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The impact of the National Environmental Education Policy initiatives in South African schools

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa`s national environmental education policy initiatives and projects are very recent and therefore under-researched (O`Donoghue, 2001). The goal of designing and implementing a well-researched, highly documented, supportive national environmental education policy is still far from being achieved. Considering the development of the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) (1991), National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI)(1992), the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA) (1992), the White Paper on Environment and Development (1998), Outcomes Based Education (OBE)(1995), it is evident that the focus on environmental education has been changing over time. It is also evident that the change in environmental education policy initiatives and documents has been shaped and influenced by the historical changes in the education system in the country. In other words, general formal education and environmental education in this country, have been informed and shaped by forces of the apartheid education system (Bantu Education between 1950s and 1960s), the Afrikaaner Nationalist education policies (between 1960s and late 1970s), state-centred ecological institutions (between 1970 and 1980) such as Wildlife South Africa, and the ANC-led government liberal education system (from 1995 to date).

This research traces and documents the development of environmental education policies internationally and draws some lessons that South Africa can learn from them. In the research, the history of the development of environmental education internationally and in South Africa is outlined and debated. The research then assesses the impact of the national environmental education policy initiatives and documents in schools, and outlines how teachers are responding to them.

1.1. Rationale

In South Africa, the post-apartheid transformation of education has presented educators with many challenges. Bearing in mind the fact that many teachers were schooled and trained in the apartheid era, where teachers were not mediators and facilitators of the learning process but subject instructors and knowledge bearers, it does not come as a surprise that the introduction of both OBE and environmental education in schools has been a challenge. It is this challenge, which faces many schools, that is of interest in this research. This research aims to document current policy initiatives, NEEP in particular, in environmental education. In the research, the researcher details how the national environmental education policy programmes and projects are being implemented in the eight (8) schools that were interviewed, records teachers` understanding of environmental education and reflects their feelings about the nature of environmental education. The contributions of GDE, Delta Environmental Centre, Area District officials and educators, in this regard, in promoting and implementing environmental education in schools in Soweto are evaluated and discussed.

1. 2. Aim and objectives

The aim of this research is to assess the impact of the national environmental education policy programmes and projects in schools. Its objectives are to:

- document South Africa`s environmental education framework and policies
- investigate role of GDE officials in implementing environmental education
- assess effectiveness of implementation programmes
- assess role of the Delta Environmental Centre as an implementing agent
- determine teachers` understanding of environmental education concepts and processes involved

1.3. STUDY AREA: SOWETO

Map 1



Township map with special reference to Soweto

Ref: **http://encarta.msn.com/map_701516674/Soweto.html (2005)**

1.4. BACKGROUND TO THE CASE STUDY

1.4.1. The social setting

SOWETO stands for South Western Townships. It is a combination of townships found in the South West of Johannesburg. Soweto came into existence in the 1930s, with Orlando being the first township to be established (Mayekiso, 1996). In the 1950s, more black people were relocated there from 'black spots' (black neighborhoods which the apartheid government had reserved for white people) in the inner city (Miltin, 1998). Orlando like any other Soweto townships, during that time had an expanding, unplanned settlement pattern. This township is today the most populous black urban residential area in the country, with Census 2002 estimating its population at 99 896 (Stats SA, 2003).

Socially the township is characterized by homelessness. Homelessness has been brought about by urbanization (Mayekiso, 1996). The in-flow of immigrants into the area tends to undermine service delivery efforts from the municipal government (Metropolitan City Council Report, 1999). The municipality tries hard to see to it that service delivery reaches residents but there are more people in these townships than resources available. Every year there are new immigrants coming in from other provinces of the country and from nearby countries like Mozambique, Lesotho and Zimbabwe (Elisah, 2002). With high number of people clustered together, coupled with a rising unemployment rate, the area has also spawned many gangsters and has been a seedbed of criminal activities (Mayekiso, 1996). Theft, car hijacking, illegal seizing of a person`s property by force (*nkuzi*), have become the order of the day in Orlando.

1.4.2. Environmental Education

The ongoing environmental problems of Orlando include poor housing, overcrowding, poor infrastructure, waste dumping and land degradation (Dumming, 1990; Mayekiso, 1996). On its surface the township indeed looks gloomy, dull and grey. It is clear that the apartheid planning did not take into account the environmental problems of that area, and it is only in recent years that the local government has spearheaded moves to plant trees,

develop parks, and install electricity and running water in the township (Metropolitan City Council Report, 1999).

As one enters the townships he/she is greeted by coal smoke. Poor township dwellers still use coal and paraffin for cooking and heating. Just a few metres from the residents` houses are filthy streams where waste is dumped. At the time of the interviews, the school surroundings in Orlando were littered with papers and dumped waste. Most playing grounds there have also become the residents` dumping sites. In some streets there are sewage overflows. Over the years there have been attempts by the Area Civic officials from both Orlando East and West to promote environmental awareness and sensitiveness (Soweto Area Civic, 2002). The local government also tries its best to remove the dumped waste in some streets but in just a few days waste is dumped in the same areas again (Metropolitan City Council Report, 1999). The level of community based environmental education is still very low in this area. Much work needs to be done by schools, community builders, local firms and companies to guide these residents on the road of environmental awareness.

Picture 1



Serious environmental problems (poor housing infrastructure, ghettoism, land degradation and solid waste dumping) in Soweto.
Ref: http:// www.pienternet.be/zuidafrica/images. Soweto (2002)

1.4.3. Education for Black people

Many schools in Soweto were built in the apartheid era, of the Bantu Education system. Black students during the apartheid era were learning in harsh, overcrowded environments (Shriener, 1995; Mayekiso, 1996). To make matters worse, in the late 1950s, the government withdrew most of its subsidies from black schools in support for the white privileged learners (Shriener, 1995). By 1963, the government enforced the 1950 Group Areas Act and closed many black schools stating that they were located in areas reserved for whites only. In 1974, the government of the day mandated that all Black children were to be taught in Afrikaans (Miltin, 1998). This impacted negatively on education for black people on the whole. By 1986, 50% of the black population was illiterate and 69% of their teachers had not completed schooling (Stats SA, 1990). According to Stats SA (1990: 301), one out of 25 black learners finished their education, as opposed to 2 out of 3 whites. A study by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (1998) also found that out of the 37,000 schools in South Africa: 83% did not have libraries and media centers, 69% did not have science laboratories, 12% of all schools had no toilets; 61% had no access to telephones, 52% were without electricity, 24% of all schools did not have any water on site, 18% of all schools either needed major repairs or were beyond repair (DBSA, 1998).

Picture 2



Soweto: typical housing in Orlando

Ref: *http/www.joburg.org.za/Soweto/overview.stm* (2005)

Generally the people of Soweto are struggling to recover from the decades of repression and discrimination they suffered under the apartheid regime (Elisah, 2002; Mayekiso 1996). According to Mayekiso (1996:17), one of the township`s challenges is to address the huge historical imbalances that existed as a result of the Apartheid "Bantu" education policy and to deal with the existing huge disparity in investment per learner between the schools in the previous white areas (suburbs) and the previously black areas (townships). This process is clearly on-going and although progress has been made, there is still a perceived real gap between the education in the township schools and in the suburbs. Some schools in Soweto are still under-resourced, their learning environments are poor and some are still taught by under-qualified teachers (Elisah, 2002). Clearly these factors limit the extent of learning in Soweto.

Given the high unemployment levels in these areas, many working class parents today find themselves having to bear a greater economic burden in educating their children (Elisah, 2002). This was also worsened by the state's withdrawal of some funds, following IMF policies of cutbacks to schools (Frey, 2001). The Department of Education allocates less than 30% of its budget for secondary education. The government recently (2003) released figures showing that 43% of South African schools have no electricity, 27% have no water, 50% have no flushing toilets and use pit latrines or the bush and 80% of the schools have no libraries (Department of Education Stats Department, 2004). It is perhaps no wonder that 60% of all children who enrol in Grade 1 do not make it to matriculation or that under-resourced schools produce poor matric results at the end of each year.

1.5. Outline of Chapters

Chapter One is a brief description of environmental education policy shift in South Africa from the early 1990s to 2000s. This chapter gives some background on the aim, purpose and the direction of the research. Chapter Two discusses the research methodology. This chapter provides a discussion on research methods used and outlines how the findings were analysed. In Chapter Three the relevant literature is reviewed. The chapter

documents and discusses the shift in environmental education policy initiatives globally and in South Africa. It further discusses the change in teaching methodologies and approaches that have come to influence and shape the understanding of environmental education in general education. Chapter Four provides the theoretical framework. This chapter outlines education theories and discusses how they influence the understanding of environmental education today. Chapter Five is the Research Discussion and Analysis. The chapter assesses the progress of NEEP-GET project in promoting environmental education in schools and discusses how environmental education is coordinated at the provincial and district level. Chapter Six is the conclusion. Based on literature review and analysis from the fieldwork findings, this chapter calls for the need to empower schools to be environmentally aware and sensitive, and the need for institutional reform, thus the need for a new coordinated body of professionals who will run and spearhead environmental education for the Gauteng Department of Education.