

THE PROBLEM OF INDIGENOUS PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

The previous Afrikaner Nationalist Party's policies of segregation, and the deliberate institutionalizing and enforcement of Bantu Education (i.e. a special type of education that was designed specifically for the indigenous peoples) have given rise to the production of "hundreds of thousands of illiterates and semi-literate blacks who lack effective control over their lives" (Nkomo, 1990, 231). Through Bantu Education, the government discouraged Africans from attaining and acquiring critical literacy skills for fear that 'awareness of reality' would arouse critical consciousness, thus putting at risk the legitimacy of the government. Three possible solutions relating to the problem of illiteracy in the post-apartheid era, together with their advantages and disadvantages are discussed in this paper.

These are respectively characterized as: (i) the "centralist solution" in which the new government is expected by parents to tackle the problem of illiteracy; (ii) the "communalist solution" in which the communities through the parents, initiate and undertake literacy programs; (iii) and "individualistic solution", whereby parents abdicate their responsibilities to individual teachers and tutors, or any other persons who are seen as having the concerns of children at heart.

PAPER TO BE PRESENTED AT THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN
EDUCATION.

PRESENTER: THEMBA MHLAMBO.

DATE and VENUE: 28-11-94, ROOM V108 - UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE, NSW.

TIME :12.00hrs.

Topic: The problem of Indigenous Parental Involvement In Education In

South Africa.

The involvement of parents in activities or enterprises that are undertaken by any community or society is of great importance if the values of that society are to be perpetuated as the cherished pillars of existence and survival of that social group. In South Africa, the policy of segregation, together with the deliberate institutionalization and enforcement of Bantu Education gave rise to the following:

- the production of "hundreds of thousands of illiterate and semi-literate blacks who lack effective control over their lives", (Nkomo, 1990, 231). What this means is that the victims of the low-quality system of Bantu Education were made by the Afrikaner Nationalist government, to acquire industrial basic

skills, so as to keep the white-owned economy alive at all times.

- through Bantu Education, it discouraged Africans from attaining and acquiring critical literacy skills for fear that 'awareness of reality' would arouse critical consciousness, thus put at risk the legitimacy of the government.

The immediate effects of the absence of the necessary basic education is conspicuous in that most parents are not only ignorant of the role they need to play in the formal education of their children, but have in most cases, little or no time to spend with their families. When speaking of the "agony of growing up black," Sparks (1991, 227), says of black parents that they have no "control over home, food, shelter, education, employment, or personal liberty," and can therefore not "feel themselves to be truly their children's providers and protectors." He goes on to speak for example, of "fathers" as people who are gone for most of the year [and] know that all they can offer their families is a remitted share of their meagre pay packets. They cannot offer regular guidance or love as the children grow, or experience the immense satisfaction of watching them emerge from the chrysalis of babyhood into young adulthood. (227-228).

While most parents understand that children need to attend school, they nevertheless do not know what it is, or what activities take place in a school situation. Sparks points out, that "each generation" of parents, "has strained to enable the next to do better" in life. He goes on to ask "... what can the black parent bequeath, proudly to his [her] progeny to complete that final obligation to posterity..." (228) if he/she is not involved in the education of one's children?

Having been imbued with the principles of apartheid, it is not easy for them to decide on the type of education that is relevant for the future of their children. As a teacher in public schools, the author observed that the agency that played almost every role in the activities of such schools was, and still is the government department of education.

Parents were merely informed of the school's intended engagements such as sporting outings. Other than for purposes of raising funds from parents, the apartheid system, especially in homelands, did not deem it fit to have them involved in the actual educational operation of the school. This means that since the academic year is divided into two semesters, parents or guardians only had contact with the school when they enrolled children at the start of the academic year, and through achievement reports which were issued at the end of each semester. The absence of communication between the school and the parental body can among other reasons, be ascribed to apartheid's concern of keeping as many people as possible from the wealth of knowledge.

Three possible solutions can be arrived at in attempting to resolve the problem of parental involvement, namely:

- the centralist solution, which emphasises the creation of official structures such as community projects and resources in residential areas in order to eliminate illiteracy. This means that the new Government has the responsibility to free victims of Bantu Education from the "culture of silence" they have been subjected to, and to expose them to a significant "language" by means of which they can communicate and understand their new "world". (Freire, P., 1985, 50-51).

I have labelled this approach as broad on the grounds that if governmental structures and initiatives are to be expected as saviours, then there will be a danger of the very victims of illiteracy relaxing and expect the Government to do things for

them. Society needs to acknowledge that it is the combined efforts of the various political parties that have brought about the new South Africa. As such therefore, it is the responsibility of every citizen to play their roles by forming a common front whose aim is inter alia, to tackle the problem of illiteracy. If the responsibility is to be carried by the Government, there is the further risk of expenses being said to be unavailable.

If, however, the Government is not in a position to deliver the goods, then the solution to the problem of illiteracy will not be in the near future, and parents will thus be inactive 'players' in their children's education.

- the communalist solution, akin to that proposed by Hill (1993, 234), emphasises the negotiation of "new social agreements" by parties whose interest is in education..

Although designed for schools in Queensland, this approach seems to be the most appropriate in that it takes into account contemporary societal obligations to compromise in order to overcome imbalances. Its application centres in that when making "new social agreements", "governors of modern societies" in this

case community leaders, may generate the creation of residential groupings among community members for the sole purpose of setting up classes for adults. School buildings and other community facilities may be used for this purpose.

On defining the phrase "education for adult persons" or "adult education", UNESCO says that it denotes the entire body of organised educational processes whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise,..whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social and cultural development. (Khanyile, 1988,3).

The changes referred to aim at arousing among adults the role they ought to play in the formal education of their children. Unlike the apartheid era, democracy demands of them to be active participants in determining the future roles of their off-spring. It is only through exposure to literacy activities that their 'development' as individuals will be flexible to democratic changes that will enable them to discover and realize their role in the new South African culture to which only their children are beneficiaries.

Change of 'attitudes..behaviour' or learning new tricks would also mean that parents will need to allocate time especially during non-working days, to physically and emotionally support their children, or seeing to it that school-work is done at home. Even though the services of private subject tutors could be required, this approach is essential in that it guarantees the relationship of parents and their children. The approach further relies on the delicate catalyst that once parents understand their supporting roles at home, it then becomes easier for them to play meaningful and responsible roles in the running of local schools. They will do this in partnership with their own children, the principal and staff of the school concerned, and the governing structures of education in the particular province. They will need to understand that the success of school policies will depend on their

partnership with other interested parties. This means that unlike in the past, school buildings and property will be enshrined and given new meaning in terms of being safe-guarded against hooliganism.

If partnership is absent, it means that administrators and teachers have the burden of understanding the meaning of educational change, and "highly educated parents are bewildered" by it as well, "what of the

less educated ones who have always felt uncomfortable in dealing with the school?" (Fullan,1982, 193).

- the individualist solution stresses the risk of further breakdown of the parent-child relationship if as a result of illiteracy, parents surrender their rights to a second party who could be a tutor, teacher or any other persons who are seen as having the concerns of children at heart.

The recent history of South Africa has its foundation in the role that was played by indigenous children since 1976, in demanding a change of their education system. As witnessed during the last five years, instability led to the complete change of Government, and the recognition of the rights of the indigenous peoples. The central point here is that it is children, rather than their parents who were concerned about education. Most parents were not aware of what was wrong with the education system. Those who were, were too intimidated to question the Government's policies.

It is an open secret that the then movements such as SASO (South African Students' Organisation), Black Consciousness, the then banned political organizations in the form of Pan Africanism, the South African Communist Party, and the African National Congress, one way or the other, had an influence in the national school riots that rocked the country since 1976. In the place of parents, representatives of these movements and organisations became role models.

In conclusion, the estrangement of parents from the education of their children is too extreme and dangerous a solution in that it will perpetuate alienation within the family set-up. Contrary to what the previous Government did, the new South Africa needs is an education system that will build and maintain values and co-operation within family relations and society at large.

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INDIGENOUS PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

BACKGROUND: The previous Afrikaner Nationalist Government's policies of segregation, and the deliberate institutionalizing an enforcement of Bantu Education have given rise to the following:

1. the production of "hundreds of thousands of illiterate and

semiliterate blacks who lack effective control over their lives". (Nkomo, 1990, 231).

2. Bantu Education discouraged Africans from attaining and acquiring critical literacy skills for fear that awareness of reality

would arouse critical consciousness, thus put at risk the legitimacy of the government.

Possible solutions.

1. Centralist solution: availing of official structures such as projects and resources in residential areas in order to eliminate illiteracy, viz: as victims of Bantu Education, most parents need to be freed from the "culture of silence" they have all along been subjected to, and be exposed to a significant "language" through which they can communicate with the "world. (Freire, 1985, 50-51).
2. Communalist solution: "negotiating" of "new social agreements.." (Hill, 1993, 234).
-plight of parent-child relationship should generate the creation of residential groupings not by officials, but by residents themselves, so that tutorship, and especially parental support are guaranteed.
3. Individualist solution: If the above solutions are unsuccessful, then parents will surrender their rights to a second party, thus play no role in the education of their children.

