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Gardiner, Michael

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Michael Gardiner

LIBERATING LANGUAGE
PEOPLE'S ENGLISH FOR THE FUTURE

People's Education for People's Power[1] took form barely a year ago at the conference called by the Soweto Parents' Crisis Committee in December 1985.[2] Since then, the March 1986 Education Crisis Conference, public statements by National Education Crisis Committee executive members, articles collected for publication,[3] papers at conferences[4] and discussions at regional and local levels have provided those interested with an increasingly substantial body of material upon which to reflect.[5] Even so, there is no brief answer to the question 'What is People's Education?', for it is quintessentially developmental, a process involving entire communities and which is being explored in the teeth of ferocious opposition. The notion of academics or experts circulating decisive formulations among the masses is contrary to the nature of People's Education for People's Power. The most authoritative documents on the issue remain the resolutions passed at the December 1985 and March 1986 Education Crisis conferences.

Everything that has been said subsequently is a gloss upon those decisions and guidelines.

It is obvious why there is a present desire to press vehemently for an alternative form of education for the whole country. People's Education for People's Power is but one manifestation of the political, cultural and intellectual ferment of our time. Out of long-standing convictions about the utter inferiority and inappropriateness of Bantu Education has emerged a wider vision of the need to restructure the bases of all education in this country. Furthermore, it is the government which is trapped in the consequences of its policies, while the proponents of a nonracial democracy generate radical alternatives as part of the creation of a new society. And it has been realized that the forms that the alternatives take are as important as their content, for the processes by which the new evolves are as much a challenge to dominant concepts as the substance of alternative education can be. There are traditions of alternative education on which to draw. The Irish hedge-schools, the Greek response to Turkish domination,the practices of Paulo Freire and certain Cana-

dian experiments are available instances. But People's Education for People's Power provides opportunity for the translation of indigenous experience into a system.

For example, but for the work of radical historiography during the last fifteen years,[6] there would not have been the materials or the methodology with which to compile the history courses which are emerging from the People's Education Commission.[7] Similarly, African and Southern African literature in English has been studied systematically only recently at colleges and universities and there are only now some resources available with which to work. In addition, recent thinking about language, especially in certain areas of applied linguistics, has opened possibilities for the reconsideration of the teaching of English.

It would be erroneous to consider education in South Africa without careful acknowledgement of the connexions between childhood (and what that means requires the most careful attention) and education:

> One truth about South Africa... is to be found in understanding the relationship between unequal systems of formal learning and its systems of early generational nurturing. A fundamental of this evolution is a teaching and an early learning about human polarization, pain, injury, power and powerlessness.[8]

As Nasson's reminder indicates, formal education is but one aspect of the broader social experience.People's Education for People's Power acknowledges this overtly and deliberately. It redefines the role of the teacher in the community, it acknowledges the relationship between educational issues and community concerns such as rent and consumer boycotts. By perceiving education in much wider terms than school- and institution-based programmes can imply, People's Education for People's Power encourages thinking about the interests of the whole of society. This is in sharp contrast to the educational (and social) attitudes contained in the De Lange Committee's Report on the provision of education in South Africa, which proposes solutions to narrowly defined problems and needs as determinedby the state, the private sector and industry, and as ex-

pressed by technological interests.[9]

People's Education for People's Power intends to apply to all South Africans, and cannot be distinguished from government by all South Africans in a unitary state. It is meant to replace education for exploitation as well as education for domestication.

At the heart of the conception and the evolution of People's Education lies the process of consultation. Consultation has characterised the method and style of the National Education Crisis Committee as well as all the structures which have been set up for the implementation of its programmes. One such structure is the formation of Parent-Teacher-Student associations at each school. These associations are dependent upon organized parent/community groups, teacher unions (preferably one, representing all teachers) and student representative councils. At local and regional levels these PTSAs - composed of democratically elected, mandated and accountable representatives - are intended to guide the implementation of People's Education. Where the formation of PTSAs has proved difficult (because of school closures, emergency regulations and

the like), the street, block and area committees are intended to reflect and represent the educational concerns of communities. Furthermore, student organizations, political movements and trade unions are becoming closely involved in the process of People's Education for People's Power.

Education and educational responsibility are thus neither the prerogative of children nor adults alone, and education will not be confined to schools and conventional institutions of learning.The engagement of all people and all spheres of activity in continual education is a particularly marked feature of People's Education.

The truism that education, no matter how conservative, is concerned at least partly with change is given sharp re-emphasis in People's Education because of the emerging focus upon process as its intrinsic mode. This is a matter of great complexity and its implications are vast. Central to the notion of process within People's Education are consultation and subsequent development. Then there is the understanding by the learner of process:

the educational processes and procedures which involve learning and power, the understanding by workers of economic and productive processes so that they can contribute to union and industrial decisions as well as to community concerns and the education of parents in issues affecting their destinies. These are instances which can be extended.

At other levels, process has implications for the following:

* the role and function of the educator when learners are actively engaged in their own education
* procedures most appropriate to such learning experiences - methods, modes of presentation, learning resources
* attitudes to knowledge - its origins, purposes, implications and responsibilities
* the relationships of parts to the whole and the context of the whole
* the interrelationships between the school, the factory and education centres within the community
* the relations of subjects to the curriculum

* subject content and emphasis
* learner involvement in the actual production of materials
* the connexions between mental and manual labour
* the role of the intellectual, the academic and the expert
* the purpose and function of skills
* methods of evaluation and means of accreditation.

Process also provides a means whereby to respond to the extensive powers being used by the government to inhibit community-based initiatives.[10] And the difficulties faced by teachers - many of whom are likely to be daunted by the requirements of People's Education, given that their education, training, experience and organization have not provided them with the confidence or resources to adapt to significant change - must also be addressed through processes which make accessible to them the innovative nature of People's Education.

Consultation, organization and the setting

up of supportive structures are essential to dealing with both major difficulties referred to. People's Education for People's Power depends absolutely upon the closest co-operation between all the sectors within every community for the pressure to implement it and for the generation of resources and attitudes to learning which are its central features.

Already in response to the demonstrable failure of all official systems of education there has arisen an educational movement which is generating theory, purpose, practical content and new social direction within the context of broad-based campaigns against all manifestations of apartheid. Compared to this, the ventures of corporate finance, the state's pretensions at the achievement of educational equality, official enquiries and the experiments of almost all private schooling are marginal and irrelevant.[11] People's Education for People's Power is neither a slogan nor a rallying cry. It is a mass-based undertaking by an entire society to transform itself.

It is the transformative function which People's Education for People's Power is intended to

have that lies at the heart of the proposals put forward in People's English, proposals which are being considered by a wide range of groups.

In the first instance, People's English intends to assist all learners to:

- understand the evils of apartheid and to think and speak in non-racial, non-sexist and non-elitist ways
- determine their own destinies and to free themselves from oppression
- play a creative role in the achievement of a non-racial democratic South Africa
- use English effectively for their own purposes
- express and consider the issues and questions of their time
- transform themselves into full and active members of society
- proceed with their studies.[12]

It must be noted that the entire educational community is intended here, not only all those at school and in conventional institutions of

learning. Furthermore, these general aims do not distinguish between age, occupation, reasons for study or the linguistic situation or history of the learners.

Thus far in its evolution, People's English has drawn distinctions in its public documents betweenwhat is called language competence and content, but it must be stressed that the materials being generated seek the fullest possible integration between the processes involved in both the achievement of competence and the exploration of written, oral and visual texts. This concern with integration exists not only because of the split between 'language' and 'literature' which has bedevilled almost all language study in the West. The integration of all attention to language is necessary as the forms that learning processes take are of central importance to both the nature of the struggle for appropriate education in a just society and to the sense of reality that education should give to those freeing themselves from the astonishingly complex influences of oppression. The earlier brief comments about the significance of process to the educational experience of learners are particularly

germane to this matter.

Thus People's English cannot construct itself upon setworks 'more relevant to the experiences and background of the learner' and upon the implementation of the English as Second/Foreign Language principles generated so industriously and marketed so assiduously by British universities, publishers and agents of its Foreign Office. That would be tantamount to changing the name of the actors but retaining the same old play.

Not only should future syllabi be reconceptualised; they must proceed from different principles. For example, notions about what texts can be explored legitimately need to be expanded to include:

> popular culture, biographies and life histories,oral literature including song, talks by people of the community and elsewhere, written literature from the whole world (including translations) but particularly from our time and place, newsletters, pamphlets, advertisements, public documents, speeches, essays, sermons and orations, cartoons, material

from radio, television and film, texts from other subjects in the curriculum and the range of languages and dialects in South Africa.[13]

The study of literary texts, embedded in the syllabus as one form of cultural expression, should be based upon a range of approaches so that learners are not subject to the limitations that a single, dominant method imposes. Departments of English at universities and colleges can be as one-dimensional in their ideologies as departments of History were. Teachers of English will thus need to be trained to make the possibilities of texts accessible to learners in a variety of ways. Linked to different modes of literary exploration should be opportunities for learners to become aware of language and its flexibilities, so that side-by-side with the normative tendencies of language teaching will be the constant sense of the diversity of languages, language forms, dialects, registers and modes of communication which people actually use. Examples of everyday speech with a wide diversity of texts would provide materials to make this work possible. But if the experience of language is to be

a process in which the learner plays a part while conscious of its meaning and context, and if that experience at the same time is to transform and to empower, the learner's critical resources must be engaged in every aspect of what is being discussed.

Thus the wretched dichotomy between facts and values[14] should be healed by the materials and the methods selected. Furthermore, the ideological significances of all language should be open to constant scrutiny. Because we are now in a time of conflict and change, the 'inner dialectic quality of the sign'[15] is more easily evident, especially in political discourse. But in more tranquil periods and in less contentious-seeming texts, that plurality of meanings requires persistent and constant revelation so that whichever modes of discourse are dominant and influential, learners will be capable of critical responses to claims and assertions. This will be particularly necessary in unravelling the terms which racial capital has entrenched more deeply than most commentators are prepared to conceded. Work currently being done on critical linguistics is of great importance here,[16] addressing as it does questions of language and power as it offers techniques for resisting the

text where useful and necessary.[17]

Allied with these examples of what might occur in English lessons should be experience for learners of production as process. The designing, wording, making and use of news-sheets, pamphlets, posters, bulletins and fixed-format documents have their obvious uses in a multitude of circumstances. This would be only one dimension to the active part that learners would be expected to play in their own education. Apart from participation in decision-making structures, learners of English would be drawn into the process of self and mutual education through an emphasis upon discussion, the sharing and pooling of ideas, argument, dramatization, performance, song and demonstration. The collection and recording of community-based experiences, the telling and retelling of stories, as well as the exploration of life-histories are examples of what is possible. So too should be the recognition in the discussion of a poem, for example, that what the group or class discovers and reveals is the truth for those people at that time, capable of revision or reconsideration at a later stage, but not to be verified or corrected by outside, received opinion.

The importance of such a climate of critical and interpretive responsibility must be stressed. The purpose is to enable people to develop confidence in the formation of conclusions and opinions. Far from imprisoning people within the limitations of their own resources, this process allows them to encounter ideas and arguments as enquirers rather than as victims. Received wisdom is not discarded by such an approach. But the sacrosanct is open to scrutiny and questioning. Most important is the sense in the learners that the text and its provenance are to be explored in terms of what the learners (and the teacher if there is one) can bring to that enquiry. Misconceptions - so-called - are bound to occur, but they are likely to have more meaning than external, authoritative opinion.

For these and similar processes to occur, language competence must include the ability to say and write what one means as well as to be able to defend a point of view through argument, debate and persuasion. The skills of negotation should be allied to hearing what is said and what is hidden in speech, and linked to this should be fluency in reading print with the ability to resist it when necessary. An understanding

of the relationship between language and power should be accompanied by the linguistic resources to create, to reflect and to invent, as well as to play, joke and to rejoice. The notion of competence which underlies these basic attributes is the previously cited aim of enabling learners to use English effectively for their own purposes.

The inclusion among the texts which should be available for exploration of essays and public documents is important to look at. If, for example, learners explore the essays of Cabral, Fanon, Ghandi, Gwala, Machel, Nkosi, Schreiner and Soyinka, and if they give attention to such historic documents as the Freedom Charter, the U N Declaration of Human Rights, the Communist Manifesto and the French Constitution, they are likely to be engaged in issues well beyond even the broad boundaries of People's English, regarded as a subject in the curriculum. And this is where there is a most interesting debate at the moment. Not only are we looking at English as a medium of instruction in most educational institutions from day one (the language policies of SWAPO and the ANC point to this), but at a reconsideration of the con-

,entional boundaries between subjects as we know them in South Africa. Thus there is thought being given to the introduction of additional subjects in People's Education (such as Political Education) and to the reconstitution of subjects into broad-based areas of study such as Cultural Studies.[18] where cultural implications would take pre-eminence over the concerns of individual disciplines so that the study of literature, for example, would not be privileged to the degree that it has tended to be. This line of thought is reinforced by the view that literature, or the study of language as a whole, should not bear the responsiblity for imaginative development alone: all experiences and ideas have full imaginative potential which ought to be developed. Thus the divisions between 'creative' and 'factual' activities can be removed so as to prevent certain abilities and preferences from being marginalised and the others from being limited to Gradgrindery.

The major reason for this account of some of the possiblities generated by thought about future South African education is to indicate the degree to which that debate has opened the way for new and fresh infusions of energy. This energy is not an outburst of oppositional

frenzy, in which alternative comes to mean reactionary. Instead of the dour and bureaucratic preoccupations with convenience, precedent, triplicated rituals and other dull-eyed dissuasions, the intelligence and experience of an entire society are available for the development of possibilities grounded upon deeply felt and considered needs.

To the sceptic, the spectre of People's Education for People's Power brings reverberations of the excesses of the Red Guards' 'Hundred Flowers' campaigns. To the pessimist, educational change will be throttled by the inherent timidity and conservatism of teachers, ramified by the overweening desire of parents to see their children educated for a 'piece of paper'. To the traditionalist, People's Education breaks the necessary barriers between the learned and the ignorant, and sweeps away received wisodom in the collapse of 'standards'.

Such attitudes, well-meaning when they are not simply neurotic, are perhaps a greater challenge to People's Education than the ferocious restrictions currently imposed by the state. One response to such attitudes is to argue

the links between educational change and the entire liberation struggle for a transformed society. And that in turn poses the paradox that there might be more opportunity now to work for thoroughly alternative education than might be the case when a future government deals with the hard issues of running the country.[19]

Constraining as economic and other circumstantial realities can be, it would be wrong to regard the movement towards People's Education or People's Power as utopian or unrealistic. Designing and planning and discussing education which addresses the full humanity of a people who have lived under one of the most pernicious systems in human history is a task well beyond self-indulgent speculation and wish-fulfilment. Not only must the powers of apartheid be resisted, but at the same time the potentialities within the community of South African people must be liberated. This is the task which People's Education for People's Power has set for us all.

(This paper was originally presented to the History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, February 1987.)

NOTES

1. To refer to 'People's Education' only is to give the term and the concept an easy assimilability which does not do justice to the notion of education implicit in the full phrase.

2. The resolutions passed at the December 1985 and March 1986 Education Crisis Conferences are important to study. They are conveniently available in Perspectives in Education v 9 no 1 July 1986 pp 60-70

3. The availability of these articles has been retarded by the confiscation of materials by the police from NECC offices in November 1986. Subsequent restrictions upon the activities of the NECC have made publication even more difficult.

4. Among those who have offered papers on People's Education at conferences are: David Adler, Ysuf Gabru, Michael Gardiner, Ken Hartshorne, Hilary Janks, Vusi Khanyile, Malcolm Mackenzie.

5. I am aware of two post-graduate dissertations on People's Education and at least one college of education offers an elective course in this field.

   The HSRC is presently conducting an enquiry into People's Education.

6. This work has been carried out by Anglo-South African historians. For a clear account of the issues involved in exploring alternative approaches to History, see Belinda Bozzoli ed. 1983. Town and Countryside in the Transvaal Johannesburg Ravan, esp pp 1-8.

   See too Samuel Raphael ed. 1981. People's

History and Socialist Theory London.

7. This Commission was set up at the March 1986 Education Crisis Conference to give content to People's Education. It is currently led by Zwelakhe Sisulu. The Commission functions under the executive of the National Education Crisis Committee. At the time of writing, Mr. Sisulu is in detention.

8. Nasson B. Perspectives on education. in Burman S and Reynolds P eds. 1986. Growing up in a divided society Johannesburg Ravan p 95.

   The experience of the young (rather than just childhood) in South Africa needs research. Nasson's focus upon the common nature of experience would be a useful starting point.

9. see Gardiner M 1984 Redefining education: the White Paper on the provision of education. Africa Perspective 24, pp 3-19.

10. 'Since June, with the sweeping powers granted by the emergency proclamation, the Government has begun a counter-offensive aimed at crippling the "alternative" community organizations and reconstructing the official administrative system.... The news blackout is part of a total war that has been declared upon the "alternative" organizations....' Allister Sparks, The Star Wednesday December 17 1986 p 20.

    The detention of members of the executive of the NECC (The Weekly Mail December 19 1986) on December 11 1986 is clearly part of the state's programme to hamper

the implementation of People's Education for People's Power.
Thus too the regulations proclaimed in terms of the 1953 Public Safety Action on 29 December 1986, whereby the Director-General of Education and Training may prohibit, among many other things .

The offering on any school or hostel premises(which include colleges of education) of any syllabus, work programme, class or course which has not been approved in terms of the (1979) Education Act. These provisos apply to educational institutions which fall under the control of the Department of Education and Training.

No 235 Public Safety Act (3/1953): Regulations, Government Gazette no. 10563

The Government Gazette of 9 January 1987 (no 10585) prohibits the discussion or drawing up of alternative courses and syllabi by the NECC.

11. This is not to discount the role that private schools can play in the present situation, but to stress the essentially mass-based nature of People's Education. Realities suggest that private and 'open' schools can test materials and implement a number of the ideas flowing from the development of People's Education. Furthermore, these schools have some time in which to demonstrate their capacity to produce students who can play a significant part in the liberation struggle. The same is true of universities.

12. NECC press release: 27 November 1986

13. Ibid.

14. Grene M. 1966. The knower and the known New York Basic Books.

Gardiner M et al. 1983. English courses

for degrees and diplomas in primary education. Johannesburg College of Education Report. Unpublished.

15. Volosinov V. 1973. Marxism and the philosophy of language tr by L Matejka and I R Titunik. New York Seminar Press. quoted in Janks H 1987. To catch a wake-up: language awareness in the South African context. submitted Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand p 60.

16. Janks H 1986. Critical linguistics and the teaching of language. Paper delivered at the Kenton-on-Jukskei conference, Johannesburg October 1986.

    McKenzie M 1986. Critical linguistics and practical stylistics: teaching the People's English instead of the Queen's English. Paper delivered at the Kenton-on-Jukskei conference, Johannesburg October 1986.

17. see Ndebele N 1986. The English language and social change in South Africa. Keynote address, Silver Jubilee Conference of the English Academy of Southern Africa. Johannesburg. September 1986.

18. This is no original idea and it is in practice in some South African schools.

19. 'Marx added to trainees' curriculum. Zimbabwean trainee teachers will soon be required to study scientific socialism - the official ideology of the country's ruling African National Union.
    The Government's intention to add scientific socialism to the teacher training curriculum was announced by Mr. Dzingai Mutumbuka, Minister of Education, in a television interview. He said that the

move would further the Government's goal of transforming the country along Marxist-Leninistic lines.

The increased emphasis on political ideology in schools has been expected for some time and follows Government exhortations that the media should also promote socialism.

Zimbabwe was one of 60 signatories to a recent declaration in Pyongyang, North Korea, calling for modern literature to be used to promote "anti-imperialist" consciousness in "the popular masses."

Mr. Mutumbuka also said that steadily increasing pupil enrolment figures meant that teacher training would continue to be a top priority.

Earlier this year Zimbabwe finally jettisoned a six-year old "education for all" policy for a more restricted system guaranteeing only two years of secondary education. After that pupils who want to continue in an academic stream are screened, with some being directed to technical or remedial courses.'

Times Educational Supplement 5 December 1986