitate and promote public participation in environmental governance” (Ibid. 1998:2). Although not specifically expressed at this stage of the Act, it is clear that the Legislature considered it important that matters concerning the environment should be promoted and maintained. “Promotion” and “education” must surely be synonymous in this context, for it is difficult to conceive of any other means by which matters pertaining to a “healthy environment” can be promoted, but through education. Even “promotion,” in the strict sense of the word, is a form of education.

The Preamble of the Constitution also expresses the view that “the law should ensure that organs of state maintain the principles guiding the exercise of functions affecting the environment” (Ibid. 1998:2). As an organ of the state, the KZNDEC clearly fulfils its mandate in this respect by maintaining environmental education centres.

NEMA Section 2 (4) (h) is more specific. It avers, “community wellbeing and empowerment must be promoted through environmental education, the raising of environmental awareness, the sharing of knowledge and experience and other appropriate means” (Ibid. 1998:7-8). This is amplified in Section 2 (2) of the Act, which posits that “Environmental management must place people and their needs at the forefront of its concern, and serve their physical, psychological, developmental, cultural and social interests equitably” (Ibid. 1998:7).

By operating environmental education centres as educational institutions, rather than as simply educational services (Dundee EE Centre 2003c:1; Government Gazette 19

December 2001, Ch. F), the KZNDEC satisfies Section 2 (1) that encourages activities “of all organs of state that may significantly affect the environment” (Ibid. 1998:6). They operate “for the development and promotion of aptitudes of learners” (KwaZulu-Natal Education Act No. 3 of 1996) with regard to education *for, about* and *in* the environment (Bellamy 1996, Section 1:2).

4.3 CONVEYING A PARTICIPATORY ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC THROUGH THE KZNDEC

The legal groundwork is thus in place for environmental education centres to contribute to the lives of the educational communities in which they are geographically situated. (In the process, the general populace in which they are situated may also be positively affected; cf. Opie 1989:4). Effective environmental education processes provide major opportunities for the realisation of sustainable development (Ballance and King 1999:28).

The vision of environmental management and conservation in South Africa, as articulated by the White Paper on Environmental Management, is of a society that is in harmony with its environment through an integrated and holistic environmental management system (Delta 2001:5; Ballance and King 1999:36). This is allied with the Vision of the KwaZulu-Natal EECF that seeks to “encourage environmental education processes that develop responsible lifestyles in harmony with the environment as whole on the part of all the learners, students and educators of KwaZulu-Natal, and make them aware of the fact that an acceptable quality of life is dependent on their judicious and sustainable use of the environment” (KZN EECF 1996; Bellamy 1996 Section 1:3).

It behoves KZNDEC Centre educators, therefore, to be aware of current, local environmental challenges (Lotz-Sisitka and Janse van Rensburg 2000:16), and to be actively responding to such issues (Lotz 1997:4; O’Donoghue 2001:7; Wagiet 2001a:7) through their teaching programmes.

4.4 THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS DEMONSTRATED BY A KZNDEC ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRE HEAD

As an environmental educator, Head B said that he is alert to possibilities in “all aspects of the environment: economic, social, political and biophysical aspects” (Head B 2003). As with the other Centre Heads, he looks for diverse activities to inculcate “this message of sustainable use.”

Clearly constructionist in his approach, he emphasises that “authentic learning should take place in meaningful contexts” (cf. Terwel 1999:195). He tries to “tailor ...anything to do with the using of the various environments of Zululand for experiential learning” (Head B 2003). He detailed how a visit to the beach entails collaborative learning (between learners and educators, with himself as the co-ordinator), sometimes with the help of Share-Net booklets and colourful resource books. The learners progress to reflecting on what has been discovered, and they critically analyse the implications of certain types of sea/beach life, and how human activities encroach on its development. Head B said that it comes as a surprise to some learners to discover that, for some people, living at the seaside is not a matter of recreation but of survival – in that they draw a living from the sea – that is “interfered with” by the KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife officials (Ibid.). Skills in argumentation are improved as the “community of enquiry” assembles its own scenarios of understanding (Terwel 1999:196).

He is “truly concerned with trying to educate young people of South Africa in the sustainable use of our environment” (Ibid.), and he strives to make such “interaction experiences with nature such that each participant is obliged to form reasonable opinions – for him/herself, and as part of the interdependent group (cf. Asmal in *Revised NCS Overview*, Department of Education 2002a:1).

Such “situationist” learning has its place (Head C 2003); but having workshopped the

Schools' Environmental Policy programme extensively, he has found that cascading skills and knowledge through educators is a "speedier" and more effective method of promulgating environmental education: "I'd [like to] introduce a system of going into rural schools with teachers and running programmes with teachers as a basis for getting into the communities... forming clusters and working through the teachers – that's the only way. We should always be servicing the teachers through our centres. I've been saying that since 1995!" (Ibid.)

4.5 THE ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRES AS RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Environmental education practitioners such as Taylor and O'Donoghue suggest that present-day KZNDEC EE Centres may evolve into "multi-sectoral resource centres together with the Department of Health, etc." (cf. KZNDEC Environmental Education Unit 2002). As the education "wing" of such a facility, the centre ("always curriculum-based") would become "a nodal point for about 60 (sixty) schools" in a community (KZNDEC 2002b).

Yet the KZNDEC Centres provide only overnight accommodation for visiting schools' groups to "promote, demonstrate and model environmental education" (Joubert et al 1994:28). It is unfortunate that it is predominantly these groups, and not often schools from the District, that benefit from the environmental educators' "curriculum-enhancing services" (KZNDEC 2002b; cf. Chapter 3, Section 3.3.5). The reasons for this, and results which flow from them, are that:

- The ex-Natal Education Department placed much emphasis on biophysical aspects of the environment and on awareness of situations *in situ* (Van den Berg 2003; cf. Chapter 1 Section 1.2). The Department even provided financial help for schools to take their learners away "on tour" (NED Circular 11 of 1992).

- The original “Centres” were inexpensive overnight facilities for Natal Education Department groups, allowing them access to the proximal (primarily natural) environment. Schools “self-catered,” using kitchen amenities provided at the hostels (Van den Berg 2003; Head A 2002; cf. Chapter 1 Section 1.5.1).

- Because transport was relatively inexpensive, and distances were (because of poorer roads) relatively farther than today, it made practical sense to “stay over” (cf. Aitcheson in Shongwe 1997:54; Chapter 3 Section 3.3.5).

- Many of these concerns have never been resolved; and because the KZNDEC Centres have relied on their visitors’ accommodation fees for their income cf. Chapter 3 Section 3.3.2), they have been grid locked into providing the great majority of their environmental education learning only to those schools’ groups that can afford to visit and stay with them. (93% of all learners visiting KZNDEC Environmental Education Centres in 2002 came from ex-Model C schools, independent schools and out-of-province schools; cf. Chapter 3 Section 3.5.5 and **FIGURE 3:7**).

- Attempts to reach into the educational communities of which the Centres are (geographically) a part are seen by the Centre Heads to be addenda to their original task (Head B 2003), an “extra” that is exclusive of the core business of accommodating and providing teaching to paying clients: “running the EE Centres... [and] running EE outward bound experiences for learners” (Müller 1998:1).

4.6 THE EE CENTRE TAKING AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION SERVICE TO THE “COMMUNITY”

4.6.1 Case Study: Dundee EE Centre and the Wasbank Community

Research by Dlamini-Boemah and Rouhani in March 1997 appeared to confirm the limited educational effect of Dundee EE Centre on its local high schools (1997:3). Referring specifically to this centre, the authors asserted “The findings... indicate that pupils in rural community schools lack indepth knowledge of the concept ‘environmental education’ hence the need for Environmental Education Centres to pursue a more aggressive drive by making their services known to the rural schools and communities in their vicinities” (Ibid.: Abstract).

They reported that of 424 grade 12 learners who lived “within about 60 km radius of [the Dundee Environmental Education] Centre”...

- only 8.5% knew of the existence of the Centre;
- none had visited it (or any other place for environmental education);
- “only 12% were able to give a suitable answer” requiring a simple explanation of environmental education; and
- whereas 58% “regarded themselves as part of the environment through a relationship between man and the environment,” their ability to “draw some correlation between such social issues like poor toilet systems, poor roads, poor schools and unemployment with environmental problems” ranged from 4% through 16% (Ibid 1997:5 and 7).

The researchers comment was that “Much as [they] appreciated the work of Environmental Education Centres ... [they] wish to suggest that they should increase their activities towards rural community schools” (Ibid 1997:8).

They recommended that the KZNDEC “should encourage field trips (through funding) especially to Environmental Education Centres” (Ibid 1997:8). This underscores the centres’ financial dilemma: they must operate in an economically sound manner to exist, yet they have a moral obligation to serve local schools. Regional officials also say that they would like to “see the Centre serving clients [from other Regions], but also to expand to serve more schools within the Ukhahlamba Region. [They] would also like [Head C] to see more of the learners within the Region” (Dundee EE Centre 2003b:1). Local schools, however, often prefer to travel away, usually to the coast (Head A 2003).

The quandary is compounded: whereas it would have been ideal for Head C to visit all of the 1 304 educational institutions in the Ladysmith and Vryheid Regions (Department of Education 1999:11), it would have been unfeasible. Whereas it would have been ideal to have accommodated the 585 437 learners (Ibid.) from each of those institutions (even over a period of many years) at his Centre, it too would have been impracticable.

4.6.2 Case Study: Dundee EE Centre and the Schools' Environmental Policy Programme

In March 1997, the Head of Dundee Environmental Education Centre held discussions with the Regional Chief Director of the then Ladysmith Region. These resulted in a nascent Schools’ Environmental Policy (SEP) programme. The Centre Head compiled it and workshopped it in schools in the Ladysmith Region (Lotz 1997:34). It hinged on each school performing an elementary environmental audit (“a careful look at the way things are – and how they can be improved”: SEP 2002:1 “Getting Started”; Bellamy 1996 Section 2:5), and encouraging educators to practise curriculum-based teaching and

learning that enhanced their schools' environments (Northern Ireland Curriculum Council in Bellamy 1996; KABC 1996:9; Terwel 1999:195).

Other researchers took up the programme, and it has become a standard environmental education tool throughout the SADC Region (Suzuki 2000:14) that supports "a responsiveness which allows participants to take ownership and to signify curriculum content in the social politics of their ecological context" (SADC REEP 2002:13).

The pressure of "servicing" Schools has been performed "jointly with partners (such as the KZN Nature Conservation Service) from KZN EECF, especially in implementation of the ...Schools' Environmental Policy programme" (Dundee EE Centre 1999:1).

4.7 THE EE CENTRE WORKING WITHIN THE "COMMUNITY" WITH ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

4.7.1 "Walking Alongside" and "Working Within" Schools

On 16 May 2003, the researcher called for a workshop at Umgeni Valley to discuss the provision of practical educational training and professional support to educators in north-western KwaZulu-Natal. Prof. R. O'Donoghue of Rhodes University chaired the meeting of environmental educators from the KZNDEC, WESSA, SADC and local, experienced educators.

The group determined to "strengthen the scope of professional activities of the centres." It was agreed that the Eco-Schools project, that incorporates the "*Environmental Learning School Policy and Sustainable Management*" programme (that, from 2003, replaces the SEP), would be the fundamental tool for environmental education in schools. Educators would be trained in incorporating environmental matters into the Curriculum with the "Schools and Sustainability Pack" as their primary tool.

Prof. O'Donoghue explained that "in the centres' heyday in the 70's and 80's," their activities had been aided in schools by such programmes as Pietermaritzburg's EASY ("Environmental Award System for Youth"). There had also been a rise in "eco-clubs." It was perceived, he said, that as the "experts" worked alongside the educators and learners, "using what they knew to understand better," enthusiasm amongst schools had been maintained. The SEP had introduced Curriculum links to this process. It had provided a framework within which the schools could operate.

The advent of the NQF, had, however "shifted thinking" to a requirement to have "EE on the inside" (O'Donoghue at Umgeni Valley 2003). The need was to "empower teachers" to work within their specific domains and to "build up their own resources packs within their schools" (L. Wilkens, Scottsville Senior Primary School, at Umgeni Valley 2003).

4.7.2 Eco-Schools Workshops for Educator Groups

After negotiation with the Acting Regional Senior Manager and District Managers of the KZNDEC Ukhahlamba Region, it was arranged that three pilot groups would be run through Dundee Environmental Education Centre:

- On 2-6 June 2003 for educators from Madadeni (a five [5]-day course);
- On 23-26 June 2003 for educators from Normandien and Dannhauser (a for [4]-day course); and
- On 17-19 September 2003 for educators from Nquthu (a four [4]-day course).

At the end of each course, educators would be offered free enrolment in the EcoSchools project. Follow-up days, where participants would report on progress that their schools had made would be as follows:

- On 15 September 2003 for the Madadeni educators;
- On 16 September 2003 for the Normandien and Dannhauser educators; and
- On 17 November 2003 for the Nquthu educators.

In the interim, progress in the schools would be monitored by visits from the Head of Dundee EE Centre and/or an involved Subject Advisor, Mrs G Stroebe. Other Advisors that had been workshopped within the NEEP-GET framework, would also be involved.

The envisaged benefits of such courses were that environmental awareness and “significant social change” (Taylor 2003b:13) might be observed once the educators and their learners were “engaged in finding out about the [environmental] issues they face and are [empowered to be] in a position to challenge their assumptions and, where appropriate, re-evaluate their ideas about the issue” (Ibid.).

In order to qualify for an “Eco-Schools flag,” successful schools would have to engage in their own, contextually-based, self-driven, locally engineered solutions to environmental issues facing their school and/or communities (Holian 1999:5; Moodley 1984:4; Lotz 2001:5). They would set themselves assessable goals for curriculum-based projects involving (for example) a “Healthy Environment” or “Resource Use” in their schools. These activities would be consistent with international moves such as UNESCO’s “Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (Olivier 2003).

4.8 THE EE CENTRES AS AGENTS FOR EDUCATION- AND ENVIRONMENTAL- “UPGRADING”

Environmental education should ideally address both parts of its portfolio (environmental

and educational) in each school's locale, where "the curriculum is and will be differently interpreted and enacted in diverse contexts" (Prof. K Asmal in Department of Education 2002a:1). The methodology proposed (above) is strongly constructionist in approach.

Schools are encouraged to design appropriate local solutions to their own environmental challenges, and, in the process, classroom learning becomes relevant to the learners. Learners (and others in the school community) actively construct knowledge "within engaged meaning-making struggle in context" (Holian 1999:5; Russo and Lupele 2003:1; Klein and Merritt 1994:20). They "bring their existing understanding to the learning situation" (Bodner 1986 in le Roux 2000:64). The educator is – as is expected with Curriculum 2005 – an active mediator of knowledge and values with learners (Department of Education 1999:9).

Fieldwork, instead of becoming an awareness "end in itself" (cf. Chapter 2 Section 2.2) becomes an educational tool through which they "use what they know" (cf. Van den Berg in Opie 1986:14; O'Donoghue and Janse van Rensburg 1995:5). It can be a powerful instrument aiding an educator in the contextualisation of her learning programmes, illuminating them with environmental realities.

It is to discover what the specific environmental needs are, in urban and rural schools near to the Dundee Environmental Education Centre, so that they may be addressed and so that their educators may be empowered to use their environment in their education programmes, that Chapter Five (5) is devoted.