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# Struggle and compromise: a history of South African adult education from 1960 to 2001

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## Abstract

This article provides an overview of the history of adult education in South Africa from 1960 (when the *apartheid* regime crushed the main black political movements) to the end of 2001 when, after a period of painful struggle (which reached its climax in the late eighties and early nineties), South Africa was well into the second term of a democratic government. It is a history of an amazingly complex relationship between adult education and political trends (many of them foreign influenced) and with the changes in the associated social, economic, religious and cultural features of South African society.

The article describes the sixties when what remained of a night school movement was closed down and rendered illegal and an “alternative” education NGO movement began (originally in support of black student activists expelled from universities); the seventies when, in spite of severe repression, there was a revival of radical literacy work and innovations in alternative educational media under the influence of a heady melange of Paris 1968, Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, ‘black consciousness’ and liberation theology; and the eighties with its bitter and dramatic resurgence of internal resistance associated with trades unions, NGOs, and ‘people’s education’ . The nineties saw the victory of democracy and the (so-far) lacklustre attempt to institutionalise a state system of adult basic education and training as South Africa made ethical, political and economic compromises with the new world order.

The author, himself an adult education activist since 1962, provides a number of reflections on this history and the ideologies that were embedded in the discourses, actions and compromises that adult education actors, their supporters and enemies, engaged in during this period and describes some of the rethinking that a small but growing group of adult educators are beginning to articulate about a renewal of a more radical adult education tradition.

## Introduction

In the history of South Africa and in line with the international history of adult education, organised adult education became significant only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, adult education in South Africa was very limited, directed primarily towards the westernisation of black (African origin) adult learners and closely related to Christian religious education. There are, however, factors in the more recent history which derive directly from the pre-20<sup>th</sup> century situation.

The most significant factor is the legacy of neglect of education in general of the vast majority of the population which gives rise to the tremendous need for literacy and adult basic education in South Africa today. Indeed, in South Africa, 'adult education' is still frequently assumed to be a term synonymous with 'literacy and adult basic education'. It is not surprising that this should be so. Given the history and socio-political circumstances of South Africa, it is entirely appropriate that adult basic education should be at centre stage. It has been a site of educational struggle – starved of resources and systematically decimated by the *apartheid* state and used as a rallying point for the forces of liberation. It carries the hopes of many for the redress of educational deprivation and for this reason it is currently the primary and almost exclusive focus of adult education policy development. This focus on adult basic education is also in line with international understandings of adult education which locates adult basic education at the heart of adult education practice.<sup>1</sup>

A second factor derives from the active involvement of Christian missionaries in what little adult and general education was provided outside the schooling given to white (that is, of European ancestry) children. It is possible to glimpse some of the missionary zeal (both religious and political) in the ethos which characterised adult education projects and practice in South Africa in the eighties and nineties.

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<sup>1</sup> All this notwithstanding, literacy and adult basic education remains but a component of a larger adult education context. The many adult learners who attend training courses at various levels, or who attend management seminars, or professional refresher courses, or bible study groups, or art classes, or voter education, or university extra-mural classes, etc. are all participants in some form of adult education and part of this broader adult education context which has an historical past.

The more immediate 20<sup>th</sup> century origins of adult education in South Africa begin with the development of night schools providing literacy and basic school education for adults. Although this is often referred to as ‘the night school movement’, it is a history of sporadic initiatives which began in the early 1920s and eventually grew into the beginnings of a system in the 1940s (at least in the major industrial cities).<sup>2</sup>

Within the broad economic conditions of first forty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was not a heavy demand for well educated or highly skilled black workers. The economy of the time needed labour for agriculture and mining and in fact the politics of the time was heavily influenced by the white working class trying to defend itself from exploitation by management tempted to undercut them by employing cheaper black labour. The depression of the thirties further reduced the economic need for the education and training of black people. It was the Second World War which first created a bigger demand for skilled black labour as well as for adult education which took seriously the democratic concerns which had led to the war against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

The South African Television series “The Struggle for Literacy” documents various initiatives in this period. Other accounts can be found in Bird (1984), Gush and Walters (1996), and French (1982, 1992).

By the end of the Second World War black workers had become increasingly important in the manufacturing sector and there were great hopes that, with the defeat of fascism, South Africa would become a true democracy. Adult education reflections of this mood can be seen in the

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<sup>2</sup> Adrienne Bird (1984) has documented part of this history in an article titled *The Adult Night School Movements for Blacks on the Witwatersrand 1920-1980*. In constructing this history, Bird points to two different traditions each pursuing a different priority. The radical tradition is represented for her primarily by the Communist Party (and ex-Communists such as Eddie Roux (see Roux, 1964)) which reflects the broader interests arising from the beginnings of organised labour movements. It is important to recognise that these initial classes run by the Communist Party, while they taught the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, went beyond this to broaden their learners’ understanding of political and economic relationships. They were essentially concerned with political education and the development of leaders to spearhead political change. The failure for a variety of reasons to sustain this socialist project left the field to those initiatives which, though similar in content and sympathetic to the ideals of the radical initiative, nevertheless set adult basic education on a different course which was fundamentally liberal in its ideology. The effect was that the radical tradition all but disappeared from adult basic education in the thirties and did not really re-emerge until the seventies.

growth of night schools, university extra mural classes in Cape Town and Johannesburg and the beginnings of a Bureau for Literacy and Literature. In 1946, the government appointed Eybers Committee recommended the establishment of a National Council for Adult Education and the subsidisation of local and voluntary adult education bodies. However, with the triumph of the *apartheid* forces this brief false spring soon withered when, in 1948, the racist National Party won a majority of seats (though not a majority of votes) in the South African elections (from which all blacks were excluded) and began to implement a series of laws to segregate the country. The National Party government systematically gained control of black education and moved to eliminate church influence from it. It also encouraged the expansion of primary education for blacks (the growth of the manufacturing industries now needed semi-skilled workers). Teaching black people in other than a registered school became a crime and by the early sixties virtually all night schools had been deregistered and closed. Education and adult education in the *apartheid* period from 1948 to the end of the eighties are well documented in Kallaway (1984), Hartshorne (1992), Millar *et al* (1991) and Wilson (1991).

Two significant actors in the period of *apartheid* authoritarianism and repression were the Christian churches and the English-speaking universities. Church opposition was raised by denominations such as the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist (which identified *apartheid* (“separateness”) as contrary to the Christian gospel and saw themselves systematically excluded from any further real say in education) and the liberal universities (from which black students were now legally excluded and which had their academic freedom restricted).

It is important to note, however, that though there was struggle against *apartheid* and its doleful effects on education, there were compromises that continually inhibited that struggle.<sup>3</sup> Some of these compromises were perhaps inevitable where a settler population was large, powerful and had long enjoyed the benefits of racial discrimination. *Apartheid* merely institutionalised and exacerbated injustice in an already *de facto* racist and heavily segregated society. The Churches, though most of their leadership

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<sup>3</sup> The pressures on educators to continue to work within an *apartheid* system they personally detested is well described by Hartshorne (1992, pp. 9-17) in his personal account of his own work as a civil servant within the Department of Bantu Education.

immediately divined that *apartheid* was an evil heresy, were largely led by conservatives and they, wrongly as the case turned out in the long term, thought that over-strident protest would lose them what moderating influence they had. Both they and the African political parties found that head on confrontation over education led to the exclusion of students and the closing of educational institutions – something that in the fifties, sixties and seventies was thought to be too high a cost to pay.<sup>4</sup> Internationally, the Cold War led to tacit support by the great Western powers for the *apartheid* regime's suppression of its more radical opposition right up into the mid-eighties.

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<sup>4</sup> African political movements generally had a very positive and conventional view of the importance of education. There was little of the alternative about it and little critique. The main complaint was that black people did not have full access to it or that what they were provided with was of inferior quality. As the Freedom Charter drawn up at the Congress of the People held at Kliptown near Johannesburg in 1955 stated it, the aim was to “open the doors of learning and culture”. The only positive suggestion was that “Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass education plan.”

## Part 1: The night of the night school and the dawn of alternative education

The fate of a night school run in a Pietermaritzburg township<sup>1</sup> by University students in 1961 provides a good case study of what happened to the night schools for black people (Wilson, 1991). Technically it was an illegal operation. In 1953 the Bantu Education Act had made it an imprisonable offence to provide any education to black people unless it was in a government registered school.<sup>2</sup> The Act had been passed to bring black education under tight central government control and to exclude

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<sup>1</sup> In racially segregated South Africa black people who lived in urban areas were segregated into so-called townships which were essentially dormitory suburbs with only the most elementary infrastructure of sub-economic housing and roads. No economic development was allowed in them and so they were in no sense equivalent to functioning parts of a city.

<sup>2</sup> The Bantu Education Act No 47 of 1953 was the cornerstone of *apartheid* education. One of the purposes of this act was to concentrate control of education for blacks in the hands of the State. One of the provisions of the act meant that Church schools and night schools had to be handed over to the State or face diminished subsidy. Only the Roman Catholic Church was able to retain some control of its schools for a number of years until the cost became prohibitive. The Act required the registration of all voluntary organisations concerned with black education but the registration was intended to control the institutions involved and was not used for purposes of co-ordination or promotion as such. In response to the passing of the Act some people ceased working in night schools on principle and in protest against an unjust system. Later regulations issued in 1957 in terms of this Act made it effectively impossible for night schools to continue. The publication of Government Notice 1414, entitled *Regulations for Night Schools and Continuation Classes for Bantu pupils in European areas* explicitly linked adult education in night schools to that given to children in the formal sector; automatically excluded young people, the unemployed and those self-employed in the informal sector; ruled that all night schools had to be registered, and in European (White) areas applications for registration had to be accompanied by permits from the Group Areas Board and renewed annually. These night schools had to be controlled and administered as private schools by the proprietor or his representative who had to be a European. The regulations were further tightened in 1963. In 1967 the Department of Bantu Education issued a letter closing most night schools and by the end of that year most night schools, with a few exceptions, had ceased to exist.

church influence on the system.<sup>3</sup> At Pietermaritzburg, a local municipal official had agreed to ignore this particular night school's illegal status. In 1963 it became impossible to continue in the township and the night school was conducted underground on the university campus where it survived illegally for a number of years. It was one of the lucky ones. Elsewhere the government had systematically closed down every night school for black adults, even those which had managed to gain some form of registration. There was no general protest for South Africa was in the grip of an increasingly totalitarian state which had massacred peaceful protesters at Sharpeville in 1960 and then detained thousands in a State of Emergency and banned the black majority's main political parties (the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress – the Communist Party had already been proscribed in 1950). Liberal thinking whites were few in number and what protests they could muster were drowned out by “anti-communist” propaganda, suppressed by punishment without trial for serious political opposition, and smothered by the material benefits of an economic boom.

But in the midst of the rise of the *apartheid* state, there were three interesting signs of adult education life that were to become of great importance in our adult education history. The first was the start of the first non-governmental literacy organisations, the second was the start of the alternative education NGO, the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED), and the third was the importation by some churches of group dynamics (T-group) training and its associated techniques..

In 1956 an interim committee had been set up by the South African Institute for Race Relations to establish the Bureau of Literacy and Literature (BLL) which was the outcome of initiatives dating back to the

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<sup>3</sup> Though the National Party government suppressed adult education in night schools for blacks, this did not mean that it did not take adult education very seriously for whites. A Division of Adult Education was created within the Department of Education, Arts and Science and a National Advisory Council for Adult Education was set up to see to white adult education interests. A well produced educational magazine, *Lantern*, was distributed *via* schools so that parents could receive cultural education. Adult education programmes were arranged in collaboration with Afrikaans-speaking churches, provincial library services, the National Thrift Association and others. Overall, as a programme of educational and economic upliftment it was a remarkable success. Unfortunately it was also racist, thoroughly anti-democratic in temper, and built upon the legal exclusion of the rest of the population.

forties and fifties. Its objectives included training literacy teachers, providing the necessary material and fostering the distribution of edifying and useful literature. The Bureau of Literacy and Literature's application for registration as an "association not for gain" was finally granted in 1964. It embarked on a campaign to increase literacy work on the mine compounds. The mining houses gave the BLL a *per capita* grant to train teachers for the mines. In its best years the Bureau reached as many as 60,000 adult learners. In 1966 another literacy organisation was formed, Operation Upgrade, which was started by Sandy d'Olivera, a disciple of Dr Frank Laubach, and had its head office in Durban, Natal. Operation Upgrade used an adaptation of Laubach's methods (and did not further change them until it abandoned them in the nineties). Operation Upgrade was an avowedly evangelical organisation and, though it had good relationships with people on the ground through its church links, became increasingly conservative and commended itself to government as a weapon against communism. It acquired government legitimacy and, later, when in 1977 the government allowed some state night schools to start up again, Operation Upgrade materials and training were used. Operation Upgrade was important because of its production of primers and readers in many African languages and for its focus on the preparing of easy-reading texts (though they too, like its literacy teaching method, became increasingly dated).

In 1958, the Government imposed strict segregation on the universities (which had by custom if not by law in most cases been *de facto* segregated) and took direct control of the one black university, the University of Fort Hare, and from it expelled staff and students considered to be politically suspect. A year later a committee was set up to enable the expelled students to study by correspondence for United Kingdom O- and A-level examinations and then to take University of London external degrees. Thus the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED), an alternative non-governmental education organisation, was initiated to serve the needs of black students affected by the closing of the older universities to black students and by the takeover of the University of Fort Hare by the government. In 1965, David Adler, who had been the Vice-President for International Relations for the National Union of South



African Students (a non-racial anti-*apartheid* body)<sup>4</sup> became one of the leaders of SACHED. Over the next twelve years under his direction he was to transform it into what was probably the largest and most effective educational NGOs that South Africa has ever seen. The early experiment with the University of London external degrees was short lived and SACHED started to support students studying through South Africa's own correspondence university, the University of South Africa (a large, powerful and interesting, if at times unedifying and racist, institution in its own right) and by running a secondary education correspondence college which produced superb course materials. SACHED, particularly in the seventies and early eighties is important because of its espousal of alternative education that is different, and indeed consciously in opposition to that run by the state.

In the mid-sixties some of the mainline churches introduced workshops and courses that were based on the use of T-group (group dynamics; sensitivity training; human relations) training methods that had been pioneered in the United States. It was introduced largely as a means of enabling white and black church people to meet each other at a greater level of intimacy and it certainly had a powerful and emotional impact.<sup>5</sup> In the longer term it developed a cadre of church and student leaders<sup>6</sup> who were adept at small group work and who would later apply some of these

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<sup>4</sup> After the state prohibited non-racial political organisations in 1968 (thereby eliminating the last remaining non-racial political party, the Liberal party of South Africa) the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) became the main generator of sporadic anti-*apartheid* protest in South Africa (somewhat encouraged by the upswelling of student protest internationally against the Vietnam War and in the 1968 Paris revolt) until the revival of black political resistance in 1976. South Africa's underground resistance mounted by the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress, the South African Communist Party and the African Resistance Movement, though present in the sixties and seventies, was weak, savagely suppressed, and never a serious military threat to the *apartheid* regime.

<sup>5</sup> Its impact was later recognised by the *apartheid* government and one of South Africa's more notorious commissions of inquiry, the Schlebusch Commission, was set up to *inter alia* look at sensitivity training as a force for 'subversion', which it was duly found to be. On the other hand, the impact of T-groups, encounter groups, etc. was, at least as far as their original form went, limited by their addressing the concerns which were felt most keenly by the relatively affluent.

<sup>6</sup> Many of them trained by the interdenominational Christian Education and Leadership Training (CELT) grouping in Natal and the Cape Province and by the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre (WFC) near Johannesburg.

methods in the student,<sup>7</sup> trade union and political contexts within the broader anti-*apartheid* struggle. Needless to say, it was to have a powerful influence on adult education in a variety of settings.

Precisely because overt political opposition was suppressed,<sup>8</sup> much of the energy of those within the country who sought to oppose *apartheid* was inevitably channelled into forms of resistance that were given some slight sanctuary in churches and universities and which were less obviously rebellious challenges. Adult education in various forms thus clothed much anti-*apartheid* work.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Two of the student movement's so influenced were the (United States influenced) Black Consciousness Movement that began to form in 1968 on the new ethnically segregated and state controlled 'tribal' universities set up by the *apartheid* state for black students and by the University Christian Movement formally set up in the same year. The University Christian Movement (UCM) coalesced out of some of the parts of the Student's Christian Association (SCA) (which had been broken up into racially segregated parts) and other tertiary level denominational religious associations. It made some effort to encourage literacy work and printed literacy primers (though it achieved little in practice, partly because some of the students in charge of the literacy programme were secret police spies). In 1969, Black students constituted the South African Student Organisation (SASO) led by Steve Biko. It was an amalgam of United States Black power ideology, Africanism and Marxist, but not Communist, socialism. It was initially tolerated by the *apartheid* state because it was for black students only and often stridently critical of the liberal and non-racial National Union of South African students (and towards which the government's paranoia about non-racial mixing was chiefly directed).

<sup>8</sup> Although blacks were excluded from the vote, during most of the *apartheid* period South African had a well functioning 'democracy' for whites and opposition parties and the press existed in relative freedom – as long as they did not cross the line into non-racial or radical politics. If they did, a battery of laws allowed the state to take arbitrary action against dissidents – banishment, restriction (banning orders and house arrest), detention without trial – as well as imprisonment for breaking the draconian security laws and, increasingly, torture and, particularly after 1976, extra-judicial execution (sometimes via state sponsored right wing 'vigilantes' and militias).

<sup>9</sup> The government of course also had an interest in adult education as a means of building up the folk consciousness of the Afrikaans speaking white community and eventually the whole white community. In 1968 the government's Division of Adult Education became the responsibility of the new Department of Cultural Affairs and in 1969 the National Culture Promotion Act was passed "to provide for the preservation, development, fostering and extension of the culture of the White population of the Republic by the planning, organisation, co-ordination and provision of facilities for the utilisation of leisure and informal, out-of-school education". In the eighties as the political struggle raged, the government began to create bogus adult education organisations to assist in its attempts to 'win hearts and minds', to gather intelligence and, in some bizarre cases to assist in the 're-education' of young political detainees (using Suggestopaedia).

## Part 2: From conscientisation to revolt

If the sixties was the nadir of resistance to *apartheid*, the seventies began with signs of a slow (and often educational) process of building up the strength to struggle again. In 1970 an important interchurch initiative, the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (SProCAS), began to publish a number of influential reports, including one on education. Shortly thereafter the radical University Christian Movement began circulating mimeographed summaries from the United States of America of the works of Paulo Freire, the radical Brazilian literacy educator (who, in exile, worked for the World Council of Churches in Geneva). Freire's famous book, *The pedagogy of the oppressed*, was immediately banned by the South African government. Some students were trained in Freire's methodology and used it in their community education and literacy classes. In Johannesburg, Angela Norman of SACHED and Anton Johnson were involved in this work which can be seen as the origins of the progressive literacy movement.

Conscientisation as a strategy became the dominant note in a variety of groups and organisations. Actual political work was very difficult but educational and conscientising activities made use of the cracks in the system of repression to survive and, indeed, flourish. Effective political organising was further hampered by the increasingly refusal of the activists in the South African Students Organisation (SASO) to engage in any multi-racial activities. SASO advised white students that they should change white people's consciousness while they dealt with black consciousness.<sup>10</sup> Given that working on the white political psyche was considered a largely lost cause, young white democrats increasingly turned to educational and research interventions. A fascinating example of this were the activities of a small group of white students and staff at the University of Natal who set up a Wages Commission to look at the exploitative conditions under which black workers and farm labourers were employed. They provided backup to a massive and unexpected strike by workers in the region in 1973, and then steadily and calmly set up works committees, benefit societies, an Institute of Industrial Education in

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<sup>10</sup> In 1972 the Black People's Convention was launched with an emphasis on the psychological and physical liberation of black people. A number of community education and development projects were initiated by the organisation.

Durban and the Industrial Aid Society in Johannesburg. From these an independent trade union movement emerged with strong commitments to worker education. It was the real beginning of modern South Africa's massive trade union movement.

These interventions, as they became more visible and public, naturally led to state reaction. The University Christian Movement was banned in 1972. In 1977 some 26 of the university associated trade union activists were banned in one swoop. The originator of the Institute for Industrial Education, Richard Turner, was assassinated in 1978. Turner, a lecturer in Political Studies at the University of Natal, had been involved in SProCAS<sup>11</sup> and was also instrumental in the setting up of an Extension Department at the University of Natal in 1971. The early seventies had been marked by a revival of student protest by NUSAS (there were, for example, scenes of savage beatings by riot police of students seeking refuge in the Anglican Cathedral in Cape Town). In Durban, a right wing daily newspaper, *The Natal Mercury*, constantly attacked the local University as a hotbed of subversion and the formation of the Extension Department was (apart from its obvious borrowing of ideas from the British university extra-mural tradition) partly an attempt to educate the local white community on the idea of the university and its defence of intellectual freedom and human rights. In 1973 the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg established a similar Institute for Adult Education and External Studies (later to split into an academic department of adult education and a Centre for Continuing Education).<sup>12</sup> The University of Cape Town had had some form of extra-mural programme since at least 1910.

Meanwhile the seeds of the progressive literacy movement began to sprout. In Cape Town some of the young labour activists began teaching literacy (including Judy Favish, Debbie Budlender and Trevor Manuel (now South Africa's Minister of Finance)) and the Western Province

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<sup>11</sup> Readers are duly warned that one of the immensely creative but less pleasing aspects of the organisational fecundity of the South African anti-*apartheid* struggle was a predilection for forming acronyms from the names of their organisations.

<sup>12</sup> The University of Witwatersrand initiative incorporated an independent Institute for Adult Education with a history going back to before the Second World War.

Literacy Project was set up in Cape Town in 1974<sup>13</sup>; in Johannesburg, Learn and Teach was founded by Basia Ledochowski with financial support from the Catholic Church. Interestingly, parallel to the beginnings of the progressive literacy movement, were some signs of life for literacy work in the education departments in the puppet 'self-governing' ethnic states (variously called 'Bantustans', 'tribal homelands', and so forth, that the *apartheid* regime set up with the dual purpose of persuading the gullible that its policy was one of 'separate development' rather than *apartheid* domination and for purposes of divide-and-rule). Education departments in Lebowa and Gazankulu used the Bureau of Literacy and Literature to provide training and materials. A previous director of the Bureau for Literacy and Literature, Dr Ken Baucom, started a private company in 1971 to provide literacy courses to industry.

In 1976 South Africa was rocked to its foundations by the Soweto revolt by school children protesting against *apartheid* education (and more specifically, against being forced to have instruction in half of their school subjects in Afrikaans rather than English). It was the turning point in the political struggle that came to a climax in the late eighties. Apart from its political fallout, the Soweto revolt led to considerable rethinking about education, which had now become a central site for struggle. Various modest reforms took place in black education and the Department of Bantu Education also created an adult education section, which dealt with literacy and night schools, and the latter began to be reopened in 1978, though firmly under departmental control.

As on previous occasions, the government struck back against the protesters. Nearly a thousand people were gunned down during the revolt, and in 1977 trade union activists were detained and banned as was the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) and 18 other related organisations (including the Christian Institute), *The World* newspaper and the Director of SACHED, David Adler. In the period of disruption to schooling after the Soweto uprising, SACHED had produced an innovative educational supplement in *The World*. The final form of this supplement, called 'People's College' included significant quantities of adult education material.

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<sup>13</sup> Both Favish and Budlender were banned in the purge of trade union activists in 1977 and the Western Cape Literacy Project had to close.

Whilst state repression intensified there was also a recognition by both government and the business sector that reforms were necessary, some of them in relation to schooling<sup>14</sup> and literacy<sup>15</sup> and others in relation to labour regulations.<sup>16</sup>

During the mid- and late seventies there was steady growth in non-governmental organisations which in some way engaged in adult education, either directly in the form of literacy organisations or as part of early childhood education or in relation to human rights or radical Christian education work.<sup>17</sup> Other organisations began to develop expertise in materials development, as for example *Learn and Teach* magazine, started in 1979, which was written in easy English and addressed worker issues and was produced regularly at a cheap price. A survey at the start of the eighties by the Urban Foundation, a private sector body set up to respond to the post-Soweto revolt crisis, found that there were over 700 organisations involved in 'non-formal' education work. The mid- and late seventies were also characterised by a growth in university-based extra mural activities, particularly at the University of Cape Town which also started community education programmes. These activities were to become the base for more significant work in the eighties.

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<sup>14</sup> The 1979 Education and Training Act replaced the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Though less suppressive of non-formal education for blacks, it still required that all centres offering 'formal' instruction to blacks be registered with the Department of Education and Training (the renamed Department of Bantu Education).

<sup>15</sup> In 1978 the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), essentially the government's social research agency, convened a national literacy and language teaching conference and constituted a Division for Literacy Research.

<sup>16</sup> In 1979 the Wiehahn Commission report resulted in the recognition of black trade unions.

<sup>17</sup> An interesting Christian education development in the seventies was the creation of a number of theological and ministerial training correspondence courses (notably the African Independent Churches' Association Correspondence Course run by Danie van Zyl; the A New Theology Correspondence Course run by Louis Peters O.P.; and the Khanya Theological Training Programme run by John Aitchison and Stephen Hayes) that together developed the momentum that led to the setting up of the interdenominational Theological Education by Extension College in March 1976 that developed a network of study groups all over the country.



### Part 3: Adult education in the struggle for hegemony

The eighties began with indications of reform, or to put a more negative cast upon it, the modernisation of *apartheid*. Though some of the pressure for reform came from within South Africa and particularly from the psychic jolt that the Soweto revolt had given to the powers-that-be, the government's security forces were well able to contain it and during the eighties would enhance their murderous capacities. The real pressure was coming from a changing world in which the West's toleration, and indeed avid support, of anti-Communist dictatorships in Latin America, Africa and the rest of the world was beginning to wane and economic sanctions against South Africa began to bite. For adult education, the spaces now opened by the reforms were soon colonised and exploited, often for political purposes, for the eighties were years of political struggle in the context of an embattled economy beset by economic sanctions, a different world economic situation and the rise of the South African independent trade union movement. Adult education, and particularly variants of the methods of the Brazilian adult educator, Paulo Freire, became an important weapon in anti-*apartheid* mobilisation and also influenced the short-lived 'People's education' movement of the mid-eighties. Educational institutions became the training grounds for, and the actual sites of, political resistance to *apartheid* alongside the growing power of the independent unions in the factories and mines.

To understand the events of the eighties a brief synopsis of the major political and economic developments is needed. The openness to reform at the start of the decade was soon marred by the regime's habitual inability to tolerate overt opposition. However the strength of that opposition led the government to recognise that it needed a wider support base than the white population and it proposed a major constitutional change that would, in a set of three linked parliaments, enfranchise the Coloured (mulatto) and Indian minorities and remove some of the more racist legislation. However, Blacks would remain excluded and would exercise their rights through so-called independent states. It was in essence an effort to modernise *apartheid* and co-opt two of the major minority groups in South African society. The proposals led to outrage. Whilst South Africa had always been a racially divided society and most blacks had never been enfranchised, the idea that disenfranchisement would now be permanently

enshrined in the constitution galvanized anti-*apartheid* sentiment. A United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed to oppose this tri-cameral parliament constitution and about 800 organisations, ranging from large trade unions to tiny non-governmental organisations and cultural and sports clubs affiliated themselves to it.

The United Democratic Front was amazingly successful. It gathered broad support from unionists, schoolchildren and out-of-school youth, and a huge range of civil society organisations. It managed to hold together a range of political positions from relatively conservative liberals to left wing communists.<sup>18</sup> Because it was a front of organisations rather than individual members it was endowed with enormous flexibility which also enabled it to evade many of the attempts to suppress it. On the ground the black youth, the comrades or *amaqabane*, supported it as the local proxy of the banned and exiled liberation movements. Within months the UDF was making the townships around Johannesburg ungovernable in the Vaal revolt of 1984 against rent increases and government-imposed black local authorities. It joined forces with the struggle against *apartheid* education, and black schools throughout the country began to be boycotted (until the boycott was officially ended in March 1986 by the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC)). It was heavily involved in a National Consultative Conference of anti-*apartheid* groupings in 1985 where the notion of 'people's education for people's power' emerged.<sup>19</sup> The biggest federation of independent black trade unions was launched as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) 1985. It played a leading role in the development of worker leadership and worker education and strengthened the UDF. Violent conflict escalated and two states of emergency were declared, the 13 June 1986 one being national and lasting into the nineties. Thereafter the UDF led a virtually underground existence but survived it because of its extremely loose organisational structure and creativity. COSATU was still able to repeatedly call national one-day strikes.

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<sup>18</sup> In so far as the UDF can justifiably be said to have possessed an ideology, given its diversity of affiliates, it was a kind of populist Gramscianism.

<sup>19</sup> Although it created much political and intellectual excitement at the time, 'people's education' remained little more than a slogan and organisationally the movement soon ran out of steam. It was always unclear whether people's education was really about good and democratic educational practice or simply indoctrination in the interests of the liberation movements.



By now the *apartheid* regime was in severe trouble internationally, particularly when major North American banks started to refuse to renew massive bank loans. By 1987 the government had secretly entered into negotiations with the exiled African National Congress for a settlement, which fact became public in February 1990. Unfortunately, the regime, or at least major sections of its security forces, decided to cheat on this settlement and through a major 'dirty tricks' campaign started what in effect was a civil war in the province of the Natal between the conservative and traditionalist Inkatha movement and the UDF (and later the ANC after its unbanning)<sup>20</sup> and its trade union ally, COSATU. In spite of the death toll (at least 20,000 people)<sup>21</sup> and destabilisation the war failed totally in one of its intended aims of intimidating the future electorate into voting the regime and its allies back into power. However, the war applied enough pain to humble the African National Congress's expectations and led to concessions and compromises that characterised the eventual transition to democracy that culminated in the democratic elections of April 1994.

It was within this eighties context that the universities which had adult education or extra-mural departments began to play significant national and regional roles. In 1980 the University of Cape Town appointed Clive Millar as the first professor of adult education in South Africa and offered the first postgraduate diploma programme for educators of adults. Throughout the eighties the University of Cape Town remained a centre for serious thought and research about adult education (see Millar *et al*, 1991, for some of their work). In 1984 they published a survey on literacy and illiteracy by Linda Wedepohl (Wedepohl, 1984) and helped to develop a rural literacy project that influenced future guidelines on running such projects (Wedepohl, 1998a, 1998b). At the University of Natal an Advanced Diploma in adult education was offered for the first time in 1984 and the Centre for Adult Education was one of the first to research and popularise adult basic education. Of greater significance was

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<sup>20</sup> After the unbanning of the African National Congress on 2 February 1990, the UDF was deliberately marginalised and closed down in August 1991. Though, in one sense, many had belonged to the UDF because it was seen as an ANC front and its closure was therefore inevitable, this meant the loss of a remarkable force within the broader civil society for human rights, social and economic justice, and participatory democracy.

<sup>21</sup> To gain some idea of the impact of the conflict in the areas where it raged, in the Pietermaritzburg region one in every hundred people were killed.

the Centre's engagement in providing training workshops in organisational, educational and media skills to civil society organisations, and after 1987, in computerising the trades unions, human rights organisations and UDF affiliates in the region. The Pietermaritzburg branch was more directly engaged after the emergency of 1986 in support for the UDF and provided facilities for underground meetings of the Midlands UDF executive throughout this period. When the civil war erupted in September 1987 in the Natal Midlands, the Centre for Adult Education became the main source of information and analysis about the conflict. In 1985 the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) was established at the University of the Western Cape and Shirley Walters appointed Professor. CACE was, as with the Centre for Adult Education in Pietermaritzburg, well connected to community groups and involved in UDF support during the late eighties. It started the first certificated adult educator training courses for people at pre-university level in 1988. In 1986 a Department of Adult Education at the University of the Transkei was established. In 1989 the University of the Witwatersrand set up an Adult Literacy Unit headed by Edward French, South Africa's most respected literacy researcher, who had previously, when working for the Human Sciences Research Council, published a major study of literacy work in South Africa, *The promotion of literacy in South Africa : a multi-faceted survey at the start of the 80s*. For a number of years the Adult Literacy Unit played an important role in disseminating information about adult literacy and basic education and easy reading for adults.

During the eighties several progressive literacy organisations were started alongside a dramatic increase in the number of progressive NGOs (who were often supported by foreign anti-*apartheid* donors). After Soweto 1976 and the growth of strong anti-*apartheid* resistance in the eighties, the literacy movement revived and the small politically committed non-governmental educational organisation came into its own. Learn and Teach, USWE<sup>22</sup> and others combined a modified Freirian method with service to trade unions and United Democratic Front groups. Their methods and materials were often of extremely high quality, though their organisational structures often limited the scale of operation. The eighties

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<sup>22</sup> The organisation USWE (Use, Speak and Write English) was established in Johannesburg by Basia Ledochowski to provide improved and relevant teaching of English as a second language for adults (especially to domestic and migrant workers who attended classes at the Centres of Concern run by churches in white suburbs).

also showed some ventures in literacy and adult basic education work by the few universities with adult education departments. The university connection played a particularly important role in the reconceptualisation of literacy as adult basic education, particularly as the possibility of a post-*apartheid* society became realisable. Meanwhile larger literacy and adult basic education providers such as the Pretoria-based Project Literacy (known as ProLit) arose and by the end of the eighties there were uneasy moves towards cooperation between the various sectors in adult literacy. These included the politically correct progressive NGOs, networked in the National Literacy Co-operation (NLC), business and industry and the less aligned organisations such as the Bureau of Literacy and Literature, Operation Upgrade and ProLit. (The NLC was formed in 1986 to assist its members to work together in areas of common interest, share experiences and organise joint events, and keep adult literacy on the agenda of the liberation movements and trades unions<sup>23</sup> (See Harley *et al*, 1996, pp. 507-517).)

In 1988 two further NGO developments occurred. The Independent Examinations Board (IEB) was set up to develop and oversee a new system of examination and accreditation for schools; they later also set up an adult education division led by Edward French (which, starting in 1993, was to pilot and run the first adult basic education examinations). The Forum for the Advancement of Adult Education (FAAE) was formed in Johannesburg and was the first effective association of adult educators. (Other regional associations followed and a national body, the Adult Educators and Trainers Association of South Africa (AETASA), was formed in 1994.)

During this same general period, there had been some parallel attention given to reading and in the provision of reading material. The interest in reading tended to be school and university based and a number of short lived reading associations came into being. The Read Educational Trust played a significant role in encouraging library development in black schools and also, later, showed some interest in adult education. Literacy NGOs in some cases produced readers, magazines or newspaper supplements (notable among the latter being SACHED's various

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<sup>23</sup> With some success, for by 1989 some unions begin to include literacy and education in their demands to management.

newspaper linked endeavours – the last being *Learning Nation*), the English Literacy Project's *Active Voice*, and the University of Natal Centre for Adult Education's *Learn with Echo*. This latter body also started a New Readers Project to produce easy readers for adults. The ERA Initiative, dedicated to the promotion of accessible reading for adults, was one of the last of the creative responses to emerge in these last days of *apartheid*.

Even state and business provision of literacy increased. The Director of the Bureau for Literacy and Literature estimated that in the year ending July 1980 approximately 40,000 adults were reached, though not necessarily effectively, by about 3,000 instructors. French (1982) estimated that there were 42,619 literacy learners in official literacy schemes (excluding KwaZulu, KaNgwane and the Transkei). In 1983 the Department of Education and Training designed and implemented its own curriculum for adults, which started with a basic literacy programme called *Course for Adults to Read and Write*.

The government's new found interest in literacy was but one of the signs of reform during this period. The most significant educational manifestation of this mood for reform was the State-commissioned report by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) entitled *The Provision of Education in the Republic of South Africa*, published in 1981, which had an extremely powerful influence on both educational and broader political and social developments throughout the early and mid-eighties. This de Lange Commission report popularised the term 'non-formal education': education (mostly for adults) designed to complement and link up with the formal system and job-related educational needs. This was the first time that non-formal adult education had been identified by an *apartheid* state-appointed commission as an area for development. Alongside this a new Manpower Training Act consolidated all previous legislation pertaining to training and theoretically eliminated all racial discrimination in the area of labour training and development. It also set up a system of subsidies for training (which led to a large growth in the number of private training centres and training schemes registered with the Department of Manpower). In 1983, a Government White Paper was published in response to the Human Sciences Research Council de Lange Commission report. Though it accepted the basic principle of equality of opportunities and standards, it retaining the doctrine of separate education.

In 1982, the Urban Foundation (a major non-governmental organisation founded and supported by the private sector and which engaged in a variety of policy studies which were then often taken up by government) started a design study into non formal education. The Universities of Cape Town and Natal played a significant role in this. Some sections of a draft report were issued, but the final report was never released (presumably because the Urban Foundation was told by government that the time for this particular reform was not ripe, though the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) established a Non-Formal Education Work Committee in 1983 and in 1984 the General Education Affairs Act empowered the Minister of General Education Affairs to decide on policy for non-formal education with regard to key areas and provided for a South African Council of Education which could *inter alia* advise the Minister on non-formal education). Another reform initiative was the Foundation for Rural Development established with government funding for the purpose of developing and uplifting rural farm workers in co-operation with farmers and community development workers. Literacy and other adult education formed a large part of this work, particularly in the Western Cape.

The eighties ended in high drama with a massive defiance campaign in the streets of all the major cities. Though cathartic and a real demonstration of the almost total hegemony the UDF and its allies had gained over the population of the country, it was in another sense a merely ritual performance – those in the know had already been told that the *apartheid* government was about to agree to a settlement and a transition to democratic rule.

## Part 4: Post apartheid South Africa's adult education policy promises

The period after 2 February 1990, when President de Klerk announced the unbanning of political organisations and the start of a transition to a democratic society, has been characterised by great efforts to develop new educational policies, significant failures to really transform the South African education system, and a very harsh economic situation in which South Africa has rejoined the highly competitive global economy. Internationally there has been a strong move towards a standardisation of skills training and qualifications. In this difficult environment, the early promise of great developments in adult education, and particularly in adult basic education and training, has been largely unfulfilled.

The story of this period has been largely one of immense energies going into policy development (largely for adult basic education and training), failures in their implementation, and serious weakening of the university and non-governmental bases for adult education thinking and action.

### ABET policy development from 1990 to April 1994

In the first four years of the nineties there was considerable expansion of cooperation among NGOs – the National Literacy Co-operation broadened to include virtually any NGO that wished to join (including a new look Operation Upgrade and a ProLit which had turned into a delivery agent of some size). There was, however, a political split with the formation of the South African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (SAALAE), in April 1992, which espoused a more Black Consciousness and Africanist line (but which by 1997 was no longer functioning in the literacy field). There was also considerable activity among commercial providers serving industry who had seen the need for a better educated workforce and were also under pressure from the unions to provide ABE. In the period of political transition many people and organisations were waiting for 'something' or 'the real thing' to happen (which was usually seen as a new democratic government putting literacy and adult basic education high up on the national agenda).



The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI),<sup>24</sup> set up by the anti-*apartheid* National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) in 1992, produced two reports that deal directly with literacy and ABE issues (*Adult Education* and *Adult Basic Education*) and another which touched on it (*Human Resources Development*). The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was an influential presence within the NEPI and was wedded to the idea of some kind of general education (ABE) being provided to workers parallel to a more rational and generic form of skills training. Both these issues were strongly present in reports from a National Training Board investigation (National Training Board, 1991, 1994) into a new system of industrial training for South Africa. COSATU then set up its own policy research process, the Participatory Research Project (PRP), that argued for a close integration of ABE and skills training in a modularised system backed by new certification authorities and mechanisms for articulation in every conceivable direction. Also in 1992, the Joint Education Trust (a large new South African Trust with representatives from the business sector, political movements and unions) commissioned a report on Adult Basic Education. This recommended that in the interim the Trust should continue to support NGOs (some of which were experiencing funding difficulties as donors prematurely pulled back from the anti-*apartheid* education enterprise) and encourage research into ABE and promote the development of regional support agencies for ABE (Joint Education Trust, 1992).<sup>25</sup> Arising out of the report's recommendations, two major JET funded research projects were set in motion in 1994. The one, into the social uses of literacy was led by researchers from the Universities of Cape Town and the Western Cape. The other, into ABE capacity building in the country as a whole, was

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<sup>24</sup> NEPI, which started out with a radical agenda, was considerably influenced by political messages it received in its two years of existence that it needed to be less keen on recompense for past wrongs and concentrate more on development. Much of this was the result of what many UDF people considered the baleful influence of the returned exiles (who were more amenable to deals with the Western powers and the business sector) and USAID and the advisors it provided through a pro-American NGO called the Education Foundation. An example of the consequences this had for state provision for adult education is that the education system financial modelling software that the Americans foisted on the new and inexperienced democratic policy makers simply made no provision for the category of adult education at all!

<sup>25</sup> Only one regional agency was ever set up, the Natal ABE Support Agency (NASA) in KwaZulu-Natal in 1994 (Harley *et al*, 1996, pp. 529-533) which was funded by the Joint Education Trust.

conducted by researchers at the University of Natal's Centres for Adult Education. The results of both studies were published in 1996 (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996 and Harley *et al*, 1996). At the same time the Independent Development Trust (IDT), set up by the government, apparently had budgeted about R90 million for literacy, but reneged on this commitment.

In 1993 the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) was set up to serve the democratic movement. It had a number of working groups including one on ABE. In 1994 the CEPD was commissioned by the African National Congress to prepare an Implementation Plan for Education and Training (IPET). Another body that had a brief influence on ABE policy was the South African Committee on Adult Basic Education (SACABE) which represented a wide field of political, trade union, academic and community based organisation interests but held only one conference in November 1993 and then withered away.

There are a number of key documents produced during this period to consider. These include :

- the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) report of 1992 on *Adult Basic Education* (and also the reports on *Adult Education* (1993) and *Human Resource Development* (1992).
- the Joint Education Trust's 1992 commissioned report *Adult Basic Education: focus on a priority field for funding*.
- The Independent Development Trust's 1992 commissioned report, *Developmental strategy in adult basic education* (Morphet *et al*, 1992)
- COSATU's Participatory Research Projects's 1993 report, *Participatory Research Project. Consolidated recommendations adult basic education and training*.
- the National Training Board's National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) draft document of 1991 and the preliminary report of February 1994.



- the South African Committee for Adult Basic Education (SACABE) report on its November 1993 Conference ( South African Committee for Adult Basic Education, 1994).
- The African National Congress's *Implementation Plan for Education and Training* (IPET) of April 1994 produced by the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD)(1994b) as well as its more general policy statements in *The Reconstruction and development programme* (1994a) and *A policy framework for education and training* (1995).

A summary of the policy and implementation recommendations that come through in most of these documents is reproduced on the next page.

Summary of key pre-April 1994 ABET policy and implementation recommendations	
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong national department of (adult) education</li> <li>• National Qualifications Framework</li> <li>• National certification</li> <li>• National (core) curriculum</li> <li>• National Council/National Stakeholders Forum</li> <li>• Legislation</li> <li>• National programme</li> </ul>
Provincial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council</li> <li>• Regional support agencies</li> </ul>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity for systematic planning</li> </ul>
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• [Assumption of future state funding]</li> <li>• Interim NGO funding body</li> <li>• Bigger slice of the education budget</li> <li>• Mechanism for getting money from ministries</li> </ul>
Human Resource Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidelines for teacher training</li> <li>• Capacity for training teachers</li> <li>• Training at all levels</li> </ul>
Research, development and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity for system design</li> <li>• Capacity for curriculum development</li> <li>• Capacity for research in regions</li> <li>• Audit of skills and infrastructure</li> <li>• Comprehensive information base</li> <li>• Identification of priority groupings</li> </ul>
Existing infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancement of state night schools</li> <li>• Existing facilities</li> </ul>
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships</li> <li>• With Reconstruction and Development Programme</li> </ul>
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen advocacy</li> </ul>
Materials development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen materials development capacity</li> </ul>

## Part 5: ABET planning and implementation from May 1994 to 1997

### The State fails to meet (unrealistic) expectations

Subsequent to the April 1994 election,<sup>26</sup> literacy and ABE activists were soon disappointed by the seemingly slow pace of development in the ABE sector. ABET did not seem to be a major concern of the new Government of National Unity, nor of the national Ministry of Education.

The CEPD's proposals for a strong, well resourced adult basic education section within the national department of education were never implemented. Indeed it took until early in 1996 for a Director of ABET to be appointed.<sup>27</sup> A national ABET Task Team appointed by the Minister of Education in September 1994 was destroyed by a virtual *coup d'état* at a consultation it called in January 1995 that saw experienced policy makers and planners kicked out and replaced by provincial education department representatives who knew very little about ABET policy or practice.<sup>28</sup> It was replaced in May 1995 by a National Stakeholder's Forum (NSF) which came to be dominated by formal education system and business sector representatives. No legislation relating to adult education was tabled.

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<sup>26</sup> Preceded by a truly impressive national effort at voter education by a multitude of public and private initiatives.

<sup>27</sup> This neglect has much to do with the priority necessarily accorded to schooling and the disproportionately large size of that schooling budget which in part was due to the gross inefficiencies in mainstream school education and its ideologically driven legacy.

<sup>28</sup> The illegitimate deposition of the Task Team of 1994 at the consultation held in early 1995 was the result of a curious alliance between some new African National Congress candidates for jobs in the national Department of Education and officials who had served in the old *apartheid* education departments. The retention of a largely unreconstructed civil service in which none of the bureaucrats of the old order would lose their posts was part of the historic settlement and political transition in South Africa. It may well have been a political necessity but it had ghastly consequences for the attempt to set up an new state adult education system.

The new national Department of Education's attempts at initiating nationally co-ordinated programmes or campaigns (sometimes via the NSF) were not very successful. The ABET Directorate tended to engage repeatedly in last minute attempts to start great leaps forward, the dates for which had been decided months before but about which almost nothing had been planned or even budgeted for.<sup>29</sup> Thus the fiasco of the April 1995 'strategic thrusts' (nothing happened), repeated a year later with the Ten Thousand Learner Units (nothing happened). This latter non-event was obscured by the Department piggy-backing on the National Literacy Co-operation's One Thousand Learner Units campaign (which had actually been planned and which did, in a manner of speaking, start). However in 1997 this Ithuteng campaign did achieve some modest successes in some provinces (such as KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape). The ABET Directorate weaknesses were predictable - it was understaffed and had only a small budget. (Though literacy was proclaimed a Reconstruction and Development Programme Presidential Lead Project, it was the only one that had no money allocated to it at all and was to be totally dependent on foreign donors.) Some planning support from ABET came from the National Literacy Co-operation and consultants and was paid for (sometimes) by USAID grants. At the provincial level only a few provincial education departments set up workable provincial ABET councils or stakeholder forums and many of the NGOs which had led the struggle for literacy in the previous decade were sidelined by education department officials. Apart from the JET funded Natal ABE Support Agency, no regional support agencies were set up.

In September 1995 some money (R5.4 million per province) was made available for ABET and made a short, if temporary improvement in provincial capacity (though it took most provinces a long time to actually get the money). Provincial budgets for education (basic education provision being a provincial competency) were also erratic. Though the overall amount of money given to state adult education did grow in size, adult education budgets remained a very small percentage of the provincial education budgets (in the 1997/98 financial year overall about 0.8%).

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This points inescapably to the inexperience at the practical level of the officials directing these programmes.

## The downsizing of NGO capacity

From 1995 onward there was a growing sense of crisis in the NGO field which saw much reduced funding as foreign donors now preferred to work directly through bilateral agreements with government and these agreements were slow to be agreed upon and implemented. Older NGOs began to downsize and retrench staff (such as USWE) or even close (such as Learn and Teach), although, ironically, through the National Literacy Co-operation, the field was now better represented nationally than ever before and there was an influx of small new NGOs and CBOs (many of these aspiring to make use of the expected Reconstruction and Development Programme money that never arrived). Through the failure of the state to rapidly reallocate resources, NGOs were thus unable to benefit from new openings in a democratising society – the real beneficiaries tended to be well capitalised commercial providers contracted by industry and commerce.

The National Literacy Co-operation was restructured in April 1995, and was now less of a network of affiliates than a national organisation to which affiliates belonged. The positive side of this was that the NGO sector had a more coherent national voice. The downside of this was that as a national organisation led by its assertive national director, Kumi Naidoo, it now was in certain respects a competitor with its affiliates. Some of the drive towards it becoming a national body came from foreign funders (notably USAID and the European Union) who insisted (largely for their own convenience) on having a single national body to deal with. It was a policy which had already had truly disastrous results in the Early Childhood Education and Career Information and Guidance fields as local and regional expertise was sidelined.

During 1996 and 1997 the National Literacy Co-operation engaged in a complicated tango in the dark with the national Department of Education with perplexing results,<sup>30</sup> at the same time as the international donors tried

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<sup>30</sup> The National Department's Directorate for Adult Education and Training had often used the National Literacy Co-operation head office for policy advice and in fact had outsourced the development of a new ABET policy document to the new NLC Director, Enrico Fourie. The document produced by the NLC was rejected by the national Department of Education in early 1997 because of some impolitic sentiments expressed therein about the government's new Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) economic policy.

to develop mechanisms for dispensing their money via a Department that did not appear to have the capacity or at times, the will to do so. All this was within the broader complexities of a lacklustre national Department of Education that appeared incapable of tackling the admittedly awesome task of rationalising education provision, resources and teacher deployment. When it came to resources, the voice of ABET learners was drowned out by that of higher education students and school teachers demanding the continuation of the lifestyle to which they had become accustomed.

### The formalising of ABET and the assessment of ABET

The problems in the NGO field occurred in a context of the ongoing formalisation of adult basic education with a heavy stress on assessment issues that, in the field of practice, was increasingly dominated by the Independent Examinations Board. Grasping the Training 'T' in ABET proved more difficult, though moves towards special curriculums and examinations in industry sectors indicated one way in which this issue might be eventually resolved.

The formalisation process, heavily influenced by the international trends in favour of competency based training standards and qualifications, is clearly seen in the key documents produced from 1995 to date, and include the following:

- The *Education White Paper* of March (Department of Education, 1995a)
- The national Department of Education's *A national adult basic education and training framework: Interim guidelines* of September 1995
- The research project report of 1996 on *Adult Basic Education and Development* compiled by a group comprising the Department of Education, Congress of South African Trade Unions, Development Bank of Southern Africa, Centre for Education Policy Development, and National Literacy Co-operation. This document is interesting in that it attempts to reassert the role of literacy and ABET in

development rather than in formal education provision. It had little impact however.

- The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology's Language Plan Task Group's final report of 1996, *Towards a national language plan for South Africa*.
- The Department of Education's October 1997 *Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training* and its *A National Multi-year implementation plan for Adult Education and Training: Provision and Accreditation*. (Department of Education, 1997a, 1997b).

A summary of the key post-April 1994 policy and implementation recommendations that come through in most of these documents is summarised on the next page. They are not remarkably different from the pre-April 1994 positions. Many of the recommendations are now solidly enshrined in the detailed *A National Multi-year implementation plan for Adult Education and Training: Provision and Accreditation*.

Summary of key post-April 1994 ABET policy and implementation recommendations	
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong national department of education</li> <li>• National Qualifications Framework</li> <li>• National certification</li> <li>• National (core) curriculum</li> <li>• National Council/National Stakeholders Forum</li> <li>• Legislation</li> <li>• National programme</li> <li>• Professional directorate for ABET in the Department of Education to undertake or sponsor research on structure and methods, develop norms and standards, and to liaise with the RDP office, the Department of Labour, and provincial departments of education</li> </ul>
Provincial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council</li> <li>• Primary responsibility for provision lies with the state</li> </ul>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity for systematic planning (via national ABET task team (1994/95) or multi-year implementation plans at national and provincial levels (1997/98))</li> <li>• Well-planned literacy campaigns</li> </ul>
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General silence about finance</li> </ul>
Human Resource Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidelines for teacher training</li> <li>• Capacity for training teachers</li> <li>• Training at all levels (particularly in outcomes-based education)</li> </ul>
Research, development and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity for system design</li> <li>• Capacity for curriculum development</li> <li>• Capacity for research in regions</li> <li>• Audit of skills and infrastructure</li> <li>• Comprehensive information base</li> <li>• Identification of priority groupings</li> </ul>
Existing infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancement of state night schools into community learning centres</li> <li>• Existing facilities</li> </ul>
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships between government and organised labour and business, women's and youth organisations, civics, churches, specialist NGOs, learner associations, all levels of government, media and other stakeholders</li> </ul>



Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General silence about community empowerment</li> <li>• Greater stress on the African languages and South African Second Languages.</li> </ul>
Materials development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possible state involvement in materials development</li> <li>• Audit of materials</li> </ul>

## Other players

Alongside the policy and planning work largely centred around the national Department of Education and the modest attempts to increase provision by state and NGOs, there were other roleplayers who also exhibited some enthusiasm about ABET and in some cases adult education in general:

Firstly, the South African Broadcasting Company, manifested a commitment to publicising and working in the field of ABET that was commendable. This may be a reflection of the extent to which the SABC is still an adherent of edifying **public** broadcasting (however narrow and perverted this adherence was during the *apartheid* era). It proved to be a force for the good in respect of literacy. A number of advocacy programmes were shown on television from 1994 to date such as *Literacy Alive*, *The struggle for literacy*, and *Adult Basic Education in the workplace*, *Basic skills in English*, and *Mochochonono*; they were also duplicated in the various languages on radio. At an important conference on educational broadcasting held in February 1998, it was reaffirmed that adult education would remain an important priority for educational broadcasting and that substantial resources would be devoted to ABE programmes. Increasingly new SABC initiatives looked at literacy within a wider, more holistic setting than before and tried to integrate programming within a multimedia support environment.

Secondly, libraries and particularly the provincial library services were generally supportive of literacy and the provision of easy reading material, although this support has now become more muted because of funding constraints.

A third grouping, the community college sector, was still trying hard to reach take off point. A *Green paper on Further Education and Training*,

which addresses many of the community college sector issues, was released by the Department of Education in April 1998 and followed in August by a white paper and in October 1998 by a Further Education and Training Act. Because of a very slow development of Further Education and Training policy and implementation such community colleges as existed were unable to play a significant role in literacy and adult basic education. By the end of 2001 this was still the case.<sup>31</sup>

## Part 6: Things fall apart (1997 - 2001)

### The decimation of the NGO sector

By the end of 1997 there was a growing feeling that the national Department of Education's renamed Directorate for Adult Education and Training, under the leadership of Gugu Nxumalo, was now working more effectively and realistically and that, though not without continuing difficulties, partnerships between state and NGOs and university-based adult educators had had some modest successes. The Multi-year implementation plan had affirmed that NGO delivery would supplement state and industry delivery programmes. This, coupled with fiscal constraints on the expansion of delivery by the state, indicated that NGO programmes would continue to be an important component of ABET delivery for some time.

However, at the end of 1997, the future of the NGO literacy and ABE providers remained uncertain, largely because of funding uncertainties, the loss of experienced staff and often poor management and administration. In spite of better national and provincial co-ordination through the National Literacy Co-operation, the NGO literacy field was in some disarray. Their hopes of a rapid change in provision of literacy and ABET had been severely disappointed. Then, in January 1998, came the total collapse of the National Literacy Co-operation. This dismal event had a

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<sup>31</sup> Initial work in the Further Education and Training field was largely restricted to the rationalisation of technical colleges. In 2001 all teacher training colleges run by provinces were closed or incorporated into nearby universities and technikons. Some of the closed but not incorporated colleges then tried to continue as community colleges but few have done so successfully.

forerunner in the acts of fraud that effectively disabled and led to the eventual closure of the World University Service South Africa. In October 1997 the European Union, dissatisfied for some time with the National Literacy Co-operation's reporting, commissioned a rapid appraisal of the Thousand Learner Unit Pilot Programme which they had funded. The review found that the NLC had not fulfilled its obligations and further payments by the European Union were withheld. In January 1998 the organisation ceased operating, and by the end of February all staff were retrenched and the organisation closed.

The attrition of NGOs continued and by the end of 1998 USWE in Cape Town and the English Literacy Project in Johannesburg had in effect closed, retaining a tenuous existence through some ongoing contracts with publishers. In January 1999 two major ABET NGOs in KwaZulu-Natal, the English Resource Unit and Operation Upgrade were in dire financial straits and retrenchments started. The ending of any regular funding for ABET NGOs from the Joint Education Trust was in many cases their death knell. The decline of the many did, however, lead to advantage for Project Literacy which, by the latter part of 1999, was increasingly being seen as **the** national literacy NGO.

An initiative, supported by the Institute of International Co-operation of the German Adult Education Association (DVV-IIC), to set up a new NGO funding conduit raised some hopes but by the end of 2001 it was still too early to evaluate its possibilities of success.

From the mid-1990s literacy NGOs had struggled on in anticipation that the new National Development Agency (NDA) would finally come on stream and fund them properly. The interim Transitional National Development Trust had, within its restricted limits, kept some barely alive. By the end of 2001 it became clear that there was no immediate hope or even promise from the NDA that it would aid them and foreign donors were still too closely locked into state-to-state bilaterals to intervene either. For NGOs the picture was increasingly gloomy.

In 2001 the Adult Educators and Trainers Association of South Africa (AETASA) was liquidated after a period of poor management and a failure to recruit fee paying members or to gain further foreign funding.

## The state plans to implement adult basic education

Meanwhile, in late 1997 and early 1998, the attempts by the national Directorate for Adult Education to get provincial education departments to develop provincial variants of the national multi-year implementation plan (and which was indeed part of the national plan) were moderately successful and some financial support from foreign funders was obtained for this process (particularly for the Eastern Cape and the Northern Province). A number of plan documents of varying practicality were produced. Simultaneously, some attempts at building capacity in areas such as training in outcomes-based education were attempted via a 'cascade' model in which each province sent a number of recruits to be trained as trainers in Gauteng, the plan being that they would then replicate the training back home in an ever widening cascade. Whilst an attractive model in theory, in practice it has not worked well because of inflexible timetabling and a lack of support (particularly managerial, logistical and financial) at each level of the cascade in the various provinces.

In November 1998 the University of Natal released a series of draft research reports on ABET in each province and, though there were many positive findings, generally the reports are critical of the lack of progress in implementation and transformation. The final reports were published in 1999 and early in 2000 a synthesis report was produced (Aitchison, Houghton and Baatjes *et al*, 2000). An update by Aitchison (2000) at the Conference 'ABET on Trial' held in November 2000 confirmed this picture. Some money has been spent on public adult learning centres and there have been increases in some provincial budgets for adult education. But the overwhelming impression is of lacklustre system that (with some provincial exceptions) fails at just about every level: management, planning, innovation, monitoring and evaluation, and, above all, delivery to adult learners. The awful question that has to be asked is whether the prioritising of the state PALCs as the site for the growth of a new ABET system has not turned out to be a costly mistake – a wasteful and destructive one that led to the neglect of the NGO sector and a failure to capitalise on ABET delivery in the business sector. The same critical question can be asked of the national and provincial Multi-year implementation plans for ABET. Ambitious in scope, they have failed – so far – to be implemented to any acceptable degree and are weighed

down at the top level by a system of voluntarily staffed and financially unsupported committees that is unsustainable.

After the June 1999 general election a new Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, was appointed. On 27<sup>th</sup> July he issued a call to action (Asmal, 1999a) which recognised that the public believed that there was an education crisis and that the state was not upholding their rights to education. It was indeed ‘a national emergency’ and people would have to work together to end it. He set nine priorities, one of which was to ‘break the back of illiteracy among adults and youth in five years’. He reaffirmed the role of NGOs in eradicating illiteracy and argued the need for mobilising a social movement to bring reading, writing and numeracy to those who do not have it. However he also reasserted the (by now) thoroughly unrealistic projections that the Multi-Year Implementation Plan for ABET would enable close to a million new learners to achieve the equivalent of Grade 9 by 2003, provided the funds could be found and ABET practitioners trained. The Minister did finally acknowledge that several provincial education departments had been cutting back or closing ABET programmes when they should have been expanding. Though this trend should be reversed he saw it as improbable that the government would find sufficient additional funds in the near future to eliminate illiteracy through formal ABET programmes run by provincial education departments. The alternative strategy he envisaged was to encourage employers (be they government departments or the business sector) to run ABET programmes (possibly partly funded through the new skills levy on all employers) and to stimulate voluntary service in the literacy field. However, funds to support such voluntary initiatives would not come from government but be appealed for from national and international grant-making agencies.

In March 2000 an Adult Basic Education and Training Act was passed and it became law in late 2000. It is largely concerned with the regulation of public and private adult learning centres and the setting up of governing bodies for them. One interpretation of some of the clauses is that it makes the running of any unregistered literacy or ABET programme or part of a programme a criminal offence (a harkening back to the worst of Bantu

Education legislation of the 50s).<sup>32</sup>

## The South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI)

In September 1999, the Minister announced a literacy campaign (Asmal, 1999b) and in January 2000 it was included in the *Tirisano* documents. A previous Director of SACHED (now sadly among the many deceased alternative education NGOs), John Samuel, was appointed by the Minister set up the new National Literacy Agency and in mid-2000 a small working group engaged in the first steps of this process. Their initial plan has since been modified with the following objectives:

- mobilising voluntary services in support of a nationwide literacy initiative;
- developing training programmes and support for volunteer educators;
- designing, developing and procuring reading and resource materials;
- setting-up local literacy units responsible for running the initiative at local level; and
- establishing institutional capacity to support, monitor and evaluate the project.

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<sup>32</sup> 38. (1) Any person other than an organ of state, who without the authority of a public or private adult centre—

- (a) offers or pretends to offer **any** adult basic education and training programme **or part thereof**;
- (b) confers a qualification which purports to have been granted by a centre, or in collaboration with a centre; or
- (c) purports to perform an act on behalf of a centre,

is guilty of an offence and is liable on conviction to any sentence which may be imposed for fraud.

(2) Any person who pretends that a qualification has been awarded to him or her by a centre whereas in fact no such qualification has been so awarded, is guilty of an offence and is liable on conviction to any sentence which may be imposed for fraud.

(3) Any person who establishes or maintains an unregistered private centre, is guilty of an offence and is liable on conviction to a fine or imprisonment not exceeding five years or to both such fine and imprisonment.

[However clause 43 states that clause 38 (3) does not apply to a person who was providing adult basic education and training programmes at an unregistered private centre immediately prior to the date of commencement of this Act (i.e. late 2000) who can continue to do so until a date set by the MEC and published in the Provincial *Gazette*.]

Of interest was that initially the Minister seemed determined that the Agency should not be part of the national Department of Education and its Adult Education and Training Directorate and a Board for the South African National Literacy Initiative was appointed by the Minister. Literacy activists saw a faint flicker of hope – but it was not to be. The national Department regained control of the process, halted the production of materials, reverted back to the idea of working through the provincial departments of education and finally settled on a two province pilot that looked increasingly and suspiciously like the warmed up leftovers of the Ithuteng campaign Samuel was sidelined, as was the Board (and it was officially disbanded in August 2000), the innovative plan for a national campaign discarded and a set of largely inexperienced staff housed in the national Department of Education. At the end of 2001, two years after the launch of the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI), there was little to show and SANLI was now a new Directorate in the national Department of Education. In 2002 SANLI opened a number of provincial offices and claimed that it was reaching a large number of illiterates through the University of South Africa's ABET Institute which offers a Certificate for ABET facilitators. The extent to which this initiative is reaching new groups of illiterates as distinct from existing programmes and projects is uncertain.

### Hard times at the universities

The adult education departments which were so influential in the 80s and early 90s are now struggling for survival. Although this is partly due to the unfortunate attitudes of the national Department of Education's Adult Education and Training Directorate, the real threat is from the universities themselves. After 1994 it can be safely said that universities found themselves in a mess. *Apartheid* South Africa had multiplied the number of universities to cater for each so-called ethnic group. Many of these were, given their illegitimacy, always hopeless institutions, but the new government was given the unenviable choice of closing many of them or spreading the declining university budget even more thinly. It chose to make no real decisions. Meanwhile, an anticipated huge increase in university students failed to materialise. (Whether this was due to faulty statistical projections, an inability to pay fees in a lacklustre economy, the rise of commercially based alternatives, the emigration of increasing



numbers of white youth, or the impact of AIDS is unclear. Probably all factors play a part.) At the same time many universities started to rationalise and restructure, emasculated their senates and installed various forms of American-style university executive administration. Departments were collapsed into larger schools. Programmes which did not cover their costs by subsidy or fees were terminated. *De facto* the famous Department of Adult Education at the University of Cape Town is no more, the Centre for Adult and Community Education at the University of the Western Cape, the equivalent at the University of the Witwatersrand, and the Centres for Adult Education at the University of Natal, though they still survive, are continually having to justify their existence in often crassly financial terms. The idea that universities should provide some form of community service through adult education has fallen on hard times.

### At the dawn of a new millenium

In spite of Asmal's call to action made a few months away from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the prospects for the delivery of appropriate and high quality literacy instruction and adult basic education and training remain uncertain in South Africa. Possible scenarios include the eventually successful construction of a state driven ABET system or the collapse or abandonment of such an enterprise. In the event of this latter conclusion, the extent to which the decimated NGO sector could be revitalised seems dubious. The future role of the business sector in ABET, though probably still the major provider, is also unclear, but current trends suggest that the business community will rapidly phase out ABET and concentrate on the Further Education and Training needed to keep the workforce competitive in the global economy.



## Part 7: Calls to renewal

Given the obvious dismay in the adult education field about the developing trends since the mid-90s it was not surprising that criticism and calls to renewal should emerge at the end of the decade and the beginning of the new millennium.

Public criticism of current policy and has largely been expressed by some academics in university adult education departments and their work has been received with the utmost hostility by the national Directorate (see for example Aitchison, 1998).

Four renewal moves are of note:

- a group looking at the setting up of a new ABET funding conduit whose work has been funded by the German Adult Education Association;
- a small group that has met at two seminars called by the Umtapo Centre;
- renewed activity by an NGO dedicated to encouraging reading among new literates; and
- the setting up of the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) by the new Minister of Education.

### The ALBED Foundation

The German Adult Education Association's Institute for International Co-operation (DVV-IIE) has a small office in South Africa headed by Wolfgang Leumer, who, on behalf of the Association has played a major supporting role within the NGO sector in the aftermath of the NLC collapse, particularly through modest but strategic financial aid to support new provincial NGO forums or ABET Councils and various adult learning networks. More substantial support was given to AETASA, though this proved fruitless.

In April 1999 a meeting of an *ad hoc* group of experienced people in the ABET field was funded by the DVV to meet to look at the possibility of a funding conduit that would help channel funds from donors to the

distressed NGO sector. The meeting, while responsive to this funding need came to the conclusion that the problem was not just money – the whole ABET enterprise needs some rethinking and a fairly critical first draft of a document, *Adult literacy, Basic Education and Development: a call to renewal*, was produced. Through a series of meetings and editorial re-draftings, the tone of the document has been considerably mellowed but still argues that a conception of ABET that is much more concerned with empowerment and development is needed. A new final version of the paper (ALBED Task Team, 1999) was given to the All Africa Education for All Conference in early December 1999 may well have reinforced the new Minister of Education's initial desire to set up a National Literacy Agency in his office rather than tied to the national Directorate in the national Department of Education. The Adult Literacy and Basic Education Foundation of South Africa (ALBEFSA) has been set up and there is cautious optimism that something will come of this initiative.

### The Umtapo Centre initiative

The Umtapo Centre was a key affiliate of the South African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (SAALAE) that split from the National Literacy Co-operation (NLC) in 1992. SAALAE is now essentially defunct. In May 1999 a seminar was called to look at the Freirian tradition in South African literacy work and a critical analysis was made of the current situation in South Africa. In essence this analysis matched that made by the 'funding conduit' group though it was somewhat more strident (Soliar, 1999, Umtapo Centre, 1999). At another meeting in December 1999 it was argued that there was a need to set up a non-formal Peoples Education Network (PEN) that would encourage Freirian and popular education approaches but also avoid the past divisions of the NLC/SAALAE split. It would also seek to take advantage of the new openness to alternative visions of literacy delivery suggested by the Minister of Education. To what extent this initiative can succeed without any major resources has yet to be seen.

## The return of the reader

There has long been a tradition in South African adult education that values reading (and implicitly, the autodidact). In the late 1970s and early 1980s some attention was given to this by some general and short lived provincial reading associations and by academics such as Edward French (then of the HSRC) and John Aitchison and Arie Blacquiere of the University of Natal. The tradition continued in the ERA Initiative and in the University of Natal's contributions to developing easy readers and a newspaper supplement for adult new readers (Harley *et al*, 1996, pp. 363-372). This tradition was downgraded and submerged by the relentless pursuit of a formalised system of ABET and the whole apparatus of outcomes, unit standards and learning areas in which reading hardly figures (it is striking that the words 'read' or 'reading' do not appear once in Curriculum 2005's list of 66 desirable outcomes of schooling (subsequently revised)).

In 1998 the ERA Initiative started a research project to evaluate the impact of its programme to develop easy readers. In discussions within its reference group a view began to emerge that a return to reading as the core competency and value was required. This view is stated strongly in various sections of the ERA Initiative's final report on this research (ERA Initiative, 1999). Effective advocacy by the ERA Director, Beulah Thumbadoo also saw 'promotion of a culture of reading' (as part of a national literacy campaign) added as one of the outcomes for Minister Kader Asmal's new *Implementation plan for Tirisano* (Department of Education, 2000, p.18) . A conference pursuing these ideas took place in late February 2000. It is an indication that there is still a will to have an educated citizenry who can read, write, do sums and understand the world and change it, but also that South African is still far from this goal.

Although an official initiative, *Masifundesonke*, was housed by the national Department of Education to provide support for this promotion of reading, by the end of 2001 its effectiveness was not particularly evident.

## The South African National Literacy Agency

Although this initiative has already stalled, positively it can be seen as a sign of recognition that the installation of a formal system of ABET was not the complete answer to the needs of illiterate and undereducated adults. It also, in theory at least, re-engaged the energy in civil society waiting to be directed at literacy.

### In conclusion

In evaluating the past four decades of adult education work it is clear that significant lessons have been learned by the protagonists of the field. Adult education activities, and particularly those related to literacy and adult basic education, have been closely tied to and influenced by the political and economic struggles in the whole society. Advocates for adult education have learned a keen appreciation of the need to gain the support of the real (though sometimes latent) powers in society if their often ambitious plans are to come to fruition. The enormous expansion of interest in adult education in the eighties was inextricably tied to the groundswell of sentiment and action that would in due course end in the current hegemony that the African National Congress exercises over the South African body politic. But it is precisely here, at the beginning of a new century, that there is a pervasive sadness that the hoped for adult education renaissance has been a great disappointment.

Over the past decade there has been much intellectual and other effort devoted to getting adult basic education policy and, to some extent, methodology and materials right. In this, South Africa has developed substantial expertise. But, at the same time, experience and track records of competent delivery have been ignored. The adult educators have also been curiously inept and naive in their attempts to gain footholds in the corridors of power. Particularly in the NGO field, they seem always to have underestimated the fragility of their organisations and support bases and financial support.

Adult education has been very closely associated with the political transformation of South Africa. As dependent as any enhancement of adult education (and particularly literacy and ABET) provision is on political

will, it is likely that its successes and sometimes dreadful defeats will continue to reflect the South African struggle to be a more democratic, enlightened and industrious society.

## Appendix

### The literature on the history of adult education in South Africa

The South African literature on the history of adult education has yet to be written. What there is largely a few references in autobiographies from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, passing references in general histories of education, and occasional references to the past in recent academic papers and policy studies. The formal study of adult education in South Africa universities has only existed since 1980 and weakly at that (partly because the last two decades have been characterised by action and organisation building rather than reflection). The decline of the university resource based for the study of adult education over the last few years gives scant hope for the improvement of the situation.

The quantity of publications with any bearing on the history of adult education is accordingly small. This literature can, for convenience, be divided into three major categories: policy, practice and research.

The literature on **policy** is largely about non-formal education (in the early eighties) and about adult basic education (the actual policy documents themselves from 1992 onwards). Few of the actual policy documents (except for those from the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) of 1992/93) have been formally published.<sup>33</sup> There is also some grey literature, usually photocopied working papers written by policy task team members (as in the cases of the NEPI and Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) ABE groups). There is even less published **about** the policy documents. Exceptions are Harley *et al*'s substantial *A survey of adult basic education in South Africa in the 90s* (1996) and some journal articles and papers in conference proceedings (for example, Fisher, 1992; Morphet *et al*, 1992; Greenstein, 1995; Aitchison, 1996a, 1996b, 1998; Bhola, 1997; Aitchison *et al*, 2000).

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<sup>33</sup> The Department of Education's important October 1997 documents, *Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training* and *A National Multi-year implementation plan for Adult Education and Training: Provision and Accreditation*, although printed in considerable quantities and widely distributed, are not formally published.

If anything, the literature on educational **practice** which has some reference to history is even more limited – a book developed by a consortium of university adult education departments, *Adult basic education in South Africa: literacy, English as a second language, and numeracy* (Hutton, 1992), and some conference papers and journal articles (Hamilton, 1997, Kell, 1997).

**Research** literature is also very limited, though there are three notable publications, namely, Edward French's *The promotion of literacy in South Africa: a multifaceted survey at the start of the 80s*, published by the Human Sciences Research Council in 1982, and two products of research grants from the Joint Education Trust, the aforementioned Harley *et al* *A survey of adult basic education in South Africa in the 90s*, an empirical study, and Aitchison *et al*'s *University of Natal survey of adult basic education and training: South Africa* (2000) though their main focus is current policy and implementation. Oxenham and French's *Universities and adult literacy in South Africa: an exploration of their relationship* (1990) is also useful. Gush and Walters (1996) have produced a really useful first chronology on *Adult education and training in South Africa: a selected chronology from 1910 to 1995* but it is clearly only a beginning.



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