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Editorial

Robin Mackie

The idea of a special edition of the *Journal of Education* was mooted in 2004 in recognition of the need to rally adult education in South Africa. Now, two years later, this edition presents six papers which represent the best academic scholarship in this area of education in South Africa today. They are six good papers – but there are only six and it has taken two years to bring them together. How are we to understand the paucity of academic writing in this field?

Broadly speaking, from about the 1970s South African universities began to take an active interest in adult education. Initially this engagement was often narrowly focussed on a liberal adult education tradition, but the individuals and units charged by their institutions with responsibility for this area, rapidly shifted their attention to making sense of, and providing support for, an emerging field of adult education practice. The field was informed by various competing ideological agendas. In this, the humanistic legacy of the 1960s with its T groups and existential preoccupations and the liberal arts tradition of extra mural university classes might be seen as bit players; the major league players were the trainers of industry and the practitioners of progressive and radically orientated adult education then prevalent in NGOs. The training sector was driven by the demands of a growing economy for skilled labour and the quest was for effective and efficient methods for developing skills in the face of the inadequacies of an apartheid education system. The NGO sector was informed both by the need to plug the gaps of apartheid education and by the possibilities which these gaps created for empowerment and transformation.

University engagement in adult education was broadly, though not exclusively, aligned with the radical and transformative agenda represented by the non formal education sector. By the middle of the 1980s a number of fledgling university departments of adult education had been established and were providing training for practitioners from these different traditions, supporting the work of NGOs and developing contested analyses of the field. Adult Basic Education was a present, but not always primary, aspect of this work. For the next ten years these departments thrived. And then almost as suddenly as they had sprung up they began to decline.

There are several factors which may account for this sea-change and they no doubt combined in different ways in relation to specific instances. During the 'struggle years' as the apartheid state repressed all forms of oppositional intervention, universities had afforded one of the few spaces from which non formal education could continue to operate and a number of non formal educational projects and organisations took refuge in universities. These projects and organizations were often associated with, or allied to, adult education programmes and departments. These associations were welcomed by universities as expressions of their commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle. The 1994 transition rendered this rationale obsolete and indeed, as universities have increasingly become instruments of the new state, alternative and oppositional forms of practice become unhelpful and even threatening to both the institution and the state. This loss of symbolic value has rendered adult education departments particularly vulnerable to the restructuring of the universities with the implications which this restructuring holds for the realignment of priorities and the imperatives of financial viability. Always marginal to mainstream education, the transfer to universities for the full responsibility of teacher training, formerly undertaken by teacher training colleges, serves only to exacerbate the marginal status of adult education departments, as the primary focus of educational faculties inevitably shifts to school teacher development.

But it would be mistaken to ascribe the demise of adult education activity in universities to these internal dynamics alone. Significant changes in the field also played a part. The decimation of the NGO education sector was a consequence of similar forces to those afflicting university departments of adult education. In some ways these organization can be seen to be victims of their own success as the educational methods and vocabulary which they had pioneered, as alternative to apartheid education, were incorporated into the new educational system. And insofar as the radical and technicist agendas were represented by the NGO and training sectors, the latter eclipsed the former as the dominant model of the post-apartheid education system with an almost obsessive emphasis on certification which virtually obliterates the opportunities for non formal education. Ironically the State's assumption of responsibility for Adult Basic Education circumscribed the NGO sector's capacity to continue to contribute in this area, so much so that most of the foremost literacy organizations, themselves serviced by university adult education departments, have closed their doors for lack of funding. The tragedy is that the strong rhetorical and constitutional commitment to Adult Basic Education is yet to be matched by real delivery as two of the papers in this edition bear witness. But neither is the decline of adult education simply a national problem. On the world stage traditional notions of adult education can be seen to be in retreat as new meaning is sought for the concept of Lifelong Learning in an information satiated and rapidly changing global society. More

insidiously, a relentless neoliberal agenda, with an obsessive tendency to order the world to its own image, is progressively closing the spaces which adult education previously took as its fora of engagement. These were often messy, organic spaces which were responsive to human needs rather than to the determinants of any system

This would be one explanation for the absence of academic publications in the field of adult education though it does not entirely explain the silence given that the influences sketched here invite a deeper analysis. John Aitchison in two 2003 *Journal of Education* articles titled “Struggle and compromise: a history of South African adult education from 1960 to 2001” and “Brak! – vision, mirage and reality in the post *apartheid* globalisation of South African adult education and training” tells a similar and more developed story. And there could be many others. One of these is the explanation offered by Shirley Walters in the first article in this publication.

Walters takes issue with Aitchison for his “narrow, nostalgic view of adult education” and instead employs a wide-angle lens to reveal the “vibrancy that exists but which Aitchison is not able to see”. Using this lens, Walters reviews the litany of education policy legislation enacted during the first decade of democratic rule and sees in this significant achievements particularly in relation to the mandatory provision for the training of staff. She then treats the reader to a *tour de force* of the myriad activities which can be understood as adult learning (deliberately and carefully distinguished from adult education) and situates this within a framework of Lifelong Learning. This includes learning opportunities provided by civil society organizations, the private sector, and particularly continuing professional development, and by government departments - specifically the Departments of Labour, Education, Correctional Services, Health, and Water Affairs. From these examples she concludes that “there is a wide range of learning or capacity building programmes” which she sees as largely disconnected and unlikely to understand themselves within an adult and lifelong learning framework. This opens to question the usefulness of a frame which reveals itself as primarily descriptive, fundamentally related to human resource development and whose association with core values of adult education is relatively recent and not secured. One is left wondering whether the proverbial baby has not been cast out with the bathwater. Walter herself examines the competing views of Lifelong Education in a useful paragraph earlier in the article.

Walters’ article concludes with a brief review of the Western Cape’s project which seeks to construct a ‘learning province’. This theme can be understood to be taken up in a very different context in the second article in this edition in which Linda Cooper explores through a case study, a trade union as a learning organization. This study breaks the mould to the extent that it seeks to

understand the opportunities and patterns of learning in an organization which is not normally characterized as a learning organization, having as it does, purposes orientated towards social action rather than competitive advantage. Using Situated Learning Theory, Cooper examines several trade union activities – notably meetings and mass action through a learning lens. Interestingly in this article, learning refers to informal learning which contrasts sharply with the notion of formal lifelong learning in the first article. Whether this is indeed informal learning is perhaps a moot point. While the learning itself may occur informally, it is clearly self-consciously intentional which moves it towards non formal education. Complicating this definitional nuance is the distinction which has to be maintained between the learning of the organization as an organization and the learning of its members.

Bhekathina Memela and Sandra Land's article on an education and democracy project in KwaZulu-Natal with its explicit Freirean roots, non formal delivery and community context, shifts the frame to a more traditional model of adult education. Despite its playful metaphors, it speaks to the margins with a directness which lays bare the complexity of this kind of organic and holistic engagement with its false starts, disappointments, triumphs and hope. In so doing it reveals the gulf that exists between the reality of this grass roots experience and the systems and policies which are intended to address these needs.

Edith Kiggundu and Jane Castle's article which looks at how rural ABET centres respond to HIV/AIDS is in a similar vein. Even though the context moves to public ABET centres and a formal curriculum, the elements of non formal community education can be seen in the income generating projects and the texture of the context. The article contrasts the experience of a deep rural ABET centre with one situated in peri urban environment. The research reported, discovers, not surprisingly, that HIV/AIDS is integrated into the curriculum more readily in the latter than in the former with a concomitant greater awareness of the disease, its causes and its consequences. This is attributed to the more strongly developed social networks and social capital which is manifest in the peri-urban ABET centre. More generally the article points to the massive challenges which ABET centres face in implementing policy requiring the incorporation of HIV/AIDS education into the ABET curriculum, without the means or support. The gulf between policy and implementation is again very evident.

The last two articles focus directly on literacy, arguably the centre of adult education endeavour. John Aitchison and Anne Harley demonstrate how poorly constructed official statistics give a distorted impression of illiteracy in South Africa. Careful consideration and analysis of the contradictions lead Aitchison and Harley to a reinterpretation which reveals limited and possibly

even negative progress towards the reduction in the level of illiteracy in the second half of the 1990s. They point to instances where raw data scores actually show increases despite apparent or claimed proportional improvement. There is also evidence that functional illiteracy amongst adult women may have increased. Definitional differences and ambiguities in relation to functional literacy, the inclusion of FET learners, the number of ABET learners and of Public Adult Learning Centres all combine to paint a confused and perplexing picture of illiteracy and ABET provision in South Africa which may account for some of the exaggerated official claims, but the reader is left wondering whether these should be attributed to carelessness or callousness. Provincial differences which reveal the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal as the worst afflicted provinces also serve to obscure the extremes when these are combined in national figures.

While Aitchison and Harley provide us with a bleak reading of the state of illiteracy, the final article in this edition by Peter Rule can be seen as an exhortation. *The Time is Burning* is a quotation from an address by Professor Bhola to a recent international conference on literacy which was held in Pietermaritzburg. Rule begins with a survey of the current 'parlous' state of Adult Basic and Literacy Education which mirrors that provided by Aitchison and Harley. He tempers the cold statistics with a life story which makes stark the lived reality of the millions who are condemn by their illiteracy to live in isolation from the mainstream economic system. Rule then moves to explore the basis for the constitutional right to literacy and the arguments which might be brought to bear to compel delivery based on this right. It is a clarion call to action; we can only hope that it will be met by the clamour of action as the current national initiative presently represented by a Ministerial Committee on Literacy begins to bear fruit.

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Adult learning within lifelong learning: a different lens, a different light

Shirley Walters

Abstract

Adult learning is located within a lifelong learning framework both as a lens for looking back and for projecting forward. The competing views of adult and lifelong learning are discussed and a preliminary overview of what has been achieved within adult learning in the last 10 years in South Africa is given. Lifelong learning and the learning region are suggested as frameworks for providing a 'connected up' approach to human development, and a possibility for finding 'troubled spaces of possibilities' (Edwards and Usher, 2005) to create new solutions to old problems.

Introduction

The year 2004 was a watershed for South Africa as it marked ten years of democracy. This propelled intense retrospection by Government, civil society, academics, business and labour, to assess what had been achieved whether fully, partially or unexpectedly, in improving the conditions of life of the majority of people (South African Government, 2003). The field of adult education was no different (Aitchison, 2003a, 2003b).

This article argues that to assess what has been achieved, the lens that is used is critical. I propose locating adult learning within a lifelong learning framework both as a lens for looking back and for projecting forward. I begin with a brief discussion of Aitchison's (2003b) reflection on adult education and training in the last ten years. Then move to a discussion of lifelong learning and an overview of what has been achieved within adult learning in the last decade. The contrasts in the reflections of Aitchison and myself are marked partly because of the different lenses used. I finally focus on lifelong learning and the learning region as frameworks for providing a 'connected up' approach to human development.

An opaque lens

There is very limited literature on adult education or adult learning in South Africa. Aitchison's (2003b) article is therefore to be welcomed. It is, however, an article, which is limited. One of the major limitations is the lack of clarity on the lenses that he is using to describe adult education and training.

The title of the article addresses 'adult education and training' but the article is concerned with notions of 'adult education', 'adult basic education and training (ABET)' and an 'adult education system', which seems to refer very narrowly to a State system within the Department of Education. None of the terms are explained which is unexpected, given his own concern previously with delineation of the field (National Education Policy Investigation, 1993). He is disappointed that a 'fully fledged adult education system', which he does not explain, has not materialised. This in spite of his own recognition of the major limitations with the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) processes, which signalled a likely continuity rather than rupture with the past (Walters, 1993). He claims that the prospects for a new system have not only been 'unfulfilled' but have 'diminished'.

Put simply, his story is one of South African activists and adult educators who were on the fringes of the global economy during apartheid times doing good work. Foreigners, carrying with them 'outcomes based education', 'lifelong learning' and 'national qualifications frameworks' in the interests of global capitalism, easily duped them. One of the reasons he suggests for their gullibility was that they had learnt about 'instructional objectives' during their time, perhaps, in a T-Group, or on a *Training for Transformation* course for radical Christians. In this, he is reawakening an old debate, which gives ideological power to educational technologies or approaches. In the 1980s, for example, there was a dominant view that to be a 'progressive' educator you had to 'work in small groups'. He seems to be saying that to use 'objectives' there is an automatic translation into particular forms of pedagogy. This has been refuted. In addition, the adult educators and the activists, contrary to their history of struggle, are portrayed as victims in an all-powerful global onslaught. The university based adult education departments are portrayed in the same light, in a disappointing, factually inaccurate account.

This present article is an attempt to use another lens to identify the vast array of adult learning activities that are in evidence. It challenges the rather narrow, nostalgic view of adult education, which Aitchison describes and it suggests a vibrancy that exists but which Aitchison is not able to see.

The background to lifelong learning in South Africa

The challenge for the democratic government has been to recreate the education and training system, virtually, in totality. Education had been one of the key instruments for the furthering of the oppressive racial policies. Policies for each part of the system have been developed and, now, ten years later there are processes of retrospection and review to see what has been achieved. The *Education White Paper 3 of 1997, A Programme for the Transformation of*

Higher Education, captures the challenges confronting South Africa and the education system well:

(T)he South African economy is confronted with the formidable challenge of integrating itself into the competitive arena of international production and finance. . .

Simultaneously, the nation is confronted with the challenge of reconstructing domestic social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership, wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid (emphasis added).

A key response to these challenges has been for the government to prioritise the construction of a single, equitable system of quality education within a system of lifelong learning. The vision for this was first set out in the Policy Framework for Education and Training written by the Education Department of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994:

All individuals should have access to lifelong education and training irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age (African National Congress, 1994, p.3).

The understanding of what was meant by lifelong learning appears later on in the document.

Lifelong Learning is an essential structural objective for our system of education if the objectives of a democratic society are to be met.

This document links lifelong learning to attainment of democracy and places it as the core of the vision for the new education and training system.

In the 1994 document strong emphasis was placed on the structural changes required and the role of lifelong learning in helping to bring about these. It was a populist discourse that was strongly influenced by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and other popular formations within the ANC alliance. A great deal of store was put on the construction of a National Qualifications Framework to be the central lever for a lifelong learning system.

Since then, the central ideas have been translated into various policies, through extensive consultative, and contested, processes, and have been implemented in the last number of years. As the gloss of the new dispensation has faded, so the debates on the merits of theories underpinning the policies and on the outcomes have become heightened. A very useful set of papers which captures key areas of contestation is *Education in Retrospect: Policy implementation since 1990* (Kraak and Young, 2001).

'Lifelong learning', the 'knowledge society', and the 'learning society', have not been the specific lenses used in South Africa for extensive analysis. The broad vision of a lifelong learning system was translated quite quickly into operational building blocks, both institutional and conceptual, and these have been the focus of attention. The new language of the 'integration of education and training', 'a single national qualifications framework', 'outcomes based education and training', 'recognition of prior learning (RPL)', 'learnerships', amongst others, has resulted in bureaucrats, educators, trainers and policy makers having to scrutinise and invent the individual pieces of a new system. This intense process of learning a 'new language', constructing new systems, and building capacities to implement the pieces has been all absorbing for many. It has made the holding of the overall vision for lifelong learning in the interests of the majority, articulated in 1994, difficult.

Within the broad discussion on the system for lifelong learning in South Africa, there are several issues being debated including the nature and form of national qualifications framework, human resource strategies, relationships between policies and practices and the question of 'knowledge' (Kraak, 2003). There is questioning of the wisdom of having too quickly adopted concepts that had currency amongst left leaning academics in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, in the late 1980s early 1990s. As Young suggests, South Africans perhaps picked up on the vision that was encapsulated in the theories and tried to implement, getting trapped in utopianism (Young, 2004).

Lifelong learning - competing views

Broadly speaking, lifelong learning is rooted in two main traditions – one concerned with human resource development for the economy; the other concerned with the promotion of democracy and citizenship in the interests of the majority (Gustavsson, 1997). There has been an explosion of interest in lifelong learning in the North as part of their drive to be globally competitive. In the South, governments and funding agencies have been a little more reticent. The dominant discourse of lifelong learning is mainly concerned with the economy at the high end. In addition to its economic orientation, there is a growing critique amongst certain academics of the use of lifelong learning for social control in places like the United Kingdom (Crowther, 2004). Crowther (p.125) argues that lifelong learning as currently practised is negative as it "diminishes the public sphere, undermines educational activity, introduces new mechanisms of self-surveillance and reinforces the view that failure to succeed is a personal responsibility".

Some others located in the South (Torres, 2003; Walters, 2001), argue for the importance of a lifelong learning framework and argue against the notion that

lifelong learning is good for the North while basic education is promoted in the South. They argue that all learning is inextricably linked and the strong differentiation of children's and adult's learning is unhelpful. A lifelong learning attitude is required across all ages for people's ongoing engagement in personal, political, cultural or economic development.

Unlike Aitchison, who is inclined to interpret lifelong learning and its related concepts as working only in the interests of global capitalism, evidence shows that they are contested terms and must continually be given contextual meaning. Lifelong learning is not automatically a 'good thing' or a 'bad thing'. While it is mainly used in relation to increasing the efficiency of the marketplace, there is value in challenging this hegemony and supporting the notion that its aim is to enhance active citizenship which:

connects individuals and groups to the structures of social, political and economic activity in both local and global contexts, and emphasises women and men as agents of their own history in all aspects of their lives. (UNESCO Institute for Education, 1998)

Lifelong learning within this understanding assumes the need for major pedagogical, organizational and social changes to address equity, redress and economic concerns. Coffield (2000) argues that lifelong learning is going through three overlapping stages, namely those of 'romance', 'evidence' and 'implementation'. As he says, many of the materials on lifelong learning are almost theological in their zeal and remain at the romantic levels, claiming learning as a panacea. The implementation of lifelong learning within a more holistic framework is the challenge.

Adult learning in South Africa in the last 10 years

Depending on the lens that is used to explore achievements over the last 10 years, so the outcomes vary. To do this, I am deliberately using the language and lens of adult learning rather than adult education (Walters, 2001). Before proceeding I will elaborate on this choice.

Firstly, adult education is still commonly equated with either personal development for the middle classes or literacy and basic education for the poor. In the processes preceding the first democratic elections, the NEPI, which was the think tank for the ANC, reflected this limited understanding of Adult Education, by separating it even from Adult Basic Education and Human Resource Development conceptually and in policy terms. Already at that stage it was predictable that those who were for the inclusive understanding of Adult Education had lost the argument (Walters, 1993).

Secondly, adult learning is embedded in the political, social, cultural and economic processes of society. Its primary social purposes within a context like South Africa are: to enhance possibilities for people to survive the harsh conditions in which they live; to develop skills for people in the formal and informal sectors for economic purposes and for cultural and political education which encourages people to participate actively in society through cultural organisations, social movements, political parties and trade unions. Improving the lives of the majority, who are poor, demands a holistic approach that enables inter-sectoral strategies across national and local government departments, civil society organisations and those in the economy. The language of 'learning' or 'capacity building' resonates more easily with, for example, the health, environmental, welfare, or business sectors. They more easily recognise their involvement in 'learning', rather than 'education', as they go about their daily business.

Thirdly, as Torres (2003, p.23) argues, adult education in the South "has always been trapped between meagre attention and resources and overly ambitious expectations". Unlike many countries in the North, the South does not have compact networks of public or private education and training organisations that are overwhelming citizens with learning opportunities. Adult education facilities are limited. The majority of adults do not have the expectation of 'education'; this is for their children. Therefore she argues that "expanding the perceived learning needs and enhancing the capability to demand them is particularly important for learners in the most disadvantaged situations" (p.24). Learning, she argues, does not imply an individualised approach. The building of learning communities to help address the daily struggles within a comprehensive and integrated development strategy is essential.

Trying to assess comprehensively what adult learning has taken place in the last 10 years is virtually impossible as the programmes and activities are hard to find. They may be found under 'capacity building' or 'staff development' or 'community development' in organisations or government departments. What I am able to do here is suggest a range of activities and programmes that were found through searching web sites, annual reports and other documents. What is obvious is that there is a need for substantial research to give a more comprehensive picture.¹

¹ This is based on the Confintea Review by the Division for Lifelong Learning for the UNESCO Institute for Education. Kathy Watters and Shirley Walters were the authors.

What has been achieved?

Building up lifelong learning structures and institutional frameworks

While I do not intend rehearsing the full basket of legislation that is impacting education and training in South Africa, it is necessary to recognize the crucial significance of the favourable policy environment in which education and training is being developed.

The education policy framework has been set by at least seven major pieces of legislation, starting with the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995, which provides for the creation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which establishes the scaffolding of a national learning system that is to integrate education and training at all levels and across sectors. Then in 1996 the National Education Policy Act and the South African Schools Act were passed, the latter making schooling compulsory for children aged 7 –15. In 1997 the Higher Education Act made provision for a unified and nationally planned system of higher education and created a statutory Council on Higher Education (CHE), which advises the Minister and is responsible for quality assurance and promotion. The Further Education and Training Act followed in 1998, with a strategy which provided the basis for developing a nationally co-ordinated system, comprising the secondary component of schooling and technical colleges. Then in 2000, the Adult Basic Education and Training Act, provided for the establishment of public and private adult learning centres, funding for ABET provisioning, the governance of public centres, and quality assurance mechanisms for the sector.

In 2001 and 2002 the framework for a national quality assurance system was established with the accreditation of 31 Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs). This accreditation process included the Council for Higher Education (CHE) as well as the 25 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).

The Skills Development Act of 1998, which allows for the setting up of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the Skills Development Levy Act of 1999, all aim to enhance the levels of education and training and the learning cultures. These complement the other legislation and introduced new institutions, programmes and funding policies.

In February 2001 the Minister of Labour launched the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS).² The mission of the NSDS is:

To equip South Africa with the skills to succeed in the global market and to offer opportunities to individuals and communities for self-advancement to enable them to play a productive role in society.³

SETAs have been established to implement the NSDS and to increase the skills of the people in their sector. Sectors are made up of economic activities that are linked and related, for example the banking, manufacturing and information technology sectors. One of the functions of each SETA is to develop learnerships for their sector. Learnerships replace the old apprentice training system and like apprentice training combine practice and theory. The Department of Labour had set a target of March 2005 by which date each SETA must have learnerships available.

Employers who contribute monthly fund the skills' development strategy. The skills' levy is currently 0.5% of a company payroll. This money is allocated to the National Skills Fund (20%) and 80% to the relevant SETA. Employers who have their own learnerships or other registered training programmes can claim back a portion of their contribution.

While there is some dissatisfaction with the rate of delivery of the SETAs, Government claims that in the last four years the National Skills Fund has spent R690 million to train 380 000 people (Department of Labour, April 2004). The major achievement has been the fact that for the first time there is some compulsion for employers to train staff, rather than perpetuate the previous practices of importing 'white' labour as required.

Delivery

Various state departments, private sector as well as civil society organisations, provide formal learning programmes for adults. In terms of ABET, commerce and industry provide support in the form of materials as well as providing training. Overall they are the largest providers of ABET. The State is the second largest provider of ABET programmes with provision varying in style and in specific projects across the nine provinces. The DoE spending on

² Department of Labour (undated) *The National Skills Development Strategy*. Pretoria: Department of Labour (brochure).

³ Department of Labour (undated) *SETAs – Sector Education and Training Authorities*. Pretoria: Department of Labour, p. 2 (brochure)

ABET was R343 million in the 2000/01 financial year and R160 million in 1999/2000.⁴ This money is spent only on new initiatives and national programmes as General and Further education are the responsibility of Provincial Governments and ABET is part of General Education. On average ABET is around 1% of the provincial education budgets. Civil society organisations provide about 10% of the ABET provision (French, 2002). In general, with about 30% of the adult population unable to read and write, and with the government's rhetorical support for equity and redress, there is great despondency about the level of provision of ABET since 1994 (Aitchison, 2003; Baatjes, 2003; French, 2002)

The main providers of adult learning within the state sector are the Departments of Labour, Education, Correctional Services, Health, and Water Affairs. The following examples of adult learning initiatives in government departments illustrate the nature of this provision.

Aside from conventional human resource development, the DoE targets specific groups for skills upgrading. During the year 2001/02, some 22,800 educators and 683 master trainers benefited from training. There was also upgrading of the approximately 65,000 unqualified and under-qualified educators. The initial target was 10,000 people.⁵

During the year 2001/2002 the Department of Correctional Services⁶ spent just under 7% of its budget on development for offenders. The budget covers general psychological services, social work, spiritual care and skills' development. According to the annual report 25 260 (15%) of prisoners attended education and training programmes. During this year 14 new training centres were established to provide training in basic technical skills as well as business skills. A fund allocation from the Department of Labour's National Skills fund of R10,5 million enabled 7 087 prisoners to receive training in technical and entrepreneurial skills. In addition the department runs 20 prison farms and 104 smaller vegetable gardens. The farms provide prisoners with a range of skill development opportunities.

There are a number of programmes run by the Health Department, which are aimed at improving the knowledge adults have about their bodies. These are ongoing, with a different focus being addressed at different times in the year. For example Pregnancy Education Week has been the last week of February

⁴ Department of Education Annual Report, 2000/01, p. 34.

⁵ Department of Education Annual Report 2000–2001, p. 20

⁶ Department of Correctional Services Annual Report 2001–2002, pp. 79-98

since 1999, Cervical Cancer Month has been in September since 2000 and Breast Cancer Month is in October. The Health Department has also initiated a variety of campaigns targeting specific groups. These include the Sexual Reproductive Health Right Campaign (2002), the National Inherited Disorders Awareness Campaign (2002), the Hands on Childbirth Education Programme (2000), and Male Involvement in Reproductive Health (2000).

Other programmes have also been introduced to deal with specific needs of people working in health services. According to the SA Health Review of 2002⁷ reskilling and upskilling became necessary with the move to the more decentralised system of primary health care. People working at district level required planning, implementing and monitoring and evaluation skills in addition to their clinical skills. A variety of programmes were implemented to address these needs.

Many of these programmes were aimed at specific communities, for example, Primary Health Care Practitioners received training in managing violence at schools which was conducted, under commission, by the South African Network of Service Providers (SANTSEP). The programme involved developing intervention strategies such as problem solving, conflict management and assertiveness to deal with violence. In Uthukela district, KwaZulu-Natal Community Health Workers achieved considerable improvement in child health through a combination of community participation, developing community health workers, and a concerted effort to train all primary care nurse practitioners and doctors in Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses.⁸ Lehmann and Sanders found that many health practitioners still lack skills in dealing with HIV/AIDS.

A number of other departments, such as Water Affairs, have introduced social development programmes. These programmes, aimed at creating employment opportunities, include training and education components. For example, 'Working for Water' aimed to employ 18 000 previously unemployed people in 2002 who would receive at least two days training per month. In addition these people would receive an hour of HIV/AIDS awareness training per quarter and have access to childcare facilities.

⁷ Lehmann, U. and Sanders, D. 2002. *Human Resource Development in South Africa. A Health Review 2002*, Health Systems Trust, , p. 123 <ftp://ftp.hst.org.za/pubs/sahr/2002/>

⁸ Lehmann and Sanders (2002, p.123)

The *Working for the Coast Programme*⁹ is a project of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism's (DEAT) and is one of the development initiatives introduced in the White Paper for Sustainable Coastal Development in South Africa under the umbrella brand name 'Coast Care'. Diverse target groups for the various Coast Care projects have been identified. These include: local, provincial and national authorities; coastal communities and residents; national and international tourists; subsistence and recreational resource gatherers; property developers; industry; the scientific community; the youth; students on all levels; conservation officials; law enforcement officers and legal fraternity; politicians; non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations.

From these examples, there is a wide range of learning or capacity building programmes. They are, however, largely run in separate departments with no obvious attempts to connect them into coherent sets of adult learning and development programmes. They would not, in all likelihood, see their programmes within an adult and lifelong learning framework.

Other developments have occurred in the area of *Continuing Professional Development* through professional associations. For the first time continuing education is a requirement for re-registration of certain professionals, as with the Health Profession Council of South Africa. The Medical Councils, for example, introduced compulsory CPD for all medical practitioners in 2000.¹⁰

Professionals working in allied medical fields such as pharmacists as well as doctors are now required to attend a range of courses each year in order to retain their licence. The scale of the take up of CPD is not known. There is a proliferation of private and public institutions that are offering continuing education of various sorts. There is an important development within higher education to begin to assure the quality of continuing education run through the institutions.

Within Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) there is a range of informal, non-formal and formal learning activities. In general terms, many dedicated adult literacy and basic education organisations have been forced to close through lack of funding. Much of the innovative curriculum work they had developed has been lost. The field is serviced by a few institutions like the NGO Project Literacy, and institutions like the ABET Unit at UNISA, and the Centre for

⁹ <http://icm.noaa.gov/country/safrica/safrica.html> and <http://www.projectliteracy.org.za/tmp/Document/Noel%20Daniels.doc>

¹⁰ Information accessed from website for Pharmacy Interns in KwaZulu-Natal <http://www.kznhealth.gov.za/interns2.pdf> Accessed 7 May 2002

Adult Education at University of KwaZulu-Natal. Many new issue-focussed CSOs have been started around, for example, HIV/AIDS, anti-violence against women and children, anti-globalisation, homelessness, anti-crime and so on.

HIV/AIDS training¹¹ responses are widespread through business, government and civil society. New funding is being made available through international and national sources to support health, education and support services. There are at least 600 civil society organisations working to stem the tide. There are processes of mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into the school, further and higher education curricula. There are community mobilisation campaigns and development strategies. Faith-based organisations are also involved in educating their communities. There are multiple approaches being used that include awareness raising, counselling services, and provision of other support.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is one, which most graphically illustrates the importance of having an holistic understanding of education and training within a lifelong learning framework. As Justin Ellis, Under-Secretary of Lifelong Learning and Culture in Namibia said at a conference at University of Western Cape in 2001:

HIV/AIDS demands a lifelong learning approach. It's about sexuality and changing roles. We have to work simultaneously with children and adults to discuss in new ways. There's a need for partnerships and linkages between government, private sector, civil society; between health institutions, schools, universities, workplaces. Teaching and preaching about AIDS has failed. No learning can take place until we take 'learning' seriously. The social status of women must change, their self image must be such that they can negotiate sexual relations as equals. We have to think in much more radical ways to ensure a prosperous future in the Southern African region.

In concluding this section, it is impossible to make final judgements on what has been achieved in relation to adult learning in the last ten years. That which is clear, is that the policy environment has changed dramatically and provides a basis to work within a lifelong learning framework. Therefore, the challenges facing adult learning in South Africa are not in the policy arena. Another significant advance is to have mechanisms in place to lever funding for training at the workplace. Structures have been established to facilitate these and the next step is for the potential of rolling out learnerships to be realised.

¹¹ Special Edition of *Perspectives in Education*, July 2002 Vol. 20 No 2. University of Pretoria.

A host of innovative programmes have also been run through various government departments. There is seemingly little coherence of programmes and activities across departments, and sometimes within them, which leads to an impression of fragmentation. It is not clear what the scale or quality of delivery is and who are the beneficiaries in terms of equity and redress imperatives. There is a need for substantial research to answer these questions. In the area of adult literacy and basic education, there has been limited progress in terms of increase of delivery, with the loss of capacity within the CSOs. There have been significant developments in relation to the formalisation of continuing professional education. On the face of it, then, it would appear that formalised training for employed people in formal workplaces and for professionals has potentially improved, while learning opportunities for those in informal employment or in need of basic education and training in communities have been limited and fragmented. With unemployment running at between 30% and 40% and widespread poverty this is of major concern.

There do not appear to be any umbrella organisations, which are attempting to connect the adult educators and trainers professionally across government, civil society, business, or across sectors such as health, literacy, or environment, since the demise of the Adult Educator and Trainers Association of South Africa (AETASA).

The adult learning activities are not framed within a lifelong learning philosophy and approach, besides some possible compliance with registration of formal programmes on the NQF. It therefore would appear that, using Coffield's (2000) three stages, there has been little advance towards implementation and monitoring of lifelong learning on any substantial scale.

Lifelong learning, which is not just symbolic but also has visionary, pedagogic and organisational implications, is a new and radical way of thinking. It requires institutional structures to work in new ways across old boundaries. There is no tradition of government departments, business or civil society working in 'connected up' ways. One way of providing a framework for lifelong learning programmes and initiatives to work across sectors and organisational silos is through the notion of the 'learning region'. I will now explore this idea through a description of one such effort, which is using a learning region framework that suggests what Edwards and Usher (2005) refer to as a 'troubled space of possibilities'.

The Learning Cape Province

The Learning Cape is one of four pillars discussed in the Western Cape Provincial Administration's White Paper on the 'knowledge economy' (Provincial Administration on the Western Cape, 2001). As in so many countries, the White Paper argues the case for an intimate relationship between economic development and learning, but it also recognises that without greater equity and serious poverty alleviation, economic development will not occur. The Western Cape is the second wealthiest province in South Africa. On the one hand, certain parts of the economy are fairly buoyant, like tourism, services for film, media, and IT, and the fruit and wine industry. On the other hand, 65% of people earn below R1 200 per month, there is 24% unemployment, 30% of adults are 'illiterate', 75% of pre-schoolers do not have access to early childhood development opportunities, and the number of TB and HIV/AIDS infected people is increasing rapidly. The disparities between rich and poor are some of the most extreme in the world. It is stated (Division for Lifelong Learning, 2001) that

The challenge for the Western Cape is to strike the balance in terms of resources between the external focus of promoting the region competitively in terms of the global knowledge economy and getting things 'right at home' where the focus is on poverty alleviation and employment creation. There is growing evidence that unless things are 'right at home' it is likely that the attempts to compete globally will merely privilege the few and serve to cause greater differentiation in our society.

In October 2001, there was a proposal to the Provincial Department of Economic Development that an annual Learning Cape Festival (LCF) could contribute to the development of the concept and strategy of the Learning Cape. The proposal was then canvassed amongst higher education, civil society, trade unions, business, local government, libraries, and the Department of Education. A Steering Committee made up of the range of social partners from government, trade unions, higher education, early childhood, schooling, adult basic education, NGOs, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), was set up to run it. A series of theme groups was also established. Starting the month long festival on National Woman's Day, 9 August, and ending it on International Literacy Day, 8 September, it was hoped that some of the issues of the most marginalised citizens would be profiled in the festival.

Between 2002 and 2005 there have been four, month long, festivals. It is not the aim here to give details of the festival and its relation to the province, (see Walters and Etkind, 2004; Walters 2005), but to suggest the possibilities that it presents.

Throughout the festivals, which consisted of over 500 events each, new partnerships were established and old ones strengthened with some government departments, private sector, NGOs, and Higher Education institutions. There was positive media coverage of Festival events, demonstrating ‘from the bottom up’, what good educational projects and programmes there are and what serious issues learners and educators face. The Festival succeeded in generating a degree of goodwill and energy of a wide range of people. The festivals were important first steps in popularising and giving content to the vision of a ‘Learning Cape’, particularly amongst some government departments, education and training providers, trade unions, NGOs, and SETAs. The immediate challenge after the first two relatively successful festivals was how to move from an exciting innovation to deepen and develop the vision and reality of the ‘Learning Cape’. The Learning Cape Festival was seen as a means to an end not an end in itself. It needed to be nested within a much more extensive Learning Cape initiative which would be integral to building the human development base of the Province.

The Provincial Department of Economic Affairs, together with the Provincial Department of Education, influenced by their experiences of the LCF, helped establish a multi-stakeholder HRD Task Group, to construct a framework for a provincial Human Resources Development Strategy. The Task Group developed a framework for the HRDs within a learning province framework,¹² however, this framework has not been carried through systematically in the HR strategy. The HRD Framework also proposed the setting up of a Section 21 company, which has now been established as the Learning Cape Initiative, under which the LCF resides.

In summary, using Coffield’s framework, the LCF has helped to move ideas of lifelong learning beyond ‘romance’, to ‘evidence’ and ‘implementation’. It has been a very useful vehicle to raise awareness of the notion of a learning province and to propel government to move beyond a symbolic policy to one which may begin to be implemented. The LCF has profiled lifelong learning which is concerned with economic development and social equity and redress. The framework of lifelong learning within a learning province, has enabled, for example, the Departments of Education, Economic Affairs, Transport, Educare and ABET NGOs, SETAs, Trade Unions, and the Unicity, at times, to see the inter-connectedness of their learning concerns. It has provided a ‘troubled space of possibilities’, which has proved both inspiring and fragile. It does challenge all parties to move out of their silos and learn to work in ‘connected’ ways (Walters, 2005).

12

In conclusion

In the last 10 years adult learning in South Africa has changed dramatically. As stated earlier, adult learning is embedded in the political, social, cultural and economic processes of society. Its primary social purposes are: to enhance possibilities for women and men to **survive** the harsh conditions in which they live; to develop skills for people in the formal and informal sectors for **economic** purposes; and for **cultural and political** education which encourages women and men to participate actively in society through cultural organisations, social movements, political parties and trade unions. This partial description of adult learning does show a wide spectrum of activities, run through many different government departments, workplaces, and civil society organisations, for different purposes. The learning activities are not necessarily described as adult learning, but can be named ‘capacity building’, ‘staff development’, ‘health promotion’, ‘skills training’ or ‘community development’. The many new policies developed in the last 10 years are, on the whole, facilitative of these activities.

The adult learning activities could be seen, as ‘everywhere and nowhere’ as there is no conceptual clarity or co-ordinating mechanism to help hold them in view at one time. This needs a wide-angle lens. The idea of the ‘learning region’ was mooted as one, which holds the promise of providing a ‘troubled space of possibilities’ both at conceptual and organisational levels. Linked to this, the Learning Cape Festival was described as an opportunity to practice working in ‘connected up’ ways organisationally. It also provides the space to ‘connect up’ conceptually as early childhood development, workplace learning, higher and further education are encouraged to recognise their connectedness within a lifelong learning framework. While the Learning Cape was given as one example, there are many others around the country, which could be given as impressive examples of ongoing innovative work.

While Aitchison is right to warn of the dangers of neo-liberal economic and social policies, the evidence seems to be that adult educators and trainers are engaging in a wide array of actions not as victims but also as agents. On the evidence presented, it does not appear that the scope of adult learning has ‘diminished’ but rather that there is a wide range of vibrant, no doubt contested, activities. This article argues for wide angle lenses to be used for analysing the richness of the field – this is provided by the concepts of adult learning within lifelong learning.

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The trade union as a ‘learning organisation’? A case study of informal learning in a collective, social-action organisational context

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Abstract

The ‘learning organisation’ literature tends to take a narrow view of what constitutes an organisation, assuming that all organisations are guided by the logic of profit-maximization. Understandings of the learning organisation could be enriched by research into other kinds of organisation, particularly those that have primarily a social purpose. This paper critically examines processes of informal learning within a South African trade union. It draws on Situated Learning and Activity theories to illuminate these processes of learning in an organisational context which is collective and non-hierarchical in character, social-action oriented, and directed towards social change. It concludes that proponents of ‘the learning organisation’ may have something to learn by studying the processes of learning in organisations which are social-action oriented and social purpose in nature. At the same time, however, a ‘learning organisation’ is not simply the product of good design; its existence is subject to history and to shifting power relations both within and outside of organisations

Introduction

An important aspect of any democratic union is that it should be a “learning organisation”. That a union as an organ of struggle and democratic expression should always be striving to empower its members. That its meetings and activities, and militant actions, are all an environment which teach lessons (South African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU), 1996, p.14).

Over the past fifteen years there has been growing interest in the impact of changing social and production relations under globalisation, on workplace learning. The focus in the international literature has crystallised around the implications of post-industrial and post-Fordist forms of work organisation for emerging structures of knowledge and new approaches to learning. A body of literature has emerged debating the relationship between ‘working knowledge’ and other kinds of knowledge (Davenport and Prusack, 1998; Hopkins and

Maglen, 2000) and expounding notions of ‘the learning organisation’ and the ‘knowledge economy’ (Marsick and Watkins, 1999; Mulcahy, 2000).

The learning organisation literature (Senge, 1990; Davenport and Prusack, 1998; Nooteboom, 1999; Nonaka and Nishiguchi, 2001) is essentially concerned with how to transform the traditional workplace in order to survive and compete successfully in a globalised economy. Under globalisation, it is argued, the relationship between knowledge and production has become central: “(k)nowledge is the fundamental resource of contemporary production processes and knowledge competencies are the true source of competitive advantage” (Mulcahy, 2000, p.220). In order to gain a “full return on knowledge assets” (Marsick and Watkins, 1999, p.206), companies need to transform themselves into learning organisations.

The learning organisation is “an organisation which learns continually and has the capacity to transform itself” (Marsick and Watkins, 1999, p.206). Although all organisations ‘learn’, the learning organisation demands proactive interventions in order to create an organisational environment that supports a free flow of information, knowledge creation and management, and continuous learning. The learning organisation thus requires new technologies of knowledge for capturing and spreading ideas and know-how. This requires new approaches to education and training: more decentralised and innovative, and capitalising on informal and incidental learning. It also requires new ‘knowledge enablers’ (Davenport and Prusack, 1998): managers and supervisors need to assume educator roles by shifting their role ‘from cop to coach’, and building a collaborative culture which empowers workers and allows their knowledge and creativity to be harnessed (Garrick, 1999; Mulcahy, 2000).

Notions of the ‘knowledge society’ and the ‘learning organisation’ are particularly attractive to those concerned with workplace education and training in South Africa. They promise to provide the key to the international competitiveness sought by South African industry and to contribute to broader national economic development. Furthermore, the legacy of apartheid and the failure of government since 1994 to fund the provision of adult basic education and training (see Aitchison, 2003) has meant that the need for adult education and training far exceeds the capacity of the formal education sector.

Thus the notion of informal learning¹ in the learning organisation appears to offer ideal learning opportunities for those workers previously excluded from education and training opportunities (see Dovey, 1996).

The learning organisation literature has been the subject of widespread critique levelled from a number of different perspectives. Garrick (1999) argues that it tends to ignore political, social and ethical issues, while Fenwick (2003, p.48) believes that the literature is “. . . unapologetically rooted in the belief that learning should advance the organisational goals of competition”. While the learning organisation literature claims to meet the needs not only of employers but also those of workers, a number of authors have questioned these emancipatory promises. Jackson and Jordan (2000) and Mojab and Gorman (2001) argue that the learning organisation benefits only a small, elite part of the workforce; the majority of workers gain little benefit and are given little opportunity to contribute their knowledge. Perhaps the most serious critique is based on the literature's bias towards idealistic, normative outcomes. Garrick (1999, p.129) argues that “the glossy ‘empowerment’ promises that accompany many high-tech solutions for organisations to be learning enterprises tend to be like politicians’ promises – unlikely ever to be delivered in full, if at all”. Gee, Hull and Lankshear (1996, p.24) describe much of the literature on the learning organisation as ‘fast capitalist texts’, produced mainly by business managers and consultants seeking to “attend as textual midwives at the birth of the new work order” by creating a paper version of the new work order that they are trying hard to enact in the world.

While accepting most of the above critiques, this article argues that the learning organisation model may not be merely an aspirational ideal. However, in order to capture a glimpse of what a learning organisation might look like in practice, it would be worthwhile examining an organisational context very different to that of the traditional workplace. This article takes as a case study a trade union organisation: a site which is not usually regarded as a workplace, even though it is a place where people – in collaboration – labour not for profit maximisation, but for a social purpose. Unlike the traditional workplace, trade unions have sought to represent the collective need of workers to challenge capitalism's economic logic and power relations, rather than to compete successfully within the logic and rules of the global economy.

¹ Definitions of informal, non-formal and formal education are not clear in the literature (Walters, 1998; Colley, Hodkinson and Malcom, 2003). Furthermore, the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has further blurred the distinction between formal and non-formal education. In this article, I use ‘informal’ to refer to spontaneous or incidental learning in everyday life situations, as opposed to ‘non-formal’ (non-accredited but organised) education, and ‘formal’ education (accredited education in specialised education institutions).

The article critically explores some of the key factors that facilitate learning in this kind of organisation – contextual conditions that are not generally found in the hierarchical and competitive traditional workplace. In analysing this case, the article will also seek to demonstrate the heuristic value of socio-cultural theories of learning – in particular, Situated Learning and Activity theory – for illuminating the processes of learning and teaching in such organisational contexts.

Socio-cultural theories of learning: situated learning and activity theory

Some writers on the learning organisation (see, for example Guile and Young, 1998 and Fox, 2000) draw fruitfully on the Situated Learning theories of Lave and Wenger (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Lave 1996 and 1998, Wenger, 1998), in particular, their notion of ‘learning in communities of practice’, their focus on organizations or institutional settings where teaching and learning are not the primary purpose of the organization, and their foregrounding of tacit knowledge.

Lave (1998) emphasises that we need to see ‘thought’ not only as a cognitive process, but also as embodied and enacted. She proposes the conception of ‘learning as social practice’, and argues that learning is ‘an aspect of changing participation in changing communities of practice’ (Lave, 1996). The notion of ‘learning in communities of practice’ captures both the collective/shared dimensions of learning and knowledge construction, as well as the central role of identity-construction in these processes.

We all participate in multiple communities of practice at once and for this reason, the concepts of boundaries (connections that create bridges across communities of practice), and boundary practices (where people introduce elements of one practice into another) become central elements of this conceptual framework. This theoretical perspective illuminates the fluidity and instability of the educator role, and points to the “richly diverse field of essential actors” (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.93) who – by virtue of being knowledge brokers in some sense or another – may step into this role at different times.

Writers on the learning organisation have also drawn on post-Vygotskian Activity Theory and in particular, on the work of Engeström (see for example, Guile and Young, 1998; Garrick, 1999; Worthen, 2004). For Vygotsky, learning is a socially and culturally-based activity, with social interaction, social history, experience and culture all playing major roles (Vygotsky,

1978). One of Vygotsky's key conceptual tools is the notion of tools of mediation, used to describe the role of people, artefacts and symbolic forms such as language, that assist the learner to appropriate the cultural tools developed through social history (Daniels, 2001).

Some post-Vygotskian theorists have drawn on this conceptual legacy to write about learning at work. Scribner (1997), for example, puts forward the notion that organised, social knowledge is embodied in the physical and symbolic environment of the workplace; the organisational environment must therefore be seen as part of the activity system, rather than an external 'envelope'. Engeström (2002) has elaborated the key components of an activity system, arguing that it should be viewed as a complex interaction of 'rules' (including rituals), 'roles' (or division of labour), mediating tools, object (purpose) and the community of which it is a part. Engeström's interest is in 'transformative' learning rather than the transmission of existing knowledge: his studies on the social transformation of the organisation of work seek to identify how people – through critically interrogating their work contexts – collectively produce new understandings and hence new knowledge.

The analysis of the empirical data from my case study in the following sections draws on conceptual tools from both the Situated Learning and post-Vygotskian Activity theories. By so doing, it seeks to explore the forms of participation in the union that generate learning, describe the forms of (visible or invisible) pedagogy that support such learning, identify those who play key pedagogic roles, and identify the key features of this activity system (the nature of its rules, division of labour and mediating tools) that help to promote learning.

Background to the case study

The trade union movement, with its several million members, can be seen as one of the most significant 'adult learning institutions' in South Africa, historically and currently. Over time, trade unions have invested considerable resources in organised education programmes for their members (see Seftel, 1983; Bird, 1984; Vally, 1994; Lowry, 1999; Andrews, 2003). However, arguably the most pervasive and significant processes of learning within the union movement are those associated with workers' broader involvement in their organization where – through their experiences of organizing, meeting, taking collective decisions and engaging in collective action – knowledge is shared and new understandings are sought and produced.

There has been a self-conscious awareness within the South African labour movement that trade unions do not only promote adult education but also

facilitate organisational learning. As early as 1986, soon after the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was formed, its first Education Officer captured this view in a speech to a union education conference:

Firstly, education cannot and must not be separated from organisation. . . Secondly, education can take place anywhere, at any time and involves people of all ages. . . Any meeting, any strike, any wage negotiation, and any lunch break can be used as places where education takes place (quoted in Baskin, 1991, p.244).

Worker education has long been seen as taking place not only in trade union seminars, workshops and planned education programmes, but also in a variety of events such as meetings and rallies as well as through the day-to-day actions of workers.

Trade unions have been described as “laboratories for democracy” (Friedman, 1987, p.499), pointing to their role not only as sites of learning, but also as sites of knowledge production. In the early years of the labour movement, through workers’ day-to-day experiences of organising and running meetings, new understandings of and ways of practicing worker democracy and control emerged. In the process of running increasingly large and complex organisations, elected worker leaders – often with very little formal education – experimented with new forms of collective leadership. Over time, the labour movement’s principles and practices of workers’ control and participatory democracy became embodied in the physical and symbolic environment and day-to-day rituals of the trade union as an activity system. It is therefore possible to view the historical experience of black workers in South Africa as “intelligence sedimented in organisation” (Scribner, 1997, p.313). As workers participate in trade union organisational activities today, they learn from and appropriate the knowledge of previous generations of workers.

This article draws on case study research of the Cape Town branch of the South African Municipal Workers’ Union (SAMWU), a local government affiliate of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). The union remains one of COSATU’s largest affiliates, despite a decline in its membership in recent years as a result of post-apartheid restructuring of local government and policies of privatisation. The continued militancy amongst its members has expressed itself in two national strikes, and a large number of more local protest actions in the period between 1993 and 2003 (ILRIG, 2000; SAMWU, n.d.).

The larger research project was aimed at documenting, analysing and theorising the ways in which knowledge is produced and disseminated within the trade union context. Data was gathered through over seventy hours of ethnographic observation of union activities and events spread over a two-year

period (February 2001 to February 2003), and these were complemented by data from seventeen, in-depth individual and focus group interviews. In the course of analysing the data, three discrete data sets emerged, each linked to a specific organisational setting, and bearing distinct pedagogic features: (a) the union's organised but non-certificated education programmes; (b) sites of everyday organisational involvement (including meetings, organising and negotiating with management); and (c) the context of workers' mass action (see Cooper, 2005).

SAMWU's organised education programmes – aimed at transferring skills as well as building collective identity and trade union consciousness – are relatively substantial in scale.² However, this article – concerned as it is with informal or incidental learning in organisations – will not focus on these programmes in any detail; it will restrict its focus to the pedagogic and learning dimensions of workers' routine forms of participation in the organisation (mainly in meetings), and their experiences of learning during the course of a major, national strike of their union.

Learning through routine organisational participation

Situated Learning theory enables a range of activities within the union to be viewed through a 'learning lens' and allows the question to be posed: what forms of social activity engaged in by members of this activity system have learning as a significant outcome?

The most common form of social activity engaged in by union members are 'meetings'. There are a range of forums in SAMWU in which workers participate and take collective decisions. These range from general meetings of union members in their municipal work depots, to meetings of shop-stewards who represent workers of a particular sector (such as electricity, water or waste management), to meetings of shop-stewards who represent their constituencies at the branch or regional level of the union. Worker representatives also participate in meetings with management and in bargaining forums with employer groupings.

Meetings represent sites where learning "is not reified as an extraneous goal" (Wenger, 1998, p.76). The primary purpose of union meetings is to take

² They include Foundation Shop-steward Training and a range of 'special issue' courses on areas such as health, safety and environment, political economy, collective bargaining, labour law, workplace education and training, gender studies, organisational management and union finances (SAMWU, 1996; SAMWU 2002).

collective decisions rather than to carry out education, while meetings with management usually have a strategic purpose. Nevertheless, meetings are educational in at least two ways: union meetings facilitate information-sharing between members and help to develop common perspectives, while meetings with management contribute to the renewal leadership capacity at a time when worker leaders are constantly being siphoned off into positions of greater responsibility within the union or, increasingly, into management or government.

In meetings with management, learning frequently happens through worker representatives simply being ‘thrown in at the deep end’ (sometimes deliberately). For example, one worker spoke of how one of the more experienced shop-stewards used to take her and her co-worker along with him to meetings with management:

. . . X was one of my mentors. What (he) used to do was . . . he used to take us along to meetings. We don’t know a thing about the issue that we’re going to discuss! . . . He would open the meeting, he would . . . put SAMWU’s position there, and then X would excuse himself (leave the meeting). And we were sitting there, like, we’re supposed to speak now! What are we supposed to say? And we were forced in that way . . . and to me, that was the biggest school. I mean . . . you were forced to do it, you see, you were left completely on your own. . . ja, that was the way that I learnt. Not through the formal . . . through the training workshops.

In the union’s own meetings, learning may be seen as taking place through ‘participation in a community of practice’. This participation may take the form of simply being present, listening and observing, with ‘old-timers’ modelling the roles and values that ‘newcomers’ are expected to acquire. For example, one shop-steward recalled in an interview how, when he first joined the union, he learnt from observing the General Secretary in meetings:

(he) never taught me . . . but I used to watch him very closely, you know . . . His style, and the manner in which he speaks, and the manner in which he treats people, and all of those things . . .

‘Participation’ also takes more active forms. One shop-steward who had been involved in the union’s Women’s Forum emphasised the value of what she learnt from participating in meetings of this structure:

We really learnt a lot there. And we did a lot of things. . . The women in the Women’s Forum developed to the extent that they could open up their mouths and challenge the men . . . For me, in terms of not getting formal training within the union, a lot of my training I got through the Forum.

When asked what she had learnt from her involvement in meetings of this structure, she described how it taught her not only practical skills, but also general, analytical skills as well as broader dispositions:

Public speaking . . . The ability to read and analyse documents . . . The ability to be able to develop policy . . . Debate, develop positions . . . Charing meetings. . . Also the practical skills, listening skills, learning to listen to others . . . It taught me that you've got to do your research, you've got to prepare, then you'll be able to speak to people at whatever level . . . or whatever qualification you have . . . And then the ability to guide others and give direction. So quite a lot of things . . .

While much learning takes place invisibly or unconsciously through observation or participation, there are also forms of pedagogy – more specifically, peer mentoring or 'guided participation' (Rogoff, 1984) – going on in the day-to-day life of the union. As noted above, some shop-stewards have union leaders acting as their mentors (deliberately or unconsciously), but often, it is ordinary workers and shop-stewards who play reciprocal peer-mentoring roles for one another. For example, one shop-steward (a qualified librarian) recalled:

I as a shop-steward . . . didn't go for formal training for a long time. But the minute I was elected I was told: alright, you're going to learn on the job. And I was taught by the cleaner – the shop-steward . . . I had to do cases, and he was there with me. He had to give me information and I would wonder: how does he know what I want? But he used to come with exactly what I wanted. Every time I picked up the phone . . . he'd come with exactly what I wanted.

My observations revealed that in many meetings, a process was enacted which involved a classical learning cycle or spiral: experiences were shared and compared, and participants collaborated to induce common understandings, broader principles and strategies for action. In contrast to the focus of Experiential Learning theorists however, this learning cycle is a thoroughly collective rather than individual process. One key dimension of this experiential learning cycle is the re-contextualisation of 'local' experiences within a broader context, enabling workers to gain a better understanding of how different elements of their experience might be connected to one another. The brief extract below, taken from a dialogue in one shop-steward council meeting, illustrates how more experienced shop-stewards assist newer, less experienced shop-stewards to interrogate, analyse and conceptualise their experiences. The meeting had been discussing a report from the branch's Health and Safety committee, and the issue of privatisation was mentioned. One shop-steward could not see the connection:

Ss1³: What is the link between privatisation and Health, Safety and Environment?

Ss2 (Health and Safety representative): They are using every excuse to get rid of our people – so where a shop-steward has an injury – suddenly documents disappear, next thing he's retrenched ...

Ss3 (Chairperson): Members who've been injured on duty are first to lose their jobs with privatisation ...

Some worker representatives play a key pedagogic role in this process of re-contextualisation on account of their role as 'boundary workers'.⁴ Older workers bring valuable experiences from other periods in history, while other workers bring much-needed information from outside structures and forums in which they sit as union representatives. One shop-steward who played a leading role in the branch had an unusually rich set of involvements in multiple forums: he represented his branch in higher (provincial and national) structures of the union, had attended a course in adult education at a local university, and was involved in local community organisations and activist forums. He was a plumber, and the union's representative on a national, tripartite policy body engaged in developing new water policy for South Africa. He had attended local and international conferences where he had met environmental activists from around the world and engaged in international advocacy around water issues.

Often, those who promote understanding of wider and wider layers of context are fully aware of their re-contextualising role and the importance of helping others to 'grasp the full picture'. For example, a shop-steward in one meeting continually stressed "the need to put things into perspective", while in another meeting, the chairperson emphasised the importance of drawing inter-connections between workplace restructuring and workplace education and training issues, and asked: "How in SAMWU do we make workers understand and see the linkages?"

The trade union may therefore be seen as a community of practice (see Ball, 2003) where the process of participation in routine union activities, supported by forms of mentoring and modelling, induct workers into their trade unionist roles and identities. Collective spaces offered by the union provide workers

³ Successive speakers who were shop-stewards are labelled: Ss1, Ss2 and so on.

⁴ As noted earlier, Wenger uses the term 'brokers' to refer to those who participate in multiple communities of practice, and who introduce elements of one practice into another (Wenger, 1998). I have misgivings about the entrepreneurial or commercial connotations of this term, and have therefore devised 'boundary workers' as an alternative term.

with opportunities to share and compare experiences and develop new understandings; in this context, boundary workers play a key re-contextualising role by helping fellow workers to locate their local experiences within a broader context.

Learning through mass action

'Collective doing' also plays a key role in mediating learning in the context of mass action. In July 2002, SAMWU embarked on a three week, national strike that was to become the largest strike in the country since the democratic elections of 1994. Strikers' actions included marches, 'trashing' (emptying garbage bins on to the streets), burning tires in the city streets, occupations of municipal offices, and picketing.

In the union, it is a truism that members learn from strikes, as well as that strikes help to expose organisational weaknesses. For example, in the union's shop-steward training manual produced after the 2002 strike (SAMWU, 2003, p.26), one of the workshop activities asks shop-stewards to "reflect on, and learn lessons from the strike that will help you to build strong workers action in the future", and to "identify the strengths and weaknesses of the union that the strike has thrown up".

SAMWU's 2002 strike was experienced by workers as an intense and condensed learning experience. According to one full-time shop-steward, "Whatever else the strike was – it was a massive learning experience. . .". Learning was largely tacit and took place through participation in the special community of practice thrown up during the strike. Here, the Situated Learning theorists' notions of 'learning as doing' and 'knowing in action' are most clearly illustrated. For example, on my visits to the union office, I observed activity that was quite frenzied – apparently unconscious, unaware, unreflective. Union activists were grappling with a large number of multi-faceted, complex issues, and having to deal with them literally 'on the run'. Lessons were being learnt and skills acquired which might only be reflected upon or acknowledged later.

This tacit learning was complemented by moments of self-conscious, critical reflection on experience in the midst of the strike. For example, I observed a meeting at the union's offices on the third day of the strike where worker leaders and organisers engaged in a heated debate about how to account for the uneven support for the strike, and the 'lack of discipline' amongst some shop-stewards. There was a lengthy process of sharing experiences, drawing lessons and debating new courses of action. This was accompanied by an explicit awareness of the importance of learning from the experience of the strike, as

illustrated in comments like: “We need to learn from these things – we need to tighten up, spell out everyone’s role, say exactly what’s expected of each and everyone. That’s what this morning taught me. . .” and “We need to learn from what has taken place here, not just for tomorrow but for the future.”

Participants learnt not only practical and strategic lessons but also gained a deeper understanding of a more general kind. They learnt something about how economic power functions, as well as how political power operates to protect those with economic power. For example, in a group interview after the strike, two workers discussed the role of the police during the workers’ march on the first day of the strike:

W1⁵: . . .they try to protect them (management) and let us get hurt. . . they’ve got bullets, guns, batons. . . And our strikers go there with bare hands. . .

W2: . . .With bare hands. And empty stomach.

The strike also raised broader questions that awakened in workers a desire to understand more about politics, history, and how society functions; for example, in another focus group interview following the strike, one worker argued: “We need to start giving our members political education . . . [Yes!⁶] People don’t understand how the politics work . . .”

The strike played a pedagogic role in a further, less obvious way: it acted as a significant evaluative moment of the union’s organised education programmes. It functioned to indicate whether the building of collective identity and trade union consciousness – the core aims of the union’s planned education programme – had been successfully achieved or not. It became clear in SAMWU’s 2002 strike that these aims were unevenly achieved. In central Cape Town for example, many workers did not support the strike; these included many shop-stewards who failed to exercise the roles, skills and political leadership capacity they were expected to have acquired through their shop-steward training and mentoring on-the-job. The strike revealed different ideological and identity positions amongst the union’s members that did not seem to have been successfully resolved by the union’s planned education programmes, by the pedagogic processes happening in meetings, or by the solidarity of the strike itself.

⁵ Worker 1 and Worker 2

⁶ A collective response by other workers taking part in the focus group interview.

Factors facilitating learning in the trade union context

Engeström (2002) argues that an activity system has the potential for 'breakthrough into learning activity' if it allows multiple voices and contested viewpoints to be heard, and if it is prepared to tolerate instability, internal tensions, struggles and contradictions. The 'multi-voicedness' (Bakhtin, 1965/1994) of an activity system is therefore the source of productive tensions and contradictions which can, in turn, be a source of new learning and knowledge.

It has been shown above how the 'rules of practice' of the trade union as an activity system promote learning by prioritising social interaction and solidarity between social equals, thus creating the potential for widespread participation and multi-voiced interaction. In addition to this, there are two other significant features of the trade union's organisational culture which promote inclusion and participation, and thus possibilities for learning: firstly, the widely distributed nature of the educator role, and the part played by ordinary workers as educators; and secondly, the role of culturally-embedded, symbolic tools of mediation, and oral-performativity in particular.

Shared and reciprocal educator roles

A key feature of union pedagogy is the weak division of labour between educators and learners. In the union's organised education programmes, the educator role is relatively specialised: the educator role is clearly identified, although a range of union staff, worker leaders or outside 'experts' may step into this role. In union meetings, however, the role of educator is far more widely distributed and fluid, richly illustrating Lave and Wenger's notion of the educator role being assumed by a "richly diverse field of essential actors" (1991, p.93) who engage in various and reciprocal forms of guided participation, modelling and peer mentoring. Boundary workers who traverse different communities of practice bring important information which helps workers to re-contextualise and understand the significance of their experiences, while ordinary workers also share experiences and work collaboratively to construct common understandings.

During the 2002 strike, the boundaries between educators and learners became even more diffuse as workers assumed the role of the 'collective educator', using mass action to communicate their experiences, their identity, their world view and their power to the world at large. This weak specialisation of the educator role and inter-changeability of educator and learner roles (weak division of labour) allows ordinary workers to add their 'voice' to the union's rules of practice and contribute to the shared 'knowledge pool' of the organisation.

Culturally-embedded tools of mediation

In the South African trade union context, a range of symbolic tools of mediation play a key role in facilitating learning. Together, these assume the form of ‘oral performativity’ – a mode of communication embedded in the historical and cultural experiences of black people in South Africa (Gunner, 1999), and rooted in the history of the trade union movement more specifically (Sitas, 1990).

Despite the presence of large amounts of written text, oral communication dominates in union meetings, and often assumes the form of a distinctive speech genre involving code-switching between different languages. Union members frequently use English when dealing with more formal knowledge such as labour law, but switch to Afrikaans or isiXhosa (the two dominant languages in the Western Cape) when expressing their strong feelings on an issue. Code-switching is a widespread phenomenon in South Africa, and is regarded as originating in the attempts to circumvent or transcend the institutionalised, ethnic barriers of apartheid (Slabbert and Finlayson, 2002). It is seen as a form of accommodation, and as symbolising the values of democracy, equality, mutual understanding and respect (*ibid.*). In the union context, it signals the importance with which equality and respect amongst workers is regarded, and helps to build an inclusive, working-class identity.

Story-telling is also an integral part of information-sharing and comparing of experiences in meetings, and its pedagogic, mediating role is illustrated by the numerous occasions when control over ‘stories’ is exerted by the chair to stop shop-stewards from relating experiences which do not seem relevant to the item under discussion. Meetings are often lively and boisterous and have a distinct, ‘carnavalesque’ quality to them. The use of ‘folk humour’ (Bakhtin, 1965/1994) allows workers to celebrate their collective identity, functions to parody ‘the bosses’ (a subversive function), as well as having a sardonic, self-mockery (critical self-reflective) function.

Emotion and the dramatic use of the body are also key tools of mediation; debates and discussions in meetings are often highly emotional and accompanied by strong body language. For example in one meeting, a debate around privatisation was concluded with calls to “take to the streets”, “We must do something drastic”, “They’re trying to destroy the union”, and “this is a matter of life and death!” Participation in the union is not simply a responsibility or task but an act of ‘passion’ and commitment.

In the strike, there was an overall mode-switch (Kress, 2000) from the languaged discourse of union workshops and meetings to one of visual display; this was evident in workers’ public demonstrations in their symbolic

use of the body, in their toyi-toying,⁷ marching and dancing, as well as their use of visual artefacts such as banners, placards, T-shirts, political symbols and the symbolic use of colour.

The forms of oral performativity which characterised many of SAMWU's meetings and strike activities are specific, local reinventions of a long-standing cultural tradition within the South African labour movement, and are deeply embedded in the history and culture of black South Africans more generally. The rich performative culture drawn upon in the union context is indicative of 'grassroots creativity' and 'grassroots energy' (Sitas, 1990), signalling a space for ordinary people to draw on familiar, historical, cultural resources to mediate knowledge and meaning, and give voice to their experience and knowledge. It allows for the 'dispersed educator role' referred to above, and enhances the multi-voicedness of this activity system

Conclusion

The use of Situated Learning theory has allowed a range of 'everyday' activities within the trade union organisational context to be viewed through a learning lens, and the deployment of Activity Theory concepts has shown that a number of key features of this activity system – its participatory 'rules of practice', its weak division of labour, and its culturally-embedded tools of mediation – create affordances for learning. The research presented in this article shows that rich examples of 'innovative learning' and 'working knowledge' may be found in organisations which have primarily a social purpose, and which seek to challenge rather than reproduce dominant social relations. The material from my case study suggests that learning may best be promoted in organisations which value collectivity and social solidarity, where a 'thirst' for new knowledge is born out of the real experiences and needs of its members, where multiple 'voices' are able to meet and contest, where the educative role of ordinary, grassroots members of the organisation is valued and nurtured, and where the symbolic and communicative culture of the organisation is an expression 'from below' of the cultural history of its members.

The learning organisation literature seems generally to have based itself on a restricted definition of what 'counts' as an organisation. Those interested in exploring the contextual conditions that make possible the enactment of a learning organisation may therefore have something to learn from organisations which are social action- and social change-oriented.

⁷

A form of chanting-marching-dancing performed in a militant mood.

A cautionary note is required however. Situated Learning theories have been criticised for their neglect of power relations, and in particular, for failing to account for how broader, historical and structural relations of power at a societal level might reverberate within the dynamics of any community of practice (see, for example, Hasan, 2002). My research on this union suggests that broader, unequal, power relations within the society are echoed and reproduced, even in a relatively democratic organisation such as SAMWU. There are constraints on participation in the organisation arising from inequalities between workers based on language, different levels of (formal) education, gender, the urban-rural divide, and the hierarchical division of labour in the workplace. All these factors promote greater participation by some, and the more limited participation or exclusion of others.

Furthermore, the conditions of collectivity which historically made possible a widely dispersed educator role within the union, have been undermined over the last few years by a new and increasingly aggressive ideology of competitive upward mobility (Grossman, 1999). There has been growing pressure for greater knowledge specialisation to enable unionists to deal with a complex range of policy issues; this has been accompanied by the increased foregrounding of those with specialised expertise, and pressure from union members for formally accredited courses. There has also been a shift in the nature of the dominant tools of mediation which facilitate learning with the organisation. Over the last fifteen years, there has been a move away from more dialogical, oral forms of communication to a greater reliance on forms of written text – particularly policy and legal texts – which are more ‘authoritative’ and therefore more ‘univocal’ in form (Bakhtin, 1965/1994, p.78).

The contextual conditions which have promoted organisational learning within the South African trade union movement are not a given but are subject to history and to shifting power relations both within and outside of these organisations. The ‘learning organisation’ does not simply emerge from rational and carefully-planned pedagogic and organisational interventions (as suggested by some of the management and organisational development literature). Its emergence is the result of contestation and struggle, embedded in particular social and historical contexts.

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Isicathamiya saseStoffelton: Reflections on an education for democracy project

Bhekathina Memela and Sandra Land

Abstract

For many rural, impoverished South Africans who continue to live in conditions of political and economic oppression, ten years of democracy have not reduced their marginalisation.

Started in 1999, the Human Rights, Development and Democracy project is a co-operative initiative between an NGO offering adult basic education (ABE) in rural centres in KwaZulu-Natal, and the Centre for Adult Education, of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The project aims to serve participants in rural areas, who are undereducated, mostly unemployed, and whose participation in democratic procedures is extremely limited.

Informed by, among others, Mezirow's transformational theory, the project combines adult basic education with education for democracy and income generation projects, with a view to enable people to reach new perceptions of their lives and South African society.

The article shows how participants moved from early expectations, and how different paces and rhythms of different participants had to be accommodated within the project paradigms.

It focuses on:

1. the combination of education for democracy with adult literacy classes, and the setting up and running of community projects by participants.
2. the extent to which the aim of the projects (to provide real practical opportunities for exercising newly gained rights, accessing resources and negotiating with various other organisations) was met.
3. difficulties encountered in using two languages (English and Zulu) in training, and attitudes of students to Zulu as an indigenous language used as a language of higher learning
4. attempts to evoke a critical attitude on the part of educators and rural participants
5. the development of published informal basic education materials drawing

on practical experiences from this project.

Introduction

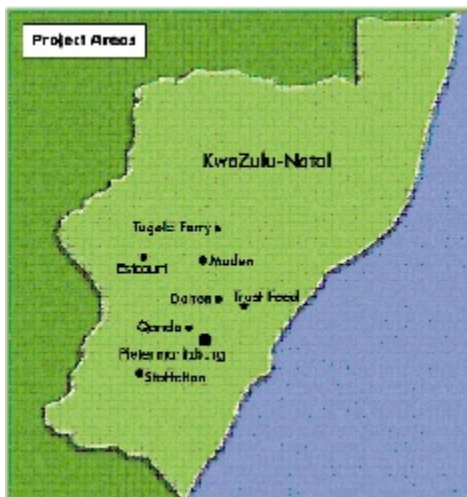
This article reflects on successes and challenges in an education for democracy project in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa which is run by the Centre for Adult Education (CAE) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and Tembeletu (a community NGO in Pietermaritzburg) and funded by the Embassy of Finland.

South Africa's Constitution is hailed by many as one which is particularly protective of human rights and conducive to democratic governance. Yet for many South Africans, life is much the same after eleven years of democratic government, as it was under the apartheid government.

At the Centre for Adult Education, we believe that education for democracy should be included in adult education programmes. Constitutional rights are hollow for people who do not know that they have these rights, or how to exercise them, or do not understand the duties that accompany them. It is appropriate for all South Africans to know :

- how to access their rights and the resources that support them
- what is meant by accountability and transparency
- how people should be served by representative political systems, and
- what ordinary people have to do to support a democratic society.

In pursuance of this, in 1999, with support from the Embassy of Finland, the Centre for Adult Education and Tembeletu, started a project that attempted to make South Africa's democratic changes real for a group of ordinary people in rural areas. The project is called the Human Rights, Development and Democracy (HRDD) project, and runs in seven rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal.



The project is informed by a number of writers, including Freire, Habermas and Mezirow. By committing itself to making democracy real for ordinary people, the HRDD project explicitly chose what Freire (1972) calls education for liberation. In the course of implementing the project, staff at both the university and Tembalethu have become very aware of the negative power of deeply ingrained and limiting habitual perceptions, and the need for constant critical reflection. Living in a democracy implies accepting that citizens from different backgrounds have diverse experiences and expectations. Official policies of our democratic dispensation value our diversity, and, since races are no longer forcibly separated, this diversity offers opportunities for learning. This article focuses mainly on what Habermas (1984) calls emancipatory learning and Mezirow (1991) calls transformative learning. This learning enables people to liberate themselves, through critical reflection, from psychological factors that limit their control over their lives (Gravett, 2001). However, reflection is necessary for transformative learning to occur (Mezirow, 1991), and we argue that the value of diversity lies in participants' willingness to reflect and question the validity of their presuppositions. For people in a democracy to gain from their diversity, they need not only to communicate freely, but also to question each other's premises and presuppositions, as well as their own. This is where transformative learning and democracy meet.

Freire (1972) warns that uncritical conversation is no different to monologue. Thus questioning each other's presuppositions requires critical thinking, which encourages learners to be "skeptical of quick-fix solutions, of single answers to problems, and of claims of universal truth." (Brookfield, 1987).

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Highlighting the significance of critical thinking, Shor (1987) argues that education that does not encourage learners' critical thinking only furthers their oppression. However, critical thinking and transformative learning can be sensitive and risky (Mezirow 1991 and Brookfield 1987).

Questioning the assumptions under which we have been acting, is psychologically explosive. The effect can be appreciated by visualizing an explosives expert who lays dynamite charges at the base of a building requiring demolition. When these charges ignite at key points in the structure's foundation, the whole edifice comes crashing down. Beginning to question key assumptions is like laying down charges of psychological dynamite. (Brookfield, 1987, p.30)

Sensitivity and riskiness of critical thinking is severe in challenging people more powerful than oneself (Shor, 1987). It is because of this that systems thinkers such as Ulrich and Midgley argue that ordinary citizens can hardly debate with experts since experts have significant advantages, knowledge power being one of them. However, Ulrich (1998) and Midgley (2000) argue that experts do not have rightful power over ordinary citizens when it comes to boundary judgement. By boundary judgement they mean drawing boundaries within which presuppositions that inform analysis cannot be challenged. Ulrich (1998) and Midgley's (2000) argument is that experts tend to make boundary judgements, which lead to elimination of certain facts, and thus questionable conclusions. Their argument is that ordinary citizens should be able to question the experts' boundary judgement (Ulrich, 1998 and Midgley 2000). Our reflection in this article is guided by the notion of boundaries and empowerment. Boundary judgement is crucial, since where we draw boundaries determines which presuppositions can be challenged, and which cannot. The way we use the concept 'empowerment' in this report has two connotations. Firstly, it means giving people skills they need to be active citizens in a democracy. This is like letting people learn to swim if they are to be in the deep end of a swimming pool. Secondly, it means emancipating people so that they are more in control of their development and their learning in a democratic dispensation. This is like giving people space to swim in the deep end of a swimming pool.

So far we have argued that eleven years of democracy has posed new challenges for the role of adult education in addressing new changes. One of those challenges has been to learn from our diversity of experiences and expectations. We take the position that transformative learning can enable ordinary South African citizens to have more control of their lives. We have also argued that reflection, boundary judgment, critical thinking, empowerment, and dialogue are interrelated elements crucial for transformative learning.

Parallels between *Isicathamiya* and life in a democracy

The name *Isicathamiya sase Stoffelton*, is derived from the Zulu word *cathama*, that means to walk gently on one's toes so as not to disturb others. *Isicathamiya* music and dance is associated gentleness and harmony. Other Zulu names for this dance and music, such as *Ingoma busuku* (night music) also show its gentleness. *Isicathamiya*, one of the few mediums through which black people could express themselves during Apartheid, was sung by migrant workers in mine hostels at night. The singers tried not to disturb those who were asleep. *Isicathamiya* songs are about lives of black people, for instance, some *Isicathamiya* songs are about democracy, and the dangers of alcohol.

The *Isicathamiya* group Ladysmith Black Mambazo sing a song about responsible driving. Although in *Isicathamiya* one person is responsible for starting each song, everybody's voice contributes to the music, since singers sing different complementing parts, and the singers move in harmony with the singing.

The reason for calling this article *Isicathamiya sase Stoffelton* is that the outcome of both *Isicathamiya* and the HRDD project exist only in shared effort. In the same way, each citizen in a democratic dispensation has to actively play his or her role in it.

Just as *Isicathamiya* singers' movement must be in line with the song, HRDD partners must ensure harmony between practice and theory. Without reflecting and critical interrogation, it would be impossible to draw parallels between HRDD partners' actions and interaction, and theories we draw on.

Human unpredictability in both *Isicathamiya* and the HRDD project makes it crucial for each one to be aware of, and respond to, movements of others. Both endeavours require constant communication and response, which depends on participants' willingness and capacity to engage in dialogue. We earlier indicated that empowerment is a prerequisite for healthy dialogue in a democracy.

Both *Isicathamiya* and HRDD influence and are influenced by what lies beyond their environment. For instance, some *Isicathamiya* songs have been translated into English for international audiences. Similarly, the HRDD project has undergone changes since its inception, and both face the challenge of undergoing change without losing identity.

Lastly, boundary judgement determines what counts as *Isicathamiya* and what is seen as gains in the HRDD project. For instance one might define *Isicathamiya* only in terms of music, overlooking dress and movement. Similarly, one might define the HRDD project in terms of human rights, and overlook training and other components. Diverse views and ideas in *Isicathamiya* and HRDD can enrich understanding if clearly communicated and perceived, just as they can be detrimental if poorly communicated. This depends on the participants' willingness and capacity to engage in dialogue about each other's mental models that shape their boundary judgements.

The Human Rights, Development and Democracy project

Many rural impoverished South Africans have lived all their lives in political and economic oppression, and stand to gain much from learning experiences that offer opportunities to review and reconstruct their habitual ways of seeing themselves in relation to the world.

There are few reports of development projects in Africa that aim to enable people to fulfil their potential role in the societies in which they live. One, from the Republic of Guinea, is of a women's group that faced formidable odds and showed considerable resilience in recovering from setbacks. This group's salient characteristic appears to be that their endeavours sprang from their own initiative as opposed to the more usually reported pattern, where participants engage in activities suggested by outside agencies (Barry, 2000).

Barry's observation that after three decades of authoritarian rule, the people of the Republic of Guinea had become 'totally passive' (Barry 2000 p.197), resonates clearly with the South African context. Barry notes that development initiatives resulting from endeavours of ordinary citizens of Guinea were rare. Similarly, there are very few development projects based on the initiative of ordinary people in South Africa. Projects are usually the result of external initiation, although attempts to involve members of participating local communities at every level of planning and implementation are increasing. The HRDD project fits this description. Its components are:

- the inclusion of a human rights and democracy component in community adult basic education classes;
- the special admission of community teachers to a university course in community education;
- the setting up of community income generation projects; and,
- the production of adult education material based on events in the running of the project

The partners in the project are:

- community participants, who live in poor and often marginalised conditions in rural areas;
- adult educators, who are members of the communities in which they teach;
- two organisations working to implement the project, Tembaletu, which runs the rural centres, and the Centre for Adult Education, which provides formative continuous evaluation, and produces education materials; and,
- the Embassy of Finland, who fund the project.

The project runs in seven rural KwaZulu-Natal areas. In one site, Stoffelton, which has seen the most success so far, Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes are held in venues such as creches, churches and households. Although there is little basic infrastructure, the Stoffelton community has worked with development organisations including Department of Agriculture and Farmer Support Group since 1992.

This article describes some interrelated aspects of the HRDD project and their implications.

Partners' expectations

Since the partners come from different backgrounds, with differing needs, they have different expectations.

Judging from project proposals, interaction at meetings, and reports for funders, Tembaletu and CAE would deem the project successful, if, at the end, previously educationally disadvantaged rural participants, had gained a basic education through ABE classes, and were living as active citizens of a democracy by:

- showing a critical awareness of issues that affect the nation as well as the local community;
- communicating needs to their representatives, from whom they would demand accountability;
- accessing resources;
- starting more community projects based on what they learned from successes and failures in the initial funded community projects;
- using dialogue rather than violence to resolve conflicts,
- choosing representatives and leaders according to leadership qualities, integrity and track records of delivery rather than traditional political allegiances, and
- finding, or at least seeking, effective ways of containing crime and vandalism within their communities rather than being held to ransom by young, destructive criminal bands.

Although some of the learners have taken some steps towards some of the above, their priorities are meeting their own basic needs, for instance feeding their families.

Community participants' expectations include the following:

- keeping contact people from the implementing organisations feeling positive enough about the project to ensure the continued trickle of funding into the community;
- earning a little from the income generation projects;
- gaining some education, and, importantly, certificates from ABE classes; and,
- increasing their employability

Stoffelton has met some of the implementing organisations' expectations by forming a Community Based Organisation called Kgotso. Although Kgotso is still mentored by Tembaletu, it manages its own funds and writes its own financial reports with assistance of Tembaletu. Four of the organisation's committee members are ABE teachers and two of them are ABE learners. By showing such a degree of self-reliance, Stoffelton's participants seem to be in be dancing the same step as implementing organisations.

However there is also evidence that the community is still struggling to master some of *Isicathamiya* steps. One expectation of the implementing organisations, applicable in any democratic setting, is for citizens to deal with conflict resulting from diverse views and practices. There are signs that the Stoffelton is still struggling with this. For instance, there is unresolved conflict associated with a chicken house constructed with the assistance of an NGO in 1999. At first, twelve women collaborated to construct the chicken house, but conflict arose when one woman, afraid that a disease would kill the chickens, slaughtered and froze them all without consulting other members. The others were angry and withdrew from the project, the house still remains empty, and people harbour resentment. Here the dance of the community does not match the steps to the "music" of the HRDD project expected by implementing organisations, which would be that adult learners should draw on a Peace Education module they have completed to resolve this situation. Skills learnt in this Peace Education module should equip the community educators to manage conflict, yet they have not intervened in the situation. Although a Peace Education facilitator from CAE volunteered to assist the community deal with any conflict situation, none of the community educators approached him. In this instance, the community is not taking the initiative in resolving its problems.

The question of boundaries cannot be left out of this discussion. The way implementing organisations draw boundaries might be wider than that of the community educators. There is no clear indication of a dialogue around how loud the community educators should sing in the community. Some community educators pointed out that they do not have enough resources to

“dance for the whole community”. In *Isicathamiya* language this is like saying that a stage for dancing is not high enough for more community members to see the ‘dance’. More dialogue between the community educators and implementing organizations might address this.

Also, sadly, the income generating projects started as part of HRDD have failed to flourish. Seven Stoffelton classes were engaged in chicken rearing projects.

In spite of using the same suppliers, costs of the project were disputed, with different participants claiming to have paid different prices for transport and chicks. No records were kept by the learners about their projects. This is discrepancy between the “song” learnt in ABE classes, and the “dance” of putting learning into practice.

However the ABE learners attempted to bridge this discrepancy between a song and a dance, by drawing on the successful experience of one community member, and following her example of buying chicks rather than hens, which had proved more profitable. This learner ran a training workshop for her neighbours, and shared her knowledge on chicken production. Learners were so excited about what they had learnt they decided to meet more often to share ideas on chicken production. Other learners decided to make blocks so that they will be able to construct a bigger and better ventilated house for their chickens, so that they could order more chickens. They also decided to order chicks and chicken feeds together to minimise transport costs and get discounts from the suppliers. The whole process started with assisting the learners to see limitations of their projects and take advantage of their human capital to find solutions. The learners had been attending classes as early as 2000, but they only learnt in 2004 that they could do something about profitability of their project after critically reflecting on what they were doing.

As participatory researchers, we should state that encouraging the learners to discuss and reflect on what they were doing was quite a challenge. One challenge was to accept that the aspirations of the rural community members were not as high as those of the implementing organisations, or as their entitlement in a democratic South Africa. It was difficult to deal with the fact that the communities might be less ambitious because they have been socialised under Apartheid to regard themselves as second class citizens, without the ambitions of someone who has received education. Sometimes we did not know who had to learn from whom. Although *Isicathamiya* is about gentleness it is still questionable to what extent one should be gentle, especially given that HRDD project has a limited duration.

Key elements of the project

Combination of education for democracy with ABE classes

The idea of combining simple education for democracy with ABE classes initially appeared uncomplicated, and it was assumed that community educators could easily be trained to teach adult learners about the new constitution, and choose texts related to democracy for mother-tongue literacy and English classes. We also assumed that community educators, once trained, could lead discussions on the content of these texts, and the implications of the Constitution to learners' life situations.

In practice, our assumptions proved false. Community educators had difficulty in following a training course on the new Constitution and its implications for ordinary people, since the course required familiarity with academic procedures and greater competence in written and spoken English than most of the community educators had. Afterwards, participants expressed their feelings of helplessness in attempting to keep up with instructors, and few have since managed to put what they should have learnt in this course into practice.

Another part of the educator training designed to prepare them to offer education for democracy, involved the use of a book produced in the Centre for Adult Education called *The Women's Handbook*. This book, which has proved to be a central resource in the project, is written in simple language and informs ordinary women (and men) about accessing resources (such as pensions and water schemes), managing negotiations with officials, and about the systems of government. After the lack of success of the instructional type of training described above, a task based style of training was used to prepare community educators to use *The Women's Handbook*. In this, participants were presented with a range of social and political problems, fictitious and fairly colourful, but typical of problems faced by under-educated people in rural communities, and were required to discuss these problems and find some ways of dealing with them. Without any introduction to the book, they were given copies, and told that the book might contain ideas for dealing with the problems. Community educators embarked enthusiastically on this task and, in the course of somewhat lengthy searches for information relating to the problems they had to deal with, found their way about *The Women's Handbook* and familiarised themselves with what it contained. This practical task-based training proved much more effective than the more instructional approach of the first part of their training. Community educators continue to rely on *The Women's Handbook* as one of main resources for the education for democracy in the classes.

HRDD responded to the fact that participants lacked access to information. It publicises relevant issues in communities in *Learn with Echo (LWE)*, a weekly newspaper supplement written for people with limited literacy and English skills, that devotes space each week to human rights and democracy issues.

In reflection workshops, learners affirmed that the supplement's combination of English and Zulu text makes issues easier to understand, whilst improving English comprehension. Some learners commented that articles about HIV/AIDS assist them in taking care of HIV/AIDS sufferers. *LWE* was also useful in explaining voting procedures during 2004 elections since it reached areas where there were no voter education programmes.

In spite of these small successes, some community educators are not dancing the same step as the implementing organisations in implementing components of HRDD. For instance, some still struggle to integrate literacy, human rights and democracy and income-generating projects. Some say that they do not have enough skills and knowledge for teaching human rights. Some complain that there is insufficient time to thoroughly engage in discussions with learners about human rights. Some point out that, in view of its history of inter-party political violence, the volatility of KwaZulu-Natal makes it dangerous to engage in discussions about human rights. Talk of human rights is associated with one political party, the African National Congress (ANC), and some educators have said that if they raise human rights issues, they will be regarded as ANC affiliates and their lives will be in danger.

Isicathamiya music is context specific, and in the HRDD project, questions remain about the extent to which teaching of human rights and democracy in HRDD classes has been sensitive to context. It is not clear how relevant lessons have been to learners' needs given that human rights and democracy is a broad topic. Answering this question is crucial, since adult learners will learn things that address their felt needs. For instance, do the prevailing circumstances of the learners in each site have an impact on what the community educators teach in the classes? For an example, it has emerged that some communities are dissatisfied with their Councillors. In Dalton some of the community members did not even know where their Councillor was based. In one of the community workshops in Stoffelton a local Induna (a Tribal Authority) disagreed with a suggestion that they should approach their Councillor about the shortage of basic infrastructure in the community, and stated that since 1999 the community has been unsuccessful in inviting the Councillor to the community meetings. He angrily complained: "It is not easy get hold of our Councillor. We do not know how to get hold of him. He is hiding from us. Maybe the only option we have is to go straight to parliament and complain about this because development is not happening in our community." (Stoffelton Induna, 2004)

Although the weekly learning supplement has carried information on how to go about demanding accountability from local leaders, there is no evidence that Stoffelton community educators have used this material in their classes to find their solutions to their problem with the Councillor. In this instance the community is clearly not in step with implementing organizations which expect them to use resources and take initiatives in solving their problems.

Earlier we described how *Isicathamiya* is characterized by gentle, unhurried movement of the singers. Implementing organizations seem to have urged other dancers to attempt to master the steps. For instance, they invited the South African Human Rights Commission to teach human rights on each of HRDD sites. We believe that this will not only provide the communities with knowledge on human rights but, the introduction of this organisation to communities, must improve their network contacts. A strengthened network should improve the communities' capacity to exercise their rights. In the *Isicathamiya* metaphor, the hope was that after this training there would be more dancing (implementation of knowledge about human rights) to go with the singing (knowledge about human rights).

Setting up and running of income generating projects

The idea of assisting the sites to start their Income Generating Projects (IGPs) came in 1999 after Tembaletu discovered that learners could not attend classes since they needed to earn money to feed their families. Initially each site was given R15000 to run an IGP through which it was hoped they would access resources that they had rights to, and implement what they learnt in the classes for human rights and democracy. The implementing organizations assumed that, through guided experience of running an IGP and reflecting on it, the learners would learn from successes and failures so that their projects could grow, provide a small income, and improve people's capacity to fill their roles as democratic citizens. Thus IGPs were giving the learners space for dancing (implementing knowledge) as a response to *Isicathamiya* music (knowledge gained from ABE classes).

The communities chose different projects, such as chicken rearing, block-making, and sewing projects. As indicated above, Stoffelton learners started rearing chickens.

All the projects experienced problems ranging from theft of sewing and block-making machines, theft of learners' money by community educators, or other community structures wanting to reap the projects' benefits, or take control of the learners' projects. The main problem is that the projects do not generating enough money to sustain themselves.

Several factors might have contributed to the failure of IGPs. Although giving R15,000 to the learners was appropriate in the long run in terms of creating citizens that would know how to use their resources to address poverty, it had its own drawbacks. It is questionable whether learners who might be struggling to meet very basic needs have enough skills and social energy to know how to put the money to use for specific purposes. If the learners had been given appropriate skills before the start of IGPs these projects might have been more likely to succeed. This is where an idea of seeing empowerment as a means to an end becomes applicable. However one might argue that as much as a person who starts an *Isicathamiya* song has to give a space for other voices to be heard, so implementing organizations should allow community participants to shape the project. Experience in the HRDD project has shown that there is a thin, easily crossed line between paternalism and partnership based on mutual responsibility.

In *Isicathamiya* each participant has his or her role. For instance one might be given the role of singing bass. In comparison there are grey areas in HRDD when it comes to defining roles of each participant. One of these, the lack of clarity surrounding the roles of community educators, was overlooked by implementing organisations, and has made intervention awkward in some instances. Clarifying the community educators' roles in HRDD might solve the puzzle of integrating human rights and democracy and income-generation components of the HRDD project.

In *Isicathamiya* each participant must be aware of other participants' movement so that harmonious movement can be created. In the HRDD, implementing organisations observed that performance of IGPs was not in harmony with their song, or expectations, and responded to this crisis by attempting to pressure community participants to become more organised in their projects. They did this by announcing that only the projects that presented written business proposals would be funded. Such a solution could be effective, but there were hiccups in practice. For instance, although one of the business proposals was submitted in December 2003, by July 2004 there had been no response from the administering organisation. Thus the implementing organisations' corrective measures did not address the problem of lack of dialogue about IGPs.

In spite of these challenges, there are success stories in the IGP. For instance, participants of the Stoffelton projects reported that the project improved their social capital in that some had learnt to raise chickens, and some had asked the Councillor for materials for their block- making project and received them.

Money Management

One of the tricky parts about HRDD partnership, as in *Isicathamiya*, is that someone has to lead. Tembaletu has the responsibility of managing funds supplied by the Embassy of Finland. Although Stoffelton is still mentored, it has taken responsibility of managing its own funds thus gaining a higher degree of autonomy.

Other sites apply for their funds through Tembaletu. Some stopped receiving financial support when they failed to submit business plans, and even, in some cases, in spite of submitting the plans they had been asked to prepare. The implementing organisation's justification for doing this would be that it would be irresponsible to squander money from the Embassy of Finland on unworkable community projects, and that doing so would jeopardise their reputation. While this argument has merit, this type of action inevitably shifts the relationship from partnership to paternalism.

Conclusion

In this article we have argued that democracy has posed new challenges for South Africans. One of these is to learn from our diversity. In this article we maintain that transformative learning is essential for many South Africans to take control of their lives. We used the analogy of *Isicathamiya* to reflect on our experiences of an education for democracy project which aims to offer learning experiences to rural people to aid them in fulfilling their roles as citizens of a democracy. This project still faces the challenge of finding a balance between singing (acquisition of skills and knowledge) and dancing (practice). Also, it must find more effective ways of hearing the voices (concerns and expectations) of the rural communities participating in the project. On the positive side the project can count gains made in Stoffelton as real if limited instances of success. We believe that the challenges presented in this article, once addressed, will have served as a stepping stones for taking the project forwards, and not as brick walls.

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As simple as ABC? How rural ABET Centres respond to HIV/AIDS

Edith Kiggundu and Jane Castle

Abstract

This article investigates the ways in which two rural Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Centres in the Limpopo Province address the challenges of HIV/AIDS. Theories of social capital are used to explain the different responses of the Centres. The communities surrounding both Centres face similar structural problems of poverty, unemployment, migrancy, gender inequality, poor health and low levels of education. In one Centre, educators and learners denied that HIV/AIDS was a serious issue. They had no confidence in the public health service, and no access to information or networks which support HIV/AIDS work. In this centre, no efforts were made by educators or officials to integrate HIV/AIDS in the ABET curriculum. In the second Centre, situated closer to town, the educator responsible for Life Orientation had engaged learners in a variety of social networks which directly or indirectly addressed AIDS. These networks increased the exchange of information among learners, and facilitated collective goals. The paper concludes that developing the social capital of ABET officials, educators and learners plays an important part in efforts to build the capacity of ABET Centres to respond positively to the challenges of HIV/AIDS.

Introduction

In Limpopo Province, where HIV/AIDS prevalence was once the lowest in South Africa (Barnett and Whiteside, 2002), the disease continues to spread at a rapid rate, with devastating effects on individuals, families and communities. AIDS is no longer “an epidemic waiting to happen” (Marks, 2002, p. 13), it has arrived.

Although President Mbeki and the Minister of Health, Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, among others, have been accused of denial and obfuscation with regard to AIDS (van der Vliet, 2004; Crewe, 2000) the Ministry of Education has at least acknowledged the seriousness of the epidemic. Through its National Policy on HIV/AIDS (Department of Education, 1999) it seeks to promote effective awareness and prevention programmes in the public education system, including the system of Adult Basic Education and Training

(ABET). The policy is intended to minimize the social, economic and development consequences of HIV/AIDS for the education system, for all learners, students and educators, and to provide leadership in implementation. The policy, in part, states that:

- The constitutional rights of all learners and educators must be protected equally.
- There should be no compulsory disclosure of HIV/AIDS status.
- The testing of learners as a prerequisite for attendance at an institution, or of an educator as a prerequisite of service, is prohibited.
- No HIV positive learner or educator may be discriminated against, but must be treated in a just, humane and life-affirming way.
- Learners must receive education about HIV/AIDS in the context of life-skills education as part of the integrated curriculum in schools and/or ABET centres (the.
- Educators need more knowledge of, and skills to deal with, HIV/AIDS and should be trained to give education and guidance on HIV/AIDS.

Thus Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs), the ABET Centres which serve rural communities can, and should, formulate and implement appropriate strategies to address HIV/AIDS in their communities.¹ Currently, educators working in the learning area of Life Orientation (LO) are expected to take the lead in mainstreaming HIV/AIDS education. Although policy does not spell out how this is to be done, strategies might include:

- Using literacy and life skills classes to develop knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS among learners, and to address issues such as gender and power relations which contribute to the epidemic.
- Educating and mobilising communities to set up income-generating projects, such as vegetable and poultry farming projects, to support the health and well-being of HIV/AIDS affected families.
- Providing training to community members on home based care and on counselling.
- Networking with other organisations to stay abreast of new developments in HIV/AIDS treatment care and support.

¹ A donor-funded Life Skills Programme for HIV/AIDS in Schools was started in 1995 to provide training and technical assistance to teachers, develop learning and support materials, encourage peer evaluation and conduct advocacy and motivational workshops. During 1997-8 two teachers in every secondary school in the country were trained to implement the Life Skills Programme (Crewe, 2000). However, by 2000 the programme had run out of funds and momentum, and ground to a halt. In any case, the programme was never implemented in primary schools or ABET Centres.

National policy on HIV/AIDS provides a point of departure for this paper. The pronouncements made in the policy are laudable, but so far there has been little, if any, evidence to show whether ABET Centres (or schools for that matter) are giving greater attention to HIV/AIDS education than was the case before the policy was issued. It is the intention of this paper to search out this evidence. Are ABET Centres taking up the challenge of HIV/AIDS education, as required by the Department of Education? What strategies, if any, have they devised and implemented, and with what success? How can divergent responses of individual ABET Centres be explained? In this paper we address these questions by investigating two rural ABET Centres in Limpopo Province which have responded to HIV/AIDS in different ways. We draw on theories of social capital (Coleman, 1994 and 1988; Putnam, 1992) to explain the difference.

We begin the article with background information about the challenges faced by rural communities with respect to HIV/AIDS, and the challenges placed on rural ABET Centres in particular. Case studies of two ABET Centres in Limpopo follow.

Challenges faced by rural communities with respect to HIV/AIDS education

A review of literature on this theme (see, for example, Davidson, 1997; Nelson, 1993) indicates that rural communities worldwide tend to retain traditional values, and are less diverse ethnically and culturally than urban communities. Church, traditional leaders and family generally play a more central role in the daily life of rural people than they do for people who live in cities. Geographic distance and limited resources result in increased reliance on other community members. Social support is often channelled through informal social networks rather than through the formal structures of urban areas. Therefore, new ideas such as the use of condoms, delayed sexual debut, or abstinence, made more public by the AIDS epidemic, may not be easily accommodated in rural communities. Traditional values and beliefs, for example, beliefs in witchcraft and prophecy, may work against an understanding of HIV/AIDS as a preventable, treatable phenomenon.

In South Africa, in rural areas even more than in urban areas, gendered roles based on heterosexual relationships are the norm, and there is stigma and fear attached to homosexuality. Patriarchal values are strongly held. HIV status is often hidden and undisclosed due to fear of isolation and rejection by the community. Denial is evidenced by attitudes which portray HIV/AIDS as an urban issue, or one associated with 'others' (Campbell, 2003; Davidson, 1997;

Meursing, 1996). HIV positive members of rural communities are often invisible, hidden at home by their family members and isolated from support systems. People who suspect that they are infected may be fearful of seeking testing, treatment or support services for fear of public exposure (Francis, 2002). Such fear is also prompted by mistrust of local agencies' ability to maintain confidentiality (Walker, Reid and Cornell, 2004) especially in smaller communities where members of the extended family may be known to those employed in the health services. These factors, combined with initial low sero-prevalence rates in Limpopo Province in the early 1990s, may constitute significant obstacles to HIV/AIDS education which ABET practitioners should take into account when planning and implementing interventions.

Further complicating HIV/AIDS education in rural communities is the lack of resources, both in terms of infrastructure, and in terms of financial and human resources. In South Africa, many rural areas cover large geographic areas. Education and social mobilisation efforts, such as those organised by the *Treatment Action Campaign* and *Love Life*, are thinly spread and often inaccessible. Sometimes, the approaches used to spread messages about HIV/AIDS are not effective in poor communities. For example, people with low levels of literacy may not benefit from pamphlets, posters and other printed media, especially when these are written in English or Afrikaans rather than in indigenous languages. Some AIDS awareness programmes such as *LoveLife* are strongly oriented to youth rather than to adults (Stadler, 2002; Niehaus and Jonsson, 2004).

Rural communities worldwide are characterised by a social system of extended families and traditional systems of leadership (Parker, Dalrymple and Durden, 2000) . Although these systems have been eroded in Southern Africa by the migrant labour system and by apartheid (Walker et al, 2004), the role of extended families and traditional leaders remains significant. Without the support of these leaders, AIDS education strategies are unlikely to make much impact. Therefore, a key to successfully mobilizing rural areas by ABET practitioners may lie in recruiting key community leaders as supporters of HIV/AIDS education.

Certain cultural practices², such as polygamy, wife inheritance and male circumcision, actively practised in rural parts of Limpopo province, pose difficulties for HIV/AIDS education. Deference to males, elders and

² We recognise that it is problematic to describe indigenous African cultures and practices (or the cultures dominant in rural areas) as 'traditional' cultures, especially given the diversity of South Africa ethnic groups and the lengthy exposure of indigenous Africans to 'modern' culture. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to engage in this debate. There are some grounds for drawing the distinction.

authorities, and cultural taboos prevent 'respectable' women from speaking about sex and sexually transmitted diseases, even to their children and partners (Walker et al, 2004). Subjects such as gender violence and abuse are believed to be a private problem, 'nobody else's business' (von Kotze, 2003). Even though such practices are changing, they call for sensitivity and resourcefulness on the part of educators so that planned interventions do not offend and alienate learners, or inflict damage to the relationship between the educator and the community.

ABET Centres face particular challenges when it comes to introducing new ideas and practices. Government commitment to Adult Basic Education has waned in the past decade, and there is a dearth of leadership and resources in the field (Aitchison, 2003). In the past decade, the number of Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs), particularly in rural areas of the country, has dropped from 1440 to 998 (Baatjes, 2003). So, those who need education the most have the least access to it. In addition, there are very few purpose-built ABET Centres. Classes for adult learners usually take place after hours in day schools. Practitioners are often temporary contract employees, 'surplus' to the requirements of the day school, who work a maximum of six hours per week, are not paid regularly, and do not have access to a pension, medical aid, or other benefits which government employees, including school teachers, enjoy (Baatjes, 2003). Educators in many ABET Centres are poorly motivated, regarding their appointments as a stop gap while they seek a permanent or temporary post in a day school.³ They rarely receive training or study materials from the Department of Education, and often rely on the learning and support materials used in the day school, which may be inappropriate for adults. It is important to note, however, that despite their imperfections, ABET Centres remain a resource for public adult education, especially in rural areas where there are few alternatives.

Social capital

Capital can be defined as resources that are acquired, accumulate, and are of value in certain situations or markets. Many forms of capital are implicated in health education: human, cultural, social and economic. In the section below, we focus on social capital and explore its links with health and adult education.

³ On finding a vacancy in a day school, a teacher is required to give only 24 hours notice to the ABET Centre.

Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1976, 1997), is a network of power and duty which comes from belonging to a group which provides members with access to collectively owned resources in society. Bourdieu believed that social capital, like cultural capital, could be converted to economic capital. Every member of society has social and cultural capital, but some forms of it are more valuable, and more easily converted into economic capital, than others. So, for example, a housewife in rural Limpopo may have a strong network of neighbours and relatives who provide mutual support in terms of childcare or food security. This form of social capital is less easily converted into economic capital than being a member of the ANC National Executive or the Rand Club where powerful and wealthy people sway the allocation of tenders, contracts and jobs.

While Bourdieu sees social capital as a tool for the reproduction of the dominant class, more recent public and academic interest in social capital has centred on its role and significance in fostering civic engagement and democratic governance. Researchers have investigated the benefits of social capital in a variety of fields such as schooling, community life, criminology and public health.

For Coleman (1988) social capital resides in social networks: the groups, organisations and institutions which make up society. It is the pattern of ties between individuals and networks which facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit. For Putnam (1993) social capital has to do with the way in which social and material resources are exchanged; the level of trust between individuals, and the norms and sanctions which arise from shared obligations and expectations. Seen in this light, social capital is a tool for both social cooperation and social control.

At the community level, social capital involves the nature of people's relations with local institutions, both educational and non-educational, and the extent to which institutions communicate, collaborate or compete with each other (Schuller and Field, 1998, p. 231).

Two forms of social capital are particularly important for this study: 'bonding social capital' - the trusting and cooperative relationships in homogeneous peer groups (for example in groups of women attending a rural ABET Centre) and 'bridging social capital' - the collaboration among diverse groups of agents who might otherwise not have contact. An example of this is an alliance between female sex workers in a mining community and representatives of the powerful mining companies which employ the women's clients (Campbell, 2002, p. 230). The collaboration of these agents increases the likelihood of an HIV/AIDS prevention programme being successful. However, it is important to remember that social capital is relational: participants or stakeholders may

vary widely in the quantity and quality of their knowledge, understanding and commitment to a mutual undertaking.

Concepts such as community participation and stakeholder partnership are articles of faith in HIV prevention policies and interventions worldwide (Campbell, 2003, p. 229). They are also articles of faith in the field of adult education (Vella, 1994; Aitchison, 1987). In South Africa, the ‘empowerment’ of marginalised communities and groups is a major goal of adult education for social transformation in the democratic era.

Campbell (2003, p. 50) argues that people are more likely to be healthy in communities characterised by high levels of social capital, that is, communities in which there are high levels of participation in local networks and organisations in which people feel that their needs and views are respected and valued, and which offer trust, reciprocal help and support as well as a positive community identity. Communities with high levels of social capital are most likely to have high levels of perceived control over their every day lives. People who feel in control of their lives are in general more likely to take control of their health, either through health-enhancing behaviours or by accessing health services in a timely and appropriate way. At the micro level, the emphasis is on the individual’s ability to mobilise resources through local networks, for example community meetings, extended families, churches and community based organisations. The role of educators and health workers is to facilitate access to networks for those who are excluded (by poverty or gender, for example) and to understand, build and strengthen networks which contribute to health and well-being.

There is no accepted way to measure social capital. Putnam’s work on the relationship between social capital and local government in Italy involved indices of newspaper readership, the density of local associations (such as choral societies and football clubs) and confidence in public institutions (in Pronyk, 2002). Many researchers attempt to break the concept down into its component parts- information, networks, trust and collective action. That is what we have attempted to do in this paper: to show how the information sources, networks and trust in two rural communities affect the capacity of ABET Centres to take action to address HIV/AIDS.

The research context

The fieldwork for this study involved non-participant observation as well as interviews with two provincial and district Department of Education officials, two ABET Centre managers and four educators in two rural communities in Venda (Region3, Vhembe District of Limpopo Province). In addition, focus

group discussions were held with groups of learners in each ABET Centre on three separate occasions in 2002 and 2003. This study is part of a larger investigation into the strategies used in rural ABET Centres in Limpopo Province to address HIV/AIDS, conducted by Kiggundu (2005).

The two ABET Centres presented in this study are Makahlule in the Malamulele area, and Mbaleni in the Thohoyandou area. Both centres are located in poor, rural communities in Limpopo Province, but Makahlule is much further from Thohoyandou, the commercial and administrative capital of Venda, than Mbaleni. These particular ABET centres were chosen because they were sites of a community development initiative, the 'Ikhwelo Project', run by Project Literacy, an educational NGO, in partnership with the Departments of Education in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo Province. In 2002, when this research commenced, Ikhwelo Centres were almost the only public ABET Centres still operating in Limpopo Province following a period of harsh cutbacks. Limpopo Province was chosen over the Eastern Cape for this study because Kiggundu, had lived and worked there for several years, and was familiar with the people, languages and geography of Venda.

The Ikhwelo Project (*khwelo*, is taken from the Xhosa word for a call or summons) was conceived as a three year pilot project in which the traditional curriculum offered in ABET Centres would be supplemented by two elective 'learning areas': Applied Agriculture and Agricultural Technology (AAAT), and Small, Medium and Micro-Enterprise (SMME). The goal was to provide adults with skills to improve their livelihoods while earning nationally recognised qualifications in ABET. Of the original 28 sites in the Eastern Cape and 36 sites in Limpopo Province in 1999, only 12 and 13 respectively were still operating in 2002. The project was officially closed in 2003. Surplus project funds were used to build storage and administrative buildings at the sites of participating ABET centres.

We turn now to a brief account of the two ABET Centres selected for study.

Makahlule Adult Learning Centre

Makahlule Centre is located in the Malamulele district, close to the Punda Maria Gate of the Kruger National Park and 80 kilometres from Thohoyandou, at the end of a long, dusty gravel road. The Primary School which houses the ABET Centre is built of brick and fenced with inexpensive wire fencing. There is no electricity or running water, and, on the day of Kiggundu's first visit to the Centre in 2002, there was no one to be found at all. After some time, the Centre Manager was discovered in a distant field with more than 35 learners who were de-bushing and fencing land for a vegetable garden, and digging an irrigation trench from Makuleke Dam to the ABET Centre.

Although Kiggundu counted at least 35 learners in the field, the district office’s records showed that 121 learners were registered in the Centre across the four ABET levels⁴ (see Table One, below). The Centre Manager claimed that 89 learners attended classes regularly. The discrepancy was explained by the Centre Manager thus: learners always dropped out during the course of the year but came back at examination time. Learners sometimes went to pick cotton at an irrigation scheme near Makuleke Dam. Others were employed as cleaners in Bed and Breakfast establishments bordering the Kruger National Park. Most learners were unemployed and this was attributed to their poor educational background rather than to a lack of job opportunities. Some women survived on child support grants, others depended on income-generating activities established by the Ikhwelo Project at the ABET Centre.

Table One: Learner registrations at Makahlule Centre, according to District Office records

ABET level	Male	Female	Total
One	2	30	32
Two	1	31	32
Three	0	42	42
Four	0	15	15
Total	3	118	121

As the table shows, the number of male learners registered at the Centre was minuscule. The Centre Manager explained that men “don’t have time to attend literacy classes because they have to provide for their families”.

Six educators were employed at the Centre, four women and two men. Four of the educators held a Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC)⁵, while two held pre-

⁴ In the National Qualifications Framework, ABET Level 1 is equivalent to 3-4 years of formal schooling; ABET Level 2 is equivalent to 5-6 years of schooling; ABET Level 3 equals 7-8 years of schooling (the completion of primary school); and ABET Level 4 represents at least 9 years of schooling (the General Education and Training Certificate).

⁵ In the Apartheid era, the PTC was a two-year qualification open to candidates who had completed a Junior Certificate (Grade 10 in the present education system). Teachers who held a PTC were eligible to teach in schools established by the Department of Education and Training schools for blacks. In 2000 the government published new Norms and Standards for Educators which require a four year, post-matric (Grade 12) qualification.

school certificates. All claimed that they had attended workshops provided by the Department of Education in which they were trained in methods of teaching adults. They taught Tsonga, English and Mathematics at ABET Levels One and Two. Life Orientation, Social Science and Natural Science were added to the curriculum at ABET Levels Three and Four. Agriculture and SMME were offered as elective subjects.

The learners told Kiggundu that as a consequence of the Ikhwelo Project they were running a successful fruit juice business.⁶ They bought concentrated juice which they diluted and bottled for sale to local schools and the community. They also made jam and operated a sewing project. They made sofa covers, cushions and curtains which they sold locally. However, they had only one sewing machine. They had learned how to draw up business plans, and knew how to run a small business. They believed they were equipped with skills which could make them employable. With respect to their ABET classes, learners complained that the time set aside for them was too short. The Centre was open only on three afternoons a week for a few hours when the primary school was closed. It was difficult for learners to participate in the Centre's income-generating activities, attend classes and look after their families in the limited time set aside for ABET.

ABET practitioners also indicated that they could not achieve as much as they and learners desired, but they gave other reasons for this. They complained that they were not paid regularly, and that they did not receive learning and support materials from the Department of Education (or, if materials were received, they came late and there were not enough of them for all the learners). The Centre Manager conceded these problems, adding that there was a general shortage of resources, including funds for furniture and facilities, and suitably qualified staff. All of this, he said, impacted negatively on service delivery. With respect to the Ikhwelo Project, he said he had not received the pump for the irrigation system, and the pipes which had been delivered were the wrong size. Learners had cleared the land and dug the irrigation trenches, but they could not plant crops because there was no water.⁷

Before arriving at Makahlule, the District Coordinator had told Kiggundu about the resources in the district for HIV/AIDS awareness, testing and care.

⁶ This success could not be confirmed, as financial records were not available. Learners may have claimed success thinking that Kiggundu was engaged in an evaluation of the Ikhwelo project which would determine future funding.

⁷ Sadly, even when the pump and pipes were delivered and installed, the water would not run. The hand dug irrigation trench had too many twists and turns which silted up the pipe. A new trench had to be dug, this time using a machine.

There were health centres “in every second village” where pregnant women could get medical advice and support. At Malamulele Hospital, he said, social workers were “doing a great job” of counselling and supporting people with HIV/AIDS. He added that the Department of Education employed nurses to train unemployed teachers about HIV/AIDS. Condoms and pamphlets were readily available in local clinics and the hospital. He singled out for praise the youth of the community who conducted workshops and dramas about AIDS. He concluded that services were quite adequate and accessible to local people.

When asked what the ABET Centres were doing to address HIV/AIDS, the District Coordinator said that HIV/AIDS was not dealt with by practitioners at ABET centres. It was not the practitioners’ field of specialisation and they lacked the knowledge and resources to deal with it. This was later confirmed by the Regional Coordinator who said “We presently have so much on our plate. We have left those HIV/AIDS to the Department of Health and Welfare”. The educators themselves insisted that they were fully occupied with activities such as sewing, making juice and jam, and de-bushing and fencing land, so they didn’t have time for anything else. They were short-staffed; they had not received any training on HIV/AIDS and were afraid to expose their ignorance; it was difficult to teach elderly people; it was insulting for a young person to discuss sex-related issues with someone old enough to be her mother. Moreover, Makahlule was a small community and most people were related to one another. What would their relatives think if they heard that learners and educators were talking about “that thing”?

The District Coordinator and the educators agreed that learners were “shy” and did not talk about HIV/AIDS, even among themselves, because it was frightening and horrible. However, when Kiggundu spoke to learners, she discovered the contrary. They were keen to learn about HIV/AIDS, and begged her to describe the symptoms of AIDS, and how to manage it. When she asked whether they knew anything about the disease, learners said that they had heard about it, but remained unconvinced, since they had never “seen” anyone suffering from it. They said they were unsure of its causes and how to prevent it. On further questioning, learners indicated that people with HIV/AIDS should be kept in isolation to prevent the spread of the disease. They thought that HIV/AIDS could be transmitted by hugging and kissing someone with AIDS, or by sharing a toilet with an infected person.

It was already late in the evening after a long day working in the field. Some of the learners had eaten nothing the whole day. Others announced that they had to leave to prepare dinner for their children, yet they begged Kiggundu to stay for another forty minutes to talk to them about HIV/AIDS. On the question of what caused AIDS, learners were inclined to believe that AIDS was caused by witchcraft. Indeed, many black South Africans, especially those

from rural areas, believe that supernatural forces play a role in causing ill health, with illness resulting from an enemy bewitching the victim, particularly an acquaintance or relative who might be jealous of some good fortune the victim had experienced (Stadler, 2002; Thornton, 2002). However, when asked for their views on whether traditional healers (sangomas) could cure HIV/AIDS, the learners answered in unison “No”.

Learners agreed that it was possible that people in their community were dying of AIDS, but the shame and fear surrounding the disease prevented disclosure, during and even after illness and death. Webb (1997) noted that in rural communities of KwaZulu Natal, where high levels of stigmatisation were apparent, seventy percent of survey respondents wanted to see people with AIDS either killed or isolated. Responses included: “They must get what they deserve”; “Shoot them”; “Give them fatal injection for AIDS”; “Kill the person because he might transmit the disease to other people”; “Shoot them, there is no cure, you can do nothing for them” (Webb, 1997, p. 168). Learners at Makahlule were not as aggressive as those interviewed in Webb’s study, but they also believed that people with AIDS should be isolated from others in the community. As one learner remarked, if you approached an acquaintance with questions about his illness, he might demand “Who told you that I have AIDS? Are you a witch? I will sue you for spreading rumours about me. Drop these untrue allegations or else. ...” .

What sort of networks and partnerships were there to provide awareness and information about HIV/AIDS? The District Coordinator indicated that people from Soul City came “once in a while” and spoke to learners, but these meetings were attended only by women. Men allegedly did not have time for such meetings, and did not regard them as important. Local chiefs occasionally asked nurses to come and give people information about HIV/AIDS during community gatherings known as ‘Vandla’ or ‘Xivijo’ in Tsonga, but HIV/AIDS was not considered a priority issue, and very little time was allocated to it.⁸ AIDS was usually left off the agenda entirely.

A clinic only 100 metres from the ABET Centre had been vandalised by members of the community who suspected that funds earmarked for medicines had been misappropriated by staff. The clinic was not rebuilt in the period of this research, and it was evident that people had lost confidence in the local health service.

⁸ In another ABET Centre which Kiggundu visited, the tribal chief said that he never included HIV/AIDS in the agenda of community meetings which he chaired because he didn’t have time for such “petty things”.

HIV/AIDS affects both men and women (Walker *et al*, 2004), but respondents in Makahlule observed that women were the more vulnerable. The District Coordinator pointed out that poverty and unemployment drove some women to prostitution, which placed them at risk of acquiring HIV. The learners themselves indicated that women's subordination to men made them vulnerable. They were susceptible to infection from their husbands, who had multiple partners, and they were also vulnerable to rape. Women learners implied that there had been an increase in the incidence of rape in their communities, especially of young girls. They attributed this to a belief held by some men that sex with a virgin would cleanse a man of infection.

Asked to indicate how HIV/AIDS affected women in the community, the District Coordinator replied that apart from dealing with the death of peers, women also carried out ritual cleansing of the bodies of family members who had died. Women were responsible for nursing the sick in their families. They also faced the economic burdens of health care, funeral costs and loss of income when the breadwinner became ill. It was women who took on the responsibility for caring for the children of dead relatives, a factor which could increase their desperation, as they did not have the resources to care for additional children. However, neither the District Coordinator, the educators nor learners themselves noted that women were at risk of transmitting HIV to their unborn infants, and that pregnancy, delivery and lactation generated special health care needs for women.

Learners emphasized their limited power to negotiate strategies to reduce their risk of infection. As one woman said, "We do not have control over our bodies. We cannot say 'no' to our husbands. It is a sign of disrespect... Our men do not want to use condoms, yet they sleep with prostitutes in towns.... We can be faithful but we are not certain about our men".⁹ This is in line with Jewkes, Levin and Penn-Kekana (2003) who suggest that between couples, condom use may be seen as tantamount to implying or admitting infidelity, as condoms are associated with prostitution, promiscuity and disease, and are an implicit challenge to the male 'right' to have many partners.

In summary, at this deep rural ABET Centre, the District Coordinator, Centre Manager and practitioners expressed the view that HIV/AIDS was not a serious issue in their community. The Centre did not address HIV/AIDS, either in the ABET curriculum or outside it. Women learners at this Centre

⁹ Walker et al (2004, p. 70) point out that women in rural areas are not simply victims of male promiscuity. In the absence of their partners, they have sexual relations with other men (often in exchange for money or other forms of support) . In Northern KwaZulu-Natal, infection rates of women were higher than those of returning migrants.

lacked sound knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS and did not know (or were uncertain about) how to relate to or care for people with AIDS. Learners expressed a keen interest in learning more about HIV/AIDS, but practitioners lacked incentives and resources to integrate HIV/AIDS into the ABET curriculum. Makahlule Centre is far from Thohoyandou and is poorly resourced. Existing health services and networks for HIV/AIDS are not being used because the community lacks trust in them. Lack of information about HIV/AIDS, denial and stigma, as well as poverty, pose challenges to the development of strategies to address the challenges of HIV/AIDS. These challenges are explored further in the next case study.

Mbaleni ABET Centre

Mbaleni ABET Centre is situated in a peri-urban area, Makwarela, on the outskirts of Thohoyandou. Bus and taxi routes link Makwarela to Thohoyandou, and to the district and regional hospitals, which are within a twenty kilometre radius. Makwarela Clinic, which offers voluntary counselling and testing services, is within walking distance of the Centre. There was running water and electricity at Mbaleni, and, when Kiggundi made her first visit to the Centre in September 2002, new classrooms were under construction. Two educators and the Centre Manager were helping adult learners read and interpret an examination paper. Four other educators were sitting in chairs outdoors, basking in the late afternoon sun.

Once again, the learners at this Centre were predominantly women, but they were somewhat younger than those at Makahlule Centre. As before, men reportedly believed that it was “a waste of time” to study when they had jobs to do and families to support. The Centre Manager estimated that 40% of learners were unemployed. Those who had jobs worked as domestic workers and cleaners, or sold fruit and vegetables in the Thohoyandou open air market.

The Ikhwelo Project had introduced sewing, beadwork and sisal weaving at the Centre, and encouraged learners to sell their goods to tourists from roadside stalls. The women specialised in making ‘Miwenda’ (traditional dresses worn by the Venda) as well as dolls, cushions, tablecloths, bags and toilet sets. They offered cleaning services to their neighbours: carpets, sofas, new houses and yards were cleaned, especially after funerals. Plans were underway to open a car wash, but there were no facilities for this at Makwarela Primary School.

In the following year, 2003, the ABET Centre took over the premises of Makwarela Community Creche where they had storage space for their study materials, tools and produce, as well as land and borehole water to establish a

vegetable garden. The Centre was open from morning to night, and there were plans to acquire prefabricated units for use as classrooms and for sale to local residents to use as housing. The Centre Manager expressed the hope that such income-generating projects would reduce the rate of absenteeism and dropout.

As was the case at Makahlule Centre, Kiggundu found fewer learners on site than were officially recorded at the District Office. Once again she was told that learners interrupted their studies to take up short-term employment or to attend to family affairs.

Table Two: Learner registrations at Mbaleni Centre

ABET level	Male	Female	Total
One	0	20	20
Two	1	20	21
Three	0	20	20
Four	1	52	53
Total	2	112	114

Eight educators were employed at Mbaleni Centre, all of them female. They all held teaching diplomas, and most of them had completed an ABET certificate at the University of South Africa or the University of Venda. The District Coordinator commented favourably on the educators' commitment to ABET and to the Ikhwelo project, despite the lack of departmental support.

The curriculum offered at Mbaleni was identical to that in Makahlule, except that Venda was taught as the Language of Learning and Communication at ABET levels 1 and 2 rather than Tsonga.

The Centre Manager avoided answering any questions related to HIV/AIDS, referring Kiggundu instead to the educator responsible for teaching Life Orientation (LO). This confident and dynamic young woman acknowledged that HIV/AIDS was a serious problem in the community, and said that learners were aware of it. They had heard about AIDS from the radio and television, from the local clinic and from her. She herself was a member of the Makwarela branch of the ANC Women's League, and she had persuaded some of her learners to do voluntary work at the local hospitals and clinics. It was while they made beds and washed patients that they came to realise that AIDS really existed, and was not something which happened to other people, in other places. The learners returned to class from voluntary service with "shocking stories" to tell their colleagues.

The LO educator had not received any formal training in HIV/AIDS, but had attended several workshops at Tshilidini Training College, the University of Venda and the Technical College of Venda. She had heard about these workshops from her fiancé who worked as a peer educator with the South African Police Service in Thohoyandou. Her interest in HIV/AIDS had also led her to advise learners to take part in a forum organised by the Civic Association, where people with AIDS had been invited to address the community. This level of extra-curricular engagement with HIV/AIDS was not found in Makahlule ABET Centre, where educators avoided the topic altogether.

The educator reported that she discussed HIV/AIDS related issues at length with learners in her LO class. Learners talked openly about AIDS, asking questions about the causes, symptoms and ways to protect themselves from the virus. According to the educator, most learners were single mothers, and those who were married had husbands who worked away from home. These husbands exposed their wives to HIV/AIDS because “they probably had several sexual partners” as they lived far from their families for most of the year. As at Makahlule Centre, women cast themselves as helpless to prevent the spread of AIDS, pleading “How can I convince my husband to use a condom? He is a womaniser but I cannot leave him. ... I do not have a job and I have children. How will I survive?”. Women’s dependency on men, their subordination in patriarchal society, and their vulnerability to infection were stressed by the learners and the LO educator. Men reportedly took the decisions regarding sex practices, and likened using condoms to “eating a sweet with the plastic wrapper on”. They also disparaged the condoms distributed free of charge by the Department of Health, claiming that they would break easily due to exposure to the sun at the distribution points.

The LO educator said that it was not easy to mobilise and support people with AIDS in the wider community because few would admit to being HIV positive. She narrated an incident where she had approached a woman who had recently lost a husband and two-year-old daughter. She encouraged the woman to participate in voluntary counselling and testing for HIV/AIDS, but the woman refused, insisting that a malicious neighbour had bewitched her husband and daughter.

Although the District Coordinator said that there were no reports of people with HIV/AIDS in the district, most learners at Mbaleni Adult Centre knew that HIV/AIDS had penetrated their community. They thought that many people had died of HIV/AIDS, but their relatives generally attributed AIDS deaths to other causes, for example “She died from drinking too much”, or “He died of tuberculosis”. They were against the idea of isolating people with AIDS because they knew that one could not be infected by hugging, kissing,

from the toilet seat, or from sharing food or cutlery with an infected person. They were aware that an infected mother could pass on the virus to an unborn child.

While learners acknowledged the presence of the disease in their community, they conceded that people with AIDS rarely spoke freely about their illness, for fear of being stigmatised. Learners believed that if people with AIDS had access to treatment and support from health services, and groups such as the ANC Women's League, they would be more likely to disclose their status, and receive support. This was in contrast to the view of learners at Makahlule who believed that resources were either unavailable or withheld from them.

The LO educator proposed that a premium should be placed on encouraging people to go for HIV/AIDS tests and counselling. She also expressed the view that the nurses at the nearby Makwarela Clinic were "cruel". They discouraged people from coming for tests because they did not maintain privacy and confidentiality. This mirrors the findings of other researchers in South Africa (Walker et al, 2004) who found that although HIV/AIDS tests are widely available, counselling is rare, and people do not trust health workers to maintain confidentiality.

When asked about the challenges faced by people in the community with respect to HIV/AIDS, the District Coordinator said that the main challenge was people's lack of knowledge. This included learners and educators. A further problem, according to the District Coordinator, was that ABET practitioners did not network with other organisations and individuals. The LO educator at Mbaleni Centre had a different view of the matter. According to her, "people [learners] are aware of HIV/AIDS, they know it kills, yet there is no behavioural change and husbands are resistant to use condoms".

The LO educator had quite a range of contacts through her fiancé in the South African Police Services, her informal studies, her participation in the ANC Women's League and connections with the Civic Association. She drew on her contacts to develop HIV/AIDS awareness among learners at the Centre, and she had further ideas in mind. She suggested, for example, that a forum for couples should be started, since women found it difficult to implement what they had learned about HIV/AIDS without the support of men. She pointed out that poverty and unemployment remained significant challenges in the community, and that young, unemployed women were driven to sell sexual services. She suggested that the Department of Education should organise "a thorough training programme" on HIV/AIDS which would run for more than a week, for both educators and learners. This would ensure that not only the LO educator took responsibility for HIV/AIDS education. She pointed out that Department of Education officials who already "had the knowledge" were the

ones who got the chances to go for training. When they returned to their jobs they were too busy to disseminate the information.

The LO educator used the syllabus for Life Orientation designed for the day school. She was quick to point out that a book meant for primary school learners would not be suitable for adult learners. She adapted and supplemented the syllabus with clippings from newspapers and magazines which she photocopied at her own expense. She had a Project Literacy book, *Positive People, Managing HIV in the Workplace*, which she found useful. She also used Soul City materials (charts, pamphlets and magazines) which were given to the Centre by Project Literacy when the Ikhwelo Project was introduced.¹⁰ She kept them at her home and carried them to the Centre every day, as there were no storage facilities there. There were not enough books for all the learners, so she had to collect them after each class.¹¹ She attempted to integrate HIV/AIDS into learning areas other than LO. For example, she used extracts from the AIDS materials for English comprehension as well as for life orientation. She devised role plays to stimulate dialogue on how women could negotiate condom use with their partners.

When learners were asked what they thought the ABET centre should do to address HIV/AIDS in their community, they responded by saying that other educators at the Centre should join in the campaign launched by the LO educator, and teach women more about how to protect themselves. They suggested that the Centre model itself on the ANC Women's League, which held workshops for women in which they were taught to network, "build each other", stand up to domestic violence, speak out against child abuse and create jobs by forming income generating projects. The League provided start-up capital and training for these projects, and supplied free "books" (pamphlets) and soap. On Women's Day, celebrated nationally on 10 August, women sang and performed HIV/AIDS related songs and dramas on stage. Door to door visits afterwards cemented the messages and swelled the members of the League. Learners felt that they would benefit if more practitioners at the ABET Centre networked with the League, and if educators, too, raised funds to develop income generating projects.

In summary, then, the learners at Mbaleni Centre were aware of HIV/AIDS in their community and believed it was a serious problem which should be

¹⁰ At other Centres which Kiggundu visited, these resources, distributed to Ikhwelo Centres by Project Literacy staff, were kept in store rooms or locked cupboards, and were never used.

¹¹ By the time of Kiggundu's third visit to the Centre, in late 2003, each learner had been given a copy of *Managing your Life, Life Orientation ABET Level 4*. There were still no learning support materials available in indigenous languages, or in English, at ABET levels 1-3.

tackled by ABET practitioners. They had heard about AIDS through the media and from the educator responsible for Life Orientation. Information which they picked up from the media and the classroom was supplemented and confirmed by those who volunteered to provide patient care at local clinics and hospitals under the auspices of the ANC Women's League. Generally, the Centre Manager and ABET practitioners did not concern themselves with HIV/AIDS. They felt it was the responsibility of the LO educator. She used all the resources at her disposal to bring HIV/AIDS into the ABET curriculum. Although she had no formal training, she was keen and had attended several workshops on HIV/AIDS. She had ambitious plans to establish a support group and training in home based care. She believed the biggest obstacle to HIV/AIDS education arose from the stigma attached to people who disclosed HIV-positive status. Little behavioural change had resulted from HIV/AIDS education because of men's perceived persistent promiscuity and resistance to condom use. Women were believed to be especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of their poverty and dependency on men. Solutions suggested by learners and the LO educator were to establish income-generating projects and support groups for women and men so that the weight of poverty, unemployment and exploitation could be countered.

Analysis

The table on the following page summarises the distinctive features of Makhahlule and Mbaleni ABET Centres. The similarities between the Centres rest in the size and gender of their student body, the spread of learners across the four levels of the ABET curriculum, the organisation and content of the ABET curriculum, the lack of Departmental supervision of the Centres and lack of support for practitioners and learners. The learners at both Centres were mostly married women, mothers and grandmothers, whose partners are migrant workers. The women were scarcely educated in youth, and they were unemployed or self-employed, with low and irregular incomes. Men were absent from the home and regarded learning at the ABET Centre as a women's pastime. Women were aware of their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and blamed men for spreading the disease. Secrecy and stigma surrounded HIV/AIDS in the wider community, discouraging people from going to local health services for testing and counselling.

Table three: Features of Makahlule and Mbaleni Adult Learning Centres

	Makahlule ABET Centre	Mbaleni ABET Centre
Geographical location	In Malamulele district, more than 80 km from Thohoyandou, on a gravel road.	In Makwarela district, 5 km from Thohoyandou, on a tarred road busy with bus and taxi traffic.
Structural/contextual issues	Unemployment, poverty, migrant labour, gender inequality.	Unemployment, poverty, migrant labour, gender inequality.
Learners	118 women, 3 men. Most learners registered in ABET Levels 1-3. Only fifteen learners in ABET level 4. Learners older than at Mbaleni.	112 women, 2 men. 20+ learners registered in each class in ABET Levels 1-3. 53 learners registered in ABET Level 4. Learners younger than at Makahlule.
Educators	6 educators (4 with PTC, 2 with a pre-school certificate).	8 educators (all with PTC and most with an ABET certificate from UNISA or Venda.)
ABET Centre	Makahlule Primary School, solid brick structure, well maintained. No electricity or running water.	Makwarela Primary School, then Makwarela Community Creche where electricity, borehole water, and storage space were available.
HIV/AIDS in the Curriculum	Not addressed at all.	Addressed in LO and English literacy classes by one educator using resources in English provided by Project Literacy and supplemented with photocopied newspaper clippings.
Income generating activities	Fruit juice business, jam production, sewing.	Sewing, beadwork, sisal weaving, cleaning services. Plans to open a car wash and sell prefabricated housing units.
Health services	Nearby clinic vandalised in community action.	Local clinic within walking distance. Two district hospitals within 20 km radius.

Levels of trust	Denial of AIDS and stigma towards people with AIDS expressed by learners and educators. AIDS perceived to be a consequence of witchcraft initiated by jealous neighbours rather than as a sexually transmitted disease. Little faith in 'delivery' of resources by DOE or Prolit. No trust in health services.	Wide acceptance among learners of the existence of AIDS in the community. Information shared among the ABET learner group and LO educator. Confidence expressed in LO educator. Men blamed for the spread of HIV/AIDS. Stigma and blame in the wider community acknowledged as factors which discourage disclosure, testing, treatment and care.
Sources of information about AIDS	Hearsay, radio.	Radio, television, newspapers, witnessing AIDS in local clinics and hospitals, Soul City and Project Literacy resources used by LO educator.
Networks and partnerships	Ikhwelo Project	Ikhwelo Project; ANC Women's League. LO educator was a participant in wider network of information, education and support offered by the SAPS, local Civic Association, UNISA and University of Venda.

Differences between the Centres lie in their distance from sources of information and organs of civil society. Learners and educators at Makahlule Centre, 80 km from Thohoyandou, had relatively little access to the media and to organisations which are active in HIV/AIDS and community development. Department of Education officials (as well as Ikhwelo Project staff, local nurses and others) doubtless visited the Centre less frequently than they did Mbaleni Centre, which is located on the outskirts of Thohoyandou, and is infinitely better served by public transport. Learners at Mbaleni Centre were slightly younger women, and more of them were registered at ABET Level Four, than were learners at Makahlule Centre. The ratio of learners to educators at Mbaleni Centre was more favourable than that at Makahlule Centre, and the educators were better qualified. Several of the Mbaleni educators had completed an ABET Certificate which included a component on HIV/AIDS. This may have given them more knowledge and confidence to address AIDS in the classroom. Above all, the LO educator at Mbaleni Centre was involved in a variety of social networks (educational, professional, political) which directly or indirectly addressed AIDS. These networks helped to situate AIDS as a social issue (and not merely a health issue, or an ABET

learning area) alongside poverty, unemployment, migrancy, gender inequalities, alcoholism, violence and domestic abuse- problems which are interrelated and more effectively addressed at community and societal level, by a variety of agencies, rather than at individual level.

Discussion

The relative success of Mbaleni ABET Centre in facilitating awareness of HIV/AIDS could be seen as a product of social capital developed by the LO educator which brought adult learners together in networks despite widespread community denial, disapproval and discrimination against people with AIDS. The social networks provide information to group members which facilitate a collective goal. Without these social networks, the possibility of exchanging information is extremely limited, as seen at Makahlule Centre.

The quantity of information available to the learners at the two ABET centres was quite different. Learners at Mbaleni Centre had access to a wider range of sources of information, including the media, their LO and English literacy classes, and their own experiential learning at local clinics, when compared with learners at Makahlule Centre. The quantity and quality of information contributed to increased bonding capital (among learners) and bridging capital (between learners and other agencies) in Mbaleni Centre.

Coleman (1990) has argued that the quality of the information exchanged depends on the functionality of the relationships in which people are engaged. How is this functionality reflected these two ABET Centres? In both Centres, learners did not trust the confidentiality of testing and counselling services provided by local clinics. Women did not have confidence that men would act responsibly and competently when it came to sexual relations with other women and condom use. District officials and Centre Managers did not express confidence in the capacity of young educators, especially, to teach older adults about HIV/AIDS. It appears, then, that many of the relationships in which ABET practitioners and learners are engaged are dysfunctional, at least in terms of their ability to contribute positively to HIV/AIDS education. However, learners at Mbaleni Centre expressed a high level of social trust in the ANC Women's League, and it appeared that women who engaged in voluntary activities organised by the League, and in meetings organised by the Civic Association, were more likely to exchange information with others, to act in concert with them, and to suggest initiatives to develop and support the community. Learners at Mbaleni Centre also expressed more confidence in their educators than those at Makahlule Centre, so there were some functional relationships which contributed to the exchange of information, and to learners' sense that it was possible to take charge of some aspects of one's life.

The case studies show that social capital is not always a positive resource. For example, in both ABET Centres, the norm was for 'respectable' women not to talk about sex, sexual relations, or sexually transmitted diseases with older and younger people. It is also a norm for women to respect, and acquiesce to men's decisions regarding sex, including the use of condoms. According to Coleman (1985) norms develop to permit group members some control over the actions of others when those actions have consequences for the group. In this instance, norms uphold the dominance of men in decision-making around sex, and prevent women from exercising control over their sexual health.

Conclusion

Clearly, ABET Centres and the practitioners who work in them are faced with enormous challenges when it comes to dealing with HIV/AIDS in their communities. The Department of Education has added to these challenges by issuing a directive which requires all educational institutions, including ABET Centres, to incorporate HIV/AIDS in the curriculum, without providing guidelines or resources to enable this to happen. Policies can only be implemented on the ground if the capacity and will to do so exist. Capacity includes material, financial, managerial, and bureaucratic resources. Will is greatly increased if positive social norms and expectations are created and sustained through social relationships and networks. The implications of this are that the government should support HIV/AIDS education, and local responsibility for it, by devising enabling policy, providing expertise, infrastructure and finance. Developing the social capital of ABET officials, educators and learners is a significant concomitant to such capacity building.

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South African illiteracy statistics and the case of the magically growing number of literacy and ABET learners

John Aitchison and Anne Harley

Abstract

This article examines the state of South African illiteracy and adult basic education statistics.

Firstly, it reexamines the mid to late 1990s consensus on South Africa's illiteracy statistics (based largely on Household surveys and the 1996 Census data) which formed the baseline starting point for various government adult education provision and campaign goals (such as Education for All and the South African National Literacy Initiative), and finds that the actual number of illiterates has not been significantly reduced (if indeed they have been reduced) by such interventions.

Secondly it provides a critique of the Ministry and Department of Education's claims and their supporting statistics on how various state interventions have allegedly rendered illiterates literate and provided adult basic education to millions of people. The authors present evidence to show that a series of these government claims are based upon unreliable, confused, self-contradictory, inflated and sometimes non-existent data and that these misleading claims about provision have indeed become endemic.

The mid- to late-90s consensus on literacy statistics

After the publication of Harley *et al*'s *A survey of adult basic education in South Africa in the 90s* (1996) most South African commentators on literacy began using their figures (pp. 17-43) on adult illiteracy levels in South Africa. These statistics (derived from the Central Statistical Service estimates for 1991 and the annual October Household Survey of 1994) were updated in Aitchison *et al*'s *University of Natal survey of adult basic education and training: South Africa* (2000, pp. 15-21) (taking into account the 1996 General Population Census and 1995 October Household Survey). This latter summary stated that of the slightly more than 26 million adults in (people aged 15 and over) about 12 to 13 million of them had less than a full (grade 9) general education, about 7.4 to 8.5 million of these had less than grade 7 (often used as a minimum education level indicator of sustainable functional literacy) and about 2.9 to 4.2 million people had no schooling at all (and were presumably, by definition, illiterate). They also noted that these figures of functional illiteracy tended to be used rather loosely with some people talking about "12 million illiterates" when they should say "12 million people with an incomplete general education", though they considered it permissible to talk about 3 or 4 million total illiterates or 8.5 million functional illiterates. Aitchison *et al* (2000, p. 17) noted that there were no signs of a decrease in the percentage of functionally illiterate adults in the population.¹

Subsequently, many Statistics South Africa compiled illiteracy statistics for adults tended to provide figures for those adults aged 20 and over and some other government publications use age 16 as the lowest age for an 'adult'. Though this made direct comparisons more difficult, these statistics did not materially alter the picture outlined by Harley *et al* (1996) and Aitchison *et al* (2000) and which had formed the basis for estimates of need and provision in the Department of Education's *A National Multi-year implementation plan for Adult Education and Training: Provision and Accreditation* (1997, pp. 78-86; 225-228).

¹ Aitchison *et al* (2000) adduced various reasons that could be used to explain this – that some children are still receiving little or no general education, particularly in the more isolated rural areas; that the provision of adult basic education in state Public Adult Learning Centres is still reaching a very small proportion of those needing it; that the destabilisation caused by AIDS related deaths is deschooling the young orphans; etc.

Summarising the literacy statistics from 1995 to 2001

The following table summarises figures for the literacy and basic education levels of adult South Africans aged 15 and over using the following sources – the 1995 October Household Survey, the 1996 General Population Census and the 2001 General Population Census:

Literacy and basic education levels of South Africans aged 15 and over			
Level of education	1995 October Household Survey	1996 General Population Census	2001 General Population Census
Full general education (Grade 9 and more)	14.3 million (54%)	13.1 million (50%)	15.8 million (52%)
Less than full general education (less than Grade 9)	12.2 million (46%)	13.2 million (50%)	14.6 million (48%)
Less than grade 7	7.4 million (28%)	8.5 million (32%)	9.6 million (32%)
No schooling	2.9 million (11%)	4.2 million (16%)	4.7 million (16%)

These figures show that there has been no decrease in the actual number or percentage of functionally illiterate adults (less than grade 7). Some 32% of the adult population may therefore be regarded as functionally illiterate and therefore the functional literacy rate amongst the adult population is estimated at 68%.

The corollary of these statistics is that the state system of adult basic education and training and its parallels in the business sector and non-governmental organisations had by 2001 failed to reduce illiteracy in South Africa. At best it was keeping the percentage of functional illiterates the same though their raw numbers were still growing.

The Education For All literacy goals

In the *Education for all status report 2002: South Africa, incorporating country plans for 2002 to 2015*, issued at the end of 2002 by the Department of Education in Pretoria, appears the following statement (pp.47-48):

The EFA goal of halving the illiteracy rate means an average increase in the number of people aged 15 and over who are functionally illiterate (*sic*) by just under 470,000 yearly from 1996 in order to halve the illiteracy rate. This is equivalent to increasing the national functional literacy rate to 83% by 2015 for people aged over 15 years old, from 1996 values of 67%, and increasing the functional literacy rate of 15 to 24 year-olds from the 1996 levels of 83% to 92% by 2015. This assumes a modest population growth of 1.44% (as observed in the respective cohorts in recent years) but a more vigorous growth (of about 2.5%) in the number of literate people aged 15 or over. By 2015, then, of the estimated population of 53 million people, 34 million will be aged 15 years and over and 28 million of these over-15-year-olds will need to be functionally literate if the EFA goal is to be achieved.

South Africa is on track to achieve the literacy target as long as the number of learners graduating from Grade 9 (particularly when the General Education and Training certificate is implemented) remains at levels above the 470, 000 mark per year. However, as well as being committed to improving literacy rates, the Department of Education, is committed to expanding lifelong learning adult education and training opportunities, particularly in partnership with SETAs, non-governmental and private organisations. This will enable the EFA targets to be achieved before 2015 for adult basic education as well as adult education and training.

Later (p. 49), this table is provided:

Statistics on adult literacy and adult education levels in South Africa

	1991	1996
Number of adults aged over 20 years with no formal schooling	4 529 354	4 066 187
% of adults aged over 20 years	26.5%	18.4%
% of total population	14.6%	10.0%
Number of adults aged over 20yrs	17 106 335	22 146 220
Number of adults aged over 15 years		26 337 143
Number of adults aged 15 years who have attained a Grade 6 or higher level of education		17 550 913
Functional literacy rate of adults aged over 15 years		6.6%
Total population	30 986 920	40 583 573

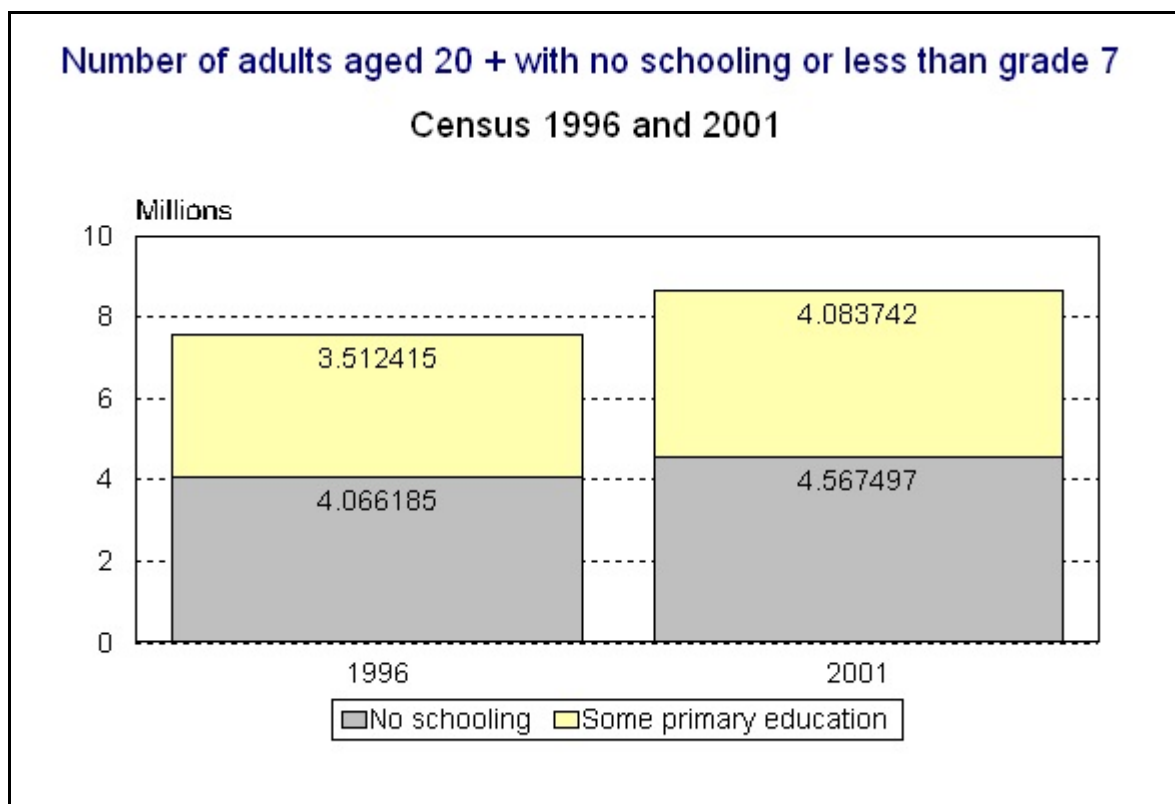
[Note: the 6.6% functional literacy rate is a calculation or typing error, it should be 66.6%]

and there is also a claim (p. 50) that according to 1996 national Census data, gender parity in literacy has also been achieved with equal proportions of female and male functionally literate persons (achieving Grade 6 or higher) in the population.

The 2001 census results

According to the 2001 census, some 18 % of people aged 20 years or older had no education at all, whilst a further 16% had completed some primary school education (ranging from grade 1 to 6). In real terms, just over 4.5 million (4,567,497) had no schooling, and just over 4 million (4,083,742) had some primary education. Thus about 8.6 million South Africa adults aged 20 years or older (over one third, or 33.9%) could be calculated to be functionally illiterate.

The 1996 census had found that 18.4% of those aged 20 years and older had no schooling, and a further 16.7% had completed some primary school education. Harley (2003) points out that this suggests a slight drop in the **proportion** of adults with little or no schooling in 2001.



One curious phenomenon is that whilst the percentage of adults with no schooling at all fell between 1996 and 2001, their actual number increased (by 501,310) after decreasing between 1991 and 1996, as shown in this table:

Adults aged 20 and older with no schooling: Census 1991, 1996 and 2001			
Census year	1991	1996	2001
Number	4,529,354	4,066,187	4,567,497
Change		- 463,167	+ 501,310
% change		- 10.2%	+ 12.3%
As % of adults aged 20+		19.3%	17.9%

It is difficult to explain this phenomenon, apart from suggesting one of three possible causes:

- The increase is a real and substantial increase – i.e. there really were more adults with no schooling in 2001 than there were in 1996. This would suggest that a significant proportion (1 in 8) of the 4 million children between 15 and 19 in 1996 never had any education at all. Though the Census 2001 figure of adults aged 20 to 24 with no schooling is large, 286, 269, it is not that large and it is less than the previous cohort (344,698).
- There is no real increase – the 2001 census was simply more accurate (either because it reached more people with no schooling or because people were more honest about their lack of any schooling than they were in 1996).
- The Census 2001 educational statistics are simply seriously wrong and it is pointless to enter into this sort of analysis of changes.

Of course, the figures for South Africa as a whole disguise the considerable inequities between the provinces. Limpopo Province (formerly Northern Province) remained the province with the highest proportion of adults with no schooling (over a third). As in 1996, the Western Cape had the lowest proportion of adults with no schooling in 2001.

As can be seen from the next table, the proportion of adults with no schooling has decreased in all provinces bar the Eastern Cape (where it has climbed from 20.9% to 22.8%), and the Free State (where it has remained relatively constant – 16.1% in 1996, and 16% in 2001) (has there been an exodus of more educated people from these two provinces seeking better employment prospects?).

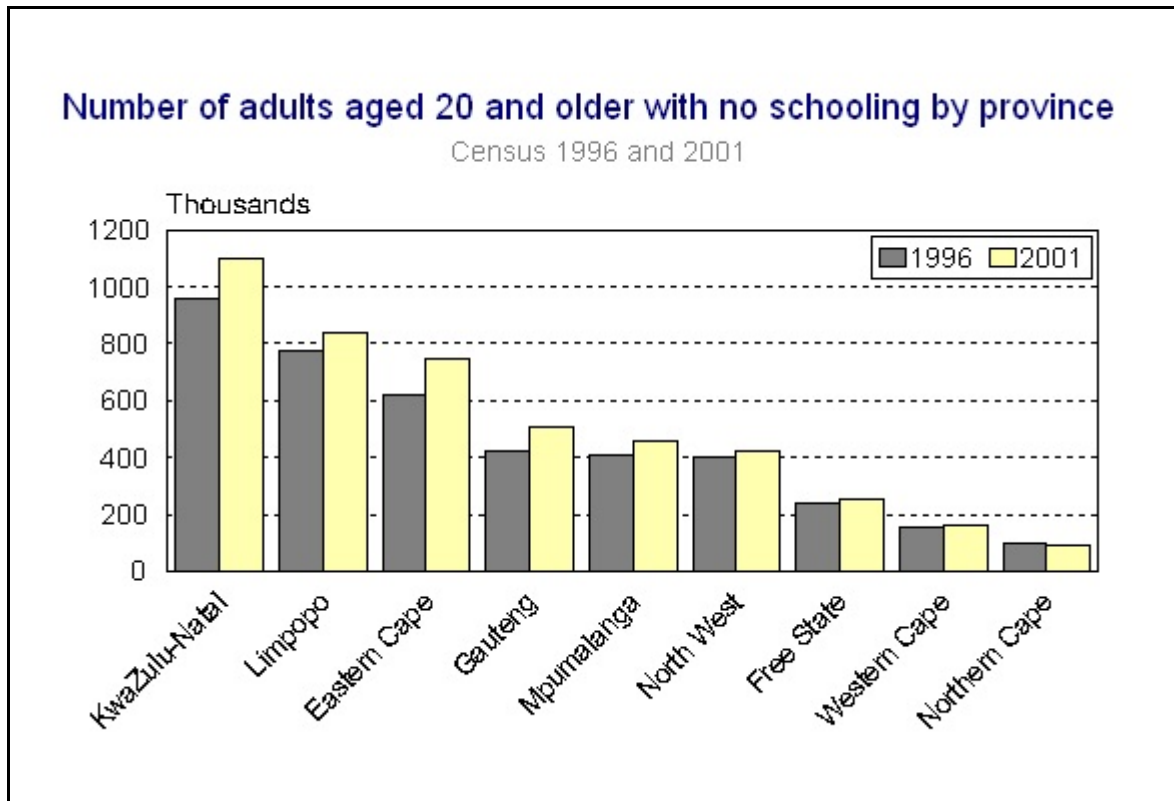
Percentage of population aged 20 years and older with no schooling by province: Census 1996 and 2001

Province	1996	2001	% change
KwaZulu-Natal	22.9%	21.9%	-1.0%
Limpopo	36.9%	33.4%	-3.5%
Eastern Cape	20.9%	22.8%	1.9%
Gauteng	9.5%	8.4%	-1.1%
Mpumalanga	29.4%	27.5%	-1.9%
North West	22.7%	19.9%	-2.8%
Free State	16.1%	16.0%	-0.1%
Western Cape	6.7%	5.7%	-1.0%
Northern Cape	21.7%	18.2%	-3.5%
South Africa	19.3%	17.9%	-1.4%

Actual numbers, however, show a disturbingly different picture. In every province except the Northern Cape there has been an increase in the raw number of adults with no schooling.

Population aged 20 years and older with no schooling or less than grade 7 education by province: Census 1996 and 2001

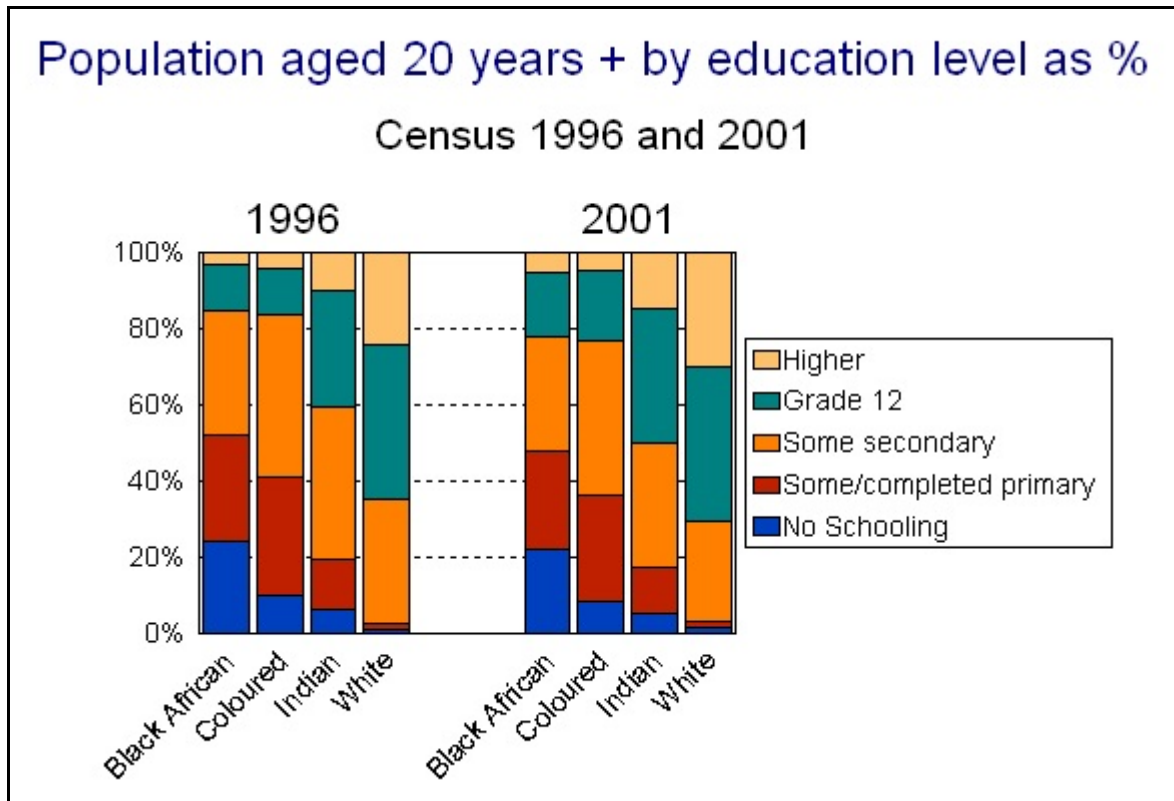
Province	No schooling		Some primary education (less than grade 7)	
	1996	2001	1996	2001
KwaZulu-Natal	957,217	1,100,291	747,586	849,144
Limpopo	771,587	835,485	252,287	352,437
Eastern Cape	617,796	743,700	635,475	643,921
Gauteng	419,157	504,619	516,624	673,283
Mpumalanga	410,336	456,747	211,216	264,548
North West	403,143	423,787	364,297	426,025
Free State	236,149	251,408	328,076	340,753
Western Cape	153,109	162,781	362,284	431,698
Northern Cape	97,691	88,680	94,570	101,934
Totals	4,066,185	4,567,497	3,512,415	4,083,742



These increasing numbers of the unschooled are particularly noticeable in five provinces – Limpopo, Mpumalanga, the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng – and less so in North West, the Free State and the Western Cape. Indeed the only province in South Africa where there was a decrease in the actual number of people aged 20 and over with no schooling was the Northern Cape (possibly due to closure of mines – the Northern Cape was the province with the biggest out-migration between 1996 and 2001).

The largest increase was in KwaZulu-Natal, where, compared to 1996, an additional 143,074 adults had no education. KwaZulu-Natal remained the province with the highest number of adults with no education at all.

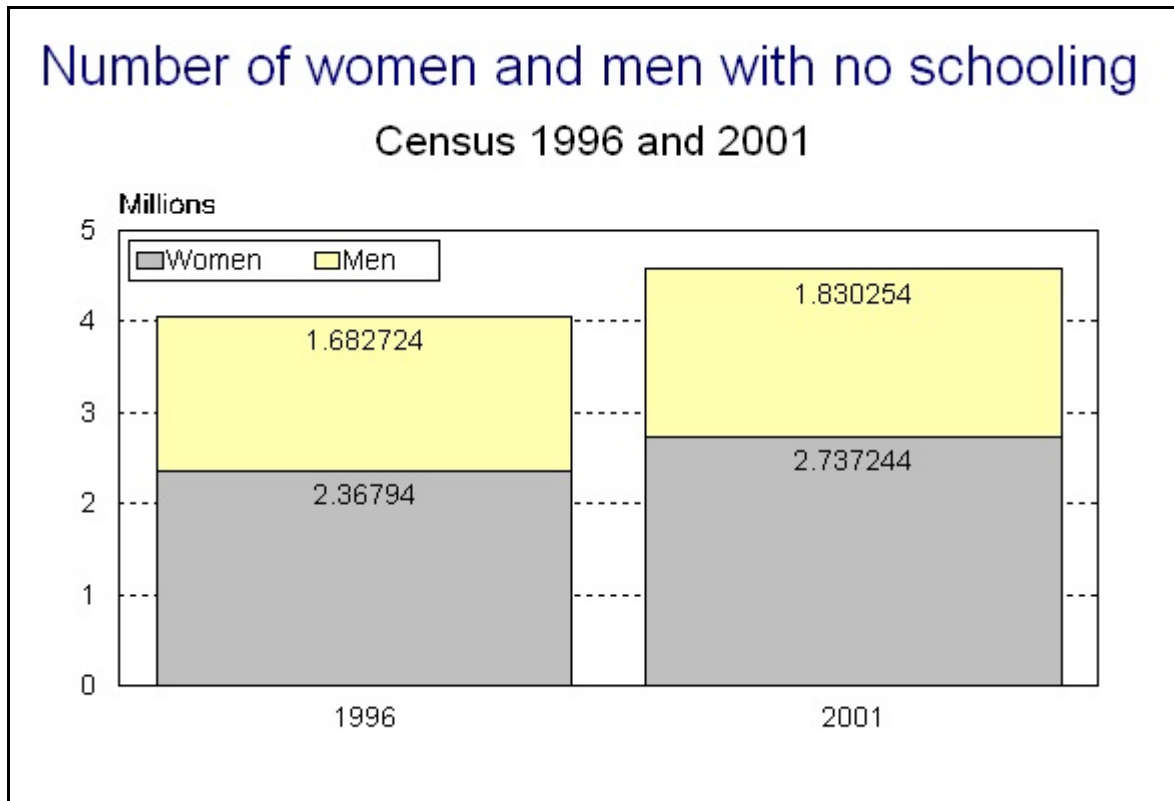
The considerable differences between the provinces is to some extent explained by the considerable differences between apartheid designated ‘race’ groups. As would be expected, the vast majority of adults with little or no education in 2001 were black Africans (93.9%), as was the case in 1996. Since there are far more black Africans living in South Africa, this is to be expected. However, the proportion of black African adults with no schooling is significantly higher than the proportion of coloured, Indian and White South Africans:



Expressed as a proportion of each race group, just over one in five (22.3%) adult black Africans in this country in 2001 had no schooling at all, compared to just over one in one hundred Whites (1.4%). For Black Africans this is slightly down from the 1996 figure (24.3%), and very slightly up for Whites (1.2%).

The sex differentiation is not as skewed: although more adult women have little or no (or very little) schooling than men, this is not as grotesquely skewed as in the case of race. In 2001 men represented 40% of the unschooled, women 60%. However, the increase in the number of unschooled women is nearly double that of men.

Number of women and men with no schooling: Census 1996 and 2001			
Sex	1996	2001	Increase
Men	1,682,724 (41.5%)	1,830,254 (40%)	147,530 (9%)
Women	2,367,940 (58.5%)	2,737,244 (60%)	369,304 (16%)
Totals	4,050,664 (100%)	4,567,497 (100%)	516,833 (12.8%)



As can be seen from this graph, the sex differentiation between unschooled illiterate adult men and women is increasing. The increase since 1996 in the actual number of people over the age of 20 who have had no schooling (some 516,833) consists primarily (71.5%) of women. Whereas in 1996 there were 685,216 more adult women who had never been to school than men, by 2001 this had increased to 906,990. Though this might suggest a growth in sex based discrimination in access to schooling in favour of males, it contradicts what is known about there being currently more girls than boys in schools. It is possible that this simply reflects the fact that the unschooled women are living longer than men.

Conclusions from surveying the literacy and basic education statistics for adults

It is clear that the need for literacy and adult basic education interventions continues. It is also clear that such interventions are needed most urgently in the Eastern Cape, where not only the actual number of adults aged 20 and over with no education at all has increased, but also the proportion these adults make up of the total population of that province. However, the fact that there are now over a million adults with no schooling at all in KwaZulu-Natal suggests that this province also needs to be targeted, as does Limpopo, which

remains the province with the highest proportion of adults with no schooling. There is also the worrying growth in the number of functional illiterate adult women – and that must be of concern to everyone.

Reprise on the Education for All promises

The *Education for all status report 2002: South Africa, incorporating country plans for 2002 to 2015* promised that the department of Education's commitment to "improving literacy rates ...[and] expanding lifelong learning adult education and training opportunities particularly in partnership with SETAs, non-governmental and private organisations ... will enable the EFA targets to be achieved before 2015 for adult basic education as well as adult education and training." (Department of Education, 2002, p. xiii). The EFA targets included halving the illiteracy rates.

The evidence from the literacy and basic education statistics suggests that halving the adult illiteracy rates by 2015 means ensuring that about 3 million adults gain functional literacy.

What then, is the evidence of provision that is likely to meet this target?

The data desert and misleading statistics

Aitchison *et al* (2000, p. 131-132) lamented the fact that statistical data and other information on provision on literacy and adult basic education was "still unreliable, confused, and self-contradictory, but more often, simply absent". Attempts to analyse what data are available has often led to acerbic exchanges (for example Aitchison, 1998) between Department of Education officials and researchers because the latter have made findings of lacklustre provision and criticised unlikely departmental claims. Misleading claims about provision have indeed become endemic.

The Building an ABET system report

The report, *Building an ABET system: the first five years 1995 - 2000*, was published in mid-2001 as a Tirisano document by the national Department of Education and was the output of a project put out to tender by the Adult Education and Training Directorate of the Department and funded by the European Union. Not merely does the report contain misleading information but it also totally ignores and fails to address the findings and criticisms that have come from researchers and ABET practitioners. Indeed it even totally ignores findings from research commissioned by the Department from the Human Sciences Research Council in 1999 which do not accord with the rosy

picture which the report tries to present.²

The report's claims about ABET enrolments are particularly unlikely. The first extraordinary assertion occurs on the very first page of the actual report. It claims (p. 8) that:

According to the Education Information Systems evaluation report by Provincial departments, during 1999 alone provincial Departments of Education reached 300 000 ABET learners whereas the target set in the Multi-Year Implementation Plan was only 177 000 learners.

In examining this claim, one first has to note the following:

1. ABET is very clearly defined as being basic education for adults at the General Education level of the National Qualifications Framework (that is, NQF level 1 more or less equivalent to school education from Grade 1 to Grade 9 (Std 7)). ABET does **not** include education and training delivered to adults at NQF levels 2 to 4 (which is Further Education and Training).
2. The *Multi-Year Implementation Plan* (MYIP) targets are precisely for ABET and not for any FET at all.
3. The Department's own statistics for 1999 (in the *Draft ABET Sectoral Report* and the final *ABET Sectoral Report* both produced in 2000) which respectively provide totals of 190,822 and 156,858 (or 176,151)³ ABET learners and the *Annual Survey of Public Adult Learning Centres 1999. Final Report* conducted for the Department by the Human Sciences Research Council which had a figure of 162,900 ABET learners.

How is it then that the report can claim nearly double these numbers for enrolment in 1999? On a closer inspection of the figures it becomes apparent how this statistical inflation has occurred. Examination of the provincial figures given in the report for the numbers of learners in 1999 (Eastern Cape, p. 16; Free State, p. 24; Gauteng, p. 35; KwaZulu-Natal, p. 45; Mpumalanga, p. 53; Northern Cape, p. 67; North West, p. 70; Northern Province, p. 78; Western Cape, p. 88) makes it abundantly clear that these figures include not

² It is notable that this project report does not contain a single reference to any document or source. Whilst the publication is clearly a popular one for general distribution and it would be unfair to expect it to have a full scholarly apparatus, it is still unacceptable that, at the very least, it does not refer the reader to a fuller report or reports from which it has been distilled and makes not reference at all to contradictory or missing statistics.

³ One obtains different totals from the general section of the report and by adding up the provincial subtotals in other sections of the report.

only ABET learners but **also** learners studying at the FET level (that is, mainly young people who have failed their matric at school and are now trying again through a Public Adult Learning Centre).

The Gauteng figures for 1999 provide an instructive example of this:

Source	ABET	FET	Total
Draft ABET Sectoral report	29848	25295	55143
Human Sciences Research Council	22991	35390	58381
<i>Building an ABET system</i>	60307		

The obvious conclusion from these Gauteng figures is that the report has reported some 30,000 or so FET learners as ABET ones. This also appears to be the case with every other province except the Northern Province (Limpopo). These figures would not be a problem if this report was about **all** adult education provision by the Departments (though one would worry that the authors do not seem to know what ABET is as distinguished from FET) but, when it claims meeting Multi-Year Implementation Plan targets for 1999 by 172% when that Plan's targets are specifically and only about ABET, it becomes misinformation.

The second extraordinary assertion is as follows (p. 8):

For the period 1995 to 2000 a total of 1,405,071 adult learners and 85,219 educators have been involved in ABET programmes across the country.

The report carefully specifies that this refers to Departments of Education only.

Now, like the claim about exceeding the Multi-year Implementation Plan target for 1999, these student and educator figures are thoroughly misleading.

To reach the total claimed 1,405,071 ABET learners over a six years period requires (mechanically averaging out this figure over six years) some 234,178 **new** learners in each of five of the six years under review. This must be nonsense on three counts.

Firstly, it is fantastically unlikely that there has been an enrolment in **each** of five years of 234,178 **new** learners.

Secondly, if the actual target for ABET learners was 177,000 for 1999 (a target we have already shown was not achieved) how on earth can the total for each of the preceding, building up, years vastly exceed this figure.

Thirdly, the Department's own previously reported statistics simply do not correspond to these outlandish claims. Examples of previously reported totals for ABET learners for some of this period are as follows:

1994/95	89,151	
1996	150699	
1998	173015	(though these included FET learners amongst the 39,783 Mpumalanga learners)

Regrettably, the Department has misrepresented the truth.

The Centre for Adult Education of the then University of Natal approached both the authors of the report and the Department to point out these errors but they were never corrected. Moreover, these claims continue to be recycled.

The Department of Education published statistics on "ABET" learners in *Education Statistics in South Africa at a glance in 2001* (Department of Education, 2003, pp. 26-27). In summary the following is presented:

ABET learners, educators and institutions: 2001			
Province	Learners	Educators	Institutions
Eastern Cape	55,517	2,917	668
Free State	47,284	2,088	206
Gauteng	165,074	3,211	225
KwaZulu-Natal	27,394	1,517	259
Limpopo	17,381	724	189
Mpumalanga	18,411	1,789	212
North West	32,679	2,750	474
Northern Cape	3,981	198	99
Western Cape	18,614	1,087	162
Totals	386,335	16,281	2,494

It is interesting to compare these with the Human Sciences Research Council and *Building an ABET system* figures for 1999:

Number of learners at PALCs: 1999, 2001 and 2002					
	1999 HSRC (ABET only)	1999 HSRC (ABET and FET)	1999 <i>Building an ABET system</i>	2001 Department of Education	2002 Department of Education (ABET only)
Eastern Cape	37,119	54,281	69,426	55,517	52,460
Free State	10,499	25,586	9,737	47,284	29,520
Gauteng	22,991	58,381	60,307	165,074	57,811
KwaZulu-Natal	12,814	20,671	30,000	27,394	12,002
Limpopo	27,943	28,807	32,364	17,381	22,842
Mpumalanga	22,424	25,207	22,424	18,411	4,519
North West	17,348	45,940	50,872	32,679	39,078
Northern Cape	3,593	5,763	6,951	3,981	5,277
Western Cape	8,169	23,044	23,000	18,614	26,069
Totals	162,900	287,680	305,081	386,335	249,578

From this table it appears that in the 2001 report at least six of the provinces have included FET learners in their supposed ABET statistics and that in two others it is unclear and in only one province, the Northern Cape, are the statistics unmistakably only for ABET. But what is particularly remarkable is that the 2001 statistics show, using the Department's **own** figures, a **decline** in numbers of learners in seven provinces. Only two provinces show growth and their expansion is somewhat unbelievable – Free State 386% increase; Gauteng 174% increase (the latter particularly so as in the other provinces the educator:learners ratio ranges from 10 to 22 whereas in Gauteng in 2001 it was 1:51, double what the Department itself recorded for Gauteng the previous year) ! The statistics for 2002 record a further decline (Department of Education, 2004, pp. 28-29).

An interesting though probably unreliable statistic from the 2001 census is that for people aged between 5 and 24 only 26,480 were attending adult education classes (Statistics South Africa, 2003, p. 49). Given that adult education centre attendance is normally highest amongst young adults (and that they are trying to gain FET qualifications, not ABET ones), this suggests again that claims of annual intakes of nearly a quarter of a million new ABET learners are preposterous.

The national ABET examinations evidence

Backup for our contention that many of the national Department's ABET learner statistics are inaccurate is found in the figures of learners who enrolled for the national ABET examinations conducted by the Department from 2001 onwards. They can usefully be compared with the estimates prepared in 1997 for the National Department of Education's *Multi-year Implementation Plan for adult education and training* that proposed (in an admittedly "optimistic scenario") that in 2001 there would be 310,000 ABET learners in public adult learning centres, 341,000 in 2002 and 375,100 in 2003 (p. 91) and that at least 45 to 50% of them would pass the courses they were enrolled in those years (p. 230-231).

Well what happened in the new national ABET level 4 examinations run through the provincial education departments at public adult learning centres from 2001 to 2003? What kind of throughput was there? In 2001 some 18,438 candidates enrolled and by 2003 this had risen to 26,067. In 2001 a mere 78 qualified for a General Education and Training (GETC) certificate, in 2003 it had risen to 1,252 (Umalusi, 2004, p. 12). More broadly, Umalusi had by the end of 2003 only issued 440 ABET GETC certificates (it is unclear why the other successful candidates had not received theirs) and 19,028 learning area certificates (for individual learning area courses passed).

To get a more realistic idea of how this output relates to targets set in 1997 one must have some idea of what percentage of ABET learners are in level 4. In 1999 the HSRC survey estimated it at about 21%. Even if we assume that only about 10% of ABET learners in PALCs are at ABET level 4, the output seems very small. The *Plan* assumed a 45% pass rate in 2001. Therefore one would expect some 1,395 to pass the GETC – but only 78 did. In 2003 one would expect 1,876 to pass. There were 1,252. So output (even in the more limited sense of passing at least one learning area course), even when a very high drop-out rate is assumed, does not match the targets, suggesting either a smaller number of enrolments than expected or very inadequate instruction.

The possibility that, even if the state sector is performing badly, learners in the business or NGO sectors would enormously increase the overall national enrolments and throughput is remote. The Independent Examination Board examinations in October 2002 for some of the ABET level 4 learning areas only had 1,022 candidates.

Blowing up the educators

Similarly inflated claims are made about the number of educators in the *Building an ABET system* report. When one looks at the claims about the number of educators (85,219) claimed over the same period, one must be equally suspicious (apart from the obvious caveat that these are statistics for educators for all PALC classes from ABET to Grade 12, not just ABET). Clearly many of these educators have been recounted each year (unless one really imagines that a completely new batch of educators replaces the old one each

year). Two other obvious points of interest (and equally alarming ones) are jumps in the educator: student ratios (as in KwaZulu-Natal) or the unusually perfect stability around the officially targeted ratio of 1:20 (as in Mpumalanga or the Eastern Cape – in the latter case, in spite of huge differences in enrolments in succeeding years).

University of Natal research (Harley *et al*, 1996; Aitchison *et al*, 2000) estimated that there were 14,373 educators in 1994 and 20,000 in 1998 delivering ABET and FET.

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC, 2000) found 16,089 in 1999 (and was able to determine the provincial breakdown for 13,628 of them) with a teacher:learner ratio of 1:18 (the range was from 1:15 in the Free State and the Northern Province to 1:24 in the Eastern Cape).

Educators numbers in PALCs – 1999, 2001 and 2002					
Province	1999			2001	2002
	HSRC	HSRC adjusted	<i>Building an ABET system</i>	Department of Education	Department of Education
Eastern Cape	2,245	2,651	3,370	2,917	2,928
Free State	1,310	1,547	735	2,088	2,042
Gauteng	2,336	2,758	2,984	3,211	2,789
KwaZulu-Natal	1,263	1,491	3,000	1,517	943
Mpumalanga	776	916	1,121	1,789	33
North West	2,466	2,911	3,494	2,750	1,712
Northern Cape	303	358	240	198	240
Limpopo	1,729	2,041	1,922	724	1,040
Western Cape	1,054	1,244	1,515	1,087	1,372
Not known	146	172			
Totals	13,628	16,089	18,381	16,281	13,099

The *Building an ABET system* figures are consistently higher than the HSRC survey except in one or two provinces (possibly where there has been a genuine attempt to record the number of actual ABET teachers rather than all PALC educators). The Department's figures for 2001 show some provincial declines and some increases but with an overall decline, which has deepened in 2002 (Department of Education, 2004, pp. 28-29).

Research done by the HSRC for the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority and reported on in the *ETDP SETA Annual Report 2002* (p. 5) gives a total of only 10,848 staff employed in South Africa's public ABET system.

The same caveats apply to claims about the number of Public Adult Learner Centres (PALCs) run by the Department of Education. One of the main reasons that policy makers in the early 1990s saw the future of ABET as within the Ministry of Education was the existence of a functioning night school system using the existing infrastructure of the schooling system. This is still very much the case and school buildings and school teachers (working part-time for ABET) are the major state resource for ABET. In 1994 there were estimated to be 1440 public adult education centres in South Africa. More current estimates of the number of PALCs (including so-called satellite centres) vary from the University of Natal figure for 1998/99 of about 3073 (Aitchison *et al*, 2000) to the Human Sciences Research Council count in 1999 of 2123 that catered for ABET (another 103 did not) (HSRC, 2000) to the Department's 2001 figure of 2494 (Department of Education, 2003, p. 27) and 2002 figure of 1895 (which distinguishes between ABET and FET centres)(Department of Education, 2004, p. 28-29).

Estimates of the number of PALCs					
Province	Aitchison <i>et al</i> (1997 or 1998)	HSRC (1999)	<i>Building an ABET system</i> (2000 or 2001)	Departme nt of Education (2001)	Departme nt of Education (2002) (ABET only)
Eastern Cape	1118	319	429	668	256
Free State	139	144	175	206	211
Gauteng	223	196	196	225	210
KwaZulu-Natal	270	166	320	259	139
Mpumalanga	238	250	250	212	137
North West	415	341	360	474	171
Northern Cape	74	60	100	99	117
Limpopo	457	520	750	189	369
Western Cape	139	127	125	162	285
Totals	3073	2123	2705	2,494	1,895
Note: The HSRC figures exclude some 45 PALCs that did not provide any ABET at all.					

The HSRC figures for 1999 were probably the most reliable. What needs explaining is the big drop from 3073 (Aitchison *et al* estimate for 1997/1998) to 2123 (the HSRC estimate for 1999) followed by an immediate increase of some 27% to 2705 (in the *Building an ABET system* figures for 2000) and then a drop again in 2001⁴ and further drop in 2002. The large Aitchison *et al* estimate maybe partially but not completely explained by their including a number of so-called satellite centres not included in later enumerations. But the most plausible explanation is that both the Aitchison *et al* and the *Building an ABET system* figures for most of the provinces appear to be essentially **claimed** figures from the provincial departments of education and it is likely that they are inflated. Research done by the HSRC for the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority and reported on in the *ETDP SETA Annual Report 2002* (p. 5) gives a further indication of serious decline – it records a total of only 1,720 public ABET centres.

Pronouncements on literacy and ABET provision in recent years

ThisDay of 9 December 2003 (Pretorius, 2003, p. 3) reported Duncan Hindle, the Deputy Director General of the Department of Education, as saying that the Department had reached at least 1.6 million people through adult literacy programmes since 1999. These may include the claimed 309,000 literacy learners reached through a joint University of South Africa/South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) partnership in 2002 and 2003 and another Department of Education initiative in four provinces that had reached 4,130 learners via service providers. But where do the other 1.3 million learners come from? What seems most likely is that the fantastical figures in the *Building an ABET system* report have been extrapolated into the period 1999 to 2002 and that these figures are now routinely bandied about by officials and inserted into the Minister of Education's speeches to portray the national Department of Education's adult literacy and basic education work in a good light. They have even made it into the National Treasury *2004 Estimates of national expenditure* (National Treasury, 2004, p. 365) where it states that "The department's literacy initiative exceeded the target set in February 2002 by 309 per cent. Since 1999, the department has reached 1.6 million illiterate people."

Examples of this sort of puffery can be found in a statements on the University of South Africa website reporting on the launch of the Department of Education/University of South Africa partnership. Hindle is reported to have said that the initiative aimed to reduce the

⁴ Three of the *Building an ABET system* figures are almost identical to the HSRC ones (Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Western Cape) whereas the six other provinces show an extraordinary higher figures for the number of centres (an average of 38%). However, what may in fact be being exhibited is a modest drop from the Aitchison *et al* number to the *Building and ABET system* and Department of Education number of **claimed** centres. This probably reflects a very real decline in the number of PALCs whose **actual** number is probably best captured by the HSRC research in 1999.

level of illiteracy by at least 35 per cent by 2004 and was a major part of the Department's strategy for "breaking the back of illiteracy" among adults and the youth. He was somewhat outdone by a another statement which said that the University's ABET Institute would, with its vast resources, assist SANLI in achieving its goal of reaching a target of two million adults and in ensuring that two million adult learners would complete the literacy programme by 2004 (University of South Africa, 2002).

In April 2002, the Minister of Education claimed that SANLI had reached 90,000 adults in 2001 (Asmal, 2002a) and on 15 July 2002 the African National Congress's web based magazine, *Umrabulo* published an article by him, entitled *Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan*, in which he said (Asmal, 2002b):

Our government has made a number of international commitments around the provision of education, including adult education and literacy. In particular, the Education Ministry is a signatory to the Dakar Framework for Action adopted by the World Education Forum in April 2000 in Dakar. In terms of this, and among other targets, we are committed to achieving a 50% decline in illiteracy by 2005, especially for women.

We are pleased to report that at present there are over 400 000 adult learners in our Adult Learning Centres across the country, and they are studying a range of newly designed programmes, ... We also have a large number of students, mostly adults, who are taking literacy classes. ... We are therefore glad to have over 200 000 such learners striving to become literate, These numbers will be expanded in the next year or two, as we get more volunteers and more resources.

Then the *Financial Mail* of 8 November 2002 published an article by the Minister in which he said that (Asmal, 2002c):

An estimated 5.2m people are illiterate, and nearly 1 million of these are enrolled in literacy programmes. ... There are about 400 000 adults in public adult education centres, striving to improve themselves and their communities.

Then, on 16 May 2003, in a keynote address launching the "Readathon 2003" in Johannesburg, the Minister of Education (Asmal, 2003) said that SANLI had presented literacy classes to more than 200,000 newly enrolled adult learners this year, the majority of them from the Eastern Cape and Limpopo.

Finally, in an address to the Cape Town Press Club on 16 March 2004, the Minister stated (Asmal, 2004):

... we said that we must break the back of illiteracy among adults and youths in five years.

In meeting this priority, Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) has been crucial. We have established 2 371 ABET centres, involving 210 569 adult learners in a variety of programmes in business management, agriculture, and applied technology. Together with a

range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and statutory partners, the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) has been able to advance literacy delivery.

As a result of these combined efforts, departmental literacy projects have reached nearly 2 million learners. Certainly, these efforts must be intensified, but we are making real progress in breaking the back of illiteracy.

Surely some magical and increasingly potent growth factor is at work.

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“The time is burning”: The right of adults to basic education in South Africa

Peter Rule

Abstract

The government has neglected the constitutional right of adults to basic education over the last decade. This paper examines the bases for holding the government to account in the constitutional court for its performance. It examines the effectiveness of government responses to adult illiteracy since 1994, drawing on a range of policy documents, statistics, scholarly reviews and other data. It outlines two lines of argument which might be pursued against the government: its underspending on adult basic education, and its failure to cater for adults for whom the formal ABET system is not accessible. On a constructive note, it calls for a comprehensive approach to the challenges of adult basic education, outlining key principles that might inform such an approach as well as alternative models of provision.

Education

29.(1) Everyone has the right –
to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further
education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make
progressively available and accessible.
(Chapter 2, Bill of Rights, Constitution of the Republic of South Africa).

The time is burning and the multitudes continue to wait.
(Professor H.S. Bhola)

Introduction

The words of Professor H. S. Bhola, renowned Indian literacy expert and global campaigner for Adult Basic Education and literacy, were addressed to an international conference on Adult Basic and Literacy Education in Pietermaritzburg. They resonated with delegates from throughout the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, and especially with the large South African contingent. This paper revisits the right of South African adults to basic education, a right which is enshrined in our constitution but so often gets eclipsed in the glare of publicity surrounding Matric results and new intakes of Grade Ones. With the overwhelming emphasis on formal schooling in South Africa, the education of those who are either too young or too old to attend school is scandalously neglected. If Early Childhood Development is the stepdaughter of the education system, Adult Basic Education is the poor sister, and thus far golden slippers have been few and far between.

In an article in the *Journal of Education*, Aitchison (2003, p. 168) posits the close association between adult education and the political transformation of South Africa, and writes of “a pervasive sadness” concerning the failure of “the hoped for adult education renaissance” in the post-apartheid era. In the same volume Baatjes (2003, p. 179) focuses on the “marginalisation and exclusion” of the poor in South Africa and argues that an “instrumentalist tradition” in adult basic education contributes to this marginalisation. This article picks up some of these themes in exploring basic education for adults as a constitutional right in South Africa.

I begin with a brief examination of the state of adult basic education and literacy in South Africa. This provides a context for the discussion that follows. I then focus on the reasons for the neglect of ABE, the legal ramifications of this neglect regarding the constitutional right of adults to basic education, and possible ways forward. I argue in this article that the

government is failing to meet its constitutional obligation in providing adult basic education. I discuss why basic education is a constitutional right in the first place, and why it is imperative for national development in general, and poverty alleviation in particular, that the government deal with adult basic education as a priority. I consider the possible arguments that might be presented in a case against the government regarding its violation of adults' right to basic education. I conclude by arguing for a comprehensive national strategy to deal with adult basic education in all its facets, and provide some models of adult basic education provision that fall outside the conventional format of public adult learning centres.

Defining Adult Basic Education

What do we mean by Adult Basic Education (ABE)⁵? Who an adult is for the purposes of basic education has been variously described (*Adult Basic Education and Training Act*, 2000; Aitchison, 1999). Since my focus is the constitutional right to adult basic education in South Africa, I take an adult to be fifteen years and older, not engaged in formal schooling or higher education and with an educational level of less than grade 9. "Educational level" should be taken here as qualitative (a standard of education achieved) rather than quantitative (a grade reached): because of the appalling standard on apartheid schooling, and the continuing dysfunction of schools in the democratic era, many adult learners who have nine years of schooling still require basic education.

In the formal context of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), ABE refers to all learning programmes for adults from levels 1 to 4, where level 4 is equivalent to grade 9 in public schools or level 1 on the NQF (*Adult Basic Education and Training Act* No 52 of 2000, p. 6). In other words, ABE is equated with nine years of schooling. It includes the two fundamental learning areas of Language, Literacy and Communications and Numeracy/ Mathematical Literacy, as well as a growing number of core learning areas, including Natural Science, Human and Social Sciences, Economic and Management Science, and Technology; and learning areas in the elective category which include Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME), Tourism, Agricultural Science and Ancillary Health Care.

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The Constitution of South Africa (1996) uses the term Adult Basic Education and documents in the early 1990s tended to use this formulation. Later documents, reflecting an official preoccupation with linking Education and Training, included a "T" for Training, and ABE became ABET. This article uses the term Adult Basic Education or ABE to refer to the constitutional right, and ABET in contexts where a policy and/or systemic emphasis is appropriate.

The state of Adult Basic and Literacy Education

While the emphasis on formal schooling is absolutely justified and necessary, the neglect of adult literacy is not. Professor Bhola's striking imagery of the times burning suggests a devastating waste of human potential. While development in the coming decades depends on today's school children, development today depends on today's adults. Of course, the high rate of functional illiteracy among South African adults is a legacy of apartheid and the deliberate policy of inferior educational provision for black people. It is important not to lose sight of the effects of Verwoerd's *Bantu Education Act* (1953) and its later modifications, which stunted the education of generations of learners. In addition, the struggle against Bantu Education and state repression of the student movement seriously disrupted and even curtailed the education of many of today's adults (See French, 1992). Given this legacy, it was imperative that the new democratic government effectively address the issue of functional illiteracy among adults.

Drawing on the 1991 Census, the National Education Policy Report on *Adult Basic Education* (1992, p. 5), intended to inform post-apartheid education policy, stated that there were "about 15 million people without a basic schooling". Of This 15 million, about 4,5 million were illiterate. The vast majority of the 15 million semi-literate and illiterate people were black African, with more living in rural than urban areas. There was little gender variation in rates of illiteracy. A second NEPI report on *Adult Education* (1993, p.10) made a strong link between lack of education and economic position: "Many, perhaps more than half, are school dropouts, unemployed, or underemployed in informal sector activities". Ten years on, how has the government responded to the challenge of adult basic education arising from decades of apartheid neglect? The answer is: not well.

The government's initial Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) held out great promise for national development in general and adult basic education in particular. The RDP was a redistributive socio-economic policy with five-year targets to *inter alia*: build a million low-cost houses; electrify 2.5 million houses; create 200 000 jobs annually; redistribute 30% of the agricultural land; and drive massive education initiatives. The RDP recognised the role of ABE in achieving its goals, calling for a "coherent human resource development policy" focusing on skills acquisition and ABE (*RDP White Paper, Government Gazette, No. 16085, p.26*).

In retrospect, the RDP was too ambitious in its goals, given the financial resources available and the government's own capacity to deliver. *The National Multi-year implementation plan for Adult Education and Training* (1997) of the Department of Education estimated that it would require R18

billion to bring ABE programmes to 3 million illiterate and under-educated adults (Department of Education, 1997). In reality, ABE received R50 million in international donor-sourced funding for a literacy campaign during the RDP era (Baatjes, 2003, p187). The government fell similarly short in its other development goals, and the RDP was soon replaced by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, a neoliberal macroeconomic policy with an emphasis on economic growth and global competitiveness.

Nearly ten years after the NEPI study, the 2001 census data indicates that approximately 48% of the South African adult population (or 14.6 million adults) had less than 9 years of schooling and 16% (4.7million adults) had never been to school (Aitchison, 2005; Baatjes, 2003, p. 191; UNESCO, 1999; United Nations Development Programme, 2000; Statistics South Africa, 2003). Although there is some discrepancy between different statistical sources, the general trend is unmistakable: more or less the same numbers of people are undereducated or illiterate as was the case ten years ago. A close comparison of the 1996 and 2001 census figures indicates that adult education levels are either remaining static or actually declining. The number of adults with no schooling at all increased by 516,833 between 1996 and 2001. This increase was evident in all provinces except the Northern Cape, where there was a slight decrease. The 2001 census also indicates that the differentiation between functionally illiterate adult men and women is increasing. In actual and percentage terms, there are more women with no schooling in 2001 than in 1996 (Harley, 2003; Statistics South Africa, 1999b; Statistics South Africa, 2003). The number of Public Adult Learning Centres operating has dropped from 1440 to 998 over the last 7 years. These figures indicate that there has been no significant progress in reducing adult illiteracy since the end of the apartheid era. Tellingly, ABET receives less than 1% of the education budget.

Regional and class factors also intersect in significant ways with the profile of illiteracy in South Africa. The October Household Survey of 1999 showed that certain provinces had much higher illiteracy rates than others (Statistics South Africa, 1999a). While only about 5% of the population aged 20 or older in Gauteng had no schooling, the figures were 17% for the Eastern Cape, 14% for KwaZulu-Natal, 20% for Mpumalanga and 34% for Limpopo Province. The statistics regarding illiteracy are striking when examined through the lens of economic activity. A 1994 study shows that 32% of formally employed workers had less than 9 years of schooling. On the other hand, the figures were 57% for unemployed adults, 67% for the informally employed and 80% for those employed in the agricultural sector (BMI, 1994). The 1999 October Household Survey confirmed this trend: 90.7% of non-urban people had no training (Statistics South Africa, 1999a). The implication is that there is a strong link between poverty and illiteracy, particularly rural poverty. Those

who are illiterate are likely to be poor, either unemployed or involved in informal or agricultural work. This is not to suggest that illiteracy causes poverty, but that the two phenomena are closely associated: “the maps of illiteracy, poverty and unemployment are beginning to mirror each other” (Baatjes *et al*, 2002, p. 1).

Statistics, by their very nature, are an abstraction of reality. They transform real lives into ciphers. While this is useful for the purposes of broad national profiling and policy development, it loses the existential dimension of lived reality. Since an illiterate adult is likely to be either unemployed or underemployed and to live in poor circumstances, such as an informal settlement or a rural area, and since most adults who attend existing Public Adult Learning Centres are women, a concrete example might help to sharpen our focus. Doris Mthethwa is seventy years old and lives in Ntunjambili, a rural area in the Tugela valley near Kranskop in KwaZulu-Natal (Sunday Times, 2002; Greytown Gazette, 2002). She walks more than a kilometer a day to fetch water, carrying a drum on her head. She does not receive a pension. Four years previously a councillor offered to help her get one; he took a copy of her identity document, but she is still waiting. She lives with her daughter who is the breadwinner, doing menial tasks in the district wherever she can find them. Her two grandchildren, aged five and seven, do not attend crèche or school.

This is by no means an isolated example – “Sadly,” the reporter writes, “this story is repeated time and time again as one wanders up and down the roads and paths of ... Ntunjambili” (Greytown Gazette, 2002, p1). Doris Mthethwa does not have access to a public adult learning centre, even if she wanted to attend formal classes. With unemployment in South Africa estimated at 37% in 2000 and 17% of the population living in absolute poverty, according to the United Nations Human Poverty Index (United Nations Development Programme, 2000), the story is a common one not only in Kranskop but across the country. The poverty indices for the Northern Province (28.34%), Eastern Cape (23.34%), Mpumalanga (21.71%) and KwaZulu-Natal (21.12%) are especially high.

Reading the times

Why is Adult Basic Education in such a parlous state just at a time in our history when we need to engage all our human resources optimally? South Africa has a strong enabling legislative framework for adult basic education and training. Besides the inclusion of adult basic education as a constitutional right, the *Adult Basic Education and Training Act* (2000) sets out regulations for ABET and provides for the establishment, governance and funding of

public and private adult learning centres, as well as for quality assurance within the centres; the *South African Qualifications Authority Act* (1995) provides for a qualifications framework which includes ABET; and the *Skills Development Act* (1998) provides for a system of levies to fund workplace learning. A *National multi-year implementation plan for adult basic education and training* (1997) spells out in great detail the responsibilities of the government for implementing the right. In addition, the government has an infrastructure of Public Adult Learning Centres run by the provincial departments of education and Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labour to effect the implementation of ABET. Whether this infrastructure is adequate for addressing the needs of poor people in rural areas and on the margins of the cities is debatable and will be addressed below.

There is verbal recognition within government of the urgent need to tackle illiteracy and to develop human resources in South Africa. In 1999 the new Minister of Education announced the government's intention to "break the back of illiteracy" and launched a new literacy campaign known as the South African National Literacy Initiative to effect this (Asmal, 1999). At the beginning of 2002, President Thabo Mbeki announced the *Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa*. The purpose of the strategy is to provide a plan to ensure that people are equipped to participate fully in society and to be able to find and create work, and to benefit fairly from it (Department of Labour, 2004). In 2005 there have been some promising developments in the ABET field at the level of ministerial acknowledgement of the problems and the failures of previous ABET campaigns and initiatives. The National Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, has called for a Task Team to review ABET policy and implementation. At a provincial level, the MEC for Education in KwaZulu-Natal, Ina Cronje, recently held an "ABET Imbizo" and pledged the province to eradicating illiteracy in three years (Macfarlane, 2005). While this kind of attention at a ministerial level is welcome and political will is a key component of any effective initiative to reduce illiteracy, it remains unclear how rhetoric will be translated into practice; in particular, whether and how such initiatives will be funded. Thus South Africa has the legislative framework, the infrastructure and, apparently, the political will to implement an effective adult basic education strategy. However, the record over the last decade raises grave doubts about whether there will be any significant reduction of adult illiteracy in the next ten years – an untenable state of affairs for a country of South Africa's resources, democratic character and leadership profile on the continent and internationally.

An analysis of the Preamble of the *Adult Basic Education and Training Act* of 2000 is revealing in highlighting some of the contending forces within ABET. The government's discourse around ABET draws on the language of democracy, redress and human rights which is consistent with adult basic education as a constitutional *right*. However, other clauses indicate that ABET is viewed as an instrument in the service of broader needs and interests. Its purpose is, *inter alia*, to:

- RESTRUCTURE AND TRANSFORM programmes and centres to respond better to the human resources, economic and development needs of the Republic;
- ADVANCE strategic priorities determined by national policy directives at all levels of governance and management within the adult basic education and training sector;
- RESPOND to the needs of the Republic and the labour market and of the communities served by the centres;
- COMPLEMENT the Skills Development Strategy in co-operation with the Department of Labour.

Is the purpose of ABET primarily to serve the needs of the poor and their communities or to service the GEAR policy within the context of globalization? The argument that these two purposes are not mutually exclusive is dubious since unemployment and the gap between rich and poor have increased during the GEAR era (Bond, 2002; IDASA 2002). The Act employs both discourses. Phrases such as "human rights", "democracy", "access", "the marginalised", "the needs of communities", "equality" and "freedom" suggest a concept of development which is about building civil society and empowering people within their communities. Other phrases, such as "human resources" and "the labour market" can be linked to a discourse of human resource development with its values of competitiveness, productivity and efficiency within the global market. Since both discourses exist within the Act, what is the relation between them? Are they complementary, or does an instrumental focus on economic "strategic priorities determined by national policy directives" – GEAR, for example – lead to the subjugation of personal and community development needs?

I argue that, in practice, despite the human rights discourse within the ABET Act and numerous other policy statements and plans, the government focuses on formal and instrumental conceptions of basic education. The government, with its GEAR policy, has placed the emphasis on global competitiveness and on an effective workforce. This is evidenced by the availability of resources

for adult basic education within the formal sector of the economy as part of Skills Development Plans: funding comes through the Skills Development Levy and infrastructure through the Sectoral Education and Training Authorities. The benefit of this is that those adults who need basic education and happen to have employment in the formal sector are well positioned to advance. As the *Skills Development Act* (1998) begins to take off, many workers stand to improve their education.

However, most illiterate and semi-literate adults are unemployed or informally employed. The danger of the *Skills Development Act* is that it could reinforce the gulf between an elite workforce and the mass of the unemployed, while allowing the government to claim that it is addressing the issue. The challenge for those involved in the ABE sector is to effect a re-channelling of unclaimed funds that are damming up in SETA coffers and the National Skills Fund to create and sustain worthwhile ABE initiatives among the poor, particularly in rural communities and informal settlements.

The government and the private sector are not the only role-players in the ABE field. The NGO sector, which carried the torch for literacy work during the era of apartheid, has been decimated by the funding squeeze over the last ten years. Of the 150 NGOs that operated in the ABE sector in 1997, only 38 were functional in 2000 (Baatjes, 2003, p.191). Those NGOs that remain are often primarily occupied with surviving: the innovative and creative work which characterised literacy NGOs in the 1980s has been replaced by tender-chasing and side-swiping in the race for the chequed flag. Despite this, the NGO sector retains a core of highly capable ABE practitioners and invaluable funds of experience which should be properly utilised. In addition, a very wide range of cash-strapped but committed community-based organisations exists which could play a role in integrating literacy and development at a local level.

How do we move forward? Literacy campaigns have not worked effectively in South Africa over the last seven years. Multi-year Implementation Plans with detailed targets have been drawn up but never implemented. Provincial ABET Councils have faded away. The number of Public Adult Learning Centres has diminished over the last seven years. Many NGOs working in the literacy field have closed down. These setbacks in the literacy field appear to be related to intersecting factors such as lack of capacity in the field, inadequate funding and poor vision. Determined adult learners continue to attend classes and dedicated educators to teach them, but learner numbers are far below what the development of our country and our people requires.

Why is adult basic education a constitutional right?

A discussion of why ABE is a constitutional right is in order since ABE is so often subordinated to the right of children to basic education. I will focus on four aspects: first, ABE as a response to the historical legacy of apartheid deprivation; second, ABE as an essential contribution to personal and community development; third, ABE as a component of democratic citizenship and civic participation; and fourth, ABE as an enabling mechanism in poverty alleviation and economic development.

Adult Basic Education as redress

As argued above, millions of adults were deprived of an adequate education as children because of the poor quality and limited scale of apartheid education. Therefore, the value of redress underpins the constitutional right to adult basic education. It is *just* that uneducated and poorly educated adults should have access to adult basic education because apartheid denied them in the past. The argument that adults are too old to learn and that we should concentrate on educating children for the future, besides being fallacious on educational grounds, glosses over the systematic deprivation of adults in the past and the obligation of the democratic state to correct this situation.

Adult Basic Education as personal and community development

There is strong evidence that adult basic education has the ability to transform learners' sense of themselves, to build their confidence and to equip them to participate actively in their communities. Lauglo (2001), in his research on ABE in Sub-Saharan Africa, shows the link between adult basic education and improved family nutrition, health, and children's schooling; adult basic education for women in particular has a beneficial effect for the family and children. In addition, adult basic education has spin-offs for local development projects and livelihoods.

Adult Basic Education and democracy

Land (2001, p. 1) argues that, for many South Africans, the change from apartheid to the present democratic dispensation continues to mean very little. "Constitutional rights are hollow for many of our people who do not know that they have these rights, or how to exercise them, or do not understand the duties that naturally accompany them." Adult basic education which is clearly

linked to civic literacy, not only to the right to, and mechanics of, voting but civic participation more broadly, has a role to play in strengthening democracy in South Africa. Such a focus could include consumer education regarding local government services; as well as accessing pensions, child support grants and disability grants.

Adult Basic Education and sustainable livelihoods

There is evidence that literacy has a beneficial effect on the ability of people to initiate and develop livelihoods and co-operatives. This is particularly the case with development programmes that incorporate literacy into their activities in an integrated way (Oxenham *et al*, 2002). Such a focus should include context-specific skills, for example: budgeting; costing and pricing; developing a curriculum vita; banking; applying for employment; and keeping records.

Testing the constitutional right to adult basic education

Given the government's failure to deliver adequately on adult basic education over the last decade, the strategic advantages of taking the government to court over the violation of the constitutional right to adult basic education are potentially compelling. These might include:

- Focussing public attention on, and raising awareness about, the neglected area of adult basic education in South Africa
- Mobilizing various progressive forces in the ABE field, including learners groups, teachers' unions, NGOs, community organizations, universities and social movements, around a single issue.
- Clearing the ground for a more comprehensive and flexible strategy for ABE provision in South Africa.
- Creating a platform from which to lobby for greater resource allocation for ABE.

In this section I examine two arguments which might be presented to support a case against the government for violating the right of adults to basic education. The first argument concerns the allocation for ABE within the education budget. The second argument concerns the form of ABE which the government provides. Both arguments are premised on the assumption that adult basic education is a right in and of itself. As a right, basic education for adults is not primarily a tool for economic growth or for instrumentalist

purposes, but rather a claim for dignity and self-respect. However, the provision of adult basic education can contribute to the advancement of the public good as an aspect of poverty alleviation, the strengthening of democracy, building the self-esteem of citizens and developing communities. While adult basic education may achieve some or all of these benefits for different groups of adult learners in different contexts, all adults have a right to it in itself.

Argument 1: Government funding for ABET is inadequate as a proportion of the education budget. This reflects its lack of commitment to meeting its constitutional obligation to provide adult basic education.

Government funding for adult basic education is less than 1% of the total education budget in a country where four and a half million adults have never been to school. Provincial governments allocate the money they receive from the national education budget. Thus, while the overall amount for ABE might increase at a national level (Asmal, 2002), this does not necessarily translate into increased provincial spending for ABET, especially in percentage terms. In fact, IDASA's review of provincial education budgets starkly indicates the neglect and actual decline of ABET as a priority in government spending. Seven of the provinces consistently allocate well below 1% for Adult Basic Education and Training: Eastern Cape and Free State, for example, provide provincial estimates of 0.2% for ABET in their 2003/2004 and 2004/2005 budgets, declining from 1% (Eastern Cape) and 1.5% (Free State) in 2001/2002. Only Mpumalanga (1.1%) and North West (1.2%) exceed 1% in their estimates for the period 2003-2005. Overall, provincial estimates of expenditure for ABET decline from 0.8% in 2002/2003 to 0.5% in 2004/2005 (IDASA, 2002).

The constitution points out that, regarding the right of adults to basic education, the state must, *through reasonable measures, make[it] progressively available and accessible*. What is a reasonable allocation for adult basic education? If one takes as a yardstick for what is reasonable the Dakar Framework's target of improving levels of adult literacy by 50% by 2015 (World Education Forum, 2000) – a target which South Africa accepted by signing the framework – the government's present levels of provision leave it far short. It would need to educate approximately 7 million adults over thirteen years in order to improve the functional literacy of 50% of the illiterate and semi-literate population. At present approximately 260 000 adult learners are enrolled in ABET-level classes. Minimally, the South African government and other ABET providers would need to double the enrolment of adult learners, to about 575,000 per year, and therefore proportionately increase budgetary allocations to adult basic education, to bring the target within reach.

The government might argue that literacy levels will improve naturally as illiterate adults get older and die and as more children pass through the education system. This argument fails to take into account the number of children who are out of school: in 1996 about 16% of children between the ages of 6 and 14 were not in school (Statistics South Africa, 1999a). This amounts to 1.2 million children compared to approximately 7.5 million children in primary school. If this trend continues the rate of adult illiteracy will also continue. The 2001 Census confirms that the actual number of adults who have never been to school has increased since 1996. The state cannot rely solely on the school system to reduce adult illiteracy through attrition, because unschooled children are swelling the ranks of illiterate adults as they grow up.

The enrolment figures for ABE since 1994 indicate that the state is not making ABE progressively available and accessible. If it were, the number of learners and the number of public adult learning centres would be increasing. Instead learner numbers remain static and the number of public adult learning centres has declined (French, 2002).

Potential obstacles to adopting the line of argument that government funding of ABET is inadequate include the quality of statistics available regarding public adult learning centres and learner enrolments. Department of Education reports tend to lump together ABET learners with Further Education and Training learners who are repeating their matric, thus inflating the enrolment figures for ABET (Aitchison, 2002; Department of Education, 2001). There are wide discrepancies between sources regarding the number of PALCs, with Department of Education figures higher than those from the Human Sciences Research Council and the ETDP. An argument regarding whether the government is fulfilling its obligation to provide adult basic education could hinge on which statistics are most credible. Another obstacle could be the constitutional court's possible reluctance to adjudicate on spending priorities and budget proportions in regard to adult basic education, as opposed to the principle of providing adult basic education as a constitutional right.

In addition, there are difficulties in determining actual government spending on ABET. The government states that it has "increased resources for literacy and adult education" and that "the education community" spent R248 million on ABET in 2001, increasing to R822 million in 2002 with a projection of R1.2 billion by 2004 (Asmal, 2002, p. 4). These are sizeable increases in anyone's reckoning. However, it is unclear whether the government is including the SETAs and other government departments within the ambit of "the education community" or whether these increases are allocated to the Department of Education. If the former is the case, the money is directed at those involved in formal employment and not at the poor and unemployed. Again, an argument against the state would need to base itself on accurate and

detailed accounts of state spending on ABET, and these are not easy to compile.

Finally, Argument 1 would need to show that particular learners or communities who require ABET are not receiving it. This is likely given the numbers of adults who have never attended school (approximately 4.5 million) and who have less than Grade 9 (approximately 10 million). However, those who prepare the constitutional case would need to develop case studies of such learners and communities and show that the state is not meeting their educational needs. One source of information would be applications from schools and communities to provincial education departments requesting that PALCs be established.

Argument 2: government provision of adult basic education within the formal system does not cater for a significant proportion of potential adult learners for whom the system is not accessible. This excludes millions of adults from learning and therefore violates clause 29.(1)a. of the Constitution: Everyone has the right to basic education including adult basic education.

It could be argued that the formal configuration of ABET in relation to the National Qualifications framework, its location predominantly in schools and formal workplaces, its use of school educators or corporate trainers and its focus on instrumental purposes, marginalize those who are outside the formal system: the poor; the unemployed; people with disabilities; the rural population; and their communities. In particular, the location of ABE within Public Adult Learning Centres and workplace venues excludes:

- those who cannot afford to travel to Public Adult Learning Centres;
- those who do not have access to a centre because there are no centres in their areas;
- those who have no interest in a formal ABET qualification;
- those who face physical and psychological barriers to learning, such as adults with disabilities and adults whose school experience was so negative as to be a disincentive to further learning.

Since the constitution states that “*Everyone* has a right to basic education, including adult basic education”, the effective exclusion of a large percentage of people who fall outside the formal frame could be taken as a violation of this right.

One such category of people that is neglected by the ABET system is adults with disabilities (Rule, 2005). With their consent, adult with disabilities might

provide an example in the constitutional court of a social group that is largely excluded in practice from formal ABET provision. The *White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy* (Office of the Deputy President, 1997), provides government departments with guidelines for the development of people with disabilities within inclusive environments, specifying, inter alia, "access to all institutions and services of the community, including education". Draft Guidelines for the implementation of this legislation include a section on Adult Basic Education and Training which urges "all ABET initiatives and programmes ... to take urgent steps to ensure redress and inclusion" of learners with disabilities" (Department of Education, 2002, p.200). There are recommendations regarding the establishment of Full Service ABET Centres accommodated by future Full Service Schools, as well as guidelines concerning needs assessment, inclusive curricula, assistive devices, Braille and South African Sign Language. In reality there are very few Public Adult Learning Centres – the Nduduzweni centre in Umlazi is an exception – which cater for adults with disabilities. Again, we are confronted with the spectre of progressive legislation with only a remote and rhetorical connection to actual implementation.

Neither the provision of ABE through Public Adult Learning Centres nor the running of literacy campaigns nor the inclusion of ABE in workplace skills plans is adequate in themselves to address the problem of functional illiteracy. Although these forms of delivery have a role to play, the strategy for ABE needs to be broader and more inclusive. In particular, it needs to take seriously the situation of poor people, especially in rural and peri-urban areas, and their development contexts.

Towards a comprehensive strategy for ABE

We need a comprehensive and flexible strategy for adult basic education in South Africa which includes but moves beyond formal provision and mass campaigns. Although space does not permit a thorough consideration of such a strategy in this article, the following principles are pertinent:

- Contextualisation: it should accommodate a variety of modes and purposes of delivery suited to learner's contexts and resources, recognising that one size does not fit all.
- Integration: Literacy and numeracy practices need to be effectively and appropriately integrated with aspects such as income generation, democratic participation, family health and nutrition, and so on.

- Holism: Adults assume multiple and complex roles which might include those of breadwinner, parent, citizen, community member, religious adherent, employee or work-seeker, and so on. All of these roles are relevant to adult basic education and constitute opportunities for learning.
- Dialogue: ABE providers, including the state, business and the NGO sector, need to learn from one another's strengths and be open to constructive criticism at the levels of policy development and implementation.

Alternative models of adult basic education

I have argued that it is necessary to move beyond an emphasis only on formal ABET provision in Public Adult Learning Centres in order to address adult illiteracy in South Africa. Five alternative models which have been tested in various contexts are outlined below. These models have various strengths and weaknesses; there is also considerable overlap among them. However, they hold the promise of situating adult basic education in relation to the immediate contexts and requirements of diverse adult learning constituencies.

ABE and social movements

The call for private-public partnerships has become a cliché in South Africa. However, if we are to advance the cause of basic education in South Africa, such partnerships are crucial. Particularly in relation to poor people in rural and peri-urban areas, partnerships between government, social movements, development organisations and community structures could forge programmes that link literacy with development imperatives and have the capacity to generate local support. Social movements, such as the disability movement and the HIV/AIDS movement, are able to mobilize people. Development organisations, including ABET NGOs, could work with these social movements to develop literacy programmes that address their developmental needs. In KwaZulu-Natal, for example, the Enable Education, Training and Development Initiative links disabled people's organisations, welfare organisations and literacy organisations in an effort to provide appropriate ABE programmes for adult learners with disabilities (Natal ABE Support Agency, 2001). This partnership has begun to engage the state with a view to making the programme sustainable through state payment of educators and provision of materials. The state also is able to provide accreditation routes for learners if they choose a formal pathway. In this case, the state would play an enabling role rather than that of provider.

ABE and livelihoods

Other joint initiatives could link up partners around livelihoods. Women's co-operatives with a focus on skills training and income generation could benefit from a partnership with literacy NGOs and small business development agencies, and perhaps the Department of Labour, in developing appropriate ABE strategies for women working in co-operatives. Here an integrated programme might link literacy and numeracy to business skills, craft skills and access to credit facilities. Such a partnership works on the premise that ABE is one piece of the puzzle which does not have much value unless it engages with other social imperatives: employment; income; solidarity; community upliftment, for example. The partnership between Project Literacy and the Department of Education in the Ikhwelo Poverty Relief Project provides a reference point here (Project Literacy, 2003). Research in African countries indicates that "organisations that are more concerned with livelihoods and other aspects of development seem to be better at designing and delivering effective combinations of livelihoods and literacy than organizations that are more focussed on literacy" (Oxenham, et al, 2002).

ABE and democratic citizenship

Adult basic education has a key role to play in building and sustaining South Africa's new democracy. This role includes not only voter education but a broader focus on participative democracy in order to enhance learners' capacities as active citizens and to strengthen local structures of governance and delivery. Appropriate adult basic education is one of the factors that can enable people to participate on school governing bodies, in local development committees, community organisations and church groups. Such education could include meeting skills, organisational skills, discussion skills and analytical skills. An example of this kind of integrated education for democracy is the Human Rights, Development and Democracy Project in KwaZulu-Natal. This is a co-operative initiative of the Tembalethu Community Education Centre, an NGO which offers adult basic education classes at satellite centres in six rural areas in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, and the Centre for Adult Education of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The project includes adult basic education, democracy education, income generation and tutor development. The integration of these elements is a continuing challenge, but would be worth examining as a model for wider replication (Land, 2001).

ABE and poverty alleviation

As the case study of the grandmothers from Ntunjambili in this article suggested, adult basic education is not necessarily a priority for people who are hungry. An approach which integrates adult education with poverty

alleviation holds some promise. An example of such an approach was the Working for the Coast project of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in the early 2000s (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2003). This project combined the employment of poor people to clean and protect coastal areas with adult basic education, including entrepreneurship, and environmental education. The rationale was to equip participants with literacy, life skills and business skills so that they would no longer require poverty relief. This model requires further resources to test its effectiveness, but initial results were promising.

ABE and family literacy

International and local research indicates that children have an advantage at school when they grow up in homes where parents are literate and reading materials are available. The Family Literacy Project, which operates literacy projects for caregivers in the Drakensberg region of KwaZulu-Natal, aims to improve the literacy levels of the caregivers while at the same time giving them information and support on how they can help their young children to develop early literacy skills. Research arising from the Family Literacy Project indicates that mothers who attended the programme were able to build the pre-literacy skills of their small children (Desmond, 2001). A wider replication of this model, and other models of family literacy that have been proved effective, could help to develop a culture of literacy within the family and strengthen the educational relation between caregivers and children. It could build on the provision of Early Childhood Development, using ECD sites and drawing on ECD practitioners, thus enhancing both ECD and ABET in local communities and family units.

Conclusion

I have argued that the government, as the agent constitutionally responsible for the provision of adult basic education in South Africa, should be held to account for its record over the last decade in the constitutional court. ABE is a constitutional right for very good reasons. The legacy of apartheid is that millions of adults never had a chance to attend school, and millions of others did not complete their schooling. It is *just* that they should be given the opportunity; the government has a responsibility to provide it. The principles of redress and equity are crucial in this regard. A variety of statistical sources indicate that the adult literacy rate in South Africa has not improved significantly over the last ten years and that the government is therefore not fulfilling its constitutional obligation to make ABE available and accessible.

Provision of adult basic education through Public Adult Learning Centres should not be viewed as the only or even the best form of delivery. There is a need for a comprehensive strategy that embraces a variety of forms of delivery, both within and beyond state structures. The basic education needs of the urban and rural poor and unemployed, not only those of the formally employed workforce, should be attended to.

While not a panacea, adult basic education can contribute to personal and social development. It has a role to play in the workforce and in communities, and in the development of a strong, inclusive and participatory civil society. The cost of adult basic education amidst competing educational priorities is cited as a reason for its neglect, but the cost of its neglect is incalculable.

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No country in the world can afford the schooling its people want (Reimer, 1971) and it has been argued that “of all ‘false utilities’, school is the most insidious” (Illich, 1971, p.60).

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Does the journal have a policy to encourage and support budding novice researchers?

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What is the rate of acceptance/ rejection?

The following statistics for 2002 and 2003 provide an indication of the pattern of acceptance/ non acceptance:

Year	Accepted with no or minor revisions	Accepted after revisions	Not accepted
2002	9	7	41
2003	15	9	47

Even an increase in the number of issues each year will not keep pace with the ever-increasing number of submissions. We can do little to mitigate the competition engendered by state funding policy and the kinds of incentive schemes that have become a feature of the higher education landscape.

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The journal describes itself as providing “a forum for scholarly understanding of the field of education”. What does this really mean?

We understand this as implying that articles should represent a rigorous enquiry (conducted through argumentation or empirically) into the understanding of educational issues. Such inquiry originates in a problem rather than a solution, and it is rare for such enquiry to have no reference to, or engagement with, a broader literature and theory. Advocacy in the form of prescriptions or ‘how to do it’ recipe knowledge for practitioners seldom finds favour with referees. The question of audience is key. The assumed audience is the collective body of researchers rather than those more narrowly concerned with the effective implementation of specific policies.

Recent non-acceptances include a high proportion of undeveloped research reports, summaries of dissertations, and even sound but small-scale case studies that are purely context specific and unconnected with broader issues, literature or theory. Similarly, even a successful conference paper is usually in need of further development before it merits publication.

