

**The Role of Literacy in a Changing Society:
an analysis of the changing South African literacy field,
1979-2000**

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Abstract

Social literacy research in the last two decades has described literacy in complex terms. Literacy is expressed as a social practice, as something that individual people *do*. Its meaning is accordingly both contextually and socially specific. This thesis in part considers whether such a localised understanding of literacy can be accommodated within national education policy discourses. It does so by attempting to isolate, from education and training discourses, the national role that literacy is said to play in a society. It then considers whether that role can reasonably be said to accommodate a nation's diverse literacy needs.

Taking its cue from social literacy research, the thesis holds that the role that literacy is said to play in a nation is grounded within the unique socio-historical, economic and political conditions associated with that particular country. The thesis' consideration of literacy's national role is therefore restricted to post-apartheid South Africa. It argues that the role of literacy in South Africa has evolved over the past two decades in accordance with the social changes that took place in South Africa's transition towards majority rule.

The view that literacy's role exists as a socially structured discourse is theoretically supported through a discussion of Pierre Bourdieu's key concepts of field, habitus and capital. These in turn underpin a methodology that uses themes of analysis – in particular 'equity' and 'growth' – to highlight the structuring tensions in terms of an exploration of key education and training reports since 1979, and current South African Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) policy.

The thesis identifies several roles of adult literacy within South Africa's integrated education and training system. It concludes, however, that the current system's focus on 'outcomes' and 'skills' privileges a national 'human capital' role of literacy. It further suggests that this prioritisation risks marginalising literacy's role in redress and social transformation.

Declaration

I declare that *The Role of Literacy in a Changing Society: an analysis of the changing South African literacy field, 1979-2000* is my own work, that it has not been presented in whole or part for examination for any degree, and that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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List of Acronyms

AALAE	African Association for Literacy and Adult Education
ABE	Adult Basic Education
ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AE	Adult Education
AET	Adult Education and Training
AETASA	Adult Educators and Trainers Association of South Africa
AETC	Adult Education and Training Council
ALP	Adult Learning Project
ANC	African National Congress
APLA	Azania People's Liberation Army
AZACTU	Azania Confederation of Trade Unions
AZANLA	Azania National Liberation Army
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BCMA	Black Consciousness Movement of Azania
BCP	Black Community Programmes
BLCs	Basic Learning Competencies
BLL	Bureau of Literacy and Literature
CBML	Competency Based Modular Learning
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CNE	Christian National Education
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
CONFINTEA V	Fifth International Conference on Adult Education
COPWE	Commission for the Organisation of the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia

COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CUSA	Council of Unions of South Africa
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DBSA	Development Bank of South Africa
DE	Department of Education
DET	Department of Education and Training
DF	Department of Finance
DfID	Department for International Development
DNE	Department of National Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECE	Early Childhood Educare
EDUPOL	Education Policy and System Change Unit
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELP	English Literacy Project
EPU	Education Policy Unit
ERS	Education Renewal Strategy
ESF	Employment Strategy Framework
ESKOM	Electricity Supply Commission
ETF	Education and Training Fund
ETQA	Education and Training Qualification Authority
EU	European Union
EWLP	Experimental World Literacy Programme
FE	Further Education
FEC	Further Education Certificate
FET	Further Education and Training
FETC	Further Education and Training Council
FSC	Formal Schools Council
GATT	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs

GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution
GEC	General Education Certificate
GENCOR	General Mining and Finance Corporation
GET	General Education and Training
GETC	General Education and Training Council
GETT	Gender Equity Task Team
GFET	General and Further Education and Training
GNU	Government of National Unity
HBU	Historically Black University
HE	Higher Education
HEC	Higher Education Council
HRD	Human Resources Development
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
HWU	Historically White University
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IDT	Independent Development Trust
ILI	International Literacy Institute
ILY	International Literacy Year
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMWG	Inter-Ministerial Working Group
IPET	Implementation Plan for Education and Training
ISL	International Socialists League
JET	Joint Education Trust
LAC	Learning Area Committee
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MERG	Macro-Economic Research Group
MK	Umkhonto We Sizwe

NAPTOSA	National Professional Teacher's Organisation of South Africa
NCAL	National Center on Adult Literacy (University of Pennsylvania)
NECC	National Education Crisis Committee (later changed to National Education Co-ordinating Committee)
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NETC	National Education and Training Council
NETCC	National Education and Training Co-ordinating Committee
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NICD	National Institute for Curriculum Development
NLC	National Literacy Co-operation
NLP	National Literacy Programme
NOLA	National Open Learning Agency
NP	National Party
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NRDC	National Revolutionary Development Campaign [Ethiopia]
NSB	National Standards Board
NTB	National Training Board
NTS	National Training Strategy
NTSI	National Training Strategy Initiative
NUM	National Union of Mineworkers
NUMSA	National Union of Metalworkers, South Africa
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
OBET	Outcomes Based Education and Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PRISEC	Private Sector Education Council
PRP	Participatory Research Project
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme

REFLECT	Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa
SAALAE	South African Association for Literacy and Adult Education
SACHED	South African Council for Higher Education
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADF	South African Defence Force
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SANLI	South African National Literacy Initiative
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
SETA	Sectoral Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standard Generating Body
SIDA	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise sector
SoUL	Social Uses of Literacy research project
SRC	Student Representative Council
SSC	State Security Council
TLU	Thousand Learner Unit Project
TNDT	Transitional National Development Trust
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UF	Urban Foundation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USWE	Use, Speak and Write English
WCED	Western Cape Education Department
WCEFA	World Conference on Education For All (1990)
WOALP	Work-Oriented Adult Literacy Programme
WPET	White Paper on Education and Training

When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning.

Nelson Mandela's concluding thoughts in Long Walk to Freedom (1994).

Introduction

We live in a world where education is by now universally valued and perceived to be essential in terms of equipping people with the skills necessary for life in a modern era. Reading and writing is understood by most to be extremely important; in fact, few people would argue that literacy skills are irrelevant. It is fair to assume that most people would agree that adult literacy is important too. For those who are literate, reading and writing is so intrinsically intertwined with their daily lives – a taken for granted skill – that the idea of not being able to read or write is almost inconceivable.

But ask those same people *why* reading and writing is valuable and the answers received will be diverse. For some, literacy is understood to be an essential stepping stone to a job, the ability to understand bills, or the enjoyment of reading the newspaper. For others, literacy may be about self-esteem, individual independence and empowerment. Many might believe that literacy will lead to improved democracy, better healthcare and, because parents will be better equipped to play a role in their children's education, increased primary education achievements. Each answer in its own way reflects the respondent's vision for the potential *role* that adult literacy can play in a learner's life.

But, as this thesis will show, believing that literacy education is an essential basic skill, and believing that it is socially important, is not necessarily enough to ensure that adult literacy will be prioritised in national education policy discourses. The South African experience reveals that simply getting adult literacy onto the national education agenda is a struggle – it is only in the last ten years in South Africa that adult literacy (within the context of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)) has become a significant feature of an overall national strategy.

The fact that literacy is at last formally on the education agenda is a remarkable achievement and a testimony to the commitment of many who have worked tirelessly in the field of adult literacy even during times when to do so could be construed as a subversive political act. By now it is a well known fact that the majority of South Africans have been deliberately disadvantaged through an oppressive apartheid system designed to preserve the privilege and power of a minority of people. Estimates on the extent of illiteracy in South Africa reveal too that the legacy of apartheid continues to reach deep into the country's future and that it is something that needs to be addressed. Perhaps more importantly, those who lack literacy skills *expect* it to be addressed, not least because many of them feel that they have sacrificed their education for 'the struggle' (Walters and Kruss 1988).

The figures representing the scale of the challenge in South Africa are shocking. Estimating literacy levels through statistical methods can be difficult, not least because, as an International Literacy Institute (ILI) publication points out, the classification of individuals as either 'literate' or 'illiterate' is increasingly valueless in a world where it is rare to find more than a small number of individuals who are unaware of the meaning and uses of reading and writing (ILI 2000: 16). Nevertheless, in a report on adult basic education emerging from the NEPI policy research¹, the authors suggested that "There are about 15 million people without a basic schooling" (1992b: 5).

A subsequent survey qualifies the NEPI figure of 15 million and argues that the figure of 15 million includes *literate* people who are under-educated (Harley *et al* 1996: 27). In an attempt to more accurately identify the challenge specifically facing the ABET sector, the 1996 survey estimates that about seven and half million adults are severely under-

¹ The NEPI research is given close attention in a section of chapter four (see page 229).

educated. And if that figure is discounted to take into account the assumption that older people are less likely to make use of ABE provision, and the fact that some people are considered 'ineducable', the survey researchers conclude that the actual number of people who might require adult basic education is 5, 268, 200 adults. This figure is based on the number of people who have less than a standard five level of schooling.² If the definition of functional literacy is expanded to include those who have less than a standard seven level of education³, the estimate rises to 9, 945, 802. The survey points out that current provision only caters for about 6% of those who require a basic education.

The 1996 South African population census sought to determine the level of functional literacy in South Africa, and concluded that 67% of the adult population [aged 15 years and more] are 'functionally literate': "A person is considered functionally literate if he/she has completed Grade 6" (DE 2000: 59). The Department of Education however cautioned that these statistics (see Table 1 on page 4) do not necessarily reflect *actual* reading and writing levels attained and therefore could overestimate the level of literacy in the country (DE 2000: xi).

It is perhaps ironic that as the profile of adult literacy seems to acquire greater prominence in South Africa, the global prioritisation of it becomes more tenuous. The World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) meeting in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 proposed to reduce the adult illiteracy rate "to, say, one-half of its 1990 level by the year 2000" (WCEFA 1990: 3). King notes that the tentativeness of the phrase 'say,

² Within the South African school system this equates to six years of basic schooling. A child in Standard 4 (or Grade 6) is 12 years old.

³ The survey suggests that education of black people was so inadequate that functional literacy in these schools could only realistically be achieved after nine years of schooling (Harley *et al* 1996: 30).

Province	Gender	Population		Number of Literate Persons		Literacy Rate		Literacy Gender Parity Index	
		15+	15-24	15+	15-24	15+	15-24	15+	15-24
NATIONAL (The whole country)	TOTAL	26 337 143	8 160 315	17 550 913	6 797 428	66.6	83.3	1.0	1.1
	Male	12 411 682	3 966 197	8 370 423	3 216 853	67.4	81.1		
	Female	13 925 461	4 194 118	9 180 490	3 580 575	65.9	85.4		
Eastern Cape	TOTAL	3 774 620	1 280 464	2 356 203	1 004 048	62.4	78.4	1.0	1.1
	Male	1 637 382	605 527	1 000 808	440 785	61.1	72.8		
	Female	2 137 238	674 937	1 355 395	563 263	63.4	83.5		
Free State	TOTAL	1 784 501	528 728	1 198 067	449 906	67.1	85.1	1.0	1.0
	Male	875 201	256 515	587 053	213 359	67.1	83.2		
	Female	909 300	272 213	611 014	236 547	67.2	86.9		
Gauteng	TOTAL	5 410 774	1 370 394	4 090 970	1 210 323	75.6	88.3	1.0	1.0
	Male	2 785 620	698 878	2 074 582	604 787	74.5	86.5		
	Female	2 625 154	671 516	2 016 388	605 536	76.8	90.2		
KwaZulu Natal	TOTAL	5 311 394	1 765 550	3 357 601	1 427 973	63.2	80.9	0.9	0.9
	Male	2 403 502	843 897	1 580 300	672 603	65.7	89.5		
	Female	2 907 892	921 653	1 777 301	755 370	61.1	82.0		
Mpumalanga	TOTAL	1 751 238	576 964	1 071 459	478 421	61.2	82.9	0.9	1.0
	Male	841 775	279 492	529 878	227 227	62.9	81.3		
	Female	909 463	297 472	541 581	251 194	59.5	84.4		
Northern Cape	TOTAL	553 513	159 515	342 449	124 956	61.9	78.3	1.0	1.0
	Male	268 486	79 267	165 076	60 993	61.5	76.9		
	Female	285 027	80 248	177 373	63 963	62.2	79.7		
Northern Province	TOTAL	2 786 723	1 051 268	1 641 316	894 713	58.9	85.1	0.9	1.0
	Male	1 190 316	502 859	756 455	420 575	63.6	83.6		
	Female	1 596 407	548 409	884 861	474 138	55.4	86.5		
North West	TOTAL	2 191 864	680 150	1 374 253	541 292	62.7	79.6	1.0	1.1
	Male	1 070 825	329 386	662 218	254 400	61.8	77.2		
	Female	1 121 039	350 764	712 035	286 892	63.5	81.8		
Western Cape	TOTAL	2 772 516	747 282	2 118 595	665 796	76.4	89.1	1.0	1.0
	Male	1 338 575	370 376	1 014 053	322 124	75.8	87.0		
	Female	1 433 941	376 906	1 104 542	343 672	77.0	91.2		

Table 1: Functional literacy rates of persons aged 15-24 and 15 years and above, and literacy gender parity index by province, South Africa, 1996*

* From 1996 South African Population Census (cited in DE 2000: 59).

one half', offered latitude to countries when it comes to meeting literacy targets (1990: 10). The commitment therefore does not represent a firm objective, but is instead a "proposed dimension" within which other countries can set their own targets (WCEFA 1990: 3).

Consider too the fact that, up until very recently,⁴ the world's major funding bodies have largely been in favour of supporting primary education rather than adult literacy ventures. This suggests that when the word *literacy* is used, it is more commonly in the context of 'school children's literacy' rather than 'adult literacy'. The concept of 'Education for All' is therefore something that is open to question. In fact, Jones notes that the concept of 'basic education for all' proved to be the only issue where agencies significantly disagreed: "At the heart of their disagreement was the contrast between the Bank's commitment to universal primary education as the optimum pathway to education for all, and UNESCO's support for the dual track of primary education and adult and young people's programs" (1997: 373-74). The disagreement is evident in that it was noted, in an information magazine published by UNESCO just before the commencement of the Dakar conference (April 2000), that "Adult literacy has remained largely neglected and the ranks continue to expand" (Martin 2000: 4). The tension between *adult literacy* and *primary education* remains despite the fact that participants in the World Education Forum (WEF) meeting this year in Dakar, Senegal, have re-affirmed their commitment "to the achievement of education for all (EFA) goals and targets for every citizen and for every society" (WEF 2000: 1).

⁴ There is some evidence that the Bank's position on funding adult basic education is shifting slightly. This is discussed in chapter one.

If a recent consultation document released by the Department for International Development's (DfID) can be viewed as indicative of agency trends, then the suggestion is that adult literacy concerns will again remain 'largely neglected' in this decade too:

The 'Jomtien World Conference on Education for All', held in 1990, identified six dimensions to ensuring that every person – child, youth and adult – should be able to meet their basic learning needs. These go beyond primary education to include early childhood care and development, adult literacy, and basic skill training. But Universal Primary Education remains at the core of attempts to achieve Education for All, and is a target still eluding many developing countries (DFID 2000: i).

It is worth noting too that the DfID's stance is reflective of the development goals set out in the 1996 OECD⁵ publication entitled Shaping the 21st Century: the contribution of development co-operation – goals which were ostensibly building on the ground laid at the Jomtien conference in 1990. The literacy related development target set out in this text proposes that "There should be universal primary education in all countries by the year 2015" (OECD/DAC 1996: 10). This development position was explicitly reiterated earlier this year in a joint publication produced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the OECD, the United Nations (UN), and the World Bank: the goal, the report noted, is to "enrol all children in primary school by the year 2015" (IMF/OECD/UN/World Bank 2000: 8).⁶

Getting adult literacy issues onto the world education agenda represents only one part of the challenge. Globalisation and changing world economic priorities indicate that we

⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

⁶ It is worth calling attention too to the fact that 'gender equality' represents another social development target mentioned in both reports. This does not necessarily mean, however, that adult women are being targeted for adult literacy classes. In fact, the 1996 document explicitly states that the "empowerment of women should be demonstrated by eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005" (OECD 1996: 10). Furthermore, the report published earlier this year, in June 2000, focuses exclusively on the issue of girl's education in the section devoted to the progress made so far towards achieving the gender equality goal (IMF/OECD/UN/World Bank 2000: 10-11).

also need to carefully consider the role that adult literacy plays within the education system. One only has to look at the way in which the definitions of functional literacy have evolved since the 1940s to realise that the claims made for what literacy can supposedly achieve span both functional and social effects. Furthermore, these very different declarations are so diverse and wide-ranging that it has become increasingly difficult for those engaged with literacy work to make specific claims about precisely what it is that adult literacy will or will not achieve. So what is it that we expect the world to support in terms of adult literacy's part in Education for All if we cannot definitively say what it is that literacy means in a society?

Given this, why has South Africa nevertheless made an effort to include adult literacy within its National Qualifications Framework? What is the story being told about literacy to the people of South Africa on why literacy is important enough to be formally included? What is the national role of literacy in this society and what is its relationship to the fact that South Africa is a society that has undergone radical changes? If the South African government can be viewed as an 'investor' investing in adult literacy, what 'returns' does it hope to get on its investment?

A clue to the role that literacy plays in society is clearly related to how the term is labelled. This is because the moment that literacy is defined its meaning is constrained and the implicit suggestion is that a specific literacy related purpose has been identified. For example, the definition of functional literacy arrived at the Persepolis conference in 1975 suggests that literacy plays a significant role in the achievement of practical skills, the liberation of man, and in achieving critical consciousness.⁷ It can consequently be argued that in accordance with these terms, the definition implicitly embodies a 'mission statement' for how literacy is perceived to function in the world at that particular time.

⁷ Again, this is discussed in more detail in chapter two. See page 27.

It is not only how literacy is defined that provides an insight into the role it is perceived to play. This thesis will suggest that adult literacy's purpose at a national level – or the official vision for what literacy is claimed to be directed towards achieving – is in fact evidenced in far more than the term's interpretation. It is understood that the actual inclusion of literacy in an education framework, which itself is developed in accordance with certain objectives and principles, similarly constrains the meaning of literacy. It therefore understands that the role of literacy in South Africa emerges through a series of struggles between diverse sectors of society, each seeking to imprint a specific vision of how literacy can contribute to a broader agenda. In keeping with all this, the role of literacy is about more than a definition and more than a set of objectives and principles. In the end, these are merely words, an official statement, a negotiated settlement. The role that literacy practically embodies has to be partially determined by how and why that final resolution was arrived at.

Is adult literacy a *priority* in national discourses – how much attention does this sector of education receive in relation to others? How are all the diverse expectations of adult literacy accommodated within a single system that is intended to provide education for everyone equally regardless of who they are and what their position in society is? Which claims made about literacy are abandoned in preference of others – for example, is adult literacy in South Africa about addressing the inequalities of the past, or is it about meeting the high skills required for future economic development? And what do these sort of compromises say about the final role of literacy manifested in national discourses? Related to this, we therefore need to consider, when we determine what the role of literacy is, whether or not the role of literacy it is in fact about adult literacy *per se* (if it is even possible to say that literacy can only ever be about literacy) or about something else instead. These are some of the challenges and thoughts that this thesis keeps in mind while seeking to determine the role that literacy plays in South African society in the 21st century.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The analysis is carried out in chapters three, four and five. Chapter one serves as an introduction to the actual concept 'literacy' through an exploration of how it is defined as well as through recent theoretical insights into how literacy functions in a social context. Chapter two establishes a broad theoretical approach to understanding how it is that literacy can be argued as playing a role in society. The theoretical approach strives to explain how a specific role emerges through competition between a variety of different fields – all of which have a structuring influence on the notion of literacy itself. Chapter six concludes by drawing together the threads from the previous three chapters in an attempt to see whether a clear trajectory emerges to describe an evolving role of literacy, or whether the role of literacy has emerged independently of its socio-historical context. Finally, it considers the implications for literacy in the 21st century. The rest of this section of this chapter will provide some insight into how each chapter contributes to the overall project.⁸

It is clear, simply in terms of the questions this thesis attempts to answer, that the concept of literacy is elusive and difficult to fix. The first section of Chapter one therefore engages with the meaning of the term literacy by first tracing how the words 'functional literacy' came to be used during the 1940s, and how the phrase 'functional literacy' has been repeatedly modified in the course of time. These evolving definitions are later contrasted in the same chapter with literacy research that essentially views literacy as a social practice – particularly as one which is contextually specific, and therefore meaningful only in relation to its social situation. This suggests, then, that the word literacy is almost impossible to exclusively define. The two sections considered together set up a tension in an approach to exploring the field of literacy and in the

⁸ The chapters concerned with the textual analysis will be referred to towards the end of this section of the chapter.

process reveal that the word literacy resists simple definitions: In fact, it embodies highly complex understandings of what the ability to read and write means in society.

The second section of Chapter one provides a broad overview of the South African literacy field and begins to raise some of the practical challenges faced in the attempt to research it – especially in terms of using texts to generate a particular approach to discourse analysis. The overview is outlined in chronological order and focuses on selected involvements by a variety of organisations having different motivations for participating in this sector of education. The disparate activities of diverse agencies again calls attention to the different ‘roles’ that literacy plays in society and it demonstrates too how this sector of the education field can be utilised too to meet needs removed from the immediate skills of reading and writing – for example, for political conscientisation. This section of Chapter one provides the reader with a ‘feel’ for the field which in turn serves as a useful background to the more focused discourse analysis that takes place in later chapters.

The second chapter in this thesis provides a detailed description of the theoretical approach utilised towards meeting the end objective of understanding the role that literacy plays in society. The crux of the chapter lies in its explication of Bourdieuan concepts which themselves are used *heuristically*⁹ to develop a conceptual framework that serves to guide and inform the process of analysing key texts. The concepts that are essential to this task are those of capital, habitus and field.

It is worth noting that Bourdieu’s theories are more commonly associated with practical fieldwork methodology. However, this thesis exploits the valuable logic underpinning Bourdieu’s theories by reconsidering them in the light of what can loosely be described

⁹ The use of the term ‘heuristic’ is explored in detail in chapter two.

as discourse analysis. Each of these key texts selected for analysis represents what I will describe in this chapter as a ‘conditioned discourse’ – that is, a discourse that corresponds with the locus of competing fields operating within the literacy field. Defining particular texts as conditioned discourses, and understanding how they come to be ‘conditioned’, is crucially important in terms of comprehending how certain texts can claim to be reflective of a role that literacy plays in society at a particular moment in time, and also suggests how the texts are examples too of social *literacy practices*.

The decision to use Bourdieu in this way has its origins in the fieldwork research carried out in South Africa, in the Western Cape region, between March 1998 and October 1998. The original focus for this thesis, influenced by Bourdieuan theory, was to be on the diversity of literacy needs in the Western Cape and, more specifically, on the different roles that literacy played within different contexts in this region of South Africa. The fieldwork set out to gather information through a series of interviews with literacy practitioners working within the various contexts (for example, NGOs, industry, trade unions). However, in the course of carrying out the fieldwork, questions emerged that suggested that an alternative approach to literacy research might contribute more usefully to existing debates. There were several reasons for this concern.

First, on a logistical level, a growing awareness of the scale of the Western Cape, of the difficulties posed by the many languages spoken in the region, and of the complexity and diversity of the contexts, made it obvious that a project of this nature was far too ambitious to be satisfactorily accomplished within the bounds of PhD research. Second, the conversations carried out with various practitioners¹⁰ raised issues related to the direction the research was taking. The majority of people I spoke to were very

¹⁰ Appendix 1 on page 427 lists the various respondents.

practically involved, at a grassroots level, in the adult literacy field. Their knowledge was beneficial in terms of their *experiential* understanding of literacy, which at times seemed to be at odds with policy debates. Furthermore, their knowledge was *highly* contextually specific – sometimes being more reflective of the specific organisation that they worked in rather than reflecting general contextual trends. Finally, many of the people I spoke to were reluctant to be interviewed, feeling that their ‘lowly’ position within the literacy field meant that they were not qualified to make statements about the field as a whole. These factors helped to contribute to a sense of a literacy field that, at grassroots level, was fragmented, extremely contextually specific, and isolated from mainstream policy discourses. This gap between grassroots and national discourses presented itself as an area that needed some consideration.

Despite the fact that the conversations raised valid and stimulating questions about the diversity of literacy practices, and about how national policy correlated (or did not correlate) with grassroots experiences, it was felt that limiting the research to one context alone (one possible solution to the logistical complications) would duplicate the approach, and possibly many of the findings, of the Social Uses of Literacy (SoUL) study published in 1996.¹¹ I was instead motivated to make a new contribution to the South African literacy debate, hopefully one that would prove useful at both a policy and grassroots level.

The impetus for this thesis was therefore derived from a single question that recurred through the original fieldwork conversations, and through reading and talking about the implications of the SoUL research findings. Namely, how could a *single* National Qualifications System (NQF), particularly one based on a concept of pre-determined

¹¹ This research was jointly carried out between the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC). It is introduced in the next chapter on page 70.

learning outcomes, effectively meet *all* the literacy needs of *all* the people of South Africa. The focus of the thesis accordingly shifted towards the challenge of determining and discussing the *national* role of literacy in South Africa, and towards a consideration of the implications that this role might have for the various literacy needs present in the new South Africa.

The final section of Chapter two accordingly outlines a methodology derived from the theoretical groundwork set out earlier. The key section of the methodological approach relates to five themes that are used to generate a reading of the texts. Two of the themes are especially essential to the analysis – they are the themes of equity and growth. These themes, representing what are often considered to be principles in conflict, serve to deliberately impose a tension in the reading of the texts and therefore initiate provocative questions. Because the themes often seem to be at variance with each other, the perception that the role of literacy emerges through a process of negotiation and competition is amplified. This is a sense that is consistent with the theoretical approach to exploring the role that literacy plays in society.

As mentioned previously, Chapters three, four and five form the bulk of the thesis analysis. The chapters engage with a series of texts, or conditioned discourses, analysed in a chronological sequence. Chapter three is therefore concerned with conditioned discourses emerging between 1980 and 1989 (the time period leading up to negotiations towards a new South Africa). Chapter four focuses on those produced between 1990 up until 1994 (a period of transition), and the final chapter engages with discourses published after 1994 up until the year 2000, or post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter three makes it very clear that up until 1990 adult basic literacy was not a high priority for the government. In some respects, this chapter is about absences. For example, the first discourse focused on is primarily concerned with reforming labour

legislation. The text imparts a sense of the status of black workers in South Africa, their position within a labour hierarchy and the attitudes of the state towards improving their basic skill levels. In many ways this report provides insight into *why* literacy discourses did not feature high on the government's agenda. Other texts considered in this chapter reveal how attitudes towards basic education evolved over the next few years in terms of the growing realisation, especially by big businesses, that the country faced a massive skills crisis. Chapter two discusses how the role of literacy at this time was carved out between conflicting needs and principles especially evidenced in the conflict occurring between the demands for reforming legislation to facilitate better training for workers, and the social separatist principles of apartheid.

Perhaps the biggest absence dealt with in this chapter relates to People's Education. As a vanguard discourse that challenged the state's attitudes towards black people's education, People's Education is therefore not formally represented in an 'officially recognised' documented format. It has been described as a movement, rather than a specific concept, and as such it can be argued that it does not lend itself to being a 'conditioned discourse' (Muller 1987). Nevertheless, People's Education, by its very existence, has a conditioning effect on other documents produced at that time and therefore is an important feature in attempts to influence the role of literacy in South Africa.

Chapter four is concerned with a period in South Africa that is described as transitional, a period of negotiations and tensions, and period of conflicting principles and visions for what the future of South Africa will be. This is evident on several levels: between different political parties, between participants representing different interests while participating in researching future policy options, and on an individual level between 'activists' and 'experts'. The struggle over the future role of literacy relates to an awareness of where South Africa has come from historically, and a perception of what

the country is moving towards in terms of a post cold-war world caught up in a process of 'globalisation'. In other words, this is a time when equity and growth imperatives are both deemed highly relevant. The role of literacy is therefore concerned with the challenge of how to accommodate both, as well as with the enormous question of whether either principle can be achieved at all through a process of adult basic education.

It is in chapter five that the evolution in the role of literacy begins to crystallise. Adult basic education is more highly represented in national policy than ever before and therefore provides for an analysis which can contrast the 'official' stance *vis-à-vis* literacy with the arguments in the preceding two chapters that have sought to shape and influence it. The language used in the discourses in this chapter becomes increasingly relevant, and the terms and principles underpinning the vision of a unified national education framework are explored with the intention of seeing how they too serve to structure the role of literacy. Is this a perception of adult literacy that neutralises the complexity that the term has come to encapsulate, and that the following chapter will clearly demonstrate? Is the role of literacy reduced to one particular agenda or does it attempt to accommodate the varied arguments articulated in the previous two chapters? Is adult literacy important in South Africa, and if so, why?

Thinking about Adult Literacy

Harvey Graff, an influential literacy historian, has claimed that, “Literacy [...] is *profoundly misunderstood*” (1987a: 17). He comments that, “different commentators [often] ‘mean’ different things by reference to ‘literacy’ and that the same persons sometimes implicitly contradict themselves in their employment of ‘literacy’” (ibid.: 8). The first section of this chapter will provide an overview of some of the more significant ways in which approaches and conceptualisations of adult literacy have changed in the last century and in so doing will introduce an insight into how literacy has been understood, or, as Graff claims, misunderstood.

The concept of ‘functional literacy’, for example, has been repeatedly modified since the 1940s. It will be shown too in this chapter that despite early attempts to define what it is that literacy actually means, the term – what it signifies, what it aims to do, and the claims made about what it can achieve – is still the subject of intense debate. Social literacy theories, or what Graff refers to as the ‘third generation’ in the historical study of literacy (1986: 124) especially evidences this. Other literacy researchers commonly

refer to this period in literacy research as the 'New Literacy Studies' (Street 1993 and 1995; Gee 1996: 39; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000).¹²

The chapter will trace how the concept of literacy has evolved from being very narrowly defined – especially in terms its 'functionality' – to the more recent concepts arrived at at the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held at Jomtien, Thailand. The chapter contrasts earlier decades' considerations of 'functional' literacy with a broader discussion of the contribution that social literacy research has made to understanding literacy as a 'social practice'. With this in mind, it becomes clear that the movement away from strict functionality in the 1990s – signalled especially by the expanded vision of literacy arrived at at Jomtien – owes much to the thinking behind literacy as a social practice.

In the course of discussing evolving approaches to literacy, this chapter will briefly refer to the experience of Tanzania under UNESCO's Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP). The Tanzanian experience serves several purposes. First, it provides an 'African' view of literacy's role in society. Second, the unique Tanzanian philosophy of *Ujamaa* impacted on the developing Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa which, in turn, had some influence on the South African literacy field at this time. Finally, the Tanzanian approach to mass literacy stands as a possible option that might have been adopted by the South Africans post-apartheid, especially given the scope of the South African literacy challenge and its relationship to redress.

The second section of this chapter provides a broad chronological overview of literacy in South Africa up until the year 2000. This introduction to the literacy field serves as a

¹² James Gee has written on the development of the New Literacy Studies and its relationship to other social movements, see Gee 2000.

backdrop for later discussions in the thesis where the role of literacy is teased out in more detail through a close examination of official discourses. Accordingly, Section 2 of this chapter is especially useful in that it gives a ‘feel’ for the field and introduces some elements of the field that will be referred to again in the main body of the thesis.

Section 1: Shifting conceptions of literacy

Functional literacy

The concept of ‘functional literacy’ has historically been linked with the ability to perform certain tasks. The term first appeared in the United States during World War I when it was associated with the types of skills needed to meet the tasks of modern soldiering (Scribner 1979: 207).¹³ It was used again in World War II when the draft revealed that many fit and healthy men (that is, men one would expect to be eligible for active service) were unable to read and write.¹⁴ These people were consequently defined as ‘illiterate’: they were “persons who were incapable of understanding the kinds of written instructions that are needed for carrying out basic military functions or tasks” (Levine 1982: 250). Like an illness or a physical disability, ‘illiteracy’ resulted in many men being deferred from active service. Literacy at this time was therefore considered an essential pragmatic skill that enabled an individual to effectively perform in a particular context. This view of literacy stands as a precursor to subsequent attempts to formally define the concept.

¹³ It was UNESCO, however, that formally introduced the *concept* of ‘functional literacy’ into educational discourses in 1965 (Bhola 1989: 483).

¹⁴ Ginzberg and Bray 1953 contains a chapter concerned with the scale of illiteracy amongst American soldiers during World War II. See chapter four, pages 38-58.

Up until the early 1950s, UNESCO's programme of fundamental education very simply defined a literate person in this way: "A person is literate who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his everyday life" (quoted in Graff 1979: 3). Literacy assessment was equally as simple, often taking place via a census style question which asked respondents (or their families, or their neighbours) if they could read and write (Graff 1987a: 58).

By the 1960s this rudimentary definition of literacy evolved and became associated with an individual's ability to perform certain tasks that involved literacy. Literacy was therefore formally defined in this way:

[A person must be able to] engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community's development (UNESCO quoted in Lind and Johnston 1986: 17).

By the mid 1960s, UNESCO's understanding of literacy as something which enabled a person to 'effectively function' was incorporated into developmental programmes – this is despite the fact that, as Graff subsequently notes, "nowhere [in the definition] are 'effective functioning', 'knowledge and skills', or 'development' defined or discussed" (1979: 3). Literacy's relationship to certain approaches to development remains a debatable point today. However the perceived link between the two has often been used to justify various government approaches to literacy, as we will see in the subsequent chapters of this thesis.

In 1964 UNESCO launched the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP)¹⁵ in an attempt to find ways of transforming literacy into an effective instrument for social

¹⁵ Eleven countries participated in the EWLP: Algeria, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Iran, Madagascar, Mali, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, United Republic of Tanzania. The programme was partially supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The EWLP dominated UNESCO's education programme between 1964 and 1974.

and economic development. In other words, literacy was understood as something that could be used in a developmental framework as a ‘tool’ that would have direct developmental consequences. It was understood to provide a causal link to development and to serve as a measurable variable that related to economic development and modernity (Barton 1994). The ‘functional literacy’ label started to be used in 1965 at the World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy held in Tehran where it was accepted as an “essential element in overall development [...] closely linked to economic and social priorities and to present and future manpower needs” (UNESCO, cited in Bhola 1989: 485). The concept of literacy, in terms of ‘functional literacy’, was therefore expanded into a theoretical ‘functional literacy approach’ to development (Lind and Johnston 1986: 21).¹⁶

It is worth noting too that the 1960’s trend towards understanding literacy as a tool for development coincided with an increasing interest in human capital theory: “Human capital theory is described as the most influential economic theory of western education, setting the framework for government theories since the early 1960s” (Fitzsimons and Peters 1994: 251). In this regard UNESCO’s adoption of a functional literacy approach was especially dependent on the idea of literacy as a vehicle for *economic* development in terms of the effect literacy supposedly had on human activity. Accordingly, the term ‘functional literacy’ was used by UNESCO to describe “the process and content of learning to read and write to the preparation for work and vocational training, as well as a means of increasing the productivity of the individual” (quoted in Verhoeven 1994: 6).

¹⁶ Bhola comments that the politics of literacy during the 1960s was paradoxical: “the USSR was in favour of UNESCO working for universal literacy, while the United States was insisting that UNESCO focus on vocationalised literacy for manpower training for the more organised sectors of the Third World economies” (1989: 485).

Functional literacy at this time can therefore also be described as a human capital approach to literacy.¹⁷

Much of the EWLP's rhetoric and rationale support the human capital elements implicitly captured in the EWLP's understanding of functional literacy. Lind and Johnston note in a SIDA publication that the EWLP "stressed strict economic growth aims such as increased productivity and consequently included vocational subjects in the literacy programmes" (1986: 21). Furthermore, the EWLP interpretation of an economic 'functionality' held that literacy "must be part of a broader development effort; provided in a vacuum it only disappoints expectations" (UNESCO 1972: 42). The resulting EWLP programmes were subsequently referred to as Work-Oriented Adult Literacy Projects (WOALP).

Literacy with a specifically productive/economic focus required the EWLP to be highly selective in terms of who participated in the programmes. For that reason the WOALPs were primarily offered to adults who, in UNESCO's terms, could draw "the most personal benefit and make the greatest contribution to national economic and social progress as a result of becoming literate" (UNESCO 1972: 42). UNESCO was particularly supportive of the view that literacy could "play a generative role in socio-economic development of communities by unlocking human potential in farmers, fisherman, artisans, and workers of those communities [my emphasis]" (Bhola 1970: 1).¹⁸

¹⁷ There is evidence of human capital theory influences in early South African policy documents. In the context of apartheid, human capital theory is stripped back to quite literal interpretations of the workforce (especially the black workforce) as a tool or machine for economic development. This is referred to later on page 149 of this thesis.

¹⁸ Husén argues that it was during this period in literacy history that education was "sold' [...] to the Third World as the main instrument in bringing about development and economic take-off". This, he argues led to a "revolution of rising expectations" (1982: 46-47).

Given that the focus of this thesis is on the role of literacy in South Africa, it is worth taking a closer look at how EWLP literacy initiatives were accommodated in Africa – I shall briefly refer to the Tanzanian experience. Tanzania’s mass literacy campaign is considered to be one of the most successful experiments in literacy training in the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) carried out by UNESCO (Torres and Schugurensky 1994: 135). Its massive National Literacy Campaign between 1972-75 grew out of the UNESCO/UNDP Experimental Functional Literacy Project¹⁹ and, by the end of 1975, about 5.2 million people aged 10 years and over had been enrolled (Kassam and Masisi 1978: 126). Tanzania decided to adopt a selective and intensive approach to literacy, “employing the concept of functional literacy [as phrased by UNESCO] in so far as it was more directly linked to production than other methods” (UNESCO 1976: 103).

The link between literacy as a functional tool for production is clearly demonstrated in the Tanzanian example. Here, the regions on the receiving end of EWLP efforts were those where coffee and cash crops were extensively grown: “Illiteracy, it was thought, constituted a bottle-neck in the diffusion of agricultural innovation and social change in these areas” (Bhola 1970: 2). In addition, one of the programmes’ stated objectives clearly aimed to instil a particular ‘version’ of literacy – the goal was to “teach illiterate men and women basic reading and writing skills, and to solve simple problems of arithmetic, utilising as basic vocabularies the words used in agricultural and industrial practices” (Malya 1979: 143). The clearest statement of intent and expectations comes through in part of the government’s definition of literacy:

Adult literacy, an essential element in overall development, must be closely related to economic and social development priorities and to present and future

¹⁹ The Mwanza-based WOALP programme in Tanzania began in 1968.

manpower needs. All efforts should therefore tend towards functional literacy (Mbakile cited in Malya 1979: 144).

The Tanzanian approach to functional literacy did however differ from that of UNESCO's. The Tanzanian approach posited functional literacy within a unique ideological framework summarised in the word *Ujamaa*²⁰, which in turn is described by the party leadership as a Tanzanian version of socialism (Mushi 1991: 354).²¹

Julius Nyerere expresses the sentiment of *Ujamaa* ideology in this way:

We are not importing a foreign ideology into Tanzania and trying to smother our distinct social patterns with it. We have deliberately decided to grow, as a society, out of our own roots, but in a particular direction and towards a particular kind of objective. We are doing this by emphasising certain characteristics of our traditional organisation, and extending them so we can embrace the possibilities of modern technology and enable us to meet the challenge of life in the twentieth century world (Nyerere 1968:2).²²

Apart from the economic objectives expressed above, Tanzania seemed too to be aspiring toward a politicised form of adult education that was at odds with the EWLP's concept of a dispassionate and practically *functional* form of literacy:

²⁰ The term *Ujamaa* is a Swahili word that literally translates to mean 'familyhood'. It is however generally understood to mean 'socialism' or 'Tanzanian socialism'.

²¹ It is worth noting at this point in the thesis that Nyerere's *Ujamaa* philosophy appealed to Black Consciousness proponents in South Africa who viewed it as being very similar in principle to the South African concept of *ubuntu*, or black communalism. Moyo notes the notion of humanity held within the concept of *ubuntu* is best captured in the words "*ubuntu nguruntu ngabantu*" which literally translates into "people are people through other people" (Moyo 1995: 234). The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa is discussed on page 140.

²² Tanzania's basic policy on education is based on Nyerere's 'Education for Self-Reliance', a policy statement announced in 1967 which grew out of the Arusha declaration. The Arusha declaration is a declaration of intent oriented towards self-reliance: "for our development we have to depend upon ourselves and our own resources. These resources are land, and people" (Nyerere 1968 : 318). It is about "mobilising human resources for self-reliant development rather than relying entirely on capital or material resources" (Kassam 1978: 4). The Arusha declaration espouses, in the main, two things: "The first is the dismantling of class distinctions between Africans, these 'new Gulfs' which rest on the educational and professional privilege of a select few. The second is a new morality – one of frugality and hard work – to lay the cornerstone for the development of Tanzania" (Zanolli 1971: 29).

it is not only the leaders who must be involved in the building of socialism. There must be an active adult education system which is directed at helping the people to understand the principles of socialism and their relevance to real development and freedom (Nyerere 1968: 31).

Nyerere identified the importance of adult education within Tanzania in his introduction to the first five-year plan (1964-69). His words again link economic and political concerns:

First we must educate adults. Our children will not have an impact on our economic development for five, ten or even twenty years. The attitudes of the adults [...] on the other hand, have an impact now. The people must understand the plans for development of this country; they must be able to participate in changes which are necessary. Only if they are willing and able to do this will this plan succeed (Nyerere quoted in Mundy 1993: 395).

The combined effect of UNESCO's EWLP approach and *Ujamaa* ideology has been described by some as quite *revolutionary*, as a foray into mass-literacy that is characterised by "frontal attack socialism" (Unsicker quoted in Mundy 1993: 402). The successes of the Tanzanian approach have been documented in a Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA)²³ publication: the Tanzanian illiteracy rate, it claims, was brought down from "probably more than 67% in 1967 to a low 20% in 1981" (Johnsson, Nyström and Sundén 1983: 77). These claims are however compromised by some of the criticisms of the Tanzanian literacy campaign. For example, "It is claimed that the Tanzanian government has built a façade of well-running adult education programmes in order to continue receiving foreign aid from donors, especially from Scandinavian countries" (Torres and Schugurensky 1994: 142). Other weaknesses relate

²³ The relationship between Tanzania and Sweden is frequently commented on. The Tanzanian literacy campaign was partly inspired by a visit to Sweden and particularly by the Swedish Folk High Schools and Folk Development Education (FDE) (Johnsson, Nyström and Sundén 1983: 43).

[FDE] is profoundly democratic in its outlook on man and society. It is based on participation pedagogy. It has a strong faith in every individual's ability to develop actively, and in the group both for the acquisition of knowledge and for taking action. Its emphasis is on human development rather than formal qualification" (Norbeck, Albinson, Holgersson and Sundén [n.d.]: 3).

to the fact that literacy educators were themselves poorly educated and badly remunerated, and to the fact that most of the literacy work was left to primary school teachers and school leavers (Mushi 1991: 356).

It seems indisputable, though, that part of the success of the Tanzanian scheme can be attributed to the positive involvement of donor agencies, especially the UNDP/UNESCO projects and SIDA (Mundy 1993: 402).²⁴ By the 1980s the Tanzanian literacy campaign was to again fall under the influence and direction of donor agencies, this time with agencies having a negative impact. At this stage the country was “increasingly indebted to the World Bank and the IMF and consequently to the terms that governed these institutions lending policy” (Buchert 1994: 145). In particular, King notes that education policy in the late 1980s was clearly linked to the World Bank’s policy of structural adjustment, a fact that qualifies Nyerere’s *Ujamaa* vision quite profoundly (1992: 258; *see also* Senanu 1995).²⁵

In general, the WOALPs were far from conclusively successful and a critical assessment of the EWLP (published in 1976 by UNESCO) questions the perceived link between development and literacy.²⁶ It argues that if “development is mainly economic growth, as was widely accepted at the time EWLP was launched, then rather narrowly

²⁴ Nyerere displayed a deep sensitivity to the need to maintain a good relationship with potential donors. For example, Samoff points out that the *Ujamaa* approach to socialism was largely undefined. He notes that its main identifiably socialist elements can be seen in its emphasis on “nationalisation of major economic institutions, planning, equality of income, improved social services, and democratic participation, with intermittent concern for agrarian reform” (1990: 214). Nyerere later pointed out the lack of definition was a deliberate strategy to avoid the risk of excluding powerful allies when Tanzania needed them the most (*ibid.*).

²⁵ I will be discussing the impact of donor agencies on literacy work in more detail later in this chapter on page 47.

²⁶ Other shortcomings of the programmes are reported on in more detail in the EWLP assessment report (UNESCO/UNDP 1976). *See also* Abraham 1994; Johnsson, Nyström, and Sundén 1983; Sjöström and Sjöström 1983; Jones 1988: 159-211; Malya 1979: 144-146).

work-oriented literacy is its functional partner” (UNESCO/UNDP 1976: 122). The report however goes on to comment that, “it would seem that literacy programmes can only be fully functional – and development contexts can be fully conducive to literacy – if they accord importance to social, cultural and political change as well as economic growth” (ibid.).

The introduction of social, cultural and political issues into the ‘functional’ approach to literacy implies that radical elements brought to the EWLP by countries like Tanzania, for example, had some effect. In the light of this observation, it is also significant that the publication of the EWLP assessment report coincided with other ‘radical’ agendas. One such example relates to the increasing interest during the 1970s in Freirean pedagogy.²⁷ Another instance is the fact that the issuance of the EWLP assessment report corresponded with a change of leadership within UNESCO – Senegal’s Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow’s appointment to the leadership coincided with what Jones refers to as “the first wave of third-world radicalism within the UN” (1988: 216). And it was in this overall context that the concept of functional literacy underwent further definition.

A Freirean approach to literacy education argues that the political reality of learners needs to be critically considered on the grounds that no programme can be politically neutral. M’Bow’s position on literacy work stressed the need for each adult to become the “agent of his or her own literacy training” which implied “a conception of literacy work as being the work of liberation” (M’Bow quoted in Jones 1988: 241). It seems clear then that some of the conclusions reached by the EWLP assessment report, and

²⁷ Paulo Freire’s thinking was developed in the course of writings emerging from work carried out in Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s. Freire’s emancipatory approach to literacy maintained that a pedagogy of the oppressed is one which is forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed: “This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. And in struggle this pedagogy will be made and remade” (1970: 33).

particularly its interest in social, cultural and political change, owes something to the influence at the time of Freirean pedagogy. It is also fair to say that the radical politics of newly independent African countries contributed something to the debate. Tanzania, for example, was the first Southern African Development Community (SADC) country to become independent (in 1961). In fact, Freire himself has commented on how the Persepolis evaluation of the success of literacy programmes found that, “the relative success of literacy campaigns evaluated by UNESCO depended on their relation to the revolutionary transformations of the societies in which the literacy campaigns took place” (Freire and Macedo 1987: 109).

Participants at the Persepolis UNESCO Conference on Literacy in 1975 made it clear that the governments of the developing world and their agencies very often introduced literacy along with a whole range of features of western society thus perpetuating a ‘colonial’ model of literacy transmission (Street 1995: 37). In accordance with this view, the UNESCO definition of ‘functional literacy’ was modified again in the Declaration of Persepolis:

The International Symposium for Literacy [...] considered literacy to be not just the process of learning the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, but a contribution to the liberation of man and his full development. Thus conceived literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives and of its aims; [...] Literacy work, like education in general is a political act. It is not neutral, for the act of revealing social reality in order to transform it, or of concealing it in order to preserve it, is political (quoted in Sjöström and Sjöström 1983: 23).²⁸

²⁸ The Nicaraguan Literacy Campaign (which began four years after the Persepolis conference and made use of Freirian materials) provides one example of the changing perception of literacy’s role in society. The Nicaraguan Ministry of Education believed that “[Literacy] gives the popular masses the first instruments needed to develop awarenesses of their exploitation and to fight for liberation” (cited in Arnove 1986: 18). The experience of mass literacy in Ethiopia is another example of change. After the regime of Haile Selassie was overthrown in the ‘creeping coup’ of 1974 (the UNESCO EWLP was completed in 1975) Ethiopia embarked on a radical mass literacy campaign that was heavily dependent on student involvement (Alemayehu 1988; Balsvik 1994). The campaign is referred to as the Zemacha where Zemacha means ‘Development through Cooperation, Enlightenment and Work Campaign’, and it operated from a predominantly Marxist perspective (Donham 1999). For more information on literacy in Ethiopia, see Sjöström and Sjöström 1983; Mammo 1982 and 1985; Nagash 1996.

These views are echoed in a review of literacy published a few years later in 1979 by the Canadian International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). The publication pointed to a growing consensus that, “Designing literacy programmes is not just a question of how to train the largest number as quickly and as inexpensively as possible; it is an expression of the social structure in which learning takes place” (ICAE 1979: 6). Both the Persepolis Declaration and the ICAE review indicate a movement away from a strictly human capital approach to literacy.

Previous stringently defined views of what adult literacy meant and would accomplish began to be located within the broader context of adult education. For example, Coombs notes that the ‘Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education’, adopted by UNESCO’s 1976 General Conference in Nairobi, rendered all “earlier limited concepts of adult education obsolete”, by declaring that “the term ‘adult education’ denotes the entire body of organised educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise” (cited in Coombs 1985: 28). Furthermore, in words that clearly encompass adult literacy activities, “adult education activities [...] have no theoretical boundaries [...]; they cover all aspects of life and all fields of knowledge” (ibid.). Also in 1976, ‘basic education’ came to be stressed as one of many ‘basic needs’: “Basic education is different from universal primary education it represents the ‘minimum learning needs of especially identified groups’ [...] the target groups include all age groups” (Mbilinyi 1977: 491).

Despite the broadening educational context within which adult literacy was located, the UNESCO General Conference held in 1978 raised the possibility of having a decade devoted to literacy.²⁹ And, by 1979, participants at the World Conference on Agrarian

²⁹ Eleven years later, 1990 became the International Literacy Year and marked the beginning of decade of literacy leading up to the year 2000.

Reform and Rural Development recommended that governments should prioritise efforts towards achieving universal primary education and universal literacy: “By the year 2000 [...] governments should ‘either achieve it or attain and maintain a level that is close to it’” (cited in Noor 1982: 166). This ambition was later realised in the Udaipur Literacy Declaration of 1982, which pledged to eliminate world illiteracy by the year 2000 (ILI 2000: 9).³⁰ However, this ambitious goal had to contend with changing world economic conditions. The early 1980s saw developing countries experience plummeting drops in economic growth and, as interest rates increased in industrialised countries, debt reserivicing obligations grew by 50 per cent between 1980 and 1982 (Orivel 1986: 198; Lewin 1986: 217). An additional pressure on educational spending came from the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) effort to encourage developing countries to dramatically cut social spending in an attempt to increase economic growth (Carnoy 1986: 209).

The fourth International Conference on Adult Education, held in Paris in 1985, referred to the economic crisis that had impacted on educational activities in education, but also noted that, despite the economic challenges, concepts of adult education had expanded considerably. This was attributed by many of the delegates to the 1976 adoption of the Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education at UNESCO’s General Conference (UNESCO 1985: 9). More specifically, the final report of the conference notes that:

Though in many cases adult education remained focused on its primary objective of compensating for an inadequate or even non-existent initial education, that form which consisted in steadily raising the level of knowledge in the context of life-long education and taking account both of advances in theoretical and practical

³⁰ It is worth noting too that a request for an International Literacy Year was included in the Udaipur Declaration (Hall 1989: 574).

knowledge and of technological and social changes had expanded substantially (UNESCO 1985: 10).

The proposal for an International Literacy Year (ILY) was reiterated again at the Paris conference and, in December 1987, the proposal was passed by the United Nations General Assembly. A 1989 UNESCO press release claimed that the initial ILY initiative was to “eliminate illiteracy by the year 2000” but cautioned that “this objective will not be easily attained, given the lack of available resources and the upward statistical spiral of illiteracy figures” (UNESCO 1989).

1990 was International Literacy Year (ILY).³¹ 1990 was also the year of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA).³² Both the ILY launch and the WCEFA were held in Thailand, within weeks of each other. Despite the fact that ILY activities were largely overshadowed by the WCEFA, NGOs participating in the ILY nevertheless played an important role in calling attention to the gender disparity in literacy statistics around the world, and in calling attention to issues regarding language of instruction (McNab 1990: 59; *see also* Ramdas 1989). King consequently notes that despite the fact that “there had been strong concerns about what appeared to be a tendency to give relatively little attention to literacy [in the lead up to the WCEFA]”, it eventually “came into its own, and very forcibly” (1990: 38). Furthermore, “The participants of the Jomtien conference openly acknowledged the failure of the 1980s in terms of literacy work through the world, and called for a decade of action up to the year 2000 to reverse this trend” (Barton 1994: 195).³³

³¹ Hall writes that, “the achievement of International Literacy Year (ILY) was the result of effective co-operation between NGOs, governments and UNESCO” (1989: 574). About 600 NGO representatives from the literacy and adult education movement attended the ILY launch in 1990 in Thailand.

³² The UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank jointly sponsored the WCEFA.

³³ As a result of its apartheid policies, South Africa was isolated from the international community and consequently was not invited to participate in the WCEFA.

The World Declaration on Education for All accordingly observes that “Literacy programmes are indispensable because literacy is a necessary skill in itself and the foundation of other life skills” (WCEFA 1990: 6). Furthermore, in a phrase that encompasses adult and children’s basic education, the declaration clearly states that “Basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults [my emphasis]” (ibid.: 4). Despite these all-encompassing principles, King has noted that the goals and targets for primary education represented a firmer commitment to eradicate children’s illiteracy than did the resolve to address adult illiteracy (1990: 10). With respect to this, the primary education target unequivocally aspires to “universal access to, and completion of, primary education [...] by the year 2000” while the adult illiteracy target is a more tenuous commitment to the “reduction of the adult illiteracy rate [...] to, say, one-half its 1990 level by the year 2000” (WCEFA 1990: 3).³⁴

Like previous conferences, Jomtien uniquely influenced the way in which literacy was defined. Literacy was now couched within what was described as an “expanded vision” of basic education, one which included ‘basic learning needs’, or what the International Literacy Institute (ILI) refers to as “basic learning competencies (BLCs)” (UNESCO 1990: 32 and ILI 2000: 10 respectively; *see also* Grimes 1990). Article 1 of the WCEFA Declaration states that these needs

Comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human being. The scope of basic learning needs

³⁴ It is worth noting, however, that the year 2000 deadline included in the UPE target was arrived at with considerable debate and, most especially, through the intervention of the then executive director of UNICEF (King 1996: 1-2).

and how they should be met varies with individual countries and cultures, and inevitably, changes with the passage of time (UNESCO 1990: 157).³⁵

BLCs are seen to “promote empowerment and access to a rapidly changing world. They should support independent functioning and coping with practical problems or choices as a parent or worker or citizen, and are seen as a critical gatekeeper to job entry and societal advancement in all countries” (ILI 2000: 3). And, in keeping with this expanded vision, human resource development objectives are embedded within the broader notion of “human development” (UNESCO 1990: 1).³⁶

The word ‘globalisation’ does not actually appear in UNESCO’s human development oriented Meeting Basic Learning Needs document,³⁷ but it is used a few years later at the Mid-Decade Education for All (EFA) review held in Amman, Jordan³⁸, where it is noted that the

³⁵ It is worth mentioning at this early stage in the thesis that this approach to education, through an understanding of ‘essential learning tools’ and ‘basic learning content’ is similar in principle to the South African method of understanding knowledge. In South Africa, the overall ‘basic learning need’ is referred to as a capability. A capability is made up of both critical outcomes and specific outcomes, terms that broadly correlate to the ‘essential learning tools’ and ‘basic learning content’ mentioned here. The complex and detailed South African approach will be addressed in more detail in chapter five. The outcomes concepts referred to here are formally defined in Table 8: Definitions of various ‘outcomes’, on page 331.

³⁶ Human development is defined as, “the process of enlarging people’s choices— not just choices among different detergents, television channels or car models but the choices that are created by expanding human capabilities and functionings— what people do and can do in their lives” (UNDP 1999: 16). The first Human Development Report was published in 1990 under the auspices of the UNDP: “It went far beyond narrowly defined economic development to cover the full flourishing of all human choices. It emphasized the need to put people— their needs, their aspirations and their capabilities— at the center of the development effort” (ibid.).

³⁷ It does however note that “meeting the basic learning needs of all has become of greater importance than ever, not only because of technological and other rapid changes in most societies, but also because of the increased global interdependency of nations in their cultural and economic activities” (UNESCO 1990: 8).

³⁸ After its first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa was invited to participate in the EFA process and, as a result, South Africa was represented at Amman.

Context for educational development in the 1990s has been profoundly affected by changes in the world political and economic order following the end of the Cold War: the emergence of new democratic governments, the on-going globalization of the world economy, expansion of the service sector and rapid spread of new information and communication technologies – all of which call for new knowledge, skills and attitudes (UNESCO 1996: 7).³⁹

Recalling the different levels of commitment to primary education and adult literacy at Jomtien, Amman participants reflected on the fact that the term ‘Education for All’ was often interpreted to mean ‘schooling for all’, and was therefore aligned with the need for Universal Primary Education (UPE). The report further points out that forms of knowledge that define ‘basic learning needs’ are changing:

as the economies of [industrialised] countries become increasingly information-based and geared to the world market, ever more sophisticated literacy and numeracy skills become essential in the workplace and in the community, thereby raising the level of basic learning needs (ibid.: 43).⁴⁰

Understanding basic learning needs in the context of a globalising world becomes a central concern of the fifth International Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg, (CONFINTEA V, 1997), where it was argued that a new role of adult education needed to be defined:

the Conference was viewed and lived by many participants as a sounding board to construct a new vision, looking at adult learning as an integral part of a lifelong and life-wide learning process, promoting family and community learning as well as dialogue between cultures, respecting differences and diversity and thereby contributing to a culture of peace (UNESCO Institute of Education 1997: 10; *see also* King 1997a).

³⁹ The changing nature of work in an increasingly knowledge driven society is discussed in greater detail in chapter two of this thesis (see page 115).

⁴⁰ Nevertheless, four years after the publication of this document, the British DfID, for example, has reaffirmed its commitment to “achieving Education for All through Universal Primary Education (UPE)” (DfID 2000: i). This was alluded to in the introduction to this thesis, (see page 6).

In terms of basic needs, however, there is a growing realisation that a globalising world could have a polarising effect on society divided down the line of those who have knowledge and those that do not.

The key resource in a globalisation context is 'knowledge', and basic learning needs are crucially important in the process of developing the adaptive skills needed in a technologically competitive world (UNESCO 1997: 12). While this may seem to accord basic learning needs a higher priority, the opposite could well happen: "employers prefer to invest only in workers who need relatively little further training to upgrade their skills" (ibid.: 13). In terms of literacy specifically, the Hamburg Declaration argued that "Literacy is [...] a catalyst for participation in social, cultural, political and economic activities, and for learning throughout life" (UNESCO 1997a: 4). In the agenda for the future, the CONFINTEA participants committed themselves to "replacing the narrow vision of literacy by learning that meets social, economic and political needs" and to "encouraging creative uses of literacy" (ibid.: 16). It can be argued that these literacy-related views reflect the influence of current literacy research, something that will be addressed in more detail in the next section of the chapter.

The concerns that globalisation brings with it with respect to basic learning needs remained a issue at the World Education Forum conference (aimed at assessing EFA in the year 2000) held in Dakar, Senegal, earlier this year (26-28 April 2000). Again, it was remarked that "globalisation carries with it the danger of creating a market place in knowledge that excludes the poor and the disadvantaged" (WEF 2000b). And, in a comment that goes to the heart of the concerns of this thesis, section 15 of the document notes that

Many countries continue to face the challenges of defining the meaning, purpose and content of basic education in the context of a fast moving world and of assessing learning outcomes and achievements (ibid.).

In particular, section 18 identifies South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa as the most challenging regions facing the goals of Education for All (ibid.). The commitments made a decade earlier in Jomtien were amended. However, as in Jomtien, the commitment to UPE was held up as the more crucial aspect of achieving education for all. The participants resolved that “by 2015 all children [...] will have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality” (WEF 2000). As far as adult basic education was concerned, the participants committed themselves to “achieving a 50 per cent reduction in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults” (ibid.). Despite the marginal role that adult education played in comparison to UPE, the EFA 2000 Assessment noted that the education of adults remained isolated and “often at the periphery of national education systems and budgets” (WEF 2000a).

The Dakar conference also argued that “Adult and continuing education must be greatly expanded and diversified, and integrated into the mainstream of national education and poverty reduction strategies” (WEF 2000a). In many respects, this view echoes the Jomtien call for an ‘expanded vision’ of basic education – an expanded vision within which adult literacy would be located. The Dakar and Jomtien view of adult literacy – namely, as one component functioning within a broader integrated system of adult education – reveals how far conceptualisations of the role of adult literacy have changed since, for example, the narrow human capital view of literacy upheld during the 1960s, or the socio-political perspectives adopted at the 1975 Persepolis conference.

The last decade has witnessed a gradual movement towards thinking about literacy, particularly evident in the 1995 Hamburg Declaration, in terms of the way in which people use it in ‘real life’, and not in the way it is conceived of within top-down programmes. This, to a certain degree, reflects the influences of *social* approaches to literacy research. Terms like ‘essential learning tools’ and ‘basic learning competencies’

(used at Jomtien) hint at a movement towards formally defining knowledge in terms of skills that are socially meaningful within specific contexts. Social literacy theorists have been exploring this view with respect to literacy since the mid-1980s and have consequently suggested that literacy *is* a social practice. Alan Rogers, for example, has argued that “adults do most of their learning by doing” (1997: 12). The implication for adult literacy education therefore is that “adult learning in literacy might best be based on existing literacy activities” – a “literacy-comes-second-approach” (ibid.: 13). Rogers raises two things that he believes need to be done if adult education and literacy are really to be successful:

First, we should take adult education (despite its title) and literacy away from the educationalists and give them to the social development agencies. Adults will learn much more through social and economic development activities rather than through educational activities. [...] And secondly, we should take the facilitators as the main target group for our assistance. Once they have learned and developed their own ways of advancing, then they can help others (ibid.).

The next section of this chapter explores the notion of literacy as a social practice in considerable detail.

Social literacies: the ‘third generation’ of literacy

The term functional literacy, up until Jomtien, has been argued as a ‘supply side’ concept of literacy “in that it presents an apparently precise specification of the minimal level of reading and writing skills required of individuals for their roles in work and as citizens” (Levine 1994: 124). Later developments in literacy research came to problematise this view from a variety of perspectives. Dan Wagner, for example, comments on the complexity of the term ‘literacy’ itself:

Literacy is a remarkable term. While it seems to refer simply to individual possession of the complementary mental technologies of reading and writing, literacy is difficult to define in individuals and to delimit within societies, and the term itself is charged with emotional and political meaning (1993: 2).

Other developments in literacy studies have challenged the notion that it is specifically the basic ability to read and write that plays a direct role in bringing about social change:

Movements to transform social reality appear to have been effective in some parts of the world in bringing whole populations into participation in modern literacy activities. The validity of the converse proposition – that literacy *per se* mobilises people for action to change their social reality – remains to be established” (Scribner 1979: 209).

Even those approaches to literacy that are overtly respectful of the unique social and political circumstances of different communities are questioned in that the claims being made about literacy are subject to intense scrutiny. Gee, for example, critically engages with Freire’s position that education should foster “a critical spirit and creativity, not passivity” and in so doing calls attention to Freire’s comment about reading and writing in relation to ‘thought’:

When we learn to read and write, it is also important to learn to think correctly. To think correctly we should think about our practice in work. We should think about our daily lives (Freire, quoted in Gee 1996: 38).

Gee observes that “It is startling that a pedagogy that Freire says is ‘more a pedagogy of question than a pedagogy of answer’, a pedagogy that is radical because it is ‘less certain of ‘certainties’’, in fact knows what it is to think correctly” (1996: 38).

But even as questions such as these are asked, and research is produced that radically questions the popular perception of what it is that literacy means, old ideas nevertheless continue. For example, Barton has commented that, while there was some evidence at Jomtien that international bodies tried to accommodate new approaches to literacy, they nevertheless did so while at the same time remaining loyal to a functional approach (1994: 195). Similarly, Street argues that much of the rhetoric accompanying International Literacy Year reproduced stereotypes about literacy:

in particular, that ‘illiterates’ were lacking in cognitive skills, living in ‘darkness’ and ‘backward’ and the acquisition of literacy would (in itself, ‘autonomously’) lead to major ‘impacts’ in terms of social and cognitive skills and ‘Development’ (Street 1995: 13).

In contrast to the ‘supply side’ method of thinking about literacy, social literacy theorists instead approach the subject through an understanding of how literacy is socially useful and meaningful to individuals – a ‘demand side’ approach.

David Barton suggests that the New Literacy Studies, or the third generation of literacy research, owes much to the work of four key researchers: Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, Brian Street, and Shirley Brice Heath (1994: 24; Barton and Hamilton 1998: 13). All four researchers, in different ways, locate literacy firmly within the domain of the social thus questioning those functional approaches that view it as an autonomous subject that remains unaffected by its social context. Their research provides valuable terms and concepts that play a major role in defining the theories underpinning the new literacy studies.⁴¹ This section introduces and considers the key concepts contributed by their work.

Scribner and Cole carried out research in the Vai society in north-west Liberia. Their work involved an analysis (grounded in cross-cultural psychology) that compared three population groups in the area: school attendees, Vai script literates, and non-literate people. The results of their research encouraged them to “approach literacy as a set of socially organised practices which make use of a symbol system and a technology for producing and disseminating it” (1981: 236). Scribner and Cole describe this approach as a ‘practice account’ of literacy (*ibid.*: 235). They argue that the various uses of literacy amongst the Vai people require a variety of skills and different types of knowledge that are specific to the occasion. To demonstrate this they show that letter writing, keeping a diary, and record keeping, are all Vai activities that need to utilise different forms of

⁴¹ Social literacy research has also been carried out in South Africa in the form of the Social Uses of Literacy (SoUL) research project. This is referred to in Section 2 of this chapter. See page 70.

literacy skills in order to be performed effectively. Crucially, Scribner and Cole claim that their research did not support the ‘literacy myth’⁴² at all:

On no task – logic, abstraction, memory, communication – did we find all nonliterate performing at lower levels than all literates. [...] We can and do claim that literacy promotes skills among the Vai, but we cannot and do not claim that literacy is a necessary and sufficient condition for any of the skills we assessed (ibid.: 251).

The researchers concluded that the value of their research lay in the fact that “Vai culture is *in* Vai literacy practices: in the writing system, the means used to transmit it, the functions it serves and contexts of use, and the ideologies which confer significance on these functions” (ibid.: 259). In short, their research situated the cognitive skills associated with literacy firmly within cultural practices.

Like Scribner and Cole, Brian Street employs the term literacy practices to convey the sense that the way in which literacy is used is embedded in social practices.⁴³ Unlike Scribner and Cole, Street emphasises the ‘ideological’ nature of literacy practices over and above their preferred use of the concept of culture. He argues that the term ideological is preferable to ‘cultural’ or ‘sociological’ because it incorporates the understanding that literacy practices are aspects of both culture and of power structures. Street takes pains to stress that his use of the term ‘ideology’ is not defined according to

⁴² Harvey J. Graff is attributed with first introducing the notion of ‘literacy myths’ into literacy discourses (See Graff 1979 and Graff 1987). From a historian’s perspective, Graff points out that “Historical findings confirm that there is *no one* route to universal literacy, that there is *no one* path destined to succeed in the achievement of mass literacy levels” (1981: 7). The ‘literacy myth’, he argues, has been constituted by “popular and scholarly conceptions of the value of skills of reading and writing [which] have almost universally followed normative assumptions and expectations of vague but powerful concomitants and effects presumed to accompany changes in the diffusion of literacy” (1987a: 16-17). (Also see Wagner 1993a).

⁴³ The term ‘literacy practice’ is loaded with meaning. Barton and Hamilton explain that “Practice includes people’s awareness of literacy, constructions of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people make sense of literacy” (1998: 6). They argue that practice “cannot wholly be contained in observable activities and tasks” (ibid.: 7).

“old-fashioned Marxist” definitions that understand it as “false consciousness” or “simple-minded dogma” (1993: 7). Instead, “[...] ideology is the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and individual resistance and creativity on the other” (Street 1995: 162). In Street’s opinion, studies that do not take account of the power structures inherent in literacy practices are themselves ‘ideological’ in terms of their need to disguise the power dimension (1993: 7). By considering the ideological aspect of literacy, Street claims to avoid ‘polarising’ approaches taken to literacy (that is, avoids talking about ‘autonomous’ and ‘new literacy studies’) in that the ideological approach encapsulates all aspects of literacy including the cognitive aspects and cultural aspects within a framework of power.

By acknowledging literacy’s ideological components, Street rejects the idea that literacy exists autonomously of its social context, and he rejects what he terms ‘autonomous approaches’ to literacy – these are approaches that consider literacy in its technical aspects, independently of social context (Street 1995: 161).⁴⁴ Autonomous approaches assume that literacy enables one to decontextualise information and therefore make information easily transferable. In terms of this ‘progress’ in knowledge transference, literacy is understood and held up as evidence of a general advancement, of progress, in western civilisation; for example, statements like, “Western European culture changed in an essential way after the invention of alphabetic script by the Greeks [my emphasis]” (Narasimhan 1991: 177). Autonomous approaches hold this belief in progress to be true and consequently tend to work from the premise of ‘literacy for social advancement’. Street argues that the ‘autonomous’ model is dominant in UNESCO and other agencies concerned with literacy:

⁴⁴ In *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (1984), Street discusses the ‘autonomous’ approach to literacy in some detail, particularly with respect to Hildyard and Olson (1978) and Goody (1968 and 1977).

the model assumes a single direction in which literacy development can be traced, and associates it with 'progress', 'civilisation', individual liberty, and social mobility. It isolates literacy as an independent variable and then claims to be able to study its consequences (1995: 29; *see also* Street 1984: 183-212).

Other critics have additionally pointed out that the 'literacy for social advancement' approach implicitly assumes that those who lack literacy skills are *not* socially advanced and that literate people are "more reflective, more abstract, more complex and more logical" than 'illiterate' people (Denny 1991: 66). Similarly, that certain "ways of thinking, cognitive abilities, facility in logic, abstraction and higher order mental operations are all integrally related to the achievement of literacy" (Street 1995: 21). The result is that, using Street's terminology, the autonomous approach gives rise to a deficit theory of literacy which in itself creates a polarising effect on society resulting in an 'illiterate' versus 'literate' dichotomy – a 'great divide' (*ibid.* and Street 1984).⁴⁵ These negative perceptions about illiteracy and non-literate people have been dismissed by many, most notably Harvey Graff, as 'literacy myths'. Gee ironically comments, with respect to literacy myths, that "Literacy, it is felt, freed some of humanity from a primitive state, from an earlier stage of human development. If language is what makes us human, literacy, it seems, is what makes us civilised" (Gee 1996: 26).

Shirley Brice Heath's contribution to the new way of approaching literacy emerged from research conducted over a period of seven years during which time she closely examined how the individuals within the Appalachian community used literacy in their daily lives. Her work focuses on a multitude of specific instances in which reading and writing are used. These particular moments, where social talk or activities revolve around a piece of text, are described by Heath as a "literacy event" (1983: 200). A

⁴⁵ Earlier in this chapter, on page 34, I referred to the polarising effect that critics anticipate might occur as a result of globalisation. In that context the 'great divide' splits those who have certain forms of knowledge from those who do not. What is not clear at this stage is the extent to which the words 'knowledge' and 'literacy' are synonymous.

literacy event is specifically defined as “any action sequence, involving one or more persons, in which the production and/or comprehension of print plays a role” (Anderson, Teale, and Estrada quoted in Heath 1983: 386).⁴⁶ Barton and Hamilton describe it in this way: “Events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them” (1998: 7). Heath shows that literacy is deeply located within the various ways in which families in communities organise their lives and use space and time. She writes

Roadville and Trackton residents have a variety of literate traditions, and in each community these are interwoven in different ways with oral uses of language, ways of negotiating meaning, deciding on action, and achieving status. Patterns of using reading and writing in each community are interdependent with ways of using space (having bookshelves, decorating walls, displaying telephone numbers), and using time (bedtime, meal hours, and homework sessions). Habits of using the written word also develop as they help individuals fulfil self-perceived roles of caregiving and preparing children for school (1983: 234).

Heath’s research reveals literacy to be infinitely and minutely woven into the daily fabric of people’s lives to the extent that it is almost an unconscious part of it. Barton and Hamilton confirm this when they comment that “the notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that it always exists in a social context” (1998: 7).

Scribner and Cole, Street and Heath all contribute key terms that play a major role in defining the central components of the new literacy studies. Terms like ‘literacy events’ and ‘literacy practices’ firmly locate literacy within a social domain. And taking into account the fact that a social domain would comprise both traditional and new approaches to literacy, Street’s concept of an ‘ideological approach’ to literacy studies introduces the understanding that ‘power relations’ will inevitably feature in literacy

⁴⁶ Literacy events are more focused and specific than literacy practices. The latter term (as used by Street, Scribner and Cole) is more abstract and “refers to both behaviour and the social and cultural conceptualisations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing” (Street 1995: 2). In other words, literacy events are located within a broader framework of social and ideological concerns.

discourses. It has to be said though that these micro approaches to literacy work, and the belief that the meaning of literacy is bound up within an individual's life in a multitude of ways, creates an impression of literacy that resists definition. So how do we start to think about literacy? It is perhaps more useful to develop a conceptual understanding of where and how literacy manifests itself, and to work towards defining it from that point on.

James Gee embeds the notion of literacy within that of Discourses⁴⁷ and in so doing arrives at the belief that 'multiple' literacies exist within society. He distinguishes between two broad forms of discourses in society; primary discourses and secondary discourses. Primary Discourses, he argues, are those that people acquire through their family settings. This is the Discourse that socialises an individual within a particular setting: "They form our initial taken-for-granted understandings of who we are and who people 'like us' are, as well as what sorts of things we ('people like us') do, value and believe when we are not 'in public' (Gee 1996: 137). Gee's explanation of what a primary discourse is is supported by Stephen Pinker's description of how we acquire language through what he terms the language *instinct*.⁴⁸ Pinker argues that

Language is not a cultural artefact that we learn the way we learn to tell the time or how the federal government works. Instead, it is a distinct piece of the biological makeup of our brains. Language is a complex, specialised skill, which develops in

⁴⁷ Gee defines the term 'discourse' in this way:

A *Discourse* is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artefacts', of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role' (Gee 1996: 131).

⁴⁸ I am quoting Pinker at length here because both his perception of language as an *instinct* and Gee's discussion of primary discourses are supported by, and supportive of, the Bourdieuan concepts that I refer to throughout the following chapter. Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital provide a useful guide to my analysis of South African literacy discourses. See chapter two, pages 77, 79 and 84 respectively.

the child spontaneously, without conscious effort or formal instruction, is deployed without awareness of its underlying logic, is qualitatively the same in every individual, and is distinct from more general abilities to process information or behave intelligently [...] Thinking of language as an instinct inverts popular wisdom, especially as it has been handed down in the canon of the humanities and social sciences. Language is no more a cultural invention than is upright posture (1995: 18).

Our primary Discourse is ours ‘for free’, something that we acquire spontaneously and instinctually. As Gee says, “All humans barring serious disorder, become members of one Discourse free, so to speak – their primary Discourse” (1996: 141).⁴⁹

Gee’s notion of secondary Discourses relates to those discourses that do not come to us freely and intuitively. These are those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socialisations within various local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialisation – for example, churches, gangs, schools, offices. They constitute the recognisability and meaningfulness of our ‘public’ (more formal) acts (1996: 141).

Gee thus locates literacy, and defines it, in accordance with his considerations of discourses:

I believe that any socially useful definition of literacy must be couched in terms of these notions of primary and secondary Discourse. Thus, I define literacy as mastery of a secondary Discourse.

Therefore, literacy is always plural⁵⁰: literacies (there are many of them, since there are many secondary Discourses, and we all have some and fail to have others). If one wanted to be rather pedantic and literalistic, then we could define literacy as mastery of a secondary Discourse involving print (Gee 1996: 143).

⁴⁹ Gee’s use of the term discourse distinguishes between ‘discourses’ and ‘Discourses’. The former describes ‘language-in-use, while the latter refers to moments when discourses are “melded integrally with non-language ‘stuff’ to enact specific identities and activities” (Gee 1999: 7). This is not a convention that I have sustained in this thesis, although I do refer to ‘Discourse’ when discussing Gee’s use of the word.

⁵⁰ Gee talks about various ‘texts’ that are ‘read’. Thus leading to concepts such as visual literacy, computer literacy, literary literacy – literacies derived from painting, literature, films, television, computers (among others) (Gee 1996: 141-42).

Literacy is therefore defined as a secondary Discourse. Secondary discourses, however, are defined in terms of our primary discourses in that they are those which enable us to be socialised within the contexts of our immediate lives. Literacy is therefore inextricably linked to both our instinctual selves as well as our social selves (the role we play in a community and how others see us and understand us as belonging to that community).⁵¹

Lev Semenovitch Vygotsky's⁵² work predates Gee's concepts but addresses the essential principles Gee proposes in a similar way. It can be plausibly argued too that Vygotsky's work was to indirectly influence the New Literacy Studies through Scribner and Cole who, along with two other colleagues, co-edited a volume of his work entitled L. S. Vygotsky: Mind in Society.⁵³ Vygotsky argued that higher mental functioning has its origins in social activity:

Any function in the child's development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition [...] It goes without saying that internalisation transforms the process itself and changes its structure and function (quoted in Wertsch 1990: 113).

This insight is articulated by Vygotsky as a differentiation between "the 'everyday concept', that develops spontaneously in the course of living and the 'scientific concept', which is acquired through verbal definition and is usually transmitted through formal

⁵¹ This is something that is supported by Heath's description of a literacy event. This was referred to a little earlier on page 42).

⁵² Lev Semenovitch Vygotsky was a Soviet psychologist: "L. S. Vygotsky (1896-1934) is the founder of a dialectical materialist approach to psychological theory that has been variously characterised as a 'sociocultural' or 'sociohistorical' framework" (Scribner 1990: 267).

⁵³ Cole, M.; John-Steiner, V.; Scribner, S. and Souberman, E. 1978 L. S. Vygotsky: Mind in Society Harvard Univeristy Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts

(school) instruction (Scribner 1968: 180). Using Gee's language, Vygotsky is essentially differentiating between a primary Discourse and a secondary Discourse.

The relationship between primary and secondary discourses, within a specific context, is explicated in terms of a description of how a context functions as an 'activity system'.⁵⁴ Engeström writes, "Contexts are activity systems. An activity system integrates the subject, the object, and the instruments (material tools as well as the signs and symbols) into a unified whole" (1993). And in this animated context, Lave argues that

Meaning is not created through individual intentions; it is mutually constituted in relations between activity systems and persons acting, and has a relational character. Context may be seen as the historically constituted concrete relations within and between situations (1993: 18)

Primary discourses give us our instinctive understanding of what it is to 'be' within a particular context (our everyday concept), and this in turn has a defining and guiding influence on what it is we learn (our scientific concept). As Boud and Miller explain, "Learning takes place within a framework of taken-for granted assumptions about what is legitimate to do, to say and even to think" (1996: 14). In this regard, different people will use 'literacy' differently, for different purposes, and in different ways depending on their different contexts. Sylvia Scribner points out that, "In the course of activities, people engage in goal-directed actions, carried out for particular purposes under particular conditions and with particular technical means" (1987: 229).

Gee's tentative attempt to specifically define literacy falls short of equipping policy makers and donor agencies with the exact terms and specifications of what the one thing that literacy absolutely *is*, *does*, and can *potentially achieve*. His definition of literacy as 'mastery of a secondary Discourse involving print' is not as straightforward to address

⁵⁴ 'Activity theory' has its origins in Vygotsky's argument that "socially meaningful activity should serve as explanatory principle in regard to consciousness" (Daniels 1993: 48).

as is, for example, the 1960s concept of ‘functional literacy’. Defining literacy in terms of how it is socially used reveals that the definitive meaning of literacy depends on too many variables to be restricted to a single definition. This suggests that how governments and agencies approach literacy and talk about it possibly says less about what literacy actually *is*, and more about the claims that they are trying to make about literacy.

The way in which social literacy theories have served to problematise earlier conceptualisations of literacy goes to the heart of one of the challenges that the Dakar Framework for Action says needs to be confronted – and that relates to the challenge of “defining the meaning, purpose and content of basic education”, or, the *role* of basic education in society (WEF 2000b). Alongside this challenge, adult basic education is also faced with the fact that donors are no longer as interested in funding adult literacy initiatives as they once were. This factor is a powerful reason why the literacy problems that the world faced in the 20th century still remain a challenge in the 21st century.

Literacy as a marginal concern? A brief overview of donor support

In 1990, the Jomtien commitment to basic education, coupled with the UNDP’s focus on ‘human development’, promulgated a dual focus on poverty and individual basic needs which implicitly married socio-cultural needs with economic development. King and Carr-Hill found that in the two years following Jomtien there was a noticeable increase in aid commitment from donor agencies to the basic education sector, a fact that suggested that WCEFA commitments were being taken seriously by donor agencies (1992: 8-10). However King and Carr-Hill also cautioned that “reporting on [financial] support to basic education is not straightforward [because] many projects do not fall neatly into the sub-sector of primary schooling, or adult literacy, or basic skills development” (ibid.: 18). In 2000, Bentall *et al* report that bilateral funding for basic

education had increased from around 1% of total education commitments in 1990 to approximately 15% in 1997 (2000: 28). The authors echo the comments made by King and Carr-Hill in 1992 regarding the difficulty of determining how the proportions of basic education aid that went to each basic education sector: “There is a major problem in reporting sector breakdowns for disbursements in general and of reporting amounts of aid allocated/committed to basic education in particular” (ibid.: 30)..

In 1996, however, Archer and Cottingham clarified the position of donors with respect to adult basic education by saying, “since [Jomtien], despite an increase in primary education for children by both governments and international donors, there has been relatively little parallel investment in adult education (Archer and Cottingham 1996: 3). Jones, writing about the World Bank in 1997, similarly noted that “the adult literacy area retains a virtual pariah status within the Bank, despite some lip-service to the contrary” (1997: 368). Bennell and Furlong have also pointed out that the relatively small increase in International Development Association (IDA) loans between 1990 and 1996 resulted in increased competition amongst various governments for these resources. Countries that had not successfully obtained IDA support⁵⁵ tended not to borrow at commercial rates of interests to support basic education initiatives.

It has been argued that the disinterest that major donors have in underwriting adult literacy initiatives can be traced back to the 1970s, and specifically to their general disenchantment with UNESCO’s EWLP programme:

The EWLP procured for UNESCO within the UNDP and the World Bank a damaging reputation, at least as far as its commitment to literacy was concerned. This, more than any other single factor, justified the on-going scepticism in these circles that a ‘hard-headed’ approach to adult literacy was difficult if not impossible

⁵⁵ Loans from the IDA are ‘soft loans’ that have highly concessional rates of interest (as opposed to commercial terms) and are usually lent to low income developing countries (Bennell and Furlong 1996: 8).

– possible only if evidence was irrefutable that work-oriented literacy would lead to measurable increases in worker productivity (Jones 1992: 99).

King has noted that the World Bank's attention towards the end of the 1960's and in the early 1970s had turned instead to nonformal education:

Nonformal education was attractive as a criticism of the imbalances and elitism of formal education systems, and as a way of signalling the fact that education was not helping the poorest segments of society (1991: 167).

By 1990 the World Bank's interest in financing adult basic education, in particular adult literacy education, was minimal – a fact clearly noted in a World Bank working paper:

Support for literacy programmes was included in 49% of the [Non-formal Education and Training] programs supported by the Bank. The allocation of funds to the literacy component was, in fact, negligible. Of the completed projects with literacy components, 35% did not even mention the literacy component in the completion report and only about 25% was satisfactorily carried out (Verspoor 1990: 27).

In short, “The World Bank has studiously neglected literacy programmes for adults and young people [and where] significant progress has been made since the 1960s in adult literacy, the World Bank has not been associated with it” (Jones 1992: 216).

It is therefore not surprising that, following the Jomtien conference (and in spite of the inclusive notion of basic education *for all*), the World Bank confirmed that its own trend towards prioritising and supporting primary education projects would continue and in all likelihood, increase. In the World Bank's view, the commitment towards *primary* basic education reflected the “growing realisation of the importance of this level of education for economic growth and the reduction of poverty” (World Bank 1995: 148-149).⁵⁶ The World Bank was not alone in shifting its focus away from the funding of adult literacy

⁵⁶ It can be argued that the World Bank's interest in primary education has its origins in the 1975 Persepolis conference. Here participants are said to have recognised, “the error of an exclusive concentration on adult training while allowing the literacy instruction of children to continue in unexamined modes” (Graff 1987: 54). Also see, World Bank 1986, and World Bank 1990.

projects. King notes that, “For some agencies, notably USAID, the absence of a clear pay-off to literacy on its own has been one of the reasons that the emphasis has been on skill development and income generation as a first step” (1991: 163).

Jones suggests that World Bank policy generally depends on the answer given to a single question:

At the heart of [World Bank policy] concerns is a single question with which the Bank grapples unceasingly: how might education better contribute to development, especially economic growth through increased productivity (1992: 232).

McGrath notes, however, that the World Banks’ strongly neo-liberal position is on the wane in the late 1990s, as are other institutions (1998: 5). This is partly related to the trend in the 1990s towards defining poverty in terms of the impact it has on human development⁵⁷: “Incorporating other dimensions of poverty – longevity and literacy – into our definition [of poverty] expands considerably the range of policy instruments available to alleviate poverty” (Kunbar and Squire 1999: 13).

The World Development Report: 2000/2001 makes this observation:

To many, including staff at the World Bank and other multilateral financial institutions, fiscal prudence, free markets, and outward orientation had clearly demonstrated their superiority as the most efficient way for countries to grow and develop.

But it has become clear that simple strategies for development and poverty reduction are elusive. While markets are a powerful force for poverty reduction, institutions that ensure they operate smoothly and that their benefits reach poor people are important as well (IBRD/World Bank 2001: 192).

Key buzzwords accompanying this new thinking include ‘partnerships’, ‘poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs)’ and ‘sector wide approaches (SWA)⁵⁸’. These words

⁵⁷ For example, the development by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) of the Human Development Index (HDI) is one example of this type of thinking (Kunbar and Squire 1999: 12).

⁵⁸ See Ratcliffe, M. and Murray, M. 1999 *Sector Wide Approaches to Education: a strategic analysis* DfID Occasional Paper, Serial No. 32, DfID: London

and their associated concepts are intended to move away from the prescriptive approaches adopted by the Bank in the past. However, despite this new approach, the World Bank still reserves a certain degree of control, argued in terms of its responsibility regarding ‘global priorities’ – in particular, those that “emerge from the Bank’s commitment to the international education goals” (IBRD/World Bank 1999: 29).

Nevertheless, the linking of poverty and factors such as literacy, combined with the focus on poverty reduction strategies, has provided the opportunity to renew arguments for the funding of adult basic education in the 21st century (Lauglo [forthcoming] and Oxfam International 2000). There remains a concern, however, that the prioritising of UPE in the international development targets will lead to donors choosing to fund primary basic education over adult basic education. For example, basic education forms a crucial element of the DfID’s poverty reduction strategy, but, as a speech by the Secretary of State for International Development revealed, it is primary education that is envisaged to pave the way “for illiteracy to be removed from the human condition for the first time ever within 20 years” (Short 1999).⁵⁹ This position was strongly emphasised again in another speech delivered to the World Education Forum at Dakar. The title says it all: ‘Universal Primary Education: the key to poverty reduction’ (Short 2000; *see also* DfID 2000).

The remaining part of this overview on the funding of basic education will look at how funding initiatives have affected South African adult basic education initiatives. Funding initiatives in South Africa are complicated by more than economic concerns or a specific interest in primary education, mainly because of the history of apartheid and the desperate need for redress and social reconstruction. The Independent Development

⁵⁹ The British Development White Paper focus on poverty is evidenced in the title of the document: *Eliminating World Poverty: a challenge for the 21st century* (DfID 1997).

Trust (IDT) in South Africa was set up in 1990 by the National Party government with an initial grant of R2 billion grant, and was mandated to uplift the “poorest of the poor” (*Financial Mail* 1995b).⁶⁰ The initiative was partly motivated through a realisation that the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) had limited grant funding capacity and that independent agencies would become vital in the process of social amelioration (Heymans 1997 and Mehl *et al* 1994). The IDT, as a result, represents a public sector supported development fund managed outside the public sector. The IDT’s early affiliation with the National Party however earned it the reputation of being little more than a “grand gesture” by the National Party government, and it was dismissed by many NGOs as a “ ‘liberal’ outfit designed to effect palliatives” to the poor (*Financial Mail* 1996b).

Many NGOs in South Africa have relied instead on support from the Joint Education Trust (JET).⁶¹ Like the IDT, JET was set up in 1990 and referred to as the Private Sector Initiative (PSI). It consisted of 10 representatives nominated by the private sector funders who initiated the organisation. Although it was principally corporate funded, JET had a wide range of trustees from several major political and economic organisations (McGrath 1996: 169).⁶² In 1992 JET targeted three areas in education:

⁶⁰ It is worth noting that the first chairperson of the IDT was Jan Steyn, who had previously been the chairperson of the Urban Foundation. The Urban Foundation’s role in education under apartheid will be briefly introduced later in this chapter (on page 65) and referred to in more detail in chapter three (see page 150).

⁶¹ JET is also responsible for commissioning two research projects in South Africa that have significantly contributed to broadening the literature available on the adult basic education field beyond policy documents. One project resulted in the publication of the Survey of Adult Basic Education in the 1990s (Harley *et al* 1996), while the various reports of the SoUL project have been compiled into The Social Uses of Literacy: theory and practice in contemporary South Africa (Prinsloo and Breier 1996). These initiatives are referred to again in Section 2 of this chapter on pages 70 and 70 respectively.

⁶² Bird writes that JET “was initially intended to be a ‘consensus forum’ between so-called community groups (which represent the vast majority of South Africans) and organisations of large capital” (1992: 22).

adult education, youth development and improving the quality of teachers (Jansen 1992: 14). With respect to JET's role in improving the quality of teachers, Jansen includes a quote signifying the special link between JET, education and market orientated principles: JET's focus was aimed towards improving the quality of teachers "particularly in subjects relevant to employment opportunities" (ibid.). Harley *et al* note that JET, in 1996, remained "the most important funder in the field" and was responsible for funding nearly 40% of all ABE NGOs in South Africa (1996: 235 and 239). In contrast, Aitchison notes that one of the IDT's early reports was "notable for its dismissive attitude towards the NGO sector which the author justified by the incoherence and factionalism in that sector" (1997).⁶³

Future trends from all major funders surveyed in 1996 indicated that funding support for the adult basic education sector was likely to decrease further in the latter half of the decade. However, there have been some signs that the new Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, has successfully secured funding in support of the Tirisano campaign.⁶⁴ For example, in November 1999 the British DfID pledged funding towards helping South Africa target its basic education and training programmes in some of the most disadvantaged communities in South Africa (DfID 1999). In May 2000, the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA) pledged financial aid for the creation of adult basic education learning support materials (Asmal 2000c).

The funding dilemma that has in the past undermined the South African adult basic education sector is only one of many challenges. Literacy provision in South Africa has a history of being uncoordinated, fragmented and taking place in accordance with

⁶³ The IDT will be referred to again in chapter five with respect to the funding crisis that NGOs found themselves in (on page 289).

⁶⁴ The Tirisano Campaign, launched by Kader Asmal in 1999, is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

various philosophies and methods. The next section of the chapter aims to provide a broad outline of different literacy providers in South Africa with the intention of contributing a sense of the diversity and complexity of the field.

Section 2: A chronological outline of the literacy field in South Africa

Although it is fair to say that adult literacy (within the adult basic education and training sector) currently enjoys a much higher profile within the education system than ever before, it is nevertheless essential to point out that no outline of the South African literacy field can fully describe the extent and diversity of literacy practices taking place within it. In fact, past publications that have attempted to generally identify and describe the South African literacy field are more often than not forced to comment on the lack of information available to them.

The most recent and most comprehensive survey carried out to date on the field of South African adult literacy comments that prior to 1990, ABE policy was practically non-existent (Harley *et al* 1996:149). In the early 1980s the HSRC conducted a survey into illiteracy in South Africa because they argued that “information about the extent, nature and problems of literacy training in South Africa has been hazy and incomplete” (French 1982: 2). On the opening page of another survey carried out in 1984 the author comments that a “reliable knowledge database, on which to make decisions regarding investment and action in the promotion of literacy, needs to be established (Wedephol 1984: 1). Again, eight years later in 1992, the NEPI initiative was forced to base their analysis of the literacy field on data which they themselves deemed unreliable and problematic and, like others before them, they called for reliable databases to be compiled (NEPI 1992b: 5).

To date the problem of accessing information relating to the literacy field has still not been adequately resolved. One of the most recent documents on the adult literacy field, issued by the Department of Education, calls attention to several challenges that are predominantly related to the lack of data and information on adult literacy in South Africa.⁶⁵ It notes that “It is difficult to indicate the total number of educators who are involved in adult education and training. This is partly due to lack of reliable data” (DE 1997a: 38). In addition, the field of ABET “suffers from fragmentation due to a lack of integration between different government departments and stakeholders which hampers the process” and “there is a lack of adequate information and data regarding ABET programmes, learners and other components of the ABET system. Data is not accessible to learners or practitioners” (ibid.: 49 and 57). The document concludes that the lack of data is one of the major weaknesses of the field:

There is a general lack of information about the sector. This is seen as a result of diminished technical capacity and poor understanding of the relevant data. Where information exists, it is often not used due to a lack of capacity and knowledge. There is a need to develop technical skills and competency so as to facilitate the flow of information (ibid.: 47).

The background information provided in this section is therefore based on surveys and sources which themselves have questioned the information that they have relied on in the course of their analyses. While this section does not supply a definitive answer to the literacy field in South Africa, it hopefully serves to provide a chronologically based flavour and feel for the field.

⁶⁵ A National Multi-Year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training (DE 1997a).

1910-1948

South Africa adult literacy provision at the start of the 20th century was initially directed at skilled white workers by the International Socialist League (ISL).⁶⁶ The classes had a clear political motive and were primarily aimed at organising and instilling Marxist values into workers. Bird comments that the words written on the slates were familiar Marxist slogans: “Workers of the world unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains and a world to win” (Roux quoted in Bird 1984: 194). Black unskilled labourers were eventually encouraged to participate in the night classes, largely because the Communist Party, recognising that they comprised the biggest proportion of the working class, was anxious to encourage more people to join the party.

In the early 1930s the emphasis in adult literacy shifted from political education to a more general approach and coincided with the instructors’ realisation that their students were not only potential leaders but were also individuals who needed educational skills. As a result, for example, the Cape Town night school introduced a Junior Certificate class that soon became the most popular in the school (Bird 1984: 198). The 1930s also saw migrant workers taking the initiative for their own education: “Many migrants on the mines and in the hostels became determined to learn to read and write. Often they would turn to fellow migrants who, out of concern or for a small fee, would assist them with basic literacy (Delius 1993: 135).

General skills, rather than a focus on collective organisation, formed the basis of the African College and the Mayibuye schools. Students from the University of Witwatersrand started the African College in 1938 and two years later the first

⁶⁶ In 1921 the ISL became the Communist Party of South Africa.

Mayibuye⁶⁷ school opened. Trade Unions were encouraged to send their workers there to participate in the programmes. However, despite the implicit suggestion that the form of education provided was oriented towards individuals' needs, the schools were by no means progressive institutions. Bird describes the programmes undertaken by the schools as liberal reformist programmes that suggested that,

the environment is given and the pupils must 'adapt' to it, and revealing a belief that the traditional culture is inferior and must be transcended in order to 'adapt' to modern or 'European ways' (Bird 1984: 199).

Other forms of adult education were taking place during the 1930s too but, this time, was particularly oriented towards the white community. Night schools operated through the initiatives of universities and churches that offered skills development, Standard 8 and matric classes. The Red Cross offered first aid courses at night and the army became involved in teaching soldiers about democracy and current affairs (WCED [n.d.]).

1945: South African Institute of Race Relations

The Witwatersrand Federation for Non-European Adult Education was formed in 1945 (this includes the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR)) and it called attention to the importance of adult education when it recommended that night schools should receive state subsidies. Two years later the recommendation was followed up by a SAIRR conference on adult education where adult literacy provision was again encouraged in response to poor post-war economic conditions.

The SAIRR was not involved in running courses itself. However, Mrs Maida Whyte, the wife of the SAIRR Director at the time, began working on a project that aimed to

⁶⁷ Mayibuye is a word that literally translates to 'Let it come back', where 'it' refers to Africa.

provide literacy to black people. She developed programmes in accordance with the Laubach 'Each one teach one and win one for Christ' literacy method. Mrs Whyte's approach adapted the Laubach method to facilitate teaching in English, Afrikaans and some South African vernacular languages. Classes were concentrated on the mines and in Durban night schools and, after the National Party came to power, "No class [was] initiated without the approval of the Union Education Department" (quoted in Bird 1984: 204).

The start of literacy here, with a small group of literacy workers, soon grew and eventually became known as the Bureau of Literacy and Literature (BLL) 1964, an organisation that existed autonomously of the SAIRR.⁶⁸ It is worth briefly mentioning though that Mrs. Whyte's work was eventually subsidised by the National Party government – presumably because it was deemed to be 'politically neutral' with a strong Christian focus (ibid.: 204).

1948: National Party

When the National Party came to power in 1948, literacy work, as limited as it was, was actively discouraged. Many non-governmental and community literacy projects were closed down. Two acts in particular had an effect on literacy provision for black people: the Group Areas act of 1950 and the Bantu Education Act of 1953.

The Bantu Education Act served to bring all forms of education under the control of the central government and set in place a system of education that deliberately aimed to keep the black population in subservience. Verwoerd famously said, in 1954,

⁶⁸ BLL's work began in 1964 and as such will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter (on page 60).

We should not give the natives an academic education, as some people are too prone to do. If we do this we shall later be burdened with a number of academically trained Europeans and non-Europeans, and who is going to do the manual labour in this country? [...] I am in thorough agreement that the native who attends those schools will know that to a great extent he must be the labourer in the country (quoted in Christie and Collins 1984: 175).

The Group Areas Act had an incidental effect on black education. The SAIRR noted that,

the policy of deliberately separating the Bantu on as many points as possible from contact with the white man on the plea that we must not “turn a black man into an imitation white man” is as heartless as it is specious if it deprives him of the incidental means of improving his livelihood (cited in Malherbe 1969: 6).

By this the SAIRR referred to the fact that contact with the white community and living in urban areas seemed to have the effect of improving black education levels, presumably through increased opportunity in terms of greater exposure to, and contact with, texts, literacy requirements and education facilities.

Further regulations issued in 1957 built on the Bantu Education Act and required all night schools operating within ‘European’ areas to be controlled and run as a private institution by a proprietor who should be white, whilst private organisations operating in black areas were required to hand over control of the school and all their assets and liabilities to the state by 1st January 1958 (Bird 1984: 207). Adult learning in this period was thus largely restricted to conservative and religious initiatives (similar to Mrs Maida Whyte’s programmes) that the government approved of. Restrictions increased until, by 1967, adult education classes could be “conducted only in urban African townships, mines or industrial compounds, and in the homelands⁶⁹” (Sneesby 1973: 49).

⁶⁹ The National Party’s vision for society envisaged that people occupied certain ‘homelands’ in accordance with their ethnicity. ‘South Africa’, was exclusively reserved for whites while black South Africans were forced to live in what the National Party considered their ‘historic homeland’ where they were given their ‘independence’. People were moved into the homelands often with the use of force and against their will. (See also, Hill 1964).

Nevertheless, the 1960s saw a small increase in literacy provision. In a survey conducted during the early 1980s, French remarks that some of the interest in adult literacy during this period could be attributed to work carried out at this time by newly independent states, often with the support of UNESCO (1982: 2).⁷⁰

1964: Bureau of Literacy and Literature (BLL)

The Bureau of Literacy and Literature (BLL) was set up in 1964 but has its origins in work begun by Mrs Maida Whyte in 1945.⁷¹ BLL represents South Africa's first commercial literacy organisation and as such it was chiefly involved in providing literacy within the mining sector, although it sometimes provided for industry and commerce as well (French 1982: 13).

BLL courses focused on second language English instruction and on administration. Bird consequently argues that the BLL "was concerned to promote good labour relations by teaching black workers" (1984: 212). Wedephol's criticisms go further and claim that the methods and materials employed by the BLL were "extremely rigid, structured and dogmatic, with a high risk of boredom for teacher and student" (Wedephol 1984: 44). French comments that the materials were strongly influenced by input from American missionary specialists (1992: 59).

Given the conservative, company friendly BLL approach, it is not surprising to find that it was an organisation that found favour with the National Party government to the extent that the government made use of both its programmes and its methods. French

⁷⁰ UNESCO's work has been discussed earlier in this chapter. To refer back to UNESCO's Experimental World Literacy Campaign, see page 19. To review the Tanzanian experience and approach to literacy, see page 22.

⁷¹ Discussed earlier on page 57.

argues that BLL, as well as servicing some state departments, was a “major contributor to missionary literacy work” (1992: 59).

1966: Operation Upgrade

Operation Upgrade is one of the oldest literacy organisations in South Africa. Started in 1966 it used an adapted form of the Laubach method⁷² – a method developed by Laubach Organisation in the United States. All connections between Operation Upgrade and the US Laubach Organisation were severed in 1971. At its outset, Operation Upgrade was an organisation that was very responsive to the economic climate as well as to state imperatives prompting Bird to describe it as “the literacy and language organisation which meets state-perceived needs” (1984: 214).

Consequently, the majority of literacy centres run by the government used Operation Upgrade materials and methods (French 1982: 19-20). The organisations’ state-aligned history and conservative materials and approaches made them the recipients of negative criticism, forcing them, during the early 1990s, to evaluate and rethink their methods. French critically describes the materials used by Operation Upgrade as “boring, irrelevant, and paternalistic” (1992: 62). Generally speaking, the organisation’s work is regarded by many to be ineffectual, untruthful about the results it claims to achieve, and rigid in its approach – so rigid that projects working within Operation Upgrade which have tried to add more progressive materials to their stock have been expelled from the organisation (ibid.: 63). Despite radically revising their courses and retraining their teachers, the University of Natal survey in 1994 still found that many Operation

⁷² In this regard its origins are very similar to BLL’s.

Upgrade teachers were unaware of the changes and continued to use old materials (Harley *et al* 1994: 272).

1968: Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)

Black resistance manifested itself during the late 1960s with the establishment of the Black Consciousness Movement. Black Consciousness philosophy, as articulated by Stephen Bantu Biko (the best known South African proponent of Black Consciousness) was a synthesis of the fundamental principles of the three most prominent black liberation organisations; the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) (Halisi 1991: 101).

Biko defined BCM in this way:

It becomes necessary to see the truth as it is if you realise that the only vehicle for change is these people who have lost their personality. The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump life back into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity; to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is the definition of 'Black Consciousness' (quoted in Cross 1992: 65).

The link between BCM and this thesis' interest in adult literacy is clear. On joining the Black Community Programmes (BCP), Biko was briefed to "expand the thrust of conscientising to youth beyond the schools" (Bennie Khoapa quoted in Wilson 1991: 34). In this context Biko recognised the value of Paulo Freire's book Pedagogy of the Oppressed. He, and fourteen other people, attended a four month course teaching Freirean pedagogical methods. Wilson writes that BCM "practices were confirmed and strengthened through the methods of Paulo Freire's pedagogy" (1991: 27). Ramphela similarly notes that "Paulo Freire's conscientisation approach [...] was found to have great relevance for the problems BC leaders identified amongst black people in South Africa" (1991: 155).

1970s: State involvement in adult literacy

In the early 1970s many of the homeland states began establishing literacy schemes. The Lebowe Education Department was the first to do so in 1973, and it approached BLL to initiate a scheme. In 1975, the Department of Education and Training (DET) followed suit and began setting up 'Adult Education Centres'. By the end of 1977, twenty centres were operating around the country with most of them using courses devised by Operation Upgrade, although some made use of BLL courses. Altogether the Adult Education Centres, more commonly referred to as 'night schools', were run under the auspices of the 13 different education departments. These are listed below:

- Department of Education and Training (responsible for black education in the so-called 'white' areas of South Africa).
- Department of Education and Culture of the House of Representatives (responsible for coloured education).
- Department of Education and Culture of the House of Delegates (responsible for Indian education).
- The Departments of Education of the six 'self-governing territories': Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, Lebowa, KwaZulu and QwaQwa.
- And the Departments of Education for the 'independent states': Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei (Harley *et al* 1996: 250).

In the early 1980s the DET started to develop their own materials which French ironically criticises: "The DET's literacy course has an interesting syllabus which has stimulated comment" (1982: 25). The major criticism directed at the DET's approach to adult basic education was that the courses provided too great a learning load on the students and that they emphasised school-equivalency certification which necessitated using school textbooks – textbooks that were largely irrelevant to adults' lives and work situations (Wedephol 1984: 30). In addition, some DET materials deliberately fostered the perception of black people contentedly working within the structures of the South

African governing system. Themes of self-improvement put forward marginal aspirations that did not threaten the hierarchical structure of South African society. The example below comes from the DET's English Unit 4 textbook:

This is Tom Mbali. The house is his. He always saved some of his money. He bought the home last year. He never thought to have a house of his own. He decided to build a room for his wife who was going to have a baby. Tom is a storeman in a large supermarket. He went to classes every Saturday afternoon to learn how to build. He bought a trowel at the shop where he works. He also bought bricks, sand and cement. Sometimes his brother helps him. His little son always tries to help his father. Tom usually builds then he has a day off or on Saturday afternoons. Tom never works on Sundays (DET 1988).

Between 1988 and 1990, the DET's enrolment figures dropped by 35% from 104 452 students at 419 centres to 67 528 students at 258 centres. Some of the reasons for the fall in enrolment has been attributed to political unrest, the DET's lack of credibility with students, poorly trained teachers, courses perceived to be irrelevant in a real-life context, and budgetary constraints (Harley *et al.* 1996: 56, see also pages 217-225). This was the state system that needed to be reformed in the post-apartheid South Africa.

1974: Learn and Teach

Learn and Teach was started in 1974 as a small organisation under the sponsorship of the Catholic Church. This organisation signals the start of progressive approaches to adult literacy provision in South Africa. Learn and Teach methods were influenced by Freirean principles: "their aim is perhaps more concerned with developing the individual's ability to cope in his changing environment than with political awareness" (French 1982: 18). For much of its first decade Learn and Teach was co-ordinated by

Mastin Prinsloo⁷³ before going on to become the first literacy organisation managed by a predominantly black team.

The organisation emphasised the need for the community to initiate classes and this approach is reflected in the materials they produced as well as the methods they employed (Bird 1986: 215). Learn and Teach are also responsible for the production of the Learn and Teach magazine, established in 1979, which became one of the best known and most widely used literacy materials (Harley *et al* 1996: 273). In the mid-1980s, the Learn and Teach magazine team broke away from the literacy organisation to set up Learn and Teach Publications. The organisation is described by French as having a “guarded relationship with others in the field” (1982: 18). It is a comment that indicates the organisation’s awareness of obvious tensions between the methods and principles it employs in the light of state directives. Wedephol’s survey in 1984 describes Learn and Teach as having an approach to literacy which is “ideologically [...] the most ‘progressive’” of all the organisations operating at the time (1984: 47).⁷⁴

1976: Urban Foundation

In the wake of the Soweto Uprising of 1976⁷⁵ the private sector established the Urban Foundation in the hope that “the frustration of more able members of the black community would be reduced and resistance diffused” (Wedephol 1984: 30). The Urban

⁷³ Prinsloo is a key figure in recent academic research into the ‘third generation of literacy’, sometimes referred to as the New Literacy Studies, in South Africa. He was involved in the Social Uses of Literacy (SoUL) research project that will be mentioned shortly on page 70.

⁷⁴ Learn and Teach is exactly the type of organisation that was distrusted by the apartheid state to the extent that some copies of the Learn and Teach magazine were banned by the government because it was deemed politically dangerous. This is discussed later in the thesis in chapter three on page 141.

⁷⁵ A brief background to the events now known as the Soweto Uprising is provided at the start of chapter three.

Foundation is referred to in more detail in the body of this thesis. Its practices during the 1980s illustrate the way that big businesses have attempted to negotiate the state's restrictive involvement in South African capital with their increasing need to accommodate international economic imperatives.⁷⁶

1976: AA Mines

In 1976 Anglo American Corporation started to get involved in adult education as well. The basic education was designed by Ken Baucom and, like other organisations at this time, was primarily oriented towards the needs of industry.⁷⁷

1980s: USWE, ELP, Adult Learning Project, Masazani

The 1980s saw the rise of a plethora of NGOs in the ABE field, many of them inspired by Learn and Teach. Organisations mentioned during Wedephol's survey include USWE, run by a former member of Learn and Teach and aimed at a target population of "domestic workers, cleaners, night-watchmen, garage attendants – i.e. non-unionised labourers" (1984: 50).⁷⁸ Learn and Teach also helped to develop the English Literacy Project (ELP), an organisation that focuses on providing English language lessons designed to be immediately functional when taught. Although the courses are primarily designed for workers in industrial employment, ELP committed itself to working through trade unions in an attempt to avoid any dependence on management's largess, and later it went on to link its work specifically to COSATU and the Mass Democratic

⁷⁶ See chapter three, page 150.

⁷⁷ The programme devised by Baucom is discussed in more detail in chapter three on page 175.

⁷⁸ USWE later faced serious a serious funding crisis in the 1990s and was consequently forced to alter its approach to literacy. This is discussed in more detail in chapter five on page 291.

Movement (MDM) (French 1992: 68). Two other organisations, Adult Learning Project (ALP) and Masazani, both operate within the Learn and Teach framework but are autonomous organisations. ALP is “strongly committed to radical democratic grassroots action” and was the first organisation to set up a controlling committee that had learners serving as representatives on it.

National Literacy Co-operation (NLC)

The National Literacy Co-operation⁷⁹ (NLC) was formed in 1986 by the progressive literacy organisations (WCED [n.d.]). All the organisations that became involved in the NLC were basically aligned to the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). The NLC was set up to work towards the “positive transformation of society” with the view to being a partner of the state. It aimed to make the NLC a major NGO force. With respect to this vision,

Literacy was seen as a weapon against oppression and exploitation, one which would empower people to participate more fully in organisations and take control of their lives (Harley *et al* 1996: 508).

The 1990s

In 1990, the United Nations’ International Literacy Year meeting in Jomtien stimulated a certain amount of interest in literacy activities in South Africa. Further optimism about the future was stimulated in 1990 by the fact that Nelson Mandela was released from jail on February 11. Not long after that, in December 1991, Mandela was participating in negotiations with the government in a move towards addressing the prospect of a post-

⁷⁹ The Presidential Lead Project announced in 1996 was initially steered by the National Literacy Co-operation (NLC), an umbrella organisation which at its outset had 200 literacy NGOs affiliated to it. This is discussed later in the thesis, especially in terms of the funding crises that nearly crippled the organisation. (See especially, Footnote 289 on page 292 and page 298).

apartheid South Africa. Against the backdrop of renewed conviction for adult basic education on the world's stage, and the promise of change (and therefore redress and equality) at home, literacy changed from being a very low priority to something that was talked about and is currently formally mentioned in policy documents. The expanding interest in literacy during this period in South African history can be directly attributed to a changing political culture, and particularly to the fact that post-apartheid policy discourses encourage debates around reconstruction and redress. This implies that literacy and ABE are social imperatives.

The 1990s are partially characterised by a significant increase in small local community-based organisations (CBOs) formed within communities. These are especially distinguished from the larger NGOs established during the 1980s (and already mentioned in this chapter) by the fact that they are commonly staffed by local black activists rather than the predominantly white female staff of older organisations. Unlike many of their larger counterparts, CBOs tend to be loyal to the SAALAE⁸⁰ rather than the NLC.

Private Sector

The Private Sector Education Council (PRISEC) was also established in South Africa during the 1990s.⁸¹ Business interests in ABE had slumped during the late 1980s as economic recession set in and companies were forced to retrench workers – especially those with lower education levels who were perceived to be the most difficult to train

⁸⁰ The South African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (SAALAE) was formed in 1992 and is discussed in more detail a little later in this chapter (on page 69).

⁸¹ PRISEC went on to significantly influence policy research and formation in the 1990s. PRISEC's role in the NEPI investigation is addressed in chapter three (page 240), and its contribution to the NTISI is discussed in some detail in chapter four (page 254).

(Van Heerden cited in Harley *et al.* 1996: 268). This changed during the 1990s with companies setting up ABE programmes at a rapid rate, so much so that “company programmes now reach more learners than the government night schools system” (Harley *et al.* 1996: 268). It is worth recalling too that both JET and the IDT, discussed in the previous section of this chapter, were initiated at the start of the 1990s.

Parastatals

In line with the increased interest by the private sector, various parastatals began taking a greater interest in the literacy field. Libraries, for example, significantly expanded their involvement in ABE. Some libraries emphasise their involvement in materials distribution while others see their role as including information dissemination, facilitating ABE projects, and networking with others in the field (Harley *et al.* 1996: 266, 382-393). They now provide for *all* South Africans, and are often seen as places where people learn and study, rather than merely borrow books. Other large parastatals including Spornet, Eskom, Telkom, Portnet and Transet started running ABE programmes too.

1992: South African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (SAALAE)

In 1992, the South African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (SAALAE) was formed to unite literacy organisations that were not a part of the NLC.⁸² SAALAE comprises mainly of literacy organisations coming from a ‘black consciousness’ or having Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) political loyalties rather than a Charterist⁸³

⁸² The NLC was founded in 1986. Refer back to page 67.

⁸³ Refers to the Freedom Charter. The Freedom Charter is elaborated on in more detail in chapter two on page 116 (see Footnote 15).

tradition. It is worth noting that many people within the BCM were hostile to the Freedom Charter and viewed it as a document that had been influenced by white liberals within the ANC. Biko once commented that “the biggest mistake the Black world has ever made was to assume that whoever opposed apartheid was an ally” (cited in Buthelezi 1991: 119). The founding of SAALAE was controversial: “Organisations which supported the formation of SAALAE believed in the need for black people to rally together and form an organisation of their own with strong international connections” (Harley *et al* 1996: 517-518). The result of having two major competing organisations was that the SAALAE often found that funding had been directed instead towards the NLC.

1994: A Survey of Adult Basic Education in the 1990s

In 1994 the most comprehensive survey of South African adult basic education carried out so far was undertaken by the University of Natal’s Centre for Adult Education (Harley *et al*: 1996). The two year research project, commissioned by the Joint Education Trust (JET), resulted in the publication that is used extensively as a reference source by many working in adult basic education. It was also used by those working on the Multi-Year Plan and ABET Policy Document in the late 1990s, as well as the Gender Equity Task Team report (DE 1997d).

1994: The Social Uses of Literacy (SoUL) Research Project

Like the survey just mentioned, the Social Uses of Literacy (SoUL) research project was also commissioned by JET in 1994. It was jointly carried out by the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC). The SoUL project openly acknowledges the influence of the New Literacy Studies that was addressed earlier in this chapter in the section titled ‘Social literacies: the ‘third generation’ of literacy’ (see page 36). The editors of the resulting publication note that

The focus [of the research project] is not just on what people do with literacy, also their understandings of what they do, the values they give to their actions, and the ideologies and practices that encapsulate their use and valuing of literacy (Prinsloo and Breier 1996: 24).

The research project resulted in the publication of 12 reports that, read together, contribute to an understanding that literacy, in a South African society, is used in diverse ways. (Appendix 2 on page 430 of the thesis lists the titles of the various reports available as a result of the SoUL research).

Universities

Writing in 1992, French commented that “Academics in South Africa have not yet made the kind of direct contribution which universities abroad have made to adult literacy work” (71). Nevertheless, the 1990s has universities becoming increasingly involved in ABE. The University of Cape Town’s involvement started in 1983 and continues today while historically black universities⁸⁴ (HBUs) are also taking a role in the field. University involvements range from providing ABE classes, to materials development, teacher training, advice and support to others in the field and research (Harley *et al* 1996: 267). The University of Natal is responsible for the survey produced by Harley *et al* (1996), while the Universities of Cape Town and Western Cape worked jointly on the SoUL project.

Adult Learning Centres (ALCs)

The various education departments that managed the night schools set up under the apartheid system of education were re-organised into nine provincial education departments. By 1996, the process of transforming the night schools into what are now

⁸⁴ Universities set up by the apartheid regime for black South Africans.

referred to as Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) began (WCED [n.d.]). The state currently provides literacy classes through 2 226 ALCs throughout the country (DE 2000c). Many of the criticisms levelled at the night schools during the late 1970s and 1980s still apply. In particular, the focus on a Christian National Education⁸⁵ approach which had few adult specific features; very few staff members devoted solely to the operation of the night schools; was always inferior to the day schools within which it operated; and was highly regulated by the government but very low performance (DE cited in Harley *et al* 1996: 254).

1996: Ithuteng Campaign

The Ithuteng Campaign was launched as a Presidential Lead Project in 1996 and by the end of 1996 had been established in 6 provinces. Ithuteng, a word that literally translates into 'Ready to Learn', focuses on 10 000 adult learners per province and is being conducted by a parallel project funded by the EU (Thousand Learner Unit (TLU), a project under the auspices of the NLC) (*Mail and Guardian*, March 7 1997a).⁸⁶ The campaign concentrates on ABET levels 1 and 2. The campaign, although ostensibly targeted at the very needy, has its own share of problems – particularly with respect to regional differences and limited funding. Furthermore, Budlender notes that

At this stage [2000] virtually all provinces are mainly employing ordinary teachers, who then teach adults at night. This denies opportunities to other educated, equally

⁸⁵ The National Education Policy Act of 1967 provided the cornerstone for Christian National Education (CNE). The 1967 Act was specifically limited to white people, prompting Malherbe to ironically suggest that it would be more accurately entitled *The White Persons' Education Act* (cited in Christie 1985: 175). Christie points out that "CNE is not a neutral theory of education. The CNE movement expressed the worldview of Dutch-Afrikaner people. It expressed their views about the role of the church – their particular Calvinist church – in education. It expressed their views about a nationalist education for Dutch-Afrikaner children" (Christie 1985: 174).

⁸⁶ The Ithuteng campaign and the TLU are mentioned later in chapter five. See Footnote 282 on page 287, also refer to page 298.

competent but unemployed people. Most educators are using school methods and materials. These limit the appeal for potential learners who see ABET as assisting them in attaining a better life and, in particular, earning a better living (2000: 105).

Sibusiso Bengu, the Minister of Education at the time, claimed in 1999 that the original target of reaching 90 000 learners set in 1996 had been reached and that 130 000 new learners were recruited and taken through ABET levels 1 and 2 as part of the campaign. He also commented that "Since then, more than 500 000 learners have been reached" (Bengu 1999: 25). Budlender however points out that some provinces are unable to distinguish between ABET learners and those studying at higher levels. This makes it difficult to determine whether the figures cited truthfully reflect that the targets are in fact being met (2000: 105).

Summary

The overview provided in this chapter reveals a field that has undergone radical changes but is still faced with enormous challenges in the future. The 1996 survey into adult basic education convincingly reveals that while the scope of illiteracy in South Africa is not as high as the figure of 15 million frequently mentioned in other reports, it is still shocking at between seven and a half, and ten million. Adult literacy, it seems *should* be a priority.

This chapter has shown that making ABET a priority will entail real commitment and energy. The previous government's inadequate and prejudiced approach to the night schools continues to haunt provision in the ALCs. This, combined with the awareness that provision by NGOs, CBOs and businesses are fragmented and operating in accordance with very different motivations, suggests that, at a local level, the role of literacy is varied and difficult to identify.

Nevertheless, the government has long displayed a strong commitment to the principle of a single unified system of education that accommodates all sectors of education. This

means that adult basic education, despite being neglected for so long, has to be convincingly integrated into the system in such a way that embodies the government's broad principles of education for *all*. It will also have to contend with diverse expectations in such a way that it can still be seen to be inclusive of various social literacy practices resulting in complex literacy needs.

The opening sections of this chapter reveal that to be a challenging task indeed. UNESCO's early definitions of 'functional literacy' continuously evolved to accommodate growing perceptions and changing ideological positions. To what extent will this be possible within a single unified system. Research carried out by social literacy theorists raise the question of whether it is even possible to proscribe a role for literacy, so how will the government approach this difficult task and what claims will be made about what adult literacy means in South Africa in the 21st century?

The following chapter offers a theoretical perspective on how the role of literacy is structured and evolves through a process of competition in accordance with the changing values and expectations of competing groups within a particular society. This insight forms the foundations for a particular approach to teasing out the uniquely South African conception of the role that literacy plays in society. The theories and methods presented in Chapter three take notice of some of the discussions presented in this chapter. In particular, the realisation that the concept of literacy itself is something that has to be considered at every stage of trying to assess the role of literacy. It also appreciates the challenges presented by an understanding of the disparate nature of the South African field of literacy provision.

Researching the Role of Adult Literacy in South Africa

Chapter one introduced several challenges facing an undertaking aimed at determining the national role of literacy in South Africa. First, literacy is a concept that evades absolute and concrete definition. Second, there is a limited amount of detailed data and information available on the South African literacy field – a fact that is frequently commented on by South African literacy practitioners. Finally literacy provision in South Africa is highly fragmented and diverse. In addition to these challenges, the previous chapter also provided an explication of recent developments in literacy theory, in particular, the theoretical movement towards describing literacy as a *social practice*.

This thesis seeks to determine the national role of literacy in South Africa. This chapter will discuss how this objective will be achieved through an analysis of selected texts representing significant moments in the development of literacy discourses between 1979 and 2000. Texts represent literacy, and the previous chapter has described activities resulting in text as social practices. This chapter will therefore attempt to disentangle and discuss the relationship between various concepts including literacy, text, reading and writing, social practices, and discourse analysis.

I will make use of a handful of Bourdieuan concepts to aid this discussion – concepts that Bourdieu himself refers to as a set of *thinking tools*.⁸⁷ These tools serve key functions in this thesis. First, they enhance chapter one’s discussion of literacy as a social practice by providing a detailed theoretical perspective on how literacy is actively, and competitively, determined by the constraints and requirements of the society within which it is located. Second, Bourdieu’s unique view of reflexivity encourages an engagement with the notion of myself as an active participant in a literacy event⁸⁸ – an event located within academic social practices.

This chapter will also describe how Bourdieu’s concepts have facilitated the textual analysis that takes place in chapters three, four and five. In this thesis, the concepts of habitus, capital and field function as a *heuristic device*, a thinking tool, which has provided me with a way of understanding both literacy and textual analysis. My use of the term heuristic device is derived from heuristic research methodology. The meaning of the word *heuristic* refers to “a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and developing methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (Moustakas 1990: 9).⁸⁹ The heuristic process is “a way of being informed, *a way of knowing* [my emphasis]” (ibid.: 10). Bourdieu’s concepts therefore contribute to an autobiographic process that is inextricably linked to the literacy practices that have contributed towards the production of this thesis.

⁸⁷ In so doing he resists the notion that the concepts taken together amount to what may be termed a ‘Bourdieuian theory’. In his words: “I never set out to ‘do theory’ or to ‘construct theory’ *per se* [...] And it is a complete misapprehension of my project to believe that I am attempting some kind of ‘synthesis of classical theory’. There is no doubt a theory in my work or, better, a set of *thinking tools* visible through results they yield, but it is not built as such” (quoted in Grenfell and James 1998: 152).

⁸⁸ I am the author of this thesis, and I am the reader of selected South African texts. Both activities are examples of what Heath has described as socially situated literacy events. The concept of a literacy event was introduced in the previous chapter on page 41.

⁸⁹ “The root meaning of the word *heuristic* comes from the Greek word *heuriskein*, meaning to discover or find” (Moustakas 1990: 9). Moustakas notes that “the cousin word of heuristic is *eureka*” (1994: 17).

Bourdieu's 'thinking tools'

Wacquant, in an interview with Bourdieu in 1996, noted that “The notion of fields is, together with those of habitus and capital, the central organising concept of [his] work” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996: 94). The theory underlying the three concepts is outlined in this section of the thesis. Coming to terms with the language that Bourdieu brings to the sociology of education clarifies an awareness of how practices within a society cannot be attributed to either individual agency or socio-historical context alone. Instead, practice derives from a dialectical tension between individual reflexivity and specific socio-historical circumstances. In this sense, Bourdieu's theories avoid impossible circumstances where individuals are seen to be ‘locked’ into a context and deprived of choice as a result of that context. Similarly, he avoids the impression that practices that take place can be directly attributed only to historical circumstances. His language and concepts can at times seem dense and difficult to grasp, but together they amount to a particular form of logic. It is that form of logic that will drive this thesis.

Field

Bourdieu's field concept can be read as an attempt to theorise social space by understanding social space as an active network of different fields. At its broadest level, a field is defined as “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996: 97). Each field is itself “nested in a network of hierarchical relations with other fields” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996: 149). Furthermore, a field (for example, the literacy field) holds a semi-autonomous position within social space in that it has its own determinate agents (literacy practitioners, students), it functions according to its own logic of action, and it competes for its own preferred forms of capital. A field cannot be described as fully autonomous because it is

continuously structured by the relationship it has with other fields sharing social space, and with the broader field of power (Postone *et al* 1995: 5).⁹⁰

For example, Bourdieu describes the scientific field as “a social microcosm partially autonomous from the necessities of the larger social macrocosm that encompasses it” (1991a: 375). He continues: “This world [the scientific world] is homologous to various social universes – the economic field, the political field, the religious field, and so on [...] – that is, it is at once similar to them in a number of respects and crucially different in others” (*ibid.*). He emphasises however that the scientific field “is also a special world, a peculiar world [...] endowed with its own laws of functioning” (*ibid.*).⁹¹

A field does not function as a firmly defined system with an organised clear set of concrete rules that govern its activities. Rather, it “constitutes a potentially open space of play whose boundaries are *dynamic borders* which are the stake of struggles with the field itself” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996: 104). Bourdieu therefore describes a field as “a patterned system of objective forces”, where the words ‘objective forces’ relate to the distribution of power existing between the agents that make up the field (Bourdieu 1997b: 67). A field can also be described as “the locus of relations of force – and not only of meaning – and of struggles aimed at transforming it, and therefore of endless change” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996: 103).⁹²

⁹⁰ Bourdieu stresses that the field of power should not be confused with the political field. The former is characterised by the distribution of forms of capital, while the latter (like the literacy market) is defined by the network of relations between competing agents. The field of power is therefore a type of ‘meta-field’. For further information see Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996, and Bourdieu 1998a: 34.

⁹¹ The complexity of the literacy field in relation to other fields in South Africa is discussed more specifically a little later in this chapter (see page 97).

⁹² While the term ‘field’ is Bourdieu’s preferred technical term, Thompson notes that Bourdieu sometimes usefully refers to field as a ‘game’ or a ‘market’ (1991: 14). These terms are utilised in this thesis too, and will be explained in more detail in the sections of this chapter concerned with habitus and capital.

In attempting to determine the existence of a particular field, it is also useful to consider what a field is *not*. The key lies in understanding that within a field, ‘dominant people’ always have to contend with the “resistance, the claims, the contention, ‘political’ or otherwise, of the dominated” (Bourdieu 1991a: 102). A field therefore is *only* identifiable in as much as its ‘relations of force’ can be identified, or certain ‘sites of struggle’ within it can be discussed. Conversely, a field changes and becomes something else entirely (an apparatus) when the

dominant manage to crush and annul the resistance and the reactions of the dominated, when all movements go exclusively from the top down, the effects of domination are such that the struggle and the dialectic that are constitutive of the field cease, an apparatus (ibid.).

As will become apparent in the course of this thesis, discussions of the ‘sites of struggle’ and ‘relations of forces’ between competing fields contributes towards a description of the South African literacy field and, consequently, the role that literacy plays within this society.

Habitus

To make the ‘relations of force’ and the ‘sites of struggle’ within a field more explicit, Bourdieu actively incorporates the role of individual agents within the field context. It is useful to think of habitus as a word and concept that describes how people understand and engage with their habitat – a habitat which is itself a part of what Fowler has referred to as a “habitualized world” (1981: 24). Given this, the terms habitus and field are intrinsically connected. So much so that Wacquant claims that Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field are *relational* and that they function fully “*only in relation to one another*” (Wacquant 1996: 13).

Habitus is a word that tries to make explicit those aspects of our social understanding that we take for granted. Bourdieu’s theory of habitus amounts to what Wacquant refers

to as ‘the fuzzy logic of practical sense’ (1996: 19). It is worth briefly noting here that the concept of habitus as an ‘unconscious’ understanding of ourselves is very similar in principle to Gee’s concept of primary Discourses and to Vygotsky’s ‘everyday concept’, both discussed in the previous chapter. It can therefore similarly be argued that habitus, like primary discourses, is something that we all *initially* acquire ‘for free’.⁹³ I stress the word *initially* because, unlike Gee’s notion of primary Discourse which falls short of discussing how the primary Discourse is influenced over a period of time, habitus is conceived of as something that is initially acquired and constantly evolving. This point will become clearer when I discuss Bourdieu’s concept of capital (on page 84). Figure 1 on page 81⁹⁴ describes how an individual’s unconscious perception of their surroundings is assimilated into an embodied way of ‘being’ within that environment.

Habitus attempts to capture the

intentionality without intention, the knowledge without cognitive intent, the prereflective, infraconscious mastery that agents acquire of their social world by way of durable immersion within it [...] and which defines properly human social practice (ibid.: 19-20).

It is a theory that aims to makes us aware that our ‘social understanding’ is unconsciously embodied within us, but that it is also an understanding of ourselves that has the capacity to adapt and change with shifting social conditions:

Our body is not just the executant of the goals we frame or just the locus of the causal factors which shape our representations. Our understanding itself is embodied. That is, our bodily know-how and the way we act and move can encode components of our understanding of self and world [Furthermore] My sense of myself and of the footing I am on with others are in a large part embodied also. The deference I owe you is carried in the distance I stand from you, in the way I

⁹³ See pages 43 and 45 respectively for Gee and Vygotsky’s contributions to my understanding of literacy.

⁹⁴ Figure 1 is an adaptation of a diagrams produced by Richard Harker (1984, see pages 120 and 121).

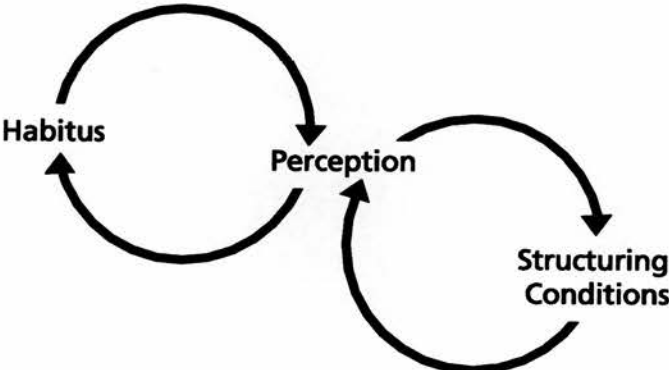


Figure 1: The nature and production of habitus

fall silent when you start to speak, in the way I hold myself in your presence
(Taylor 1995: 50-51).

Because habitus describes how a person exists within a particular social context, habitus has to be defined “by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production” (Bourdieu 1997a: 95). Again the role of history and existing social conditions are explicitly invoked to make us conscious of how we operate within given fields. In other words, the field of adult literacy (for example) is determined within and by the relations between individuals living and interacting within that particular competing context (of adult literacy) which is in itself predetermined by history and social conditions.⁹⁵

And as social conditions change and power distributions shift, so do habituses adapt accordingly. By definition habitus (as an embodied/experiential form of social understanding) is “a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions” (ibid.: 72).

All individuals adapt according to the principles of habitus, and these same individuals coexist within fields. In order to reach an understanding of how coexistence is mediated by habitus, Bourdieu uses the analogy of a game to describe how habitus and field interact with each other. He writes, “The habitus as the feel for the game is the social game embodied and turned into second nature [...] the habitus, as society written into the body, into the biological individual, enables the infinite number of acts of the game” (Bourdieu 1990: 63).

⁹⁵ This supports Gee’s argument that the Secondary discourses we acquire are in part shaped by our Primary discourses. Significantly, Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field serve to unify Gee’s principles with activity theorists’ description of context as an activity system (to review that earlier discussion see pages 44 to 46. Activity systems are specifically mentioned on page 46).

By 'game' Bourdieu refers to ways in which various individuals engage within, and with, a particular social space:

Consequently, habitus produces practices and representations which are available for classification, which are objectively differentiated; however, they are immediately perceived as such only by those agents who possess the code, the classificatory schemes necessary to understand their social meaning. Habitus thus implies a 'sense of one's place' but also a 'sense of the place of others'. For example, we say that a piece of clothing, a piece of furniture, or a book: 'that looks petty-bourgeois' or 'that's intellectual' (ibid.: 131).

Trying to understand which agents have the best 'feel for the game', and why they have the best feel for the game, will become one of the guiding principles behind determining the shifts and changes in the role of literacy in a changing South African society.⁹⁶ Those who are intuitively most familiar with the game's regulations⁹⁷ will have the most potential for determining the outcome of the game. Those who do not understand the rules of the game are at a disadvantage:

encounters between a habitus and a field which are, to varying degrees, 'compatible' or 'congruent' with one another, in such a way that, on occasions when there is a lack of congruence [...] an individual may not know how to act and may literally be lost for words (Thompson 1991: 17).

Awareness of the 'feel for the game' will be highlighted in various instances of policy development over the two decades this thesis is concerned with. For example, in

⁹⁶ The concept of having a 'feel for the game' can be illustrated by an observation that appeared in the previous chapter. Edward French, while writing a report commissioned by the HSRC (a parastatal organisation), evades directly criticising the state-run literacy course through the use of irony. In his words, it is a course with "an interesting syllabus" which has "stimulated comment" (see chapter one, page 63). His use of irony here reveals his understanding of certain 'rules' governing the literacy 'game' being played in South Africa at that time.

⁹⁷ Bourdieu argues that the social game is regulated rather than governed by definitive rules and social contracts: "Things happen in a *regular fashion* in it; rich heirs *regularly* marry rich younger daughters. That does not mean that it is a *rule* that rich heirs marry rich younger daughters" (Bourdieu 1990: 65).

chapter five we will consider who between all the parties represented in the NEPI process had the best ‘feel for the game’.⁹⁸

Capital

The final element of Bourdieu’s concepts which coheres the principles of habitus and field hinges on his notion of capital. Without the presence of capital, the concepts of habitus and field can be interpreted as describing a completely spontaneous form of human activity. This makes it difficult to determine how, for example, a discourse within a particular field assumes a particular direction. Bourdieu therefore adopts an economic metaphor to explain how people ‘socially exchange’ and compete for specific ‘capital gains’ that exist within the ‘market-place of life’ (or a particular field).⁹⁹ The economic metaphor implicitly concludes that some people prefer some gains over others and that they are prepared to compete for them.

Bourdieu differentiates between various types of capital which, when considered together, make up the overall picture of what is termed the ‘habitus’. The various forms of capital that can be competed for are cultural, social, and economic capital.¹⁰⁰ The position that an individual occupies within a particular field is determined by the type of

⁹⁸ NEPI is discussed in greater detail in chapter four, page 229.

⁹⁹ The concept of capital tells us *how* literacy emerges between Gee’s notions of primary and secondary discourses within a specific context. With this in mind, Bourdieu’s thinking tools suggest that the word ‘activity’ in the term ‘activity system’ is related to the process of competition – in other words, ‘market place’ activity through decision making, negotiation, choice and free will. This suggests that individual behaviour within contexts is not purely spontaneous although habitus does serve to instinctually play a moderating role.

¹⁰⁰ It is not essential to the immediate concerns of this thesis to define each of the forms of capital in depth. However, for further insight into them see, Bourdieu, P. 1997c ‘The Forms of Capital’ in A. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown and A. Stuart Wells (Eds.) Education: culture, economy, society OUP: Oxford.

capital he/she holds and the extent to which it is the most favourable type to have (Lash 1995: 197). Accumulated economic and cultural capital, and the competition to acquire some types over others, goes some way to explaining how various aspects of society are reinforced and maintained. Accordingly, the type of capital that an individual acquires, and the relationship that that capital holds within a particular field, helps to explain an individual's life trajectory. Individuals within a field compete for a form of capital which they understand (due to the social structuring of their habituses) to be the most valued at that particular time. In the process of acquiring that form of capital, they increase their influence within a society. It is in this process of competition that less privileged people acquire a greater ability to alter their environment, and less powerful fields achieve greater prominence in society.

In addition to cultural, social and economic forms of capital, Bourdieu defines a fourth form that he calls symbolic capital – probably the most useful form of capital in terms of the interests of this thesis. Symbolic capital is essentially that which ascribes a 'value' to the particular forms of capital operating within a given field: "Symbolic capital is a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition [through competing for various forms of capital in the field/market place] to be in a position to impose a recognition" (Bourdieu 1990: 137-38). It can be argued therefore that any struggle for capital – whatever the form – is also a struggle for symbolic capital

Literacy has already been described by Gee as a secondary Discourse and Bourdieu's theories so far have contributed to an understanding that literacy is a secondary discourse that is acquired through a process of competition within a specific context. In this sense, literacy represents a form of 'symbolic capital'. The literate person can claim 'symbolic power' within his or her community by virtue of that fact that he or she has mastered the ability to read and write within a specific context. Furthermore, the fact that symbolic capital has the potential to be converted into economic capital makes it

doubly desirable (Lipuma 1995: 29). Scribner and Cole's research further suggests that the form of symbolic capital that literacy takes will also ascribe varying degrees of value to an individual within a specific context. Their research amongst the Vai people uncovered three forms of literacy within their society – Vai literacy, Qur'anic literacy and English literacy – and they found that each form required different motivational reasons for mastering the necessary literacy skills and that each acquired its social *value* within different contexts. For example, Qur'anic literacy is especially valued within a religious context while English literacy was often pursued for pragmatic reasons (Scribner and Cole 1981: 62-87).¹⁰¹

Bourdieu's concepts have been described as an adapted form of Marxist thinking that seeks to come to terms with “the way in which culture – and, therefore, education – might function as an independent force to be manipulated by agents to secure social position” (Robbins 1998: 31). This argument suggests that education (and literacy) is symbolically powerful on a national level as well as an individual level. In other words, understanding how literacy is valued as a symbolic form of capital within national discourses – practically manifested as an adult literacy certificate of competency – will provide an understanding of the role that literacy plays within society.

Useful as the concept of symbolic capital is, it has also been critiqued for being too ‘circularly defined’: “Everything from accumulating monetary capital to praise for being burned at the stake automatically counts as symbolic capital. To say that whatever people do they do for social profit does not tell us anything if that profit is defined as whatever people pursue in a given society” (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1999: 91). This consequently suggests that “the struggle for symbolic capital alone constitutes human

¹⁰¹ Scribner and Cole's contribution to the third generation of literacy research was discussed in the previous chapter on page 38.

beings and the social field” (ibid.). This thesis understands symbolic capital to be directly related to ‘symbolic power’ which is “the power to make things with words [...] the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society” (Bourdieu 1990: 138). Other writers have also described symbolic capital as relating to “reputation or honour” (Fowler 1997: 31), and it is described by Bourdieu in this way: “symbolic capital [is] another name for distinction” (quoted in Lipuma 1995: 29). The idea that it is symbolic power that empowers people to voice opinions, to debate in public, to write documents and to maintain a position of influence, will become clearer in the course of this chapter.

A heuristic process

In my introduction to this thesis (on page 76) I mentioned that Bourdieu’s concepts of field, habitus and capital contributed to my approach to textual analysis and that this approach had its origins in South African fieldwork conducted between March and October 1998. This section of the chapter will describe how an understanding of Bourdieu has been used *heuristically* in this thesis, as a methodological tool, a thinking device, to provide me with a conceptual framework that has facilitated my analysis of texts.

Very briefly, my fieldwork in South Africa originally sought to identify different contexts in the Western Cape and to arrive at an understanding of how literacy was used within those different contexts. This initial approach to literacy-related fieldwork was informed by the view that the way in which literacy is used and valued, within different

social contexts, is related to individual habitus and field.¹⁰² It became clear however that given various constraints – particularly time, financial limitations, and logistical difficulties – this project was too ambitious to be effectively pursued within the scope of PhD research. The focus of the research needed to be reconsidered.

The original conversations I had with people working in South Africa proved to be invaluable in this regard.¹⁰³ The very different experiences I encountered had, in the course of conversations, frequently prompted the question of how a *single* National Qualifications Framework (NQF) would be able to meet the diverse needs of people living and working in extremely different social contexts. This question therefore became the focus of a revised approach to thinking about the social role that literacy played in society.

Given that social literacy research had, for the most part, concentrated its attention on literacy in localised contexts, I decided to instead involve myself with a consideration of the *national* role of literacy in South Africa. Research of this nature, I felt, would contribute to existing South African social literacy research and play a part in the

¹⁰² The very different findings of two MPhil dissertations, both submitted in 1994 and both concerned with an examination of literacy practices in Cape Town, seem to exemplify this view. The first dissertation focuses on literacy practices in Ocean View while the second is concerned with literacy practices in Site 5, an informal settlement in the Cape Peninsula. The two contexts are very close to each other; in fact, a visit to the area confirmed that they are divided by no more than a narrow tarred road. The dissertations reveal, however, that despite their proximity, the two communities use literacy in distinctly different ways. Sæ Breier 1994 and Kell 1994.

¹⁰³ The respondents (listed in Appendix 1 on page 427) were drawn from contexts that include the fishing, metalworking, farming and textile industries; various Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) and NGOs; and two trade unions.

construction of a more comprehensive overview of the broader South African literacy field.¹⁰⁴

Although located within a broader tradition of South African policy analysis, the approach I have adopted is distinguished from this field by the fact that it is a *textual analysis* of official sources which include policy documents. The methodology that I will describe in this section of the chapter therefore represents a departure from the existing field of policy analysis which has been largely characterised, as Tikly notes, by three main traditions: the nationalist/conservative tradition, the liberal tradition, and the radical/neo-marxist tradition (1994: 7; *see also* Behr 1988, Christie 1985 and Alexander 1990).

While this thesis does not set out to interrogate or align itself with a particular school of thought, a textual analysis of sources located within these traditions will inevitably impart some of the flavour of these views to the thesis. For example, the analysis of sources in chapter three requires a close engagement with policy firmly aligned with the nationalist/conservative approach to policy, the most visible tradition during the apartheid era. Similarly, the liberal¹⁰⁵ influence on education policy can be seen, for example, in the impact it had on *verligte* Afrikaner thinking within the National Party (this is discussed in more detail in chapter three, on page 153).

¹⁰⁴ One of the researchers participating in the SoUL research project has noted that “The approach and methodology adopted within SoUL does not lend itself easily to formulations and solutions. The disparate case studies that made up the SoUL project do not present average accounts which stress the generalisable nature of the context of study, but rather its distinctiveness and particularity” (Kell 1996: 5).

¹⁰⁵ Tikly argues that publications by Malherbe (1925), McKerron (1934) and Brooks (1930) provide important precursors to the South African liberal tradition. He also suggests that the emergence of neo-liberalism in South Africa can be linked to the work of people like Leon Louw, Clem Sunter and Jan Lombard (Tikly 1994: 22).

The 1984 publication of *Apartheid and Education*, a collection of essays edited by Peter Kallaway, gave expression to neo-marxist critiques of the hitherto neo-conservative and liberal traditions. The views expressed were subsequently criticised, however, for prioritising economic concerns and thus under-theorising racism and sexism as political and ideological phenomena. This absence in the radical tradition was partly addressed by the advent of the People's Education movement during the 1980s (discussed in some detail in the following chapter on page 198). Tikly comments that People's Education began to address the nature of educational change by implicitly addressing theoretical questions concerned with the relationship between education and its wider political and ideological context (1994: 34).¹⁰⁶

A textual analysis of policy sources, rather than a theoretical alignment with one of the South African policy traditions, has two merits which are particularly beneficial to a thesis concerned with literacy. First, the approach overtly situates the reader/researcher within a literacy context – namely, the task of reading and writing and thinking about literacy. Second, this approach encourages the researcher to be critically reflective of his/her own reading process, a fact that in turn encourages a deeper consideration of the way in which literacy functions as a social practice. The approach therefore serves to both examine, and make further contributions to, current literacy theory through its interrogative methods. Given that both these merits are inextricably linked to how the methodology evolved, I will return to them after providing a brief explication of the heuristic process that led to the decision to focus on textual analysis, rather than policy analysis.

¹⁰⁶ Contributors to this tradition include the names of Peter Kallaway, Harold Wolpe, Mogubung Nkomo, Michael Cross and Blade Nzimande.

The opportunity to research the official role of literacy in South Africa through textual analysis was especially attractive to me because it offered me the opportunity to once again work closely with documents. My previous academic qualifications, obtained within the Faculty of Arts from the University of Cape Town, include a BA (with majors in English Language and Literature and Theory of Literature) and a BA Honours degree in English Language and Literature. While I felt that this text-based background provided me with skills particularly suited to a PhD focussed on the analysis of texts, I was also conscious that this decision signalled a departure from analysing literary fiction, towards analysing documents that are explicitly located in society.

What had once seemed a natural and automatic process to me – namely, reading texts, analysing texts, and writing about texts – became a methodological challenge. At the root of my concerns was a sense that my own ‘academic sense of being’, of who I was, was significantly affected by my transfer from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Cape Town to the Faculty of Education at the University of Edinburgh. In other words, the challenges posed by my decision to carry out a thesis based on textual analysis were inextricably linked to my sense of myself within a different academic context. It is for this reason that I describe my attempt to resolve these concerns as a *heuristic process*.

The heuristic process, as I indicated at the start of this chapter, is “exclusively and continually aimed at understanding human experience” (Moustakas 1994: 19). Frick accordingly argues that “each researcher’s experience [of the heuristic process] will be unique, reflecting the individuality of the researcher, the nature of the project, and the open flexible nature of heuristic inquiry itself” (1990: 78). As a result, “Learning that proceeds heuristically has a path of its own. It is self-directed, self-motivated, and open to spontaneous shift” (Douglass and Moustakas 1985: 44).

My own heuristic process began with a reading of Bourdieu's approach to reflexivity. This self-examination subsequently led to the development of a conceptual framework¹⁰⁷ that has served as the invisible 'intellectual scaffolding' guiding (not informing) my reading of South African texts, and which serves to constrain bias. In addition, the heuristic process has also significantly broadened my understanding of the way in which text functions as a literacy practice and has unexpectedly raised areas of interest that may be suited to future social literacy research. I will refer to two possibilities in passing – namely, academic literacy functioning as a social practice and intertextuality – because they function as stepping stones in my heuristic process. What follows is a brief outline of that progression, an outline drawn from a synthesis of reading and note-taking carried out early in the research process.

Bourdieu claims that there are three types of biases that may blur the sociological gaze. The first concerns that aspect of reflexivity that is possibly the most familiar to us, namely, the social origins of the individual researcher. The second bias relates to the position that the researcher occupies within an academic field (student or professor; sociologist or historian). Finally, the third bias is described by Bourdieu as an intellectualist bias: one which “entices us to construe the world as a *spectacle*, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically” (Wacquant 1996: 39).

My main concern related to whether my own academic habitus trajectory might have biased me towards taking a particular approach to the interpretation of texts – an interpretative approach that might not be suited to my new academic context. This concern, and my attempt to resolve it, led me to understand that an approach focussed

¹⁰⁷ This is discussed in the next section of this chapter, on page 96.

on textual analysis had merits not immediately obvious in a broader conceptualisation of policy analysis. I realised that by not aligning myself with a specific tradition, by focussing instead on how texts are read and analysis, that, in addition to the biases outlined by Bourdieu, the *literacy related biases* associated with my role as the researcher, and as a reader, would be consciously and deliberately addressed. This advantage would not necessarily have been contributed to the thesis had I instead aligned myself with one of the main South African traditions of policy analysis.

Terry Eagleton, writing in the context of literary criticism, has argued that the academic institution acts as a constraint on reading and writing: it upholds a “stock of socially legitimated ways of reading [which] relate to dominant forms of valuation and interpretation in a society as a whole” (1990: 88). Similarly, Barton and Hamilton, writing from a New Literacy Studies perspective, have noted that

Socially powerful institutions [...] tend to support dominant literacy practices [...] This means that literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others (Barton and Hamilton 1998: 10-11).

The first stepping stone in my heuristic process therefore relates to my realisation that this thesis is itself a representation of literacy as a social practice. This awareness calls attention to the fact that this text is constructed in accordance with the constraints (or biases) imposed by the practices peculiar to a particular field, the academic field. Using Bourdieu’s language, this thesis is a text that has been produced within a particular social field that is made up of its own determinate agents, imbued with its own logic of action, and which competes for its own forms of capital (Postone *et al* 1995: 5).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ For further insights into the functioning of the academic field, see Bourdieu, P., Passeron, J. and Saint Martin, M. 1994 *Academic Discourse: linguistic misunderstanding and professorial power* R. Teese (Trans.) Polity Press: Cambridge. For insight into French intellectual life, see Bourdieu, P. 1988 *Homo Academicus* P. Collier (Trans.) Polity Press: Cambridge.

Understanding this point raises questions about the act of writing in the context of social literacy research. There is a circular tension, perhaps an unresolvable tension, in writing texts that make claims about the nature of textuality (or literacy). However, if we understand texts to be reflective of literacy practices, then this tension is amplified. Future literacy research could concern itself with the question of how the claims made within social literacy research are affected by the fact that those claims are inextricably associated with a different literacy practice that has its roots in a different field governed by its own set of rules? This question suggests that a textual analysis of policy sources which critically engages with the notion of literacy related biases, could in turn make an important contribution towards advancing an understanding of how literacy functions as a social practice. This is an intuitive resulting from a heightened personal awareness of literacy issues promoted by the critically reflexive methodology. Again, this is a the thesis would have not benefited from this heightened sensitivity to literacy issues had I decided instead to pursue an analysis that was aligned with one of the traditions of the policy analysis, rather than adopting my own method based on a heuristically derived view of textual analysis.

This thesis exemplifies *academic literacy*.¹⁰⁹ More precisely, it represents an academic literacy derived from an academic habitus, my academic habitus, a habitus that mediates between two different disciplinary fields that arguably favour certain literacy practices over others.¹¹⁰ This thesis, as an example of literacy as a social practice, therefore

¹⁰⁹ Ann Johns has written about the concept of 'academic literacy' in a way that attempts to integrate literacy theory with pedagogical approaches. See Johns 1997.

¹¹⁰ If habitus is embodied understanding, then it can be argued that the 'rules of the game' governing academic writing and participation within particular disciplinary fields will be both consciously and unconsciously understood by those who have thoroughly learnt the rules by participating in a disciplinary field from an undergraduate to a postgraduate level. Others, like myself, who encounter different disciplinary fields in the course of their academic careers, could experience discordance in their academic habituses. And, to paraphrase Thompson's commentary on habitus (cited earlier in this chapter), this could leave them feeling at a loss for words, not knowing what to say, or how to say it (Thompson 1991: 17).

represents a *negotiated* settlement between different disciplines occupying the academic field. The conceptual framework I eventually arrive at is an overt attempt to manage that mediation.

This brings me to another stepping stone in my heuristic process. Through an understanding of habitus – of knowing that who I am is inextricably linked to why I write and how I write – I have come to understand that this thesis, as an example of a social practice, is itself dependant on a variety of other social literacies. The most obvious example of this is evidenced in the fact that the text is interspersed throughout with allusions to other texts (other literacy practices) that are alphabetically organised at the back of the thesis in a bibliography. This example of intertextuality¹¹¹ – where fragments of writing are drawn on and used to redirect and reinfect the myriad texts, reflecting literacy practices circulating within society – is brought to the text through the author (Dentith 1995: 94).

Intertextual moments are also generated as a result of reader participation in a literacy event: “what is produced at the moment of reading is due to the cross-fertilisation of the packaged textual material (say, a book) by all the texts which the reader brings to it” (Worton and Still 1990: 1-2).¹¹² In this sense, the analysis of the texts in the following three chapters can also be described as *intertextual* because it draws on, and explicitly refers to, other writings. Furthermore, it is intertextual because my analysis of text is

¹¹¹ Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality in the course of her engagement with Mikhail Bakhtin’s work in the 1960s: “Any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva, cited in Dentith 1995: 95; *see also* Moi 1986).

¹¹² For example, I have come to understand that the supervisory marginal annotations that have appeared from time to time in various drafts of this thesis function in several ways. Most obviously, they are literacy practices related to the social activities governing supervisory practices. Secondly, the sometimes different viewpoints expressed are reflections of my supervisors’ their different academic habituses – habituses that are associated with their textual histories.

influenced by my own textual history, by moments where the “production and reception of a given text depends upon the participants’ knowledge of other texts” (Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 37 and 182).

The meaning in this text is therefore deeply intertwined with a multitude of literacy practices. Trying to identify all the literacy practices involved (through intertextual analysis¹¹³) would result in what Brownlow and Kronick have described as a “mind-expanding abstraction” – in my opinion, an almost impossible task (1998: 12). However, Fairclough’s argument that, “Intertextual analysis draws attention to the dependence of texts upon society and history in the form of resources made available within the order of discourse”, is less abstract and more useful to me in terms of formulating a conceptual approach to analysing texts (1999: 184). He claims too that “The concept of intertextuality sees texts historically as transforming the past – existing conventions and prior texts – into the present” (Fairclough 1992: 85).

The process of critically considering the evolution on my own ‘academic habitus’ has led to the development of what I describe, in the next section of this chapter, as a conceptual framework. I have used this framework heuristically to approach and understand texts that are themselves representative of social practices.

Conceptual framework as a heuristic device

This section of the thesis serves to outline a conceptual framework that functions, in the following three chapters, as a heuristic reading device. I have utilised insights gained from Bourdieu’s theories of habitus, field and capital, and, together with the insights gained from my heuristic process, have devised a reading and thinking tool. In other

¹¹³ See Worton and Still 1990; Brownlow and Kronick 1998.

words, the tool described in this section of the thesis (and depicted in Figure 2 on page 100) is not intended to promote a Bourdieuan reading of South African texts produced between 1979 and 2000. Rather, it is a device that serves to deliberately constrain and guide my reading process.

This thesis seeks to describe the national role of literacy in South Africa and to do so through an exploration of literacy's national role, within the literacy field, between 1979 and 2000. The literacy field can be described as a metaphorical construct¹¹⁴ that consists of other components which themselves may function as fields. For example, in the first decade under consideration, the literacy field is influenced to varying degrees by business interests, by activists, by the government, by trade unions, by non governmental organisations, by learners and so on. Each of these fields function semi-autonomously of the literacy field. The literacy field is itself accordingly structured by the relationship it shares with other fields sharing social space. I refer to these diverse fields participating in the structure of the literacy field as 'compository fields', and I do so to call attention to the fact that the literacy field is not an autonomous construct, but is made up of various social components derived from different social fields.

The compository fields contributing towards the literacy market are linked through a shared interest in literacy, and each seeks to be the most influential field within the literacy market. Each seeks to control the form of symbolic capital, the role that literacy takes in society, that is most valued within the broader field of power. This enables them to direct and control the nature of the game governing the literacy field. Analysing the shape of the field, through various discourses, will enable us to better understand

¹¹⁴ It is helpful to think of a field as a metaphorical construct that operates in the same way as perhaps a magnetic field, or a electric field might do – it has a range of influence that diminishes at its peripheral edges.

the role that literacy plays within a society, and to understand the social symbolic value that is attached to the concept of 'literacy'.

Given the principle of on-going competition, it is fair to say that the structure of the literacy field will constantly undergo change, be rendered unstable, with some of the compository fields becoming more influential within the literacy field than others at different times. In other words, the field will be restructured and re-defined by the shifting field positions within it.

Bourdieu writes that the "space of interaction is the locus where the intersection between several different fields is realised" (1996: 257). In this thesis it is understood that the locus of competing compository fields within the broader literacy field is discernible in texts, the outcomes of literacy practices, which reflect the result of an interaction between various agents objectively representing (and subjectively embodying) their respective fields. Each document therefore advances a structuring of symbolic capital within which one form is dominant and which shapes the form of literacy in that moment in time. This structure has been successfully competed for, or influenced, by one of the compository fields, thus establishing that field, and that form of capital in a position of influence.

The semi-autonomous nature of fields suggests that changing social conditions external to the literacy field will also impact on and alter the way in which fields compete and function in society. For example, Harker describes how education, as a field, responds to changing social conditions: "the reaction of many schools to rising levels of employment is to run courses on how to apply, or be interviewed, for a job – to transmit the 'style', language etc. of the dominant habitus" (1984: 122). Attempting to delineate all possible permutations of the changing social conditions that structure

society would generate endless possible influences.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, in order to determine the degree of influence that a compository field has in society in general (and thus have a sense of what it brings to the literacy field) it is important to monitor those external conditions that especially serve to influence each field's shape.

Using Bourdieu's thinking tools to inform a methodological approach to the South African literacy field provides a useful conceptual model within which data can be collected. The process outlined above has been graphically described in Figure 2 on page 100. This diagram summarises the conceptual framework underpinning the analysis of the South African literacy market into five key components.

The five steps are as follows:

Various compository fields (groups of agents) with an interest in the literacy market are positioned within social conditions and circumstances that are unique to South Africa. This is described in Figure 2 as the 'social medium'.

The social medium partly serves to structure each field and contributes to the formation of that field's collective habitus.

The field habitus in turn is outwardly manifested in its actions, decisions and writings. It is inwardly, and less obviously, manifested in the perceptions and attitudes, the discourses, which inform its literacy practices. The field habitus therefore results, through literacy practices, in a practical, identifiable form (such as a mission statement)

¹¹⁵ This is why it is impossible to say that a field has 'limits'. If we keep in mind the metaphorical idea of fields as magnetic fields we can understand that although the field is limitless, there still comes a point where the effects of competing fields further removed from the field under investigation no longer have any immediate (or determinable effect) on the object of enquiry. This, perhaps, serves as a limit.

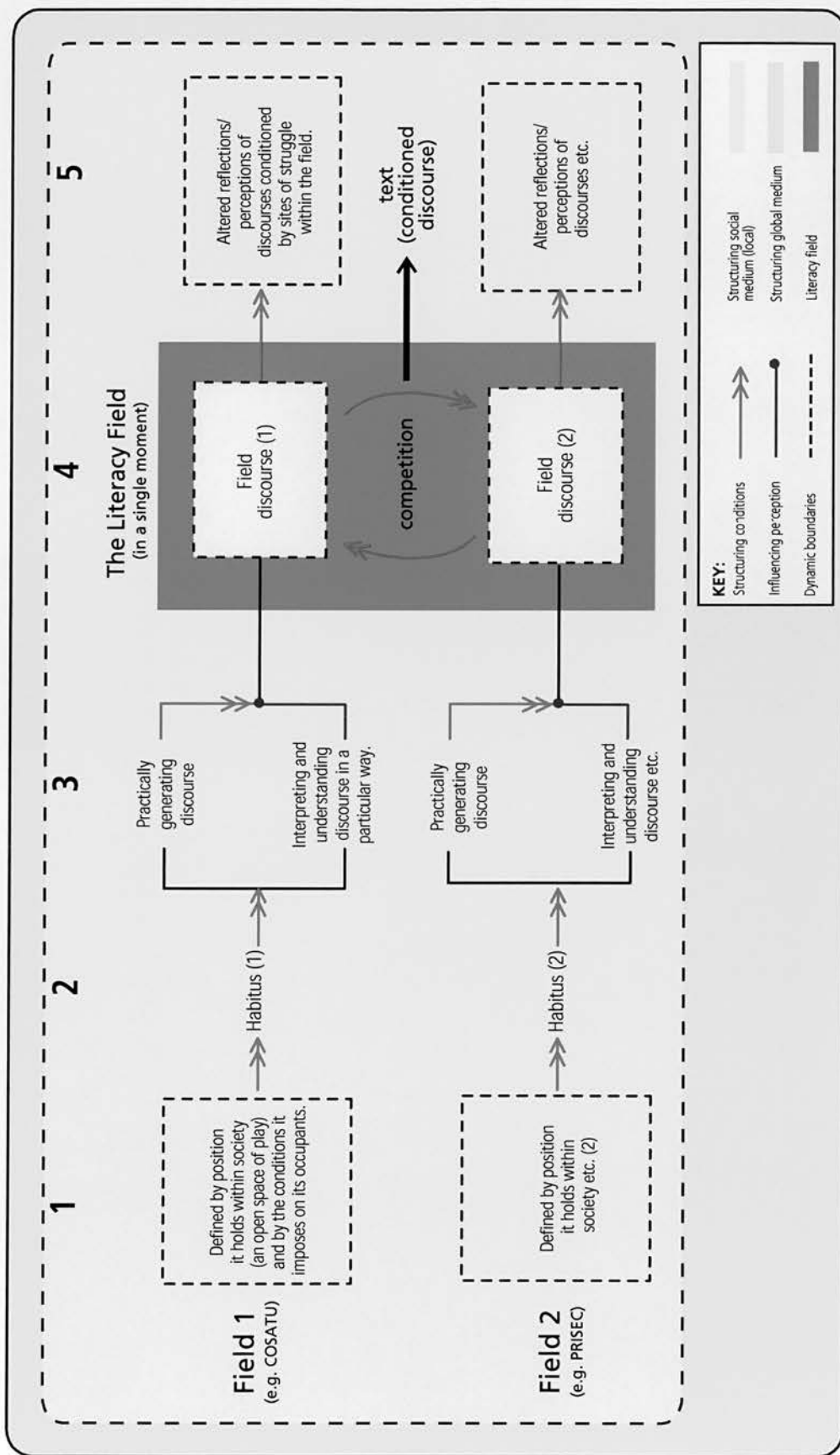


Figure 2 : Model of a conceptual framework forming the basis of the literacy market

as well as in an 'invisible' embodied form (the various agents' intentions that influences the claims made in the document).

These two features of the habitus come together within the literacy field resulting in a literacy practice that is itself the result of competition between agents in the field. In this example a particular field (Field 1, for example, could represent the field of organised labour) will bring to the literacy field a habitus which reflects, and contributes to, the position that labour field holds in society at that particular time. Within the literacy field, labour's stance on literacy will necessarily undergo further competition with discourses from other fields. It is this 'state of play' in a given moment in time that delineates and informs the literacy field, and that eventually results in a literacy practice that describes the role of literacy in society at a particular moment in time.

As a result of the competition taking place, it can conversely be argued that the literacy field also serves as a structuring device on each field. This results in compository fields, as a result of their competitive engagement with the literacy field, having an adjusted habitus resulting from the state of competition between competing compository fields within the literacy market place.

Gathering information

The conceptual framework outlined so far provides an 'organising' principle to the heuristic device. This section of the thesis looks at how information is to be gathered from within that process. The literacy field outlined in Figure 2 on page 100 highlights (in section four of the diagram) a moment that could result in the publication of a single document. This thesis, however, is concerned with the national role of literacy between 1979 and 2000, a period spanning two decades. Bourdieu has emphasised that the relationship between field and habitus is partly determined by the historically and

socially situated conditions of its production (1997a: 95). Fairclough has described how the concept of intertextuality sees texts as “transforming the past [...] into the present” (1992: 85). These perspectives therefore suggest that the *current* national role of literacy, outlined in textual sources, has its origins in earlier literacy practices – practices structured according to the social and historical conditions of the time.

An analysis of the dominant role of literacy in South Africa therefore understands that role to be reflected in a series of texts produced between 1979 and 2000. The question seeks to determine the national perspective on the role of literacy and this suggests that texts that contribute to the national discourse are an essential source of information. This macro approach to the role of literacy maintains the view that the notion of literacy – the claims made about what it is that literacy means, and what it is said to achieve – is symbolically powerful from both a national viewpoint as well as within an individual’s immediate life.¹¹⁶ In this sense, literacy can be said to ‘play a particular role in society’.

Discourse analysis

Literacy practices are active social processes. A text, however, is a tangible physical product, a visual medium that represents the material form of language. In this section of the thesis I will describe how I have understood the concept of discourse analysis within my heuristic device. The term ‘discourse analysis’ calls attention to the fact that

¹¹⁶ The suggestion that literacy is symbolically powerful within communities as well as the nation was made earlier in this chapter on page 85.

texts, while remaining material objects, nevertheless emerge from active social activities that simultaneously produce, constrain, and influence their meaning.¹¹⁷

Some theorists do not formally distinguish between text and discourse. For example, Roger Fowler has described literature as discourse – “as discourse and thus as communication rather than as object” (1981: 28). Sarangi and Slembrouck comment that “Discourse can be looked at as text, as processes of text production [and also] as an ideologically invested vehicle in a societal formation” (1996: 13).

Hodge and Kress, however, take a more rigorous view of the relationship between text and discourse. They argue that *discourse* refers to the social processes in which texts are embedded, while *text* is the material concrete object produced in discourse. They conclude: “Text is only a trace of discourses, frozen and preserved, more or less reliable or misleading” (Hodge and Kress 1988: 7). Similarly, Fairclough and Wodak argue that discourse is “socially *constitutive* as well as socially shaped: it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people” (1997: 258). For that reason, Fairclough argues that, rather than being discourse, “texts selectively draw upon *orders of discourse* [...] which are available to text producers and interpreters in particular social circumstances” (1999: 184).

This thesis consequently takes the view that an analysis of text can never be a complete analysis of social practices, or literacy practices. Instead, it is an analysis of traces of discourses that have emerged from literacy practices. To emphasise the fact that texts are socially constituted through a negotiation between field and habitus, I have referred

¹¹⁷ In fact, it could be argued that the material visual nature of text itself is as much embedded in social practices as its meaning. Kress describes how features of spatial design, paragraph indentations, typography and other aspects of text “drift uneasily in and out of definitions of literacy” (1997: 120). It is worth commenting that the visual aspects of this thesis, for example, are in keeping with stipulations set out by the Faculty of Education.

to the texts under investigation in this thesis as ‘conditioned discourses’. This term is especially pertinent to many of the texts discussed in this thesis because they are the result of collaborative processes – processes that emphasise the negotiated, competitive, engagement between various fields of interest, which eventually results in a text. Moments where literacy discourses contribute towards a literacy practice (a social practice) are what Kress has referred to as the motor, or engine, that produces texts (1985: 12).

This heuristic device therefore uses the term ‘conditioned discourse’ to contribute towards a reading of texts that understands texts as the product of social literacy practices. Conditioned discourses are frozen traces of discourse, evidence of the outcome of literacy practices. Conditioned discourses are clues that proffer insight into which fields participating in the literacy event held the most symbolic power, the authority to ‘make things with words’.¹¹⁸

The nature of competition that results in a conditioned discourse takes place in relation to the conditions affecting all the fields participating in, or contributing towards, the field of literacy. With this in mind, the conditioned discourses, positioned within a broader chronological framework, will remain the prime focus of the thesis but mention will be made too of significant external conditions that contribute to the final form of the conditioned discourse¹¹⁹ (see Figure 3 on page 105).

Finally, keeping in mind my heuristic device, I will analyse the conditioned discourses in accordance with five broad themes selected to tease out and identify the shifting forms

¹¹⁸ Symbolic capital as a form of symbolic power was discussed earlier in this chapter on page 87.

¹¹⁹ This aspect of the discourse analysis is represented through the thematic strand of ‘structuring conditions’ used to analyse the texts. This is discussed on page 125.

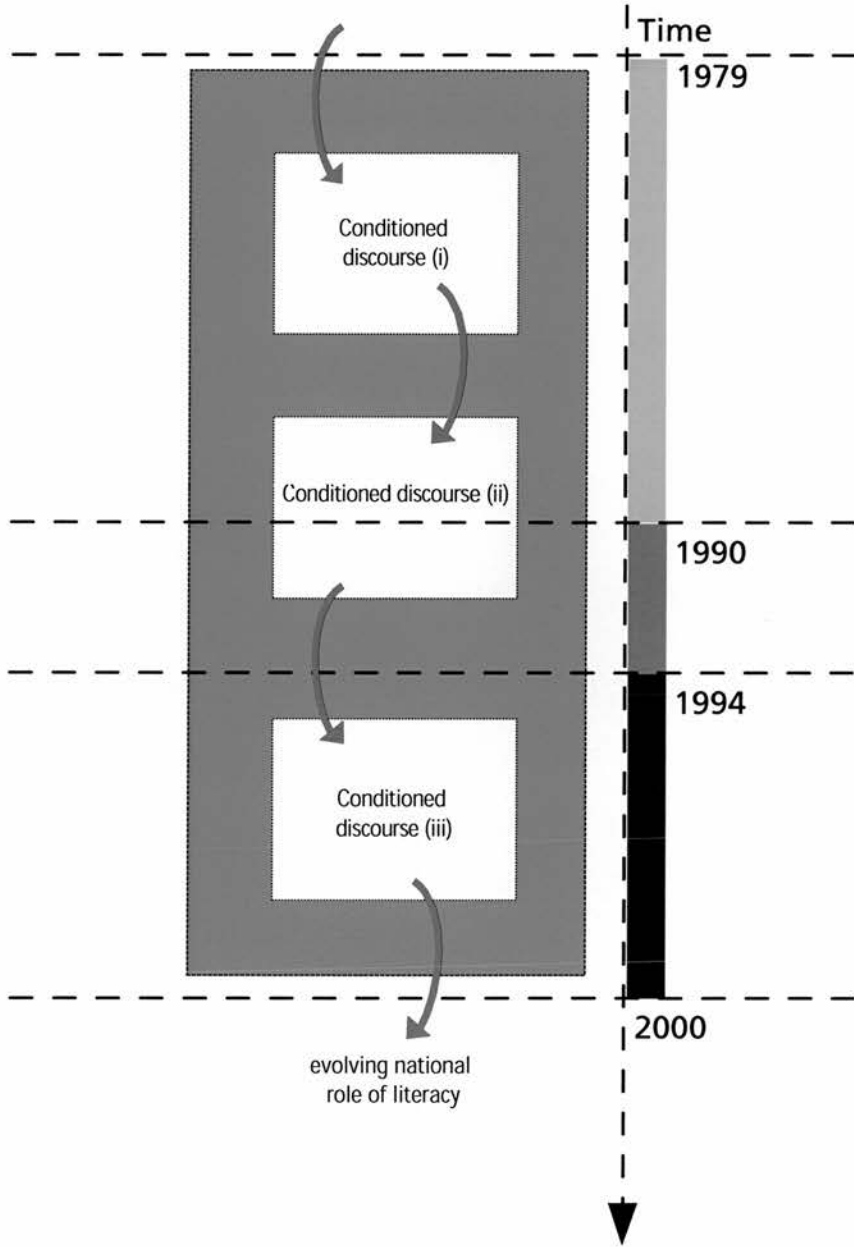


Figure 3 : Conditioned discourses and the literacy field

of capital exchanges within the literacy market. This approach is intended to help focus attention on the relations of force – social tensions – and in so doing gain an understanding of the symbolic capital that, at different stages in time, determines the value of the literacy market. To achieve this objective, a preliminary reading of the conditioned discourses was carried out to identify broad themes that consistently recur through the texts.¹²⁰

Identifying conditioned discourses

Identifying specific conditioned discourses for analysis, especially discourses pertaining to adult literacy in South Africa, represents a methodological challenge. This is primarily because there is relatively little adult literacy specific textual evidence available to reflect two decades of involvement in the field of adult literacy.¹²¹ This is especially true of period between 1979 and 1990 when the apartheid government restricted literacy activities within the country. Nevertheless, adult literacy activities did take place within the country and therefore it can be said that a field of adult literacy did exist. And this thesis is concerned with one particular aspect of the field of literacy; namely, the *national* role that literacy is said to play in the country.

The relevance that certain available documents have for defining the official position on adult literacy in South Africa therefore becomes the first criterion used in the process of identifying primary conditioned discourses for analyses. For example, the Wiehahn report is a labour relations document, not a text concerned with literacy, but nevertheless gives access to traces of discourse that reveal the state position regarding

¹²⁰ These themes will be discussed shortly in more detail (on page 111).

¹²¹ This challenge to the South African literacy field was mentioned earlier in chapter one (see page 58).

the role of literacy in South Africa. The Wiehahn document demonstrates too how the concerns and issues relating to the field of labour relations can be said to have a structuring effect on the literacy field too, and therefore on the role that literacy plays in South Africa at that time. Table 2 on page 108 lists the primary conditioned discourses that provide a textual pathway towards determining the role of literacy in South Africa in the year 2000.

Not listed in Table 2 are the many documents that have contributed to the highly intertextual nature of this thesis. These texts include those that have been read with a view to the structuring (conditioning) effect that they have on the central conditioned discourses. For example, documents published in the late 1990s relating to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) or to the macroeconomic Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy.

It is worth noting, however, that some of the more significant elements of the literacy field – significant because they have a structuring effect on the national role of literacy – are not immediately represented in a detailed textual format. The People’s Education movement is prime example of this. In spite of the fact that certain literacy discourses are ‘silent’ (or underrepresented), they still have the ability to influence the literacy field. They are, therefore, to a small degree *present* in conditioned discourses emerging from the social activities which invisible discourses also participate in. Chapter four, for example, will reveal how the presence of literacy as an integral component of ‘political resistance’¹²² has an impact on other fields that consequently compete to control and curtail the literacy market. The challenge of including invisible discourses in the overall

¹²² Learn and Teach, one organisation mentioned previously in chapter two, exemplifies this approach to literacy (see page 64).

YEAR OF PUBLICATION	PRIMARY CONDITIONED DISCOURSE
1979	The Wiehahn Commission
1981	The Report of the Main Committee of the HSRC Investigation into Education (de Lange Report)
1984	HSRC/NTB Investigation into the Training of Artisans in the Republic of South Africa
1989	HSRC/NTB Investigation into Skills Training in the RSA
1991	HSRC/NTB Investigation into a National Training Strategy for the RSA
1992	Education Renewal Strategy
1992-1993	National Education Policy Investigation, primarily focussing on the reports respectively entitled <u>Adult Basic Education, Adult Education, Human Resources Development and Framework Report and Final Report Summaries</u>
1994	A Discussion Document on a National Training Strategy Initiative
1994	Implementation Plan for Education and Training
1995	A Policy Framework for Education and Training
1995	White Paper on Education and Training
1997	A National Multi-Year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training: provision and accreditation
2000	Education for All : the South African assessment report

Table 2: Primary 'conditioned discourses'

discourses is mentioned in more detail when I discuss the thematic strand of ‘absences’ later in the chapter (on page 126).

Although not a central feature of the research (for reasons outlined in the introduction to the thesis on page 11), the analysis of the central conditioned discourses and the accompanying structuring texts is enriched by insights gained through the series of conversations I had with literacy practitioners working in the field during the 1990s. The conversations themselves cannot be described as conditioned discourses in the sense that I have employed the term so far. Nevertheless, I have occasionally referred to them in the body of the thesis in moments where they add depth or insight, through practical experience, to my analysis of the texts.¹²³ In addition to the conversations, and in an attempt to gain a sense of the diversity of experiences in the Adult Learning Centres, I circulated a questionnaire amongst various teachers working in disparate sectors of the field (rural and urban and township based ALCs).¹²⁴ Although the response rate to the questionnaire was too poor to draw general conclusions about the overall ALC context, the individual comments in the questionnaires that were returned reflected different perspectives and, like the conversations, they offer experiences that sometimes enrich the broader textual analysis.

The process of teasing out literacy discourses from a selection of conditioned discourses raises certain methodological issues. First, do the conditioned discourses selected together represent the field of literacy according to the whole of South Africa? The answer is quite simply, no. Whether they accurately describe *all* experiences of the

¹²³ I have assured all the people I spoke to that their identity would remain confidential. They will accordingly be referred to in the text only as ‘Respondents’. Appendix 1 on page 427 lists the various respondents.

¹²⁴ See Appendix 7 on page 455 for a copy of the questionnaire.

literacy market or not, the fields involved in shaping and constructing these discourses have nevertheless acquired the symbolic power, through competitive processes, to influence and make proclamations about what literacy is and how it should be interpreted. In this sense the documents prescribe a dominant, or national, version of the role that literacy plays within society. The conditioned discourses therefore do meet the purposes of the thesis which is to determine the role that literacy is said to play in South Africa.

The fact that the conditioned discourses do not accurately represent *all* the voices in South Africa is highlighted by the decision to occasionally include literacy practitioners' voices into the main analysis. Their diverse experiences point to alternative views on literacy that frequently contradict the story being told in the documents. An analysis that seeks to determine the *national* role of literacy therefore potentially benefits grassroots practitioners too in that it decodes official discourses and makes accessible to them a sense of the 'bigger picture' that they operate in. An examination of policy discourse, through textual analysis, isolates the dominant claims (claims manifested in traces of discourse that reflect trends in thinking about literacy) being made about literacy in South Africa.. The outcome, a careful synthesis and analysis of all the claims, will hopefully enable grassroots practitioners to reflect on the way in which their immediate practical localised experience is echoed in the overall South African literacy narrative.

A further methodological concern relates to the fact that the documents have been analysed in a chronological process. This suggests that various 'roles' of literacy will be determined at different moments in history. The fact too that the discourses analysis in this thesis has been organised into three chapters presents another structured representation of literacy's role possibly implying that the three chapters represent three key moments when the role of literacy underwent change. It is therefore worth mentioning that the discourse analysis is carried out in three chapters for pragmatic

reasons, to make the thesis manageable and more readable. The chapter divisions are very roughly structured around three stages in South African history: apartheid during the 1980s, the transitional period before general elections in 1994, and post-apartheid South Africa up until the year 1999. The conclusion looks at literacy between 1999 and 2000. A chronological approach to the analysis of these discourses meets the purpose of describing the role of literacy as an intertextual, evolving concept rooted in the socio-historical conditions of the time

Thematic strands of analysis

The third step in the approach to discourse analysis outlined earlier on page 104 mentions that the conditioned discourses will be analysed by using 'thematic strands of analysis'. These will highlight the tensions within the field, and accordingly draw attention to the fact that the role of literacy is shaped through a process of competition between diverse interests. This section of the chapter will introduce the five broad strands of analysis chosen in the course of a preliminary reading of the conditioned discourses. They are referred to here as growth, equity, terminology, structuring conditions, and absences. Figure 4 on page 112 graphically represents how these will be used to tease out information in relation to the conditioned discourses depicted earlier in Figure 3 on page 105.

Of the five thematic strands identified here, equity and growth are derived from carrying out a preliminary reading of the conditioned discourses themselves. A further two strands (structuring conditions and absences) have their origins in the conceptual framework underpinning the thesis while the final theme of 'terminology' relates to the process of analysing text itself.

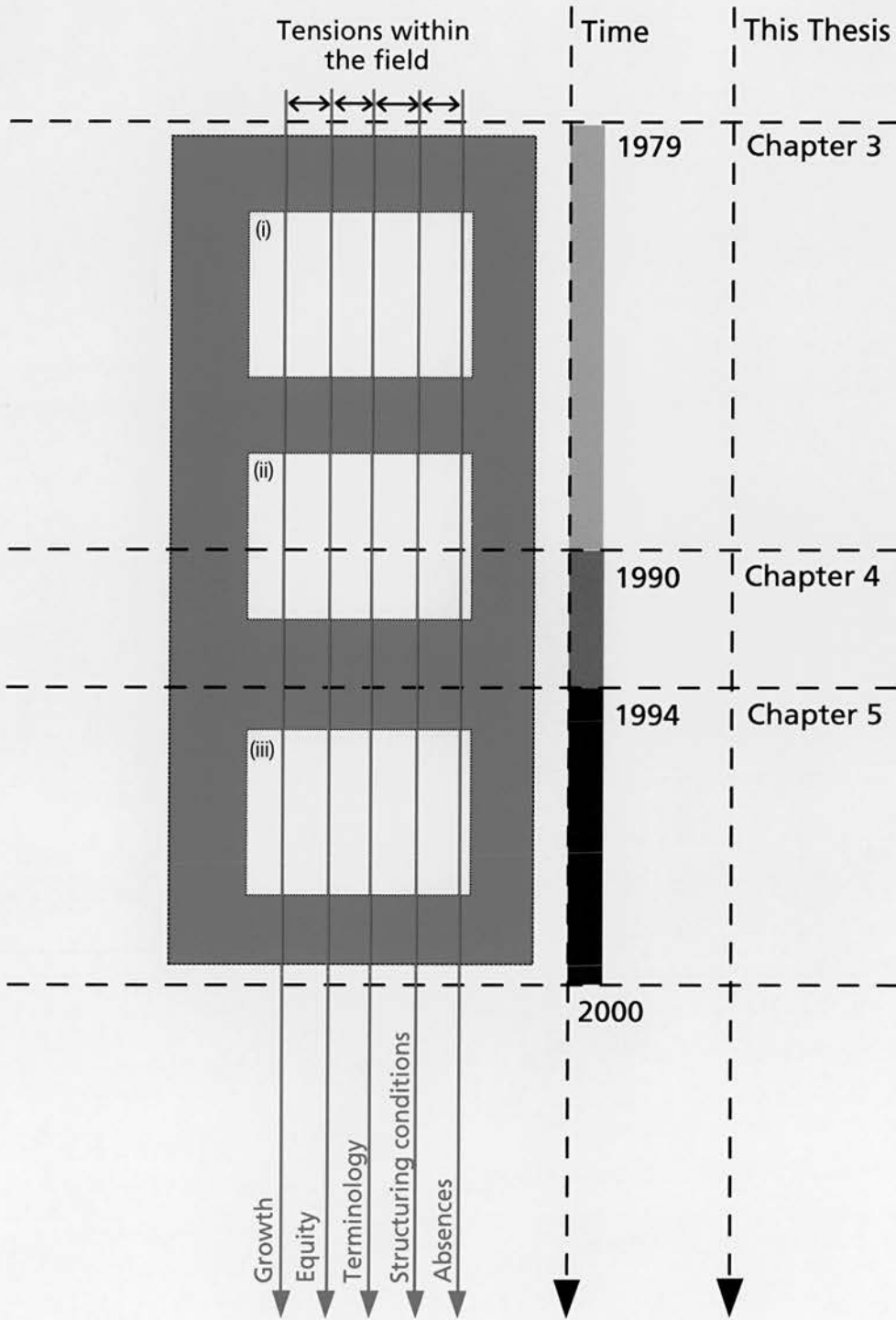


Figure 4: Analysing the literacy market using thematic strands of analysis

Equity

The right to education is commonly understood to be a basic human right. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly states that “Everyone has the right to education”.¹²⁵ With respect to adult basic education, Article 13 of the United Nations’ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that

“Fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education”.¹²⁶ In South Africa, very diverse groups, including those who acted in the interests of the National Party under the very inequitable system of apartheid, have used the term ‘human rights’ in relation to educational concerns. In this sense, the term ‘human rights’ and the notion of education and the role it plays with respect to equity, has to be critically considered throughout all the conditioned discourses explored in the next three chapters.

The American educationist, Horace Mann,¹²⁷ saw the role of education in achieving equality to be paramount: he said that “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the greatest equaliser of the conditions of man – the balance wheel of social machinery” (cited in Le Grand 1982: 54). But thinking about education, in relation to issues of equity, is far from straightforward and raises a minefield of questions that needs to be carefully explored.

¹²⁵ The full text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be found on the Internet at the following URL: <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/udhr.html>.

¹²⁶ <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/escr.html# Article 13.2.2>

¹²⁷ Deeply involved in the field of public education, Mann started a movement for better paid teachers and better teaching. He was elected to the American congress in 1848 where he fought vigorously against slavery. Mann was born in 1796. He died in 1859.

Is the principle of 'equal education' and education as an inalienable human right something that individuals should take literally? If so, does this mean that citizens can hold governments criminally responsible for 'violating human rights' when they fail to deliver on these promises? Or should we understand the concept of equality in education as a guiding principle, a hope for the (ideal) society we would all like to live in? In this sense the word equality encompasses a tension between social justice and practical restraints. Does the presence of practical restraints mean that there is something in our society that takes a higher priority than 'equality'?

And how do we understand what the term equality, with respect to education, actually means? Are we referring to equality of opportunity, equality of access, equal choice of subjects, equal treatment within the system, or equal standards of education? Do we mean all things at the same time? Does favouring one or another of these principles over others threaten the overall principle of equality? In this case, what is the relationship between the words 'equality' and 'fair'? If our methods of achieving equality depend on a level of unfairness (some would argue that affirmative action, for example, is unfair) is this socially just?

And where does equality begin? Do we begin from today, from the day we promise to achieve equality, with a statement that says from now on we are all equal? Or does educational equality automatically need to be cognisant of other words – terms such as redress, reconstruction, affirmative action, and recognition of prior learning?

It is worth noting that the Bourdieuan notion of 'competition' within society immediately poses the question of whether equality is in fact even attainable. Bourdieu's idea that we all compete for 'capital' gains provides the most basic understanding of *how* we come to be who we are within our social contexts. This suggests that there will always be inequality and that people will always compete to acquire more than others, to

be more powerful and to be more influential. In this case, are 'equality' discourses merely another arena in which we compete in order to determine and impose meaning and definition on both the word 'equality' and the concept of equality?

The fact that the concept of equality is so thoroughly problematised in this section of the thesis points to a real tension that exists whenever the term is employed with respect to education. These are the sorts of questions that will be asked in the course of analysing the conditioned discourses outlined in Table 2 on page 108. The questions asked here in this section become even more challenging when posed alongside issues relating to economic growth, the other main thematic strand of analysis used to tease out the role of literacy.

Growth

Education's relationship to principles of growth is related to an awareness that education is valuable in terms of its intrinsic benefits to an individual as well as the extrinsic value it has in terms of its economic exchange value (Jonathan 1998: 272). In this sense, how principles of economic growth are envisaged within conditioned discourses can have a structuring effect on how literacy is defined, its symbolic value in society, and the type of knowledge that it is claimed to yield. These factors all contribute to the role that literacy plays in society.

Considering the shape and form of growth discourses as they appear in these documents, and attempting to analyse how these may in turn shape the role of literacy in society, has to be considered most particularly in terms of where the impetus for the growth discourses emerges? The following chapters will show that the various interests competing within (and thus structuring) the field of education in terms of growth imperatives are diverse.

In the apartheid era, for example, growth concerns were dominated by the state and by private sector interests. The state, unlike big business, was compelled to filter economic issues through its broader social apartheid strategies. The private sector in the meanwhile was in a freer position to seek answers to South African challenges by looking to experiences abroad. To further complicate growth discourses emerging at this time, the ANC was known to have a strong socialist inspired approach to economic development.¹²⁸ Its position as a popular force opposing the government therefore suggests that directives issued by the state and by the private sector were to some extent made in response to the possibility of future economic conditions should the ANC ever come into power.

In this sense it can be argued that the desire by one group operating within a diverse field to directly influence growth development is a tense local issue, competing in local conditions, but is a local issue which is also influenced by global economic conditions and ideologies. This is exemplified to some extent by the ANC's socialist inspired approach to economic growth. In a local context the ANC historically shares a close alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) – both being organisations bound by strong socialist

¹²⁸ The language of the Freedom Charter suggests that the opposition movement in South Africa had strong socialist inclinations. It has to be noted, however, that in an article published in 1957, the ANC announced that “the immediate aim of the liberatory movement is not and cannot be the establishment of socialism” (ANC 1957). This was in response to fears that the Charter was indeed a socialist manifesto. The Freedom Charter, adopted in 1955 at the Congress of the People at Klipton (near Johannesburg), is a publication that sets out a democratic vision of a future South Africa. The Charter resulted from a campaign that set out to collect the demands of people from all over the country and to formally document them. The Congress of the People consisted of delegates representing a wide variety of organisations (and races) who banded together to form what became known as the Congress Alliance – an anti-apartheid united front (see Price 1991). The Freedom Charter became known as the alliance's manifesto, and, given this and its origins, it can be described as a document that represents the voices of the oppressed majority, and one that formally describes their needs. It is not surprising that the Charter came to be an important symbol of the struggle against apartheid. Two important figures in the field of education policy in South Africa describe it as being a “central organising tradition for a large number of people for over thirty years of struggle” (Muller and Taylor 1993: 316). See Appendix 3 on page 431 for a full transcript of the Freedom Charter.

principles. Regional changes can also be argued to have a structuring influence (in terms of socialist principles) on the ANC's approach to economic growth issues. The year 1980, for example, saw the last of South Africa's immediate neighbours¹²⁹, Zimbabwe, achieve independence with considerable support from Russia and China.¹³⁰ The combination of regional achievements, combined with both the local politics involved in sustaining the tripartite alliance, as well as the expectations of a population fast tiring of extreme inequality and deprivation, makes the ANC's initial alignment with socialist principles unsurprising.

Similar regional and global changes would have a different structuring effect on other groups with a vested interest in a neo-liberal approach to economic growth discourses. Zimbabwe's independence, for example, represented the removal of what could be viewed as an important 'buffer' between South Africa and other independent socialist African states in the sub-Saharan region. Importantly, it also signifies the strengthening of socialist politics in sub-Saharan Africa, a trend that was increasingly at odds with global economic developments. This latter point is something that the South African government was very sensitive to.

It was during the 1980s that a particular right wing ideology – the 'New Right' – gained renewed prominence in the global arena by virtue of the fact that Thatcher, Reagan and Kohl all came to power at about the same time (Thatcher in 1979, Reagan in 1981, and Kohl in 1982). Given that the conditioned discourses selected during the 1980s primarily represent the voices of the state, with the opposition's voice being

¹²⁹ Excluding Namibia, which came under South African mandate. Namibia achieved its independence in 1990.

¹³⁰ The two political parties principally involved in bringing Zimbabwe to independence were ZANU PF and ZAPU. The Chinese government supported ZANU-PF's liberation efforts while Russia assisted ZAPU.

suppressed,¹³¹ the emergence of a New Right orthodoxy in international circles contributed significantly to the local tensions. These tensions were especially pronounced between the State's apartheid principles, the private sector's goals for the economy, and opposition groups' concerns with eliminating apartheid and inequality and improving the lives of the majority of South Africans.

The term New Right is understood to refer primarily to economic and political liberalism but is especially associated with those macroeconomic approaches summed up in the word 'monetarism' (Bosanquet 1983: 5). It has been argued that the central understanding underpinning the concept of the New Right is the idea that "markets should proliferate" (Jordan 1993). New Right thinking is also commonly associated with conservatism and the notion of traditional values within a particular conception of the state, society and the individual roles within both (King 1987: 9). In keeping with the notion that markets should proliferate, New Right principles essentially held that too much power was concentrated in the hands of bureaucrats, politicians and teachers.

The International trend towards New Right thinking had significant implications for educational issues. For example, the idea that markets should proliferate gave rise to the belief that if an unfettered market best met the purposes of providing consumer commodities, then there was no reason why it should not be equally as suitable in terms of public sector services. In this sense the New Right proposed that "education should be bought and sold in the same way as any other commodity. It should be conducted in private or self-financing public institutions" (Collard 1968: 6). In many respects this was articulated as giving greater power to parents in terms of meeting their children's

¹³¹ The issue of 'absences' in the conditioned discourses will be discussed shortly (on page 126).

educational needs (Smith 1993: 157). Education came to be viewed as a commodity that needed to be set free and allowed to be more responsive to market demands.

The changing economic environment during the 1980s gave rise to a different way of actually conceptualising education too. In Britain, for example, there was a growing awareness that massive de-industrialisation (originating in the 1960s) was beginning to impact on the type of education that would be needed to furnish the changing economic field – in this case, skills supporting jobs in the service sectors.¹³² The changing nature of work was largely a result of changing forms of production reflected in a shift from mechanised processes to automatism. Consequently, the argument that liberal education¹³³ was perceived to be hostile to industry, commerce and the practical application of knowledge, acquired greater leverage (Dale *et al* 1990: 24).

The principle of ‘New Vocationalism’ came to be used to describe a changing view of education:

new vocationalism is a critical movement – radical in the sense that new foundations are being put in place and new structures erected on them. The issue is not whether education should be vocational, but what vocational means in contemporary terms, what could count as adequacy or quality of vocationalism, and how well the vocational orientation is balanced with other purposes and values of education (Skilbeck *et al* 1990: 5).

In many respects New Vocationalism represents a critical consideration of the attitudes to education in general, and to liberal education especially. This is seen, for example, in the argument that scientific and technical subjects should be moved to the centre of the

¹³² Bosworth and Wilson call attention to changing working conditions: “The share of jobs in the primary and manufacturing industries has shrunk from 50 per cent in the early 1950s to less than a quarter by 1990. This fall has been offset by the growing share of employment in both the public and private services” (1994: 54).

¹³³ Liberal education was seen to be a system that stressed the intrinsic, non-instrumental value of education over and above the extrinsic vocational requirements that students faced after leaving school.

curriculum in order to make education more responsive to the needs of the ‘world of work’ and of industry (ibid.: 24 and Walford *et al* 1988: 6). Entwistle sums up this period in a way that closely links education and growth concerns. He describes education in the 1980s as being situated within an environment of “economic and political constraint” characterised by “crises in the supply of energy, industrial recession, and the swing towards governments committed to ‘monetarism’ and the retrenchment of the social services” (1981: 38).

The favouring, during the 1980s, of New Right approaches to markets and public services implied that socialist principles had been significantly de-legitimated in the eyes of the electorate. In Britain, Stuart Hall’s ‘New Times’ argument can be read both as a response to the New Right and as a realisation that, in the light of New Right popularity, the left needed to reconsider and transform their socialist policies (Hall 1988).¹³⁴ In addition to this, and on a more practical level, Antony Giddens has commented that New Times, like the New Right, was the left’s response to a changing era: an epoch “marked by a shift from manufacturing production to information technology, the declining role of class politics and the expansion of choice in consumption, lifestyle and sexuality” (Giddens 2000: 28).

The rapidly changing nature of world economic patterns and production can be seen in the plethora of terms emerging at this time. Hall, for example, describes New Times as a metaphor that addresses many of these elusive concepts:

¹³⁴ Re-thinking socialist principles in the face of overt economic liberalism was not necessarily popular in socialist circles, a fact clearly reflected in Hall’s remarks: “Who, on the left, now has the confidence to address the problems and promise of New Times with a matching comprehensiveness and range? The sad fact is that a list of ‘new questions’ like that are most likely to engender a response of derision and sectarian back-biting at most meetings of the organised political left today – coupled with the usual cries of ‘sell-out!’” (Hall 1996: 231).

If we take the 'New Times' idea apart, we find that it is an attempt to capture, within the confines of a single metaphor, a number of different facets of social change. In the current debates, a variety of different terms jostle with one another for pride of place [...] They include 'post-industrial', 'post-Fordist', 'revolution of the subject', 'postmodernism'¹³⁵ (Hall 1996: 224).

Hall's New Times project therefore aligns post-Fordist principles with those of culture and in so doing suggests a relationship between the intrinsic and extrinsic symbolic values of education in relation to changing systems of production and a global economic crisis. His is a vision which addresses a "totality of change" (Amin 1994: 4).

What is interesting, and significant, in the context of a discussion on growth and education, is the fact that these terms and concepts implicitly signify an era of fundamental change on both a social and economic level, an era of uncertainty which is difficult to philosophically understand and challenging to practically address. Bauman perhaps captures the essence of uncertainty of this time when he describes postmodernity¹³⁶ as "perhaps more than anything else – a *state of mind*", one that discovered that "human order is vulnerable, contingent and devoid of reliable foundations" (1992: vii and xi).

That uncertainty, especially in relation to changing economic conditions and global growth discourses, was compounded in 1989 with the removal of the Berlin wall, a symbolic reflection of what is frequently heralded as the 'beginning of the end of communism'. The fact that this occurred just one year before Nelson Mandela walked free, and a mere five years before the hitherto socialist-aligned ANC party participated in South Africa's first inclusive general elections, has significant implications for the

¹³⁵ This elusive era is referred to by other theorists in different ways: it is "a time which Anthony Giddens calls 'late modernity', Ulrich Beck 'reflexive modernity', George Balandier 'surmodernity', and [Zygmunt Bauman] (together with many others) [have] chosen to call 'postmodern'" (Bauman 1997: 19).

¹³⁶ Hall uses the term postmodernism to describe the 'cultural' character of New Times (1996: 227))

direction that growth discourses would take under the direction of the ANC led government in a post-apartheid era. This is especially interesting in light of the powerful alliance formed between the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU).

As Kumar notes:

What 1989 meant was the end of the communist challenge and, with it, the elimination of one of the two principal contenders for world hegemony. We could no longer speak of Three Worlds [...] only of One World, the world of liberal capitalist society (Kumar 1996: 129).

Bauman argues that, “That collapse ushered us into an as-yet-unexplored world: a world without a collective utopia, without a conscious alternative to itself” (1992: xxv). And in words that seem to describe the challenge facing socialist oriented fields competing in the literacy market in South Africa at this time, Giddens argues that

post-1989 we can't think of left and right in the same way as many once did. Nor can social democrats any longer see either capitalism or markets as the source of most of the problems that beset modern democracies. Government and the state are at the origin of social problems as well as markets (Giddens 2000: 29).

The absence of the cold war schism between left and right thinking in world politics, the sense that communism was on the wane and that the world was tending towards a unified ‘one world’ doctrine is, to some extent, summed up in the word ‘globalisation’.

This term presents yet another challenge to national economic discourses, particularly on an ideological level, with respect to what it means within nation states moving from a ‘three world system’ to the new global ‘one world’. Bauman argues that prior to the fall of the Berlin wall, “Everything in the world had a meaning, and that meaning emanated from a split, yet single center – from the two enormous power blocks locked up, riveted and glued to each other in an all-out combat” (1998: 58). However it is the globalising effect of changing technologies, and the economic implications of these

technologies, that has the greatest impact on education discourses and especially so in the broad concept that is referred to as post-Fordism.

If New Vocationalism was a New Right response to changing attitudes towards education, post-Fordism¹³⁷ can be read as a left-centre response to understanding the skills needed within this so-called globalised world.¹³⁸ New technologies gave rise to an economic order driven by the rapid changes within the extremely competitive field of science and technology. Capital was thus enabled to closely forecast demand and to also anticipate and meet demand in small niche markets previously unsuited to mass production (Fordist) techniques.

Supermarket retailers, for example, are able to monitor every transaction taking place during a single day and to place new orders for the next day that exactly meet the demand evidenced by the previous day's sales. Taking their cue from retailers, Toyota implemented post-Fordist principles by making use of design and materials technology to speed up and simplify car production. In terms of training practices within this new system, management realised that a more skilled workforce would give them immediate

¹³⁷ Murray usefully explains the principle difference between Fordism and post-Fordism (1991). In summary, the term Fordism originates from the mass production techniques pioneered by Henry Ford. Purpose built machinery allowed manufacturers to mass-produce products in large quantities at low prices. The positive side of mass production for manufacturers are potentially outweighed by the fact that mass production presupposes mass consumption. This fact left manufacturers especially vulnerable to falls in demand for their goods. Education requirements within the mass production system were limited and based on a assumption of "lowly educated workers [performing] atomised, rigid and routinised tasks" (Skilbeck, Connell, Lowe and Tait 1994: 28). Employees in the mass production chain functioned as if they were a part of the machine, with their work fragmented into specific repetitive tasks: "mass production had taken the skill out of work" (Murray 1991: 58) (For further reading see Murray, R. 1991 'Fordism and post-Fordism' in G. Esland (Ed.) Education, Training and Employment. Vol I, Educated Labour: the changing basis of industrial demand Addison-Wesley in association with the Open University: Wokingham).

¹³⁸ King and McGrath (2000) take care to point out that post-Fordist discourses predate discourses on globalisation. Nevertheless, both stand as responses to the same challenges being posed by a fast changing world economy.

access to the information required for future innovation: “Even hourly paid workers are trained in statistical techniques and monitoring, and register and interpret statistics to identify deviations from a norm – tasks normally reserved for management in Fordism” (Murray 1991.: 63). As a result, the post-Fordist workforce is viewed as more highly skilled and flexible in the face of changing market requirements. In Murray’s words, “In post-Fordism, the worker is designed to act as a computer as well as a machine” (ibid.).

The skills discourses emerging from post-Fordist debates are concerned with various facets of change. There is a keen sense of awareness of the growing importance of information technologies. The emergence of highly specialised niche markets and increasing diversity within the economic field gives rise to discourses that stress the need for specialised, as well as flexible, forms of skills within the labour market. There is a concern too that those in the manufacturing industries need to be equipped with the skills that will enable them to participate within service sectors as and when changes take place. Similarly, in a high skill environment there is a need for the unemployed to be actively provided with the skills necessary to enter the labour market. In countries with an enormous disparity between those who have these skills and those who do not, the post-Fordist debate can be linked to a strategy of survival within the broader global market. For these countries, globalisation has enabled multinational companies to expand and transfer their systems of production, thus benefiting from low labour costs in countries where there is a high demand for employment and low skills levels. In this sense, a post-Fordist discourse which prioritises the need for high skills development also implicitly holds the promise of national independence and self sufficiency within a world increasingly dominated by a handful of transnational companies (Hutchinson and Smith 1994: 11).

It is clear that growth discourses contribute significantly towards the trajectory that education discourses take. It is also clear that a tension exists between the principles of

equity and growth. This is especially pronounced in the adult basic education sector. Although the argument for an education system oriented towards high, flexible skills seems to almost be inevitable in the face of the changing global markets, one has to wonder where, within this global framework, are those who lack the barest minimum of training skills – literacy – accommodated?¹³⁹ As John Kavanagh notes:

Globalisation has given more opportunities for the extremely wealthy to make more money more quickly. These individuals have utilised the latest technology to move large sums of money around the globe extremely quickly and speculate ever more efficiently.

Unfortunately, the technology makes no impact on the lives of the world poor. In fact, globalisation is a paradox: while it is very beneficial to a very few, it leaves out or marginalises two-thirds of the world's population (John Kavanagh of the Washington Institute of Policy Research quoted in Bauman 1998: 71).

Structuring conditions

This thematic strand is utilised to formally include an understanding that the role of literacy within society is partly *structured* by conditions external to the literacy field. An immediate example is manifested in the way evolving growth concerns (discussed in the section immediately preceding this one) impact on how the role of literacy is conceptualised within businesses competing to be successful within the global economic market. Similarly, the role of literacy is also *structuring*. In this sense how literacy is itself conceptualised serves to influence how the role of literacy continues to evolve. For example, Chapter three will mention how the role of literacy within progressive NGO's during the 1980s was largely a response to, and therefore structured by, the official role of literacy espoused by the state. These two views of literacy both contribute to debates

¹³⁹ The previous chapter referred (on page 32) to how changing economic conditions of a post-cold war world impacted on a conceptualisation of knowledge in the context of basic learning needs. These concerns were raised at the Mid-Decade EFA review held in Amman, Jordan, in 1996.

about the role of literacy in a post-apartheid society. This is particularly evident in the NEPI debates.¹⁴⁰

The structured character of the role of literacy – the role envisaged within a particular document – will be represented in the thesis by allusions to key events and people, national and international circumstances, etcetera, that are seen to significantly influence the construction of a particular text within a particular time. Allusions to structuring conditions will be made within the principal focus of analysing the textual representation of the conditioned discourse content itself. The attention given to the socio-historical circumstances in this thesis is not intended to construct a detailed historical account of South Africa during the two decades being considered. Instead, the conditioned discourses within each section will be analysed in terms of the socio-historical conditions that are the most likely to have a structuring effect on them. In this respect the past, presented as a structuring condition, contributes to understanding the overall trajectory of the literacy field up until the year 2000.

The structuring nature of the role of literacy is especially evidenced in the thesis in what will be seen to be an evolving and changing idea of what it is that literacy is, and the accompanying claims about what literacy can achieve, through the next three chapters.

Absences

The thematic strand of ‘absences’ is useful in a variety of ways. Firstly, it is important to be aware that not all literacy discourses are embodied in a textual format. (This challenge was discussed earlier in this chapter in the section concerned with discussing how the conditioned discourses were selected. See page 107). Some of those discourses

¹⁴⁰ NEPI is discussed in chapter four on page 229.

nevertheless serve to significantly contribute to the envisaged national role of literacy that is evident in the official documents that are available.

It is because of this awareness of 'absences', for example, that chapter four includes a section on the People's Education movement. In the highly controlled system of apartheid where what *cannot* be said is as much an indication of the status quo as what *can* be said, absent texts, and absences in texts, have to be viewed as a form of structuring evidence as well. Bourdieu argues that when a field is controlled to the extent that no relations of force are identifiable, and where the dominant have managed to completely annul resistance, it becomes what he terms an 'apparatus' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996: 103).¹⁴¹ Although the apartheid system was highly divisive and rigorously controlling, it cannot be claimed that all forms of resistance were smothered and that the field was rendered devoid of tension and relations of force. So it is important to remember that the conditioned discourses emerging from this time do not represent all the voices participating in the field, and that, in fact, they may exist as a controlling response to absent voices.

Finally, in the course of analysing the texts themselves, absences become crucial when considering how the various thematic strands are pulled through in terms of all the discourses. Given the many questions posed by the thematic strand that is 'equity' which aspects of the quite debate are present in the conditioned discourses, and which are absent? Are some claims present in some document but absent in others? How does this contribute to an understanding of the way in which the role of literacy is evolving?

¹⁴¹ This was discussed earlier in the section that explicates Bourdieu's concept of field. See page 79.

Terminology

The thematic strand of ‘terminology’ is the final filtering theme used to tease out the role of literacy from conditioned discourses. How terms are used becomes crucial when considering that the discourses under analysis emerge from within a process of competition between various compository fields. What terms do businesses use when talking about literacy as opposed to, for example, educationists? Sometimes adult literacy is directly addressed in the conditioned discourses using the words ‘adult literacy’. At other times, adult literacy is dealt with (and therefore implicitly alluded to) within a variety of collective terms such as ‘adult education’, ‘adult basic education’, ‘adult basic education and training’ or simply basic education. How do the words ‘basic learning needs’ used at Jomtien contribute to the field? When considering the impact of terminology on the role of literacy we need to consider, for example, whether the term adult basic education and training contributes a specific meaning to the term ‘adult literacy’ that is missing from the words ‘adult basic education’.

Similarly, the ways in which other words are used in different conditioned discourses controlled by different agents, contributes too to the understanding of the role that literacy plays in society. For example, the issues raised in relation to equity – terms such as equal opportunity – may mean something quite different within a document constructed during the 1980s, to one produced in the 1990s. Terminology, as a thematic strand, helps to maintain sensitivity to the nuances that are present in the language used to construct the texts.

Notes on writing about the South African literacy field

It is worth briefly mentioning some of the challenges that are faced in the course of actually writing about the South African literacy field. The first relates to the racial classification system developed during the apartheid era and imposed on all South

Africans. The language of apartheid will always be reminiscent of a deliberate attempt to socially organise and oppress individuals and many of the terms used under apartheid are deemed pejorative. Race and language is contentious in other ways too, seen for example, in the split between the Charterists and the PAC in the mid-1950s.¹⁴² The PAC defined 'African' as being "people of any group who considered themselves African, and who identified with Africa and its people rather than exploiting settlers" (Moodley 1991: 145). Under the BCM the word 'black' evolved to encompass the understanding that blackness was "a mental attitude and not just a matter of skin pigmentation" (ibid.).

It is crucial to realise how deeply issues of race and education are intertwined in South Africa. Apartheid legislation required every single South African to be categorised into a legally defined racial group leading to the recognition of four main groups: white, African, Coloured and Indian. Race definitions were constantly refined since 1950, resulting in an increasingly complex categorisation system. For example, in 1967 the Act was amended to allow the state president to classify Coloureds and Africans into various sub-categories. Coloured people could be classified into one of seven sub-categories (Cape Coloured, Cape Malay, Griqua, Indian, Chinese, 'other Asiatic' and 'other coloured') while African's belonged to one of nine social groupings (North Sotho, South Sotho, Tswana, Zulu, Swazi, Xhosa (two units), Tsonga and Venda) (Omond 1985: 21-25).

South Africa's policy of population registration resulted in an equally complicated segregated education system. Education, including many adult literacy initiatives, was

¹⁴² Splits along similar 'black consciousness versus charterist' lines would be repeated again and again in South Africa. When the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) was formed in 1985, the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) opted instead to join the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions (AZACTU), now known as the National Council of Trade Unions. And as mentioned earlier in this thesis, literacy organisations are similarly divided in terms of the NLC and the SAALAE (see chapter one, pages 67 and 69 respectively).

controlled by eighteen different departments and fifteen different education ministers (ibid.: 77). The figures translate into one national and four provincial departments for white education; a national department each for Coloured and Indian education; and ten departments for black education (six departments in the self-governing territories and four in the so-called independent states).

Despite the complexity of the system, and inequity that such a system perpetuates, it would be almost impossible to reproduce this differentiated view on adult literacy activities in South Africa for several reasons. First, the limited statistical data available for the field of adult literacy implicitly qualifies in advance any claims that are made about literacy with respect to various registered population groups (the limitations of available literacy statistics are discussed in more detail in the previous chapter on page 54). Second, it is important to remember that adult literacy activities were not exclusively carried out within the various segregated education departments. Other ventures, especially urban ventures that catered to the needs of workers from different homelands, did not conduct their classes in accordance with strict segregation. These ventures therefore blurred the various ethnic distinctions reflected in the state's legislature and thus undermine the little statistical information that is available. Finally, as chapter three will reveal, many literacy activities were conducted secretly, and therefore are not reflected in official statistics, due to the fact that the government viewed many adult education projects as being 'politically subversive'.

These points demonstrate the difficulties that face any attempt to accurately represent literacy activities in terms of the registered population groupings that are central to apartheid's language and policies. For the purposes of this thesis, the decision has therefore been taken to, where possible, use language as it appears in the various texts to preserve a sense of the attitudes prevalent at the time. Where there is no guidance available, I have elected to use the word *black* in preference of the word 'African' that is

often used instead.¹⁴³ As a fourth generation white Zimbabwean, I believe that the latter term includes all races and nationalities of people who live in Africa and as such does not differentiate between races in the way an analysis of South African texts demands. I have accordingly chosen to use the term *white* when referring to white South Africans¹⁴⁴, in preference of the outdated use of the word 'European'. These decisions are not influenced in any way by a particular view in terms of either the Charterist or PAC traditions, or with respect to Black Consciousness philosophy, and my intent is not to cause offence to any group, or groups, of people.

My second concern in the course of writing the analysis relates to how to negotiate the various terms which all relate to adult literacy without confusing the focus of the thesis. As far as possible, I will refer to adult literacy as *adult literacy* or *literacy* (meaning *adult literacy*). Where necessary I will adhere to the terms used in the conditioned discourses themselves, terms such as literacy, adult basic education (or ABE), basic education, and adult basic education and training (or ABET). On occasions where it is questionable to refer specifically to 'adult literacy', the more encompassing words 'basic education' (again, meaning *adult* basic education) will be used instead. Similarly, a decision has been taken to refer to the literacy field as the 'literacy field' or 'literacy market' as opposed to the field of adult basic education, which is far broader.

Given that the concept of adult literacy is often embedded within different terminologies, it is also important to take care that the meanings of those terms are not

¹⁴³ It is worth noting that the word 'African' was officially taboo because it translates into Afrikaans as *Afrikaaner*, the word that is used for white, Afrikaans speaking South Africans. The word black was used instead, but other terms utilised have included the words 'Bantu' and 'Native' (Omond 1985: 20). My decision to use the word *black* is not intended to reflect National Party ideology at all.

¹⁴⁴ It is worth noting too that the South African education systems tended to segregate white people into Afrikaans and English speaking groups. My use of the word does not distinguish between the two linguistic groups.

automatically imposed on the understanding of adult literacy *per se*. At all other times I shall strive to use the language employed by the texts themselves¹⁴⁵ and, where this is not possible, I shall explicitly call attention to how language is functioning at that particular moment.

The teasing out of the role of literacy will primarily be conducted through an analysis of conditioned discourses spanning two decades and organised into three separate chapters in this thesis. In some ways this thesis organisation risks imposing the perception that there are distinct stages where the role of literacy abruptly shifts and changes. So to try and sustain a sense of fluidity in relation to the evolution of the role of literacy over a period of time, I will continue to make extensive use of footnoted cross-referencing throughout the document. This will serve to trace the path of literacy backwards and forwards throughout the document to give a sense that the role is always coming from somewhere and continuously evolving towards something else.

Finally, this is a thesis that is especially concerned with literacy, and, despite its theoretical underpinnings, it does not seek to prove or disprove the validity of Bourdieu's concepts. However, the theoretical perspectives discussed in this thesis do occasionally serve to usefully highlight moments where 'negotiations' are taking place. I will return to the Bourdieuan arguments discussed in this chapter, again through a cross-referencing technique, to highlight those moments when they arise.

¹⁴⁵ This will sometimes entail the use of acronyms. This will be elaborated on in the course of the discussion.

Summary

The three chapters following this one carry out the process of analysing the conditioned discourses in accordance with the conceptual framework and methods described so far in this chapter. The selected documents will be investigated along the lines of the five themes outlined earlier, and by focussing specifically on how the issues of equity and growth are negotiated within each text. This serves to sift to the surface key roles and ideas about literacy that will be drawn on chapter six when identifying the role that literacy plays in South Africa.

The theme of absence is especially relevant to the discourses explored in the next chapter. Adult literacy is in many ways an 'absent' or ill-considered sector of education and, when it is represented at all, it is frequently articulated in ways that are inconsistent, and poorly developed. Furthermore, it is in chapter three that the absent 'voice' of People's Education is made more prominent thus giving a sense of how it served to structure official lines of opinion. Despite the low profile given to literacy in an apartheid era, there nevertheless emerges a sense of the role it played, and how that role continues to influence perceptions of literacy after 1990.

Reform or Rhetoric?

Emerging Literacy Discourses, 1979-1990

This chapter aims to critically engage with some of the key texts emerging between 1979 and 1990 that have an impact on the literacy field. Most of the texts in this section are concerned with training issues. These include the Wiehahn Commission's report and the three HSRC/NTB reports. However, the fact that these various reports are primarily training issues does not disqualify them having an interest in adult literacy. On the contrary, literacy discourses are an important element – even implicitly—because training discourses at this time will be seen to centre on the need to improve manpower skills in South Africa. This therefore requires them to deal with the fact that a significant proportion of the group targeted as the source for future skills lack the skills to read and write.

Unlike the preceding four documents, the de Lange Commission's contribution is predominantly concerned with the overall education system and consequently provides useful insights into how adult literacy concerns are couched within the context of broader systemic discourses. This document, combined with the previous five texts already mentioned, indicates that the literacy field at this time is predominantly influenced and shaped by official state discourses.

The final section of this chapter introduces an 'alternative' discourse to the official ones mentioned so far. People's Education is an opposition discourse based on socialist

principles and is broadly representative of a range of people who are closely involved in black education at a grassroots level: students, teachers and parents. It provides an important contrast to the state's offerings and also serves to introduce some of the broad principles that would underpin education initiatives in the early part of the 1990s.

The Soweto Uprising of 1976 sets the tone for this turbulent period of protest, resistance and reform. June 16th 1976 marked the culmination in a series of school boycotts by students protesting the government's decision to impose the use of Afrikaans in Mathematics, Social Sciences, Geography and History at secondary school level. Students marched peacefully towards Orlando Stadium in Soweto for a mass rally. More than 20 000 people, mostly children, took part in the demonstration. The Soweto police overreacted to their presence and approximately 16 000 rounds of live ammunition was fired into the crowds. This resulted in hundreds of deaths. The official figure was 192 dead and 1 006 injured. Unofficially, journalists at the scene estimate that between 700 and 800 people were killed (O'Meara 1996). Riots once again swept the nation as parents joined their children in outrage at police brutality. The childrens' anger drew international attention to the poor and contentious state of education in South Africa, thus serving as a catalyst for government education and training reform initiatives. These subsequently led to the formation of the Wiehahn commission, and the Wiehahn report provides us with a starting point for a textual exploration of the role that literacy plays in South Africa.

All the sections in this thesis are considered in light of the conceptual framework introduced in the previous chapter.¹⁴⁶ They are therefore analysed in terms of the broad themes discussed in Chapter two and in terms of the tensions and struggles taking place

¹⁴⁶ This chapter reviews policy between 1979 and 1990, a fact that makes it difficult to include practitioner voices.

in the South African socio-historical context at the time. In some cases, international influences on the South African literacy field are considered too.

The Wiehahn Commission (1979)

Change over a wider front in society is essential. A society without the desire or the willingness to change or to adapt gradually loses the means and opportunity to survive. Without this, that society runs the risk of losing even those institutions and cultural assets that it holds most sacred (Wiehahn 1982: xxvii)

The Wiehahn Commission was initiated in March 1977, the same month that saw major American companies begin to pressurise the South African government to reform their labour policies. The commission's task was completed in May 1979 and the full collated report was published in its entirety in 1982. This introductory quote taken from the commission's report stands as a carefully phrased warning to a fearful white community that the only way to maintain life as they knew it was to reconcile themselves to change. In many respects, the level of opposition to the government at this time indicated that change was inevitable. The question then was how to manage it without compromising those "institutions and cultural assets" held "most sacred" (Wiehahn 1982: xxvii).

Perhaps the most significant sign that the committee's version of 'change' or 'reform' is inclined towards preserving the status quo is the fact that the Wiehahn Committee members were all male, and that they represented the Department of Labour, white trade unions and employer organisations. In other words, the Wiehahn Committee in itself was reflective of the most privileged sector of South Africans. This section of the chapter will review the content of the Wiehahn Report in terms of the themes identified in Chapter three.¹⁴⁷ In other words, it is especially concerned with how the report

¹⁴⁷ The five themes are equity, growth, structuring conditions, absences, and terminology. Each is introduced in chapter two, see page 111.

conceptualises and articulates principles of equity and growth. The discourses that emerge from this approach to labour skills development provides a useful introduction to the recommendations from the de Lange Commission, discussed later in this chapter.

Literacy discourses in the Wiehahn Report

Literacy discourses are for the most part resoundingly absent from the Wiehahn Commission's final report – and this is in spite of the fact that part of the commission's mandated role is to review legislation in terms of training. The absence becomes more pronounced in light of the report's efforts to highlight the low education levels throughout the country. The commissioners cite statistics from the 1970 census that reveal that only 25.3% of urban black males and 13.6% of rural black males managed to attain a level of education between Standard 3 and Standard 5.¹⁴⁸ The statistics for black women are worse: 33.7% of urban women and 16.4% of rural woman have not attained Standard 3-5 (Wiehahn 1982: 165).

These statistics substantiate the commission's perception that there was a strong need for an improvement in South African education standards if future skills levels were to be met. That argument was made at the outset of the report:

The commission accepts that further economic development, which is vital to the creation of employment opportunities and an adequate standard of living for South Africa's rapidly growing population, can be achieved only if the working population is adequately educated and trained (Wiehahn 1982: 7).

And yet in spite of the fact that educational levels were acknowledged to be a problem, the commission gave little attention to the fact that literacy skills, the essential stumbling

¹⁴⁸ The de Lange Report produced in 1981 classed Standard four as being the final year necessary for the attainment of what it called a basic education (this is illustrated in Figure 5 on page 166). The Wiehahn use of statistics bridge that year implying that a proportion of this group might be considered functionally literate while others will not.

block *en route* to elevating skills levels in South Africa, needed to be radically addressed. This absence has significant implications for the role that literacy is perceived to play in South Africa at this time.

The report adopts a somewhat paradoxical stance with respect to education levels and adult literacy levels thereof. On the one hand, the report argued that legislation related to the principle of work reservation¹⁴⁹ for white people was outdated. Section 3.129.3 provides the following reasons and arguments to abolish legislation pertaining to work reservation:

Its existence is no longer tenable in view of developments on the labour front affecting Black workers [because of] the provision of more training facilities for Blacks; the improvement of their education level; their increased mobility in sectors not covered by work reservation determinations; and the growing unemployment amongst blacks, particularly educated youths (ibid.: 77)

The quote implies that there is a growing pool of educated black people who need jobs. In this instance, improving education and training opportunities are used to support the suggesting that work reservation should be scrapped.

The Wiehahn commission's endorsement of change nevertheless has to be considered in the light of the fact that certain changes would be perceived as a threat to the secure protected existence of white union members. Section 3.58.1 therefore stands as a reassurance to those fearful of the possibility that officially registering black trade unions¹⁵⁰ would result in black workers being accorded equal rights:

¹⁴⁹ Work reservation, or job reservation, refers to legislation introduced in 1956 as the Industrial Conciliation Act. This Act serves to restrict certain work to particular race groups and had a far reaching effect in a variety of industries. For example, black workers were restricted to only menial forms of labour within the mining context, and, in Cape Town, the jobs of ambulance drivers and firemen were reserved for white people.

¹⁵⁰ Registration of a union would require that union to submit constitution membership records and financial books to the government. It is a highly problematic concept because it enables the government to closely monitor union activities.

The fear that unions would be dominated by migrants through sheer numbers cannot be regarded as realistic: the law protects the right of a union to prescribe in its constitution who qualifies for membership and who does not [...] Furthermore, the very factors that make of migrants a largely alien and unassimilable presence in unions – their low general level of education, their lack of experience of sophisticated industrial relations systems – make it a rather fanciful prospect that they could overrun these organisations (ibid.: 47).

Using educational levels in this way introduces an awareness that the word ‘change’ or ‘reform’ in this context does not function as a radical concept that is keeping with progressive education discourses. Rather, within the context of apartheid rule, the word ‘change’ is only radical in so far as the reform objectives are deemed as such by those who support extreme apartheid policies. Nevertheless, the commission’s dual use of low education levels as reasons for firstly, justifying the need to reform labour policies, and secondly, claiming that the status quo would not be significantly altered, reveals a tension in the field which points to the highly *conditioned* nature of the Wiehahn report.¹⁵¹

Furthermore, the use of low education levels as an assurance to white union members also provides insight into the role of education in society at this time. Here education is equated with power and political sagacity – an adult who has a ‘low education’, or lacks literacy skills, is perceived to be unthreatening and ‘safe’. ‘Education as power’ becomes a recurring theme in the report. For example, in the process of debating whether or not to raise the education qualification for entrance to certain trades (in terms of the Training of Artisans Act of 1951), the commissioners generally agreed that “persons who left school with a Standard 6 certificate were normally irresponsible, lazy or mentally retarded” (ibid.: 221). Given that the commission’s own census figures from 1970 indicated that only 13% of black urban males¹⁵² attained a level of education

¹⁵¹ The argument for approaching certain documents as ‘conditioned discourses’ is made in the previous chapter (on page 103). See also Figure 3, on page 105.

¹⁵² The figures for other sectors of black society attaining this level are as follows: urban females, 20.9%; rural males, 4.1% and rural females, 5.4% (Wiehahn 1982: 165).

between Standard 6-7, their commentary on powerlessness in terms of laziness, irresponsibility and mental capacity extends to the majority of the black adult population.

The decision to raise the entrance requirements to certain trades, coupled with the idea that education is directly related to power, suggests two reasons why literacy discourses might be absent from the Wiehahn Commission's report. The first reason relates to the perception that education cultivates political aspirations, which in turn threatens the government's ability to maintain political control over the black majority. To formally recommend literacy education for adult workers is implicitly tantamount to deliberately nurturing political opposition. In fact, the view that the role of adult literacy at this time could be equated to power is crucially underscored by the absence of literacy discourses from the report. How can it be that literacy discourses are absent in a report focused on training legislation, and which acknowledges the very low levels of education in the country? The Wiehahn commission's evasive approach to literacy results in a sense that, in this document, literacy is deemed a non-essential component of the training system. However, the converse is true: literacy, and the view that it is powerful and potentially dangerous, is crucial to an understanding of the commission's avoidance of it. So although literacy discourses are *absent* in this document, their absence is a significant clue to the fact that they are present in the broader society in such a way that underscores their role in oppositional power and thus instils caution in the state.

It is plausible to assume that the National Party's caution with respect to the political aspect of basic education may have been derived from earlier experiences of the Black Consciousness Movement under Steve Biko (starting in 1968). The Movement aimed to "infuse [the black person] with pride and dignity" (Barney Pityana quoted in Davis 1987: 25). In this regard, Freirian pedagogical methods were inextricably a part of BCM philosophy:

What BCM did was to initiate a nation-wide, scrupulously law-abiding education and community action campaign designed to work at grass-roots level towards building a psychology of self-reliance among blacks (ibid.).

In addition to BCM initiatives, a politicised view of literacy was emerging within UNESCO – most evident in the acceptance of the concept that “Literacy work, like education in general, is a political act” (quoted in Sjöström and Sjöström 1983: 23).¹⁵³ Furthermore, the Freirian methods that had earlier influenced the BCM were becoming increasingly popular among some literacy practitioners at this time – for example, the Learn and Teach organisation (introduced in Chapter one on page 64) began operating in 1974. South African politics had created an educational environment conducive to literacy classes that aimed to dispel false-consciousness. Several people I spoke with in South Africa confirmed that their own experience of literacy work during the 1980s was central to ‘the struggle’. One respondent described that the difference between literacy during the 1980s and 1990s was that the earlier decade had a “strong communal emphasis and was about empowering people to see their conditions rather than the focus, as now, on individual achievements and attainment and credits” (Respondent 3: 15th April 1998).¹⁵⁴

The government responded incisively to the potential threat of increasing black political awareness. Learn and Teach, for example, found itself raided and had 14 300 copies of its own easy reading publication entitled The Historic Speech of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela at the Rivonia Trial confiscated (Merrett 1994: 125). The confiscation may at first appear pointless because the proceedings of the trial were a part of open court proceedings and historical record and were accordingly already open to the entire

¹⁵³ This amendment to UNESCO’s definition of functional literacy was made in the Declaration of Persepolis and was discussed in more detail earlier in the thesis on page 27.

¹⁵⁴ Outcomes Based Education (OBE) is discussed in greater detail in chapter five (see page 315).

public. However, the act of confiscation can be read as a specific attempt to prevent *black people* from having a full awareness of the details of the trial. A literacy publication of the proceedings, especially in easy reading format, made the proceedings more readily accessible to the broader 'less literate' black community.

The argument that literacy was viewed as politically powerful is however best understood within the broader context of P.W. Botha's 'Total Strategy'.¹⁵⁵ Total Strategy came to encompass a set of principles that "set out to redefine three important elements in official discourse: the nature of 'the war'; its contending forces – the definition of self ('us') and of the other ('them'); and the broad lines of [...] defence ('compromise' or 'solution')" (O'Meara 1996: 264).

Botha's Total Strategy was in part driven by his belief that the South African government had no choice left but to change and he is on record as saying "We must adapt or die" (cited in BBC News Online 1998). The Total Strategy approach to change resulted in an extensive reorganisation of the government that reduced twenty cabinet committees to four permanent cabinet committees, respectively responsible for National Security, and Constitutional, Economic and Social Affairs (O'Meara 1996: 279). Significantly, "The ability of ministers to make policy in their field of responsibility was absolutely dependent on the approval of, and support from, the Prime Minister" (ibid.: 279). Total Strategy can therefore be read as an effort to reduce the functioning of the state to what Bourdieu describes as an "apparatus".¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ O'Meara provides a broad historical background into the origins of the concept 'Total Strategy'. He discusses how the term evolved from the writings of General André Beaufre, a French strategist, and how it was later used by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington during the Vietnam war (1996: 259-69).

¹⁵⁶ By this, Bourdieu means an attempt to minimise all 'sites of struggle' and resistance within the field. This concept was addressed in more detail in the context of Bourdieu's field concept (see chapter two, page 79).

O'Meara describes the Cabinet Committee for National Security, more commonly known as the State Security Council (SSC), as the most important of the four Cabinets. In fact, Botha explicitly noted that the SSC would be charged with formulating the "total national strategy for the RSA" (quoted in Price 1991: 86). In this regard, education, like everything else, fell under auspices of a committee more commonly associated with issues pertaining to national security.

The SSC was responsible for responding to an 'indirect war' against South Africa – an indirect war that was, in Botha's opinion, characterised by "a global struggle between the forces of communism on the one hand and the forces of stability, security and progress on the other" (Botha quoted in SANDF [n.d.]). The South African National Defence submission to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) outlines three elements of this indirect war:

Three themes predominated in [Botha's] speeches: firstly that the West was threatened by Soviet expansionism, secondly that South Africa was part of the West and lastly, that South Africa played a central part in the Soviet strategy of cutting Europe off from South Africa's essential raw materials (SANDF [n.d.]).

The internal aspects of the 'war' were conducted between,

on the one hand the ANC (MK), and to a lesser degree the PAC (APLA), assisted by several mass democratic organisations and on the other the South African Government with its security apparatus, namely the South African Police (SAP) and the South African Defence Force, (SADF) (SANDF [n.d.]).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ The principal participants on the side of the revolutionaries were

- a. The Charterist Alliance comprising the ANC/SACP/COSATU, with Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK) as The military wing, and internal front organizations such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and later the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) and SA National Civic Organization (SANCO);
- b. The Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and its military wing, the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA); and
- c. The Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA) and its military wing, the Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA) (SANDF [n.d.]).

External aspects of the indirect war are more difficult to specifically identify and relate in part to a generalised fear of the forces of communism:

I do not believe that the government of the day ever regarded Africa as a military threat [...] The focus was on Soviet penetration and the possibility of the Soviet Union using unstable situations in Africa to benefit itself, to take root and foment trouble (Botha 1997).

Literacy, and the possible role it could play in society, was therefore located within a complicated belief in an onslaught against South African from enemies within and outside the borders of the country.

I suggested earlier that there were two plausible motivations for why literacy discourses were marginalised in the Wiehahn report. The first, which I've just outlined, relates to the notion of literacy as a 'political threat', as a 'national security' issue. The second reason relates to the reports' recommendation to raise entrance requirements to certain trades, and to the fact that this would result in a deliberate barrier to career advancement. By raising entrance requirements to certain sectors of training, the commission endorses a mechanism that can be unofficially used to reserve jobs for those who stand the best chance of attaining that standard—namely, white people—despite their suggestion to abolish work reservation. This in turn suggests that a concerted effort to raise literacy standards among the black population might conceivably have led to increased competition for jobs. It can be argued therefore that the absence of literacy discourses in this report is indicative of the commission's desire to preserve a system that privileges the status quo. What cannot be ignored however, is the fact that this objective in essence contradicts the thrust of the report – and that is to reform labour legislation in such a way that the economy is in accordance with free market principles.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ This inherent contradiction has ramifications for the report's principles of equity that will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

The fact that the commission is concerned with maintaining white privilege is clearly evident in that it takes great pains to emphasise the need for increased training and retraining opportunities within the context of safeguarding existing (white) jobs:

3.137.6 training and retraining opportunities at the expense of the employer or in certain instances the State with a guaranteed income during such training

3.137.8 the acceleration of the introduction of training and retraining schemes [...] and the possible introduction of similar schemes for other sectors of commercial and industrial activity

3.137.9 the upgrading of semi-skilled workers by means of training and retraining within industry (ibid.: 79).

This formal recommendation is again prompted by fears that recommendations aimed at removing work reservation legislation would result in white people losing their previously protected jobs to black people. So in spite of the fact that white people already had the highest education standards in the country, the report repeatedly asserted that a measure which included further training – at the expense of employers and the Government—was necessary to “provide better protection for employees against unfair displacement” (ibid.: 80). As Milkman comments in 1982,

A white skin is the best insurance against falling below a certain social level, and a black skin marks all but a few exceptions as members of a class with nothing to sell but labour power – and at a low price (407).

In stark contrast to the commitment displayed towards white labour, the commission’s approach to adult literacy (in Section 1.16) for black people amounts to little more than a token gesture:

The Commission wishes to express its appreciation of what is being done and would like to appeal to employers/trade unions to encourage and enable their workers/ members to improve their educational (including numeracy and literacy) levels in whatever ways they find possible (ibid.: 167).

Lodged within this appeal is a tacit awareness of a ‘political’ element to literacy classes. For example, adult literacy is referred to as “basic adult education [that includes] literacy training” and it is firmly couched within the objectives of workers obtaining extra

benefits from “on-the-job training” (ibid.). In this respect the report supports Hartshorne’s perception that

the dominant viewpoint [leading up to this period in time] was that the economy was at a level at which limited skills were required of black workers, and that emphasis should not be laid on ‘education’ but on industrial and vocational training leading to lower skill levels [...] the ‘real’ skills were to be provided by whites (1991: 118).¹⁵⁹

As well as maintaining skills levels at a level in keeping with the requirements of work reservation, this distorted version of literacy’s functionality also served to neutralise literacy’s perceived ideological components thus rendering it politically ‘safe’. French describes this approach as being typical of the social sciences’ “tendency to use ‘social scientific’ (often little more than a euphemism for ‘bureaucratic’) knowledge as a substitute for democracy” (1988: 14). In other words, using ‘logical reasoning’ as a substitute for democratic principles.

The perceived political risk associated with endorsing adult literacy classes is further curtailed when the commission recommends in Section 5.75 that both training institutions and trainers should be “subject to the requirement of registration” (ibid.:114). The resultant white paper sanctions this recommendation by accepting that training should take place within “registered trade unions, registered trade union federations, employers and registered employers’ organisations and their federations, industrial councils, works committees and works councils” (ibid.: 146). This calls attention to the fact that the form of training will be subject to strict control, just as trade union activities were.

¹⁵⁹ This deliberate attempt to restrict skills to ‘on-the-job’ training and to downplay the importance of educational skills amongst black workers was to become a central redress feature of in the education and training discourses that emerged during the early 1990s. In other words, ‘integration’ discourses – particularly with respect to equity issues – owe much to the education and training’s historical origins. (This is discussed in more detail in the two chapters following this one).

Significantly, these training initiatives clearly articulate adult literacy classes in limited non-political terms in that the

expansion of adult educational programmes [was aimed to] improve the functional competence level of employees, particularly as regards literacy and numeracy, as a prerequisite for the effectiveness of industrial relations training (ibid.).

The absence of specific recommendations, despite the extent of illiteracy in South Africa, reflects the contradictory tension in the various objectives that the commission is faced with. Namely, the need to develop a workforce to alleviate the economic crisis but to do so in such a way that apartheid's social strategies would not be compromised. The tension becomes even more pronounced in terms of how the commission attempts to negotiate and control growth principles through reforming legislation.

Growth discourses: international pressures and local tensions

The Wiehahn commission's restrictive, interventionist approach to adult education was at odds with their claim that all recommendations in the report were supported by the underlying premise that "The Republic of South Africa subscribes to the principles of a free market economy based on individual freedom in the market place" (ibid.: 6). The quote reflects the fact that at this period in South African history, education and training discourses fell under increasing pressure to move away from interventionist policies with the intention of improving market-place conditions. This pressure for change can be partially attributed to the National Party's drive for "desperately needed loans" thus requiring it to "swallow the bitter medicine meted out to most third world governments by the IMF – which is in essence the embodiment of monetarist policy" (Kallaway 1988: 511). However, it is also true that changes in political developments abroad

pointed to the emergence of a new orthodoxy – the New Right.¹⁶⁰ While New Right influences in the field of education are especially evident in the de Lange commission's approaches to education and training (discussed later in this chapter), there is some evidence of it in the Wiehahn report too.

Foreign investment in South Africa, including the smooth functioning of big business corporations based in the country, played an equally influential role in calling for reforms, and not simply because of developments abroad. South Africa was fully appreciative of the important function that foreign investment had in the country's struggling economy and of the ethical challenges that investors found themselves confronted with as a result of apartheid policies. These lessons had been painfully learnt a decade earlier after the Sharpeville riots of 1960¹⁶¹ resulted in a massive outflow of investment caused by investor fears that there would be a revolution in the country. It was largely with the support of American corporations who, during that period of crisis, increased their direct investments to the country, including making emergency financial loans to the SA government, that the country survived economically. The sign of continuing American confidence helped assuage investor fears until slowly, confidence returned and the immediate economic crisis was averted (Milkman 1982). Nevertheless, the realisation that foreign investment was crucial to the success of the South Africa

¹⁶⁰ Between 1977, when this report was initiated, and 1982, when the report was published in full, Thatcher, Reagan and Kohl had all come to power. See page 117 of chapter two to review the earlier discussion of the New Right and its implications for education concerns.

¹⁶¹ On 21st March 1960 a crowd of people converged on the small Sharpeville police station as part of a stay away campaign protesting against the National Party's Pass laws. They were peaceful – the mood has been described as cheerful – and they had come to hand in their passbooks. The police responded aggressively to the crowd's presence and called in reinforcements. Without warning or instructions to do so, the police spontaneously fired gunshots into the crowd killing 69 people and wounding 178 – many had been shot in the back while fleeing from the gunfire. Riots shook the country in protest of the police's actions and, as a result, a state of emergency was declared and the ANC and PAC were both outlawed. (See <http://www.sharpeville.org/history.htm> for an overview of this time. For more detail, see Parker and Mokhesi-Parker 1998).

economy was painfully obvious: Milkman cites the South African Reserve Bank as stating,

In the long run, South Africa has to a large extent been dependant on foreign capital for development purposes ... it is still highly dependant on foreign capital, particularly risk capital to achieve a relatively high rate of growth (1982: 434).

However, investing countries faced their own problems from critics 'back home' in terms of international demands on them to make a concerted and obvious stand against apartheid. This in turn resulted in businesses applying pressure on the South Africa government to reform its policies (Hartshorne 1991). The competition within the economic discourse 'market place' (to use Bourdieu's language) however revolved around a range of conflicting issues. These in turn play a fundamental role in shaping training policy, which in turn is instrumental in the structuring the role that literacy played within society.

The Wiehahn Commission paints a clear picture of how it intended to conceptualise manpower needs within an economy that had to struggle with the inherent contradictions posed by 'free market' principles, the trend towards monetarist economics abroad, and the restrictive interventionist nature of the apartheid system. For example, the Wiehahn Commission's section on Human Resources Development opens with a quote by the economist Adam Smith that likens the "dexterity of a workman" to that of "a machine or instrument of trade" (ibid.: 159).¹⁶² It can be argued that the commissions' approach to adult basic education takes this quote at face value and interprets it and uses it in a very literal way. In short, the report presents basic education

¹⁶² It is worth noting that Adam Smith's publication entitled *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) formulated the basis for what later became known as the science of human capital. Human capital theory gained prominence in the 1960s and, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, was instrumental in shaping UNESCO's approach to functional literacy – especially as far as the WOALP's in the EWLP were concerned (this was discussed in chapter one, see page 20).

as the means to make a working person more efficient, more machine-like, and therefore more productive. It is a vision that stubbornly refuses the admittance of ‘dangerous’ political ideas into the education system.

However, not all ideas were excluded from the adult education system— ideas that were non-political and conducive to the state’s vision for South African economic reform were made very welcome. In fact, there are moments within the report that suggest that adult education – within a state controlled environment – served the useful purpose of instilling certain values into the black workforce. For example, the commission argues that registering black trade unions would have the added advantage of possibly “inculcating a sense of responsibility and loyalty towards the free market system” (ibid.: 35). Similarly, it was hoped that joining a trade union would have the added bonus of “engendering careerconsciousness [*sic*]” among black workers (ibid.: 45). This in turn suggests that literacy training within a registered union that set out to impart free market ideology as well as reading and writing skills would be more than acceptable to the State.

In many respects this vision of training’s approach to education would be in keeping with trends already set by big business. The Urban Foundation, for example, initiated by Anton Rupert and Harry Oppenheimer in 1976, enjoyed the support of most of South Africa’s big businesses.¹⁶³ Its principal aim, as critics have argued, was to contribute towards the development of a black middle class with “Western-type materialistic needs and ambitions” (Davies *et al* 1984a: 123). The emergence of a black middle class would “have a stake in stability and provide a counter to the process of radicalism” (*Financial Mail* quoted in Mann 1988: 55-56). It is worth noting too that the launching of the Urban Foundation was followed soon after (on 1st of March 1977) with the declaration

¹⁶³ The Soweto Uprising of 1976 provided a catalyst for the formation of the Urban Foundation with respect to reforming South African education and training.

by 12 major American corporations based in South Africa to end segregation and promote fair employment practices in their plants.¹⁶⁴ The corporations included companies like GM, Ford, Caltex, Mobil, Union Carbide, Citicorp and IBM, and their public statement on their code of practice was later supported by an additional two dozen American companies (Milkman 1982: 449). These intentions naturally impacted on the nature of South African education, particularly in terms of adult education and training. Among its many undertakings the Urban Foundation also maintained a keen involvement in education: “Here it has involved itself in training schemes, literacy work and other types of pre-school and adult education” (ibid.).

The link between state policies and business at this time was clearly recognised and articulated in the commission’s report. This is an extract that identifies many of the competing objectives within the economic discourse market place. It also calls attention to their structuring capabilities in other fields such as, for example, the literacy field:

Recent developments in South Africa clearly indicate an increasing interdependence of the labour, business and political interests in the country. It is a truism that the social dimensions of industrial relations have waxed to the extent that they at present include many more disciplines than before. In practice this means that steps or measures taken in the field of labour must have consequences either directly or indirectly in the fields of commerce, politics and many others (Milkman 1982: 5).

Education was increasingly understood to be a vital element of a free market economy and not only an element of liberal society. In Bourdieuan terms, education as a form of capital had both market and democratic value.¹⁶⁵ The fact that free market principles were openly proposed did not necessarily mean that radical politics was recognised as a

¹⁶⁴ The principles underlying the code of practice were developed by Reverend Leon Sullivan, a black American and a member of the General Motors board of directors. They became known as the Sullivan Principles (El-Khawas 1982: 530).

¹⁶⁵ Bourdieu’s capital concept was considered in considerable detail in chapter two (see page 84).

viable alternative to the apartheid system. In fact, it can be argued that efforts were made to control the capital value of education and limit it specifically towards the market. Anton Rupert himself is on record as saying, “After many African countries became free they got dictatorships like [Idi] Amin’s. *We have to find a solution that won’t end up giving us one man one vote*” (quoted in O’Meara 1996: 187).¹⁶⁶

Despite the fact that growth discourses called for change, there was still considerable resistance to the types of reform that they called for. Much of the opposition emanated from factions developing within the National Party itself, a point that introduces yet another competing element into the economic market place. So while the literacy market was largely influenced by growth discourses at this time, it is important to realise that those discourses were to some extent modified and structured in accordance with National Party factionalism. In other words, the structure of the literacy field and the role that literacy plays in society at this time would be the product of a ‘negotiated response’ to the diverse conditions of the field.

In some respects the events of the Soweto Uprising called attention to the differences in opinion held by members within the National Party. Dr Andries Treurnicht was instrumental in the creation of the provocative language policy that initiated the riots.

¹⁶⁶ Rupert’s conservative comment can be understood as a indication of his own personal Afrikaans roots – a background essentially overridden by his concern for business issues. However it could also be argued that his was not an entirely unusual perspective to take in South Africa amongst the business community in general. Some American corporations based in South Africa only signed up to the code of practice adopted by American companies two years after the practice was first introduced. One late signatory is on record as saying that they had delayed signing the record until they were absolutely certain that the code’s primary purpose was to “pacify critics in the States” (quoted in El-Khawas 1982: 531). El-Khawas calls attention to the fact that in spite of the strong equity base of the Sullivan principles, they were extremely slow to manifest in practice, if at all – a fact that suggests that the principles existed primarily at a rhetorical level (ibid. 530-534). Reverend Leon Sullivan himself, the author of the six principles forming the code of practice, came to realise that some companies used the fact that they had signed up to the code as a way of opting out of involvement in addressing inequities within the broader South African labour market. See <http://www.revleonsullivan.org/>, for more information on Rev. Leon Sullivan and his involvement in South Africa.

One time leader of the Transvaal branch of the National Party he was known for his conservative hard-line approach to Afrikaans Nationalism. The fact that the *Afrikaner Broederbond*¹⁶⁷ dominated Transvaal politics gives some indication of why, for Treurnicht and members like him, apartheid could never be reformed. Their belief in racial segregation and apartheid ideology was absolute and, in their opinion, essential for the well being of all Afrikaners.

Significantly, National Party politics in the Cape were rooted in different interests. Unlike the Transvaal politicians who were largely supported by the Afrikaans petty bourgeoisie in that region, the Cape politicians drew their support from wealthier farmers and financiers (Davies *et al.* 1984a: 140). The resulting differences in interpretations of what constituted the best for the *volk* resulted in a split in the party when P.W. Botha became Prime Minister in 1978. A Cape Nationalist and the former Minister of Defence in the National Party, Botha's Total Strategy concept of 'reformation' seemed to challenge the founding precepts of the *Afrikaner Broederbond*. The fact that his concept was deemed controversial and unpopular amongst some members of the party was made obvious when Treurnicht left the National Party in 1982 to form the Conservative Party.

The tensions between *verligte* and *verkramp*¹⁶⁸ members of the National Party is partially reflected in Anton Rupert's endorsement of modified reforms – in other words, an

¹⁶⁷ Formed in 1918, the *Broederbond* was set up to promote and preserve the interests of Afrikaners. It aimed to elevate the status of Afrikaans people who they claimed had been "politically and economically [...] reduced to a slave in the land of [their] birth" (Davies *et al.* 1984b: 267). Fundamental to the thinking of the *Afrikaner Broederbond* was the principle of a classless *volk*. The aim of the *Broederbond* was to transform all Afrikaners into a unified classless group of people who could become the "owners of capital and [the] employers of labour" (ibid.: 268).

¹⁶⁸ Willem de Klerk coined the terms *verkramp* and *verligte* to describe the two opposing factions of Afrikaner Nationalism discussed earlier: the word *verkramp* described the reactionary members of the party who strongly supported apartheid while *verligte* Afrikaners were those who were 'moderate' and in favour of reforming the system (O'Meara 1996: 156).

endorsement of reforms coupled with attempts to prevent the possibility of democratic elections. For some, the state's involvement in maintaining an inequitable climate in South Africa sustained the idea that continuing low labour costs would benefit the employer. In fact, some businesses saw themselves benefiting by having low wage costs as well as a freer hand in the economy. Nattrass describes this approach as being "good for capitalists but bad for capitalism" (1991: 659). Afrikaner nationalism coupled with capitalist principles did not necessarily engender a strong belief in monetarist economics – instead it gave rise to a new breed of bigoted capitalists. It also provided *verligte* Nationalist politicians with the ability to re-work existing racial doctrines by claiming to have the market's best interests at heart. This tension in the growth field explains why the thrust of the radical critique of South African economics at this time lay in the belief that "the interests of capitalists, capitalism and the apartheid state were in many crucial respects coterminous" (ibid.: 666). This awareness of the complexities and contradictions intrinsic to growth discourses at this time impacts on the exposition of equity principles in the Wiehahn Report. Furthermore, those discourses have considerable influence (a structuring effect) on the reason why literacy discourses, and therefore the possible roles that literacy could play in society, were so marginalised in national education discourses.

Reforming training: the emergence of an equitable system?

Noting that the word 'reform' is one that especially characterises this period in South African history invites a critical engagement with how reform principles existed in relation to broader equity issues. Under P. W. Botha, South Africa embarked on the politics of 'New' Apartheid – the politics of adjustment, of adapting to accommodate new tensions and pressures within the country. Botha, in his earlier role as the South African defence minister, was all too aware of the discontent and anger swelling up amongst the black population and responded incisively in the form of his Total Strategy

project. Given this socio-political context, it is fair to assume that any discussion of reform would simultaneously invoke hopes and fears amongst the black population – hopes for real justice but also fears that a Total Strategy view of justice would again render the word devoid of significant meaning for the black community.

‘Reform’ implied that change would take place and in particular that those changes would have a calming effect on the explosive mood of the majority of the public. This understanding of ‘reform’ is alluded to in the Wiehahn report when it says;

Many of the issues covered by the terms of reference [in this report] are of a highly sensitive and emotive nature. These issues mostly concern the economic and social security of groups of workers and seem to lie at the very root of the social structure of South African society. Any hasty or ill-considered treatment of these issues could well be counter-productive, because of the apprehension which exists in the minds of those individuals and groups who, rightly or wrongly, expect change to be detrimental to their interests now and in the future (1982: 4).

This section of the chapter will consider how principles of equity were addressed in the report and, as a result, attempt to reach a clearer understanding of what the word reform means within the context of New Apartheid. As noted already, the Wiehahn Commission’s approach to equity was partly framed by its objective of achieving a (regulated) free-market. This meant that the concept of reform had to bridge the gap between *verkramp* ideology and monopoly capital ambitions. The solution to the South African situation was presented in the form of a mediated compromise, of controlled reform. Mediated, because of the continuing faith in apartheid ideology – Botha’s belief in the fundamental precepts of apartheid is clearly reflected in this quote:

I am not deviating from my course [of apartheid], but – this I something I learned from Dr Malan, and I stand by it tonight – if I have to divert the road in order to keep to my course and reach my destination, I shall do that. Only a fool would keep travelling on the same road, even when it has been washed away, if there is a better road to reach his objective (quoted in *ibid.*: 255).

The all-controlling nature of Botha’s Total Strategy, and the fact that it stands as a response to the perceived threat of ‘Soviet expansionism’, introduces the political into

all aspects of policy reform in South Africa. Equity, in terms of its relationship to adult literacy, therefore has to be filtered through an understanding of a context that exists specifically to control political dissent and to avert the looming communist threat.

Free market discourses provided reformists with a way to reframe the apartheid ideology in new, apparently equitable ways, that allowed the fundamental precepts of apartheid ideology to remain intact. But couching the overall process within the context of 'reform' required the commission to conceal any elements of mediation and control within the carefully chosen rhetoric of betterment. And in this context, equity principles played a vital role in constructing a discourse that seemed to be genuinely reformist while at the same time preserving the self-interests of apartheid ideologues.

The Wiehahn Commission, on several occasions, indicates that discrimination on the grounds of race is unacceptable. It claims that official government policy was about "moving away from discrimination on racial or colour lines" (1982: 36). It uses this reasoning in some of its more (ostensibly) radical reforms thus positing them in the light of justice and equity. For example, it argues that unions should be registered because "Black workers working side by side with non black workers in the same skilled occupation [might] find themselves excluded from the statutory trade union system purely on the grounds of their colour" – they add that this had "strong moral implications" (ibid.: 33).

Equity principles are also incorporated into arguments relating to the work reservation law. Here the commission argues that the law of work reservation "constitute[d] a drastic infringement of the freedom to work and of work choice in a free market system" (ibid.: 78). The changes proposed in the report are presented as an attempt to bring legislation in line with industrial relations practice – in other words, the legislators

had heard the demands of *all* the people, and now intended reforming the system to meet them (ibid.: 2).

Encompassing all these recommendations was the very public and prominent suggestion by the commission that the name of the Department of Labour should be changed. They argue that the word 'labour' was understood as work relating to "manual or purely blue-collar, hourly paid or mostly unskilled workers" (ibid.: 12).¹⁶⁹ The government later approved the recommendation in its white paper, choosing to rename the department as the Department of Manpower Development. Presumably because the word 'development' seems to hold the promise of concerted efforts on the part of the government to change and improve the life of individual workers. Furthermore, changing the name of the department ensured that the government's 'reformist' stance would achieve maximum visibility in the public eye. The reforms were clearly intended to be interpreted as honourable, fair and just. In fact, at one point the commission claimed that it was "motivated by considerations both of practicality and of morality" and that these recommendations were the "only equitable and logical course to adopt" (ibid.: 37).

It is arguably true that the objectives were both practical and logical in the context of Botha's Total Strategy objectives, but to argue that they were also moral and equitable is to mask their real intentions. Some of the reforms suggested by the Wiehahn Commission can be interpreted as conciliatory concessions towards the black majority workforce but, even so, most of the potentially radical recommendations have controls

¹⁶⁹ This comment, while appearing to be sensitive to stigmas associated with manual labour, is somewhat ironic given the commission's earlier assurance to white trade union workers that low education levels would prevent black people from taking over white trade unions. This was an assurance that surely perpetuated the stigma of low skilled manual labour and thus raises questions about the commission's real motives for renaming the Department of Manpower Development.

built into them that qualify their notion of 'reform'. For example, work reservation was scrapped – a move that suggested that all black people would be free to work where they pleased. The control built into this assumption was the decision taken by the commission that the closed shop union practice was necessary and should be allowed to continue. In principle the practice would allow white unions to maintain a dominant hold in certain industries thereby ensuring that white members would secure most jobs. In other words, black people would not be free to work where they pleased – work reservation could be *informally* continued and sanctioned by the state.

In addition to this control, as mentioned earlier, white jobs were protected by the strong recommendation to train and retrain existing white workers. The fact that white people are preferred for certain jobs can be seen too in the renewed effort to make “greater use of the White female labour in productive fields, so as to release male labour for more productive work” (ibid.: 162). These built in restraints reveal that the commission aimed to maintain the existing hierarchical (racially organised) labour structure by ensuring that white workers became increasingly skilled and ascended the ladder with black workers slowly filling in the bottom rungs behind them. In essence, reform translates into raising the ceiling on black advancement but simultaneously raising the white ceiling as well. Milkman notes that,

While the upward movement of the colour bar is resisted at every turn by the white trade unions to whom it represents the threat of competition, their resistance is usually stilled by assurances of continued control of the jobs at the top of the occupational hierarchy (1982: 433).

Freedom of association and knowledge was restricted as well, in terms of attempts to register both unions and training institutions. In fact, the Wiehahn Commission's approach to registration seemed to be so constraining that one commissioner objected to the overall recommendation on the grounds that it risked infringing on the activities already being carried out in existing (white) trade unions: “The aspirations of Black trade unions will necessitate stricter control over the trade union movement with

resultant inroads into existing rights and freedoms [of white people]" (ibid.: 37). But the clearest indication that newly registered unions were to be restricted in their practices lay in the recommendation that all political activities within trade unions were to be strictly prohibited (ibid.: 72).¹⁷⁰

The emergence of a New Right orthodoxy in the west, and the perception of a 'Soviet threat', enabled the commission to re-position what it was that 'equity' meant within a Total Strategy managed South African context. Within a stated objective for achieving a 'free market', the restrictions are put forward in such a way as to suggest that they are intended to uphold and protect the free market system for all South Africans, and not to specifically discriminate against black people in general. The free market, it could claim, was a potential victim to encroaching Soviet expansionism, and therefore required reasonable measures to ensure its survival. In other words, the apartheid state's struggle for self determination was no longer race related, it was about the spread of Marxist ideology:

Political developments in Southern Africa during the past two decades have considerably changed the constitutional and economic pattern in countries north of our borders – the free market systems have been replaced by African socialism on a large scale (ibid.: xxv).

The benefits gained by the white community under apartheid would be protected by a reformed apartheid system that sought to protect the free market against an onslaught

¹⁷⁰ It is therefore not surprising that the state's approach to union recognition backfired and had a negative impact on National Party education policies during the transitional phase of South African politics during the early 1990s. The South African Democratic Teacher's Union (SADTU) was not recognised by the government and therefore not included in the government's Education Renewal Strategy (ERS). As a result of tactics like these, opposition groups questioned the legitimacy of the government's proposals. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter four. See page 212 for reference to SADTU.

from Marxism. This, perhaps, was the different route that Botha hinted at – a route designed to meet the same (apartheid) objective – namely, the preservation of the *wolk*.¹⁷¹

The perception that Soviet expansionism was seen as a threat, and as a force that needed to be reckoned with, is obvious in the Wiehahn Commission report: “[socialist thinking] has already made itself felt among Blacks in South Africa and will increasingly do so”. The report argues that socialist thinking was particularly apparent in the field of labour: “Socialist thinking among Black workers is a phenomenon which has in recent times become more noticeable and with which employers will have to reckon in the future” (ibid.). This led the commission to state that some of the critics of the existing system in South Africa had their perspectives “coloured more by political objectives than by concern for sound industrial relations” – in other words, there is no room for socialist thinking within *sound* industrial relations (ibid.: 6). The controls were suggested as one way to curtail the funding and support that black trade unions enjoyed from outside sources who did not necessarily act purely in the interest of free market principles: “other non-labour organisations regard these unions as vehicles for change, using them also in matters other than those of a purely labour character” (ibid.: 3). By mediating the types of practices taking place within black trade unions, the commission implicitly suggests that the government would be able to prevent the subversion of industrial peace thereby protecting the free market system.

These then are the relative forces within the South African context that were competing to shape the literacy market. First, pressure on the government by big business to respond to increasing disinvestment in South Africa coupled with the pressure to meet

¹⁷¹ The National Party was not alone in its opposition to socialist ideology. In the de Lange section I allude to the support that the National Party got from other countries, particularly Britain and the USA, in terms of their mutual co-operation on military intelligence. That is in Footnote 184 on page 173.

international monetarist requirements. Related to this, pressure from big business to adapt the education and training system to enable them to compete on similar grounds as those demanded by international capital. Thirdly, the developing split within the National Party over how to meet demands for reform whilst still remaining loyal to the *wolk*. Fourth, a growing discontent amongst the black population about the nature of education and training in South Africa. And finally, and perhaps most significantly, the perception that the Soviet threat was virtually on South Africa's doorstep after both Angola and Mozambique gained their independence in 1975.¹⁷² This presented a risk to both the government and big businesses: a pro-Marxist movement in South Africa would have jeopardised both the segregated social system as well as given rise to anti-capitalist rhetoric from the majority black population.

In light of this, it was necessary for educational concerns to be brought in line with growth principles irrespective of the tensions between the apartheid system and certain education organisations. The contradictions between the commission's dual objectives of control and reform made negotiating the education issue a particular challenge. For example, one of the concerns regarding allowing black unions to operate without registration was the possibility that 'foreign influences' might have an impact on the thinking that took place within unions. In particular, the commission argued that foreign forms of education were "highly undesirable" in a South African context (*ibid.*: 34).

Approaches to adult education issues therefore came to be propounded in terms of the states unique definition of equity, and growth principles. With respect to this, the commission claimed that

¹⁷² This perception was strengthened by the fact that both states granted liberation movements like the ANC permission to establish training bases and transit facilities in their territories (SANDF [n.d.]).

The right to development consists of the components of education, instruction and training [and that] Behind this is the new idea that the worker should undergo the development to ensure his complete self-realisation in the work situation (ibid.: xxvi).¹⁷³

Equity here means self-realisation *in the work situation*, and freedom is understood to mean “individual freedom *in the market place* [my emphasis]” (ibid.: 6). The working environment therefore provides the grounds for defining equity principles. This suggests that the words ‘equal opportunity’, within a workplace environment, represents the fundamental principle that underscores the meaning of the word equality. This generates a very different view of equal rights from those expressed in either the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.¹⁷⁴ The fact that ‘equity’ is restrained suggests that something else was prioritised. It is particularly significant therefore that the Wiehahn Commission refers to literacy education as “literacy training”.

It is also significant that the report, despite its claims of equality and equal opportunity, never acknowledges that the most significant cause of the crisis in South Africa lay within the apartheid system. Given this, it is unsurprising, but equally significant, that there is no attempt to address the concept of redress. Without redress, the assumption seems to be that if certain barriers to black career advancement were removed then the success or failure of black people becomes the responsibility of individuals rather than

¹⁷³ It is worth recalling that a specifically *work oriented approach* to understanding literacy had been abandoned by UNESCO a couple of years earlier (discussed earlier in this thesis on page 20). UNESCO’s own criticism of the EWLP rejected the notion that word ‘development’ related exclusively to economic growth.

¹⁷⁴ Referred to earlier on page 113.

the system.¹⁷⁵ It has to be noted in contrast that white achievements are deliberately crafted into the system, particularly in terms of retraining recommendations. Similar attempts at ‘affirmative action’ for black people are firmly rejected by the Wiehahn Report. In fact, the commissioners go so far as to say, “A lowering of standards for the sake of others is a disservice to all concerned” and that “merit must continue to be the overriding criterion” (ibid.: xxvi). This report’s version of equity leaves the black community still largely uneducated, poor and underprivileged and it leaves them with the responsibility of proving their ability in spite of their poverty and lack of skills.

The de Lange Report (1981)

This section of the chapter is concerned with addressing how literacy discourses evolved under the de Lange Investigation. Unlike the Wiehahn Commission, the de Lange report is primarily concerned with education concerns. It was also considered more representative of South African society in that it was comprised of a group of experts drawn from a variety of organisations and academic institutions that included the University of Zululand and the University of Durban-Westville – both being historically black universities (HBUs). The composition of the commission can therefore be interpreted as an attempt to appear more representative and consequently less conservative in its findings than the previous commission’s – a fact that has positive implications for the future of adult literacy discourses. Nevertheless, Davies notes that the de Lange investigation was still criticised as being unrepresentative by the National

¹⁷⁵ Earlier in this chapter (on page 141) I cited a respondent who had worked in progressive literacy NGOs at this time and described her work then as being about ‘the struggle’ and ‘empowerment’. She contrasted this with the focus in the 1990s as being about individual achievements. It is interesting to note that literacy at this time was also posited as an individual achievement, something I will return to when I discuss the OBE in the 1990s later in the thesis.

Educational Union of South Africa because the main committee contained neither popularly recognised community leaders nor students (Davies 1984: 358)

It is reasonable to assume that tensions evident in the Wiehahn Commission will also be present in the de Lange investigation. Especially in light of the fact that the section that this thesis is concerned with, the one relating to 'education and manpower', was directed by the then Deputy Director-General of the Department of Manpower. Furthermore, Professor J.P. de Lange, like P.W. Botha, was viewed as a member of the *verligte* faction of the *Afrikaner Broederbond* and seen to be in favour of 'reforming' the state.¹⁷⁶ He went on to become the leader of the *Afrikaner Broederbond* in 1983, just one year after the *Broederbond* had convened to reject many of the recommendations put forward by his commission (Davies *et al.* 1984b: 270). Worth noting too is the fact that big business had a presence in the commission in the form of a representative from the Anglo American Corporation.¹⁷⁷ Buckland thus points out that the committee "was clearly dominated by white male Afrikaners, with a heavy preponderance of education bureaucrats" (1981: 139).¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ The factions within the *Afrikaner Broederbond* were discussed earlier in this chapter on page 152. Also see Footnote 167 on page 153.

¹⁷⁷ Mention will be made in this section of Anglo American's ventures into adult literacy a little later in this chapter (on page 175).

¹⁷⁸ It is important to note too that the de Lange report emanates from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) which was then headed by Dr. Garbers, a man who is described by Cloete and Muller as one of the "most distinguished Afrikaner social scientists" (1991: 147). He headed the HSRC from 1979 until 1989. Together with Dr. P. Smit (a geography professor from the University of Pretoria, an Afrikaans University), he helped to make the HSRC an institution that could claim to offer quality research by recruiting more highly qualified people to work in the HSRC. Cloete and Muller however note that the recruitments did not include black people, radical academics or women and point out that the HSRC's 1989 annual report photograph was a picture of "the proudly smiling 20 overridingly Afrikaans male top managers" (*ibid.*). The HSRC is described by these authors as "the main instrument through which [Botha's 'total strategy' and Oppenheimer's call for evolutionary change] would occur" (*ibid.*: 143).

Literacy discourses in the de Lange Report

The Wiehahn Commission referred to literacy education as “literacy training” (1982: 167). This work-oriented view of adult literacy is developed further in the de Lange report. In fact, basic education is seen to be crucially important in the de Lange report:

Basic education should be the focal point of any long-term or short-term strategy for the reform of education. Basic education is the foundation for any design that may be proposed at post-basic levels. It forms the basis of the non formal system and to a large extent determines the effective functioning, utilisation and linking together of alternative educational possibilities through the media, correspondence courses, etc. If a priority investment in education is to be made by the State it should focus its attention on the basic and pre-basic phases of education (HSRC 1981: 115).

Rather than the narrow focus of ‘literacy training’, adult literacy education is described as a form of ‘basic education’ that exists within the domain of ‘non-formal education’. Further explication shows that the concept of basic education (including primary education) refers to “the minimum education which must be provided in order to have a reasonable assurance that the learner will profit from the next phase, whether it be within formal or non-formal education” (HSRC 1981: 100). In other words basic education was seen as the first step to educational advancement that could take one of two routes: a formal or non-formal route. A closer examination of the concept will reveal that *adult* basic education was less open to choice.

The de Lange report recommended that basic education should include “mastery, in terms of content appropriate to the learner’s age group, of the reality surrounding him [my emphasis]” (ibid.). Those falling within the appropriate ‘adult’ age group are referred to in the report as those who need a “second chance” because they have “either never entered the formal system or [they] left it earlier” (ibid.: 93). Figure 5 on page 166 summarises the education structure proposed by the de Lange Commission. The highlighted section of the diagram denotes where adult basic education – and therefore adult literacy classes – is located within the

Age of Learner	Current Levels	New Levels	Formal Education: Modular System	Non-Formal Education	Education Phase
22 or 24 21 or 23 20 or 22 19 or 21*	4 th yr 3 rd yr 2 nd yr 1 st yr	16 15 14 13		K J I	Higher Education
*Depending on Compulsory military training					
18 17 16 15 14 13 13/14	Std.10 Std.9 Std.8 Std.7 Std.6 Std.5	12 11 10 9 8 7		H G F E D C	Senior Intermediate Junior Intermediate
12 11 10 9 8 7	Std.4 Std.3 Std.2 Std. 1 Grade 2 Grade 1	6 5 4 3 2 1		A B	Basic Education
6	Pre-primary				Pre-basic Education

Figure 5: De Lange Report: recommendations for RSA education structure*

*From HSRC/NTB 1981: 81

proposed system. What is especially important to note is that while outlet points are provided from the formal system into the non-formal system, there are no outlet points that allow access from the non-formal system back into the formal system.¹⁷⁹ The words “second chance” are therefore very misleading. There is no ‘second chance’ for adults to acquire a formal school education. Their options are restricted towards the limited choices that this canalised system provides.

Given that the non-formal system is principally “directed towards literacy, induction, in-service training, retraining, support programmes [and] ad hoc needs”, it is clear that the system of basic education, and consequently the role of literacy within it, that was meant to enable learners to master the ‘reality’ surrounding them, pertains to the environment of work. Adults who acquire literacy skills within the non-formal system were not intended to proceed through to a formal education where they might hypothetically have gone on to acquire a matric certificate or a university education. On the contrary, adults with newly acquired literacy skills were meant to proceed along the non-formal route of work specific training. When the report advises that “basic education should be directed mainly towards basic education and its subsequent consolidation”, it infers that *adult* literacy skills are to be consolidated within a working environment (ibid.: 98). The role of literacy is again defined by its envisaged contribution to the world of work.

By constructing a system that especially oriented adults towards work specific education, the de Lange commission revealed that the term ‘basic education’ was very similar in principle to the Wiehahn approach to literacy. ‘Literacy training’ might be a more

¹⁷⁹ The importance of having a system that allowed for transferable skills came to be a significant part of educational reform during post-apartheid South Africa. The impetus for this originally came from COSATU (in particular in terms of their involvement in the NTSE, discussed later on page 253). The notion of transferable skills (referred to as ‘critical outcomes’ within the National Qualification’s Framework (NQF) is discussed in greater detail in chapter five of this thesis (on page 330).

specific allusion to the role mapped out for adult literacy, but changing the language to 'basic education' manages to obscure the explicitly market-orientated intentions. The term 'basic education' also imparts a sense of fairness, implying that the basic education received within the non-formal system was equal to the early stages of the formal system.

This sense of equity is explicitly alluded to in the commission's description of the general aim driving their view of basic education. Equity here is partly articulated as 'free-choice', something that I have already noted as being misleading:

The aim of basic education is to provide that range of education which, on the one hand, will ensure basic literacy and some understanding of life, so that should the learner leave the formal education at this stage he will be capable of benefiting from training in his occupation or from career-orientated non-formal education; on the other hand continuation in post-basic formal education must be possible for those who have the ability and choose to take this path (ibid.: 108).

The suggestion here is that adults who take part in basic education, and have the ability and desire to continue studying, will be able to advance through the formal system. The key word here perhaps relates to how the commission understands the word 'ability'. The commission's constrained understanding of 'ability', especially regarding black people, re-introduces an awareness of how apartheid ideology features as a key element within the structuring of the 'literacy market'.

Like the Wiehahn Commission, the de Lange report contains inherent prejudices regarding people who lack literacy skills. The commission posed this question in an attempt to delimit the boundaries for the role of basic education: "What is the minimum education that can be given to a person (child or adult) so that he can participate meaningfully in institutional society and general cultural activities?" (ibid.: 43). A critical look at the question suggests that the underlying belief giving rise to the question is that those who *do not* have this level of education are not able to participate "meaningfully" in society. The pejorative aspects of this statement are made more explicit when the

commission says that there are a “large percentage of pupils [who] leave school before they have obtained suitable qualifications, skills or developed value systems that will be of service to them [emphasis added]” (ibid.: 31). Furthermore, the report remarks that a lack of literacy skills results in “a loss of [individual] human dignity and opportunity in life” (ibid.: 27). These comments reveal a conception of adults who do not have literacy skills as being less capable than their literate counterparts. This is what Brian Street has referred to as the ‘great divide theory’ – a theory founded on attitudes dismissed by Harvey Graff as ‘literacy myths’.¹⁸⁰ This problematic vision of the ‘civilising’ role of literacy in society is especially potent in an apartheid context.

A broad summary of the de Lange commission’s perception of the role of basic education in society is that it is that which enables a person to meaningfully engage with their environment through the instillation of value systems and dignity – notably, *human* dignity— in individuals. Given that the statistics provided by the commission show that almost half of the black population do not reach Standard 2, this negative and prejudiced outlook by implication encompasses most of the black adult population (Table 3.1, ibid.: 28). The report, whether it means to or not, sets up a dialectical tension between those who have literacy skills and those who have not. And literacy is perceived as vehicle for prescribing particular values and attitudes to the members of the population. In keeping with this analysis, Buckland refers to the de Lange report as,

a blueprint for socialisation, the goal of which is ‘the reproduction of society within the personality, with minimum emphasis on the development of the person as an intervening critic of society’s claims’ (1981: 146).

¹⁸⁰ Street and Graff’s observations were referred to earlier in this thesis in chapter one, on page 40.

Growth Principles in the de Lange Report

Like the Wiehahn Report, the de Lange Commission took great pains to emphasise South African skills shortages and it moved one step further by stressing the role that education had to play in addressing those shortages. Of particular interest to the concerns of this thesis is the argument that skills shortages created a “special demand for the provision of non-formal education” (ibid.: 24). The rhetorical question referred to earlier – “What is the minimum education that can be given to a person (child or adult) so that he can participate meaningfully in institutional society and general cultural activities?” (ibid.: 43) – suggests that the commissioners have a particular understanding of what constitutes a ‘meaningful’ role for adults (as opposed to a role devoid of meaning and therefore of no value) in society. If basic education plays a role in achieving ‘meaning’ then it is worth exploring what the word ‘meaningful’ connotes and which group of people it is especially targeted at. I argued earlier that the commissioners’ deficit approach to literacy skills set up a tension in society between those who were literate and those who were not. This section will show how that tension is amplified within the context of growth discourses in terms of how the commission structures its arguments about non-formal education.

The report makes it clear that a very particular group of people have been targeted to fulfil South Africa’s semi-skilled manpower needs – namely, black people. With respect to this, the report points out that across society there are “differentiated needs” within a community of people (ibid.: 31). Taken on its own the comment seems reasonable; however, the report posits that remark alongside an explanation for why some people are unable to achieve certain standards of education – an explanation that relates to a theory of ‘environmental deprivation’. The report asserts that an “environmentally deprived child” is one that cannot progress or successfully learn at school due to “socio-

economic and cultural” reasons (ibid.).¹⁸¹ ‘Differentiated needs’ accordingly becomes a term that signifies a barrier between those who are rich and those who are poor, and those who are (culturally) able to cope with the existing formal system and those who cannot. In the context of apartheid this interpretation of ‘differentiated needs’ results in a racial comment which essentially amounts to the perception that black people in general have different educational needs to white people as a result of their social backgrounds. Literacy myths in the de Lange report incorporate more than a misunderstanding of what literacy is in that it grounds that misunderstanding within a prejudiced view of black people in such a way that the ‘great divide’ becomes educational, social and racial.

When the report remarks that “In the RSA all population groups are to a greater or lesser degree guilty of having unrealistic expectations of education” it in essence implies that, given the theory of environmental deprivation, the black population is particularly guilty of unrealistic expectations (ibid.: 71). It infers that those unrealistic expectations stem from the fact that the demand for education exists independently of “practical realities” (ibid.). In other words, if the ‘practical realities’ of individual lives were taken

¹⁸¹ The report’s description of an ‘environmentally deprived child’ is similar in theory to discussions by Bourdieu on the role of the individual’s habitus in various environments. One could suggest that the reason for a child’s inability to cope with scholastic challenges might relate to the fact that he or she is primarily equipped with the social skills derived from his or her field of experience – skills related to coping within an environment that challenges him or her to survive. Furthermore, these survival skills might not be very useful in a classroom environment thus leading to discordance between habitus and context – a discordance which will ultimately affect scholastic achievement. However, the significant difference between the Bourdieuan approach and the de Lange explanation is that Bourdieu’s theory of habitus requires the analogy to be situated within a much broader field of relative social positions, and as such takes into account the various forces within a society that lead to the overall development of a range of different habituses. Conversely, the theory of ‘environmental deprivation’ exists independently of a social context and therefore locates the responsibility for education difficulties in factors that are implicitly located beyond the realm of state control or influence and therefore not needing to be accounted for within the scholastic system.

into account, so individual (black) needs would be accordingly adjusted.¹⁸² Presumably 'practical realities' refers to those economic and cultural limitations associated with the commissioners' concept of environmental deprivation.

By compartmentalising society in this way the report begins to indicate what was meant by an individual life being made more 'meaningful' as a result of education. It argues that

the demand for continuing education outside the formal provision of education (i.e. non-formal education) is of especial importance in providing the economy with the necessary manpower in the short term and in improving the quality of life of unskilled adults [black people] in particular (ibid.: 87).

The comment indicates that the commissioners' envisaged a dual role for non-formal education; namely, one that meets economic requirements and one that will also meet the (as they see it, 'realistic') needs of black people. Together these two points would constitute a 'meaningful' role in society. And of the two aims, the primary role of non-formal education was to meet demands for semi-skilled labour: "stress has been laid on the special importance of the contribution that non-formal education should make, particularly with regard to manpower needs" (ibid.: 93).

¹⁸² There is some evidence to suggest that the attitudes underpinning the theory of 'environmental deprivation' still persist in the post-apartheid era. In an interview with a respondent based in a farming region in South Africa, the respondent argued that literacy programmes devised for farm workers needed to be more "realistic" in their aims. This person took a very paternalistic approach to farm workers, saying that they needed "individual attention" because they had short attention spans and "lacked ambition and responsibility" (Respondent 5). Furthermore, the respondent claimed that a literacy programme that he/she had devised was very popular in the region precisely because it was sensitive to the learners' limitations. It could be argued though that this 'success' (confirmed by others I spoke to) might be due in part to that fact that the programme does not challenge the social fabric of the region. In Bourdieu's terms, the respondent has acquired a 'feel for the game' and understands the type of capital that has most value in the area (to review the theory behind this discussion, refer back to chapter one, page 82-84 and page 84). In support of this perception, interviews with other practitioners in the area instilled the sense that this particular farming region is still very conservative, highly paternalistic and adhered to racist practices. In some places, for example, some farmers were rumoured to still use the 'dop system' (part pay their workers with alcohol instead of money) (Respondent 4 and Respondent 14). A recent article in the *Cape Times* suggests that there is some truth in these comments (*Cape Times* 2000).

The commission's emphasis on the desirable contributions that the non-formal sector could make towards the economy can be partly attributed to the influence of changes taking place in British and American education systems at this time (Kallaway 1998). New Vocationalism, the term used to describe a re-conceptualisation of attitudes held about education, came into being in these countries in response to a skills crisis resulting from massive de-industrialisation in the 1960s.¹⁸³ In Kallaway's words "it [...]sets up a polarity between the general area of 'formal' or 'academic' or 'traditional' education and the 'practical', relevant', 'vocationally oriented', 'skills based' education" (ibid.: 515).

Kallaway argues that it was natural for South Africa to look to its major trading partners for guidelines in implementing a reform process.¹⁸⁴ It is worth noting too that Milkman, writing from an economic perspective commented on the enormous significance of foreign investment into South Africa, says

The significance of foreign investment goes beyond their direct contribution to the total amount of capital invested in the South African economy. Equally important are transfers of technology and managerial know-how in sectors of the economy which are absolutely critical to its diversification and growth (1982: 435).

Milkman's insight suggests that South Africa might be compelled to adopt a similar approach to formal and non formal education as its international trading partners, and

¹⁸³ New Vocationalism was introduced earlier in this thesis in chapter two (see page 119).

¹⁸⁴ It is worth noting too that the ties between the National Party, the Reagan administration and the Thatcher government extended well beyond foreign investment alone. The South African Directorate of Military Intelligence is known to have had surveillance assistance from both governments with respect to gathering intelligence on the ANC's activities, and in terms of monitoring frequencies used by the governments of Zambia, Angola, Mozambique, and Tanzania. In return the South African government was said to report weekly to Britain and America on Soviet activities being carried out in southern Africa. In 1987 Davis wrote, "Still secret is how much information was passed to Pretoria and how long the barter relationship lasted" (176-77). So in some respects the connection between the three countries also centred on a shared suspicion of Marxist and socialist principles. It was not until 1987 that the Reagan government finally recognised the ANC party as a legitimate factor in the South African struggle (ibid.: 204).

might equally be influenced by international interpretations of the forms of knowledge necessary for a successfully functioning economy.

In other words, the emerging canalised structure (depicted on page 166 of this thesis) envisaged by the de Lange commission, is a systemic interpretation of international trends which themselves are based on the emergence of a New Right orthodoxy. This perception is underscored by the fact that the de Lange commission's reformation of the education system shifted some of the funding responsibility for education from the state to the private sector. This is in keeping with the New Right perception that educational needs could be reasonably served if education was allowed to function as a commodity and be responsive to changing market needs (Collard 1968: 6). It could be argued too that the private sector in turn benefited by implementing educational initiatives which directly meet the needs of their businesses and the South African market, rather than the needs of the individual learners.

There is some evidence that market oriented discourses have a significant impact on the type of literacy education provided which in turn points to the symbolic value of literacy at this time. The fact that the 'education and manpower' aspect of the investigation was co-ordinated by the Deputy General of the Department of Manpower suggested that big businesses would play a key role in determining the form of literacy education provided within the non-formal system. Literacy work carried out by two different corporations highlights how industry needs, or growth discourses, could shape the provision of adult literacy. The two corporations that have been used to exemplify this are Anglo American¹⁸⁵ and Gencor. Both are mining corporations.

¹⁸⁵ It is worth recalling that the person representing big business interests on the de Lange commission was Mr M. O'Dowd from the Anglo American Corporation of South Africa Ltd.

Anglo American invested considerably in a literacy programme designed for them by Ken Baucom¹⁸⁶ who is on record as saying that

the basic value of literacy programmes is not that they will develop all the skills necessary for industry, but rather that if [industry] can provide a work situation which meets the needs of the company and of the individual then both the well-being of the individual and of the company will prosper (1978: 33).¹⁸⁷

While at first glance Baucom's remark does not appear to be as specifically and narrowly defined as that under UNESCO's WOALP, it nevertheless clearly perceives literacy's value as being defined in terms of a workplace environment. In this sense it does not begin to embrace the 1975 Persepolis conception that "literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives" (quoted in Sjöström and Sjöström 1983: 23). Nor is there any evidence in this statement of literacy's value in terms of the Freirean pedagogical values that had gained recognition during the 1970s.

Although Baucom here describes the needs of industry and the individual as being coterminous, it is more accurate to say that needs of the individual are defined in accordance with the needs of the company. Bird notes that the course Baucom designed "was planned in such a way as to include information needed on mines, such as what procedures to adopt for dealing with grievances" (1986: 214). She goes on to note that also written into the programme were "production home truths [such as] 'I must not be late', and censures like 'he is a lazy worker' (ibid.).¹⁸⁸ The focus on using education for

¹⁸⁶ Previously, Ken Baucom had headed an adult education organisation established in 1971 called 'Communication in Industry'. The organisation was primarily involved concerned with English language proficiency courses catering specifically for the needs of industry.

¹⁸⁷ He was speaking at a conference convened by the HSRC with the aim of preparing for the establishment of a Division for Literacy Research.

¹⁸⁸ It is worth noting at this early stage that Adrienne Bird later went onto become an important figure in the construction of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) during the early 1990s. Her name recurs throughout the thesis.

mining specific skills becomes more evident in view of the industry's preoccupation with the idea that literacy classes should be run in English. The argument put forward here was that *Fanakalo*,¹⁸⁹ the existing lingua franca of the mines, did not have an extensive enough vocabulary to disseminate technical information: "it is not literacy *per se* that is stressed, rather literacy in English" (Vinjevold and Fleisch 1992: 37). The principal aim for literacy therefore seems to be to use literacy education to improve industry's efficiency and to familiarise labour with how the mine works rather than impart mining specific skills or meet the personal needs of individual workers. The mine, and not the workers, determined literacy's capital value.

If literacy supposedly leads to better work skills then it would be fair to assume that job promotion and literacy acquisition would be linked, since what is primarily acquired is a more comprehensive understanding of the mine's functioning. However, the problematic connection between job promotion and literacy education is made clear in the programme devised by Gencor¹⁹⁰ Gencor's involvement in adult literacy began after legislation restricting training was changed in accordance with the Wiehahn Commission

¹⁸⁹ Fanakalo is a language that is an amalgamation of the many languages spoken on the mines that resulted from the migrant labour system.

¹⁹⁰ The history behind Gencor, a mining company, gives it a particularly interesting role in this period in South African history. Previously known as General Mining, it came under the control of Federale Mynbou in 1964. Mynbou was a subsidiary of the Sanlam-controlled Federale Volksbeleggings, an Afrikaans financial institution that represented the improved economic status of Afrikaners as a result of apartheid legislation. The only reason that Mynbou came to control Gencor was because Oppenheimer, the chairperson of Anglo American (an 'English' mining corporation), sold the company at a fraction of its value. O'Meara writes that this was a calculated decision: "Oppenheimer decided that the time had come to open the doors of the business establishment to Afrikaner undertakings still largely confined to working in an ethnic and linguistic ghetto [and also to] help shore up a moderating tendency in Afrikaner nationalism" (1996: 120). This action introduced a capitalist ethic into the National Party that eventually contributed to its crisis in the 1970s. It is worth recalling at this point that Oppenheimer was attempting to instil similar capitalist principles into the black community through his involvement in the Urban Foundation. This was discussed earlier in this chapter (see page 150). These two activities by this very influential business figure give some indication of the type of pressure being placed on government in South Africa at this time, and also indicate the level of big businesses' commitment to a free-market economy.

recommendations. The programme they devised signifies the different motivations held by the industry at each stage of the literacy programme. These are elaborated on in an article written by Bryan Phillips,¹⁹¹ then the Adult Education Manager at Gencor. For example, by eliminating *mother-tongue* illiteracy the mine hoped to engender ‘social responsibility’. By eliminating *English* illiteracy, Gencor aimed to “identify [and] create a ‘pool’ of potential trainees” (Phillips 1988: 29). The next stage of the programme was geared to “promote [a] concept of self-development”. In this regard Gencor hoped to “enable workers to cope with development options [and to] recognise and encourage initiative” (ibid.).

Despite the apparent motivation behind each outcome-objective to improve skills levels within the industry, Phillips writes that, “at all times the company has emphasised that the achievement of any qualification represents a means whereby one renders oneself eligible for selection for in-house training or development]” (ibid.). The emphasis on the word eligibility, Phillips stresses, was to “negate a common expectation in poorly-educated people that a certificate means automatic promotion” (1988: 29). This focus on ‘eligibility’ consequently raises interesting questions with respect to how Gencor valued literacy. In the Anglo American example I noted that it was the mine that determined literacy’s value, and not the workers. If workers were not necessarily promoted, then one has to assume that the value of literacy was not related to its ability

¹⁹¹ It is worth noting at this stage that, like Adrienne Bird, Bryan Phillips, through his work in adult literacy during the 1980s, later went on to play an instrumental role in the formation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) during the 1990s. He chaired the National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) committee on ‘Integration of Education and Training; competencies and career paths and certification’ – a committee that McGrath suggests was the most important in the NTSI process (1996: 178). The NTSI is discussed in greater detail later in this thesis in chapter four (see page 255 for reference to Bryan Phillips then).

to transform literacy learning into capital gains. In other words, in Bourdieuan terms, literacy has minimal ‘economic capital’ value.¹⁹²

The fact that one becomes merely ‘eligible’ for selection therefore suggests that other value-determining criteria come into being. For example, eligibility might relate more to how successfully the ‘social responsibility’ and ‘self-development’ objectives were acquired in the course of the basic education classes. If literacy’s economic capital value depends on the attainment of *more* than just literacy skills, then this suggests that the primary value of literacy was either as ‘social capital’ or ‘cultural capital’, with its value again being defined in accordance with the mine’s social or cultural needs. If the needs of the workers were sublimated to the needs of the mine, and if literacy did not translate into economic, social or cultural profit for the workers, then we need to consider how equitable and fair this form of literacy is.¹⁹³

Technicism: a rational approach to equity?

Much of what has been said so far with respect to the de Lange Commission reveals it as having an agenda influenced by New Vocationalism, which, translated into the social context of South African society, amounts to a racially biased approach to adult basic education. This detail alone stands as a solid qualification for any equitable principles the report might claim to offer. Nevertheless, the report’s engagement with issues relating to equity is complex and worthy of comment. Unlike the Wiehahn Commission

¹⁹² I use this term in accordance with my explication of capital that appeared in chapter two (see page 84).

¹⁹³ It is worth realising at this stage of the thesis that these values attributed to literacy are not unique to an apartheid era. Research carried out during the 1990s through the Social Uses of Literacy Project indicates that this conception of literacy continues today. Breier and Sait note that management within a Cape Town factory stated that their decision to run literacy classes was a “business decision” that had “nothing to do with tokenism or affirmative action or social responsibility” (1997: 1). The researchers further comment that “such expectations were not peculiar to this factory alone” (ibid.).

findings, the de Lange Report does not document any minority dissenting opinions. (This is in keeping with consensus decision-making as one of its guiding principles). Without any evidence of overt racial discrimination in the document, the equity principles articulated in the de Lange report seem less contested and more unanimous and therefore also more equitable than those in the Wiehahn Commission. Closer analysis reveals though that equity principles are as carefully managed in this document as they are in the other.

The document discusses equity in a variety of ways but most references to equity typically manifest themselves in accordance with four broad themes: the document encourages self-realisation, that inhabitants should be allowed to fulfil their potential; it endorses equal opportunity; it proposes the same quality of education for all and it respects different cultures equally. All of these themes are framed by the report's primary focus which is emphasised as the commission's exclusive concern with the "principles *for the provision* of education" in South Africa (ibid.: 11).

Peter Buckland writes in detail about how the deliberately technicist approach adopted by the commission serves to make the report stand as a document which appears 'scientifically' reasonable and therefore objective. He refers to what might be termed as a 'subliminal' element of technicist language, and that is that the endorsement of technicist principles appear to be value-free, fair, practical, and rooted in scientific interpretation and analysis, thus making it difficult (or unreasonable, or impractical) to contest the report's findings. However, it can be argued that technicism also serves to negate or undermine human will, human need and human potential (Buckland 1986: 371-386; also see Buckland 1981: 144). This argument thus raises questions about how genuinely equitable the principles can be when people are marginalised.

Nevertheless, equity concerns are presented as one of the commission's main concerns. This is particularly evident in its radical (given the South African social context) recommendation for a single ministry of education. It is inferred too that a single ministry would result in education of an *equal quality* for everyone, and that all South African's would be given an *equal opportunity* within the scholastic system. The seemingly related principles of 'equal quality' and 'equal opportunity' comprise the first principle put forward for the provision of education in South Africa: "Equal opportunities for education, including equal standards in education, for every inhabitant, irrespective of race, colour, creed or sex, shall be the purposeful endeavour of the State" (HSRC 1981: 14). In other words, equal quality is recognised in terms of opportunity and achievement.

If equity is solely considered in terms of even-handedness and impartiality then, in technicist terms, it could be argued that the report is reasonably equitable because the report does try to 'level the playing field'. The report's point of departure for providing equal quality in education was as follows: it aims for "the reduction and elimination of demonstrable inequality in the provision of education available to members of the different population groups [emphasis added]" (ibid.: 211). However, while adopting an equitable approach to the provision of education might remove practical barriers to opportunity, it has to be noted that it does not remove the barriers established through years of oppression and discrimination. Addressing this issue would have required the investigation to grapple with the fundamental precepts of apartheid, which, as already discussed, is something the report takes pains to avoid.

In this sense, the commissioners' interpretation of equity was superficial and did not reflect principles aimed at achieving genuine equality through redress and redistribution. Furthermore the theory of 'environmental deprivation' held by the commissioners indicates that their perceptions for future possibilities for black opportunity were

inherently constrained by their pre-conceived understanding of black environmental 'realities'.¹⁹⁴ It can therefore be suggested that the education structure proposed by the investigation was partly designed to provide for specific (limited) opportunities that were 'realistically' constructed to accommodate the effects of environmental deprivation. This prescriptive approach meant that individual freedom of choice was removed. However, by removing the practical (demonstrable) barriers to advancement in general, and then housing the overall education system within one ministry, the commission benefits from the public impression that it strives to be equitable.

The commissioners' recommendations pertaining to adult basic education certainly indicate that limited opportunities were envisaged for black adult learners. As already discussed in this chapter these were constructed towards providing for a 'meaningful' role in South African society – that is, meaningful in terms of labour requirements.¹⁹⁵ It could be argued that restricting the types of opportunity available in this way might make sense in the context of adult work related needs. However, in the context of a child's life it is less reasonable and therefore stands as greater evidence of pre-conceived roles for black people within South African society based on what are perceived to be 'environmental restrictions' – rather than apartheid related restrictions – to scholastic advancement.

With respect to children the commission recommended that nine years compulsory education should be instituted, six of which should consist of compulsory school attendance (*ibid.*: 130). Figure 5 on page 166 shows that this essentially translates into six years of compulsory basic education within the formal system after which

¹⁹⁴ I referred to the de Lange commission's perception of basic education with respect to 'reality' earlier in this chapter (see page 165).

¹⁹⁵ See page 168 for the section concerned with growth principles in the de Lange report.

compulsory education can continue for a further compulsory three years within the non-formal system or the formal system. Given the theory of environmental deprivation, this suggests that the commissioners envisaged black children acquiring their basic education within the formal system and then continuing on into the non-formal system for a further three years. The overall structure proposed by the commission ensures that 'environmentally deprived' children will achieve a minimum of at least three years vocational education and will therefore be able to engage 'meaningfully' in a South African context despite their 'environmental disadvantages'.

This proposal reinforces the idea that the non-formal system was primarily meant to be utilised by black people in order to meet labour requirements. In the process the report seems to advocate two systems that maintain existing racial divisions notwithstanding the generalised equity rhetoric: this amounts to a formal system for white children and a mixed non-formal system. This fact undercuts other equity discourses in the document, particularly the notion that both "commonality and diversity" had to be accommodated within the education system and that the report held that differentiation based purely on race or colour could not "be regarded as relevant for inequality of treatment" (ibid.: 87 & 209). The implication is that differentiation based on an understanding of environmental deprivation was more reasonable, perhaps even 'realistic'.

The investigation thus serves to reformulate race discourses in terms that appear to be more respectful of cultural differences and therefore more equitable. This reformulation of existing ideology emphasises the biggest qualification of the equity position adopted by the paper in that, like the Wiehahn Commission, it at no time acknowledges the central role of apartheid in the education system's shortcomings.

However, the system in its entirety is presented as an equitable, realistic, solution to the country's skills-shortages in spite of the obvious contradictions that exist within the

document. It achieves this by emphasising that it is “important to realise that formal schooling is not necessarily the effective instrument for bringing about social change and economic development that it is generally believed to be” (ibid.: 20). This critical look at the contribution of the formal system to the economy is in keeping with the New Vocational movement abroad where liberal education was perceived to be hostile to the needs of industry.¹⁹⁶ Non-formal education is therefore posited as a precursor to social change and economic development. The sentence thus establishes a relationship between non-formal schooling and economic development and then suggests that these are the effective mechanisms for social change. It implies that this relationship between education and work is the most suitable route to take *en route* to equitable reform. This is an argument that is more determinedly expressed in the HSRC/NTB trilogy of training reports in the 1980s.

HSRC/NTB Investigations into Training in the 1980s

The National Training Board (NTB) in conjunction with the HSRC produced three reports during the 1980s, all of which looked at training related issues. The NTB commissioned the HSRC/NTB Investigation into the Training of Artisans (1984) as a further examination of the de Lange commissions’ recommendations, especially regarding non-formal education. This document was subsequently described as a pilot study for the two research reports published later (HSRC/NTB 1991: 35). The HSRC/NTB Investigation into Skills Training in the RSA (1989a) followed the Artisan report in 1989. The third report, the HSRC/NTB Investigation into a National Training Strategy (1991),¹⁹⁷ suggested that the skills training investigation should be considered as

¹⁹⁶ See chapter two, page 119 to review that discussion.

¹⁹⁷ In the interests of clarity subsequent references to the trilogy of reports shall adopt the method of referencing used by McGrath (1996). The three reports will be respectively referred to as “Artisan”, “Skills” and “NTS”.

“an interim report in the process of developing a national training strategy” (NTS: 35). There are clear links between all three reports and as such they will be examined together. With respect to adult literacy in particular, it is worth noting that Artisan training formally required a minimum entrance qualification level of Standard 7 (age 15) which meant that most learners wanting to be artisans would already be functionally literate (Artisan: 32). The Artisan report is therefore most useful in terms of this thesis’ concerns in contributing towards an understanding of the growth and equity trends at the time.

Evolving perceptions of basic literacy in a training context

As I have already noted, the provision of basic literacy was not a significant concern to the Artisan report’s objectives, mainly because those entering an apprenticeship would have already acquired basic literacy skills. Nevertheless, the Artisan report aligned itself with the overall recommendations made in the de Lange report, even going so far as to develop further their suggestions for the non-formal system. It notes that the non-formal system needed to incorporate “pre-apprenticeship training” (not post-basic formal education) for those children leaving the basic education system at too young an age to be considered for an apprenticeship (Artisan: 165 and 188).¹⁹⁸ And in terms that echo the de Lange report’s argument, the Artisan report suggested that one of the roles of basic education was to ensure a “realistic orientation after the possible withdrawal from formal education [my emphasis]” (ibid.: 167).

Unlike the Artisan report, the Skills and NTS reports address literacy concerns in more detail and in the process reveal a significant shift in terms of the role of literacy. The

¹⁹⁸ Figure 5 on page 166 shows that children being oriented towards the non-formal education system will be as young as 12 years old.

Skills report in particular takes pains to distinguish between various levels of literacy with respect to proficiency. It talks about *preliteracy*, the level of proficiency where literacy skills are unstable; *basic literacy*, which reflects the permanent acquisition of basic literacy skills and which enables workers to read and write a short communication relating to their everyday lives; *functional literacy*, a level of reading and writing that enables an individual to engage effectively in the literacy practices assumed in their culture group; and *job literacy*, a level that implies that a person has skills at a level which matches the readability of their work material (Skills 15-16). In this regard the Skills report identified a continuum of various literacy levels with job literacy implicitly identified as the highest literacy level possible.

With respect to this, the Skills report noted that there was a great need to train unemployed people in:

- Basic and job literacy;
- Basic management training;
- Entrepreneurial training;
- Cultural transition from a traditional culture to an industrial culture (Skills: 131).

Again, the Skills report distinguishes between various forms of literacy. In this case, 'basic literacy' and 'job literacy' – the latter being defined as “skills at a level which [match] the readability of [a worker’s] work material” (Skills: 16). By including 'basic literacy' alongside 'job literacy', the Skills report implicitly allowed for the fact that literacy needs extended beyond purely work related skills and as such appears less prescriptive than the earlier de Lange report. The inference that *individual* personal literacy needs were being accommodated within the non-formal system rests in the Skills report’s definition of basic literacy as the ability to “write a short communication relating to [workers] everyday lives” (Skills: 15-16). Any suggestion though that the Skills

report's endorsement of basic literacy alongside job literacy is a sign that it was being holistically sensitive to workers' complete literacy needs, is somewhat overshadowed by the inclusion of the fourth point that makes a case for the need for 'cultural transition'. This last point seems to be a modified version of the de Lange report's concept of 'environmental deprivation' and 'cultural gaps'.¹⁹⁹ Unlike the de Lange report, which seemed to suggest that environmental deprivation was an incurable affliction that could only be realistically accommodated within a canalised system, the Skills report infers that it is a shortcoming that can be addressed in time and through education. The use here of the word 'transition' introduces the idea of a continuous learning process that evolves the individual from an undesirable traditional culture to a desirable industrial culture.²⁰⁰

Like the Skills report, the NTS document also reveals an increasingly careful and considered approach to literacy. It too seems to highlight a trend towards accommodating individual literacy needs within training when it suggested that training should also take into account the "orientation and socialising role of training in the person's working life" (NTS: 206). However, as a cautionary note it is worth pointing out that there are two ways of interpreting this suggestion: significantly, the report does not make it clear whether it is suggesting that training should be sensitive to the needs of the individual in terms of *how* the individual experiences training and adjusts to a working life, or if it is endorsing a similar socialising approach as that described by Bryan Phillips with respect to Gencor. In the Gencor example, training played an active role in deliberately orienting and socialising the individual towards a working life – for

¹⁹⁹ Refer back to page 182 for the more detailed discussion.

²⁰⁰ Similarly, the Urban Foundation has been described as being motivated by the desire to instil "Western-type materialistic needs and ambitions" in the broader South African community (Davies *et al* 1984a: 123). This was referred to earlier in this chapter on page 150.

example, it endeavoured to achieve ‘social responsibility’ in its workers in a way that went beyond basic skills development and precluded individual needs.²⁰¹

Nevertheless, language use in the NTS report does indicate a growing sensitivity to the idea that, at the start of the 1990s, narrow work-oriented literacy education was no longer conceived of as a suitable way to address literacy needs. The following extract, which includes an editing error that appears in the original text, reveals that the focus of training was amended from a narrow focus of ‘business issues’ to the wider concept of ‘work enrichment’.

Organisations will also be increasingly prepared to send employees on training courses which are not only concerned with business issues. The reason for this is that development of the employee as a “whole” person enables the employee to cope with difficult tasks and adapt to change more easily. The focus will therefore fall on business issues. *The reason for this is that development of the employee as a “whole” person enables the employee to cope with difficult tasks and adapt to change more easily. The focus will therefore fall* increasingly on work enrichment (NTS: 202-203).

Considered together, the Artisan, Skills and NTS reports reveal a gradual shift away from the narrow and prescriptive approach to literacy described in the Wiehahn and de Lange commission reports. Of the three reports, the Artisan document is the most closely aligned to the early documents, especially with respect to its emphasis on ‘realistically orienting’ workers after they had left the formal system (Artisan: 167). The Artisan report accordingly seems to see the role of basic education to be involved in shaping – and, re-shaping if necessary – the ideas that some groups have about education and their relationship to it. The overriding concern was to mould people to the working environment.

²⁰¹ My criticism of Gencor’s approach appeared earlier in this chapter on page 178.

The Skills report adjusts that view slightly by criticising some of the approaches that industries take to training in particular. It argues that “cognitive, communication, human and management skills do not always come into their own in the training process” (HSRC 1989: 8). In the recommendations it makes, the Skills report notes that “Industry should emphasise thinking, communication, human and management skills in addition to technical skills during the training process [my emphasis]” (ibid.: 22). The criticism is addressed at those aspects of training that involve, among other things, basic literacy: “[Thinking, communication and human relations] do not receive sufficient attention, particularly at the lower employment levels” (ibid.: 39). Although the report departs from a narrow idea of literacy as a strictly functional tool, the broader ‘human’ understandings of what literacy’s purpose are nevertheless still defined in accordance with the work environment.

Later in the NTS document the shift becomes more explicitly stated, most likely due to the fact that by the time this report has been published, Nelson Mandela had been released from jail and negotiations towards majority rule had started to take place. In fact, it is worth noting that the words “New South Africa” appear for the first time in the NTS document while they had not been alluded to at all in the preceding reports (ibid.: 176). Furthermore, the NTS was conscious of a general dissatisfaction amongst trainees with respect to the training open to them. In response to questionnaires sent out by the NTS investigation, more than 50% of the respondents indicated that they did not believe *at all* that training opened doors for trainees to work for themselves (ibid.: 107). The investigation concluded from this that existing training was too industry specific and thus did not resonate with individual learners. The document later levels a veiled criticism at the types of training taking place in various industries by saying that “Most organisations train people mainly for their own specific needs” (ibid.: 139). All these points taken together led to the fact that the NTS investigation identified “the level of literacy (of the economically active section of the population) – that is, adult

literacy—as an immediate threat to the success of a National Training Strategy and thereby deemed it immediately important in the short term [my emphasis]” (238).

The social context at this time cannot be ignored and neither can the impact that it has on evolving discourses at this time. The NTS displayed a keen awareness of what the future might hold, referring to the fact that South Africa was increasingly moving toward a post-apartheid model where everyone would be entitled to vote, where new political view points would impact on training issues and where the so-called self-governing states would probably be incorporated into the new political dispensation (177). It is fair to assume that this fast approaching reality would influence the language used in literacy discourses and contribute towards describing a new role for literacy. In fact, this type of political consciousness is referred to in the document itself when they comment that the changing environment had a significant impact on employers’ attitudes to training:

Another group of respondents indicated that employers were training their staff in order to improve their image or reputation. This desire for better social standing or prestige for a company promoted training (116).

Introducing an element of ‘political correctness’ into the literacy discourse has implications for equity principles as will be discussed later in this chapter. The question that remains to be seen though is whether the shifts in literacy discourses at this time were predominantly rhetorical or whether they were substantiated by policy decisions taken in the new South Africa.

Growth principles: towards skills for the ‘new’ South Africa

The criticisms launched by the de Lange investigation into the failure of the education system to provide for future manpower requirements in the country is intensified in this trilogy of reports on training. In particular, the influence of British New Vocationalism on the de Lange commission mentioned earlier in this chapter (see page 173) are more

explicitly spelt out in the trilogy of reports. Like the previous two commissions of inquiry, these reports increasingly stress the need for the education system to provide the types of training candidates necessary for the new technological environment that had replaced industrialisation. The discussion has shifted increasingly towards the need for training for new forms of skills and this is a discourse that is quite pronounced in the 1990s, as will be seen in the following chapter.

The HSRC/NTB reports' attack on the formal academic system in South Africa is reminiscent of the New Vocational criticisms of liberal education. The reports reinforce the de Lange commission's view that preferences for academic courses rather than vocational training is a serious weakness in the education system (Artisan: 178; NTS: 113, 128, 173).²⁰² The education system, it is argued, fails on two levels. First, it does not produce the right type of candidate for a workforce geared towards a changing global economic environment, provoking the NTS report to recommend that the government needs to "provide basic education for 'a healthy technological culture'" (NTS: 171). In other words, basic education must contribute towards the development of a community that can not only "understand, accept and promote technological change" but also accord "high status to technical and scientific training and occupations (and not only to academic training)" (NTS: *ibid.*). The educational emphasis should be placed on "how to" rather than "what is" (NTS: *ibid.*). The criticism in terms of attitudes towards training is widened too to encompass employers with the NTS arguing that employer attitudes were not conducive to creating the necessary semi-skilled workforce (NTS: 120).

²⁰² The de Lange commission stressed that formal schooling was "not necessarily the effective instrument for bringing about social change and economic development" (HSRC 1981: 20). This was discussed earlier in this chapter on page 183).

Second, the education system fails because it continues to produce students who are not equipped with the skills necessary to embark on training: “There are still relatively large numbers of pupils, particularly in the coloured and black communities, who leave school before they have reached a sufficiently high level of education to be considered functionally literate” (NTS: 209). The report further notes that a lack of literacy skills adversely affects the “potential trainability of individuals” (ibid.:185).

The black community straddles these two failings in the education system, and again, as in earlier reports, they are the group specifically targeted as the source for future skills. In terms of having the ‘wrong’ educational orientation the Skills report notes that

there is a strong tendency in the community, and particularly among black persons, to choose academic courses in preference to career skills. Complaints about blue-collar workers being functionally illiterate and about the lack of a command of language among clerical workers are commonplace (NTS: 47).

Further evidence that the black community has been identified as the essential component of future economic growth comes through in the analysis of literacy statistics presented in the NTS investigation. The results show that with the exception of black people, more people in all the race groupings achieved matric level in 1985 than in 1980. Furthermore, “with a few exceptions (notably among blacks), the number of [economically active persons] who do possess postschool training has increased noticeably over the past five years” (ibid.: 159). There is a strong implication then that future education initiative and future training initiatives will be strongly biased towards provision of a certain type of education for the black communities. In fact, the NTS report comments that “Training will have to provide increasingly for young people from the black and coloured populations” (152).

All three reports call for a stronger vocational element in the education system in order to meet the demands of increasing technological advances. The Skills report recommended that the national training strategy needed to address the “closer

integration of formal education and training initiatives and actions with a view to the eventual formation of a nationally integrated vocational educational and training system” (HSRC 1989: 14). This was to be partly met by a partnership between “formal education [...] and training bodies representing the needs of industry” (NTS: 44). The NTS report affirms this recommendation by commenting that the “division of education and training into different departments is unable to address existing problems effectively” (ibid.: 214). The future Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) was presented as a possible arena in which the problems in formal and non-formal education could be addressed. Among many possible solutions, the NTS report proposes a “career-orientated education” as one that might ease skills shortages (ibid.).

The intensifying power of the growth discourse can be seen in the increasing demands for privatisation and deregulation to stimulate small business development as well as the need to provide literacy training in support of this (HSRC 1989: 10; NTS: 46). The Artisan report, possibly influenced by New Right discourses abroad, commented that greater responsibility for training should be transferred to the private sector and that large companies with proven successes in the field of training should take the lead in training initiatives (Artisan: 227 and 21). The concern about the state’s involvement in education filters through the reports in various requests for less intervention by the state in training affairs (Artisan 113; NTS: 47). In fact, the earlier role played by the state in education matters seems to shift in these documents with greater emphasis being placed on the role of Industry Training Boards (HSRC 1989: 15) and of the trade unions (NTS: 222).

While it is true that the changing socio-political environment might have contributed enormously to the decreased role of the state in training initiatives, it is also fair to say that that same changing environment is perceived as a potential threat to new-found freedoms. In this regard the NTS report notes that

The degree to which political influences give rise to demands with regard to training to the benefit/ detriment of a particular interest group and its supporters will have to be taken into account in the creation of a training strategy.

Proposals to keep party political disputes well clear of the South African training strategy, and to accommodate the views of the various interest groups at the same time, will have to be set up and implemented (177).

This recommendation calls attention to one of the most significant shifts in education and training discourses and that is a deliberate effort to control political input into the system. Here the market is viewed independently of social and political ideological structures, thus requiring carefully considered ‘protection’ in order to flourish. In some respects, this depoliticisation of training has overtones of the early 1980s’ rationale for forbidding political activity within unions.²⁰³ There is a suggestion that one of the perceived possible threats to the market comes from the unions: “Union leaders are increasingly entering the political arena – a trend which will become increasingly popular as black politics becomes stronger in South Africa” (175). Apart from having a political threat, the report argues that unions have the added ability to influence their members: “Union management is able to influence union members in such a way that the training offered fails to have intended results” (ibid.).

Growth discourses are given added weight by the inclusion of a particular economic presence – namely, the global market. In this respect the world market is identified as a key pressure for change in the training system in South Africa. It notes that “fast-changing world markets and economic trends demand skills that are not yet being met in the current training system [and that this] brings about delays in the internal production” (229). Training issues take on added dimensions when the NTS document argues that “Training will contribute to the development of ‘citizens of the world’”

²⁰³ This was specifically alluded to in the Wiehahn Commission’s findings and is discussed on page 159 of this thesis.

(203). This argument is put forward in the section concerned with international issues, suggesting that the understanding of ‘citizens of the world’ is derived from the global market itself. The global market is also attributed an important role in the training system with the comment that “South Africa’s isolation from the international community with regard to training systems, resources and methods results in training deficiencies” (216). This point was alluded to earlier when the report gave attention to international concerns regarding literacy.

Equity in the context of ‘world citizenship’

The inclusion of the global market into education and training discourses impacts favourably on the attention given by earlier reports to concepts of ‘environmental deprivation’ and ‘cultural differences’. The word ‘culture’ is neutralised within this context and takes on technicist overtones. For example, the NTS report remarks that the “current ‘culture of the country’ with regard to technology provides support for enterprises or industries, but does not provide support for development of new and applied technology” (232). The word ‘culture’ here describes the overall country’s stance with respect to technological change and the global market – this culture is inclusive of all South African cultures.

The movement towards this cultural context is significant when considered in the light of the trilogy of reports. The first report in the series argued that training was “radically influenced by the cultural background and environmental adjustment of young people” (165). While there are overtones in the comment that a particular ‘global economic culture’ was necessary for successful training, the term ‘cultural background’ still points to specific different cultures and different environments as a stumbling block. This point is especially pronounced in the report’s later comment that “Those who are still predominantly bound by traditional culture must therefore be orientated in the

“culture” of the Western World before they can be meaningfully trained” (ibid.). Research put forward by the Artisan report revealed that different cultures ascribed different values to different occupations. This, the report implies, impacts negatively on vocational training and this negative impact is the direct result of the fact that people “are strongly influenced by their cultures” (178). The most overtly problematic presentation of this attitude manifests itself in the report’s recommendation that future research should include research on “trainability tests for Blacks”, a point that suggests that their cultural background might render them ‘untrainable’ (162).

In the Artisan report, and previous investigations into education and training, the term ‘culture’ refers to the different ethnic backgrounds of people within the country as a whole. This understanding of culture incorporated into growth and education discourses generally establishes a hierarchy of cultures ranging from those people least adapted to training to those people most suitable for training. ‘Western cultures’ are held as an ideal while other cultures are seen as lacking in desirable qualities – the lack giving rise to the need for “cultural bridging” programmes among others (183). In this sense, the first report in the trilogy has more in common with the environmental deprivation theory put forward in the de Lange report than with the economic concept of culture proposed by the NTS report later.

In the NTS report, different cultures are on the whole subsumed within the desire to be part of what I refer to as a ‘global economic culture’. However, whether or not this approach to culture and economics is equitable is questionable. The ‘global economic culture’ opinion put forward by the NTS does not expressly denigrate particular South African cultures but instead posits the global economic culture as a component that can be added on to other cultures. This impression is in part derived from the report’s notion of trainees developing into ‘citizens of the world’. The suggestion is that a global economic culture can be acquired through learning and that it exists as the world’s

lingua franca. In short, the report isolates this aspect of culture from the broader social context, a point emphasised by the report's need to limit political influence in the field of training (described in the section on growth principles). It can be argued that this compulsion to isolate economic concerns from the broader social context does not allow growth concerns to be addressed and dealt with in the immediate context of individual South African lives.²⁰⁴ This qualifies the suggestion that the shift in growth principles, and the consequent shifts in language use, is entirely motivated by equitable principles.

The increasing sensitivity towards language use discussed earlier serves to mask moments of overt discrimination. Nevertheless, moments of insensitivity to equity issues still call attention to a superficial approach to engaging with these concerns. For example, the Skills report paid considerable attention to the question of training for farm labourers in the agricultural industry. It argued that there was a "lack of appreciation by farmers of the value of skills training and consequently they are not always motivated to ensure that their farm labourers are properly trained" (HSRC 7). The NTS report picked up on those comments and said that there "is a real need for the employer, particularly the farmer, to have an insight into the content of training courses and to accept what is being taught and the skills required" (38). However, neither of the reports reflect on the nature of the social relationship between farmers and their workers. This relationship is enormously oppressive and problematic in South

²⁰⁴ Bourdieu's social theories of habitus and economic capital, discussed in detail in chapter two (see pages 79 and 84), describe how the social context of individuals informs the value that they associate with various aspects of society. In this sense isolating growth principle from the broader socio-political concerns deprives the broader community from personal engagement with those concerns.

African history and therefore possibly directly related to the farmer's disinterest in training issues.²⁰⁵

Rural concerns also manifest themselves in contradictory ways in the light of equity principles. The Skills report's argument that there is "a need to provide skills training in rural areas" suggests an awareness of social inequality between urban and rural areas – a suggestion that is implicitly equity driven (NTS: 43). However, this is contradicted later in the NTS report where concern is expressed that literacy statistics among the black population are worse in the rural areas than they are in urban areas. The report continues to say that this means, "if people from the rural areas wish to enter the labour market [...] literacy training will have to have a high priority" (154). The same report however also perceives inadequate literacy education to be the responsibility of the formal education system. Consequently low literacy statistics had earlier been referred to as an "additional pressure on training" because "it means that literacy training must take place before any other training can proceed" (185). Altogether these comments suggest that it would be preferable if rural people did *not* undertake employment in urban areas. This in turn suggests that skills training in the agricultural sector is seen as one way to maintain a balance between the urban/rural divide, albeit a balance that does not strive to directly address the inequality between them.

Another moment of insensitivity to history and social oppression comes through in the NTS report's analysis of improvements in educational achievements over the previous five years. They comment that "with a few exceptions (notably among blacks), the number of [economically active persons] who do possess postschool training has

²⁰⁵ Linda Waldman has carried out considerable research into the nature of farmer/labourer relationships. See Waldman 1993 and 1995.

increased noticeably over the past five years” (159). However, the report does not attempt to explore why this might be the case for black people, in particular possibly as a result of the Wiehahn commission’s emphasis on training and re-training to protect existing white jobs.²⁰⁶ The superficial approach to these concerns is in keeping with the technician overtones of earlier training report that prioritises objective rationality over equity concerns.

In spite of the contradictions and ambiguous nature of equity principles in the trilogy of reports there are some changes that are significant enough to suggest future development in equity issues. For example, there is increasing attention paid to apartheid’s role in the existing problems plaguing the education and training system—for the first time, the NTS report directly draws attention to the role of apartheid: “the current system of separate educational facilities for each population group almost completely excludes the possibility of equal educational standards” (176). Related to this statement is the acknowledgement that “the ways in which education can be made uniform for all population groups [...] requires urgent attention” (127). There is also more attention given to the rural areas (discussed above), the unemployed (HSRC 1989: 22; NTS: 226) and to some problems facing women in the workforce (Artisan: 159). All these groups are largely invisible in previous reports and this shift in itself suggests a movement in an equitable direction.

People’s Education: An Alternative Discourse

Despite the fact that opposition groups were seldom represented in policy-making forums, there nevertheless existed a strong counter-movement to official discourses. In

²⁰⁶ This was discussed previously with respect to Wiehahn commission’s attempt to retain some form of control over the inequitable training system. See page 145.

the second half of the 1980s, this came to be known as People's Education. Work stayaways in 1984 expanded to extensive school boycotts throughout 1985 and 1986, eventually resulting in a partial state of emergency being declared in July 1985 (Walters and Kruss 1988: 2). People's Education began at the initiative of Sowetan parents, and by March 1986 the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC)²⁰⁷ had been formed which helped to formalise a network of parents, teachers and students opposed to apartheid education (Muller 1987: 320).

People's Education is most accurately described as a broad based movement: "For all, People's Education is less a concept with precise semantic content than the symbol of a national educational and political movement in the making" (Muller 1987: 319). Walters comments that "Much of the writing on people's education is on 'what ought to be done' rather than providing empirical data on what people's education 'is'", while Greenstein describes it as a "desire to create and consolidate the nucleus of a new society within the existing state" which was "not discussed in concrete terms" (1986: 17 and 1996: 3 respectively). In short, "People's Education can be described as a vanguard discourse in that it seeks not to reproduce but to challenge and transform the status quo along the lines of a specific vision of the future" (Deacon 1996: 229). These explications of People's Education reveal that it does not allow for the type of analysis that has been conducted so far in this chapter. However, the mood and the origins of the movement serve to emphasise the tensions between progressive perceptions of education and those discussed so far in this chapter.

Between 1985 and 1990, the People's Education movement shifted from a position of protest to one of challenge – this is partially characterised by the later preference for the

²⁰⁷ Later referred to as the National Education Co-ordinating Committee. The NECC went on to play a significant role in the NEPI investigation in the early 1990s.

'education for liberation' slogan to the earlier slogan which proclaimed 'liberation first, education later'.²⁰⁸ And with respect to that vision, Wolpe observes that the NECC's position was as follows:

in order to ensure that education does not become merely a means of individual advancement or serve to reproduce the social system through a reform of the existing education institutions, two conditions had to be met:

First, a struggle had to be initiated to change the content and local control of education in accordance with conceptions of people's education.

Secondly, those struggles and the educational structures created in the course of the struggle, had to be linked to the broader political movement for national liberation. This policy was embodied in the slogan of 'people's education for people's power' (1990: 6).

The political heart of People's Education is clearly recalled by Mkatshwa²⁰⁹ in his keynote address to the first National Consultative Conference when he describes the conference as being something similar to the 1955 Congress of the People which eventually resulted in the publication of the Freedom Charter²¹⁰ (1985: 239). Similarly, Sisulu, in her keynote address at the second conference held in 1986, invoked memories of those killed in the 1976 Soweto Uprising (1986: 255). These experiences, coupled with a strong resistance to official policies, gave rise to a concept of education as something that should be about liberation, about justice, and about freedom (Mkatshwa 1985: 240). The values to be promoted within People's Education were those of democracy, non-racialism, collective work and participation (Hartshorne 1992: 52).

²⁰⁸ It goes without saying that this is a slogan that has very significant implications for the need for basic education provision in a post-apartheid society. It also serves to explain why many people in South Africa do not experience their illiteracy as a social stigma – they believe that they lack literacy skills for very good and honourable reasons (Respondent 11).

²⁰⁹ Mkatshwa went on to become the Deputy Minister of Education in Nelson Mandela's government.

²¹⁰ See Footnote 128 on page 116 for the introduction to the Freedom Charter.

The values are derived from a particular political viewpoint:

It is crucial to point out that from 1985 onwards, community perceptions of education, couched in terms such as People's Education, community education [...] particularly as voiced by younger people, are strongly influenced by socialist doctrine (Hartshorne 1992: 341).

The socialist principles with respect to the relation between education and the economy are clearly reflected in Mkatshwa's observation that South African education "reproduces capitalist relations and forces of production" (1985: 240). This belief is firmly entrenched in the resolutions adopted at the 1985 conference which claims that People's Education "eliminates capitalist norms of competition, individualism and stunted intellectual development, and replaces it with one that encourages collective input and active participation by all" (NECC 1985: 253).

Perspectives on adult literacy are also shaped and influenced by this framework of opposition in accordance with socialist principles. The Freirian notion that there is no such thing as a neutral form of education is expressed in terms of the understanding that "Education is either for domestication or for freedom" (Mkatshwa 1985: 242).²¹¹ In 1989 the NECC produced a discussion document which presented their view of 'Empowering Basic Education' (EBE). EBE is understood to represent the

Vital means for enabling people to develop a greater understanding of the underlying structures of society, a vision of an alternative society and a commitment to fighting for such a society. It is also a means whereby people can develop their full potential and have their creative abilities stimulated (quoted in van Neikerk 1992: 150).

²¹¹ Earlier in the thesis I discussed how the South African BCM had been significantly influenced by Paulo Freire's writings (see page 62). However, the extent to which Freirian pedagogy can be described as a direct influence on the People's Education is not as clear. In the academic field, Walters used Freirian pedagogy to develop a conceptual framework for the analysis of People's Education when it first started (Walters 1986). However, it is worth noting that, by the mid-1980s, student organisations which had popularised BCM had started to treat it "as an issue of the 1970s" (Budlender 1991: 236).

People's Education was understood to eliminate "illiteracy, ignorance and the exploitation of one person by another" (NECC 1985: 250). And literacy, within EBE, is consequently accorded emancipatory and political qualities:

literacy is viewed as a vital condition for the transformation of the dominated classes. It is seen as integral to ending their marginalisation from existing political structures and educational institutions. Literacy is also accorded the power of enabling the newly literate to become 'liberated and empowered agents' of the democratic, non-racial transformation in South Africa (van Neikerk 1992: 150).

The NECC thus stressed the need to link literacy efforts with a political movement and mass struggles "which aim at transforming the existing political and social system" (ibid.).

It was at this time too that COSATU became formally involved in the People's Education movement. They declared their intention to link People's Education to worker's education and they "resolved to actively develop and help build the NECC to become a mass-based democratic organisation" (Botha 1992: 92). Both COSATU and the NECC upheld the general goal of achieving universal literacy and numeracy (Unterhalter and Wolpe 1991: 2). COSATU also acknowledged the importance of literacy within the broader concept of education transformation and particularly in respect to workers:

In July 1989 COSATU admitted that some of its members were unable effectively to participate in decision-making processes because of the high rates of illiteracy among its members. For COSATU illiteracy constitutes disempowerment as workers are not only unable to participate in union activities but are also denied the necessary tools of analysis which would help them develop confidence and effectiveness within the union structures, in political parties and in community organisations" (Botha 1992: 92).

This collaboration and affirmation for the principles of People's Education serves as an early introduction to COSATU's participation in the NEPI adult education processes.

As an opposition movement with socialist principles and the support of COSATU, the NECC was perceived as a major threat by the state. In 1985, top NECC officials were

among the first people to be arrested by Botha's police forces during his state of emergency. There is evidence too that police methods went further than merely arresting leaders: attempts to discredit the movement included the mysterious circulation of pamphlets that accused the NECC of a range of crimes, (including necklacing, arson and acts of intimidation), conferences being banned, and NECC materials being confiscated (Muller 1987: 324).

One effect of these measures resulted in the progressive reduction of the political content of People's Education (Wolpe 1992: 6). Nevertheless, the history of People's Education and the role of the NECC towards the end of the decade served to introduce alternative concerns and discourses into the policy discourses of the 1990s. They also served to highlight the expectations and understandings that a broader South Africa community had for education in a new South Africa. These expectations are partially evident in the NEPI investigation. To a lesser degree (and in a more controversial form) they are also evident in the new attention that the National Party's Education Renewal Strategy gives to equity discourses.

Summary

This chapter sought to explore the evolving roles of literacy expressed through the conditioned discourses represented by the Wiehahn report, the de Lange reports, and trilogy of HSRC/NTB reports. It has contrasted the key literacy related moments emerging from these documents with the concepts underscoring the People's Education movement. The analysis used the thematic strands identified in the Chapter two. The theme of 'absences' is most significant in the context of adult literacy discourses at this time.

The chapter has shown how the absence of literacy discourses does not indicate that literacy discourses are not present in South African society. On the contrary, the

absence of literacy discourses, when considered in terms of Botha's Total Strategy, indicates the perception that literacy discourses, classes and materials were considered potentially powerful, and therefore represented a political threat that needed to be suppressed. Absence, therefore becomes a potent indicator of how literacy was viewed.

The de Lange report, and subsequent trilogy of HSRC/NTB reports, confine literacy related objectives in terms of objective rationality and realistic social constraints. Under the influence of international New Right ideology, a case was made for locating and orienting literacy education towards and within the domain of non formal education and skills development discourses. This trend towards skills discourses will be carried through in the next chapter of this thesis.

Unlike this chapter, where race divisions were maintained alongside skills discourses through the use of scientific rationality and realism, chapter four will discuss literacy concerns in accordance with the economic growth discourses that have gained currency with the emergence of a global economic system. These discussions are framed alongside the enormous social concerns challenging South Africa in its transition towards liberty and democracy. Literacy discourses will no longer be avoided and suppressed, and the language of equity and social democratic principles will replace technicism.

Policies in Transition

Literacy Discourses, 1990-1994

February 1990 signalled the beginning of a period of radical change in South Africa. With the ANC unbanned and Nelson Mandela free, the time between 1990 and 1994 was devoted to negotiations towards the free general elections held in April 1994. With the introduction of alternative political interests into the policy making forum, education discourses controlled by the National Party during the 1980s were exposed to new criticisms and challenges from a diverse range of organisations.

This chapter explores emerging education discourses informed by both the National Party and by alternative organisations. It identifies emerging tensions between the various political and economic stakeholders and demonstrates how socially based interests play a fundamental role in determining the role that literacy plays in a society undergoing change. The disparate discussions presented here reflect the trends in policy making most likely to impact on literacy in a post-apartheid society.

Two key education policy initiatives, emerging during the early 1990s, contribute an understanding of how the role of literacy in the new South Africa has evolved. They are the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) and the National Education Policy Investigation

(NEPI). The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) made a substantial contribution to basic education discourses and as such this chapter will also evaluate their contribution in terms of how their conceptualisations impact on literacy discourses. This is focused on in terms of the work carried out under the National Training Strategy Initiative as well as COSATU contributions in other arenas of policy investigation. The key document emerging from the ERS process is the government's Education Renewal Strategy: management solutions for education in South Africa (1992).

The ANC also took part in policy research at this time. Their contribution to policy research emerged in the form of A Policy Framework for Education and Training, a draft version of the ANC's approach to an integrated education and training system. The final version of the report was published in 1995. The booklet was accompanied by the ANC's Implementation Plan for Education and Training (IPET report) published in May 1994. Although the research leading to the publication of these two texts was conducted during the chronological time frame this chapter is concerned with, I have elected to evaluate their contribution in the following chapter which deals primarily with the discourses emerging after the first free elections. Both texts serve to introduce ANC policy in a post-apartheid era and therefore serve as a useful opening to the white papers and education discourses after the 1994 elections. They also provide an essential contrast to how those development subsequently evolved. This chapter will however provide a broad introduction to ANC policy leading up to A Policy Framework for Education and Training.

In terms of chronology, the National Party announced the ERS project in May 1990 as its contribution to discourses on restructuring education in South Africa. Soon afterwards, in December 1990, the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) commissioned the NEPI policy investigation project with the intention of

“[interrogating] policy options in all areas of education within a value framework derived from the ideals of the broad democratic movement” (NEPI 1992: v).

Selected texts have been chosen for review from the NEPI research exercise. The reports deemed most relevant to adult literacy concerns are respectively entitled, Adult Basic Education, Adult Education, Human Resource Development and the Framework Report and Final Report Summaries. Other texts produced by NEPI are also considered. It will be seen too that COSATU's proposals for adult basic education recurred through all three of these reports and, as will be seen more clearly in the section concerned with the NTSI, these had a significant impact on ANC policy and, consequently, on policy developments taking place after the first elections. This chapter therefore closely examines COSATU proposals for adult basic education as presented to the NEPI commission.

In addition to the formal education policy work being carried out at this time, this chapter also looks to non-education policy research that will nevertheless contribute towards a deeper understanding of the trends influencing the education policy process. In particular, the relevant section of the chapter will consider the emerging macroeconomic debates articulated by the Macro-economic Research Group (MERG) in the understanding that these are policy discourses that will naturally impact on labour (and consequently adult education) concerns.

Education Renewal Strategy (1992)

There is little doubt that the introduction of negotiations in South Africa threatened National Party status. Much of the National Party's activity during this time reflects the strategic thinking of a government alarmed by impending political change and driven to preserve the interests of the minority white population. The formal start of the process

of political reform began in December 1991 with the beginning of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), a forum for multi-party talks and negotiations. CODESA signals the National Party's movement away from a strong segregationist stance towards an attempt to gain wider support for the party. As O'Meara writes, "The NP's future lay in alliance with people who shared its values, not necessarily a white skin" (1996: 408). In keeping with this, the ERS document stands as a careful presentation of National Party 'values' with respect to education set against the backdrop of a highly critical audience.

Winning support from the hitherto oppressed back majority involved a two-pronged strategic approach by the National Party. On the one hand, the party had to appear to be genuinely reformed and in favour of a democratic South Africa – this is where documents like the ERS have a vital role to play. The second part of National Party strategy was a more calculated attempt by certain members of the party to destabilise the ANC using violent tactics. This gave rise to the common feeling at the time that a secret 'Third Force' existed in the security forces to incite trouble in the urban townships.²¹² The National Party's direct involvement in Third Force tactics stands as a significant qualification of the type of equity rhetoric presented in documents like the ERS.

The National Party's destabilising tactics through the use of violence and intimidation eventually led to the breakdown of negotiations between the National Party and the

²¹² The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, set up after the 1994 general elections, soon uncovered evidence of the actual existence of a Third Force. Evidence revealed that in 1986/87 a secret sub-committee of the State Security Council facilitated the training of 200 Inkatha loyalists in the Caprivi Strip. Dubbed the 'Caprivi 200', they were trained in counter-insurgency and guerrilla warfare. The government's intention was to use the Caprivi 200 to curtail the then growing popularity of the United Democratic Front and as an opposition to the ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe (see *Mail and Guardian* 1995a and 1995b).

ANC. After the Boiphatong massacre of 43 ANC supporters by hostel dwellers on the 17 June 1992, and after the death of a further 50 ANC supporters at the hands of Ciskei soldiers at Bisho, the ANC walked out on negotiations and CODESA collapsed. These two cruelly violent incidents were to be the final straw for ANC supporters who were still enraged by the assassination of the Communist Party's secretary-general Chris Hani. Without Hani (who was commonly believed to be one of the few people able to contain the rage of black youth and militants) the massacres forced the ANC to publicly acknowledge the tensions in South African society or risk the start of a civil war. Mandela recalls in his autobiography that at a rally following the Boiphatong massacre he saw placards saying 'Mandela, give us guns' and 'Victory through battle, not talk' (Mandela 1994: 596).

The result of the ANC walkout was two-fold. Propelled by a need to give the public an outlet for their anger at the violence, the ANC initiated a three month plan of 'rolling mass action' which culminated in a mass general strike on the 3rd and 4th of August 1992. In the face of such a clear demonstration of outrage and of 'power from the streets' the National Party conceded to Joe Slovo's 'sunset clause' in the negotiation procedures. The clause provided for "a period of compulsory power-sharing in the form of the [Government of National Unity] GNU" and a "willingness to establish (during negotiations) a set of Constitutional Principles that could not be violated by the final Constitution" (Marais 1998: 87).²¹³ Finally, in late September 1992, the National Party signed a 'Record of Understanding' with the ANC and the negotiation process started again.

²¹³ The sunset clause also guaranteed civil servants their posts for five years which meant that the responsibility for implementing policy would depend on staff who had previously carried out the work of the apartheid regime (Unterhalter and Young 1995: 13).

It was this volatile period of violence, tension and negotiation that provided the backdrop for the ERS process – a time when ANC and National Party tensions were played out in plain view of the majority of the population thus creating confusion, anger and suspicion. Started in 1990, the final ERS document was published in November 1992, two months after the Record of Understanding was signed between the ANC and the National Party. The strategic manoeuvring of the National Party during this period is reflected in the primary themes of equity, growth and literacy used to analyse the text.

Literacy Discourses in the ERS Report

In spite of the overwhelming size of the literacy issue for many, early drafts of the ERS document failed to adequately deal with the question of adult. It was only after the third phase of the project (collecting responses from various organisations and individuals) that the ERS project realised that adult education needed to be focused on:

Career development and guidance, education of children with special education needs, Adult Basic Education and community colleges which were not sufficiently addressed in the *Discussion Document*, were highlighted by a large number of respondents and included in the ERS (DNE 1992: iv).

The lack of attention paid to adult education issues in particular is a striking omission on the part of the state. Especially when one considers that government policy initiatives leading up to the ERS strongly endorsed the need for adult literacy classes. The NTS report pointed out in no uncertain terms that “the level of literacy (of the economically active section of the population) – that is, adult literacy – is an immediate threat to the success of a National Training Strategy and thereby deemed [...] immediately important in the short term” (HSRC/NTB 1991: 238). And the ERS document was suggested as one means of dealing with problems such as these – it is referred to in the NTS report as a future project which would possibly provide the

means of dealing with problems in formal and non-formal education.²¹⁴ It is generally understood that the ERS project was meant to accompany and develop on principles put forward by the NTS, but a changed political environment obviously introduced new priorities.

In a sense the insufficient attention paid to adult education issues is partially indicative of the nature of the ERS process. The ERS venture, in its approach to education and training concerns, follows a typical state trajectory that was established with the trilogy of reports written in the 1980s. For a start, it adopts a strongly technicist approach to education solutions in South Africa. It also uses growth discourses as the means to direct, inform and justify proposals (both these points will become more apparent later in the chapter on the section on growth discourses in the ERS document). And just as the state had a strong and determined affiliation with the policy processes during the 1980s, so the state maintained a firm role in the ERS.

The dominant state presence is especially highlighted by the fact that opposition groups were excluded from participating in the process up until the third phase where people were invited to submit comments on the findings of the group.²¹⁵ This perhaps provides one insight into why there was an inadequate treatment of adult education discourses in the discussion documents. Literacy discourses assumed a role of minor

²¹⁴ The role of the ERS within the NTS was mentioned in the previous chapter on page 192.

²¹⁵ Excluding opposition groups from decision-making processes was a typical feature of policy discourse under the apartheid system. The NTS document departs from the overtly racist implications of this tendency in that it introduces a different 'non-apartheid' rationale for excluding political groups from future training strategies. The document maintains that the market exists independently of socio-political interests and therefore should be allowed to function independently of political differences (this is briefly addressed in chapter three, see page 193). It is unclear at this point whether or not the National Party's isolated attempt to reform education through the ERS is primarily a continuation of apartheid separatist ideology or whether it is intended to 'protect the market' by minimising the tensions of an inclusive process. Irrespective of this, both motivations serve to maintain white privilege, which, as this chapter subsequently argues, is the National Party's ultimate aim.

importance in comparison to the other concerns and interests put forward by the National Party thus reinforcing the awareness that literacy discourses up until now had remained the priority of NGOs rather than the state. The ERS document can especially be seen as a 'National Party' document – that is, the 'oppressor's' document – in that in the third stage of the ERS process, where interested parties were invited to comment on the proposals put forward in the draft documents, most of the alternative organisations chose not to respond.²¹⁶

Two reasons have been suggested for the course of non-responsiveness. On the one hand, opposition groups reasonably “argued [that] it was pointless to comment on a project which they had not been included in from the outset” (Sayed 1995: 20). On a more strategic level, many felt that a response to the document would empower the state to work against their best interests: “The point has often been made that any formal or extended response to the ERS would allow the state to anticipate and incorporate whatever is said by democratic forces – for this reason, many have desisted from making such a statement” (Bennell *et al.* 1992: 1). Bennell *et al.*'s interpretation is validated by the fact that the ERS process was dominated by what has been described as a “policy elite” of mainly “Afrikaans-speaking educational officials, teacher-representatives²¹⁷, and academics” representing the National Party's DNE (Orkin *et al.*

²¹⁶ In the previous chapter I discussed how the existence of alternative discourses within the literacy field served to shape and influence official policy discourses irrespective of whether or not they were officially included in policy processes. In this case, the wilful decision to not participate in official discourses indicates a sense that the feel for the game governing policy discourses has considerably altered. In terms of the Bourdieuan conceptual framework, the implication is that ERS discourses do not have the same value within the altered field as they did in the previous decade – that is, that the capital they offer and compete for is no longer sought after, and thereby no longer has the same influence within the field. In this case there is little benefit to be gained by participating in their methods of 'playing the game'.

²¹⁷ Significantly, the teacher-representatives did not include the non-racially constituted South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) who were only officially recognised by the DNE in late 1992.

1997: 469). Those involved in the ERS process have been described as being in “substantial consensus among themselves in seeking incremental changes in response to political pressures (such as unrest among students, and impending change of government)” (ibid.). The stance adopted by the opposition groups hints at the idea that they hoped that the state would be forced to reveal itself for what it was and face the consequences of its policies later in a more democratic social context.

Significantly, the ERS document makes light of the absence of input from opposition groups and in fact takes pains to suggest that the ERS process was wide-ranging, representative and ‘democratic’ in spite of it. The ERS project firstly makes the claim that “The ERS is the result of a co-operative effort in which all interested parties in South Africa were invited to participate” – a statement which deliberately and problematically stresses inclusivity (DNE 1992a: 5). It also pointedly notes that the “HSRC classified and structured the comments contained in more than 200 submissions [...] and submitted them to an extended integrating committee including experts from the self-governing territories and the independent states” (DNE 1992: iii). Furthermore, the question and answer booklet accompanying the main text took pains to point out that (despite the absences of opposition groups) “the personal affiliations of those who were involved [...] meant that the perspectives and standpoints of groups within the alternative structures were nevertheless taken into account” (DNE 1992a: 20). The impression generated by these comments led some sectors of the opposition to remark that the ERS represented the state’s attempt to “aggressively [market] its new image as peacemaker” (Bennell *et al.* 1992: 3).

The introduction and eventual treatment of literacy discourses in the final ERS document contains only a minor sense of continuity with the approach taken to adult

education in the preceding Skills and NTS report with respect to use of language.²¹⁸ To a very small degree, the ERS document continues in a similar vein by using language that at times distinguishes between various forms of adult education. For example, the 'Question and Answers' booklet written to accompany the main text comments that, "The qualification structure should also make provision for Adult Basic Education and literacy instruction" (DNE 1992a: 9). Like the NTS report, which at one point carefully defined literacy in terms of "basic and job literacy", the ERS document suggests a distinction between 'literacy' and 'Adult Basic Education' (HSRC/NTB 1991: 42).

However, unlike the NTS document, the ERS report fails to strive to maintain the impression of holism in adult education throughout the text. For example, in chapter three of the report (which deals with Distance Education and Training) the document uses language which quite firmly restricts the meaning of the word 'literacy' to a single focused purpose in that the report notes that "not all education departments are involved to the same extent in the provision of literacy training" (DNE 1992: 34). The term used here, 'literacy training', goes back as far as the Wiehahn commission (see page 145). In fact, adult literacy is referred to throughout the document in various forms of terminology used interchangeably. It is approached in the context of terms such as, 'adult education', 'Adult Basic Education', 'Adult Basic Education and literacy instruction', 'basic education', 'literacy training' and 'literacy education'. None of the careful thought evident in the NTS report's differentiation between 'job' and 'basic' literacy is evident in the ERS report's approach. The unfocused manner in which adult literacy is dealt with, coupled with its late inclusion in the report suggests that literacy, or Adult Basic Education, is not a carefully considered element of the ERS project.

²¹⁸ This was discussed in detail in the previous chapter, see page 184.

This is supported by the fact that the central state, throughout the report, reveals an intention to withdraw from an immediate involvement with literacy provision. In endorsing the formation of a devolved education system with a central authority and regionally based departments of education, literacy provision thus becomes the responsibility of regional departments rather than the central state. This proposition envisages that regional departments will act in accordance with a “principle of maximum functionally justifiable devolution of decision-making power to the community or individual institution” (Standpoint 2.3: *ibid.*:23). In other words, the extent to which literacy provision takes place within the formal system will be dependent on the extent to which the community asks for it, a point made clear in the report: “regional education departments, because of the composition of their learner population [...] will be increasingly involved in the provision of programmes to combat illiteracy” (*ibid.*: 34).

The reference to the particular ‘composition of [a] learner population’ anticipates that in certain areas where literacy is considered important to the community, provision will be a priority. In a racially segregated South Africa, that translates into greater involvement in literacy provision in predominantly black regions of the country. This approach to literacy has enormous implications for equity discourses in that it risks excluding those (irrespective of their needs and rights) who live in areas where literacy is not deemed an immediate priority for the majority. It also suggests that the perceptions of ‘environmental deprivation’ and particular ‘realities’ still prevail.²¹⁹

In addition to devolved responsibility, the state proposes distance education as a further means of tackling adult literacy concerns in the country, “especially those [programmes]

²¹⁹ These are concepts that originated within the de Lange Investigation. They are addressed in the previous chapter on pages 171 and 182.

presented by means of the radio together with printed texts or even by means of TV” (ibid.: 33). The report suggests that “such an initiative will [...] constitute the means for providing Adult Basic Education to those adults who have not completed basic schooling” (ibid.: ix). With respect to this, “employer groups” and “community organisations” are identified as two potential key role-players in this form of provision. In fact, Standpoint 4.3 clearly states that “the primary role players in basic education (literacy programmes) of adults should be employer groups (public and private) and community or service organisations” (ibid.: 34).

These approaches mean that the state’s role in adult literacy education is minimal:

The greatest contribution that the State can probably make in regard to the elimination of illiteracy is the establishment of compulsory education up to a level that will ensure that learners leave school as literate individuals (ibid.: 34).

In reality, the most direct involvement that the state takes with respect to *adult* literacy concerns rests with its suggestion for the development of a “nationally acknowledged criteria for minimum literacy skills”, which the report goes on to say will be determined by the establishment of a “national certification of vocational training [my emphasis]” (ibid.:35 and 28). The criteria for literacy skills will be decided after “necessary consultation with the interested parties” (ibid.: 29). The report makes it clear that the expression ‘interested parties’ refers primarily to “the levels of literacy required by the employer sector” (ibid.: 27). The state’s interest in adult literacy is therefore strongly framed by vocational requirements: the “national recognition of vocational training qualifications by means of a qualification structure will lead to the expansion of training opportunities”(DNE 1992a: 9). Given the frequently cited need for improved skills in the HSRC/NTB reports (considered in the previous chapter), literacy, as a *skill*, is implicitly restricted to a human capital concept. And if we consider the large number of students who boycotted schools during the second half of the 1980s, this suggests that

the only experience that many adults would have of literacy (under ERS recommendations) would be of it as a technical skill strictly defined by market needs.

A human capital view of literacy is compounded by the ERS's introduction of decentralisation and devolved regional decision-making discourses. In this instance, the link between literacy and work is assumed and not critically challenged. Literacy education is viewed as an employer investment and the labour market is viewed as neutral and impartial (Blackmore 1992). Just as earlier National Party documents approached literacy issues with scant regard for research that challenged these precepts, so the ERS in many respects represents a continuation of the trajectory of education discourses during the 1980s that were informed by 'New Right' policies. The National Party has yet to engage with the concept of adult literacy as a *social* practice, and is especially reluctant to engage with it in the South African social context.²²⁰ A human capital consideration of the adult literacy skill makes few considered allowances for the needs that are identified by many working in the field of literacy. For example, for those communities that choose to acquire literacy skills in order to read the Bible (Respondent 2; Respondent 5), or for those who associate it with the ability to better educate their children (Respondent 19). Nevertheless, the turbulent political climate of the early 1990s imposed a need for the National Party to be publicly seen to be equitable. The next section will show however, that the National Party's interpretation of 'equity' has an uneasy relationship with equity principles that are intended to eliminate inequality in South Africa.

²²⁰ The concept of literacy as a social practice was discussed in considerable detail in chapter one (see page 36).

Addressing equity: the ERS, decentralisation, and human rights

The state's withdrawal from a direct involvement in adult literacy provision directly influences equity issues. On a superficial level the National Party's proposal for decentralisation and greater community and parental involvement in education seems to embrace equity in that individuals are given a more participatory role in the education system in the form of "control through consensus" (Bennell *et al.* 1992: 10). Similarly, Sayed points out that an "analysis of the ERS document suggests that its notion of representative democracy revolves around the idea of individual freedom [which is] expressed as parental control" (1995: 162). Decentralisation in this context therefore serves to represent increased provision for broader social involvement in education. However, it is worth noting that, in a country as inequitable as South Africa, decentralisation discourses can also be used to maintain the status quo: Bennell *et al.* argue that "the right wants decentralisation in order to entrench privilege and establish control" (1992: 10). It is a perception of the National Party that is supported by the ERS document in spite of the equity rhetoric that accompanies proposals for decentralisation.

The most illuminating suggestion of equity as empty rhetoric is that equity is couched within a 'trickle-down' philosophy where the benefits of a few people having access to improved education will, in the long run, benefit the entire country. With respect to this the report states that,

the maintenance of existing high academic standards [...] in some sectors will benefit the whole community in the long run because standards in education are derived from the best that is being achieved in a community (DNE 1992: 12).

The report goes on to firmly reiterate that structural changes in the education system will have to take place "without in any way compromising existing high standards [my emphasis]" (ibid.). It is clear though that existing/current high standards are preserved in a continuum of privilege with the least privileged sectors of society having the lowest

standards. 'Individual freedom', in areas already racially segregated by the apartheid system, therefore translates into the ability for minority groups to 'control' education in their areas without the direct involvement of a future majority elected government that might not be as sympathetically disposed towards white communities as the apartheid state was. Equity in this context translates into according black communities the same degree of control over the system in their regions irrespective of whether those communities are able to support the system as effectively as their wealthier white peers.

Consequently, Bennell *et al* are moved to point out that "a certain 'learned helplessness' has had the effect of robbing individuals and communities of initiative" (1992: 3). The ERS document's concept of equity is fundamentally undermined by its failure to convincingly recognise and address the fact that, unlike affluent white areas, equity in terms of 'parental control' over the education system is constrained in black communities by the reality that those communities also have to deal with basic survival challenges as a result of a calculated legacy of oppression. This in turn suggests that the single decentralised system envisaged by the National Party will in reality translate into two class-based systems with the system for poorer communities being inferior to that of richer communities.²²¹

There is little evidence in the ERS document of social democratic discourses aimed at addressing inequity through redress and redistribution. The new 'equitable' National Party side-steps accountability by not acknowledging and challenging its own crucial

²²¹ This supports Kallaway's analysis during the 1980s that a 'New Right' approach does create a dual system, one inferior to the other. To some extent this concern is later actualised in events arising out of the National Party subsequently winning control over the Western Cape province after the 1994 general elections. The resulting approach to education policy in this region is described as being one where the "social democratic discourse of access and redistribution embodied in the WPET [White Paper on Education and Training] was silenced, in favour of a discourse privileging the rights of the individual, regulated by the market" (Krusz 1997: 104).

role in establishing the inequitable status quo – the existing system is not criticised with a stated awareness of the oppressive and discriminatory practices that upheld it. Instead, the document glibly argues that the system should be changed

[not because] the education system attempts to accommodate diversity in society, but rather because an unacceptable and educationally irrelevant basis for diversity, namely race, has been used in providing education instead of different basis arising naturally from society itself (DNE 1992: 15).

The statement leaves the impression that the greatest criticism that the state feels able to level at a racially biased system is that race is ‘educationally irrelevant’ as opposed to being discriminatory, oppressive and completely unacceptable. This seeming refusal on the part of the National Party to be held accountable for the long term consequences of apartheid filters through much of the document.

For example, the report talks about “the difficulty of establishing a sound learning culture and study discipline” (ibid.: 7). It goes on to list several examples which contribute to the lack of a sound learning culture including “the presence of so-called ‘over-age’ learners in classrooms”, poorly qualified teachers and the fact that “disturbances and disruptions [take place] in schools” in which teachers are accorded with playing an “initiating role” (ibid.: 5, 7 and 10). The ERS document goes on to infer that some community problems can be resolved by the community itself: “communities should co-operate with the education authorities to ensure that discipline is re-established in schools where necessary” (ibid.: 11).

By not recognising that the problems it cites are inextricably related to apartheid policies which resulted in an inferior education system, migrant labour and political violence, the National Party implicitly holds the black community responsible for its own problems thus introducing a new twist to the environmental deprivation argument made during the de Lange commission. In this instance, the so-called socio-economic ‘realities’ of environmental deprivation are amplified through the report’s impression that those

deprivations are coupled with a wilful attempt on the part of certain communities to undermine their own opportunities.

Decentralisation discourses are linked to broader equity discourse in the ERS report. However, rather than engaging with equity within the localised context of existing South African problems (which places the National Party in a somewhat compromising position), the ERS report turns instead to the meta-narratives of human rights. It argues that “provision will have to be made for the accommodation of diversity based on internationally recognised and educationally relevant basic human rights” (ibid.: 17).

It is important to note, nonetheless, that the principles that frame the ERS’s endorsement of human rights are those that originally derived from the de Lange investigation in 1984 but which were later radically curtailed by the government in the National Policy for General Education Affairs Act, 1984 (Act 76 of 1984). The new limited concept of human rights brought them in line with the apartheid system’s constitutional framework:

(a)ll decisions taken in terms of the recommendations in the [de Lange] report will have to take due account of, and fit in with, the constitutional framework within which they are to be implemented (Government Interim Memorandum quoted in van Zyl, C 1991: 11).

The result was a sloughing off of some of the more equitable and all-encompassing principles held in the original report. In other words, the ERS document’s stance on human rights is bound by *qualified* equity principles – principles that do not challenge old apartheid values. A comparison of the first two principles reflects the extent to which this government is in favour of modified human rights:

Principle 1 of the HSRC stipulates that equal opportunities for education which extends to “every inhabitant, irrespective of race, colour, creed or sex, shall be the purposeful endeavour of the state” The ERS document privileges the above for “all learners” rather than every inhabitant (which would included adult learners and especially those that boycotted schools during the late 1980s), and states that these

opportunities “should be available.” There is no mention of the state’s role with respect to this.

Principle 2 in the de Lange report calls for an uncurtailed “positive recognition of what is common as well as what is diverse” in the South African society. The modified form adopted by the ERS instead proposes that “there should be a balance between commonality and diversity”. The ERS approach therefore implies that equity can be, and should be, moderated and accordingly ‘rationed’ (van Zyl, 1991: 27 and DNE 1992: 15).

Nevertheless, in spite of editing out some of the more inclusive elements of the de Lange principles, the ERS document makes claims for the acknowledgement of *internationally* recognised basic human rights – a suggestion that at face value, is seemingly in favour of broad based equity for everyone. In taking this approach, the ERS recalls the NTS shift towards a ‘global’ interpretation of culture that provides the document with the means of neutralising the content of its recommendations by isolating them from the immediate South African local context.²²²

However, the ERS’s modified approach to human rights compromises some of the more powerful tenets of Article 26 from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For example, the ERS’s affirmation of basic human rights that are deemed “educationally relevant” introduces a proviso that hints at a subjective interpretation of ‘human rights’, possibly based on a predetermined vision of education or, more dangerously, on value judgements. This compromises Article 26’s position which simply and clearly states that “Everyone has the right to education” (in Robertson 1991: 187).

Furthermore, the ERS document principally endorses a “balance” of commonality and diversity within the South African society rather than an unfettered acknowledgement that *all* commonality and diversity should be positively recognised. This suggests that

²²² A similar approach was adopted in the NTS report (see page 195 of the preceding chapter), where I suggested that different cultures were subsumed within the concept of a ‘global economic culture’ which transformed civilians into ‘citizens of the world’.

the National Party considers the latter approach as one that might infringe on the rights of some communities which in turn implies that the party is driven to maintain and protect the privileges already held by the white community. An all-encompassing recognition of human rights might privilege the rights of the majority over the rights of the minority. In keeping with this perception, Badat comments that “the changes that occurred [as a result of the ERS] had little effect on addressing the profound structural inequalities that conditioned educational outcomes” (1997: 11). All in all, the ERS’s commitment to equality is undermined by the priority given to other concerns in the report such as decentralisation discourses and growth concerns. The National Party’s commitment to equity is therefore unconvincing.

Facing up to ‘reality’: growth discourses in the ERS Report

The entrenchment of equity discourses in the ERS document represents the new challenge facing the National Party; namely, the struggle to retain power in the face of an overwhelming majority of people who have in the past opposed the party for its discriminatory practices.²²³ O’Meara comments that the National Party, unable “to protect white privilege through ‘own affairs’ and group rights [...] was now summed up in two words: ‘standards’ and ‘order’ (1996: 408). This approach meant that the National Party concentrated its efforts on wooing the private sector and in upholding policies that would feature favourably with wealthier communities and that might appeal to an emerging black middle-class. In some respects it is an approach which harkens back to the Urban Foundation’s approach in the early part of the previous decade (see page 150).

²²³ The concerted attempt to include equity discourses can be described, in Bourdieuan terms, as the National Party’s attempt to regain a ‘feel for the game’ in terms of increased competition within the education market. It also reflects the party’s awareness that ‘equity’ would be a highly valued form of capital within this field at this time.

The ERS represents a continued trend in National Party policy-making through its highly technicist tone which serves to convey an impression of an objective and rational approach to education reform in the new South Africa. In this regard it is significant, particularly so in the tumultuous political climate of the time, that the report makes a considerable effort to stress how impartial the research process was by describing the report as “a technical document based on sound research” (DNE 1992a: 5). This is emphasised again in a press briefing about the research when Dr. Garbers,²²⁴ the chairperson of the project, stated that “the production of the document was a technical exercise, that he was a technical man and it therefore did not contain any particular values or goals [my emphasis]” (quoted in Sayed 1995: 26). (An ironic statement given the report’s endorsement of international human rights values). Impartiality and objective scientific methods are upheld in the report’s declaration that a variety of problems and difficulties had been considered using the “extensive and sophisticated information systems developed by the DNE” which enabled researchers to carry out regular “analyses of the condition of the education system” (DNE 1992: 2).

The stress on objective scientific methods lends weight to the tone of ‘realism’ that underscores the report – especially with respect to budgetary constraints. The proposals put forward by the ERS report highlight the financial challenges that face the government in terms of funding an education system that would meet the expectations of the majority of South Africans. The report therefore establishes a set of immediate priorities, with the state taking on a lesser role in a decentralised formal system and removing itself from a direct role in adult literacy: “it is [...] clear that the financial implications of [establishing compulsory education for school children] would to a great

²²⁴ It is worth recalling that Dr. Garbers’s former position prior to heading the ERS was to serve as the head of the HSRC, from 1979 - 1989. For more information pertaining to his position there, refer back to Footnote 178 on page 164.

extent limit its ability to participate in the provision of literacy training to adults” (ibid.: 34).

Financial challenges are then woven back into the earlier market-orientated discourses that dominated the trilogy of reports during the 1980s: the ERS report argues that “In view of South Africa’s limited resources for the funding of education, it is important that study programmes [...] should be more closely matched to our personpower needs” – the shift in language here from ‘manpower’ to ‘personpower’ being one small ‘politically correct’ indication of the ERS’s avowed interest in equity (ibid.: 58). The ‘personpower needs’ focus is supported in the four guiding aims for curriculum development proposed by the ERS. These are said to relate to

The development of the character of the learners.

The development of the inherent potential of the learners.

The preparation of learners for occupational competence and economic independence.

The education of learners towards responsible and useful citizenship (DNE 1992: 48-49).

These aims, coupled with the report’s suggestion that education should be determined too by the “need for inculcating broad and generally accepted values and attitudes in learners”, aligns the ERS with earlier documents which used similar language in terms of education’s primary role being seen to relate to non-formal education and skills development. And in this context, literacy’s social role is again restricted to the workplace.

Budgetary constraints coupled with low literacy levels in the country provide the state with the opportunity to propose a ‘realistic’ approach to adult literacy that is in keeping with on-going growth concerns. The suggestion that employer groups and community organisations should be primary players in literacy provision implicitly gives adult literacy classes a predominantly vocational orientation. This is because employer

organisations are more likely to have access to the necessary funding than are community organisations. Furthermore, this overall endorsement of literacy provision through alternative organisations stands as one of the government's stated attempts to "eliminate backlogs in education" (DNE 1992a: 7). In other words, proposals for what are likely to be primarily vocationally orientated literacy classes are couched within a more generalised aim to achieve equity in South Africa making vocational education an important part of the state's interpretation of redress.

But tied to this approach is the implicit realisation on the part of the researchers that redress in this guise might not be acceptable to a population that has undergone decades of oppression and now expects change. The report therefore goes on to make the appeal that "realism, determination and good sense will have to prevail" in the course of reform (DNE 1992: 8). The general impression conveyed is that of a rallying call to a unified South African community to 'pull together' to make the 'best of a bad situation'. Presumably the appeal for 'good sense' is directed at those who stand to lose the most by adjusting their 'unreal' expectations in terms of the rational scientific reality put forward by the National Party – namely, the disadvantaged black majority. The role of technical and pseudo-scientific methods therefore serves as a useful tool to 'rationally' dissuade the majority of people from having what was previously described in the de Lange report as "unrealistic expectations of education" (HSRC 1981: 71). The measure of calm, level headed rationalism in the ERS report also appeals to the perception that a changing global economic order is uncontrolled and something that everyone has to deal with irrespective of individual needs and desires. In Bauman's words:

[Globalisation] refers primarily to the global *effects*, notoriously unintended and unanticipated, rather than to global *initiatives* and *undertakings*" [...] 'Globalization' is not about what we all, or at least the most resourceful and enterprising among us, wish or hope *to do*'. It is about *what is happening to us?* (Bauman 1998: 60).

A generous interpretation of the ERS's approach to basic education might argue that the solution posed by the National Party is the only logical option that South Africa has.

A critical view however, would recognise that the proposal strives to sustain white privilege (in terms of upholding existing standards) while being prepared to compromise on equity principles that would adversely affect only the most disadvantaged among the black majority. A critical analysis would also recognise that the private sector is being attributed with a greater role in education policymaking and in education provision, the implication being that education is increasingly being informed by market-oriented needs rather than equity or basic human rights.

The fact that the ERS process “bypassed the progressive education sector, but included the business community” clearly reveals that growth concerns still featured heavily in the determination of National Party education discourses (Orkin *et al.* 1997: 452). The role of the private sector in education provision is explicitly stated in the ERS booklet accompanying the main text:

The ERS takes the view that education is the responsibility of society as a whole and that the private sector, as in other countries, can play a more significant role in the provision of education. The standpoints set out in the ERS open up the system of education provision so that the private sector, in a responsible manner, can play a greater role in this regard. This applies to all facets of the system [...] The largest role for the private sector is, however, envisaged as being the provision of vocational training outside the formal school structures, but in partnership with formal education (DNE 1992a: 8).

It is therefore quite clear that adult literacy provision is to be predominantly framed by vocational requirements.

Other trends favouring a market-oriented approach to education are carried through from the 1980s into the ERS document as well. For example, the continued emphasis on the need for students to begin to value vocational courses – the report notes that “There is an urgent need for more learners to follow vocationally-orientated or vocational study programmes” in schools (DNE 1992: 5). The endorsement of vocational courses appears in a section largely devoted to a discussion – or what is presented as an impartial scientific ‘analysis’ – of low achievement results in DET

schools. The impression conveyed therefore is that black students in particular, with the supporting evidence of their low academic achievement results, should be oriented towards vocational courses.

This approach is emphasised by the recommended removal of academic support and bridging programmes from universities and locating them in community and technical colleges – supposedly, to help remove technical colleges of “their image of being predominantly trade schools” (ibid.: 60). This is a recommendation that is again reminiscent of earlier documents and especially in relation to the influence of British New Vocationalism on them.²²⁵ Again, using language very similar to earlier reports, the ERS states that access to universities should be reserved for specific people: “it is imperative that only students who have a realistic chance of completing their studies successfully should be admitted to these institutions [universities]” (ibid.). Given that DET results tended to be vastly inferior to the other education systems, it is far to say that this statement limited the opportunity for DET students to attend universities and instead oriented them towards technical colleges.

The overall sense of the report is that education in general would continue to be racially driven, albeit along the lines of class rather than an overtly racist system. Nevertheless, the effects would still be predominantly racial, with black students being strongly guided towards a technical vocation while academic university courses would be reserved for the wealthy. Bennell *et al.* conclude that the “intention of the ERS is to move away from the present mass education model of twelve years of mainly publicly funded general education for all races to one that limits access to secondary education” (1992: 6).

²²⁵ The HSRC/NTB reports engagement with this was discussed in the previous chapter on page 190. Discussions of New Vocational influences on the de Lange report appear in the same chapter on pages 173 and 183.

National Education Policy Investigation (1992)

NEPI represents the first openly democratic and representative attempt to investigate education policy in South Africa. Unlike the ERS process, the NEPI objective was to “interrogate policy options in all areas of education within a value framework derived from the ideals of the broad democratic movement” (NEPI 1993: vii). The NECC initiated the NEPI process through the Educational Policy Units (EPUs)²²⁶ that had been established under their auspices in the late 1980s in anticipation of policy research needs and in recognition of the fact that suitable forums did not exist. Apart from the need to foreground alternative policy options, Wolpe and Unterhalter argue that the NEPI process also faced pressures related to the expectations that black South Africans had for education and training in the new South Africa. In other words, NEPI had some obligations towards considering and addressing the demands of the majority of the people (1990: 8).

The initial decision to initiate a policy investigation came after the government approached the NECC in 1990 for advice on where to allocate an additional R800 million for black education (ibid.: 48). Given this, the NEPI process can be seen as an alternative response to the government’s ERS project and as a sign of the need for the more progressive organisations to formally instate their views into the policy-making domain, and to move beyond “rhetoric and slogans” (Badat 1997: 22). The resulting investigative process spanned two years and involved approximately 300 participants drawn from various sectors of society. The NEPI contribution to education policy research materialised in the publication of twelve reports covering various areas of

²²⁶ These were initially based at University of Witwatersrand, University of Natal, Durban and the University of the Western Cape and were tasked with carrying out research into education in South Africa.

education, including those areas which had previously received very little attention from the government – one of them being Adult Basic Education.

Although initiated by the NECC, the NEPI process cannot be described as an immediate example of People's Education. In fact the researchers take pains to distance NEPI from the obvious connections between the NECC and the ANC. The Framework Report claims that NEPI does not “present an NECC position in education”, and given that the ANC assumed political leadership over the NECC after its 1990 unbanning, this statement also serves to implicitly distance NEPI from ANC policies too (ibid.: vii). Instead, the NEPI process is described as “an initiative of civil society, in that it arises out of the efforts of a sector of bodies in civil society to pursue their interests” (ibid.: 8). The clearest link between the NEPI process and the NECC lies in the close attention NEPI gives to issues relating to equity. In fact, like People's Education, the NEPI process is strongly underpinned by equity discourses.

In spite of all the attempts made by the NEPI team to initiate a democratic and representative investigation, the new co-operative methods of policy research still had to straddle existing South African social divisions – this time between ‘experts’ and ‘activists’. These are (respectively) white university-based people on the one hand and predominantly black community-based people on the other (Nzimande 1992: 162). Sayed consequently writes that

While the proponents of the NEPI project claim that it was a participatory research policy process [...] it is questionable whether it was in reality so.

Proponents of the NEPI project conflate formal structures of participation with the actual realities [...] the personal experiences of the writer and his informal discussions with ‘activists’ and other members of the NEPI project suggests that it was mainly white intellectuals who dominated the NEPI process (1995: 23).

In order to prevent the process from being paralysed by sometimes contradictory aims, Sayed goes on to say that separate working groups were established thus creating an

effective split between academics (or ‘experts’) and activists with each respectively involved in working on development and political functions (ibid.: 24).

The divide between ‘activists’ on the one hand, and ‘intellectuals’ on the other, calls attention to a different field that has, until this point, been embedded within the policy making structures that themselves are subsumed by the more powerful tensions of apartheid. Using the Bourdieuan conceptual framework, this emerging site of struggle relates to the competition taking place in what might be referred to as the ‘linguistic market’. In other words, a field which is shaped by various agents competing to claim the authority to ‘speak’, to be known as the legitimate voices of the ‘people’ and the new South Africa.

It can be argued that activist discourses present a unique example of this form of competition. On the one hand, they are vanguard discourses – carving a path into new ways of thinking, sometimes (as in the case of People’s Education) from a grassroots perspective (Deacon 1996: 234). On the other hand, posited as they are outside the broader field of power, the purveyors of these discourses may find it difficult to authoritatively represent themselves once access to the field of power has taken place. By this I mean that they ‘lack the feel for the game’, for the rules of exchange, of discourse, or of competition, that govern a particular field of power which, up until a certain point, they had been excluded from.²²⁷ In the end it is the agent who fully understands the rules of the game that acquires the position to control the field. Their

²²⁷ It is worth noting however that those agents who did have experience of policy research (a ‘feel for the game’) nevertheless found themselves operating in a new situation. Here, their old experience of policy research was bound to be reshaped by the new experience of engaging with people who had previously been excluded from similar policy oriented processes. Wolpe, for example, notes that “state educationists were not unpractised in the policy process *per se* but were locked into a policy debate which was narrowly circumscribed by the parameters of the apartheid order and by the exclusion of the democratic order from the debate” (1994: 6).

understanding may derive from many things: from their experience in similar negotiations, through credentials that formally legitimate their speech (for example, academic qualifications), or perhaps from a known reputation as an expert within the particular field.²²⁸

The relationship between academia and activist discourses is clear – something that Deacon points out:

in many cases these subjugated discourses were, perhaps unavoidably, “no sooner brought to light, accredited and put into circulation, then they were re-codified and re-colonised”.²²⁹ [For example] the oral traditions of diverse groups, written down and canonised as ‘people’s history’, have become a thriving academic trade, in the same way that the conceptual development of People’s Education has been monopolised. The landscape has been colonised by development projects of all sorts (Deacon 1996: 234).²³⁰

In the case of academic involvement with NEPI however, a more ‘global’ impact can be seen. Greenstein comments that

The intervention of dozens of academic ‘experts’ drawing on international experience and models in the design of policy, and the need to present a responsible image to domestic and international audiences, meant that the concerns brought into the process by the NECC and its affiliates seemed to have lost much of their relevance (Greenstein 1996: 4).

So in some sense the rules of engagement governing the field took place between individuals who were intimately familiar with People’s Education principles (albeit from

²²⁸ Greenstein points out too that in the broader South Africa social climate at this time, multiparty talks in the run-up to the first general elections shifted power from mass-based organisations to the ANC (1997: 3). This had a detrimental impact on the NECC.

²²⁹ Deacon is quoting Foucault. See Foucault, M. 1987 ‘The juridical apparatus’ in W.Connolly (Ed.) *Legitimacy and the State* Blackwell: London

²³⁰ Mangcu, writing for the *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, comments that “Black people have been excluded from [...] the ‘knowledge-ideas-complex’. It consists of interlocking, mutually supportive and impenetrable relationships among white intellectuals” (July 2 1999).

different perspectives), coupled with shifting priorities in the broader political domain, and combined too with the realisation that what was being said needed to carry weight with a large body of interested people who had a variety of needs. The NECC no longer principally addressed a homogenous audience with vested interests in NECC principles.²³¹

Apart from the forces of linguistic competition, Sayed's experience and subsequent remarks highlights a further tension in the NEPI process – and that is the potential divide between development and political concerns, or, in other words, the distinction between 'growth' and 'equity' principles.²³² As will be seen later in this section, this tension proves to be crucial to adult basic education concerns in terms of how it is dealt with (and not dealt with) in the final NEPI reports.

Despite distancing itself from the NECC and ANC involvements in education policy research, the NEPI team working on Adult Education and Adult Basic Education both credit a great deal of attention to the Congress of South African Trade Union's (COSATU) suggestions for education and training. COSATU's involvement infers that adult literacy issues will be a priority for two reasons. Firstly, in the course of their close involvement with People's Education during the late 1980s, COSATU upheld the principle of literacy and numeracy for all and did so in such a way that implicitly acknowledged literacy's function as a social practice. Second, and related to the first point, trade unionism in South Africa since the 1970s has been described as "social-

²³¹ Similar 'linguistic markets' operate in a variety of fields in South Africa, each of which in turn might have a structuring influence on the literacy field. This is something I will refer to again in the course of this chapter with respect to COSATU's involvement in the NTSI, and later in the next when I discuss engagements between the Ministries of Education and Labour.

²³² Yusef Sayed served as the convenor of the NEPI group working on the 'Governance and Administration' section of the project. He also co-wrote the resulting report with Peter Buckland, Jane Hofmeyer and David Johnson (NEPI 1992a).

movement unionism” – a phrase that recognises its dual focus on economic concerns *and* social and political issues (Webster 1988: 195). Both points nevertheless have to be balanced against COSATU's principle concern for workers' rights, a fact that Cyril Ramaphosa²³³ made clear when he noted in 1985 that COSATU would take an active role in national politics, but that such alliances must be on terms favourable to the working class (cited in Webster 1988: 192).

‘Adult literacy’ in the context of ABE

Of the twelve reports generated by NEPI, three are directly relevant to the central concerns of this thesis and they are Adult Basic Education (1992b), Adult Education (1993a) and Human Resources Development (1992c). All three teams working towards the production of these reports were asked the same question: “To what extent, and in what way, do the policy options under consideration give effect to the five NEPI principles?” (NEPI 1993: 12). The five principles referred to are those of non-racism, non-sexism, democracy, a unitary system and redress (ibid.: 51). The NEPI initiative therefore establishes itself as a process that is primarily driven by a framework of equity inspired principles, rather than as a venture that sees growth concerns as an automatic priority.

The nature and understanding of the term ‘adult literacy’ within the equitable framework of the NEPI process undergoes a fundamental shift which generates a more

²³³ Ramaphosa's own biography qualifies his statement. At the time of making this comment Ramaphosa was then the General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), a union that was started at his instigation (see also Footnote 244 later in this chapter on page 247). He was appointed to the position of Secretary General of the ANC in 1991 and in 1994 became the Chairperson of the new Constitutional Assembly. In 1996, Cyril Ramaphosa became known as a ‘pioneer of black business’ when he was elected to chair the National Empowerment Consortium (NEC) and was appointed Deputy Chairman of New Africa Investments Ltd (Nail). On the back of a poster representing the ‘black pioneers’ appeared the words “Battles are lost or won by generals, not by the rank and file” (Mail and Guardian 1996a). See also Murray 1996.

discerning form of adult literacy discourse in South African policy research. Unlike the ERS approach which interpreted adult literacy loosely and used literacy terminology interchangeably (thus displaying a lack of insight into the complexity of the term) the NEPI investigators first of all attempt to closely identify, locate and define adult literacy's location within the broader education system.

NEPI suggests that adult literacy is situated within the broad sector of education referred to as Adult Education (AE) which includes "vocational education and training, human resources development, and adult literacy and basic education" (1993a: 3). Clearly, adult literacy transcends the boundaries between all these sections of AE and presumably this is one reason why the NEPI strategy decided to formulate a separate working group for Adult Basic Education (ABE). Adult literacy is therefore located within the specific field of ABE, which itself is a sub-sector of AE: "Literacy learning is most usefully placed in the context of basic education for adults" (1992b: 3).

The NEPI report makes it explicit that the distinction between AE and ABE is not "for reasons of conceptual clarity" but rather because "the question of redress for the victims of apartheid education is most compelling in respect of literacy, numeracy, and basic education" (1993a: 4). Such differentiation accords ABE a specific responsibility in its future role in South African education. This understanding immediately suggests that any analysis of policy suggestions regarding ABE need to be strictly assessed in terms of how far they will go towards *redressing* apartheid's legacy along with other pedagogical and policy concerns.

It is adult literacy that the NEPI reports seem to attribute the most significant role to play in redress within the formal setting of ABE. The ABE report notes that "literacy in

itself does not promote cognitive advance, social mobility or progress,”²³⁴ going on to say that the “political task in literacy work is to address the complex variety of literacy needs evident in contemporary society” (1992b: 3). Recognition of this fact reveals that the researchers have an understanding of literacy as a social practice, as being meaningful within a social context rather than as an isolated technical tool. It is an approach to literacy that represents a radical departure from the concept of literacy commonly presented during the 1980s. In this sense literacy is ascribed a certain ideologically derived power in terms of achieving redress even if it does not intrinsically hold the promise of cognitive advance, social mobility or progress.²³⁵ The latter objective is considered possible only within a framework where the “concern is to develop an understanding of what constitutes a general basic education for adults” which can accordingly lead to further learning opportunities and includes adult literacy and basic education (*ibid.*).

The AE report suggests that an understanding of what constitutes a general basic education for adults in the 1990s is an issue that is increasingly complicated by technological advancements. They comment that in time the “ability to read, to do simple calculations, and to function minimally in society will be recognised as totally inadequate” (1993a: 30). Locating ABE within a broader technological context qualifies the meaning of the word ‘basic’ in Adult Basic Education. As Blackmore notes, writing in an Australian context, “Literacy and numeracy are now joined by computer literacy and communication skills as the key elements of vocational literacy” (1992: 369). So

²³⁴ It is perhaps ironic that the White Paper on Education and Training (WPET) published in 1995 nevertheless described the Adult Basic Education and Training sector of education as a force for “social participation and economic development” (DE 1995: 31).

²³⁵ The NEPI position on ABE therefore has similar principles to those expressed by the NECC with respect to People’s Education – that as well as illiteracy, ABE “eliminates [...] ignorance and the exploitation of one person by another” (NECC 1985: 250).

while South Africa is at this time supposedly moving towards social redress through ABE, the rest of the world has moved on and re-conceptualised ABE in accordance with an advancing and increasingly competitive global market.

This concern is picked up in the NEPI Human Resources Development (HRD) report as well in terms of labour's transition to a post-Fordist²³⁶ system of production:

Instead of repeating a simple task, workers in new automated enterprises have to be able to perform a wide range of both manual and mental tasks as part of a close-knit production team. They have to be able to 'think on their feet' in order to respond quickly to problems as they arise. Workers are therefore multi-skilled (both in a technical sense and socially, since they must be good team members), flexible, and have a broad, holistic understanding of the production process (1992c: 6).

Reading literacy within the ABE, AE and HRD reports suggests that the field of ABE in the new South Africa has a larger role to play than that of redress – the role implicitly prioritised in the ABE report. In other words, the distinction between AE and ABE is not as obvious as the investigation suggests, and in fact separating the two possibly serves to obscure the wider implications for ABE work.

It becomes clear in terms of the three reports that ABE in the new South Africa is seen to play two crucial roles in society: it needs to help achieve redress and it needs to help the labour market to make the transition to a post-Fordist economy. Understanding this has implications for future adult literacy provision too. If adult literacy is associated with a primarily social role and the ability to meet a 'variety of literacy needs' then the use of the term ABE implicitly recontextualises literacy and redefines it in accordance with evolving HRD concerns that argue for multi-skilling in a technical and social sense as well. And the HRD report notes that skill needs "have shifted away from Taylorist

²³⁶ The concept of post-Fordism was introduced in chapter two on page 123. See also Footnote 137 on page 123 for reference to Fordism.

conceptions of narrow competencies to an emphasis on more broadly defined general education qualities such as communication, problem-solving, computer literacy, and leadership skills” (ibid.). With the exception perhaps of computer literacy, all the education qualities outlined here have implications for future forms of literacy provision in a changed education system. The relationship between ABE and HRD is reinforced within the ABE report which states that the “nature of the ABE programme affects the training process” (1992b: 22). Furthermore the fact that ABE has already been defined as uniquely associated with redress in South Africa, the implication is that a South African post-Fordist approach, expressed in the HRD report, has a strong social element. This suggests that post-Fordist discourses in the broader NEPI context are more in keeping with the “totality of change” vision encapsulated in the British concept of New Times (Amin 1994: 4; *see also* McGrath 1996: 145).²³⁷

In fact, the NEPI attempt to separate ABE from the broader field of AE can be viewed as an effort to isolate and highlight redress concerns from the extensive AE framework which, by virtue of its diversity and complexity, threatens to subordinate equity concerns. This is a fear that can be traced to long before NEPI. For example, David Adler noted in 1986 that there was a danger that “the concept of alternative education [would be] hijacked by educational authorities and introduced in a bastardised form” (1986: 11). He went on to specifically note that “Basic education, together with lifelong education, literacy, and adult education, must be linked to changes in society, if they are to escape the charge of being mere rhetoric” (ibid.). Separating the two reports serves to highlight literacy’s role as redress but at the same time cannot avoid the undeniable tensions emanating from how the role of literacy and ABE is affected in a different

²³⁷ The New Times response to New Right approaches to education and training was discussed in greater detail in chapter one, see page 120.

context – for example, workplace training programmes. ABE thus becomes a site of conflicting interests and tensions between growth and equity principles which consequently suggests that future adult literacy provision will be informed by the dominant tension within ABE. This in turn has enormous implications for redress concerns.

Growth and Equity: a question of ‘trade-offs’?

The ABE report opens with the comment that

People who are marginalised or displaced are further disadvantaged by their inability to participate in the dominant forms of literacy. They are disadvantaged in job-seeking, they are sometimes unable to participate effectively in training or development programmes, they might be unable to provide the support for their own children’s learning and they might be unable to respond to the critical medical and environmental issues which pose direct threats to their existence [my emphasis] (1992b: 1).

The NEPI approach to ABE, AE and HRD thus poses the question of what the “dominant form of literacy” in a future South Africa will be? It is the driving question behind this thesis. The NEPI reports, in their stated aim to interrogate policy options rather than offer proposals, do not deal in sufficient detail with concerns of how a ‘dominant form of literacy’ within a national system might impact on other aims such as equity and redress.²³⁸

Nevertheless, the NEPI approach to dealing with ABE, and consequently adult literacy, attempts to formally conceptualise basic adult education in a way that was absent from previous attempts by the government to research education policy. And while the

²³⁸ In fact, one literacy practitioner expressed surprise at how quickly and uncritically many people with roots in NGO work during the 1980s had become so involved in process of developing the national system of the NQF. She suggested that this might have something to do with the fact that work during the 1980s was “bitty, small piece-work”. The idea of national provision along with the belief that redress and reconciliation would be incorporated into the system, brought great excitement and optimism (Respondent 2).

distinction between AE and ABE serves to potentially obscure future implications for ABE (as will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter) the language and education terminology appropriated is used consistently and with careful consideration. This in itself serves to foreground, clarify and formalise literacy discourses within the broader education movement. The NEPI reports also unequivocally establish AE as a site for redress in a way that generates expectations for the future role of ABE: they argue that “AE is in fact a crucial test case of the NEPI principles” (1993a: 53).

Unlike National Party policy, which consistently revealed a predilection towards prioritising growth concerns over equity concerns, the NEPI process strove to draw attention to the ‘trade-offs’ between the two thus foregrounding the growth versus equity dilemma as one of the biggest challenges facing future policy development:

It is in principle possible to increase both equity (defined as improved distribution of educational resources to disadvantaged communities), and efficiency (defined as maximising rates of return on education investments), but in practice, policy choice will involve some or other trade-off between them (NEPI 1993: 11).²³⁹

ABE under National Party rule is strongly criticised by NEPI researchers as being too vocationally oriented, particularly in the aftermath of the ERS. In that document vocational education is prioritised at the expense of equity in that the ERS proposes to offer “financial incentives to employers to undertake job training of workers” (1992b: 53). This proposition, as the ABE report points out, does not necessarily serve as a simultaneous incentive to provide literacy or basic education (*ibid.*). That point becomes clearer when considered in light of PRISEC’s involvement in ABE. Like the

²³⁹ It is worth noting that in spite of defining equity here in terms of distribution of resources, the various reports use the term in a much broader sense of the word: “in many cases the research groups’ assessment of alternative education policies accept ‘equality’ and ‘redress’ without qualification, implying a simple progress towards equality” (NEPI 1993: 14). In fact, an examination of the NEPI concept of equity as put forward in the AE, ABE and HRD reports reveals that these terms need to be interrogated rather than uncritically accepted, a point made also in the Framework Report (*ibid.*).

government, the private sector confines their approach to ABE in line with market oriented concerns:

PRISEC has called for the structuring of ABE curricula along narrow competencies because many employers do not believe that the provision of general education is the responsibility of the employers (ibid.: 56).

This restricted approach to ABE has the added effect of determining the forms of literacy provision within an industrial context: “The inclusion of elements in a literacy programme is accordingly limited to what [employers] regard as necessary for effective training programmes” (ibid.).²⁴⁰ This is to some extent reflected in experiences in the South African literacy field today, and is described by this respondent as a ‘quick-fix’ solution:

Employers don’t take a sophisticated view of education and training, you know [...] they do not think of it in terms of, for example, as putting the fundamentals in place. They are quite happy if they can find a quick fix between mother tongue and English, you know, if English is not the mother tongue (Respondent 7: 9th June 1998).

In an attempt to move beyond a narrow, economy determined approach to AE, the HRD team argues that, “Unless equity and development programmes are planned in a complementary manner, the inherent tension between the two will result in development demands tasking [*sic*] precedence over equity concerns” (1992c: 71). Although the point being made here stresses the need for a ‘complementary’ approach to development, the inference is nevertheless clear that it is only through a high skill

²⁴⁰ Experiences of basic education in the mining industry (discussed in the previous chapter) reinforce this expectation. The effect on employer provision of adult basic education was discussed in more detail in chapter three. See page 175 of the preceding chapter for two examples of programmes provided in the mining sector by Anglo American and Gencor.

post-Fordist aligned approach to training that equity objectives will be met. Kraak, one of the authors of the HRD report, makes this point when he argues that

It's only on the basis of acquiring a high skill industrial workforce that South Africa will be able to generate an export-led growth path capable of sustaining the ambitious goals of the 'growth and redistribution' strategy (1992: 8).

For the editor of the HRD report, the automatic assumption that growth and redistribution could be achieved in a simultaneous complementary fashion is less clear.

Wolpe, notes that

In the case of the ANC, prior to February 1990, the attainment of equal rights in education was prioritised [...] Since then, however, human resources development programmes have become the principal concern. In neither instance however, has sufficient attention been paid to the central policy question, namely, how are the competing demands of human resources development and the equal provision of education to be reconciled or balanced? (Wolpe 1992a: 1).

McGrath notes that concerns like these hardly feature in the final HRD report (1996: 144). In fact, in a background document to the HRD report Kraak has gone so far as to describe Wolpe's position as seeming to be hostile towards skilling the working class, and as 'idealistic' (Kraak 1992). In many respects the debate between Kraak and Wolpe is also indicative of the political tensions generated by a changing post-cold war era and the growing importance of social democratic thinking within the new political upheaval of a global world.²⁴¹

All three NEPI reports dealt with here reveal themselves to be strongly influenced by policy developments by the ANC and COSATU. But the HRD report in particular identifies the COSATU/ANC approach to education and training as especially important in future ABE policymaking in that it makes the claim that the

²⁴¹ I briefly referred to the uncertainty characterising this post-cold war era earlier in this thesis in chapter two (see page 121).

COSATU/ANC vision has much in common with the corporate sector's concerns as well (1992c.: 68). Furthermore, in keeping with a socially sensitive approach to post-Fordist concerns, Kraak describes COSATU's high participation/high skill (HP/HS) model as one where "equity and development can be viewed as complementary elements of a unified and comprehensive reconstruction plan. They are simultaneously about equity and development" (Kraak 1992: 5).

With respect to basic adult education in particular, COSATU advocates a comprehensive approach to general ABE provision that *includes* literacy. They conceptualise ABE as an holistic approach in which ABE is intended to function towards accomplishing the dual roles of redress and growth. However, adult literacy alone is not enough. In fact, the writers comment that it is important "that policies for strategies to redress the legacy of Bantu Education amongst adults do not focus only on basic literacy" (Favish and Omar 1992: 5). Redress, therefore, is seen to require larger initiatives than basic literacy programmes. Within a national system, ABE will provide "an adequate educational base to cope with training courses covering generic skills and competencies", and it will provide "the knowledge and skills needed to help shape and develop economic policies, restructure industries, strengthen job creation projects and participate fully in a democratic society" (ibid.: 14).

If we understand that literacy exists as a social practice,²⁴² then this suggestion indicates that literacy's social value will be derived from within a broader context that is essentially work-skill oriented rather than social skill oriented – notwithstanding the underlining arguments for equity. These are words that literacy practitioners have used to describe the positive values of reading and writing: "empowered" (Respondent 34);

²⁴² The concept of literacy as a social practice was discussed at length in chapter one (see page 36).

“self respect, dignity” (Respondent 27); “learners gain confidence” and it “improves their self-image” (Respondent 24); “improves their self-esteem” (Respondent 26); “my learners feel that they are getting somewhere in life” (Respondent 23). Within the COSATU approach to adult basic education, these words will become less associated with the social values derived from the immediate context and needs of an individual’s life. Instead, the value of reading and writing risks being associated with the extent to which it can enable an individual to get a job.

ABE is accorded a central role in COSATU’s vision – it is described as a “fundamental part” of the overall integrated education system and COSATU is in agreement with the NEPI position that the

platform on which a future reconstructed education system will have to rest is that of quality basic education [which is described as] both an end in itself, and a necessary condition for higher skills (ibid.: 9 and 1993: 25).

The centrality of ABE in COSATU’s vision for education and training is posed in strong inflexible terms that are narrowly related to training:

Many workers are denied access to training because they are illiterate and innumerate. The iniquitous Bantu Education system has resulted in 66% adult illiteracy. The enormity of this problem constitutes a national crisis and an effective drag on any policy for economic and political transformation (Bird 1991: 3).

The ABE report submitted to NEPI goes so far as to say that COSATU’s approach “implies that the state should prioritise adult basic education in the allocation of resources in the first ten years of a democratic state” (1992b: 60).

However, in spite of the recognition given to ABE, the emergence of a high-skill, high participation trend in policy-making does not adequately deal with the equity concerns that directly impact on *all* South Africans requiring ABE. The nature of the field of

ABE seems to resist COSATU's vision of equity through a unified system of education and training.

A closer analysis of the future field of ABE described in the ABE, AE and HRD reports gives an indication of inevitable challenges facing this area of education, some of which are alluded to in the NEPI Framework report (*ibid.*). The ABE report describes that current provision (in 1992) of ABE is primarily distributed between the state, industry and NGOs. The overall figure of 100 000 learners engaged in ABE classes in South Africa is assumed to be less than 1% of the total number of people who are illiterate or semi-literate and in need of ABE thus indicating the extent of the problem in South Africa (1992b: 9). In an attempt to identify trends in ABE provision, the NEPI team conducted research which gathered data from 42 430 learners. Of those 42 430 learners, 45% are taught in state run institutions, another 45% are taught in industrial programmes, and the remaining 10% are taught by NGOs (*ibid.*).²⁴³

Keeping in mind the current provision of ABE, COSATU argues that a future integrated system needs to be regulated and controlled by the state but with a degree of decentralised involvement as well:

the implication is that there would be a need for a forum comprised of organisations of civil society which would be involved in the development of a national framework for adult basic education as well as the organisations of provision (Favish and Omar 1992: 5 and 20).

As well as civil society being involved in the provision of ABE, COSATU argues that “Employers [...] need to contribute towards redressing the inequalities and imbalances that have arisen from Bantu Education” (*ibid.*: 15). In making this recommendation

²⁴³ These statistics are challenged in a later survey. I have referred to their findings in the introduction to this thesis (see page 2).

COSATU counters PRISEC's argument that the business sector is not responsible for general adult education by saying that employers are liable because "employers have [already] benefited from the cheap labour system in South Africa" (ibid.).

COSATU's proposals therefore envisage a broad shared responsibility for ABE but one where the overarching involvement of both the civil society and the business sector within the education system is to be regulated by the state. It has to be noted, however, that this approach to employer responsibility does not accommodate the financial 'make or break' pressures that some sectors of industry face. As one industry based ABE coordinator commented:

I think that if you've worked in industry you get a sense of where they're at. And, ja, it's not where they're at, they're not jacked up, they're not into [adult basic education]. It's not a big thing for them, it's just about survival. You know, satisfying the shareholders and doing all the necessary things to stay in business [So their motivations are rooted in] the need to survive. Because it is tough!
(Respondent 7: 9th June 1998).

The role of employers in ABE provision is a key part of COSATU's ABE proposals. A point that raises obvious concerns about the impact that employer needs might have on the form of ABE provided. Take for example, PRISEC's narrow interpretation of ABE (discussed earlier in the chapter) and the possibility that extensive corporate involvement in ABE might similarly adversely influence the nature of future ABE provision. Furthermore, the national integrated system proposed by COSATU rests on an understanding of generic skills and core competencies that form the basis of a transferable system of education. The type of research into these skill clusters was, at the time of COSATU's submission to NEPI, taking place within industrial locations thus suggesting that the generic skills underpinning all ABE would be informed by

industrial concerns.²⁴⁴ Nevertheless, COSATU argues that “accredited general skill-training modules can be developed and can be applied in all sectors of the economy” (1992c: 46). Chapter five discusses problems relating to the concept of generic skills in more detail (see page 330). Suffice it to say here that it is questionable whether generic skills suitable in an industrial context will necessarily be transferable and equally as suitable in a rural context.

The idea that three powerful sectors of the community share common principles and ideals with respect to education establishes the ‘high-participation, high-skill’ model espoused by the ANC and COSATU as the key emerging trend guiding the future provision of ABE in South Africa. As far as the NEPI HRD authors were concerned, “a ‘high participation, high-skill’ model in South Africa, as espoused by the ANC and COSATU, potentially satisfies both the development requirement for economic growth and the equity requirement for social equality in the long term” (1992c: 69). Despite the debates and issues raised by the NEPI investigation, it nevertheless remained as a policy research process in that it lacked the status to significantly shape policy formulation. It was the ANC who controlled future policy developments. With the help of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)²⁴⁵ and the Canadian International

²⁴⁴ The research was being carried out under the auspices of NUMSA. McGrath cautions against blurring the distinctions between COSATU and NUMSA policy, pointing out that NUM was less than enthusiastic about the high-skill approach being carved out by NUMSA: “NUM members tended to be less educated and less likely to benefit from the changes offered [...] For NUM, issues of Paid Education and Training Leave (PETL), Recognition of Prior learning (RPL) and Adult Basic Education (ABE) were more pressing” (Footnote 11, 1996: 147). The skills levels differentials in COSATU cannot be ignored. NUM is historically responsible for the enormous upsurge in trade union membership amongst mineworkers just prior to the formation COSATU in December 1985, and, next to NUMSA, is COSATU’s other largest affiliate (Webster 1988: 183).

²⁴⁵ Canada’s IDRC is a donor agency devoted to the pursuit of developmental research and also takes an active role in co-ordinating, synthesising and disseminating information between donor agencies (King 1991: 14). In October 1988 the IDRC adopted a policy to work exclusively with the democratic movement in South Africa in an attempt to undermine apartheid. As a result of its ‘subversive’ activities, it was banned from operating in South Africa and was only able to start work there again in 1990, after Mandela was released from jail. The IDRC established a Regional Office in South Africa in 1992. See IDRC 1997 and IDRC 1998.

Development Agency (CIDA), a Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) was established and entrusted with the development of policies aimed at restructuring apartheid (IDRC 1997 and IDRC 1998). Documents produced under the CEPD will be reviewed in the next chapter. However it is worth briefly reviewing the ANC's stance with respect to adult literacy prior to policy development carried out under the CEPD.

Adult Basic Education and the ANC prior to 1994

The ANC's most visible involvement in education policy analysis began after the completion of the NEPI process, and their recommendations for education and training are formally presented in the draft document entitled A Policy Framework for Education and Training. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the ANC's A Policy Framework for Education and Training will be considered in Chapter five where it serves as an important undertaking into later policy developments.

Although this 1994 publication represents the ANC's first concerted and most public undertaking into education and training policy research, other important documents issued by the party describe their evolution towards that position. These provide a very useful background to the party's stance on equity and growth principles in the years leading up to 1994. Given the importance of equity and growth themes to this thesis' central concerns, it is worth briefly reflecting on how they inform and filter through early ANC discourse.

In 1992 the ANC published *Ready to Govern*, a document arising out of the ANC's National Policy Conference held in May 1992.²⁴⁶ The document introduced four basic policy objectives that the ANC argued would form the foundation of their vision for a future South Africa:

To strive for the achievement of the right of all South Africans, as a whole, to political and economic self-determination in united South Africa;

To overcome the legacy of inequality and injustice created by colonialism and apartheid, in a swift, progressive and principled way;

To develop a sustainable economy and state infrastructure that will progressively improve the quality of life of all South Africans; and,

To encourage the flourishing of the feeling that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, to promote a common loyalty to and pride in the country and to create a universal sense of freedom and security within its borders (1992: 1).

The four objectives chosen to reflect the ANC's 'suitability to govern' mark the final stage in the ANC's evolution from an activist position to one which presents them as convincing future leaders of the country. The emotive language of 1955, seen in the Freedom Charter,²⁴⁷ was more constrained in 1988 when the ANC issued its 'Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa'.²⁴⁸ In this document the ANC

²⁴⁶ The decision to hold a National Policy Conference was made at the ANC's 48th National Conference held in Durban, July 1991. At the 1991 conference, the ANC also recognised that "mass organisation and mobilisation is at the centre of [the ANC's] struggle" and expressed its determination to include the experiences of women and those living in the rural areas in the formation of its strategies and tactics (ANC 1991). Both sentiments reveal a commitment to groups of people who were possibly left the most disempowered by the apartheid system.

²⁴⁷ The origins of the Freedom Charter and the importance of its role in South African history was referred to earlier in the section dealing with People's Education, particularly in Footnote 128 on page 116. A copy of the Freedom Charter is included in Appendix 3 on page 431.

²⁴⁸ Perhaps the strongest link between the 1955 Freedom Charter and the ANC's 1988 Constitutional Guidelines is that the latter document makes provision for a future Bill of Rights in South Africa. Section (h) of the Constitutional Guidelines proposes the following:

The Constitution shall include a Bill of Rights based on the Freedom Charter. Such a Bill of Rights shall guarantee the fundamental human rights of all citizens, irrespective of race, colour, sex or creed, and shall provide appropriate mechanisms for their protection and enforcement (see Robertson 1991: 225).

footnote continued on next page

drew attention to its changing position: “the Freedom Charter must be converted from a vision for the future into a constitutional reality” (in Robertson 1991: 223). Nevertheless, the 1988 constitutional guidelines contained much of the equity-based sentiment of the Freedom Charter. Those same overriding principles of justice and fairness for a post-apartheid South Africa filters through in the four objectives chosen with respect to Ready to Govern.

It is worth noting too that equity was the driving force behind both the Freedom Charter and the Constitutional Guidelines in terms of the two documents’ respective stances on economic growth concerns. The 1955 publication makes the following assertions: “The people shall share in the country’s wealth”; “the mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole” and “All other industries and trade shall be controlled to assist the well-being of the people” (ibid.: 220).

Given the Freedom Charter’s strongly socialist stance with respect to growth concerns, those in favour of a greatly liberalised economy in a post-apartheid South Africa would have been alarmed by the 1988 Constitutional Guidelines stated alliance with Freedom Charter objectives: section (p) of the document states that “the private sector of the economy shall be obliged to co-operate with the state in realising the objectives of the Freedom Charter in promoting social well-being” (ibid.: 225). Mandela, on his release from prison in 1990, clarified (and seemingly confirmed) the neo-liberals’ worst fears. He stated that “the nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industry is the policy of the ANC and a change or modification of [the ANC’s] views in this regard is inconceivable” (quoted in Marais 1998: 146).

This is particularly significant for future adult basic education policies in that the Freedom Charter unequivocally states that “Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan” (ibid.: 222).

Paving the way towards the ANC's A Policy Framework for Education and Training, the Ready to Govern document affirms some of the basic tenants of the Freedom Charter and the Constitutional Guidelines when it describes education and training as a basic human right (ANC 1992: 17). In particular, it stipulates that “all individuals should have access to lifelong education and training, irrespective of race, class, gender, creed, age, sexual orientation and physical or mental disability” (ibid.). The document, remaining true to the 1988 Constitutional Guidelines, then goes on to stipulate that “education and training should be enshrined in a Bill of Rights” (ibid.). In other words, the language seemingly reflects a solid commitment to the achievement of equity through education and training.

Ready to Govern's position regarding ABE is presented in very general terms which nevertheless manages to convey a significant shift from the unequivocal support for a ‘mass state education plan’ to combat illiteracy as advocated in the Freedom Charter. Equity principles, however, are still implicitly central to the ANC's overriding concerns. For example, the state is held centrally responsible for education because “Only the state is in a position to ensure that the present inequalities are redressed” (ANC 1992: 17).

In spite of the ANC's concern with redress issues, and in spite of its insistence on the vital role of the state regarding redress, provision for adult education is still clearly divided between the state and employers:

Employers will have the prime responsibility for providing adult basic education for those in their employ and the state will have responsibility for ensuring the delivery of adult basic education to the unemployed (ibid.: 18).²⁴⁹

In this sense the Ready to Govern publication significantly departs from the basic tenants of the Freedom Charter. The earlier document clearly and unequivocally associated adult basic education with equity and redress concerns while the ANC's 1992 stance towards adult basic education is more nebulous. Ready to Govern does affirm the government's commitment to support adult basic education for the unemployed and for those in the rural areas – it supports the development of “special programmes [...] to address the problem of illiteracy, especially in rural areas” (ibid.). However, its reluctance to be centrally involved in work-place adult basic education implies that, in an employment context, redress needs have already been fulfilled. Does this mean then that ‘redress’ is equated to having a job? Is the role of ABE at this stage concerned with helping to achieve a position of employability?

In spite of its bifurcated stance with respect to redress and equity, the Ready to Govern document does make use of equity rhetoric in its discussion on adult education. However, unlike the policy documents discussed in the previous chapter, growth discourses do not represent a strong feature of the ANC's stance on education – Ready to Govern does not attempt to address the relationship between adult basic education and economic growth in its section on adult education. Neither does the section entitled ‘The development of human resources’ make any mention of the potential role of adult basic education in Human Resource Development (ibid.: 19).

²⁴⁹ This point is particularly interesting in light of the conclusions reached by the NEPI investigators who also published many of their reports in 1992. The NEPI Adult Education report argued that ABE should be clearly distinguished from broader AE issues because “the question of redress [...] is most compelling in respect of [adult basic education] (NEPI 1993a: 4). (NEPI's position with respect to redress and ABE is discussed earlier in the thesis in chapter four, page 235). Conversely, the Ready to Govern document argues that the state should have the central responsibility for education and training to ensure redress and yet defers significant responsibility for adult basic education in the workplace to employers.

Instead, the Ready to Govern policy guidelines broadly defends the concept of a “coherent and nationally integrated strategy for the development of our country’s resources”, of a system that ensures that all “skills acquired are nationally recognised, portable and contribute to career-pathing” (ibid.: 17 and 19 respectively). In this respect the document implicitly suggests that an integrated education and training system will meet the needs of both equity and economic development. It is a position that aligns the ANC at this early date with the opinions contributed by COSATU to the NEPI process.²⁵⁰ This is the position that leads into the ANC’s 1994 publication of A Policy Framework for Education and Training. The ANC’s focus on education *and training*, therefore suggests that developments in training discourses are essential to a full understanding of the role that adult literacy plays within an integrated system. This is evident in the National Training Strategy Initiative and especially in the ABE influences brought to it by COSATU – influences that have already been alluded to earlier in this chapter (on page 243).

The National Training Strategy Initiative (1994)

The investigation known as the National Training Strategy Initiative (NTSI) and its resulting recommendations marks a significant departure from earlier NTB training ventures into policy analysis (NTB 1994).²⁵¹ The NTSI represents a crucial milestone in the thinking behind the new education and training system that will characterise post-

²⁵⁰ Especially relating to the consideration of a high-skill, high-participation approach to AE discussed earlier on page 241.

²⁵¹ Previous ventures were discussed in the previous chapter. See chapter three, page 183 for the discussion of the HSRC/NTB trilogy of reports conducted during the 1980s. Note too that the Wiehahn Commission was also primarily concerned with training issues (refer back to page 136 of chapter three for the analysis of this report).

apartheid lifelong learning, particularly with respect to the language and concepts that come to define the National Qualifications Framework.

COSATU's inclusion in the National Training Board (NTB) in 1991 significantly contributed to the NTSI report. In particular, it resulted in a rejection of the non-representative NTS report published in 1991 to allow "a more representative task team [to] be appointed to develop a strategy" (NTB 1994: 2). Nevertheless, there is still evidence of previous New Vocational type critiques filtering into the new policy document which also fit in with COSATU's representation of a broad workforce. For example, the NTSI, like previous NTB documents, critiqued the academic system's elitist stance with respect to general education: it argued that "it would appear that in terms of *integrating the school-leaver into work*, the education system plays no meaningful role" (ibid.: 72).²⁵² In the de Lange report, this critique resulted in the recommendation of a canalised system of education and training.²⁵³ COSATU's position in the NTB significantly impacted on the NTSI process in terms of reinterpreting how to overcome the education/training dichotomy without resorting to a solution that would result in a canalised system of education and training.

McGrath, in an analysis of two important documents emerging from the working committee dealing with the 'Integration of education and training; competencies and career paths and certification', reflects on how the final outcome of the committee was an amalgamation of Bryan Phillip's (representing PRISEC²⁵⁴) and COSATU's input.

²⁵² I called attention to instances where these critiques appeared in chapter three in Footnote 225 on page 228 of this chapter.

²⁵³ See chapter three, page 165.

²⁵⁴ PRISEC's very narrow approach to ABE was referred to previously in the NEPI section (on page 240). McGrath's analysis of the PRISEC contribution to the NTSI supports the NEPI perception. He says, "the narrowness of the [PRISEC] approach was striking" (1996: 179)

This process of collaboration leads him to conclude that the NTSI report can be described as a “paradigm of negotiated compromise” (1996:186). Furthermore, although McGrath concludes that the NTSI is one of the few areas in education and training policy developments where there was meaningful communication between the state and opposition groups, he also points out that “the limited number of progressive educationalists in the eight working committees was [...] striking” (ibid.: 177-78).²⁵⁵

The perception that the negotiations were primarily between PRISEC and COSATU is supported by comments from other committee members who commented that: “during the deliberations of the committee, Phillips, representing the PRISEC alliance, and [Adrienne] Bird²⁵⁶, representing COSATU, dominated proceedings (ibid.: 187)”. Both people represent sectors primarily concerned with training issues, but from frequently opposed perspectives. Of the two groupings, COSATU’s (through Adrienne Bird) seems to have been the most influential voice in the NTSI, often controlling the

²⁵⁵ It is significant, however, that the influence of a handful of progressive educationalists can be felt in a succession of documents. For example, Enver Motala was one of the few representatives from the progressive educational sector working on the NTSI. Based at the University of Durban-Westville’s EPU, he also served on the IPET report’s ABET Task Team (this will be discussed later in the chapter). Before IPET he was a member of the NEPI Executive Committee and worked with Adrienne Bird on the NEPI HRD process (see NEPI 1992c). Of all the NEPI reports, the HRD report is the one that is most closely aligned with COSATU’s position that equity and growth can be simultaneously achieved through an integrated education and training system (see chapter four, page 241). Motala was also involved in Working Committee 5 (chaired by Adrienne Bird) of the NTSI process and went on to become the Deputy Director General of the Gauteng Department of Education.

²⁵⁶ At this time Adrienne Bird was the co-ordinator of COSATU’s Human Resources Committee. During the 1980s Adrienne Bird strongly criticised the adult literacy programmes being run at some of the major mining houses (refer back to chapter three, page 175 for those criticisms). Her subsequent involvement in the National Training Strategy Initiative brought her into contact with one of the recipients of her criticism – Bryan Phillips was the Adult Education Manager at Gencor (see chapter three, page 177, for an earlier critique of one of his programmes). During the 1980s Bird worked in both FOSATU and within the National Union of Metalworkers, South Africa (NUMSA). NUMSA later played a significant role in the initial research into skills development that informs much on the NTSI (see Footnote 244 on page 241 for mention of that). Her role as education officer at COSATU made her an instrumental part of the construction the NQF during the second half of the 1990s as will be seen more clearly in the next chapter. Her current role within the Department of Labour, as the Chief Director of Employment and Skills Development Services, arguably wields the greatest influence. (Other areas of Bird’s work are briefly mentioned in Footnote 274 on page 275).

proceedings – Unterhalter and Young point out that Phillips, during an interview in 1994, alluded to the COSATU representatives at the NTSI as COSATU’s “first team” (1994: 3). The same authors also call attention to the fact that COSATU adopted an aggressive strategy of leadership in the NTSI negotiations, quoting Phillips’ remarks that: “COSATU caucused before meetings of task teams and working groups and so was able to come up with initiatives, to which other players had to respond” (ibid.).²⁵⁷

The COSATU position on an integrated education and training system, based on a National Qualifications Framework thus became one of the key components of NTSI deliberations:

Education and training should form part of a system of human resources development which provides for the establishment of an *integrated approach* to education and training which is expressed in terms of nationally acceptable qualifications (NTB 1994: 8).

COSATU’s general position on ABE policy in particular was previously outlined in a paper jointly submitted to both the ABE and the HRD NEPI teams. The primary means for achieving equity through ABE in terms of COSATU’s approach rested then with their endorsement of a “totally integrated education and training system” (ibid.: 9). Here, an integrated system is interpreted as one way to overcome the legacy of social differentiation created by the apartheid government in that the pejorative distinctions between ‘mental’ and ‘manual’ skills – or formal and non formal education – are blurred (Kraak 1998). What is significant to note in the context of the NTSI proceedings, is that the COSATU adherence to the concept of an integrated *system* gives way to the concept

²⁵⁷ This form of compromise between the PRISEC representative and COSATU exemplifies again the Bourdieuan concept of a ‘linguistic market’ operating within a specific field of competition (this was referred to previously in the NEPI section, on page 231). In this case, Phillips’ comments on how COSATU engaged in the proceedings and managed to consequently lead them reflects the way in which particular forms of discourse and engagement can serve to gain control of ‘the game’.

of an integrated *approach*. (The implication of this paradigm shift will be critically considered in more detail in the next chapter (see page).

COSATU's approach to dealing with equity is bound up in terms of its concept of integrated education and training: equity in the form of 'equal education' is proposed by establishing "clearly defined national standards" based on "common core skills and content areas at each level of basic education" (Favish and Omar 1992: 11). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this approach was especially well received by the NEPI HRD team who commented that a

'high participation, high-skill' model in South Africa, as espoused by the ANC and COSATU, potentially satisfies both the development requirement for economic growth and the equity requirement for social equality in the long term" (1992c: 69).

However, given that the NTSI negotiations taking place are primarily between COSATU and PRISEC, it is worth considering how such an approach to equity will be sustained within, firstly, the labour market and from there, within the broader community.

COSATU's vision of integrated education and training as being the most *equitable* solution for adults lacking a basic education, coupled with the essential role played by employers in ABE provision, has to be critically considered in light of a fragmented labour market. The HRD report provides a breakdown of labour market segmentation in 1992. This reveals that the secondary labour market employs half of the formal sector's workforce, while the informal sector²⁵⁸ employs a quarter of the black working population (1992c: 11). This projected outlook indicates that the majority of economically active black workers work in areas which are described as being non-

²⁵⁸ Later known as the small, medium and micro enterprise (SMME) sector. The SMME sector does not include farms.

unionised, requiring unskilled forms of labour thus necessitating minimal training. Furthermore, the jobs are usually poorly paid and insecure with little opportunity for career advancement.²⁵⁹ The report goes on to say that “adults outside the formal sector will [probably] outnumber those within it by at least three to one by the end of this decade” (ibid.: 18).

People working in this segment of the labour market represent the biggest challenge to equity driven educational policies. For example, the ABE report points out that “The basic needs of workers in commercial agriculture have been, and remain, an area of total neglect [and that] farm workers have been almost totally excluded from the formal educational process” (1992b: 9).²⁶⁰ Apart from distinctions between the various labour market segments, the report indicates that ABE provision is gender differentiated as well. They comment that NGOs will “probably attract predominantly women learners” while industry is “catering predominantly for men” (ibid.: 10).²⁶¹ Industry based provision is further complicated by the fact that unemployment is running at “upwards of 40% in major cities” (1992c: 11).

²⁵⁹ An analysis written several years after this document similarly argued that those employed in the informal sector “are severely disadvantaged in the labour market” (Tørres, Bhorate, Liebbrandt and Cassim 2000: 79). The authors point out that 45% of people working in this sector of the economy have earnings which fall below the Minimum Living Level (MLL) while more than half fall below the Supplementary Living Level (SLL) (ibid.: 80). (The MLL and SLL reflect whether the earnings of an individual are sufficient to support him/her above a level of poverty. Of the two, the MLL uses more stringent poverty criteria).

²⁶⁰ This criticism of policies addressing the needs of the informal sector is repeated eight years later when May, Rogerson and Vaughan argue that “There is a pressing need for a set of targeted interventions to address the special challenges of rural SMME development” (2000: 233).

²⁶¹ The report of the Gender Equity Task Team entitled *Gender Equity in Education* confirms this perception. This is reflected in the following chapter where the GETT team indicate that men tend to access ABET primarily through the private economic sector, parastatals and municipalities while women tend to attend programmes organised by NGOs and churches (DE 1997d: 165).

This social backdrop reveals that many of the educational ‘safeguards’ associated with COSATU’s proposals for an integrated system do not extend to the majority of the black working population – safeguards such as union involvement in ABE programmes, paid time off work to attend ABE classes, worker involvement in constructing programmes, and employer obligation to provide ABE. These serve to ensure that ABE within the COSATU integrated system will primarily benefit, empower and serve the needs of a minority of *workers* in the formal sector rather than the majority of disadvantaged adults. This lends weight to the suggestion by the HRD team that “What is in fact being proposed by COSATU is essentially a “human resources-led development model” for education (ibid.: 49). It is worth noting however, that even this limited opportunity is thrown into question by the experience of a senior shop steward working in a large metalworking industry:

Ja well, ABET is good, you know ... especially on the notice boards so that when people like you visit the company they’ll see that this is a company that’s interested in ABET. But whether it goes beyond face value is a completely different thing (Respondent 9: 3rd July 1998).

A human resources-led development model infers that COSATU’s concept is (perhaps unwittingly) biased towards upholding growth concerns rather than issues relating to equity. In fact, there is a suggestion that COSATU’s proposals are inherently driven by the same changing labour needs dictated by international growth imperatives than the government’s were. This is what a COSATU representative had to say about globalisation pressures:

I think that COSATU is being pulled like the rest of the world. They understand crucially about global markets, global economies, global competitiveness. They understand that technology is going to create a core of highly skilled, mostly temporary workers. And that is their constituency. So they’re saying that these people are going to lose their jobs unless they can be upskilled (quoted in Groener 1998: 94).

In the NTSI, equity problems regarding ABE surface too in the way they are researched and represented within the document itself. Particularly regarding the fact that approaches to ABE are principally informed by the scale of the literacy problem in South Africa, coupled with financial constraints. The NTSI accordingly adopted a series of priorities for addressing ABE needs:

Priorities. The planning, organisation and implementation of ABE programmes should be related coherently to a framework of redress, economic policies, and an integrated approach to education and training. Obviously the economy of South Africa cannot deal with the entire 12.5 million needing ABE at the same time, therefore a series of priorities should be developed.

Criteria for selection should include:

21.1 the most disadvantaged sectors of society

21.2 groups involved in key economic and development projects and

21.3 those in whom an investment of ABE is likely to bring the most advantage (NTB 1994: 160).

The criteria for selection embodies the paradoxical challenge of addressing both equity and growth challenges at the same time. However, although the document stresses that it was “vitaly necessary to determine the extent of the problem of education and training” in order to develop a national training strategy, it also admits to not having very much data on some of the more disadvantaged sectors of society:

Although there were attempts to provide information on the unemployed, informal (largely female) and rural sectors and training, the lack of recognised sources of data for these sectors reflects the dominant mind-set of the past and of most current policy makers (ibid.: 35).

The absence of this form of data, in accordance with the NTSI report’s own claims for the necessity of acquiring data, therefore weakens its position on identifying people for ABE from the most disadvantaged sectors of South African society. And the remaining criteria problematically privileges those working in the formal sector of the economy thus biasing ABE towards a male, urban, possibly unionised section of the population.

In other words, the needs of the broader South African population and the most disadvantaged groups of people are formally recognised in the NTSI report, but are not fully addressed – something that the report implicitly acknowledges represents an inadequate engagement with broader ABE issues. It is worth mentioning that this admission is a familiar theme in COSATU's engagements with basic education – the COSATU submission to the NEPI investigation seemed to recognise a similar intrinsic tension in their policies which biased them towards workplace-based ABE for the already employed.

At that time COSATU noted that, “To ensure that provision of adult basic education in the workplace does not only benefit privileged employed workers, COSATU is committed to negotiating access for the wider community” (Favish and Omar 1992: 15). In an approach similar to that adopted by the NTSI, COSATU then went on to acknowledge the deficiencies in their position:

The COSATU principles do not address mechanisms that would be needed to ensure that the most disadvantaged sections of the community such as those in the rural areas and the unemployed in the urban areas actually get access to education and training (ibid.: 21).

In addition to these sectors of the community, they also noted that the COSATU “ABE principles do not address specific mechanisms to facilitate access of women to adult basic education classes” (ibid. 22). Consequently, the strongest assurance from COSATU with respect to addressing broader social inequalities is established within their stated intention to remain committed to ‘ongoing negotiations’ to address these problems. This was said in 1992, two years prior to the publication of the NTSI.

A further softening of COSATU's position in the NEPI investigation is evident in the NTSI's approach to funding adult basic education. The NTSI recommends that “An innovative funding formula be devised and implemented to ensure an effective, efficient and affordable ABE system, with the State remaining the major provider in this respect”

(ibid.: 164). COSATU took a more precise view during NEPI, prompting the NEPI ABE report to say that COSATU's approach "implies that the state should prioritise adult basic education in the allocation of resources in the first ten years of a democratic state" (1992b: 60). This shift, coupled with the fact that 'ongoing negotiations' over the course of two years amounted to little more than a restatement of an earlier position, significantly undermines COSATU's initial equity rhetoric. The overriding effect is to make the future prospect of broad-based adult basic education geared towards addressing equity in all sectors of the community seem increasingly unlikely.

Nevertheless, the NTSI process confirms that COSATU's conceptualisation of literacy with respect to ABE has advanced considerably. The NTSI position on ABE naturally evolved from an understanding of education as a lifelong process that served to "break down the barriers which separate "education and training" (NTB 1994: 6). In accordance with this the report notes that

The term "Adult Basic Education" is used rather than "literacy" because the first more accurately reflects a commitment to provide adult learners with a broad general education, rather than functional literacy, in order to enable people to cope more effectively with the demands of society (ibid.: 148).

A broad education is further described as that which includes "a core of knowledge, skills, values, experiences and behaviours which form the basis of a general education" – all of which will take place with the National Qualifications Framework (ibid.).

The National Qualifications Framework is envisaged as having a "3+8 level framework" where the '3' refers to "ABE and training" followed by 8 levels of compulsory and post compulsory schooling (NTB 1993: 6). The report then goes on to introduce some of the concepts which will be used to underpin the NQF curriculum – in particular, the broad principal of a credit based NQF based on a system of achieved learning outcomes, capabilities, generic competencies and skills (ibid.: 12). These concepts represent a significant contribution to future policy developments and as such, are critically engaged

with in more detail in the next chapter. However, before moving to the next chapter, it is worth reflecting on how the NTSI serves not only to introduce essential concepts that will dominate future education and training discourses, but also to concretise COSATU's overall position regarding South Africa's future transformation.

It is important to appreciate COSATU's entire position regarding the future socio-economic development of South Africa in order to completely grasp the full implications of the forthcoming NQF for broader basic education concerns. Bird emphasises this point herself when she argues that "the COSATU policy on education and training needs to be understood within the context of a comprehensive and integrated political and economic strategy for South Africa" (1991: 2).

Firstly, up until this point COSATU has made it absolutely clear that the transformation of the *training system* is envisaged as a fundamental step towards achieving equity and redress for all:

COSATU sees that a drastic upgrading of skills of workers and unemployed will be needed as basis on which the transformation of the South African economy can be built. Such upgrading is not sufficient to ensure growth and redistribution, but is a necessary part of a broader programme towards social justice (ibid.).

The COSATU understanding of growth through labour reform was expressed as follows in a COSATU document entitled 'Social equity and job creation: the key to a stable future': "Growth is fostered by investment, training and technological innovation. These key engines for growth both contribute to, and are encouraged by, rising productivity (COSATU 1996: 4). Being aware that a transformed training system is a key part of COSATU's overall perception of equity and social justice adds emphasis to the NTSI's third filtering priority for ABE – that is, to privilege ABE for "those in whom an investment of ABE is likely to bring the most advantage" (NTB 1994: 160).

COSATU's impression that the labour markets form a fundamental part of South Africa's process of transformation is reflected too in the findings of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The IDRC visited South Africa in 1991 (at the invitation of the ANC) to carry out a 'Mission on Economic Analysis and Policy Formulation for Post-Apartheid South Africa' – their aim was to gain a better understanding of South African economic policy issues. The group's focus was primarily orientated towards the needs of the anti-apartheid economics community, and in particular the needs of the ANC.²⁶² One of the key recommendations coming out of the mission was the suggestion that a Macro-Economic Research Group (MERG) needed to be established in order to “stimulate and co-ordinate policy research in [...] identified priority areas” (Van Ameringen 1995: 41). The findings of that research group resulted in the 1993 publication entitled Making Democracy Work: a framework for macro-economic policy in South Africa (referred to hereafter as the MERG report).

The MERG report reflects COSATU's close relationship with the ANC in that “the core of the [report argued] that the economy could best be restructured through the labour market” and that this would take place by “improved training and higher wages” and by “interventions aimed at improving the structure and operation of business” (Marais 1998: 159). More specifically, the MERG report addressed inequity in the labour market by arguing for the introduction of a national minimum wage. It also supported COSATU's concern for human resource development especially with respect to improved training:

[The introduction of a minimum wage will] act as a spur for many enterprises throughout the country to restructure, innovate and provide their workers with transferable skills. Unprofitable and inefficient enterprises should not receive long

²⁶² For a more detailed discussion of the methods and members of the mission team, see Building a New South Africa: Economic Policy published by the IDRC in 1995.

term subsidies from the poor, i.e., from those of their employees who are accepting very low wages (MERG Report quoted in Natrass 1994: 222).

It can therefore be argued that in the years leading up to the first general elections, COSATU's approach to a future macro-economic strategy for a new South Africa was in step with the ANC's and that labour transformation lay at the heart of it. The MERG proposal saw a two phase approach consisting of a "public-investment-led phase" between 1993 and 1999, followed by a "sustained growth phase" between 1999 and 2004 (Marais 1998: 159). In this regard COSATU and the ANC stood in opposition to many businesses who were in favour of increased market liberalisation after the years of stultification by the apartheid system and saw the MERG report as "unconvincing and scary" (Natrass 1995: 220). Within a socio-economic framework that recognised the centrality of labour transformation for future development, and an integrated education and training system that sets out to realise that objective, Bird suggested that a suitable environment would be created to allow "workers to progress, through education and training, from "sweeper to engineer" (Bird 1991: 11).

However, as the next chapter will show, this perception is vitally threatened by two developments taking place after the NTSI process: first, the expansion of the fundamental concepts underpinning Outcomes Based Education and second, a radical readjustment of the country's macroeconomic strategy.

Summary

This chapter introduced three very different views what literacy means in South African society, how to provide for it and the role it plays in social redress and economic development. The ERS approach to literacy extended many of the tensions that were identified in chapter three into the early 1990s. The NEPI investigation however introduced very different views of literacy, that exhibit understandings derived from the social literacy research discussed in chapter one. In particular, they called attention to

the complex variety of literacy needs in society exposed several myths regarding literacy's ability to promote social development. The final section of the chapter introduced the COSATU approach to literacy education and discussed the way in which it was altered by the narrow instrumentalist focus brought to the debates by the private sector. The next chapter will address how the COSATU approach to literacy has been carried through into the 1990s by the ANC.

Liberation through Integration?

Literacy Discourses, 1994-1998

The previous chapter outlined policy trends emerging from a highly competitive policy environment characterised by interest groups with divergent motivations all competing to influence the outcome of education and training policy in a post-apartheid South Africa. In many respects, the early 1990s represent a time when the field of play, or the struggle between relative forces, was at its most heightened. COSATU's name loomed large amongst the players who emerged as the most successful at governing and determining the rules of play, and thus the most likely to influence trends in adult basic education after the first general elections. Nevertheless, contributions from the other representatives within the literacy field still serve to shape and influence aspects of the field and therefore cannot be forgotten.

The National Party's contribution to policy reform in the form of the ERS continued trends established during the 1980s towards an increasing involvement of the private sector in the education system. As in the 1980s, and in keeping with the increased support from the private sector, the ERS primarily framed adult literacy discourses within broad vocational requirements aimed at encouraging economic growth, albeit one that simultaneously aimed to maintain the inequitable status quo that benefited a

minority of the population. Equity issues are fleetingly considered in the ERS – notably, only after respondents to the first draft of the ERS pointed out that adult literacy was insufficiently addressed in the document. Equity principles are sweepingly outlined in terms of broad ‘international’ human rights rather than as concerns within a specifically South African context. In this sense the ERS distances itself from equity concerns and strongly aligns itself with growth imperatives instead. In many respects the ERS can be understood as a continuation of the market liberalising approaches to education embraced during the 1980s by organisations such as the Urban Foundation. In fact, the neo-liberal response to MERG recommendations for economic reform in a post-apartheid era during the 1990s strongly reflects some of the concerns voiced by big business representatives such as Harry Oppenheimer and Anton Rupert during the 1980s who were entirely opposed to anything resembling a socialist economic policy (Nattrass 1994 and 1995).

Unlike the ERS, other policy initiatives discussed in the preceding chapter display a deeper, and more transparent, awareness of the tensions between growth and equity in a South African context. The NEPI initiative in particular highlights the trade-offs involved in constructing an education policy that is intended to meet the seemingly polarised demands of both equity and economic growth. ABE is consequently explored as one possible means of addressing both concerns. The socialist principles underpinning People’s Education have enough of an impact on the NEPI investigation that equity principles became the driving force behind the overall process.²⁶³ Nevertheless, policy analysis into HRD during the NEPI process necessitated a close engagement with South African economic growth concerns, which consequently positioned ABE discourses within conflicting tensions.

²⁶³ NEPI’s five framing principles are more strongly aligned with equity considerations than they are with growth discourses. See chapter four, page 234.

The previous chapter also considers the impact of COSATU's input into ABE discourses, in terms of both the NTSI and the NEPI processes, in accordance with the union's vision for integrated education and training. Chapter four thus raised questions about whether or not equity interests are best served by an ABE system couched within COSATU's concept of an integrated system.

This section of the thesis is concerned with the impact that the trends outlined above have had on education policy – and in particular 'literacy' within adult basic education policy – as it is known today. It is understood that the role that adult literacy plays within the broader adult basic education framework is influenced, and possibly constrained by, trends that fit most comfortably with ANC interests. Equally as important to this section of the thesis are the effects, on the education system, of excluding less popular trends and concerns from the current education system (for example, excluding some of NEPI's findings).

In keeping with the approaches taken in the previous two chapters, the texts analysed in this chapter are approached through a close analysis of literacy discourses in terms of how they are represented through the broad themes of equity and growth. The chapter takes as its starting point the ANC's document entitled A Policy Framework for Education and Training (1994).²⁶⁴

Policy documents published after the ANC's Policy Framework are also integral to an understanding of the role that literacy plays within the broader South African education system and will be closely examined in the course of this chapter. These documents include, among others, the three white papers on education and training and policy

²⁶⁴ Hereafter referred to as the Policy Framework.

relating to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (including the formulation of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)) (DE 1995, 1996, and 1997; DE 1996a respectively). More specifically related to ABE concerns are the two publications known as A National Multi-Year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training and a Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training (DE 1997a and 1997b). These publications highlight the extent to which early ANC policy shifts during the course of the party's first term in power.

In line with approaches taken in the preceding two chapters, the patterns of change in policy discourses will be considered in light of the broader South African socio-economic context that informs and impacts on ABE interests. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) is described as "A programme which puts people first" thus identifying it as a crucial programme in terms of South African concerns with equity and redress (RSA 1994c). Furthermore, human resource development is identified as one of the five key programmes of the RDP with education and training forming an integral role in the RDP's approach to human resource development. And ABE is allocated a key position within the education and training system: "ABE must be centrally included in all reconstruction projects" (RSA 1994a).

Economic development is also an important part of the RDP thus contributing to the macro-economic context within which ABE discourses are situated. The RDP approach to macroeconomics gives way in 1996 to the government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic strategy (DF 1996). The tension between the RDP and GEAR highlights the tensions between equity and growth that are of central importance to this thesis' consideration of ABE discourses.

The ANC's Policy Framework and IPET Report (1994)

Often referred to as the ANC's 'yellow book', the ANC's Policy Framework was first published in January 1994 just three months before the general elections (ANC 1994). The ANC published the final version of their framework document later in the same year after comments on the draft document were received and amendments were made (ANC 1995). Both versions will be analysed and accordingly contrasted in this section of the chapter.

The document moves from the ANC's generalised references to integrated strategies, national systems and recognised skills in the years leading up to the Policy Framework, to a clear statement of a future education system. It confirms that the new education system will be a "national system of education and training" based on a "single national credit-based qualifications framework" (ANC 1995: 17). In this respect the document clearly supports the principles expressed by COSATU during the NTSI. The ANC document further notes that the system will fall under the auspices of a "single national ministry for Education and Training" (ibid.:10).

In the section entitled 'Goals, Commitments and Tasks', the Policy Framework presents four values which underpin the principal goal that "all individuals shall have access to lifelong education and training irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age" (ibid.: 4). In a small departure from the values underpinning the NEPI process (which are almost exclusively concerned with equity principles; see Chapter four, page 234) the Policy Framework's values provide for economic growth imperatives as well. Growth discourses are alluded to in the value that promotes the "pursuit of national reconstruction and distribution" through education and training (ibid.). In this sense,

growth discourses are presented as being an integral part of equity issues rather than two mutually exclusive concepts that can only be resolved through 'trade-offs'.²⁶⁵ It can be argued therefore that the Policy Framework is not as critical of the equity/growth tension as was, for example, the NEPI investigation. Given that this is a tension that is often foregrounded in adult education processes, it will be interesting to see how the Policy Framework resolves the tension with respect to its stance on adult basic education and literacy.

Literacy discourses in the Policy Framework

The Policy Framework presents adult basic education as one of the ANC's major policy initiatives to be fulfilled within the five years following 1994. Adult literacy is no longer approached independently of basic adult education concerns; instead literacy is dealt with as one component of broader adult requirements that include, for example, numeracy. The document discusses adult basic education generally and in terms that assume a clear understanding of where and how adult basic education is located within the broader education structure. In this respect it differs from the NEPI process which attempted first to contextualise literacy *per se* within basic adult education, and then go on to locate ABE within the broader Adult Education (AE) system.²⁶⁶ The Policy Framework's unfocused approach to defining and dealing with adult literacy, especially when correlated with the NEPI investigation's methods, raises questions about literacy's role within ABE, and also about literacy's role within society as a whole. These will be

²⁶⁵ Affiliating equity discourses with growth discourses is in keeping with the ANC/COSATU position on economic 'growth through redistribution'. The concept of 'growth through redistribution' is referred to in the previous chapter's mention of the MERG report (see page 264).

²⁶⁶ NEPI's considered approach to literacy's location within AE and ABE is reviewed in the previous chapter on page 235.

addressed in more detail in the section concerned with literacy and equity under the Policy Framework.

Language use in the Policy Framework – especially in the form of the choices made regarding the use of adult education terminology – suggests that the document’s content is guided (it is never directly stated) by a perceived role for adult literacy in a new South African. The draft version of the Policy Framework uses the same terminology adopted by NEPI, accordingly referring to all facets of adult basic education as Adult Basic Education (ABE). However, in the revised document published a few months later in 1995, the term ‘ABE’ is amended to ‘ABET’ (Adult Basic Education and Training) (ANC 1995).

It can be argued that the language amendment in the final version of the Policy Framework reflects the fact that ABE is envisaged as part of a broader integrated system in which training priorities are given an equal footing to educational objectives – especially given that the creation of an integrated education and training system is the Policy Framework’s fundamental proposal. In support of this proposal the document explains that the existing separate education and training systems split education into two structures respectively involved with “general and vocational” requirements (ANC 1995: 17). This, the document argues, “has contributed significantly to the situation where most of our people are under-educated, under-skilled, and under-prepared for full participation in social, economic and civic life” (ibid.: 10). In this sense the terminology alteration from ABE to ABET reflects the central policy objective proposed by the ANC’s Policy Framework, and that is that education and training are to be fully integrated.

The term ‘ABET’ therefore calls attention to the fact that this is an area of education that spans, and will fulfil the needs of, both general and vocational requirements – it is

concerned with Adult Basic *Education and Training*. ABET will therefore impart skills, including literacy skills, that exist within and across a variety of contexts. It is evidently deemed necessary to formally reflect this position in the terminology used. This consequently raises the question of whether or not adult literacy, within ABET, has a different role to play than it would within the more general term of ABE. In other words, is adult literacy within an ABET system more or less oriented towards fulfilling vocational requirements or towards fulfilling individually based personal needs?

The tension between 'educational skills' and 'vocational skills' and use of terminology is especially highlighted by the fact that the terms used to describe the other education sectors – General Education, Further Education and Higher Education – are *not* changed at this stage to reflect their respective affiliations to training within an integrated system.²⁶⁷ This implies that, for the authors of the Policy Framework, the link between education and training is particularly pronounced in the context of adult basic education. If the change from 'ABE' to 'ABET' is merely reflective of broad intentions to integrate education and training, then it is likely that the other sectors would have been altered at the same time.

Altered terminology is not the only indication that ABET is fundamentally differentiated from the rest of the integrated education system. The draft version of the Policy Framework establishes that ABET will fall under the auspices of the General Education and Training Council (GETC). The GETC would therefore consist of four sub-committees (or boards), one of which would be an Adult Basic Education Board

²⁶⁷ By 1995 these two education sectors are respectively referred to as General Education and Training (GET) and Further Education and Training (FET). It is worth noting however that, although the 1994 Policy Framework publication refers to 'General Education' and 'Further Education', the same document proposes establishing a General Education *and Training* Council (GETC) and a Further Education *and Training* Council (FETC) to develop and implement policy relating to the two respective sectors – this makes the delayed alteration of the terms more conspicuous.

(ANC 1994: 17).²⁶⁸ The overall system of education is envisaged as having three major exit points following the primary phases of General Education, Further Education and Higher Education. The entire integrated education and training system will be co-ordinated by a National Education and Training Co-ordinating Council (NETCC).²⁶⁹

ABET, however, is given unique treatment within the system in that three additional certified levels are provided for within the General Education sector – this is in keeping with the NTSI’s vision as well (mentioned earlier on page 262). ABET Levels 1-3 are all certified exit points, while ABET Level 4 is held as equivalent to the General Education Certificate (GEC). So while school children conclude their basic schooling with a GEC, adults have will have completed four certifiable stages (see Figure 6 on page 276).²⁷⁰ Figure 6 locates the four ABET levels in relation to the three exit points denoted by the three education and training bands. It indicates that ABET leavers who attain ABET Level 4 can, if they so wish, extend their education to achieve their FEC and finally continue on to HE qualifications, but that they also have the option to leave after each ABET level. In theory at least, the structure supports Bird’s comment in 1991 that an integrated education and training system would enable “workers to progress, through education and training, from ‘sweeper to engineer” (11). However, the emerging tensions between education and vocational systems questions whether the proposed

²⁶⁸ The final version of the Policy Framework only mentions that sub-committees or boards will be established for the different areas of education and training within the ambit of each Statutory Council (1995: 19). It does not stipulate, as the draft version does, what the sub-committees will be.

²⁶⁹ The Implementation Plan for Education and Training refers to the NETCC as the National Education and Training Co-ordinating *Committee*.

²⁷⁰ I have used the current terminology of GETC, FETC and HET to denote General Education and Training Certificate, Further Education and Training Certificate, and Higher Education and Training. Figure 8 on page 316 locates the four ABET stages within the broader structure of the NQF

EDUCATION AND TRAINING BANDS	MAJOR EXIT POINTS	EQUIVALENT TO CURRENT LEVEL OF SCHOOLING	EQUIVALENT TO PREVIOUS SYSTEM'S LEVEL OF SCHOOLING	EQUIVALENT YEARS OF SCHOOLING
General Education and Training Certificate (GETC)	ABET Level 1	Grade 3	Standard 1	4
	ABET Level 2	Grade 5	Standard 3	6
	ABET Level 3	Grade 7	Standard 5	8
	ABET Level 4	Grade 9	Standard 7	10
Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC)				
Higher Education and Training Degrees and Diplomas				

Figure 6: New exit points from education system in relation to previous system's levels and years of schooling

system will, in addition to workers, benefit the many disadvantaged people who are not employed in union represented sectors of the labour market.

Those tensions are partially represented in the rationale for the inclusion of additional ABET exit points. ABET Levels 1-4 are clearly concerned with meeting both individual learner requirements and employer needs:

The attainment certificates will provide learners with measurable targets towards GEC; address the needs of, and recognise the skills obtained by, learners who have specific and limited objectives such as developing basic literacy and numeracy or job-related functional skills, and who do not want to obtain the GEC; and provide employers with criteria for assessing the skills levels of workers (ANC 1995: 75).

Incorporating employer requirements into the system detracts slightly from the Policy Framework's overall claim that an integrated education and training system is entirely "learner-centred" (ibid.: 17).

While the inclusion of extra ABET exit points from the system is intended to be sensitive towards a flexible *adult* approach to learning, the position that the four exit points occupy in relation to the GEC are problematic because they implicitly correlate adult learning to children's formal schooling. This point will be returned to later in the chapter when an understanding of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) enables a more detailed discussion of this point by re-emphasising it in a way that heightens these emerging concerns.²⁷¹

This evidence of conflicting requirements and expectations with regards to ABET is strongly supported by the Implementation Plan for Education and Training's engagement with the draft Policy Framework's governance recommendations. The

²⁷¹ This point will be returned to on page 324.

IPET report's alternative recommendations directly impact on the future role of ABET in an integrated education and training system and as such it is worth elaborating on the understanding of ABET that filters through other sections of the IPET report.

Literacy discourses in the IPET report

The IPET report is charged with the responsibility for creating a platform that discusses *how* the Policy Framework's recommendations can be implemented. The introduction to the report argues that

The focus on implementation is a conscious attempt to overcome a common weakness associated with policy documents, that is, that in the absence of implementation criteria, policy statements remain no more than hopes and dreams (ANC 1994a: iii).

Incorporating adult basic education into the existing education structure (inherited from the apartheid system) possibly represents one of the biggest challenges facing the IPET attempt to realise the 'hopes and dreams' of many disadvantaged South Africans. The previous two chapters of this thesis have shown that adult basic education was not a priority under the previous government. The IPET report emphasises this point by calling attention to the fact that only one 'national department', the DET, has an adult education division and that "provision at the adult education centres [...] is seriously run down and needs to be substantially improved in quality" (ibid.: 279).²⁷²

Nevertheless, a quick glance at the IPET report's contents page sums up the special role that adult basic education has within the future integrated education and training system. Most of the report's sections are titled in accordance with the various education sectors that each Task Team respectively addresses; for example, the section on HE is

²⁷² Adult education centres, then more commonly known as 'night schools' are now referred to as Adult Learning Centres (ALCs). These were introduced in chapter one, see page 71.

entitled 'Higher Education' and the section on FE is entitled 'Further Education'. However the ABET sector stands as a notable exception: this is impressively headed with the words 'Adult Basic Education and Training as a Force for Social Participation and Economic Development' (1994a: ix).

The IPET report recalls the ANC's position in the Ready to Govern document (see page 251) and has something of the flavour of the Freedom Charter when it says "Mass provision of ABET requires strong state involvement and commitment" (ANC 1994a: 278). The report goes on to say

Our conception of the ABET system must always be understood as extending the struggle for a democratic state which has been central to our liberation struggle. We see the state as having the fundamental responsibility of providing the environment, and a framework, for the policy making and planning processes, management and implementation and delivery of ABET in a democratic South Africa (ANC 1994a: 278).

Keeping in mind the fact that COSATU plays an integral in the overall construction of the NQF and ABET's location within it, it is worth recalling that COSATU's broad perspective on social transformation is that it believes this can be significantly carried out through restructuring the labour system.²⁷³ Correlating this with the quote above, the perception that ABET (and therefore literacy) is primarily located within training initiatives becomes increasingly self-evident. It is also clear that ABET, through training, is associated with broad liberation principles – this is especially evident in the NTSI's proclamations that "Access to ABE for all should be ensured" and that "ABE is a fundamental human right and should form the basis of the process of life-long learning" (NTB 1994: 149).

²⁷³ COSATU's concept of how to achieve 'social justice' was broadly outlined at the end of the previous chapter. To review that discussion, see page 263.

Integrated education and training therefore serves to allow everyone to gain from the benefits of both systems. The Policy Framework alludes to the fact that those who were oriented towards a vocational education tended to be “locked into low-skilled and low-paying jobs” whilst those who benefited from a general basic education often found themselves “largely unprepared for the rest of their lives” (ibid.: 11). This last point supports Unterhalter and Young’s argument that the idea behind integrating education and training serves two functions:

First it is a way of raising the profile of training by linking it to education and all the prestige that this has in the wider culture. Secondly, it reflects a recognition of the inappropriateness for the future South Africa, of any narrow sense of training or vocational or job specific skills (1994: 7).

Their perception that integrative discourses exist to primarily facilitate better training opportunities is supported by some of the systemic discussions taking place within the IPET process, and the subsequent effect that those discussions had on the revised version of the Policy Framework.

In a significant departure from the previous government’s approach to adult basic education, the ABET Task Team²⁷⁴ advocated establishing a Directorate of Adult Basic and Continuing Education and Training within the new Ministry of Education and Training. The Directorate, it advised, should be split into two divisions: an ABET Division and a Continuing Education and Training Division (ibid.).

²⁷⁴ It is worth noting that the ABET Task Team (within the IPET process) was co-ordinated by Judy Favish. Favish (in 1992) served as one of the four convenors of the NEPI report on Adult Basic Education (NEPI 1992b). At that time she co-authored a paper with Rahmat Omar (from COSATU) submitting COSATU’s position on ABE to the NEPI ABE group (see Favish and Omar 1992). Their paper draws heavily on work carried out by Adrienne Bird, the then co-ordinator of COSATU’s Human Resources Committee who later went on to become a key figure in the NTSI (see page 255). Enver Motala was also involved in the IPET report’s ABET Task Team. Based at the University of Durban-Westville’s EPU, he served on the NEPI Executive Committee. Motala and Adrienne Bird were involved in the NEPI HRD process (see NEPI 1992c). Of all the NEPI reports, the HRD report is the one that is most closely aligned with COSATU’s position that equity and growth can be simultaneously achieved through an integrated education and training system (see chapter four, page 256).

ABET's location within the overall integrated education and training system is also picked up by the IPET report's Training Task Team. This group, which included Adrienne Bird,²⁷⁵ criticised the draft Policy Framework by saying that "[it] is relatively quiet on the training component of the future system" (ibid.: 384). The Training Task Team was especially concerned with the fact that the Policy Framework neglected to mention how training was to be integrated into the future system. In an attempt to resolve this absence, the Training Task Team proposed that the existing NTB should be "fundamentally restructured" (ibid.: 385).²⁷⁶ They also suggested that the new NTB should be called the National Education and Training Council (NETC), and that the proposed new Ministry of Education and Training should govern the NETC. It is a recommendation which has significant implications for ABET in that one of the primary functions envisaged by the Training Task Team for the proposed NETC involved establishing and managing an Adult Basic Education committee (ibid.: 386).

The position adopted by both the ABET and Training Task Teams naturally affected the Governance Task Team's appraisal of the draft Policy Framework's governance propositions. The most obvious question that resulted was one that related to the way in which the Policy Framework structured the integrated system according to the various proposed exit points (depicted earlier in Figure 6, page 276). The Governance Task Team consequently argued that the structure proposed by the Policy Framework split the governance of adult basic and continuing education between the GETC and

²⁷⁵ Adrienne Bird and John Tyers, then the CEO of the Transnet Training Board, compiled this section of the IPET report.

²⁷⁶ The NTB under the apartheid system was non-representative and racist in its policy making. The effect of the NTB's involvement in ABE clearly supports this view and is discussed in detail in chapter three of this thesis. To review that discussion, refer back to chapter three, page 183. It is worth recalling that the eventual admission of COSATU to the NTB in terms of working on the NTSI had a significant impact on the final outcomes (see page 254).

the FETC. They accordingly recommended that adult basic and continuing education should be governed under a single governing body – this recommendation served to uphold the suggestions made by the ABET and Training Task Teams.

The impact on ABET is comparatively depicted in the two organograms generated by the Governance Task Team as part of its report: the first reflects the Policy Framework's recommendations while the second depicts the IPET teams' revised suggestions. Figure 7 on page 283 adapts the organograms²⁷⁷ in an effort to provide a diagrammatic comparison of the recommendation which also highlights ABET's location within the overall systems. The highlighted sections show that the IPET recommendations perceive ABET to exist within a specifically vocational context; in contrast to this, the Policy Framework suggestions have ABET split between general education and training. This suggests that the Policy Framework's structure resists (at least graphically) the possibility of a narrow instrumentalist approach to ABET.

The visual representation of the IPET teams' governance recommendations recalls some of the criticisms made earlier in this thesis regarding the work carried out by the De Lange Commission in the 1980s, where the commission then distinguished between formal and non-formal education.²⁷⁸ The Governance Task Team's proposed system is

²⁷⁷ The IPET report's organograms have been simplified and modified to highlight the sections directly related to ABET concerns. For the full versions of the organograms, see Appendices 1 and 2 of the Governance section in the IPET report (ANC 1994a: 66 & 67).

²⁷⁸ See page 163 of this thesis for a detailed analysis of the de Lange Commission's recommendations. Also Figure 5 (chapter three, page 166) for a diagrammatic representation of the Commission's recommendations. Figure 5 depicts a canalised system that distinguishes between formal and non-formal education.

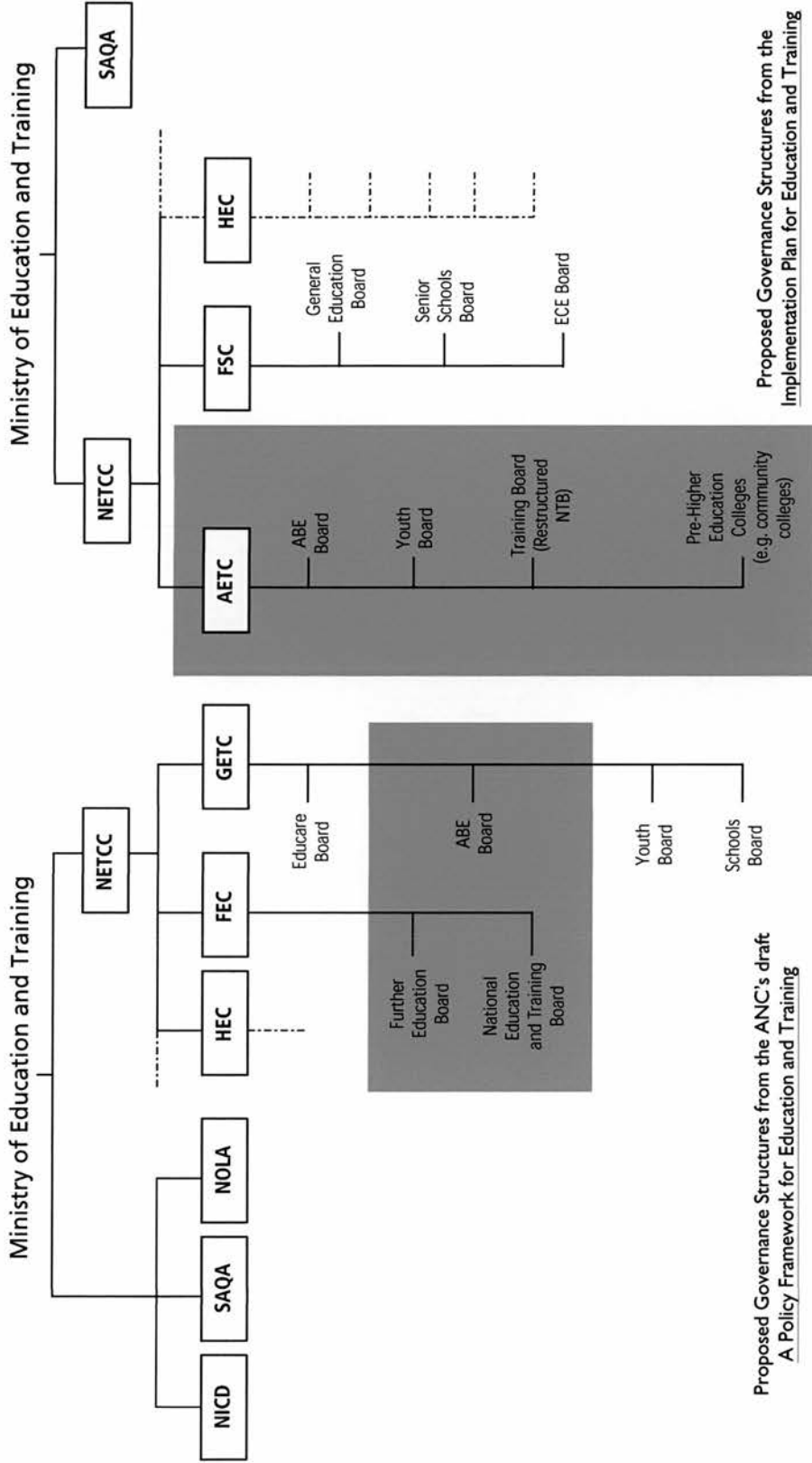


Figure 7: Comparison of governance structures proposed in draft policy framework with governance structures in the IPET Report

more complex structurally, but is arguably very similar in principle in that it implicitly distinguishes between FSC and HE (what the de Lange commission understood as formal education) and AETC (non-formal education).

However, in an attempt to avoid criticisms that the IPET propositions reproduce a differentiated (rather than integrated) canalised system, the Governance Task Team argued that SAQA and the NETCC served as key instruments for facilitating integration. Given that these oversee all the organisational substructures (including the AETC), the implication is that integration takes place within the competencies and standards set by SAQA and not within the various governing bodies. In this respect the proposed framework gives some suggestion of what the NTSI's shift from an integrated *system*, to an integrated *approach* really means.²⁷⁹ This will be discussed later in this chapter in connection with the development of the National Qualifications Framework.

The IPET report recommendations resulted in some revisions to the final version of the ANC's Policy Framework. In the draft version, as Figure 7 shows, ABE governance clearly fell under the auspices of the General Education Council:

Stakeholders will have a central role to play in the formulation and development of ABE policy through representation on the ABE board, a sub-structure of the General Education Council (ANC 1994: 90).

This was amended in the final version to read as follows:

Stakeholders will have a central role to play in the formulation and development of ABE T policy through representation on the relevant Statutory Councils and Boards (ANC 1995: 101).

The amendment is less specific possibly allowing for greater flexibility for future changes to the system that avoided contradicting the ANC's initial policy suggestions.

²⁷⁹ This was commented on in the previous chapter on page 256.

Systemic discourses will be returned to again after the publication of the White Paper on Education and Training.

From the RDP to GEAR: a rightward shift from symbolic radicalism to orthodoxy?

The IPET report's efforts to realise the draft Policy Framework's 'hopes and dreams' involve locating the Policy Framework's recommendations within the context of the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme.²⁸⁰ Considering the RDP in light of basic education issues raises several questions which contribute to a greater understanding of the trajectory of basic education discourses. First, where within the RDP's integrated reconstruction and growth vision is basic education located? Second, what role will existing providers of basic education play within the RDP and what plans have been made to extend the provision of basic education? Third, does positing the integrated education and training programme within the broader framework of the RDP impact on the structure of the literacy field?

Like the Policy Framework and the IPET report, the word 'integration' is a central concept within the RDP: "Nation-building links reconstruction and development. The RDP is based on the notion that reconstruction and development are part of an integrated process" (RSA 1994: 7). The programme is further described as "An integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework" which "seeks to mobilise all our people and our country's resources towards the final eradication of the results of apartheid and the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future" (ibid.). And in addition to this, the RDP

²⁸⁰ Hereafter referred to as the RDP.

should [...] be seen as part of a broader African Renaissance [This] is a renaissance in which economic development, popular participation and respect for human rights are seen as part and parcel of the same process (ANC 1994b: 1).

In many respects the integration rhetoric infiltrates most of the RDP document in a way that is clearly evidenced in the Policy Framework and the IPET report.

Basic education for adults is thus located within the context of one of the five key programmes making up the RDP: the programmes are, “Meeting Basic Needs, Developing Our Human Resources, Building the Economy, Democratising the State and Society, and Implementing the RDP” (RSA 1994: 7). ABE²⁸¹ discourses in particular evade being attributed with a specific role within the RDP. On the one hand, as we have said, the RDP argues that “ABE must be centrally included in all reconstruction projects” (RSA 1994c: 41). On the other hand, ABE discussions are clearly restricted to the section of the report entitled ‘Developing Our Human Resources’ and not, for example, within the context of ‘Meeting Basic Needs’. So in spite of the fact that ABE discourses are implicitly attributed with a role in all programmes (presumably basic needs issues as well) the discussions on ABE are concentrated on its role in human resource development.

Nevertheless, literacy issues (with specific reference to *literacy* rather than ABE) are given a high priority within the RDP. The RDP policy framework report argues for an ABE system that provides adults with an education system equivalent to exit level in the formal schools system and emphasises that the focus will be on literacy and numeracy skills. Section 3.3.9.1. of the report reads as follows:

²⁸¹ It is worth noting that although the RDP document was published in September 1994, four months after the publication of the IPET report, it still uses the term ABE while referring to basic education. As mentioned in the section preceding this one, the IPET report favoured the term ‘ABET’.

Adult Basic Education (ABE) aims to provide adults with education and training programmes equivalent to exit level in the formal school system, with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills [my emphasis] (RSA 1994a: 41).

In addition to this, the RDP white paper discussion document contains the announcement of a Presidential Lead project for a National Literacy Programme²⁸² (RSA 1994: 57). It is interesting to note that although the programme is referred to as a 'National Literacy Programme' in the body of the text it is nevertheless described as a National Adult Basic Education and Training Programme:

Aim	To launch a National Adult Basic Education and Training Programme through the line departments and institutions to address the literacy and numeracy gap in the country.
Scope	Identification of appropriate mechanisms for harnessing resources and skills for the provision of literacy and training. Mechanisms should conform to the criteria of national acceptability, inclusiveness, integration with the RDP, be action-orientated and be cost effective. Operates primarily through existing capacity.
Output	Planning for implementation – September-December 1994 Implementation Phase – January 1995 – 1999
RDP Fund	None – Donor funded to 1997 (RDP 1994: 57).

The lead project points to two factors which directly impact on the provision of basic education through existing organisations, and consequently on the future role that literacy has to play within South African society. Firstly, the fact that provision should

²⁸² The national literacy campaign became known as the Ithuteng 'Ready to Learn' Campaign. It was launched in February 1996 together with the NLC's Thousand Learner Unit (TLU) project. The TLU project represents one of the largest NGO initiatives – it aimed to reach 18000 learners by the end of 1997. (See chapter one page 67 for a general background to the NLC).

be cost-effective (a point I will return to later in this section), and secondly, that provision should take place primarily through existing capacity.

The later point directly relates to the fundamental principles underpinning the RDP. And that is that the RDP must be an “integrated process” where the “public sector must play a major enabling role, since it cannot be expected that the market will make such a structural transformation on its own [my emphasis]” (RSA 1994c: 53). The RDP, it is argued, “must become a people-driven process” (RSA 1994:6). Provision of ABE must therefore come about by

building a partnership of all employer, labour, local and provincial government, community and funding agencies. This will establish a process to provide funding support to a national ABE programme, managed at provincial, sectoral, local, community and workplace levels, and where possible using existing educational and training facilities when these are unutilised or underutilised, such as at night, over weekends and during holidays (RSA 1994a: 41).

The ‘group effort’ approach is most clearly expressed in this statement in an ANC document entitled ‘The core values of the RDP’. The document argues that

Where we fail to take the people driven approach, we often play into the hands of those who seek to sink the RDP. These are the forces which, while continuing to retain very significant powers and privileges, are happy to see the ANC in government single-handedly carry all the responsibility for ‘delivery’ (ANC 1994b: 1).

It can be argued that the approach overestimated the support that the government would have for the RDP. Philip Dexter²⁸³ who was then the general secretary of the National Education, Health and Allied Workers’ Union (Nehawu) commented on this flaw in the principles underpinning the RDP:

It is obvious that transfers of resources and power will only be effectively managed if these are done via institutions that are in favour politically of the reconstruction and development process. This factor is the proverbial ‘Achilles Heel’ of

²⁸³ Philip Dexter went on to become an MP in 1994.

reconstruction and development, as the established institutions of the state, the existing parastatals, and the public corporations are nearly all firmly in the hands of the National Party (Dexter 1994: 6).

This signalled the first possible flaw in the RDP.²⁸⁴ The second limitation related to how a ‘people driven’ approach would be funded.

The long-term effects on funding basic education provision within an RDP-orientated South Africa began to be felt two years later. In August 1995 the *Financial Mail* reported on the results of a study carried out by the Independent Development Trust (IDT):²⁸⁵

[Post-election] expectations of funding from government’s RDP were high. But while government is reported to lend a sympathetic ear to the problems facing NGOs, the overwhelming majority reported that they had not yet received any funds. Attempts by the NGOs to garner support from national and provincial RDP offices and line departments have borne little fruit.

When it came to foreign funding, a major complaint was that bilateral aid packages were diverting funding away from NGOs. Respondents reported their perception that major donors like the EU and USAID were redirecting funding largely or exclusively to government RDP projects (IDT report quoted in *Financial Mail* 1995).

In spite of the fact that funding was apparently being diverted to RDP projects, the article went on to comment that, “The real problem [with NGO funding] arises because the expectation that the new democratic government would – at least to some extent – replace the NGOs through the RDP, has not been fulfilled”. And in cases where RDP projects had been established, the article continued by saying “There is growing concern

²⁸⁴ Some of the National Party’s principal concerns can be seen in their strategizing during the 1980s. This is particularly evident in the discussions taking place in chapter four. In that chapter too, I mention Kallaway’s discussion of the international influences over the National Party at the time. Refer back to page 173 to review that discussion.

²⁸⁵ The IDT is very involved in facilitating funding for NGOs and was broadly introduced in chapter one (see page 51). It also represents a further state-capital alliance with interests in education (McGrath 1996: 169). Others mentioned previously in this thesis in accordance with their role in ABET concerns are PRISEC, who were centrally involved in both NEPI and the NTSI, and JET (see page 52).

that the RDP projects are not working properly, that benefits are not flowing through” (ibid.).²⁸⁶

In addition to funding problems, the climate of affirmative action and opportunities resulted in a ‘brain-drain’ from civil society with NGOs losing some of their black experts to more attractive positions in the new government. One NGO director complained that that too exacerbated certain NGO’s funding problems: “In plain English, it means that NGOs that are still run by whites can forget about getting government contracts or RDP funds” (Bertelsmann quoted in the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* 1996). The extent of the NGO funding problem with respect to literacy organisations is clearly evidenced by the National Literacy Co-operation’s falling membership: the co-operation initially had a membership of approximately two hundred NGOs but by 1998 at least sixty of those NGOs were no longer operating (*Mail and Guardian* 1998). In 1996 the Transitional National Development Trust (TNDT) stressed that in order to receive TNDT funds, NGOs needed to switch from making applications for ‘crisis funding’ to ones which applied for ‘project funding’ (*The Star* 1996). NGOs, in the face of imminent closure, were forced to take up new approaches to basic education issues.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ The RDP eventually abandoned its policies regarding the funding of NGOs in 1996 which meant that funders were again able to directly fund projects that had been approved by the government and facilitated by NGOs (Wolpe 1996: 132). Although this improved the funding for certain projects, it still left adult literacy providers in the vulnerable position of needing to convince funders that their projects were equally as viable as others such as housing, or general education.

²⁸⁷ The TNDT was established in April 1996. Its purpose was to cover the immediate needs of civil society organisations until such time as the permanent National Development Agency (NDA) was set up. The NDA took over the role of the TNDT in April 2000. On the first of September 2000, the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper reported that “the National Development Agency has yet to deliver a cent to any NGO” (*Mail and Guardian* 2000).

Two NGOs exemplify the radical shift necessary for economic survival. The first, Project Literacy, faced donor funding cuts from R9m in 1994, to R2m in 1995. Their response to the funding crisis was to employ a full time business development executive and to focus on selling literacy training to big organisations: “aside from smaller donations [...] the project’s only means of support is the sale of its services to large employers” (*Financial Mail* 1995a). In many respects, the drive towards servicing corporate basic education needs made sense at a time when big businesses had started taking a greater interest in basic education as part of their training strategies (McGrath 1996: 170).

The second NGO, USWE,²⁸⁸ was set up in 1982 in Johannesburg and in 1986, a second branch was set up in Cape Town. The Johannesburg branch was forced to close down due to financial difficulties while the Cape Town branch continued to expand. In 1994 it employed 69 staff members and was involved in materials development, curriculum development, teacher training, research, policy work as well as providing ABE classes to approximately 1 031 learners (Harley *et al* 1996: 273). Nevertheless, the Cape Town branch soon faced funding difficulties as well, thus forcing it to adapt. In 1995 USWE made the following announcement:

USWE has adapted to the new dispensation by redefining itself as an organisation that tenders for RDP related contracts with government and sells ABET services to the business sector, training boards and educational institutions (USWE quoted in Harley *et al* 1996: 274).

This change in direction is a remarkable departure from the organisation’s original interest in primarily serving “domestic workers, cleaners, night-watchmen, garage attendants – i.e. non-unionised labourers” (Wedephol 1984: 50). The NGO funding

²⁸⁸ USWE stands for Use, Speak and Write English. chapter two briefly discusses the origins of the organisation (see page 66).

crisis increased significantly amidst allegations of corruption within the NLC²⁸⁹ which is responsible for providing financial assistance to many of its member NGOs.

The negative implications of both ‘survival shifts’ are obvious. Within an economic context, basic education risks being restricted to narrow vocationalism constrained by current market requirements. Enver Motala, in a background document used for the IPE T report, argued that the

The problem of narrow ‘economism’ is unfortunately exacerbated in the terrain of ABE. If the goals of reconstructing the education and training system are simply economic then the pressure on ABE policies to conform to the prescriptions of a dis-empowering and narrow vocationalism are so much the greater. The struggle to establish the right to a basic education could easily be ‘converted’ to one in which the primary goal of basic education is to develop a ‘competent workforce’ (Motala 1994: 7).

This perception is supported by the experience of one literacy practitioner working within an organisation oriented towards meeting basic education needs in the commercial sector. Her remarks cited here reflect what she described as “aggressive commercialism” from her company. Her words relate to her annoyance at having routine assessments she carried out duplicated by a senior member of the organisation for the sole purpose of charging the company money:

I’ve carried out an assessment and then John from [Anonymous Literacy organisation (ALO)] decides he wants to come and watch me, and then charge R250 an hour [...]. He came and he spent the whole morning, about four or five hours, at about R250 an hour. [...] I later turned around to the ALO chairperson and said that one of the things I had a problem with at ALO was that kind of [...] gross misuse of money and trust. [I said] ‘you know, you can come for an hour, but at R250 an hour you don’t need to come for four or five hours when I’ve already done the assessments...!’ I mean, it’s absolute rubbish! Because ALO end up

²⁸⁹ Kumi Naidoo, the NLC’s director up until 1996, is attributed with a central role in securing the NLC a phased grant of 20 million rand from the European Union (EU) in 1995. Naidoo left the NLC in 1996 to head the South African National Non-Governmental Organisation Coalition and in 1998 he was asked by Deputy President Thabo Mbeki to head a commission on poverty. His NLC successor, Enrico Fourie was at the centre of a funding scandal that crippled the organisation in 1998 (Mail and Guardian 1998). (For the general background to the NLC see chapter one, page 67).

charging the company, an assessment fee, and an hourly fee [...] Then the company gets given a bill of, you know, R1200 for that sort of thing. I'm sure they think [...] they've got better ways of spending their money. I mean, no wonder the company turns around and says, you know, this seems odd (Respondent 13: 26th August 1998).

Human resource development plays a key role in the RDP's economic policies – and education and training discourses, as already mentioned earlier in this section, are located within the 'Human Resource Development' section of the report. Section 4.2.2.9 states that one of the aims and objectives of the RDP is the goal to “integrate into the world economy in a manner that sustains a viable and efficient domestic manufacturing capacity and increases our potential to export manufactured goods” (RSA 1994a: 51). In order to achieve this, the RDP states that it needs to “develop the human resource capacity of all South Africans so the economy achieves high skills and wages” (RSA 1994: 25).

The perceived extent of the problem of South African skills shortages is perhaps aptly exemplified by the fact that it is not limited to those who were disadvantaged as a result of apartheid's racial policies: *Finance Week*, a leading South African business newspaper, reported that, “while most white children are reasonably educated in the broad sense of the term far too few are equipped these days for the demands of the economy” (1994: 10). The demands of the economy are thus seen to be setting the pace for skills development and consequently requiring the entire concept of skills development to radically shift from previous education and training strategies: “In the 21st century the education and skills of the workforce will end up being the dominant competitive weapon” (Lester Thurow²⁹⁰ quoted in *Finance Week*: 1994: 9).

²⁹⁰ Lester Thurow was, at the time of this article, the Dean of the Sloan School of Management at Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT).

According to Thurow, those skills will be concentrated in one of seven key industries: “microelectronics, biotechnology, the new materials industries, civilian aviation, telecommunications, robots plus machine tools and computers plus software” (ibid.). He goes on to argue that

If the route to success is being the cheapest and best producer of products, old or new, the education of the bottom 50% of the population moves to centre stage. This part of the population must learn new processes. If the bottom 50% cannot learn what must be learned new hi-tech processes cannot be employed (ibid.).

It is an undeniable fact that the changing nature of global capital has had a significant impact on education and training. Professor Makgoba, the then Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of the Witwatersrand, made this claim in 1995:

The pursuit of knowledge and the truth for its own sake is a dead concept, untenable in almost all societies. The global competition, the involvement of industry in universities, the social, economic and political pressures of modern society, have made the latter principle obsolete. The pursuit of knowledge and the truth with a purpose and social responsibility is what universities are all about (quoted in the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* 1995).

But where, in a world dominated by capital vying for top place in industries like microelectronics, biotechnology, telecommunications, and computers and software, does this different form of knowledge hinted at by Makgoba leave the adult person who lacks even the basic skills to read and write? This is the character of the economic challenge that the RDP was faced with with regards to basic education, a challenge it implicitly acknowledged within its economic strategy which included the intention to conduct a “modernisation of the human resource programmes to meet the challenges of changing production processes” (RSA 1994: 26).

In Section 4.2.10, the RDP policy framework report states,

Our economic policies require human resource development on a massive scale. Improved training and education are fundamental to higher employment, the introduction of more advanced technologies, and reduced inequalities [my emphasis] (RSA 1994a: 52).

And with respect to the 'bottom 50%' of the population, section 3.3.15.1 proposes to achieve these economic objectives through a "substantially restructured and expanded training system, integrated with Adult Basic Education, post-standard 7 formal schooling and higher education" (ibid.: 44).

Motala, in his submission to IPET report, noted that

The most important strategy in the development of the human resources of the country concerns the education and training system and the recognition that ABE is a critical component of the education and training systems and the RDP (Motala 1994: 1)

In other words, the RDP, with its integrated approach to reconstruction and development faced considerable pressures, prompting one observer to comment, "Already the ANC is subject to tremendous pressure from local and international capital, forcing it towards the centre [politics]" (Dexter 1994a: 31).

Despite this, the RDP's stated position at this point in history resisted being specifically aligned with either neo-liberal capital interests, or socialist principles: "We are convinced that neither a commandist central planning system nor an unfettered free market system can provide adequate solutions to the problems confronting us" (RSA 1994c: 50). There is, nevertheless, a implicit sense of 'prioritising' within the integrated approach with economic growth considered first, and redistribution (or redress, reconstruction, equity etc.) following:

The fundamental goal of the RDP is an employment-creating, labour-absorbing economy which will ultimately lead to full employment. Secondly, redistribution must occur to alleviate poverty in the process of meeting basic needs. The RDP takes the view that neither economic growth by itself or redistribution on its own will resolve the serious crisis in which South Africa finds itself (RSA 1994: 28-29).

Basic education teeters between the priorities of economic skills development and redress, suggesting that unless the integrated approach is strictly balanced in meeting its various objectives, basic education will be biased towards either one or the other. Given

the funding difficulties facing literacy providers in the RDP climate, and given the global economic pressures, economic objectives comprise the most likely scenario within which basic education will develop.

This fact is emphasised by the fact that the RDP's role as the country's major socio-economic policy framework was short-lived. On the 28th of March 1996, the RDP office was closed down. In that same year, the RDP contribution to economic policy discourses was marginalised in favour of the government's macroeconomic policy entitled Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). Although the RDP office was closed, it was argued that the RDP fund had not been abolished but was instead integrated into departmental line budgets thus causing the need for separate programme funding allocations to fall away (*Financial Mail* 1996). This devolved control for programme funding to provincial authorities within a more decentralised approach (*Financial Mail* 1996a).

The advent of GEAR thrust many of the concerns raised in the context of the RDP into the foreground. It is inflexible and non-inclusive in that it is described as a "non-negotiable" economic strategy which was constructed without any consultation within the ANC: "even top ANC figures were not acquainted with its details before public release" (Marais 1998: 160). In the words of a leading South African newspaper, GEAR is essentially "redistribution through growth, or 'trickle-down'" (*Weekly Mail and Guardian* 1997). In this respect GEAR differs enormously from MERG's simultaneous vision of 'growth and redistribution' which later evolved into the RDP.

GEAR predicates its success on four economic models: the Reserve Bank, the Development Bank of South Africa, the Bureau of Economic Research (at the

University of Stellenbosch) and the World Bank.²⁹¹ All four models, “are extremely orthodox, with biases that favour neo-liberal policies and that treat markets as reliable, well functioning institutions” (Bond 1996: 23). Nothing could be further from Mandela’s claim in 1990 that “the nationalisation of the mines, banks and monopoly industry is the policy of the ANC and a change or modification of our views in this regard is inconceivable” (quoted in Marais 1998: 146). Aligning the economy with global standards clears up any confusion that might have been generated by the ‘comfort zone’ that was the RDP White Paper. Rather than obfuscating issues and trying to be all things to everyone, this macroeconomic strategy is a hard hitting outward-orientated economic plan clearly aimed at achieving growth through global competitiveness.

One of GEAR’s key features is the aim to reduce the country’s fiscal deficit. This is also one of GEAR’s most controversial aims, especially in light of some of the earlier problems related to the RDP and the financing of adult basic education in South Africa. Maria Ramos, the Director General of the Department of Finance argues that to achieve a reduction of the fiscal deficit, “the Minister of Finance has initiated a thorough audit of government expenditure, including RDP allocations, to identify those areas in which budgetary cuts can be made [my emphasis]” (ibid. 8). For many observers, the exchange of the RDP for GEAR is tantamount to destroying the more affirmative radical components of the policies the new government brought with them when they came to power:

To all intents and purposes, the policy that almost replaced the sacred Freedom Charter in its vision of a more equal and progressive order has now been shelved. Even its symbolic radicalism is no longer *en vogue*. A Thatcherite discourse of fiscal discipline and market forces has taken over (Adam *et al* 1997: 161).

²⁹¹ The impact of World Bank policies on basic adult learning needs in the world was addressed in more detail in chapter one, see page 47.

Adelzadeh notes too that “[GEAR] leaves little remaining of the RDP as it was first conceived, other than in name alone” (1996: 67).

For many, the movement from the RDP to GEAR signals a shift in rhetoric from language that articulated social justice and reconstruction in the form of redistribution and growth, to talk of sacrifice in the short term in order to reap long term benefits²⁹²: “The story the government is giving is ‘no pain, no gain’; so you have to take the pain today to get a better future” (Duffy quoted in AIDC: [n.d.]). ABET, it seems, stands directly in the firing line for ‘pain’. In March 1997, the *Mail and Guardian* reported that the Ithuteng campaign was floundering for lack of financial support from the Department of Education and that ABET within the private sector was governed by a debate that boiled down to “who pays, how much, and what is the money going to be used for?” (*Mail and Guardian* 1997a). The Ithuteng campaigns problems were magnified within the NGO sector in March 1998 when the NLC closed down and terminated the services of all their staff who had been working for them.²⁹³

This crisis is partly related to the fact that provincial education departments negotiated budgetary constraints by rethinking their priorities (Chisholm 1998: 6). In 1996, for example, the Western Cape and the KwaZulu Natal departments announced that they would deal with budgetary cuts by reducing their allocations to ABET and ECD (DE 1997d: 169). This prompted Motala to argue, in 1997, that financial constraints meant that “the programmes most likely to suffer, [as a result of budget cuts, were] the more innovative programmes and more marginal areas such as Adult Basic Education and

²⁹² Marais notes that there are only four references to the RDP in the GEAR document and he comments that they are all “flippant” (1998: 161)

²⁹³ Enrico Fourie, the national director of the NLC was forced to resign after the EU audited the NLC's books and uncovered approximately R35 000 worth of personal corruption by Fourie, and a further R7-million which could not be accounted for.

Training and Special Needs” (1997: 7). This view was later supported by the 1998 government report on Poverty and Inequality in South Africa, which pointed out that provinces tended to allocate approximately 80% of the budget towards public ordinary schooling leaving little scope for expansion in areas such as ABET and ECD. It further argued that ‘development-related’ areas such as ABET and ECD are under-funded, under-resourced, and lack capacity and ‘clout” (RSA 1998: 11).

In June 1998 the Adult Educators and Trainers Association of South Africa (AETASA) complained that adult education had “slipped off the national agenda” with many adult education centres being closed in Gauteng due to financial difficulties (*Cape Times* 1998a). Nevertheless, in his ministerial status report for 1999, Sibusiso Bengu claimed that the original 1996 Ithuteng target of reaching 90 000 learners had been reached and that a further 130 000 new learners had been recruited and taken through ABET levels 1 and 2 as part of the campaign. He also commented that “Since then, more than 500 000 learners have been reached” (Bengu 1999: 25).²⁹⁴ Budlender however points out that many provinces are unable to distinguish between ABET learners and those studying at higher levels, making it difficult to determine whether the ABET figures cited truthfully reflect the fact that targets are being met (2000: 105). In words that seem to support this concern, Kell has observed that, “There is no great rush [amongst adult learners] to fill the literacy classes” (1999: 5).

²⁹⁴ The targets mentioned here are referred to again later in this chapter when I discuss the ABET Policy Document and Multi-Year Implementation Plan. Table 10 on page 349 outlines the targets set out for between 1997 and 2001.

Education and Training in the 'new' South Africa

The new South Africa was not born out of the radical revolution that many activists campaigning for reform in the 1980s might have expected it to be. Instead, it was born out of deliberations, negotiations and compromises between key political parties – and most particularly in negotiations between the ANC and the National Party which lead to major compromises from both parties. Adam, Van Zyl Slabbert and Moodley suggest that along the road towards democracy

Mandela and his negotiators sold out the National Democratic Revolution, whereas De Klerk and his negotiators sold out Afrikaner minority domination. The one sacrificed ideological purity and correctness, and the other political power. The negotiated outcome was a liberal democratic constitution which neither had ever seriously believed in or was quite sure it wanted (1997: 61).

When the Government of National Unity (GNU) assumed office in May 1994 it embodied a spirit of uneasy fusion of continuing National Party bureaucrats and new ANC memberships with their respective ideologies, different notions of what transformation entailed, and enormous expectations from their various constituencies. Compromise and negotiation would clearly still have a significant impact on evolving policies resulting in what Deacon and Parker describe as an “elite-pacting” government (1996: 166).

This section of the thesis will consider how the emergence of the GNU impacts on the Policy Framework and IPET discourses etched out prior to the elections. The White Paper on Education and Training²⁹⁵ published in 1995 against the backdrop of the RDP, officially introduces the new system that will characterise education and training in South Africa. What is especially clear is that the debates on integration leading up to the publication are formally entrenched in official discourses:

²⁹⁵ Hereafter referred to as the WPET.

The publication of the White Paper on Education and Training signalled a key stage in attempts to resolve [debates on integration]. By calling itself the White Paper on Education *and* Training it committed the state irrevocably to the adoption of an integrated approach (DE 1996a: 19).

But how integration is manifested within the system, and how that impacts on the forms of knowledge generated by the system, are not as obviously evidenced in the WPET.

It is with the formation of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) that we are provided with our first clues to the knowledge forms that will eventually characterise education and training in South Africa. The concept of integration becomes inextricably linked with SAQA's notions of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) – this is particularly apparent in the way in which SAQA conceptualises the future National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The forms of knowledge embodied within the principles of South African OBE and the NQF are also influenced by the changing macroeconomic context. In the previous section I discussed the impact of the RDP on the emergence of the Policy Framework and the IPET report. In this section, the switch to the government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy (GEAR) contributes towards understanding how socio-economic trends contribute to the shape of basic education discourses. GEAR discourses also have significant impact on the RDP.

The literacy field at this time is consequently fashioned within the context of the WPET, SAQA, the NQF and against the backdrop of GEAR. The language of the NQF and GEAR will be critically considered in terms of how it impacts on adult basic education in particular. This will be discussed at the end of this section.

White Paper on Education and Training (1995)

The White Paper on Education and Training (WPET) is peculiarly non-committal and vague in terms of specific fields of interest consequently generating conflicting impressions of how 'integration' is envisaged within the NQF. Pam Christie comments on the "virtual absence of the formal education sector in the [WPET's] conceptualisation of the integrated approach" going on to say, in strong terms, that a "fundamental flaw was that the emerging consensus on the new education and training agenda was based almost exclusively on training" (1997: 118). Conversely, McGrath makes the case that the WPET was "almost entirely focussed on compulsory schooling" (1996: 198) and King suggests that "there is a distinct sense of the Department of Education being concerned principally with the Education side of the proposed integration" (1997: 4).

The WPET therefore offers a very general vision of education, couched within extensive equity rhetoric and rough principles, rather than provide specific details on how integration will be practically manifested within the broader education and training system. Adult basic education in particular is framed within the same recurring principles offered by earlier discourses; namely, redressing historic oppressions, building inclusive partnerships within which ABET activities can take place, and interpreting ABET as a force for "social participation and economic development" (DE 1995: 31). The WPET is similarly ambiguous with respect to what the words 'basic education' will mean within the NQF saying that

Basic education must be defined in terms of learning needs appropriate to the age and experience of the learner, whether child, youth or adult, men or women, workers, work seekers or self-employed. Basic education programmes should therefore be flexible, developmental, and targeted at the specific requirements of particular learning audiences or groups, and should provide access to a nationally recognised qualification or qualifications (DE 1995: 40).

In fact, human rights issues stand as the most coherent discourse within the WPET. The document makes a concerted effort to posit integrated education and training as something which challenges apartheid history, contributes to the restoration of a culture of learning and a culture of accountability. It is also accorded with an active role in the task of levelling out some of the fundamental differences in society arising out of diverse religious, cultural and language traditions (DE 1995). The strongest endorsement of an individual's rights to education and training is encapsulated in Chapter six of the WPET, a chapter entirely devoted to outlining the fundamental rights expressed within the South African Constitution.²⁹⁶ (The affirmation that the South African constitution "guarantees equal access to basic education for all" are later formally enshrined in Section 4 of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (DE 1995: 21)).²⁹⁷

The WPET explicitly locates itself within the broad aims of the RDP thus suggesting that the equity rhetoric it devotes attention to is, to a certain extent, an extension of the principles expressed in the country's socio-economic framework (ibid.: 13). In fact, there are several instances in the WPET where RDP discourses are clearly represented within an education and training context. It is significant to note, however, that the similarities in positions are not only attributable to socio-economic rhetoric prevalent at the time, but, more specifically, owe something to the fact that many of the people who fashioned RDP discourses found themselves later working on the construction of the WPET too (Greenstein 1996: 8). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning a few of the most

²⁹⁶ Discussions on Constitutional rights in the WPET relate to Act No 200 of 1993. Basic educational rights can also be seen in the Bill of Rights expressed in Act No 108 of 1996: Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (on page 13).

²⁹⁷ Act No. 27 of 1996

salient RDP principles present in the WPET to highlight the shifts that will take place later.

The most obvious similarity between WPET and RDP discourses can be seen in the fact that the WPET addresses issues of equity and growth simultaneously in the context of basic education and training: “[historical inequalities must be addressed] because basic education is a right guaranteed to all persons by the Constitution, and because our national development requires an ever-increasing level of education and skill throughout society” (DE 1995: 31). In addition to this is the stated awareness of changing global economic trends and education and training (and the concept of integration) is explicitly situated within the context of those trends: the WPET notes that

In response to such structural changes in social and economic organisation and technological development, integrated approaches to education and training are now a major international trend in curriculum development and the reform of qualification structures. An integrated approach to education and training will not itself create a successful economy and society in South Africa. However, the Ministry of Education is convinced that this approach is a prerequisite for successful human resource development, and it is thus capable of making a significant contribution to the reconstruction and development of our society and economy (DE 1995: 13).

Finally, like the RDP, the WPET embraces the concept of inclusivity and shared partnerships with particular reference to the fields of ABET and ECD (DE 1995: 22, 40 and 63).²⁹⁸ However, despite the fact that the WPET (like the Policy Framework and the IPET report) uses the RDP as a common point of departure when talking about integration, there are significant differences in the way in which the three reports conceptualise how ‘integration’ manifests itself in practice.

²⁹⁸ This position directly correlates with the RDP’s approach to ABET, mentioned earlier on page 288 of this thesis.

Earlier in the chapter I graphically compared how the Policy Framework and the IPET report both interpreted integration as something which would involve merging – integrating – the historically divided systems of education and training thus resulting in a single unified system of education and training.²⁹⁹ At the broadest level, integration at that point of the discussion necessitated the establishment of a single Ministry of Education and Training with some of the finer details of the argument revolving around whether or not ABE should be governed by, or independently of, a council that also governed the restructured NTBs. In other words, integrative discourses were preoccupied with achieving integration through and within the systemic structure itself.

In a significant departure from this position, the WPET announces that the Ministry of Education will accept executive responsibility for the NQF in cabinet. It goes on to stress, however, that the policy work carried out by the Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IMWG) (resulting in the WPET) involved “very close co-operation between the two [Ministries of Department and Labour], on the basis of a careful definition of where their respective interests, responsibilities, and competencies converge and diverge” (DE 1995: 16). And while the Ministry of Education holds responsibility for the NQF, the WPET notes that

In promoting an integrated approach to education and training under the NQF, the Ministry of Education does not wish to assume executive responsibility for the provision of training which falls within the competence of other Ministries (ibid.: 15).

The term that is key to the new concept of integration therefore lies with the words ‘integrated approach’ – McGrath calls attention to Trevor Coombe’s³⁰⁰ position on the

²⁹⁹ The diagram referred to is Figure 5 (see page 166).

³⁰⁰ Trevor Coombe was the Chairperson of the IMWG.

concept of integration where he indicated that there was “no need for an integrated system of education”³⁰¹ suggesting instead that “an integrated approach was needed” (McGrath 1996: 197).³⁰² McGrath indicates that Coombe’s position in this context relates to his (Coombe’s) perception that integration would take place naturally within a radically decentralised NQF – a perspective that is in keeping with the WPET’s principles of inclusivity. In addition to this, it should be noted too that the word ‘approach’ also implies that the emerging consensus on integrative discourses perceives integration to be intrinsically embedded within the principles of the OBE discourses that underpins the NQF – this is a point I will return to in the section on OBE.

If integration is said to manifest itself in a decentralised system, then it is important to note that the concept of integration in South Africa is problematic. For a start, a decentralised NQF functioning within different sub-systems makes the assumption that there is unanimous support for the NQF and for integrating education and training. However, differences of opinion are likely to result in different practices that in turn may undermine integrative principles.³⁰³ In addition to this, a more fundamental challenge to a decentralised control relates again to the question of financial limitations. The new transformational programmes, and the extra staff required to effectively manage them, is meant to be funded from provincial budgets which, to a greater or lesser degree, cannot cope with the extra financial burden. One proposed solution

³⁰¹ Kraak elaborates in detail on what he means by a ‘systemic discourse’ concluding that it is usually associated with the “privileging of the idea of a single, unified and integrated regulatory framework applicable to the entire [education and training] system, that is, to all of its sub-parts” (Kraak 1998: 5).

³⁰² The emphasis is mine.

³⁰³ When I discuss the impact of the WPET and the NQF on adult basic education discourses a little later in the chapter, I will highlight this concern by reviewing the adult basic education discourses emerging from the Department of Labour. In so doing I will show that where adult basic education is concerned, the Departments of Education and Labour do not speak with one voice.

suggests that neither of the visions of either systemic or decentralised integration should occur resulting instead in a thrust towards recentralisation and a more interventionist role for the Department of Education (Motala 1997: 2).

For some critics, the shift towards recentralisation represents part of a broader political debate focussing on the relocation of those who fashioned the Policy Framework and IPET discourses into the forum of negotiated state discourses. On the one hand, this is interpreted as an attempt by those with newly acquired political power to retain as much control over the functions and process of education and training as possible:

The [NQF] process has been driven by an Inter-Ministerial Working Group headed by the top leadership of the Department of Education. To expect them to undermine their own control over the system is unrealistic. It is not clear how control over formal schooling would be wrested away from those who are currently in charge (Greenstein 1996: 10).

More explicitly, Greenstein raises this question: “what is the likelihood that state officials would preside over the demise of their own powers – a certain outcome of the NQF as a devolved structure if logically pursued” (ibid.: 9).³⁰⁴

This perspective is enhanced by the sense shared by many that few efforts were made to seriously consult those outside the circle of influence on matters relating to education and training:

On the whole, the proposals for integration have been driven and negotiated by a few policy experts, academics, top business and trade union leaders who did not seriously consult, nor initiate a nation-wide debate with, the broader education community, the bureaucrats and teachers” [top down approach] (De Clercq 1997: 143).³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ I will be discussing the NQF shortly.

³⁰⁵ Also see Kruss 1998: 102-103.

On the other hand, there is also a sense that the modified vision of integration has something to do with the new South Africa shared political forum within which policy discourses take place:

In the transition to the old-new mode of operation, priority has been given to those individuals, organisations and social forces that can speak the language of the state, the language of rationality, responsibility, stability, gradual reform (Greenstein 1996: 12).³⁰⁶

In other words, the language necessary for policy consensus, something which has a particular resonance in the context of the GNU, and possibly contributes to the reason why Christie would comment that the WPET is “generous in vision [but] short on implementation strategies”, and that it masks the political choices it must have made (1997: 119 and 121). Deacon and Parker also comment on the nature of policy discourse:

policy discourse assumes the separation of knowledge from power and pays homage to the ‘unforced force’ of a universal reason deemed capable of producing policy consensus. These assumptions, however, conceal real inequalities between and amongst policy-makers and learners (1996: 166).

This sense of compromise and negotiated rhetoric that is assumed to have impacted on the principles of integration are also evident within the context of the government’s macro-economic framework and in some of the OBE language used in the NQF.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The NQF comprises of a system based on the concept of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and an operationalising agency, SAQA. The new education and training system introduces a minefield of terminology and concepts within both SAQA and OBE

³⁰⁶ Greenstein’s comment points directly to the functioning of a ‘linguistic market’ within the GNU. As noted previously in this thesis, linguistic markets constitute a significant structuring effect on various fields. This has already been addressed in the NEPI process (see page 230) and the NTSI (page 253).

discourses which, for the purposes of even facilitating a discussion, need to be briefly raised in the section introducing SAQA. Other terms and concepts will be critically considered in the OBE section.

Both the WPET and the first edition of the *SAQA Bulletin* specifically acknowledge that the NQF was principally developed within the NTSI process, thus calling attention to its trade unionist origins (DE 1995: 26 and SAQA 1997: 2). And many of those trade unionist discourses can be attributed to similar competency based developments in international communities; in particular, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (Young 1994, Donn 1998 and Kraak 1998). The international influences of the NQF prompt Christie to describe the policy proposals for an integrated education and training approach, together with a modular, competency-based curriculum under the NQF, as a “pastiche of policy borrowing and local initiatives adapted to South African circumstances” (Christie 1997: 117).

The South African challenge for adapting international experiences to South African circumstances entails accommodating the two discourses that have recurred throughout this thesis within a competency based modular approach:

There is on the one hand a commitment to the ‘social democratic’ project of transformation, the legacy of the democratic movement, which highlights issues of equality, social justice and redress. On the other hand there is the politics of the ‘free market’, the legacy of the reforming apartheid state, with the added weight of global economic pressures and institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF (Krusz 1997: 86)

It is in the NQF’s approach to redistribution and equity issues that the South African NQF gains its unique character and this is especially reflected in the language adopted

within OBE discourses, and perhaps too in the attention it gives to ABET.³⁰⁷ But whether the NQF manages to stand the test of time and achieve the “supreme challenge [of developing] a national skills and qualification service that really does manage to be inclusive”, even with its equity-based priorities, remains to be seen (King 1997: 8). This seems especially tenuous against the backdrop of GEAR and the RDP’s diminishing status in political discourses.³⁰⁸ The next section serves to briefly introduce SAQA’s role in the development of the NQF before critically considering the central principles of OBE discourses a little later.

South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) functions primarily to

oversee the development of the NQF, formulate and publish criteria for registering bodies responsible for establishing standards and qualifications, accrediting bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of standards and qualifications; overseeing the implementation of the NQF (SAQA Act, 1995).³⁰⁹

In the first edition of the *SAQA Bulletin*, pains were taken to stress that the various members of the team represented diverse interests and brought with them very different ideas of what the NQF would look like and how it would function. This stands as a

³⁰⁷ Christie has argued that “the NQF debate could be more accurately described as providing a new vision for training and adult basic education, rather than an integrated vision for general education and training” (Christie 1997: 118). Similarly, Greenstein has remarked that “Since [the NQF] emerged from labour/business circles with their concerns with adult basic education and training, it is not surprising that the NQF should come full circle to where it started from” (1996: 10). I will return to these perceptions later in the thesis (on page 338), and in particular, to the implications they have for broader ABET concerns.

³⁰⁸ The WPET took pains to associate the NQF with the RDP: “The NQF is specifically endorsed in the Government’s Reconstruction and Development Programme as a key element of human resource development strategy” (DE 1995: 26).

³⁰⁹ The SAQA Act is Act No. 58 of 1995

marked attempt to stress SAQA's position as an independent and fully representative body based on the principles of inclusivity:

The groups and individuals who fought for the establishment of the NQF come from a diversity of backgrounds and have approached the initiative with different priorities. Some are mainly concerned to promote equity and redress, some to promote productivity and economic competitiveness and some to promote quality in learning *per se*. They all realise, however, that equity, productivity and quality are tightly interwoven (SAQA 1997: 2).

The 26 person SAQA team was jointly appointed by the Ministries of Education and Labour. It consisted of "education and training providers, trade unionists, business representatives and non-governmental organisations" (Samson and Vally 1996: 10).³¹⁰ The first Chairperson of SAQA (a ministerial appointment) was Samuel Isaacs.³¹¹

The National Qualifications Bill was passed into law as SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995 (4 October 1995). The SAQA team constructed a very detailed, and, it has to be said, a highly complicated, approach to the NQF which would be overseen by a tiered system of standards setting councils. The standard setting councils are, in hierarchical order, SAQA, National Standards Bodies and Standard Generating Bodies (NSBs and SGBs) and these are monitored and maintained by Education and Training Qualifications Authorities (ETQAs).

³¹⁰ Other members of the SAQA team whose names have appeared previously in this thesis include Adrienne Bird, nominated as a representative by the Labour Department's Director-General, and Bryan Phillips, nominated by national bodies representing organised business in NEDLAC. Patrick Madube from the National Literacy Co-operation (NLC) represented ABET interests. He was nominated to SAQA by national bodies representing the adult basic education and training sector.

³¹¹ Formerly the Director of the Centre for Continuing Education at the Peninsula Technikon. It is worth mentioning that technikons are more commonly associated with vocational forms of education thus suggesting that the key figure in the development of the NQF brings with him considerable experience in vocational education. Immediately prior to his appointment to SAQA, Isaacs worked on the Ministerial Committee for Development Work on the NQF resulting in the publication of Lifelong Learning through a National Qualifications Framework (DE 1996a).

One NSB would be responsible for each of the 12 fields of education delineated by SAQA where the twelve fields are:

1. Agriculture and Nature Conservation
2. Culture and Arts
3. Business, Commerce and Management Studies
4. Communication Studies and Language
5. Education, Training and Development
6. Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology
7. Human and Social Studies
8. Law, Military Science and Security
9. Health Sciences and Social Studies
10. Physical, Mathematical and Computer Sciences
11. Services and Life Sciences
12. Physical Planning and Construction

Within the domain of the NSBs, SGBs represent key education and training stakeholders occupying sub-fields within the broader field; for example, this is simply illustrated by the field of Information Studies within the broader 'Communication Studies and Language' field (see Table 3 on page 313). Described as "the bodies which will provide much of the character and richness of the NQF", SGBs function to recommend unit standards and qualifications representing their sub-fields to the NSBs (SAQA 1997: 5). To avoid conflicts of interest, ETQAs are responsible for ensuring that the set standards are monitored and maintained throughout the system while the NSBs and SGBs are tasked with setting standards within the various fields (DE 1996a: 41). One of the ETQA's responsibilities is to "train and register assessors in RPL" (DE 1996a: 42).³¹² In addition, the Department of Education hopes that the "Long-term sustainability of ETQAs should be possible on a commercial basis" through providers and learners paying fees for the ETQA service (DE 1996a: 44).

³¹² Despite this statement, there is no direct mention of the ETQA's functions with respect to RPL in the Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies Regulations, 1998 (SAQA 1998).

NSB 4: COMMUNICATION STUDIES & LANGUAGE	
SUB-FIELDS	SCOPE OF COVERAGE
1. Communication Studies	<p>Intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and mass communication</p> <p>Media studies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadcasting Print media Film studies Journalism <p>Business and organisational communication</p> <p>Advertising and marketing</p> <p>International and political communication</p> <p>Tele- and digital communication</p>
2. Information Studies	
3. Language	<p>Language practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translation Interpreting Language editing Copy-writing Terminology Lexicography <p>Linguistics</p> <p>Language Usage</p>
4. Literature	Literary texts, in different languages and at different levels

Table 3: Example of a field level NSB with associated sub-fields (SGBs)*

*Taken from the SAQA website: <http://www.saqa.org.za/html/nqf/nsb/html/nsb4/subfields.htm>

SAQA's engagement with standards has moved the debate beyond the narrow view, embraced by the ERS, that implicitly prioritised the maintenance of existing privilege by not 'lowering' standards (discussed in detail in chapter three, on page 218). 'Standards' in the context of the NQF are meant to be broadly encompassing of diverse needs. On the one hand, they are meant to reassure communities that 'high educational standards' are a priority for the government. On the other hand, standards (through RPL) are intended to provide those with no formal schooling at all some sense of pride in the informal learning they have acquired in the course of their life.³¹³ An ABE co-ordinator for an Industrial Training Board similarly argued that, the NQF, in order to compete with overseas examining bodies such as the City and Guilds and Pitmans, had to reassure prospective students that their standards are 'internationally recognised':

I think that's ultimately the whole issue of the NQF and standards, you know, ultimately being accredited, by the structure of the NQF. Through education, training, qualification frameworks – or whatever they might be – that those standards, just like the NQF, are internationally comparable. And that people would then be able to say, 'well the standards we set for language at which ever level, is of a standard that can be used anywhere in the world'. And it could then boast of the same kind of quality that Pitmans or any other organisation might go for now. [...] Standards not being only nationally recognised, but internationally recognised as well (Respondent 7: 9th June 1998).

Another respondent, the training manager of a factory saw standards and the NQF as one way to achieve regularity and consistency within the overall education sector. He described how his company had started ABE classes seven years previously and since that time had hired three different organisations to provide literacy instruction only to find that very little progress was ever made: "... we knew we'd moved on a bit but we weren't really sure how far. You know, against some sort of norms or standards, and that was what I was looking for" (Respondent 8: 30th June 1998).

³¹³ How realistic this is is a matter for some debate, as we shall see shortly in this chapter when I closely analyse SAQA Com 102, a literacy-related unit standard.

The responsibility for meeting these diverse goals lies within a system of Outcomes Based Education.

Outcomes Based Education (OBE)

The NQF, through OBE, aims to achieve several objectives:

- a. create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- b. facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- c. enhance the quality of education and training;
- d. accelerate the redress of unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby
- e. contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large (SAQA Act, 1995).

These objectives are based on various principles listed in Ways of Seeing the NQF,³¹⁴ some of which represent ambitious objectives. For example, the NQF is to be *flexible* and allow for multiple pathways to reach same learning ends; it will be *portable* thus enabling learners to easily transfer acquired credits from one learning context to another; it aims to accommodate *RPL*; and it intends to facilitate easy *access* for all prospective learners in a way that will enable *progression* through the system (HSRC 1995: 11). Figure 8 on page 316 graphically outlines the structure of the NQF.

³¹⁴ Although Ways of Seeing the NQF (an HSRC publication) was presented as an “informal initiative of a group of concerned specialists and practitioners in education and training”, it is nevertheless accorded an important role in the subsequent development of the NQF (1995). Several of the people who participated in the writing of this publication were subsequently nominated to SAQA; Samuel Isaacs, Adrienne Bird, David Adler (of the IEB) and Sam Morotoba and Rachmat Omar (both from COSATU). It is worth mentioning too that the majority of people who worked on Ways of Seeing the NQF would normally be considered as people who represented ‘training’ interests.

NQF LEVEL	BAND	TYPES OF QUALIFICATIONS AND CERTIFICATES	LOCATIONS OF LEARNING FOR UNITS AND QUALIFICATIONS			
8	Higher Education and Training	Doctorates Further Research Degrees	Tertiary / Research / Professional Institutions			
7		Higher Degrees Professional Qualifications	Tertiary / Research / Professional Institutions			
6		First Degrees Higher Diplomas	Universities / Technikons / Colleges / Private / Professional Institutions / Workplace, etc.			
5		Diplomas, Occupational Certificates	Universities / Technikons / Colleges / Private / Professional Institutions / Workplace, etc.			
Further Education and Training Certificates						
4	Further Education and Training	School / College / Trade Certificates Mix of units from all	Formal High Schools/ Private / State Schools	Technical / Community / Police / Nursing / Private Colleges	RDP and Labour Market schemes / Industry / Training Boards / Unions / Workplace	
3		School / College / Trade Certificates Mix of units from all				
2		School / College / Trade Certificates Mix of units from all				
General Education and Training Certificates						
1	General Education and Training	Senior Phase	ABET Level 4	Formal Schools (Urban / Rural / Farm / Special)	Occupation / Work-based Training / RDP / Labour Markets Schemes / Upliftment / Community programmes	NGOs / Churches / Night Schools / ABET programmes / Private providers / Industry Training Boards / Unions / Workplace, etc.
		Intermediate Phase	ABET Level 3			
		Foundation Phase	ABET Level 2			
		Preschool	ABET Level 1			

Figure 8: Structure of the NQF*

*Taken from DE 1996a: 5b

The language referred to above plays an integral role in maintaining the perception of the NQF as an equitable system which will facilitate both opportunities and redress. In fact, this perception is consistently reinforced and can be seen in other areas of constructing the NQF language as well, and particularly with respect to OBE.

For example, OBE is put forward as a learner-centred approach to education and training which takes place throughout an individual's life and is available to *everyone*: "all people are viewed as learners, lifelong, in a learning society with developmental needs" (DE 1996b: 8). In addition to this, lifelong learning is described as "a dynamic process, where teachers and the learners function as learners, lifelong, in a changing developmental and transformational social context" (ibid.: 10). In this context lifelong learning through OBE is posited as a process that students actively participate in, and which flexibly recognises learning that takes place in a variety of contexts. It is a never ending learning process, which has been referred to as the "discourse of personal achievement", of "personal redress and personal credits" (Respondent 3: 15th April 1998). In fact, SAQA specifically alludes to the NQF as an 'open-ended' structure thus allowing SAQA to have the power to register standards above and below the structure in the future in order to accommodate the never ending principles of 'lifelong learning' (SAQA 1997: 3).

The Department of Education therefore argues that "One of the main thrusts of Lifelong Learning Development is to enable people to make use of life's opportunities – even if they did not have the necessary facilities and chances in the past" (DE 1996b: 10). The drive for equity is explicitly evident in a Department of Education document aimed to gain support for the NQF amongst teachers by providing background information on OBE. In the publication the Department of Education, in a slightly patronising approach, motivates the country for change:

We all tend to respond to the future in terms of paradigms and models of the present and past. However, existing paradigms or ways of thinking have an amazing power to blind us to the benefits of new paradigms. We tend to be comfortable with what we know and develop fears for the new and unknown. When people get into new behaviour patterns they repeat the successful patterns of the past.

Because of past successes or patterns, many people and organisations often do not question why things are done in a certain way or are done at all, and, as a result of this, we keep doing things which are no longer appropriate and sometimes we ignore new options. Some people would cling to the old practice of the syllabus, be controlled by time table, subject the learners to the tests and end-year examinations instead of realising the benefits of learning programmes and the learner-paced approach (DE 1997c: 7).

The most persuasive thrust of the argument is the conclusion that “we need to reflect on the need to embrace new paradigms based on the principles of access, redress and equity”, thus implying that the OBE approach is the most viable alternative against, and stands in direct contrast to, the former Christian National Education system (*ibid.*).

It is clear that the concept of educational ‘outcomes’ is at the core of whether or not the OBE system will meet all its objectives and uphold its wide-ranging principles. Samson and Vally suggest that the “‘thick, rich’ definitions of ‘outcomes’ [are] supposed to deter from criticisms that the system will focus on what people can *do* to the exclusion of other knowledge that they might have” (1996: 10). Some of the ‘richness’ they refer to is highlighted later in this chapter in Table 8 on page 331. This defines the various outcomes which, when combined, make up a Unit Standard.³¹⁵ The table also calls attention to the shifting language associated, in particular, with ‘critical outcomes’. The fact that the terms have constantly changed meaning, and the fact that the concepts that they address are so complex, has prompted Jansen to claim that ‘OBE will fail’: “The only certainty about OBE and its predecessor language is that it has constantly changed

³¹⁵ These are the standards jointly developed by SAQA, the NSBs and the SGBs (discussed earlier on page 311 of this thesis).

meaning. This language is quite simply inaccessible” (Jansen 1999: 149; *see also* Greenstein 1997).

The language’s inaccessibility is clearly reflected in the description of the SAQA Com 102³¹⁶ unit standard depicted in Figure 9 on page 320. SAQA Com 102 describes the end achievements – the outcomes that define competency – of a person who has mastered the ability to *read and respond to a range of text types* within ABET Level 1.³¹⁷ Figure 9 is a literacy-related unit standard within the Communications Studies and Language field, and I shall draw on this unit standard in particular to highlight specific concerns relating to the South African OBE conceptualisation of basic literacy.³¹⁸

In chapter one I provided an introduction to Brian Street’s argument that autonomous literacy approaches viewed literacy as evidence of general advancement, of westernised progress.³¹⁹ Street argued that this approach is especially evident in models that assume a “single direction in which literacy development can be traced, and associates it with ‘progress’, ‘civilisation’, individual liberty, and social mobility” (Street 1995: 29). Furthermore, I have also argued in this thesis that the way in which literacy is defined serves to fix its meaning and determine the role it plays society. The evidence embodied

³¹⁶ SAQA Com 102 is the unique registration number, allocated by SAQA, for this unit standard.

³¹⁷ Appendix 4 (on page 435) provides background information into what each component of a unit standard is intended to represent. This information is enormously helpful in unravelling the complexity of a unit standard, and I have included the extract, taken from the SAQA *NSB Manual*, for precisely that reason (see SAQA 1999: 20-23).

³¹⁸ This is one of the twelve fields outlined earlier on page 312.

³¹⁹ This was discussed in chapter one on page 40.

<p>Title: Read and respond to a range of text types</p> <p>Level: ABET 1</p> <p>Credit: 8</p> <p>Field & Sub-Field: Communication Studies and Language</p> <p>Issue Date: September 1997</p> <p>Review Date: September 2000</p> <p>Learning Assumptions: Open. Learners may be unable to read and write in any language.</p> <p>Purpose: Persons credited with this Unit Standard are able to read, understand and respond critically to a range of texts. They will recognize that different types of texts have different uses and purposes.</p> <p>Specific Outcomes and Assessment Criteria</p> <p>Outcome 1: Understanding the literal meaning of a text.</p> <p><i>Assessment Criteria</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main ideas, topics or messages are identified. • Surface/literal content is found and recalled. • Visual or graphic information is found and recalled. <p>Outcome 2: Relate text to own experience and knowledge.</p> <p><i>Assessment Criteria</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own experience and knowledge is drawn on to respond to text. • Conclusions and opinions derived from reading are expressed. <p>Outcome 3: Interpret and respond critically to a text.</p> <p><i>Assessment Criteria</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose, intended audience and likely source are identified reasonably accurately. • The omission of necessary information is noted. • Values and views of the world are identified. • Aesthetic and creative uses of language (e.g. rhyme, simple comparisons) are recognized. <p>Outcome 4: Use appropriate reading strategies to suit the text and the purpose of the task.</p> <p><i>Assessment Criteria</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading strategies appropriate to the text and task are chosen and used. • Meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary is inferred through use of context clues and word attack skills. • Reading for detailed meaning is done. • Specific information is found using basic referencing skills (e.g. numbering, alphabetical order etc.) • Typographical features (e.g. headings, numbering, bold etc) and their significance (functions and meanings) are recognized.

Figure 9 continued overleaf

Figure 9: SAQA Com 102**Taken from the SAQA website: <http://www.saqa.org.za/html/nsb/regstds/comm/com102.html>

Title: Read and respond to a range of text types**Special Notes:**

Please note many of these assessment criteria apply across outcomes as they are demonstrated through different activities and in different contexts. The list of assessment criteria given under each outcome is not exhaustive for that outcome, but gives those that are specific to that outcome.

RANGE STATEMENTS FOR ABET LEVEL 1

Note: texts may be of mixed types.

1. Text types to be read at this level include narrative, persuasive, factual and everyday information/practical texts. For example:
 - a. Narrative: stories, very simple readers, simple songs, personal letters, dialogues, drawings or photographs.
 - b. Factual: simplified information pamphlets
 - c. Persuasive: simplified advertisements, posters, slogans.
 - d. Everyday information/practical: forms, lists, number combinations in everyday contexts (e.g. telephone numbers, dates, times, prices), simple written instructions, signs and notices (street, shop, warning), simple linear timetables, calendars, simple recipes, letters, cartoons, simple messages, newspaper headlines, product labels, symbols (e.g. logos), and so on.
2. Text length is up to approximately 150 words and up to four paragraphs for assessment purposes. (Longer texts are appropriate for teaching purposes.)
3. Text content is appropriate for adults, and covers everyday topics.
4. Vocabulary is limited and accessible, not specialized or technical. Difficult vocabulary is explained in the text itself.
5. Sentences have simple syntax. This includes a limited range of complex and compound sentences.
6. Text is explicit, clear and non-ambiguous. (E.g. repetition is used, references throughout text are clearly signalled, text is not densely packed with information, etc).
7. Text is readable and well-spaced.
8. The following punctuation marks are avoided: colons, semi-colons, dashes and slashes, brackets, inverted commas, hyphens.
9. Texts display format and style features such as paragraphs, headings, numbering, sections.
10. Text is backed up by clear, appropriate, well-placed illustrations.
11. Evidence of comprehension is established through responses to texts which include:
 - relevant single sentences are given orally or in writing in answer to questions on a text.
 - correct responses are given to yes/no, true/false, gap fill, matching and multiple choice exercises on a text.
 - appropriate oral or written answers are given to open ended and interpretive questions on a text.
 - discussions and debates are held in response to texts.
 - role plays and drama are performed in response to texts.
 - the gist of a text is given orally.

ACCREDITATION OPTIONS

1. External written examinations through examining bodies.
2. Portfolio of continuous assessment tasks used throughout course of study.
3. Portfolio of real life writing done in context of work or home
4. In the case of RPL, a cluster of assessed performance tasks may be required.
5. Moderation of all the above according to guidelines.

CRITICAL CROSS-FIELD OUTCOMES SUPPORTED BY THIS UNIT STANDARD

1. Using reading to display problem solving and critical thinking (CO 1)
2. Using reading to communicate in order to work effectively as a team (CO 2)
3. Using reading to organize and manage oneself (CO 3)
4. Using reading to collect and organize information (CO 4)
5. Using reading to communicate effectively (CO 5)

This unit standard also facilitates the five developmental outcomes noted by SAQA.

ESSENTIAL EMBEDDED KNOWLEDGE

Learners should know:

1. that language has aesthetic, affective, cultural, social and political dimensions.
2. that language is central to learning.

in SAQA Com 102 goes further than either a broad ‘autonomous approach’ or a specific definition of literacy. In fact, the unit standard infers that the ability to read and write at a certain level can be systematically achieved through four precisely identified steps.

The steps towards reading and responding to a range of texts are represented by the four outcomes that make up the unit standard (highlighted in yellow in Figure 9). The outcomes range, in a cognitive hierarchy, from the ability to literally understand the meaning of a text, to using what are described as ‘appropriate reading strategies’ to suit the text. Furthermore, the range statements associated with SAQA Com 102 (highlighted in green in Figure 9) position this as a low skill literacy unit standard through its emphasis on using texts that are simple, utilising limited uncomplicated vocabulary, simple syntax, and non-ambiguous content. The unit standard therefore conveys assumptions about what it is that ‘illiterate’ adults can or cannot understand, and thus infers that the ability to *read and respond to a range of text types* simultaneously provides a technical doorway to certain ways of thinking. This approach could be described as a literacy myth that does not necessarily correlate with adult learning experiences. Alan Rogers, for example, has argued that adult learners are equally as capable of understanding complex materials as literate people are, the crucial difference being that the adult learner has yet to master the ability to read the materials for themselves. In his words: “adults do not need to learn literacy in a linear progression from simple words to more complex words [because their] more normal progression is from concrete to abstract” (Rogers 1994: 39).

Despite the fact that the range statements stress that text content should be appropriate to adults, both the cognitive and content elements of the unit standard overlook the fact that ABET Level 1 recipients will be mature people who bring a wealth of life-experience and exposure to diverse social contexts to the literacy class. Furthermore, it

overlooks the fact that this experience will be reflected in networks of knowledge about the world that are in part reproduced in their vocabulary. Where adult literacy learners do lack experience is in the ability to utilise print-literate skills and, as a result of this, they have a limited exposure to different *formal* literacy practices.³²⁰

The assessment criteria guidelines provided for each outcome in SAQA Com 102 provide further insight into the view of literacy being etched out within the NQF. Outcome 1, for example, suggests that if an individual can identify the main ideas, topics or messages within a text, they will have demonstrated that they are capable of understanding the literal meaning of the text. This approach infers that there is only *one* meaning to a text, and, more problematically, that the correct literal reading of the text is that which correlates with the assessor's interpretation. In addition, the assessment criteria relating to Outcome 3 seem to define what critical reading is; namely, a process that can apparently be determined by, among other things, the learner's ability to identify values and views of the world (whose values, whose views of the world?). Finally, Outcome 4 requires the use of *appropriate* reading strategies.

Although OBE is intended to be a new paradigm it nevertheless reproduces a particular view, what Street would describe as an autonomous view, of the *right way* that literacy should be practised.³²¹ The opposite of 'illiteracy', in the SAQA context, is therefore not

³²⁰ I referred to different formal literacy practices earlier in this thesis (on page 94) when I discussed my own heuristic engagement with the different ways of reading and writing, different formal literacy practices, that are bound up with my academic trajectory. These schooled, or academic approaches, differ from the informal literacy social practices identified, for example, by the Social Uses of Literacy research carried out in South Africa.

³²¹ The socially legitimate 'schooled' way of practising literacy is not necessarily adhered to amongst those who use literacy in a social informal context. For example, Mpoyiya and Prinsloo call attention to the fact that letter writing in peasant/migrant households in the Transkei would often transgress letter-writing norms. There would be no conventional salutation. The letter would give an account of the household and little more, before ending with a request or a directive to send money. There would be no formal closing or signature (1996: 186).

'literacy': it is 'schooled literacy'. This is clearly evidenced by a hierarchical approach that is bound up with cognitive assumptions about how adults read and write, and by the very precise, technically correct, interpretations of how mastery of this literacy skill should be demonstrated. To paraphrase Terry Eagleton, the outcomes defined in SAQA Com 102 prescribe a socially legitimate view of literacy that relates to the dominant forms of valuation and interpretation in society as a whole (1990: 88). It is worth noting in passing that, although I have not discussed the writing aspect of literacy in as much detail, similar socially legitimate ways of writing – that is, schooled ways of writing – are also advocated in SAQA Com 103. This is the unit standard entitled 'Write for a variety of different purpose and contexts' (see Figure 10 on page 325).

Earlier in this chapter, when I was discussing the Policy Framework's proposal for four ABET levels leading to a GEC, I commented that the levels were potentially inappropriate for adults because they implicitly correlate adult learning with children's formal schooling.³²² The location of the four levels within the overall NQF structure emphasises this point and heightens the concerns raised earlier in relation to SAQA Com 102. The overall structure of the NQF (depicted earlier in Figure 8 on page 316) reveals that all four ABET levels are located within Level 1 of the NQF, and it is after completing ABET Level 4 that learners acquire their GETC. This means that those adults who

³²² This was discussed on page 275.

<p>Title : Write for a variety of different purpose and contexts</p> <p><i>This Unit Standard assumes that reading, writing, speaking and listening are taught and learned in an integrated way.</i></p> <p>Level: ABET 1</p> <p>Credit: 6</p> <p>Field & Sub-Field: Communication Studies and Language</p> <p>Issue Date: September 1997</p> <p>Review Date: September 2000</p> <p>Learning Assumptions: None</p> <p>Purpose: Persons credited with this Unit Standard will be able to write for a variety of different purposes and in a variety of contexts.</p> <p>SPECIFIC OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA</p> <p>Outcome 1: Select and present content appropriate to the writing task.</p> <p><i>Assessment Criteria</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content is consistent with what is called for in the task. • Irrelevant content has not been included. • Sufficient information must be included so that the purpose of text is achieved. • Accurate information is given where requested. • Awareness of purpose, context and audience is shown. • Opinions are expressed and supported where required. <p>Outcome 2: Organize and format text appropriately to the writing task.</p> <p><i>Assessment Criteria</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texts are structured and organized so that content is clearly and logically sequenced. • Sentences are thematically linked and coherent. • Sentences should be linked to form a story if the task requires this. • Headings are used when required or appropriate. <p>Outcome 3: Use language conventions appropriate to the nature of the text type.</p> <p><i>Assessment Criteria</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text must be easily understandable on the first reading. • Spelling will not be completely correct but must be understandable. • Grammar will not be completely correct. • Sentence structure should be simple but varied. • Capitals and full stops must be used correctly. • Vocabulary is limited but sufficient for everyday descriptions and events. <p>Note: <i>Grammatical correctness will be interpreted in the light of established South African idiom for that language.</i></p> <p>Outcome 4: Plan, draft and edit own writing.</p> <p><i>Assessment Criteria</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of planning and drafting is shown. • Writing is revised and corrected.

Figure 10 continued overleaf

Figure 10: SAQA Com 103**Taken from the SAQA website: <http://www.saqa.org.za/html/nsb/regstds/comm/com103.html>

Title : Write for a variety of different purpose and contexts**Special Notes:**

Please note many of these assessment criteria apply across outcomes as they are demonstrated through different activities and in different contexts. The list of assessment criteria given under each outcome is not exhaustive for that outcome, but gives those that are specific to that outcome.

RANGE STATEMENTS FOR ABET LEVEL 1**A: Learners are able to produce a variety of texts types.**

Note: *texts may be of mixed types.*

Text types to be produced include narrative texts, persuasive texts, practical and social texts. Examples are:

1. Narrative: life stories, stories, simple reports of incidents.
2. Persuasive: viewpoints given on personal, community and work-related concerns.
3. Practical and social:
 - Forms: simple forms or simplified versions of, for example, competition forms, registers, money withdrawal or deposit forms, voter registration.
 - Form vocabulary must include, but is not limited to: first name, family name, date of birth, address (home and work), occupation (if applicable), ID number, marital status, number of dependants, gender, use of / for N/A. Forms to be filled in using first party information only. A maximum of six items per form.
 - Simple versions of other practical texts such as: notices, shopping lists, things to do lists, invitations, messages, telephone messages.

B. The length of text type to be produced depends on the text type and task.

1. Learners respond in writing to tasks such as gap fill, sentence completion, matching, labelling, ticking boxes, yes/no, true/false responses and so on.
2. Learners write single sentences, and linked sentences up to five sentences.
3. Dictation is limited to five sentences with familiar vocabulary, read slowly.

C. Stimulus Texts

1. Learners respond in writing to written, oral and visual texts.
2. Stimulus texts cover the range of text types required in the reading and speaking and listening components for this level.
3. The stimulus texts are easily understandable by learners at this level.
4. The nature of the writing task required is clearly indicated.

ACCREDITATION OPTIONS

1. External written examinations through examining bodies.
2. Portfolio of continuous assessment tasks used throughout course of study.
3. Portfolio of real life writing done in context of work or home
4. In the case of RPL, a cluster of assessed performance tasks may be required.
5. Moderation of all the above according to guidelines.

CRITICAL CROSS-FIELD OUTCOMES SUPPORTED BY THIS UNIT STANDARD

1. Using writing to display problem solving and critical thinking (CO 1)
2. Using writing to communicate in order to work effectively as a team (CO 2)
3. Using writing to organize and manage oneself (CO 3)
4. Using writing to collect and organize information (CO 4)
5. Using writing to communicate effectively (CO 5)

This unit standard also facilitates the five developmental outcomes noted by SAQA.

ESSENTIAL EMBEDDED KNOWLEDGE

Learners should know:

1. that language has aesthetic, affective, cultural, social and political dimensions.
2. that language is central to learning.
3. reading skills at ABET Level 1.

elect, for example, to complete only ABET Level 1, 2 or 3, will be aware that, despite their achievement, they have fallen short of fully completing NQF Level 1. In other words, the positioning of the four ABET levels within the NQF structure risks entrenching a deficit view of adult learners as those who *lack* education, as people who *do not even have a Level 1 education!*

Furthermore, recent work in SAQA on developing level descriptors has heightened the perception that the four ABET levels have not been sensitively integrated into the NQF with a view to meeting the needs of adults.³²³ The description of the eight levels of the NQF clearly reveals that the four ABET levels have been subsumed within the overall category of NQF Level one – a fact that heightens concerns raised so far. Table 4, Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7 (on pages 328 and 329) introduce a range of descriptors related to processes, scope of learning, responsibility and learning. The absence of descriptors for the ABET levels is immediately noticeable. It can therefore be argued that the lack of separate level descriptors for adults risks minimising adult learners' sense of achievement and progress within the ABET sector. Despite the possibility of acquiring three ABET qualifications and a GETC, all four levels of adult learning are confined to the same static Level 1 description. In other words, the progressive cumulative acquisition of skills inferred from having ABET levels ranging from 1 to 4 – a feature in keeping with the overall *hierarchical* structure of the NQF – is further undermined *within* NQF Level one by the fact that the ABET sector implicitly amounts to four 'sub-levels' within an overall basic level.

³²³ It is important to note that the document comments on the fact that work on level descriptors for levels 1-4 of the NQF has been minimal. This suggests that the view expressed in this document has the potential to change in the future.

Level	Skills	Procedures	Contexts
1	Limited in range	Repetitive and familiar	Closely defined
2	Moderate in range	Established and familiar	Routine and familiar
3	Well-developed range	Significant choice	Range of familiar
4	Wide-ranging scholastic or technical	Considerable choice	Variety of familiar and unfamiliar
5	Wide-ranging, specialised scholastic or technical	Wide choice, standard and non-standard	Variety of routine and non-routine
6	Wide-ranging, specialised scholastic or technical, and basic research, across a major discipline	Wide choice, standard and non-standard, often in non-standard combinations, in a major discipline	Highly variable routine and non-routine
7	Highly specialised scholastic or technical, and advanced research across a major discipline	Full range, advanced, in a major discipline	Complex, variable, and highly specialised
8	Expert, highly specialised, and advanced technical or research, both across a major discipline and interdisciplinary	Complex and highly advanced	Highly specialised, unpredictable

Table 4: SAQA level descriptors: nature of processes*

Level	Knowledge	Information Processing	Problem Solving
1	Narrow-ranging	Recall	Known solutions to familiar problems
2	Basic operational	Basic processing of readily available information	Known solutions to familiar problems
3	Some relevant theoretical	Interpretation of available information	A range of known responses to familiar problems, based on limited discretion and judgement
4	Broad knowledge base	Basic analytical interpretation of information incorporating some theoretical but often concrete concepts	A range of sometimes innovative responses to unfamiliar problems, based on informed judgement
5	Broad knowledge base with substantial depth in some areas	Analytical interpretation of a wide range of data	The determination of appropriate methods and procedures in response to a range of concrete problems with some theoretical elements
6	Knowledge of a major discipline with depth in more than one area	The analysis, reformatting, and evaluation of a wide range of information	The formulation of appropriate responses to resolve both concrete and abstract problems
7	Specialised knowledge of a major discipline	The analysis, transformation, and evaluation of abstract data and concepts	The creation of appropriate responses to resolve contextual abstract problems
8	In-depth knowledge in a complex and specialised area	The generation, evaluation, and synthesis of information and concepts at highly abstract levels	The creation of responses to abstract problems that expand or redefine existing knowledge

Table 5: SAQA level descriptors: scope of learning*

*Taken from Cosser 2000: 8-9.

Level	Orientation of Activity	Application of Responsibility	Orientation and Scope of Responsibility**
1	Directed	Under close supervision or learning of others	No responsibility for the work
2	Directed	Under general supervision and quality control	Some responsibility for quantity and quality, and possible responsibility for guiding others
3	Directed, with some autonomy	Under general supervision and quality checking	Significant responsibility for the quantity and quality of output, and possible responsibility for the output of others
4	Self-directed	Under broad guidance and evaluation	Complete responsibility for quantity and quality of output, and possible responsibility for the quantity and quality of the output of others
5	Self-directed, and sometimes directive	Within broad, general guidelines or functions	Full responsibility for the nature, quantity, and quality of output, and possible responsibility for the achievement of group output
6	Managing processes	Within broad parameters for largely defined activities	Complete accountability for achieving personal and/or group output
7	Planning, resourcing, and managing processes	Within broad parameters and functions	Complete accountability for determining, achieving, and evaluating personal and/or group output
8	Planning, resourcing, managing, and optimising all aspects of processes engaged in	Within complex and unpredictable contexts	Complete accountability for determining, achieving, evaluating, and applying all personal and/or group output

** Responsibility for self is assumed for each of the levels in this category.

Table 6: SAQA level descriptors: responsibility*

Level	Education Pathway	Training Pathway
1	Entry to senior secondary education	Entry to career-based training
2	Senior secondary study beyond entry level	Training towards certification in sub-crafts and sub-trades
3	Continuing secondary study	Training towards certification in skilled occupations, crafts, and trades
4	Entry to undergraduate or equivalent education	Training towards certification in advanced trade and technical occupations
5	Continuing undergraduate or equivalent higher education	Training towards certification in technological or paraprofessional occupations
6	Completion of undergraduate or equivalent higher education and entry to honours, masters, or equivalent higher education	Subsequent completion of professional certification, and entry to professional practice and/or managerial occupations
7	Entry to doctoral and further research education, and to research-based occupations	Professional practice and/or senior managerial occupations
8	Academic leadership, advanced research, and/or research-based occupations	Professional practice and/or senior managerial occupations

Table 7: SAQA level descriptors: learning pathway*

*Taken from Cosser 2000: 10-11

The descriptors relating to NQF Level one reinforce perceptions that the four ABET levels are narrowly conceived of and correspond to children's education. For example, the ABET levels are described as developing skills that are limited in range, involving procedures that are repetitive and familiar, taking place within closely defined contexts. Furthermore, learning activities are directed, closely supervised, and students are not given the responsibility for the work or learning of others. Finally, the scope of learning is restrictive, with NQF Level one being focussed on a narrow range of knowledge, utilising basic recall methods of information processing, and involving problem solving methods that rely on known solutions to familiar problems. In many ways, this view of ABET learning, subsumed as it has been so far within the NQF Level one band, makes little effort to recognise the diverse knowledge, complex life experiences, and informal learning that adults bring to a learning context. In short, this description of adult learning could be described as patronising.

It can be argued that the complex concepts of 'critical outcomes' and 'capabilities', outlined earlier in Table 8 on page 331, are fundamental to the NQF's principles of redress, flexibility, portability and access. Both terms derive from the argument (presented in *Ways of Seeing the NQF*) which advances the idea that manual skills, or specific forms of content, are only one part of performance, and that this can only be understood fully if we consider the other 'invisible' aspects to performance that takes place at the same time as the manual task. And so the HSRC team argues that knowledge, understanding, skills and values/attitudes are "undivided and indivisible", and that they all "operate together in performance" (1995: 43-44). The team use an 'iceberg metaphor' to describe their thinking. Figure 11 on page 332 is a graphic adaptation of the principles they put forward in *Ways of Seeing the NQF* (on page 43).

'Critical outcomes' and 'capabilities' therefore evolve from this complex understanding of performance. Together they represent an attempt to arrive at a system that would

TERM	DEFINITION
Learning Outcomes	"A term used to describe the results or achievements of learning and teaching. Outcomes are of two kinds, viz. essential [later termed critical] and specific outcomes" (DE 1995a: 3).
Critical Outcomes <i>Previously referred to as essential outcomes, fundamental abilities or fundamental competencies, generic abilities or generic competencies</i>	<p>Accepted as the official term in 1997 by SAQA. Critical Outcomes is the short title for 'Critical Cross-Field Education and Training Outcomes' (SAQA 1997: 3).</p> <p>Essential Outcomes: "A term used to describe generic, cross-curricular learning outcomes. Equated with the aims of traditional curricula." (DE 1995a: 2).</p> <p>Essential Outcomes: "are cross-curricular, broad generic outcomes that inform teaching and learning" (DE 1996a: 15)</p> <p>Critical Outcome: Describes the qualities which the NQF wishes to promote regardless of specific area or content of learning (SAQA 1997: 4)</p>
Specific Outcomes	<p>"A term used to describe the learning outcomes specified for individual areas of learning at different levels of complexity" (DE 1995a: 4).</p> <p>"Contextually demonstrated knowledge, skills and values, reflecting essential outcomes" (DE 1996a: 15)</p> <p>This is a skill or an understanding that takes place in a specific context, such as a specific job or a specific school subject.</p>
Unit Standard	This is an 'assessed specific outcome' which supports critical outcomes. These form the building blocks of the NQF in that one has to complete certain unit standards in order to achieve a qualification.
Competence	"The capacity for continuing performance within specified ranges and contexts resulting from an integration of a number of specific outcomes. The recognition of competence in this sense, is the award of a qualification" (Act No. 27 of 1996).
Capability	"The expression of generic abilities as they relate to specific content areas [...] the basic enabling component of performance which involves generic abilities acting in relation to defined content areas, contexts and value frameworks" (HSRC 1995: 1).

Table 8: Definitions of various outcomes

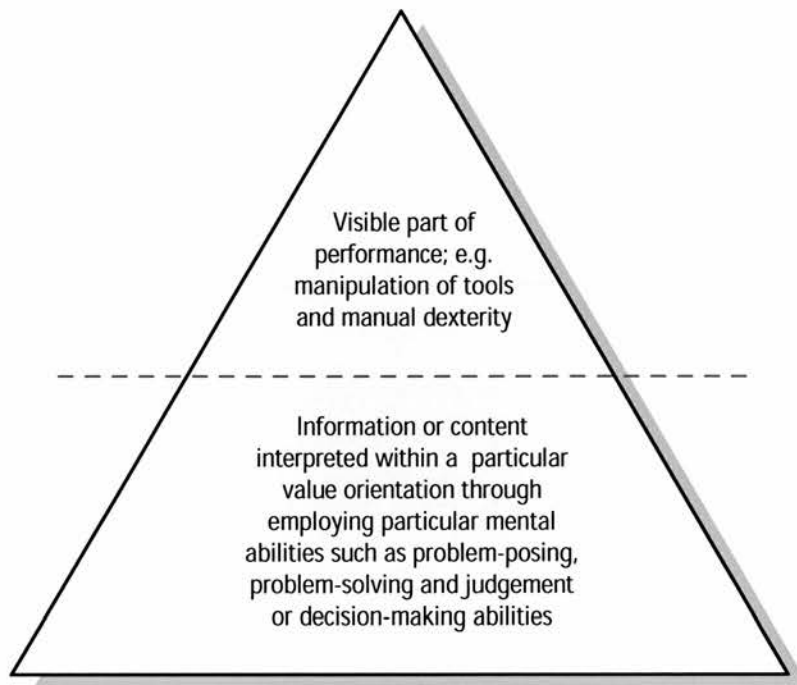


Figure 11: The 'iceberg' metaphor of knowledge

enable assessors to assess performance *in its entirety*. Consequently, capabilities can be described as a combination of both specific demonstrable information and invisible processes – or, in NQF terms, ‘specific outcomes’ and ‘critical outcomes’. This perception explains why *Ways of Seeing the NQF* envisages that both concepts are inextricably involved in the awarding qualifications (see Figure 12 on page 335).³²⁴

In many respects, this insightful approach to understanding performance is upheld within a Bourdieuan framework, and consequently the iceberg metaphor could just as easily be described using Bourdieuan terms. In those terms, performance is the result of visible/evident practices (specific outcomes) which are outward manifestations of a habitus (an embodied understanding). Performance therefore reflects the specific requirements imposed on the habitus by a particular field (or learning context) and it is also reflective of the field itself.³²⁵ The concept of ‘critical outcomes’ can thus be understood as that which attempts to ‘assess’ the habitus. The idea that it is ‘habitus’ which is being discussed here is especially emphasised by the HSRC’s inclusion of the notion of ‘values’ and the idea of ‘body language’ (or ‘gestural aspects’) as evidence of the invisible but *knowing* components of performance.³²⁶ Wacquant, writing about

³²⁴ Taken from DE 1996a: 27, itself originally based on HSRC 1995: 64.

³²⁵ The sections in this thesis which outline Bourdieu’s concepts of field and habitus in some detail are on pages 77 and 79 respectively.

³²⁶ On page 80 of this thesis I included a quote from an article by Charles Taylor which usefully highlights the relationship between ‘body language’ and habitus. The extract contributes towards an understanding of the HSRC’s interpretation of performance (in Bourdieuan terms) and is therefore worth quoting again here in full:

Our body is not just the executant of the goals we frame or just the locus of the causal factors which shape our representations. Our understanding itself is embodied. That is, our bodily know-how and the way we act and move can encode components of our understanding of self and world [Furthermore] My sense of myself and of the footing I am on with others are in a large part embodied also. The deference I owe you is carried in the distance I stand from you, in the way I fall silent when you start to speak, in the way I hold myself in your presence (Taylor 1995: 50-51).

Bourdieu's theories, has described this form of understanding, or knowledge, as 'the fuzzy logic of practical sense' (1996: 19). Similarly, Marginson, writing about the generic skills concept³²⁷ in Australia, says that, to many people, transferable skills "are just common sense" (1994: 240).

It is by understanding performance as something which consists not only of what people *do* (that is, what they visibly demonstrate) but also of what they *know*, that the NQF hopes to promote portable skills which can be transferred from one learning context to another³²⁸ – skills which have value within a variety of different fields. Furthermore, the recognition of critical outcomes forms a basis for discussions on how to assess RPL in that it ostensibly recognises that performance reflects knowledge irrespective of whether or not that performance has been previously certified or not. 'Critical outcomes' therefore provide an essential contribution to the NQF's principle of access – a principle that seeks to allow previously unschooled people to gain access to the education system through the acknowledgement of their 'prior learning' that may or may not be experience based. With this in mind, it is significant to note SAQA's acknowledgement that much of its discussion revolved around the concept of a 'critical outcome'. They comment that one of the challenges of the unit standard was

³²⁷ Australian policy literature widely refers to 'generic skills' while British policy prefers the term 'transferable skills'. In South Africa, this concept has been encapsulated in the term 'critical outcomes' (Marginson 1994: 238).

³²⁸ Remembering that 'critical outcomes' is a shortened title for 'critical *cross-field* education and training outcomes' (see Table 8 on page 331).

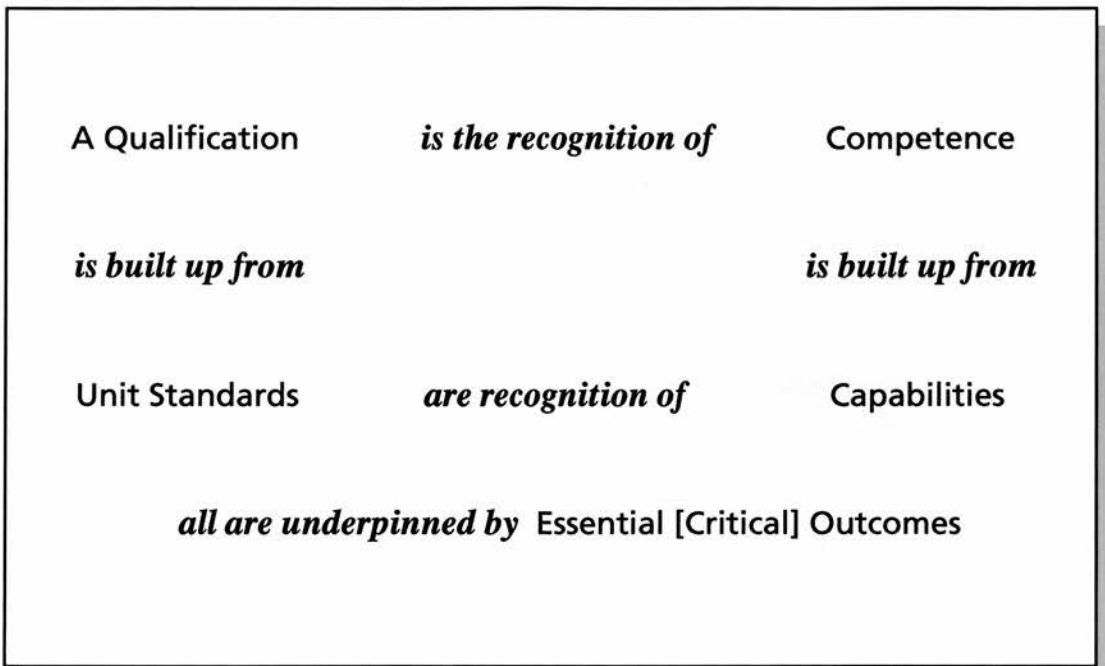


Figure 12: Describing a qualification in terms of OBE concepts*

* Taken from HSRC 1995: 64.

“how the Critical Outcomes could be built into the Unit Standard in such a way so that there would be an obligation to take them seriously” (SAQA 1997: 4). The discussion conducted earlier in this chapter into the literacy related skill – unit standard SAQA Com 102 – raises serious questions about the extent to which SAQA has so far succeeded in this objective with respect to adult learners. The broad critical outcomes referred to in SAQA Com 102 are undermined, even constrained, by the very narrowly defined specific outcomes that essentially comprise the unit standard. Furthermore, even if the construction of SAQA Com 102 was perfectly suitable for an adult audience it would nevertheless be weakened by the fact that it is a ‘sub-field’ within another very basic, limited, low level field.

Despite the ambitious intentions for the roles played by critical outcomes and capabilities, the ‘iceberg’ theory of knowledge is crucially undermined by the failure of those working on the NQF to critically engage with the notion of ‘context specific performance’. Understanding performance *in context* is fundamentally important. Especially in light of the idea that the ‘critical outcomes’ which contribute to achieving a qualification within a particular field are claimed to result in a qualification (or credits) which are *portable* therefore promoting a concept of knowledge that is *transferable*, and of equal value within other fields of learning (or other contexts) too.

It is the NQF’s failure to address contextuality that makes its approach to performance significantly different from a Bourdieuan consideration of knowledge and practice. Bourdieu’s analogy of agents developing a ‘feel for the game’³²⁹ describes how an individual develops a form of ‘social understanding’ that is partially structured by its

³²⁹ This is discussed in some detail earlier in the thesis. See pages 82- 84.

location within specific social and historical conditions; in other words, ‘understanding’ is inextricably associated with the context within which it is produced.

South African critics of the critical outcomes concept have made a similar point drawing on a variety of theorists from fields of expertise other than Bourdieu’s. For example, Breier refers to examples from cognitive psychology (Perkins and Salmon 1989), higher education research (Marginson 1994 and Barnett 1994), and philosophy (Bridges 1993). In a position similar to the Bourdieuan perspective put forward earlier, Breier concludes that the ‘critical outcomes’ view of generic skills

does not take account of research from different disciplines, particularly anthropology and psychology, which has led to theories that emphasise the situated nature of all forms of knowledge and the context-specificity of knowledge and skill acquisition and suggest that learning and knowledge cannot be considered in isolation from the everyday practices in which they are embedded (Breier 1998: 1).

The issues of knowledge production, with respect to contextual specificity, thus undermine the idea that the credits earned will necessarily be portable and enable progression through the system.

These concerns are likely to have a significant impact on adult basic education and therefore literacy discourses. It is therefore worth briefly returning to the discussion of SAQA Com 102 and thinking about it in terms of ‘critical outcomes’ and the relationship that these have with ‘invisible knowledge’ processes.³³⁰ The view that critical outcomes represent an attempt to assess *habitus* suggests that the qualities outlined in Figure 11 – particular value orientations, mental abilities, judgement and decision-making abilities – are certainly likely to be more developed and entrenched in adults than they are in children who lack equivalent life experience. However, SAQA Com

³³⁰ The critical -cross field outcomes referred to in this discussion have been highlighted in yellow in Figure 9: SAQA Com 102, on page 320.

102, as we have already seen, does not set out to specifically incorporate adult life-experience into the learning process.

This suggests that the invisible processes, the critical outcomes, referred to in this unit standard are new processes, taught processes. Additionally, the fact that SAQA Com 102 is oriented towards teaching *schooled* literacy practices implies that the invisible knowledge processes that are supposedly supported by critical cross field outcomes will be knowledge processes that specifically underpin schooled literacy practices. This raises questions about the extent to which so-called generic competencies can be promoted “regardless of specific area or content of learning” (SAQA 1997: 4). It also raises questions about the extent to which recognition of prior learning is actually incorporated into the NQF, and, more broadly, about the meaning of the term ‘life-long learning’ in a South African context.

The nature of critical cross-field outcomes therefore plays a major role in influencing the character of the overall literacy field and in describing the nature of knowledge that is most valued within the field. SAQA called attention to the fact that ABET is considered a priority within the NQF:

The recognition of Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) on the NQF was of particular concern. It was felt that ABET should be included in the NQF for three main reasons:

ABET provisions generally lacks the accountability and institutional structures which can be assumed in schooling;

ABET could be further marginalised if not included;

important steps needed to be taken by various industry training boards to link substantive benefits to a training and education framework at ABET levels. This needed to be recognised with the NQF (SAQA 1997: 3).

Some experts have commented on their view of the NQF as a system which prioritises ‘training’ concerns. Christie, in particular, has associated the emphasis on ABET as a part of that: she argues that “the NQF debate could be more accurately described as

providing a new vision for training and adult basic education, rather than an integrated vision for general education and training” (1997: 118). She goes on to say:

There is no doubt that a reformed vision for adult education and training would be an important policy achievement in its own right in South Africa, here large sections of the adult population are illiterate or under-educated. It meets the equity goal of providing access to education for all and the human resource development goal of improving the education and training levels of the workforce (ibid.).

While it is arguably true that the attention given to ABET and training within the NQF owes much to the particular interests of those who worked on its construction, it is risky to assume that a higher profile for ABET will simultaneously ‘meet equity goals’ and ‘human resource development goals’. This belief rests on the presumption that ABET is comprised of homogenous sub-fields, all of which are simply met by introducing the notion of ABET into the education system whereas in reality, ABET concerns need to be met within both industrial and rural contexts (for example) and have to cater to both employer and individual needs.

Finally, describing the NQF as a vision for ‘training and adult basic education’ implies that training and ABET share common ground and are intrinsically related to each other. Equating ABET with ‘training’ risks ignoring the needs of those who work outside of industry, or those who want literacy to read the Bible. This conceptualisation of ABET risks further marginalising a sector of the illiterate population who have already spent a great deal of their lives outside the formal education system. It is this realisation that suggests that the apparent disintegration of the concept of integration should be taken very seriously indeed if equity discourses are not meant to exist at a purely rhetorical level.

Earlier in this chapter, in the section concerned with the WPET, I discussed how the concept of an integrated system had been relinquished in favour of an integrated approach to learning (refer back to page 305 of this thesis). As we have just seen, the

integrated approach, in the form of transferable skills and portable credits, is open to question. This suggests that the drive toward an integrated education and training system – be it an integrated *system* or an integrated *approach* – is currently in jeopardy. In fact, the Department of Labour’s publication entitled ‘Creating Jobs, Fighting Poverty: an employment strategy framework’ exemplifies some of the concerns alluded to both a ‘systemic’ integrative discourse or an integrative approach (DL 1997: 42).³³¹ Despite integration discourses, the divide between ‘labour’ and ‘education’, and ‘vocational’ versus ‘educational’ skills are still evident in policy discourses. The overall tone of the ESF document gives the impression that it was, for the most part, constructed independently of SAQA or education discourses despite the fact that the Departments of Labour and Education are meant to be working together in an ‘integrated’ fashion. For example, the ESF document still uses the term ‘ABE’ to refer to adult basic education even though it was published two years after the WPET formally acknowledged the concept of ABET within the education and training agenda.³³² The discordant use of different terminologies for the same area of education highlights concerns that the system of integration is not entirely represented in its policy discourses.

The ESF document also raises concerns for the form of knowledge that an integrated approach claims to generate.³³³ Especially that form of knowledge engendered within a specific context. With reference to literacy, the ESF announces a skills programme in the clothing and textiles industry as a tri-partite programme to pilot “industry-based

³³¹ Hereafter referred to as the ESF.

³³² ABET was commonly adopted in the NTSI and IPET reports too. These are reports published three years prior to the ESF in 1994.

³³³ Keeping in mind the iceberg metaphor of performance (depicted in Figure 11 on page 332).

ABE and skills training [my emphasis]”. Furthermore, it states that the programme “modules are being developed with a view to facilitating process and technological change and the promotion of industrial competitiveness” (ibid.: 43).

Given the problems involved with critical outcomes and competencies, we have to ask whether ‘industry-based’ ABE, as a form of knowledge, will be able to meet the diverse needs which individuals have as a result of both their working and their social lives. How will an industry based literacy programme, which might value an employee’s ability to construct a “dot point report” contribute to that same individual’s functioning within a different learning context?³³⁴ How does writing a dot point report help someone to write a letter, or an essay, or fill in a form?

The OBE basis of the NQF raises other concerns in addition to the problems associated with of critical outcomes and integration principles. For example, the RPL concept. The Department of Education’s document entitled Lifelong Learning through a National Qualifications Framework describes the process of RPL is this way:

With RPL, credit is awarded to learners for unit standards which they have never formally studied if they can demonstrate that they are able to meet the registered outcomes for those unit standards [...] Learners will be expected to demonstrate through agreed procedures that they have met the required learning outcomes before they are awarded credits. Credit will only count towards a given qualification if they are relevant to that qualification” (DE 1996a: 30).

In a statement that problematises this radical concept, the same document also notes that “The NQF will not, however, credit *any* skills for any course – only those which are relevant to the learning or career pathway which a learner wants to follow” (DE 1996a:

³³⁴ Marginson quotes an Australian careers advisor as saying “in the business world it is far more valuable to know how to write a dot point report than it is to write a 50 000 word thesis” (1994: 241).

19).³³⁵ In other words, RPL will be officially recognised within a particular context – a fact that belies the notion that RPL is a recognition of *all* forms of knowledge gained in the course of a lifetime’s learning or experience. In most instances, RPL is likely to remain the privilege of those workers who are already employed within a particular context and not a general principle that will enable everyone to gain access to qualifications, and from there, employment.

Furthermore, even if RPL does recognise learning within a specific context, it nevertheless creates expectations that in some cases cannot be practically supported by the reality of many working environments. For example, the training manager in a large metalworking industry commented that RPL led workers to believe that their experience in the workplace gave them the opportunity to, for example, “become a welder when they are just an artisan”.³³⁶ However, he pointed out that the business only required two welders, and not the ten that could be potentially trained (Respondent 9: 3rd July 1998).

Related to the perception that RPL will predominantly serve to benefit those already in employment – that is, in contexts which are able to officially recognise particular forms of knowledge – is the view that RPL will thus serve to further marginalise forms of knowledge which are already on the peripheral edges of society. Samson and Vally argue that “[RPL] might serve to entrench inequality in terms of, for example, women’s work which is historically unrecognised and is made increasingly invisible within a ‘progressive system’ which still fails to see it (Samson and Vally 1996: 13). If a radical,

³³⁵ The Multi-Year Plan discussed next in the next section of this chapter argues that the “T” in ABET also includes ‘dance and praise poetry’ as well as technical and employment skills. The vast difference between these two forms of skills raise questions about some of the claims made by the NQF, especially pertaining to issues regarding skills transference and portability between various learning pathways.

³³⁶ It is noted that contrary to the remark, welders can be artisans. The quotation included here, although not technically correct, nevertheless conveys a realistic concern regarding promises implicit in the concept of RPL.

progressive system is unable to recognise marginal experiences and knowledge, then what will?

And can a system that does not give due attention to the processes by which knowledge transferral takes place, or attention to how certain contexts and circumstances can constrain learning, be described as truly radical or progressive? The Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) appointed by the Department of Education reported that ABET is usually understood in terms of one of two choices:

One is humanistic and democratic and speaks the language of social justice and personal development. The other is economistic and concerned with efficiency in the market place. Women are often associated with the first and men with the second (DE 1997d: 163).

Given that knowledge is in part located within a specific context, it is therefore plausible to suggest that those contexts will inform the nature of knowledge. For example, GETT points to the fact that men tend to access ABET primarily through the private economic sector, parastatals and municipalities whilst women are inclined to attend programmes in NGOs and religious organisations (see Table 9 on page 344).³³⁷ Given that knowledge is in part located within a specific context, it is therefore plausible to suggest that those contexts will have a structuring effect on the knowledge production process. ABET trends so far seem to be biased towards provision for the unionised

³³⁷ This table has been taken from the GETT report (DE 1997d: 165).

SECTOR	MALES		FEMALES	
State	34 720	42%	48 940	58%
Companies	18 919	67%	9 170	33%
NGOs/CBOs	2985	28%	7739	72%
Parastatals	3 118	93%	246	7%
Municipalities	2 574	91%	247	9%
Religious organisations	382	37%	659	63%
Total	62 698	47%	67 001	52%

Table 9: Number of learners attending ABET programmes by sex and sector in 1994*

*Taken from the GETT report (DE 1997d: 165)

sector of the force, prompting the question of how that might impact on women seeking to participate in ABET classes.³³⁸

Samson and Vally have already pointed to one possibly negative effect, and that is that women's informally acquired knowledge and experience may be deemed invalid within this context. Rajuli, on the basis of her research conducted amongst women in Moutse, a rural district in Mpumalanga Province, has found that the knowledge conveyed in ABET classes impacts on the extent to which women want to participate in them: "some women [...] do not find adult education meaningful because it does not meet their immediate practical and to some extent strategic needs" (2000: 182; *see also* May, Woolard and Klasen 2000). She consequently argues that "Although the importance of literacy and technology cannot be over emphasised, it is also important to recognise that different forms of knowledge [...] are essential to fulfil the aims of ABET" (*ibid.*: 183). This last comment is related to her perception that ABET, at a macro-level, "is considered a socio-political programme" (*ibid.*: 192).

A more obvious negative impact might arise from the practical conditions of the learning context itself that might require women to achieve outcomes within an environment that is discriminatory and inhibitory. In fact, GETT found that the pursuit of 'literacy and learning' sometimes posed a threat to women's safety and that women had to lie to husbands and employers about where they were going when they left to attend classes:

Besides the physical barriers of transport and lack of safety that adults have to overcome to get to classes, women also have to fight dominating men or employers who do not want them to become 'too clever' (*Cape Times* 1998).³³⁹

³³⁸ For example, the Department of Labour's green paper on skill's development represents a concerted effort to target and improve the skills of people in the workforce (DL 1997a).

It therefore seems likely that men will have a greater chance of achieving NQF outcomes in this context. This stands as a further criticism of the OBE engagement with regards to its engagement with context and knowledge production. It may be true that OBE recognises the final outcomes emerging from a particular context, but it is perhaps also true that it does not critically recognise the structuring effect that contexts have on outcomes. It fails to create an education and training system that will effectively achieve empowerment and redress.

The ABET Policy Document and the Multi-Year Implementation Plan (1997)

The government's Policy Document on Adult Basic Education and Training (1997) and the accompanying text entitled A National Multi-Year Implementation Plan for Adult Education and Training (1997) both take their cue from many of the policy initiatives discussed so far in this thesis.³⁴⁰ In 1995 the government issued a set of Interim Guidelines for ABET which was used to form the basis of launching the Ithuteng Campaign in 1996. Following from this, the ABET Policy Document and the Multi-Year Plan are referred to as the Directorate's first "comprehensive and inclusive" plan for bringing about quality and quantity improvements in the delivery of adult learning (DE 1997a: 14).

³³⁹ Gender inequity in South Africa is extremely high. The level of gender based violence in South African schools prompted the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, to refer to this form of violence in schools as a "national crisis" (quoted in *Mail and Guardian* 1999). The ministry also acknowledges that the problem of violence extended beyond the schools. Asmal's representative is reported as saying: "The minister takes a personal interest in this. There is no way rape or sexual violence can take place in schools and he is determined to root it out" Furthermore, "The problem of sexual violence is not confined to schools: it takes place in the broader community where people live and work" (ibid.).

³⁴⁰ These will hereafter be referred to as the ABET Policy Document and Multi-Year Plan.

The links with previous publications are clear: the ABET Policy Document calls attention to the importance of basic education in the South African Constitution; both documents note the government's commitment to lifelong education; it is noted too that "the vision, principles, values, aims and objectives of ABET" are located in the RDP (DE 1997b: 8). In addition, the documents call attention to the fact that ABET policy is shaped by the WPET, SAQA and the National Education Policy Act. Rather than repeating the commitments already addressed in earlier discussions of those texts, this section will highlight the areas where ABET policy reveals tensions between the ABET sector and the broad vision of education and training that is being proposed by SAQA. First though, I shall introduce the broad aims proposed by the Multi-Year Plan for ABET.

The Multi-Year Plan opens with the words: "The overall objective of the Four Year Implementation Plan is **to provide general (basic) education and training to adults for access to further education and training and employment**" (DE 1997a: v).³⁴¹ The stressed inclusion of the word 'employment' in this objective establishes a solid link between the country's ABET sector and the government's current macro-economic strategy. In keeping with this the notion of future employment, the Multi-Year Plan comments on the link between ABET, GET and FET but nevertheless notes that "the focus and priority for the Plan is on the Adult Basic Education and Training sector" (ibid.).

The Multi-Year Plan broadly recommends a two-phase approach to ABET provision: phase one (for the years 1998 and 1999) aims at relatively small increases in the numbers of learner enrolments with accompanying efforts into developing an ABET curriculum

³⁴¹ The use here of a bold typeface is consistent with the report's form of emphasis.

framework with unit standards. Phase two (for between 2000 and 20001) aims at mass mobilisation of learners so that the overall target of 2.5 million learners is reached by the year 2001 (DE 1997a: vi). Table 10 on page 349 outlines the breakdown in anticipated enrolment increases according to the various providers with the field.³⁴² The Multi-Year Plan proposes achieving these targets through discussions with the stakeholder representatives.

The ABET policy document, in accordance with SAQA guidelines, officially introduces the eight learning areas that have been identified for ABET:

- language, literacy and communication
- mathematical literacy, mathematics and mathematical sciences;
- human and social sciences;
- natural sciences;
- technology;
- economic and management sciences;
- life orientation; and
- arts and culture (DE 1997b: 21).³⁴³

The eight learning areas adopted are critiqued by the Multi-Year Plan and identified as one of the weaknesses of the ABET sector. The Plan argued that the learning areas were limited and not designed to meet the needs of all adult learners:

³⁴² Table taken from Multi-Year Plan (DE 1997a: 78).

³⁴³ These are not to be confused with the twelve fields of education mentioned earlier in the chapter on page 312.

YEAR	Potential Learners	State (% increase)	NGO (% increase)	Economic Sector and other (% increase)	All Providers
1997	9 400 000	140 000	50 000	180 000	370 000
1998	9 245 000	154 000 (10%)	52 500	189 000 (5%)	395 500
1999	9 100 000	177 100 (15%)	57 800 (10%)	207 900 (10%)	442 800
2000	9 000 000	221 400 (25%)	66 500 (15%)	239 000 (15%)	526 900
2001	8 800 000	310 000 (40%)	83 100 (25%)	298 800 (25%)	691 875
TOTAL 1997-2001		1 002 500	309 900	1 114 700	2 427 100

Note: Enrolments from 2002 to 2007 would be expected to grow by 10% per annum in each sector

Table 10: Escalating increase in ABET provisioning with a great leap forward in 2001*

*Taken from the Multi-Year Plan (DE 1997a: 78)

These eight learning areas are not designed to meet the variety of interests and needs of all ABET learners [...] ABET learning areas could be tailored to meet the needs of communities while at the same time teaching core principles with respect to ABET (DE 1997a: 51).

Similarly, the ABET Policy Document suggests that, in addition to these learning areas, the National ABET Curriculum Co-ordinating Committee would work towards constructing an adult version of the GETC which would allow adults to acquire credits that are not necessarily restricted to the eight learning areas identified so far (1997b: 24).

The need to distinguish between ABET's and GETC's respective achievements of NQF Level One reflects the ABET sector's awareness that adult basic education has historically been restricted to 'second chance schooling' which relied on material unsuited to an adult audience (ibid.: 3). It is interesting to note that despite SAQA claims that the NQF system is broad and flexible, there is nevertheless an implicit need within the ABET sector to further broaden it and make it even more accommodating. Nevertheless, despite a slightly qualified approach to 'flexibility', the ABET Policy Document still articulates its position using OBE principles and terms.

It claims that "learners will be able to attain the learning outcomes through a wide range of experiences encountered in a variety of contexts" (ibid.: 18). In this extract the use of the word 'experience' points to an OBE focus on 'doing', while the word 'context' alludes to the system's learning location flexibility. It is important to note, however, that in terms of this chapter's earlier questions regarding the notion of 'context' and knowledge production (on page 336), there is no critical engagement in either the ABET Policy Document or the Multi-Year Plan with the ways in which contextually specific 'doing' might influence the form of knowledge produced, and how that might in turn impact on progression through the system. In fact, the ABET Policy Document's engagement with RPL is highly accepting of OBE rhetoric: it comments that

The basic premise underlying Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is that people, especially mature adults, learn many things outside the formal structures of education and training and that, irrespective of where, how and when learning was acquired, subject to assessment, this learning is worthy of recognition [my emphasis] (DE 1997a: 98).

Despite the fact that both documents are couched within a chain of policy initiatives which have preceded it and as such remain loyal to the language and terms already established, a tension nevertheless emerges between these two documents and their predecessors. To begin with, the ABET Policy Document claimed that two objectives needed to be realised within the ABET sector:

to develop an interface between the ABET levels on the NQF and the General Education and Training Band so as to provide a learning path into Further Education and Training; and

to make provision for the ongoing application of skills and knowledge acquired by those learners who do not choose or do not have access to continuing education pathways (DE 1997b: 16).

It is the second objective that is interesting in that it implicitly acknowledges an inherent tension within general ABET discourses – a tension that has been glossed over in most of the policy work up until this point.³⁴⁴ The second objective tacitly acknowledges that the needs of learners who take part in literacy classes are diverse and consequently, that their motivations for taking part in ABET classes are not exclusively oriented to either employment opportunities or vocational advancement.

This tension is amplified with respect to the reports' dealings with the notion of literacy specifically. The Multi-Year Plan comments on the damage caused to the education system by apartheid, after which it notes:

³⁴⁴ With the exception perhaps of the NEPI investigation conducted in 1992, see page 229.

Given this, the task facing a nation engaged in redress and transformation is twofold: to

address the complex variety of literacy needs evident in contemporary society, as well as to develop a framework where adult literacy and basic education are at the beginning of substantial learning careers [my emphasis] (NEPI 1992b quoted in DE 1997a: 1).

The Multi-Year Plan also claims that

The global vision for adult basic education and training in South Africa is the eradication of illiteracy through the development and recognition of a skilled and knowledgeable adult learner population (DE 1997a: 8).

Still on the issue of literacy, the ABET Policy Document observes that the term ABET “subsumes both literacy and post-literacy as it seeks to connect literacy with basic (general) adult education on the one hand, and with training for income-generation on the other hand” (Bhola quoted in DE 1997b: 1).

In other words, neither report gives a clear indication of where and how literacy is located within ABET. On the one hand, the Multi-Year Plan foregrounds the ‘complex variety of literacy needs’ within a framework which respectively refers to ‘adult literacy’ and ‘basic education’ as though they are independent concepts.³⁴⁵ It also claims that eradicating ‘illiteracy’ is the ultimate goal to be achieved through recognising a skilled and knowledgeable adult population. On the other hand, the ABET Policy Document generally claims that literacy is ‘subsumed within ABET’ a perception that emphasises ‘ABET’ instead of ‘literacy’. Taken together the documents produce a rather confusing characterisation of literacy that does not give a coherent sense of how important literacy is within the system. What role does literacy play within the system? Is ABET about

³⁴⁵ This particular quote was used earlier in this thesis in support of my argument that the NEPI report on Adult Basic Education seemed to particularly identify ‘literacy’ as a vehicle for redress within the broader concept of ABE. This is especially because the ABE team refers to the ‘political task’ of literacy – a task that is not included in the Multi-Year Plan’s use of the extract. (The analysis of NEPI’s contribution to the literacy field took place in chapter four on page 235).

eradicating illiteracy generally, or is it about eradicating illiteracy in accordance with other forms of knowledge, or is it about something else entirely?

The confusion seen here seems to stem, as it did during the NEPI investigation, from the difficulty of negotiating the ‘trade-offs’ that plague ABET policy efforts.³⁴⁶ This in turn is related to the overall conceptualisation of where ABET is located in terms of the word ‘transformation’ – after all, the Multi-Year Plan clearly states that “Within the field of Adult Education and Training, Adult Basic Education and Training is a ‘transformational’ project” (DE 1997a: 1).

In dealing with the notion of ‘transformation’, the ABET Policy Document outlines two principles which implicitly relate to two different developmental processes: the first is ‘development and reconstruction’, and the second is ‘development and integration’ (DE 1997b: 9). In the first process, ABET is described as “an important tool in the process of social transformation and a foundation for economic growth”. In the second, ABET is seen to form a part of a coherent national development policy in that it “should form a part of an integrated education and training system which enhances opportunities” and that it should “link to development programs; employment creation initiatives; further education and training opportunities; and allow for career pathing” (DE 1997b: 9). The two principles therefore seem to split broad social transformation on the one hand and systemic transformation on the other. However, it is clear that growth discourses feature in both processes. In a subsequent section of the ABET Policy Document entitled ‘Aims and objectives for implementation’ the bifurcated approach dovetails into a single developmental goal that this time presents the two principles as simultaneously achievable and mutually reinforcing objectives:

³⁴⁶ NEPI’s engagement with ‘trade-offs’ was considered earlier in the thesis in the previous chapter on page 240.

[The Department of Education aims] to link ABET with the development of human resources within a national development programme aimed at restructuring the economy, addressing past inequalities and building a democratic society (1997b: 11).

In this regard the ABET Policy Document is in step with the other discourses.

So far the ABET's inherent tension has been discussed in terms of manifesting itself in the ways in which 'literacy' is dealt with within the overall sector and also in terms of the broad transformational goals that ABET is said to play an important role in. It is worth noting too that the actual terminology is a site of tension itself. The Multi-Year Plan calls attention to the unclear relationship between ABE and ABET and identifies this as one of the main weaknesses in the ABET sector and in so doing offers one possible explanation for some of the inconsistencies discussed so far. The report says:

A lack of clarity exists concerning the relationship between Adult Basic Education and Adult Basic Education and Training. The underlying principles of both are educational and have the objectives of nation building: the development of responsible citizens and the provision of social justice. Adult Basic Education and Training implies an extension of Adult Basic Education through the provision of specialised skills and skills training. This skills development can be utilised to improve employment opportunities for the individual and the human resources base in the country (DE 1997a: 47).

It can therefore be argued that the tension, or the difficulty, that the ABET sector is faced within how to accommodate the 'extension' to Adult Basic Education without compromising whatever it is that Adult Basic Education is believed to be fundamentally concerned with.

In an attempt to grapple with what the extension to ABE truly means the Multi-Year Plan comments that the 'T' added to 'ABE', "is crucial in the context of the large number of adults and out-of-school youth who are unable to access skills resources" (1997a: 53). Nonetheless, in what seems to be an attempt to avert obvious suggestions that adding on the 'T' might compromise some of the equity based transformational aspects of ABE, the report also says

It must be noted that the ‘T’ in ABET refers to more than technical or employment skills. This is a narrow and restrictive interpretation of training. Rather the ‘T’ refers to a wide range of skills and expertise that includes technical skills such as plumbing, dress making and the like, through specialised skills such as conflict management and negotiation, to creative skills such as dance and praise poetry (ibid.: 12).

It has to be noted, however, that this is the first document in a series of many that progressively attempts to equate ‘skills’ with ‘dance and praise poetry’ in the context of ABET. Most texts approach skills discourses strictly within the domains of economic growth and the need to radically transform the labour market. As a result the Multi-Year Plan’s assurances seem to be little more than a desperate attempt to clutch at straws.

In this respect it can be seen as an attempt that inadvertently sets the sector apart from the overall general education and training system in spite of the notion that the system should be completely integrated. Two further clues point to how this report is significantly different to others: first, the Multi-Year Plan includes a list of priorities for those who need ABET:

The Multi-Year Plan identifies several groups as priorities for mobilising and enrolling adult learners in adult basic education and training programmes: they are disadvantaged women; women with special needs; disadvantaged youth; youth with special needs; persons with disabilities capable of independent learning (DE 1997a: 11).

These priorities stand in sharp contrast to those that were issued by the NTSI which also highlighted “groups involved in key economic and development projects” and “those in whom an investment of ABE is likely to bring the most advantage” (NTB 1994: 160).

The second clue that suggests that ABET Policy Document and the Multi-Year Plan represents a leftward shift from mainstream integrative discourses is the comment that

There is a tendency for bureaucratic approaches to supplant activist enthusiasms. While bureaucracy is necessary to facilitate efficiency and informational activities within the sector, it should not constrain either the effectiveness nor the objectives of the sector (DE 1997a: 57).

This extract combined with the Multi-Year Plan's priorities, conveys the impression that ABET is still, to a certain degree, a vanguard discourse that risks losing its potency in the face of the more powerful training discourses. It is an extract that clearly reminds us that this is a sector which has its historical roots in socialist principles aimed to empower people, to liberate people – in accordance, for example, with the People's Education approaches. If the activists leave, who will be left and what will that say about the character of the literacy field then?

Summary

This chapter has shown how the COSATU/ANC endorsement of an integrated education and training system evolved from systemic integration to a systemic *approach* to integration. In this regard, literacy's meaning, the values subscribed to it and the vision of the role that it plays in society need to be filtered through the complicated language of the NQF and OBE. The chapter strove to link the concepts of critical and specific outcomes with the insights gained from social literacy research and from the Bourdieuan framework guiding this thesis. It suggests that the principle of 'invisible knowledge processes', reflected in the concept of critical outcomes, fails to fully engage with evidence describing performance as a contextually specific practice. This, it is argued, undermines many of the claims that the NQF makes about portability and transferable skills.

The future of literacy acquisition is similarly undermined by the outcomes based unit standards developed for the field, and by their hierarchical location within the NQF framework. This view was supported by a close analysis of one of the unit standards, SAQA Com 102, that will be used to assess and direct the learning processes of people learning to read and write. It was determined that the unit standard was only superficially suited to an adult audience. Furthermore, despite being a part of a 'learner-

centred' approach, it advanced a very particular view of the type of literacy practices that would be carried out in the classroom – schooled literacy. In many respects, the way literacy has been posited within the NQF generates more questions than it does answers.

The following chapter will pick up on some of these uncertainties and question the impact that they might have on literacy in the years to come. The next chapter will also attempt to synthesise the roles of literacy that we have seen evolving through chapters three, four and five. The discursive roles that literacy plays in South Africa are posited within the broader framework of OBE. What will that mean for literacy in the 21st century?

The Role of Literacy in South Africa

Literacy discourses: 1999 -2000

This research took its cue from the question ‘What is the role of literacy in a changing society?’ In chapter two I outlined a ‘conceptual framework’ that I have used, heuristically, to guide my reading and analysis of selected texts. I came to refer to these various texts as conditioned discourses. The term draws attention to that fact that they themselves exist as examples of social practices – social practices revolving around, amongst other things, policy objectives, implementation policy, social and economic imperatives, and changing social conditions. Some of the texts in this thesis have been more highly conditioned (negotiated) and structured than others. But all of them, rooted as they are in society, serve to reflect social discourses that existed at given moments in time. More precisely, the material condition of texts – the fact that the words are fixed on paper with ink – means that the texts stand as “[traces] of discourses, frozen and preserved, more or less reliable or misleading” (Hodge and Kress 1988: 7).

Through this understanding of texts, I have guided my reading by focussing on tensions between five thematic strands of analysis. These have helped to sift to the surface a variety of literacy related concerns, all of which have been addressed in some detail in the chapters preceding this one. This chapter will synthesise the information in previous

chapters to describe, broadly, the five key *discursive* roles that literacy plays in South Africa. It will be shown too that the role of literacy evolves and adapts in accordance with social changes. The five roles are:

- literacy, as it is defined
- literacy as redress
- literacy as power
- the civilising role of literacy
- the human capital role of literacy

This chapter will also discuss the impact that an OBE/NQF discourse might have on the discursive role of literacy, and it will do so by drawing on an understanding of ‘habitus’, of the *embodied knowledge* that guides adults in their literacy-related endeavours. The OBE/NQF discourse, as we know, encapsulates an attempt to introduce a new educational discourse into the South Africa context, a new teaching practice. At its broadest level, this is a discourse that departs from the fundamental pedagogics of the apartheid era, and instead strives to align itself with a new democratic system (*Business Day* 2000). This paradigm shift is more convoluted in terms of South African adult literacy traditions: here, OBE discourses require learners and teachers to reconsider practices which have historically been associated with fundamentalist pedagogics or Freirean pedagogy – in other words, OBE discourses implicitly points to a shift away from the two traditions that have dominated South African literacy pedagogy on the last two decades (Kell 1999: 6).

The theoretical underpinnings of this thesis represent a departure from the dominant South African traditions of policy analysis. Chapter two described how the theoretical approach contributed to a deeply reflexive reading of the texts that addressed various

researcher biases. Perhaps most importantly, chapter two described how the approach encouraged me, the researcher, to critically engage with (and accordingly minimise) *literacy related biases*. This fact, coupled with the thesis's understanding of literacy as a social practice, generates practical experiential understandings of how literacy practices vary according to their social context. In other words, by interrogating my own relationship to literacy, I have benefited by gaining deeper subtle insights into my theoretical understanding of the field. This in turn has positively fed back into, and been an advantage to, the textual analysis taking place in chapters three, four and five.

This close personal engagement with literacy related concerns while writing this thesis has contributed to an analysis that has been conscious of the uniqueness of my own relationship with literacy. It is a personal awareness that has, in a very real way, engendered a reading that has always been conscious of the diversity of experiences that other people have in relation to literacy. My position was aided too by insights I gained through conversations I shared with grassroots practitioners working in the literacy field (discussed in detail early in the thesis, on page 11). Their wide-ranging experiences within fragmented, isolated, localised contexts, encouraged me to strive to identify the *official* position on the role that literacy played in society, the role that supposedly represents and unifies the various literacy activities in the country.

By seeking to understand the role that literacy plays in South Africa, and to do so with an awareness of how literacy functions as a social practice, I hoped to delineate the official literacy narrative through an understanding of how literacy functions as a social practice. The context specific approaches that many practitioners take in relation to literacy can create a sense of a very fragmented complex field which in turn can lead to practitioners feeling isolated from mainstream discourses. It is therefore hoped that the conclusions I have arrived at, coupled with insights into how literacy functions in society and with an analysis of future literacy trends, will enable grassroots practitioners

to assess the extent to which they are a part of the dominant discourse being related to South Africans by the South African government. It is hoped too that the questions and criticisms that may arise from their engagement with this picture of the official stance on literacy will contribute towards the positive future development of the literacy field in South Africa in a way that is more inclusive of divergent voices and social experiences.

Literacy: changing trends and trajectories

Literacy: the defined role

The way in which literacy is defined is often taken at face value as representing the authoritative role that literacy plays in a society. Changing definitions give some indication of how the language of literacy has altered with time, and how the discursive role of literacy shifts too.

In a marked departure from international thinking on literacy³⁴⁷, the Wiehahn report's limited approach to literacy described it as 'literacy training'. Furthermore, it proposed that development consisted of narrowly defined education, instruction and training (Wiehahn 1979: xxvi). In 1981 the discussion of adult literacy was broadened in the de Lange report to talk about 'basic education' instead. More precisely, adult literacy, within the broader context of adult basic education, would be confined to a non-formal education system that was very oriented towards manpower needs. This approach to

³⁴⁷ The 1975 Persepolis Declaration argued that literacy was not neutral, and that "literacy creates the conditions for the acquisition of a critical consciousness of the contradictions of society in which man lives" (quoted in Sjöström and Sjöström 1983: 23).

literacy was later expanded in the Artisan report³⁴⁸ published in 1984. It became clear here that adult literacy's purpose within the context of 'basic education' was also partly cultural: it ensured a *realistic orientation* to the non-formal system after leaving the formal system.

In 1989, the Skills report defined various levels, rather than *forms*, of literacy. 'Functional literacy' was defined as a level of literacy that enabled a person to engage in literacy practices in their community, while 'job literacy' related to a more advanced level of work related literacy skills. In this context, basic education was viewed as contributing to the development of a healthy technological culture (NTS 171). This meant that basic education, within a training context, should not only be restricted to technical skills, but should consider too the orientation and socialising role of training in a person's working life.

The ERS report in 1992 did not contribute towards a closer definition of literacy, instead it used adult education terms interchangeably (DNE 1992: 35). In contrast to the ERS report, the NEPI investigation firmly posited adult literacy within the broader context of Adult Basic Education, which in turn was located in the educational sector referred to as Adult Education. It refuted literacy myths that claimed literacy could promote social mobility and progress and, in words that echo social literacy research, proposed that the main task in literacy work was to address the *complex variety of literacy needs* in society. It also cautions that, in the context of global economic developments, basic literacy skills are likely to be viewed as "totally inadequate" (NEPI 1993a: 30). The NEPI contribution to thinking about literacy in South Africa signals a turning point in

³⁴⁸ In this chapter, as in chapter four, 'Artisan', 'Skills' and 'NTS' respectively refer to the following texts: HSRC/NTB Investigation into the Training of Artisans (1984), the HSRC/NTB Investigation into Skills Training in the RSA (1989a) and the HSRC/NTB Investigation into a National Training Strategy (1991).

South African approaches to defining literacy through the use of terminology and concepts.

The NEPI contribution was, however, increasingly marginalised by the view of literacy held by COSATU and the ANC, seen particularly in the NTSI report, and in the Policy Framework and IPET reports. Adult literacy continued to be referred to in terms of its contribution to ABE, but ABE itself was now defined in accordance with its location within an all encompassing integrated education and training system. Despite NEPI's earlier attempt to dispel common literacy myths, the NTSI nevertheless prioritised ABE for those "in whom an investment of ABE is likely to bring the most advantage", therefore tying a definition of literacy to the achievement of specific pre-conceived objectives (NTB 994: 160). In this regard, adult literacy, within the context of ABE, risked being as narrowly defined as, for example, functional literacy was under the EWLP in the 1960s.

Adult literacy is currently defined in terms of its relationship to an integrated education and training system – as one component of the adult basic education and training (ABET) sector. In other words, adult literacy is now understood as one outcome within many in ABET, outcomes that consist of outwardly demonstrable information taking place in accordance with invisible processes. In terms of the language used when talking about literacy in South Africa, literacy is now defined as a unique (specific) outcome within a broad NQF ladder of individual achievement. In this context, the goal of literacy is to generate literacy related outcomes that will, in the end, reflect the achievement of one individual who will be described as both skilled and knowledgeable (DE 1997a: 8).

Literacy as redress

The word 'redress' can be used in various ways. It signifies an attempt to rectify, to set right an injustice or an error. Redress is indicative of efforts to make amends, to change for the better, to improve a situation, to apologise. Redress is essentially an effort to correct an imbalance.

Within the 1979 Wiehahn report, the role of literacy as redress related to the State's need to be seen to be *trying* to rectify imbalances in the education system. Literacy accordingly provided a vehicle for claims regarding morality and equity. In the de Lange report, redress has to be considered in the light of its recommendation that all South Africans should have an equal opportunity to access education that was the same quality for everyone. Through literacy, redress would be achieved as a result of more people progressing through the system from a basic education to either a formal or non-formal post-basic education. However the view that 'redress' functioned to address an imbalance in society is nullified by the report's assertion that the imbalance was partly the result of 'environmental deprivation', and therefore was a naturally occurring phenomena which had little to do with deliberate systemic oppression. Towards the end of the 1980s, literacy's role as redress increasingly became associated with the potential acquisition of skills that would ostensibly enable an individual to participate in the global economy as a 'citizen of the world'. When the ERS report was published in 1992, the fact that literacy would not play a *national* role in redress became clearer when the National Party suggested that the central state would withdraw from an immediate involvement in literacy provision.

In contrast to the ERS report, the NEPI investigation in 1992 specifically highlighted the role of literacy in redress by mentioning the need for literacy amongst the adult population, and by referring to the 'political task in literacy work' – a phrase that invokes concepts of Freirean pedagogy and the People's Education movement. In fact,

redress was identified as one of the five principles guiding the NEPI research (NEPI 1993: 51). COSATU's contribution to discourses at this time, however, suggested that redress strategies should not be exclusively limited to adult literacy initiatives, and that a broad educational base needed to be provided instead. The role of literacy as redress was therefore contextualised through ABE, and its role is consequently defined by the extent to which ABE is intended to redress past injustices.

Currently, the redress role of *specifically* adult literacy has been obfuscated as a result of its location within the diverse ABET sector. The promise of redress relates to the overall NQF claim that every single South African, regardless of race, class, gender, or creed, now has the potential to progress, with limitless possibilities, through the NQF. Redress is therefore about a *promise* of equality in the job market, and adult literacy is partly responsible for reaching the first rung on the ladder to success. This vision represents a remarkable shift from the view of redress in the early 1980s. Whether this 1990s version of redress is a panacea or a pipe dream, as one critic has commented, will be a question returned to later in this chapter (Breier 1998).

Literacy as power

Literacy plays a role as power, in that it is perceived to reflect and be representative of power, on both an individual and a communal level. For individuals, literacy's power is reflected in the control, the ability, the capacity that individuals gain over literacy related aspects of their life. This section of the thesis, however, is more concerned with identifying the national view of literacy's power within society. Literacy is described as being powerful because it is perceived to have the ability to influence or exert control over the choices and decisions that face communities.

In South Africa, the role of literacy as power in national discourses has its origins in attempts to restrict and control literacy activities and to promote certain literacy

practices over others. The Wiehahn report, for example, inferred that literacy is powerful because it functioned as a gatekeeper – it either enabled change (including desirable change) or prevented it. This uneasy relationship between the State and literacy continued throughout the 1980s. By the early 1990s, the perception of literacy's role as a powerful political threat had dissipated. The ERS document took pains to avoid inflammatory language, and strove instead for an extremely neutral approach: it benignly described itself as “a technical document based on sound research” (DNE 1992a: 5).

Literacy and power in the new South Africa can be seen in the way in which literacy is associated with positive change and a new future. The NEPI reports, for example, are based on principles that would have been regarded as a potentially divisive force under apartheid.³⁴⁹ In the new South Africa, the role of literacy as a powerful positive force is invoked to provide momentum and support for a changing education system, and to win over the hearts and minds of the South African audience.

The civilising role of literacy

The word ‘civilising’, when used in connection with the role that literacy plays in society, describes how literacy is used to conform society – that is, align it with certain standards of taste and behaviour – by adjusting individuals to a particular view of what South African society is meant to be. Consider, for example, the view that a lack of basic education could result in a person being described as “irresponsible, lazy or mentally retarded” (Wiehahn 1979: 221). In this context, literacy was used to set up a divide between those who were perceived to be effective members of society (civilised) and

³⁴⁹ Namely, “non-racism, non-sexism, democracy, a unitary system and redress” (NEPI 1993: 51).

those that were not. The process of civilisation is located within adult education, taking place in controlled environments, working towards engendering career-consciousness, and a sense of responsibility and loyalty towards the free market system (ibid.: 45 and 35). This view of literacy has changed in a post-apartheid South Africa. In this context, the civilising role of literacy is strongly aligned with the language of democracy, equality and human rights. It is also aligned with opportunity, choice and the potential for individual achievement.

The human capital role of literacy

The human capital³⁵⁰ role of literacy contributes to improving the exchange value of training skills through imparting a specific form of literacy. It is the market that dictates the form of literacy skills required, the teaching methods used and the final exchange value of the skills acquired. The impetus for literacy therefore does not have its origins in the social context of workers lives – it is not provided in accordance with personal requirements.

The discussion so far of the roles that literacy plays has revealed that the 1980s represented a time where adult basic education, and consequently adult literacy, were strongly aligned with human capital objectives. The 1990s, however, defined the human capital role of literacy in terms of broader ABE objectives. In the early 1990s we saw a general agreement that ABE should be both an end in itself and a necessary condition for higher skills (NEPI 1993: 25). The later addition of the ‘T’ to ABE formally acknowledged the role of adult literacy in the development of human capital, and this,

³⁵⁰ ‘Human capital’ is understood to refer to those human activities that function as monetarily valued, exchangeable commodities.

as the thesis has shown, reflects the dominant discursive role that literacy has so far played in the South African education and training discourses.

ABET is conceived of as an access point to a high participation, high skill model of education and training and literacy. The literacy roles previously mentioned in this chapter provide the scaffolding for this, the overriding role of literacy in South Africa, in that they are all oriented towards supporting the role of literacy in human capital development. For example, the role of literacy in redress will enable people to gain access to a system that will address imbalances in society through enabling every person to gain a high skill qualification. Discourses that gave literacy political potency in the 1980s are used now to provide impetus, power, for the high skill high participation model of education and training espoused by COSATU and the ANC. And finally, the civilising role of literacy is directed towards the achievement of forms of knowledge that will enable access to high skills and to participation in a world order increasingly shaped by the new standards set down by global economic imperatives.

The use of the term 'human capital' implicitly imposes a narrow reading of the role that adult literacy plays in South Africa. This is partly the result of South Africa's movement towards an OBE system that is ultimately aimed to work towards the development of a highly skilled workforce. This suggests that a very specific form of skills and knowledge is required amongst adults to enable their smooth procession through the career pathway leading to the desired skill-outcome. Consequently, adult literacy, forming the bottom rung on the ladder of achievement, will need to meet both the basic skills required in the development of that knowledge, as well as an introduction into the values – the invisible processes – that support that knowledge.

The Department of Education has already specified that the NQF will only credit those skills deemed relevant to the learning or career pathway that a learner wants to follow.

This suggests that the OBE system is also partly about establishing a culture of learning in South Africa that values various learning outcomes differently. Most specifically, it seeks to establish certain skills, those that are deemed ‘high skills’, as the most symbolically valuable in society and therefore the most sought after. In this regard, the role of literacy in South Africa is reflective of a narrow human capital vision, but one where human capital has been reinvented in terms of an evolving world order. If human capital previously referred to an individual’s ability to function like a machine, it now relates to an individual’s ability to function like a machine that *thinks* in *contextually specific*³⁵¹ ways – in other words, a computer.

Towards the 21st century

On becoming the new Minister of Education in 1999, after the second democratic elections in South Africa, Kader Asmal launched what he termed an “extraordinary listening campaign” (2000: 2).³⁵² Asmal, affectionately known as ‘Papa Action’ amongst his civil servants and once referred to as “Professor Delivery” by a local journalist, has generated a storm of activity in the field of education (*Weekly Mail and Guardian* 1999). Asmal has injected new energy into adult illiteracy, a component of adult education that has been rendered almost invisible, increasingly subsumed by broader ABET discourses. Asmal’s listening campaign resulted in a dramatic ‘call to action’ presented to parliament on the 27 July 1999.³⁵³ Asmal’s Call to Action ultimately stemmed from his perception

³⁵¹ This is very clearly specified in the invisible process outlined in Figure 11 on page 332.

³⁵² South Africa’s second democratic election was held on 2 June 1999. Thabo Mbeki became the second democratically elected President of South Africa (succeeding Nelson Mandela), and Jacob Zuma became the Deputy President.

³⁵³ The full text of Kader Asmal’s Call to Action: mobilising citizens to build a South African education and training system for the 21st Century, is included in Appendix 5 on page 438.

that “the educational condition of the majority of the people in this country amounts to a national emergency” (ibid.: 6).

The national emergency, in terms of adult literacy, is reflected in 33.4 percent of adults³⁵⁴ being classified as functionally illiterate.³⁵⁵ In real figures, the percentages translate into a total of 8, 786, 230 functionally illiterate South African adults – a third of the total adult population. Furthermore, the racial disparity between literacy rates amongst white and black South Africans is partially reflected in the human development index (HDI) generated by the UN. *Independent Online* reported, in 1998, that the weighting given to South Africa’s literacy rates ranked South Africa 95th out of 174 countries. A closer analysis of the findings reveals the harsh reality of apartheid’s legacy: ‘white’ South Africa ranked 24th in the world, while ‘black’ South Africa ranked 128th (*Independent Online* 1998). These indicators serve as a stark reminder of the pressing need to address historical social injustices.

It is likely too that, unless concerted efforts are made to address poor primary schooling, adult illiteracy statistics will worsen in the future. The South African EFA Assessment Report reported that the majority of primary school (Grade 4) learners they surveyed scored between 25 and 50 percent in their literacy task: it comments that “A very small proportion of the learners demonstrated a high level of competency” (DE 2000: 39). It has been reported too that “South African students [are the worst performers] in Africa where numeracy, literacy and life skills were concerned” (*Weekly Mail and Guardian* 2000). Unless these educational concerns are addressed soon, these young students will become future candidates for ABET.

³⁵⁴ People aged fifteen and over.

³⁵⁵ These figures have been extrapolated from information contained in Table 1 on page 4. The table uses data gathered in the 1996 South African Population Census.

In 1997, in an attempt to address adult literacy, the Multi-Year Plan aimed to increase the number of adult learners participating in state organised ALCs from 140, 000 in 1997, to 177, 100 in 1999. A survey of ALCs conducted in 1999 found that the target set for 1999 had been exceeded, and that 295, 577 learners were enrolled (DE 2000: 44).³⁵⁶ But, as Budlender has commented, many provinces are unable to distinguish between ABET learners and those studying at higher levels, making it difficult to determine how many of the people currently enrolled at ALCs are actually participating in basic education classes oriented towards achieving functional literacy goals (2000: 105).

In relation to that point, it is worth noting too that the South African EFA Assessment Report obscured the distinction between ABET learners enrolled in different ABET Levels. First, the report refers to what are commonly known as Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) as 'ABET learning centres' (DE 2000: 44). The language used here is misleading because it disguises the fact that not all the education taking place in these centres is strictly 'basic education'. For example, the assessment report describes functional literacy levels to be equivalent to the achievement of Grade 6 or higher. This means that adults participating in ABET Levels 3 and 4 are already classified as functionally literate despite the fact that they are enrolled at an ALC.³⁵⁷ In fact, learners in ABET Level 4 can study for their National Certificate in ABET Practice, a certificate that qualifies them to *teach* basic literacy.

The enrolment figures for ALCs therefore should not be equated with the number of students participating in basic education classes. Nevertheless, this correlation is

³⁵⁶ The targets mentioned here are outlined in Table 10 on page 349.

³⁵⁷ Figure 6 on page 276 illustrates this point.

strongly inferred in the South African EFA Assessment Report: “Table 21 [in the report] indicates the priority that is given to youth and adult literacy. More than 2,000 centres and nearly 300, 000 learners were involved in 1999 in the ABET programme” (ibid.: 44).³⁵⁸ Even if the figure of 300, 000 was strictly accurate (which it is not) this means that ALCs, the largest provider of ABET, are catering for just less than 3.5 percent of people termed functionally illiterate. In reality, *The Teacher* estimates that only 1 percent of ‘illiterate’ adults participate in literacy programmes. The publication also comments that “a very large part of society – like the unemployed and domestic workers – are not benefiting from [ABET] projects” (2000).

In response to this national emergency, Asmal declared that he was announcing a mobilisation campaign under the slogan *Tirisano*, a seSotho word which means ‘working together’. He identified nine priorities that needed immediate attention, and it is the second priority that is of particular interest to this thesis – “We must break the back of illiteracy among adults and youths in five years” (ibid.: 9). Closer observation suggests, however, that Asmal’s wording of the priority is not as straightforward and as obvious as it might at first appear. What is interesting about this literacy-related priority is the way in which it is intertwined with the overall concept of ABET and outcomes based education.

First, the priority that Asmal has identified is to *break the back of illiteracy*, a phrase that very clearly isolates literacy skills from the broader context of basic education. The inference, therefore, is that it is *literacy*, and not other basic skills, that is the main concern. However, Asmal’s priority is almost immediately problematised when he

³⁵⁸ It is worth noting too that the headings of the South African EFA Assessment Report also slanted it towards an audience interested in the extent to which *literacy* targets were being met. The section outlining ABET policy in the EFA 2000 Assessment Report fell under the heading of ‘Adult Literacy’ and not, as one would expect, ‘Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)’ (DE 2000: 22).

comments that “Literacy is not an easy skill to retain. It can be rendered ineffective through disuse”. Breaking the back of literacy, it seems, therefore requires a concurrent commitment by the government to address issues regarding adult literacy skill retention, and a commitment to create conditions and circumstances where literacy will be frequently *used* by adult learners. Neither of these secondary issues are mentioned with respect to literacy in Asmal’s Call to Action. However, using words that seem to stand as a reassurance mitigating the difficulty of literacy skill retention, Asmal goes on to say, “Our new Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Programme *transcends literacy* [because ABET] targets learning outcomes that empower, rather than leading to a dead end [my emphasis]” (ibid.). Significantly, Asmal does state that “all employers, including employers in national, provincial and local governments, must be encouraged to run or support ABET programmes for their employers” (ibid.: 10).

So, is literacy really a priority, or is ABET viewed as a sector that can circumvent, *transcend*, problems related to literacy acquisition? Or perhaps ABET is regarded as the ultimate ‘safety net’ in circumstances where highly prioritised literacy skills are not retained in the long term? To receive an ABET Level 1 qualification, adults are expected to master literacy-related unit standards (for example, SAQA Com 102 and 103, referred to in the previous chapter on page 319). Asmal’s remark however implies that if literacy skills are not retained in the long term, the ABET qualification nevertheless remains useful, remains *empowering*, because of the other (perhaps more readily retained?) outcomes that are mastered alongside literacy. If this is the perception that underscores the value of an ABET qualification, then to what extent is literacy truly a *long-term* priority within the overall adult basic education and training sector? Without a long-term vision that holds literacy in as high a regard as other components of the ABET sector, then the acquisition of literacy skills is reduced to little more than the mastery, in the short-term, of a ‘gate-keeping’ skill that enables the ultimate acquisition of an ABET qualification.

Wagner has observed that there is a major gap in the research on the issue of literacy skill retention, particularly regarding *adult* literacy (1994: 19). His own research into literacy skill retention amongst Moroccan adolescents³⁵⁹ who dropped out of school before completing their fifth grade of studies, found that “The only significant loss in skill was in basic math or computational knowledge while general cognitive function [...] showed no change whatsoever over time” (ibid.: 16). Literacy skills were barely affected. In fact, Wagner notes that not only did the pupils retain their Arabic literacy skills, some even improved them. Furthermore, their French literacy skills, which were studied much less at school, showed a minimal loss after drop out. If literacy is understood to function as a *social practice*, then it is fair to suggest that Wagner *et al*’s findings amongst previously schooled adolescents cannot be extrapolated to unschooled adults. Understanding literacy as a social practice therefore raises concerns regarding how successful Asmal’s Call to Action will be.

Adults bring to literacy classes expectations about what literacy means and what it will do for them. They come from contexts where literacy is used in different ways to fulfil different objectives. Their literacy habituses³⁶⁰ are more diverse and are usually directed towards specific real life needs. For example, to read the Bible or to perhaps gain skills that will lead to improved wages. Adult literacy habituses are less likely to readily conform to the specific literacy practices that are taught in the formal classes they attend.

³⁵⁹ See Wagner, D., Spratt, J. and Ezzaki, A. 1989 ‘The Myth of Literacy Relapse: literacy retention among the Moroccan primary school leavers’ in *International Journal of Educational Development* 9: 307-315

³⁶⁰ Habitus was defined in chapter two on page 79. I referred to the concept in the previous chapter when I discussed its relation to the ‘invisible processes’ in the construction of knowledge (on page 333).

An experience described to me by a retired South African literacy practitioner effectively illustrates how unschooled adults have particular views about reading and writing – views that are sometimes incomprehensible to those of us who have *schooled* literacy habituses.³⁶¹ The literacy teacher told me how she was approached one day by her neighbour’s gardener who had heard that she used to teach adults how to read and write. She agreed to teach him, and began their first lesson by giving him a pen and paper. At this point he politely told her that perhaps she had misunderstood, that he had approached her because he wanted to learn to *read*, not write. He claimed he already knew how to write. Confused, she asked him how it was possible that he could not read if he already knew how to write? The gardener was adamant that he could write. The literacy teacher asked him to go home and to write her something, and she asked him to bring it back to her the following day so she could see his writing.

The next day the gardener returned with a page filled with lines of neatly printed letters grouped into ‘words’. The literacy teacher saw that the words he had written were meaningless, and she asked the gardener to explain to her what his writing meant. He said he did not know, but that this was proof to show that he was completely able to ‘write’. The gardener, although he knew that writing involved alphabetic letters, had not realised that writing had meaning, that letters made up words, and that words are printed reflections of our spoken language. This gardener’s literacy habitus had already constructed a perception about what literacy was – a perception based on the minimal social value that writing, as a social practice, had in the context of his life. He had not made the connection between reading and writing, and had determined that reading was the more important skill than writing.

³⁶¹ Respondent 20. See page 428 of Appendix 1.

Literacy, for this gardener, had a deeper, more potent meaning. When asked by the teacher what being ‘illiterate’ meant, he said it meant “fear”. He believed that not being able to read would lead him to his death. He described how, when in strange cities, he could not read signs and was afraid to ask people for directions. He believed that one day he would ask a stranger for directions and the stranger, knowing he was illiterate and lost, would lead him to an unsafe place and murder him for his possessions. Literacy, and especially reading (a practical activity meeting his social needs), would be the tool that would keep him safe.³⁶²

The perceptions that unschooled adults have about literacy go further than the practical literacy skills themselves and also extend into the actual learning experience. Research has indicated that adult learners have experiential, socio-cultural expectations of how one actually goes about the process of learning, and what the experience of being taught should feel like. In her research amongst predominantly Christian church-going adult learners in Ocean View³⁶³, Breier noted that the highly conservative literacy programmes and materials used in the classes mirrored the learners’, “expectations of formal schooling [...] They also mirror the formalities and rituals [the learners] experience in church on Sundays” (Breier 1994: 76).

If the long-term retention of literacy skills depends on the ‘use it, or lose it’ maxim, then literacy practitioners need to seriously consider the impact that informal practices, developed by learners to circumvent the fact that they lack print literacy skills, have on

³⁶² This gardener’s perception of the real-life value of literacy skills is not unique. China and Robins, for example, have found a similar view of literacy in their research with *tsotsi*’s (gangsters): “For Buli, schooling and literacy practices had a purely practical and material utility. Being able to read and write meant he was street-wise and able to avoid being conned” (1996: 10).

³⁶³ Ocean View is in the Western Cape region of South Africa.

adult literacy education. In other words, traditional print literacy skills will be competing with known and trusted strategies that learners have used and relied on for years.

The Social Uses of Literacy research project, for example, has called attention to the various ways in which adults innovate and develop non-print literacy ways of achieving tasks and skills that many would ordinarily assume were text dependent. Watters describes how a gardener at a school in Cape Town, relying on visual literacy³⁶⁴ alone, could install and operate complex sprinkler systems through the interpretation of complex diagrams (1996: 21). Similarly, Gibson describes how a farmworker's visual literacy skills enable him to decode highly detailed diagrams (see, for example, Figure 13 on page 378) (Gibson 1996: 37). Breier, Taetsane and Sait's research amongst minibus taxi drivers found that drivers were able to visually interpret road signs despite the fact that they did not have print literacy skills (1996). Will learners find conventional literacy skills a more useful mechanism, or will they continue using their old methods?

All these points about the literacy habituses of adults suggest that, if Kader Asmal's commitment to break the back of illiteracy amongst adults and youths in five years is to be successful, then the concept of literacy in adult classrooms needs to actively engage with the notion of literacy as a social practice, as an adult's social practice. In this regard, the social relationship that adults have with reading and writing – how literacy is physically materialised, what literacy means and can achieve for them, their expectations of what the teaching process will feel like, and, ultimately, whether or not literacy skills are as useful to them as their informal methods – needs to be incorporated into the classroom too. Claims for a 'learner-centred' approach have unique ramifications in an

³⁶⁴ By visual literacy I mean the ability to 'read' diagrams.

adult learning context, where teaching processes need to be adjusted in accordance with adult experiences.

In the previous chapter I described how SAQA Com 102, the unit standard concerned with reading and responding to texts, reflected a very focussed, individualistic, literacy practice – schooled literacy. This formal literacy practice is couched in learning outcomes that are organised into a problematic hierarchical process of acquisition that I argued did not reflect the fact that they were intended to meet the needs of adult learners.³⁶⁵ SAQA Com 4.06, depicted in Figure 14 on page 380, outlines the teaching unit standard for language and literacies containing four specific outcomes that a learner must master towards the attainment of a National Certificate specialising in ABET Practice.³⁶⁶ Significantly, none of the four outcomes are directly concerned with developing teaching practices oriented towards the contextual experiences that impact on adult learning. And it seems unlikely that, unless concerted efforts are made to incorporate this knowledge into teaching practices that an OBE discourse will be flexible enough – just because it says it is – to meet the needs of adults.

For example, Wedekind *et al* have pointed to the *social* aspects of teaching embedded in South Africa thereby revealing how experiences of teaching in South Africa have contributed towards the construction of what could be referred to as a *teaching habitus*. In a marked contrast to the flexible ‘learner-centred’ approaches envisaged in OBE, they

³⁶⁵ The discussion took place in chapter five on page 322.

³⁶⁶ This certificate is oriented towards ABET Level 4 learners. The broader context and skills required to complete an NQF Level 4 teaching qualification is included in Appendix 6 on page 453.

Title: Help learners with language and literacies across the curriculum**Level:** NQF level 4**Credit:** 12**Field:** ETD (Sub-field Adult learning, Specialisation in ABET)**Issue Date:** March 2000**Purpose:**

This unit standard is intended for all ETD practitioners who work in the GET band with adult learners who have relatively low levels of formal education. It enables practitioners to modify teaching practices to accommodate and assist these learners to learn effectively and to provide support for these basic skills.

SO 1 Manage language in the learning situation

- AC1 Learners are consulted on language(s) to be used for all activities.
(e.g. in whole group, small groups, materials, written and oral work)
- AC2 Strategies for dealing with language difficulties which may affect learning are suggested.
(e.g. translation, peer assistance, pair work, use of MT)
- AC3 Relevant terminology of the subject, including acronyms and abbreviations, is explained.
- AC4 Level and style of language used for instruction is suitable for learners.

SO 2 Help learners with visual literacy

- AC1 Relevant symbols and their uses are explained to learners. (eg. &, X, =, @)
- AC2 Layout and style of visuals used in materials are explained to learners.
(e.g. charts, graphs, tables, diagrams, conventional uses of colour, comic bubbles)
- AC3 Use of visual aids by practitioners is in line with learners visual literacy abilities.
(e.g. Practitioner does not write on board in cursive or italics if learners do not understand.)

SO 3 Help learners to use printed materials

- AC1 Learners are helped to use the different parts of a text.
(eg. contents page, glossary, index, page numbers, captions, headings, boxes)
- AC2 Learners are questioned on the purpose of a text, fuller explanation is given when required.
- AC3 Learners are questioned to ascertain how much is understood, fuller and alternative explanations are given when required.
- AC4 Learners are shown how to store and retrieve documents from relevant filing systems.
- AC5 Learners are shown how to maintain an organised file of all relevant documents and texts.

SO4 Help learners to produce texts and assignments

- AC1 Details of the text required are explained to learners.
Range for the AC: purpose, topic, length, time frame, medium
- AC2 Learners' progress is monitored and constructive feedback is given at timely intervals.
- AC3 Alternative modes for producing texts are offered to learners where possible.
(e.g. Learners are given the option of oral or written assignments.)
- AC4 Learners are helped to fill in forms relevant to the learning situation.

Figure 14 continued overleaf

Figure 14: SAQA Com 4.06**Taken from the SAQA website: <http://www.saqa.org.za/>

Title: Help learners with language and literacies across the curriculum

Special Notes:

1) The term 'text' is used here to mean all types of texts produced by learners written, oral, models etc.

2) Values and insights which would enhance the application of this standard are:

- demonstrated respect for all languages
- appreciation of language as a tool for learning as opposed to a tool for asserting status
- awareness of how language and literacy factors affect the validity of assessment instruments.

CRITICAL CROSS FIELD OUTCOMES SUPPORTED BY THIS UNIT STANDARD:

- Identifying and solving problems in which responses display those responsible decisions, using critical and creative thinking have been made.
- Working effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, or community.
- Organising and managing oneself and one's actions responsibly and effectively.
- Collecting, analysing, organising and critically evaluating information.
- Communicating effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation.
- Demonstrating and understanding of the world as a set of related system by recognising that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation.
- Contributing to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the society at large, by making it the underlying intention of any programme of learning to make an individual aware of the importance of:
 - (i) reflecting on and exploring a variety of strategies to learn more effectively;
 - (ii) participating as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities;
 - (iii) being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts;
 - (iv) exploring education and career opportunities; and
 - (v) developing entrepreneurial opportunities.

argue that, “Historical conditions, the professional training and the professional experience of the principals of African schools would certainly be likely to encourage them to accept an external locus of control as a taken for granted norm” (1996: 429). They conclude: “The principals’ essential conservatism and the constraints surrounding their situations in African schools suggest that meaningful curriculum change in democratic South Africa will not easily be achieved” (ibid.: 419).

Asmal’s Tirisano campaign was translated into a five year Implementation Plan and launched on the 13th January 2000. The nine priorities identified in his Call to Action were organised, in the implementation plan, into five core programmes:

- HIV/AIDS;
- School effectiveness and teacher professionalism;
- Literacy;
- Further Education and training and higher education; and
- Organisational effectiveness of the national and provincial departments of education

Asmal’s public commitment to the plan is absolute: in his statement accompanying the launch of the Tirisano campaign, he included a personal assurance: “I [...] want to emphasise that I am going to personally ensure that all the time frames indicated in the plan are adhered to. I will even accelerate the pace such that where we can we deliver outputs well before the time we have indicated in the plan [2004]” (2000b).

The literacy programme is divided into two projects: a National Literacy Campaign and System Development. The second project is primarily concerned with implementing the Multi-Year Plan for ABET discussed in the previous chapter (on page 346). It is the National Literacy Campaign that is specifically concerned with adult literacy, and it is here that we first learn that the forceful phrase ‘breaking the back of illiteracy’ practically translates into a far less forceful goal summed up in the words, “Illiteracy [will be] significantly reduced in five years” (DE 2000a: 19). The performance indicator

accompanying this target does not shed further light on the goal, simply saying that there will be a “significant increase in literacy amongst adults” (ibid.).

As for how many people will be targeted and who they are, a briefing note issued by the Department of Education on the National Literacy Initiative states that: “The Literacy Initiative will be targeted at [the 3, 5 million] adults who are illiterate” (2000c).³⁶⁷ The initial target is to enrol half a million adults within the first year. John Samuel³⁶⁸, the person picked by Asmal to head the National Literacy Initiative, describes their aims as a ‘goal within a goal’: “We are working towards the [International Development Target set at Dakar] as part of a long term vision [...] but we have a short-term five-year plan to begin with” (quoted in *The Teacher* 2000b). By overtly striving to reach and meet the needs of those people who have no experience of schooling at all, South Africa seems, in the 21st century, to be returning to the types of principles and values articulated in the Freedom Charter³⁶⁹ – ones which seek to address the needs of the most marginalised South African people. Furthermore, the proposal for a National *Literacy* Initiative (and not a National *ABET* Initiative) is a reminder that remaining focussed on basic skills is crucially important.

This sense of going back to the drawing board and re-visiting old priorities is especially evidenced in Asmal’s appointment of a Committee tasked with reviewing Curriculum 2005 (C2005), the curriculum developed within an OBE framework. Unsurprisingly, the

³⁶⁷ The figure of 3, 5 million requires some explaining in relation to the statistics cited earlier in this chapter. These are people who are ‘illiterate’ as opposed to ‘functionally illiterate’; in other words, people who have never attended school at all.

³⁶⁸ John Samuel headed the ANC education wing prior to the first democratic elections and was instrumental in the development of education policy.

³⁶⁹ A complete draft of the Freedom Charter has been included in Appendix 3. The education component of the charter is mentioned on page 433.

report criticised the complexity of language used. This resulted in the finding that “teachers have a generally shallow understanding of the principles of C2005/OBE” (DE 2000d: 65).³⁷⁰ The report recommended that the several features of unit standards should be dropped – including assessment criteria, range statements and performance indicators – and also said that specific outcomes should be referred to instead as ‘learning area statements’ (ibid.: 77).³⁷¹ With respect to literacy, the report advocated that more teaching time should be devoted to literacy outcomes – more than to any other outcomes – in the foundation phase³⁷² (amounting to 40 percent of classroom time) (ibid.: 75). The feeling that adult literacy initiatives are beginning to pick up speed was concretised by the long awaited publication, in August 2000, of the Adult Basic Education and Training Bill. It was announced too that a Adult General Education and Training Bill was due to be published before the end of 2000, which would provide a regulatory framework for the ABET Bill.

Using words that depart from the human capital rhetoric of skills development, Kader Asmal’s speech at the launch of the South African National Literacy Initiative (SANLI) on the 26th June 2000 powerfully reminded his audience of the social value of literacy:

When language becomes a mere tool, simply a useful thing, it is [...] endangered. The idea that literacy is a mere tool interposes propaganda where truth should be; separates literacy from self-expression, reduces our vocabulary to that of technical manuals and textbooks (Asmal 2000a).

³⁷⁰ A summary of the findings of the review committee are correlated with many criticism by teacher’s in South Africa in a gloating response to the committees findings by the National Professional Teacher’s Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA). These are contained in an article entitled ‘We told you so ...’ (*NAPTOSA Update 2000*).

³⁷¹ These features of unit standards are evident in Figure 9 on page 320. The complex language of OBE was outlined in Table 8 on page 331.

³⁷² ABET Levels 1 and 2.

In fact, Asmal described literacy as “the faculty of humanity itself”, and the SANLI as an attempt to rebuild the gift of reading and writing (ibid.). The mobilisation campaign is also a social campaign, drawing on everyone in society³⁷³:

The first task will be to create awareness about adult literacy. This will include sensitising the community to the personal, community, social, cultural and economic benefits of being literate. The message will be targeted at motivating the non-literate adults to enrol, and literate adults to volunteer as educators, and communities to support the Initiative (DE 2000d: 3).

It is too soon to tell how successful Asmal’s National Literacy Initiative will be, but there is no doubt that the task that South Africa faces is an enormous one, and that there are many hurdles that still need to be faced. Linda Chisholm, the chairperson of the C2005 review committee, has indicated that the challenges will be dealt with they arise: she has acknowledged that “with every set of reviews and changes, new issues, problems and contradictions emerge” (*The Teacher* 2000b). The next few years will tell whether the press, instead of calling Asmal ‘Papa Action’ or ‘Professor Delivery’, will begin to irreverently refer to him as ‘Dr Spin’ instead. At the moment, however, few would disagree that the Minister of Education, at the start of the 21st century, deserves a resounding ‘A’ for effort.

³⁷³ In this regard it draws on a spirit of communalism, on *ubuntu*, an aspect of South African culture that both Moyo (1996) and Rajuili (2000) have stressed as an important component of education.

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Appendix 1

List of respondents*

Respondent 1	Public education co-ordinator of an NGO that supports victims of violence.
Respondent 2	Lecturer (HWU); adult literacy teacher during the apartheid era; social literacy research experience; involvement in adult basic education policy development during the 1990s.
Respondent 3	Lecturer (HBU); adult literacy teacher during the 1980s; social literacy research experience.
Respondent 4	Human resource management consultancy work, especially amongst commercial farmers.
Respondent 5	Adult literacy programme developer (for Afrikaans speakers) and literacy teacher. Not affiliated to any organisation – respondent describes him/herself as a ‘literacy consultant’. Own developed literacy programme is sold commercially and widely used throughout South Africa and in Namibia.
Respondent 6	Adult education co-ordinator of an ALC run through an urban high school; adult literacy teacher.
Respondent 7	Regional adult basic education co-ordinator for an industrial training board; trade unionist.
Respondent 8	Training manager in the fishing industry.
Respondent 9	Senior shop steward; training manager; senior member of influential union; involvement in formulating the NQF.
Respondent 10	Regional education co-ordinator of influential trade union.
Respondent 11	NGO based literacy teacher.
Respondent 12	Retired literacy teacher. Previously worked as a volunteer in literacy classes run through a Catholic Church based in an affluent suburb. (Church has since abandoned this initiative).
Respondent 13	Literacy teacher in NGO oriented towards industry; experience of literacy teaching during the apartheid era.

* Information from the various respondents was obtained between March and August of 1998.

Respondent 14	Co-ordinator of a student volunteer adult education programme run through an HWU.
Respondent 15	Teaches English as a Foreign Language and basic literacy to adult students; semi-rural region.
Respondent 16	Adult literacy teacher and NGO co-ordinator; small urban based NGO that meets the literacy needs of learners living in a nearby township - students are transported to the NGO at the expense of the organisation.
Respondent 17	Adult literacy teacher in small urban based NGO; students come from nearby township.
Respondent 18	Director of an ALC run through a township based high school that was originally started by the Catholic Church. Classes take place in the evening and during the day.
Respondent 19	Teacher in an NGO that runs support programmes for children. Through this the NGO identified literacy needs in the children's parents and participated in family literacy work at the NGO. This was later abandoned due to funding problems.
Respondent 20	Recently retired adult literacy teacher; previous experience of working in a relatively new NGO that is very involved in the development and publication of adult literacy programmes in various languages.
Respondent 21	Member of the Adult Basic Education and Training sub-directorate of a regional Department of Education.
Respondent 22	[Survey response] ALC teacher/primary school teacher by day; semi-rural farming area; Afrikaans speaking; male
Respondent 23	[Survey response] ALC teacher; suburban based ALC; Xhosa speaking; female
Respondent 24	[Survey response] ALC teacher; teaches ABET level 2 at a suburban ALC and level 2 Mathematics at a township based ALC; English speaking; female
Respondent 25	[Survey response] ALC teacher/ part-time relief teacher by day suburban ALC; teaches level 1-2 Afrikaans, level 1 basic numeracy, level 4 English; English speaking; male
Respondent 26	[Survey response] ALC teacher/ sales representative; suburban based ALC; teaches ABET levels 1-2; English speaking; female
Respondent 27	[Survey response] ALC teacher/ community development work; semi-rural ALC; teaches ABET levels 1, 2 and 3; English speaking; female
Respondent 28	[Survey response] ALC teacher/ contract based school teacher; rural based ALC; Afrikaans speaking; male
Respondent 29	[Survey response] ALC/ school teacher; rural ALC; teaches ABET level 2; Afrikaans speaking; male

- Respondent 30** [Survey response] ALC/ school teacher; teaches ABET levels 2 and 4 and also teaches Matric Human Social Sciences; Afrikaans speaking; male
- Respondent 31** [Survey response] ALC teacher/ school teacher and freelance journalist; semi-rural based ALC; teaches ABET level 4; Afrikaans speaking; male
- Respondent 32** [Survey response] ALC teacher/ also involved in materials development for adults; township based ALC; teaches ABET levels 1 and 2; Xhosa speaking; female
- Respondent 33** [Survey response] ALC teacher/ secondary school teacher; rural based ALC; teaches ABET levels 1-3; Afrikaans speaking; female
- Respondent 34** [Survey response] ALC teacher; semi-rural based ALC; teaches ABET level 1; Xhosa speaking; female
- Respondent 35** [Survey response] ALC teacher/ retired school teacher; semi-rural based ALC; teaches ABET levels 2 and 3; Afrikaans speaking; female
- Respondent 36** [Survey response] ALC teacher; semi-rural based ALC; teaches ABET level 1; Afrikaans speaking; female

Appendix 2

Case study reports comprising the SoUL research project

The Social Uses of Literacy Research Project: Implications for policy and provision in Adult Basic Education and Training.

Catherine Kell

Literacy and Social Position in Newtown.

Liezl Malan

Literacy, Communication and Worker Health in a Cape Factory.

Mignonne Breier and Lynette Sait

Farmworkers, Literacy and Literacy Practices in the Breeriver Valley.

Diana Gibson

“It’s all right when we’re alone”: Insider/outsider literacies in an informal settlement in the Cape Peninsula.

Catherine Kell

Reading and Writing in the Minibus Taxi Industry.

Mignonne Breier, Matsepela Taetsane and Lynette Sait

Literacies of School and Everyday Life in Bellville South.

Liezl Malan

A Weak Belly or a Strong Backbone: A study of the communicative practices of the service staff of a school.

Kathy Watters

“I read Xhosa books in prison, but here outside I don’t read *****-all”: Local and bureaucratic literacies in a Cape Town squatter settlement.

Annon China and Steven Robins

Local Literacies, School Knowledge and the Brokering of Legal Discourse in Namaqualand.

Steven Robins

“The kind of education I have, one cannot see”: Uses and perceptions of literacy in rural Eastern Cape.

Mary-Jane McEwen and Liezl Malan

Migrant Literacies in Khayelitsha.

Phunza Mpojiya and Mastin Prinsloo

Appendix 3

The Freedom Charter**

(Adopted at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, on 26 June 1955)

We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know:

that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people;

that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;

that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;

that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

And therefore, we, the people of South Africa, black and white together equals, countrymen and brothers adopt this Freedom Charter;

And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.

THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN!

Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws;

All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country;

The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex;

All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government .

ALL NATIONAL GROUPS SHALL HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS!

There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races;

** Taken from the ANC website. See <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/charter.html>.

All people shall have equal right to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs;

All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride;

The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime;

All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

THE PEOPLE SHALL SHARE IN THE COUNTRY'S WEALTH!

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of South Africans, shall be restored to the people;

The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the Banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole;

All other industry and trade shall be controlled to assist the wellbeing of the people;

All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions.

THE LAND SHALL BE SHARED AMONG THOSE WHO WORK IT!

Restrictions of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all the land re-divided amongst those who work it to banish famine and land hunger;

The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and dams to save the soil and assist the tillers;

Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the land;

All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose;

People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labour and farm prisons shall be abolished.

ALL SHALL BE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW!

No-one shall be imprisoned, deponed or restricted without a fair trial; No-one shall be condemned by the order of any Government official;

The courts shall be representative of all the people;

Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance;

The police force and army shall be open to all on an equal basis and shall be the helpers and protectors of the people;

All laws which discriminate on grounds of race, colour or belief shall be repealed.

ALL SHALL ENJOY EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS!

The law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organise, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship and to educate their children;

The privacy of the house from police raids shall be protected by law;

All shall be free to travel without restriction from countryside to town, from province to province, and from South Africa abroad;

Pass Laws, permits and all other laws restricting these freedoms shall be abolished.

THERE SHALL BE WORK AND SECURITY!

All who work shall be free to form trade unions, to elect their officers and to make wage agreements with their employers;

The state shall recognise the right and duty of all to work, and to draw full unemployment benefits;

Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work;

There shall be a forty-hour working week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave, and sick leave for all workers, and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers;

Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work;

Child labour, compound labour, the tot system and contract labour shall be abolished.

THE DOORS OF LEARNING AND CULTURE SHALL BE OPENED!

The government shall discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life;

All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands;

The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace;

Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children; Higher education and technical training shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit;

Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan;

Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens;

The colour bar in cultural life, in sport and in education shall be abolished.

THERE SHALL BE HOUSES, SECURITY AND COMFORT!

All people shall have the right to live where they choose, be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security;

Unused housing space to be made available to the people;

Rent and prices shall be lowered, food plentiful and no-one shall go hungry;

A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state;

Free medical care and hospitalisation shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children;

Slums shall be demolished, and new suburbs built where all have transport, roads, lighting, playing fields, creches and social centres;

The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state;

Rest, leisure and recreation shall be the right of all:

Fenced locations and ghettos shall be abolished, and laws which break up families shall be repealed.

THERE SHALL BE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP!

South Africa shall be a fully independent state which respects the rights and sovereignty of all nations;

South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes by negotiation - not war;

Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights, opportunities and status of all;

The people of the protectorates Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland shall be free to decide for themselves their own future;

The right of all peoples of Africa to independence and self-government shall be recognised, and shall be the basis of close co-operation.

Let all people who love their people and their country now say, as we say here:

**THESE FREEDOMS WE WILL FIGHT FOR, SIDE BY SIDE,
THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES, UNTIL WE HAVE WON OUR LIBERTY**

Appendix 4

Information that specifies a unit standard³⁷⁴

3.2.3 A unit standard can be described as a set of registered statements of desired education and training and their associated assessment criteria, together with administrative and other information.

In other words, a unit standard is an end-statement of the achievement of a certain competence, as well as being a building block for possible qualifications.

The following information must be specified for every unit standard:

3.2.3.1 Title of the unit standard

The title has to provide a brief but comprehensive and pointed indication of the contents of the unit standard and has to be unique, that is, different from any other title registered on the NQF.

3.2.3.2 Logo [SAQA will fulfill this requirement]

The purpose of the logo on the unit standard is to visually capture approval and registration of the standard on the NQF.

3.2.3.3 Unit standard number [SAQA will fulfill this requirement]

This is the unique registration number for the unit standard, allocated by the Authority, by means of which the award of achievement to qualifying learners will be cross-referenced.

3.2.3.4 Unit standard level

This is the level on the NQF to which the unit standard has been developed. It includes consideration of the learning and outcomes requirements in respect of progression within the particular pathway.

3.2.3.5 Credit attached to the unit standard

This is the value (credit) attached to the unit standard that is expressed in notional hours of learning time. Notional learning time is a calculation and recording of the average amount of learning time needed to acquire proficiency in that standard at that level. Ten hours of notional learning time equals one credit

3.2.3.6 Field/s and sub-field/s within which the unit standard applies

While most unit standards will be developed for a particular purpose within a sub-field and organising field, there are unit standards that will be applicable over a range of sub-fields within a field and even across fields. SGBs must indicate the possible fields and sub-fields to which the unit standard could apply. NSBs and SAQA will establish criteria and guidelines for the registration of unit standards across these divisions, ensuring that they are applicable to the specific requirements of different fields and that they fall within the parameters of the principles which underpin the NQF.

³⁷⁴ Extracted from SAQA 1999: 20-23

3.2.3.7 Issue date [SAQA will fulfill this requirement]

This is the date on which the Authority registers the unit standard on the Framework. It acts as a benchmark date against which providers will be evaluated and registered, according to requirements for quality learning programs and the assessment of achievement as captured and reflected in the unit standard.

3.2.3.8 Review date [SAQA will fulfill this requirement]

This reflects the period of time for which the unit standard will be operational and before which a review and re-registration of the unit must take place. The review period is currently set at three years, with applications for re-registration being due in the first half of the third year of registration. SAQA's internal systems will be used to alert NSBs to the need to review standards and, to reactivate standards generating processes.

3.2.3.9 Purpose of the unit standard

This is a concise statement of the contextualised purpose of the unit standard and what its usage is intended to achieve – for the individual, for the field or sub-field, and for social and economic transformation. It must reflect a qualitative improvement for the field and sub-field, both in respect of enhanced ability (performance) and enhanced learning. It must subsequently capture what the learner will know and be able to do on the achievement (award) of the unit standard.

3.2.3.10 Learning assumed to be in place

This statement is not a “prerequisite” entry requirement for a learning program. In keeping with criteria and guidelines for levels, it is a statement that captures and makes transparent the knowledge and skills that might reasonably be assumed to be in place, before a learner enters a learning program leading to the achievement of the qualification.

3.2.3.11 Specific outcomes

This constitutes contextually demonstrated knowledge, skills and values that support one or more critical outcome. As a general “rule of thumb”, unit standards should consist of between four and six specific outcome statements. More than six indicates that there may be more than one purpose which the standard is trying to address, and hence more than one unit standard. Fewer than four may indicate that the purpose of the unit standard is too narrow, and that these specific outcomes should in fact be incorporated into another unit standard.

The statements of specific outcomes should each:

- a. Directly reflect and capture the purpose of the unit standard in a detailed and contextualised manner, and in a way that is measurable and verifiable.
- b. Be reflected in language that is precise and consistent with normal usage in the sub-field but is able to be generally understood.
- c. Focus on competence outcomes and avoid describing specific procedures or methods used in the demonstration of competence (to ensure that unit standards have a broad and inclusive applicability and are able to be registered for a period of time rather than requiring frequent review and overhaul because of procedural or methodological shifts in tendencies).
- d. Focus on competence outcomes for learning and performance, not descriptions of tasks or jobs. Requirements for performance judgements based on contextual understandings should be included, appropriate to the level and purpose of the unit standard.

3.2.3.12 Assessment criteria

- a. These are a set of statements that guide the development of particular assessment tasks at learning, program or services level. The guidelines should allow assessors to develop formative and summative methods related to credentialing purposes

appropriate to contextual and situational readings of candidates presenting themselves for the recognition of learning achievements.

3.2.3.13 Accreditation (including moderation) process and criteria

- a. Mechanisms and bodies for internal and external moderation of learner achievements “processing” must be indicated. Such processes and bodies must meet the requirements for transparency, affordability and development of the field, sub-field and framework. NSBs and SAQA must ensure coherence and the avoidance of duplication across moderation criteria, bodies and mechanisms.
- b. Accreditation criteria must be written within the regulatory framework for quality assurance as outlined in the SAQA/NQF statutory requirements. Additional criteria appropriate to the unit standard, sub-field or area must be stated and motivated in this category, subject to agreement by the NSB and the Authority.

3.2.3.14 Range statements

- a. These are statements that serve as a general guide to the scope, context and level of the unit standard. They are particularly related to the Assessment Criteria and describe the situations and circumstances in which competence must be demonstrated for credentialling purposes.
- b. The range statement captures essential, related and relevant contextual information for the demonstration of reflexive and repetitive competence. It reflects, subsequently, the range of circumstances in which the acquired knowledge, skill, understanding and values associated with the unit standard have to be demonstrated.

3.2.3.15 Notes

This section, contains additional information essential for understanding and applying the unit standard, and must include the following:

Embedded knowledge

- a. This is a statement of the knowledge base required for competent performance and achievement of the unit standard. It represents what the learner has to understand and be able to explain in the area (sub-field) at the particular level.
- b. The statement might include demonstrations of knowledge of the classificatory systems operating in the area and at the level of the unit standard. Also included are names and functions; attributes, descriptions, characteristics and properties; sensory cues; events, causes, effects and implications; categories and lists; procedures; regulations and legislation; rules, principles and laws; and relationships relevant to competent performance of the unit standard.

Critical cross-field outcomes

The relationship of the *purpose*, *specific outcomes* and *embedded knowledge statements* to the critical cross-field outcomes, must be captured in this/these statement/s. Each and every unit standard must list the critical cross-field outcomes that it supports. These must be measurable and verifiable within the context of the unit standard.

Appendix 5

CALL TO ACTION: MOBILISING CITIZENS TO BUILD A SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

By Professor Kader Asmal, MP, Minister of Education,
Tuesday 27 July 1999

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT THABO MBEKI

"Education and training must constitute the decisive drivers in our efforts to build a winning nation.

"The Government will therefore intensify its focus on education so we succeed in producing an educated and skilled population.

"A great deal of work has already been done, but we will ensure that existing policies and programmes are carried out with a sense of urgency and commitment to their success.

"To achieve these results, we will also have to engage in massive in-service and pre-service training. All necessary steps must and will be taken to ensure that learners learn, educators educate and managers manage.

"We will also take measures to mobilise the people, including parents, so we succeed as a country to meet the challenge of educating all our people"

An excerpt from President Thabo Mbeki's first speech made as President in Parliament on 25 June 1999. South Africa's new President recommitting Government to building a caring society that will guarantee the dignity of every citizen.

TIRISANO: WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD A SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM FOR THE 21ST CENTURY.

FOREWORD

A sense of urgency runs through Minister Kader Asmal's "Call to Action".

After close study of the condition of education and training, and an intense engagement with the leadership of the system in all its complexity, he has assessed the state of affairs and isolated nine areas for priority attention.

Three themes predominate in this statement:

- The vital value of a fully-functioning education and training system to the health and prosperity of the nation.
- The urgent need to remedy the injustice and assault on human dignity embodied in our inheritance of educational deprivation.
- The conviction that South Africans can mobilise untapped reserves of resourcefulness and determination to extend education opportunity and restore education to the centre of community life.

The nine-point priority programme in the "Call to Action" speech is selective by definition. It does not attempt to cover every aspect of the system. While drawing attention to nine broad areas of major importance, the Ministry of Education is committed to education reconstruction and development in all phases of the system and at every level, from early childhood development to postgraduate education and research. The Ministry will continue to work with all partners in education to strengthen our education foundations and help raise a permanent edifice of lifelong learning of which our nation can be proud.

*Trevor Coombe
Acting Director-General
Department of Education*

INTRODUCTION

Today I am announcing the start of a national mobilisation for education and training.

At the first Cabinet meeting of the new government, President Thabo Mbeki posed the question: "Is our education system on the road to the 21st century?"

The South African public has a vital interest in the answer.

Today, having consulted virtually the entire leadership corps of the education and training system, I can give him and the nation my reply.

EXPLORING THE TERRAIN

For the past five weeks, I have undertaken a wonderful mission of discovery. I have read dozens of documents. My officials have given me copious briefings. In a week of meetings unprecedented in their intensity and frankness, I have met the leading representatives of every significant national education structure.

They spoke for statutory bodies in education and training, commissions established by our constitution for the protection of democracy, the representative associations of vice-chancellors and principals at all levels, national governing body associations, all national teachers' unions and staff associations, national student bodies representing all levels, leaders in adult education, early childhood development, and education for special needs, organised labour and business.

We talked, we disputed, and we found common ground. Finally, to cap this extraordinary listening campaign, I consulted yesterday with my provincial colleagues in the Council of Education Ministers.

I want to select three salient points from the hundreds of facts, ideas and impressions that the listening campaign has evoked.

We have strong, committed leadership for the 21st century

Firstly, the leadership of our education and training system in the field embodies remarkable qualities of patriotism, talent, experience, and commitment. The leaders I have met, and the organisations and institutions they represent, have been making heroic unsung contributions to the transformation of our education and training system. I salute them. They are an essential resource for the next phase of our education revolution. What is more, they want to get on with it.

We have excellent policies and laws for the 21st century

Secondly, I was told by everyone I met that we have created a set of policies and laws in education and training that are at least equal to the best in the world.

In 1994, as we turned our back for good on the divisive and cruel legacy of *apartheid*, education was considered the most explosive and contentious area of national life. I am proud that our young democratic government, after inclusive and genuine consultation, has built a national consensus around the main education policy positions of the mass democratic movement, while simultaneously re-organising the entire structure of education administration and provision.

The important thing about building consensus for a policy or a law is that people own it and want to make it work. Implementation takes time, but I have seen convincing evidence that it is happening in all parts of the system, for instance in adult basic education and training, early childhood learning, school curriculum, further education and training, higher education planning, democratic governance, and quality management.

There has been a revolutionary change in South African thinking about education and training. The consensus we have achieved is based squarely on our democratic Constitution, deals squarely with South African realities, and aligns us to respond to the global challenges of the new century.

In crucial respects we are not ready for the 21st century

Thirdly, the national education leadership is unanimous that our system of education and training has major weaknesses and carries deadly baggage from our past. Large parts of our system are seriously dysfunctional. It will not be an exaggeration to say that there is a crisis at each level of the system.

I will select the worst and most troubling features of our education and training system for special mention: the massive inequalities in access and facilities, the serious state of morale of the teaching force, failures in governance and management, and the poor quality of learning in much of the system.

WHERE WE ARE FAILING

Rampant inequality

Firstly, there is rampant inequality of access to educational opportunities of satisfactory standard. In particular, poor people in all communities, of whom the overwhelming majority are rural Africans, continue to attend decrepit schools, too often without water or sanitation, electricity or telephone, library, workshop or laboratory. Their teachers may never see their supervisors from one year to the next. Their parents remain illiterate, poor and powerless. They are unable to give practical and intellectual support to the educational aspirations of their children.

For such children of democratic South Africa, the promises of the Bill of Rights remain a distant dream. Without a solid foundation of learning, their chances of educational and economic success in later years are dim. So poverty reproduces itself.

Low teacher morale

Secondly, I was told repeatedly that the morale of teachers in all communities is low. This is more complex terrain, because the causes and the incidence may be different in different institutions.

It is obvious that many teachers have been demoralised by the uncertainty and distress of rationalisation and redeployment. Since 1995, protracted consultation, bargaining, legal and labour action, and a lot of sensational rumour mongering have accompanied this process. The cause of equitable and sustainable provision of teachers is just and necessary, but the cost has been high. Teachers have a reasonable expectation of stability and job security, but that has been long in coming.

Another potent reason is the vulnerability of learners and teachers in many schools, colleges and other educational institutions to crimes of trespass, vandalism, carrying and using weapons, drug-dealing, rape, sexual abuse and other forms of physical assault or even murder. Whether committed inside or outside the gates, such outrages create insecurity and fear, and destroy the basis of a learning community.

Indiscipline on the part of principals, teachers and learners was also cited repeatedly as a source of demoralisation among those who want to work and succeed. I was particularly appalled by the repeated observations that too many schools fail to start on time and close early, that too many learners absent themselves at will, that too many teachers believe that their obligations cease at 1 o'clock or 2 o'clock on a school day.

Many educators at all levels may suffer a more subtle and insidious form of demoralisation if they are not professionally equipped or resourced to cope with the new demands that are being made of them, whether arising from racial integration, or new curricula and pedagogy.

Failures of governance and management

The third disturbing feature to which my attention has been drawn is the serious crisis of leadership, governance, management and administration in many parts of the system. This has many facets. The most serious, in terms of scale, is the incapacity of several provincial departments of education to set the agenda for their systems, perform their tasks in a business-like way, and give adequate professional support to their institutions of learning.

Within institutions, from universities and technikons to small rural schools, such failures have a drastic effect. They open wide the gate to corruption, fraud and indiscipline. They sap the morale of conscientious staff. In the end, they undermine good teaching and learning, which depend on peace, order, stability and professional challenge.

The situation is worsened if governing authorities are ineffective, if they collude with management at the expense of other parties, or if they allow themselves to be subverted by factionalism. In such circumstances, they are unable to fulfil their essential role of good governance and true stewardship of the interests of the institutions they have been appointed to serve. The consequences may be very costly, especially in higher education institutions.

Poor quality of learning

Given the conditions described above, it should not be surprising that the leaders of education with whom I have consulted are intensely concerned about the poor quality of learning in large parts of our system.

The Senior Certificate examination at the end of Grade 12 is the first external check on performance in our school system, and the poor results, especially in six provinces, have shocked the nation. By comparison with other middle-income countries, our **learners** perform very badly in internationally standardised tests of mathematics and science. School leavers become job-seekers or enter higher education with serious gaps in fundamental knowledge, reasoning skills, and methods of study.

Overwhelmingly, poor learning is associated with poverty, bad or absent facilities, under-prepared teachers, lack of learning resources, and a serious lack of purpose and discipline in many schools, or what is called a culture of learning, teaching and service.

The number of young people who study mathematics with any degree of understanding and proficiency has declined when it should have been increasingly rapidly. As a result, mathematical illiteracy is rife in our society, and the pool of recruits for further and higher education in the information and science-based professions is shrinking, a fact that has grave implications for our national future in the 21st century.

NO TIME TO LOSE

What do I conclude from this rough balance sheet of the assets and liabilities of the education and training system? Despite our success stories, we are failing, especially in those wide-flung tracts of the system that serve poor urban and rural communities. Our new systems of governance, administration and finance have not yet succeeded in hauling these communities out of the arbitrary and unequal education conditions imposed by generations of apartheid and minority rule. In some respects and some areas, the situation has deteriorated.

All modern nations with strong democratic traditions and successful economies have invested heavily in the education and training of their people, in order to ensure access by all citizens to educational opportunity, and continuously raise the level and quality of learning throughout their societies. Our country has a long way to go, and no time to lose.

A NATIONAL MOBILISATION FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Our mandate and duty

The Constitution places a compelling duty on the government to respect, protect, promote and fulfil everyone's right to a basic education, including adult basic education, and to take reasonable measures to make further education progressively available and accessible (section 29).

In June of this year, the people of this country gave the national and provincial governments both a mandate and a responsibility to accelerate the delivery of basic services that will improve their quality of life. The public believes that we have a crisis on our hands. Our people have rights to education that the state is not upholding. They have put their confidence in the democratic process, and returned their government with an overwhelming mandate. After five years of democratic reconstruction and development, the people are entitled to a better education service and they must have it.

We will not fulfil our democratic responsibility, nor will our nation be prepared for the demands of the 21st century, unless we rapidly improve the access of all our people to sound basic education and training in satisfactory facilities, and ensure a fully functioning system of good quality at all levels, from early childhood to university and beyond.

President Mbeki's charge

The President expects that the essential functions of the education system will be carried out efficiently and speedily. As he remarked in his reply to the debate on his State of the Nation address to Parliament, "Teachers must teach. Learners must learn. Managers must manage." That is a fundamentally reasonable expectation, on which all other education success will depend. We will attend to it.

Tirisano

I have concluded, after intensive consultation with representatives of all the main actors in education and training, and the MECs for Education, that the educational condition of the majority of people in this country amounts to a national emergency.

A national emergency requires an exceptional response from the national and provincial governments.

I announce a national mobilisation for education and training, under the slogan "*Tirisano*", working together. President Mbeki announced the theme of the second democratic government, "A nation at work for a better life for all". That is what we must do in education, together.

The details will be worked out over the coming weeks and months, in consultation with all concerned.

The scope is vast, and even an energetic government cannot attempt everything at once. We will determine priorities, and within those priorities we will set targets.

We will also work with other state departments on the integrated, targeted projects for rural and urban regeneration that President Mbeki called for in his speech, and that are now being planned.

What I am asking for at present is a commitment by citizens and all organs of society to work together with the Ministry of Education and the provincial education authorities to attack the most urgent problems.

National Education Parliament

Once a year, we will summon a National Education Parliament. This will be a true deliberative body of all education stakeholders. Its task will be to reflect on the state of education and training, take stock of our collective progress in attacking the priority areas of need, build solidarity among the main actors in education delivery and the education departments, and point the way forward.

NINE PRIORITIES**Priority 1: We must make our provincial systems work by making co-operative government work**

The overall responsibility for the effective management of the education system rests with the Minister of Education, and I intend to fulfil that responsibility. I will do so within the letter and spirit of the Constitution, in particular the provisions relating to co-operative government, the executive authority of the Republic, and the executive authority of provinces.

Under our present arrangements, all education below the higher education level is managed by provincial governments, over which the Minister of Education has only political but not executive authority. I intend to exercise my political authority as Minister of Education as vigorously as is necessary to promote the advancement of the national education and training system.

The management of education systems is a highly complex function of government, and provincial education departments vary considerably in their ability to manage education

efficiently. The most serious problems of executive capacity are experienced in the provinces that incorporated former homelands or "independent states". The three largest provinces have the gravest difficulties. They are also the poorest provinces, with the largest backlogs of school buildings and services, and poor communications infrastructure in rural areas.

National education legislation binds provincial governments under certain conditions, and it is important, therefore, to ensure that national Acts, regulations and policies do not impose unreasonable burdens on provincial administrations. Alternatively, provincial departments must be empowered, with the assistance of the national department, to fulfil their statutory responsibilities. National laws and other instruments will be reviewed with this in mind.

There are acute problems with the allocation and management of many provincial education budgets. The Minister of Education has some leverage on these matters through the budget process under the Medium Term Expenditure Framework, although this is largely indirect. I intend to take responsibility, with the Minister of Finance, for collaborative work on provincial education budgets, together with provincial MECs, and MECs for Economic Affairs and Finance.

It is vital to improve the ratio of non-personnel to personnel funding. The good work being undertaken to cut waste and fraud and improve efficiency in provincial systems has my emphatic support. However, it is imperative that provincial governments allocate sufficient funds for the essential personnel and non-personnel needs of provincial education systems, and that such allocations are not tampered with during the course of the financial year.

The national Department of Education, using its ordinary budget, dedicated state grants, and external support, assists its provincial counterparts through direct administrative and professional support. I will review what is currently happening under the technical assistance programmes, in order to ensure that they are well targeted and effective, and to explore whether they could be expanded.

The Minister of Education has powers, under the National Education Policy Act, 1996, to monitor the performance of provincial education authorities in meeting their constitutional obligations and in implementing national policy. The Minister must report breaches to Parliament, as well as remedial action that is jointly planned by the provincial and national education departments. This formal power to monitor and report will be used whenever appropriate, especially when there appears to have been serious failure by provinces to meet their obligations.

However, I will employ a faster and less formal method of monitoring and advice, by requiring all senior officials of the Department of Education and my own advisers to spend a certain amount of their time on visits to provincial education departments and institutions. Such visits, on which each officer concerned must report, will also serve as a means to cross-check whether or not national law or policy needs to be reviewed or changed.

In addition, I will report to the President every three months on the progress in provincial education, according to a set of indicators that will be discussed with the Council of Education Ministers (CEM). Such reports will be sent to Premiers and the press.

Priority 2: We must break the back of illiteracy among adults and youths in five years

No adult South African citizen should be illiterate in the 21st century, but millions will be unless we mobilise a social movement to bring reading, writing and numeracy to those who do not have it. At present, millions of South African adults and young people cannot read or write in any language, and millions more are functionally illiterate and innumerate, that is

they cannot put their reading and writing skills to any useful purpose, and cannot manipulate numerical concepts.

In modern society illiteracy excludes people from avenues of learning and communication, improved job skills and many normal responsibilities of citizenship. It is an alienating and disempowering thing, and increases dependence on others. For these reasons, many adults who are illiterate and innumerate are ashamed of their condition, and try to hide it.

Literacy is not an easy skill to retain. It can be lost or rendered ineffective through disuse. Our new Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) Programme transcends literacy. It targets learning outcomes that empower, rather than leading to a dead end. Its learning programmes give qualifications that carry credit in the National Qualifications Framework. This enables adult learners to proceed with formal education, by self-study or otherwise. The Multi-Year Implementation Plan for ABET will enable close to a million new learners to achieve the equivalent of Grade 9 by 2003, provided the funds can be found and ABET practitioners trained.

We must support this programme as much as possible. Unfortunately, budgetary pressure has resulted in several provincial education departments cutting back or closing ABET programmes when they should have been expanding. This trend ought to be reversed, but it is improbable that the government will find sufficient additional funds in the near future to eliminate illiteracy through formal ABET programmes run by provincial education departments.

Another strategy is needed.

Firstly, all employers, including employers in national, provincial and local governments, must be encouraged to run or support ABET programmes for their employees. Many do so already, and some are leaders in ABET provision. But a major opportunity opens up through the introduction of the skills levy, and the establishment of Sector Education and Training Authorities under the National Skills Authority. I will consult the Minister of Labour with a view to ensuring that we target a massive increase in ABET provision through this route. Illiterate citizens who are not in employment would also have access to ABET programmes through the National Skills Fund.

Secondly, we must stimulate the civic virtue of voluntary service, in support of our illiterate compatriots. I extend an open invitation to all religious, political, social, educational and community formations to help us design a major programme of voluntary service on behalf of literacy and numeracy, and make facilities available to run it. Students, especially in secondary schools, further education and training institutions and higher education, will have a brilliant opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to community service by becoming literacy practitioners. My Ministry will be consulting on this matter with the National Youth Commission.

Even voluntary service requires funds to meet overhead and other costs. Given the scale of the need, such funds might be considerable. Once the programme has been planned and costed, I will appeal to national and international grant-making agencies to assist. The National Development Agency should have a strategic role in providing support to participating NGOs.

Priority 3: Schools must become centres of community life

The crisis in primary and secondary schools must be dealt with by ensuring that schools become the centres of community life.

The school will truly become a centre of community and cultural life if its facilities are being put to use for youth and adult learning, community meetings, music and drama, sports and recreation. An idle school is a vulnerable place, inviting vandalism. A busy school is a place the community will protect, because it is theirs. There is a role in a community school for religious bodies, businesses, cultural groups, sports clubs and civic associations, both to serve their own requirements and to contribute to the school's learning programme both in and out of school hours.

The school governing body, led by parents, exercises a trust on behalf of the parents of the community, and functions as the indispensable link between the school and the community. It must not be forgotten that this is a new concept for most communities in the country. We must therefore put great effort into ensuring that governing bodies, especially in poor communities, are given the support they need to become strong and viable. The Ministry of Education has an interest in ensuring that all public school governing bodies become members of governing body associations, which can represent them in dealing with the education authorities, and provide valuable technical support to their members. We will assist *bona fide* established or new governing body associations to access funds to support their organisational costs and outreach work.

The school principal, who represents the provincial department of education and is head of the school management team, has the crucial role of professional and administrative leadership, and is responsible for the standard of learning and teaching in the school. The principal needs to forge a working partnership with the governing body, so that they can jointly serve the vision and mission of the school in the community. Both parties require guidance in exercising their respective roles. It is therefore important that the school leadership team, headed by the principal, and the governing body in each public school, is given the opportunity to create the sense of common purpose and mutual support.

A functioning school is a true community in its own right, and an indispensable centre for the wider community's social and cultural needs and interests. But for this to happen, we need peace and stability in schools and in the environment of schools. Schools must therefore be rendered safe for learners, teachers, staff and the public. There must be regulations to restrict access only to those who have legitimate business in the school. Schools need to forge links with police stations, and join Community Policing Forums.

Public schools must be reclaimed from those who are violent in word or deed. Only in conditions of peace can discipline flourish. The law and order approach may bring about pacification, but it will not bring peace. Peace must be internally generated. In a society that is prone to violence, the peaceful settlement of disputes must be taught, and acted out in the society of the school. Values, morality and decency must be reinstated as the bedrock of school life, and self-discipline as the basis of disciplinary codes in the school. Corporal punishment is contrary to the Constitution and the South African Schools Act. In the past it has contributed to the culture of violence in our society. Parents, teachers and learners need help to understand why it has been prohibited, and to work out more effective substitutes.

Discipline in a community school will require that teaching starts on the first day of term. School must start on time and end on time, from Monday to Friday every week of the school year.

It would be incompatible with the notion of "community", as well as a denial of basic rights, if public schools ignored their responsibility to children with special needs, and their parents. Public schools should be, by definition, inclusive, humane and tolerant communities. The Ministry's long-awaited policy on education for learners with special needs will shortly be ready for publication. Schools must be assisted to create an enabling environment for parents whose children have physical disabilities or other special needs, so that early identification can result in appropriate advice and placement. To the greatest extent compatible with the interests of such children, the ordinary public school in the community should welcome them and provide for them.

A mobilisation in support of the community school idea will give a boost to the Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service (COLTS) campaign, whole school development programmes, and a new programme launched by President Mbeki to forge partnerships for school improvement with poorly functioning but well-motivated public schools.

Priority 4: We must end conditions of physical degradation in South African schools

Although the government has contributed more than R1 billion to the National School Building Programme, it may require twelve times that amount to meet the backlogs identified in the School Register of Needs. This is well beyond the reach of the normal budgets of provincial education departments, which in recent years have suffered sharp decreases in the funds allocated to school building and services.

Nevertheless, millions of school children in democratic South Africa are required by circumstances to exercise their fundamental right to basic education in conditions of squalor and degradation. Thousands of schools have poor physical fabric, and many are dangerous and unfit for human habitation. Hundreds of schools have no water on site, no sanitation whatsoever, or rudimentary and insufficient toilets. Such conditions threaten the health of learners and teachers alike, and radically restrict the social and teaching activities of the school. It is impossible to contemplate this with complacency. The situation cries out for remedy.

I will use every opportunity to press the priority of public spending on replacing dangerous and dilapidated schools, and providing water and sanitation services where they do not exist. It will be necessary to prioritise and target the areas and schools where the need is greatest, working with the provincial education departments. This could be a major project under the new Integrated Rural Development Programme announced by President Mbeki, working in partnership with other state departments, provincial authorities, parastatals and NGOs. Bringing water and sanitation in schools offers scope for a labour-intensive, community-based project. My Department has begun the initial planning work.

Priority 5: We must develop the professional quality of our teaching force

All the evidence provided to me indicates that there is a real malaise in the teaching corps of this country, notwithstanding the high levels of professional service which teachers provide in schools all over the land.

The provision of teachers in schools under apartheid resulted in two serious social distortions. One was the extreme inequality in learner-educator ratios that were sustained by unequal budget allocations based on racial and ethnic discrimination. It is bitterly unfortunate that teachers have borne the brunt of a process of rationalisation that, for the first time, allocates teachers equitably to schools according to curriculum needs. However, there is every prospect of job security for all qualified and registered teachers who are currently employed, and a return to stable staffing in our schools.

The second serious distortion was the racially-defined qualification structure, linked to racially-defined opportunities for training, which ensured that African teachers, taken as a whole, are less well qualified than other teachers. These less qualified teachers also teach, predominantly, in schools with poor facilities, inadequate learning resources, greater isolation from urban centres, and infrequent or no professional support services.

Professional development for teachers, combined with effective professional support services, the efficient provision of learning support materials, a mobilisation campaign to make the school the centre of community life, and the progressive elimination of inhuman

physical conditions in schools, will make a major impact on teachers' morale and the quality of the service they render.

The Ministry of Education will give top priority to develop and implement a long-range plan for teacher development, both pre-service and in-service, in support of outcomes based education and improved standards of teaching. President Mbeki put this at the head of his list of government commitments in education. Special attention will need to be given to the compelling evidence that the country has a critical shortage of mathematics, science and language teachers, and to the demands of the new information and communication technologies.

In order to recognise outstanding teachers at all levels of the system, I will establish a National Teacher Award scheme, after consultation with the South African Council for Educators, the national teacher unions, and the provincial education departments.

I will also give priority to the preparation of a green paper on professional standards in education, as part of the process of enabling the South African Council for Educators to take its full place as a statutory professional body with real influence on the quality of service provision.

All these measures will help to realign the identity of the teacher in South African society. The years of discrimination, repression, struggle, and democratic transition have taken their toll, on teachers in all communities. It is time to re-assert the dignity of the teaching profession, because teachers at their best are vital agents of change and growth in our schools and communities.

Priority 6: We must ensure the success of active learning through outcomes-based education

The government and the Minister of Education give complete support to the new national curriculum framework based on the concept of outcomes based education. Curriculum 2005 represents our best hope of transforming the retrograde inheritance of *apartheid*-era learning theories and obsolete teaching practices.

It is important to recognise what damage was done over the decades by an approach to education that was essentially authoritarian and allowed little or no room for the development of critical capacity or the power of independent thought and enquiry. Outcomes based education is an approach that embraces the capacity of learners to think for themselves, to learn from the environment, and to respond to wise guidance by teachers who value creativity and self-motivated learning.

While giving unreserved support to the approach, the Ministry of Education will resist over-zealous attempts from any quarter to convert OBE into a new orthodoxy with scriptural authority. There will be no mystification of an approach to learning and teaching that is essentially liberatory and creative.

I have directed that the Department of Education undertake a speedy review of the implementation of outcomes based education, with a view to the phasing of the introduction of new grades.

I have also established as a target performance indicator that all children will achieve competence in reading, writing and numeracy skills by age 9, or the end of Grade 3. The Department of Education will take advice on the appropriate formulation of this standard and the manner of its implementation. It is essential to put in place a strong scaffolding for the new curriculum framework. The Department is working on appropriate key tests of learning attainment at grades 6 and 9.

It is fully recognised that the success of the implementation of the new approach is entirely dependent on the extent to which teachers are properly prepared to facilitate it with understanding, and the extent to which appropriate learning support materials are in the schools.

It was unfortunate in the extreme that the inaugural year of Curriculum 2005 (1998) coincided with the crisis in provincial budget management, with the result that the preparation of most provincial education departments was seriously compromised, or even disrupted. In both 1998 and 1999, new materials in support of the curriculum reached the schools late in the year, despite President Mandela's directive.

The specification, ordering, delivery and retention of learning support materials is a critical factor in the current crisis of school education, for which urgent solutions will be found. A business review of the entire process in all nine provinces is nearing completion. I have directed that the results are made known to both the Minister of Finance and myself, so that effective follow-up can be considered with the least possible delay. The target that all schools must receive their materials before the first day of school is not negotiable. We will find the way to ensure that provincial education departments are empowered to make it happen.

It is important to ensure that the large sums that are needed for learning support materials each year are wisely spent and represent the kind of value for money that is appropriate to our circumstances as a middle-income country with a majority of poor citizens. I have therefore directed that a study be undertaken of the costs of producing learning support materials, after consultation with the publishers and suppliers.

The retention of books in schools is a vital ingredient in keeping costs down and keeping learning up. All parents, principals and governing bodies must be made aware of their responsibilities to ensure that this aspect of discipline is strongly enforced, with appropriate sanctions. I commend the Congress of South African Students for launching Operation Mazibuye, which aims to use advocacy and persuasion at school and community level to achieve the same result, both for school books and other school property that may have been removed from schools. This campaign deserves total support.

Priority 7: We must create a vibrant further education and training system to equip youth and adults to meet the social and economic needs of the 21st century

Further education and training (FET), as the name implies, is the post-compulsory sector that precedes higher education. It includes education in senior secondary schools, technical colleges, community colleges and youth colleges, and much training at this level by employers within commerce and industry. Private providers are highly active in this field, and will be subject to regulation under the Further Education and Training Act, 1998.

As a bridge between general education and higher education or employment, this is a vital sector for young people and adults whose formal education has been cut short. The policy has been settled and the legislation is in place. We must now get on with implementation, in close co-operation with the Department of Labour and the South African Qualifications Authority, since the establishment of the Sector Education and Training Authorities opens up exciting opportunities for further education and training institutions.

There is an urgent need to review all FET programmes in the light of community social and economic needs in the 21st century. Language programmes, mathematics and science, and information and communication technologies are priority areas for review.

It is essential for the FET sector to be as accessible as possible to adult learners who were unable to continue their education because of poverty or lack of opportunity. The sector must set itself the goal of becoming leading practitioners in the assessment and recognition of prior learning, gained informally or through experience, so that able and experienced adults may be admitted to programmes from which they could benefit.

Work on the replacement of the Senior Certificate examination by a Further Education and Training Certificate will be taken forward with all necessary speed. In the mean time, it is essential for fail-safe mechanisms to be put in place to guarantee the security of the present Senior Certificate examination process, and avoid the slightest possibility of criminal manipulation of the marks by anyone. The South African Certification Council (SAFCERT) has been directed to certify the results independently before they are announced to the public by provincial examination authorities. I will introduce amending legislation in Parliament this year to clarify the responsibilities of this important statutory body and ensure that in future there is no uncertainty about its role.

Priority 8: We must implement a rational, seamless higher education system that grasps the intellectual and professional challenges facing South Africans in the 21st century

The country depends on the higher education system to meet its high level human resource needs and to be the engine for the creation of new knowledge and innovation, and critical discourse. Given the magnitude of our other priorities, it is unlikely that significant additional resources will be available for higher education, which already receives 14 per cent of the education budget, a proportion well in line with international spending in this area.

It is important, however, that funding levels to the sector are sustained, while institutions become more efficient and accountable for the utilisation of their intellectual, infrastructural and financial resources.

Like schools, our universities, technikons and colleges must become vibrant centres of community and cultural life.

They must provide a safe and secure environment conducive to promoting their mission of teaching and learning, scholarship and research, and community service. Violence of any sort and especially violence against women will not be tolerated. University and technikon residences must be reclaimed as safe learning and living spaces, particularly for women students.

I am very pleased to report that the student leadership in higher education, across a wide political spectrum, have committed themselves to peace and stability in the sector.

I expect higher education managers to run their institutions in a responsible and inclusive manner, which means engaging in good faith consultation with SRCs and staff associations. Provided that they do so, I expect student and staff bodies to exhaust all local remedies on their own campuses before contemplating an appeal to the Minister.

Similarly, I will expect institutional councils to account for their legal and fiduciary responsibilities. I take seriously the responsibility to nominate certain members on each institutional council. I will be reviewing the appointment and performance of such Ministerial nominees, from whom I expect a report on their contribution to good governance in these institutions.

The shape and size of the higher education system cannot be left to chance if we are to realise the vision of a rational, seamless higher education system, responsive to the needs of students of all ages and the intellectual challenges of the 21st century.

The institutional landscape of higher education will be reviewed as a matter of urgency in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education. This landscape was largely dictated by the geo-political imagination of apartheid planners. As our policy documents make clear, it is vital that the mission and location of higher education institutions be re-examined with reference to both the strategic plan for the sector, and the educational needs of local communities and the nation at large in the 21st century.

This complex and difficult exercise is likely to result in mergers between some institutions, and decisions to change the missions of others. It is well known that institutions find it very difficult to come to such decisions on their own. Provided the investigation has been thorough and consultation has been undertaken fully and in good faith, I will not hesitate to take the necessary action with all deliberate speed.

I am committed to the wise and full development of the public higher education system. I will not be party to inadvertent damage to this system, or to public interests, brought about by an unduly generous interpretation of the regulations for the registration of private higher education institutions. The proliferation of such institutions, both local and trans-national, has become part of the unfolding South African higher education landscape, as it has in other countries. This must now be brought under strict but considered regulation, consistent with the Constitution. I will undertake an urgent review of the criteria and procedures for registration in terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997. I will also seek international advice on the management of the private, corporate and "borderless" higher education phenomenon, and its relationship to strategic human resource development planning

Enrolments in public higher education institutions have declined in the past few years. The reasons need to be better understood. The long-term sustainability of individual institutions and the system as a whole requires that growth be promoted in a planned and responsible manner. As part of the ongoing planning process, I will be asking all universities and technikons to inform me of their intake targets for the year 2000 and the recruitment strategies for attaining these targets. These must include a commitment to the recruitment of mature age learners, and the application of procedures for the recognition of prior learning.

While the student composition of higher education institutions has changed significantly over the past few years to better reflect the demographic realities of the broader society, the same cannot be said for the composition of the academic staff in higher education, which largely remains white and male. I will be giving close attention to promoting greater staff equity in the system through an investigation of staff conditions of employment and related matters. Institutions must be challenged to set targets to progressively achieve greater representation of women and black academic staff, as part of their institutional plans.

The higher education system will also be called upon to play a central role in the building of capacity for the education system as a whole. In particular its resources must be mobilised to support quality pre-service and in-service teacher education and educational management capacity building. Our faculties and schools of education have an exceptional opportunity to inform educational policy and practice throughout the education system through research, critical reflection and innovation.

I am committed to building a responsive higher education system of high quality. We have much to do. I will ask universities, technikons and colleges to provide me with evidence to show that they are indeed on the road to the 21st century.

Priority 9: We must deal urgently and purposefully with the HIV/AIDS emergency in and through the education and training system

This is the priority that underlies all priorities, for unless we succeed, we face a future full of suffering and loss, with untold consequences for our communities and the education institutions that serve them.

The Ministry of Education will work alongside the Ministry of Health to ensure that the national education system plays its part to stem the epidemic, and to ensure that the rights of all persons infected with the HIV virus are fully protected.

Appendix 6

QUALIFICATION	FUNDAMENTAL	CORE	ELECTIVE	TOTAL CREDITS
Level 6 First Degree	20 credits from level 5	88 credits at level 6 (US 6.01 - 6.05) + 48 credits from level 4 + 104 from level 5	100 credits to be selected (incl. 68 from level 5) US 6.06 & 6.07 (16 credits each)	360 credits 88 Core at level 6 104 Core from level 5 48 Core from level 4 20 Fundamental from level 5 68 Electives from level 5 32 Elective to be selected
Level 5 National Diploma	20 credits to be selected (incl. 10 credits from Higher Certificate)	104 credits at level 5 (incl. 42 from Higher Certificate US 5.01 - 5.08) + 48 credits at level 4	68 credits to be selected (incl. 20 from Higher Certificate US 5.09 and 5.10 (20 credits each)	240 credits 48 Core at level 4 104 Core at level 5 68 Elective to be selected 20 Fundamental to be selected
Level 5 Optional exit point Higher Certificate	10 Credits to be selected	at least 42 credits at level 5 (US 5.01, 5.02, 5.07)	20 Credits to be selected	120 credits (72 at level 5) 42 Core at level 5 48 Core at level 4 10 Fundamental to be selected 20 Elective to be selected (Fundamental & Elective need to be at level 5)
Level 4 National Certificate	20 credits Communication or 36 credits Communications + Maths	48 credits at level 4 on facilitation (US 4.01 - 4.05) +20 credits at level 4 on support	16 or 32 credits US 4.08, 4.09, 4.10 (16 credits each)	120 credits at level 4

ABET Practitioner Qualifications Map *

*Taken from the SAQA website: <http://www.saqa.org.za/>

UNIT STANDARD TITLES	CREDITS
Fundamental category	
Communications @ level 4 (FETC)	20
Mathematics @ level 4 (FETC)	16
<i>(As specified by SAQA for all FETC qualifications)</i>	
Total Fundamental credits <i>(Candidates must complete 36 credits.)</i>	36
Core category	
<i>Facilitation standards</i>	
US 4.01 Plan a learning event	8
US 4.02 Facilitate an adult learning event	16
US 4.03 Assess learners within a learning situation	10
US 4.04 Fulfill administrative requirements of a learning group	6
US 4.05 Evaluate own facilitation performance	8
<i>(These unit standards are also compulsory for the level 5 qualification.)</i>	
	<i>Sub-total=</i> 48 credits
<i>Support standards</i>	
US 4.06 Help learners with language and literacies across the curriculum	12
US 4.07 Identify and respond to learners who have special needs	8
	<i>Sub-total =</i> 20 credits
Total Core credits <i>(Candidates must complete all of these 'core' standards.)</i>	68
Elective category	
US 4.08 Facilitate mother-tongue literacy	16
US 4.09 Facilitate an additional language at ABET levels 1 and 2	16
US 4.10 Facilitate numeracy at ABET levels 1 and 2	16
US 4.11 Facilitate the use of technology by adult learners in basic skills training	16
<i>(Other elective USs will be produced as more recognised ABET learning areas develop. Unit standards from other qualifications can also be selected if they are relevant.)</i>	
Total Elective credits <i>(Candidates complete 16 credits in this category.)</i>	16
GRAND TOTAL	220

UNIT STANDARD AT NQF LEVEL 4	
Unit standard numbers and titles	
US 4.01	Plan a learning event
US 4.02	Facilitate an adult learning event
US 4.03	Assess learners within a learning situation
US 4.04	Fulfill administrative requirements of a learning group
US 4.05	Evaluate own facilitation performance
US 4.06	Help learners with language and literacies across the curriculum
US 4.07	Identify and respond to learners who have special needs
US 4.08	Facilitate mother-tongue literacy
US 4.09	Facilitate an additional language at ABET levels 1 and 2
US 4.10	Facilitate numeracy at ABET levels 1 and 2
US 4.11	Facilitate the use of technology by adult learners in basic skills training

National Certificate in ABET Practice (NQF Level 4)*

*Taken from the SAQA website: <http://www.saqa.org.za/>

Appendix 7

A survey of Teachers' Experiences in Adult Learning Centres in the Western Cape

Why this Questionnaire?

This questionnaire is part of a larger doctoral research project that examines the various discourses around adult basic education in the Western Cape. The project is primarily concerned with adult basic education in this region. I have asked teachers who are involved in adult basic education in various Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) to complete this questionnaire because I feel that their experiences are absolutely crucial to understanding the role of adult basic education within the region.

Sharing the Information

The data that this questionnaire provides will be analysed and the results will be fed-back to the Western Cape Education Department and to the various ALCs that participate in the survey. By feeding back information generated by this survey, I hope that teachers will have a better sense of how their particular experiences, challenges and difficulties, within their unique areas, are located within the broader context of the Western Cape. I see this as a way in which teachers can share their experiences with other teachers in different parts of the Western Cape.

Instructions for Completing the questionnaire

All information provided on the questionnaires is completely confidential. It is your personal experience as a teacher that is crucial to this survey. I would be very grateful if you would answer all the questions as frankly and fully as possible. I have provided a blank page at the end of the questionnaire if you need more space to answer a particular question/s. Please write as clearly as possible for those questions that require a written answer, and use the tick boxes for the others. The questionnaire uses both sides of the paper and it is divided into five sections. Please check that you have answered all the questions in all the sections when you reach the end of the questionnaire. Once you have completed the questionnaire, please return it to the person who gave it to you so that he/she can post it back to me.

Thank you

Margaret Lee

Teachers' Experiences in Adult Learning Centres in the Western Cape

Section 1: General Information

a) If you would like personal feedback on the results of the questionnaires, please provide me with your name and address:

Name

Address

.....

..... Code

b) What is the name of the learning centre where you work and what area of the Western Cape is it in?

Name

Area

c) Are you male or female?

Male Female

d) What is your first language?

e) What level/s of adult basic education do you currently teach?

f) What language do you teach your classes in?

g) Why do you choose to work in the field of adult basic education?

h) Do you have another occupation apart from this one? If so, what is it?

i) Do you see yourself still teaching adult basic education classes in five years time? If not, why?

Section 2: Language

a) Please list the two most common first languages spoken by your students, with the most common language listed as number one.

1. 2.

b) What language do your students tell you that they would most like to learn?

c) What reasons do they give for wanting to learn this language?

d) How often do you think your students use this language outside of the classroom?

A lot A little Not at all

e) To what extent do the students actually speak this language during your classes?

All of the time

Most of the time

About half of the time

Not very often

Never

f) Please elaborate on your answer above.

Section 3: The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

a) Has the NQF affected your work at this learning centre at all? If so, please say how.

b) In your opinion, what are the most useful aspects of the NQF for adult basic education and why?

c) What are the least useful aspects of the NQF for adult basic education and why?

d) Has the NQF had any effect on your students? Please elaborate on your answer.

Section 4: Student Backgrounds

a) In terms of gender, are your classes made up of

Only women

Mostly women

Half men and half woman

Mostly men

Only men

b) What proportion of your students come from the following occupations? Please tick one answer for each occupation.

Occupation	More than 75%	Between 50% & 75%	Between 25% & 50%	Less than 25%	0%
Shop owner					
Factory worker					
Security guard					
Construction worker					
Domestic worker					
Farm worker					
Street trader					
Currently unemployed					
Taxi operator					
Shop assistant					
Gardener					

c) What is the age distribution of your class?

Age	Most of the students	Quite a few students	Not very many students	None of the students
Over 60				
40-60				
25-40				
Under 25				

d) How many disabled students have you had in the last three years?

Section 5: Your Opinions

- a) Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of adult basic education in this country? Please elaborate on your answer.
- b) What do you consider to be the greatest challenges facing the adult learners that you teach, and why do you think that?
- c) Do you think that the location of the school that you teach in presents you, as an ABE teacher, with any unique difficulties? If so, what are they and why?
- d) Do you have any ideas, based on your experience as a teacher, on how adult basic education could be improved in the Western Cape? If so, what are your ideas?
- e) Do you believe that adult basic education has an effect on adult learners? If so, what is that effect?
- f) Do you think that adult learners have certain expectations regarding the classes they attend? If so, what are they?