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the influence of english-speaking south africans on educational policy and decisions

V. HANNA

It is usually unwise to make generalisations about national characteristics, but history suggests that some at least of the characterisics commonly ascribed to English-speaking South Africans have shown themselves in the work of those who have had to do with education in South Africa. A certain genius for the techniques of administration, an inborn respect for law and order and for the rights of the individual have appeared time and again in the attitude of the leaders in this field.

Definitions of education come and go. In all of them there is an underlying similarity, but in all of them there are nuances which enable their interpreters to give a particular direction to the implementation of their own philosophy. Aristotle insisted that the art of education existed only in order that a certain character of soul might be produced in the young, and that the production of that character was its end. Livingstone told us long ago that "the prior task of education is to inspire and to give a sense of values and the power of distinguishing, as in lesser things, what is first-rate from what is not." No true educationist would disagree with the hope behind these definitions, but Colville's suggestion highlights the direction given by the English tradition. "The encouragement of informed, civilised intellect through tested knowledge of the best that humans have achieved; as rational, individual thought and articulate expression". The two key words are "encouragement" and "individual". The British idea of education is pragmatic and adaptable. Attitudes are encouraged, not produced. The educationist relies on the rationality and the development of **Individual** thought, through its study of the best thought patterns of the past.

Primarily the ideas on education that have shown themselves in South Africa have developed from religious motives. The attitudes of the Afrikaner Nationalist and of the English-speaking South African cross each other at many points, but the particular difference lies in the acceptance of authority. The Afrikaner Nationalist acknowledges a purely Calvinist religious motive, using all subjects of the curriculum to further this interpretation of the religious background of education. The community must be answerable for the individual. The Church knows the way, and he must learn the whole lesson from the Church via the State. The English-speaking South African accepts the religious basis of education, but emphasises the Christian way as he sees it. In 1949 A H Murray added his dissentient remarks to the Eiselen Report, and in them he states that the conception that education has a "social purpose" and that its function is to preserve and propagate the group "Culture" conflicts with the Christian standpoint that man is an end in himself, and that his social institutions are merely means to aid him to a better life. He comments that the Nationalist view of education is based on a faulty interpretation of the Aristotelian theory. Aristotle did not imply that man possessed a herd instinct in the modern sense of being a gregarious animal dependent for his personal survival on his existence within the group. What Aristotle did say was that man was a rational being and that, since reason joins things in the proper way, it is possible for man to live with other human beings and yet retain his individuality.

The term "English-speaking South Africans" must not be thought of as including only those born in South Africa. An English-speaking South African must surely be one whose attitude to life has been formed by his devotion to this country. This does not mean that they have been consciously dogmatic about their contribution to South Africa. As Donald Wood puts it: "that would be too un-English". It was their habit of mind which gave them their value to the land. The whole history of the British people has proved the advantage of assimilation from foreign cultures. D R Beeton in an article on Pauline Smith

said, "Spontaneity of vision in the non-South African sometimes created a better South African Englishness than a lifetime of unseeing and grudging service."

The missionaries who were prime movers in education in South Africa have often been accused of lack of knowledge of and therefore lack of understanding of the people among whom they worked, but it was their "spontaneity of vision" that stirred them into action where others had accepted the conditions they found there without question. These men had brought to South Africa the traditions of the Church which had, as Butterfield has it, "conducted education and schools, built universities, and given its protection to men opening the path to modern science". It was not surprising that the mission schools established in South Africa showed no differentiation. All the children were there to be educated and there could be no division. Such men as Bishops Gray and Armstrong had one ideal and that was that they should give lives of service, bringing the fruits of education to whomsoever would come to them. "Bishops" became one of the famous names among schools in the Cape, and bore the stamp of the strong men who founded it, and of the religious basis behind it.

Gradually a new concept emerged. The State must take responsibility for the education of its citizens. Education must be encouraged for the sake of the body politic. Governor Cradock used what he called Church-Clerk schools, government grants were given to local enterprise. And, of course, the government, paying the piper, more and more called the tune. Education came to be used, as it so often has been since, as a political football. Somerset clutched at it to anglicise the children as he was attempting to anglicise all the other aspects of South African life.

It is ironical and totally in keeping with the type of paradox which delights the English, that it was a counter-attack against this autocrat that brought to light an instance of the influence of other English-speaking South Africans on the policy of education in South Africa. Fairbairn and Pringle, of "freedom of the Press" fame, had started their own academy, and although Somerset used his influence to ruin their school, the stand made by these doughty fighters made itself felt in new policies in education. The broadening of the curriculum in their Academy, the establishment of good libraries, the encouragement of initiative and research on the part of their pupils — all these set their mark on subsequent styles of educational institutions.

In 1838 Sir John Herschel, assisted by Col Bell, had drafted a memo suggesting that education in the schools should become more secular and more professional. "To make the profession of education truly respectable, it must be made an independent profession", said Herschel, and went on to discourse on the importance of improving the status of the teacher and of freeing him from the dominance of the religious tradition.

Fairbairn took this idea further and saw the need for professional supervision of the whole system. His "Memorandum for the Advancement of Education at the Cape" dated 18 February, 1838, and his journalistic efforts to enlist public support for the scheme, contributed to the appointment of a Superintendent-General of Education, and James Rose Innes (grandfather of the eminent jurist of the same name) was given this post. He did much to implement the ideas set out, by his methodical and tactful approach. Fairbairn maintained his interest in education and in 1854 was chairman of a Select Committee to investigate the working of the existing educational system. Many of the findings of this committee were incorporated in the Education Act which was finally passed in 1856. The Cape had set the pattern for education in South Africa, and this was a pattern which unmistakably bore the stamp of Fairbairn and his colleagues.

When we consider the advance in the Cape, it is not surprising to know that when the Transvaal was annexed by the British in 1877, only eight per cent of its White children were at school, as compared with 49 per cent in the Cape, 60 per cent in Natal, and 12 per cent in the Free State. The Cape and Natal had forged ahead, and their progress was sustained by such men as Langham Dale and Robert Muir who were successively Superintendents-General of the Cape after James Rose Innes.

But now the whole situation of the North was to change rapidly and radically. The backlash of resentment against the British annexation, which might have driven the republicans to an even greater dependence on their old ways of life, was overwhelmed by the changes

which inevitably followed the discoveries of mineral wealth and diamonds. President Burgers was the first to see the writing on the wall, and he introduced an educational system very like that which Somerset had used 50 years before. It failed for the same reason. Both were using education to achieve the absorption of the "other sector". Somerset wanted to Anglicise the Afrikaners; Burgers wanted to Afrikanise the "foreigners". Parents were given no say, the church was bypassed. With the opening up of the Witwatersrand gold reefs the problem became acute. Numbers of uitlanders poured in, some with low educational qualifications, others well versed in the best that Europe could offer. Again, a State educational system was started under the leadership of Dr Mansvelt from Holland. The figures quoted earlier show the small number of children at school at this time. The State system was therefore geared for the lower standards, and many of the uitlanders found this unacceptable for their children. Just as in Somerset's time the Afrikaners had set up their own private schools devoted to CNO ideals, so the uitlanders set up the Council for Education, Witwatersrand, to establish the type of school they wanted, and English-speaking churches followed suit.

The onset of the Anglo-Boer War and the concentration of children in camps put a different complexion on affairs. Teachers were brought out from Britain and in 1903 John Adamson was appointed as Director of Education for the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony. This was a most fortunate choice. Adamson was an educationist through and through. He had a good measure of those qualities we have spoken of as characteristic of the English. He was far-sighted, a good organiser, a pragmatist who could see both sides of a problem as it developed, and could compromise and adapt where necessary, but stand firm if the situation demanded it. His only aim was to provide a sound education, and he treated with a fine contempt any efforts to sabotage or side-track this aim. To achieve it, he realised that it was necessary to establish an education system which would be broadly acceptable to all sections, and this he accomplished.

The Selborne minute on education, largely composed by Adamson, gave an indication of the premises he had adopted. It ensured that education would gradually become compulsory; that parental interest would be maintained by local representatives on advisory school committees and boards; that the appointment of teachers should satisfy local wants, but be ultimately a professional matter; that Mother tongue education should be a **sine qua non** in the lower standards.

It is small wonder that when Smuts, then Minister of Education, drew up the South African Education Act in 1907, he relied greatly on the advice of this Englishman who had become so completely South African in his desire to see a uniform education sweeping the whole country. Adamson's comments on the Act are indicative of his own ambitions for education. As Michael O'Dowd says, Adamson's sound principles and long term goals were worked in with existing traditions and the situation he found before him.

To staff enough schools for the new compulsory education in the lower standards, he had to emplcy unqualified teachers, but these were not given permanent appointments, and he never ceased to press for a fully qualified staff, while at the same time insisting that the compulsory standard should be raised and raised again.

Other points in the legacy that Adamson left to South Africa included his encouragement of initiative in teachers as well as in pupils. He urged the formation of professional teachers' associations and saw that teachers took part in the development of syllabuses that he had introduced — history, geography, nature study, religious instruction, hygiene, all brought in to supplement the Three Rs which had been the basic ration before this. He encouraged the development of technical education, but broke away from the English system by providing the students with a solid academic base on which to build the scientific or technical side.

Where teachers were concerned, Adamson's words could well be used to express what we now consider as our progressive attitude. Teachers, he said, were members of a learned profession, and their status and salaries must not be inferior to those in other learned professions. When we remember those itinerant and degraded folk who had been the representatives of education in early South Africa, we realise what his unfailing support of the profession must have meant to its members

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additional comments

DR. WHITMORE RICHARDS

Dr Richards, who has been chairman of the Witwatersrand Council of Education for the past thirty years, has taken the lead in suggesting ways and means of finding the teachers which the schools need.

Dr Richards has made the following comments:

"Over the last decade it has become increasingly clear that three and a half million Whites cannot provide all the skills needed for a total population of twenty-two and a half million. At a time of chronic manpower shortage it is unlikely that the teaching profession, especially English-medium teaching, will get more than its share . . .

"In the past there has been a sufficient surplus of able and dedicated Afrikaans teachers to provide for the needs of English schools. But this pool is drying up. There are more and more openings for young Afrikaans-speaking persons in commerce and industry and professions other than teaching . . .

"The shortage of science and mathematics teachers has become critical, not only in English schools. Unless something is done **all** our universities are going to run short of students registering in the faculty of science; and this will quickly be translated into a dearth of these skills in recruits to commerce and industry and to the technical branches of the Government service, especially the big, new ISCOR, ESCOM and SASOL ventures . . .

"The critical shortage of teachers calls for Cabinet action but the Government has been slow to move because certain sections have a rooted objection to bringing teachers from overseas, though the experience of history has shown that the impact of teachers could enrich and expand the profession . . . The Department of National Education should co-ordinate the needs of the provinces and send a recruiting team to London or elsewhere to select carefully a limited number of well-qualified young men to teach mathematics and science. Initially, they could be brought out on a three-year contract and the best could be invited to stay."

Editor's note:

At the time of writing this it has been reported in the Times Educational Supplement that there are over 7 000 unemployed teachers in Britain.

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at that time. It was a sad thing that Adamson resigned in 1924 feeling that the political parties were against his ideals, when in fact they proved later that this was not so. His ideals were so strongly woven into the South African scene that they survived even his own disillusionment.

All through this time of development in education for South African Whites, there had been a steady effort to promote better facilities for Non-Whites. Such men as D Kidd, M Evans, and C T Loram, accepted the principle of separate courses of study and separate schools, but urged more adequate education. Edgar Brookes in his "History of Native Policy in South Africa" in 1924 insisted that such education must be neither assimilating nor subordinating. Others, like Bennie, Macquarrie and Rheinhalt-Jones felt that racial differences were not important, and Stuart of Lovedale tried to emulate the British public schools and give a special type of teaching for the Black elite. All of these men left distinct marks on the problems faced by workers in this field.

It has been said that the English have a tradition of victory in the things of the spirit. In South Africa, the English-speakers have always been a minority, but that they have been what Toynbee calls "a creative minority" is evident in the way that educational policies have been changed to fall into line with their inclinations. Pretorius refers to the 1820 settlers as "those, who, not seeking it, yet left behind them a greatness reaching out beyond our borders, and whose names are etched in the granite of our history for ever.' Many who followed them have won the right to be included in that description.