

# MANAGING CURRICULUM INNOVATION IN ADULT EDUCATION IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA

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## ABSTRACT

SACHED Trust has been involved in the most substantial curriculum development process in adult education in the country. This has taken place over the past four years, with major donor support from international donors. The curriculum, called **A Secondary Education Curriculum for Adults (ASECA)**, for adults at junior high school and senior high school equivalence levels, spans humanities, sciences, English language, and mathematics. The curricula have been accepted nationally for adult education and are in the second year of implementation. The curricula are taking a lead in implementing innovations in outcomes based education within the new National Qualifications Framework (NQF); integrated multiple-disciplinary courses; appropriate programs for South African adult learners; for distance education delivery; and community based delivery systems. Much of the development and pilot implementation has been completed, and the issues that arise with the implementation of the curricula across all sectors of society is what currently concerns SACHED and the ASECA program, and is the subject of this paper.

## INTRODUCTION

SACHED is one of the oldest educational Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in South Africa. In the early 1990s it became obvious that there was a vacuum in appropriate South African adult education curricula, particularly at senior high school and junior high school levels.

The ASECA program took on the task of developing new curricula and educational programs to start to fill this vacuum. In 1996 we are now at the point where we have developed four courses, in an integrated curriculum design, across junior high school and senior high school levels. These are: Communication in English, Mathematics, Integrated Social Studies, and Combined Sciences.

These courses have all been accepted at national level, with the partial exception of the senior high school equivalent Combined Sciences course, which we hope to have accredited by the end of April 1996. The curricula have been designed within the emerging parameters of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). They are outcomes based instead of content based; they are criterion-referenced instead of norm-referenced; they are modular, and can be assessed and accredited in modules, which allows for effective "open learning"; they are assessed continuously, and assessment is integrated into the learning program rather than being merely a summative measurement, they are learner centered and tutor supported, within a distance education delivery system, which is appropriate for community based learning.

With all these good things in place, implementation should surely be plain sailing. The reality is that innovation requires a supportive and informed environment in which to thrive. This requires new approaches to financing; new policy; new implementation structures and processes; new assessment and evaluation procedures; and above all it requires that the *innovators*, such as ASECA, who are very excited about change, and see change and innovation as a good thing, can convince the educators and learners, who are the *innovatees*, that change and innovation can be managed in a way that does not have to be scary, unsettling and disruptive. In order to do so, the program needs explicit backing at the highest level, which is currently being discussed, and should be put in place soon.

## **NATIONAL ADULT EDUCATION POLICY**

The new education policy, and in particular adult education policy, has been developed within comprehensive national consultative processes. The key processes (all of which SACHED and ASECA have been involved in), and key documents are the following:

1.1 The ANC "*Yellow Book*" on Educational Policy (April 1993), was the first comprehensive educational policy document to come from the ANC during the 1990s. This endorsed adult education, and proposed four crucial curriculum areas: English, Mathematics, Social (Development) Studies, and General or Combined Sciences.

1.2 The Implementation Plan for Education and Training (IPET)

This very comprehensive document, with separate chapters for all aspects of educational implementation, was produced by the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD), and was completed shortly after the election in April 1994. It outlined in some detail proposed structures and processes for the implementation of adult education, and endorsed the "Yellow Book" proposals.

1.3 South African Council for Adult Basic Education and Training (SACABET)

This was founded at a national conference in late 1993, and attempted to co-ordinate all developments in the ABET sector (Adult Basic Education and Training - as it is now known, as the policy has shifted quite markedly to a commitment to integrate education and training). This did not operate effectively, and was disbanded in early 1995.

1.4 The Presidential Lead Projects in the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme), which were announced in late 1994. These included Literacy, as a lead project, but literacy was allocated a zero budget within the total allocation for Presidential lead projects of more than two billion Rand, as the project was to be entirely donor funded for the first three years. It is not clear that the donors were entirely in agreement that they alone would fit the bill, or precisely what funding mechanisms and grant administration capacity would be used to do the job.

1.5 The Education White Paper

This White Paper (early 1995) endorsed adult education within an overall commitment to provide 10 years of free education to all - children, youth and adults. This includes, in school equivalent terms, one year of pre-school, and nine years of schooling, up to and including junior high school level. The educational budget which followed did not stretch beyond providing 9 years of free education, only for schools, and the question of financing adult education was not dealt with.

1.6 The RDP White Paper

The RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) White Paper similarly endorsed adult education, within the overall policy commitment to 10 years free education for all, including adults. The business of the RDP is to ensure reallocation of budgets across State departments, but this has not been applied to the problem of adult education. Adult education has established itself at the top of the policy agendas, but remains at the bottom of the budgetary agendas, with the notable exception of the Gauteng Youth College, in Johannesburg, which will initially be based entirely on ASECA.

#### 1.7 National Stakeholders Forum (NF) on ABET

After the demise of SACABET, in early 1995, the National Stakeholders Forum was set up by the National Department of Education. This established the first set of guidelines for ABET, the Interim Guidelines for Mathematics and English, which established syllabi, in an "outcomes" format, for adult learning up to and including junior high school levels (what in South Africa is demarcated as ABET Levels 1-4).

Both Math and English are compulsory, but it is unclear what mechanisms, or even processes, will or can practically be put in place to ensure compliance.

There is also unfortunately a discrepancy between the language policy in the Interim Guidelines for ABET (issued by the Minister of Education in September 1995) which make English a compulsory subject for adult learners, and a statement by the Minister of Education a few months later, that an English language course will not be a requirement in the new school curriculum. The ability to use English in other subjects will be sufficient for progress in and through the school system, including for access to tertiary education. This discrepancy in emerging language policy will have to be resolved.

The further delimitation of curricula and subject specifications for ABET is subject to processes of consultation which are likely to continue to at least the end of the second quarter of 1996.

#### 1.8 Technical Committees for senior high school programs for adults

At senior high school level, (what in South Africa is called the FEC, or Further Education Certificate) there is no policy for adults, and from the latest documents on education policy it seems unlikely that there will be any serious attention to policy at this level, either for adults for schools (see South African Country Report to the UNESCO Education for All Conference in Johannesburg in February 1996).

In the absence of policy processes, ASECA and the IEB - Independent Examinations Board (an assessment NGO) asked the National Department of Education to convene a process to consider accreditation for the ASECA courses. This included representatives of the Committee of University Principles, the Committee of Technician Principles, the Matric Board, SACHED/ASECA, the IEB and the Gauteng Youth College, the RDP project which will implement the ASECA course on large scale for youth in the Gauteng Province in April 1996.

This process concluded in later 1995, with recommendations that English, Mathematics and Social Studies should be accredited as University entrance level courses, and we are confident that the fourth course, Combined Sciences, will be recommended for accreditation in April or May 1996.

Adult education policy has certainly made progress during 1995, but it has a long way to go.

## **FUNDING**

There is definitely a lack of money for ABET in South Africa. The figures that came out of the Natal University survey (see Lister, at this conference) show that NGOs provide a much larger part of ABET provision (18.5%) than they were previously credited for; the State much less (28.5%) and the Corporate Sector also much more than they were given credit for (41.7%).

What is clear from the Natal University study, and from all reports from NGOs, is that NGO's are going to the wall in alarming numbers. What is not clear, and also not part of current debates on NGO ABET provision is:

1. That the very commendable process of establishing a Government of National Unity in South Africa has within it a serious anomaly. Those within the Apartheid State, who were directly responsible for maintaining Apartheid, have had their salaries and conditions of employment guaranteed for five years, during which time restructuring must take place. On the other hand, those within the NGO sector, most of whom spent most of the past two or three decades opposing Apartheid, and developing alternative models and practices of education, have been given no guarantees at all, and their ability to maintain capacity while restructuring the NGO sector, has already been severely compromised.

2. The funding crisis does not mean that there is a shortage of money. Most of the donors assure the NGOs that money is available, even if only for the next three years. The problem is very specific - it is a crisis in funding *mechanisms*.

A number of attempts have been made to solve the mechanisms crisis, but, going on for two years after the election, these have been singularly unsuccessful. Some of the donors are now going back, to some extent, to more direct funding to NGOs, and the shift from direct funding for NGOs to funding via State-to-State bilateral funding is partly being put on hold until effective new mechanisms can be put in place. What is more, the recent doubts that were raised about the State Health Department's expenditure of R14,7 million (\$3,8 million) on an AIDS awareness play raises further questions about the merits of transferring all development funding to the State, and some specific cases of substantial fraud, as well as massive underspending on housing, within RDP projects, make matters worse and more confusing.

This two year *mechanism* crisis has severely undermined the ability of NGOs to maintain, let alone develop, capacity to service the growing needs of adult education. As a result, many of the NGOs have been forced to try to commercialize their activities. This has a negative impact on their ability to manage and contribute to innovation in curricula and related issues. First many of them have had to commercialize at precisely the time when they experience financial crises, so that they could not afford training in commercial operations and management. And most aspects of education cannot be provided on a profitable basis - particularly for the substantial proportion of people living in poverty, with very high employment.

Second, the type of innovation that NGOs have been involved in, and much of it has been valuable, is not necessarily amenable to commercial pressures. It is definitely the case that innovation in NGOs could be managed in a "leaner" fashion, but as will be discussed below, management of innovation has to include more extensive processes of consultation and communication, not less. And that makes the process inherently expensive.

(A more detailed paper on the funding issues is available from SACHED).

### 3. Linking and Rationalizing ABET/D

#### 3.1 Rationalizing State Ministries

The process of establishing an institutional base for ABET, both formally within Ministries, and informally within ABET practices, has been very uneven and also impacts on the ability of various institutions, including ASECA, to manage curriculum innovation.

The previous Education Departments (17 of them for the various permutations of the Apartheid 'states') had few if any posts, particularly at substantive levels, for adult education. Within the new State Departments, there was some debate about where the Adult Education would best be located, institutionally - within the Department of Education, or the Department of Labour, or within a new unified department of "Education and Training". The last possibility did not materialize - and eventually adult education was situated within Education. But within the 10 Departments - one National (policy) Department, and nine Provincial (implementation) Departments, adult education is situated at a variety of levels, and grouped with different other functions from Province to Province. This makes the National Department's job of establishing policy and providing co-ordination very difficult - particularly as the only mechanism for co-ordinating ABET implementation is the National Department, which only has co-ordinating powers at policy, and not at implementation levels. The other mechanisms for co-ordinating implementation (the meeting of the 9 Provincial Ministers or the meetings of the 9 Provincial Heads of Department) are certainly not centrally concerned with adult education - the massive task of establishing adequate school education has to be the top priority. Adult education comes

very low down on their agendas.

Secondly, the process of rationalizing and unifying the previous Departments under one new Provincial Department (up to 6 in a single province) is a time consuming business, and the restructuring and staffing of the new structures is unlikely to be completed before the third quarter of 1996.

At national level there are some mechanisms which attempt to address these problems. There is an inter-Ministerial committee with representatives from the Departments of Education and Labour, but it has tended to be dominated by labor and business interests. There is a committee for co-ordinating curriculum development, which has started to produce framework documents. And various Departments have sent representatives to the ABET National Stakeholders Forum meetings, to try to co-ordinate ABET's role in programs such as the Public Works programs. Unfortunately the time-scales for these projects do not often coincide with the time-tables for ABET programs.

There is also a process, which has been running for a few months, to establish development indicators for ABET - which includes the South African Development Bank, the National Literacy Co-operation, and other members of the ABET National Stakeholders Forum. This is aimed at providing an ABED - or Adult Basic Education and *Development* - framework. It too is in early stages of drafting, and once it is agreed upon, mechanisms have to be put in place to gather monitoring and evaluation information from very diversified projects, preferably across the State, NGO and community sectors, if not also the business sector. This will take another 6 - 12 months to put in place, even at provincial level.

### 3.2 The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The NQF has promulgated in a Bill signed late in 1995. It will be put in place towards the middle or end of 1996. It seeks to enable quality control, and the development of standards and curricula, to take place in within a process which:

- Involves all stakeholders;
- Facilitates Open and Life-long learning and Effective Recognition of Prior Learning;
- Ensures horizontal portability and vertical articulation, by
- Being structured in a modular, and modularly assessed fashion, within
- A single national matrix on which all qualifications must be placed, which are
- Outcomes based and Criterion referenced.

The metaphor of a three-dimensional jungle-gym comes to mind.

The NQF is an exiting and constructive step in the right direction for educational transformation. The ASECA curriculum is firmly within its framework, and ASECA is committed to making a success of this unique opportunity for curriculum development.

However, as in any development on this scale, there are a number of complex issues, which will take some time to resolve.

First, the notion of Life-long learning. In itself this is something which everyone supports. It is a kind of self-evident virtue. The question arises, though, as to exactly what model of development is embedded within this notion of life-long learning. At a recent seminar on ABET in Cape Town one of the delegates from India put the problem something like this: people within a development environment, she said, primarily want to get to the next stable level of development - they do not want to go on and on developing (or worse still 'being' developed) as development is change, and change is unsettling and destabilising. They want, to put it succinctly, to get to the next comfort zone. And it is only very secure middle-class people who find continuing education not destabilising, but rather enriching.

It is a crucial issue - so much so that it is worth insisting on a change of terminology - from "life-long learning" (a rather privileged pursuit) to "life long *opportunities for learning*". The received wisdom (as well as the macro economic analyses) holds that although a certain measure of education is a right, and must be kept as a basic right, its marginal utility decreases rapidly, after basic education, for most of the population. What this amounts to is to take a bit away from the "long" in 'life-long learning' - most people in policy making positions will admit that they have probably

already had too much inappropriate education, and the same is true for the rest of the population.

Second, the degree to which the NQF, and indeed the Interim Guidelines for ABET encourage an over-formalization of adult education is a matter which is still being hotly debated. Many people have said that standardizing ABET, particularly at literacy and post-literacy levels, restricts ABET development and might even be a cause of the low success rates in adult education. This might or might not be true in South Africa, we don't have the research data yet, either way.

What is certain is that many of the funders, who find ABET as difficult to evaluate as any of the rest of us, tend to default to formula assessment requirements, and many demand that adult learners pass three national examinations (ABET 1 - 3) to achieve the equivalent of primary school education. It is of course the case that at some stage formal qualifications are essential for the management of job applications - the question is, when does that apply? Good placement tests for entry into ABET 4 (junior high level) would be sufficient, and assessment prior to that level should certainly be done, but primarily for self-assessment purposes, and as a rule only within locally set assessment tests, with broad syllabus parameters. If on the other hand the learners insist on certificates, that would need to be negotiated. But national examinations at all these levels are not necessary.

The idea is that learners could approach the NQF jungle-gym through various informal programs (operating within broad national frameworks) and have a choice of either doing formal national examinations at the end of primary school level (ABET Level 3), or alternatively writing an ABET Level 4 placement test. They must also have the option of entering the NQF jungle-gym at a later stage if they so wish, if they perform adequately in placement 'tests' of one kind or another, at a further level up the jungle-gym.

Thirdly, there is a large gap between the conceptual framework of the outcomes based, and criterion referenced NQF, and its implementation, assessment and administration. One of the principles informing both the NQF, as well as the National Training Board's policies on education and training (April 1993) is that of a "basket" of generic competencies, must be applied across all programs. This is a fine principle, but its implementation is difficult. And despite the fact that the very interesting document, the *Ways of Seeing the NQF*, which was produced by a number of institutions (first available in 1996) attempts to use real examples to illustrate how the NQF can be implemented, it does not overcome all of these problems, and in some cases makes them more abstract rather than less so.

There is still no answer as to how many courses institute an ABET qualification - which at ABET Levels 1 - 3 might or might not be a crucial issue. But at Level 4 (junior high school), if not at Level 3 (equivalent to the end of primary school) some specific parameters are required, now. There is also a need for some resolution to the question as to how many courses constitute the next level (FEC, or tertiary entrance). Right now it is possible for adults who are at least 23 years old to apply for tertiary entrance if they have passed 4 subjects. If they are younger than that, they have to have attempted 6 but passed 5. The precise utility of the age of 23 as a cut off point needs to be re-examined.

In addition, the ASECA curriculum, at FEC level, is explicitly not available to anyone younger than 18, or anyone in formal schooling. People representing the National Department of Education on the ASECA accreditation technical committees insisted on both exclusions. While ASECA is specifically designed for adults, and assumes a certain level of life-skills and exposure to life outside the classroom, it is not necessarily the case that youth who have been outside classrooms for much of their lives (and may have seen active service in liberation struggle - or a more informal form of active service in the townships) are less 'adult' than people who happened to have turned 18.

Fourthly, a potential problem with some forms of the NQF, which has already arisen in other countries, is that of what certificates the potential employee presents for job applications. Particularly in a situation of high unemployment, where thousands of people often apply for a few jobs, it is essential that not only the learner must know exactly what constitutes a particular educational qualification, but it must also be clear to the employer. The employer cannot sift through a whole portfolio of tests, projects, assignments, research reports and so on, for every employee they might wish to interview. A balance must always be maintained between the breadth of educational opportunity, and the flexibility of open learning, as opposed to the narrowness of the administrative requirements for taking people into formal employment.

Fifthly, the introduction of outcomes-based education is a lengthy and complex problem. One of the problems stems

from the virtue of eliminating a lot of the content (not all of it by any means) in favor of increasing the outcomes requirements. The problem is that of assessment, in the form of the classic "context-free IQ test dilemma", which, simply put, is that testing very abstract competencies, such as much of the pattern recognition in IQ tests, is very difficult to do without some familiar context for the learners. This is most strikingly demonstrated in the work of Feuerstein in Israel, in which he taught immigrant Arab Jews the basics of, essentially, pattern recognition, to assist them to integrate into, and succeed in, the Israeli education system.

Within the implementation of the NQF, within ASECA, for instance, this problem crops up in developing assessment. The outcomes for ASECA are not proprietary outcomes to ASECA or for that matter the assessment agency, the Independent Examinations Board (IEB). They must be outcomes that have to be satisfied *as outcomes*, which means that theoretically a wide variety of learning programs could be completed, all of which should adequately prepare students for the examinations based on those outcomes.

The problem is that learners need to have a basic *common learning experience* to sit a common examination. Exams are not, in fact, set from syllabi, they are set from the common learning experiences of the learners, which are their primary sources, their text books. This needs to be supported by an expensive set of exam exemplars for each subject, so that the learners can also have some prospective familiarity with the examination. This does not mean teaching to the exam, it merely means the students must have a full set of *common learning experiences*, which effectively give them a familiar learning environment in which to learn and be assessed.

At the level of educational innovation which South Africa requires to transfer past educational practices, this takes a long time. It is simply not possible to jump into an outcomes based educational program with multiple options, and a fully open learning system, where many learners are following different programs to get to the same outcomes. That kind of practical diversity, and that level of open learning, can only be built up on the basis of much more narrowly defined set of common learning experiences, which must mean a limited set of core texts, from which an increasing diversified set of texts can be elaborated and extrapolated as time goes on.

Sixth, the implementation of the ASECA program in communities (taking education to the learner, rather than taking the learner to education), also has its own problems. Learning centers have been set up, and have run for 20 months, in townships, squatter camps, rural villages and so on. But the community management of these centers needs extensive support, and the mechanism for funding them is yet again an immediate issue. There have been many proposals on how community based organizations can manage and fundraise for their own projects (the Thousand/s Schools Project is one such attempt). But a framework for sustaining this is only now starting to emerge, notably within various Community College type initiatives, in both the Eastern Cape, and in the emerging 'National' Western Cape Access Consortium, of which ASECA is an affiliate.

These community college initiatives, with community learning centers as 'satellite' extensions, have long been on the policy drawing boards. They need to be supported, and that level of institutional innovation too will have to be managed.

Last, but not least, the learners and the educators have to be given very real assurances that they will benefit from the changes, which will inevitably be disruptive, and will add to the already large numbers of issues that they have to deal with to proceed from day to day. Some resistance has already been experienced from both educators and learners who have been in the adult education system for some time, and who see it as a right that they should be able to complete their existing adult education programs, or even to start on the old programs now, which are it is true, easier to complete than the new ones. They question why adult education should be made more difficult, and whether this constitutes progress at all.

They have to be convinced that the new approaches will be to their benefit. This is beginning to happen, but it is a slow process, and the very necessary restructuring of the entire South African society adds to the level of experienced disruption. Life long learning cannot mean life long disruption, and learners need to be convinced that they can indeed proceed more effectively to the next level of stability in their own lives.

## CONCLUSION

The process of managing curriculum innovations in a society such as South Africa, in which innovation and change is taking place at all levels is both existing and very complex. The innovator need to be able to keep in mind that innovation is both a good and a bad thing - good because the changes can bring improvement and progress, and bad because change in itself is always unsettling and disruptive. For it to be endorsed, particularly by adult learners, a lot more effort needs to be put into managing innovation and the substantial risks that go with all worthwhile innovation.

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