

A NEW ROLE FOR THE HISTORY SUBJECT ADVISER*

A case study of educational provision in the Transkei region of the Eastern Cape

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We also believe that our education must integrate, must merge education and training. We should not just be talking about content, that a child has to be provided with a History content. We believe History must provide content of knowledge but must provide the skill of questioning. So that from the subjects that children study, they must begin to acquire skills that make them more able to manage outside school.

Naledi Pandor, ANC MP, July 1994

Participants in this conference will have no difficulty in agreeing strongly with these sentiments and will, I am certain, be pleased that at least one Member of Parliament has spoken of the need to transform the teaching of history in our country, against the background of the deafening chorus of those calling for improvements in mathematics, language and science teaching. It is to this urgent need that this paper is directed.

A legacy

The role of an education adviser anywhere is likely to be a confused and contested one, as the line between advising teachers and inspecting them is such a fine one (Pearce 1986, Sullivan 1988). This was more than usually the case in South Africa under Apartheid, where a number of different models for advisers existed in the segregated education departments. The tasks of these 'Subject Advisers' ranged from overt control over classroom practice by personal decree and the moderation of examination papers to, at the user-friendly end of the scale, facilitating in-service education by teachers themselves. In some departments they were universally despised by the profession and unilaterally banned from school premises, while in others they were highly respected and regarded as representatives of the profession in the employment of a department. Some departments did not consider them necessary at all. In very few parts of the country, however, was their task so well defined or well supported by the relevant education department that it

could be said that a model of 'good practice' for an advisory service had been established.

In Transkei, which serves as a case study for us, subject advisers have been recent arrivals on the educational scene, introduced largely as part of a programme of in-service education, the origin of which lies in a commission of inquiry into Education in the Republic of Transkei (chaired by Prof. A. Taylor) in 1979. The commission recommended that the upgrading of teachers through in-service programmes should be a priority. Besides attracting teachers into in-service programmes, it proposed that a comprehensive structure of in-service teacher education, which would allow teachers to progress from the lowest pre-service certificate to the highest professional qualification, should be designed (Mbekela 1990). After consideration of these recommendations an in-service college (Trinset) was set up in 1986, and two five-year plans were drawn up by the Transkei Department of Education. The first five-year plan covered the period 1986-1990. In his evaluation of the Transkei in-service programme on the expiry of the first five-year plan Mbekela (1990) observed, inter alia, that (a) a needs assessment involving teachers, principals and inspectors should be conducted to ensure effective in-service training, (b) follow-up programmes as well as feedback systems needed to be developed, and (c) subject advisers for all subjects should be appointed to promote liaison and better communication between Trinset, the Department of Education and the Colleges of Education.

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In terms of the second five-year plan, covering the period 1991-1995, the importance of in-service training was recognised in educational policy planning to permit full co-ordination and co-operation with all other teacher education activities, including career-orientated education. Accordingly, the plan aimed at improving co-ordination and co-operation among the wide variety of in-service programmes offered and between in-service and pre-service training institutions. Particular attention was to be paid to the problems 'so frequently experienced in the past by teachers, who when ordered to attend sporadic and uncoordinated courses at short notice by their superiors, had no choice but to interrupt their teaching, to leave their classes unattended for apparently little gain' (Transkei, Republic of, 1991). These recommendations led to a history subject adviser being appointed for the first time in January 1993. The main aim of the position was to facilitate communication between the Department's head office, teachers and Trinset. Another reason for the appointment of the subject adviser (which applied to the nine subject advisers appointed for other subjects as well) was to 'refocus the operational aspect of the subject advisory services away from school inspection towards subject development' (Transkei, Republic of, 1990).

A purpose

By choosing 'subject development' over 'inspection', the Transkei Education Department was following the trend of education authorities internationally. A review of British literature reveals circumstances and concerns which, despite the obvious differences, are common to South African education. The move towards separating the advisory function from the inspection and reporting function began in the UK in the 1950s and was well established by the end of the 1980s, when the National Curriculum and changes in the governance of schools altered the nature of (and demand for) the work of subject advisers and inspectors once again.

Pearce (1986:337) has described the most important established functions of advisers in England before these changes as follows:

- (1) Maintaining a good knowledge of schools within their area, chiefly through visiting classrooms;
- (2) Using this knowledge to advise the education department, head teachers, classroom teachers, and boards of governors;
- (3) Providing or arranging professional support for teachers, including INSET;

- (4) Giving advice regarding the appointment of staff, and career advice to teachers;
- (5) Surveying the work of schools; and,
- (6) Promoting curriculum development and disseminating curriculum guidelines.

The emphasis of the subject adviser's work in England has more recently come to include new aspects which have developed out the traditional role. The National Curriculum has meant that advisers have had to advise schools on implementing the substantial curriculum changes which have taken place, a process which had led in places to the appointment of special advisory teachers, to assist, for example, in primary mathematics and science (Sullivan 1988:4). Chris Jones (1988:10) emphatically described this role as 'curriculum supporter', NOT 'adviser'. A new phase of partnership has begun in some areas (described by one adviser as 'looking *with* schools and not *at* schools' (Haigh 1989), with 'shared criteria' being developed, whereby schools fix their own criteria for their evaluation. For some advisers the emphasis has shifted to their assuming the mantle of agents of change in the educational system (Nixon and Rudduck 1992:432; O'Mahony and Sollars 1990:33), to work alongside teachers to improve their practice of schooling, and to exercise their professional judgement based on the criteria that the schools have chosen. The key to their role is flexibility and networking. In a survey they conducted Blanchard, Cowling and Newhofer (1991:95) found that most teachers valued the training days, the classroom work, 'negotiated contracts' [working with teachers on agreed action plans], materials development, and up to date professional knowledge (of reports and policies) of their subject advisers. But, they conclude,

Ultimately it is professional expertise derived from working in the classroom with pupils which carries the greatest respect; classroom teachers obviously have the greatest credibility and advisers have developed an invaluable role as convenors and maintainers of *networks* - settings where teachers can share and reflect upon their practice (1991:95).

For Geoffrey Faux this was at the heart of his work as a subject adviser, for the joint planning of courses had become the method of creating and sustaining networks of teachers (1987:7).

What is the purpose of the subject advisers in Transkei? The document detailing the decision to appoint them hinted at what their purpose might be, for it called for a recognised degree in the subject, 'Demonstrable

interest in the subject e.g. membership and contribution to Subject Associations and Societies', and five years teaching experience in the subject, at least two of which were current (Transkei, Republic of, 1990). A more detailed recent description of their role lists the following responsibilities:

- (a) Field trips: to schools for survey, guidance and follow-up; to groups of teachers for in-service courses; to groups like HODs and Principals for subject management workshops; to Colleges of Education for panel moderation.
- (b) Out-going trips: Courses, seminars and conferences outside Transkei, sometimes attended by subject teachers.
- (c) Subject development: Collecting question papers for question banks, collecting relevant subject material, researching topical issues.
- (d) Subject committees: Chairpersons of the committees which review textbooks and teaching materials, and decide on policy for the subjects (Transkei Education Department, n.d.)

In reality the job description masks the fact that subject advisers are expected to try to solve the problems which the rest of the system cannot solve. They need to be able to diagnose the reasons for poor examination results (which had improved between 1986 and 1990, but have worsened since then); to assist new teachers to cope with the mismatch between the training they received at college and the conditions they experience in schools; and to attempt to fill the gaps left in the in-service provision of the Trinset courses - to be the field worker on the spot, and to feed the college with the needs of teachers. While it is possible for the subject adviser to act as the go-between for the colleges of Education, Trinset and the schools, there is no proper planning to facilitate this, and no formal links between the colleges and the advisers. College lecturers have no forum where they can meet with Trinset lecturers, though they have direct contact with the University of Transkei, through its Department of Collegiate Education.

Teachers in Transkei, as revealed in recent interviews, tend to see the adviser as a channel of communication and as a problem solver, someone who can help them with the interpretation of the syllabuses; who can teach demonstration classes; who is acquainted with the situation in their schools and in a position to convey it to the in-service centre; and who informs the examiner of their grievances, and provides a link with the department.

Under these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the subject adviser finds it difficult to satisfy anyone. The lack of funding for proper support of teachers, the difficulties of transport to more remote areas of Transkei and the absence of a strong sense of subject professionalism add considerably to the difficulties of the task. The feeling of frustration is not unique, for British advisers report similar problems, as Pearce describes:

The uncertain definition of advisory work and the absence of formal priorities render advisers susceptible to a number of dangers. One is loss of self-esteem, stemming in part from the formal superior's belief that colleagues of such professional self-reliance do not need managing in the sense of assessment of their performance. A more widespread danger is that of being converted into a supplementary administrator (Pearce 1986:338).

Towards a future specification

To return to history, our subject is arguably one of the most badly in need of the support services which a subject advisor can provide. Unlike almost all other subjects it requires a new content, the introduction of a skills-based approach which is incorporated into the content, and a new classroom pedagogy - all three simultaneously - if it is to move towards achieving its potential. It also requires a reorientation in the underlying focus of the subject towards education for democracy, mutual understanding and the appreciation of more than one perspective on the past and present. To begin to accomplish this bold agenda, history teachers will need considerable support and encouragement, which, we would argue, in the absence of strong professional history associations, can only come from subject advisers in a rehabilitated and reconstructed subject advisory service.

Such a conception is not foreign to the policies presently being formulated for the Department of Education and the provincial education departments. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (ANC 1994b:67) speaks of,

a body of teachers, educators and trainers committed to RDP goals and competent in carrying them out. This requires that they are able to understand and respond flexibly to the challenges of the new approaches to curriculum, method, delivery and certification which an integrated system of education and training demands.

The ANC's draft policy framework for education and training proposes that 'the supervisory services' be

linked to pre- and in-service teacher education, allowing personnel to 'perform developmental and mentoring roles' and that there should be 'new criteria' for 'selection and promotion into the supervisory services' (ANC 1994a:55). More detail is contained in the implementation plan (IPET), which foresees the establishment of resource centres as part of INSET, which will 'provide support not only to those undergoing in-service training, but also to the daily work of all teachers' (ANC 1994c:103), and provides for an Education Advisory Service within each Provincial Institute for Curriculum Development (PICD). It is expected that it 'shall act as the developmental agency in regard to the curriculum. All institutional improvement shall be facilitated by the Education Advisory Services, including syllabus support, teacher appraisal and development, and education management' (ANC 1994c:142).

Some planning towards these goals has been done already. For the Transkei, it is likely that developments will come under the ambit of the Eastern Cape Regional Education and Training Forum, which is in the process of negotiating a model for a pilot INSET programme, to be implemented in 1995, based on a structure of one provincial education resource centre, four regional education resource centres, and thirty-five district education resource centres, which will each operate with 'the relevant seconded subject advisors' (ECRETF 1994).

These welcome developments are only the beginning. If we are to foster the welfare of our subject, we will need to agree together about the subject advisory service that we need and be vigilant that it serves the needs of history teachers, rather than the education departments. Teacher organisations and unions will have to fight for subject advisers generally, but it is our task to use whatever influence we have to try to ensure the history subject advisers we want. The suggestions below, we believe, should be part of our agenda.

- Subject Advisers Advisers should be subject experts in history, who have up-to-date historical and professional knowledge. Curriculum development in history in all its forms (teaching materials and textbooks, assessment, school-based syllabus development, pedagogy) should be at the centre of their concern. This may well be a difficult position to defend against proposals for humanities advisers, integrated studies advisers, or primary subject advisers, for example. The point to be made is that history subject advisers are all the more necessary in an integrated curriculum framework to maintain the distinctiveness of the subject within the broad curriculum.

- Advisers 'If advisory teachers are identified as primarily playing a remedial or 'fire-fighting' role within a climate of accountability, they might well be perceived as an arm of judgmental authority rather than a critical friend and trusted colleague (Blanchard, Cowling and Newhofer 1991:95). There should be a very clear separation of advisory and inspection services, with advisers acting as the supporters of teachers through resource centres and through close links with subject associations, and not as those who report on them or evaluate their performance. It will be very difficult to rid education of the idea that departmental officials are there to check and control, and are members of the bureaucracy rather than colleagues, but in a climate of change this could be possible, provided that advisers are not appointed for false reasons.

- Teaching and teachers Working alongside teachers in shared teaching in classrooms, being agents of change, collaborating in the presentation of in-service education with teachers: these are the crucial elements required of history subject advisers. They must be good teachers and good facilitators, able to sustain a wide network of contacts inside and outside schools. Here much can be learned from the operation of the specialist subject-based NGOs, in projects such as those in maths and science. They provide good models of non-official advisory service which should be copied by departmental history advisers. [It is perhaps ironic that it is the very success of these NGOs which places our subject under pressure. The Primary Science Project in the Western Cape, has, for example, found that it needs to run workshops for teachers in other primary subjects, and has done very valuable work in supporting history at primary school level in the region.]

- Location If the Eastern Cape Regional Education and Training Forum pilot project suggestions were to be implemented, there would be thirty-five history subject advisers, each based at a district resource centre in the province. Both aspects of this proposal are worth supporting if meaningful progress is to be made. There need to be sufficient subject advisers and they need to be based within resource centres in order to fulfil their support and in-service functions satisfactorily.

- In-service In future, even more than in the past, INSET for teachers is likely to receive considerable emphasis. The kind of in-service work which is expected of advisers needs to be clearly specified. Their task should not be to run courses single-handed or to be involved in certifying teachers. Their in-service responsibility should be of the more informal and supportive kind.
- National liaison One main complaint of subject advisers is that they are expected to operate in relative isolation from other subject advisers *in their subject* (Pearce 1986:338; Blanchard, Cowling and Newhofer 1991:95). There is scope in the new educational dispensation for an association of history subject advisors, which could be the means of regular renewal and support for the advisers themselves.

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- In Transkei This paper has used the Transkei as a case study to draw attention to present realities and challenges. The region is one of the most needy in terms of educational resources in the country, but it has the beginnings of an infrastructure which could provide subject advisory services in history in terms of the above specification. The goodwill of teachers, lecturers and student teachers is certainly there. What is needed is a structure which will release subject advisers to advise, without being officials, and to fit into an in-service network which includes resource centres, Trinset, the colleges and the university, without having to create it from scratch themselves.

Let's use our influence to have our departments working with and for us in future to advance our subject from the inside rather than the outside!

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It is often asked: Why should one take History as a subject at school? Why not rather take a subject which can prepare one for a career with a high income?

Let us listen to two testimonies on the value of History:

In a novel on her autistic daughter, Elly, the author Clara Clairborne Park (in the book *The Siege*) tells about the problems to free her child from her fortress of isolation. It was not possible to make meaningful contact with Elly, since she was deaf. When Elly was four years old, the family moved from the area which she knew so well. For Elly this was a traumatic experience and she lost all feeling of security. Under normal circumstances it would have been possible to speak to her and she would have been able to get answers on her earlier and new environment. In order to restore Elly's feeling of security, it was necessary for her mother to *draw* the earlier house and garden in all detail. The book tells this story.

In a chapter "Regaining the past" the mother writes: "The human being is human in that he has a usable past. All human societies are built upon it; in even the most primitive cultures the poets and artists, the keepers of the memory, have an essential place. To be fully human, a child needs a past to which it has access."

The second testimony:

In the well-known funerary chamber of Tutankhamun, probably the most well-known funerary chamber of Ancient Egypt, we find a most remarkable inscription on one of the goddesses protecting the coffin with outstretched arms (when translated):

I have seen yesterday; I know tomorrow.

In this inscription the past is connected to the present and to the future in a very remarkable way. In fact, the expectations of the future are made dependent on the experience of the past.

The problems and challenges for which solutions must be found in South Africa, are numerous and comprehensive. Every sphere of life is involved: economy, technology, agriculture, housing, manufacturing, politics, etc. But all of these areas involve *people!* We will have to reach a better understanding of each other ... and this better understanding can only come *through a better understanding of the past*. This, however, requires u to have access to the past, to know it and to understand it. This requires History.

"Honest history is the weapon of freedom"

Arthur M. Schlesinger jr: *The Disuniting of America*, p. 52. (W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1992).
