

The new knowledge-rich society: perpetuating marginalisation and exclusion

“Marginalisation is ... the silencing of lived experiences in discourses constructed through legislation and policies created by the dominant culture, which either “commatizes or negates” the political, economic, historical and social realities of those living in the margins of society.”

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Background

Adult Basic Education (ABE) in South Africa is often described as a key vehicle in the reconstruction and development of the country. In a society faced with enormous social and economic challenges, technological innovation and transfer, rising unemployment, racial strife, crime, poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, ABE has emerged as an important component of a comprehensive education and training system. It has great promise to incorporate the historically disadvantaged and marginalised into a new form of citizenship and democracy. The term adult basic education in South Africa has taken on an extra meaning with the introduction of training as a vital element of the new education and training enterprise. South Africans – government, labour, civil society, business and industry -- have adopted the term Adult Basic Education and Training (ABE) which purports to reflect greater integration of education and training. The emphasis on training emanates from organised labour that argues for the recognition of existing technical skills of the worker and the need for these skills to be acknowledged as part of the learning and teaching process. Many workers have been exploited in the apartheid era in which the education system and the workplace deliberately ignored the skills of workers, paying low wages and denying workers access to further education and training. ABE was also viewed, in the apartheid era as the responsibility of government and not industry, and the introduction of the “T” shift this responsibility partly to industry. In addition to this, ABE aimed to provide an argument for the introduction of training as part of all ABE programmes in the new education and training system. In terms of the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF), ABE is equated with 9 years of schooling. ABE conceptualised in this way has become current policy and the implementation of this policy is in its seventh year. In this paper I will use the term ABE because the promise of training has not yet materialized.

Introduction

Marginalisation and exclusion occur when people are systematically excluded from meaningful participation in economic, social, political, cultural and other forms of human activity. People are cut off from the mainstream and do not have access to the fruits of membership of the wider society. Key concepts within the exclusion and marginalisation paradigms that capture the essence of marginalisation include: ‘illiteracy’, ‘cultural others’, ‘the underclass’, ‘ghettos’, ‘ethnic cleansing’, ‘race’, ‘gender’, ‘class’ and lately, being ‘HIV positive’. This paper draws attention to the marginalisation and exclusion of a large and growing sector of the South African population that is systematically being excluded from meaningful participation in the social, cultural, political and economic activities of society.

This paper intends to evoke discussion about marginalisation at a time when much attention is drawn to the 'knowledge citizen' in the new knowledge-rich society which demands certain levels of basic education as a prerequisite for further learning and knowledge acquisition (UNESCO, 1997). Those without the threshold of knowledge would most certainly be excluded from the new knowledge-rich economy. This paper also attempts to locate the issues of marginalisation and exclusion within the relationship of the state and its economic policy and the political context of South Africa. In other words, the issues of marginalisation and exclusion need to be understood in their relationship to economic development or the political economy of adult education (Youngman, 2000; Torres; 1990; Collins, 1991). Marginalisation occurs at a number of levels. For the purpose of this paper, I focus on two levels where marginalisation is clearly evident: firstly, the marginalisation of the ABE system itself and, secondly, the marginalisation and exclusion of adult learners. It is argued that ABE is an important vehicle in overcoming marginalisation and exclusion and that deliberate efforts are required to incorporate large numbers of individuals into active citizenship and the new knowledge-rich society. Both the emancipatory and instrumentalist traditions of ABE present possibilities to incorporate individuals into an inclusive and just society. However, the instrumentalist tradition, which is emerging as the dominant tradition that defines the purpose of education in South Africa, contributes to the marginalisation and exclusion of under-educated, semi-illiterate and illiterate adults in the country.

This paper introduces a brief history of illiteracy as characteristic of the black working class in South Africa and discusses how it was reproduced as an essential component of the apartheid capitalist state. It will be argued that illiteracy forms part of a set of oppressive mechanisms that should be understood within the historical and structural context of South Africa shaped by the mode of production and its class and race relations. This is followed by brief descriptions of two post-apartheid economic policies, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the Growth and Redistribution strategy (GEAR), with specific focus on their relationships to social policy of which ABE is part. While the RDP as a redistributive socio-economic policy provided a foundation for an emancipatory literacy project, and its location within a strategy that would simultaneously respond to a range of other oppressive structures, it was displaced by the neoliberal GEAR which rendered such a project impossible. This leads to the conclusion that illiteracy amongst black working class adults is reproduced within the larger market-driven peripheral capitalist state. Two examples of ABE Projects are used to show that the neoliberal macro-economic policy not only marginalise ABE, but the instrumentalist tradition that results from it, also excludes the illiterate, semi-illiterate and undereducated from participating in it. The new-knowledge rich society relies on an educated citizenry and yet the marginalisation and exclusion of millions of adults are reproduced by inhumane economic policies continue to deny people full participation in the social, political, economic and cultural aspects of life.

A brief historical overview (pre 1994)

Illiteracy amongst adults in South Africa remains a deeply-rooted social issue and is inescapably implicated in the political and economic forces of the country. Marxist theory explains the production of social relations that resulted in the division of society into classes and the struggle of these classes against one another (Youngman, 1986). The theory also explains the political economy which originates from this struggle and the consequent division of society and how the distribution of political power is reflected by an economy characterised by a minority having

ownership of the means of production while the majority are dependent for their subsistence on wage labour. The division between mental and manual labour is a terrain of domination and subordination. The subordinate class in South Africa was, and still is, constituted by a majority black illiterate working class and the reproduction of class/race relations is a result of a combination of ideological state apparatuses and organised violence within the larger context of capital accumulation. The endemic apartheid capitalist state required a large black workforce in order to maintain white domination. The political economy of adult literacy was therefore clearly shaped by the ruling political class whose power was anchored in the economic structure of apartheid capitalism.

In 1990 the adult illiteracy rate was estimated at 50% and some would argue that it could have been as high as 61% depending on how literacy was defined. The black labour force was largely uneducated, unskilled and easily replaceable in occupational structures. The rapid expansion in industrialisation and modernisation of the late 1970s and 80s required a stable, better-trained productive labour force with main emphasis placed on the fragmentation of skilled labour and semi-skilled work. Basic literacy levels became requisite for an efficiently functioning labour market. Ironically, with the high illiteracy rate in the 1970s the government failed to launch a literacy campaign as a prerequisite to rapid economic growth.¹ Instead government responded by focusing attention on the education of the smaller urban black population, particularly at the secondary and technical levels, as well as small-scale literacy programmes in the form of night schools. The corporate sector also provided mainly functional literacy programmes which, it believed, would bring immediate economic returns. Adult literacy provision and delivery by the state and corporate sector show congruency with the apartheid capitalist ideology and its investment in racially segregated human resource development. The state's limited commitment to adult literacy and the emphasis on "training" were ideological measures to preserve the status quo, therefore ensuring the reproduction of a majority illiterate black working class as an important component of apartheid capitalism. A marginalised adult literacy pseudo-policy of the apartheid state, is evident in the following: (1) the budget for adult literacy programmes remained less than 1% of the total education budget for black South Africans; (2) the total number of adult learners dropped from 104,000 in 1988 to 67,000 in 1990; (3) less than 1% of illiterates were involved in existing literacy programmes; (4) the drop-out rate was higher than 60%; (5) Between the period 1988 to 1990 the number of learning centres for adults declined from 390 to 258; (6) the only route to literacy was through the oppressive and discriminatory schooling system; (7) literacy education in industry was viewed as a cost and not an investment; and (8) much skilled labour performed by blacks was categorised as unskilled.

The apartheid capitalist state was also characterised by a range of other social injustices that cannot be separated from illiteracy because they formed part of the concrete forms of domination and asymmetrical relations of power that functioned to marginalise and exclude people from active participation in the socio-economic and political life of the country. Illiteracy amongst adults, although there is no causal relationship, was connected to: (1) a high infant mortality rate amongst the black population; (2) increase in poverty; (3) massive unemployment; (4) homelessness; (5) illiteracy amongst black children; and violence and death – all concrete forms of domination and asymmetrical relations of power.

Reflections on the history and analysis of illiteracy amongst adults in South Africa show that it

¹ According to UNESCO a 80% national adult literacy rate is required for rapid economic development.

was reproduced through the bureaucratic centralised education system and the political subjugation of blacks that was sustained by repressive mechanisms anchored in the economic structure of apartheid capitalism.

The new era (post 1994)

The new national government of South Africa highlighted ABE as a fundamental vehicle to social, political and economic power. ABE provided great possibilities in the reconstruction and development process (Bengu; 1996; Mkhathshwa; 1997). It was regarded as: (1) an integral component of building a participatory democracy; (2) having the potential to incorporate illiterate and under-educated adults into a new form of citizenship; (3) indispensable in the development of a critical consciousness; (4) a vehicle to respond to a range of social and economic challenges; and (5) an ideal mechanism to transcend exploitation, manipulation, powerlessness and oppression. In essence ABE was viewed within a larger political framework and action plan: literacy as a cornerstone in overcoming social, political and economic domination. ABE therefore linked concretely with the struggle against racial oppression and class exploitation; it was understood as an emancipatory literacy that would be fought from these theoretical perspectives.

ABE and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994-5)

The role of ABE as a vehicle in the reconstruction and development process has received generous attention over the last seven years. In 1994 the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) as economic and social policy became the official African National Congress (ANC) policy supported by the different organisations within the Mass Democratic Movement.² The original RDP document contains a substantive set of campaign promises which captured the imagination of most sectors of society (Bond, 2000). The Working Group paper entitled “*Rebuilding the MDM for a People-driven RDP*” describes the RDP in the following way: “Through the RDP we provided the only viable vision for change in our country. It is a vision based on meeting the needs of the impoverished majority of our population through a people-centred, people-driven developmental process” (Bond, 2000, p.90). The RDP set a five year target which promised inter alia: (1) a million new low-cost houses available to even the poorest South Africans; (2) electrification of 2,5 million houses; (3) creating 200,000 jobs annually; (4) redistributing 30% of the agricultural land; (5) clean water and sanitation for all; (6) universal health care and social welfare; and (7) massive educational initiatives. Of concern and interest to adult educators were the promises made by the RDP in relation to the empowerment of civil society and the resultant incorporation of illiterate and marginalised adults into a new form of participatory democracy. The RDP as socio-economic policy was clearly promising to break the reproduction of illiteracy amongst the black population and to incorporate the marginalised into mainstream society. This policy provided impetus to the declaration of basic education as a

² Patrick Bond argues that the RDP has different interpretations – neoliberal, socialist and populist. From his analysis it appears as if the neoliberal orientation within the ANC with links to the World Bank and IMF has emerged as the dominant force that swayed the RDP towards an economic policy in line with the free market economy. This neoliberal economic policy emphasises the human capital tradition or instrumentalist view that education and training assume. Education policy geared towards economic growth dictates the central purpose of education programmes.

human right as set out in the South African Constitution.³ This would be achieved through literacy campaigns and other national skills development initiatives, which I discuss later in this paper. The RDP become official government policy as the RDP White Paper. This RDP policy emphasises that adult education and its provision at effective sites of learning, is integral to the socio-political and economic concerns of the country and specifically to both labour market and human resource development.

ABE was viewed as part of the process of meeting the basic needs of the population. These needs are described in the RDP White Paper in the following words:

The basic needs of people extend from job-creation, land and agrarian reform to housing, water and sanitation, energy supplies, transport, nutrition, health care, the environment, social welfare and security. In creating the infrastructure to meet these needs the RDP will encourage and support the participation of people in making the key decisions about where the projects should be and how they should be managed. (Reconstruction and Development Programme White Paper, **Government Gazette**, No. 16085, p. 9)

Meeting these basic needs cannot be separated from the varieties of adult learning and training. ABE as captured in the White Paper is viewed as a significant vehicle in social, political and economic transformation.

A coherent human resource development policy will be developed to focus on the skills acquisition and ABE for the incumbent workforce and those who have been deprived of basic schooling. (Reconstruction and Development Programme White Paper, **Government Gazette**, No. 16085, p.26)

The RDP White Paper describes the education and training system as a tool that will empower people and create the scope for everyone to participate in decision-making processes, as well as a mechanism for the democratisation of the society. Effective learning sites and alternative delivery mechanisms have a critical role to play in the education of the nation and are therefore integral to the overall human resource development strategy of the country (Baatjes, Aitchison & John, 2001). The RDP was often referred to as a long-term strategy, a national strategic vision, a philosophy, a way of life and the most ideal redistributive socio-economic policy to address the interrelated problems of basic services, housing, unemployment, education, health and other inequalities (Harley, Baatjes et al, 2000). It was viewed as an empowering policy that was inherently progressive and emancipatory, concerned with people-centered development, ecological safeguarding, gender equality, self-reliant economics, inclusivity and empowerment.

The RDP programme was short-lived and relegated to a project-based programme when government realised that they lacked, or so it appeared, the necessary resources to achieve the unachievable (Harley, Baatjes, et al, 2000). For instance, the Multi-Year Implementation Plan (1997) of the Department of Education estimated that it would require approximately R18 billion to operationalise its ABE Policy that provides a strategy that would bring ABE programmes to 3 million illiterate and under-educated adults (Department of Education, 1997). During the RDP-era, ABE received R50 million for a government-led literacy campaign and generous support

³ Like the World Declaration of Education for All (UNESCO, 1997), the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa recognizes ABE as a basic human right and the National Education Policy Act (1996) supports the protection of rights such as the right to basic education.

from a number of international donors who were keen to support the establishment of a framework for improved planning, coordination and delivery of programmes for adults, strengthening national capacity to provide ABE, the development of a national curriculum and standards, programme development to enhance the acquisition of technical skills, family literacy, empowerment of women and sustainable development. This type of support to government nose-dived towards the end of 1998 coinciding with the growth in prominence of a newly adopted macro-economic policy. At the same time, however, we witnessed the calculated demise of civil society organisations that failed to access resources that the RDP programme was meant to mobilise.

For radical adult educators in South Africa, the RDP was a redistributive socio-economic policy that fostered the development of a participatory democracy and provided a meaningful, and perhaps ideal, foundation for the incorporation of the marginalised adult population into meaningful roles in a society characterised by such great inequalities. It also provided the context to grapple with the complex and intertwined issues of poverty, unemployment, racism, sexism, disease, crime, moral decay – and map the most suitable route to emancipation from the intricacies of exploitation, oppression, exclusion and marginalisation (Welton, 1992). The RDP provided both the promise of addressing the basic needs of the marginalised, while at the same time, providing the necessary resources to provide millions of adults access to good quality learning and training opportunities. Despite this early promise the RDP today has come to stand for “**Rumours, Dreams and Promises**” (Bond’s metaphor for RDP, 2000).

ABE and the GEAR Policy (1996-)

In 1998 the RDP was effectively displaced by the current neoliberal macro-economic policy – the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy.⁴ Government insists that GEAR is not a new policy but merely a strategy that operationalises the RDP. Government and business regard GEAR as the most appropriate way of inserting the South African economy competitively into the global economy.⁵ GEAR departs from the former RDP in many respects and emphasis is placed on economic growth that will precipitate employment opportunities for a more equitable distribution of the country’s wealth. The intention of this macro-economic policy is to place primary focus on economic growth and demand that all other policies – education, labour and social – are streamlined according to the economic imperatives of the country. This policy is also congruent with the global economy that demands high-skilled and competitive labour markets.⁶

⁴ In 1997 when the first draft of the ABE T policy first appeared the Department of Education wrote a letter to all stakeholders informing them that the document bearing its name on the cover was not a departmental document. The reason for the critique of GEAR created difficulties for the department in a time when opposition to GEAR was strongly voiced by organised labour and civil society.

⁵ Burbules’ and Torres’ observations best capture the political forces that shape government’s constraints in relation to economic restructuring. They identify transnational capital, global political structures, domestic pressures and demands and internal needs as the four imperatives that require political response.

⁶ GEAR echoed and expanded upon policy recommendations proposed by the World Bank (see Fallon and Pereira de Silva) that South Africa should: (1) encourage rapid growth in skilled labour by upgrading semi-skilled and unskilled labour; (2) re-orientate manufacturing towards exports; (3) promote job creation through small business development and through agricultural reform; and (4) restructure government

In doing so, the GEAR strategy focuses on: (1) a competitive and fast-growing economy which creates jobs; (2) a redistribution of income and opportunities towards the poor; (3) a society in which sound health, education and other services are available to all; and (4) an environment in which homes are secure and places of work productive. GEAR targets included an economic growth of 6% per annum and the creation of 400,000 jobs per annum by the year 2000. The capacity building required for global competitiveness is also seen as fundamental. This would be achieved through an integrated strategy of which the following elements are at the core: (a) fiscal reduction programme; (b) a competitive exchange rate policy; (c) restructuring of state assets; (d) expansionary infrastructure programme that addresses service deficiencies; and (e) expansion of trade and investment flows. GEAR has been implemented in the nine provinces in South Africa through provincial Spatial Development Initiatives⁷ (SDIs) in a number of Industrial Development Zones (IDZs). The education and training system would provide the human resources necessary to drive this economy. In essence GEAR can be described as the real education policy that drives the education and training system in the country.

GEAR sets itself ambitious targets. In 1997 it projected that more than 200,000 jobs would be created on an annual basis until the year 2000 and that the unemployment rate would decline to approximately 8% by the year 2020. In addition, the economic growth rate per annum was set at 6% (Harley, Baatjes et al, 2000). GEAR has missed most of its targets. Statistics indicate job losses and thus an increase in unemployment rate from 33% in 1997 to 37% in 2000.⁸ The most common problems linked to GEAR are: increase in job losses; decrease in public services including health and other basic services; privatisation and outsourcing; increase in structural poverty; and the growing gap between the rich and the poor.⁹ This economic restructuring has also resulted, as in many other peripheral capitalist countries, in a number of other problems that are reinforcing marginalisation and exclusion of the millions of illiterate and unskilled population of South Africa. These include amongst others: (1) the reduction of the welfare state and an increase in privatisation of social services, health, housing and education; (2) a model of exclusion that leaves out large sectors of the population (the poor, women and rural population); (3) an increasing proletarianisation and deskilling of jobs; (4) the withdrawal of the state's responsibility in administering public resources and the promotion of social justice; (5) drastic cutbacks in social spending; and (6) a deep fiscal crisis reduction affecting the public sector.

expenditure by raising investment in infrastructure and public service, targeting the poor and under-privileged, and maintaining prudent fiscal and monetary policy.

⁷ A number of SDIs can be found in each of the nine provinces. These include the Coega, Alrode Industrial Corridor, Richards Bay, Maputo Corridor, Gariep, Phalaborwa-Maputo, Platinum Corridor and West Coast SDIs. These SDIs would attract foreign investment and as a result create employment opportunities.

⁸ Between 1996 and 1998, 300,000 jobs were lost (Bond. Can South Africa shake the Washington Consensus, in Development Update. Quarterly Journal of the South African National NGO Coalition and INTERFUND, p.49.)

⁹ This is well-illustrated in recent findings that though there has been some redistribution of wealth in South Africa since 1991 largely to the advantage of black people, it has taken the form of the gaining of wealth by a small black elite that is part of the wealthy top 10% of the South Africa population and that for the bottom 40% of predominantly black households their economic situation has in fact deteriorated. During the period 1991 to 1996 the poorest 40% of blacks received only 0,1% of the estimated R55 million of the redistributed wealth gained by blacks compared with the R24 billion gained by the richest 10% of blacks. The average income of black households at the bottom of the scale declined by 20% (Sunday Times, October, 1999: Rich man Poorer man – C. Jacobson).

The marginalisation of a fully functional ABE system is being entrenched by this macro-economic policy. The great Multi-Year Implementation Plan that was meant to bring this system into existence has been shelved and, although government claims it as its official plan for ABE, it is yet to be implemented (Department of Labour, 2000). Today 50% of the South African adult population (or 10 million adults) has less than 10 years of schooling and 3 million adults have never been to school. A growing number of under-educated, semi-skilled and unskilled adults are unemployed, face retrenchments or are trapped in the informal economy. Over the last five years, the commitment by government to the provision and delivery of ABE as a political project has faded despite recognising illiteracy as a threat to the 'economic order' and as a profound injustice. This waning commitment is evident in the insignificant financial support for ABE which is still receiving less than 1% of the national education budget. The number of PALCs dropped from 1440 to 998. Over the last seven years, three poorly conceptualised and under-resourced campaigns have been launched and have consequently failed. The role of civil society in the provision and delivery of ABE programmes has also been undermined and left to collapse. Since 1997 there has been a significant decline in the ABE NGO sector. Of a total of 150 NGOs operating in 1997, only 38 were still partly functional in 2000. The demise of the NGO sector is partly linked to multilateral and bilateral agreements that redirected funds to governments instead of NGOs. Consequently the role of civil society efforts in the provision and delivery of ABE has declined sharply. Today, millions of South Africans continue to experience deepening social problems – the maps of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy are beginning to mirror each other. Illiterate adults are experiencing deepening socio-economic dilemmas – health, housing, unemployment, crime, etc. Their structural position, created by a range of forces, also deter them from participating in ABE programmes. These include structural, situational, psychological and informational barriers (Baatjes, Aitchison & John, 1999, 2001; Baatjes, 2002)

The literacy scenario in the year 2000 almost mirrors the scenarios of the 1970s and 80s. It appears as if the illiteracy amongst the largely black population in the country is still being reproduced. Prior to 1994 the reproductive mechanism was apartheid capitalism and today it is neoliberalism. Patrick Bond's metaphor – the South African government is merely 'shining the chains of apartheid instead of breaking them' best captures the reproduction of asymmetrical power relations and the perpetuation of marginalisation and exclusion (Bond, 2001). To further demonstrate how marginalisation and exclusion are advanced, I focus on ABE projects provided by the two lead ministries of education and training, namely the Departments of Education and Labour. There are a number of issues that could be presented as evidence of both the marginal status of ABE and of how the beneficiaries of the system are marginalised, but for the purpose of this paper, I am highlighting only a few in the section below.

ABE Projects

Department of Education

In the year 2002, ABE provision and delivery is taking place in three sectors, government, business and industry and NGOs. In this section of the paper the focus is on a brief overview of ABE provision and delivery by government and two of the largest economic sectors in the country – mining and manufacturing.

In 1996, during the short-lived RDP-era, the new government launched the Ithuteng “Ready to Learn” Campaign with the intention to register 90,000 adult learners in government Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) with a budget of R50 million. This campaign only lasted for one year and failed. Whether the campaign reached its target has been questioned (Aitchison, Houghton & Baatjes, 2000), and while it had a strong political and revolutionary element to it, it was ultimately a disaster. Launched nationally on 11 February 1996 (coinciding to celebrate five years of Mandela’s release from prison) it became known that most of the nine provincial departments had limited or no experience or no ABE staff to co-ordinate the campaign; three provinces did not implement the campaign; it had no publicity and no recruitment strategy; only one provincial plan existed; there were serious problems with materials for learners; and the funds for the campaign could only be accessed six months into the campaign. These examples clearly suggest some of the key problems of Ithuteng. Realising that a one-year campaign was inadequate the departments abandoned it and embarked on the development of a planning process that resulted in the Multi-Year Implementation Plan. Although this plan showed great promise it received limited political and economic support from politicians, business and even the labour movement.

In 1999 the new Minister of Education within the first few weeks of his reign, threatened to ‘break the back of illiteracy’ and launched a new literacy campaign under what became known as the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) (Asmal, 1999; Castle, 2000). This ‘initiative’ would depend on adult educators who would volunteer their time teaching the illiterate. Two years later, SANLI has achieved little and the lack of financial resources to support its implementation is blamed for its failure. The similarities between SANLI and Ronald Reagan’s National Adult Literacy Initiatives of the 1980s are striking (they even have the same name) include their dismal failures. The real purpose of this campaign, which is meant to target some of the poorest communities in the country, remains unclear. It certainly does not show the revolutionary zeal of Ithuteng and appears to be merely a strategy to control and manage conflict between government and an increasingly impatient third sector. The lack of political will to drive this ‘initiative’, which requires substantial resources, is congruent with the neoliberal tendencies to cut back on social spending that affects this campaign. It also shows government’s lack of responsibility to the marginalised and its orientation to maintain models of exclusion that marginalise large sectors of the population. There is also an argument that suggests that government policies would not promote political participation of its citizens because they might become difficult to control, hence the deliberate lack of literacy provisioning and the strategic destruction of civil society through a process of severing their funding source.

A sister campaign to SANLI, called the Masifunde sonke campaign, was also launched in 2000 as a mechanism to develop a culture of reading in the country. This campaign was initially located within SANLI and later established as a separate unit in the Department of Education with a small budget. This campaign suffers the same difficulties as SANLI and has made no contribution to the culture of reading. What is quite clear is that the Department of Education seems to have an inability to implement any campaign linked to adult literacy. The three campaigns are good examples of this. This inability to provide and deliver literacy education poses a serious problem, as millions of South Africa adults are so poorly educated that they cannot access jobs on the market. The hope of being retrained or schooled for a new job in the elite knowledge sector is painfully out of reach. Millions of adults are being permanently displaced by technological transfer and a growing underclass is emerging -- the illiterate, semi-illiterate and under-educated. Jeremy Rifkin provides an apt description for the marginalized as millions of able-bodied South Africans are stranded by a society that no longer needs or wants their labour (Rifkin, 1995).

Another key issue that also shows the limited interest and lack of political will to support ABE is the marginal status of adult educators. Adult education in South Africa was always located within the broader social movement and adult educators developed their knowledge and skills within the NGO sector. Most universities, with the exception of perhaps Western Cape, Natal and Cape Town, do not provide programmes for adult educators. When ABE was adopted as one of the key focus points of government there was an expectation that a significant number of adult educator posts would be established and that government would embark on a development project that would increase and multiply the skills base of adult educators who would also find employment in the PALCs, NGOs, business and industry and other government departments. By the year 2000 fewer than one hundred adult educators have been appointed as programme co-ordinators or programme supervisors in PALCs and others remain employed as part-time educators. Most recently in the Eastern Cape Province which has the largest number of under-educated adults, after KwaZulu-Natal, the restructuring of its provincial department of education has led to the redundancy of approximately 100 ABE regional officials who are being redeployed into mainstream schooling posts.¹⁰ The number of adult educators enrolled in university-based programmes has also declined due to poor conditions of service and limited support from the main employers of adult educators. The development of skilled adult educators is therefore undermined which simply reinforces the marginalisation of a focal area in education that requires government support and leadership.

Department of Labour

In South Africa the terms “ABET”, “Further Education and Training” and “lifelong learning” are increasingly being used to signal new concepts of adult education that support economic productivity and economic growth. There is greater emphasis being placed on linking adult education more effectively to the needs of the economy, concentrating on clients’ needs, effective service delivery, co-ordinating resources, quality management, accreditation, etc. These developments are indicative of the fact that adult education is becoming less marginal to the mainstream of education, the major preoccupation of the state.¹¹ The neoliberal tradition dictates that adult education should become more and more relevant to the needs of the economy or corporate capitalism. Business and professional interests often invoke adult education as a means to increase efficiency and profitability. Adult education in South Africa is decked under slogans such as “lifelong learning”, “further education and training”, “outcomes-based education” and “human resources development”. The human capital theory argues that long-term investment in education leads directly to increased productivity and economic growth. ABE is being made to fit within this neoliberal tradition. At the same time it is this neoliberal tradition that absorbs adult education into a ‘cult of efficiency’ (Collins; 1991) or instrumentalism is failing to create a more just and equitable society, therefore perpetuating asymmetrical power relations, marginalisation, exclusion and injustice.

¹⁰ Griff Foley in an article entitled, “Adult Education and Capitalist Reorganisation “ highlights restructuring as a key element of the crisis with capital and challenges adult educators to resist it and to articulate alternatives.

¹¹ It is indicative that government exhibits an inconsistent philosophy in approaching adult learning issues by adopting a more interventionist attitude towards programmes linked to economic productivity compared to a laissez-faire attitude toward emancipatory projects.

In 2001 the Department of Labour introduced a *National Skills Development Strategy: Skills for Productive Citizenship for All* which operationalises two pieces of legislation¹², namely the Skills Development Act and Skills Development Levies Act that require business and industry and all institutions to invest in the education and training of their employees¹³. The key concepts that show the NSDS allegiance with the instrumentalist tradition include 'demand-led', 'skills development for employability', 'productivity' and 'productive citizenship'. One of the 'success indicators' of the NSDS is that by March 2005, 70% of workers should have at least a NQF level 1 qualification. This would be achieved through the establishment of 25 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) which need to develop complex frameworks, systems, strategies and procedures to achieve this tall order.¹⁴ The two baseline studies yielded interesting information which show the marginal status of ABE in the workplace and the vulnerability of workers without 9 years of schooling.

The Mining and Mineral Sector (MMS) and the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector (MERSS) are two of the largest and most important economic sectors employing close to 1 million people (Baatjes, Aitchison & John, 2001; Baatjes, 2002) across 40,000 companies.¹⁵ Approximately 60% or 600,000 workers have less than 10 years of schooling and are the target group of the respective SETAs. The two baseline studies yielded the following results:

Firstly, the percentage of companies that provided programmes to workers within the General Education and Training Band (ABE is part of this band) for the MMS and MERSS was 18% and less than 7% respectively. These statistics were not surprising as the history of adult literacy provision and delivery in business and industry in South Africa indicates (Aitchison et al, 2000). What is quite interesting is the bitter complaints amongst companies about their so-called unskilled workforce and the consequent threat to the economic order and yet the reluctance to develop the skills of these workers. Amidst this complaining is the almost non-existent information available about the education and training levels of workers.

Secondly, the baseline study shows that there is a lack of political and economic will amongst the

¹² These Acts create the National Skills Authority, the National Skills Fund, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), Skills Development Planning Units, skills development levy-grant schemes and labour centers. In 2001, the National Skills Fund recorded an amount of R1,3 billion which could not be allocated for education and training. The lack of bureaucratic systems in 2001 made it impossible for funds to be allocated to services providers. Only a small percentage of this fund is allocated to programmes for marginalised people in South Africa.

¹³ A company or each workplace must develop a workplace skills plan (WSP) and submit it to the SETA under which it is registered. Clearly defined regulations stipulate and outline the format for a WSP. A Skills Development Facilitator helps a company with the development and completion of a WSP. A WSP clearly identifies the learning, education and training that are strategic by linking the skills required to the priorities of the company. Companies pay a levy and receive funding for staff development but only on submission of a WSP. It loses the funds to the National Skills Authority if no WSP is submitted.

¹⁴ It is unclear how this objective has been set given the lack of information available about the educational levels of employees. In 2000 and 2001 two of the largest economic sectors embarked on baseline studies to gather data for their own planning purposes.

¹⁵ Companies in these sectors are divided into large, small, medium and micro. Most of the companies are either small or medium employing up to 100 workers.

majority of these companies to provide ABE. The statistics speak from themselves, but the response to claiming a levy back shows the lack of interest in ABE and skills development of unskilled workers. Out of the 25,000 levy-paying companies registered with the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services SETA (MERSETA) only 1,000 companies submitted Workplace Skills Plans (WSPs) which is the mechanism to fund education and training programmes.

Thirdly, in a small number of companies (mainly larger companies) where ABE programmes are provided, access to programmes is extremely limited. Most of the companies only accommodate between 20 to 30 workers in a class over a six-month period. Time, cost and space are presented as key inhibitors to providing ABE. Some companies have long waiting lists of workers keen to attend classes and, in some cases, it will take two years before workers will be able to be enrolled. No effort is being made to find alternative venues for classes while part-time programmes receive very little support.

Fourthly, the types of programmes provided also point to the need for serious evaluation. Despite the arguments for programmes that focus on a combination of basic knowledge and skills, the ABE programmes are limited to English literacy (a language which is foreign, a second, third or fourth language to almost all the workers) and numeracy with some introduction of science and technology. There was hardly any evidence of any form of skills training for workers at the ABE level. The WSPs, which should provide some indication of skills development, do not clearly show the number of ABE-level workers that benefit from a combination of English literacy and skills programmes.

Fifthly, the curriculum development processes, which are meant to set the general competency statements for skills requirement of workers, lean more towards workers with higher levels of education. This indicates that training is not regarded as a necessary component of the ABE curriculum in the workplace. Curriculum development and its implementation through learnerships are far more advanced for workers with more than 10 years of schooling. Development of learning materials to support the implementation of ABE programmes also receives poor attention.

Sixthly, learner motivation and participation are key aspects that require attention. Although the participation and motivation in full-time programmes appears to be high with a very low drop-out rate, the same cannot be said about part-time programmes. Workers are facing many barriers to participation and very little is being done to address these. Incentives to workers are limited and those who do attend the full-time classes can lose wages if they drop out of the programme.

Seventhly, workers without 10 years of schooling are the most vulnerable in the two economic sectors. During both studies many of them were retrenched and it is extremely difficult for them to enter the job market. In addition to this they receive no support for further learning.

Lastly, ABE programmes in the workplace can easily be interrupted or stopped. If companies fail to produce the required production quotas, workers in full-time classes are called back to the production lines. Budgets for ABE in the workplace are also the first to be cut in cases of financial difficulties in companies.

Summary

The aim of this paper is to highlight the significance of ABE as a mechanism to incorporate illiterate and under-educated adults as active participants in the socio-economic, political and cultural life of South Africa. ABE is viewed as a prerequisite for participation in a growing knowledge-rich society and as a necessary vehicle in the reconstruction and development of the country. Failing to recognise the significance of ABE, I have argued, will perpetuate the marginalisation and exclusion of millions of illiterate people. I have presented a brief overview of how illiteracy amongst the black population was reproduced as a necessary element of apartheid capitalism. Illiteracy was also part of the multiple forms of oppression – poverty, homelessness, disease, hunger -- and asymmetrical relations on which the apartheid state depended for its existence. I have also argued that the RDP policy of the first democratic government provided an ideal redistributive mechanism through which ABE as a vehicle could redress the inequalities of past discriminatory policies and create social policies that would map the most suitable route to emancipation from the intricacies of exploitation, oppression, exclusion and marginalisation (a route that incorporates the themes of justice, freedom, care equality, peace, stability and development). I then presented an argument showing that the displacement of the RDP by the neoliberal GEAR policy paved the way for a new way of reproducing marginalisation and exclusion. I provided evidence to show that the status of the historically disadvantaged, marginalised and oppressed has not changed and that their collective oppression in the apartheid era compares well with their collective oppression in the post-apartheid era. Adult education is therefore used by the state to advance the interest of capital through its human resource development strategy and, at the same time, undermining the possibilities presented by ABE as an emancipatory project fostering a just social order. I have used examples of failed government projects as well as projects within business and industry to support my argument. I have also tried to show that although the instrumentalist tradition has grown to become the dominant ideological force in shaping education and training programmes, workers without 10 years of schooling remain threatened by a system that demands higher levels of education. If current trends continue, they will ultimately be retrenched. In conclusion, I hope that this perspective on the reproduction of marginalisation and exclusion encourages adult educators to revisit our view of ‘adult education as the stepsister’ and to find the tools of analysis that will advance our understanding of adult education within a dehumanising world.

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