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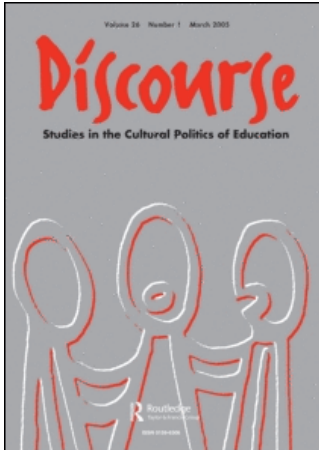
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Global Trends in Local Contexts: a South African perspective on competence debates

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In a 1994 article in *Discourse*, Roger Dale raises important questions about the plausibility of international comparisons in education policy debates. Analysing education reform in New Zealand from the perspective of New Right explanations, Dale suggests that the 'apparent homogeneity of education systems' and apparent 'policy convergence' be subject to greater scrutiny. The present article endorses Dale's cautionary comments from the perspective of recent policy debates in South Africa around a competence-based curriculum. It argues that the terms of the debate have local possibilities and constraints which cannot be straightforwardly read off from international debates or the experiences of another country, in this case Australia. In Margaret Archer's terms, 'the task of international sociology is to specify how global mechanisms combine with regional circumstances, in non-uniform fashion, to shape new trajectories and novel configurations' (1991, p. 113). This article highlights the need to address the complex relationship between global trends and local contexts in understanding education policy by considering points of comparison between Australian and South African competence debates.

Local Complexity: post-apartheid reconstruction

The post-apartheid government in South Africa has been faced with an immense task in addressing the complex legacy of apartheid education. Out of the stark inequalities of the apartheid-divided system, its priorities are to fashion a non-racial and equitable system which enjoys legitimacy and which functions effectively. 'Restoring the culture of learning' has become a catch-phrase which captures the importance of qualitative changes if structural education reform is to succeed.

As the end to apartheid became a possibility and then a reality, significant policy actors began to explore educational alternatives. Between 1990 and 1994, groups across the political spectrum—the African National Congress (ANC), the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the Private Sector Education Council (PRISEC) and the National Party (NP)—addressed themselves to policy alternatives for educational

reconstruction, both as separate organisations and in the multipartite National Education and Training Forum (NETF) and National Training Board (NTB).

As with all policy activity, the construction of problems in particular ways for policy agendas to address is itself a significant activity (see Beilhartz, 1987). In this case, it involved both a rearticulation of old concepts and the introduction of new ones. In developing local policies, all of the major groupings drew explicitly on policies developed in other countries through literature, visits, and the work of local and foreign consultants. One of the new concepts which was introduced was competence-based education and training. In placing competence on the South African policy agenda for education and training, groups like the ANC, COSATU and PRISEC were directly influenced by Australian debates, as is illustrated by references to the Finn and Mayer Reports in a range of working documents and published papers.¹ The meaning developed for competence early in the discussion was a broad one: that it should embrace the ability to apply skills to performing a task, and encompass theoretical understanding of the task, as well as the ability to transfer knowledge, skills and understanding to another context. This definition drew on the formulation of the Mayer Report:

This broader definition emphasises that competencies, especially if they are to be transferable, are not automated, 'trained' behaviours. They are mindful, thoughtful capacities. In this sense, they cannot be explained or inculcated through the use of behaviourist learning theories which rely on low-level drill and reinforcement. They must incorporate a sense of the learner as one who builds concepts and develops understandings which inform technical applications. Competence requires both 'heads on' and 'hands on'; the capacity to think about performance and also to perform. It goes beyond pure or abstracted thinking to the skilled application of understanding. Because the competent performer has grasped the principles behind actions, the possibility of transferability to new contexts is heightened. (Mayer Report, 1992, section 3.2)

However, commonsense meanings are not changed by the simple task of providing a different definition for them. Advocates of competence-based education—myself among them—found that formulating a broad definition of competence was not enough to complete the hegemonic work necessary for the term to change its connotations. While competence was not a new term in training, it was viewed with suspicion in many quarters, particularly in formal schooling. And indeed, Dwyer's comment that some of the Australian 'training programmes and competence measures ... replicated some of the worst instrumentalist aspects of the behavioural movement of the sixties and seventies' (1995, p. 18) could be applied to some of the South African training material as well. Past local experiences brought a mistrust that was indeed partly warranted. Since reappropriating the term from its behaviourist links proved to be a difficult task, policy advocates and formulators came to use the more generic term 'outcomes-based' education, particularly in the context of general education.

From the perspective of education and training reform in South Africa, adopting a competence or outcomes-based approach was seen to offer important advantages, as will be elaborated in the course of this article. It became part of a reform agenda to transcend racial inequalities with a vision of education and training as basic human rights for all. This vision was given official status in the first post-apartheid White Paper on Education and Training (1995). There are two main points to highlight about the education and training system set out in the White Paper as well as the proposals from the democratic

movement² which preceded it. These points will provide a basis for the later comparison between competence approaches in Australia and South Africa.

First, the new policy proposals brought together two axes: equity and human resource development. The inequities of apartheid education are well documented and need not be fully elaborated here. Suffice it to say that there are more than a million school-age children out of school; there are high drop out and repeater rates, particularly in black schools; most students do not complete the twelve years of schooling for senior certificate; senior certificate examinations consistently fail nearly half of all candidates; and there is large-scale adult illiteracy and under-education. The White Paper was firmly grounded in a commitment to equity to redress these past injustices. As it stated, quoting the historic words of the 1955 Freedom Charter, "The challenge the government faces is to create a system that will fulfil the vision to "open the doors of learning and culture to all"' (1995, p. 17). In its discourse of rights, the White Paper quoted the country's Interim Constitution:

This Constitution provides the historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief and sex. (*Ibid.*)

At the same time as these equity concerns, an axis of human resource development structured the White Paper. The government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) became a major symbol of fundamental change away from apartheid, and the influence of this was also to be seen in the Education and Training White Paper. In the words of this White Paper:

The main theme of the RDP's human resource development programme is the empowerment of people, through education and training, including specific forms of capacity-building within organisations and communities, to participate effectively in all the processes of democratic society, economic activity, cultural expression and community life. (1995, p. 25)

More specifically, the White Paper stated, 'National reconstruction and development, demands that the knowledge and skills base of the working and unemployed population are massively upgraded, and that young people still at school have better opportunities to continue their education and training' (*ibid.*). This development axis was combined with the equity axis in the White Paper (as in ANC and COSATU documents that preceded it) in complex if not contradictory ways.

A second important dimension of the new policy proposals is that education was conceived of comprehensively and not simply in terms of schooling. This was an important policy shift in South Africa, where large-scale illiteracy and under-education have existed alongside the system of twelve years free and compulsory education offered in the historically privileged parts of the system. Building on previous ANC policy, the White Paper proposed an articulated education and training system which would bring together different learning contexts under a single national qualification framework (NQF), and supported an integrated approach to education and training. The proposed new structure was intended to promote articulation of learning contexts, vertical and horizontal mobility for all learners, credit accumulation and transfer, as well as recognition of prior learning.

Importantly, if such a system were to operate, it would need to offer different but

formally equivalent learning experiences to students of different ages and life experiences in different learning contexts. And it is here that a competence or outcomes-based approach was proposed to offer flexibility in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment for different learners.

Global Trends? The competence agendas in Australia and South Africa

As mentioned earlier, the South African shift towards competencies and then outcomes-based approaches to curriculum and assessment drew specifically on Australian debates, among others. Similarly, support for an integrated approach to education and training reflected the influences of international trends.³ However, these international trends were adapted to address the specificities of local conditions and took specific local forms, and it is in the complex interface between global and local that meanings of these policy positions need to be understood.

During the past two decades, both Australia and South Africa have faced increasing pressure as nation-states attempting to secure growth under the intensified competition of the globalising economy. However, as Brown and Lauder point out, there is no necessary 'post-industrial logic which will lead nations to respond to the global economy in the same way, despite the fact that their fates are inextricably connected' (1996, p. 5). The Australian response has included the development of an agenda of micro-economic reform, within which education has been harnessed as a means for developing a better skilled, more productive and more flexible workforce for an internationally competitive economy (see Henry, 1992; Porter *et al.*, 1992; Lingard *et al.*, 1993; Marginson, 1993; Dwyer, 1994, 1995; Taylor & Henry, 1994; Walker, 1996). The new agenda has been based on corporatist agreements between governments (Commonwealth and state), trade unions, and business and industry. It has explicitly embraced human capital and economic rationalist approaches to post-compulsory education in what Taylor and Henry (1994) term an Australian version of 'new vocationalism'. These reforms have advocated a convergence between education and training, the incorporation of work-related competencies into the post-compulsory curriculum, and a network of pathways in a lifelong learning system. While Porter *et al.* (1992) question the equity possibilities of the new agenda, Taylor and Henry argue that, despite contradictory tendencies, it does to some extent harness equity principles, and could potentially benefit disadvantaged groups. The new agenda has been controversial and divisive in the education community. Hager points out that 'political allegiances seem to be no guide to a person's position on competence standards' (1994, p. 3), while Taylor and Henry suggest that it is not easy 'to untangle ... the new alliances and divisions, in turn symptomatic perhaps of the difficulty of assessing the meaning of "progressive" or "regressive" in the current conjuncture' (1994, p. 116).

In comparing the South African experience with this brief analysis of Australian policy shifts, five themes will be explored further: the initiation and orientation of the agenda; the part played by human capital assumptions; the integration of education and training; curriculum implications of the shift to competencies or outcomes; and issues of implementation. My purpose in doing this is to illustrate that, in Beilhartz's terms, the specific problems and solutions in the construction of the two policy agendas are different in significant respects between the two countries. In other words, though there are indeed global similarities—and specific policy borrowings—there are also important local differences.

Initiation and Orientation of the Agenda

The political conjuncture for South Africa has indeed been structured partly by the same global economic trends as Australia. However, the crucial impetus for change in South African policies has been the dramatic political transformation accompanying the end of apartheid, and the fundamental restructuring promised by the ANC-led government. Formulating policies for political and social reform as well as economic redistribution has been a mammoth task for the new government, particularly in the current international economic and political conjuncture, in which capitalism is ideologically ascendent in increasingly competitive global markets.

The formulation of the competence/outcomes agenda in South Africa was part of a platform of education and training policies formulated to counter the divisive legacies of apartheid education. Though partly corporatist in its construction (as in Australia), it cannot really be accused of having its roots in bureaucratic and managerial concerns, a criticism levelled by Porter *et al.* (1992) against the Australian reform agenda. Nor can its equity orientation be seriously disputed. Rather, the agenda stemmed squarely from groups in opposition to apartheid education and training, intent on redressing its consequences for both equity and development. The agenda was given definition by COSATU together with the ANC's Human Resource Desk prior to the change of government. Improving education and training levels, particularly for workers, became an important strategy for working towards both equity and economic development. Integration of education and training and the establishment of an adult education and training pathway with equivalence to formal schooling went together with broadbanding and multiskilling to form an agenda for change. In much of this agenda, capital was not an unwilling partner—though who should meet the costs of the education and training, and what the balance should be between general education and skills training have been points of contestation.

The new education and training agenda was more fully developed and given impetus by a highly significant and extensive consultative process initiated by the National Training Board (NTB) to draft a national training strategy. This process brought together representatives of the state, unions, capital, political and community groups to draw up a report, completed in early 1994. Notably absent from this consultation were representatives from formal schooling. The NTB report argued strongly for the integration of education and training in a single, modular, competence and credit-based qualification system held together by a national qualification framework. Though the NTB's agenda addressed the system as a whole, the virtual absence of representatives of formal schooling greatly weakened the thrust of its proposals for integration. Instead of debating a single education and training agenda, interest groups from the schooling sector were active around a different set of issues during this period, particularly issues of access, school ownership and governance. Curriculum work within the ANC drew on the NTB process and grappled with a competence/outcomes agenda (see ANC, 1994). However, this remained very broadly formulated. Consequently, although the 1995 White Paper on Education and Training made several supportive statements, there was little substance to these.

It is also worth noting that a major point of difference between the Australian and South African agendas is that policy advocacy for a competence and outcomes-based curriculum in South Africa was initially most active, not in the context of post-compulsory education as is the case in Australia, but in the context of adult basic education and training (ABET). Although it was envisaged that all education and

training would form part of a single system, and by implication, would be outcomes-based, the debate centred around ABET and received little attention in a general education context.

The important point to stress here is that the particular political formulations of the South African and Australian agendas cannot be assumed to be the same. In South Africa, the new agenda was driven strongly by anti-apartheid groups before the change of government (mainly COSATU and sections of the ANC) as part of strategies for achieving equity and development in post-apartheid South Africa. There have been strong factional differences within both COSATU and the ANC over its specific forms, and the same can be said for capital's interests in it. In both countries, the reform agenda has been multistranded in terms of supporters and contesters. However, if the agendas of the two countries are collapsed into their broad similarities, the result is not only a less nuanced picture; it is also a less accurate analysis of the economic and political possibilities and constraints in each context.

Human Capital Theory

In South Africa as well as Australia, human capital assumptions can certainly be seen in the new education and training agenda. Again, however, there are local differences which add complexity to any comparisons.

Clearly, technicist models linking education, wages and productivity in a rational and free market need to be questioned in both contexts. The general criticisms which, for example, Porter *et al.* (1992) make of human capital ideology, apply in the South African context as well. However, it needs to be borne in mind that in South Africa, access to education and training as well as wage levels have been engineered by apartheid policies which have produced specific distortions that need to be addressed. Over the last 30 years, the real growth rate in the South African economy has been declining (see Colclough & Pillay, 1994). Though the reasons for this are complex in the global context, there is broad agreement that the huge inequalities in education and skills between racial groups have been a contributing factor. Given the generally low levels of education and training among the South African workforce, there is an argument for policies for investment in education and training as part of more general development strategies (see Archer & Moll, 1992; Centre for Development Studies, 1993). Though development experiences elsewhere have called into question early human capital assumptions that investment in education could spearhead growth, a range of research studies on education and development indicate some support for arguments that there are links between education and development (see Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985; Haddad *et al.*, 1990; Samoff, 1994). However, this is not to support micro-economic assumptions that there are specific links between schools, skills and development, as Porter *et al.* ably argue against (see also Berg, 1971; McGregor, 1994; Paris, 1994). Moreover, as Brown & Lauder (1996) point out, it is more important to focus on the ways in which skills are linked to economic development trajectories than to concentrate on questions of skill formation.

The racially skewed patterns of education, wages and productivity in South Africa are well illustrated in the work of the Macro Economic Research Group (MERG), a collection of economists linked to the democratic movement. The MERG Report (Centre for Development Studies, 1993) points out that high proportions of economically active black people are illiterate and innumerate, and of those who have attended formal schooling, levels of mathematics and science education are also low. For many workers,

these low education levels are a barrier to formal skills training (and productivity) as well as to higher wages. In many cases, where workers do develop skills, these are not recognised by employers. On-the-job training is often task-specific, and does not serve as a basis for further training or mobility. In this context, claims that education is necessary for the development of the modern economy have a compelling logic. In the words of the MERG Report:

... behind the label of unskilled (black) work, there exists a large pool of unrecognised skill and a poorly motivated workforce, which has experienced many years of adversarial industrial relations during a period of macro-economic mismanagement and rapidly increasing job insecurity. The MERG proposals address these problems, and argue that the talents of this pool can contribute to productivity growth in the economy in the second half of the 1990s. (*Ibid.*, p. 156)

Importantly, the MERG proposals link access to education and training to equity rights, seen as necessary for empowerment in terms of general social and economic participation. As the Report argues:

The prospect of a democratic society poses not so much the problem of bridging the skills gap that has previously developed, than of transforming the way in which both the demand for, and the supply of, skills are generated, although it bears repeating that economic functions are neither the primary nor the sole determinants of educational provision. (*Ibid.*, p. 92)

Indeed there is a general consensus from capital to left labour in South Africa that improved education is essential for development.⁴ This does not assume that the education/wages/productivity nexus is unproblematic; but it is based on the assumption that a composite set of labour market policies will be necessary to effect social and economic changes. As de Clercq points out, it also assumes that growth and equity 'cannot be achieved through the free market but require careful state coordination and regulation as well as parallel state-co-ordinated institutional reforms in the labour market and the economy' (1996, p. 11). What these policies should be—and indeed what broad human resource development strategies might best serve growth and development—are the subject of significant debate. On the one hand, for example, the Industrial Strategy Project made up of ANC-aligned economists, has argued for South Africa to move towards post-Fordism in order to be effectively reincorporated into the global economy, and it argues for a human resources strategy which supports new forms of work organisation. On the other hand, Kraak (1994a, b, 1995) has questioned the assumptions that global post-Fordist economic trends are applicable in South Africa, or that they would be beneficial for South African social and economic development policies. He argues that the ANC-led government has inherited a legacy of economic differentiation, with a 'core' urban manufacturing sector (often not even Fordist in organisation) and a 'peripheral' economy of the rural and informal sectors, the under-developed small business sector and the unemployed. In this context, differentiated development strategies need to be considered.

What should be apparent from this discussion is that debate and use of human capital frameworks are not the same in South Africa and Australia, despite the obvious (global) similarities. The same point applies also in debates on the integration of education and training.

Redefining the Divide between General and Vocational Education

In recent years, reforms in education and training, including integration or convergence, have been the subject of considerable policy activity. At a time of policy borrowing, education and training reforms, including policies for the convergence of the two, are currently being internationally exchanged (see Finegold *et al.*, 1993). Reviewing post-compulsory vocational education and training in OECD countries, Conyer notes:

Analytically, this call for closer relations between historically distinct institutions and programs is justified in terms of economic demand for higher level qualifications in the workforce, by pressures from within educational systems for more openness and coherence of educational structures and pathways, and by pedagogical arguments in favour of 'integrated learning', that is, meaningful combinations of practical, theoretical, academic and vocational learning. (1993, p. 66)

South Africa has been no exception to this international trend. During the post-1990 period, proposals for educational changes were set out by the previous Department of National Education, and by the NTB, the ANC COSATU.⁵ With the notable exception of the previous national education department, all of these proposals favoured the integration of education and training and the promotion of higher level skills needed for economic growth. In developing these policy proposals, all of the major groupings drew explicitly on the policy experiences of other countries.⁶ The White Paper, as a policy text, grounded itself in the proposals put forward by these key policy actors, echoing similar concerns to those raised in international debate. It is important to note that in these proposals, a basis of nine years of general education was seen as essential grounding for post-compulsory integration. In the area of adult education, however, debate raged over the extent to which an adult curriculum needed to be grounded in general education and the extent to which it may be contextualised in work.

However, an important local slant on international debates is, again, the link drawn between human resource development and equity policies to redress the apartheid legacy. In this regard, the White Paper builds on the earlier ANC and COSATU political platform of 'growth through redistribution', which links popular demands for social equality with strategies for economic development. Though the White Paper is a much weakened version of earlier ANC and COSATU positions, it is interesting to note that its statement on integration is a strong one:

An integrated approach implies a view of learning which rejects a rigid division between 'academic' and 'applied', 'theory' and 'practice', 'knowledge' and 'skills', 'head' and 'hand'. Such divisions have characterised the organisation of curricula and the distribution of educational opportunity in many countries of the world, including South Africa. They have grown out of, and helped to reproduce, very old occupational and social class distinctions. In South Africa such distinctions in education and career choice have also been closely associated in the past with the ethnic structure of economic opportunity and power. (1995, p. 15)

Thus, integration has been linked with an agenda for social transformation—though of course much depends on how this agenda is taken forward in practical politics as well as in policy implementation. This point will be addressed more fully later on.

As the well-established co-ordinates of education and training begin to change, the warning sounded by members of the Australian education community that vocationalis-

ing general and critical education need not necessarily bring a progressive outcome, is an important one for South Africa as well (see Porter *et al.*, 1992; Marginson, 1993; Seddon, 1994; Taylor & Henry, 1994; Dwyer, 1995). In exploring this, Seddon's (1994) comments are helpful. Seddon acknowledges that there are certainly contradictory trends in current debates on vocationalism. She suggests that as entrenched dichotomies between education and training shift, 'there is scope for an educational politics oriented toward the reconstruction of a democratic social democracy within the framework of vocationalism' (1994, p. 64). In this context, the debate between 'education *versus* training' needs to shift towards 'progressivism *versus* conservatism on the terrain of vocationalism' (*ibid.*, p. 79). As with policy generally, outcomes are never secure, and the Australian experience highlights this usefully in the context of integration policies.

That said, it is important to recognise that general academically-oriented education has consistently played a part in social inequality. Formal schooling in South Africa has traditionally failed women and rural dwellers, to say nothing of black people. Not all of this can be laid at the door of inadequate provision; what is being provided also requires attention. Furthermore, while human capital assumptions about the links between education and work may well be problematic, this does not mean that a work-related agenda has no place in progressive education policies. Certainly, what the Australian debates suggest is that a progressive outcome on the terrain of vocationalism cannot be assumed and would need to be won.

Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment

Returning more specifically to competence debates, there are serious issues to be addressed in both Australia and South Africa about the learning and teaching assumptions underpinning the competence movement. International debate on these issues has been fierce (see for example, Norris, 1991; Hyland, 1993; Jones & More, 1993; Leicester, 1994; Edwards & Usher, 1994; Hager, 1994; Hager & Beckett, 1995; Burke, 1995; Foster, 1996; Walker, 1996). While there is general agreement that narrow, behaviourist and fragmented conceptions of competencies are undesirable, serious doubts have been raised by critics as to whether these can be avoided, and whether a move to a competence approach would bring desirable consequences in practice. Indeed, the fear is that an emphasis on outcomes may bring rigidity in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Again, however, there are important local differences to consider between South African schooling and more conventional western schooling systems, including Australia. As indicated earlier, the new government is faced with redressing a legacy of structural inequalities in access and achievement along the lines of race, gender and locality. One of the means for achieving systemic redress is to establish an integrated, articulated system under a national qualifications framework. Given that adults, out-of-school children and youth, and in-school children need to be brought together into an interlinking system, curriculum flexibility is crucial. An outcomes-based approach would allow for different learning contexts, curricula, assessment, and learning pathways to be articulated in a single system.

In my view, the appeal of an outcomes-based curriculum in South Africa stems primarily from equity concerns. The very 'performativity' for which Porter *et al.* (1992) criticise an outcomes approach in the Australian context may in fact be an advantage in the South African context. Of course the key issue raised by Porter *et al.* has salience in South Africa too: is it possible to establish equivalent competencies or outcomes in

different learning contexts? Related to this is the question of whether or not achieving formal equivalence in different learning contexts would lead to actual equivalence and actual mobility if a student wished to shift from one context to another. These are extremely difficult issues which are pivotal to the whole outcomes approach.

However, in the South African context where curricula have traditionally been content-oriented, where an external matriculation examination has had significant backwash effects on the whole school curriculum, and where curriculum has always been developed in bureaucratic structures without teacher participation, a shift in approach is clearly necessary. An approach which foregrounds concepts and skills rather than content has been advocated as an equity move (NEPI, 1992), in the hope that it would allow different curricula and assessment practices to be developed, based on what different groups of learners could actually be expected to do or achieve.

In discussing the Mayer competence of 'language and communication', Porter *et al.* raise the question:

[I]s it actually possible to assess meaningfully the 'acquisition' of skills in this area in ways which consider performance separately from: social background, age, developmental level, opportunities, geography, individual needs, individual differences, community background, ethnicity, gender, prior knowledge, prior access to provision and equity of present provision? (1992, p. 56)

Arguably, this is a problem faced by all systems of national curriculum and assessment. In the South African context, the purpose of freeing outcomes from context is exactly in order to be able to take such acknowledged differences into account in curriculum content and pedagogy. However, there are still fundamental questions to be asked about whether an outcomes approach can bring greater equity, flexibility and mobility. There is always the danger that changed curriculum formulations will do little more than introduce new enclosing orthodoxies which continue to privilege the social groups with cultural capital.

Though these new policy directions offer a vision of change, it is not likely that the deeply carved inequalities of apartheid will prove easy to bridge. However, what is clear is that the traditional Western schooling system will not manage to do so, if only because the country cannot afford to provide it on an equitable basis to all, at least in the short term. The best offer from the new government is for the introduction of free education for all children starting with the 1996 Grade 1 cohort and expanding by a grade each year. This offers nothing to those who are under-educated and/or out-of-school; they fall outside the scope of interventions based on conventional schooling. Indeed, without imaginative restructuring, inequalities of opportunity and outcome will be a long enduring feature of South African education.

It needs to be acknowledged that a competence or outcomes-based framework for education, both in its Australian and South African forms, does not stipulate content or learning processes for the curriculum. The competence approach as formulated here does not constitute, or even aim to constitute, a total curriculum theory. In principle, it should be possible for different learning theories to be accommodated and different content to be taught within a competence or outcomes-based framework. Nonetheless, some concerns have been expressed about what an outcomes-based approach would entail for formal schooling in South Africa (see Gordon *et al.*, 1993; Moll, 1994; de Clercq, 1996). Given the agenda's origins in adult basic education and training, there has been unease about whether it is an adequate or suitable approach for the learning and

developmental processes of children. Again, this is a pivotal issue which needs to be thoroughly explored as the curriculum debate develops in South Africa.

And so to Implementation

To implement the changes entailed in an articulated system of lifelong learning (of which outcomes-based curricula and assessment are one part) will be a major task for the new South African government. One of the major weaknesses of the 1995 White Paper is that it had almost nothing to say on implementation processes. Instead, every complex or potentially contested issue was displaced to a promised commission, working group or investigation. Here, Offe's comments about policy are particularly pertinent in suggesting work to be done: the real social effects of policy are generated by social disputes 'for which state policy merely establishes the location and timing of the contest, its subject matter and the "rules of the game"' (1984, p. 32). Most of the policy proposals of the White Paper, including outcomes-based approach to curriculum and assessment, are merely fields mapped for play in a very uncertain game. If global policy outlines can be easily transferred from context to context, it is surely the case that the struggles of implementation are a wholly local matter.

By mid-1996, the track record for implementing the complex framework of education and training policy reforms in South Africa did not look promising. In the post-1994 government, education and training remained under separate ministries. Though an NQF and South African Qualifications Authority were among the first legislated changes in education, education and training continued on separate tracks. The Department of Labour has proceeded to work on human resource and labour market policies, while the National Department of Education has focussed its attention on developing blueprint policies for school governance and funding. Though adult basic education and training concerns were well articulated in the new policy formulations, the ABET directorate in the National Department of Education has been notably inactive. These developments must surely be a setback for the articulation of general education, training and ABET in multiple pathways under the NQF.

In the National Department of Education, a new outcomes-based national curriculum framework is being developed, out of step with the promised Further Education Commission which has not yet been appointed to consider possible changes such as the introduction of an integrated, modular, credit-based curriculum and assessment structure at the post-compulsory level. In the new draft national curriculum framework, twelve 'essential outcomes' are listed, providing an expanded and localised version of British core skills and Australian key competencies. However, these have not been negotiated in any serious way with key stakeholders in formal education. In terms of this outcomes-based/competence agenda, implementation poses major challenges. From the two year timescale suggested for the new curriculum to be implemented (1996–1998), there is every indication that there will be insufficient attention to consultation, debate and 'buy in' for the new approaches. Without careful attention to implementation procedures, it is doubtful whether curriculum formulators and teachers will have a sufficiently broad understanding of the complexities of competence debates and the capacity to draw up programmes in relation to them. There are real dangers that outcomes may be formulated in ways that reflect narrow rather than broad competencies, may be simple rather than complex, behaviourist rather than thought-provoking. So far, there is a strong likelihood that curriculum changes will be implemented as the replacement of one set of top-down policies by another. If this is the case, de Clercq's sobering warnings that

new education policies may well not bring about greater development, equity, participation and redress need to be considered:

Because of the way they understand and engage with the policy problem and the policy process, these proposals risk affirming and consolidating the advantages of the privileged sections of the education sector while not addressing adequately the education situation in the disadvantaged sectors. (1996, p. 1)

The equity and development dimensions to new policies, which I have argued were pivotal to their initial formulation, may well be blunted through inadequate attention to implementation.

Conclusion

One feature of the globalisation of recent decades has been ease of knowledge transfer and a certain homogenisation of conceptual analyses of education systems. Indeed, it has specifically facilitated education policy borrowing. Yet this globalisation has been accompanied by markedly different local circumstances—as well as uneven development within and across sectors and regions. The strength of a globalising perspective in the area of curriculum theory is exemplified in the international study by Meyer, Kamens and Benavot (1992) which shows the similarity of primary curriculum outlines and the homogeneity of curricular categories in modern states across the world. Yet Meyer and colleagues note that their insights are achieved at the expense of local contextual complexity: 'It moves us towards a very limited and incomplete practical definition of the curriculum—one that leaves out the rich variability in methods, materials, and detailed topics and themes that is the focus of much research' (1992, p. 4). This article has argued that the interplay between global and local is itself an important focus for conceptual analysis of education policy. By examining the competence debate in post-apartheid educational restructuring in contrast to Australian conditions, it has suggested that globally used concepts need to be specifically examined in local contexts if a thorough explanation is to be achieved.

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NOTES

1. For examples of this, see Bird's (1991, 1992, 1993; Bird & Elliot, 1993) work for COSATU; Christie's (1993a, b, c) work for the ANC; Phillips's work for PRISEC (Woods & Phillips, 1993), and the work of the National Training Board (1994).
2. This is the loose term for the anti-apartheid movement generally, crossing specific groupings.
3. In particular, the work of Michael Young (1992a, b, 1993, 1994a, b) has been very influential.
4. See the documents mentioned in endnote 1, as well as the MERG Report (Centre for Development Studies, 1993) and the NEPI Reports (1992a, b).
5. The previous DNE produced the *Education Renewal Strategy* and two versions of *A Curriculum Model for*

Education in South Africa; the NTB produced a discussion document on *A National Training Strategy Initiative* out of a consultative process with major stakeholders; the ANC and COSATU produced *A Framework for Lifelong Learning*; and the ANC set out its vision for a restructured system in a discussion document entitled *A Policy Framework for Education and Training*.

6. For example, in developing its national training strategy, the NTB explicitly drew on the experiences of a range of industrial countries, including Britain, a selection of countries in Europe and South America, 'Asian tigers' and Australia and New Zealand. All of the major policy groups had international visits to investigate policy options. Consultants from Australia, Britain and New Zealand contributed towards the development of integration policies and particularly the NQF.

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