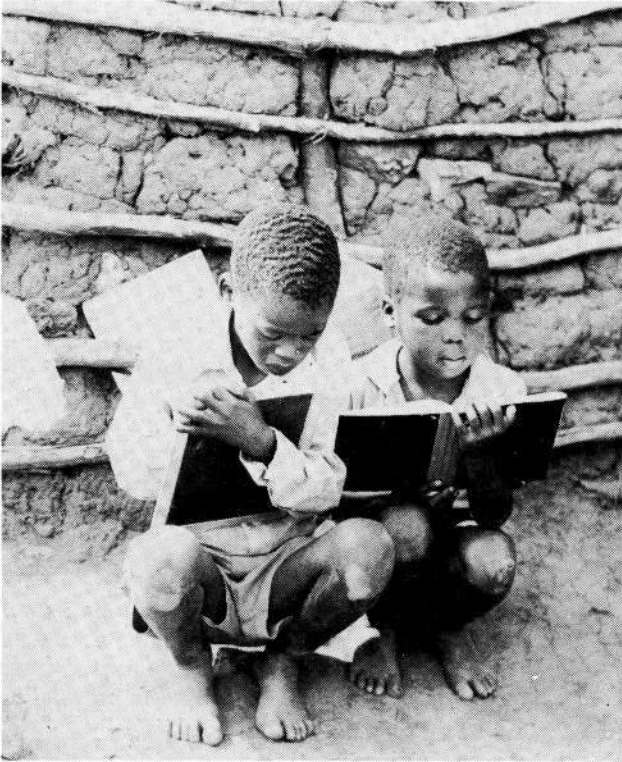


# THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ISSUES THAT AFFECT THE EDUCATION FOR BLACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA



This article will not devote much attention to the political and economic issues underlying educational problems as these have been widely and sufficiently discussed and documented elsewhere. It only needs to be emphasised in passing that the political and economic issues cripple the education for Blacks in a very serious manner. In this article no sophisticated research findings or persuasive arguments will be given to prove that the education for Blacks suffers tremendously also as a result of **social** and **cultural** issues that exist in the South African social system. A few of these issues will be discussed in this article.

First, let it be borne in mind that school education for Blacks is a foreign imposition that was grafted into the social and cultural life of the various tribal societies by the missionaries. This introduction of school education divided Blacks into educated and non-educated classes but also divided them into Christianised and non-Christianised classes. When later industrialisation and urbanisation came about, both groups mentioned above were affected. These social processes set in motion a dynamic movement from stable norms of traditionalism to highly unstable conditions of modernisation. Those groups or individuals who were favoured by circumstances and who also possessed the ability to adapt quickly to new conditions moved faster through the process of

social transformation. Those groups who were left behind at the various stages of development were mainly found in the rural areas. Even in these areas there are varying levels of rurality. The urban people are also at the various stages of urbanisation. This is complicated by the political system in South Africa which frustrates the free movement of Black people.

If education is understood as a process of cultural transmission of beliefs, norms and values of society, the issue that arises for Black education is: whose cultural values, beliefs and norms are being transmitted by Black education? Let me quickly stress that I am not pleading for the so called black oriented education. During the missionary era (up to 1953) the Christian norms were clearly and deliberately pursued. Schools were found in and around mission stations and pupils came mainly from families that had accepted Christianity. When **mass education** was promoted during the 25 years of Bantu Education, pupils began to come from all sorts of families who were at the various levels of transition from traditionalism to modernism.. The heterogeneity of social background of the pupils made it very difficult for the teachers to uphold a consistent value system. The teachers themselves did not understand the educational implications of these social dynamics because of their own background and poor qualifications. The consequence of this situation was that school education became concerned merely with the imparting of bare facts of the subject matter which were hardly related in any way with the daily lives of the pupils. It was not infrequent to find teachers teaching **hygiene** to dirty pupils in dirty classrooms and surroundings. I must also stress here that that were several examples of schools and pupils that were always very neat and tidy. The point I am making here is that many things that were learnt at school were only remotely related to the pupils' daily lives and experiences in their homes. Historical and geographical facts were memorised without much understanding. Scientific facts were taught without developing a sense of scientific inquiry. One can find several examples from any school subject which illustrate lack of congruence between the culture of the school and the culture of the home.

## NORMS

Secondly, let it be understood that in Western societies (from whence formal education for Blacks came) school education promotes middle class norms. Pupils from the lower classes have always found it difficult to do as well as the pupils who come from middle class homes. Black people in South Africa are not only coming from a

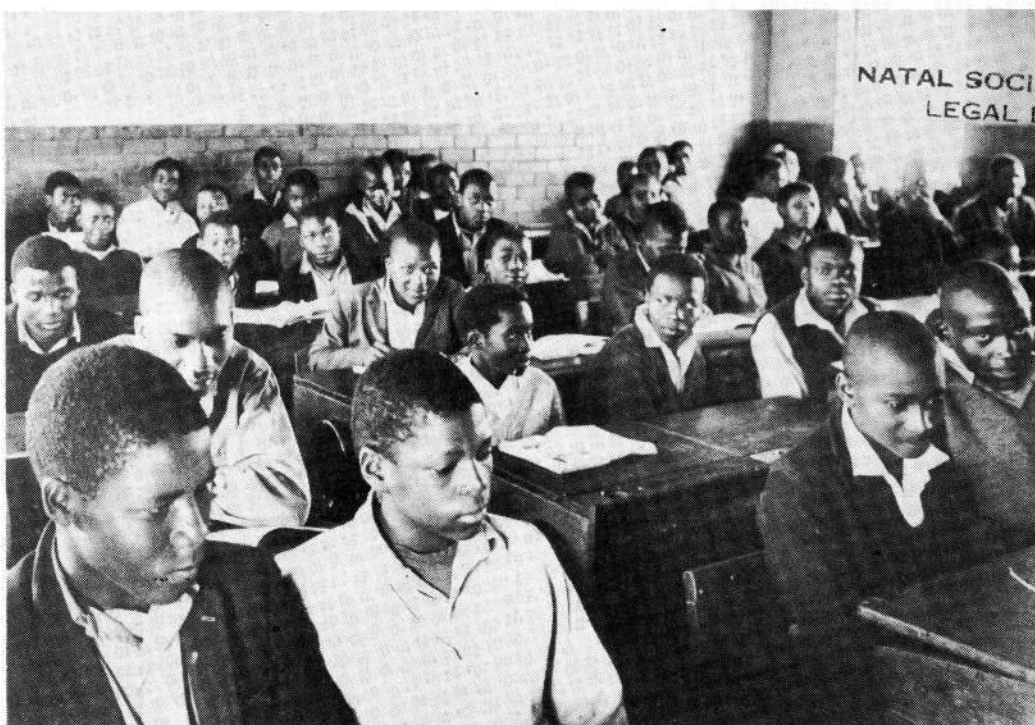
culture in transition, but are also at the bottom of the South African social structure which happens to be determined by race as well. It is to the Black's great credit that a sizeable number have been able to surmount these social and cultural barriers and are able to compete favourably with the other race groups. But these are exceptions. The great majority is seriously handicapped and cannot get out of this dilemma. A few children who get admitted into White private schools escape this dilemma but probably get into a worse one. They get alienated from their cultural group without being accepted or assimilated into the White cultural group. This is complicated by the political issues which create an atmosphere of discrimination of Blacks and make it difficult for them to surmount their educational problems. If the Blacks were left to handle the problem of coping with a situation of adjusting a foreign system of education to their social and cultural circumstances, they would have enough homework to do. What I am saying here is that if Blacks were afforded the same type of facilities and equal provision of everything, they would be faced with the one problem of adjusting to a discontinuity between their home culture and school culture. Problems (about overcrowding, high failure rates, high drop-out rates, leaks of examination question papers, lack of facilities, poor teaching, under-qualified teachers, delayed or non-payment of teachers' salaries) add up to a situation in which Black schools are functioning at a very low level of productivity. An attempt to improve the quality and qualifications of teachers is frustrated by all these handicaps. How does one teach a group of 70 pupils, through a medium of a foreign tongue, a subject that one has hardly mastered himself, under drab and dreary conditions with no aids at all? The use of rote learning and the intense recourse to corporal punishment by some teachers may be a mechanism adopted by them to survive in an extremely difficult situation. The insistence by Inspectors on such matters as the keeping of records, giving of tests and plenty of written work is not very helpful in improving the quality of education.

## SCHOOL CONDITIONS

The imparting of knowledge to enable the pupils to gain real understanding and insight into the subject matter is absent. The proper development of the physical, mental and moral skills and wholesome attitudes and appreciations is absent. There are no means at school, the teachers have very little capacity and the environment is not conducive to the development of creativity, original thinking and reasoning powers. This does not mean that these qualities are not developing in Black children. They develop in spite of the situation obtained in schools and not because of it. What I am saying here is that the school is not very helpful in developing these qualities to the full. The conditions which exist in many schools tend to dwarf or even wipe out the very good work that is still done by many teachers in some relatively good schools. The tragedy is that in all these schools there are excellent, innocent children who are endowed with great talent which is not being developed to its full potential because of the present conditions. The result is that schools are not producing properly developed and educated individuals who can hold their own ground anywhere in the world in science and art, literature and religion, commerce and industry. Instead schools are providing a keg site of resistance as more and more people perceive the conditions at school to be an inevitable consequence of the general socio-political situation in the country. When pupils attack teachers and burn down school buildings they are reacting against the immediate symptoms of their frustrations. It is a suicidal syndrome of desperation. Many pupils, of course, may not be aware of the causes of their discomfort and may even be manipulated by some people with other motives.

If we left these overt issues for a moment and looked at a deeper level, the following questions emerge:

- 1) Is education an ideologically neutral process of acquiring knowledge and skills?



Unfortunately the architect of Bantu Education made pronouncements that were not very helpful when he said 'the native should be educated for his station in life'. This leaves us with another question:

- 2) What is the role of schooling in maintaining the domination of the dominant class and its culture, and the subordination of the subordinate classes and their culture?

Viewed against this light the discriminatory practices in the provision of education for the various racial and cultural groups seem to vindicate the assertion made by some people that Black education is education for slavery. Once this perception is filtered down to the consumers of a system of education, the credibility of such system is reduced to zero. Anything you do after that to try to improve the system is also going to be rejected. This explains the Black university students' inclination to boycott classes at the slightest provocation. To the outsiders this sounds like a futile and stupid exercise that is self-defeating. My interpretation is that it is a rejection of a system that is not acceptable. This is a dilemma in which Black education finds itself today.

The budget for the Department of Education and Training may have improved dramatically since 1976 and much improvement and innovations may have been effected. But if a perception of a 'system of education for slavery' still persists, the system will still be rejected. In this case the social arrangements in the country, born out of a political system which prevails, are a main cause of dissatisfaction.

### DISCIPLINE

There are two further issues of a cultural nature which affect the education for Blacks in South Africa. The first is the concept and practice of discipline. Whereas all societies accept obedience to and respect for authority as a virtue, traditional Black societies have absolutised these norms. A child is expected to obey his superiors without question. According to this norm what the elders and people in authority say must be accepted without question. In a school situation this tends to suppress creativity, initiative and originality. Teachers who do not understand the need to encourage these qualities will insist that pupils must do as they are told.

In classroom practice this is translated into rote learning and teacher-centre instruction. This situation is compounded by the fact that teachers operate in a school system that is highly centralised and over-prescriptive. All instructions come from above and a team of Inspectors see to it that these instructions are obeyed without question. This stultifying atmosphere re-inforces the traditional norm of obedience without question and reduces everybody into a state of resigned docility that is antithetical to the development of the desirable state of self-assertiveness. When this distressing condition is stressed to its limit, the students begin to rebel. In many Black schools there is always a tense atmosphere. What is more, the whole system is overwhelmingly examination-oriented. Departmental officers, teachers, parents and thus the pupils overemphasise the importance of examination and certificates on the one hand. On the other hand there is a very high failure rate. A large number of pupils are

taught 'to fail'. This generates a high level of frustration and a loss of self-esteem. These pupils may lose self-confidence and self-respect.

Teachers try to enforce their authority by a military form of discipline and the pupils rebel against this.

This situation of poor adult-child relationship is not assisted by the child's home atmosphere. In many rural homes the father is away as a migrant labourer at his place of employment for many months. Boys grow up without parental influence from their fathers. In the urban areas children seldom see their parents because these parents leave home before 6 a.m. and are not back home before 6 p.m. We are talking here about those children who still have intact families. Many children come from homes with broken families. This social factor of the disorganisation of many Black families is bound to have a deleterious effect on the child's school life. Some children actually leave their homes and squat in shacks near the school. A decent place of study is not known to them. I am leaving out of this discussion the problem for education that is created by poverty and malnutrition.

### LANGUAGE

The second issue of a cultural nature which affects the education for Blacks is the language of instruction. There are several threads which come in to complicate this issue. First there is the colonial hangover and indoctrination that made some Black people to think a really educated person is one who speaks English very well. Then there is an apparent contradiction between the desire for the development of national and cultural pride on the one hand and the desire for westernisation on the other. This conflict finds its manifestation in the language policy of the school. A very strong argument for the use of English as a medium of instruction is that it is an international language; a language of commerce and industry, science and literature. It is asserted on the other hand that African languages possess none of these characteristics yet. Therefore their use as media of instruction in schools would lock the Blacks into their small tribal cultural kraals from which they would not emerge. The pedagogically sound principle of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction throughout the school system is frustrated by non-pedagogical consideration arising from the economic and political issues. Black children learn through the medium of their mother tongue for the first four years (i.e. up to standard two) and thereafter switch over to English as a medium of instruction.

Pupils from rural areas seldom hear or use English outside the classroom. Obviously the use of a foreign medium presents the child with a double problem of having to struggle with the language as well as the concepts of a particular subject. It must be pointed out that the subject matter is itself western-oriented, selected and ordered from the western culture. The child learns about electricity when there is none in his environment. Even highly urbanised areas like Soweto have only recently had electricity installed. The extent to which the use of a foreign tongue as a medium of instruction affects the cognitive development of Blacks has not been properly investigated. It can only be imagined that a great majority struggles along and gives up sooner or later. Add to this difficult

situation the fact that the teachers who teach these pupils have themselves not mastered properly both the language of instruction and the concepts they are transmitting.

### CONDITIONS AND COMPETENCE

Since educational disability is found among socially and economically disadvantaged groups in all societies, we can conclude that there is a systematic relationship between social conditions and educational competence. The culturally deprived child is also retarded in cognitive skills by the time he enters school. Many Black children come from squalid slums which exist on the periphery of large cities. These urban slums with their overcrowded apartments offer a limited range of stimuli to a child. The scarcity of objects to manipulate and lack of diversity at home, in addition to the absence of individualised training

(because mother is busy looking after a large family or is away at work) give the child few opportunities to manipulate and organise the visual properties of his environment and thus learn to discriminate perceptually the nuances of his environment. Discrimination of form is essential as a basis for later reading readiness.

The purpose of this article was not to provide answers to the many problems that beset the education for Blacks in South Africa. The purpose was to raise issues in order to emphasise that in planning and administering an educational system for a system that abounds in socially and culturally disadvantaged children, one cannot merely be concerned with expanding facilities for learning, however worthwhile and long overdue that may also be. This calls for a wider attention to the transformation of society and deliberately attending to all those issues that constitute obstacles to the realisation of educational goals. □

by M.D. McGRATH

# THE DISTRIBUTION OF PERSONAL WEALTH IN NATAL

## 1. Introduction

Personal wealth consists of the physical and financial assets which are owned by individuals, and is distinguished from income by the fact that it is a stock of assets whereas income is a flow over time of the receipts accruing from the ownership of assets (and from other sources such as earnings).

Important reasons can be given for studying the distribution of wealth in any particular economy. Incomes from wealth account for at least 20 per cent (and often a larger proportion) of national income, and a concentration in the ownership of wealth will operate to concentrate the distribution of incomes. Wealth is also an important determinant of economic welfare, through the control it generates over resources and firms, and because it is a source of social and political power. Further, in the present search for just economic and social arrangements for South Africa the distribution of wealth is a major source of potential conflict.

This article outlines the results of research on the personal wealth of Whites, Coloureds and Asians in Natal in the year 1975.<sup>1</sup> That year was chosen for investigation since it was fairly recent, and it represented a turning point in the business cycle when 'fairly' normal values would have been recorded for assets such as shares and property. The study was based on the records of deceased estates lodged at the Supreme Court in Pietermaritzburg in the year 1975, and these estates were extrapolated to represent the population

of the living using an Estate Multiplier technique.<sup>2</sup> Although this procedure has many limitations it is nevertheless regarded as being the most accurate for obtaining an estimate of the distribution of personal wealth, and it is used in the production of annual wealth statistics by the British Central Statistical Services.

African estates were ignored, since in most cases they were insignificantly small, and the data drawn from the Supreme Court records was not representative as most African estates are processed by district administration commissioners. The omission of African wealth is unlikely to bias the results severely, for African personal wealth is a negligibly small fraction of the total, as has been shown by the small proportion of the income from wealth which accrues to Africans.

## 2. The Distribution of Wealth

The average estimated value of wealth for the race groups is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Average Wealth by Race, 1975 (R)**

	White	Coloured	Asian
All members	13 731	688	2 408
Men	18 384	1 006	3 064
Women	9 361	406	1 753