LIFELONG LEARNING AS TRANSFORMATION:
Challenges of affirmation, discipline and power

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In thanking you for your invitation to be here today, I also thank you for the opportunity it has afforded me to reflect and consider the issues you are focussing on. I do this, in the context of the last four decades of my life in far-away South Africa, and hopefully to develop a conversation with you today.

To some who may have hated their school years, *lifelong learning* sounds like a life sentence. In a neo-liberal market perspective, *lifelong learning* becomes a commodity, captive to the winds of each passing interest or fad, and marketable. I modestly offer that lifelong learning is a beacon in human life, everywhere at all times. It is the font of imagination and transformation.

In this address, I would like to consider a range of experiences in my engagement with education alternatives in South Africa since the 1960s.

Looking back I realise that I was constantly driven by a notion of lifelong learning, (usually by other names), as cognate with the ideal of transformation – although I must say that the term has always sounded too grand to describe the day to day effort to make things work, the small achievements and many failures of sustaining a mission in a deeply dysfunctional society.

I want to draw on my experience to reflect that the quest for transformative lifelong education whether in South-Africa under-apartheid or the world crisis with-peak-oil or climate-change, is the imperative itself.

Once we hold lifelong learning as transforming we no longer have lifelong learning as a course to be studied and certificated which is then institutionalised and practiced in everyday life with a handbook which is modified and reprinted from time to time.

So lifelong learning becomes an ongoing engagement, with failures and fall-back built in, and also meaningful, if not always obvious, successes.

You will have realised that I move quite opportunistically among theoretical models depending on the demands of the moment and situation. Not having the ability or the temperament of an academic, but perhaps rather of an educational plumber, I have never found myself bound to be highly self-conscious or definitive about my tools of trade, be they theories or definitions.

I do not mean this in a derogatory way. I appreciate deeply how the use of words and their abstraction and the scientific method are critical in evolving homo sapiens. Somehow it has been appropriate for me, to aim towards

more visionary goals rather than to define and hold the journey in prescriptive frameworks.

Of course I have wholehearted commitment to and involvement in planning, thinking, problem solving and ongoing reflection. I feel a great imperative to advise, urge, and hold on to the essential planning-action-reflection cycles, all the more in our instant electronic action and reaction world.

No doubt this orientation entails a whole cluster of theories with their centres in the very different narratives I inhabit. Colleagues tell me that this approach is endorsed by some versions of post-modernism. My wife is fond of locating it in the narrative of Exodus and social growth and development of values. Others less polite say it is an excuse for laziness.

THE IMPACT OF APARTHEID

Some say that as activists, we were lucky to have had apartheid. It fashioned and gave meaning to our lives. We knew to what we were opposed - and it fused us in action and solidarity. We didn't have to grapple too hard with the detail or even identifying too deeply the ideology of what we were for – we knew what we were fighting against.

For those involved in the educational side of the struggle for a just South Africa there was always a choice well known to lifelong educators.

Was your inclination to a palliative approach that would teach language and skills to enable people to be better workers, domestic servants or even lower level government officials – such as police constables or clerks. While the beneficiaries of the skills would apparently access the prevailing socio-political framework, and be rewarded accordingly, they would also strengthen those institutions that served the state more efficiently in maintaining the status quo.

The radical educators were those who trained for transformation and revolution. Paulo Freire and Frantz Fanon (whose thoughts were banned in South Africa but available in illicit copies) and others were the inspiration for many adult education programmes in garages and the open veld.

Apartheid Education or Bantu Education as it was labelled, was the state's attempt to ensure that "Blacks knew their place" and would remain "hewers of wood and drawers of water" There were of course good and dedicated teachers in the system but the majority of teachers and administrators were either inadequately trained or ideologically racist. Catholic Church Schools were the only religious schools which opted to work under the Apartheid government – the other church schools closed on principle against teaching under racist policies. The education in Catholic schools is an example of effective formal education sustained within a prevailing evil system.

The greatest iniquity of Apartheid education was not its separateness, nor its second class education, not even its vision of the inferiority of black people. I

believe that its greatest crime was the undermining of the self esteem of those fellow human beings who were not classified white in South Africa. The social, cultural, family, religious and moral values of people whose foundational, ingrained philosophy is:

"umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" **a person is a person through other persons, or I am because we are –**

was systematically attacked and eroded in word and deed. Perhaps even worse, it eradicated every assertion of authentic indigenous leadership**.** We live with the consequences of that to this day and will do so for a long time to come.

I see now that this realisation spurred me and others at the time to develop the foundation of our educational outlook and my orientation towards lifelong learning. I quickly became aware that lifelong learning begins at least at birth and is certainly shaped by all one's surrounding circumstances and forces, both positive and negative. The learning ideology of that time undermined lifelong learning which would value and nurture self actualisation and an internal locus of disciplined control as the source of self esteem, confidence and respect for oneself and others, and a conscious awareness of the environment. I understood then that education can never be neutral or one-dimensional. It is obliged to work with the cognitive and affective development of the individual, also the power and resource relationships and conditions in which the individual, the community and global community interact.

This outlook soon brought me into conflict with the apartheid state. I was refused a teachers' diploma and was not permitted to teach in a state school.

It was my good fortune, after a few years of teaching in private schools to be presented with an opportunity to put into practice some lifelong learning insights.

THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMITTEE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (SACHED)

As part of the apartheid agenda the Government introduced the ambiguously termed "Extension of Universities"Act. This act in fact closed off access by preventing black students from attending so-called 'white' universities. A few African, Indian and so-called coloured students were allowed to attend by ministerial consent. .

The passing of this law provoked a huge reaction amongst academic institutions internationally and in English speaking institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa. As a practical response to this exclusion a programme called the South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) was established in 1958 to provide "an alternative education" (I bet you were wandering when I would come back to the point) for black South Africans who could otherwise only attend ethnically based and ideologically compliant institutions. As a vice-president of the National Union of Students

this programme fell into my portfolio and in 1968 when I was free to do so I took joined the project on a full time basis.

The SACHED programme enrolled black students in a correspondence programme with the University of London. We soon found that the challenges of the UK-orientated degree, plus studying by correspondence as well as coming from generally weak schooling were proving very difficult for most of the students. They were losing confidence and the political motivation provided by an educational alternative was waning There were also pressures to convert the project into a recruitment base for revolutionary activity to the exclusion of the learning ideals of the programme. It was the same unresolved dilemma the need to meet immediate needs as against long term human investment.

One of the components of the later “miracle of South Africa’s peaceful transformation” was the availability of a significant cadre of men and women who had been educated in more than just political /revolutionary techniques. This was the case with SACHED. The programme opted for a lifelong education route. The students were placed in a situation where they could learn and flex their planning skills. The framework of the London degree permitted an open thinking horizon and most of all they worked in groups with access to a mentor whose role was to ensure their psychological growth, the growth of their cognitive skills, but most of all their ability to see the world as interlocking systems and not in one dimensional-frames. The programme was limited in numbers, and a number (including our former President Thabo Mbeki) had to be assisted into exile. Although the numbers were small evaluations of the major donors who supported the programme, such as the World University Service and Misereor (the International German Catholic Development Agency), led them to believe that this and similar efforts had made a significant contribution to the peaceful political transformation in South Africa in 1994.

The SACHED programme anticipated a number of activities in South Africa. Pioneers of the development of the Open University visited SACHED during their own gestation period and its methods were, much later, to be built into the practices of the University of South Africa, now the largest Distance Education Institution in the world, then a pillar of Apartheid.

SACHED became the biggest educational NGO in South Africa in opposition to the Apartheid State. The Director who succeeded me when I was banned in 1978 became the ANC’s Director of Education and many of its staff and students were involved in the planning of the new democratic South Africa. (I will say a little more about banning later suffice to say here that it was a government legal device which meant, inter alia, that I was by law prevented from participating in any educational activity other than with my own child.)

THE PEOPLE’S COLLEGE

One of the offshoots of the SACHED approach was its newspaper project, a weekly 24 page insert in the Sowetan, the largest circulation newspaper aimed at a predominantly black readership. The project was known as the People's College.

The immediate reason for its creation was as a support mechanism for the many thousands of school learners who were boycotting schooling. As the boycott escalated the situation between the police and the student became more violent and confrontational.

Once again we were faced with the dilemma – was this a lifelong learning endeavour or a support of the immediate revolutionary aims of what came to be called the "Mass Democratic Movement"? Both approaches were vulnerable and dangerous. The project opted for the educational path. It initially gained recognition for its intrinsic developmental approach to education. It encouraged the setting up of study groups throughout the country, and received support from a wide spectrum of donors ranging from conservative capital to European Governments and radical overseas student groups.

The project was contested. It was for some too radical, for others too conservative, but they continued to support it.

The South African security establishment saw red. The programme according to them, actually stoked the 1976 uprisings in the schools. It was even part of an international conspiracy. In terms of transformational lifelong learning they had a point. The Government Commission to examine the causes of the riots, the Celliers Commission, said that the project leaders were following the dictates of a Brazilian Professor – they meant Paulo Freire. In 1977 the state banned 17 organisations including the Peoples College, and at least 7 individuals on a day still known as Black Friday.
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I was one of those served with a banning order which curtailed my physical movements, prevented me from publishing or teaching, kept me under constant surveillance and imposed limitations on work and social relationships.

Years later when research was undertaken about the impact of the People's College, it was found that students had formed groups all over the country, especially in rural areas, and that users of the programme materials had found the supplement to be their lifeline and inspiration for many young people in what they described as "a dark time".

SACHED'S GROWING UNDERSTANDING OF LIFELONG LEARNING

SACHED pioneered in South Africa methodologies of educational materials writing which challenged both the current writing of text book materials as well as correspondence materials. New methodologies were being developed

simultaneously elsewhere, for example the new 'open learning' systems emerging in the Open University in the UK and others in Asia. SACHED saw its role as enriching the paucity of the education system of the time. It became transforming as it counteracted the attempt to close the minds of those in the state systems away from foreign influences. It became lifelong learning as it equipped those whom it touched with a vision of themselves able to act to build a new society and assisting them to assert values and apply skills for that new society.

This led to the initiation of the South African Institute of Distance Learning (SAIDE) which continues to propagate and encourage "Open Learning" programmes in South Africa. Time will prevent me from discussing this further on this occasion.

ADULT EDUCATION - ASECA

The major non-governmental Lifelong Learning activity in South Africa during those times, 1970's and 1980's, was that of adult education particularly basic literacy and numeracy. Here the same challenges presented themselves between those making opportunities for everyday skills to enable people to survive and maybe better themselves in the current framework, and those others committed to emancipatory pedagogy empowering people towards change. The dichotomy was never as clear in practice as it was in theory.

In 1990, stimulated by the welcome imminent major political change, SACHED embarked on the development of a curriculum and a programme which would be designed by and meet the needs of adults in the contemporary and future South Africa. The Alternative Secondary Education Programme for Adults (ASECA) was a breakthrough, both in its involvement of stakeholders in the creation of its curriculum and in its methodology.

A more detailed look at ASECA'S Framework gives insight into its view of Lifelong Education at the time.

The stated aims of the ASECA curriculum were the provision of –

- a learning experience that encourages a learner to fulfil his/her potential ;
- a learning experience appropriate and relevant to the individual's concerns, interests and intellectual capacity;
- a sound educational base for access to further academic vocational education and training, or for movement into the formal informal sector of employment;
- a sound educational base to foster in the individual a justified confidence in his/her capacity to analyse, engage and impact on the world around him/her

In line with its commitment to the principles of equity and redress the ASECA curriculum -

- Allows for multiple entry points for learners;
- Allows for open entry not dependent on the attainment of previous formal qualifications. Placement of learners in the programme is based on diagnostic tests in English and Mathematics; and it
- Connects education to the workforce and encourages further study;
- Caters for the broad needs of the adults and out-of school youth by accommodating learning preference of pace and progression and place of study;
- Encourages learners to develop flexible and multiple skills thereby facilitating worker mobility and direct career development;
- Culminates in an accredited and recognised qualification reflecting four subjects, namely –

    - Communications in English
    - Mathematics
    - Integrated Social studies
    - Integrated Life/natural Sciences

The ASECA programme,is still being used in 2009, consists of a set of curriculum, course and course material, and has a number of additional features. These include -

- Comprehensive tutor training programmes in order to wean tutors away from direct talk-and-chalk methods towards methods cultivating inner locus of control and self-directed learning – preferably within groups;

- Assessment strategy instruments of a continuous and summative nature

- A learner support strategy which includes counselling, group work and face-to–face tutorials;

The ASECA programme works on a distance learning basis and with partnerships wherever possible.

The earlier SACHED programme was to a large extent tied to adapting to the formal academic curriculum in place. Some exception to this had been demonstrated in worker education and political economy in articles in the Peoples College. ASECA now reflected an integration of vocational and theoretical streams. This was opposed by some academic gatekeepers who were not sympathetic to its social goals. The idea of integrated sciences, for example, was not approved by the universities' matriculation authority. Nonetheless approval was gained for the recognition of the programme for access to higher education.

Through the lense of lifelong education, the noteworthy elements in ASECA'S orientation are -…

- the integration of worker, youth and out of school youth needs;

- the emphasis on equity, justice and redress;
- the openness of entry;
- the development of the whole, autonomous ,self directed and flexible individual;
- the emphasis on assessment and formal accreditation

These lifelong learning concepts would appear in the education policies expressed in legislation of the first democratically elected Government after 2004. It is interesting to note that the South African Government is now considering a Matriculation programme for out of school youth and that the curriculum frame-work is premised on ASECA's.

In retrospect it can be seen how the importance of assessment and formal qualification developed as these activities progressed. With the People's Education movement and the anti-certification ideas of Ronal Dore and others, exemplified in writings such as "The Diploma Disease", there was encouragement for a mouthing of support for education without certification. Ideologues, often with degrees and certificates posited learning as an intrinsic value and that certification made for unhealthy competition and division. This supported an explicable call by the boycotting, excluded youth for a Pass-One-Pass-All model of assessment. I will return to this theme later.

PEOPLE'S EDUCATION

The movement towards integration of vocational and academic streams has a choppy history. In the 1980s, as the thrust towards for political change grew it impacted increasingly on organisations such as SACHED. They found themselves interacting with concepts such as "People's Education" which insisted on a direct relationship between educational activity and political activism. Also emerging was the demand for a strong link between formal and worker education. Worker and Trade Union activity had shifted away from traditional bread-and-butter issues, wages and the improving of worker conditions. The Trade Unions were now legal and the main internal black oppositional organisations and they had moved towards a strong militancy both in their strike activities and the demands of those with whom they were in alliance, such as educational organisations like SACHED.

"Peoples Education" was a reflection of the militancy of youth and workers at this time. The concept was popularised, but was never systemised and located an organisational base. It was concerned with knowledge and values, but lacked the questioning, analysis and rigor that would develop autonomous and sustainable individuals and groups. It could not achieve formal accreditation.

THE ANGLO AMERICAN UNDERGRADUATE CADET SCHEME

In the 80's Corporate Capital in South Africa started to act on their recognition that racial politics as a way of maintaining privilege was counter to growth.

The government was also recognising this privately since its elite had also moved into the market economy. However, it could not publicly admit this for fear of losing its political grip.

I was unable to teach or publish after being banned in 1977. Nonetheless, I was given a commission, facilitated by a few visionary leaders then in the Anglo American Corporation, then the biggest mineral resource company in the World. I mention this because it was the first time I was exposed to and had an opportunity to test my forming concepts of lifelong learning in a highly competitive commercial enterprise where the bottom line of profit was the dominant motivator.

My commission was to think ahead to the time when the legal framework would allow black people to be freely employed. Until such a time certain jobs in South Africa were legally restricted and for classified Whites only. The less skilled and menial were available to blacks.

The Anglo American Corporation was not seeking a fundamental change of government, or of itself. It sought a freeing up of talent and the beginnings of a society whose divisions would be based on class rather than race.

A programme known as the Undergraduate Cadet Scheme was developed together with the University of the Witwatersrand – a local English speaking University, to devise and initiate a black advancement programme that would facilitate the entry of management level black people into the organisation.

The challenges of the scheme were intriguing.:

- While the top leadership shared of Anglo American recognised the vision of a more equitable society, the majority of the organisation, including senior management were sceptical. They reflected the prejudices of South Africa namely, that blacks were backward and did not have the capacity to take on high level jobs;

- As with all organisations there were “soft” (such as H.R, Marketing, Industrial Relations) departments and hard departments, those that made the money such as engineers geologists and the financial sections. It was the natural inclination of Anglo to place the incumbents in the ‘soft’ departments. If the new professionals were to be taken seriously, namely to become able to exercise real power in positions of full participation, they had to be placed in the hard positions. In the Anglo situation this meant being developed as Mining, Electrical and Civil Engineers and Accountants. These professions constituted the ruling guts of the organisation. These were also the professional qualifications in which almost no blacks had been trained locally. There was virtually total resistance to opening this space.

- The black students entering the organisation would have little if any understanding and probably suspicion, many misconceptions and fears about how alien, corporate organisations and organisational culture

operated. There would be nothing in either the experience or education of the black people preparing insight to either the overt or covert agendas operating.

- The general perceptions in both Anglo American and Wits were that the scheme was a new academic scholarship. There was a conviction that if "they could only get good qualifications at the University all will be well'. This despite the failure of many black and many whites from poorer backgrounds to advance in the corporation.

The way forward in regard to these challenges required more than a conventional education and training intervention. It was a lifelong learning practitioner's dream – a site for transformation of all players in multiple environments. It required the reorientation of attitudes, confidence as well as different skills to work.

The scheme involved the appointing of mentors, senior managers in the Corporation who chose their protégés and undertook to support their careers in the corporation. The cadets were employed in the various divisions of the corporation, in the mining and finance sections. They undertook a pre-university one-year orientation in their departments as well as academic preparatory work. Once at university they continued as employees and also worked with their mentors during vacations.

The biggest single challenge in the whole operation was the reorientation of the mentors and the corporation. The block lay in the belief that "we are doing this for them. They are getting a job and a bursary to do what we need done. To succeed they must become like us." The general feeling expressed was that "the blacks have to come up to our standards." This *weltanschaaung* predetermines a one-sided, dominant relationship which excludes partnership, joint learning and full participation. The objective of increasing the effective human resource capacity of the organisation is constrained from the outset. The cadets relegated permanently to reading the organisational world from below, would never become self-determined, which is, fundamental to management success in corporations, particularly in a "man's world'.

The scheme sought to encourage cadets to understand the systems inside and outside the corporation and their interlinking interactions. They were encouraged to assert their values which gave them worth. These included attending customary rites such as initiation, practising respect for elders in an alien social construct, observing cultural commitments. Importantly, they were encouraged to challenge incidents which showed disrespect for themselves and perpetuated stereotypes and prejudices. The training of the mentors was critical, and through them power relationships began to alter and a sense of worth was nurtured and a self-dignity emerged in the group.

It is possible to assess impact of the cadet scheme and there is currently an evaluation being undertaken. The head of Eskom, South Africa's national electricity supplier, and the immediate past Director of the South African Broadcasting Corporation are former cadets, who are also visible in high-level positions in government and commerce in South Africa.

COMMUNITY BASED DEVELOPMENT TRUST

The legal restrictions were removed from me in 1982. The country was heading towards a confrontation. The leadership of the mass democratic movement was being decimated – jailed, or going underground and into exile.

A European anti apartheid Trust gave the Kagiso Trust, an NGO, the resources to establish training capacity for the Mass Democratic Movement. Again in partnership with Wits University, in its Business school, a programme called the Community Based Development Programme (CBDP) was set up. At the academic level the normal business school approach to organisation and management was applied, with an explicit attempt to apply principles to community organisation and instigation. The students earned accredited diplomas. The programme was bedevilled by an attrition rate as its students were arrested or otherwise disappeared. There was also harassment by the security police who said they "just wanted to check if the students were working hard". Most importantly, ample time was assigned for students to discuss and strategise within the frameworks of the curriculum. Very few hard skills or analysis wider than immediate needs was undertaken.

On the surface this programme seems to have been a success. The graduates played high profile roles in the transformation process of South Africa. Some are high profile as Ministers at both National and Provincial level. A fair smattering occupy senior politico/bureaucratic positions.

On reflection however, I believe we overlooked a fundamental component in what might be seen as elements of a good lifelong programme. The pressing urgency for mobilisation overshadowed the need for hard skills and analysis necessary for leadership development and judgment. There was insufficient emphasis on disciplined planning, strategising, assessing the implications and consequences of activity on the interacting systems that make up the world of a politician and a civil servant. This was also lacking in many of the programmes of many of the NGOs involved in "the struggle": Concepts such as "struggle accounting were countenanced and sloppy accounting tolerated.

This relative undervaluing of "hard skills and accountability" weakens current government and obstructs meaningful delivery to change current political and economic conditions in South Africa. There has been significant upheaval in South Africa based on the non-delivery of promises made by government. We are able to develop excellent policies and laws, but do not have the ability and capacity or will to deliver on these policies. Conversely, our relatively undeveloped democracy and citizenship is minimally understood and is too often expressed in the claiming of rights-entitlements without concomitant responsibilities and obligations. These attitudes could be traced back to the earlier education which prohibited an understanding of the "larger and deeper picture" and gave a simplistic view of process, management and the consequences of action.

THE INDEPENDENT EXAMINATIONS BOARD (optional)

I have referred to the role of assessment and credentialism in lifelong learning. Despite the push from radicals and students it was becoming clear that certification was critical to the success of any educationally related venture in South Africa. It was equally obvious that one could use the power of assessment to encourage different attitudes and practices in learning – in whatever context it might take place.

In an unlikely partnership - organisations associated with peoples education found common interest with representatives of the Private schooling system and created the Independent Examinations Board in 1988. The time of change was being sensed and the IEB was seen by its creators as a shadow institution preparing for the day of democratic change when they would provide the foundation of the National Examinations Department.

My involvement with the IEB, eventually as its National Director, was driven by the tough experience that transformative practices were often enthusiastically endorsed by education practitioners, yet were defeated unless they had institutional and regulatory powers behind them.

The opportunity for educational change after 1990 was most clearly available in adult education, where the state provision was discredited, and the moral high ground was held by radical NGOs often allied to the trade union movement. The IEB undertook long processes of consultation, which included government, labour, business and the community, and eventually led to the creation of a system of examinations where the intense popular quest for credentials was used to give force to some of the best values of lifelong learning.

The achievement of this system was palpable as long as we had control of implementation. One of the most satisfying moments was the experience of marking weekends, where adult educators, under the guidance of moderators steeped in a shared vision, would come out stimulated, and would be heard to say things like, “Now I see what the IEB means when it requires evidence that the candidate has been encouraged to use writing to express authentic critical thinking, and that empty but correct utterances or calculations without understanding are not acceptable.” Our requirements supported the teaching in the best material available and discouraged rote drilling or practices associated with a debased form of schooling.

The practices and success of the IEB was to be built in various ways into the policies of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which I chaired in its three formative years, and also had an influence on national education policy. However, I wish I could say with confidence that the influence was entirely beneficial once the machinery of the system moved out of the hands of the practising visionaries who created it.

PREPARING FOR DEMOCRACY

In the run up to the first Democratic Elections there was great excitement and planning in all spheres, not the least in Educational circles.

The first White paper on Education and Training appeared in 1995.

A key policy principle was that education and training were to be seen together as an integrated whole and this implied a "view of learning which rejects a rigid division between "academic" and " applied", "theory" and "practice", between "knowledge" and "skills", and between "head" and "hand"

The purpose of education and training was to serve human resource development and this indicated a decided shift in discourse from that of the days of struggle radicalism towards that of the business sector's language.

The paper advocated a new National Qualification Framework (NQF) based on a system of credits for learning outcomes achieved, which would:

- encourage creative curriculum design;
- support the recognition of prior learning by opening doors of opportunity for people whose academic or career paths have been needlessly blocked because their prior knowledge (acquired informally or by work experience) has not been assessed and certified, or because their qualifications have not been recognised for admission to further learning, or employment purposes."

The actual words, "lifelong learning" appear only a few times in the White Paper. In summary it reflected:

- The over-arching goal of policy must be to enable all individuals to value, have access to and succeed in lifelong education and training of good quality

- Educational and management processes must therefore put the learners first, recognising and building on their knowledge and experience, and responding to their needs.

- An integrated approach to education and training will increase access, mobility and quality in the national learning system.

- The system must increasingly open access to education and training opportunity of good quality, to all children, youth and adults, and provide the means for learners to move easily from one learning context to another, so that the possibilities for lifelong learning are enhanced.

- the recognition for credit of prior learning experience, the provision of learner support, the construction of learning programmes in the

expectation that learners can succeed, and the maintenance of rigorous quality assurance over the design of learning materials and support systems. South Africa is able to gain from world-wide experience over several decades in the development of innovative methods of education, including the use of guided self-study, and the appropriate use of a variety of media, which give practical expression to open learning principles.

THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATONS FRAMEWORK

One of the major educational achievements in South Africa in the last 14 years is the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which was to be central to driving the policy of lifelong learning which was implemented after 1994.

The NQF brings together education and training as well as skills development. It encompasses early childhood development (ECD), general education and training (GET), adult education and training (ABET), further education and training (FET) and higher education (HE) and places them within one integrated framework.

The NQF aimed to provide for flexibility of delivery, portability of credentials and recognition of prior learning by promoting modular approaches, expressed through 'unit standards' and registered programmes. To support integration of the various components into a single system, all components, from early Childhood Development to Higher Education, including workplace and vocational education, employ outcomes based approaches. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act established standards, quality assurance systems and management information systems to support the NQF.

The NQF embodied in principle all the Lifelong Learning practitioners could have dreamed for. It allowed for integrated learning literally from birth to death. It allowed for access from anywhere at any level within the education and training system. It encouraged mobility and participation.

These hopes were distilled in the so called "crossfield outcomes which had to be appropriately incorporated in every standard or qualification. In SAQA we used to say " What kind of person are you hoping will come out of this system. And the answer is:..

Learners should be able to successfully demonstrate their ability to:

- Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation.
- Identify and solve problems by using creative and critical thinking.

- Organize and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively.
- Work effectively with others in a team, group, organization and community.
- Collect, analyze, organize and critically evaluate information.
- Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others.
- Understand that the world is a set of related systems. This means that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation. (taken from a Canadian Source)
- Show awareness of the importance of effective learning strategies, responsible citizenship, cultural sensitivity, education and career opportunities and entrepreneurial abilities.

There can be no doubt that the NQF has had an impact. Universities are much more self-conscious now about curriculum development, assessment and the learning needs of students with disadvantaged educational backgrounds. The design of industrial training is far more fully informed by an understanding of learning needs for growth that go way beyond narrow training. The national curriculum statements for formal education are shot through with perspectives more characteristic of lifelong learning than of traditional schooling.

The reality of implementation does not reflect the influence nearly as much. There are many reasons for this, not least the sheer capacity costs of merely maintaining a dysfunctional formal education system. Institutions which were meant to partner the NQF and the vision of lifelong education simply did not come into being. For example, we hoped that the IEB would be incorporated into state provision, that the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) would become a leading contributor to a national centre for curriculum and materials development, and that the small handful of NGO community centres would become the core of a major Community College movement. None of these things happened, putting too much of a burden on the mere regulatory mechanisms.

The best lessons in the process relate to the management of trade-offs in trying to make transformative lifelong education work.

Managing the trade-offs

A central lesson for me from the last four decades lies in the management of the trade-offs between the ideals of a transformational vision of lifelong learning and the multiple contesting strands in the tough social, cultural, economic and political realities of our society.

These trade-offs were over-simplified in the struggle against apartheid education, but they were not absent. It was necessary to negotiate ways and means between political absolutists, corporate sponsors, liberal international donors, external political interests and the pressure of actual conditions in community and school. Embedded conservatism in the assumptions and aspirations of all communities about learning – also of political radicals – had to be taken seriously, at least in establishing starting points.

Compromise was inevitable. Managing the compromise has always been the trickiest part.

In the new era in South Africa, we have had to face the much more complex challenges of implementation from a position of official power – or at least the assumption that power for transformation is in our hands. In reality, the power for transformation has been limited by many factors, which include…

- the hold of established education structures – higher education institutions, provincial departments of education – whose priority, rightly from some perspectives, has been continuity and maintenance of practices, even while there are major changes in the racial profile of management;
- the immediate training needs of industry, which may admit the value of critical outcomes for learning in the long term, but are driven by very narrow views of skills;
- the dramatic weakening of the alternative NGO sector after 1994, when international donors transferred their support to the state, on the assumption that the state was more committed to people's education than it really was – the political elite send their children to private schools, aspire to traditional degrees and have at best a rhetorical sympathy for transformation or lifelong learning.

Perhaps, however, the most difficult management task has been that involving trade-offs between stakeholders. The struggle produced an intense ethic demanding the participation of all stakeholders in decisions and action. This approach was supported from the opposite direction by the managerialist idea that participation best secured stakeholder buy-in. This was all very well, except that in the process we often failed to manage the inevitable tension between stakeholder participation and expertise. Specialists in the management of specific educational institutions, in curriculum development and assessment played key roles in the moments of policy decision making that were more appropriate to stakeholders, while stakeholders were involved in design and implementation where rigorous and profound expertise was needed.

This challenge has gone hand in hand with the almost impossible conundrums of going to scale. This requires bureaucracy, and bureaucracy, especially with limited competence, has proved death to the spirit of the innovations it is meant to support. Complex, organic perceptions are squeezed into tick-boxes. The only solution to this may be the slow growth of

a culture of transformation and lifelong education in which practitioners steeped in the needed values have power over the bureaucrats.

I have no doubt that valuable local achievements have come from our efforts to give force to the values of a transformative vision of lifelong learning. At the very least the discourse is still alive and available to those who care about transformation. But, as we don't stop repeating in Southern Africa, *A luta continua* – the struggle goes on.

CONCLUSION

For me Lifelong Learning must be premised on the potential for transformation for the good of the community and the larger society. Transforming the individual as an end in itself is not enough. I believe we should weigh Lifelong Learning activities against ethical and moral considerations of the sort are found in the values of all religions and many of the modern institutions which seek a just and equitable society. I have concerns about the compliance, lowest common denominator models tolerated which allow for the admiration of those who practice great greed most evident in the latest financial crisis.

Life Long Learning must affirm the individual. It must be imbued with the centrality of confidence in learning and competence, as well as the affirmation of marginalised people, marginalised knowledge and cultures and undermined "native" leadership

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Lifelong Learning practitioners must develop strategies to cope with turf wars. The problem of the hard edges of formal learning, knuckling down to what doesn't quite come naturally to it , but even more the tough experience that knowledge disciplines, with their necessary traditions and discourses, can undermine both lifelong learning and transformation; they need to be drawn into LLL and transformation

The harnessing and containing of Power. We need to give power to transformation, but there are traps. The inexorable power of established institutions, the thinness of public experience of or commitment to LLL or transformation or education alternatives, the dangerous need to use statutory / bureaucratic structures and all the trade offs needed to give formal power to the mission.

And, finally the question of responsibility. Who takes the responsibility for the ills that need transforming, or the failures of transformation. Was it the greedy bankers alone, isolated from the rest of society that caused the financial crisis or are they just the algae who respond to what allows them to grow in the nurturing pool - and who constitutes and can change the pool?.

I leave you with that question

Thank you.

I hope your workshop will assist in changing the algae in the pool

(Postscript if required)

As I end I would like to ponder Lifelong Learning as an integral part of Human and Economic Development.

One of the activities that keep me occupied in South Africa is my participation in the Board of the National Development Agency. The NDA is the State Agency mandated to work in the are of poverty alleviation. I chair the Audit Committee and participate in the committee which makes grants aimed at providing projects or interventions which will assist community groups to find a way out of poverty.

Most of the projects are of an agricultural nature and a fair number are concerned with land restitution of land mainly stolen by whites over the past 450 years.

Local, particularly rural, communities have significant skills deficits in the management, finance, budget community organizational, logistical and supply chain management (to mention a few) as well as the technical skills say for pig or goat farming, beekeeping, etc.

What has also become manifest is that even when these skills are either trained or provided, that projects continue to fail.

Communities need more than skills and once off training. They need accompaniment and nurturing to heal as communities and grow in confidence and understanding of their new potential and the challenges that face them. They need the self -esteem that movers them from a passive to grasping the possibility of taking control and making sustainable their own lives.

What an opportunity for lifelong Learning practitioners and learners to make the path while they walk on it.

I wish you well in your deliberations – lifelong learning is worth it even if I introduced it as an “empty notion”. As you can see I don’t really believe that.

Learners should be able to successfully demonstrate their ability to:

- **Communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation.**
- **Identify and solve problems by using creative and critical thinking.**
- **Organize and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively.**
- **Work effectively with others in a team, group, organization and community.**
- **Collect, analyze, organize and critically evaluate information.**
- **Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others.**
- **Understand that the world is a set of related systems. This means that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.**
- **Show awareness of the importance of effective learning strategies, responsible citizenship, cultural sensitivity, education and career opportunities and entrepreneurial abilities.**