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Lengwitch

Academic Support Programmes for a Changing South Africa

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Foreword

This edition of LENGWITCH is devoted almost entirely to a topic that is as controversial as it is topical: Academic Support Programmes. The promises of politicians apart, it is clear that South Africa is rapidly moving towards an open non-racial society. The educational and economic implications of such a change in the structure of our society cannot be under-estimated. If South Africa is going to survive economically it is going to have to educate vast numbers of managers, engineers, scientists, economists, technicians and teachers. The first halting steps towards such a re-emphasis in our education system has been taken by the so-called open schools and universities. And it is these institutions that are at the cutting edge of the educational dilemma that faces the country: how to teach, train and educate large numbers of people, most of whom have, what is described euphemistically as, "a disadvantaged educational background." Most of the pupils and university students who have been admitted to the 'open' institutions come from an education system in which rote learning is the norm; where there is a strong emphasis on the authority of the teacher as the sole arbiter in a world of knowledge divided between what is right and what is wrong; where there is little opportunity for discovery or independent learning; where, in fact, few of the teachers are properly qualified; and, where there is little recognition, theoretically or practically of the central role of language in cognitive development.

Given the heritage of appalling teaching, impoverished backgrounds, institutionalised discrimination and intellectual deprivation, what can schools, technicons, teacher-training colleges and universities do to help their pupils and students fulfill their intellectual potential? How can they assist them to realise their intellectual and material ambitions? These are questions that more and more educational institutions in South Africa are having to face. There are no easy solutions. Years of institutionalised neglect and ideological myopia have resulted in the devaluing and waste of South Africa's greatest asset: its human resources.It is hoped that the papers published in this edition of LENGWITCH will go some way to alerting those who need to be alerted to the problems confronting us all. Further it is hoped that LENGWITCH can become a forum for promoting debate and ideas towards solving what is the greatest educational problem facing the country. We would like to encourage those who have experience in Academic Support in the classroom or at a theoretical level, in whatever aspect of education, to contribute to LENGWITCH in the future.