
Brak! - vision, mirage and reality in the post *apartheid* globalisation of South African adult education and training

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Abstract

In South Africa, the 1990s saw the victory of democracy and the (so-far) still dysfunctional, if not failing, attempt to institutionalise a state system of adult basic education and training, as South Africa made political and economic compromises with the new world order and globalizing imperatives.

This article attempts to explore some of the history and the agents active in the this period in which much South African adult education was captured by globalizing conceptions of education and training and instituted mechanisms (such as a standards based qualifications framework) by which these conceptions were established and institutionalised. Because South Africa, by virtue of its semi-isolation during the apartheid era, had been able to resist or been bypassed by many globalizing trends, the swiftness with which it succumbed to them in a few years deserves description and interpretation.

The article looks both at the general influence of these global trends on South African adult education and their specific impact on adult education in South African universities within the context of a complex societal transformation.

Following the advent of democratic government and the concomitant evolution of a constitution with a progressive bill of rights which included a strong commitment to addressing the needs of the disadvantaged sector of society, the prospects for developing a fully-fledged adult education system for South Africa were encouraging but despite rhetorical and symbolic commitment, the various government initiatives floundered. In a parallel and related development, the engagement of South African universities in adult education shrank, driven by a multiplicity of factors amongst which the effects of globalization are not absent but are masked by South Africa's simultaneous re-entry into the international arena and the wider effects of 'transformation' in education generally and higher education in particular.

Introduction: In a dry season

brak *adj.* Dutch somewhat salty (possibly the same as Middle Dutch *brak* worthless)

South Africa is a largely dry country. In the early days of Dutch settlement, when renegades from English liberalism in the Cape Province ventured into the interior intent on trade with, and the plunder of, the indigenous inhabitants, they would frequently travel over waterless plains. Driving further and further north with a vision of finding the source of the Nile and their own promised land, they would be beset by mirages of lakes and pans of water. Even when they found them, they were frequently *brak* (salty) and deadly and South Africa is littered with places named *brakpan* or *brakwater*. A couple of centuries later a new band of adventurers, this time towards democracy, had a vision of a radically new educational dispensation that would, amongst other things, offer a new system of adult education and training. A mere eight years after democratic elections in 1994, the vision is increasingly seen as a deceptive mirage, and the actual reality inescapably *brak*. This paper is an attempt, in relation to adult education (including the interaction of universities and adult education), to understand and tell the story of this South African transformation which is so inextricably tied up with global economic, political and educational trends.

Conveniently, the historical period under review can be divided into three, the period of visioning (from 1990 to 1994), the period in which the visions turned into an implementation mirage (1995 to 2000) and a period of reality checking and rethinking (the last two years).¹

¹ See my article, *Struggle and compromise: a history of South African adult education from 1960 to 2001*, in the *Journal of Education*, No.29, pp. 125-178, for a straightforward narrative of events and trends during these periods.

Part 1: The period of visioning (and the first saltings)

The constraints of settlement

Following the advent of democratic government and the concomitant evolution of a constitution with a progressive bill of rights which included a strong commitment to addressing the needs of the disadvantaged sector of society, the prospects for developing a fully-fledged adult education system for South Africa were encouraging. Some eight years later these prospects are not only unfulfilled but diminished.

To understand why this is so also requires understanding that the dynamics of contemporary South Africa are heavily determined by the fact that there was no revolutionary transfer of power in the early 1990s – it was rather a negotiated settlement after the Western superpowers, soon to be totally victorious in their economic defeat of the Eastern bloc, prodded the South African government to the conference table with financial sanctions and, no doubt, gained all sorts of assurances from the then exiled African National Congress about how it would behave when it returned home (which it was able to after February 1990). In this respect, South Africa's democratisation is not dissimilar to what happened, or rather, was allowed to happen, in the Phillipines and Latin American countries once the United States of America was able to put aside its various paranoias and agree to political liberalisation.

The new government, elected in 1994, was accordingly constrained by a number of factors. A first one was the debt to, particularly, North American finance for having severed apartheid South Africa's access to loans. Secondly, and more broadly, the new rulers accepted the new world order dominated by the United States and South Africa never even experimented with socialism, though the African National Congress, dominated in exile as it was by the South African Communist Party, had been quite overtly socialist in policy and rhetoric (and still is in many of its communications with the masses). It was also, initially, seriously intimidated by fears of an army *coup d'etat* and ongoing destabilising violence from the Inkatha movement². Also, when it came to create policies and later to implement them, it had weak capacity

² A recent coherent study of these threats and violence is found in Greenstein, R. (Ed.) 2003. *The role of political violence in South Africa's democratisation*.

(most of its exiles had been trained in the Eastern block in how to run a, now clearly obsolete, centrally planned economy).

Given this situation, the early policies on education³, developed in the period February 1990 to April 1994, were on the one hand astonishingly visionary and responsive to the challenge of addressing the need to build a new non-racial educational system and make up for the neglect and discrimination of the past (particularly in respect of adults) and on the other hand already making concessions to globalization. It is now obvious, with the benefit of hindsight, to discern the already inserted tendencies and ideas that would later come to near deadly dominance, though at this early stage they seemed to be in relatively benign forms.

The first saltings

I would argue that there were already in existence in early 1990s ideas and discourses that prepared the grounds for the exceedingly rapid acceptance of concepts associated with the globalization of education and training. This can be seen particularly in respect of the linkage of the discourse of instructional objectives (and the discourses about competency, outcomes and standards that developed from it) to participation and empowerment, as well as the growing concentration on the needs of the labour market⁴.

In the mid-1960s, the importation by some churches of group dynamics (T-group) training and its associated techniques pioneered in the United States

³ Outlines of the policies of this period in respect of adult (and particularly adult basic) education can be found in Harley *et al* (1996, pp. 145-244) and Aitchison (2003, pp. 146-158).

⁴ See Kraak (2001) for an illuminating account of this and the subsequent period but focussing on higher education.

was the first introduction for people other than those in industry training⁵ to objectives and a simple systems approach to workshop and educational event design.⁶ These T-group/group dynamics/sensitivity training/basic human relations training methods had been introduced largely as a means of enabling white and black church people to meet each other at a greater level of intimacy and it certainly had a powerful and emotional impact. In the longer term it developed a cadre of church and student leaders who were adept at small group work and who would later apply some of these methods in the student, trades union and political contexts within the broader anti-*apartheid* struggle. Needless to say, it was to have a powerful influence on adult education in a variety of settings.

An African variant of this “technology” was seen in Anne Hope and Sally Timmel’s three immensely popular training manuals, *Training for Transformation*, which propagated a seemingly bizarre amalgam of T-group theory, Freirian conscientisation, vulgar Marxist economics and papal encyclicals and was published by a Catholic Church publishing house. It became the training Bible of a large number of United Democratic Front activists in the 80s, particularly those working outside the labour movement.

⁵ Where the trainers all had their copies of Robert Mager’s guides on instructional objectives.

In the intellectual archaeology of South African adult education and indeed of the whole current education and training system and its discourses, Mager’s work on behavioural objectives in training can be found mixed into the concrete of the now covered up mid 20th century foundations of our National Qualifications System and Outcomes Based Education.

These foundations, then, are those of American behaviourism applied (successfully we imagine) in the 1940s to the rapid training of men for the Second World War (the T-group training for officers, the more heavily objectives orientated training for the ranks) and then applied (in a failure approaching fiasco) to education (though the taxonomies of cognitive and affective educational objectives developed by Bloom and Krathwohl (Bloom *et al*, 1956, Krathwohl *et al*, 1964) have an enduring and seductive appeal) and to training where behaviourism and objectives embedded themselves and begot various offspring such as Criterion Referenced Instruction (CRI) and Management by Objectives (MBO) and who in turn begot Competence based education (CBE) and finally outcomes and standards (becoming part of the newly erected vocational education and training qualifications systems in such places as the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia). Finally, of course, this intellectual technology entered the university.

⁶ There are certain ironies in the fact that the church T-group training already contained within itself educational methods from another engrafted stock which had been used in the military and business. As the late sixties and seventies devotees of sensitivity training ran their courses around the country, people began to note that mixed up in the content and processes of the courses, that is, with the feely-touchy stuff, was a quite stiff skeleton of aims and objectives and indeed, with what we would now call a “systems-approach”.

The point to be noticed is the practical association of a somewhat behaviourist training technology with progressive social goals and attitudes and a premium on learner participation.

In academia, objectives were barely mentioned in the semi-liberal English speaking universities, though they increasingly took hold in Afrikaans speaking institutions. The reasons for this are complex but include the fact that it was Afrikaans speaking institutions (or black institutions run by white Afrikaans speaking staff) that trained the bureaucrats of the apartheid state, who wanted operational tools to run the system. However, a more potent factor operated at a much deeper ideological level. In reality, many in the Afrikaans elite had, certainly by the end of the seventies, lost faith in the ideology of apartheid (though they still observed its habits and practices).⁷ However, there was no obvious alternative ideology to turn to – humanistic liberalism or Marxism were just not on for them. Their answer was to turn to an essentially technicist ideology of no ideology (which, one must remember was much touted in the Western world of Reagan and Thatcher at the time).⁸ At a very practical level it enabled Afrikaans speaking universities to run their institutions⁹ far more efficiently than others and to be early adopters of

⁷ In field of educational ideology, Afrikaans teacher training institutions had adopted the educational philosophy of fundamental pedagogics, so intellectually bankrupt that it is perhaps understandable that refugees from it wanted nothing to do with “ideology” but were also ill prepared to interrogate the technicist ideology they then fell prey to.

⁸ Compassionate observers of the sad state of Afrikaans intellectuals who had lost their racist faith would soon be challenged to extend their sympathy to a multitude of South African Communist Party members in the ANC as the socialist experiment in the Eastern bloc went belly up. Their situation was compounded by the fact that the political rhetoric of the ANC continued as if the poor and wretched of the earth were about to come into their own in a socialist society while simultaneously the ANC leadership made concordats with global capitalism.

⁹ They also controlled South Africa’s huge distance education University of South Africa. Distance education was an early adopter of the paraphernalia of objectives in educational texts. Early educational experiments with behavioural objectives in school education in the United States were a dismal failure and programmed education texts (which supplied behavioural objectives and minute chunks of instruction at a time) soon landed in the dustbins of educational institutions. In distance education the enthusiasm lasted longer, though it is instructive to examine early Open University’s texts for their ponderously detailed instructional objectives at the beginning of each course and section of the course and the speed with which they withered away. They also survived in Christian fundamentalist theological education by extension which had also been influenced by behaviourist psychology. It is worth noting in relation to psychology that, on the whole, the objectives and outcomes movement seems to be almost totally oblivious of the dramatic late 20th century revolution in cognitive psychology and its implications for learning.

electronic technology in education and training¹⁰.

In adult education, and particularly in literacy and adult basic education,¹¹ there was the predictable desire for a large scale adult education initiative to undo decades of exclusion and discrimination. Hence there was no significant resistance, even from the most alternative of educators, to the idea of building an adult education system.

Amongst adult educators there was also a new attitude to accountability (which soon found a natural link to the idea of outcomes). During the struggle period a host of non-governmental organisations, funded from overseas, had in practice simply been the means of sheltered employment for political activists (and the odd confidence trickster). Even genuine adult literacy education organisations often delivered pitifully inadequate outputs at astronomical costs per learner. Clearly, this was going to have to change, particularly if donor agencies were going to be persuaded to continue to fund South African organisations (for though apartheid was terrible, wealth wise South Africa was far better off than most other countries in Africa).

So here, in seed form, were ideas about instructional objectives that were seemingly transparent to learners, enabled (at least in theory) recognition of prior learning, had been (apparently) successful in the training field, and, on the one hand, seemed non-ideological to those who had burned their fingers with ideology, and on the other, to those wanting access to education and training, had some associations with progressive pedagogy and conscientisation. There was a positive attitude to a state run system and towards a discourse of accountability for deliverables. The South African education and training mind was well prepared for the globalizing discourses.

¹⁰ The South African Defence Force was also deeply committed to this type of training. When the Defence Force and its subsidiary arms manufacturers and psychological warfare fronts began to be unbundled after the political settlement some of them ended up as designers and producers of education and training material, including in adult basic education.

¹¹ In South Africa in the 1990s, a discourse about adult basic education (ABE) (and by the mid-1990s adult basic education *and training* (ABET)) replaced the previous non-formal discourse of the 1980s in which the term literacy was dominant. Some of the earliest encouragement of the concept of ABE was done by the Universities of Natal and Cape Town in the mid-1980s.

Training and adult basic education

So it was with this background that the progressive educators, fresh from the suffering and dangers but also exhilaration of the democratic struggle, started to develop policy for the about to be born democracy. For adult education, this was to be largely restricted to policies about adult basic education and training. Adult education in a more general sense simply dropped off the agenda after 1992. The reasons for this are complex but understandable.

In South Africa during the late 1970s and 1980s there was a flowering of a range of non-governmental organisations, all more or less anti-apartheid and politically conscious, who survived repression (because of their multiplicity and smallness of size) and thrived to give more and more support to the growing resistance to the system. Of the educational NGOs, some were involved in various forms of alternative schoolteacher development (to make up for the lack of it in the apartheid education departments) and others were involved in literacy work. The latter group worked increasingly closely with the Congress of South African Trade Unions which took the issues of literacy and adult basic education to heart (owing much to the efforts of a number of education officers in the movement such as Adrienne Bird, Alec Erwin and Mapete Leeuw) as part of their vision of reforming industrial training and at the same time enabling workers, deprived through discrimination of the requisite education and certification, to benefit from their experientially developed skills.

Both these issues were strongly present in reports from a National Training Board investigation (National Training Board, 1991, 1994) into a new system of industrial training for South Africa. COSATU also set up its own policy research process, the Participatory Research Project (PRP), that argued for a close integration of ABE and skills training in a modularised system backed by new certification authorities and mechanisms for articulation in every conceivable direction.¹²

¹² What this vision would mean in practice is conveyed in remarkably concrete terms in Chapter 2, *Who will benefit?*, of a book compiled in 1995 by the Adult Basic Education and Lifelong Learning division of the Human Sciences Research Council called *Ways of seeing the National Qualifications Framework*. Unfortunately, by 2002, few if any of the envisaged developments have been delivered to the waiting beneficiaries!

From 1991 to 1994, the National Training Board, through eight committees representative of the state, business, labour and providers, worked on a *National Training Strategy Initiative*. One of these committees worked on a qualifications framework and another on adult basic education. Brian Phillips who had worked for Gencor on an ABET communications course for employees of this mining house (and who subsequently became a commercial ABET provider) was a Business South Africa representative and Adrienne Bird and Gail Elliot were both COSATU representatives.¹³ All three played a significant role in the direction the ABE took in South Africa. In the skills training group, convened by Ian Bellis, a Professor of Human Resources at the Rand Afrikaans University, there was receptivity to the emerging international discourse of “outcomes”. Edward French (2002), a member of this group described their conception of outcomes as “broad and indeterminate in nature, a rich composite of what was needed at the end of a process of growth” and corrective of the narrowness of “competencies” (the “can hammer in a nail” type of thing). He also describes the skills group as being vocal in its anti-university sentiment (French describes their parody of university education, curriculum and programme design, and sense of national objectives as “Jones is on sabbatical and can’t teach Chaucer this term. Let’s get Smith to do another Shakespeare.”).¹⁴

At this point an interesting historical (and psychological) question arises. Why did the radicals from the labour unions and academia fall in love with the

¹³ Adrienne Bird and Gail Elliot wrote the influential paper, *An integrated approach to post-compulsory education* that was presented in 1993 a policy workshop of the Centre for Education Policy Development and the ANC Education Department. Bird went on to become an influential official in the new Department of Labour. Elliot was the first drafter of the Department of Education’s *Multi Year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training* in early 1997 and subsequently worked for the South African Qualifications Authority.

¹⁴ An important factor in the general discrediting of disciplinary content knowledge in South Africa was the racist curriculum content in South Africa schooling and in much higher education. It made the attraction of outcomes-based education all the more compelling.

trainers?¹⁵ French (2002) describes how impressed he was by the quality of the thinking among the higher level training practitioners and their thoughtfulness about learning.¹⁶ Some of the impulses for this conversion¹⁷ came from the visits of teams including people like Bird to Australia and New Zealand where there were new qualifications frameworks and the competency/outcomes discourse was strong, and, in the case particularly of Australia, supported by the labour unions.

Workerists versus the populists - the arrival of the education and training policy experts

A further complexity in the policies constructed in the pre-1994 period and how they were implemented relates to an ongoing political and intellectual division amongst the anti-apartheid forces. Though the South African regime crushed overt political resistance to apartheid in the 1960s, at the beginning of

¹⁵ An interesting issue in relation to this is the local impact of the fall of communism in the late 1980s. Whilst Marxist academics were perhaps not as bereft of ideological solace as Afrikaans academics who had lost faith in the racial ideology of apartheid, the reality was that the functioning examples (bad as they were) of centrally planned socialist states had collapsed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. There was no longer even a small ideological space between capitalism and the communism. The communist managers had failed and many of the academics turned to the trainers (who seemed to know what they were doing) for a new form of management (they were not tempted to some kind of Freirian position for, indeed, many had never really liked Freire, or peasants or poor people). They cheerfully renounced critique in favour of “reconstruction”, reconstituting the past education struggle into a list of problems to be solved by technical (and technological) means, and joined the new state and the corporate world (though, of course, still on the side of the workers and students!).

¹⁶ Their inability to resist seduction is unsurprising. Many of the leaders of the educational policy struggle in unions and NGOs had little if any practical educational background (for example both Ihron Rensburg and Pravin Gordhan from the NECC were trained as pharmacists and many of the people from academia, though coming from Faculties of Education, had virtually no actual school teaching or adult education experience). Even those who had dabbled in Freirian practice had imbibed a simplistic view that the nature of all reality could be unpacked as simply as decoding *favela* (few had bothered to read or actually understand the heavy philosophical material in *The pedagogy of the oppressed*). The “simplicity” of training, its explicitness, its avoidance, if not horror of the ineffable, has an analog (even if a false one) in the simplicity of the Freirian promise.

¹⁷ The word conversion is used deliberately, French describes two key actors in the ABE field, in business and NGOs respectively, as having been converted to “strong theologies of Outcomes-Based Education”. Of course these early apostles of outcomes-based education and its encapsulation in standards should not be misrepresented as foreseeing or agreeing with the later crystallisation of the outcomes and standards environment. They saw these things as simply extremely useful support devices on which to connect lively practice.

the 1970s there was a slow but steady building up of an independent trade union movement, which brought together black workers and young white university intellectuals. Partly because of the political repression of the time (student protests were savagely suppressed both in the early 70s and more dramatically in the Soweto uprising of 1976) these activists adopted what came to be called a “workerist” position. This put systematic steady building up of a trade union base first and, sensibly, eschewed all political adventurism and overt challenging of the state – which infantile behaviour they ascribed to the “populists” who, with the burgeoning of resistance in the 80s, came increasingly to the fore. The workerists dominated the precursors of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)¹⁸ whereas the populists dominated the United Democratic Front, and particularly its student and civic affiliates.

The workerist and populist division, though seemingly overcome in the last years of the 1980s in the midst of ungovernability in the black townships and continual states of emergency, was retained in many of the policy positions held by key actors and has important consequences in relation to the openness to globalizing trends. The workerists were interested in the economy, labour markets and training. The UDF activists who were interested in politics, participation and the struggle in the institutions of education (hence the attraction to the UDF’s organic intellectuals of the new English translations of Gramsci). The unions represented workers, the UDF represented the students and the graduates of schooling. Though in the 1990s it became much more difficult to discern who was a workerist and who a populist (the very discourse had fallen out of fashion), the fault lines between those who put the economy first and those who put political participation first remained.

In 1991 the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) was set up by a group of intellectuals¹⁹ in association with the populist anti-apartheid National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC). Initially the NEPI enterprise was meant to be two pronged: the first, a clutch of committees and working groups, staffed largely by middle class academics (the experts²⁰) would

¹⁸ Formed in 1985, COSATU undoubtedly shifted its alignment much closer to the populist sentiment of the times which led, in due course, to its formal political alliance with the ANC for the first elections in 1994.

¹⁹ Notable among them Ihron Rensburg and Pravin Gordhan (both from the NECC), Nick Taylor, Johan Muller, Blade Nzimande and Harold Wolpe (a returned exile).

²⁰ Including Michael Young from the United Kingdom and several USAID advisors.

develop policy options, the second, a massive national process of participative consultation organised by the NECC would feed in ideas and critique on these options – the voice of the people (and particularly the students and school children). Perhaps predictably, the consultative process was a shambolic failure and the small cabal of intellectuals at the core of the project decided to dump the participative element.²¹ Undoubtedly, if this had not happened the policy documents would never have been written but it also meant that the populist concerns of participation, equity and redress would be increasingly threatened, particularly by COSATU which became an increasingly influential presence within the NEPI²². Its voice was most keenly felt in the Adult Basic Education and Human Resources Development groups. COSATU was wedded to the idea of some kind of general education (ABE) being provided to workers parallel to a more rational and generic form of skills training (about which they had various proposals related to industry training boards). At an early conference of all the working groups, the Adult Education and ABE working groups got together and agreed that it was sensible to merge. But this decision was soon overruled and the ABE group eventually produced a report on *Adult Basic Education* that looked at it essentially through labour market and training eyes. The *Adult Education* report looked at far more open ended options and was genuinely concerned about both education and training. Under similar pressure from COSATU and the returned exiles in NEPI, the *Human Resources Development* group was instructed to rewrite their report.²³

The equity (participation/redress/education as a human right) tendency, particularly dominant at the beginning because of the NECC constituency and reflected in a *Principles and Frameworks* document drafted by Pravin Gordhan and Ben Parker, was gradually replaced by an overt tension between

²¹ Something that resonates with the earlier example of South Africa's most famous political document, the Freedom Charter, endorsed by a national gathering at Kliptown near Johannesburg in 1955. Supposedly the result of a national process of gathering demands from the poor and oppressed in every corner of the land, it was actually written, allegedly with the help of several bottles of red wine on a single evening, by a South African Communist, Rusty Bernstein, in Johannesburg.

²² Adrienne Bird and Rahmat Omar were their most influential representatives.

²³ To be comprehensively accurate, there was another major threat to the populist democrats, that from the American advisors delivered by USAID who, apart from their patronising attitude that NEPI was a training exercise, partly designed to enable the struggle intellectuals to get all the socialist hot air out of their system, foisted education system financial modelling software on the largely innumerate educationists that, amongst other things, made no provision for the category of adult education at all!

equity and “development” (and the economically possible), the latter being stressed by Harold Wolpe, who, after the departure of Gordhan to the constitutional talks, became the pre-eminent NEPI guru. This tension is explicitly documented in the final NEPI *The framework report* of 1993 (National Education Policy Investigation, 1993, pp. 10-14):

It is in principle possible to increase both *equity* (defined as improved distribution of educational resources to disadvantaged communities) and *efficiency* (defined as maximizing rates of return on education investments), but in practice, policy choice will involve some or other *trade-off* between them. ...

What analysts may deduce from this is that:

- trade-offs have to be made in practice;
- emphasizing efficiency exclusively will certainly widen social disparities;
- emphasizing equity will be against the interests of the middle class élites, and can be expected to be vehemently opposed by them, except in cases where equity goals are perceived to serve their ends as well – as, for instance, expanding access to higher education in South Africa for the black middle class.

There is no gainsaying the hard facts of feasibility and affordability. ...

Though the experts came to dominate NEPI and downplayed populist concerns and encouraged labour market ones, the next stage of policy development in the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD), was more responsive to political imperatives, dominated as it was by the ANC. The CEPD was commissioned to produce an *Implementation Plan for Education and Training* (IPET) for the ANC alliance. It had strong, though carefully chosen, stakeholder representation, and saw the re-emergence as players of bureaucrats in the existing state structures. Unlike the NEPI production, which was of policy options, IPET was about producing plans for implementation. In the ABET working group, as the elections neared there were warning that there had to be plans (and budgets) for actual high profile programmes, which were drafted with frenetic speed (though never implemented).

Part 2:

The period of implementation mirages

A mere eight years later, both the NEPI reports and the IPET are dead and unread. But their demise should actually have been recorded in months rather than in years. The new Minister of Education, Sibusiso Bhengu, was a lacklustre former exile whose only distinction was that he, unlike many of the other cabinet ministers, had never been a member of the Communist Party. Whether his appointment was a balancing act in the cabinet or possibly an awful indication that the new government actually did not think that education was all that important, it was a bad start to a new education dispensation. A further startling policy shift was the retention of the separation between the ministries of Education and Labour. Much previous ANC and COSATU policy up till then had insisted on the integration of education and training and on the merging of the two ministries.

The global context within this implementation phase felt the increasing demands of international corporations and organisations and pressure on South Africa to be “globally competitive”. The education authorities had taken on board the global discourse of outcomes, performance and accountability, and, as was to be seen when in 1996 the government ditched the progressive, distributist Reconstruction and Development Programme for the austere Growth, Employment and Redistribution policy (without bothering to consult their union-based allies), there was increasing emphasis on the economic and human resource development roles of education and training. These above developments were in one sense indicative of a market-orientated and expert guided tendency. Yet in education this trend was masked by what Young (2001, p. 2) describes as a conflation of “a progressive view of pedagogy and an outcomes-based approach to curriculum and qualifications”, the latter reflecting what Kraak and Young (2001, p. 8) believe were “political pressures to find a short cut in the long road of building new forms of institutional capacity.” In practice little change occurred in educational practice because all the energy was devoted to the political symbolism of the policy changes. It was a time of educational (and especially adult education) mirages.

The National Qualification Framework²⁴ and its implementing authority were set up and over the next few years created an inordinate number of Standards Generating Boards and other committees, registered standards and unit standards²⁵. The development of these standards and qualifications was however slowed down to a snail's pace by the system of stakeholder participation built into the process²⁶. Actual expansion of provision did not necessarily follow.

Jansen, a harsh critic of outcomes-based education, argues (2001, p. 47) that in the period 1994 to 1999, "the over-investment in political symbolism at the expense of practical considerations largely explained the lack of change in South African education six years after the demise of apartheid." Evidence for this he finds in:

²⁴ The NQF's origins are summed up in the NQF review of 2002 (Department of Education and Department of Labour, 2002, p. 1):

The concept of an NQF emerged in various policy initiatives of the democratic movement prior to 1994 and was given substance in the National Training Strategy Initiative and the RDP. It was regarded as a major innovation of the new democratic government, aimed to bring all learning under a single framework of outcomes-based standards and qualifications. The intention was to widen opportunities for learning and enable prior learning, however achieved, to be recognised so that workers and learners could advance either in education and training or in their career paths. The South African Qualifications Authority Act was passed in 1995, with the joint sponsorship of the Ministers of Education and Labour. The Authority began work in 1997 and the National Qualifications Framework was established by regulation in 1998.

²⁵ A unit standard is an odd South African term meaning a standard or set of standards that is the smallest certifiable unit of learning.

²⁶ The language of "stakeholding" was a North American import and was soon misleadingly associated with the local progressive discourse of full participation. In practice the stakeholders were not particularly reflective of the beneficiaries or participants in programmes or indeed of all interested parties, but tended to reflect the dominant organs of the state, business and labour. This writer's experience of such stakeholder representing bodies was that invariably there was a tacit alliance between the state officials who chaired these meetings and one or more representatives of business (often in the form of paid consultants) who "volunteered" to do the actual work. This output achieved two things, firstly it enabled the business sector to get the output they wanted and, secondly, it also enabled them to have a head start in commercial applications of the as yet not formally approved standards or policies. This particularly applied to the Business South Africa representatives who served on the ABET National Stakeholder Forum who were also commercial providers of ABET in their own right. NGOs and universities simply lacked the resources, the venture capital so to speak, to gain these headstarts.

- the public claims by politicians and education bureaucrats concerning the primacy of symbolic politics in education policy making between 1994 and 1999;
- the prominence assigned by politicians to policy production (the making of policy) rather than its implementation;
- the inordinate amount of attention paid to formal participation in policy processes irrespective of their final outcomes;
- the lack of attention to implementation in official policy discourses on educational change;
- the way in which policy makers invoke international precedent in the development of national education policies as part of an external legitimization of local change processes;
- the way in which international participants (mainly in the form of foreign-paid consultants) are drawn into and influence the development of national policy making as an extension of the legitimization role of post-apartheid education policies; and
- the way in which national policy positions are validated through claims to South African incorporation within the globalization of modern economies.

The dominance of ABET and its impact on university adult education

With respect to adult education, I have already written about the failure of the policy implementation period from 1995 to 2001, the marginalisation of the adult literacy and basic education NGO community and the increasing intolerance of state officials to criticism that pointed to their provision failures (Aitchison, 1998, 2000, 2003; Aitchison *et al*, 2000). The temptation in analysing these failures is to ascribe them too directly to character failings in the key personalities, given that the situational pressures were such that it was inevitable that the new bureaucrats would form alliances with the old bureaucrats and the host of black Uncle Toms in the education systems who had never lifted a finger in the struggle against apartheid²⁷.

Although what could be described as a more populist educational administration came to power in 1994, the key policy documents and implementation plans that dealt with adult education obsessively concentrated on adult basic education and training (ABET) which was directed either

²⁷ One of the features of the South African political settlement was that no state employees from the previous regime would lose their posts. This had an obvious influence on how things came to be run.

towards training²⁸ or, in the state public adult learning centres, back to schooling for adults.

Criticism of developments by academics or NGOs was met with hostility verging on the pathological. In part, apart from predictable sensitivity to being told that they had not delivered, this was because the middle level bureaucrats in the state had entirely bought the proposition that the technicist superstructure of standards and so forth that represented the global demands for a decontextualised screening system for recruitment to the labour market was in fact progressive and participative. Criticism of it, therefore, was perceived as an assault on the gains of the liberation struggle. In such an environment rational criticism got short shrift. It was not an environment receptive to universities (although the state readily bought academic consultants to do the policy, implementation plan and review reports for it).

What happened to university based adult education?

The origins of adult education in South African universities had been primarily in liberal arts programmes offered as an extension of mainstream curricula and very much modelled on the British tradition of extra mural courses. It was the University of Cape Town's Centre for Extra Mural Studies that pioneered the development of these programmes beginning in the 1940s (though there had been earlier antecedents). In the 1960s the Centre's work began to encompass the developmental interest of adult education and the 1980s saw the introduction of the first programmes which offered formal certified training to adult educators. During the 1970s and 1980s similar developments took place at a number of other universities, which offered innovative and vibrant programmes which served as a forum and (perhaps even a refuge) for adult educators and activists engaged in the turmoil of resistance against the apartheid state. As the government successively closed the agencies of civil society, universities became havens for many of these education and development NGOs and in this environment university adult education departments flourished as expressions of alternative understandings of education and society (see the fine collection of papers from the 1980s edited by Millar, Raynam and Schaffer (1991)).

²⁸ Although ABET programmes in industry often provided courses in languages and communication, these had a quite instrumental purpose, to enable black workers to be communicated with in the language of business (which was English). It had little to do with a desire to provide a basic education for a citizen of the world.

By 1992 there were eight universities with centres or proto-centres and following the advent of democratic government and the concomitant evolution of a constitution with a progressive bill of rights which included a strong commitment to addressing the needs of the disadvantaged sectors of society, the prospects for developing a fully-fledged adult education system for South Africa were encouraging. University adult education departments and centres expected to come into their own. They had, after all, been key conceptualisers of ABE, had supported the rights of adult learners, and played a significant role in the new policies being formulated for education and training. But it was not to be.

Two factors quenched the possibilities. The first was that, with ABET now firmly ensconced in the Department of Education and the workplace and the prevalence of a hostile attitude to higher education critiques and thinking, the role of university adult education departments was unclear. The second was an amalgam of financial constraints on higher education allied to the absorption of new managerial models of governance of universities largely as the result of South Africa's re-entry into the international arena and the wider effects of 'transformation' in education generally and higher education in particular. Global prescriptions for higher education began to be applied.

Indeed for much of this period the Higher Education sector was in a rather dismal state. Most publicly funded higher education institutions came under increasing financial stress with cuts in government subsidies and donor funding of bursaries, and, in some cases, appallingly bad management. Profit making higher education institutions, many of them multi-nationals that have recently invaded the country were not interested in a non-profit making activity such as support for adult education. The combined effects of the structural changes and funding crises within the universities and the dominance of formal fee accruing programmes has led to the disappearance or reduction of previously strong adult education departments and other outreach and community service activities.

Ironically enough, the national stress on ABET in distinction from other forms of adult education, also worked to the disadvantage of university adult education departments. On the one hand, university bureaucrats, ignorantly assuming that adult education was synonymous with ABET, and trying to rationalise and downsize "unproductive" units, crassly argued that ABET was not a university matter. In addition, foreign donors who had previously sponsored work in university adult education departments, now worked solely through government gatekeepers. Many of these problems are well expressed

in a letter from the University of Natal to the deputy Minister of Education, Fr Mkhathshwa, in response to the latter's October 1997 call to universities to state how they could contribute to the Culture of learning, teaching and service campaign starting in 1998 in relation to literacy and adult basic education and training. *Inter alia* the University expressed its opinions of the *Multi-year implementation plan* and the support that the University could give to it and adult education (Maughan Brown, 1997, pp. 2, 4):

We are now facing a Catch-22 situation in which the donors who previously funded such work in the eighties and early nineties are now stating that they are funding via government and it has become extraordinarily difficult to gain such resources. Yet we are being encouraged to play an enhanced role in such things as the Multi-Year Implementation Plan. This Plan requires, we believe, substantial university inputs - in human resources training, curriculum and materials development, monitoring and evaluation, etc. We would like to expand our support for these. But we are facing diminished resources and it is our general perception that the last three years have seen a deterioration of the capacity of South African universities to serve the adult education field. Something needs to be done to eliminate this contradiction.

A further finance related problem is the lack of capacity for inter-university collaboration in adult (basic) education work. The networks that were set up in the late eighties that enabled university adult education personnel to meet on a regular basis have since largely collapsed as funders withdrew (notably USAID which now seems to work almost exclusively via government departments). This has further incapacitated the university sector's ability to contribute to this sector. It should also be noted that there has been a scandalous lack of support for adult education departments at the historically black institutions created during the apartheid era. It is deeply disturbing, for example, that the University of Zululand has no such facility (our University has assisted with attempts to start such a Centre on the Ngoye campus).

At the University of Cape Town and other institutions, the now standard process of institutional change happened: move to a North American model of executive management of the University, emasculate the Senate, reduce the number of Faculties, collapse Departments into large Schools, and only run programmes that bring in state subsidy or lucrative donor funding. It was the end of the famous Department of Adult Education and Extra Mural Studies at Cape Town (though the latter function continued on a smaller scale). A similar process happened at the University of the Witwatersrand. At the University of the Western Cape, although their centre survives, it is now in the shadow of a Lifelong Learning Division that *de facto* has to concentrate on the university as a provider to the market. At the University of Natal the general trend was resisted in Pietermaritzburg where the Centre for Adult Education, though incorporated into a School, was able to retain its identity and even grow. Ironically enough, it may be because this Centre had invested major intellectual and materials development resources into ABET that it, alone among the eight centres, managed, by 2001, to have actually thrived. The

ABET connection also served a new player, the University of South Africa, which set up an ABET Institute and managed to gain enormous financial support from the British Department for International development and gain the ear of the national Department of Education.

In sum then, the global trend makeover of the major South African universities allied to the narrowing of adult education to ABET as controlled by the departments of education and in the workplace, acted to decimate the presence and potential of university based adult education.

Part 3 Local realities

A recent book, *Transformation in Higher Education: Global pressures and local realities in South Africa* (Cloete *et al*, 2002), presents three possible answers to the failures in higher education transformation that are quite applicable to the whole education enterprise (Cloete, N. and Maassen, P. 2002. pp. 447 - 448):

The first is a kind of conspiracy theory: it argues that global capitalism was never going to make an equitable transformation possible and so the source of the widening gap between institutions must be found in globalisation, the Washington consensus and the ANC government which 'sold out' the ideals of the anti-apartheid struggle.

The second line of argument is that the new bureaucracy did not have the experience or capacity to implement the over-ambitious, complex policy proposals initially developed by intellectuals outside of the bureaucracy.

The third, and we hope more enlightening path that we wish to explore, concerns the intricate and often contradictory relationships between South Africa's entry into the global world in the post-1994 period, the problems of forming a new state, and the growing interaction between higher education and society, and the responses of higher education institutions firmly rooted in certain traditions and social contexts.

The third option, as pointed out by Desai (2002), is actually not very enlightening and suggests leaving transformation to the experts and consultants working to fine-tune the dysfunctionalities out of a market-driven education system.

Certainly, as the new millennium dawned, even the leading bureaucrats had to acknowledge that there was a problem with South Africa 'transformed' education system. Their solution was to set up two reviews, one of the outcomes-based education Curriculum 2005 and the other on the

implementation of the NQF. Both were expert model reviews and perhaps irredeemably compromised by having on the review panels people who had been architects of the original constructions (Michael Young is a particularly pointed example on the NQF study team). Generally and perhaps predictably (as with most expert reports) they are well written and researched and say sensible prudent things, but, as with most expert reports, they do not bite the hand that feeds them and both reports take care to praise the goodness and nobility of the policy intentions, extol what has been implemented, and itemise what can be reformed as a result of the experts' recommendations.

The Curriculum 2005 review (Department of Education, 2000) essentially acknowledges the jargon-filled over complexity of the original, suggests simplifying it, and recommends that attention be given to restoring the role of content and developmental sequence in education (though to call it a 'back to basics' is perhaps too extreme).

The NQF review (Department of Education and Department of Labour, 2002) is similar in temper. The over complexity and over bureaucratisation (allied to a dependence on the voluntary involvement of citizens in standards setting structures) is acknowledged, the confusion over the respective roles of the Departments of Labour and Education and the interests of higher education are taken a little more seriously, and it accepts that the curriculum can be based upon the actual standards. Stakeholder representation is, accurately enough, seen as inefficient, and it is recommended that it be reduced to ritual rubber stamping of what the technical experts have already designed.

Thus the two reports coalesce in giving the go ahead for the restoration of a centrally, state determined curriculum – the very thing the whole new system was meant to move away from.²⁹

²⁹ See *The Education Laws Amendment Act No 50 of 2002* which states that:

- 6A. (1) the *Minister* must, by notice in the Government Gazette, determine -
 (a) a national curriculum statement indicating the minimum outcomes or standards; and
 (b) a national process and procedures for the assessment of *learner* achievement.
 (2) The curriculum and the processes for the assessment of *learner* achievement contemplated in subsection (1) must be applicable to *public* and *independent schools*.

Clause 27 proposes a nearly identical amendment to the ABET Act 52 of 2000 that is "applicable to public and private centres."

Clause 28 confirms the extent to which public ABET is seen as a form of schooling in its prohibition of "corporal punishment to a learner at any adult basic education and training centre."

Conclusion: “The world has been NQFed!”³⁰

In 1998 the SAQA Executive Officer reported that “the NQF is part of the South African psyche” (Department of Education and Department of Labour, 2002, p. 1) and the Chapter 4 of the *Report of the study team on the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework on International Developments* discovered that it was a universal psychosis (p. iii):

The development of NQFs is an international phenomenon, backed by the ILO and UNESCO, which is gathering pace at national, regional and international levels. South Africa’s decision to establish an NQF is vindicated by the international record.

A few academics and social activists have begun to think the unthinkable and suggest that this system cannot ever be implemented in a humane way and that it will have to be scrapped (see ALBED Task team, 1999; Umtapo Centre, 1999; Aitchison *et al*, 2000, pp. 168-169; Aitchison, 2000; Allais, 2002).

Who brought the Ice 9?

In his quirky science fiction novel, *Cat’s cradle*, Kurt Vonnegut tells the alarming tale of a disaffected scientist who produces a form of ice (“Ice 9” in the story) that, even at normal temperature, instantly turns any water it comes into contact with into ice. The Ice 9 falls into the hands of a third world dictator, an explosion happens during a warplane display, the ice is blown into the sea and – the world’s seas and rivers crystallise instantly – that is the end of the human world as we know it.

In reflecting on the rapidity with which the new democratic South Africa’s education and training policies, practices and institutions (including many of their adult education ones) adopted, often in a most extreme form, features associated with the globalization of education and training, one has to distinguish, but also acknowledge the connectedness between, the new precipitating agents (the Ice 9 of Vonnegut’s dystopic fantasy) and the already existing receptivities (water has a molecular structure that is amenable to crystallisation) that themselves may have been prepared by interactions with earlier catalysts.

In considering the historical details of how our education and training system was globalised over a few short years, with, in our case, I suspect, rather

³⁰ Comment by Ben Parker, a member of the NQF review study team (Parker, 2002).

unfortunate long term results, I have been constantly struck by how a very few people, though well placed ones, were able to initiate large shifts in policy and institutional practice.³¹ Is it possible that we would not be where we are now if those key agents had not been present at meetings, conferences and on working groups. Were they the bearers of Ice 9? Or is this simply another version of “the great man theory of history” that can be dismissed as irrelevant – if it had not been them it would have been someone else because we are engulfed in an unstoppable surge of globalization. I suspect the truth is somewhere between the two positions. The nature of our political settlement was such that, in conjunction with major shifts in the global economy and the collapse of communism, we would never have been able to resist a compromise with globalism and globalization. But if certain people had made different decisions and we had been more wary of foreign governments and donors sending us educational policy advisors we would be in a better place. To believe in education is, of course, to also believe that knowledge and understanding make a difference to human life and history. Education therefore has to be a hopeful science. And there are still South Africans seeking and struggling for our own version of a promised land beyond the Nylstroom.

Meanwhile, for the lucky South African prisoners in the global classroom, lucky that they are not in the exclusion zones of poverty and plague and illiteracy where there will only be increasing misery and no Internet access, there is no prospect of early release, though internal to the prison, promotions to trustee posts will be abundant. But, as to the routine, the hidden curriculum of prison, (as prisoners know) things do not change very fast. The Gordian knot of global standardisation and vocationally related standards and

³¹ Desai (2002) makes an apposite point about this in his review of Cloete *et al* (2002):

“I had hoped to put down the book with an understanding of how the growth, employment and redistribution (Gear) strategy came to be embodied in the workings of “institutional forums”, senates, admissions policies, departmental closures, research orientations and so forth. I wanted to know which intellectuals, unions and student activists had opposed or hastened the process.

This is important because no matter how many abstract policy documents with which the authors are able to display some familiarity, it is the concrete reception of these policies that really requires investigation.”

Authors of a recent collection of essays, *Education in retrospect: policy and implementation since 1990*, edited by Andre Kraak and Michael Young (2001) are similarly disingenuous about the role they played in erecting a system they now criticise with the appearance of detached objectivity.

qualifications systems is now too complex to be untied. In this sense there is no scope for future policy development in the new millennium – only the tinkering with implementation plans and their review. The knot can but be cut and we still await a liberator with a sharp enough sword.

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