

UPBEAT

A history of education in South Africa

1. BEFORE BANTU EDUCATION

Long before Bantu Education was introduced, education in South Africa was separate and unequal. For well over a hundred years, the mission schools were the only schools for black children. The first mission school opened in 1799. Mission schools gave mainly primary education.

In 1902, the British administration in the Transvaal started free primary schools for white children. By 1910, 90% of all white children in the Transvaal were at school.

But the authorities did nothing about black education. A very small percentage of black children were receiving an education at mission schools. The majority were not getting any schooling at all.

2. BANTU EDUCATION BEGINS

In 1948 the Nationalist party came to power with a policy of white supremacy. They wanted blacks to be temporary labourers in the towns. Their permanent home was supposed to be in the reserves. Bantu Education was designed to fit in with this plan.

In 1953 Dr H.F. Verwoerd introduced Bantu Education. He said that if blacks were being taught to expect equal rights with whites, they were getting the wrong idea. Verwoerd said that Bantu Education should prepare blacks for manual labour. 'Bantu Education', he said, 'must stand with both feet in the reserves'.

Under Bantu Education the mission schools lost their independence. A lot of mission schools decided to close rather than be controlled by the government.

The primary schools started by the government were poorly equipped and overcrowded. So were the few high schools set up in the reserves. And instead of being taught in English, students had to study in their home language.

In 1963 the government took control of 'coloured' education and two years later, of all Indian schools.

In 1979 the Education and Training Act was passed to replace Bantu Education. Black Education was now in the hands of the DET, but it remained virtually the same.

In the same year, COSAS was started. It grew rapidly into a national wide student organisation.

3. WHITE EDUCATION

White schools are also part of apartheid education. Students at white schools have small classes, enough desks, books and teachers. They have sports fields, swimming pools and libraries. White education prepares white children for a privileged future.

But, like black students, they do not have freedom of

thought. White schools are controlled by the government's National Education Department, which decides what students are allowed to learn.

4. THE 1976 UPRISING

In 1975 the Minister of Bantu Education announced that half of all subjects from standards 5 to 10 must be taught in the medium of Afrikaans.

SASM (South African Student's Movement) held a mass meeting to protest against the enforcement of Afrikaans. An action committee, the Soweto Students Representative Council, (SSRC) was formed.

On 16 June, 20 000 students marched peacefully through Soweto in protest against the new rule. The police opened fire. Hector Petersen, the first of many victims, was killed. The Soweto uprising had begun.

In the following weeks the protests spread to townships on the Reef and Pretoria, further afield to Nelspruit, Bothaville (OFS), Nyanga (Cape Town) and also to the universities of Turlloop and Ngoye.

The 1976 uprising was sparked off by the introduction of Afrikaans in the schools. But the shortage of classrooms and qualified teachers, dilapidated buildings and the high failure rate, had for a long time caused anger among students. There was inadequate housing and unemployment was high. Black matriculants struggled to find jobs.

More than 1 000 people died in the uprising. Many more were injured or fled the country. After 1976 Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was withdrawn. But schools remained segregated and unequal.

5. RESISTANCE IN THE 80s

A new wave of boycotts against 'gutter education' started in Cape Town in 1980 and rapidly spread throughout the country. In certain regions 'Coloured', Indian and DET schools closed down. Hundreds of teachers came out in public support of the boycotting pupils.

During the boycott, committees were established in most centres to organize and co-ordinate the protest. In the Cape Town region the boycott was co-ordinated by the Committee of 81, who held regular meetings with SRC reps from schools in the area. Students came together and held talks and discussions.

By the beginning of 1981 most of the students were back at school and the boycott was over. Three years later it flared up again.

In early 1984 unrest broke out in Atteridgeville and Saulsville near Pretoria, in Cradock and Port Elizabeth in

the Eastern Cape. Students listed their educational grievances. They wanted:

- to elect their own SRCs
- qualified teachers
- an end to corporal punishment
- an end to sexual harassment of female students by teachers
- an end to the age limit

These demands were not met. At one point, 850 000 students were out on boycott.

In 1985, COSAS, by then the largest black student movement, was banned.

The crisis continued in 1986 and as the year progressed, the conflict between students and the authorities intensified. Soldiers moved into classrooms and new laws were made to try to crush the students.

The NECC was formed to bring parents, teachers and students together to solve the crisis and plan a different kind of education.

In spite of severe repression by the state, students and teachers have started to think concretely about the kind of education that is needed for the future.

ALL ABOUT UPBEAT

UPBEAT is a progressive, educational magazine for today's teenager.

UPBEAT is one of several projects of SACHED, a non-profit making educational organisation.

UPBEAT comes out seven times a year. It costs R3,00 to subscribe for a year, and 30c per copy.

UPBEAT covers issues of crucial importance such as unemployment, housing, trade unions and child labour. It also takes up student concerns such as corporal punishment and school uniforms. UPBEAT encourages debate on political and educational topics. In addition, UPBEAT carries vocabulary lessons, short stories, quizzes and articles on health, African history, education, sport and music. All this in very easy English. UPBEAT may be educational, but it is also fun to read. It takes the sting out of reading.

Readers are encouraged to send in their poems and short stories for publication in UPBEAT.

Teachers use UPBEAT in the classroom with the teachers' notes provided by UPBEAT. They say there is a noticeable improvement in the English reading skills of students who read UPBEAT regularly.

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