

FOCUS

ON LEARNING & TEACHING

Galvanising Education

Schooling in and for the New South Africa

Neville Alexander

The Debate about Re-opening Teacher Education Colleges

Linda Chisholm

The Promise and Challenge of University Based Teacher Education

Ruksana Osman

How are the Teachers?

Anthea Cereseto

Mother Tongue Instruction

Tshepiso Matentjje

A Narrative

My First Generation

Matric Journey

Alfred Lephoi

Reviews:

Michael Cardo, Thabo
Rapoo, Bobby Godsell,
Eusebius McKaiser



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In keeping with the Foundation’s stated policy of seeking to offer a platform for both seasoned commentators and new and marginalised voices, we present this edition of *Focus on Learning and Teaching*.

The Foundation works from the premise that education is not only an important developmental issue, but is also a human rights issue. Beyond the central concern of personal growth, our social development and, crucially, our long-term economic development is dependent on the acquisition and availability of suitable and appropriate skills. Arguably the major constraint confronting South Africa’s growth trajectory has always been its poor human capital base. In this regard our history of segregationist and apartheid educational policies has resulted in a legacy which we continue to grapple with today. More recent policy interventions, however well intentioned, have not succeeded in creating a new and realisable vision of universal education.

But, as Gillian Godsell, our commissioning editor, points out, it is tempting to be drawn into negative accounts of the public educational system. She goes on to warn about this negativity becoming something of a national pastime. This warning should be taken seriously if we are to move away from a destructive despair which itself may prevent us from having the sort of productive conversations necessary for improving the education system.

“Getting the basics right” is always a good place to begin and nowhere is this more obvious than with the issue of “mother tongue” education. In this regard the Foundation is particularly pleased to offer the thoughts and arguments of Alexander, Matentjie, Owen-Smith and Henning.

Education continues to be a central concern of the Foundation, and forthcoming editions of *Focus* will deal with Further Education and Training and Higher Education.

This edition of *Focus* offers an innovation in the form of a Narrative. In all the theoretical debates and policy discussions it is useful to be reminded of one man’s educational journey and what that may entail. If education is not also about realising individual hopes and aspirations, then it is manifestly circumscribed.

We continue with another innovation introduced in the last edition of *Focus*, namely of providing a Review Forum wherein various reviewers comment on a recently published work. This innovation was widely appreciated and is in line with the Foundation’s policy of providing a forum for discussion and debate.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Gillian Godsell and her accomplished team of writers for preparing this important edition of *Focus*.

Galvanising Education: Commissioning Editor's Overview



Gillian Godsell has a PhD from Boston University. She is an Industrial Psychologist, and an Associate Research Fellow at the School of Public and Development Management at Wits. She hosts weekly programme *Jozi Today* on Joburg community radio station *Radio Today*.

“Parents and communities will have little say in the education of their children and teachers will have little scope to exercise individuality or originality or experiment” Helen Suzman said in 1966, opposing the Education Bill. “The Bill aims at uniformity in education and control from above”.¹ Suzman was opposing a Bill governing the education of white as well as black children. Although the worst effects of apartheid on education manifested in Bantu Education, there was much else that was wrong with Nationalist educational ideology.

However, every step away from both ideology and content of Christian National Education (CNE) seems to have had its own pitfalls. Who could have predicted, for example, that the welcome move away from segregated education would have curtailed exposure to mother-tongue, and thus impacted on the development of higher cognitive functioning in young children? (Alexander, Matentjie, Owen-Smith, Henning)

It is tempting to focus on the potholes our education system crashes into, and not on where the road to better education is leading us. Indeed, compiling lists of potholes of varying sizes has become a national pastime. But not all lists are equal. Some lists of our educational failings are paralysing and others are galvanising.

The writers in this Education issue of *Focus* are galvanisers. They offer remedies. They move away from government as the source of all problems and all solutions, and offer resources to improve our education system, school by school. They recognise both the complexity of the problems facing us, and the possibility of taking small steps, right now, in the schools, to begin to solve these problems.

The two key themes in this issue are partnership, and mother-tongue education. Mother tongue education, or its absence, has a particularly important effect on the development of reading, and therefore of higher cognitive functioning, in young children.

Higher cognitive functioning is essential for learners to cope with the new curriculum. The development of this curriculum is another important move away from apartheid education which has had unintended consequences.

Focus readers who recall rote-learned CNE history as a school subject, and history papers with many one-word and one-sentence answers, will enjoy the following new curriculum questions put to learners in the 2009 matric history paper:

“What, do you think, were the attractions that enticed people from East Berlin to defect to West Berlin?” and “You were a young teacher filled with hope and optimism at the time of Ghana’s independence celebrations in 1957. By the 1970s you decided to leave Ghana. Using all the sources and your own knowledge, write a paragraph... explaining your feelings for leaving”.

Sources to be used by learners answering these questions included photographs, graphs, cartoons and original written documents.

But which learners could have analysed those sources, and answered those questions? Those matric candidates at state schools who passed with university exemption² – 107 000 in 2008,³ 61 000 of them black^{4,5} and 109 000 in 2009, roughly 64 000 of them black⁶ – would have been able to answer well. This is a significant number, but what about the two thirds of learners who passed without an exemption? They would have battled to cope.

These learners are caught between the devil of a new curriculum demanding advanced skills of analysis and written expression, and the deep blue sea of the absence of foundations of those skills in primary school.

Learners must learn to share their languages because *“without social integration in the classroom, the social cohesion necessary for us to move forward as a country will be unattainable”*.

Educational foundations

Writers in this issue of *Focus* are concerned with both the big and the small questions. They look at the pattern and process of learning to read (Henning, Owen-Smith, Matentjie) and they discuss where the reading leads – that is, what the goals of a good education system should be. They don’t just look at the potholes, they look at where the road itself is going.

Osman reminds us to ask not just how to move away from dysfunctionality in education, but what sort of functionality we want to move towards. Mkhabela is clear where we should be going, and it’s not just

towards better maths and English: “education is at the heart of reconciliation, reconstruction and nation-building programmes.”

Alexander agrees that education is about more than transmitting “the crucial knowledge and skills required by young people in order to operate in the modern world.” Education in South Africa, he states firmly, must be about “equality of opportunity, non-racialism, multi-culturalism, democratic freedoms and attitudes and.... humane citizenship”.

Owen-Smith makes a similar point about the power of language to join or to separate. Learners must learn to share their languages because “without social integration in the classroom, the social cohesion necessary for us to move forward as a country will be unattainable”.

Nation-building cannot be pursued at the expense of reading – both must be classroom goals, and it is teachers who must implement them. Can they do this? Cereseto paints a picture of teachers that is both alarming and reassuring. She reminds readers of the idealism with which many young people enter the profession – and the pressures which cause them to lose this idealism, and which fracture their professional identity. One of the teachers Cereseto interviewed wrote: “I used to be something else – now I am a sinking ship”, while another described herself as “a shining diamond – buried in the sand”.

What can be done to help the teachers? There is quite a lively debate on this topic. Alexander feels that teacher training should be much more practical, and that the teacher training colleges should be re-opened. Chisholm argues that not all of the colleges were good in the first place, and that all are now serving other purposes. For her, re-opening or not is the wrong question to ask; we should instead ask how we are to provide more and better teachers.

Osman argues for universities as the appropriate place for teacher training. She challenges the dichotomy between practice and theory with her concept of reflective practitioners who evaluate and innovate while teaching.

Although the authors wrote separately and individually, this pattern of dialogue – of agreement, disagreement, and picking up threads of an argument – continues across articles throughout the issue. Mkhabela,

Matentjie sees inherent barriers to higher cognitive functioning within a mother-tongue where higher order thinking skills such as arguing, criticising, questioning and judging would all be deemed “disrespectful, argumentative and difficult” when produced by children.

Osman and Alexander all call for demonstration schools, and are answered by Henning’s description of the experimental Foundation Phase school run in Soweto by the University of Johannesburg.

Ngoma and Cereseto, in very different contexts, both remind us gently of easily forgotten idealism – Ngoma describes the idealistic phase in which national education policies were first drawn up, and Cereseto writes about the individual idealism of teachers, which is easily obscured by press headlines.

As well as agreements, there are sharp disagreements: Alexander and Owen-Smith’s plea for mother tongue education is answered by an equally passionate argument from Matentjie. Matentjie sees inherent barriers to higher cognitive functioning within a mother-tongue where higher order thinking skills such as arguing, criticising, questioning and judging would all be deemed “disrespectful, argumentative and difficult” when produced by children.

Chisholm’s theme of false nostalgia for times past is picked up, although not explicitly, by Everatt who challenges the idea of Bantu Education having produced better results for black learners.

Bantu Education itself is described poignantly and personally by Lephoi. He paints a picture of Bantu Education which is both ideal and horrifying. Here indeed are the schools where “what we lacked in resources we more than made up for in great teaching” and teachers who “understood the concept of in *loco parentis* and played many parts in our lives”. The cost of this is the Bophuthatswana army patrolling to enforce a youth curfew, resources distributed at the whim of a homeland ruler, and corporal punishment that is in fact assault.

Partnerships

What Lephoi describes is a totally hierarchical system, but an area of agreement between most of the other writers is the importance of educational partnerships. Implicit in Suzman’s criticism of the Education Bill of 1966 is the idea of education as an innovative partnership between parents, teachers and community. This is the “educational community with a common purpose” Chisholm hopes for.

Trust is the foundation for communities and partnerships in and around education. Hofmeyr describes parents making sacrifices to get their children to private schools because they believe in the school. Henning tells readers about state schools which operate as successful partnerships because teachers are trusted.

These partnerships are particularly important, Henning tells us, for developing reading skills. “A teacher who works systematically, a home environment where the school work is overseen and strengthened, and a school where learning is valued are essential ingredients of a young child’s formal education life. When children fail to learn to read it is almost always because school, or home, or both, have failed them”.

A partnership is not automatically a good thing. Ngoma calls for “extended networks of knowledge and expertise” and in particular for moving out of “limited... and familiar network zones which endorse known cultural, social, political and economic patterns”. The dangers that limited political and economic networks may hold for education are highlighted by Mkhabela, who notes that “school governing bodies are often utilised to achieve external objectives and... politically manipulated”. Matentjie also makes the point about culture and language sometimes providing a straitjacket, rather than a support, for learning.

A successful partnership increases resources, rather than limiting or appropriating them. Roos’s article explains how fee-paying parents increase resources in state schools. This partnership is often overlooked in wider education debates. The yearly contribution of these parents in fees alone is R10 billion; add fundraising and professional services not charged for, and the value probably doubles. These are resources directly transferred into the state education system – to pay teachers at state schools and build and maintain buildings owned by the state.

Of course paying teachers well is not the only way to motivate them. Hofmeyr offers a different model

of motivation and of partnership when she explains that in many of the small private schools for the poor, teachers earn far below what is paid in state schools, and deliver good results. Private Education for the Poor is another model of partnership offered, between state and various private sector actors.

What is appealing about well-functioning partnerships is that important roles are allocated to a very wide range of actors. So Govender and Dlamini outline how even the youngest learners have a role in countering the school bullying which feeds violence in schools and in the wider society.

Conclusion

Problems in improving an education system are not unique to South Africa, or even to developing countries. The British sociologist Furedi⁷ cites governments from both the left and the right – Thatcher’s, Blair’s, Reagan’s, Clinton’s – which have failed to solve the problems of mass education in their developed and wealthy countries, despite constant policy reform.

“This vicious cycle of educational reforms represents an enormous waste: of resources, of teachers’ energies and creativity, and of pupils’ opportunity to acquire knowledge”⁸. For Furedi, education is “a cultural institution, inhabited by young people who are influenced by their family, peers and community”⁹, and the problems of education cannot be solved by policy or pedagogical technique alone. Solving these problems will require partnerships within and across cultural institutions, and also the development of a culture of respect for education.

Culture, feelings, belief, and memory play an important part in the way all of us approach education.

Chisholm’s article describes a form of nostalgia, of “loss and longing” around education. The cadences of an education debate will never be formed only by logic. Education is about our own past, remembered and mis-remembered, and the future of our children and our nation. We engage the debate passionately, with fear and hope.

Mindful of both history and future the writers in this issue of *Focus* debate, ask questions and issue challenges to their readers. Everatt’s research challenges some of our current beliefs by questioning the poorest of the poor, and finding that education is the area of delivery with which they are most satisfied. Hofmeyr invites us to step beyond prejudiced perceptions of private education as a privileged ghetto, and presents evidence for the effectiveness of private education for the poor. Alexander demands that we examine the impact of geographical location of schools – it’s not just what happens inside the classrooms that matters, but where those classrooms are built.

Cereseto presents the clearest challenge to all the readers of *Focus*: are we encouraging our own children, and young people among our families and friends, to become teachers? Are we presenting teaching as a desirable profession to those who are close to us? If not, how will we build the road forward to an innovative, inclusive education system?

This road cannot, and should not, be built by government alone. Active participation in resource-growing educational partnerships is not just the terrain of governments or of corporations or other formal organisations. It is a challenge for individuals, families, neighbourhoods, community groups. In other words, all of us.

NOTES

¹ Lewsen, P. (Ed) (1991). Helen Suzman’s Solo Years. Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball. P 85

² The old term of university exemption is used here, as most readers are likely to be familiar with it. The new terminology is: ‘meets minimum requirements for admission to bachelor’s degree’

³ Department of Basic Education (2010) National Senior Certificate Report 2009, Republic of South Africa

⁴ Keeton, M. (2009). 2008 National Senior Certificate Results – feeling confused? Epoch and Optima Trusts. Retrieved 30 December 2009 from www.tsi.org.za/uploads/Margie%20Keeton%20-%20matric%20results%202008.pdf

⁵ South African Institute of Race relations Survey 2008/2009

⁶ This is an approximate calculation, subtracting all the English home language and Afrikaans home language learners from the total of university exemptions, therefore slightly underestimating the number of black learners

⁷ Furedi, F. (2009) Wasted: why education isn’t educating. London/New York, Continuum Books

⁸ *ibid* p 206

⁹ *ibid* p 203

Schooling in and for the New South Africa



Neville Alexander

is Director of the Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa at the University of Cape Town. He has been advisor on language policy to various government departments. He has been special advisor on language policy and planning to the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology and a member of the Western Cape Language Committee.

We write about schooling in South Africa at a time when most knowledgeable educationalists and practitioners are agreed that the educational system is in a state of chronic crisis. Increasingly and ever more frequently, alternatives and “solutions” to the crisis, based on very different analyses and diagnoses, are being proffered from all angles, depending on and occasioned by the vested interests of the respective analysts and would-be reformers, be they parents, academics, business people or professional associations. Many of these suggestions are well researched and grounded in sound empirical evidence. Most of them have something that can be used. Very few are merely fanciful, since all of them begin from real experience of the inadequacies of the system. We have to take it for granted, therefore, that there is no single, all-encompassing blueprint that can or does contain the “final solution”.

What cannot and, I hope, will not, be denied is the patently obvious fact that fundamental mistakes of a conceptual, strategic and political-pedagogical character were made in the process of transition from apartheid to post-apartheid education during the period 1993-1998 approximately. Not everything was wrong, of course, but many of the beacons that should have facilitated a soft landing for the new system were placed wrongly. And, to make things worse, subsequent attempts to address some of the obvious deficiencies of the evolving system, e.g., the Revised National Curriculum Statement and the mergers of higher education institutions, among others, were doomed to fail, precisely because they did not replace these beacons and, instead, themselves became no more than decoy beacons that had to end up in numerous but related crash landings.

As I write this, the third major overhaul of school education is being initiated by the administration of President Jacob Zuma. The deep irony of what is taking place now is that much of what is being packaged as ‘new’, is what many of us were saying and proposing 15 years ago. More than this, it is unnecessary to state in this article. Our writings and publications are testimony to the truth of this assertion. Suffice it to say that the current review and rescind process may well be the proverbial window of opportunity for all dedicated and open-minded educators, i.e., those who are not merely following or complying with the party line.

In what follows, I shall deal briefly and programmatically with only three of the beacons

referred to against the background of the universally accepted notion enshrined in the constitution that one of our primary goals is to build a united, non-racial, democratic and multicultural South Africa. My contribution, which is, hopefully, devoid of jargon is intended as a serious attempt to call things by their name and as an invitation to all practitioners to join in a meaningful discussion about what is wrong and how we can make it right under the circumstances we are forced to operate in.

In the final analysis, however, the failure to consider some of the fundamental implications and socially transformative instantiations of this mandate can only be laid at the door of the governing party and its allies that have been in office since 1994.

Deracialisation and integration

Educational institutions are the key ideological state apparatuses in all modern states. They constitute for that very reason a highly contested terrain. The post-apartheid South African state has as its constitutional mandate a specific set of liberal democratic values, derived primarily from the great bourgeois tradition that stretches all the way back to the Magna Charta. One of its fundamental tasks is to establish, entrench and perpetuate these values, of which the most important, as intimated above, are equality of opportunity, non-racialism, multiculturalism, democratic freedoms and attitudes as well as human dignity and a general sense of ubuntu, a flexible but useful descriptor for a humane citizenship.

Schooling in the new South Africa, besides its professional, strictly educational function of transmitting the crucial knowledge and skills required by the youth in order to operate in the modern world is, therefore, geared towards the realisation of these values, among others. Of course, other apparatuses such as the media, as well as diverse conservative forces often work against the realisation of one or other of these values because of vested interests. In the final analysis, however, the failure to consider some of the fundamental implications and socially transformative instantiations of this mandate can only be laid at the

door of the governing party and its allies that have been in office since 1994.

Let us consider, by way of example, the structural issue of where schools are located and how resources are distributed. Having due regard to the political obstacles and the economic as well as the ideological and cultural constraints in which the transition was negotiated, a different approach to urban (and rural) planning could have initiated a very different, more integration-orientated pattern of siting and equipping schools from that which had characterised the apartheid state. In 1995, Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) published a book entitled *Taking South African Education out of the Ghetto: An Urban-Planning Perspective*, in which the benefits of such an approach were spelled out clearly and in detail. The book challenged the inherited pattern of localised community secondary and, in some instances, also primary, schools, especially in the larger cities, and pleaded for the establishment of well equipped (magnet) schools at important nodal points on the main transport arteries of the respective city, so that all children, regardless of colour, language group or place of residence would want to attend such schools. Resource hubs, consisting of expensive infrastructure, such as halls, libraries, laboratories and sports facilities would be shared by clusters of schools as well as the surrounding communities. The transport, management and coordination implications of such an approach would have to be worked out carefully but it was abundantly obvious that the educational and social benefits of this approach far outweigh the initial costs. Only new schools would have been affected but it was clear that some of the older, more established schools would have been emptied and given over to other important local functions.

Although complimentary copies of the book were made available to some individuals in the new bureaucracy and the approach was discussed with and positively received by cabinet ministers and urban planners involved in rethinking the apartheid city in Cape Town, it had very little impact at the time because of the timidity and tentativeness, i.e., lack of clarity and vision, that characterised the first years of the transition. Yet, unless we get back to this approach, complemented by and working in tandem with some of the other foundational changes that are required, social and racial integration among poor and working class children will remain a dead letter

... the neighbourhood location of schools effectively reinforces polarisation in education by limiting the exposure of pupils to the world beyond their immediate community, and also aggravates inequality in education between rich and poor communities.

for decades, if not centuries, and the current two-tier system (one for the children of the rich and another for those of the poor) will be perpetuated. The point of departure of the PRAESA research team remains as true today as it was in 1995:

As a result of the extreme racial and socio-economic segregation of South African urban areas, the neighbourhood location of schools effectively reinforces polarization in education by limiting the exposure of pupils to the world beyond their immediate community, and also aggravates inequality in education between rich and poor communities. In addition, the dispersal of schools throughout residential areas means that limited educational resources are very thinly spread, resulting in large numbers of standardized schools of poor quality. The net result is an education system that is inadequate and restrictive.¹

Share, improve and expand existing resources

Urban and rural planning geared towards racial and social integration addresses the issues at the level of the systemic hardware within the given historical context and the socio-economic parameters of a legitimate liberal democratic dispensation. The essential principle behind this approach is that all existing education related resources should be shared, improved and expanded in line with the priorities identified in the ongoing national debates about the character of the new historical community we are trying to establish. The principle can be, and is in fact being, realised in many different ways at local and school community levels². Wherever possible, however, the mechanisms of clustering and twinning ought to be used in order to achieve the best results. As Smit and Hennesy³ suggested almost 15 years ago,

One argument for the clustering of schools in accessible locations, rather than the dispersal of schools in residential areas, is that it would contribute to the integration of pupils from different communities, and would help reduce inequalities in education standards. Another argument in favour of school clusters is that they would enable facilities to be shared between schools and with the community. For example, instead of providing an understaffed community library and a number of ill-equipped school libraries, one fully staffed and fully equipped library to serve both the community and a number of schools could be provided within a school cluster.

With respect to the in-service and pre-service training and professional development of teachers, the beacons have to be shifted radically, if we are to hope for any success. It is trite to remark once again that unless an educational system has a majority core of well educated, committed and professional teachers, no amount of curricular sophistication and OBE-type jargon can redeem it.

Given the generally understood and acknowledged legacy of apartheid, we have to follow a two-track strategy in most domains, i.e., compensatory measures in the short to medium term in order to fix temporarily what is not working properly and longer-term strategic initiatives geared towards turning the system in the direction that will bring us closer to the vision enshrined in the Constitution and, indeed, even beyond those horizons. In the domain of teacher education and professional development, we have at one and the same time to improve the subject knowledge and teaching methods as well as the professional commitment and dedication of the existing teacher complement and begin to put the entire system of teacher training on a different basis. We should, as I see it, identify in each educational district (and province, for some purposes) the most effective and charismatic teachers in every subject or phase of the school system. How we define “most effective” should be a matter for serious discussion in the profession and in the department and should not be reduced to the simplistic descriptor: “those who produce the best marks” at the relevant level. These “lead teachers” should be asked by the department to spend at least one full day every fortnight for a period of two years helping their peers in the relevant subject to work through the syllabus, lesson by lesson, as it were. Such workshops should be organised on

an egalitarian basis, i.e., all the participants can and should be expected to have valuable insights they will contribute to the discussion of any particular problem, issue or subject. After two years of consistent work in this mode, every district in the country would be ensured of a core of 75% to 80% of teachers who know their subject well and are able to communicate its basic principles and essential content to the students in their care. In the course of this process, innovative ideas for new kinds of textbooks and other learner and teacher support materials will undoubtedly surface.⁴

When I first put forward this suggestion as a contribution to short-term compensatory measures for improving the capacity of teachers and the quality of teaching, it was met with all the obvious doubts about feasibility and cost, none of which is worthy of serious consideration. Pre-service teachers, retired teachers, respected parents with a matriculation certificate can be recruited in each district in order to supervise students on the day(s) when the teacher(s) is or are participating in the relevant in-service training workshops. A small stipend would in most cases be a welcome addition to the income of such assistant teachers. Pre-service teachers, as I shall demonstrate presently, will learn important skills on the job.

The most significant objection to this proposal when I made it in 1998, came from the then Head of Education in the Western Cape Province, Professor Brian O'Connell, the current Rector of the University of the Western Cape. He agreed that it was a perfectly feasible proposal from an administrative and logistical point of view but doubted whether teachers would be willing to make the "sacrifices" implicit in the suggestion. To this objection, there are two responses. Firstly, this is a matter of leadership and management. If the relevant district officials and school principals understand what we are trying to achieve, they will without any doubt be willing and able to persuade teachers about the benefits that will accrue to themselves, their children, the system and the country. It does, of course, raise the crucial question of the effective management of schools, which is not the focus of this article. Suffice it to say that next to teacher quality, school management is the key element in making schools work properly. All of us know this and it is more than obvious that this should be one of the main foci of the new administration's strategic interventions during the next five years or so. The second response is now more than obvious: all the fancy notions about two-

and three-day workshops, vacation seminars and cascading processes with their well known dilution of the message, which became the hallmark of OBE-speak and practice have not only been shown not to work but have confirmed that they are based on deficient epistemological understandings. One cannot pump a struggling person (teacher or anyone else) full of some "theory" and then expect him or her to "apply" what they have "learnt" in the classroom. While this approach may work for a few people, it is not the way in which most people learn, especially when there is no consistent follow-up monitoring of the "pupil's" practice.

This brings me to the longer-term need to base the system of teacher training on the apprenticeship and mentorship model. Although there has been a tendency towards more hands-on training of teachers during the past few years, it is still the case that predominantly, our would-be teachers sit in lecture halls for three to four years imbibing pedagogical theories and history of educational systems and approaches with only a few weeks spent in actual classrooms under the guidance of experienced teachers. This is clearly no simple matter, but it is urgently necessary that we shift the balance towards time spent in the school classroom as opposed to time spent in the college or university lecture hall. Besides the fundamental question of whether apprenticeship- rather than theory-based approaches tend to work better (it is never an either-or question), at this stage in our history where the ravages of the apartheid system are still so visible, we cannot pretend that approaches which are more theory orientated will be more effective. In any case, they have palpably not succeeded. For the same reason, we should never have shifted the entire teacher training programme to the universities. We still need the colleges of education, especially for the training of primary school practitioners. They should, of course, be staffed by the best trained education specialists on the same basis as the universities. It should also become a matter of good practice that every educational district has one or two demonstration schools where specialised attention can be given to particularly intractable challenges.

There is no blueprint for apprenticeship models but there are very good local and regional (state) examples in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and the USA. We could do worse in my view, than to make a thorough study of the administrative and logistical implications of such a system during the

next two to three years with a view to adapting good practice to our own conditions. Above all, we have to bite the bullet and move towards bilingual training of teachers. It ought to be the point of departure of all teacher training in South Africa that, generally speaking, any educator should be able to conduct his or her professional activities in both the mother tongue and in English.

We still need the colleges of education, especially for the training of primary school practitioners. They should, of course, be staffed by the best trained education specialists on the same basis as the universities.

Mother tongue based bilingual education

The language medium issue is the last of the three systemic beacons that I wish to deal with briefly. One of the most obvious blind spots of the system is the language question. While most people agree that we have an excellent language policy in education, issued by Professor Bengu on 14 July 1997, all are equally agreed that it is seldom, if ever, applied in practice. Professor Asmal, Bengu's successor used to quip that we have a perfect language policy in education but it is unworkable, and I myself as well as some of my PRAESA colleagues have on occasion made the point that we need to move "from languish policy to language policy" in order to highlight the lack of political will in this critical domain. Let me make the point bluntly: the failure to understand and to address the language issue in the educational system is tantamount to an act of national suicide by omission. It is my view that people are dilly-dallying on one of the most important issues, if not the most important, issue in education. Indeed, if I may transpose a mispronunciation by a certain teacher at a workshop: instead of being a stepping stone to effective learning, language policy more often than not is perceived as a "stopping stone" that prevents such learning.

Generally speaking, we treat language the way we treat a window. We look through the window, and very seldom look at the window. Unless we begin to look at the window of language and see how we are mediating knowledge, the way we transfer

knowledge via language, and begin to understand that the medium can be defective, we are not going to be able to make significant progress. Fifteen years into the new dispensation, the fundamental decision about language policy in education has not yet been made. This is no more and no less than the answer to the question: on what language do you base a democratic system of education? Do you base it on the mother tongues of the children as you do in every other country of the world virtually – outside of Africa – which is also in line with our proud boast that we have a learner-centred educational system, or do you base it on a foreign language, which is what English is for most South Africans?

That is the fundamental decision that has not been made. I contend that until we decide this question properly, we are off on the same detour through the educational wilderness that the rest of Africa has been on for most of the last 40 years since independence. Most of those states simply continued using the ex-colonial languages – English, French and Portuguese, mostly – as the main medium of teaching and learning after the first two or three years – in many cases in the French-speaking zone not even after the first two or three years but from day one – the ex-colonial language became the main language of teaching, training and tuition at all levels of education. The result, after 40 years of so-called independence, is that we have dysfunctional educational systems which service less than 10% of the population because that is, on average, the number of people in any one of these countries that actually have proficiency in the "official" language, i.e., in French, English or Portuguese. Only these 10% – the rising middle class, the established elite – can empower themselves via their proficiency in that language. The simple fact is that proficiency in the dominant European language, English in South Africa, constitutes cultural capital and this capital is used by the middle class in order to marginalise and perpetuate the oppression of the majority of the people.

Let me stress again that we are going to go on the same detour for the next 20 to 30 years unless and until that decision is made. But let me add immediately that the issue is not: either the mother tongue(s) or English. I want to make it very clear that the fundamental issue in a multilingual country like South Africa is both the mother tongue and English. The real question to which we have to find the answer is: how do you do this? What is the range of options and permutations that will enable most

South Africans to acquire reasonable competence in at least two, preferably three, of the official languages, of which English will necessarily be one? How and over what period do you phase it in? And of course, is it desirable? The answer to that question is that it is a class issue. It is desirable for the simple reason that the only way in which the majority of the people of this country and of any other African country can empower themselves is by means of the languages they know best. And, with very few exceptions, the languages they know best are their own languages. Middle class intellectuals and others are usually misled by their own proficiency in English, the global language. Such proficiency is the result of middle class privilege, but this is not the position for most of the people. For something like 70% to 80% of the population of South Africa, it is simply not possible currently to acquire the kind of proficiency in English that would empower them sufficiently to be able to compete on an equitable basis in the market for highly skilled and remunerated jobs. And democracy, we should remind ourselves, means power to the people. Language is one of the most important means of empowerment of both individuals and societies, and for that reason the language question is at the heart of a sound democratic system of education.

Placing English in the correct context

The second fundamental issue, which I have already touched on, is for us to realise that we are not going to get past English. English is the global language. It will not necessarily be so forever. Already, many people in English speaking and English orientated countries, including South Africa, are encouraging and enrolling their children to learn Mandarin Chinese. At the moment, however, and for the foreseeable future, it is English — we all know that. And from that point of view, of course, we are very “fortunate”. For, if you look at the whole of the African continent, or even more narrowly at so-called anglophone Africa, South Africa is very fortunate because we have a fairly large percentage — between 8% and 9% — of the population that are first language English speakers and this fact has a definite influence on the quality of English that we speak in this country. But, let us not be too smug: a few years ago, I heard a very funny comment on a local talk radio show: A person from Leeuspruit in the old Transvaal was being interviewed and he must have felt that his English wasn't all that good. So he told the talk show host, “I'm terribly sorry. You know, my English is not very good. Normally, I only use English in self defence”. English is the global

language and therefore it will be counter-productive to suggest that we should be “against English”. We are not against English, and in that regard the official language policy is completely clear. We want every child to get as proficient as possible in English, but there are linguistic, psycholinguistic and other pedagogical theories which indicate very clearly, that the way to gain maximum proficiency in any additional language is via the mother tongue. Incidentally, when I use the term “mother tongue”, I am fully aware of how problematic the concept is.⁵ Most scholars and educationalists in the area of bilingual education are agreed that the deeper one's grounding in the mother tongue, the easier it is for one to acquire maximum proficiency in English or in any other language.

What we have to oppose is the hegemony of English. I want to stress the point, not the dominance but the hegemony of English. The dominance of English is the result of market forces. We cannot stop that easily, but the hegemony of English, the feeling among non-English-speakers that without English there is no power, the feeling that African languages are worthless, that we cannot empower ourselves by means of African languages, for example, that is what hegemony implies. It means that you disempower yourself because the aspiration is to become English, to know English so well that you can get the best jobs and the highest status and authority. We have to persuade people, particularly people in government departments, politicians and bureaucrats, to understand that we have to counter this hegemony of English. We have to have a counter-hegemonic strategy so that some of the African languages, over a period of at least two generations will be able to compete with world languages like English in most domains of life. When I say compete, I do not mean that they will displace English; I mean it in the sense of complementing one another, i.e., English will be used where it is appropriate, as will isiZulu or isiXhosa or Setswana, and so on. On the basis of modern examples, one can safely say that it takes at least two generations to get to that point. If we look at our own history, the development of Afrikaans is a good indicator.

In this connection, the latest oracular statements from the Ministry of Basic Education point in the wrong direction. In the *Report of the Task Team for the Review of the Implementation of the National Curriculum Statement*, the following confused assertions are made with respect to language policy:

The thorough development of a child's language skill is a reliable predictor of future cognitive competence. This applies equally to the child's Home Language and Language of Learning. The two languages are in effect two sides of the same coin. While the Home Language plays the primary role in developing literacy and thinking skills and is of importance in enhancing the protection and further development of the indigenous language, the Language of Learning (in particular English) is the one in which students must master educational concepts, and provides a platform to participate and engage meaningfully in the information age on a global stage. The highest enrolment of any subject in the NSC is English as a First Additional Language. In 2007, 490 404 out of 564 775 Grade 12s (i.e. 87%) wrote this subject (DOE, 2007). We also know that the majority of our learners undergo the majority of their schooling learning and being assessed in English, as their second language. Crucial attention needs to be paid to issues of language, in particular First Additional Language, English, which remains a strong predictor of student success at school. (DoE 2009:41)

This is not the forum for a detailed critique of the Report's recommendations on language policy. Suffice it to say that these are based on major misunderstandings of linguistic, especially psycho- and socio-linguistic theory. What they do very plainly is bear witness to the anglocentric monolingual habitus of the task team and of the ministry, if it adopts the Report as it stands. The time has truly come to "bombard the headquarters", if we are to avoid the continuing oppression and marginalisation of the majority of poor and working class children in our schools, for whom mother tongue based bilingual education, the actual language in education policy of South Africa, is one of a few keys that can open the doors of learning. Of course, this is a very complex issue. People are misinformed and

most black people in this country do not believe that the African languages can become as important as English. They suffer from what I have called a static maintenance syndrome, i.e., they believe that the African languages must be cherished, they are very important in the primary domains of family, church, community, primary school, etc., but they cannot be developed to become languages of science, technology and computers. That view is simply not true. These languages can become powerful, but, if that is to happen, we will need leadership, we need vision and we need role models. South African presidents and other dignitaries, by way of a simple example, should make it a regular practice to deliver important announcements and policy statements in African languages instead of only in English. If Angela Merkel in Germany or Sarkozy in France or the leaders of Japan or of any other strong state in the world today make major foreign policy or other statements, they use their own languages. Our leadership should, generally speaking, do the same, so that the people can realise that their languages are equally able to be used in these symbolically and actually powerful ways.

In conclusion, I need to state clearly that space limitations necessitated that I put the spotlight on three of the many beacons that help to ensure a properly functioning system of education. The many other issues that connect up with the three I have chosen to focus on are as important. They range from the funding model at the macro level to the issue of class sizes and parental and community involvement in school education at the local level, all of which are necessarily interdependent. I trust however that the importance and relevance of the issues I have discussed here will give rise to a heightened sense of urgency among all educators and the understanding that our failure to address these, and other related, issues is a serious dereliction of professional duty.

NOTES

¹ (Smit and Hennesy 1995:1)

² An inspiring example of this kind of development in a "deep" rural area is Sosebenza Primary School near Tarkastad in the Eastern Cape where, through the initiative and support of the Winterberg Trust, 13 farm schools concentrated their resources in a school of which any middle class community in the big city would be justifiably proud.

³ (1995:1)

⁴ This observation is based on our experience in SACHED in the 1980s, when we organised teacher resource groups in different subjects in the Western Cape and elsewhere. Under the apartheid regime, it was impossible to publish officially most of the materials we developed but much of that experience was carried into the transitional debates about education and continues to be relevant today.

⁵ Elegant variations, such as home language, first language, primary language, L1, etc. are all acceptable and should be used in the appropriate context. The term "mother tongue" points to the comfort zone, nurturing dimension of the language of one's primary socialisation. This is the main reason why I prefer to use it.

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The Debate about Re-opening Teacher Education Colleges



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During 1999, the call for re-opening teacher education colleges was made repeatedly as campaigning for the election gained momentum. It was reiterated and debated at the National Teacher Education Summit held at the end of June 2009. Here a resolution was taken to investigate the issue further. The call for the re-opening of teacher education colleges provides pause for thought. Should they be re-opened? Will they address the need for both more and better teachers? It is worth considering the arguments for and against re-opening them, as well as how the idea has evolved since it was first mooted.

A Brief History

Teacher education institutions in South Africa developed in a haphazard way out of mission schools, universities and a host of local and regional initiatives, but from the 1960s onwards were more forcefully planned and segregated along the lines of race and ethnicity. Control was divided between universities and provinces; on the whole, students intending to become primary school teachers trained at provincially-controlled racially segregated colleges of education, and would-be secondary school teachers trained at segregated universities.

Colleges of education proliferated from the 1960s, when the apartheid state used them to control and divert African aspirations and advancement from urban areas by locating higher education institutions in the 'homelands'. Thus, it was hoped the graduates would staff 'homeland' bureaucracies and schools in these economically unviable areas. High enrolments in education colleges during the apartheid period resulted partly because positions in the formal economy were limited and partly because they provided the possibility for some form of higher education.¹ Provision was also influenced by 'the amount of money the various departments of education were willing to spend on subsidies to universities and universities of technology and budgets for colleges'².

Information about the number of institutions providing training, the number of students in training, and the number of students qualifying when the college system was in existence is poor. Reported statistics vary widely. Some estimate there to have been 71,008 students in training in 1994; others 80,000.³ These differences exist because there was no national system of information and the data were as fragmented as the governance of institutions. Bantustan systems of information where most teacher education colleges were located, were notoriously weak.

In the early 1990s, policy-making processes for a post-apartheid South Africa were dominated by higher education constituencies and cost considerations. Perspectives on the colleges immediately after the 1994 democratic elections were not positive. Even though college staff members were mostly unionised – some belonging to the associations that came to form the National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), but many also belonging to the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) – they did not have much impact on the direction of debate.⁴

Although many colleges, especially those serving white, Indian and coloured students, developed relationships with universities, they were on the whole considered to be junior partners in these arrangements. The pecking order was clear. As change became imminent, college rectors from these institutions formed their own organisation, the Committee of College Education Rectors of South Africa (CCERSA), to anticipate and respond to change. Some colleges in rural areas were part of this process, others not.

By the mid-1990s, some colleges were internally better equipped than others to respond to change and this often took a racial and urban/rural form. While a few colleges in rural areas were “showpieces in the dust, with manicured lawns and fountains,” many were also “quite rotten, with grass higher than you could see through, terrible facilities, chairs in the quadrangle just rotting away.... underperforming and problematic in terms of turning out quality teachers”.⁵ Many, especially in rural areas were torn by conflict between the mainly Afrikaans-speaking administrations and mainly black staff and students. Ros Jaff, who visited teacher education colleges as part of the National Teacher Education Audit, recalls that many of them were “embattled” institutions “under fire from young students.” “I will never forget,” she says, “the one college: the administration block was like the American embassy: you went in through a cage. The typically Afrikaans-speaking leadership was literally separated by walls, cages and partitions from the student group. There was fear, victimisation, entitlement of students, a new type of selfhood, anger at the malaise, a desire for places, people hungry for opportunity. Many colleges were under siege.” Yet others recall their experiences as students, lecturers and rectors with varying degrees of nostalgia, but recognition that each college, for various reasons, needed to change.⁶ The voice and role of colleges within policy-making processes considering supply was however weak. One interviewee who had been in Indumiso near Pietermaritzburg argued that actual isolation of and competition between colleges meant that each thought it would survive and that those lower in the food-chain would be closed. Each felt itself superior to others.⁷ Unfortunately, these relative strengths were flattened in the policy-process that followed during the 1990s.

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In the policy-making context of the early and mid-1990s, debate raged around the degree of flexibility that should be given colleges. The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) proposed that they be incorporated into universities. Policy research with college interests in mind advised that they be restructured rather than expanded or closed.⁸ The College Council of Education Rectors of South Africa was of the view that colleges should retain a degree of autonomy, and should be given councils and senates where they did not have them; in addition, a National Council for Teacher Education should be formed to set in place a process for colleges which did not have the capacity to become fully fledged institutions of higher education.⁹ Many of the latter suggestions built

on developments that were already occurring in the teacher education college constituency and which had begun to take shape in a climate of freer debate and discussion after 1994.

Ultimately the NCHE and cost-cutting arguments won the day. Colleges were, as even the NTEA pointed out, often small, expensive and heavily subsidised by the state. Low student to lecturer ratios were not seen as a quality advantage, but as an inefficient use of resources. A Green Paper on higher education transformation¹⁰ confirmed the approach that internal efficiency in higher education would be produced through “reducing unit costs and increasing productivity”. Such measures would include regional rationalisation, “restructuring and where necessary closing programmes that do not achieve economies of scale”.¹¹

And the introduction of outcomes-based education in 1997 was also presupposed on the existence of well-qualified teachers in command of their subject matter.

The momentum for rationalising teacher education colleges was in full swing from 1997 onwards, when Section 21 of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) made all teacher education, and therefore colleges of education, part of the higher education system. A task team on colleges was appointed in August 1997 and reported to the Heads of Education Departments Committee (HEDCOM) and to the Council of Education Ministers (CEM) in mid-1999.¹² Colleges of education were given the option to become autonomous higher education institutions if they could achieve a minimum enrolment of 2 000 full-time-equivalent students, or to become part of existing universities and universities of technology. According to Ben Parker, head of the task team responsible for college closures, provinces began restructuring their colleges and identifying those colleges suitable for incorporation into higher education.¹³ From 1997, provinces controlled the supply of teachers by placing stringent quotas on new enrolments, leading to a rapid decline in college enrolments – from 71 000 (or 80 000) in 1994 to 15 000 in 2000. Lecturers from phased-out colleges of education were absorbed into provincial departments of education through provincial chambers of the ELRC.¹⁴

At the same time, teacher education curriculum changes were placing further stresses on institutions. The Norms and Standards for Teacher Education¹⁵ introduced a national core curriculum based on seven roles of teachers and linked teacher education to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). And the introduction of outcomes-based education in 1997 was also presupposed on the existence of well-qualified teachers in command of their subject matter. Ironically, the processes intended to ensure that such teachers came into existence were highly complex and short-circuited by the complexities and unintended consequences of absorption and merger.

On 1 January 2001, colleges of education were formally incorporated into existing universities and universities of technology. Their number reduced from 32 universities and universities of technology offering teacher education qualifications to 26.¹⁶ Unions were at the time absorbed in the policy processes directly affecting schools, such as the South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996), and were only indirectly involved in teacher-supply and provision issues. There were thus at the time no strong voices arguing against restructuring. The main role of the unions was to negotiate better terms of exit for their members. Dave Balt from NAPTOSA has also indicated that unions attempted to secure favourable financial conditions for teacher education in discussions with the then Minister Bhengu, but failed to do so.¹⁷

Arguments For

The main argument for the re-opening in recent years has been made most strongly by SADTU. Their view is that teacher shortages demand it, especially shortages in the foundation phase and mother tongue, as well as maths and science. Unions have long been concerned about teacher shortages and both SADTU and NAPTOSA have indeed commissioned research on it.¹⁸ Union concern for teacher shortages is linked to the issue of reducing class size. Here the argument is that increased numbers will reduce class size and hence improve quality. Both unions' ongoing interest in large class sizes with which members have to battle has also given rise to annual representations in the MTEF provincial exercises for revision of the post-provisioning model and for smaller class sizes. In 2002, SADTU argued that the post-provisioning model together with user fees had "entrenched and deepened inequality within public education"¹⁹. It has also expressed ongoing concern about the need for training of its members in the new curriculum. At its National Congress in 2006, SADTU recommended a simple approach of a maximum class size of 30 to replace all existing formulas. If this is to be realised, then more teachers will be needed. In order to support the training of more teachers, SADTU in 2007/8 also called for the reopening of teacher education colleges.

Although the call for re-opening colleges is intended to produce more teachers in order to reduce class sizes, arguments for the re-opening of teacher education colleges are often an argument against provision of teacher education training by higher education institutions. Three points are usually made. First, the third-class status of primary education and second class status of teacher education in higher education means that it receives insufficient attention. Second, universities especially have entrance criteria for primary school teachers that are inappropriate and exclude many aspiring and potential teachers²⁰. University fees are simply too high, especially for young African women from rural areas. Third, higher education institutions may have served secondary education well but they are not attuned to what it takes to train primary teachers. University education is too theoretical and abstract. As many former college students and lecturers attest, colleges provided hands-on training, a practical education that today's universities and universities of technology do not provide. Higher education institutions are often considered to be inadequately capacitated to address the needs at primary school level. They do not use or provide opportunities for experienced principals and teachers to participate in training future teachers.

Higher education institutions are often considered to be inadequately capacitated to address the needs at primary school level.

There is some truth to these arguments, although there is no reason why, once these issues are known, government and higher education institutions cannot be flexible enough to address them. As Michael Samuel, Dean of the Faculty of UKZN said at the National Teacher Education Summit, re-opening teacher education colleges may be the wrong solution to correctly-identified problems.

Arguments Against

Arguments against re-opening have come from Deans of Education, analysts like Jonathan Jansen and those involved in teacher education provision. The main argument here is that there are historical, practical, political, economic and educational reasons not to re-open them but to build on what now exists.

The view is that there were good reasons for restructuring teacher education in the 1990s. First, if teacher education was to be racially integrated, then they needed to be integrated. Second, it made economic sense to consolidate provision and

quality rather than have myriad small colleges dotted all over the place unable to guarantee quality. Many colleges' pupil teacher ratios were often lower than those in schools and this made them too expensive to maintain. And finally, the quality of teacher education provided was extremely varied — while excellent in some, it was abysmal in others. Many in the rural areas were disparagingly referred to as "glorified high schools" and teachers were considered often to have learnt little more than the existing matric syllabus unless their college was linked to a university. Undertaking another round of restructuring would simply flatten an already-battered teacher education force.²¹ Improving quality of existing teacher education is the priority.

The problem is not the absence of colleges, but the attractiveness of teaching as a profession — and this in turn means addressing issues like salaries, conditions of work, and status of the profession.

Questions are further posed about whether re-opening colleges will in fact solve the teacher shortage problem, a challenge with quantitative but primarily qualitative dimensions. Also, there are many challenges related to the recruitment and retention of teachers that need to be taken into account. Attracting students to new colleges will be as much of a problem as it is for current higher education institutions. The problem is not the absence of colleges, but the attractiveness of teaching as a profession — and this in turn means addressing issues like salaries, conditions of work, and status of the profession²². Attracting quality lecturers to new colleges in rural areas will be difficult, and will require incentives.

Beginner teachers face specific problems and need support if they are not to leave teaching²³. Departmental officials have stated publically on several occasions, that newly-trained maths and science teachers supported by the (Funza Lushaka) bursary scheme are finding it difficult to find placements in schools. Added to this, there is ample evidence that even where teachers are trained in maths and science, schools do not employ them to do so and teachers untrained to teach maths are often found doing so²⁴. And finally, starting new colleges rather than ensuring our existing institutions are doing the job is simply impractical in the current financial climate. Many existing higher education institutions situated in rural areas simply need to be doing a better job at training teachers.

It can also be argued that describing what happened to them as 'closure' and positing what needs to happen as 're-opening' is a false representation of what did happen and what can happen. Teacher education colleges were not closed. The good ones were incorporated into higher education institutions, several of them in rural areas. They all lost their specific identities and roles, but they still exist and serve educational purposes. Approximately a quarter of the weaker ones became FET colleges that have now been recapitalised as part of that initiative and are now inappropriate for use as teacher education colleges. The remainder are high schools, community colleges or provincial training centres — they are all in some use or another. What does 're-opening' in this context mean?

Distilling the Debate

There are many difficult questions to answer in this debate. Although the arguments here are sound, too, they do not answer the question related to the search for alternatives to what is perceived to be inadequately targeted and poor quality teacher training in higher education.

Higher education institutions have been slow to respond to the criticisms of the mismatched and poor training that they provide, often in an effort to meet departmental prescriptions. Neither urban nor rurally-based higher education

institutions have yet grasped the opportunity to show how they could meet the demand for expanded provision in rural areas. Government has responded by considering a number of models that would include expanding teacher education provision and locating the training of Foundation Phase teachers, for example, in current FET colleges. These models have not yet had an adequate airing in the public arena. Different alternatives and possibilities need to be considered. Would it make sense, for example, to re-open one college as a model, monitor its success and replicate it if it works? It would mean converting a recently-recapitalised FET college back into a teacher education institution, relocating existing staff, recruiting new staff and instituting new programmes. This is clearly a long-term process.

The interesting immediate question though, is related to the discourse of loss and restoration that the discussion around teacher education colleges evokes. The discourse around teacher education colleges has been and remains an extremely emotional one, often a quintessentially romantic and nostalgic one. The discourse expresses a sense of unrecognised loss and longing. Similar discourses are dealt with by Cheryl Walker in her book, *Landmarked* (2009), and Jacob Dlamini, in his book, *Native Nostalgia* (2009).

In her discussion of land restitution processes, Cheryl Walker argues that in some cases land restitution efforts are not about restoring the actual land, but the communities and relationships that existed on that land in the past. The desire for the restoration of the land symbolises the restoration of that community. It is often no longer possible however to restore these – “(it is) not possible to recreate the relationships to places and people and ways of being in the world that are past”²⁵. Jacob Dlamini draws on the concept of nostalgia to explore what it means to have lived under apartheid as a black person and reflect on it with longing and loss.

“Such longing and loss run counter to the dominant ‘romantic telling’ of the past in which there is a neat separation between a merry precolonial Africa, a miserable apartheid South Africa and a marvelous new South Africa in which everyone is living democratically ever after”²⁶.

For most South Africans, he says, it is not like this. The past for many black South Africans is much too complex and rich. He points out that “the irony about nostalgia is that, for all its fixation with the past, it is essentially about the present. It is about present anxieties refracted through the prism of the past.”²⁷

And so, we can read the discourse of loss and restoration of teacher education colleges through these insightful approaches as an effort to rekindle a sense of relationship and community that existed in teacher education colleges that it is felt has now been lost in the present in new teacher education arrangements. The feelings of loss are about the present not the past. These college communities were probably as fractured and conflicted as any today; we know little about their histories, and need to know more.

Whatever the past of the colleges, their past exists in the present in the memories of lecturers and their students. In memory, whether true or false, they are seen as having created teachers who taught students in disciplined environments and who can do so again.

... “the irony about nostalgia is that, for all its fixation with the past, it is essentially about the present. It is about present anxieties refracted through the prism of the past.”²⁷

The animating desire of the discourse of loss and restoration of teacher education colleges can thus be seen as a positive one. The teachers and lecturers from these colleges have now moved into all walks of life and many hold key positions in public life and the private sector. Divided by the present, they are united in a common history. The call for restoring teacher education colleges is arguably a call for a restoration of a common experience and history as well as of an educational community bound by a common commitment to teaching. This is not only a discourse romantically harking back to a past. It is also one that is attempting to signal a different future from the present and from which we can learn and draw to reinvigorate teacher education and teaching.

In conclusion, the challenges of producing quality teachers in adequate numbers go well beyond the re-opening of teacher education colleges. The call for doing so has rightly focused attention on the weaknesses in current provision and the need to pay greater attention to provision and quality of teacher education. This is the challenge for the foreseeable future.

Note: This article draws from Linda Chisholm (2009) *An Overview of Research, Policy and Practice in Teacher Supply and Demand 1994-2008*. Cape Town: HSRC Press.

NOTES

- ¹ Crouch 2002; Sayed 2004
- ² Parker 2002: 21
- ³ Jaff et al. 1995; Parker, 2002
- ⁴ Dave Balt, 2009; Jon Lewis, 2009; see also Govender, 2004
- ⁵ Jaff, 2009
- ⁶ Interviews conducted with former rectors, lecturers and students at Edgewood, Springfield, Bechet, Ndamiso and Eshowe teacher training colleges in the former Natal and kwa-Zulu in 2008 and Mankwe and Tihabane in the former Bophutatswana,
- ⁷ Interview conducted by the author with Nonhlanhla Mthiyane at Mariannhill on 20 June 2008.
- ⁸ Hofmeyr et al. 1994
- ⁹ see Kgobe 2003
- ¹⁰ DoE 1996
- ¹¹ DoE 1996: 17
- ¹² Parker 2002
- ¹³ Parker 2002
- ¹⁴ Dhaya Govender, 2009
- ¹⁵ DoE 1997
- ¹⁶ National Assembly (19/06/2006), For written reply: Question 699. Internal Question Paper No. 18-2006.
- ¹⁷ Dave Balt, 2009
- ¹⁸ see Pelzer, Shisana et al, 2005
- ¹⁹ SADTU 2002, n.p.
- ²⁰ Paterson and Arends, 2008
- ²¹ Kruss, 2008; 2009
- ²² see Cosser, 2009 a and b
- ²³ Arends and Phurutse, 2009
- ²⁴ Arends, 2009
- ²⁵ Walker, 2009, 26
- ²⁶ 2009, 12
- ²⁷ 2009, 16

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The Promise and Challenge of University Based Teacher Education



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In the last few months the media has focused sharply on failing learners, dysfunctional schools and the downfall of Outcomes Based Education. Implicitly the focus has also been on ineffective teacher preparation, raising questions about quality teacher training, the most efficient pathway for teacher preparation and the ideal location for teacher preparation programmes. This scrutiny is not going to go away – if anything it will become sharper and harsher in the next few years as market driven demands for accountability and efficiencies in teacher education become the order of the day and where quality means compliance and value for money.

In South Africa, University based teacher educators do not as yet carry the blame for poor quality schooling. It is a matter of time before we will be criticised for being irrelevant to the needs on the ground; or too time consuming in our programmes; or too expensive in training teachers – which some believe could be done faster and cheaper by reopening the colleges of education. This latter issue is a debate that must be had – but at another time and in another place. The important issue to remember is that it is not the location of teacher preparation programmes that matter but what is in the teacher preparation programme and how it prepares teachers to teach the nation’s children.

Preparing teachers for the classroom

The focus of this paper is to consider the professional preparation and education of primary school teachers. I want to argue that such preparation is our ‘professional jurisdiction’¹ as university based teacher educators and that we must take responsibility for producing academic knowledge that supports professional practice and for preparing future professionals for public schools. This twin prong mandate is ours. In addition, it is our responsibility to ensure that such preparation resonates with the problematic of the practitioner and that it produces teachers who can teach in all schools in our country. In practice this means that our preparation of primary school teachers must make a difference to student learning in high need schools, that our research must improve in quality and it must inform professional practice and educational policy. A tall order indeed, and as Zeichner² points out, if we are not prepared to take this responsibility more seriously and do all that we can to have the best possible teacher education programmes, then we should let someone else do the job. From this perspective, the stakes are high for universities and university based teacher education.

In view of the responsibility we carry as university based teacher educators, we need to take a long term view about teacher education and development, a view separated out from the immediate pressure to respond to teacher shortages by opening up colleges of education. Let's recognise that a fully fledged quality system of providing for the educational needs of our country will take time to develop, and that classroom teaching expertise is complex and cannot be attained quickly. In the short term, let's be careful not to let the immediate needs and pressures overwhelm the long term trajectory of research-led quality teacher education and development in South Africa.

The emphasis on quick skills teacher training and the dominance of teacher shortage talk has overshadowed attention to deep knowledge, skills and dispositions which underpin research-led university based teacher education.

Research-led & Research-based approach

This paper is intended as a contribution to renewing meaningful conversations about teacher preparation – it is thus a contribution to debate, not its conclusion. I would like to explore a research-led and research-based approach to teacher education for primary school teachers, rather than fixating on pathways into teaching or on the location of teacher education. It would be megalomaniacal to attempt to prescribe a formula for all forms of teacher education or teacher education and training. Rather, I offer a perspective from which it is possible, in principle, to appraise any form of teacher education – although for purposes of coherence and integrity I write only of what I know and have experienced as a teacher-educator in the last 23 years.

In a country where multiple social inequalities are prevalent, quality education and quality teacher education are the challenges we face and must respond to appropriately. I take the view that systematic research, grounded in the concerns and problems of educational practice, makes the difference in quality teacher education and it is this issue that I take up in this paper.

Despite the many challenges in research-led and research based teacher education such an approach remains a viable and useful way of approaching the teaching and training of primary school teachers, especially in societies where social and economic inequalities loom large and where the institutionalisation of quality teaching and learning is still a challenging task for policy planning and implementation. The emphasis on quick skills teacher training and the dominance of teacher shortage talk has overshadowed attention to deep knowledge, skills and dispositions which underpin research-led university based teacher education. While the pervasive demands of the market must be recognised, the pressure for quality teacher education in a developmental state must be ongoing and applied from different sectors – universities, the state and civil society.

I begin with the theory/practice dichotomy which has been at the basis of most conversations about what goes into a teacher education program. This is also the central feature of all professional education – be it teaching doctors, lawyers or teachers. So we are not in this alone. For those of us who have been in teacher education know that theory without practice is dangerous, and theory *sans* opportunities for 'try outs' in contexts of practice is unthinkable. Similarly, practice without theoretical underpinning is a dangerously conservative force in education and can be a barrier to educational reform. Rather than getting stuck in this dichotomy, it makes sense to explore other ways of teacher learning – teacher education and training that encourages, combines and finds creative ways to connect theory and practice, and teacher preparation that locates theory in the context of the practice.

Centrality of Training

Recent developments in teacher education worldwide recognise that learning to teach is a process of lifelong learning, and inquiry is a vital part of teachers' work³. Further, there is greater recognition of teachers as researchers and of the transformative potential of research for their practice and development⁴. In the same vein, Grumet⁵ asserts that teaching, by its very nature, is congruent with reflection and research. These assertions contrast sharply with more instrumentalist views of teacher education as training, which consist of transmitting a 'bag of tricks' or tips about what works in the classroom or, worse, a large set of untheorised and bureaucratically driven competences. Training is vital, as it is in medical training and social work training and it goes beyond tips for teaching.

Research-based teacher education is also important in light of trends in schools in many countries to reduce teacher autonomy and to de-professionalise teaching. Developing primary school teachers as scholars and researchers nurtures in them an opportunity to grapple with questions of teaching and learning in such complex social environments as schools. It allows South African teachers to imagine a progressive social vision which could deepen their understanding of teaching in complex environments characterised by inequities, and which are distinct and distant from the university class. More importantly, this orientation to their education and training could bring teachers closer to research, rather than isolating them from it, as is the case traditionally, and it could shift the emphasis away from "the hegemony of an exclusively university-generated knowledge base for teaching"⁶. More recently, Darling-Hammond⁷ has argued that if student teachers are to succeed in teaching in complex environments, then "the enterprise of teacher education must ... engage ever more closely with school". In South Africa, where education and teacher education were tools for domination, discrimination and exclusion, whole school discourse and the development of future teachers as researchers and lifelong learners sets up expectations of teachers different from those held under apartheid. According to Sayed⁸, this alteration to the curriculum could be a welcome shift from apartheid teacher training, characterised as it was by different programmes for different racial groups and programmes for blacks underpinned by compliance, rote, and transmission-orientated practices.

the new discourse in teacher education is about 'whole school development',

Shifting Roles of Teachers

Teacher education reform in South Africa has created a shift in thinking about the role of teachers and the school in national development. Through legislative changes, teacher education has changed from a provincial responsibility to a national responsibility⁹. This has resulted in teacher colleges being merged or incorporated into universities and, subsequently, teacher education becoming university-based. Similar reforms are occurring in the United States¹⁰, as well as Namibia, especially in the context of the latter country's Basic Education Teacher Diploma, and through efforts to promote critical practitioner inquiry (CPI) in teacher education programmes¹¹. In other countries as well, the new discourse in teacher education is about 'whole school development', linked to wider social development, which emphasises the importance of learning communities in schools and classrooms. Such shifts in teacher preparation call into question dichotomies between theoretical and practical, academic and experiential, and teaching and researching, and point to programmes that focus on reflective practice or practitioner inquiry.

Developing the reflective primary school teacher or, as I prefer to see it, the inquiring teacher, who is actively engaged in studying her practices as a teacher through the eyes and the learning practices of her learners, is something all of us committed to quality education and teacher education must strive towards. This, ultimately, is a vision of a primary school teacher who is prepared to pursue issues that arise in classroom practice, through recourse to fieldwork, literature, and colleagues.

Classroom research is an important and growing aspect of developing education, through the work of inquiring teachers, often in an action research spiral of investigation, growing understanding and implementation for change. Of particular interest in this approach to teacher education will be inquiry into disciplinary knowledge and the acquisition of disciplinary capabilities, or transforming disciplinary knowledge into pedagogical knowledge, sometimes referred to as pedagogical content knowledge. Educating primary school teachers along these lines offers them narratives which broadens their outlooks and their orientation to their practice in the classroom.

...the kind of teacher identity being sought is that of *“teacher as inquirer”* — *“a teacher who questions his or her assumptions and is consciously thoughtful about goals, practices, students, and contexts”*.

Sketching the background that led to the “teacher research” movement, Richardson¹² noted that the kind of teacher identity being sought is that of “teacher as inquirer” — “a teacher who questions his or her assumptions and is consciously thoughtful about goals, practices, students, and contexts”. Within this conception, inquiry is viewed as a powerful tool for informing the thoughtful development of pedagogic practice, with close associations to Schön’s¹³ notion of the reflective practitioner. Drawing on Richardson’s work, Venkat et al¹⁴ posit that, central to the argument for incorporating research activity as either a guiding frame for teacher learning, or as a specific component in teacher preparation, is the notion that “practical inquiry” is at the heart of thoughtful pedagogic practice, teacher development and improvements in teaching and schooling.

However, there are different conceptions of ‘inquiry’ and research activity within teacher education, with differing associated goals and mediating activities. Richardson distinguishes between research as ‘practical inquiry’ and research as ‘formal research’, with the two orientations differentiated in relation to their products and goals, the nature and conventions of activity, and the communities engaging in activities.

Practical inquiry is that “conducted by practitioners to help them understand their contexts, practices, and, in the case of teachers, their students. The outcome of the inquiry may be a change in practice or it may be enhanced understanding”, while formal research is “research designed to contribute to a general knowledge about and understandings of educational processes, players, outcomes, and contexts, and the relationship between or among them”¹⁵. Explicit methodological approaches and theoretical frames are important within the latter approach, but are less in focus in the former. Localised change and development – of understandings and practices – are foregrounded in the first, whereas addition to a generalised knowledge base is foregrounded in the second. Both approaches can involve reading and using the products of ‘formal research’, but as already noted, the driving purpose for engaging in these activities is likely to differ between them. Within the teacher research literature some writing is aligned more strongly with the practical action and improvement orientation of ‘practical inquiry’¹⁶, while other writing has made a case for activity to span across both

Zeichner²¹ reminds us: “If we are to take seriously our obligation to prepare teachers to successfully teach all students, then we need ... to situate more of teacher preparation outside of the ... university campus in schools and communities, but we need to do much more than just send them out there to pick up what they need to learn by a process of osmosis”. We need to guide these partnerships and underpin them with what we do well and best – research led teacher education.

The time is now right to treat teacher education as a discipline which must have research and scholarship which is grounded in local realities. We need to get beyond territorial debates about where primary school teachers should be prepared and how long they need to study before going out to teach. Let's

focus instead on what should and could underpin such preparation and let's expect for our children the best prepared teachers.

Fiscal realities may demand that we get the teacher education of primary school teachers right the first time – but it does not make sense merely to offer a quick fix form of training so that we can get teachers out into the system. Inevitably this will require engaging in expensive teacher upgrading at a later stage, and thus would be false economy, or saving now to spend later. I take the view that investment in good quality research-based and research-led teacher education for primary school teachers is more economical in the long run, and is one of the dimensions which contributes to quality learning for pupils in the school.

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- Hussein, J. (2006). *Experience-based reflections on the potential for critical practitioner inquiry to transform teacher education in Africa*. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 4, 362–384. Recently her gaze is shifting from the macro issues of access and equity within higher education to the micro issues of teacher education pedagogy and teaching and learning in higher education. In particular she is interested in the question of how learning and teaching can be brought about in more powerful ways so that we move beyond questions of access to questions about success in higher education. This research work is part of a multi year research and development project and is in collaboration with colleagues from the University of the Witwatersrand and Gothenburg

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Ruksana has been the recipient of grants from the Spencer and the Carnegie Foundations and the National Research Foundation. She has also been the recipient of the JUTA academic prize for the best scholarly article in the category “perspectives in higher education”

NOTES

- ¹ Abbott, 1988
- ² Zeichner (1999:13)
- ³ Cockran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Leite, 2006
- ⁴ Claninidin et al, 1993
- ⁵ Grumet (1990)
- ⁶ Cockran-Smith & Lytle, 1999:16
- ⁷ Darling-Hammond (2006:302)
- ⁸ Sayed (2004:258)
- ⁹ Jansen, 2004
- ¹⁰ Darling-Hammond, 2006
- ¹¹ Zeichner & Dahlström, 1999
- ¹² Richardson (1994:6)
- ¹³ Schön (1983)
- ¹⁴ Venkat et al (2009)
- ¹⁵ Richardson 1994:7
- ¹⁶ Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Hussein, 2006; Schon, 1983
- ¹⁷ Cochran Smith & Lytle, 1993
- ¹⁸ Diezmann (2005: 183)
- ¹⁹ Richardson 1994:8
- ²⁰ Darling-Hammond (2006)
- ²¹ Zeichner (2006:334)

How are our Teachers?

What teachers and others can do to improve the current situation



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In the wake of Graeme Bloch's (2009) gloomy analysis of the state of education in South Africa, *The Toxic Mix*, it would be difficult for anyone to deny that there is a crisis in education in our country. Bloch presents some examples of good practice and the DBSA co-ordinated Ten-point programme of the Education Roadmap¹ which includes a focus on teachers' conduct and accountability for their learners' performance, qualifications and continuing development, as ways to improving quality in our system.

It is my opinion that recognition of the centrality of teachers is the key to improving the quality of the education system. Teachers are both the problem and the solution. Therefore I believe it is important to understand how teachers experience their work.

In this article, firstly, I reveal how teachers are through the use of metaphors. Some convey incredible drive and tenacity while others emphasise the loss of meaning they experience as they struggle for survival in an education climate largely hostile to the achievement of quality educational goals. Secondly, I propose an alternative for teachers to the pit of despair: I suggest that teachers harness the power of their energy and sense of purpose and adopt a conception of professionalism known as democratic professionalism which is accompanied by an activist professional identity. Finally, I propose a few ideas for action by activist citizens in our democratic society.

How are the teachers?

Teachers' metaphors² for their experiences of their roles and responsibilities reveal a teacher and teaching identity that is both powerful and fragile. Many teachers describe their identity and teaching experiences in positive, hopeful images that express high ideals for themselves and their profession. Other images reflect teachers' demoralised state and convey cynicism, despair and a belief that their work is fruitless. The instability and ambivalence of teacher identity is reflected truthfully in the single metaphor: "A teacher is a yo-yo, sometimes up and sometimes down. Teaching is sometimes rewarding and sometimes frustrating". Even within the strong, positive metaphors there lurks a, *but*.

Many of the images reflect teachers' powerful and aspirational beliefs about their role and influence. They convey what teachers ought to be, want to be, and

need to be in order to experience fulfilment in their work. Teachers are leaders in society whose work, views and values are respected: “a preacher”, “a king” and “a hero”. A teacher succinctly expresses all this in her metaphor, “a teacher is a pillar of the nation”. Identities are vibrant and powerful. They focus on leadership and releasing of potential: “The bright comet that leads the way for shooting stars”. Added to these ideas is the quite old-fashioned but very widespread belief that teachers are special because not everyone can be one: “A teacher is God’s creation”; “A teacher can’t be made; a teacher is born”; “teaching is a calling”; a teacher is “priceless”.

The developmental and at the same time protective and caring role that teachers play in the lives of their learners is often expressed. The teacher who sees herself as “the warm sun” implies that she is essential for growth as well as providing comfort and security. Each day learners anticipate her impact on their lives. She does not scorch or burn harshly but is warm and supports a congenial atmosphere for development. She is very important; without her, growth is retarded. Teachers frequently see themselves as parents, the responsible ideal kind, performing the role of inducting the young into the adult world: “I think I am a parent, a hardworking person, dedicated to help the young people grow”. Teachers’ roles extend to “pastor, social worker, parent, mother, doctor, nurse, know-all, all in one”. They offer support, security and refuge: “I am like Church Square, if you have trouble, you come to me, I’m always available!”

Teachers’ roles extend to “pastor, social worker, parent, mother, doctor, nurse, know-all, all in one”.

The metaphors also focus on teachers’ primary task of conveying knowledge from one generation to the next and stimulating curiosity, creativity and thinking – “knowledge information tanks”, “stimulator” and “bringer of light”. One teacher sees herself as “like a magician”, a professional, with particular knowledge that she manifests in a live and attention-holding performance that has an amazing outcome (the lesson).



Courtesy of Samancor.

“Sometimes I feel like a magician, trying to pull understanding and passion out of a hat. The response from the crowd is flattering, but there is always the tension of ‘will it work?’ I’m not saying my teaching is based on subterfuge or tricks, rather it is revealing the magic of literature to the audience who hopefully will never be quite the same afterwards. Whereas the magician sends the audience home baffled by his/her cleverness, as teachers we get to unmask the magic and make it accessible to all, thus hopefully spreading it!”

The teacher identities shown above show that these teachers are confident in their ability to achieve the purposes of education. They feel they have the knowledge, a sense of purpose and the drive to accomplish, trustworthiness, consistency and resilience to persist in the face of difficulties. They are supportive of, and empathetic towards their learners. Considerable strength is evident.

In contrast to this are the metaphors that indicate that this strength is constantly threatened by processes in the teachers’ environment that deplete energy and fracture identity.

The metaphor, “a shining diamond lost in the sand” depicts the teacher as a person of value, a jewel, that ought to be treasured, but the reality is that the jewel has been (carelessly) lost. The worth of teachers is no longer appreciated. In the description, “I sometimes feel like the Energiser Bunny but eventually the battery

runs out and needs to be re-charged” we see an extremely busy, energetic and enthusiastic teacher. She identifies the amount of energy required to do the job and the reality of the potential for exhaustion, excessive stress and burnout, amongst the most committed. The depletion of the energy source is evident also in the metaphor provided by an older, somewhat disillusioned teacher who says: “I used to be something else. Now I am a sinking ship”.

When the teacher sees himself as an “office worker” or a “policeman” and adds that he is thinking of changing careers “because teaching is not as enjoyable as before” he identifies two of the current endemic problems in schools that consume teachers’ energy. Firstly, the paperwork and administrative overload burdens all teachers and distances them from what they perceive as the real work of teachers, namely, interacting with children, thus undermining their sense of purpose and meaning. This heavy workload and the helpless feeling of incompetence and futility that results when one is unable to deliver all that is required, is seen in the description of teachers’ work as “pumping wheels that do not get full”. Secondly, learners’ lack of respect for authority and the breakdown of values in society have resulted in general indiscipline and, in many schools, outright chaos and total dysfunctionality. Teachers attribute this lack of respect to the emphasis on learners’ rights rather than on their responsibilities. The teachers’ identity as a respected and worthy authority figure is routinely trashed.

When one adds to these feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness, the experience of teachers being confused, de-skilled and displaced because of what they term “OBE”, meaning the total package of curricular change, one understands the teacher’s cry that “they must stop changing things, like changing underwear”. The professional identity of teachers is fractured when they experience their work as meaningless and they feel unable to achieve what they believe are the goals of education. Their sense of purpose and worth are critically undermined to the extent that their commitment diminishes and they give up caring

The professional identity of teachers is fractured when they experience their work as meaningless

because they feel so ineffectual.

It is important to have answers to the question “How are the teachers?”

It is clearly not desirable to have schools staffed by teachers whose professional identity has reached such a crumbled state. Writers and researchers recognise that teachers are central to the education process and therefore to improvement in the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom. The system is virtually powerless to influence what really happens behind the classroom doors. Carnoy states that “the role of teachers is pivotal” for realising improvement in the quality of education outcomes³. Fullan supports this: “Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it’s as simple and complex as that”⁴. In addition, the 1966 Coleman Report (in the USA) identified teachers’ characteristics as the most influential factor on learners achieving results better than those expected for their social class⁵. We must do things differently.

Teachers can help themselves: Democratic Professionalism

I believe that teachers need a new conception of teacher professionalism and professional identity to cope in the current reality. I propose that they adopt what is termed an activist teacher identity⁶ and practise democratic professionalism.

“Democratic professionalism”⁷ and an “activist identity”⁸ are particularly suitable for South Africa at present because “democratic professionalism” is “rooted in principles of equity and social justice”⁹ and is suited to accomplishing quality improvement because of its transformative influence¹⁰. This conception of professionalism relies on the assumption that teachers are highly skilled and knowledgeable and therefore able to exercise professional judgment¹¹. In South Africa this assumption holds true generally for teachers educated at a well-resourced university or a good college of education. Regrettably, however, this may not be true for the majority of African teachers who because of the apartheid policies did not benefit from quality pre-service education. These teachers are aware of their shortcomings and plead for additional in-service education to close the knowledge and skills gaps. Democratic professionalism seeks to “improve the nature of teachers’ work and to entrench teacher autonomy”¹²¹³ and to build alliances between teachers and other members of the school workforce, external stakeholders, community, parents, and learners¹⁴.

Democratic professionalism promotes the open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible; faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems; the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems and policies; concern for the welfare of others and the “common good”; concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities and an understanding that democracy is not so much an ‘ideal’ to be pursued as an “idealised” set of values that we must live by and that must guide our life as people¹⁵.

An activist identity requires teachers to move from seeing themselves as objects and victims of educational change imposed by external agents and view themselves as agents of change and transformation.

The activist identity that goes with this enables teachers to see themselves as agents of change, proactive in bringing about improvement rather than helpless victims of constant new reform strategies¹⁶. This, I argue, will restore and strengthen teachers’ fragile professional identity. An activist identity includes the following characteristics — autonomy based on knowledge and accountability for actions; life-long learning; membership of a professional learning community; commitment to improving achievement for all learners; reflective practice, collegial and collaborative teamwork; critical and creative thinking; not reproducing the same social curriculum; exercising leadership; modelling the right way every day. A passive, submissive teacher identity does not resonate with the powerful metaphors teachers suggested.

Democratic professionalism encourages a collaborative culture where the teacher’s responsibility extends beyond his or her own classroom to other learners, schools, colleagues and the broader profession. An activist identity requires teachers to move from seeing themselves as objects and victims of educational change imposed by external agents and view themselves as agents of change and transformation. Teachers need to have a vision of what is possible and what ought to be and then take the action that is necessary to achieve their

vision. They should address issues which affect their daily work, such as raising the professional standards for themselves and their colleagues, insisting on professional courtesy and respect from departmental officials and other stake-holders, eliminating obstacles to the effective implementation of the curriculum, and demanding improvement in the condition and resourcing of schools.

Teachers in schools where democratic professionalism flourishes claim to believe and practise the following:

- We respect one another unconditionally;
- We are all learners;
- We are all leaders;
- We really care;
- We share;
- We risk and we speak out;
- We support one another;
- We jointly glory in the success of another;
- We jointly suffer when another fails;
- We are a single team therefore we do not compete with or blame one another;
- We are committed to continuous improvement;
- We are a professional learning community.

Teachers in the classroom believe civil society can help them improve the quality of education outcomes for all learners

Teachers would like all sectors of society to apply pressure and take action that demonstrates commitment to education as a first priority in our country. This includes re-building respect for the profession, promoting teaching as a worthy career of choice and encouraging the best of the best to become teachers. People who engage in the education debate may wish to ask themselves whether they encourage their own children to take up the teaching profession.

To sustain recruitment and retain teachers their remuneration needs to be brought more in line with other graduates, not only at entry level but in mid- and late-career. This bullet needs to be bitten because as the McKinsey Report (2007), “How the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top”, concluded:

- 1) the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of teachers, 2) the only way

to improve outcomes is to improve instruction, and 3) achieving universally high outcomes is only possible by putting in place mechanisms that ensure that schools deliver high-quality instruction to every child.¹⁷

Teachers want parents (or other adults, in the absence of parents) to be partners with them and to support them in their work. This would include teaching and reinforcing values that are supportive of education such as, respect for authority and organisational rules, a responsible attitude, and a belief in the value of effort. It is also important for parents to find out what their children do at school each day and what must be done for homework. Parents, both mothers and fathers, should become involved in the activities of the school.

The African saying that it takes a village to raise a child is most appropriate.

Adults with time to spare during the school day and in the afternoons could volunteer their services at primary schools to help children whose parents are insufficiently educated, too busy or absent, to help them with homework, listen to reading or coach an

extra-curricular activity. The whole community needs to take responsibility for its children and make sure that they are attending school. Whole-scale truancy would be impossible if adults in the community reported this and forced children back to school. The African saying that it takes a village to raise a child is most appropriate.

Corporate entities could as part of their CSI adopt schools and channel expertise to support them in their non-educational functions, for example, financial management, fund-raising and resource and asset management, thus freeing teachers to attend to their core business.

Members of civil society should keep themselves well-informed of educational issues and be critical participants in the education debate. They should lobby their representatives in government to ensure that the education system is funded at the level necessary to bring about improvement gains in outcomes as well as to provide the support necessary to achieve this.

A society is judged on how it treats its children. Our children need teachers who will equip them for 21st century citizenship and a society whose values and actions support this endeavour. Let us not fail them in this obligation.

NOTES

- ¹ Bloch, G., 2009, *The Toxic Mix*, (p. 156)
- ² Metaphors were collected from teachers at five diverse schools in Gauteng in the course of my M.Ed. research (2007) and from participants at the World Teachers' Day celebration in Kimberley (2009).
- ³ Carnoy (1999) (p. 79).
- ⁴ Fullan (2001) (p. 115)
- ⁵ Mayeske, 1973
- ⁶ Sachs 2003
- ⁷ Whitty, 2006: 14; Sachs, 1999: 7
- ⁸ Sachs, 1999: 7
- ⁹ Sachs, 1999: 7
- ¹⁰ Whitty, 2006: 14
- ¹¹ Wits EPU, 2005: 8
- ¹² Professional autonomy does not imply absolute freedom and independence of any form of control. Hoyle and John (1995) describe professional autonomy simply as "the relative freedom enjoyed by practitioners in making and implementing choices regarding their professional practice". It is "constrained" autonomy: "Practitioners do not have licence, but have a licence" which is based on "demonstrated competence and is conditional" (p. 78).
- ¹³ Wits EPU, 2005: 8
- ¹⁴ Whitty, 2006: 14.
- ¹⁵ Beane and Apple, 1997: 6-7 in Sachs, 1999: 7
- ¹⁶ Sachs, 1999: 7
- ¹⁷ p. 40

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The Language Challenge in the classroom: a serious shift in thinking and action is needed



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The challenge

Most learners in South African schools face a language barrier in the classroom. Any child who cannot use the language which he/she is most familiar with (usually the home language), is disadvantaged and unlikely to perform to the best of his/her ability. But it is not just being able to use an effective communication medium in the learning situation that is at stake. A child's self confidence and sense of self in society are undermined if the home language cannot be used for learning, and these are further undermined by the experience of repeated underachievement. This disadvantage has cognitive, psychological, social and cultural aspects, all manifested in the ongoing failure of our education system.

A three-dimensional vision

What do we want from our education system? We surely want to make it possible for all our learners to perform to their full potential and for our national ratings to be competitive. But to achieve national excellence of this kind, equity is an imperative¹; we cannot have a system which favours some groups and disadvantages others. And we need a third dimension to our vision. Should we be separating children from each other in separate schools, or even in separate streams, on the basis of their language group? Without social integration in the classroom, the social cohesion necessary for us to move forward as a country will be unattainable. Thus whatever we do in education needs a vision with at least three dimensions — a high level of scholastic achievement, fairness to all and the promotion of social cohesion.

Multi-bilingualism as an alternative

There have to be alternatives to the academically ineffective, inequitable and socially divisive ways in which our system is currently addressing language. The Home-Language Project is piloting an approach, which we have called multi-bilingualism in a large state primary school in Johannesburg with eight or more home languages per grade. Its aim is for every child to develop two working languages — the common classroom medium (English in our case) and the child's particular home language (any of ten). Thereafter it is concerned with how all these

home languages (HLs) can be used alongside each other to support the common language, even where the teacher is monolingual.

The bilingualism most of us are familiar with revolves around the teaching of two languages as subjects, with only one of these being used as a communication medium (the language of learning and teaching – LoLT). A multi-bilingual approach, on the other hand, treats the home language (HL) as a support LoLT across the curriculum, with many HLs being able to play this role. It breaks away from the assumption that there can be only one LoLT in a classroom². I will elaborate on its practicalities after looking at some aspects of current language practice that need critical attention.

A solid body of research³, over many years, tells us that a second-language needs six to eight years of well-resourced teaching before it can be successfully used as a medium of teaching and learning.

The three-year mother-tongue policy and the switch to English-only in grade 4

Current policy prefers children to have the first three years of schooling in their mother-tongue (HL), but an increasing number of schools and parents are ignoring this and opting for English as the LoLT from grade 1. Where the three-year policy is in fact being implemented, the quality of teaching is in most cases badly compromised by weak pedagogy and a lack of learning materials in the HL. But in any case, in grade 4 all such learners are confronted with a switch to English as the only LoLT, while their English and Afrikaans-speaking counterparts simply continue using their own language from grade 1 to grade 12. This is gross inequity.

A solid body of research³, over many years, tells us that a second-language needs six to eight years of well-resourced teaching before it can be successfully used as a medium of teaching and learning. Yet our system ignores this and the grade 4 transition to English-only continues year after year in the face of damning performance indicators.

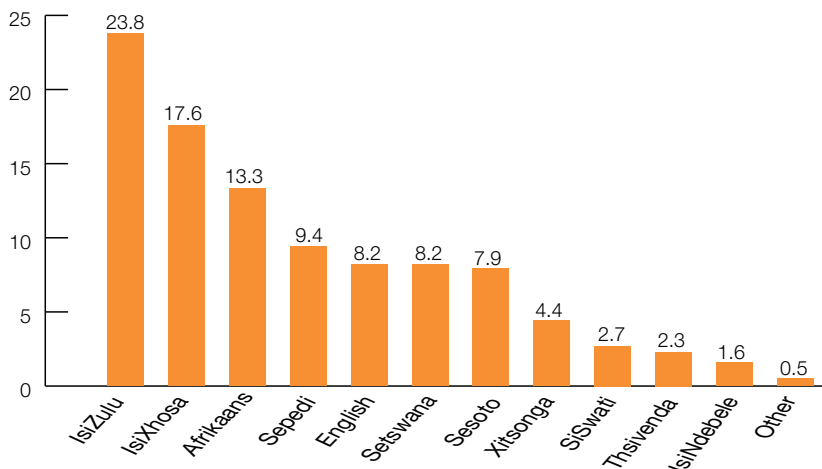
A task team commissioned in July 2009 by Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, to advise on the implementation of our national curriculum, highlights this transition as a critical problem area, but simply recommends that English be introduced earlier (in grade 1), alongside the HL, to facilitate the transition. Learning two languages from early on is indeed a sensible option but, despite the research referred to above, the report implies that a small amount of English over three years should be sufficient for the switch to English-only. The Western Cape Education Department (WCED) on the other hand, recently acknowledged the need for considerably more HL as a medium, to allow concepts to be taught effectively through a language children understand while at the same time giving them double the time (six years) to prepare their English for the transition.

Multi-bilingualism gives every child their own pair of languages, with no need to drop the support of the HL in grade 4 or even grade 7. It can be maintained as a resource throughout schooling, for all groups of learners and not only for the previously advantaged.

Social Separation: Language as a source of division or social cohesion?

In multilingual Gauteng, our system has remained shackled to apartheid-era township schools which separate children on the basis of HL and keep them spatially divided until high school. This is seen as necessary in order to follow the

Distribution of the population by language most often spoken at home
Proportion of total population %



Source: Stats SA, Population Census 2001

(inadequate) three-year mother tongue policy. We also have a situation where school governing bodies can decide to keep Afrikaans as the only LoLT, in effect barring black learners seeking English as a medium⁴. And a major weakness in the WCED's six-year HL policy, is that it too easily leads to the separation of children into what amounts to ethnic groups.

An agreed common language, with everyone's HL used in support, means that all our learners can be taught together. This turns language into a unifying factor rather than a source of division.

All HLs have a part in the learning process and, importantly, everyone can also claim "ownership" of the common language. Where this language is English, it can "belong" to the Afrikaans- and the Tshivenda-speaking child alike, as much as it can be said to "belong" to the English first-language speaker. All support-languages (HLs) can be treated equally and we have the chance to shake off what has developed over time into an inequitable hierarchy in the way our languages are resourced and perceived. Some separation is required to teach HLs "as subjects" effectively, especially for grade 1's and 2's to acquire the foundations of HL literacy, but this involves a small number of periods in the week. From grade 3 onwards, separation can be further reduced if language families (e.g. Nguni) can share a HL-as-subject classroom without compromising the teaching of the individual languages⁵.

English-medium former model-C schools have avoided the separation problem by using a common language. The result is a unifying mix of HLs in every classroom but as long as they remain unused as a resource, equity and academic excellence will still be unattainable.

The use of English as a single language of learning and teaching

Parents and the public, commonly believe that simply using English as the LoLT will result in the child learning good English. The reality is very different. And it will take

An agreed common language, with everyone's HL used in support, means that all our learners can be taught together. This turns language into a unifying factor rather than a source of division.

more than improved pedagogy to change this, because without a firm linguistic foundation in the HL, the majority of African-language students learning through English will only score between 20% and 40% in English by the time they reach Grade 12⁶. This lack of cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in the LoLT makes very heavy weather of learning, particularly in subjects like mathematics and science. It is no wonder that in the last decade, fewer than 2% of students who are first language speakers of an African language have gained a university entrance pass in either of these two subjects, or that fewer than 30% of pupils who start school achieve any kind of Grade 12 certificate. On the other hand, we have intriguing examples of good mathematics results coming from poorly resourced rural schools⁷, where undoubtedly the unofficial oral use of the HL alongside English is a facilitating factor (but unfortunately without the attention to text that could make for the acquisition of academic English at the same time).

It is no wonder that in the last decade, fewer than 2% of students who are first language speakers of an African language have gained a university entrance pass in either of these two subjects, or that fewer than 30% of pupils who start school achieve any kind of Grade 12 certificate.

But there are other problems attached to the single second-language medium which are also damaging. In their eagerness for the child to learn good English, parents easily fall into the trap of suppressing the HL in the home, when in fact it needs to be actively promoted to remain vibrant in the face of an environment that says “only English is cool”. Parents only become aware of the costs of language suppression when the implications for communication within the broader family structure become evident and uneasy questions about identity and inferiority surface. If self esteem and self confidence are undermined, this again contributes to academic disadvantage.

The Minister’s task team repeatedly points out how critical it is to improve the teaching of English, for it to play its cross-curricular role effectively. But what the report does not address, is the need for a strong foundation of cognitive and academic development in the HL to provide the stepping stones for learning a second language (in this case English) and to play the “scaffolding” role needed to assist in the transfer of knowledge to this language⁸. Multi-bilingualism can provide the framework for this interaction between the languages.

Multi-Bilingualism in the classroom: How does it work?

In the first place, a multi-bilingual approach makes it possible for every learner to use the HL orally in the classroom via same-language peer interaction, alongside the common language. Together with a same-language partner, he/she can use the HL to discuss explanations and to think through how to tackle problems. After introducing the activity in the common language, the teacher determines how and when HL learner-talk is used and then wraps up the learning points for all in the common language. This puts a powerful teaching tool into the hands of a teacher faced with 11 or more languages, and who is herself/himself probably monolingual. And what is vitally important, is that by engaging learners in this way, the teacher moves beyond the constraints of teacher-centred methodology and makes good use of peers as well as all their languages as extra learning resources in the classroom. Non-official languages can also be used like this, as long as the learner has a similar-language partner.

No extra teachers are required and a classroom is easily organised to make it possible for this kind of learner-talk to take place. It is currently being successfully demonstrated in numeracy lessons for large (40+) multilingual classes of Foundation Phase children and it can be introduced anywhere at any time for the learning of any subject. The primary school model requires every child to have a Language Buddy and systematically supports the oral use of the HL in this way as part of everyday

Okuphindiwe nokuyizigamu

1. USandle uphakamisa iminwe emi-4. U-Aroni naye usephakamisa iminwe emi-4 ehambisana neminwe kaSandle. Mingaki iminwe abayiphakamisile isijonke?

Sithi: U-4 no-4 wenza u-8 noma u-4 ophindiwe wenza u-8

Uma sikubhala lokhuya

4	4
8	

sithi: $4 + 4 = 8$ noma

2. a) UPetrus uphakamise iminwe emingaki isijonke?
b) Mingaki iminwe ayiphakamise esandleni ngasinye?

Sithi: U-6 ungu-3 no-3 noma uhafu ka-6 ngu-3.

Sibhala sithi: $6 = 3 + 3$ noma

6	
3	3

Kopisha bese ugawalisa labo hhafu kanye nokuphindiwe.

9	9
28	

15	15
32	

24	
32	

Doubles and halves

1. Sandile holds up 4 fingers. Aaron holds up 4 matching fingers against Sandile's fingers. How many fingers do they hold up altogether?

We say: 4 and 4 is 8 or double 4 is 8

We write: $4 + 4 = 8$ or

4	4
8	

2. a) How many fingers does Petrus hold up altogether?
b) How many fingers does he hold up on each hand?

We say: 6 is 3 and 3 or half of 6 is 3

We write: $6 = 3 + 3$ or

6	
3	3

3. Copy and complete the following halves and doubles.

9	9
28	

15	15
32	

24	
32	

Photographer: Margie Owen-Smith

A grade 2 parallel language mathematics text book: "Maths For All".

teaching. In the secondary school, a more flexible application of the model leaves the choice to the bilingual learner as to how to use his/her two languages most effectively¹⁰.

But multi-bilingualism can be geared up significantly if parallel-language texts can be provided. Our pilot study is using parallel readers (books are identical except for the language) and parallel-language mathematics textbooks (each book has double text). This gives language-partners a text base for their learner-talk and the teacher a further means to manage it effectively. It also gives teachers the material to explicitly address the development of subject-specific vocabulary. The two languages can systematically reinforce each other. The interface between them becomes clearer and the skills to move correctly from one to the other follow. The ability to engage with texts to find meaning is more easily taught and the skills of independent learning at the heart of excellent education, takes root. The learner is freed from the limitations of teacher-based oral learning which are particularly evident where teachers rely heavily on code-switching practices.

To use text-based material in this way, children first have to be taught to read in both their languages. This is a challenge where there are more languages in the class than are currently being taught as subjects in the school. Some extra teachers will need to be deployed, unless the school can slot into a "district" support network for sharing language teachers. This kind of support should be in existence to make it possible to respect every child's constitutional right to offer his/her own language as a subject for Grade 12. This right is currently being ignored¹¹.

The state of indigenous languages: are they ready?

But how ready are our African languages to play their part? Languages organically develop new words and ways with words as the need arises. This ongoing process is disrupted by a decision not to use a language for educational purposes, or to restrict its use to a few years in primary school. However, given the opportunity, languages will naturally resume their development via discourse. Where terminology development is driven by subject experts and teachers and backed up by professional linguists and translators, lost ground can be made up steadily and efficiently. The work that has been done at the University of Limpopo in

Multi-bilingualism can be geared up significantly if parallel-language texts can be provided.

Multi-bilingualism needs textbooks and the Minister’s task team has pointed out the “crucial” need to bring back good textbooks into our system. If we have to buy new books in any case, this is an excellent time to be introducing parallel-language books.



Children with parallel readers.

Photographer: Margie Owen-Smith

developing the first SA Bilingual Degree course (in English and Sesotho sa Laboa) is instructive in this respect¹². There is no need to hold back bilingual education while this is going on. Most words in an average undergraduate text (probably > 85%) are in any case ordinary words with current equivalents in all our African languages. We just need a clear vision and a facilitating strategy to release our hobbled languages and breathe new life into our university language departments, our publishing industry and the job market for writers and translators.

Can we afford multi-bilingualism?

Fear of costs is behind much of the reluctance to think differently about language issues. Immediate affordability is obviously a concern during an economic downturn even if the medium-term payoffs might be clear. Multi-bilingualism will require some additional financing but this should not be presented as prohibitive before being properly investigated.

For complex multilingual areas like Gauteng, a system of sharing language specialists among groups of schools for the teaching of HL literacy and HLs as subjects, has already been piloted and found to be practical and cost-effective¹³. The introduction of multi-bilingualism will involve a content shift in training for in-service teachers but this type of training is an ongoing exercise and a recurrent expense in any education system. Multi-bilingualism needs textbooks and the Minister’s task team has pointed out the “crucial” need to bring back good textbooks into our system. If we have to buy new books in any case, this is an excellent time to be introducing parallel-language books. They can be expected to cost more, but a study on the costs of bilingualism estimates the additional cost of both books and teacher training to be less than 1% of our entire education budget¹⁴. Parallel-language books of the type being used in our mathematics pilot study only require double text — the cover, illustrations, diagrams and figures do not need to be duplicated.

Multi-bilingualism demands multilingual libraries. But any educational system aspiring to excellence requires adequate library facilities, so the major library

backlog that has been allowed to develop has to be addressed anyway. A mobile system along Japanese lines, demonstrated in our country by the Mobile Library Project, could provide a cost-effective and affordable solution in a relatively short space of time. There is also scope for sharing costs in linking school libraries into national and community library networks.

The “Toxic Mix” and the “Education Roadmap”

“*The Toxic Mix*”¹⁵, lays out the failure of our current education system very clearly, along with the depth and complexity of its causes and enormous social, political and economic implications. It is a stirring and very necessary call for action on the part of every citizen and every one of our institutions — in government, business and civil society.

However, it brushes aside issues of language, not recognising them either as roadblocks or as part of the solution. It reasons that, unlike the case of early Afrikaans, the “mobilisation for other-tongue social movements” is too low to provide the impetus for these languages to have similar potential for development. It cites the lack of materials in indigenous languages as limiting the redress called for by our Constitution.

This brush-off stems firstly from a view of language as a “human rights” issue only, rather than as an issue of “resources” and academic disadvantage in the first instance. It also ignores the body of international research around language that shows our current use of a second-language as the sole educational medium to be academically unsound. Thirdly, it rests on an intuitive fear of costs which is not grounded

either in research, or in a costing of our current system which takes into account either the cost of its failures or the poor return on our present high investment (by international standards) in education.

The recent “*Education Roadmap*” exercise, co-ordinated by the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA), has been hugely valuable in throwing open the debate on issues in education to all concerned and successfully highlighting the role of education in national development. It has also produced a set of very useful and sensible points around which to focus our plans and efforts. But it makes no mention of language.

We can make our current system work a whole lot better simply by ensuring that we have teachers in our classrooms, actually teaching and able to use good textbooks and sound teaching methodologies. But without meeting our language challenge, we will still be left with a system which is fundamentally flawed, unable to reach our academic goals, inherently inequitable and a source of division rather than social cohesion. A system which perpetuates disadvantage for the majority of learners, disadvantages everyone.

Multi-bilingualism as an approach for the classroom has already been shown to be sufficiently viable to warrant serious consideration in any complex multilingual situation. It is being developed on the initiative of a handful of school governing bodies and is dependent on donor funding. This indicates another need — a proper place for research and development in our education system, to develop and activate new thinking in response to serious challenges.

NOTES

¹ Dr. Mamphele Ramphele in “*Our house is on fire*” M&G Sept 11-17, 2009.

² Where the common language and the HL are the same (e.g. for first-language English speakers where English is the common language, or in rural areas with genuinely monolingual communities), a simple bilingual model would be appropriate, provided that any shift to using the second language as the main medium retains the use of the HL as a support medium.

³ Heugh, K. (2005) *Optimising Learning and Education in Africa – the Language Factor*. Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA, DGTZ, UNESCO). Working Document (draft 22/07/2005 chapter 3: 73-76). This provides an excellent overview of a body of international research with a particular focus on Africa.

⁴ Hoërskool Ermelo case. (2009) The Constitutional Court confirmed the SGB’s legal right to choose the medium of the school, but reminded the school of their obligation to take the needs of the broader community into consideration. The school continues as single-medium Afrikaans. The SGB has stated its intention to review its policy but it appears to have been left to its own time-frames and its own criteria.

⁵ This is being tested by the Home-Language Project

⁶ Heugh K. In ADEA report above (chapter 3: 76-78)

⁷ Centre for Development and Enterprise (2004). Research report no: 13.

⁸ Cummins, J. (1984, 2000), Ramirez et al. (1991), Thomas and Collier (2002)

⁹ Owen-Smith, M. Unpublished findings of the Home-Language Project.

¹⁰ Setati, M, Molefe, T, Langa, M. (2008) *Pythagoras* (No 67, June, 14-25) Using Language as a transparent resource in the teaching and learning of mathematics in a Grade 11 multilingual classroom.

¹¹ Watson, P & Pienaar, M. (2007) *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* (Vol 25 issue 4).

¹² Ramani, E, Kekana, T, Modiba, M and Joseph, M. (2007) *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* (Vol 25 issue 2).

¹³ Owen-Smith, M. Unpublished findings of the Home-Language Project.

¹⁴ Vawda, A and Patrinos, H. (1999) *International Journal of Educational Development* (Vol 19 187-199)

¹⁵ Bloch, G. (2009) *The Toxic Mix*. Tafelberg



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Mother Tongue Instruction

Learners are often referred for psycho-educational assessments as a reactive measure because their scholastic progress is poor. They seem to be experiencing language barriers in spite of being instructed in their mother tongue; and worse, their academic self-esteem is at its lowest because of their awareness that they are struggling to cope. The purpose of the assessment then becomes multi-fold, but more importantly is in determining whether mother tongue development goes beyond the learner's conversational skills. It is about determining whether the learner can use mother tongue for cognitive development as an academic language i.e. for teaching and learning purposes. Drawing from case notes in private practice, I argue that choosing mother tongue instruction is not as straightforward as it might seem. I also hope to demonstrate that it can be contested whether it is in fact in the best interests of the child to pursue mother tongue instruction within the foundation phase for black learners who come from bi- and multilingual familial contexts. It is against this background that I write this paper where, in determining which mother tongue should form the language of instruction and therefore learning support and placement options for a learner, we need to determine the quality or the cognitive development level of their mother-tongue language(s).

'Wen my mother's tangs is meni'

For learners who experience barriers to learning as a result of poor language development, mother tongue instruction, particularly within the foundation phase is supposed to be a respite for them. In line with current South African legislation, these learners have the right to attend a school where the language of instruction is similar to their mother tongue. According to the 2003 UNESCO position paper "The term 'mother tongue', though widely used, may refer to several different situations. Definitions often include the following elements: the language(s) that one has learnt first; the language(s) one identifies with or is identified as a native speaker of by others; the language(s) one knows best and the language(s) one uses most. 'Mother tongue' may also be referred to as a 'primary' or 'first language'"¹.

As is often the case with such learners, and in fact in many South African families, these learners often come from a bi- or multilingual family environment. This makes the decision to choose which home language should be used as a medium of instruction difficult. The pressure for this decision mounts especially when the initial language chosen presents as a barrier and the learner's scholastic progress is

poor. These learners struggle to decode words, their awareness of sounds is poor [phonemic awareness and analysis]; they struggle to distinguish between similar sounds [auditory discrimination]; they struggle to associate the sound of letters with their written format [auditory visual association]; they struggle to remember sight words when reading and spelling, they struggle to spell; the sequencing of words when reading and writing is poor; and they struggle to order their thoughts and give coherent answers while speaking and discussing. They confuse the phonology from one language system to another when spelling, for instance spelling 'cat' as 'khet' because the 'kh' sound in Sepedi sounds similar to the 'c-' sound in 'cat'. The difficulties often present as attention difficulties, incomplete work, untidy work, disruptive behaviour, low motivation for learning, poor participation in group and/or class activities. At this stage the parents and teachers may refer the child for assessment.

The challenge for the Black educational psychologist is to determine the nature and cause of these difficulties through a psycho-educational assessment. This is a challenge because the history of developing psychological assessments in South Africa particularly for black people has its limitations. This is due to most psychological tests currently administered in the African languages being adapted from English tests, which are in turn adapted from western tests. While this is acknowledged and it raises questions regarding the applicability, reliability and validity of such tests, this still does not detract from the fact that decisions regarding placement and inclusion for such learners are still based on assessments of this nature, and fortunately not all the tests have this limitation. Such an assessment would entail a battery of assessment tools administered in mother tongue² including amongst others an intelligence test, an aptitude test, a visual perceptual test, a reading, spelling and writing test as well as a maths proficiency test. This discussion however is not on psychological tests, but on illustrating the complex process of isolating language barriers.

The other challenge is to determine which language is better developed in order to decide the language of instruction, determine placement and learning support interventions. The complexity of the assessment battery attests to the fact that first language on its own is not [and should not be] the only determining factor in making such decisions especially when there is more than one first language. What enables a learner to learn efficiently, even in mother tongue, also depends on their perceptual, motor, attention, emotional, social and cognitive development amongst others. The reality is that we cannot afford to assume that choosing between languages in a bi- or multi-lingual familial environment is simple and straight forward. The challenge of regaining the confidence, motivation and will after experiencing failure in the 'wrong' language is immense and cannot be overstated, in spite of how resilient children are.

The third challenge is that within South Africa's urban areas the fact that the language spoken is often a (poorer) variant of a language spoken in the rural areas, this sets the learner up for failure. Furthermore the scientific development of the African languages in South Africa remains relatively poor, their standard written forms remain in many ways archaic, limited and context-bound, and out of touch with the modern scientific world³. As further noted by Foley⁴ the official African languages are certainly able to function as media of communication at such levels as interpersonal conversation, narrative and cultural practice. As they currently exist however, the standard written forms of the languages have not yet been

The reality is that we cannot afford to assume that choosing between languages in a bi- or multi-lingual familial environment is simple and straight forward.

developed to the point where they are able to carry academic discourse effectively and therefore function as full-fledged languages of learning and teaching, even at the Foundation Phase. This weakness undermines the opportunity to develop a strong foundation in mother tongue; which in turn sets a poor foundation for developing English as a second language by grade 4 when learners switch to English as the language of instruction.

The cognitive difficulties appear to be localised to school only, to the extent that accusations of racism, witchcraft and discrimination are hauled at the teachers because reports from parents, grandparents and care givers attest to how 'clever' and 'smart' the child is at home.

Mother Tongue Instruction Or Not?

The answer is complicated because language develops sequentially through five stages; listening, speaking, reading, writing and finally the advanced use of language. This suggests that it is insufficient to simply choose mother tongue instruction only on the basis of the fact that a learner is able to listen and speak in mother tongue only. Yet this is how choices for placement at the inception year are often made. Even at the foundation level, learners are expected to demonstrate high-order cognitive functioning, and failure to operate at this level manifest in the learning difficulties outlined above.

This is evident in the increasing number of foundation phase referrals for scholastic assessments to black educational psychologists. Within the foundation phase, learners who experience language barriers demonstrate a combination of cognitive, emotional, visual perceptual, auditory perceptual, motor and attention difficulties as well. The cognitive difficulties appear to be localised to school only, to the extent that accusations of racism, witchcraft and discrimination are hauled at the teachers because reports from parents, grandparents and care givers attest to how 'clever' and 'smart' the child is at home.

Take the case of Karabo⁵, an 8 year old boy, currently repeating grade 1 because he struggles to read, write or spell in Sepedi – his language of instruction. At home they speak Sepedi and Setswana, while his mother's first language is Xitsonga. He lives with his paternal grandmother, younger sister and cousin in Mamelodi. They live with her because she is more able to provide for them in terms of emotional care and financial security. His grandmother reported that Karabo lived with his mother and siblings in abject poverty until she took them under her care. Although Karabo had never missed a day of school unnecessarily, he reportedly struggles with the cognitive demands of his subjects. His cousin, Anna, who is in a higher grade, usually assists him with homework, however Karabo seems to experience difficulty retaining what he has learnt because his performance at home is always better than at school. This is in spite of Karabo repeating grade 1, being taught in his mother tongue, and having a teacher who is also a first language speaker of Sepedi, and being in an A-class.

The cognitive component is essential because on the surface learners like Karabo may have attained a certain level of basic interpersonal communicative competence in their mother tongue, hence the feedback from home that they are 'smart' and 'clever'. This also implies that if their assessment at school remains largely concrete, simplified and oral, these learners appear to cope with learning in their mother tongue. However, difficulties arise when they progress to the higher grades, or when they are challenged to use their mother tongue to read, write, spell, discuss, explain etc. This is because they lack what Cummins⁶ termed cognitive academic language proficiency, and thus they are under-prepared to cope with the higher-order cognitive demands even if presented in their mother tongue.

Bloom's taxonomy indicates that higher-order thinking skills require application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. It requires being able to order one's thinking, make inferences to understand the underlying meaning entailed in words, and being able to understand the humor and absurdity; make generalisations; give critiques and form counter-arguments as well as draw sound conclusions. What I am arguing is that even in mother tongue we find that the higher-order thinking skills are poorly developed because performance in the spoken aspects of the language are over-emphasised at school and at home.

During the assessment, I learnt that Karabo stutters, as a result he presented as a shy and quiet little boy. This implies that in a learning environment he would be less inclined to engage in discussions, possibly for fear of being ridiculed and victimised. His test taking behaviour was largely impulsive, he was restless and he tended to fidget a lot. This raises questions regarding his ability to exercise selective, focused and sustained attention. His problem solving strategies relied on trial and error, and was overly concrete, suggesting difficulties with abstract reasoning. He would give up when tasks became difficult and he would say that he cannot complete the task, suggesting fear of failure, low academic self-esteem and confidence.

He responded positively to encouragement and positive reinforcement; however he relied on continuous support and feedback. In response to mediation, he would only perform as far as the help he was given would take him and no further, suggesting that he required intensive support and individual attention from the teacher, which raises questions regarding whether he is likely to cope in a mainstream classroom environment. Karabo's results indicated difficulties in thinking abstractly, analysing, reasoning and generalising using higher-order thinking skills. He also indicated auditory and visual perceptual problems. The findings from the assessment confirmed that he requires language enrichment, occupational therapy and speech therapy.

However in determining whether to retain him in the current school or move him to a school that would address his learning support needs, the decision rested on whether there was a school that would have the capacity, resources and learning support practitioners that he required. His current school, though they have an A-class, could not address his needs holistically, and given that he was repeating grade 1, his performance was definitely not improving. Within Mamelodi the only other school in his home language was poorly resourced. The granny's final decision was to go against mother tongue instruction, she chose a special school in Eersterus – an English-Afrikaans bilingual school. However his admission would depend on his cognitive capacity to cope with learning in a third language.

Brain research suggests that there are certain critical stages for learning. For example, children who learn a second language when they are very young, between ages of 3 and 7, learn to speak as mother-tongue speakers. However if an individual learns a second language as an adult, s/he will find it much more difficult to learn a second language and very hard to produce phonemes or sounds of the new language⁷. What is happening is that a learner like Karabo experiences his mother tongue at a low level, and therefore struggles to use it at a higher level. Numerous factors, such as his culture, dictate that he continues to use his language for low-order thinking skills only, because arguing, criticising,

Brain research suggests that there are certain critical stages for learning. For example, children who learn a second language when they are very young, between ages of 3 and 7, learn to speak as mother-tongue speakers.



MediaClubSouthAfrica: Emily Visser

The first day of school.

questioning, judging etc (all those high order thinking skills) would at his age be deemed disrespectful, argumentative and difficult.

Children who are truly bilingual understand and use two languages well, their mother-tongue language and the second language. In fact, the research shows that true bilingual abilities are associated with higher levels of cognitive attainment⁸. Therefore if Karabo was truly bilingual, he would have been able to cope with higher-order thinking skills presented in his mother tongue. Bilingual acquisition involves the process that builds on an underlying base for both languages. The duality of language does not hamper overall language proficiency or cognitive development for bilingual children.

However, the problem for many linguistically diverse learners is that they have Limited English Proficiency. This means that they experience difficulty understanding and using English⁹. A learner's mother-tongue language provides the foundation upon which English language skills are built. If they learn to use their mother-tongue

language effectively, they are more likely to acquire and use English appropriately. However learners who are experiencing difficulties in their mother-tongue language also experience problems in English as a second language¹⁰. Additionally, research shows that a student may acquire conversational English in six months but not have the language proficiency to support the complex demands of academic development in English. Reaching that level may take up to two or more years¹¹.

Consider taking your child for school readiness assessment while they are still in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase, preferably while in grade R, a year before they begin grade 1.

For Karabo, it is evident that he would require placement not only determined by language, but also determined by his cognitive development. The option of going to an Afrikaans-English medium school in Eersterus appeared more attractive to the grandmother because Karabo would receive the quality of instruction necessary to cope with higher cognitive demands. He would receive the additional English language enrichment regularly. It was still early in his scholastic development to 'start afresh' in a school that had all the resources, support and learning support practitioners that would address his learning difficulties on-site. Furthermore, this would set him up for success in grade 4 when he would have to learn in English as a medium of instruction. For this grandmother, the decision was, No. She could afford it so why not? Karabo's story represents numerous children from similar backgrounds that face the same challenge and who end up making the same decision, even when the source of the finances is a child support grant.

So now what?

Here are a few ideas:

- Consider taking your child for school readiness assessment while they are still in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase, preferably while in grade R, a year before they begin grade 1. School readiness assessments are also conducted within the first six months of grade 1. This will enable parents and teachers to make

informed choices about which schools to choose for their children, rather than wait for them to fail or repeat a grade. This will also highlight any learning support needs your child may require.

- Read stories written in their vernacular and talk to them about the story. Make watching TV or a trip to the supermarket interactive by asking probing questions using the 6 W's: Who; What; When; Where; Why and how. These questions encourage discussion, critical thinking, reflective thinking and reasoning. When we encourage children to think before they talk, and to explain their actions after acting, we strengthen their reasoning capacity, their sequential and successive processing, attention to detail and we build their self-confidence. We also encourage them to be active, reflective learners, who have the confidence to not just follow instructions out of fear, but out of understanding and depth. Caution: when you challenge children to think, they will challenge you to think as well, which makes both of you lifelong learners!
- When cooking, get your child to fetch the vegetables and ingredients from the cupboard using the vernacular names; if you don't know some of them, make it a family project to find out.
- Encourage your child to write 'grocery lists'. By the third term in grade 1 children learn how to read and write. Encourage them to write lists of common words in mother tongue like 'mama'; 'papa'; 'sesi' etc. Also encourage them to write lists of food, games or toys that they like. Instead of picking out your grocery items from the supermarket rows or spaza shop, tell them to find the items. They may not be fluent readers, but functional literacy develops when you recognise familiar items like being able to tell the difference between 'Aquafresh' and 'Colgate' based solely on what they've seen is being used at home.
- Introduce them to nursery rhymes and songs, and write the lyrics together
- Encourage them to give you daily news, recounting what they did during the day.
- Use parables to demonstrate or emphasise a point, and then make them tell you what they think it means, and how it relates to what is happening
- Share jokes and absurd stories with them
- Most importantly challenge them to do all this in mother tongue – not street slang – and correct them appropriately using the correct language!

NOTES

- ¹ 2003:15
- ² Although it has to be noted that psychological tests in some of the African languages are not available, such as XiTsonga, XiVenda
- ³ Foley 2007
- ⁴ *ibid.*
- ⁵ Names have been changed to protect the identity of the clients
- ⁶ 2000
- ⁷ Lerner, 2003:338
- ⁸ Cummings, 1989; Hakuta, 1990 in Lerner 2003: 370
- ⁹ *ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Krashen, 1992; Ortiz, 1997
- ¹¹ Cummings, 1989; Ortiz 1997 in Lerner 2003:370

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Befriending Education?

Education Partnerships: Initial Reading Instruction and Research at the UJ Institute of Childhood Education



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There is an exciting new vibrancy in varieties of partnerships with public education. In other articles in this issue of *Focus* some of these will be mentioned. In this article I will discuss aspects of an intervention in which practitioners and specialists across sectors come together in an integrated hub of learning, research, service and development. The Gauteng Department of Education’s foundation phase education specialists, a school’s community, a teacher education degree programme, and a university research team have started to collaborate. In this collaboration the participants aim not only to scaffold and to research young children’s entry into formal education, but to develop a new model of partnering with public school education. In this article I will look specifically at the issue of young learners’ first encounter with written language. The site of this research and development programme is the Funda UJabule¹ foundation phase school and the UJ Institute of Childhood Education on the Soweto campus of the University of Johannesburg.

At this university where I have been working since 1989, there have been a number of these educational development interventions, some of which have been successful, such as the Orange Farm INSET project in which more than 400 teachers were educated and trained for the profession on a part-time basis while they were working in community schools.² Nearly 300 of them qualified as teachers in a hybrid programme that was applauded at the time (1992 – 1997) as an innovative higher education endeavour. The other project that has proved to be successful beyond expectation is the Raucall Secondary School, which had its first intake of grade eight pupils in 1992 and which has consistently performed in the ‘high functioning’ category of public schools. In fact, in a survey of 2008 Grade 12 results it was the top school in mathematics, while it ranked fourth in science and seventh overall. The school has some of the characteristics of a US charter school, because it is a public school with its own ‘charter’ and partner. It also has some characteristics of a magnet school, as it draws from high performing youth and works on a contained and specialised curriculum with limited electives. Its predominantly black learner population from low-income families is evidence of how the poverty cycle can be broken through education. In this school a dedicated and well managed teacher corps educates adolescents from low-income families in townships, providing them with an environment that is conducive to learning and where the teachers are trusted.

Building on previous work, the UJ is embarking on another school education partnership in 2010 when the Funda UJabule Foundation Phase School will open its doors to the first cohort of 60 Grade R pupils on the Soweto campus of the University. There, within the Institute of Childhood Education, we will pilot another partnership with the Gauteng Department of Education. In this partnership the aim is not only to establish and nurture a high functioning school, but also to conduct longitudinal research on the young learners' development over four years. The school as a social organism will also be investigated by a team of researchers and by the teacher education students of the new foundation phase education degree programme on this campus. In addition, the school will be the University's practical training site for future teachers of the early grades, while also initiating projects for parents and families about the needs of the young child who is entering formal education. Learning in a formal setting is a group project – families, caregivers and teachers working together to guide young children towards early school success. After all, the best overall indicator of later school achievement and access to higher education is the performance in the third grade³. A strong foundation in literacy is an essential component of this performance.

Building a literacy bridge to formal learning

Until young children enter institutions for formal learning much of their learning is incidental. Few parents design a structured curriculum for their pre-school children. And few parents venture into the systematic teaching of literacy and numeracy in a curricular way. When young children enter school and have to learn that signs, such as letters from the alphabet, signify parts of words, the meaning of which they may know, they enter a different phase of their lives. In the rest of this article I will focus only on one aspect of this phase and how it is dependent on systematic instruction in a structured and secure environment at school and at home – an environment that scaffolds the young child and assists her/him in the drill and practice that is required to learn to read and write.

Literacy is a skill and like most skills it can be viewed as 'procedural knowledge,' a type of knowledge that scholars of learning argue can only be learned by practice, repetition, and by modelling. Skills can be taught, while some complex, abstract knowledge cannot be 'taught' so directly – it has to be accessed/'discovered' and constructed/made by individuals who have, in the words of Lev Vygotsky⁴, the 'higher psychological' skills to set in motion the procedural part of cognition that leads to discovery and personal construction of knowledge. Thus, although learning science concepts in the early grades may be a tactile and visual experience in some instances, young learners also have to talk about it, they have to read and write about it. Language and its literate (and numerate) forms are of great help to further understanding and also to present and articulate understanding.

But literacy, unlike oracy, does not emerge for the young child by just being in the world. It needs systematic instruction in a programme that comprises many different sets and sub-sets of skills. And with practice and repetition most of these skills can be learned. A young learner who has the potential to understand science or mathematics will have little chance to do so if she/he remains non-literate (also non-literate in numeracy) and does not have procedural knowledge skills to build theoretical frameworks for learning. Such frameworks are essentially the 'scaffolds' for building knowledge and the 'pegs on which to secure' this knowledge. Psychologists of learning such as Lev Vygotsky⁵ and Jerome Bruner⁶ respectively, use these metaphors to capture what happens when one learns. One such way of

... 'procedural knowledge,' a type of knowledge that scholars of learning argue can only be learned by practice, repetition, and by modelling.

‘scaffolding’ and ‘pegging’ is the craft of reading.

Apart from reading for enjoyment, this craft comprising a wide array of skills, also mediates much of what a growing child learns in school. Writing in the early 20th century, Vygotsky developed the notion of ‘semiotic mediation’ to show how dependent a young learner is on engaging with the written word, in addition to using spoken language. He argued that literacy is a ‘higher psychological tool.’ In this vein Bruner (1990) proposed the idea that we use tools (and signs) as ‘prostheses’ of the mind. Literacy as a culturally transmitted tool, utilising the signing systems of a language, is such a prosthetic tool. When young children are ready to learn to use this tool they enter school and they enter a system of sign mediation that will come to a close when they are able to continue, incrementally, on their own on a personal reading trajectory. Young readers differ in the rate at which they learn to become independent readers and to increase their reading incrementally. But, to begin with, nearly all children need careful instruction, much repetition and monitoring and also a great deal of care and support.

A teacher who works systematically, a home environment where the school work is overseen and strengthened, and a school where learning is valued are essential ingredients of a young child’s formal education life.

Early reading relationships, like other relationships of learning are internalised as part of the phenomenon of learning itself. Another Russian psychologist, Nikolai Veresov⁷ takes this argument further. As a Vygotskian scholar he sees learning as the internalisation of cultural practices and of the relationship with the people who are the mediators of culture. In other words, young children, when learning to read, not only internalise sound-letter relations, but human relations that they associate with reading. A teacher who works systematically, a home environment where the school work is overseen and strengthened, and a school where learning is valued are essential ingredients of a young child’s formal education life. When children fail to learn to read it is almost always because school, or home, or both have failed them.

The first few years at school is the crucial time when young children learn how to identify and make meaning of print and thus learn how to access knowledge sources and how to appropriate them. They learn the skills of the psychological craft of reading. They learn the regularities – the rules of how to recognise parts of written language and how to put these parts together, gradually becoming more ‘crafty’ as they blend micro-skills. In English there are more than 500 rules that constitute blending of parts of word. According to Catherine Snow and Connie Juel⁸ the first rules, about 90 of them in the English language, are learned best systematically with the help of a teacher who follows a programme in a specific chronology⁹. Later on young readers start teaching themselves and learn incrementally by practice. Once they know some rules of connecting a phoneme (a small sound or sound grouping) with its graphemic (written) counterpart, they can put them together and identify words, usually by ‘sounding them out’ and pointing to them, thereby connecting mind, body and text. If this word has meaning because it is already in the vocabulary of a beginner reader, reading is accomplished. If the word is not yet semantically ‘there’, the skill of ‘sounding out’ is still valuable on its own, because the mechanics of early reading are as important as the meaning that is made, or the comprehension that is established. But, obviously, if the meaning of the word is already known, reading progresses more rapidly. Vocabulary in a language and phonological awareness are powerful components of the toolkit of a beginner reader.

Under the supervision of a teacher and with the help of family and caregivers,

children practice the identification of the rules and their use, and expand their emergent craft of reading. They read often boring words and phrases to lay a solid foundation for advanced reading. Print language and oral language connections have to be practised almost laboriously for them to become solid. When they are established, the speed of recognition increases and whole words and phrases are recognised in tandem, in what is known as 'distributed processes'. Thus, it is not as if one recognises a few words together at a glance. Rather, the brain has been trained to recognise the grapheme combinations as they were drilled and practised in initial reading and is able to process them in parallel. It can be compared to learning to drive a car: one learns individual skills incrementally, puts them together by practice and then drives with the brain processing many skills simultaneously in parallel, with mind and body becoming one in a fluid use of skills and cognition. Many of the decisions a skilled driver makes are made in the same type of distributed process as when one has established reading skills as part of firm neurological pathways.

Once young readers have taken off on a trajectory of initial reading and are successful, they become interested in stories and various topics and learn many additional phonics rules and word recognition skills on their own. If they are not successful, the sense of failure tends to inhibit self-directed reading and their motivation often diminishes as a result. This is usually when parents are called in to discuss their child's 'reading problem.' Some of the stepping stones are missing. If these stones have been laid haphazardly and if reading instruction has not been happening systematically, the process of learning to read becomes more challenging. If there is not consistent practice in and out of school, the process also slows down. If teachers have not been trained in the systematic teaching of reading, using a well-organised curriculum, it is unlikely that young children will learn to read effectively.

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The process of learning to read is also slowed down when young children do not know the language in which they learn to read well enough, or when they are exposed to many languages and have to decode different systems of rules of phonics. The sound systems of Setswana and English are different. Groupings of letters and of parts of words are different. Think of adult South Africans who know neither isiXhosa nor Sesotho and who struggle to read the words of the national anthem and to sound them out in (singing) reading, despite the fact that they may sing the words phonetically without written text quite well. Imagine how young children struggle to identify foreign sound systems.

Funda UJabule – A 'learn and be joyful' partnership?

This training and research school on the UJ Soweto campus will give researchers of early school education the opportunity to study reading development, among other components of the curriculum and of general school life. In a newly built school with unobtrusive recording technologies in the classrooms and with a full-time school researcher, the classroom life will be captured and annual cohorts of 60 children from grades R to three will be studied in various projects, most of which are longitudinal. Their language development and their entry into literacy will be captured and analysed. We will also, later on, identify possibilities for interventions in which we will 'experiment' with different ways of teaching and managing the school day of young learners. In terms of literacy education we hope to be able to forward suggestions for reading instruction after completion of research projects. We hope to collaborate with schools in the vicinity to form a cluster of research oriented schools.

Our approach to teaching reading at this school will be largely phonics-based, meaning that we will use small entities such as single sounds and groups of sounds in a systematic programme of building the mechanics of reading, coupled with the semantics. It will include the gradual introduction of English after Sesotho and isiZulu, which will be the two main first languages of the school. This is probably the biggest challenge for the practice we envisage as well as for the research. It is difficult in the best circumstances to move from spoken to written language. One can only imagine how hard it is to compound this early on with the introduction of yet another language and its spoken and written idiosyncracies.

If teachers are not systematic, organised practitioners, classroom practice becomes a nightmare.

We should also not forget that young children have to master the signs of reading the knowledge system of mathematics at the same time as well. The written digit '2' is far removed from two blocks or two beads that signify number in the semantic-semiotic links of an individual learner. The written digit is also distant from the word 'two' as they are located in two different signing systems. These systems cross paths and if teaching is not structured and if teachers do not have an understanding of the different signing systems and the semiotic complexities with which young children have to deal they make easy assumptions about children's failure. Young brains have to make many new neural connections at the same time. If teachers are not systematic, organised practitioners, classroom practice becomes a nightmare. My own view of why mathematics in our schools is such a failure is that teachers have not been educated in what the complexities of the different signing systems involved for young children. Grade ones are immersed, all at once, in complex semiotic systems. The skills to survive in these systems and their abstractions need to be firm.

One of the innovations at Funda UJabule is an agreement with our partner, the GDE, to put teachers through a rigorous induction programme for a few weeks before they start teaching. The effectiveness of this induction will be researched with a view to replication in other schools as soon as possible, thereby extending the partnership to teacher development in other schools. The school's name, which can be translated as 'learn and be joyful,' is also its motto. In forging a relationship between teachers, young children and their families and caregivers we hope to see solid learning relationships internalised along with knowledge and skills, and we hope that there will be joy for the children while they build the foundations for their future learning.

A child's right to read and write

I have not yet seen any of the workbooks or the lesson plans that will be made available to all schools in the latest plan to address the 'crisis in education' and have just been informed that the tender for these books has been put on hold. I think this is a wise decision as a hurried compilation of materials may simply be a waste of money. These books have to be put together by experts of literacy and numeracy and a sample of teachers need to be consulted too. I would even like to have seen a small pilot programme to find out how the new tools are used and then refine them before mass distribution.

But, more than anything, I would like to see that teacher unions, while protecting the rights of teachers, do not ignore the rights of the child. Young children have a right to education. It is a nation's privilege to honour this right. It is such a pity that some unions do not agree with giving teachers a 'prescriptive' syllabus. There seems to be an assumption that a set syllabus, with work plans and lesson plans

for a teacher diminishes her/his professionalism and deprives her of the freedom to be a creative and independent teacher. This is fallacious. Teachers can be creative and independent and use syllabi, lesson plans and workbooks as tools to structure their day and their week and to see the logic of their programme of work. A teacher who has to create every single lesson on her own for every class that she teaches needs to be very experienced and needs a lot of time outside school hours to prepare. If a set of lesson plans and workbooks are supplied, she can spend more time on interacting with the pupils and keep a good tab on their progress. She can forge an educational relationship instead of a bureaucratic one, as has been the case of late.

I would hope that non-educational agendas will not obstruct this latest effort to revive good teaching and to increase functionality of schools. But, more importantly, I would hope that labour organisations are not going to obstruct the learning of young children who have only one chance to be an initial reader. If they miss this opportunity the country will have to spend large amounts on remedial work, most of which will not be necessary if grade one and two teachers are supported in the use of structured reading programmes with adjoining lesson plans and workbooks. If teacher development programmes,

such as the one we are implementing in 2010, invite them to work after school hours I would also hope that there will be no labour obstructions.

As well as supporting teachers, I hope time and thought will be devoted to developing programmes for parents, grandparents and community structures such as churches, to enable them to partner child and school in the development of this crucial reading foundation. Especially where there is a deficit in parents' or grandparents' own educational and literacy attainments, they need to be reassured that they have a crucial role to play in their children's learning, and given tools to enable them to play it.

If the children do not learn to read at the appropriate age, neither state nor society can function properly. Both state and society have essential roles to play in making sure this happens. The UJ Institute of Childhood Education could be an institutional partnership that could not only provide education, service and research opportunities, but also yield research findings that could help to systematically structure early literacy (and other) education. Situated on the Soweto campus it may also become both an intellectual and professional hub for educationists whose focus is early school education in this area of the city.

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NOTES

- ¹ The 'UJ' in UJabule refers to the University of Johannesburg
- ² These schools were similar to current conceptions of PEP schools in the ISASA system – see the article by Jane Hofmeyr and Lindsay McCay in this issue.
- ³ Barber and Mourshed 2007; Gravett, Morgan and Henning, 2009
- ⁴ Vygotsky, 1978, 1992
- ⁵ Vygotsky, 1992; Kozulin, 1990
- ⁶ Bruner, 1990
- ⁷ Veresov, 2004.
- ⁸ Catherine Snow and Connie Juel, 2005
- ⁹ There are different methods of initial reading instruction, but Snow, like many others who work in multilingual contexts, advises this ('phonics') approach, coupled with later 'whole language' methods.

Private Education for the Poor: More, Different and Better

The private sector is an increasingly important player in providing education services and making high quality education accessible for communities and marginalised groups in developing countries.



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According to UNESCO statistics, between 1991 and 2003 private school enrolment has grown far quicker than public school enrolment throughout the world. Interestingly, it has grown most in Africa – by 113 per cent as opposed to 52 for public education.

What is so significant about this growth in the developing world is that much of it has been in private education for the poor (PEP). This article will examine the phenomenon in developing countries and South Africa through research findings, the experience of independent school associations, and some examples of private schools for the poor in South Africa.

It will also look at public-private partnerships, which have been used in many countries to extend quality education to a range of communities, including the very poorest, the potential for public-private partnerships in South African education, and the implications for the future.

Private Education for the Poor

Worldwide interest in private education for the poor has been sparked by the research of Prof James Tooley who has found that in countries, such as Kenya, India, Ghana, Nigeria and China, there are increasing numbers of low-cost private schools that, in comparison with public schools, on average have smaller class sizes, higher test scores, more motivated teachers – all at lower costs.

A common assumption about the private sector in education is that it caters only to the élite, and that its promotion only serves to exacerbate inequality. On the contrary, recent

research points in the opposite direction. If we want to help some of the most disadvantaged groups in society, encouraging deeper private sector involvement is likely to be the best way forward.¹

His research, for example in the Ga district of Ghana (the low-income suburban and rural area surrounding the capital city of Accra), showed that out of 779 schools, only 25 per cent were government schools and that 64 per cent of schoolchildren attended private schools. In ‘poor’ areas in Lagos State, Nigeria, an estimated 75 per cent of schoolchildren were enrolled in private schools, most of which were unregistered ones.

Private schools, parents said, were successful because they were more accountable: ...

Research examining the quality of the schools found considerably higher achievements in mathematics and English in the private compared to the government schools. In all cases, this achievement advantage was obtained at between half and a quarter of the teacher salary costs.²

Tooley’s research also indicates that most parents would prefer to send their children to private schools if they could afford them. Private schools, parents said, were successful because they were more accountable: “the teachers are accountable to the manager (who can fire them), and, through him or her, to the parents (who can withdraw their children)”.

South African Independent School Sector

The South African Schools Act (1996) recognises two categories of schools: public and independent (private). Public schools are state controlled and independent schools are privately governed.

Changes in the sector

With the opening up of the political space in South Africa and the demise of apartheid in the 1990’s, dramatic changes have occurred in the independent school sector. The size, diversity and socio-economic spread of the independent schooling sector have changed significantly.

Rapid growth has occurred since 1990 in the number of independent schools, and especially in their learner enrolment.

As researchers of private education have found in other emerging economies, official databases of registered independent schools are not comprehensive or up-to-date in South Africa.³ The number of unregistered, ‘fly-by-night’ schools that are below the official radar screen can only be guessed.

Fortunately, independent research has thrown light on the scope of the sector and its growth. Research by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) has shown that there are many more registered schools than official data-bases contain and that the growth has been significant.⁴ This is also the preliminary finding of 2009 research by the Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) into the quality and extent of low-fee independent schools, both registered and unregistered, in six selected areas with a high concentration of poor people. This research has also discovered numerous unregistered schools.

Although they do not capture the full extent of the growth, even 2008 government statistics show an increase of 4.2 per cent in independent school enrolment, compared to a 1.9 per cent increase in public school enrolment from 2000 — 2008. Based on their increase in membership, independent school associations estimate that currently there are likely to be some 2 500 registered independent schools (counting primary and secondary schools separately) with some 500 000 learners, constituting over 4 per cent of the total learner enrolment in South Africa.

The dominant public perception of independent schools is “white, affluent and exclusive”. In 1990, this perception was largely true: most of the learners were white and found in traditional, high-fee, religious schools. There was, however, a significant enrolment of black learners in traditionally white independent schools, which had opened up to them in defiance of apartheid laws, as well as a number of mid-to low-fee black independent schools.

Nearly two decades later this public perception persists, but it is far from the current reality. The

majority of learners at independent schools are now black, while the majority of schools are young (established since 1990), and charge low to mid-level fees.⁵

While many of the new black elite are sending their children to high-fee independent schools, the majority of learners are drawn from black middle- and working-class and families in the informal-sector.

Why the changes?

Why has such rapid growth occurred, mainly among black learners in low-fee schools? Internationally, two main demand factors have been identified as responsible for the growth of private education: excess (unmet) demand for education above what the state can provide and differentiated demand for alternative types and quality of education to that provided by the state.⁶

In South Africa both types of demand exist: parents want more, different and better education for their children.

More education

Most unmet demand comes from black communities: this occurs in informal settlements where there are no public schools, in rural areas where there are too few public schools or none at the appropriate phase of education, and in inner city schools for over-age repeaters, who are not allowed to re-enter public schools if they have failed more than once. Immigrant children are also catered for in inner city schools.⁷

In rapidly expanding suburban areas where government provision lags behind population growth, such as Midrand or the new dormitory suburbs on the west coast above Cape Town, unmet demand comes from all population groups.

Different education

Not only has the independent school sector grown, but it has become far more diverse, catering for different races, cultures, religions, languages, philosophies and educational approaches.

The surveys undertaken by du Toit (2004) and Musker and du Toit (2009) show that the largest categories are community schools and then, religious schools, but the sector also includes expatriate, alternative, and virtual schools. The vast majority of schools are not-for-profit (less than 5 per cent are for-profit). The fact that only non-profit schools can qualify for a state subsidy is the main cause.

Parents thus have very wide choice of independent schools available to them. Apartheid education took away the freedom of parents to choose the education of their children, but that essential democratic right has been restored and parents of all race groups are exercising that right.

Better education

The desire for quality schooling that has fanned most of the growth of the sector in South Africa has come from communities and parents who are dissatisfied with government schooling and want a better quality education for their children as the critical determinant of their life chances.

The 2001/02 HSRC research found that quality of independent schools in general

Not only has the independent school sector grown, but it has become far more diverse

was better than public schools in key subjects. The average participation rate for mathematics and science in independent schools (62.7 and 44.2 per cent respectively) was higher than public schools (58.4 and 34.7 per cent), as were the pass rates. In 2001 the average pass rate was more than 7 per cent higher in independent schools than in public ones, and more than double the percentage of learners in independent schools achieved university entrance passes.

When the findings of the CDE research are published, they will throw new light on the comparative quality of public and independent schools, albeit only in the six sampled areas. The researchers interviewed the principals of 136 public and 57 independent schools and administered mathematics tests to their grade 6 learners. In line with Tooley's research model, CDE's survey also investigated other factors that have a bearing on quality and cost: teacher salaries, class size, facilities and resources, medium of instruction and absenteeism of teachers.

It is argued that the demand for quality education in South Africa has increased as the overall quality of public education has dropped. Indeed, the IFC researchers predict that the sector will continue to grow as the public schooling system continues to face quality challenges, especially in townships and rural areas. The fact that most of the best former Model-C schools are full and their fees are very high (next year the highest will reach R20 000) will provide an extra impetus.

Thus the primary driver of growth is differentiated demand in black communities for better and different schooling rather than unmet demand.⁸

PEP schools in South Africa

The Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA), the largest and most inclusive association in the region, has nearly 700 member schools with more than 145 000 learners. In line with the changes in the sector, ISASA's membership has shifted significantly in the last decade: approximately a third of its schools are now subsidised low-and mid-fee schools, and many of its new members are schools that charge fees below R5 500 a year.

Those familiar with the traditional models of independent schools would be surprised to see schools in informal settlements, such as Masibambane in Orange Farm, or in office blocks, like Sekolo sa Borokgo, a bridging high school in Randburg, and in abandoned factories as in the case of the Get Ahead schools in Queenstown.

Sekolo sa Borokgo (SSB) began life as a low-fee bridging school for grade 7 to help black children overcome their educational deficits so that they could access Model-C schools or independent schools on bursaries. Initially, the school was housed in the administration wing of the then Technisa and after moving twice, was eventually able to raise donor funds to buy a house in Randburg from a Quaker group leaving South Africa.

In response to the growing demand from older pupils for good teaching and learning so that they could successfully complete grade 12, SSB started a Matric Centre in the two top floors of an office block in Randburg near the taxi rank. The rent was R39 000 per month. Finally, with donor funding and a loan, they managed to buy another office building nearby, but this necessitated a significant fee increase. Fees now range from R9 000 to R13 000 per annum, but 30 per cent of pupils

It is argued that the demand for quality education in South Africa has increased as the overall quality of public education has dropped.

are funded through donor bursaries. The school has changed its focus to grades 7-9, with 130 pupils, and the Matric Centre has 140 pupils from grades 10-12. A new venture is a very successful pre-university college with black and white students from South Africa, Africa and Europe completing their A levels and achieving outstanding results.

A good reputation for quality increases the demand for school places and so they also add more classes to each grade. Thus they grow 'taller' and 'fatter' and pupil enrolment in independent schools grows faster than the number of new schools.

Pupils come from all over the greater metropolitan area to SSB, some travelling for two hours from townships like Tembisa because the school does not have boarding facilities. Many pupils arrive at school hungry, so school feeding is important at SSB. The parents of the children are domestic workers, teachers, nurses, government officials or owners of small businesses. The school has a committed core of excellent teachers, many who have retired from high-fee independent schools, but as they cannot afford to match state salaries, they also lose teachers every year. The matric results are very good with an average pass rate of 90 per cent and a university endorsement rate of 71 per cent.

In deepest rural KwaZulu-Natal, is Lobethal, situated in Tugela Ferry, an area which has had a turbulent history and much political upheaval. The school began in 1993 and today, most parents are subsistence farmers, often illiterate, strongly Christian and fully involved in the life of the school. The school goes from Grades 000-12 and the fees range from R2 670 in the lowest grades to R4 700 in grade 12. Despite limited finance and inadequate resources, the Grade 12s have had a 100 per cent pass rate in grade 12 since the first cohort wrote in 2001.

There are recurring themes in the stories of low-fee independent schools. Many begin as pre-primary schools where parents want their children to learn English as soon as possible. Under parental pressure, the schools extend grade by grade into primary phase, and ultimately into the secondary phase. A good reputation for quality increases the demand for school places and so they also add more classes to each grade. Thus they grow 'taller' and 'fatter' and pupil enrolment in independent schools grows faster than the number of new schools.

As their numbers increase, high and rising rent forces the schools to move often to find cheaper accommodation and also makes them desperate to buy their own buildings or land. However, without any capital, very limited prospects for fundraising from parents or the community, great difficulty in obtaining donor assistance and no security for a bank loan, this is often only a dream.

The lower their fees, the greater the schools' dependence on a state subsidy. If that is delayed, reduced or not paid, many of the lowest fee schools cannot pay their teachers and face closing down – with all the disastrous consequences for pupils' life chances and teachers' livelihoods. As the schools cannot match state teachers' salaries, South African teachers frequently leave, so teachers from Zimbabwe and India are common.

The heads and owners are typically committed Christians with a passion to serve the community. As a result, many low-fee schools run development programmes for disadvantaged public school pupils, teachers and principals and the wider community. Because the financial resources of their parents are so limited, low-fee schools struggle to keep their fees as low as possible with very small annual increases. However, if they manage to buy a property with a bank loan or offer

better salaries to retain their teachers, many have been forced to raise their fees. This is particularly true in urban areas, as in the case of SSB, where fees have had to double in the last five years.

While the reach of independent schools has now extended into poor communities, they can only cater for those families, or extended families, with enough income to afford even their low fees. Thus they cannot serve the poorest of the poor children except where the school itself provides bursaries, or where donors grant them. Even when an independent school's fees are half or less than what the province spends on a child in a public school, it can only ever obtain a 60 per cent subsidy. To keep their fees low, schools like Prestige College in Hammanskraal have used their ingenuity to start an income-earning adventure centre, bush experience on its grounds which many high-fee schools use. This income cross-subsidises their fees by R2 000 a year. They are indeed 'edupreneurs'!

Public-Private Partnerships

It is now common cause that the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education by 2015 will not be achieved. Thus a key question that is posed by researchers of private education is what role might the sector play in helping governments achieve their national education goals?

Public-private partnerships are a means of harnessing the contribution of private sector. "The concept of a public-private partnership (PPP) recognises the existence of alternative options for providing education services besides public finance and public delivery".⁹

In their study above for the World Bank, Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio and Guaqueta examine the role and impact of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in which government guides policy and provides financing while the private sector delivers education services to learners. Private providers are contracted by government to supply a specific service of a defined quantity and quality at an agreed price for a specific period of time. A wide range of services can be provided for in a contract: the development or maintenance of facilities and infrastructure, management, professional support, operational and education services.

Most developed and developing countries are, in

fact, hybrids of mixed public and private funding and management of provision of education. For instance, as in South Africa, there can be private institutions that receive subsidies and public ones that charge fees, receive donations and offer additional services. World Bank has classified countries' involvement in PPPs on a continuum, which ranges from no private sector involvement at all to the integral stage of full partnership. On this continuum, South Africa has an 'emerging' PPP environment.

Examples of PPPs

There are many examples of successful PPPs that are relevant to South Africa. In Pakistan and the Philippines, PPPs have been developed to provide access to quality education to under-served rural children and relieve the over-crowding and declining quality of public schools.

In Pakistan, the Punjab Education Foundation, an independent institution fully funded by the government, manages a partnership to improve access by the poor to low-fee private schools in Punjab province. Vouchers are used to increase access and accountability mechanisms ensure quality improvement. Performance-based incentives operate at the school and teacher level.

Tests of the pupils in private and public primary schools showed that the quality of education was higher in the private schools, at half the cost.

An independent evaluation funded by the World Bank¹⁰ found that the Punjab province has made significant gains in education through this partnership. Tests of the pupils in private and public primary schools showed that the quality of education was higher in the private schools, at half the cost. More efficient delivery in a stand-alone private school compared to a huge and highly centralised bureaucracy has been identified as the critical factor.

In the Philippines PPPs have been used to incentivise private schools to enrol students in areas where there is insufficient public schooling. This approach has reduced congestion in public schools,

addressed the problem of the low quality in public schools, saved costs and improved the viability of 2 000 private schools.

Relevance for South Africa

Experience has shown that for PPPs to thrive, it is essential for them to exist within an enabling framework.

In Africa, the African Private Schools Investment (APSI) Index shows that there is much progress to be made in improving the regulatory frameworks for private education. The Index assesses the attractiveness for private investment in education in 36 African nations, across six categories spanning 39 economic and social indicators, and reveals that in 2007 none of them was particularly attractive for private investment: first was Mauritius with only 67.8 out of 100, South Africa was ranked third with a score of 64.9, and last was Chad with only 29.4.

Other education analysts¹¹ concur that the environment is less than enabling: "Policy on independent schooling in South Africa is more regulative than facilitative, in that the policy incentives are nominal".¹²

We can all agree about the severity of the education crisis in South Africa and that the greatest challenges are to improve quality and inequality. President Zuma's administration has made schooling a top national priority and signalled a strong desire for public-private partnerships to address these challenges.

By drawing on both national and international policy options and innovations in PPPs, South African policy and decision-makers should explore how partnering with the private education sector could accelerate the achievement of our education goals.

Despite its rapid growth, the independent school sector is still small but it has significant strengths in terms of access, quality and choice, which could be harnessed to the public good. Independent schools in ISASA and other associations are keen to do this.

Necessary conditions for effective PPPs in South Africa are an enabling environment and sufficient state funding for very poor children to attend independent schools, on a sustainable basis. However, more than this is required for partnerships to work: "Trust, dialogue, accountability and commitment are crucial to successful public-private partnerships".¹³

NOTES

- ¹ Tooley, 2000
- ² Tooley and Dixon, 2005
- ³ Motala and Dieltiens, 2008
- ⁴ du Toit, 2003; Musker and du Toit, 2009
- ⁵ Hofmeyr and Lee, 2004; Motala and Dieltiens, 2008; Musker and du Toit, 2009
- ⁶ James, 1991
- ⁷ Motala and Dieltiens, 2008
- ⁸ Hofmeyr and Lee, 2004; Motala and Dieltiens, 2008
- ⁹ Patrinos, et al, 2009
- ¹⁰ Patrinos et al, 2009
- ¹¹ Hofmeyr and Lee, 2003; Motala and Dieltiens, 2008; Lewin and Sayed, 2005
- ¹² Lewin and Sayed, 2005:136
- ¹³ Bistany, 2009

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Public School Governance in South Africa

Given the painful, complex and controversial history of schooling in South Africa, it was unlikely that any model chosen for the management and control of our public schools would satisfy all role-players. A model which effectively places significant decision making power over issues such as school fees, admissions and nominations of staff outside the control of state education departments was never going to be acceptable to all. Nevertheless, it is inherent in the partnership which is reflected in the Preamble to the South African Schools' Act of 1996 [SASA] – a partnership involving the state and learners, parents and educators in accepting joint responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools. The nature of this partnership does not imply that all partners have to agree on all issues and that there is no room for contestation on important aspects. In fact, the vigour with which contestation has taken place must be seen at least partly as an indication of the seriousness with which the various parties take their responsibilities. The ongoing incapacity of most provincial education departments to administer public schooling effectively has, of course, not helped the situation. As a result, it is not surprising that over the years:

1. the courts – including the Constitutional Court – in South Africa have played a significant role in defining responsibility for various aspects of schooling, and
2. the legislative and policy framework for schooling has been subjected to a constant process of tinkering.

However, it is not the intention of this article to dwell on ideological considerations of the model of public school governance used in South Africa at present. Instead, the focus is on a few practical considerations of the current system and how School Governing Bodies [SGBs] respond to some of the challenges they are required to manage given their powers and responsibilities as set out in SASA.

Of course, SASA is, on its own, one of these challenges facing SGBs in the execution of their responsibilities. The legislative framework for governance which it sets out is complex and has been open to conflicting interpretations. Certainly there are many instances of both education departments and SGBs getting things

wrong simply because of the difficulty of interpreting what law and policy mean in relation to school governance. A prime example of this was the continued presence of variations in the recent nation-wide elections of new SGBs, despite the existence of a national level task team and equivalent structures in each of the provinces.

However, despite this complexity, there are a number of fundamental principles which underpin the model which are not complex and which, if understood and followed by all parties, provide a workable framework within which to operate. These include – but are not limited to – the following:

However, despite this complexity, there are a number of fundamental principles which underpin the model which are not complex and which, if understood and followed by all parties, provide a workable framework within which to operate.

1. Each public school is a juristic person and is therefore able to exercise a number of important functions. Public schools are not merely extensions of the state.
2. These functions are exercised on behalf of the school by the SGB on a basis of trust i.e. within a fiduciary relationship.
3. Most of these powers and functions are original [i.e. they are given to schools in SASA] and are not merely delegated. They cannot therefore be removed by political office bearers and officials on a whim. Even the recent Constitutional Court decision in the Ermelo High School matter makes it clear that there are only restricted circumstances under which the Head of Education may for a limited time only suspend the power of an SGB to determine the language policy of a school.
4. Although governors are elected on a constituency basis [e.g. parents elect parents, teachers elect teachers] once they are elected they are all equal governors of the school. Their responsibility is to govern the school within the framework provided and not to represent the sectoral interests of the group from which they are drawn. This applies equally to pupil members when they are members of the SGB. These pupils cannot be made to withdraw because of the nature of the items under discussion and, if they are 18 and older, they forfeit the liability protection given to minors in section 32 of SASA.
5. It is essential for the healthy and effective functioning of a school to understand and to respect the separation of school governance from the professional management of the same school. While SASA attempts to define these two related but different activities, in real life the distinction is not easy to manage. Apart from the usual contestations that take place between different functions in the same institution, the position is complicated by the fact that the person responsible for the professional management of the school – the Principal – is also ex officio a member of the SGB. In addition, in order for certain activities to be effectively carried out, the SGB and the Principal have to act in tandem. An obvious case in point is the responsibility of the SGB for putting a pupil code of conduct into place, within which framework the Principal and the professional staff of the school manage the day to day discipline of the school. This does not make the SGB responsible for discipline in the school.

No examination of public school governance in South Africa – no matter how limited – would be even adequate without a brief comment on the distinction between what have become known as section 20 and section 21 schools. These descriptors refer merely to the sections in SASA which describe the various functions exercised

by SGBs on behalf of the public schools at which they have been elected. In effect, all public schools are section 20 schools and all SGBs exercise the functions contained in this section of SASA. However, section 21 contains certain additional functions which can be allocated to the SGBs of schools that are seen as having the capacity to perform them. Contrary to popular belief, most of these additional functions are actually additional financial responsibilities and do not add significantly to the powers of SGBs. The really meaningful powers at the disposal of SGBs are available to the SGBs of all public schools and not only schools with a certain history or schools that fell under a particular administration before 1994. In fact, three really significant powers – those which enable SGBs to determine the admission policy and the language policy of a school as well as implement compulsory school fees – are not given to schools in either section 20 or section 21 but elsewhere in SASA.

As the governance system set out in SASA in 1996 has settled down, two major aspects have emerged as real challenges to many public schools. The remainder of this article is devoted to a short examination of these two challenges. These are:

1. funding
2. teaching staff

Funding

SASA imposes a clear responsibility on SGBs to take all reasonable measures within its means to supplement the resources supplied by the State in order to improve the quality of education provided by the school to all learners at the school. It is therefore important to have a clear picture of what these resources provided by the State are.

Once the basic physical infrastructure of a school is established, the state's funding of public schools consists of:

- the provision of state paid teaching posts according to a model based essentially on the number of pupils, school phases and curriculum choices. Provision exists for the application of some considerations of equity through a process of top slicing of the total number of posts available and the allocation of additional posts to schools in need. This consideration aside, by and large schools of the same type with similar pupil

numbers and similar curriculum choices receive the same staff allocations.

- The allocation of an equity driven per pupil subsidy to each public school. Schools are divided into 5 equal groups [National Quintiles] based on financial considerations and pupils in schools serving the poorest of communities have to receive an annual subsidy 6 times that paid to pupils in schools serving the better off communities. These allocations as determined by the Minister of Basic Education for the next three years are set out in the table below.

Target table of per capita subsidies for next three years			
	2010	2011	2012
NQ 1	855	901	943
NQ 2	784	826	865
NQ 3	641	675	707
NQ 4	428	451	472
NQ 5	147	155	162
Overall	571	602	630

Given that teaching staff are provided on an equitable basis and can therefore be removed from the equation when comparing schools, in real terms there are many schools that receive through the per pupil subsidy less than 2% of their operational budget from the state e.g. a National Quintile 5 school with 1000 learners will receive R147 000 per year. A significant number of schools have an operational budget of in excess of R10 million per year as a result of the need to improve the quality of education it is possible to offer on the basis of State funding alone.

By and large, the possibilities of income generation available to schools seeking to meet the requirement that they must supplement State resources are as follows:

- School fees.
- Voluntary contributions such as donations and bequests.
- Maximising the core business of the school through using school buildings and resources, offering after care services, running private Grade R or pre-primary facilities, etc.
- Actual business ventures.

Of these four sources available to schools, school fees remain both the most important and the most problematic. They are the most important as school fees still constitute the greater part of a school's income provided schools go about their business properly and enforce the highest possible rate of payment. They are the most problematic because although the State leaves it to communities to decide upon the size of the school fee, the same State decides on and enforces the fee exemption policy across the country.

Currently there is no compensation to schools for state set and legally enforceable school fee exemptions although there has been talk about including such a provision in a review of the existing school funding model.

A simple comparison of aspects of school funding produces an interesting result in that if the proposed per pupil subsidy for 2010 is used for the approximately 12.5 million pupils in the system, the total comes to slightly more than R7 billion. Conservative estimates of school fee payments by parents in the 40% of schools still allowed to determine and collect fees put this source of income at approximately R10 billion.

Although there has been much talk of the scrapping of school fees and then the capping of school fees, the State is very conscious of the fact that as long as these considerable amounts continue to flow into public schools, significant numbers of indigent pupils benefit from them. It is likely, however, that the acceptance of school budgets and the setting of school fees will be subjected to more stringent requirements at some future date.

Teaching Staff

SGBs are painfully aware that much of modern research into school quality indicates that the quality of the outcomes of a school [or a school system] cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. There are two particular challenges to SGBs concerning the staffing of schools. Firstly, there is the persistent shortage of quality teachers – a shortage which becomes chronic in certain subject areas. Secondly, there is the reality that in some communities, parents are simply not prepared to accept the teacher: pupil ratios and limited curriculum choice that would exist if schools were reliant only on state staffing allocations and are prepared to pay higher fees in order to supplement the school staffing.

In order to address this dual challenge, SGBs make full use of at least the following:

- Their right to advertise, interview and nominate the teachers of their choice. This has increasingly led to confrontation between SGBs and provincial education departments seeking to make appointments other than the number one nomination from the SGB.
- The provisions in SASA to employ additional teachers on behalf of the school.
- The fact that SASA allows them to top-up the salaries of state paid teachers in order to be able to compete in an increasingly cut throat market
- Bursary and learnership schemes in order to train teachers to be employed at the school once they are qualified.

An indication of the extent of the involvement of SGBs in this critical area of their responsibilities is to be seen in the following data on the employment of teachers by SGBs on behalf of schools in the various provinces:

PROVINCE	2004	2008
Eastern Cape	3017	4314
Free State	799	1427
Gauteng	5384	14604
KwaZulu-Natal	5367	6022
Limpopo	1451	2205
Mpumalanga	1217	1550
North West	1149	1518
Northern Cape	634	469
Western Cape	4331	4450
TOTAL	23 349	36 559

[Table from SAIRR South Africa Survey 2008/2009]

These figures are for full-time staff only and reveal that the number of these teachers in the employ of schools nationally is greater than the total number of state teachers in 5 of the individual 9 provinces. It is generally agreed that the impact of these additional teachers on the quality of outcomes of these schools and the system is very significant.

Within the confines of this article, it has not been possible to touch on the many other ways in which SGBs contribute to the delivery of meaningful quality education in South Africa. There are many other challenges and there are many other shortcomings. The capacity to govern schools effectively is neither the preserve of wealthy communities nor is it evenly distributed through the country. There are schools serving truly disadvantaged communities in which the level of SGB involvement is outstanding. There are SGBs in wealthy schools that make fundamental mistakes.

However, as pointed out in the latest Education for All: Country Report: 2009: South Africa:

In South Africa, SGB elections are the third largest public elections, with over five million parents having a right to cast a vote for their school governors and

In general, SGBs have become an indispensable part of the South African school environment and vital collaborators in the task of improving learning and teaching.¹

NOTE

¹ Department of Basic Education 2009



In Memoriam Richard Price 1957-2009

Originally the article on Public School Governance in South Africa was to have been jointly written by Richard Price and Clive Roos. Richard Price was killed in October.

It is volunteers like Richard Price who keep the state school system functioning, and whose contribution is often unacknowledged. Richard never joined the chorus of negativity about South African education; instead he put time, energy and expertise into improving things. He served as Gauteng chairman and also national trustee of the Governing Body Foundation. He put hours into training governing body members, and used his considerable financial expertise to ensure that schools were helped to manage their finances properly. He worked hard at bringing under-resourced schools into the Foundation, and building good relationships with the Department of Education.

Richard had three daughters at Parktown High School for Girls, and served on the governing body there for 9 years. As treasurer he controlled the finances meticulously, and ensured that the way the finances were run reflected the values of the school as well as meeting the highest standards of auditing. Families in need of exemptions were not just tolerated, they were welcomed. Families able to pay full fees were informed that it was their privilege to contribute 10% of their fees to cover exemptions and build the diversity of the school. When he died, Richard had just been elected chairman of the school governing body.

His contribution will be sorely missed at school, provincial and national level.

Gillian Godsell

The role of Community in Education: A practitioner's reflection



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A professional community organiser works with leaders within communities to promote social and economic changes. In this regard the organiser plays diverse roles that are intended to build the capacity of people to gain collective awareness and confidence to confront public issues that impact on their lives. The organiser encourages organisation and remedial actions by people. This enabling role involves acting as convener, combiner, mediator, adviser, catalyst and facilitator while engaging in flexible and continuous learning and exercise of judgment and commonsense. Conversations and participatory action research are used to enhance people's awareness and assertiveness as well as empower their direct social action to enhance their chances to access power, positions and resources.

This reflection is based on lessons gleaned from working with public schools in rural and urban contexts. It must be noted that a lot of experimenting in this work took place. Each situation presented its own challenges. The organiser had to trust and believe in people.

Community Responsibility

All communities value education for their children. Families either have power to take command and use it for the wellbeing of their children's education or outsiders exploit and dominate those who are powerless and leave them worse off. Education as one of the public goods, therefore, must not only be valued by the community and the people, but must be advanced and protected or preserved. This is the responsibility of all community role players, stakeholders as well as educational institutions.

A community that values education jealously claims ownership of the process as well as educational institutions. Buyani Primary, a school established in Finetown next to Grasmere, Johannesburg by families in an informal settlement without government help, became the hub of positive education initiatives. The community was prepared to invest their own time, hard-earned money and energy in its development. It became so viable in many respects that the Gauteng education administration mistakenly classified the school as a private school that was serving the interests of the well off.

Tladi Technical High School in Soweto had to be closed down despite all goodwill from the Sowetan newspaper and donors that provided money to refurbish the

rundown school. The parents of children at the school kept an unhealthy distance from the school. The result was the worst matriculation examination results in the country attended by ill discipline among learners and educators and their respective organisations. Members of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) as well as those of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) displaced and marginalised all role players and stakeholders. The happenings in that school is the worst case of a school that was hijacked and used to serve the interests that were inimical to those of the community. The community did not assert itself with disastrous outcomes.

Community must help deepen and expand non-formal education through the agency of community institutions in a manner that complements public education.

Community must adopt proactive and reactive approaches in education.

A school that has strong constructive relations with the immediate community is most likely to flourish. The school in this regard is perceived as a public asset to be cherished and supported by all in the feeder community. A number of schools that have previously served the country well are best placed to be sustained against the odds. Historical schools such as Inkamani, Morris Isaacson, Sekano-Ntoane High and Naledi High continue to receive special attention from their past and present role players and stakeholders, their community. The historical success of the schools is constantly motivating and spurring stakeholders and role players to associate themselves with the schools in the interest of education. Organising support for, and involvement in, the affairs of such schools was always enthusiastically embraced.

Communities, like business and the state, are consumers and users of education services, products and facilities. Communities must demand and expect quality goods and services. Taxpayers must expect and demand more from government and public servants. Learners, families, public servants and barons of business must all be held accountable for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of goods and services. In general, the public education that is

offered to marginalised and disadvantaged sectors of society, fails the accountability and quality service test. It is no surprise that black parents are withdrawing from township schools and enrolling their kids in historically white schools in search of perceived quality education.

Education as a tool for social development

Education is at the heart of reconciliation, reconstruction and nation building programmes. Is education not a tool to enhance the realisation of people's full potential? If this were the case, the act of plunging into education is an empowering process. It is an act of enhancing the capacity and ability of people to act in a manner that directly and indirectly benefits them, their environment and the rest of creation. This suggests a personal and national responsibility to seriously take part in the education enterprise.

Communities or people have to take part in defining and shaping their education. Government leaders take it for granted that they are education providers and that it is their responsibility to determine content. The apartheid government prescribed an education that was intended to serve their pathological or ideological objectives. In Tanzania the late President Julius Nyerere advocated for 'education for liberation'. Business is requiring appropriate knowledge, aptitude and skills. Community or civil society should advocate and lobby for life-long education that conserves or promotes basic human values for a rapidly changing social and economic environment and concomitant challenges.

Promotion and protecting basic human values is a political civic act that should involve all sectors of society. Civic education raises awareness and commitment among citizens about their public rights, responsibilities and obligations. The positive outcomes of such education within community cannot be overemphasised. Formal and non-formal forms of education must make their contribution felt and enjoy a pride of place in this vital area of life. Community must help deepen and expand non-formal education through the agency of community institutions in a manner that complements public education. Community must adopt proactive and reactive approaches in education.

Educational governance

Statutory communication or governance structures in education are generally ineffective and dysfunctional. This is the case especially within historically

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Extensive research has shown that there is a strong link between community involvement in schools and better school attendance, as well as the improved academic achievement of students.²

Warren, Hong, Ruben and Uy³ examined the collaboration between schools and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) to engage previously marginalised or alienated families in schools. They studied public schools, (including community and charter schools) in Chicago, Los Angeles and Newark, and found that schools benefitted from the social capital expertise of CBOs.

Warren et al found that educators and CBOs working together were able to create partnerships which supported both school change and community development. Their research revealed that “collaborative power is critical to creating the civic capacity to build and sustain school reform”. (p 2213). The relationship between school and community they asserted, was reciprocal – the community cares for the school and the school revitalises the community. As a result neighbourhood schools become potential sites for building social capital, which benefits neighbourhood as well as school, and strong communities in turn can produce a change in the culture of schooling.

The study found that collaboration and parent engagement lead to improved student performance and marks. This fits with strong evidence emerging from the literature which indicates that school results improve in low achieving inner city schools when educators, parents, education officials and particularly school principals all work together as a team, to improve education.

marginalised and powerless communities. School governing bodies are often utilised to achieve external objectives and in some instances they are politically manipulated. The vulnerable are made powerless while powerful political interests are empowered to gain inequitable advantage over primary stakeholders, namely, learners, educators and parents. Isolated governing or parent bodies are too weak to stand their ground against established community groups and the activists that lead them.

Community can play a role in conscientising its members about their critical role and place in society. Social analysis based on observation of trends and practices can enhance the appreciation of education in society. There is room to learn from observation, doing and reflecting on our actions. People may have to develop the ability to question the state of affairs as well as the conditions that confront them. Facilitators or ‘combiners’ within communities must develop a need to learn as much about their own supposed abilities as all others in their group or community. We have a role in promoting the desire to learn from one another. The educator must cultivate the desire to learn as they educate their own charges.

Broad based community organising

The antidote is to build people’s power through engaging local leaders and residents in broad-based community organising. Broad-based community organising is based on pooling the resources and strengths as well as skills and knowledge of local institutions and leaders. This is what community leaders should consider in order to bring about a shift in power relations within education. This will enable them to express their concerns with one voice. Organised communities are best placed to propose alternative plans and policies for consideration by both business and the state. Organised people’s power makes it possible to hold stakeholders and role players accountable for the provision of quality and appropriate education. Organised people’s power will promote access to existing educational projects and institutions. The capacity of people to receive equitable share of resources and facilities and other services is enhanced where community leaders cooperatively and collectively take responsibility for developments in their community and education.

The public must promote, protect and preserve education facilities. It is a fact that in the past all public

facilities were often torched as an act of defiance against the apartheid administration. An organised people that have a stake in public amenities as taxpayers and ratepayers have a duty of care. They protect that which belongs to and serves the community. In many instances community members have maintained facilities at no cost to the state. Gaps and shortages have been addressed by members' giving of their own money, time and energy.

In addition to demanding quality education, facilities and opportunities from government or the private sector providers of education service, community members may engage in various self help initiatives and projects. Nongovernmental and community-based projects have offered viable alternatives to poor state-provided education. In some cases home-based education for families with means has provided answers to some expressed need for alternatives. These parallel projects demonstrate alternatives within a democratic society. It is true that demonstration projects that provide different or new ways and means are necessary where the state is discriminating against sections of its people.

Viable and tested alternatives do need to be institutionalised and adopted by society. Community could campaign for this involving both business and the state. Powerful social movements are needed to raise concerns about quality and access. Sustained public talk and campaign actions are part of social responsibility. In living memory, the people's movement against racist-inspired bantu education should provide instructive lessons. Students and community protests about the hated system of education did help to bring about change in priorities and programmes.

Taking personal responsibility for one's education is taken as self evident. It expected that people will do all that is required to ensure that they take part in education. This for many reasons does not always happen. There are people who have missed out. It is the duty of society to help them gain some useful education. This might not necessarily be education

that is based in the letters and numbers. Society may have to educate those who have no keen interest in this type of learning. I propose to consider the promotion of a movement to make our people engage in a kind of 'action learning' or learning to do things from people who are directly involved in making things. This movement could include mentoring and mentorship programmes.

I have attempted to describe various kinds of interactions and actions that should be implemented by community in the interest of education. We have to accept that all that we need to achieve in education is derived from learning from experience. Our role in education can become clear through our direct engagement. We can gain a lot of what is possible through acting together to give our collective inputs to our education system. We have goods, materials, information, skills and concerns to contribute. We have to do all that is possible to ensure that something is done. As individuals we can play limited, but critical roles. Working in a purposeful and organised manner with all stakeholders, a community is able to enhance quality and access to education.

Further, it is important for the community to raise its concerns regarding the quality of service and products in education. The community needs to make sure that its interests as customers, consumers, clients and voters are not compromised. It is people that make organisations and systems. Community has a responsibility to ensure that education is reformed or transformed in order to meet emerging societal change. In addition communities must ensure that education is aligned or challenges beliefs about people and the values of society. Communities have a right and an obligation to expect from government, effective and efficient provision and administration of education. For our inputs we expect good outputs and outcomes. The communities' role is to act as a watchdog and ensure that education serves people, industrial organisations, and the planet. People engage in its development, and education develops them as they involve themselves.

NOTES - SCHOOLS & COMMUNITIES

¹ Related Research compiled by the Helen Suzman Foundation

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³ Warren, M., Hong, S., Ruben, C.L., and Uy, P.S. (2009) Beyond the Bake sale: A Community-Based Relational approach to Parent Engagement in Schools. *Teachers College Record* 3(9) September 2009, pp 2209-2254



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Bullying: The Monster in the Dark

Cloaked in the shadows, violence is all we see but what of the real enemy, what of the cause of this travesty?

South Africa, obsessed with violence, has become consumed with false hope. We think we can make violence go away with policies and procedures but we are failing as the problem still persists. Our obsession is understandable, given the soaring crime rate and the increasing number of violent activities dominating the news headlines. By focusing on the issue of violence alone, we are missing the mark. We experience the effects of violence, become blinded by it and focus all our efforts on these effects. By doing that, all we are really doing is shooting the beast in the foot. We are ignoring the fundamental issue which is the cause of that violence. What steers individuals to become violent? This is difficult to uncover in an uncontrolled environment like society at large. At school level which is more structured and disciplined and thus perhaps easier to monitor more effectively, we can isolate instances of violence, and in many instances attribute it to an underlying root problem, ever present but not given its due attention; this is the problem of bullying.

School violence is an expression of physical or non-physical force against any school member or even damage to school property (vandalism). Bullying is a targeted, more subtle form of school violence. It often occurs outside the eyes of authorities and so it is difficult to attend to. Bullying can manifest itself in various physical and non-physical forms where the physical is typically more prominent amongst males and the non-physical amongst females¹. The physical can range from the obvious kicking, pushing, shoving, hitting and can be quite violent. There can also be less violent physical bullying such as bumping an individual or touching them inappropriately which can also leave an individual feeling just as violated. Non-physical violence can take the form of emotional/psychological or verbal victimisation, which is more subtle than anything physical, and may be even more damaging. Examples include, teasing, name-calling, abusive comments, spreading rumours, discrimination, threatening and embarrassing gestures or exclusion from activities.

For the victim, the consequences of bullying can be long-lasting and severe. Often these are linked to serious psychological trauma, from low self-esteem and depression to the inability to concentrate at school due to the stress of worrying about one's next 'assault'. The most worrying consequence of bullying is the perpetuation of the bullying cycle². The relationship between violence and bullying is circular. Aspects of bullying may cause violence where for example, bullying may progress from a non-physical level to a physical assault, either by the bully in due course or by the victim in retaliation against the bully's bullying. Bullying can also be a precursor to violent behaviour or vice versa. Violence in society at large could be a factor contributing towards why individuals bully; or, on the other hand, bullying could lead to the bully becoming a violent criminal and contribute towards general social violence.

Research has shown that children who are bullies, are often themselves victims of some form of harassment or victimisation, often being physically, emotionally or sexually abused at home by a parent or an authoritative figure inside or outside the school³. These children frequently act out against this form of victimisation in an attempt to regain a sense of power by victimising weaker children just like they (as the weaker party) are being victimised⁴. This suggests that when bullying occurs, the victim of the bully should not be the only one offered assistance; the bullies themselves need counselling and this should be taken into consideration when formulating policies in handling school bullying.

An uncertain terrain

The South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 provides for the prohibition of violent activities in schools. It does not say how these activities should be prohibited, nor does it prohibit equally harmful activities such as emotional bullying⁵. Of course, we cannot always expect policies to solve all our problems; no one other than ourselves can protect us from ourselves. Professor Kader Asmal, Minister of Education from 1999 to 2004, acknowledged that the installation of metal detectors and security guards was not the ultimate solution to the problems of violence⁶. Indeed, often, perpetrators of bullying do not need harmful objects/tools to harm their victims. They sometimes succeed through their actions and choice of words they use to degrade their victims.

... how can we expected to solve the problem of violence if we don't see bullying (intrinsically linked to violence) as a problem.

Now, this is not a policy issue, it would be too ambitious for us to expect our policies to protect learners from one another. Ultimately, we want to breed a nation of responsible young people who can stand-up for themselves. But again, the mere fact that bullying is not acknowledged at governmental level is problematic.

What worsens the problem is that some learners don't seem to view bullying as an issue, denying that it is a problem or thinking that the victim somehow deserved being bullied⁷. Thus, how can we be expected to

solve the problem of violence if we don't see bullying (intrinsically linked to violence) as a problem, or if we don't understand what bullying is, because if one understands bullying, they would see it as wrong and never blame it on the victim? Not even teachers seem to understand this. Anderson⁸ conducted qualitative research on the impact of bullying on adolescents where through classroom observations, she noticed that bullying, especially the more subtle (non-physical) form, often happen in front of the teachers, and in most instances is never attended to. Anderson deduced that teachers are not adequately equipped to identify and intervene when such problems happen in the classroom⁹. These emotional types of bullying have no evident procedures informing educators how to proceed in such circumstances.

While policy doesn't extend to cover bullying, government has introduced the Signposts for Safe Schools initiative, which is a substantial document developed to guide schools in terms of the type of policies and interventions they should implement in their schools. It provides detailed and clear directions on how to identify bullying. Ways of appropriately addressing the issue are suggested. This could be via the observation of a suspected victim's actions during break, offering them solutions to resolve the problem, and speaking to the learner in private to avoid further intimidation by the bullies¹⁰. The document also suggests that since educators are often unaware of when bullying occurs, the school could "Appoint monitors to watch for bullying during the times that it is said to take place. Train the monitors in what to look out for and to whom to report it. Make learners aware that stopping bullying is everyone's job – even if you are not a bully or a victim"¹¹. These are good, viable suggestions but they do not seem to have been implemented effectively and so the problem persists. Having noted that, we need to also take into consideration that policies do not always mandate practice, it's ultimately up to individuals to make policy work. We cannot always blame our problems on government; we are the ones who need to take matters into our own hands.

Victims of bullies need to be empowered to stand up for themselves but even more powerful would be the implementation of a clear zero-tolerance bullying initiative adopted by learners in our schools. This could also be supported by the implementation of a formal pledge against bullying being signed by learners explicitly declaring 'No to bullying', as well as

to report bullying if they are witness to it. This is a first step towards ensuring that violence in schools, even at the level of bullying, is not normalised.

Changing attitudes

We need to conscientise our learners about bullying. Nourishing such an attitude could also require incorporating anti-bullying more strongly into school ethos in such a way that from as early as foundation phase, learners are taught about all the forms of bullying and are encouraged not to participate in such behaviour. They should be aware that if they feel that they are being victimised in any way or if they see another being victimised, this is not normal or acceptable, and there is someone they can approach to discuss the matter. Above all, victims and witnesses to bullying need assurance that they won't be victimised for exposing bullies. The success of all these initiatives also rests on the shoulders of teachers who should be trained to spot a troubled child and prepared so they can assist that child. School counsellors and psychologists would also be useful but since they are not the ones in the classroom, the teacher needs training to at least identify a distressed child. Teachers can steer their learner to help by being the active link between the psychologist and the learner, if not by being able to assist learners directly themselves.

In addition, no government policies or manuals seem to cover support for the bully. If this is not looked at, one is merely placing a sticky plaster over the problem. The cause of the problem remains, and if the cause is not being addressed, how can we ever hope to stop the cycle of bullying? Once an individual has been identified, suspected or accused of bullying,

punishment should not always be the immediate consequence. Punishment does not address the root of the problem, and does not reduce the potential of future bullying and consequent future victims of that bully's bullying. The cycle of bullying will continue unless the cause of that bully's bullying is addressed. Bullies may need counselling in order to gauge why it is they behave in the manner they do when they target their victim(s). Once they understand why they are doing that, they must be taught other methods to assert their voice, aside from bullying. If they, themselves, are being victimised in some way or the other, then they could be taught ways to stand up for themselves. They could also be offered stronger interventions in the form of an authoritative figure stepping in on behalf of the learner, speaking to their parents and/or the bully's bully (who may or may not be the parent) and suggesting counselling for the family or the bully and his bully. If this is not possible, some active measures need to be taken so that they too can be safe.

Violence and bullying undermine our hard earned democratic rights of safety and education. Our call for focus to be given to bullying is not only driven by the intrinsic correlation between violence and bullying, but by the fact that even if bullying does not lead to violence, it does undermine ones educational processes and ones sense of worth and safety. This paper shows that we too easily ignore bullying and we ignore the bully, we ignore the cause of bullying. If we can deal with it at root level, when children are young and impressionable, shaped by the environment around them, perhaps we can get to the beast at its heart and put in place an even stronger influence to combat future violent tendencies.

NOTES

- ¹ Department of Education (2003).
- ² Bully online (undated).
- ³ Holt, Finkelhor, & Kaufman Kantor (2007).
- ⁴ Montrose Primary School (undated).
- ⁵ "No person may cause any form of violence or disturbance which can negatively impact on any public school activity" (SASA 84).
- ⁶ Department of Education (2003).
- ⁷ Jkogarner (undated).
- ⁸ (2007)
- ⁹ Anderson (2007).
- ¹⁰ Department of Education (2003).
- ¹¹ Department of Education (2003:10).

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Creating networks of productivity and the third innovation space in education



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My contribution has been influenced by previous research on complexities of organisations¹ where I examined change management within an educational setting. That research showed unequivocally that the transformation of education in South Africa was a complex exercise. But more importantly it showed that unless the public service, especially the education sector, could embrace networks of productivity, many education departments will continue to be overwhelmed by the challenges of transformation. Networks of productivity are networks that are driven by knowledge and expertise whose purpose is to advance certain solutions at a given point in time. They are fluid and they shift constantly, depending on the challenges and needs at stake. The members are drawn across fields and areas of expertise and they are not bound to limited group interests but have a broader desire to advance society. They are thus externally focused and think more in terms of societal transformation, advancement and sustainability.

Again one is influenced by thoughts borrowed from organisational life cycles and change, which inform us that organisations progress in their development through different stages. For instance, in the birth stage they require creativity as they are driven by extensive growth. However, as they mature they tend to replace creativity with maintenance and stability. Depending on how they are led and managed from that point on, they could either inject new forms of creativity or they could easily die. While very few bureaucracies die, they do tend to take a different shape and form post-maturity, often becoming spaces of power struggles that make them toxic spaces to work in. In the process they become synonymous with poor productivity, inertia and poor performance. Strong leadership is required to continuously reignite new patterns of learning and growth that will see more being done effectively and efficiently. Here I will examine briefly the lessons learnt in the past fifteen years. My reflections are dominated by my previous work at the Graduate School of Public and Development Management (P&DM) and are thus biased towards public sector reforms in general rather than any specificity in education. Equally I want to explore possibilities for a new wave of transformation and change.

Reflecting on the past

The education context, like its public sector counterparts, has seen waves of reform that can be categorised into three significant eras. The first is the 1994-1997 period of negotiated settlement which emphasised the broader values of access, equity and redress. This era had a connecting theme of reconciliation and thus emphasised inclusivity and democratisation of work places. This in turn saw the public office embrace both racial and gender diversity. Encompassing this was the emergence of new paradigms and new ways of doing things, and as such, the context allowed the entrepreneurial spirit to emerge and visionaries dominated the intellectual spaces with their grand ideas that swung between idealism and anticipated reality. In this process, many policies came to life through robust debates that saw new ideas coexist with defended interests. At that point there was little concern about the likely consequences and challenges that could emerge as a result of newly adopted ideas. The energy was to create, craft and shape.

Undoubtedly, this has had advantages for South Africa's modernisation process as it could easily access the best technologies and the best ideas in the shortest time possible. What could have taken decades to shape was now fast-tracked by the dotcom revolution, and the resulting internationally and locally mobile intellectual capacity.

Of course such changes happened in the context of globalisation was also gaining momentum. While it was difficult to determine what it might entail, it was nonetheless a force to reckon with. The point is that as South Africa was defining its new democratic chapter, the rest of the world was shifting its definitions of world politics, co-operation and parameters. Accompanied by the explosion of information technology, the world of knowledge and access to information debates and discussions was reduced to the click of a button. Undoubtedly, this has had advantages for South Africa's modernisation process as it could easily access the best technologies and the best ideas in the shortest time possible. What could have taken

decades to shape was now fast-tracked by the dotcom revolution, and the resulting internationally and locally mobile intellectual capacity. Of course, the early 1990s passed as quickly as they had ushered us into a new world of democratisation.

The second phase which emerged in the late 1990s had a different emphasis, namely implementation. Coincidentally, the pressures for implementation came with the changes in the political office. Pretoria as the centre of administrative power was to usher in a new era where visionaries were to give space to technocrats. The implementation process required new sets of skills and competencies. Equally, the global debates on public sector reform were bound to the 3 Es – building efficient, effective and economical states. The subsequent years thus became more challenging than the earlier dream years, as design became more complex. The South African state at this stage was influenced by various philosophies but one can argue that the design template favoured technical rationality and efficiency.

Unlike the earlier transformation that focused on reconciliation and integration, the economy became the centre of reform. Without dwelling on the nature and shape of such reforms, as these are well-known, what is noticeable about this period is that the technical efficiency approach dominated the planning and implementation in many organisations. It became almost uncontested that the understanding and knowledge of financial disciplines was central to the management of organisational productivity and performance. While this saw the rise of accountants as the new centres of power in organisations, the broader senior management remained largely in the hands of politicized bureaucrats whose interests were diverse and not necessarily entrenched in the efficiency paradigms. Within such organisational contestations, management became a subject of internal struggles between multi-interests that were both dispersed within and external to the organisation.

In spite of such internal struggles, all public organisations, including education, were expected to manage in compliance with the Public Management Financial Management Act (PMFA) (1999) and the Auditor General regulations stipulated in the same Act. Fundamentally the PMFA called for financial control and accountability. While this improved reporting, it is questionable if it made any qualitative improvements in the way organisations performed in terms of service

delivery. What did become clear, however, was that it introduced a new obsession with 'clean audits'. Clean audits as such were now the new indicator for managerial competency and success, even though such audits indicated little about how organisations were led or their management culture. But more importantly, this financial approach, one argues, was highly influential around who would be employed and where, especially at the executive levels. The emerging pattern was that managerial competence took precedence over sectoral expertise and knowledge. This was to be a huge shock to known employment traditions as managerial experience then determined professional opportunities and mobility.

Furthermore, the drive for modernisation showed that public entities were at various and diverse stages of development; and while some could fit well into the dot.com age, others needed basic infrastructure to support the daily administration of rural schools.

Education was no exception, and was challenged to conform to the broad public sector reforms of financial accountability and performance management. Such conformity had to work in conjunction with sectoral expectations of advancing the educational goals. For some education departments to manage such a dichotomy became a call for confusion, as officials had to learn quickly to respond to multi-faceted constituencies of power, authority and needs. As a result the translation of the 3Es became even more complex for some systems due to the extended rural challenges that were characterised by poverty and lack of human and financial resources.

Overall, the era brought high levels of modernisation of state institutions, especially in relation to new managerial and financial technologies. But with scrutiny it became clear that South African organisations were more complex than had previously been realised and such complexities varied with the context. The more rural the environment, the less likely it was to respond to generic managerial and financial principles. Furthermore, the drive for modernisation showed that public entities were at various and diverse stages of

development; and while some could fit well into the dot.com age, others needed basic infrastructure to support the daily administration of rural schools.

The third phase, following the 2007 Polokwane conference, is still a new phase. It comes at a very challenging period globally due to the economic crisis, where the prosperity of the past decades has been replaced with a global recession and financial downturns. The collapse of the global economy has put a strain on all state administration worldwide. Expenditure has been drastically curtailed, and the focus has been on financial bailouts to help stimulate economic growth. Despite such a gloomy picture, the positive message in South Africa is that the new government has committed to improve the social sector, of which education is identified as one of the priorities.

Theoretically, the new government has adopted the notion of a developmental state. While the broad picture of what this means in reality is still being crafted the observations are that there will be very little to change administratively, as there is still a call for technical, financial and managerial solutions to service delivery problems. The question is: what is the alternative, if any? While answers are not easy to come by, it may be helpful to focus on two areas, namely (a) the creation of networks of productivity and collaborative practices mentioned earlier; and (b) the development of a creative and innovative third space for better transformation and change.

Creating networks of productivity and collaborative practices

One of the limiting factors in educational transformation to date is the way human capital is arranged in many organisations. For reasons embedded in our historical change, human capital tends to behave in various fragmented ways in South Africa. Fundamentally, the politics of change are well understood, but working in relational and productive ways is still a point in the transition that presents challenges, and resembles a puzzle to be solved. As a result, leadership in public and private entities tends to focus on technology, new managerial practices and resources as answers to service delivery and performance. These elements undoubtedly also add value, but unless we begin to explore the nature of human capital in our organisations there is very little that technology and resources will do. The point is that organisations function beyond technical rationality. They are a product of various

political, social and cultural networks of relations that exist and which are defined by various interests and ideologies that reside internal and external to the organisation.

For instance, it is important that people in organisations begin to function outside their limited and possibly saturated familiar network zones which endorse known cultural, social, political and economic patterns.

Besides, the peculiar nature of South Africa's transition has seen new organisational designs that are fundamentally informed by bonded political, ethnic, racial and genderised networks that tend to be survivalist, exclusive and interest-oriented. Such interests tend to be individualistic and turf-based with very little focus on the organisation itself. There are, of course, many reasons that can account for this, including management and political discourses that have championed the value of the individual beyond the big picture. Interestingly, such values seem detrimental in spaces of rapid change and transitions, as they tend to gravitate into pockets of self-interest and survival. In turn they become counterproductive to the change discourses that count on the energy of extended coalitions of co-operation and collaboration. To create a different culture and approach to productivity and performance, it is important therefore to examine these counter-productive tendencies that are short-sighted and survivalist in nature and explore seeds of growth that will enhance a new paradigm shift. For instance, it is important that people in organisations begin to function outside their limited and possibly saturated familiar network zones which endorse known cultural, social, political and economic patterns.

Of course, productive networks of practice will require open networked organisations that are able to trust the unknown and the unfamiliar. They require what Putnam (2007) calls the 'bridging' social capital which is the ability to link beyond the known groups. Bonded networks today identify the characteristic of many organisations. While so, Antcliff, Saundry and Stuart (2007) argue that while bonding capital is good for getting by, it is the bridging capital that

is necessary for getting ahead. The question is: To what extent is the education sector, its schools and its bureaucracies ready to extend their bridging capital to enhance the quality of work they do? The key issue here is that global changes necessitate new ways of thinking and bonded capital will contribute very little to South Africa's development. It is likely that the bridging of capital based on extended networks of knowledge and expertise may add more value to change. This is not new, and has been seen in the NEPI era and in the early vibrant educational policy think tanks that were a phenomenon of the early 1990s. To revive these productive spaces calls for new paradigms in education that will use the lessons of the past to create new knowledge that will promote genuine transformation.

The development of an innovative third space

The experiences of the past decade show that the state and the private sector have played a significant role in shaping the agenda for development in South Africa even though there were different areas of emphasis. For instance, the state played a lead role in designing new policies, rules and regulations. Equally the private sector and its conglomerate of industries saw the development of new business initiatives and sectors like the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. The new democracy as such provided opportunities for growth and creativity across sectors. Since the mid 2000s, there has been a stronger focus on improving efficiency, on stabilisation and maintenance than on creativity.

While maintenance has played an important role, the nature of challenges that are presently experienced in education require constant creativity. Education to date still struggles to improve the quality of instruction in the classroom, let alone creating access for many marginalized communities. If education has to see any significant change, it is important that new players come to the fore not to join the two sectors but to create a new and third space of engagement and development. This is a space for new visions and innovations to educational challenges. It is a space for creative solutions, which will advance new ways of thinking and implementation of policies. Ideally, for this third space to find ground it has to be solutions-based and advance the development of society in various ways. Part of this may mean advancing entrepreneurial thinking in education at different levels. To date there is little evidence of this. Instead there

is a high reliance on the state to provide solutions, something that has proved to be beyond its current capacity. While one cannot dictate the shape of the third space, it is necessary that it is developed and nurtured as it has the capability to unleash new talent that may respond rapidly to both the local and global needs in education.

The point is that to date education has advanced way beyond the classroom and the curriculum, as we know it. Many children, especially in South Africa's modernised cities hardly depend on the teacher for new knowledge and information. Rather the world of information technology has advanced to another space of learning where information is now accessible with the click of the mouse. The new world of dot.coms, Google, Facebook and Twitter has broadened learning beyond the traditional spaces of the classroom. Interestingly these new ventures in technology are dominated by generation Y, which is the young people aged thirty and under. The question then is: to what extent is education leveraging on such platforms to extend coverage and access in education. Of course one knows that the technological advancements mentioned here signify a quality of life that remains but a dream in rural and farm schools and hence the third space needs to think creatively and make such dreams a reality.

For instance, it maybe useful to ask questions like these:

- (a) what is the nature of available technologies that can be adapted to advance learning in rural and farm schools?
- (b) what other modes of curriculum delivery are scalable and cost-effective, and can extend access and quality of learning in the context of limited resources and capacity?

- (c) what other forms of schools need to be created to advance other areas of educational development and progress in South Africa?

Again it is about thinking outside the box and looking for new ideas that challenge known and familiar patterns.

To date the complexity of the South African education system with its diverse and challenging topography requires innovation that will address its unique terrains. To rely on a centrally designed single model approach is limiting and runs counter to change and transformation.

To date progressive societies and industries have widened their doors to include other players. Civil society is becoming more active in finding solutions for different and complex challenges that are in place. For instance, currently in management and business studies social entrepreneurship has become the new value concept aimed to advance value-driven solutions to societal and business challenges. Without reducing this to corporate social investment (CSI) as it goes way beyond that, it is refreshing to see a global movement in business studies that advances a different set of values grounded in sustainability and inclusivity. As a result it is no surprise that health and education have become part of business interests.

The key is to develop breakthrough thinking and ideas that will propel new growth and transformation of society. South Africa has had similar traditions of breakthrough thinking especially pre-and post-1994 elections. In the context of the global need for fresh solutions it is an important time to reawaken such talent, if not for South Africa then for the wider world.

NOTES:

1 Ngoma, W (2007) Complexities of Organisational Change: The case of the Eastern Cape Department of Education. Unpublished PhD. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

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Education delivery in the poorest nodes



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South Africa enjoys a rare distinction of having gone through all the convulsions and outpouring of anger associated with regime change – without actually changing the ruling regime at all.

After the Polokwane conference of the ruling African National Congress (ANC) which unseated President Thabo Mbeki and was soon followed by his recall, politicians and commentators moved speedily to blame him and his government for closing down debate, defensive posturing, denialism in multiple areas, nurturing a cronyist black bourgeoisie at the expense of the poor, and other sins. Service delivery problems are still laid at his door, frequently without regard for the substantial successes achieved under his tenure. This phantasm of regime change, where ANC replaced ANC but acted as if it were new and different, created a need for distance between ‘what was’ – under Mbeki – and ‘what is’ in the present. Senior Ministers and other politicians – as well as senior civil servants – have had to talk about the past as if they were either unwilling prisoners or powerless spectators, bearing no responsibility for what occurred between 1999 and 2008.

Education has emerged as one of the hotter potatoes being juggled amongst commentators anxious to find fault with the past. According to the Treatment Action Campaign’s (TAC) Zackie Achmat, “the intellectual dispossession of African and coloured working-class children is far greater today than it was under apartheid”.¹ Businesswoman Wendy Luhabe and commentator Mamphela Ramphele both “caused a sharp intake of breath” at a public debate by claiming that Bantu Education was better than the education provided under democracy, and a spate of bloggers followed up to complain that ‘the kids of today’ are illiterate, ill-mannered, and ill-suited to the 21st century.² Andile Mngxitama raised the stakes by talking of “educational genocide against a whole generation”.³

The point of this brief piece is to consider the views of those who don’t normally get to dominate the headlines or have their views sought by breathless journalists, and yet should be central to this story – poor citizens, living in the poorest parts of the country, some in former homelands or other rural areas without significant local economic activity, others in sprawling townships providing labour pools to the South African economy. They are the people who most needed a decent system to replace Bantu Education. In many cases this had to start with building classrooms, with school feeding schemes to give the calorific intake needed to maintain concentration, and building an educational culture from ground zero. And they are the people who we should listen to in these debates.

But of course that is naive, given the perilously slippery surface of post-Polokwane politics. Trying to separate ‘what was’ from ‘what is’ has failed. The words of critics (and others) have taken on greater urgency during 2009 as violent community protests have spread across Gauteng and the Western Cape in particular, focusing on poor service delivery. Many commentators have (albeit tentatively) argued that

the Zuma Presidency has shown a real commitment to delivery and rooting out some of the most unappetising self-enrichment of the Mbeki years, but ordinary citizens seem to have had enough, and are increasingly resorting to protest action to express their feelings.

Poor families often contribute to the education of one child that shows academic promise, knowing that his (or, less often, her) future can lift the entire family out of poverty.

Coupled with the relative ease with which one segment of the ANC was able to unseat a President who had seemed so unassailable, for so long, and rapidly remove his coterie of advisors, deployees and henchmen, it is apparent that failure to deliver is not something that can easily be by-passed: it can lead to the abrupt end of political careers. And it can dramatically launch new careers. What matters, therefore, is to keep our eyes firmly focused on what really is happening on the ground, and avoid getting too caught up in the hysterical post-Mbeki scrummage whether regarding education or any other service provided by government.

A passport out of poverty

Education does deserve special attention. Providing sanitation, refuse removal and clean water are fundamental to human dignity and the right to a healthy life. Roads matter, so does telecommunication, electricity, and all the other key components of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). But education can be a passport out of poverty for individuals and whole families. Poor families often contribute to the education of one child that shows academic promise, knowing that his (or, less often, her) future can lift the entire family out of poverty.

Most obviously, this is true for children being born in the poorest parts of South Africa, many of which were dumping grounds for surplus people whose only function in the past was to migrate and sell their labour. Consider the bleakness of their options: unemployment is especially high and economic growth conspicuously absent in rural areas and informal settlements. For example, the rate of

unemployment in nodal points making up the Urban Renewal Programme (URP) stands at 62.6%, rising to a staggering 79.1% in the nodes of the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP)⁴.

A decent education for children is their passport to a (possibly) better life elsewhere. And when respondents were asked about the range of government services provided in the ISRDP and URP (in two surveys, a large baseline in 2006 and a smaller measurement survey in 2008) their voices sounded quite dramatically different from those commentators cited above. Let me say quite clearly that I am not an educationist, and am not seeking to make arguments about the relative merits of Outcomes Based Education (OBE); but it is striking that poor people living in South Africa rate their education so highly, while voluble critics are slamming it.

In Table 1 (right), we asked respondents to tell us about the quality of the various services they receive; and in the 2008 survey, we added an option (which runs down the right-hand column) of 'no service received'.

Simply running your eye down that right-hand column shows the extent to which the 'two nations' thesis can be spun quite differently from the simplistic white/black rubric given it by Mbeki, to rather differentiate between the rural and urban worlds within South Africa. Look at the top two rows: a fifth (19%) of respondents living in ISRDP nodes get their water from streams, rivers and other unsafe and irregular sources – i.e. they do not receive water to RDP standard – only true of 1% of those in URP nodes.⁵ In the next row, 22% do not have any electricity, dropping to 4% of URP respondents. And so on, across the range of services.

But look at the bottom rows. In all, 4% of ISRDP and 2% of URP respondents cannot access education where they live. This should be cause for concern for all policy-makers, given that these 22 nodes have been the focus of government attention since at least 2001, when the ISRDP was launched.

That said, look at the left-hand cells on the bottom row, and you see that half (or more) of respondents rate the education available in their nodes as 'good quality' – and in the case of respondents from URP nodes (remembering that most service delivery protest

Table 1: Service access and quality, ISRDP/URP baseline (2006) and measurement (2008) surveys

	% Good Quality		% OK		% Poor Quality		None
	2006	2008	2006	2008	2006	2008	2008 only
Water ISRDP	35	28	23	23	43	30	19
Water URP	65	55	25	34	10	10	1
Electricity ISRDP	42	33	24	28	34	17	22
Electricity URP	50	46	33	32	17	18	4
Water-borne sewerage ISRDP	9	10	12	9	79	14	68
Water-borne sewerage URP	41	42	35	28	24	15	15
Refuse removal ISRDP	11	10	12	10	77	15	65
Refuse removal URP	53	55	35	33	12	8	4
Affordable housing ISRDP	19	14	22	21	59	20	45
Affordable housing URP	28	34	42	42	30	20	5
Public transport ISRDP	24	23	33	33	44	34	10
Public transport URP	46	51	41	39	13	9	2
Roads ISRDP	21	18	24	25	56	52	5
Roads URP	37	45	38	32	25	22	1
Health care ISRDP	27	32	31	34	42	23	12
Health care URP	35	45	43	40	23	13	3
Security ISRDP	16	21	24	27	60	29	23
Security URP	28	38	36	36	36	18	8
Education ISRDP	54	51	32	34	15	12	4
Education URP	47	57	42	36	12	5	2

has been in urban areas) this rose by 10% between 2006 and 2008. At the lower end of the scale, in 2008 just 5% of urban respondents complained of poor quality education, rising to 12% among ISRDP respondents (down from 15% in 2006).

There are clearly some locale-specific challenges, not reflected in the table. Respondents from Galeshewe in the Northern Cape were especially strong in complaining of poor quality education, followed by those from Mdantsane, Inanda and Bohlabela. On the positive side were respondents from Zululand, Sekhukhune and Umkhanyakude.

These voices should be borne in mind. These respondents are meant to be the prime beneficiaries of post-apartheid policies: they live in some of the poorest places in South Africa, many suffering from chronic economic and psycho-social challenges⁶. Yet in the midst of the challenges facing them, they have singled out education as by some margin, government's most successfully delivered service.

Perhaps it would behove us all to spend more time listening to the poor rather than assuming to speak for them about matters that affect their lives so directly.

NOTES

¹ Quoted in the Sowetan 2/11/2009.

² Marianne Thamm at <http://www.women24.com/women24/pregnancyparenting/TalkingPoint/Article/0,,1-9-34-21463,00.html> [accessed 21/08/2009].

³ 'Unite in igniting opportunity from crisis' in City Press 22/08/2009

⁴ (Everatt et al, 2006)

⁵ It is worth noting that URP nodes are all formal townships – Alexandra, Mitchell's Plein, and so on – and do not include the massive informal settlements in urban areas, which would undoubtedly have given quite different scores for urban areas if included.

⁶ David Everatt, Matthew Smith, Khanya-AICDD: Building sustainable livelihoods (Department of Social Development, 2008).

A Narrative

My First-Generation Matric Journey



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Beginnings in Bophuthatswana

I made my first stab at schooling at the height of Mangope's reign of the Bophuthatswana homeland, in Losasaneng village, the mining district of Taung. At that time Losasaneng village possessed only two schools, namely, Retshegeditse primary and Batlanang junior secondary school. I was a lad of seven summers when I started school at Retshegeditse in 1985, a ripe old age to be at school at that time. The tentacles of Mangope's regime reached every facet of our lives and our schools were not immune to this. Schooling was compulsory in Bophuthatswana and curfews were set for students by the army that patrolled villages after six-o'clock. Loitering was a petty crime punishable by law. First thing you were taught at school was to swear allegiance to the supreme leader, king of kings and the lion of kings President Mangope, those just three titles from a laundry-list of the man's sonorous titles. Black and White with Khaki was de rigueur if not the order of the day in Bophuthatswana schools. So we wore this uniform and had to look prim and proper. With our school steeped in corporal punishment, teachers also groomed nails of ogres to clip our little thighs and lugholes. Winter and summer, we reported at assembly at seven and woe betide anyone who turned up late. Come rain, sunshine or cold snap you had to be on time.

Retshegeditse a four hundred metre square piece of land is located cheek by jowl with Batlanang Junior secondary along the chalky but only main road in the village running through Losasaneng from Vryburg to Kimberley. The rambling blue and white primary, boasted about ten cinderblock classes and four corrugated iron ones. I was in block A in grade one (C), in the class of Mrs. Moipolai. A soft-spoken teacher who brooked no frivolity, Mrs Moipolai drilled in us the three Rs. We battled to hear her sometimes as we were packed like sardines in this class. You could not move your elbow without jostling another kid. There was a serious shortage of facilities and resources, which led to double sessions or platoons, where facilities had to be used twice on the same day. At that period the Bophuthatswana Department of Education supplied minimal stationery and one textbook was meant to be shared by two students. Our parents forked out a school fee of a hundred rand and my maternal grandfather took care of my schooling needs as he did with my other two siblings in the absence of a feckless absentee father. Through my entire maternal family I had a semblance of normality and never went to school with an empty belly or without a lunchbox. At Retshegeditse I started

rubbing shoulders with elite kids who looked preppy, well-fed and more well-adjusted than some of us. Not that their parents could not purchase them a better education elsewhere but because they believed in this school's reputation and the headmaster, the avuncular Alexander Seoposengwe.

teachers can only open doors but students should be ready to enter them.

Under Sops' leadership, as our headmaster was fondly known, I became a prominent student excelling in lower grades. The donnish demeanor of the headmaster, sporting a receding hairline endeared him to everyone. He was universally admired in the school and regarded as a community builder in Losasaneng. Being one of the people who pioneered the idea of a community school in the area in the form of Retshegeditse, he would brag to us about how the community built this school from scratch and I was always tickled puce to hear him singing the praises of my uneducated maternal grandfather who also contributed enormously to the project by using his horse-drawn cart to bring construction material such as sand, soil and water. I remember as lower grade kids we were all aching to be taught by our headmaster but at that time his teaching was confined to the privileged standard three's and four's. We only saw him at assembly times at seven in the morning and on Wednesdays for handiwork. He was a witty raconteur who knew how to cajole you into studying. Many of his qualities rubbed off on his teachers and even our wonderful Mrs Moiplai, save, his vocal skills. We realised early on that our class teacher was a consummate warbler who could not teach us music, let alone hold a tune. We loved her for having groomed and nurtured us though, from grade one to standard two, even if most of us were vocally challenged by then.

When I went to my standard three, I was a half-baked product, ready for my head master's hands and other great schoolteachers. Having been used to the idea of sitting on a carpet in groups in lower grades one was now upgraded to desks, albeit not new ones. Ours were rickety and moth-eaten desks that could easily be broken by a baby's tush. Our desks were lined up in rows of six in a class that accommodated sixty or so of us. From standard three in Bophuthatswana,

schooling became a sober business. Instead of being spoon-fed information by a teacher we started learning how to do our schoolwork independently of teachers. Our impressionable minds were now taught the concept of self-reliance and self-sufficiency. Seed corns of forming logical and coherent thoughts were now planted. Our little brains were exercised and stretched as our class works passing mark now ranged from 50 to 100, with test reaching 200. Everything intensified and a convincing pass was expected from all. Being in the class of the headmaster I now figured that he was not just a bundle of jokes or barrel of laughs. He had a carrot and stick approach, rewarding good performance and punishing poor. You risked a month-long contusion if you did not do his work. Once I did not do his homework and incurred his wrath. He went thermo-nuclear and gave me an almighty hiding. Discipline was paramount to him. Sops and his staff drummed into us the idea that teachers can only open doors but students should be ready to enter them.

The lie of the land

Attending school in this mining district, lying 70 kilometer northwest of Kimberley was no cake walk though. To start with, we realised as immature kids that Bophuthatswana had a barmy pecking order system with Mafikeng at the tippy-top and villages like Losasaneng at very the bottom of the pile. The system permeated every sphere of life from education, health care and water service. You had to have a prominent figure in Mangope's government coming from your place or be in the good books of the wrinkled face leader to get social services and amenities. Losasaneng had no prayer in the former and latter, so was consigned to pariahdom. To the regime, it was a rogue mining village occupied by scoundrels loved only for the revenue they generated Bophuthatswana through the sweat of their brows in dangerous diamond mines that trapped many sometimes. The village had no electricity and potable water. Brackish and fluorine-filled water abounded. My cariogenic teeth can attest to this. We were lucky to have a horse-drawn cart we could use for collection of drinkable water in nearby places like Kameelpit. We woke up at sparrow's cough to put horses in harness so that we could fill gallons and barrels of water before we headed for school. Biomass was a great source of energy and for this we also relied on our horse drawn cart for collection of firewood in far-flung woodlands. Cowpat supplied by puny and emaciated cattle of this area also plugged a vacuum.

To a certain degree, Losasaneng was reaping the whirlwind of its defiance. A compact but populous village with 700 000 or thereabouts, this labour reserve took its temper from Kimberley in the Cape Province (now Northern Cape). The coarse and uncouth miners lived in Bophuthatswana but breathed the ether of central, which, inevitably, gave the place a central character and flavour about it. The place geographically and archeologically located in the Northern Cape was given to Mangope like other obnoxious places as a sop to his ego, our elders would tell us. One other urban legend is that these miners were becoming an excrescence on the mining landscape as they defiled the place with their new shantytown they built on it. For this reason they were decanted on Losasaneng, an amorphous piece of land they turned into something habitable. Some lived in mining compounds and came home on weekends while others commuted daily to the nearby mines. A big chunk of them cycled to and fro, on a daily basis in my salad days. Mining was the lifeblood if not mainstay of this area as the bulk of the population eked a living out of it. Two of my uncles were mineworkers and detested the idea of their nephews working mines as they reminded us that their two older brothers' lives had been claimed by the mines. Most of my peers at that time left school in their teen years to ply their trade at mines. Others older than us went to the army from standard six as you qualified to go for infantry training in that grade in Bophuthatswana. A military base within an 80km radius of our place, in Buxton, the lime area renown mostly for the child fossil discovered by Raymond Dart in 1942, constantly dangled a carrot at young turks and enticed them by the truckloads. As a lad in a hurry, showing some educational potential I was dying to join the army as soon as I reached standard six though I never had the right physique for it. You had to be fit and not be a bag of bones as I was.

Making the grade

Bophuthatswana had two taxing external certificates prior to matric, in standard four and seven, both marked at the Bophuthatswana Education Department centre in Mmabatho. I passed my standard three with top marks to go for my first external examination in standard four. Obtaining the standard four certificate required some level of industry. The bar was raised and one had to apply oneself properly. With my apathy for extra-mural activities I channeled all my energies into my schoolwork and became a diligent student. In standard four I worked hard and conscientiously.

Libraries and laboratories were only words that belonged to the dictionary

Considered matured and sentient beings, albeit, impressionable we were now placed in a corrugated iron class. I suppose we were believed to have a strong constitution to even put up with inclement weathers in this metal sheet. It was our last

year at Retshegeditse and we were now expected to carry the banner of the school and live up to its reputation in Zone Seven schools. In the class of Mr Mothibi, a diminutive figure with an amazing gift of the gab and mordant wit we slogged it. He had no truck with underachievers nor substandard performance. Devoid of resources even in this senior class we had to share every facility and use it sparingly. Libraries and laboratories were only words that belonged to the dictionary so we had to make do with what we had. The standard was generally seen as the first gauge of your academic gifts. If you made the grade here, you were considered promising and your progress monitored. I surpassed my expectation in this standard and passed with a good symbol.

Surviving secondary school

Moving to Batlanang Junior secondary school to be harshly initiated by overgrown bullies who preyed on all rookies was soul-destroying and morale-sapping. They devised hideous and obnoxious methods of ill-treating rookies like making you simulate a cyclist on toilet walls. In another instance, they would make you run errands for them without giving you a red cent to buy items. For this you had to use your pocket money or be subjected to their barbaric treatment if skint. These sadistic curs made me play truant a couple of times as I avoided them. But being a country boy and taught to have a broad back and rhino hide by my uncles, I could not tell my parents as I could have been ridiculed as a puny or pansy. I took it in my stride and soon it was a passing phase.

Batlanang was a different kettle of fish from Retshegeditse with the workload piling up. With punctuality being a rule in all Bophuthatswana schools even at Batlanang we had to report early at seven or endure the treatment of the headmaster and his staff. We had dozens of class works and monthly tests. The headmaster here instilled terror in everyone with his police background. A man of bulky frame and

reddish eyes, Mr Mabotho did not suffer little fools gladly. He derived a perverse kick out of inflicting pain in school kids and I never warmed to his theme like my previous headmaster. I avoided crossing his line but found myself at the receiving end of his harsh treatment a couple of times. With a fairly developed mind, in the class of the lazy Mrs Makukumare I became a presumptuous and pesky kid. Not that I was uncouth but because I could ask teachers many awkward questions. I now had crumpled newspapers and well-thumbed magazines supplied by my uncle in Kimberley, which fired my little mind to argue cogently with my educators. This trait enraged some petty-minded teachers but endeared me to many good teachers. They liked the fact that I challenged them and still did their bidding.

Our parents parted with two hundred rand for our school fee at Batlanang plus we bought extra material for ourselves as the school was also under-resourced. Our class was bursting at the seams, with ninety of us in it, but here luckily every student had a textbook. I also had material previously used by my big sister who did this standard before me. My performance now took a shape for the better and improved rapidly. Notwithstanding some challenges, I passed both standard five and six easily.

Gifted teachers

Being faced with another rigorous external certificate in standard 7, which was more challenging to say the least, I took it in my stride. External certificates were imperative in Bophuthatswana and treated with the greatest respect. They were a yardstick with which your educational potential was measured. In standard seven we took nine subjects that you had to pass with a good symbol to progress to a higher one. Like many senior standards in Bophuthatswana, our standard seven possessed the best of the bunch when it came to teachers. These were all teachers who could impart like Oracles - minus resources. Our History and Biology teachers, Mrs Gaohose and Mr Lethae, excelled in this area. But collectively, our educators were an embodiment of great teaching itself. They understood the concept of *in loco parentis* and played many parts in our lives. What we lacked

What we lacked here in resources we more than made up for in great teaching.

here in resources we more than made up for in great teaching. In standard seven my strengths crystallised and I showed a strong leaning towards humanities, with History being my pet subject. I also showed some facility for English with an amazing flair for it. The sobriety and gravity with which standard seven was viewed led to the idea of summer schools with various standard seven classes in the zone converging in our area. We had supremely gifted teachers in the entire Zone Seven who pitched in and helped us prepare for this certificate. The exercise was worthwhile, with methods and techniques of approaching the exam. It was a morale-booster and though many of us were still apprehensive we had a modicum of confidence borne out of this effort. Flunk or pass the grade, my sole intention was now to quit school and work for my impecunious mother. Armed with my standard four certificate and standard six I now qualified to join the Buxton military base for training. My only snag at that time was to be considered a promising student with a capacity to even complete a matric. Standard seven exams came and indeed I passed with flying colours, reinforcing my maternal family's belief that I had the grey matter to go the whole hog.

Academic success

With these results my family was now hell-bent on sending me to a senior school and arranged for me to go to Majeng High School in Kgomotso, a village lying 40 kilometres from Losasaneng. I grudgingly did my standard eight in this area, commuting daily by bus or footing it with my peers when my parents were hard up. Majeng, one of the posh schools in the area benefited enormously resource-wise as it was situated in an area that the president had a soft spot for. A double-storied school, with a terracotta structure, Majeng boasted a decent library and a laboratory. Facilities abounded in this school but our parents paid through their noses for education. My maternal grandfather had to sell a beast to pay for my school fee. We paid a whopping four hundred rand and bought much other material for ourselves. I could not buy all this but was fortunate to have stuff passed down by my big sister who did this grade as well. By now my entire maternal family was four-square behind me supporting me in the best way they could as they felt that I had a first-rate mind to do any grade. At this school I chose six subjects in the humanities with Tswana as a first language. When it came to teachers Majeng also possessed the *crème de la crème*. We had Mrs Mahosh who mastered geography and Mr Mookwa with his encyclopedic knowledge of history.

Other teachers were no slouches either. But my history and geography teachers in this grade made a great impact on me and instilled in me the passion for reading. I envied how effortlessly they could impart and even mimicked them in their absence to the delight of my classmates.

My teachers here spotted my academic chops early in our class works and monthly tests. Under them my performance went an octave higher causing my family to brag to family friends and the community about my abilities. Though passing many things in the class easily, I still had a sense of inadequacy bounded up with my single-parenthood background and my mother's dependence on her family for my upbringing. This aspect always undermined my confidence at school and complicated my relations with my peers, as I could not interact easily with them without doubting myself. I was self-conscious and in my shell most of the time. On the other hand, many of my contemporaries especially those born in wedlock, looked well-adjusted and oozed with bottomless confidence typical of people born to rule. They were

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precocious and well-rounded. They were sussed and slick as they were exposed to fresh magazines and papers their parents could afford to buy them. To cap it all, they never lacked a thing and were always loaded when

it came to pocket money and other endowments. I needed to improve my mother's lot quickly and did not believe matric would be the best means of doing it. My family thought otherwise. To them matric was the best leveller, a solvent of social hierarchy. It was an instrument of social mobility with transformative powers in Bophuthatswana they said. With it the world was your oyster as you qualified to be a clerk or private teacher, thus moving in rarified and exalted circles of the Lethae's, one of the elite family in Losasaneng. I guess they saw matric certificates breaking the shackles of poverty in some ordinary families. I passed standard eight with high marks and graduated under duress to grade 11.

Change of scenery

It was in this grade that my family suggested a change of schooling scenery from a rural Losasaneng and Kgomotso to Kimberley. Devoid of a matric

child before me, my family staked everything for me to pursue my high school to the last grade. They invested heavily and pinned all their hopes on me. Quickly they plotted with my maternal uncle based in Kimberley that I move in with him for the remainder of my high schooling. In 1994 I relocated to Galeshewe Township in Kimberley to attend school at Dr.E.P. Lekhela senior secondary school. Come hell or high water I had to go all the way to carry the family banner and break the mould.

As a hick from Bophuthatswana, I experienced a major culture shock in the diamond city. Kimberley was a far cry from Losasaneng with many endowments. Where I had been used to horse-drawn carts on chalky gravel roads, Kimberley boasted swanky cars with a ton of tar roads. Where I had been used to candles and kerosene lamps, the diamond city possessed electricity. The city boasted electrical pylons in every nook and cranny. There was an efficient transport system to boot, which was as sharp as a tack. All creature comforts and mod cons were here, ranging from colour television sets to well-functioning radios.

I immersed myself in these two and started keeping my finger on the pulse of things. I could now get fresh news and information on a daily basis which added value to my knowledge and helped in shaping my worldview. The transition

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was not a doddle though as I had to take the rough with the smooth. In Uncle Sam's house, I had to do household chores, which was unheard of for a boy in my grandfather's household. Also at the imposing, double-storied E.P. Lekhela, most of my peers looked very sussed and suave. They looked wise in the ways of the world as they were even versed in courtships and dates. I envied their townie ways and wished their street-cred could rub off on me. Street-cred was valued more highly than any other commodity in this Darwinian city with a hostile environment and ruthless knife-wielding gangs. Kimberley with its rich patois combining Afrikaans and Setswana also rumbled me as a country bumpkin as I could not get the hang of this slang. My opposite numbers here delighted in my naivety and faux pas. They taunted me for these gaffes and I appeared to be a late developer to them, totally unversed in city ways. Soon that damaging tag of ' Plaas Japie' was hung

FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS¹

In South Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council's (HSRC) Student Pathways study revealed that of the 2000-2002 cohort of students, from various South African universities, who did not complete their studies, 70% were first-generation.²

The term 'first-generation' commonly refers to students whose parents did not go to university and can also apply to scholars whose parents did not complete their high-school education.

For many years it has been accepted that students whose parents do not have university degrees have had to face a separate number of obstacles not faced by their peers with university educated parents.³ Extensive research conducted in the United States has shown that such students are disadvantaged in that, among others, they are less likely to persist in completing their degree; more likely to find the transition to university difficult; likely to have less information about the culture of tertiary education and thus, have difficulty in making connections between career goals and educational requirements.⁴

Similar research⁵ conducted in South Africa reiterates the tendency for first-generation students to perform relatively poorly when compared to their peers. This research has shown that students with parents who are semi-literate or illiterate are often disadvantaged due to lack of reading matter in the household such as newspapers or books. Reasons for the reduced academic performance associated with first-generation university students has been explained in this research by a general unfamiliarity with the "culture of academe". This leads to the inability of the student to adapt to university culture. As revealed in the research, common characteristics of first-generation students that can lead to their relatively poor performance include: ignorance concerning the use of library facilities; anxiety about language difficulties; apprehension about studying in the absence of classroom-style guidance, and hesitation to set-up appointments with lecturers. They also find the coordination of their studies with other activities, difficult.

around my neck. My country ways bored them stiff. They detested my bookish ways and straitjacket life as well. By virtue of this, I battled to get friends among my city counterparts and wound up with fellow hicks from other provinces and rural areas. I also struggled to adjust, never mind assimilate.

My first year at Kimberley coincided with the advent of a new dispensation. Kimberley was shaking to vibrations of Mandela era and leadership. The zeitgeist gripped everyone and outsiders like myself were not immune to this. Every student was euphoric. They wanted to celebrate first and get an education later. Herein lay the rub: chaos reigned and the student movement (Cosas) usurped authority from teachers and bullied them. They cocked a snook at authority in the belief that they played a key role in emancipating the country. Ill-discipline prevailed and teachers felt impotent in the face of hostility. They taught those with the desire and discipline. E.P. was rudderless. There was a serious whiff of permissiveness and a laissez faire attitude. I wanted to beat a hasty retreat back to my august Bophuthatswana schools but felt it would be

a cop-out. Also, the anarchist in me relished these vibes. They seemed to present a much-longed-for proper excuse to quit school before matric.

Staying the course

Before long my uncle got wind of this and quickly summoned me to what turned out to be, a heart-to-heart meeting. As it happened, he was concerned about the developments at my school but made it abundantly clear that I had to stick it out. Uncle Sam suggested that I develop the habit of studying independently of teachers. He drummed it into me to keep what he called the good company of disciplined students. I noted all his points and heeded everything he suggested out of reverence. I steeled my nerves for my grade 11, amid distractions and disruptions of Cosas. Soon I struck relations with the disciplined pack, which was comprised mostly of fellow provincials, with a common mission to exploit the resource situation, which we lacked from our respective birthplaces. The school had all the facilities like libraries and laboratories, which we could not use, in the midst of this chaos. But we also had a field day in terms of studying as we did not pay a red

cent to our school fee as payment was suspended in all public schools in Galeshewe, courtesy of the student movement. We swiftly formed study groups and swotted together. We solicited help of teachers and they assisted. Studying in this context was complex and unsafe though, as we were branded goody-two-shoes undermining the Cosas course. We were targeted and harassed but decided to roll with the punches. I worked doubly hard burning the proverbial midnight candle as much as I could.

Obsessed with a matric certificate my family averted its eyes to the school crisis. They instead insisted that I stick it out as they believed that the end was nigh. They had now pinned all their hopes on a matric certificate. To them my pre-matric performance was a good indicator that I would pass a matric. My grade 11 performance and results, notwithstanding the anarchy, confirmed their thoughts. I obtained a B symbol in this grade that made them feel vindicated. I was more than fit for a matric they thought and could bring the certificate that had eluded many before me. Matric was still a genuine article with some intellectual cachet to grease your path to success. It may not have been a be-all and end-all, but it was important as a means to an end. And the end in my family's case was to raise its stock in Losasaneng community. I suppose my family had seen shackles of poverty being broken by matriculants of humble beginnings in the village and hoped for the same...

I suppose my family had seen shackles of poverty being broken by matriculants of humble beginnings in the village and hoped for the same...

First-generation matriculant

In 1995 I embarked on my matric journey, a year billed to be my last at E.P. Lekhela secondary school. Not to make heavy weather of it, matric was still a scary proposition to me. Always having been my schooling bogey I now had to tackle it head on. I had a dozen misgivings borne out of the fact that I was a first-generation matriculant in the family with no luxury of

foreknowledge or forewarning from my folks. I had no one in the family with experience of this grade to share tips or pointers, never mind material to pass down. On the other hand, my continuing generation classmates had the heads-up about this grade, as they were also equipped with notes and question papers passed down from their predecessors who gave them some edge over us first generations. They had pointers from their folks before them and were clued-up on how to go about approaching this grade. They sounded better equipped and optimistic even to the point of presumptuousness. I felt I was navigating this way without a compass. Where I struggled with jotting down labour intensive notes, my continuing generation classmates relied on previous notes passed down by their predecessors. They could even answer in class questions that baffled me. They spoke of a matric only as a springboard and prematurely speculated about courses to do for their tertiary education. They oozed with self-assurance where I was self-conscious. I envied their chutzpah. At this point, I had struck a good deal with my family that 1995 would be my last year at school with or without a matric certificate. Crisis abated at E.P. Lekhela in my matric year and we had unlimited access to our well-resourced library and laboratory. I knuckled down for my matric and realised that for me to complete this grade I had to ingratiate myself with teachers by doing their bidding. I hit the ground running and did every project they issued us. The effort paid off with some teachers lending me their invaluable material they normally use for their teaching trade. Through my new interpersonal skills I also endeared myself to my continuing generation classmates and borrowed their resourceful material. I wrote copious notes from their material like study guides and textbooks that I did not have, which was like pearls before swine to some. Our first quarter mock test came and I was in pole position further reinforcing my family's position. With my diffidence still getting the better of me, I saw this modest achievement as a fluke. I was still haunted by the idea that I had no brainpower for this grade and saw it as a preserve of elite bright sparks. I warned myself about setting great store by this achievement as I felt that I could easily rest on my laurels. With every project and test I raised my game and upped my ante to the delight of my curious uncle who strongly monitored my progress. I finally adjusted to Kimberley and started hitting my books at Galeshewe community library. Matric soon became bearable but still, I warned myself

against optimism as it could lead to complacency. I passed many half-yearly trials, which gave me the impetus to do more. I busted gut and maintained the momentum till the final examination.

With the arrival of matric final examination levels of anxiety and apprehension shot sky-high. Butterflies did their own thing in my tummy. The atmosphere in the massive hall in which we wrote the examination, with hawk-eyed invigilators keeping tabs on everyone only exacerbated the situation. There was

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no way you could have smuggled in a cheat sheet. We wrote this examination and with every paper I felt the weight of my family's dreams riding on my success. I thought of their vicarious feelings. Whether I failed or passed this grade, it would reflect on them either way. I applied myself and became punctilious. I wrote painstakingly and meticulously remembering that our teachers warned against dangers of sloppiness in the exam. By now, it had registered with me that I was carrying the family banner and had to break the mould. Better still, I had to show successors in my family that matric was a challenge to be surmounted by effort. I saw myself as a torchbearer illuminating the way of my successors. Their future success will depend on how well lit their way was by yours truly. When exams ended I went home to Losasaneng knowing that I gave this certificate the best shot. I breathed a heavy sigh of relief and spent time with my family that celebrated prematurely like I had made the grade already. December holidays became a non-event in my family as they were saving their energy for the results day. Days unfolded and soon the results day rolled around in January. My family woke up with the lark and sent one of my cousins to get a newspaper that carried matric results in Pampierstad, a town just a stone's throw from my place. I could not move an inch that day, as I also needed to know my fate. My cousin came back wearing a broad grin that was a give-away. A scramble for this paper ensued which resulted in it being crumpled. In the midst of this struggle my cousin, who had access to the paper before everyone, announced the news. Finally the paper was opened with many eyes on it. It became evident that I had not only passed matric but also

obtained an exemption or university entrance. I had surpassed everyone's expectations (including my own) and got more than what I bargained for. There was pandemonium in the family and I was royally treated like some warrior who brought home the glory. I had made my family proud and they were all elated bragging to everyone about this achievement as if some jinx had been expunged in the family.

The ripple effect

Soon I became a point of reference to my family members and some relatives. Aunts and Uncles encouraged their offspring to take a leaf out of my book and emulate me. I was lauded to the sky in the family and they also, inevitably, took vicarious pride in my achievement as they crowed about having raised some smart aleck. I became a White Hope expected to improve my mother's lot and theirs. I relished my exalted position in the family with everyone coming to me for some schooling advice. I helped with projects of my family members. My success became a catalyst for many of my family member's with everyone benchmarking him or herself against mine. They emulated me and this had an extra-ordinary ripple effect with many surpassing me.

My success did not go unnoticed as it set some tongues wagging in the community. Parents in the neighborhood motivated their kids to ape me. I was asked to be involved in some community school projects designed to empower learners with their education. I joined a great team of other matriculants and educators in their endeavors to motivate learners to take their education seriously. Many heeded our advice and emulated us. Soon matriculants were a dime a dozen in the area, needless, to say it became a target to shoot for in the area. It became a must-have for every student in the community. It became a norm in the Losasaneng and soon lack of ambition in the area became a thing of the past. Mining and Army, popular jobs in the area, were now scorned and frowned upon. Here as well, a long ripple effect, affected every youth in the area and the face of the area changed beyond recognition. I was chuffed by the harvest of seeds I helped sow but I had to earn a crust for my family.

Unmet expectations

With a university entrance the world was my oyster and I thought I could easily get a job with or without a tertiary qualification. With opportunities few and far between, in the newly named Northwest province I

had to pack my bags like many of my peers for the big city. Alas, when I arrived in 1996, reality struck. Opportunities abounded but matric had lost its cachet in the job market. My humanities could not help my cause like science would. I was not employable, regardless of my exemption. You had to have some post-matric certificate even for a simple job as security or waiting on tables. One could not compete with a matric anymore in the big city and I started realising that decent jobs were a domain of the 'degreed and diplomaed'. I saw many of my contemporaries living it large with tertiary qualifications and this made me envious. Though I only wanted to work for my family initially I realised that it was virtually impossible to achieve this without a post-matric certificate. Grudgingly I changed my tack and intended to pursue simple post-matric certificates with every job opportunity that came my way. Lady luck shone on me some day and odd jobs came my way. With every odd job I did I sent some money back home and also got to save for a post-matric certificate. Finally, I decided to do a national key point in security that improved my chances greatly in the marketplace. I worked for a while in this industry but was not fulfilled.

I started realising that decent jobs were a domain of the 'degreed and diplomaed'

With competition very stiff in the city I figured that I needed another proper certificate that could enable me to get a mainstream job. Having done humanities

and possessing a facility for languages I assumed that I was more cut out for artistic pursuits. Performance arts appealed to me more than anything. Perks and trappings of this career looked very enticing as well. I imagined myself as a scriptwriter or radio presenter at some point. One was spoiled for a choice in this career I thought. Without wasting time I enrolled for this certificate on a part-time basis. Within two years I completed the course and was ready to take on the world. To my disappointment, at the completion of the course the industry looked saturated with every college and university churning out artists of different stripes at a fast clip. Possessing the certificate, I still believed that I had a unique selling point that could give me an edge over others and naively quit my security job. I was intent on getting a break in the industry and decided to give it a bash. I took a calculated risk more in a sense of a leap of faith. I got stints here and there but hitherto, ran out of luck to get a proper break like many impecunious artists.

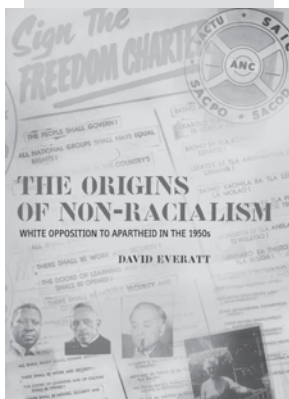
Despite these challenges, I still pride myself on having this certificate as it has shaped my outlook on life and enabled me to develop intellectually. I am now able to help with many school projects back home and also impart with people that I interact with in my life. It may not be financially rewarding, but it is fulfilling and intellectually stimulating. Owing to these life vagaries though, I do not think my career trajectory has developed along lines my family and I expected. For this reason I cannot claim to be on the credit-side of the ledger. I still owe my family and birthplace a huge debt.

NOTES FIRST-GENERATION STUDENTS

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REVIEW

Michael Cardo recently completed a biography of Peter Brown, the national chairman of the Liberal Party between 1958 and 1964.



The Origins of Non-Racialism: White Opposition to Apartheid in the 1950s: ISBN: 9781868423576

Published by Wits University Press, 2009

The Origins of Non-Racialism: White Opposition to Apartheid in the 1950s

By David Everatt, Wits University Press: 2009, pp. 273

Non-racialism has fallen on hard times in South Africa.

Racial reconciliation and “rainbow nation”-building, the dominant themes of Nelson Mandela’s presidency, gave way to a narrow, self-regarding, racially hypersensitive strain of Africanism under Thabo Mbeki.

Jacob Zuma seems eager enough to don Mandela’s mantle. At his presidential inauguration, Zuma praised Mandela and promised “not [to] deviate from [his] nation-building task”. But Zuma has done little to turn that commitment into a working reality.

Nor has he been quick enough to distance himself from the racially divisive statements of some of his key backers, like ANC Youth League President Julius Malema, whose tirade against the appointment of “minorities” to key positions in the country’s economic ministries went against the non-racialist grain.

Although David Everatt’s book is not about contemporary South Africa, his richly detailed analysis of non-racialism in the 1950s – “the decade that forged the ANC in its current form” – provides a clear historical context for present-day debates on race.

Everatt argues that non-racialism has “no common pro-active moral content in post-apartheid South Africa”. “No-one”, he claims, “including the ANC-led government seems to know what a ‘normal’ post-apartheid state looks like, or how we will know when we reach it”.

This is incongruous. How can it be that fifty years after non-racialism was first popularised in South African political discourse – Everatt regards the Freedom Charter as the founding document of non-racialism – the ruling party still does not have a clear idea of what non-racialism means in reality, for the state and citizens alike?

For Everatt, the answer is twofold.

Firstly, he doubts whether a nationalist organisation can be non-racialist. He writes that non-racialism was “crafted by the African nationalist resistance movement in response to apartheid...but it remains questionable whether the same African National Congress is able to throw off the constraints and racial blinkers of nationalism and truly embrace non-racialism”.

In fact, African nationalism and non-racialism are incompatible. The former is about racial control – so-called “equality under African leadership” which really boils down to racial bean-counting – while the latter is about freedom from “demography as destiny” and the importance of individual qualities, talents and values over skin colour.

Secondly, the ANC's failure to crystallise an agenda around non-racialism has historical roots. Non-racialism was an ideologically loaded and contested issue in the 1950s.

Although its stated goal was a non-racial society – a South Africa that “belongs to all who live in it, black and white”, as the Freedom Charter proclaimed – the ANC itself was not even organised along non-racial lines.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, hardline African nationalists in the ANC and its Youth League insisted that members of different race groups should mobilise in separate “national” congresses. They worked together through the Congress Alliance. From an organisational point of view, this was “multi-racialism” as distinguished from non-racialism.

Indeed, white supporters of the ANC, who gathered in the Congress of Democrats (COD) (formed in 1953), were only allowed to join the ANC in the late 1960s, and could not sit on the ANC's national executive committee until 1985.

The multi-racial composition of the Congress Alliance was a highly politicised issue. The extreme left – the trade unionists, the Trotskyists and those Marxists who rejected the (banned) South African Communist Party – denounced the racial compartmentalisation of the Congress Alliance. They argued that the struggle for racial equality obscured the “real” struggle, which had to be fought on class (not racial) lines and whose aim should be substantive equality for all. Otherwise, a non-racial post-apartheid society would merely replicate material inequalities.

On the other hand, many Africanists (and white Liberals) viewed the multiracial make-up of the Congress Alliance, which gave the COD seats on its co-ordinating structures, as a ploy by white communists to lead the ANC by the nose. Such sentiments eventually led to the breakaway formation of the Pan-African Congress in 1959.

It was difficult for the ANC to articulate a clear message about non-racialism in such a charged environment. According to Everatt, the disputes which tracked the development of the ANC in the 1950s were “fought about the form that racial co-operation should take, and the place of whites in the struggle against apartheid”. He remarks, in summing

up: “The failure to resolve the issue adequately then lives with us all in South Africa today”.

The book would have benefited from a concluding chapter that makes this argument clearer. But its real value lies in the rich vein of primary archival material and oral interviews which Everatt taps in bringing to life white opposition to apartheid in the 1950s.

In particular, there are two fascinating chapters on the Liberal Party (LP), formed in 1953 and forced to disband in 1968 when the Prohibition of Political Interference Act made it illegal for blacks and whites to belong to the same political organisation.

Everatt skilfully documents the LP's transition from a conservative party constrained by the classical liberalism of the nineteenth century Cape liberal tradition to a radical liberal organisation. By the 1960s, the LP's commitment to nurturing non-racialism increasingly came to be shaped by a keen appreciation that the state must take an active role in redressing socio-economic inequalities.

Of course, the real challenge to 1950s-style liberal non-racialism came not during, but after, that decade, with the rise of the black consciousness movement in the 1970s.

Its founder, Steve Biko, believed that white liberals assuaged their guilt by expressing solidarity with blacks while continuing to extract at will from “the exclusive pool of white privileges”. Their insistence on colour-blind integration as the only route to non-racialism, he claimed, blunted black consciousness and would stunt real change.

Biko was a non-racialist but he believed that racelessness was a chimera.

Biko raises several challenges for liberals. How do you plan for a non-racial future by forgetting a racially divisive past? How do you make sense of a history of racial injustice, and attempt to repair it, by pretending that race is insignificant? How do you measure progress towards a non-racial society without using race as a marker, given that it was used as a marker of disadvantage in the past?

These are the sorts of questions with which we will have to grapple if a commitment to non-racialism is to be restored to public life.

REVIEW**Thabo Rapoo**

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The Origins of Non-Racialism: White Opposition to Apartheid in the 1950s

By David Everatt, Wits University Press: 2009, pp. 273

This book, according to the author, began life as a doctoral thesis written in the 1980s – the first question that came to my mind was, why not do something new and fresh rather than recycling an old piece of work done twenty years ago? After all, there is enough contemporary material and challenging issues for vigorous policy or academic debate around racism, non-racialism, multiracialism, multiculturalism, affirmative action, black economic empowerment and other follies of the post-apartheid era. And some of these issues are raised in the introductory chapter of the book – which was obviously written and added more recently, unlike much of the book. The introductory chapter is interesting, and whetted my appetite by raising contemporary issues (accompanied by a raft of rhetorical questions).

Frankly (despite the obvious clues from the title and subtitle that the substance and period of this book is in the 1950s), I was hoping to settle down to a serious and engaging critical examination and analysis of some of the contemporary post-apartheid policy challenges (i.e. non-racialism, black economic empowerment and the resultant white resentment, among others) raised in the introduction to the book, when the author struck with a number of statements indicating that this won't be the case, at least not directly. This vain hope was stoked up by the fact that the book arrived, perhaps fortuitously if not by design, at a time when there are currently vigorous public contestations between the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) and an Africanist faction of the ANC on the one hand, and the South African Communist Party (SACP) on the other, regarding the role and perceived growing influence and power of the SACP over the ANC and the affairs of government (controversy over the influence of the SACP is an important theme in the book, albeit in the time of the 1940s and 1950s rather than now).

The author states his intention clearly, that this is a history book to “help us understand how non-racialism emerged and the various forms it took ... in the 1950s”. He goes on to state that the book seeks to review “the impact of white participation on the struggle against apartheid”. After a series of rhetorical questions in the introduction, the author duly (as is the nature of rhetorical questions) informs us that the purpose is not to answer these questions, “but to raise them and hope that others would take them up”. However it is doubtful whether there was a real desire for answers to some if not all these questions because some of them are really unanswerable, at least for now. But more importantly, rhetorical questions usually do not need to be answered as their point of impact is usually in the mere act of posing them. I think this is a missed opportunity - not that there is anything wrong with revisiting important events that occurred in the 1940s and 1950s which played an important role in shaping what we see in our country's politics today.

It needs pointing out that after reading the book, the subtitle comes across as slightly incongruous with the contents of the book, as not only are the contents of the discussion much broader in scope than the mere issue of white opposition to apartheid, but also the time period discussed includes the 1940s.

Reading between the lines, it is patently clear that the author feels strongly and passionately about some of the contemporary issues facing the post-apartheid democratic government – issues such as official race classifications, affirmative action, black economic empowerment and the follies and failures (according to the author) of the post-apartheid ANC governments to resolve the race question or the national question in the face of resentment and disaffection by whites. The author therefore goes into a rhetorical tour de force on issues of race, racialism and official race classification in the post-apartheid era, and contends that there has been failure, both in the pre-democratic and post-apartheid eras, to define non-racialism. However, this is mystifying in that a careful reading of relevant sections of the book, including the author's own reference (in the introduction) to the 1996 Constitution and discussions of a number of key points of conflict (especially the non-racialism versus multiracialism controversy) between the Africanists in the ANC/Youth League and the proponents of class struggle in the CPSA (later SACP) seem to suggest that there was a clear understanding of what non-racialism meant. However, the author then shifts slightly away from the issue of lack of definition of non-racialism, and instead focuses attention on the difference between formal and substantive equality (i.e. non-racialism). From this, one might surmise that the issue of definition was not the problem as initially posed (at least at a formal definition level) and that the real problem is the substance and application of the concept of equality/non-racialism.

Even if for a moment one were to suppose that there was no clear definition of non-racialism (either during the anti-apartheid struggle era or the post-apartheid era), surely there are innumerable secondary sources, or even an interview with one or two of the current ANC political leaders to put the issue to rest in terms of insights into what the ANC and other struggle intellectuals (both white and black) understood by this notion. I do not want to think even for a moment that the author did not spend more time researching the meaning of a concept so central to this book – but it would be implausible for anyone to suggest that a notion as important and central to anti-apartheid struggles as non-racialism was never properly defined by the towering intellectuals (both black and white) who pondered these issues for years during the struggle against apartheid in the 1940s and 1950s and beyond – this is not to suggest however that non-racialism as a political goal and policy objective has been or is easily realisable in practice. In this regard, the author does pose a number of relevant questions and issues at the beginning of the book. But more importantly, the author is clearly sceptical about prospects for realising the goal of non-racialism under an African nationalist political leadership.

The short-coming of this effort for me is that the author refrains from tackling these contemporary challenges head-on in the rest of the book. Instead, he decides to retreat to an historical account, discussing and narrating the developments and dynamics of anti-apartheid politics and the place of the white left opposition in the 1940s and 1950s. The author thus leaves it to the reader to draw implications for the more contemporary/current issues of concern. In the author's defence though, he did indicate that the book is a doctoral thesis done in the 1980s, seeking to revisit events that occurred in the 1950s. However, in my view the reason for

... it would be implausible for anyone to suggest that a notion as important and central to anti-apartheid struggles as non-racialism was never properly defined by the towering intellectuals (both black and white) who pondered these issues for years during the struggle against apartheid in the 1940s and 1950s and beyond.

doing this is not robustly stated, other than that “the warnings issued then – class struggles would be postponed indefinitely by a national bourgeoisie anxious to maximise personal wealth and advantages at the expense of the urban and rural poor – are repeated... suggesting that history does indeed need to be revisited and its lessons learned”.

This book is readable, with an easy writing style and clearly laid out discussion in each chapter, although the logic of the sequencing of the chapters and the themes contained and treated in the individual chapters is not entirely obvious. With few exceptions, the individual chapters seem largely self contained, but disjointed in terms of the flow of the themes that they deal with, and often do not follow on directly or are not structurally influenced by the preceding chapters. As a result, there is a tendency to repeat or restate issues or subjects raised and discussed previously, across different chapters in an ad hoc or unsystematic manner. Also, the book would have benefitted substantially from brief but robust statements of the purposes or aims/objectives at the beginning of each chapter, and in relation to the overall subject matter of the book, as well as brief concluding analytical statements at the end of each chapter. Instead, with few exceptions the chapters tend to come to an end either abruptly or inchoately, without inducing a satisfactory sense of closure. The same applies to the end of the book itself which does not have a satisfactory concluding chapter or a set of points or arguments at the end to tie the contents of the entire book and the discussions to the overall theme or topic of the book. The very last subsection of the last chapter (‘towards the future’) might have been intended to provide a semblance of conclusion and closure to the book but it does not do that adequately, if at all.

The author clearly seeks to alert us to the potential dangers of narrow black nationalism and its inherent racist tendencies as was seen to be the case with respect to sections of the ANC and its Youth League during the struggle years (in this the author would appear vindicated in recent times as ANCYL President Julius Malema has been decrying the dominance of racial minorities over strategic economic/finance government ministries in Jacob Zuma’s cabinet, incurring the wrath of the SACP who accused him of narrow black/racial nationalism and chauvinism). The author repeatedly refers to this throughout the book as a key issue of concern bedevilling relations

between African Nationalism and class struggle – the author sees this as a dire warning from, among others, white radicals and members of the communist party during the 1940s and 1950s. It is clear that this strong message is directed to what the author labels as a nationalist bourgeoisie (ie. the leadership of the ANC). The author reinforces this with a quote “we did not struggle to remain poor”, from a recent news article, attributed to one of the ANC political leaders).

The author also decries the continued marginalisation of white intellectuals on the left in the current political dispensation, arguing in the introduction, that they are “arguably as marginal in the post-apartheid political discourses as they were during the struggle years”. However, the author would do well to direct this warning also to the premier political organisation of the left (i.e. the SACP), many of whose members were the same white left radicals/intellectuals proffering dire warnings about a national bourgeoisie anxious to maximise personal wealth and advancement at the expense of the poor. Some of the members of the current SACP are occupying powerful positions in the current government, and enjoying the same bourgeois decadence that risks postponing indefinitely the class struggle as per the warnings of the white radicals and left intellectuals of the 1940s and 1950s, many of whom came from the predecessor of the same party.

Having said all of the above, this book is informative and worth reading especially for those unfamiliar with the politics of the broad white left, its opposition to apartheid and relations with African nationalism during anti-apartheid struggles. The historical perspectives and insights it provides into these debates, the political dynamics, internal contestations and conflicts that characterised the white left in the 1940s and 1950s are valuable. In particular, discussions of the efforts of white liberalism as it sought to achieve an increasingly difficult and doomed balancing act of positioning itself in the political middle ground between the impatience of black nationalism and radical communism on the one hand, and the rabid zeal of Afrikaner nationalism under National Party governments on the other, are worth the effort of reading.

REVIEW**Bobby Godsell**

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The Origins of Non-Racialism: White Opposition to Apartheid in the 1950s

By David Everatt, Wits University Press: 2009, pp. 273

Race and Nation: critical challenges from our history

David Everatt's *"The Origins of non-racialism: white opposition to apartheid in the 1950's"* is a compelling example of the value of history. Everatt's book started life as a PhD thesis completed in 1980s. Yet the story that it tells has direct relevance for the society South Africans are seeking to construct in this second decade of a new century.

Everatt tells the story of the role and relationship of individuals drawn from South Africa's racial minorities (but in particular white) in the ANC-lead struggle to end white minority rule, in the period 1945 to 1960.

It is the story of how political leaders, both black and white, defined their interests, and constructed their constituencies in the face of the tsunami race project of Afrikaner Nationalism. It is the story of a contest between a non-racial concept of the country (where individuals and class was central) and a group-centred and African nationalism-accommodating concept, where race remained the defining category.

The ascendancy of race-defined mobilisation, in large part due to growing influence of the new leadership of the Youth League of the ANC, saw the construction of a race defined alliance of organisations. Thus in the 1950's resistance to the racist policies of the new Afrikaner Nationalist government was organised around a "race" alliance, with the ANC representing black South Africans, the South African Indian Congress representing Indians, the South African Coloured Peoples Organisation representing Coloureds and the South African Congress of Democrats representing White South Africans.

Everatt's story is one of missed opportunities and unfinished business.

One of the missed opportunities was the rejection by both the Liberal Party and the South African Institute of Race Relations of the invitation to be co-sponsors of 1956 Congress of the People.

This convocation of organisations was intended as a second National Convention, an idea which Race Relations itself had proposed. The Liberal Party and Race Relations were offered equal representation (with the four race based organisations mentioned above, which constituted the ANC led alliance) on the organising committee, but both organisations declined involvement in designing the event, or attending it, in protest (and perhaps fear) of the dominant role that communists were playing in the ANC alliance.

In terms of the unfinished business around race there is a poignant symmetry in the efforts of white South Africans to determine the role of their black compatriots, and that of black South Africans to decide the role of whites.

The first is well illustrated by the alternative which both the Liberal Party, the Institute of Race Relations, and like-minded individuals offered to the Apartheid Project. The alternative offered to the proposal to divide South Africa into 9 or 10 race-defined nation states was not a single, united non-racial society; it was, instead, a concept of citizenship that for black South Africans was constrained by issues of education and economic status, in contrast to the universal political rights of white South Africans.

Indeed from the earliest moments of cohabitation in this strange and wonderful country, white South Africans have been on a journey of a kind of creeping, reluctant, hesitant and conditional acceptance of their black skinned compatriots. This journey is well illustrated by the Liberal Party's journey from qualified franchise to universal franchise – a journey which the Progressive Party was to follow two decades later.

This white dilemma as to what to do about blacks finds its echo in the struggle of African nationalism as to what to do about whites. Everatt is compelling on the influential role that the Colonialism of a Special Type idea had in terms of this struggle. Those who doubt the power of ideas should read Everatt's book for this alone.

With the ANC, this issue (what to do about the whites – Indians and Coloured also) had organisational expression. In 1969 a few whites were permitted to join the ANC, including Joe Slovo. However it was as late as 1986 (the Kabwe Consultative Conference) when white members were allowed to stand for the organisation's National Executive Committee.

There is more unfinished business in regard to these issues of race and class. How do people in a society understand their interests and organise themselves to promote and defend these interests? Equally where is the centre of ethical, or decision-making gravity to be located? In race-defined (or class defined) groups, or collectivities, or in the individual?

Though expressed here in conceptual terms, these questions remain vital political issues both in the organisation of political activity across the political spectrum. It can be argued that clear definition has been given in the South African constitution. However much of opposition politics involves a mobilisation of race-defined minorities around "minority interests". Equally the tensions between a non-racially structured South African Communist Party and the ANC where (black) African Nationalism remains a mobilising value, indicate unfinished business on the issue of race.

Amongst white South Africans, though the political settlement has broad support, most continue to define both their own interests and the society they inhabit through a race prism.

Everatt puts the contemporary challenge of race well in his introduction:

"The current generation of political leaders – and many of their voters – were all affected by apartheid, and may have a race-bred consciousness that will never entirely fade away. But the next generation – those born long after apartheid's demise – deserve so much better. Our challenge is to find the courage to break decisively with the past, the mindset and identities it created for and ascribed to us all, and enter a new discursive space where it is, indeed, enough merely to be."

And again:

"...it has also become clear since democracy was ushered in, in 1994, that a critical weakness was the failure to define non-racialism, to give it content beyond that of a slogan or self-evident 'good thing'."

Perhaps Everatt expects too much too quickly. The 16 years since our society adopted non-racial rules of the game is about half a generation. Prior to this race constituted the bricks with which the inhabitants of this strange society had to construct their own identities, define their own interests and decide how they were going to relate to those who were (racially) different from them.

However, Everatt is spot on in identifying both the centrality and urgency of finding a new dialogue and national conversation about race, citizenship and perhaps most importantly about patriotism. We need to develop a new and constructive vocabulary and grammar that deals with race in ways that add value. We need to distinguish the different contexts in which we need to talk about race.

Clearly there is an ongoing need to use race categories to measure our country's journey from its race structured past to an effectively non-racial future. In this, race becomes a measure of proportionality and fairness. At some stage the need for these measures will fall away. It is useful to think about when that time will be (clearly not now!).

We need to think and talk about race very differently when we think about both diversity and unity in our society. Our national motto, in a language which has the merit of being difficult to pronounce for 99% of South Africans, *!ke e: /xarra // ke* urges the diverse people of our country to unite. Building both understanding and respect for the country's diverse peoples, cultures, faiths and languages clearly requires a quite different attitude towards, and use of race.

Finally, when we think about race in terms of citizenship and patriotism, we need to work with this concept in a different way again. If we are indeed to become one nation, and share a common patriotism then we will need to develop a "hyphenated" identity. Most whites would comfortably describe themselves as South Africans. Many blacks would prefer the identity of African. Indeed the word African is often used as a synonym (perhaps even camouflage) for black. Yet a common citizenship and a shared patriotism requires a shared and inclusive African identity. So the particular, immediate and important "clothes" of language, culture and belief (so often confused and conflated as race) will need to co-habit a shared and inclusive identity as both South Africans and Africans.

This is the challenge of our history. Everatt's book is a fine example of the benefits of a thoughtful look back in defining the desired way forward.

"...it has also become clear since democracy was ushered in, in 1994, that a critical weakness was the failure to define non-racialism, to give it content beyond that of a slogan or self-evident 'good thing'."

REVIEW

Eusebius McKaiser is an associate at the Centre for the Study of Democracy. He is also a contributing editor at Business Day. He was previously an international Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University.

Re-Imagining the Social in South Africa: Critique, Theory and Post-apartheid Society

Edited by Heather Jacklin and Peter Vale

Wither Social Theory?

The humanities are experiencing an ongoing existential crisis. When our democracy was born it made intuitive sense to imagine that we could only dismantle our status as one of the world's two or three most unequal nations by focusing on practical skills development in our education system. This ranged from promoting and developing skills such as carpentry or building to more highbrow but equally instrumentally critical disciplines like science and technology. A liberal arts education seemed rather self-indulgent. This was – and remains – particularly true for many poor students who suddenly became first-time university graduates in their families. Their education yielded financial expectations on their families' part (and their own legitimate desire for material success), rather than the intrinsic and romantic satisfaction of intellectual pursuit as an end in itself. This forced many humanities departments to do some soul-searching about their place under the African sky.

Some responded by becoming commercialised or market-oriented and introducing courses that sell themselves as indispensable to the development of a student seeking to leave university ready to conquer the business world. And so, by way of example, philosophy departments offer critical thinking courses to business executives or cross-pollinate with business science and commerce degrees by persuading these faculties to employ their staff to teach students logic and argumentation. Other departments, in their turn, simply got canned based on a brute – and brutal – assessment that they are yesterday's bake. (The fate of the Rhodes University Department of Theology, for example, comes to mind).

Re-imagining the Social in South Africa is a collection of thought-provoking reflections on the state of the humanities. The editors, Heather Jacklin and Peter Vale, carefully engage the substantive contributions in the anthology to provide a very nuanced, frank and timely set of critical insights into the place of the humanities in the social universe we inhabit. Although the book's subplot, as it were, is an in-depth focus on the specific concept of 'social theory' and 'critical' theory at that, it is a strength of the book that it in fact oscillates between a big picture engagement with the overall state of the humanities and a more granular focus on the conceptual complexities regarding critical terms such as 'social theory'. Theodore R. Schatzki lays a good conceptual foundation for the book by helping to make sense of the terms that the inquiry of the book are dependent on. He defines social theory as "...abstract, systematic thought that, through rational argumentation, fashions general accounts of the character, development and organisation of social life (and of the comprehension that can be had of these.)"



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the Social
in South Africa

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In essence, the anthology is a meta-philosophical inquiry about the state of the very disciplines within which the contributors themselves are important actors. It is worth reflecting on, and engaging with, a couple of the theses that dominate.

Sources of pressure: economic, scientific, political

The main thread that runs throughout the anthology is a cataloguing of the different kinds of pressure that is still being placed on the humanities.

Ivor Chipkin, for example, examines the impact that commercialisation has on the production of knowledge by research institutions. He looks at the Human Sciences Research Council as a case in point. His key insight is that once the arrangement of research units within an institution are organised with a competitive business imperative as its main driver, perverse consequences often follow. For example, analytic approaches to make sense of why government departments fail in the execution of some of their duties is hampered by reliance on state funding. Equally, in terms of external funding, there is a disproportionate use of resources to chase donor money, such that a topic like HIV/AIDS, for example, may become a dominant research area at the expense of other equally important issues.

John Higgins, in turn, argues that an overemphasis on science and scientific method has resulted in policy debates often being couched in terms that exclude reference to social theory. This impoverishes the quality of those debates and, in the process, prevents social policy inquiry from using all available intellectual resources to make sense of, and find solutions to, the problems of society. This analysis is particularly important because it shows that even by the yardstick of practical impact as a success criterion the role and importance of the humanities, and social theory in particular, are poorly understood. It is, in fact, instrumentally critical in the same way that, say, studying science and technology or commerce is.

Nicholas Rowe echoes this truth when he points out on a similarly practical front that in today's complex business environment it is those persons with a deep understanding of human beings and social relationships that will have the best shot at success. This underscores the need to focus on the complementary strengths of different faculties rather than perversely and falsely ranking some as more or less useful in building and developing society.

Richard Pithouse, more optimistically than other contributors, focuses on how a progressive or emancipatory role can be fulfilled by intellectuals within South African universities (with maybe the University of KwaZulu Natal as a present exception). But he lays down some conditions. These include avoiding the impact of political influences. The "top-down control" of the ANC, for example, can have a pernicious extra-political impact on the work of academics. Other factors include the role of civil society – including the need, in the first instance, to properly conceptualise civil society and its role within the broader question of the place of social theory and the humanities in society's progressive advancement.

A passionate plea, "Help!"

It is fascinating how the tone of the book itself reflects the sense of crisis within the humanities. At times, formalised argument gives way to honest, un-formalised venting.

Bert Olivier's contribution, for example, is less a structured analytic argument – as one might expect of a philosopher – than it is an impassioned if cogent polemic

about the dying influence of the humanities as a result of the developmental (in a policy sense) and economic influences that have brought about immense pressure on the humanities. He bemoans this fact when he asserts that “natural habitats across the planet today are yielding to the invasive effect of economic ‘development’, which, spreading like a cancer seems to be oblivious of the vital interconnectedness of natural and social ecosystems across the globe.”

The book gives a sense then of the lived reality of the practitioners – researchers, teachers, etc. – who have to justify their intellectual existence. It is perhaps unsurprising that the self-interest of doing so would manifest in places as a passionate plea to not be executed.

Why should we care about social theory at all?

Schatzki puts it best when he argues that social theory is both important for intrinsic reasons (human beings seek general answers about the world) and instrumental reasons. The instrumental reasons are both cognitive (enabling descriptions, explanations, interpretations and evaluations or criticisms of the social world) and practical (helping with the “mutual understanding among humans, the achievement of the good society along with the amelioration of social ills ...”). It is hard to see why ‘managers’ at universities, often previously full-time academics themselves, cannot see the persuasiveness of this justification.

Coda: A thought on style

While the mere fact of this book’s existence speaks to the ongoing existential crisis of the humanities, it kick-starts a necessary dialogue within the discipline. This makes it an indispensable read to anyone intrinsically interested in the world around them (for pure intellectual interest’s sake) as well of interest to those who seek more pragmatic justifications when they select which books to read (it will enhance your ability to approach ‘real world’ problems such as policy formulation with greater skill).

One of the few shortcomings of the book is that the style of some of the contributions may put off non-specialist readers. Academics really need to accept that they are useful and smart creatures. Many, unfortunately, do not believe this and manifest their insecurity by writing in academic jargon that obfuscates rather than clarifies. It gives academics a false sense of profundity even when they convey fairly pedestrian ideas. This helps no one. As the philosopher John Searle said with only slight exaggeration, “If you can’t say it clearly you don’t understand it yourself.” Nevertheless, an ‘on-balance’ assessment of this anthology is that it is an excellent contribution in a much needed would-be area of meta-philosophical inquiry.

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