

**THE INFLUENCE OF COMMISSIONS OF  
INQUIRY IN THE EVOLUTION OF  
EDUCATIONAL POLICY FOR BLACKS  
FROM 1934-1984**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION, STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM, AIMS AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

### 1.1 Introduction

From the survey of literature it would seem that the policy regarding the education of Blacks in South Africa has, since the arrival of the Whites in 1652, evolved from integration (non-racialism) to segregation, from provincial to centralised administration and from missionary to state control. This evolution is partly the result of the impact made by commissions of inquiry on the education for Blacks. Until May 1994, education for Blacks remained centralised, segregated along racial lines and divided into ethnic groupings. There were consequently 19 different departments of education in the country, viz: one department for each of the ten "national" states, one for each of the four provinces, one for each of the four major racial groups and a Department of National Education (Education Update, December 1992 :3). On 23 May 1994 the 19 departments were merged into one.

In addition there were 17 different authorities who were responsible for employing teachers, 15 cabinet ministers with individual budgets and 12 Education Acts which applied to different education departments (The National Education Policy Investigation Report, 1992:10). Presently (1994) there are 10 education authorities: one at central government level and one for each of the nine regions.

The first school was established in the Cape Colony by the Dutch in 1656. White and Coloured children were taught together (non-rationally) in this school (Behr & Macmillan, 1971:357). Loram (1917:47) asserts that it was only in 1676 that an attempt was made to segregate schools along racial lines. Even then, the brighter Coloured children were kept at European schools pending the building of their own schools.

The first school for slaves was built in 1658 by the Dutch East India Company and was followed by the building of a school by the Moravian Missionaries a century later.

According to the Cape Education Act (13/1865) mission, public and native schools were to be established. The latter were to be segregated. It was the Cape School Board Act (35/1905) that officially established racially segregated schools in the Cape Colony. Pells (1938:138) concludes that by 1935 there existed 1 730 Native primary missionary schools, 14 Native Training Colleges and 8 Native Secondary schools in the Cape Colony.

In Natal, until 1948 there were very few missionary schools (Loram, 1917:54). The 1852 Commission of Inquiry was appointed as a result of the cultivation of State interest in the education of the Native. Subsequent to the Inquiry, the Legislative Council of Natal established racially segregated schools for Natives in 1856. These were administered by the missionaries and supervised by the state. Pells (1938:142) observes that by 1900 there were 640 primary day schools for Natives, 4 inter-mediate boarding schools, 9 industrial schools, 12 high schools and 6 Teacher Training Colleges in Natal.

In the Transvaal, the Hermannsburg Evangelical Lutheran Society initiated a drive to educate Natives in 1857. These missionaries set up schools that were not subsidised by the state until the British Government took over the two Boer Republics (Behr & Macmillan, 1971:385). Only then was each mission school given an annual grant by the government. There was only one government school, situated in Klipspruit (Loram, 1917:63).

In the Orange Free State, education for Natives was developed since 1835 by the missionaries. In 1878 the state started subsidising only those schools that were administered by the Dutch Reformed Church. In both the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, there were very few mission schools that provided formal education for the Natives (Behr & Macmillan, 1971:388).

Pells (1938:130) analyses missionary involvement in the education of Natives thus: "The foremost aim of the missionary societies and other churches, to which all other educational aims were subservient, was the evangelisation of the native. For this purpose, there came to South Africa during the course of the 19th century a succession of missionaries whose lives of devoted service gave not only a new and finer meaning to the Native mind of the significance of the White man's civilisation, but an example for all time of what a Christian could mean."

Loram (1917:79) contends that until 1917 the system of education for Natives in South Africa was "almost entirely the product of missionary enterprise", even though some governments made efforts at subsidising the education of Natives. These financial grants-in-aid were still not enough to develop the education system for the Natives in

the country (Hartshorne, 1992:22).

When the Union of South Africa was established native education was placed under the control of the provincial councils, but various councils each had their own system of native education taxation, differing materially from those of the others. As a result of this there were a number of various anomalies, and education progressed at different rates in the four provinces. Until 1922, when the Financial Relations Fourth Extension Act (5/1922) was passed, ... Provincial Councils were debarred from levying direct taxation upon Natives... At the same time, the Governor-General was empowered to make grants for Native education to any Province out of the proceeds of the direct taxation of Natives imposed by Parliament.

Therefore, since the Union of South Africa, a more uniform policy was practised in the country regarding education for the Natives: all primary and secondary education fell under the provinces without any racial distinction. A Native Affairs Ministry was also set up to look after Native interest.

Pells (1938:148) reports that between 1925 and 1950 the number of government and government-aided schools increased from 2 870 to 4 590. There was also a slow transition from predominantly missionary-controlled schools to predominantly state-aided schools (Behr & Macmillan, 1971:392).

The Native Education Finance Act (29/1945) ensured that the central government should assume financial responsibility for the education of the Natives. The Provincial Councils were therefore left with administrative duties only.

The passing of the Bantu Education Act (47/1953) brought about centralised administration and control of the education system of the Natives as recommended by the Union of South Africa Report of the Commission on Native Education (1949 - 1951), chaired by Dr. W.W.M. Eiselen. This Act re-introduced a racially segregated system of education in the country. The education of Blacks was further divided into ethnic groupings in line with the government's policy of establishing a number of "independent homelands" for the various ethnic groupings.

The history of the education for Blacks was beset with problems and crises that leave their legacy in the current state of the system of education for Blacks. This resulted in some cases and at different stages in the development of education for Blacks in the appointment of various commissions of inquiry. These crises have taken the form of boycotts, strikes, riots, marches and sit-ins (Molteno, 1988:94-101), and have characterised the education system for Blacks since its inception in 1953/4. Possible reasons for such instability in schools for Blacks could be, according to Kallaway (1988:9), that: "Schools, whether church or state-financed, were modelled on the educational systems that had been developed in the industrialised countries... Within the colonial context schools became key institutions of control, whereby a new indigenous elite was created to replace the traditional groupings who represented a different cultural and political outlook that was often hostile to the culture and social practices of the conqueror."

Molteno (1988:52) also argues that: "It was not as equal individuals that Blacks were brought into the colonial order but as a subordinate category which was integrated economically while kept outside politically and at a distance socially. Some were

schooled into an acceptance of the new 'civilisation' while their expectations of partaking as equals in the fruits of colonial society were suppressed."

Because of the African's resistance to colonisation and subjugation and government under-expenditure on the education for Blacks, there were no major advances in their system of education until the middle of the 19th century. Molteno (1988:57) believes that the steady growth of the education system for Blacks thereafter, was a result of growing state interest in the education for Blacks in the country. This process of development persisted until the first half of the 20th century. In the second half, the education for Blacks was further determined by the implementation of the recommendations of the Native Education Commission of 1949 - 1951 under Dr. W.W.M. Eiselen. Ever since the establishment of the Department of Bantu Education in 1953, there has been strong resistance to a racially segregated education system that led to its near collapse in 1976 in the wake of the riots in Soweto and elsewhere in the country (Hartshorne, 1992:60). What happened in 1976 signalled the need for reform in the education system for Blacks in South Africa.

Recently, the education for Blacks has been sinking deeper and deeper into crises. The same problems it experienced in the 18th century, viz: poor funding, inadequate facilities, poorly-paid, inadequately-trained and under-qualified teachers, over-crowded classrooms, high teacher-pupil ratios, a high drop-out rate, a shortage of books and stationery and many others, were still prevalent in the '90s (Education Update, December, 1992:1-3).

The Minister of Education and Training (1990), commenting on the state of the

education for Blacks, said that: "In short, the problems in the education of Blacks are the backlog, which has historic, population and economic dimensions... there is paternalism and mistrust. I believe if one wants to move out of this situation, then one needs more resources and new attitudes" (More, 1990:62).

Though the government's educational aims for Blacks have changed over the years, they have resulted in the creation of socially dependent communities, an unemployable Black labour force and numerous political upheavals. According to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994:58) "apartheid education and its aftermath of resistance has destroyed the culture of learning... leading... to virtual breakdown of schooling and conditions of anarchy...."

Kane-Berman's (1989:2) view of the problem is consistent with that of the Minister when he states: "Objective forces such as population growth, economic growth, skilled labour shortages and urbanisation have created the conditions necessary for policy changes".

It is noteworthy that the government reacted to most of the crises experienced in the education for Blacks, by appointing commissions of inquiry, hopefully to resolve the particular problems. The recommendations of some commissions have been accepted and others have been rejected by the government of the day. Such government sanction has resulted in some commissions being more influential than others in steering policy on the education system for Blacks.

The Report of the Inter-departmental Committee of 1935 - 1936 under Mr. W.T Welsh, gives a clear picture of the education for Blacks before 1948. The Report was not very



influential in directing policy on the education for Blacks because: "...the recommendations of the Inter-departmental Committee... have not produced the results which might have been expected, and the feeling has grown that this is largely ascribable to an endeavour to reform schools from within, insufficient attention being devoted to the social, economic and administrative structure which determines very largely the role of the schools and their success in fulfilling it" (Union of South Africa Report of the Commission on Native Education (1949 - 1951:par. 9 b).

The Report of the Commission on Native Education (1949 - 1951) under Dr. W.W.M. Eiselen, can be credited as the most influential Commission leading to the passing of the Bantu Education Act (49/1953). The Cillie (1976) and Van der Walt (1984) Reports gave a good synopsis of the state of the education for Blacks during and after the turbulence that began in 1976. Yet the most prominent critique of the present education system is contained in the HSRC/De Lange Report of 1981. The most recent critique of the education system for Blacks under apartheid is the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). It criticises three key features about the education for Blacks. These are:

- (i). the racial and ethnic fragmentation of the education system in the country;
- (ii). unequal access to education and training;
- (iii). lack of democratic control of decision making levels of the education hierarchy  
(RDP, 1994:58).

## **1.2. Statement of the problem**

In the light of this background, it is important to assess the influence that various commissions of inquiry have had on the evolution of policy regarding the education system for Blacks in South Africa in the period 1934 to 1984.

### 1.3. Topicality of the research

The government responded to many of the crises in the education for Blacks by appointing a commission of inquiry. Therefore, there seems to be a direct relationship between government policy and commission recommendations. It is important, then, for a commission to be objective to enable the government to make objective decisions. For example, in pursuing their aim of being "objective", commissioners of the Eiselen Commission (1949 - 1951) felt that they should speak to as many witnesses as possible because they believed that there was no "up-to-date and reliable" information on the system of education for Blacks then. Therefore, it was necessary for them to gather as many facts as possible pertinent to the subject. They further stated that they had been successful in "obtaining the fullest factual basis for our recommendations" (Union of South Africa Report of the Commission on Native Education 1949-1951 par. 1-11).

However, the fact that the education system for Blacks in the country has been a bone of contention since its inception in 1953 means that some of the recommendations by the Commission that led to its establishment contained flaws, which later developed into crises. Kallaway (1988:12) believed that: "Crises in educational policy which reflect stresses in the society as a whole can be identified at times of historical change...".

These flaws have caused instability and insecurity in the education system for Blacks:

The flaws have led to the mushrooming of Saturday Schools, Winter schools and various other project schools, even "fly-by-night" schools which all aim at supplementing and complementing the shortcomings found in the education system for Blacks. A number of parents with the financial means have taken their children to private and boarding schools.

Mathiane (1988:22) summarised the state of education in Black schools in the country thus: "All we are going to have is a cycle of lulls and then storms. The difference is not between progress and collapse. It is between quiet collapse and violent collapse". Her statement was as true then as it is now in 1995.

The shortcomings to be found in the education system for Blacks have also had their toll on the economy of the country. From the '80s there has been a hue and cry about the critical shortage of skilled manpower in the country. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (1994:58) states that: "The fragmented, unequal and undemocratic nature of the education and training system has profound effects on the development of the economy and society. It results in the destruction, distortion or neglect of the human potential of our country, with devastating consequences for social and economic development. The latter is evident in the lack of skilled and trained labour and the adverse effects of this on productivity."

Something needs to be done very quickly to avert this pending crisis.

Several community-based organisations like the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) and teacher unions like the South African Democratic Teachers

Union (SADTU), the Professional Teachers Union (PTU), the National Professional Teachers Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA) and many others sent delegation after delegation to various officials in the upper echelons of the education structure of the Nationalist Government. The general cry seemed to be the need for "a single, non-racial education department. There should be no discrimination in terms of race, sex, colour or creed in education" (Information Bulletin, DET, 1990:2).

Other demands cited in the **Information Bulletin** quoted above were: the need for free and compulsory education for all the people of South Africa as well as parity in the per capita government spending on education.

Minister C.J. van der Merwe said, in reply to several demands made by various delegations: "The Department (of Education and Training) and the Government (have) now,... through the special funds that were made available, taken concrete steps to prove (their) willingness and determination to address the problems in the education for Blacks in a constructive and meaningful way" (Information Bulletin, DET, 1990:1).

These flaws that had developed to crisis proportions, partly as a result of the 1976 upheavals, were identified by the Commissioners of the Cillie (1977), HSRC/De Lange (1981) and the Van der Walt (1984) Reports and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (1994). Though the recommendations of the HSRC/ De Lange Report (1981) have been criticised by, among others, Collins and Gillespie (1984:1) as a system of co-optation, the government's rejection of its recommendations has also been criticised (Schindler, 1984:1).

It is therefore ironic that despite the number of commissions of inquiry that have been appointed to look into the problems of education for Blacks, education for Blacks is still as beset with problems now as when the Inter-departmental Committee was set up in 1935. This is in contrast to the education systems of other population groups in the country which are relatively more stable.

As historians, it is important to research the reasons why there were, on the one hand, numerous commissions of inquiry into the education for Blacks but no stability, and fewer commissions of inquiry into the education of other racial groups, but greater stability. The investigation into these reasons is crucial to the understanding of factors that influence a country's system of education. These factors could be a guide in the development of a future system of education. A country should learn from its mistakes.

#### **1.4. Aims of the research**

The study aims to:

- (a). examine the historical background leading to the appointment of various commissions of inquiry into the education for Blacks in the country;
- (b). analyse the terms of reference of these commissions;
- (c). review their findings and recommendations;
- (d). assess the effects of the commissions' recommendations on educational policy, and  
to
- (e). assess the effects of implementation of the various commissions' recommendations in the education for Blacks.

### 1.5. Methodology

The historical method of research has been used. Cohen and Manion (1980:48) describe this method of research as "the systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events". The reconstruction of past events, will enable the researcher not only to understand historical events but also to assess the relevance of such facts to the present and even the future.

Cohen and Manion (1980:48) suggest the following as values of historical research:

- (i). it enables solutions to contemporary problems to be sought in the past;
- (ii). it throws light on present and future trends;
- (iii). it stresses the relative importance and the effects of the various interactions that are to be found within all cultures;
- (iv). it allows for the re-evaluation of data in relation to selected hypotheses, theories and generalisations that are presently held about the past.

According to the authors, the historical method therefore has the advantage of being able to use the past in order to explain the future, and the present to explain the past.

Primary sources such as the Reports of the various commissions of inquiry, Government Acts and other pertinent Government publications such as Annual Reports, Bulletins, Gazettes have been used. Secondary sources like library books and newspaper reports were also of great importance to the research. They provided

up-to-date and analytic reports on the state of the education system for Blacks in South Africa. Some contained relevant interviews with important Ministers or other personnel in the employ of the government or the private sector. They therefore served as valuable reference material.

In consulting these sources it became important to note what Sidhu (1987:99) writes about text criticism: "Generally, the criticism of historical data involves the dual process of establishing the authenticity of the source and of establishing the validity of its contents... External criticism primarily deals with data relating to form and appearance rather than meaning of contents, while internal criticism weighs the testimony of the dominant in relation to the truth."

Therefore the authority, validity and reliability of the sources were ensured through cross-referring to both primary and secondary sources.

#### **1.6. Delimitation of the research area by means of definition**

##### **\* Commissions of Inquiry**

Persons formally "appointed by the Governor-General for the purpose of investigating matters of public concern, and to provide for matters incidental thereto" (Commissions Act (8/1947); Statutes of the Republic of South Africa:171).

##### **\* Policy**

A plan of action pursued or adopted by a party or government (Collins English Dictionary, 1986:1186)

## \* **Education for Blacks**

The education of the indigenous people of South Africa, also referred to as Natives, Bantu or Africans. This excludes the Coloured and Indian people of South Africa despite the fact that they are sometimes also subsumed in the term "Blacks".

## \* **1934 - 1984**

An era in the history of the education of Blacks where rigorous policy changes were effected by the government and serious repercussions like school boycotts and mass resignation of teachers were experienced in the education system for Blacks. 1935 is the date of the Welsh Commissions' Report. It has been chosen as a starting point in order to provide a contrast between the recommendations of a commission of inquiry that investigated the education for Blacks prior to the Nationalist take-over of government. 1984 signals the end of an era marked by a new constitutional dispensation in the Republic of South Africa, according to the Republic of South Africa Constitution Act (110/1983).

The historical background leading to the appointment of a commission of inquiry will be studied only to a limited extent, as the main purpose of the research is to examine the influence that each commission had on the evolution of the education system for Blacks in the country.

### **1.7. Structure of the thesis**

This research report consists of the following chapters, all of which relate to the impact made by various commissions of inquiry into the education for Blacks:



1. Introduction, statement of the problem, aims and method of research.
2. The relationship between commissions of inquiry and policy-making in education.
3. The education for Blacks prior to the take-over of government by the National Party.
4. Commissions responsible for policy changes in the education for Blacks in the period 1934-1975.
5. Effects of the implementation of recommendations of commissions of inquiry on university education.
6. Reports revealing flaws in the education system for Blacks (1976-1984).
7. Findings, conclusions and recommendations.

## 1.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlines the research project which seeks to assess the influence of various commissions of inquiry on the education for Blacks and policy-making. The aim as well as the method of historical research have been defined. The research is topical because of the attention that the education for Blacks is receiving at home and internationally, and because of the fact that despite numerous commissions of inquiry that were charged to assess it and make recommendations, it still seems to leave much to be desired by its recipients and by the rest of the country. The field of the research is also delimited in this chapter.

Although a number of commissions of inquiry that are to be analysed are merely mentioned in this chapter, it is important to start off with a brief review of their relation to policy-making in the country in general.