

IT'S AN ILL WIND THAT BLOWS NOBODY ANY GOOD: ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN BOPHUHATSWANA AND THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE

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RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In 1987, nine years ago, a needs analysis for adult basic education was done in the area then known as Bophuthatswana. In 1996 a short follow-up study was done which concentrated on departmental and government reports and interviews with government officials. Cognizance was taken of the new status of the area, now called the North West Province and an attempt was made to look at the work done by the adult education section during its period under the Bophuthatswana government, taking into account the recommendations of the research monograph, which was published in 1990.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aim of the follow-up study was to see what the effect of the semi-autonomous status of the former "homeland" had been on adult basic education. Also to what extent had this aspect of education changed since its government's reincorporation into greater South Africa. Given that the monograph might have added a certain input into adult education-of what value was this input today ?

INTRODUCTION

Bophuthatswana was one of the Bantustans which the former apartheid regime founded for political reasons. The purpose of the "homelands" as they were called, was to make the separation of the races justifiable not only to South

Africans but also to the outside world. Bophuthatswana was founded in the 1970s in order to persuade the Tswanas to return to their "homeland." Blacks had no rights in white areas but the sugar coating on the pill was that certain rights were available to them in these so-called "black" areas (Kruger,1975:333).

In order to make the scheme feasible, large sums of money were poured into the Bantustans to give them the semblance of an independent government. The capital of Bophuthatswana, Mmbatho, was built up in this way with a university, government buildings, a supreme court, and other large structures, all built for the purpose of impressing the world that the place was truly independent.

Today the territory has been incorporated as a province into the new South Africa. It is basically the same territory with an additional urban element added in the form of a number of conservative Afrikaner towns, and the financially beneficial incorporation of certain platinum mines (Sebopela,1996). Its new name is the North West Province and since the 1994 election, it has an ANC government.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Although the scheme was a sham, the internal governing of these homelands was to a large extent independent of South Africa as a whole (Kruger,1975:333). Lucas Mangope, who ruled the area as a dictator, nevertheless appeared to show some favor to adult education. In both 1985, and 1994 he allowed members of the adult education section of the department of education in Bophuthatswana to travel to Israel to gain a better understanding of the adult education measures implemented by the Israelis (Sebopela,1996; Bop, 1986)

Bophuthatswana lasted as an entity for nearly twenty years. In spite of the 1985 visit to Israel, for the first ten years of its existence little was changed. From the late 1980s until the regime fell in 1994, however, as will be noted, the situation changed for the better. Israel Sebopela who assumed control of the section after 1990, stated that although none of the measures he noted in the course of his visit to Israel in 1994 were implemented by him due to the fall of the regime, nevertheless much of the intended changes which are now taking place appear to him to be very similar to the Israeli initiatives in the field (Sebopela,1996).

The efforts at adult education of any kind were initially very limited, and much was inherited from the period before the formation of Bophuthatswana. There were 228 adult education centers with, in 1987, a budget of R3 million Today there are 316 centers for adult education , and literacy which, has a budget of R5 million. The increase in the number of centers has vastly increased the number of adult learners in formal education courses, and vocational skills, from around 4000 students in 1987 to over 24000 in 1995 (Roth,1990:9;NWP,1996:5).

NUMBERS OF ABE LEARNERS

The estimated number of adult learners in 1987 was four thousand. No figures were given for literacy learners but the Chief Inspector of Adult Education estimated the number to be about a thousand. (Nthathe, 1987). By 1989 there were 1596 literacy learners out of a total of 10 698 adult learners (Bop,1990:3). In the 1991 Annual Report of the Adult Education Division of the Department of Education, the number of adults learning literacy was 1764 (Bop,1991:3). The 1995 report, however, showed a drop in these very small figures-only 1600 had taken literacy courses, out of the many thousands of the region's illiterate population. However, adult learners who were involved in attaining vocational skills had increased to 24005 (NWP,1996:4; RSA,ABET,1995). Thus from the above statistics, it appears that the number of literacy learners has remained static. Given the probable rate of illiteracy in the province, this must be viewed as a serious state of affairs.

There were only three buildings for Adult Education in Bophuthatswana in 1987. Most of the centers were housed in

schools which doubled as adult community centers but in reality these turned out to be afternoon school classes attended by adults (Bop,1986:3). This resulted in a certain amount of overlapping between the formal school system, and the adult education courses as many parents could not afford to pay school fees , and so sent their children from the age of about twelve, to attend the cheaper afternoon sessions.

This, of course did nothing for the already eroded self-esteem of the illiterate rural women who were the mainstay of the adult literacy classes (Roth,1990:9).

Due to the lack of electricity adult education centers in the period in which the original research was carried out, operated mainly in the afternoons. There were some few night schools in these remote areas which operated by candlelight. Only the ones around the capital of Mmabatho had electricity (Roth,1990:8). A program of electrification was introduced in the late 1980s, and this intensified after 1994, partially due to the emphasis placed on electrification by the central government. Now the department is apparently unwilling to start a adult learning center unless the school building in which it is to be housed has electricity (Sebopela,1996). It is undoubtedly a praiseworthy objective to aim to provide for the electrification of all centers but a blanket ban on the formation of such centers in the absence of electricity might stifle development among communities which have none.

LITERACY

The literacy level of the North West Province at present has been estimated as being 68,5% (Bop,1993:2). This is at best an informed guess but an accurate estimate is impossible until the country as a whole takes a national census incorporating this question. We do not even know our national literacy levels at the moment and the estimate of 15 million illiterates, which has been accepted for many years is now recognized as being only that, an estimate. (ABE Conference,1994:51). In 1987 a spokesman for the Department of Statistics estimated that the number of people who had no education at all in Bophuthatswana as between 36% -43% It is unlikely, that this estimate has in reality been reduced. This means that most probably at least half the population are completely illiterate (Roth,1990:39).

ABE IN BOPHUTHATSWANA

The adult basic education program originally adopted in Bophuthatswana was taken from the South African Department of Education and Training, and was originally uninspiring being an adaptation of the old Operation Upgrade method with a small smattering of pseudo- Freirian input (Roth, 1990:20).

The literacy course in Bophuthatswana initially only differed from that in greater South Africa in that it did not offer a course in Afrikaans. The course commenced with Setswana, as the great majority of illiterate adults of that region speak Setswana as their mother tongue. The limitation to Setswana literacy is that the range of reading matter, and the scope for wider communication is limited. This meant that literacy instruction did not only teach reading and writing skills but also had to include second language instruction, in this case in English. The exclusion of Afrikaans and the inclusion of English was understandable in the political circumstances of the time but difficult for the rural people involved. Afrikaans is more commonly spoken as a second language in the rural areas of the North West Province than is English (Nthathé,1987;Roth,1990:9).

The courses themselves cost the literacy learners very little, only R2 per year, although students were expected to buy their study material themselves. The report issued by the Department in 1995 bemoans the fact that adult learners have to provide themselves with stationary (NWP,1995:6).The extreme poverty of these people makes it difficult to sustain literacy learning unless some way is found to overcome this obstacle (Bop,1994:6).

The course did not change in any way from its inception until the demise of Bophuthatswana in 1994. The government was unwilling to replace the course of instruction with any other because the South African Department of Education and Training gave it out for nothing to the Bophuthatswana Education Department, whereas they would have had to pay

for any other course (Sebopela,1996). Alternatives such a self-generating innovative literacy courses were not and are still not being contemplated. (Van Wyk,1996). Such innovations are very informal and would probably be difficult to incorporate in the provincial adult education format.

ABE IN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE

Since 1994, all children in the new South Africa have the right to attend primary schools, and do not have to pay for them. The result of the re-incorporation of Bophuthatswana in South Africa has led to the withdrawal of children from literacy classes. Only adults over the age of twenty are now permitted to attend these centers. One of the significant drawbacks of the former system of adult education has thus been removed (Sebopela,1996).

Additionally, the North West Province intends to replace the literacy curriculum by one compiled by a non-government organization (NGO) in the region (Van Wyk,1996; Sebopela,1996).

An improved curriculum might well be part of the impetus needed to increase the very low enrollment which the course has at present.

NGOs will also be expected to train adult educators. The provincial government is thus envisioning a partnership between the NGOs (which the previous regime did not recognize) and adult basic education (Sebopela,1996; Van Wyk,1996). This is a total departure from previous years, and is something that has been adopted throughout South Africa.

Most NGOs were funded by the opponents of apartheid before 1994, and were thus not favorably viewed by the then government. They have developed a certain amount of expertise in the field of curriculum development, and the development of materials but how many South Africans actually attained literacy through their efforts has not been researched. In Bophuthatswana their efforts in literacy were limited to about 150 learners per year (Sebopela,1987; Sebopela,1996). They too, appeared to have problems in attracting the illiterate to their courses. It is to be hoped that the new curriculum and materials which the adult education centers will adopt for their literacy learners will be from those NGOs with a proven track record.

THE EMPHASIS ON ABET BY THE ANC SINCE 1994

The aims of the adult education policy of the ANC when they came to power in 1994 were to try to upgrade the life skills of the industrial work force, many of whom are undereducated for the jobs for which they had been employed. It was felt that structural linkages should be formed between adult basic education, training boards, and industrial education in general. Thus the upgrading of skills and the implementation of skills were not present before was seen as a priority in the field of adult basic education. The emphasis now decisively shifted to adult basic education and training rather than adult basic education alone. It was and is now understood on a world wide basis that adults learn literacy for a purpose and in order to make adults literate skills training in conjunction with literacy, is essential (CEPD,1994:3-4).

EMPHASIS ON SKILLS TRAINING IN BOPHUHATSWANA

The 1990 research report had emphasized the importance of functional literacy and the introduction of skills training as an essential component of attracting adults to become literate. This aspect appears to have been emphasized from that time, and the North West Province is thus in a favorable position to carry out the directives of the central government in

this regard.

From 1990 a vocational certificate was given out to adult learners who attended the 96 vocational centers started in that year. In that year also, it was reported that the dressmaking section of the practical skills division of adult education had shown a 35,7% increase over the previous year (Bop,1990:2). Centers offering practical skills like cookery, typing, knitting and weaving were also established (Bop,1991:2-5).

However, the integration of the skills courses with the literacy classes appears not to have been carried through. Although significant strides were made in introducing an ever increasing number of skills , the literacy component appears to have been a relatively unimportant aspect of the skills training. The reasons for this are unclear.

What is missing from the annual reports but is of great interest is a consistent reporting of all the numbers who do the skills programs in the adult education centers. Records have been kept of centers, which for example offer cookery, typing and knitting, since at least 1990. Included in the reports are functions centering around dressmaking exhibitions which testify to the popularity such courses enjoy. Nowhere, however are we consistently informed of the numbers who take these courses (Bop,1991:3-4). In the 1994 Annual Report student figures are again given with the exclusion of the numbers doing practical skills. In this report the skills are also not enumerated except for two examples, namely woodwork and simple car mechanics (NWP,1995:2).

As noted above, the reports do occasionally give some information on the skills program. For example the report for 1993 states that there were 153 dressmaking tutors who had 1736 students. One might well contrast this to the literacy students of that year who only had 989 who attended but did not necessarily successfully complete the course (Bop,1994:3- 4). In 1994 there were 2745 dressmaking students but only 1083 adults learning literacy (NWP,1995:5). This shows popularity of such courses.

The 1995 Report is far more informative in this respect than previous reports. For example, it lists the part-time tutors who are presumably the ones that teach practical skills. These were said to number 2 853. This report also for the first time gives both the number of skills being offered (ten) and also the number of adults which took these courses (1 014). The skills were dressmaking, knitting, weaving, needlework, brick- laying, motor mechanics, health care, textile design, computer literacy and secretarial courses.

It is not noted to what extent the adults taking these course were already literate, although literacy can be presumed in those taking computer and secretarial skills.

It also contrasts with the previously mentioned report which gave such a large number for those doing only one particular course whereas the impression now is that the numbers are much smaller. In addition this particular report gives courses which were offered at certain centers but does not go on to state the numbers who took these courses. Crocheting, gardening and leather work are not mentioned elsewhere in the report. Whether this was because such course were offered but not taken up is not clear. (NWP,1996:2-5)

Given the paucity of statistics provided for these courses and the general lack of information on them in the yearly reports of the Adult Education section, it appears that they are regarded as of secondary importance to the formal section of the adult education syllabus. There is no doubt that raising the educational standards of adults by making formal qualifications available to them through the adult educations section is important.

However, the low numbers of those taking the ABE, and in particular the literacy course shows that something must be done to raise up those who have no education at all and who are obviously not being attracted by the ABE course as it exists at present. This, together with the interest shown in the practical skills courses offered by the department suggests that efforts directed at incorporating a literacy component into the practical skills courses would prove beneficial. Insistence must also be placed on the fact that ABE is an intrinsic part of the skills training course.

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE ADULT EDUCATION SECTION IN GOVERNMENT

One of the advantages of the regionalism of the Mangope era was that unlike the case in South Africa, funding was provided to the University of Bophuthatswana directly by the Department of Education. This led to the development of a close relationship between this arm of government, and the university, particularly its Institute of Adult Education (Van Wyk,1996).

This Institute was instrumental in the founding of a major self-funding non-governmental organization (Malet) which oversees adult basic education projects on a village level which includes literacy instruction. Since its formation in the late 1980s, it has been a notable success story, and has won the Presidential Prize from the new government for its efforts in the field. Another effort of the Institute is its journal *Matlahasedi*, which prints articles of a high academic standard on literacy, and related topics. Its special focus on rural areas makes it unique in this field in South Africa (Sebopela,1996).

Given the advantage of the relatively small geographical area involved, much was done which in the centralized atmosphere of greater South Africa could not be accomplished at this time. For example, in 1990 the University of Bophuthatswana funded a research fellowship on the literacy needs of the area. Undoubtedly due to the fact that no other investigation into adult basic education had ever been made in the region, the resultant publication made an important impact on the government officials directly involved with adult education, and it was used by them as a policy document. Such a situation could not have occurred in South Africa itself, where research instigated by a university could not have been adopted in such a way (Sebopela,1996).

This practical relationship gave the region certain structural advantages which were unfortunately partially offset by the political difficulties which the university experienced under the Mangope regime. In an interview with the new head of Education Auxiliary Services which includes adult basic education and training, the Director felt that in spite of political differences which at times surfaced between Unibo and the Mangope government, the relationship between the university and its surrounding governmental structures could now be viewed as a positive inheritance of the former government (Van Wyk,1996).

COOPERATION BETWEEN THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE AND THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT

The extent to which the new regional government can look to the national government for encouragement and help is also not clear. So far very little has taken place, and what has been done has proved more of a damp squab than anything else. The only initiative so far taken by central government has been the "Itukeng Literacy Campaign" launched on the 11 of February 1996, six years to the day since the release of Mandela, itself a popular strategy. The director of auxiliary education services in the North West Province, expressed the hope that its impact would be felt on the rural villages, and by the laborers who work, and live on the commercial farms, which are particularly neglected educational areas (Van Wyk,1996). Given the dismal record of such campaigns in the past in other countries, it appears very unlikely that the South African Campaign would have any lasting impact on literacy. Literacy campaigns have usually been the result of the need felt by an informed citizenry for political and social change, a change in which literacy is seen as a pivotal factor. This is not yet the situation in South Africa and thus the prognosis for the campaign is poor (Wedepohl,1984,:28; IDRC,1979,:20).

ABET INITIATIVES SINCE THE FORMATION OF THE NORTH WEST PROVINCE

A directive from central government has led to the formation of ABET councils at both national, and regional level in order to discuss issues of relevance to adult basic education. This is a departure from the policy of the previous government and should have an impact on adult literacy at both national and regional levels. The councils are headed by a senior political person, and the vice chair is head of education for the government or the province as the case may be. The membership of the ABET councils has in addition an equal numbers representatives from other institutions,

employers, trade unions, youth organizations etc. It appears that in the commendable aim to democratize the council the main literacy provider, the director of adult education will be completely marginalized (CEPD, 1994:10).

ADULT EDUCATION PERSONNEL

Initially, and perhaps not surprisingly, the person responsible for adult education in Bophuthatswana was a teacher who had no qualifications in adult education. The reason he obtained the position was that he was a personal friend of Lucas Mangope (Nthathu, 1987). However, in 1990 he retired, and the person who took his place had a degree, and a post-graduate qualification in adult education (Sebopela, 1987).

One of the purposes of the Bantustan system was undoubtedly to provide job outlets for qualified black intellectuals who due to apartheid, were denied job opportunities in South Africa proper, no matter how able or well qualified they might have been. As far back as the time of Prime Minister J.B.M. Hertzog it was believed that the fomenters of revolution were the black intellectuals, and this was one way of providing jobs for them, and getting them out of the more volatile South African urban areas at the same time (*Cape Times*, 1925). The consequences of this policy was that it led to a beneficial influx of relatively qualified personnel to the Bantustans, areas to which they would otherwise not have gone.

Thus from an initially under qualified person in charge of adult education, the post went in 1990 to a person who had not only adult education qualifications, but also a great deal of enthusiasm. It was due to a combination of these two factors that led to the improvement in the field. One of the improvements suggested in the research monograph was the introduction of instructors who were not teachers but out of work matriculants in the rural areas. By 1995 these part-time tutors numbered 2853 (NWP, 1996:)

This had the result of increasing the pool of available instructors, which had formerly been limited to full-time teachers who were prepared to take after hour work at a relatively low pay. The result of using unemployed rural matriculated youth was that it injected some much needed capital into rural households which were without significant financial support. At that time literacy trainers were being paid the equivalent of R9 per lesson. It later rose to R20-25 (Sebopela, 1996). This must have been a significant income booster in impoverished rural areas, and probably made a significant difference to the households involved.

However, the new provincial government has made it clear that from 1996 first preference is to be given to qualified but unemployed teachers in all of its educational endeavors, including ABET. Teachers who are already employed will be recruited only when the regional officials have made all attempts to recruit unemployed teachers. It is apparent that the regional government has decided to drop the whole scheme of using unemployed local youth in the rural areas in preference to giving employment to qualified teachers. This is a measure which will prove of benefit to those adults taking high school courses but its benefit to literacy learners is doubtful. This decision was made at regional, not national level (NWP, 1996: Press Statement).

NORTH WEST PROVINCE PERSONNEL CHANGES

The personnel structure for adult education in the new province, has also changed. Previously there was only a chief inspector who headed the adult education section of the department of education. Now adult education has been placed in the directorate of auxiliary services. Under this directorate comes the deputy director of adult basic education and training which includes adult literacy. However, he is only one of a number of deputy directors in this section, the others dealing with rural education, farm education, and other specialized areas of education (Van Wyk, 1996). It is difficult to see what emphasis will be given to adult basic education, when it appears to have such a lowly place in the hierarchy of the province's education department.

Many NGOs who operated in South Africa under the apartheid regime consisted of ANC supporters. Some of them have now obtained employment in the government sector. The new sub  directorate of Adult Basic Education and Training in the North West Province is headed by just such a person. The gains in the adult literacy field from employing such people is that they are generally young and enthusiastic, with good academic qualifications but no significant organizational experience .

FINANCE

Funding of adult basic education was always a problem. It was not only literacy which was a neglected area, but adult education as a whole. Although it is apparent that the new regional government is fully aware that literacy is the cornerstone for any improvements in the lives of the people they govern, and that the enthusiasm, and good will is undoubtedly present, it is not clear to what extent this will be translated into action financially.

Funding for adult education as a whole appears to be more problematic at present than in previous years. During 1995 community colleges for the first time became part of the ABET scene, also certain cultural centers have been added to the North West Province. It is clear that the regional government does not have the finances to maintain these centers, and they are hoping that the communities (mostly themselves poverty stricken), in which they are situated will maintain them. After July 1995, lack of funding suspended the activities of those adult education centers which provided education for adults up to matric. This does not bode well for the future of adult education in general or indeed for adult literacy in particular (Roth,1990:9;NWP,1995).

A significant statement made in the 1994 central government ABET Report is that "In the absence of sufficient resources it will not be possible to give effect to the stated commitment on the part of the ANC to making provision to ABET a national priority." As has been noted the Mangope government was not prepared to make a commitment to adult education. The ANC is committed to ABET. But two questions must be asked in this connection. Firstly, how important is the literacy component in their perception of ABET? Secondly, will the ANC have the money to go with this commitment? This is the question not only on a national but also on a regional level as well.

ABET POLICY NOW AS COMPARED TO THAT UNDER THE FORMER REGIME

The final document outlining the curriculum for adult education has not been drafted but the guidelines are those as set out in ANC policy statements, namely the emphasis on training, and vocational skills and lifelong learning.

Initially the South African state in the apartheid era had little commitment to either adult education or literacy. The regional government of Mangope to some extent initially reflected this disinterest. Fuller has pointed out that where the central state is weak, alternative roles, and pedagogical practices are more likely to flourish (Fuller,1992:133-143).

This happened in Bophuthatswana where from 1990 certain measures were put into place which encouraged the growth of functional literacy skills, and which were then not practiced by the central government in Pretoria. At that time the central government had neither the will not the interest to institute changes in this direction.

CONCLUSION

The new central government has the will to focus on adult education. Its commitment appears to emphasize just those aspects which were started in Bophuthatswana in the late 1980s, namely an emphasis on vocational skills. However, the emphasis is not only on skills, but also on the integration of these skills with some aspects of formal learning, which must start with a literate and numerate base.

The new, and existing personnel, the cooperation between the provincial authorities, the North Western University, and the NGOs, and the goodwill so manifest at this time could well make a significant impact on adult literacy in the region. In addition the North West Province has the bonus of already having a strong vocational emphasis in its adult education centers. All it needs to do now is the strengthen the ties between the teaching of vocational skills and their integration in a proven adult basic education curriculum.

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