
Adult learning within lifelong learning: a different lens, a different light

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Abstract

Adult learning is located within a lifelong learning framework both as a lens for looking back and for projecting forward. The competing views of adult and lifelong learning are discussed and a preliminary overview of what has been achieved within adult learning in the last 10 years in South Africa is given. Lifelong learning and the learning region are suggested as frameworks for providing a 'connected up' approach to human development, and a possibility for finding 'troubled spaces of possibilities' (Edwards and Usher, 2005) to create new solutions to old problems.

Introduction

The year 2004 was a watershed for South Africa as it marked ten years of democracy. This propelled intense retrospection by Government, civil society, academics, business and labour, to assess what had been achieved whether fully, partially or unexpectedly, in improving the conditions of life of the majority of people (South African Government, 2003). The field of adult education was no different (Aitchison, 2003a, 2003b).

This article argues that to assess what has been achieved, the lens that is used is critical. I propose locating adult learning within a lifelong learning framework both as a lens for looking back and for projecting forward. I begin with a brief discussion of Aitchison's (2003b) reflection on adult education and training in the last ten years. Then move to a discussion of lifelong learning and an overview of what has been achieved within adult learning in the last decade. The contrasts in the reflections of Aitchison and myself are marked partly because of the different lenses used. I finally focus on lifelong learning and the learning region as frameworks for providing a 'connected up' approach to human development.

An opaque lens

There is very limited literature on adult education or adult learning in South Africa. Aitchison's (2003b) article is therefore to be welcomed. It is, however, an article, which is limited. One of the major limitations is the lack of clarity on the lenses that he is using to describe adult education and training.

The title of the article addresses 'adult education and training' but the article is concerned with notions of 'adult education', 'adult basic education and training (ABET)' and an 'adult education system', which seems to refer very narrowly to a State system within the Department of Education. None of the terms are explained which is unexpected, given his own concern previously with delineation of the field (National Education Policy Investigation, 1993). He is disappointed that a 'fully fledged adult education system', which he does not explain, has not materialised. This in spite of his own recognition of the major limitations with the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) processes, which signalled a likely continuity rather than rupture with the past (Walters, 1993). He claims that the prospects for a new system have not only been 'unfulfilled' but have 'diminished'.

Put simply, his story is one of South African activists and adult educators who were on the fringes of the global economy during apartheid times doing good work. Foreigners, carrying with them 'outcomes based education', 'lifelong learning' and 'national qualifications frameworks' in the interests of global capitalism, easily duped them. One of the reasons he suggests for their gullibility was that they had learnt about 'instructional objectives' during their time, perhaps, in a T-Group, or on a *Training for Transformation* course for radical Christians. In this, he is reawakening an old debate, which gives ideological power to educational technologies or approaches. In the 1980s, for example, there was a dominant view that to be a 'progressive' educator you had to 'work in small groups'. He seems to be saying that to use 'objectives' there is an automatic translation into particular forms of pedagogy. This has been refuted. In addition, the adult educators and the activists, contrary to their history of struggle, are portrayed as victims in an all-powerful global onslaught. The university based adult education departments are portrayed in the same light, in a disappointing, factually inaccurate account.

This present article is an attempt to use another lens to identify the vast array of adult learning activities that are in evidence. It challenges the rather narrow, nostalgic view of adult education, which Aitchison describes and it suggests a vibrancy that exists but which Aitchison is not able to see.

The background to lifelong learning in South Africa

The challenge for the democratic government has been to recreate the education and training system, virtually, in totality. Education had been one of the key instruments for the furthering of the oppressive racial policies. Policies for each part of the system have been developed and, now, ten years later there are processes of retrospection and review to see what has been achieved. The *Education White Paper 3 of 1997, A Programme for the Transformation of*

Higher Education, captures the challenges confronting South Africa and the education system well:

(T)he South African economy is confronted with the formidable challenge of integrating itself into the competitive arena of international production and finance. . .

Simultaneously, the nation is confronted with the challenge of reconstructing domestic social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership, wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid (emphasis added).

A key response to these challenges has been for the government to prioritise the construction of a single, equitable system of quality education within a system of lifelong learning. The vision for this was first set out in the Policy Framework for Education and Training written by the Education Department of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994:

All individuals should have access to lifelong education and training irrespective of race, class, gender, creed or age (African National Congress, 1994, p.3).

The understanding of what was meant by lifelong learning appears later on in the document.

Lifelong Learning is an essential structural objective for our system of education if the objectives of a democratic society are to be met.

This document links lifelong learning to attainment of democracy and places it as the core of the vision for the new education and training system.

In the 1994 document strong emphasis was placed on the structural changes required and the role of lifelong learning in helping to bring about these. It was a populist discourse that was strongly influenced by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and other popular formations within the ANC alliance. A great deal of store was put on the construction of a National Qualifications Framework to be the central lever for a lifelong learning system.

Since then, the central ideas have been translated into various policies, through extensive consultative, and contested, processes, and have been implemented in the last number of years. As the gloss of the new dispensation has faded, so the debates on the merits of theories underpinning the policies and on the outcomes have become heightened. A very useful set of papers which captures key areas of contestation is *Education in Retrospect: Policy implementation since 1990* (Kraak and Young, 2001).

‘Lifelong learning’, the ‘knowledge society’, and the ‘learning society’, have not been the specific lenses used in South Africa for extensive analysis. The broad vision of a lifelong learning system was translated quite quickly into operational building blocks, both institutional and conceptual, and these have been the focus of attention. The new language of the ‘integration of education and training’, ‘a single national qualifications framework’, ‘outcomes based education and training’, ‘recognition of prior learning (RPL)’, ‘learnerships’, amongst others, has resulted in bureaucrats, educators, trainers and policy makers having to scrutinise and invent the individual pieces of a new system. This intense process of learning a ‘new language’, constructing new systems, and building capacities to implement the pieces has been all absorbing for many. It has made the holding of the overall vision for lifelong learning in the interests of the majority, articulated in 1994, difficult.

Within the broad discussion on the system for lifelong learning in South Africa, there are several issues being debated including the nature and form of national qualifications framework, human resource strategies, relationships between policies and practices and the question of ‘knowledge’ (Kraak, 2003). There is questioning of the wisdom of having too quickly adopted concepts that had currency amongst left leaning academics in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, in the late 1980s early 1990s. As Young suggests, South Africans perhaps picked up on the vision that was encapsulated in the theories and tried to implement, getting trapped in utopianism (Young, 2004).

Lifelong learning - competing views

Broadly speaking, lifelong learning is rooted in two main traditions – one concerned with human resource development for the economy; the other concerned with the promotion of democracy and citizenship in the interests of the majority (Gustavsson, 1997). There has been an explosion of interest in lifelong learning in the North as part of their drive to be globally competitive. In the South, governments and funding agencies have been a little more reticent. The dominant discourse of lifelong learning is mainly concerned with the economy at the high end. In addition to its economic orientation, there is a growing critique amongst certain academics of the use of lifelong learning for social control in places like the United Kingdom (Crowther, 2004). Crowther (p.125) argues that lifelong learning as currently practised is negative as it “diminishes the public sphere, undermines educational activity, introduces new mechanisms of self-surveillance and reinforces the view that failure to succeed is a personal responsibility”.

Some others located in the South (Torres, 2003; Walters, 2001), argue for the importance of a lifelong learning framework and argue against the notion that

lifelong learning is good for the North while basic education is promoted in the South. They argue that all learning is inextricably linked and the strong differentiation of children's and adult's learning is unhelpful. A lifelong learning attitude is required across all ages for people's ongoing engagement in personal, political, cultural or economic development.

Unlike Aitchison, who is inclined to interpret lifelong learning and its related concepts as working only in the interests of global capitalism, evidence shows that they are contested terms and must continually be given contextual meaning. Lifelong learning is not automatically a 'good thing' or a 'bad thing'. While it is mainly used in relation to increasing the efficiency of the marketplace, there is value in challenging this hegemony and supporting the notion that its aim is to enhance active citizenship which:

connects individuals and groups to the structures of social, political and economic activity in both local and global contexts, and emphasises women and men as agents of their own history in all aspects of their lives. (UNESCO Institute for Education, 1998)

Lifelong learning within this understanding assumes the need for major pedagogical, organizational and social changes to address equity, redress and economic concerns. Coffield (2000) argues that lifelong learning is going through three overlapping stages, namely those of 'romance', 'evidence' and 'implementation'. As he says, many of the materials on lifelong learning are almost theological in their zeal and remain at the romantic levels, claiming learning as a panacea. The implementation of lifelong learning within a more holistic framework is the challenge.

Adult learning in South Africa in the last 10 years

Depending on the lens that is used to explore achievements over the last 10 years, so the outcomes vary. To do this, I am deliberately using the language and lens of adult learning rather than adult education (Walters, 2001). Before proceeding I will elaborate on this choice.

Firstly, adult education is still commonly equated with either personal development for the middle classes or literacy and basic education for the poor. In the processes preceding the first democratic elections, the NEPI, which was the think tank for the ANC, reflected this limited understanding of Adult Education, by separating it even from Adult Basic Education and Human Resource Development conceptually and in policy terms. Already at that stage it was predictable that those who were for the inclusive understanding of Adult Education had lost the argument (Walters, 1993).

Secondly, adult learning is embedded in the political, social, cultural and economic processes of society. Its primary social purposes within a context like South Africa are: to enhance possibilities for people to survive the harsh conditions in which they live; to develop skills for people in the formal and informal sectors for economic purposes and for cultural and political education which encourages people to participate actively in society through cultural organisations, social movements, political parties and trade unions. Improving the lives of the majority, who are poor, demands a holistic approach that enables inter-sectoral strategies across national and local government departments, civil society organisations and those in the economy. The language of 'learning' or 'capacity building' resonates more easily with, for example, the health, environmental, welfare, or business sectors. They more easily recognise their involvement in 'learning', rather than 'education', as they go about their daily business.

Thirdly, as Torres (2003, p.23) argues, adult education in the South "has always been trapped between meagre attention and resources and overly ambitious expectations". Unlike many countries in the North, the South does not have compact networks of public or private education and training organisations that are overwhelming citizens with learning opportunities. Adult education facilities are limited. The majority of adults do not have the expectation of 'education'; this is for their children. Therefore she argues that "expanding the perceived learning needs and enhancing the capability to demand them is particularly important for learners in the most disadvantaged situations" (p.24). Learning, she argues, does not imply an individualised approach. The building of learning communities to help address the daily struggles within a comprehensive and integrated development strategy is essential.

Trying to assess comprehensively what adult learning has taken place in the last 10 years is virtually impossible as the programmes and activities are hard to find. They may be found under 'capacity building' or 'staff development' or 'community development' in organisations or government departments. What I am able to do here is suggest a range of activities and programmes that were found through searching web sites, annual reports and other documents. What is obvious is that there is a need for substantial research to give a more comprehensive picture.¹

¹ This is based on the Confintea Review by the Division for Lifelong Learning for the UNESCO Institute for Education. Kathy Watters and Shirley Walters were the authors.

What has been achieved?

Building up lifelong learning structures and institutional frameworks

While I do not intend rehearsing the full basket of legislation that is impacting education and training in South Africa, it is necessary to recognize the crucial significance of the favourable policy environment in which education and training is being developed.

The education policy framework has been set by at least seven major pieces of legislation, starting with the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995, which provides for the creation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which establishes the scaffolding of a national learning system that is to integrate education and training at all levels and across sectors. Then in 1996 the National Education Policy Act and the South African Schools Act were passed, the latter making schooling compulsory for children aged 7 –15. In 1997 the Higher Education Act made provision for a unified and nationally planned system of higher education and created a statutory Council on Higher Education (CHE), which advises the Minister and is responsible for quality assurance and promotion. The Further Education and Training Act followed in 1998, with a strategy which provided the basis for developing a nationally co-ordinated system, comprising the secondary component of schooling and technical colleges. Then in 2000, the Adult Basic Education and Training Act, provided for the establishment of public and private adult learning centres, funding for ABET provisioning, the governance of public centres, and quality assurance mechanisms for the sector.

In 2001 and 2002 the framework for a national quality assurance system was established with the accreditation of 31 Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs). This accreditation process included the Council for Higher Education (CHE) as well as the 25 Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).

The Skills Development Act of 1998, which allows for the setting up of the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the Skills Development Levy Act of 1999, all aim to enhance the levels of education and training and the learning cultures. These complement the other legislation and introduced new institutions, programmes and funding policies.

In February 2001 the Minister of Labour launched the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS).² The mission of the NSDS is:

To equip South Africa with the skills to succeed in the global market and to offer opportunities to individuals and communities for self-advancement to enable them to play a productive role in society.³

SETAs have been established to implement the NSDS and to increase the skills of the people in their sector. Sectors are made up of economic activities that are linked and related, for example the banking, manufacturing and information technology sectors. One of the functions of each SETA is to develop learnerships for their sector. Learnerships replace the old apprentice training system and like apprentice training combine practice and theory. The Department of Labour had set a target of March 2005 by which date each SETA must have learnerships available.

Employers who contribute monthly fund the skills' development strategy. The skills' levy is currently 0.5% of a company payroll. This money is allocated to the National Skills Fund (20%) and 80% to the relevant SETA. Employers who have their own learnerships or other registered training programmes can claim back a portion of their contribution.

While there is some dissatisfaction with the rate of delivery of the SETAs, Government claims that in the last four years the National Skills Fund has spent R690 million to train 380 000 people (Department of Labour, April 2004). The major achievement has been the fact that for the first time there is some compulsion for employers to train staff, rather than perpetuate the previous practices of importing 'white' labour as required.

Delivery

Various state departments, private sector as well as civil society organisations, provide formal learning programmes for adults. In terms of ABET, commerce and industry provide support in the form of materials as well as providing training. Overall they are the largest providers of ABET. The State is the second largest provider of ABET programmes with provision varying in style and in specific projects across the nine provinces. The DoE spending on

² Department of Labour (undated) *The National Skills Development Strategy*. Pretoria: Department of Labour (brochure).

³ Department of Labour (undated) *SETAs – Sector Education and Training Authorities*. Pretoria: Department of Labour, p. 2 (brochure)

ABET was R343 million in the 2000/01 financial year and R160 million in 1999/2000.⁴ This money is spent only on new initiatives and national programmes as General and Further education are the responsibility of Provincial Governments and ABET is part of General Education. On average ABET is around 1% of the provincial education budgets. Civil society organisations provide about 10% of the ABET provision (French, 2002). In general, with about 30% of the adult population unable to read and write, and with the government's rhetorical support for equity and redress, there is great despondency about the level of provision of ABET since 1994 (Aitchison, 2003; Baatjes, 2003; French, 2002)

The main providers of adult learning within the state sector are the Departments of Labour, Education, Correctional Services, Health, and Water Affairs. The following examples of adult learning initiatives in government departments illustrate the nature of this provision.

Aside from conventional human resource development, the DoE targets specific groups for skills upgrading. During the year 2001/02, some 22,800 educators and 683 master trainers benefited from training. There was also upgrading of the approximately 65,000 unqualified and under-qualified educators. The initial target was 10,000 people.⁵

During the year 2001/2002 the Department of Correctional Services⁶ spent just under 7% of its budget on development for offenders. The budget covers general psychological services, social work, spiritual care and skills' development. According to the annual report 25 260 (15%) of prisoners attended education and training programmes. During this year 14 new training centres were established to provide training in basic technical skills as well as business skills. A fund allocation from the Department of Labour's National Skills fund of R10,5 million enabled 7 087 prisoners to receive training in technical and entrepreneurial skills. In addition the department runs 20 prison farms and 104 smaller vegetable gardens. The farms provide prisoners with a range of skill development opportunities.

There are a number of programmes run by the Health Department, which are aimed at improving the knowledge adults have about their bodies. These are ongoing, with a different focus being addressed at different times in the year. For example Pregnancy Education Week has been the last week of February

⁴ Department of Education Annual Report, 2000/01, p. 34.

⁵ Department of Education Annual Report 2000–2001, p. 20

⁶ Department of Correctional Services Annual Report 2001–2002, pp. 79-98

since 1999, Cervical Cancer Month has been in September since 2000 and Breast Cancer Month is in October. The Health Department has also initiated a variety of campaigns targeting specific groups. These include the Sexual Reproductive Health Right Campaign (2002), the National Inherited Disorders Awareness Campaign (2002), the Hands on Childbirth Education Programme (2000), and Male Involvement in Reproductive Health (2000).

Other programmes have also been introduced to deal with specific needs of people working in health services. According to the SA Health Review of 2002⁷ reskilling and upskilling became necessary with the move to the more decentralised system of primary health care. People working at district level required planning, implementing and monitoring and evaluation skills in addition to their clinical skills. A variety of programmes were implemented to address these needs.

Many of these programmes were aimed at specific communities, for example, Primary Health Care Practitioners received training in managing violence at schools which was conducted, under commission, by the South African Network of Service Providers (SANTSEP). The programme involved developing intervention strategies such as problem solving, conflict management and assertiveness to deal with violence. In Uthukela district, KwaZulu-Natal Community Health Workers achieved considerable improvement in child health through a combination of community participation, developing community health workers, and a concerted effort to train all primary care nurse practitioners and doctors in Integrated Management of Childhood Illnesses.⁸ Lehmann and Sanders found that many health practitioners still lack skills in dealing with HIV/AIDS.

A number of other departments, such as Water Affairs, have introduced social development programmes. These programmes, aimed at creating employment opportunities, include training and education components. For example, 'Working for Water' aimed to employ 18 000 previously unemployed people in 2002 who would receive at least two days training per month. In addition these people would receive an hour of HIV/AIDS awareness training per quarter and have access to childcare facilities.

⁷ Lehmann, U. and Sanders, D. 2002. *Human Resource Development in South Africa. A Health Review 2002*, Health Systems Trust, , p. 123 <ftp://ftp.hst.org.za/pubs/sahr/2002/>

⁸ Lehmann and Sanders (2002, p.123)

The *Working for the Coast Programme*⁹ is a project of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism's (DEAT) and is one of the development initiatives introduced in the White Paper for Sustainable Coastal Development in South Africa under the umbrella brand name 'Coast Care'. Diverse target groups for the various Coast Care projects have been identified. These include: local, provincial and national authorities; coastal communities and residents; national and international tourists; subsistence and recreational resource gatherers; property developers; industry; the scientific community; the youth; students on all levels; conservation officials; law enforcement officers and legal fraternity; politicians; non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations.

From these examples, there is a wide range of learning or capacity building programmes. They are, however, largely run in separate departments with no obvious attempts to connect them into coherent sets of adult learning and development programmes. They would not, in all likelihood, see their programmes within an adult and lifelong learning framework.

Other developments have occurred in the area of *Continuing Professional Development* through professional associations. For the first time continuing education is a requirement for re-registration of certain professionals, as with the Health Profession Council of South Africa. The Medical Councils, for example, introduced compulsory CPD for all medical practitioners in 2000.¹⁰

Professionals working in allied medical fields such as pharmacists as well as doctors are now required to attend a range of courses each year in order to retain their licence. The scale of the take up of CPD is not known. There is a proliferation of private and public institutions that are offering continuing education of various sorts. There is an important development within higher education to begin to assure the quality of continuing education run through the institutions.

Within Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) there is a range of informal, non-formal and formal learning activities. In general terms, many dedicated adult literacy and basic education organisations have been forced to close through lack of funding. Much of the innovative curriculum work they had developed has been lost. The field is serviced by a few institutions like the NGO Project Literacy, and institutions like the ABET Unit at UNISA, and the Centre for

⁹ <http://icm.noaa.gov/country/safrica/safrica.html> and <http://www.projectliteracy.org.za/tmpl/Documents/Noel%20Daniels.doc>

¹⁰ Information accessed from website for Pharmacy Interns in KwaZulu-Natal <http://www.kznhealth.gov.za/interns2.pdf> Accessed 7 May 2002

Adult Education at University of KwaZulu-Natal. Many new issue-focussed CSOs have been started around, for example, HIV/AIDS, anti-violence against women and children, anti-globalisation, homelessness, anti-crime and so on.

HIV/AIDS training¹¹ responses are widespread through business, government and civil society. New funding is being made available through international and national sources to support health, education and support services. There are at least 600 civil society organisations working to stem the tide. There are processes of mainstreaming HIV/AIDS into the school, further and higher education curricula. There are community mobilisation campaigns and development strategies. Faith-based organisations are also involved in educating their communities. There are multiple approaches being used that include awareness raising, counselling services, and provision of other support.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is one, which most graphically illustrates the importance of having an holistic understanding of education and training within a lifelong learning framework. As Justin Ellis, Under-Secretary of Lifelong Learning and Culture in Namibia said at a conference at University of Western Cape in 2001:

HIV/AIDS demands a lifelong learning approach. It's about sexuality and changing roles. We have to work simultaneously with children and adults to discuss in new ways. There's a need for partnerships and linkages between government, private sector, civil society; between health institutions, schools, universities, workplaces. Teaching and preaching about AIDS has failed. No learning can take place until we take 'learning' seriously. The social status of women must change, their self image must be such that they can negotiate sexual relations as equals. We have to think in much more radical ways to ensure a prosperous future in the Southern African region.

In concluding this section, it is impossible to make final judgements on what has been achieved in relation to adult learning in the last ten years. That which is clear, is that the policy environment has changed dramatically and provides a basis to work within a lifelong learning framework. Therefore, the challenges facing adult learning in South Africa are not in the policy arena. Another significant advance is to have mechanisms in place to lever funding for training at the workplace. Structures have been established to facilitate these and the next step is for the potential of rolling out learnerships to be realised.

¹¹ Special Edition of *Perspectives in Education*, July 2002 Vol. 20 No 2. University of Pretoria.

A host of innovative programmes have also been run through various government departments. There is seemingly little coherence of programmes and activities across departments, and sometimes within them, which leads to an impression of fragmentation. It is not clear what the scale or quality of delivery is and who are the beneficiaries in terms of equity and redress imperatives. There is a need for substantial research to answer these questions. In the area of adult literacy and basic education, there has been limited progress in terms of increase of delivery, with the loss of capacity within the CSOs. There have been significant developments in relation to the formalisation of continuing professional education. On the face of it, then, it would appear that formalised training for employed people in formal workplaces and for professionals has potentially improved, while learning opportunities for those in informal employment or in need of basic education and training in communities have been limited and fragmented. With unemployment running at between 30% and 40% and widespread poverty this is of major concern.

There do not appear to be any umbrella organisations, which are attempting to connect the adult educators and trainers professionally across government, civil society, business, or across sectors such as health, literacy, or environment, since the demise of the Adult Educator and Trainers Association of South Africa (AETASA).

The adult learning activities are not framed within a lifelong learning philosophy and approach, besides some possible compliance with registration of formal programmes on the NQF. It therefore would appear that, using Coffield's (2000) three stages, there has been little advance towards implementation and monitoring of lifelong learning on any substantial scale.

Lifelong learning, which is not just symbolic but also has visionary, pedagogic and organisational implications, is a new and radical way of thinking. It requires institutional structures to work in new ways across old boundaries. There is no tradition of government departments, business or civil society working in 'connected up' ways. One way of providing a framework for lifelong learning programmes and initiatives to work across sectors and organisational silos is through the notion of the 'learning region'. I will now explore this idea through a description of one such effort, which is using a learning region framework that suggests what Edwards and Usher (2005) refer to as a 'troubled space of possibilities'.

The Learning Cape Province

The Learning Cape is one of four pillars discussed in the Western Cape Provincial Administration's White Paper on the 'knowledge economy' (Provincial Administration on the Western Cape, 2001). As in so many countries, the White Paper argues the case for an intimate relationship between economic development and learning, but it also recognises that without greater equity and serious poverty alleviation, economic development will not occur. The Western Cape is the second wealthiest province in South Africa. On the one hand, certain parts of the economy are fairly buoyant, like tourism, services for film, media, and IT, and the fruit and wine industry. On the other hand, 65% of people earn below R1 200 per month, there is 24% unemployment, 30% of adults are 'illiterate', 75% of pre-schoolers do not have access to early childhood development opportunities, and the number of TB and HIV/AIDS infected people is increasing rapidly. The disparities between rich and poor are some of the most extreme in the world. It is stated (Division for Lifelong Learning, 2001) that

The challenge for the Western Cape is to strike the balance in terms of resources between the external focus of promoting the region competitively in terms of the global knowledge economy and getting things 'right at home' where the focus is on poverty alleviation and employment creation. There is growing evidence that unless things are 'right at home' it is likely that the attempts to compete globally will merely privilege the few and serve to cause greater differentiation in our society.

In October 2001, there was a proposal to the Provincial Department of Economic Development that an annual Learning Cape Festival (LCF) could contribute to the development of the concept and strategy of the Learning Cape. The proposal was then canvassed amongst higher education, civil society, trade unions, business, local government, libraries, and the Department of Education. A Steering Committee made up of the range of social partners from government, trade unions, higher education, early childhood, schooling, adult basic education, NGOs, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), was set up to run it. A series of theme groups was also established. Starting the month long festival on National Woman's Day, 9 August, and ending it on International Literacy Day, 8 September, it was hoped that some of the issues of the most marginalised citizens would be profiled in the festival.

Between 2002 and 2005 there have been four, month long, festivals. It is not the aim here to give details of the festival and its relation to the province, (see Walters and Etkind, 2004; Walters 2005), but to suggest the possibilities that it presents.

Throughout the festivals, which consisted of over 500 events each, new partnerships were established and old ones strengthened with some government departments, private sector, NGOs, and Higher Education institutions. There was positive media coverage of Festival events, demonstrating ‘from the bottom up’, what good educational projects and programmes there are and what serious issues learners and educators face. The Festival succeeded in generating a degree of goodwill and energy of a wide range of people. The festivals were important first steps in popularising and giving content to the vision of a ‘Learning Cape’, particularly amongst some government departments, education and training providers, trade unions, NGOs, and SETAs. The immediate challenge after the first two relatively successful festivals was how to move from an exciting innovation to deepen and develop the vision and reality of the ‘Learning Cape’. The Learning Cape Festival was seen as a means to an end not an end in itself. It needed to be nested within a much more extensive Learning Cape initiative which would be integral to building the human development base of the Province.

The Provincial Department of Economic Affairs, together with the Provincial Department of Education, influenced by their experiences of the LCF, helped establish a multi-stakeholder HRD Task Group, to construct a framework for a provincial Human Resources Development Strategy. The Task Group developed a framework for the HRDs within a learning province framework,¹² however, this framework has not been carried through systematically in the HR strategy. The HRD Framework also proposed the setting up of a Section 21 company, which has now been established as the Learning Cape Initiative, under which the LCF resides.

In summary, using Coffield’s framework, the LCF has helped to move ideas of lifelong learning beyond ‘romance’, to ‘evidence’ and ‘implementation’. It has been a very useful vehicle to raise awareness of the notion of a learning province and to propel government to move beyond a symbolic policy to one which may begin to be implemented. The LCF has profiled lifelong learning which is concerned with economic development and social equity and redress. The framework of lifelong learning within a learning province, has enabled, for example, the Departments of Education, Economic Affairs, Transport, Educare and ABET NGOs, SETAs, Trade Unions, and the Unicity, at times, to see the inter-connectedness of their learning concerns. It has provided a ‘troubled space of possibilities’, which has proved both inspiring and fragile. It does challenge all parties to move out of their silos and learn to work in ‘connected’ ways (Walters, 2005).

¹²

In conclusion

In the last 10 years adult learning in South Africa has changed dramatically. As stated earlier, adult learning is embedded in the political, social, cultural and economic processes of society. Its primary social purposes are: to enhance possibilities for women and men to **survive** the harsh conditions in which they live; to develop skills for people in the formal and informal sectors for **economic** purposes; and for **cultural and political** education which encourages women and men to participate actively in society through cultural organisations, social movements, political parties and trade unions. This partial description of adult learning does show a wide spectrum of activities, run through many different government departments, workplaces, and civil society organisations, for different purposes. The learning activities are not necessarily described as adult learning, but can be named ‘capacity building’, ‘staff development’, ‘health promotion’, ‘skills training’ or ‘community development’. The many new policies developed in the last 10 years are, on the whole, facilitative of these activities.

The adult learning activities could be seen, as ‘everywhere and nowhere’ as there is no conceptual clarity or co-ordinating mechanism to help hold them in view at one time. This needs a wide-angle lens. The idea of the ‘learning region’ was mooted as one, which holds the promise of providing a ‘troubled space of possibilities’ both at conceptual and organisational levels. Linked to this, the Learning Cape Festival was described as an opportunity to practice working in ‘connected up’ ways organisationally. It also provides the space to ‘connect up’ conceptually as early childhood development, workplace learning, higher and further education are encouraged to recognise their connectedness within a lifelong learning framework. While the Learning Cape was given as one example, there are many others around the country, which could be given as impressive examples of ongoing innovative work.

While Aitchison is right to warn of the dangers of neo-liberal economic and social policies, the evidence seems to be that adult educators and trainers are engaging in a wide array of actions not as victims but also as agents. On the evidence presented, it does not appear that the scope of adult learning has ‘diminished’ but rather that there is a wide range of vibrant, no doubt contested, activities. This article argues for wide angle lenses to be used for analysing the richness of the field – this is provided by the concepts of adult learning within lifelong learning.

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