

**Education PhD Week Presentation  
of Imbewu Keynote Address:  
The Challenges of Education and Development  
in Twenty-First Century South Africa**

**23 July 2007**

**Introduction**

Thank you for the invitation to speak to the Imbewu Programme Review Conference keynote address *The Challenges of Education and Development in Twenty First Century South Africa*.

I want to take the paper as read.

Given the nature of this PhD week I think it will be more useful for you for me to first address certain methodological issues.

Thereafter, I will deal with the key arguments and theses of the paper.

**Methodological issues**

1. The methodological issue relates in the first instance to the **objects**, **aims** and **purpose** of the paper.
  - To begin with **objects**, the paper has as its objects the important but also complex concepts of *education* and *development* and the *relationship between education and development* as concepts and practices.
  - To move to **purpose**, the paper was for presentation as a keynote address at a conference of some 500 participants who had been assembled to discuss issues of access, equity, and quality of schooling and also review the Imbewu school development programme in the Eastern Cape funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development.

The participants are provincial and district education officials from the Eastern Cape, national education officials, officials and members of local and international education development and donor agencies,

researchers from local academic and other institutions, and education activists and researchers from various countries, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, UK and USA.

The conference is not an academic conference (of academics) or a meeting of government officials or of education activists but one that has brought together all these constituencies to consider and discuss issues of hopefully mutual concern.

The approach and content of the paper is therefore shaped by the nature of the conference and the participants. Its fundamental purpose is to engage in an *appropriate* way with these diverse constituencies on the vitally important issue of education and development.

For this reason:

- ✓ I stay away from any detailed general and conceptual analysis of the terms education and development, or of the relationship between education and development
- ✓ I address the *challenges of education and development* and of the *relationship between education and development in the specific context of contemporary South Africa*; and
- ✓ I structure the paper and organise my presentation and ideas in a particular way and also deal with issues through (a number of) propositions.

There are some issues to highlight here. The specific constituencies of academics/researchers, government and civil society activists are not always easy to bring together, and especially to hold together. This is not because there is not recognition among all such constituencies of the need to work together and to build mutually respectful, beneficial, reciprocal relations to address our common concerns and challenges. The reality, however, is that there are sometimes (but perhaps here I am being too diplomatic and I should say that there are often) different and divergent interests, varying immediate concerns and therefore, understandably, differences emerge in how issues are conceptualised, which issues are prioritised, the discourses and languages through which they are discussed, and how approaches, strategies and the like are formulated.

In my view this is an unavoidable element of the coming together of different constituencies and a not unhealthy aspect of different constituencies finding each other and learning to think, debate and labour together. Whatever difficulties and tensions may arise, the important thing is to appreciate the value of such coming together, to be sensitive and respectful of different views and to recognise that we

need each other if we are to address the concerns, problems and challenges that are our common lot.

- Finally, with respect to **aims**, there were three aims that the paper and presentation sought to achieve.

One was to forcefully bring home to all the participants that the *concepts* of *education* and *development*, like the concepts of freedom and democracy, are defined in various ways and have a variety of meanings associated with them.

A second aim was to make clear that notions of education and development are not neutral in that they are embedded in different views of the world and society, including views on what constitutes a just and good society. And, further, that the choices, policies, actions and practices that are associated with particular conceptions of education and development are not benign in that they have real and differential effects on different social classes and groups in society.

The final aim was to engage with participants in a way that was rigorous and left them no doubts about the nature and extent of the challenges confronting South Africa and other under-developed countries. But at the same time the aim was also not to demoralise but to inspire and persuade that through appropriate and effective human agency and action it was possible to change education and society.

The point of this first methodological issue is the need to be very clear about the **purpose/s**, **aim/s** and **object/s** of any investigation, research undertaking and PhD thesis. I could extend this discussion beyond the issues of the **purposes of the research**, **aims** of the research and **objects of the research** to also address the issues of the **framework of the research**, of the **questions (analytical and empirical) of the research**, of the **methods of the research of the research**, and so on.

Time, however, does not permit and this is best left to another occasion. Simply note that there is a strong and necessary relationship between purpose, aims, objects, framework, questions and method and also the overall title of your PhD.

2. The second methodological issue I wish to raise is that it should be noted that the paper deals with **concepts**, **empirical facts** and **descriptions**, **generalisations** and refers to **theories**.

- **Concepts** – ‘education’, ‘development’, ‘transformation’ ‘inequality’, etc.
- **Facts** – income inequality has increased in South Africa between 1994 and 2006; inequality within Black South Africans has increased since

1994; 43% of South Africans have an annual income of under R 3000; etc.

- **Descriptions** – existence of unemployment and poverty; pervasiveness of the abuse of women; etc.
- **Generalisations** – education on its own cannot transform society; 'thin' conceptions of development cannot overcome inequality; etc
- **Theories** - human capital theory

These are the stuff of all research and especially a PhD thesis and it is very important to be clear about these terms and their role and place in research. Again there is not the time here to engage with this issue and is also best left to another occasion.

Note that in the paper I make reference to the problem of the conflation of terms such as 'transformation', 'development', 'reform' and 'reconstruction', and that the use of them 'interchangeably has tended to empty them of specific significance' (Chisholm, 2004:12), and the dangers of their loose usage.

3. The third methodological issue is that in much as one has to deal with complex issues and make recourse to complex concepts it does not follow that writing and presentation have to be unintelligible. It is a challenge but entirely possible to write and talk about complex issues intelligibly, eloquently and elegantly. I am disdainful of scholars who communicate in ways that are incomprehensible and who seem to think that this indicates how rigorous and clever they are!

There are, of course, different genres of writing – academic thesis writing; academic writing for journal publication; policy reports; newspaper opinion pieces of 1200 words, etc. - and I am of the view that it is important to master as many as possible.

Your PhD thesis and other writings will be good indicators of the extent to which we have succeeded as a University to produce a knowledgeable and information literate graduate – someone with the abilities to construct and critique knowledge and to also critically acquire, process, analyse, synthesise and communicate information in writing and orally.

4. The fourth and final methodological issue is the process of the construction of the paper.

- ✓ Invitation issued in December 2006 – discussions
- ✓ Clarifying objects, aims and purpose
- ✓ Constructing framework in mind

- ✓ Identifying relevant other writings and locating material from existing writings
- ✓ Assembling existing writing under different headings
- ✓ Identifying relevant literature
- ✓ Reading and making notes
- ✓ Writing, and rewriting
- ✓ Reading more and making more notes
- ✓ Writing, and rewriting
- ✓ Talking and seeking out more literature (lucky break re TV news)
- ✓ Writing, and rewriting
- ✓ Identifying possible different forms of organising and presenting
- ✓ Writing, and rewriting
- ✓ Rewriting and editing
- ✓ Finalizing form of organising and presenting
- ✓ Further rewriting and editing
- ✓ More rewriting and editing
- ✓ Final draft rewriting and editing
- ✓ Final copy
- ✓ Final read and post-final copy editing
- ✓ Presentation
- ✓ Minor rewriting and editing
- ✓ Final delivered copy
- ✓ If only...

Some advice:

- ✓ Reading of literature is for different reasons – not a single reason. The same with the literature review
- ✓ Keep every session of writing activity as a saved file and begin with a new copy of the previous file
- ✓ What is possible is shaped by resources, time available and nature of investigation. There is life after the paper or thesis
- ✓ Don't try and use all the notes or material that has been assembled. Will result in incoherence and too long a paper or thesis
- ✓ Software have spell check, grammar check and thesaurus functions for good reason – use them!
- ✓ Writing is fun – something magical about worrying about what you are going to write and say and then seeing words become sentences become paragraphs become sections become chapters become a thesis or book. Fantastic experience and intoxicant – try it!

## Key arguments and theses of the paper

### 5. The challenges of Education and Development

There are many challenges but I highlight two in particular.

- The first challenge concerns the idea of education and its purposes in relation to educational and social transformation and development.

As I note, it should be clear that the *Constitution* and an array of laws and policies direct us to realize profound and wide-ranging imperatives and goals in and through education and schooling. It is assumed that their progressive substantive realization will contribute immeasurably to the transformation and development of education and society.

Today, however, there is a strong predisposition to approach education and investments in educational institutions from the perspective largely of the promotion of economic growth. The effect of this is to reduce education principally to preparing students for the labour market and economy and to be productive workers and contributors to economic growth. Much of the discourse in South Africa on the supposed lack of responsiveness of educational institutions to the needs of the economy, the alleged mismatch between graduates and the needs of companies, and the demand for a greater focus on 'skills' well reflects the tendency to reduce education to its value for economic growth.

My argument is that education has an intrinsic significance as an engagement and partnership between dedicated teachers and students around humanity's intellectual, cultural and scientific inheritances (in the form of books, art, pictures, music, artefacts), and around our historical and contemporary understandings, views and beliefs regarding our natural and social worlds. Here, education is the pursuit of learning in and through language/s of nature and society, which is undertaken as part of what it means to be human (Oakeshott in Fuller, T. ed., 1989).

Education is also intimately connected to the idea of democratic citizenship, and to the cultivation of humanity as Martha Nussbaum argues. And education has profound value for the promotion of health and well-being, the assertion and pursuit of social and human rights and active democratic participation.

Hence proposition 1: if our goals are indeed educational and social transformation and development, we have to refuse notions of education that conceive of it in purely instrumental terms and reduce it to the promotion of economic growth. Instead, we are bound to protect and promote a much richer and multi-faceted conception of education that views it as also having intrinsic as well as social and political value.

- The second challenge relates to our ideas of 'development'.

As I note, there is a huge literature on development, penned from within divergent social theoretical and ideological frameworks. Suffice to say that there are what may be described as, on the one hand, "thin" conceptions of development, and on the other hand "thick" conceptions of development.

"Thin" conceptions of development are essentially economic, and tend to reduce the idea of development to economic growth and enhanced economic performance as measured by various indicators. Development reduced to economic growth gives rise to goals, policies, institutional arrangements and actions that focus primarily on promoting growth and reducing obstacles to growth.

In contrast, "thick" conceptions of development extend beyond a concern with economic growth to embrace issues of a wider economic nature as well as social, cultural and political issues. At their most extensive, the concern of goals, policies, institutional arrangements and actions are with structural economic change which widens ownership and eliminates or reduces income inequality, unemployment and poverty; greater social equality; equity and redress for socially disadvantaged and marginalised groups; expansion of human, economic and social rights and civil liberties; the institutionalisation of a substantive democracy and vibrant civil society; deracialisation and decolonisation of intellectual and cultural spaces; and extension and the deepening of political and citizenship participation.

Proposition 2: is that we must choose a "thick" conception of development if we seek to realise the goals of both educational *and* social transformation and development. Without a "thick" conception of development, it will be nigh-impossible to eliminate the historical and structural economic and social legacies of apartheid, transform economic and social relations, erode and redress inequalities in patterns of wealth and ownership. It will be also extremely difficult to achieve the 1994 *Reconstruction and Development Programme* goals such as 'meeting basic needs of people'; and 'democratising the state and society', and to ensure that development is simultaneously intellectual, cultural, social and political rather than just economic in nature.

## 6. Challenges of the Relationship between Education and Development

With respect to the challenges of the *relationship* between education and development, again among the many I confine myself to three specific challenges.

- The third challenge concerns the role of education in social transformation and development.

I argue that in South Africa it is a widely-held view that education is an important instrument for social transformation and development and that education tends to be accorded great weight as a mechanism of social transformation. The reality is that 'education *may* be a necessary condition for certain social processes, but it is not a sufficient condition, and hence cannot be analysed as an autonomous social force' (Wolpe and Unterhalter, 1991a:3). The use of the Weiler quote is to signal my agreement with his argument.

There is an undeniable and powerful link between the social exclusion of disadvantaged social classes and groups, and equity of access, opportunity and outcomes and achievement in schooling and education.

Proposition 3: With the best will in the world education on its own cannot transform and develop our society. Education is a necessary condition of transformation and development but is not a sufficient condition. That is to say, there must be simultaneous transformation and development initiatives in other arenas of our society if education is to make an effective contribution and if those who receive education are also to derive maximum benefits from it.

- The previous discussion leads on to the fourth challenge. This is, as far as it is possible under the given circumstances, to creatively push the bounds of possibility and enhance the transformation potentialities of education, and the same time minimize its reproduction of various kinds of economic and social privileges and inequalities.

Proposition 4: We must avoid two equally flawed logics.

One is 'determinism' - the notion that denies the education sphere any autonomy and rules out the possibilities of any internal changes on the grounds of constraints imposed by allegedly all powerful and determinant external political, economic and social structures. The other is 'voluntarism' - the notion that any and all changes are possible and it is all simply a matter of political will or lack of will.

A variant of voluntarism is populist 'immediatism' – the pretence that all and every need and desire can be immediately and simultaneously met irrespective of available financial resources and human capabilities. In *Poor Peoples Movements* Piven and Cloward have argued that 'what was won must be judged by what was possible' (1979:xiii). Moreover, to paraphrase them, the 'relevant question to ask is whether, on balance', we have 'made gains or lost ground'; whether we have in some ways 'advanced the interests' of



disadvantaged social classes and groups and transformation and development or 'set back those interests' (ibid.).

- From the previous comments it should be clear that it is *not* my argument that until social inequalities are eliminated or seriously reduced there is nothing that can be done in terms of development interventions in education and schools. This brings me to my fifth and final challenge, which is that the same time as we attempt to progressively realize wider economic, social and political goals we can and must also creatively and determinedly labour to remake our schools and education. If our goals are indeed to transform and develop education and to optimise the contribution of education to development, this entails a number of inter-locking, systemic and long-term initiatives, which I identify. [Morrow email comment to me on literacy at schools and universities – concur].

The key question is whether and to what extent these conditions are in place, and in what percentage of South Africa's schools.

The important thing is not to avoid certain hard questions regarding intellectual, moral, political and organisational responsibilities associated; whether we have in place the essential value orientations, policy frameworks and policies, strategies and mechanisms to help progressively realize our transformation and development goals; whether we have an effective and efficient developmental state in the domain of education; and a social consciousness of what development in education and society in South Africa in the twenty first century fully entails.

Proposition 5: That despite some achievements we continue to be plagued by various stubborn and persistent realities that thwart the realization of constitutionally and legally enshrined educational and imperatives and goals. It is necessary to openly acknowledge failings, shortcomings and weaknesses, honestly identify what accounts for these and creatively and courageously confront them. Unless and until we do this we will continue to deny millions of South Africans an education that develops their capabilities and affirms and advances their human and social rights and we will block a key avenue to social transformation and development. As it has been noted, 'although education cannot transform the world, the world cannot be transformed without education' (cited in Chisholm, 2004: 13).

## 7. Conclusion

Ultimately, transformation in education and society will be shaped by the choices and decisions we make about economic and social development and by the character of human agency outside and within education and its institutions.