South Africa education in transition: preparing for transformations

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The evaluation of universities and its effects on the financing of higher education
INTRODUCTION

Since the recent historic transformations in their politics, South Africans are facing enormous challenges in virtually every field of endeavour. In particular, education calls for exceptional pro-active thinking, planning and action. We are actually in the midst of a terrain which is largely uncharted. Events, globally and in South Africa, are also adequate proof that we are facing a bumpy future and that the educational crisis and its challenges are not like chess problems to which there are set of single solution (Spicer, 1990). To tackle the problems of housing, education and employment in South Africa demands macro as well as micro approaches and will depend on the socio-economic and politically negotiated structures of the near future (Van Zijl, 1990).

State President de Klerk's decision to eliminate backlogs and create a more equitable and we hope civil equitable society is a bold step towards "a new South Africa." These steps, as well as the lifting of the State of Emergency, could possibly lead to the desire for admission to school and university being replaced by the desire for education and learning in some other form. We also find ourselves in a period of transition because the future of the "New South Africa", to be honest, hangs in the balance. In fact, there are many signs of growing deterioration in an education system which has never really been satisfactory and which has been particularly bad during the last decade or two.

If South Africa wants to become a winning nation that is able to compete successfully with other nations in the international arenas, it will have to solve its education crisis (Sunter, 1987: 44). This will not be as simple and straightforward as some scenario-planners think. The future of South African education will depend, partly, on the values and aims of those in power, partly, on key societal forces which are already in operation and partly, on the structures that already exist. What kind of education
emerges in South Africa will come about as a result of an interaction of these variables (Ashley: 1989). Because both the education crisis and proposed solutions are complex, I want to raise some questions which may contribute to the debate, inside and outside South Africa, on educational scenarios for the 1990s.

I propose, firstly, to refer briefly to the scenario technique and then to apply it to the South African situation. I will then identify some of the key issues and trends which determine the nature of the "educational game" in South Africa. The role of the main actors or players will be analysed as well as the changing pitch and conditions that are going to shape the strategies and the nature of the "game". Finally, I will attempt to identify key structural issues that need to be addressed and redressed. Unless the education system generates learning in our schools the future of South Africa will be at stake.

SCENARIO PLANNING FOR SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION

Clem Sunter (1987) introduced the wider public to constructing scenarios as a planning methodology. This technique is based on the assumption that the future is an open possibility and can actively be made as people choose to act on key stable and variable factors, all of which are open to debate. Sunter (1987: 13-14) and an Anglo American team reduced the number of possibilities that exist by looking at the rules of the game and profiling the weaknesses and strengths of the best players (actors) on both sides of the contest. Sunter (1987: 74-84 and 104-106) uses this analogy to produce scenarios for the world and South Africa in the 1990's. It is impossible to contextualize the education crisis in South Africa without recognizing of these rules of the game (e.g. the triad and non-triad countries; the High Road and Low Road). Encapsulating a whole range of factors, the triad nations contain the rich, old millions and the non-triad the poor young billions. South Africa, which is one of the Sub-Saharan countries, is part of the latter, with very high population growth, a young population, a widening gap between population growth and production, low economic growth rate, a change in value systems
and a total erosion of learning as as a social issue.

Given the globalisation of the world economy and the firm move towards the knowledge-intensive 90s (Naisbitt, 1984: 1-35), the nations of the world will necessarily emerge as Sunter’s “winning or losing nations”. The most important factor in the formula for being a winning or a successful nation is a high level of education; an education which is relevant to the social and economic needs of the nation and which maintains a balance between education and employability. This should be coupled to what is referred to as the ability and desire of individuals to fulfil their potential - the actualization of a work ethic, a sound family system and no corruption (Spicer, 1990: 5).

This is an example of one (maybe the dominant) perspective or scenario in South Africa. One could call it a Western ideal, or a First World scenario, which includes the idea of a liberal education. This ideal is being seriously questioned in many quarters of South Africa. It is challenged on two main counts: for its tendency to elitism and on its relevance to the present needs of society. The argument is that education at all levels should be Africanized (Holdstock, 1987: 10). On the other hand, it is relatively easy to break down the old - a process well on its way in black urban and rural schools. The new does not exist yet and to build it will demand a common purpose, imagination, energy and commitment, as well as a clear vision of the civil society and low education can contribute towards the civil society.

The manner in which education will evolve and be provided will be directly related to the manner in which power and wealth are distributed in a new South Africa. Once the dominant ideological principles (or mix of principles) which should govern such a distribution and redistribution have been identified, those in power will also have to come to terms with the problems and challenges posed by the key societal forces and their impact on education.

Four positions can be identified, each of them having its roots in political and economic issues, as well as its own agenda or vision of the future of education in South Africa: the Reformist, the Reactionary, the Socialist (People’s Education), and a fourth, which can
be referred to as the Small Government or High Road ideal of minimal sanctions, small
government, decentralised power and joint negotiations (Ashley, 1989b: 2). As previously
stated, the rejection of the Western-centrism that is embodied in Western ideals,
institutions and standards calls for a continuous evaluation of appropriate alternatives.
But this can happen only in an open approach, where various alternatives are possible
and new combinations present acceptable paths (Holdstock: 1989). Before I analyse the
educational game, especially the one that is being played in black communities, I would
like briefly to identify, some of the problematic features and trends in the present
education crisis in South Africa.

THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

At a recent education conference, Educational Planning for a Winning Nation (1990),
the following resolution was taken on the crisis or challenge of education in South
Africa:

"This Conference mindful of the escalation of violence and the growing boycotts
involving teachers and pupils and the continuing dissatisfaction with the present
education system in South Africa calls on the State President, Mr F W de Klerk as
a matter of extreme urgency, to call together a meeting of educationalists,
legislators and community leaders to hammer out an Emergency Plan to meet the
current crisis in education. In urging the State President to intervene in this way the
Conference is mindful of the need for long-term planning towards a new edu-
cation policy for South Africa. Nevertheless, it is deeply concerned at the present
crisis which threatens to deteriorate even further. Education does not take place
in a vacuum and the future of our children and of our nation is at stake. Bold,
decisive action is urgently needed now" (Piper, 1990: 4).

This action plan should be directed at local initiatives, structural changes together with
creating a learning culture in our schools. The past also need to be redressed because
of the following:
1. The present scene in South Africa has a very paradoxical flavour - we have abandoned apartheid irrevocably, but do not know the shape of the "new" South Africa. A socio-political openness is emerging, but in certain areas of South Africa violence, riots and stayaways still are continuing. Political dialogue and negotiations are underway, but we are manifestly ill-prepared for this process, because the debate has been both rhetorical and superficial up to now. Policy-makers are not thinking process - they are mainly focusing on outcome. South Africa also has vast social needs, but an economic growth rate of only 1.5 percent or even lower per annum (Spicer: 1990).

2. The demographic picture shows a population reaching about 50 million by the year 2000, of which more than one third will be under the age of 15 years. This will inevitably exert pressure on primary, secondary and tertiary admissions and has vast financial implications. It is actually a "catch 22" situation (Ashley, 1990: 1). Both maintaining apartheid and trying to dismantle the dragon costs money - and we cannot afford it.

3. Rapid urbanisation will occur and lead to serious unemployment.

4. The learning environment, especially in schools for blacks is deteriorating. In Soweto, schools have come to a stand still; attendance has dropped 40-50 percent and nearly 50 percent of black pupils drop-out of primary school alone and more than 50 percent of adult South Africans are illiterate (8-10 million people) (Hofmeyr, 1986).

5. Although there is a rapid increase and expected further increases in the number of black matriculants, and this is likely to continue, the quality of both black and white education shows signs of declining standards. The present dislocation between the needs of the business sector and the overly academic nature of education, leads to a misconception of what tertiary and continuing education is
for. This means that our society is deprived of employable people, because the need for vocational education is not well understood (e.g. the proportion of black pupils who matriculate is decreasing by 10 percent per annum).

6. A number of substantial obstacles are likely to frustrate anyone who tries to alter South African education: insufficient facilities, backlogs and inequalities in provision, a declining commitment to professionalism, inadequately qualified teachers, community disengagement, the irrelevance of the curriculum, and a state bureaucracy that inhibits innovation and development.

7. The main stumbling block is the inability, and at times, the unwillingness of individuals and disparate groups to overcome their mistrust or powerlessness, (e.g. many blacks are full of bitterness and many white have succumbed to and stereotyping, prejudice and fear (Brown: 1985).

For all these reasons, it will be suicidal to try to work together on a human, political and educational agenda and to build a future, a new South Africa, before addressing all these moral problems: "When fear, bitterness, hatred and greed among South Africans have been faced and eradicated, the high road to a just and democratic society will be open" (Marivate, 1990: 5). In other words, we will have to work through the messy constitutional and political tart and sport creating a civil society.

To summarize: because the educational environment in South Africa is an untidy maze of interactions between different players, the game is certainly unpredictable. This unpredictability is due to a number of factors: a serious division in political will; the historical results of the policy of separate development (apartheid); and fundamental ideological differences, both in the theory and practice of education, amongst educationists, as well as among the different stakeholders participating in the educational game (Beukes, 1989: 413). In Freireian terms it boils down to a serious and basic contest in education: to play either for domestication or for liberation (Freire, 1985: 12).
THE GAME

There is a crisis of trust in South African education, especially in black education. It is not primarily or only a problem of reducing inequalities. In spite of the De Lange Report, which advocated equal quality of education, the Ten-Year Plan (1986), according to which "... all the country's educational institutions will fall under one umbrella, with the same standard for all" (Bot, 1986: 48), the recent announcements of four possible models of education, the increase in government expenditure so that backlogs can be eradicted and parity be established, the present educational system does not enjoy widespread legitimacy (Bot, 1986: 49). In particular black youth have been and still are alienated from the formal education system because of the banking and domesticating nature of this education. Education is regarded as a "mug and jug" affair and treats a learner as uncritical recipient (McKay, 1989: 322), who has no power over his education and does not enjoy any meaningful decision-making within the system, because "it is this lack of legitimacy, rather than the lack of equality, that is the fundamental problem in our systems of education" (Moulder, 1986). Black schools, teacher training colleges and universities will continue to be in a turmoil because on the one hand, the Western ideal which is backed by most of the business sector will remain an idealistic dream until the majority of South Africans regard the political decisions that impact on education as legitimate. On the other hand, there are no guarantees in political transitions and therefore it is possible that even a radical change in the political dispensation in South Africa will restore a positive learning environment. There are no educational "coups d'états".

On the other hand, many people, especially white South Africans, are playing a different game: more money is made available, new foundations and trusts are mushrooming, international spending is increasing, the business sector is becoming a major stakeholder (at times tends to dominate the education debate) and the imbalance in education spending is being addressed. All these moves are part of a game which has a tradition of creating a uniformly high standard of education, establishing and maintaining "excellence" in education, maintaining international standards and privatising education. This all boils down to a perception that it is neccesary in extend and expand the
Eurocentric "white" model of education. But this game has proved to be too academic, flawed in many ways and irrelevant to the future of South Africa. It could lead to a wume's wage-earning, urban, middle-class, English-speaking South African. "Rather than 'more of the same' we need a new model of education; one which will meet the aspirations of all its people and work for the country as a whole" (Hofmeyr and Moulder, 1980: 10).

Against this background I will analyse some of the issues of provision, relevance and legitimacy. The question that still has to addressed is this: Which is the winning game? Is it a good mix of domestication and liberation, of first and third world, of balancing short, medium and long term goals? The recent World Bank research (1989) report on revitalising and expanding Sub-Saharan education does have some answers to this question. It argues that the newly industrialised countries of the Pacific Rim have proved that the Bank's ideas are effective. As scenario planners we should also identify the key actors or players and explain what makes them a major stakeholder and why.

THE PLAYERS

Owing to the complexity and multidimensional nature of the South African education environment a clear and precise analysis of the interaction and role of the different players is not possible. But it is possible to indicate where the main players stand and the type of game they are playing. The main antagonists are the government, on the one side, and the black communities (mainly urban), on the other.

The struggle is for the control over schools and formal education as such. The black youth, demanding "people's education for people's power" (Sisulu, 1986) has played the stay-away, riots, violence and intimidation game. This situation becomes even worse because the black youth not in school (only 25 percent of urban black youth between 16-25 are in fulltime employment) exercise considerable pressure on those who are at school, or who are using educational alternatives.
South African society also has a fundamental problem with a "lost generation". Many other organisations support the youth - trade unions, teachers' associations, the mass democratic movement - and this contributes to their alienation. It appears as if adults, parents, community leaders and the leaders of the ANC and mass democratic movement have lost control over the youth, although this situation has shown some improvement recently, where the people's interest and community empowerment is on the agenda.

On the other hand, the government is trying desperately to maintain control. In spite of disproportionate increases in education expenditure, averaging 18 percent per annum, in which the budget for black education has increased by a staggering 2648 percent since 1973 (Louw and Kendall, 1987: 182), the student-teacher-community-trade union alliances have rejected education (Sisulu, 1986: 10). One of the great tragedies of present-day South Africa is the myth that the quality of education is a function of the quantity of money spent on it. Evidence in South Africa and abroad shows a correlation between increased state expenditure and declining education standards (Louw and Kendall, 1987: 182).

Apart from black communities, black organisations and government, the business sector has recently started using its resources to bargain, intervene in areas of educational collapse: it is training and re-training users, facilitating and funding grassroots and community initiatives, supporting educational foundations and aggressively assisting in constructive dialogue between the different stakeholders and agencies (Green and Lascaris, 1988: 64).

There are also other stakeholders - teachers' associations, international players, the homeland governments, churches and the teachers themselves. The roles and objectives of each of these players is different: they vary from supporting, improving, changing, providing to supplementing activities. The question still to be answered is how the key players will interact, because they do not represent united fronts. They (e.g. the black communities) contain different ideologies and pursue divergent objectives. A commitment to a new South Africa as a non-racial democratic and just society and an flexible approach to education for South Africans would provide sufficient common
ground for co-operative, positive and productive debate and action in the future.

The future of the debate and the actions is also going to be determined by developing conditions, forces, circumstances - the pitch and state of the pitch is going to shape the game.

A few remarks on the condition of the pitch are appropriate at this juncture. What is certain about the pitch is that it will definitely not be prepared for a one-day match. On the other hand, the pitch will have to be monitored and watched by all the interested parties and agencies all the time.

The first question is whether South Africa is a First World or Third World country, with pockets of Third World underdevelopment or with pockets and patches of First World potential? Are we actually moving from an industrial age to an information age or from an agricultural to an industrial age? South Africa, contrary to popular myth, is not a rich country, but very average. Its GDP per capita has recently been estimated at $2010 per annum putting it just ahead of Malaysia and Mexico (Louw and Kendall, 1987). It is a lower middle income developing country, although its GDP is four times that of the sub-Saharan average of $505 per annum. In educational terms, South Africa is basically an underdeveloped country. White pupils experiencing a Western-type of education constitute only 11% of the total pupil population. What I want to stress is that we are playing on a cracking, underdeveloped wicket - e.g. about 50 percent of South Africans do not have electricity.

The schooling, or education crisis is therefore an interplay of economic, social, ideological, political, as well as educational forces. At the moment the burning issue in the debate is how to redistribute wealth. It is also obvious from this debate that there are no quick fixes. Other factors that fuel the education crisis are the accelerated urbanization, the high fertility rate, the deterioration in rural areas due to erosion, overcrowding, and poverty. Many new schools will have to be built and the provision of education will have to deal with a growing over-supply of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. There is also a serious shortage of skilled graduates especially in the technical
areas. On the periphery the people outside the mainstream of economic life, especially in the informal sector are growing in number.

Unfortunately, in the areas of in-service education and non-formal education there is a desperate need for information, and reliable data to produce effective strategies for dealing with the education catastrophe (Hofmeyr, 1986). The education crisis requires a different kind of mindset, a multimindedness. I also want to agree with Moulder (1986) that unless we take the World Bank's Report seriously, the fertiliser in our education system will continue to be ineffective. The dominance of the ongoing political struggle and constitutional phase will have to come to an end "...South Africa cannot have the education that will make it a "winning nation" until it has a government that the majority of South Africans accept as legitimate" (Hofmeyr and Moulder, 1988: 12).

**CONCLUSION**

It should be clear by now that the education crisis in South Africa is a tough and complex one. The next decade is a very important because we will have to move towards a stable single national South African state, with a nonracial and universal franchise, a new national consciousness and a multi-party political system (Ashley, 1990). All this will not be finished in a hundred, or even thousand days, so the key issues of provision, relevance and legitimacy will have to tackled without delay. What will be necessary is consultation and co-operation between the three main players, namely the State, the Business Sector and the Community. This could only be in the country's and its peoples' best interest.

To recapitulate: many of the educational issues will have to be analysed seriously and without delay. Some, the media included, have been maybe too quick in labelling the "education struggle" as "democratic", a term which conflates two distinct and not necessarily compatible great underlying aspirations: the political aspiration for liberty and the social aspiration for equality. The latter two aspirations (visions) concerns social and cultural infrastructures without which formal liberties - no matter how enshrined in
constitutions and guaranteed by law - have little chance of turning into actual, and in this case, education liberties. What is needed is a fierce spirit of independence; a reflexive distrust of unsolicited offers from outside aid; a preference for doing things one's own way, using one's own preference for doing things one's own way and using one's own limited resources. This change in mindset also requires the inclination to view others in synergetic rather than in zero-sum terms, a pragmatic and opportunistic rather than an ideological orientation, an ethic of responsibility rather than of commitment, flexibility and an appreciation for laws, rules, and procedural norms (Weitman, 1992: 17-18).
REFERENCES


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