

From Apartheid Education to the Revised National Curriculum Statement: Pedagogy for Identity Formation and Nation Building in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The transition from apartheid education to the present education system in South Africa has not been without problems. Debates on educational issues are always contentious because they involve many stakeholders such as politicians and ordinary communities. In the past, South African education reflected the fragmented society in which it was based, and it hardly created conscientious, critical citizens. Education as a means of undemocratic social control created individuals who were not only short changed but were also compartmentalised along racial and cultural lines. The system also failed to address the democratic principles based on access, full participation and equity.

Currently, however, education is seen as a weapon of transformation. The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) sees education as a tool that could root the South African values enshrined in the Constitution. Democracy, social justice, non-racism, equality and reconciliation are among the fundamental values of the South African education system. On the one hand, market requirements emphasise the need to empower learners in the sciences as this has the potential to improve the economy. On the other hand, education needs to empower learners for effective citizenship and individual enrichment. In this paper, we trace the historical foundations of formal education. Thereafter, the focus falls on how the current RNCS enhances the meaningful participation of learners in society. We look at the potential of education for nation-building. It is also crucial to look at models that could magnify the value of education in post-apartheid South Africa.

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Education is always about identity formation. The legislators or others who formulate education policies always have certain goals in mind which can be political, social or cultural in nature. Historically, it can be discerned that education is not a neutral act; it is always political. South Africa comes from a past in which apartheid education was used as a tool to divide society as it constructed certain forms of identity among learners. Under apartheid education, schools were divided according to race, and education enhanced the divisions in society. These divisions reinforced the inequalities of a divided society. Many people deemed the curriculum irrelevant and monocultural since it served to strengthen the citizenship of one race over others. Apple (1990: 1) points out

that education was never a neutral enterprise. Furthermore, he avers that, by the very nature of the institution, the educator was involved (whether consciously or not) in a political act. Shor (1987: 13) supports this when he states that education is grossly influenced by economics, by community life and literacy, by commercial mass culture and by political action outside the classroom. It is a critical commonplace that classrooms cannot be divorced from the society in which they are situated. Schools have a role of either enhancing or challenging socialisation into inequality. School is a dependant sector of society that can reproduce alienated consciousness. It is also an arena of contention where critical educators can challenge inequality through a critical curriculum in a democratic learning process (Shor 1987: 14).

The educational transformation in South Africa in the early 1990s came to overhaul the old apartheid education system. It was preceded by decades of two different kinds of divisive education systems. Firstly, in this paper we trace and explore the roots of missionary education in South Africa as we try to understand what the British wanted to achieve through education. Secondly, we examine the role of the Afrikaner education system, namely Christian National Education (CNE) based on Calvinist principles. Thirdly, we look at the present Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) introduced in post-apartheid South Africa. As we explore these topics, we shall attempt to answer such pertinent questions as:

- How different are the current objectives of education compared to those of the past?
- Can education compensate for the shortcomings of society?
- What are the differences between learners produced by apartheid education and those produced today?
- What are the threats and challenges to the present system of education in South Africa?

However, before focusing on these and other debates, let us look at a brief history of South African education, starting with missionary education.

1. MISSIONARY EDUCATION

British control in South Africa and other states was to ensure the spread of the British Empire across the world. In South Africa, the British set up a system of government that was similar to that of British colonies in other parts of Africa. The British education system was colonial by nature. The British wanted to use education as a way of spreading their language and traditions in the colony and also as a means of social control (Christie, 1988). In all colonies, English was made an official language, and the church, government offices and schools were all anglicised. In the eastern parts of the Cape Colony, colleges of education such as Lovedale and the University College of Fort Hare were established

under British influence. St Matthews, Clarkebury and other mission schools were established throughout the Cape Colony to foster the British culture. Various schools arose in the British tradition and educators were brought from Britain, especially at the inception of many mission schools.

In the hidden curriculum of the British there was a need to educate the Africans so that they could take part in church activities. Mission education was also introduced so as to spread the western way of life among the backward Africans and to teach them certain work values (Christie, 1988). David Labaree (1997) states that education serves both private needs and public needs. Therefore, whilst the missionaries provided western education to the African for the public good, they had many private interests that they wanted to fulfil. The British government and the missionaries used education to attain their political goals. Christie quotes Sir George Grey, governor of the Cape in 1855, when he said:

If we leave the natives beyond our border ignorant barbarians, they will remain a race of troublesome marauders. We should try to make them a part of ourselves, with a common faith and common interests, useful servants, consumers of our goods, contributors to our revenue. Therefore, I propose that we make unremitting efforts to raise the natives in Christianity and civilization, by establishing among them missions connected with industrial schools. The native races beyond our boundary, influenced by our missionaries, instructed in our schools, benefiting by our trade would not make wars on our frontiers.

The above quotation summarizes the basic political intentions of missionary education among the Africans. It was geared to make the Africans docile and tame through the use of the Christian philosophy. Missionary education had an impact on the indigenes and while they were being anglicized, the Afrikaners started formulating their own education system. The Afrikaners had set up their schools in the trekker states such as the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. It was in these trekker states that Apartheid Education had its beginnings.

2. AFRIKANER NATIONALIST EDUCATION AND APARTHEID

Afrikaner education can be traced from the 1600s when it was minimal. By the 1800s it was still in the hands of parents and the church. After the Anglo-Boer War between the British and the Afrikaners, the defeated Afrikaners became disgruntled. The Boers/Afrikaners were opposed to the British system of education because they saw it as a way of alienating them from their own cultural practices. The Afrikaners then decided to establish their own schools based on Christian National Education (CNE).

Article 15 of the CNE policy of 1948 explains the basis of apartheid education:

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We believe that the calling and task of White South Africa with regard to the native is to Christianize him and help him on culturally, and that this calling and task has already found its nearer focusing in the principles of trusteeship, no equality and segregation. We believe besides that any system of teaching and education of natives must be based on the same principle. In accordance with these principles we believe that the teaching and education of the native must be grounded in the life and worldview of the Whites most especially those of the Boer nation as senior White trustee of the native...

The above objectives of education established by Afrikaner nationalists is very similar to those of the missionaries: the politicization of education and the abuse of religion plays a role in both instances. Apartheid education was a practice of maintaining that status quo and of preserving the master-servant relationship between the Africans and the whites. It was intended to “entrench apartheid capitalism”, as was noted at the conference on People’s Education in December 1985. Peter Kallaway (1988) points out that apartheid education not only domesticated the people but indoctrinated them as well. In the white schools in South Africa, the government policy in the past included various “educational programmes” where the young students would be indoctrinated in what was referred to as “veld schools” (literally translated as “bush schools”). This was done on the pretext of nature study. In the veld schools, the white boys were taught how important it was to protect their land from other people such as the blacks and communists, and these schools also enhanced the superiority complex of the white South African over the African.

Bantu Education for black South Africans had been a means of restricting the development of the learner by distorting school knowledge to ensure control over the intellect of the learners and teachers, and propagating state propaganda (Kallaway, 1988). The apartheid schools were doing exactly what John Holt, a deschooler, claims, namely that schools sort and indoctrinate students instead of liberating them (Gutek, 1974). The CNE principles on education for the Africans were declared as a way of maintaining the black South Africans in a permanent state of political and economic subordination. The education system had been an obvious instrument of control to protect power and privilege. And not only had apartheid education separated white children from black children; it had also divided white children into separate camps (Hartshorne, 1988). The black learners did not only feel the damaging effects of the CNE. It was destructive to the white learner as well.

It is this history of South African education that necessitated the introduction of Curriculum 2005, sometimes referred to as outcomes based education (OBE). Its formulation involved cooperation among various stakeholders. The OBE system has introduced new learning styles implying change from passive, rote learning to creative learning and problem solving through active participation in the learning process. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) provided the structure for the new curriculum in South Africa. The NQF was intended to

prevent learners from being trapped in any one learning situation by facilitating movement between different areas and levels of education and training. The introduction of OBE in 1997 was a move towards changing the past system. The RNCS was a means of revising the original OBE curriculum.

3. THE VALUES AND OBJECTIVES OF OBE

OBE is a system of education based on outcomes. An outcome refers to anything in which an individual can demonstrate knowledge or skill. Having ideas, knowing how to make decisions and how to solve problems are among possible outcomes that a learner can acquire in a learning environment. The essential outcomes enable the learner to be equipped in life and be able to find employment. A learner who has learnt how to solve problems, makes decisions and plan will be able to do a better job. The individual can also move from one job to another and from one area of study to another. The essential outcomes of the new curriculum are not subject specific but common to all subjects or courses. These outcomes also form part of the entire education system. For example, a bricklayer and a carpenter need to learn mathematics so that, among other things, they will be able to measure their work correctly. The above are essential outcomes that are supplemented by specific outcomes. On the one hand, essential outcomes are those outcomes that are not linked to a particular subject or course for they are common to all subjects. On the other hand, specific outcomes are the exact skills and information required in a particular introduced learning programme. The demise of apartheid government necessitated the introduction of an education system that is based on the foundations of democracy, non-racialism, non-sexism and justice.

Two main reasons are cited as being pivotal in the introduction of OBE. Firstly, the previous education system fell short by international standards in the field of Mathematics and Science, for example. Secondly, OBE aims to create a South Africa that is a prosperous, truly united and democratic country. These goals can be linked to the revival of a number of issues in society. Tyack, Kirst and Hansot (1980), in their search for alternatives, maintain that public schools should revive a sense of public good, and should renegotiate the ideological contract using the common school to achieve democracy. The new curriculum was developed in South Africa to ensure that education reflected the contemporary needs of society. When countries opt for educational changes, they take cognisance of several other factors such as social, political and cultural issues. Tyack and Cuban (1995) state that when people speak of educational reforms, they mean planned efforts to change schools in order to correct social and educational problems. The introduction of OBE in South Africa was not only an attempt to change the education system but also for the purpose of transforming society. Apart from being regarded as a possible solution to social and political ills, OBE was also seen as an answer to economic growth.

4. THE REVISED NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT: IN SEARCH OF A NEW IDENTITY?

The Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) informs a system that seeks to introduce egalitarian pedagogy in South African schools. The goals of this system are to create a new South African identity that encompasses critical consciousness, to transform South African society, to promote democracy and to magnify learner involvement in education. This system is based on the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, which provides the basis for curriculum transformation in South Africa. Education and the curriculum have a crucial role to play in realising the aims of developing the full potential of learners as citizens of a democratic South Africa (DoE 2002: 1). The aims of the Constitution include the following:

- to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- to improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;
- to lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law.

The RNCS also clearly states that educators and learners are to assume new roles. The new dispensation regards teachers as key contributors to educational transformation in South Africa. The RNCS envisages teachers who are qualified, competent, dedicated and caring. Teachers are supposed to assume various roles and these include being mediators of learning, interpreters and designers of Learning Programmes and materials, leaders, administrators and managers, scholars, researchers and lifelong learners, community members, citizens and pastors, assessors and Learning Area or Phase Specialists (DoE 2002: 3). All these roles are crucial for nurturing a new identity in learners. Learners are also expected to embrace the new values in the education system. The promotion of values is important not only for the sake of personal development but also to ensure that a national South African identity is built on values very different from those that underpinned apartheid education (DoE 2002: 3):

The kind of learner that is envisaged is one who will be inspired by these values, and who will act in the interests of the society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice. The curriculum seeks to create a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate, with respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen.

The above roles of the teacher and the learners are different from those under apartheid education. In the previous system, education was a one-way process

where only the adult (the teacher) was expected to “impart knowledge” to the otherwise less competent child. Education was defined as the intervention of an educator in the life of a child to guide the child on his way to adulthood (Stuart, Van Niekerk, McDonald & De Klerk 1987: 4). These writers further state that the role of the teacher was to transmit life contents to the child. The child was regarded as a blank slate, a *tabula rasa*. The learner was supposed to be obedient to the teacher at all times. The child who did not accept the authority of the teacher would not become a proper adult, hence the child had to be guided to obedience (Landman; Killian; Swanepoel & Bodenstien 1982: 11). The hidden curriculum in this system was to create learners who did not question authority. Learners were also not supposed to change the status quo.

5. DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION: VALUES FOR A NEW IDENTITY

The RNCS represents a pedagogy that has committed itself to reinventing education in South Africa. It opposes the traditional separatist education, which was the reproduction of inequality. Learners and teachers need to be exposed to a system that embraces democracy in order to build an egalitarian society. Education is the key because it empowers citizens to exercise their democratic rights and shape their destiny (DoE 2001: 13). Democratic education also enables people to participate in public life, think critically and act in a responsible manner. Democracy and education as a subject of discussion has not been without problematic areas. Chubb and Moe (1990: 23) state that there are no panaceas in social policy. This is supported by Plank and Boyd (1994: 270), who point out that democratic governance is not a panacea for the problems of an educational system. However, Gutman (1999: 76) points out that the professional responsibility of teachers is to uphold the principle of no repression by cultivating the capacity for democratic deliberation.

As mentioned above, the values of the present South African education system are rooted in the values of the Constitution of the Republic. These ten fundamental values are democracy; social justice; equality; non-racism and non-sexism; *ubuntu* (human dignity); an open society; accountability; rule of law; respect; and reconciliation. All these values are highlighted in the Manifesto drawn up by the Working Group on Values in Education (Ministry of Education 2001: 111). The new system strives to create an identity of South Africanness. Through education, South Africans yearn to affirm common citizenship and a sense of pride through commonly held values.

The government has also tried to ensure that schools adopt a number of strategies to assist learners in embracing the new patriotism. Among these strategies also highlighted in the 2001 Manifesto are the following:

- The introduction of religion education into schools

Unlike during the days of the CNE, learners are now supposed to explore the diversity of religions that inspire society.

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- Making multilingualism happen

In the past, only English and Afrikaans were the dominant languages of formal learning. However, now there are policies that maintain that learners acquire knowledge better when they study in their mother tongue, especially in the formative years. Many teachers are beginning to use code-switching in their classrooms as one of the practical ways in a world dominated by the English language.

- Making schools safe and upholding the rule of law

In the face of the abolition of corporal punishment, this has become a challenge to teachers. Schools need to see themselves as part of the community. With the expanded powers of the parents and school governing bodies (SGBs), the role of parents has ensured that schools do become accountable structures of authority in communities.

- Nurturing the new patriotism

Schools are required to promote a shared sense of pride in commonly held values. Whilst the system of education acknowledges the multicultural nature of the South African society, there are commonly held values that forge a common South African identity. This new patriotism is forged through an allegiance to constitutional values.

The RNCS comprises eight Learning Areas, namely:

- Languages
- Mathematics
- Natural Sciences
- Social Sciences
- Arts and Culture
- Life Orientation
- Economic and Management Sciences
- Technology

The objectives of each of these are to forge the new identity and affirm a new citizenship. The following two examples of learning areas objectives embody some of the aims of the RNCS. The objective of Social Sciences is to:

... develop an awareness of how we can influence our future by confronting and challenging economic and social inequality (including racism and sexism) to build a non-racial democratic present and future. (DoE 2002: 4)

Among the purposes of the Arts and Culture learning area are the following:

- The development of creative and innovative individuals as responsible citizens, in line with the values of democracy according to the Constitution of South Africa.
- The provision of access to Arts and Culture education for all learners as part of redressing historical imbalances.

- The development of an awareness of national culture to promote nation-building.

All the learning areas in the RNCS strive to redress past imbalances. Formal education in schools has the task of improving the quality of life for South Africans, while each person is free to exercise his or her potential. Currently, the South African education system strives to address relevant everyday issues. Poverty, inequality, race, gender, age and disability are some of the aspects that are stressed so that learners can be better informed (DoE 2002: 2). The RNCS also looks at topical subjects such as the challenges of HIV/Aids. The latter is examined in almost all grade levels so that learners can be equipped with the knowledge necessary for leading healthy lifestyles. Furthermore, the RNCS requires that all the Learning Area Statements create an awareness of the relationship between social justice, human rights and inclusivity. The South African Schools Act supports these aspects as well as embracing diversity.

The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 strengthens the ideals of the RNCS by highlighting the importance of school governance. One of the basic aims of SASA is to reverse the remnants of unfair discrimination as well as to redress past imbalances based on ethnicity and race. Potgieter, Visser, Van den Bank, Motala and Squelch (1997: 6) point out that the purpose of SASA is to:

... give everyone an equal opportunity to develop his or her talents. In a new system there can obviously be no place for racism, sexism or intolerance.

The schools' governing bodies have been entrusted powers by SASA. The governing bodies determine the schools' policies. Governing bodies represent one recognised structure, which falls under the Ministry of Education. Their powers ensure that there is cooperation among various stakeholders, i.e. parents, learners and teachers. Although not all school governing bodies are effective, by law they are supposed to forge links between the community and the school. The elevated status of the SGBs ensures the contribution of communities in the moulding of learners. School discipline, language policy and religious policy are some of the policies in which the voices of the SGBs are crucial.

6. DEBATES ON AFRICANISING THE CURRICULUM

There have been a number of debates since educational transformation has been taking place in South Africa. Experts have looked at various ways in which education can better serve society. Ethics and environment, gender issues, promotion of anti-racism, multilingualism and culture are among the themes that have been frequently discussed in education. In a fledgling democratic South Africa people unified as they yearned for education that would give them an identity as well as serve the purpose of nation-building. Among many debates

on democracy, transformation and education have been sustained arguments for the Africanisation of knowledge in schools. There have been many voices in support of the use of African indigenous knowledge systems in schools. What, then, would this indigenous knowledge mean for schools?

Although not particularly forthright in its approach, the RNCS accommodates local corpuses of indigenous knowledge systems. Currently there are a number of debates on how best to indigenise education in South Africa, while some still ask whether or not this is what we want. Without romanticising Africa or condescending to her, there is a great need to utilise the wealth of local indigenous knowledge systems and incorporate them into mainstream formal education. I have identified three different viewpoints on bringing indigenous knowledge into our system of education. The first group argues that the indigenous knowledge systems need to be developed as a separate strand besides the conventional education system. This can be regarded as patronising and not accommodating to the indigenous knowledge systems. The second group believes that the entire education system needs to be revamped as indigenous knowledge systems are introduced. This viewpoint is not cost effective and assumes that there are no positive aspects in the conventional system. I would posit that we need to assume the third direction, which is to use the present system and combine it with the African context in which our schools are situated. This is challenging and would require some form of retraining of educators for a transformative pedagogy that would be able to prepare learners for a new African identity.

African indigenous knowledge systems (AIKS) have the potential to address many social needs. Emeagwali (2005) points out that African indigenous knowledge, whether institutionalized or not, and whether structured or unstructured, has specific implications for democratization, community empowerment and nation-building. The potential of an Africanised system lies largely in how the learners are taught:

Learners are encouraged and trained to challenge existing relations of power and domination in terms of a transformative epistemology. Awareness of societal ills at local and global levels preoccupies discourse and the curriculum is viewed as an instrument of empowerment. Consciousness raising and so too the development of social awareness become part of the mission of the curriculum and curriculum planning. (Emeagwali 2005: 3)

It stands to reason that it would be a fallacy to state that the AIK alone could address social needs. However, it is clear from the above statements that the introduction of the AIK systems into schools is just one factor that can address the questions of political participation, economic competitiveness, levels of crime and so forth. The authors cited above also point out that education has potential in each of these areas if the proper supportive conditions and inputs are present. AIK “has implications for sustainable development, capacity building and intellectual development in Africa in the 21st century” (Emeagwali 2005: 1).

We need not overstate the potential of education by only introducing AIK systems. As South African society embraces multicultural, non-racial education, people also need to ensure that other sectors of the community work closely with schools to create an effective society based on democratic ideals. As stated above, teachers in multicultural classrooms in South Africa should endeavour to use education as a means of enhancing democracy. Nguru (1994: 6) argues that, while many factors may have contributed to the political disintegration, instability and sociological division of African nations as well as the lack of democratic citizenship, education may have been instrumental in militating against the existence of thriving democracies.

7. HOW WILL AFRICANISED EDUCATION HELP TRANSFORM OUR SOCIETY?

The above discussion shows that there is an urgent need for schools to interact with the community and learners in their home environment so that they can learn about the background and history of the learners. Research has shown that when the learner's community and background are taken into consideration, learning is more likely to be effective (Bude, 1985; McDonough & Wheeler, 1998; Rugh & Bossert 1998). Colonial education, which replaced traditional education, tended to be more individualistic and hardly enhanced the communalism inherent in African culture. In his novel *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe puts across the idea that we need to take what is best from Africa and combine it with what is best from the West. The problem with colonial education and thus apartheid education in South Africa was that they spelt the end of traditional values learning in education. Currently, education faces these challenges in accommodating indigenous knowledge systems.

African culture is interrelated with religious beliefs, moral values and social modes of behaviour and these are sometimes reflected in the art of narration and the use of proverbs and riddles (Bude, 1985; Mutwa 1997; Emeagwali, 2005). Bude also points out that songs, dance, music, handicraft, design and agricultural layout are part and parcel of the African indigenous knowledge systems. Schools have two choices. They can either keep the status quo or teach the values of Western education at the expense of indigenous cultures, which means ignoring the past and all its values and compelling learners to negate cultural identity. The second option is to include the values of African cultures in order to enrich the system of education we have with indigenous knowledge systems. This would mean a paradigm shift that recreates prior knowledge based on Western tradition.

The indigenous knowledge systems need to form part of democratic control over the political and social structures of South African society. As South Africans are transforming education they also need to use the indigenous knowledge systems as forms of emancipatory education. This would help in the

enrichment of societal values. Paulo Freire (1970) uses various terms such as the following to refer to meaningful education: liberatory social change, dialogue, freedom, and transformation. These are some of the terms we can use to define what we expect an Africanised system of education to aspire to. Teachers are always crucial in the implementation of new educational policies. Many researchers have highlighted that the hiccups in the introduction of outcomes based education (OBE) in South Africa in 1997 were caused by the fact that many teachers were not part of the formulation process. In striving to move from the past strategies to more liberatory forms of transformational pedagogy, teachers would need to be involved. Yet teachers are usually the scapegoats when policies do not work. What role should teachers play in the move towards education for a new identity?

8. DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION AND TEACHERS

Among the aspects brought by the new education policy is the idea of democracy in and outside the classroom. The classroom practice offered in OBE requires teachers to be promoters of democracy. Yet while many teachers have understood and probably internalised some forms of societal democracy as espoused in the new South African constitution, they are slow in applying this in their classrooms. The teacher as an authoritarian and imposing figure is still important in their view. However, “the trend towards the democratisation of society requires that the work of the new teachers should be not only qualitatively effective, but essentially democratic and enabling in nature” (Sieborger and Kenyon, 1992). This is not easy if one looks back at the teachers’ role in the past system. Teachers were not seen as part of democracy. They stood in the middle of the ground contested on the one hand by the State and on the other by pupils, parents and community. On the one hand they are employees of the State and on the other hand they are members of the community (Hartshorne, 1987). Teachers often used to be criticized from all sides for inadequacies for which they were not to blame. These were the challenges that teachers faced in the years of apartheid education. However, the new era of post-apartheid society has presented new challenges, amongst others the way in which teachers are expected to deal with democracy. If society is to embrace the new identity partly through formal education, teachers need to be consulted and trained so that implementation in their classrooms can be hassle-free.

9. CONCLUSION

This article traces the historical origin of South African education as well as its challenges and objectives. It is evident that education has a crucial role to play in society. DeLany (1998: 134) states that schools are continually scrambling for order in a rather disorderly world. Labaree (1997: 41) supports this view by stating that schools occupy an awkward position at the intersection between what people hope society will become and what they think it really is, between political ideal and economic realities. The RNCS is also a system that strives to achieve a number of goals enshrined in the Constitution. Nation-building, non-racism, democracy and *ubuntu* are some of the values that the new curriculum is attempting to instil. Education in South Africa continues to be a vehicle for social and political transformation.

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