

John Dickson  
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10 years walking in freedom: A snapshot of adult education in the new South Africa.

**Abstract**

This paper sketches something of the social and political context of education in South Africa, and focuses the discussion with reference to one particular province (Mpumalanga). It describes adult education provision by two different providers. Both operate well outside the scope of most analyses of the formal education system in South Africa, however, they typify something of the flexible and innovative response community based models can make within a transitional context. The paper is written for those with an interest in adult education and/or social change who may not have an in-depth knowledge of the situation in South Africa. [South Africa, Mpumalanga, adult education, community based provision].

## **10 years walking in freedom: a snapshot of adult education in the new South Africa**

*John Dickson*

JD. "So, tell me Dudu – do you have running water in your township?"

D. "Yes, now we do."

JD. "24/7?"

D. "Yebo!"

JD. "And what about electricity?"

D. "Yes. I cook with electricity"

JD. "How about paved roads: is the main road there paved now?"

D. "Yes John - this is *the new* South Africa!"

(conversation with a C4L campus employee, 2/8/04)

### **Introduction**

27 April 2004 marked the anniversary of ten years of democracy in South Africa. This paper sketches something of the social and political context of education in what has been termed the new South Africa, and focuses the discussion with reference to one particular province (Mpumalanga). It describes adult education provision by two distinctly different providers. C4L – Lowveld Centre for Lifelong Learning, and Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust both operate 'under the radar' of most analyses of South African education, however, they typify something of the flexible and innovative response community based provision can make within a transitional context. The paper is written for those with an interest in adult education and/or social change who may not have an in-depth knowledge of the situation in South Africa. As such it aims to capture and describe something of the situation rather than offer a comprehensive analysis.

### **Post-apartheid challenges**

Arguably one of the defining moments in New Zealand's social and political history, the 1981 anti-Springbok rugby tour protests could also be described as a site of learning in social action (Foley, 1999) on a national scale. Issues of apartheid in South Africa, authoritarian policing and race relations at home polarised the country. If nothing else New Zealanders learned that issues of justice in Africa could have violent implications for sacred sporting cows at home. With the release of Nelson Mandela and the subsequent democratic election of 1994, some New Zealanders may have felt a justified sense of pride in contributing to the struggle for justice in South Africa. Meanwhile, the first African National Congress (ANC) government under President Mandela inherited a social landscape disfigured by decades of deliberate oppression of the majority black African population.

According to a relatively recent analysis of 46 "developing countries", South Africa ranked last in terms of "human resource development" (World Economic Forum, 1997). Indeed, the 2001 census records that nearly 18% of South Africans over 20 years had never received *any* formal education (Statistics South Africa 2001, p. 44). Various conventional measures of literacy estimate the figure of non-readers at anywhere up to 50% amongst the non-white population (Baatjes and Mathe, p. 400). Historically, the formal education system at all levels both reflected and had a function of supporting apartheid policies. Some examples relevant to this paper: under apartheid, spending on education for white children had been - depending on

the analysis used - between 6 and 15 times higher per capita than spending on black children (see Thomas cited in Ziderman 1999; Dlamini 2000; Mebrahtu et al 2000). Under the “Bantu” education system, Afrikaans was enforced as the medium of instruction despite the fact that it was for many students their second or third language. Science and mathematics was either not available as a subject choice or at least poorly resourced, excluding most black and coloured South Africans from numerous vocational pathways.

In 2004, despite the predictions of some, the Republic of South Africa maintains a dynamic, prosperous - though radically unequal – economy:

For most blacks, a cosy, middle-class life remains the sort of thing you see on TV. South Africa remains one of the world's most unequal societies, second only to Brazil. Half of the population - 23 million people - earn just over 3 per cent of the income. In contrast 72 per cent of the wealth is controlled by a tiny slice, which is mainly, but no longer exclusively, white (Walsh, 3/4/04).

This unequal economy grew by 3% in the first half of 2004, adding 2 points to the GDP. Former ANC freedom fighter turned Reserve Bank Governor Tito Mboweni has presided over the longest period of economic expansion in modern South African history. On the other hand, the strengthening of the local currency (the Rand) has led to about 12,300 gold mine employees being retrenched, and recent privatisation plans will see Telkom (the telecommunications stata) shed another 4,000 workers (This Day, 25/8/04). Not without its critics, this same ‘new South Africa’ is evidently a good place for global capital to do business: the World Economic Forum now ranks it “third most competitive for growth potential in Africa” (2004).

Meanwhile South Africa’s “Second [informal] Economy” operates on almost every corner, and dominates every township (mainly black African, urban areas). This economy is typified in the government’s own terms as “informal, marginalized and unskilled” (Government of South Africa 2004). Clearly, one of the key challenges facing South Africa is educational transformation - in its broadest sense - with a view to opening access to the quality of life and economic opportunities enjoyed by the few.

### **Policy and training reform**

The recently re-elected ANC government has had as a fundamental central strategy what it termed the Reconstruction and Development Program (RPD). Fundamental to this has been an impetus to develop the ‘human resource capacity’ of the nation, and “Investing in People” has been identified as one of six key priority areas. In practice this program has seen a complete re-evaluation and strategic restructuring of the entire education system. Some commentators argue that the changes are either too instrumentalist, or too ambitious, particularly as they occur in tandem with the push to diversify the employment profile and ownership of companies within the economy, primarily by means of the Black Economic Empowerment strategy (*The Ecologist* July/August 2003 has a useful critique of conditions in South Africa and ANC policy).

At the education and training policy level, the 1997 Skills Development Strategy provided the basis for subsequent legislation (Department of Labour, 1997). It included the development of multi-faceted training coordination and funding mechanisms, as well as a compulsory employer contribution for funding structured training. Although the radical reforms taking place across the South African educational landscape are too far reaching and contested to be dissected in this paper, some salient aspects with resonance for New Zealand practitioners bear mention.

Mirroring international trends towards standardisation, a National Qualifications Framework was introduced in 1995. This move has been widely welcomed across the education sector, and though still in the implementation stage it will at least provide a structure for developing benchmarks and consistency. Ziderman (1999, p.490) is correct to caution that the costs of maintaining a credible, current system provides a major risk in an educational sector which is already stretched.

The Skills Development Levy (SDL) was introduced in 1998. All organisations with a pay roll in excess of R250,000 (about NZ\$60K) or registered for PAYE purposes must contribute 1% of their monthly payroll to the levy (SDL). The policy states that 60% of the levy payments become available to the contributing organisation in the form of “Skills Grants” for purchasing training from any accredited provider (Skills Development Guide for South Africa 2004). The other portion of the fund is intended to finance the operation of the 25 Sector Education and Training Authorities, or Setas (similar to the ITOs of NZ). Anecdotal evidence suggests that accessing the funds is still a slow and overly bureaucratic process, and Labour Minister Membathisi Mdladlana has threatened to merge or close some non-performing Setas. Nearer to home, Australia introduced a similar “Training Guarantee levy” in 1990. It was suspended in 1994 in the light of its “perceived inefficiency and ongoing employer resistance” (Senker 1995, summary). It will be interesting to see if employer compulsion can prove an effective mechanism for improving education and training opportunities over time in South Africa.

Educators I spoke with were generally enthusiastic about the emerging national framework of training. Transparency and portability seemed to be the attractive features, with the promise of APL for experienced but non-qualified people being used as a major selling point for the NQF. The detailed 278 page Skills Development Guide for South Africa 2004 (Rainbow SA 2004b.), almost completely dedicated to explaining how the various systems and processes are intended to work, gives some sense of the multi-tiered complexity and bureaucracy of the emerging model. My guess is that the model will be consolidated as it evolves; there are elements of adapting imported models as well as experimentation occurring. As stated above, the performance of the Seta layer is already under close scrutiny, as is the role of the 27 Industrial Training Boards which are tasked with fiscal management of the Skills Development Levy. (For comprehensive analyses of training reforms in South Africa see: King and McGrath, 2002; Harber, 2001; or Ziderman 1999).

### **The challenges of change and reform**

Paolo Federighi, former president of the European Association for the Education of Adults, used the useful notion of ‘complementarity’ to describe the way in which community based adult education, by its very nature, can function,

...[to supplement] the actions of other systems managed by principal agents, such as the state or businesses. Such systems are characterized by a high index of institutionalisation, which sometimes prevents the supply of training from reaching the areas with the greatest demand. The adult education system, thanks to the multiplicity of organizational types (associational and non-associational) involved, and its broader geographical presence, is able to ensure a better territorial and social distribution of...opportunities... (1995, p.9)

The 'business opportunities' which the Skills Development Levy, and the overall restructuring of the educational system in South Africa offer have led to a proliferation of private enterprises offering training. The National Training Directory 2004, for example, list over 600 "human resource and training providers" offering everything from "mentoring skills programmes" to "diversity and transformation management" (Rainbow South Africa, 2004a.). Federighi's "multiplicity" does not necessarily equate to quality, and 'privatised capture' may be as much a threat to democratic and liberatory forms of adult education provision as the former 'state capture' under apartheid. Likewise, the tendency, as Foley argues, to simply reorganise education as a tool for the "production of human capital" (2000, p.287) is simply reductionism, and unlikely to yield the promised "transformation". Nevertheless, the government is clearly attempting to align the various levels of the education and training sector to achieve both equity and economic goals.

Worth noting is the most recent in-depth analysis of educational change across the various levels of education in South Africa, which suggests that movements in adult education and related spheres are re-emerging with a revitalised emancipatory agenda (Chisholm, 2004). Within the governing ANC there continues a robust debate around the policy agenda and the overall economic direction.

### **Mpumalanga Province**

This section of the paper relates to Mpumalanga province of South Africa. One of the least urbanised provinces, literally translated Mpumalanga means 'the place where the sun rises'. It borders Mozambique and Swaziland and contains the internationally renown Kruger Game Park. The population of around 3 million, are 90% Black African. SiSwati and isiZulu are the most widely spoken languages in the home, although Afrikaans and English are also widely spoken and still tend to be the languages of the formal business and education sectors.

According to 1999 figures, nearly a quarter of the adult population of Mpumalanga were unemployed. Of those who were employed half were earning less than the equivalent of NZ\$80 per week (Statistics South Africa, 1999). A South African Institute for Race Relations Survey (2000/01) indicated that approximately 64% of the provinces population (or 1.79 million people) were living in poverty during 1996. Poverty was defined as the "minimum financial requirements of members of a family if they are to maintain their health and have acceptable standards of hygiene and sufficient clothing for their needs" (cited in Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, p.16). The link between poverty and HIV/Aids prevalence is underlined by the 30% infection rate in the province (Statistics South Africa 2001).

Despite the negative indicators, Mpumalanga has a number of strategic advantages over other provinces. The new Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport is linked

to the recent creation of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. This 35,000 square kilometre wildlife park straddles Kruger Park, the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, and Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe. It will be one of the largest conservation areas in the world. High-end tourism features large in the economic plans for the province. Also of note is the The Maputo Development Corridor which links Witbank, near Johannesburg, with the port of Maputo in Mozambique. This Corridor concept includes infrastructural development projects such as rail, telecommunications, and improved trans-border logistics. The airport and the corridor bring likely opportunities for employment growth, and opportunities for new small and medium enterprises, particularly relating to labour intensive floriculture and agriculture. Without broader opportunities for education and training the black African community are unlikely to be the beneficiaries of these developments. Balancing preservation of the fragile lowveld environment will also be challenged by this growth model, and eco-environmental strategies are providing further new opportunities for community development.

In terms of post-compulsory provision, Mpumalanga lags well behind the rest of South Africa in access to education. In 1996 it was one of only two of the nine provinces with neither a university campus or a Technikon (roughly equivalent to a NZ Polytechnic). The situation has improved somewhat with the establishment of a campus of Tswane University of Technology in the provincial capital, Nelspruit.

In the scenario outlined above civil-society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) face huge demands in responding to the multiple challenges of unemployment, skills and micro-enterprise development needs and the Aids pandemic. Affordable, accessible and technologically appropriate capacity building of these sectors is a matter of urgent necessity. Furthermore, any such capacity building needs to be flexible, culturally appropriate, and local. C4L - Lowveld Centre for Lifelong Learning and the Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust are just two organisations working with this in mind.

#### **C4L - Lowveld Centre for Lifelong Learning**

C4L sees its mission as “*enabling development practitioners, supporting transformation and hastening poverty alleviation by providing a collaborative service for lifelong learning*”. With no salaried faculty as such, this organisation nevertheless succeeds in servicing a multi-purpose, rural campus with accommodation for 35, and generating about 70% of its income from training and consultancy. Established in 1999, the Centre has a board of governors with expertise in development, and education within the African context: the board reflects the “rainbow nation” concept, being multi-cultural and multi-lingual.

Courses are being taught mainly in English, Portuguese or French, and delivered either on the White River campus or out-of-country locations such as Angola, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Courses are benchmarked at Levels 4 and 5 of the South African National Qualifications Framework, and C4L has accreditation with the Services Seta. Operationally C4L summarise their mission as follows:

Our overall aim, constitutionally speaking, is “to provide education incorporating Christian values”. This has been further elaborated in the following seven points:

1. To promote a culture of learning and South-South exchange in the

SADC region.

2. To provide a single, shared venue for diverse resource people and groups to deliver their services variously.
3. To establish a resource centre for the Lowveld of Mpumalanga.
4. To model sustainable development by running a human service which is largely demand-driven and partially financed by the private sector.
5. To integrate public sector, private sector and non-profit sector training onto one single campus, in order to raise awareness as to their differences and commonalities.
6. To promote holistic learning - that is the inter-connection of the material, the intellectual and the spiritual dimensions of development.
7. To prepare and deliver capacity-building services and publications which do not duplicate what is already available, but which fill gaps.

(www.c4l.org)

Perhaps reflecting its unique character, C4L has even generated its own unique vocabulary to describe itself: for example *interspersity*. This is a term to describe the faculty model in which non-salaried professionals with strong connections and commitment to the C4L vision are at once interconnected yet dispersed across sectors within Southern African. Depending on the course, regularly rostered teaching staff are drawn from development consultants, policy analysts, environmentalists, clergy, entrepreneurs, educators and/or community mobilisers. The core of this interspersity comprise Canadians, South Africans and Zimbabweans, with regular visits from an Australian academic who provides an accredited pathway from the C4L Disaster Management module into the Masters programme in development studies at Deakin University. C4L also sees itself as a *ligament builder*, contributing energy and resources to networks such as the Pan East Coast AIDS Network (PECAN), BOROKO youth leadership and diversity training network and the Wilderness Guides training project.

C4L has what it terms 'flagship courses': short, full-time one to three week courses offered on an annual schedule with themes as diverse as Project Planning, Management And Evaluation; Human Resource Management; Prophetic Peacemaking for Pastors; PRA (Participatory Rapid Appraisal); Training of Trainers and Strategic Planning, to list a few. The dominant feature of all offerings is the focus on capacity building, cultural diversity as a resource and a vision of "Africa...on a par with other continents, and civil society groups...on a par with public and private sector organisations" (www.c4l.org). C4L's learners tend to be drawn from the many non-governmental, civil society organisations, and are predominantly black African. Most work amongst poor communities in various social and economic development activities. Since its establishment in 1999, C4L has attracted over 500 participants from across the Southern African Development Corridor, many of them women. What is perhaps most notable is that for many of these learners C4L is a rare and often first opportunity to undertake formal learning of this kind.

My own experience of learning at C4L would characterise it as high participation, reflective, problem posing and rejuvenating. Integratory, in the sense that informal and incidental learning is valued and sought to bear on real world problems. Scheduled visits to grassroots projects within the local catchment add authenticity and serve to ground the theory within local realities.

### **Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust (MRTT)**

The Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust (MRTT) is what is known in South Africa as a registered Section 21 Company. Under these terms it is a not-for-profit company, receiving core funding only for salaries from the Department of Education. It was one of three training structures established in 1994 with a brief to provide training for the unemployed. In addition these training trusts have an expanding but more problematic role in providing enterprise based training for employees of small and medium sized enterprises (with upwards of 3 trainees). Since its inception, MRTT has been involved with (mainly short duration) training for over 18,000 people in Mpumalanga, Gauteng and Limpopo provinces. It is managed by a Board of Directors, has 42 full-time staff, and operates out of 6 operational centres including its own training facilities (MRTT Profile 2004, p.10).

In an in-depth analysis of training reform in South Africa Ziderman (1999: 481) suggested that, historically, the Regional Training Centres have not been able to build the sorts of links with industry that could lead to a diversification of income away from government contracts and tenders. He also justifiably criticises their focus on short term training interventions (which to be fair is a function of Department of Labour funding policies). That may be so, but what is notable about the MRTT is the way it has been able to work intentionally at grassroots levels with the disempowered, high need communities which make up its constituency. Formal and informal community organisations have provided potential partners. As such MRTT has been able to provide a crucial link between the central government's "programme of action" and the aspirations of communities targeted by these strategies. For example, housing.

The 1999 census recorded that about 71% of Mpumalanga's population lived in dwellings defined as "made of bricks, and...on a separate stand". Conservatively, approximately 25% of families were living in "informal dwellings/shacks". More acutely, 46% of Mpumalanga dwellings comprised 2 or fewer rooms, serving an average household of 4 persons (all statistics: Statistics South Africa 1999 or 2001). A key objective of the ANC's "programme of action" has been the construction of affordable "formal housing". The principal mechanism for operationalising this objective after 1994 was the Reconstruction and Development Programme, most commonly referred to as the RDP. Although replaced by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy in 1996, the RDP acronym has become the popular term for many government "projects" in the townships.

Since 2003 MRTT has been the lead provider of skills training for the Witbank Housing Project, which most recently involved the construction of 5,000 RDP dwellings (Witbank News). Accredited, short-duration, off-job training has been delivered to unemployed and under-employed people from local communities in bricklaying, plastering, painting, plumbing, electrical work, project management and business studies. Longer duration, higher level training, including a leadership focus for those completing the preliminary phase, led into employment on the actual construction work.

Similar skills development programmes – with and without RDP funding – have been held in numerous other areas and townships. The mobility factor of taking the training to the townships, and working with grassroots community groups to identify skill-gaps and training needs has become a feature of the way MRTT is responding

to the challenges and opportunities of the new training environment. The ability to work successfully over a number of years with township communities, offering training locally, speaks of the skills and credibility of MRTT's multi-lingual, multi-cultural staff.

Like C4L, the Mpumalanga Regional Training Trust also has a diverse range of programmes ranging from the Micro-Enterprise MBA through Workplace Skills Facilitator training to Public Finance Management Act Compliance. However, the core activity remains technical skills training, and MRTT has Seta accreditation in Construction, Manufacturing and Engineering, Energy and Service sector. In addition the training offered includes content around the tendering processes used by provincial government, and people completing MRTT training have gone on to successfully tender for RDP construction work in their own right.

One of the striking things about South Africa for the visitor from New Zealand is the prevailing geographic separation of the urban black and urban white residential areas. This is a legacy of apartheid when most black South Africans were restricted to 'homelands'. MRTT is now involved in the launch of a new Hospitality and Tourism Academy, located near kaNyamazane, formerly a homeland.

[kaNyamazane was] established in 1968 after the people were forcibly removed from the township of Mbombela, in order to serve the labour needs of the metals and minerals plant (MMC). This systematic policy of urban apartheid thus resulted in a convenient source of cheap labour for the industrial area that was just far enough so that the responsibility for providing in their developmental needs, e.g. schools, housing, etc. rested with the tribal authorities. This resulted in a situation where Nelspruit [the nearby Provincial capital]...exhibits an urban structure that contains a previously 'white' developed core, which is well serviced and provided numerous opportunities for this section of the population. In contrast, the periphery supports a largely 'black' population that has little access to basic services and development opportunities. (Adams and Moila, 2003b, p.4).

Identified as a "crime flashpoint of national concern" in 1999, kaNyamazane was seen as a springboard for trans-national syndicates who worked with corrupt government officials and police officers. Crime was seen as a major factor hindering economic development and community wellbeing (Lubisi, 2001, p.20). This situation has led to a focus on the area for "upliftment" (a phrase often heard in the new South Africa). An outcome of this was the targeting of central and provincial government funding towards projects in the area.

Jointly funded by the departments of education, finance and economic affairs, the NZ\$3 million Hospitality and Tourism Academy project will offer various tourism training programmes - from short courses to diplomas. The operational base will comprise a refurbished hotel (26 rooms) as well as classroom facilities. About 22 people will be employed there and 75 students will be trained on site at any one time. The focus in 2004 will be on catering, accommodation and establishing the hotel facilities. Future possibilities could include tour guiding and ecotourism, as the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park is in close proximity. In this project MRTT's facilitation and training expertise, provincial economic growth strategies and central

government's initiatives intersect, providing an excellent example of Federighi's (1995, op. cit.) previously mentioned complementarity.

## Reflection

N'Zimande and Mathieson assert that educational change in South Africa needs to be understood as "a struggle reflecting the broader contradictions – and struggles – within the society itself" (cited in Mebrahtu *et al* (2000), p.107). Many aspects of struggle and contestation around adult education remain unmentioned in this paper: essentially the focus has been on what is being achieved by two organisations in the space available to them. This aspect of the paper comes from first-hand observation and informal dialogue with those educators and local community members. I have simply tried to discern for myself something of how the two organisations described relate to and hear the needs of their learner communities (servanthood); how they utilise their available resources (stewardship); and what motivates them (mission). I recognise that such an analysis will always be partial, and reflects my own biases and preconceptions. If nothing else I hope it serves to "deepen insight and to enliven commitment" (Carr and Kemmis 1986, p.93), particularly for those who feel a sense of solidarity with Africa. For those looking for "a full social analysis of [South African] education which takes its historical roots seriously" I suggest the recently published *Changing Class: Education and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2004, p.4).

In Southern Africa everything in education now has a HIV/Aids dimension. Ray Achilla, a board member at C4L, took a copy of my institution's prospectus to peruse. One of his observations was of the absence of training or even comment around HIV/Aids. In a context where 30% HIV positive is not unusual, people I spoke to found it difficult to conceive that New Zealand has less than 0.1% HIV positive. C4L Director Chuck Stephens, a development consultant with many years experience in Africa, describes the situation as a "slow onset disaster". Within this context HIV/Aids related education, awareness raising and impact mitigation must be integrated across curricula, formal and non-formal. Capacity building takes on a new dimension and urgency. The *Aids Brief for Sectoral Planners and Managers: Education Sector* puts it bluntly: "does the education sector have adequate replacement stock to cover absence through illness and attrition through death?" (Whiteside and Smart. undated, p.3).

My overall summary of C4L, MRTT and the other vocational education and training organisations I visited would be: enthusiasm, transition and massive challenge. The educators and institutions are faced with huge pressures, and a burden of expectation placed upon them from communities, learners and Government. South Africa is looking to the education sector, in particular the post-compulsory sector, to be the catalyst for "transformation". It remains to be seen if those expectations can be met, particularly along the current policy lines. Deacon and Parker have argued that educational policy reforms in South Africa are still "profoundly silent" in relation to the most historically disadvantaged populations: rural people, women, the unemployed, and youth (1996, cited in Harber, 2001. p.103). C4L and MRTT, though quite different in form, operation and target communities, are both well positioned and proactive in working with these strata of the population. Without the commitment of providers such as these it is unlikely that the rhetoric and hope of "a

better South Africa and a better world” (Government of South Africa, 2004) could possibly be realised.

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Ngiyabonga!

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**Note on contributor:**

***John Dickson***

has been involved in adult education for about 12 years, including work in New Zealand, Mozambique and Australia. John works at Bay of Plenty Polytechnic / Te Kuratini o Poike as an Academic Advisor.

*Address for correspondence:*

Bay of Plenty Polytechnic

Private Bag 12001

Tauranga 3030

Phone (07) 544 0920

Email: [john.dickson@boppoly.ac.nz](mailto:john.dickson@boppoly.ac.nz)