



# Beyond aid effectiveness: The development of the South African further education and training college sector, 1994–2009

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## ABSTRACT

The current dominant account of aid to education focuses on schooling and official development assistance and talks in terms of policy work, donor harmonisation and, increasingly, budgetary support. However, this approach is limited in a number of ways. The return of international policy interest in vocational education provides an opportunity to take a look at whether the dominant paradigm is really a solution in all cases. Through an exploration of the evolution of the South African further education and training, this paper illustrates the importance of looking at where a country wants and does not want to learn from. It points to the need to gaze beyond official development assistance to examine the way that dimensions such as cultural diplomacy, commercial interests and solidarity play a role in policy learning. It also draws attention to the often-varied national institutional resources for learning and the complex interplay of individuals, both local and foreign, in the learning process. Finally, it hints that many apparently minor instruments such as exile, study abroad and structured exchange visits may contribute to a far more complex web of policy-related learning than is captured in conventional accounts of policy borrowing/learning that focus on the official level. It may be that a more meaningful discussion of the effectiveness of international cooperation, rather than the more narrow notion of aid, would ensue if such perspectives were taken on board.

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## 1. Introduction

Much of this special issue is concerned with the emerging preferred approach of many donors to supporting education in Africa: harmonisation around a sector programme and even budgetary support. In this paper, I deliberately look at a very different example. As in the Indian case of Colclough and De (2010), I am looking at a case in which a national government often felt confident and competent enough to select which international partners it wanted to work with and on which elements of the system. However, in doing so I take my focus beyond the usual gaze on official development assistance and into a more complex world of multiple actors in international influencing (cf., the papers in King, 2010; Novelli, 2010; Srivastava and Oh, 2010; Steer and Wathne, 2010).

More importantly, the focus is not on schools but on the college sector. The aid modalities discourse has grown up in large part around the challenge of delivering on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and basic education has been a key element of these. However, as King et al. (2007) noted, there has been a re-emergence of policy attention to post-basic education and training as we approach the target date for Education for All (EFA). In late

2009 this re-emergence was made highly visible as the UK Department for International Development explicitly included skills matters in its education policy consultation; the Southern African Development Community signalled that it intended to develop a new regional technical and vocational education and training strategy; and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation identified skills as one of its top three educational priorities for the next period.

It is not clear that the aid harmonisation discourse that informs the drive towards the MDG-EFA targets works for the skills sector. As this paper illustrates, the range and nature of actors are often very different. Moreover, the policy-oriented capacities that for schooling are relatively well developed in national ministries, aid agencies and international organisations are not present in the skills field. Nor is there anything like the same research capacity internationally on skills matters. Whilst there is some general sense internationally that devices such as National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) are supposed to help deliver skills, there is very little understanding of how vocational institutions can be rehabilitated in Africa, given the huge neglect of such institutions in the post-Jomtien era.

Therefore, this paper illustrates the very different world of international cooperation in skills development to question whether the current orthodoxies of aid harmonisation, effectiveness and budgetary support make sense for work on skills. It does

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this through an exploration of the complex interplay of national and international actors, forces and discourses in shaping further education and training in South Africa between 1994 and 2009. Until mid-2009 this system was under the authority of the Department of Education and distinct from (though overlapping with) the skills development system under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labour. This paper, therefore, is effectively a companion piece to a previous study of international influences on the skills development system (McGrath and Badroodien, 2006), and an updating of that study by Adrienne Bird, former Deputy Director-General at the Department of Labour, and Werner Heitmann, head of GTZ's skills work in South Africa for more than a decade (Bird and Heitmann, 2009).

In this exploration I draw heavily on two literatures: education policy and international and comparative education and, particularly, their South African manifestations (e.g., Chisholm and Fuller, 1996; King, 1999; King and Carton, 1999; Jansen, 1999, 2002; Fataar, 2006; Hoppers, 2009). Later in the paper I will come back to some of the key themes from those literatures and show how this study informs our thinking about how education policy has been made in South Africa and its implications for wider debates about national and international policy processes in education, including the debates about new aid modalities.

In what follows I draw on 13 new interviews done in mid-2009 but also on some 150 other interviews conducted by myself and colleagues since 1995 (cf. McGrath, 1996; King and Carton, 1999; King and McGrath, 2002; McGrath and Badroodien, 2006), and on a rereading of a wide range of official policy documents, publicity materials for various programmes and internal documents of key national and international organisations. It is also profoundly shaped by the experiences of 20 years of engagement with the issue in various mixtures of insider–outsider and participant–observer roles.

The rest of this paper is structured into two parts. First, I tell a relatively simple story of the interaction of national and international forces in the development of the system. Second, I deconstruct this story, offering alternative readings of the account and exploring its relevance to the larger academic accounts of educational policy making, in South Africa, in developing countries and globally, and to the interface of these accounts with debates about aid modalities.

## 2. Building the new South African college system

### 2.1. A brief historical background

In 1994 the new South African government inherited 152 technical colleges. These had their origins in a small number of white urban institutions opened early in the 20th Century that mirrored the British model of evening classes and subsequently day and block release for apprentices. In a process of parallel evolution, there was a gradual rise of commercial colleges that also fell under the technical college umbrella, as in Britain. Again as in Britain, the 1960s saw the splitting off of parts of some of these colleges into advanced technical institutions: in South Africa these were called technikons. In another mirroring of British experience, the 1980s and early 1990s saw a growing crisis for the colleges as changes in employment and technology brought about the decline of apprenticeship, the rise of non-indentured “private candidates” and an increasing mismatch between the programmes colleges offered and those demanded by industry.

However, the similarities with Britain were limited by the peculiarities of the Apartheid system. Whilst British colleges were strongly inscribed by class, gender and race, they had nothing like the legislated racial segregation of the South African system. Separate urban institutions for coloureds (Cape Town) and Indians

(Durban) developed relatively early on, but African access to skills was much more heavily regulated. Some provision was available in the “homelands” though this was largely practical. However, it was not until the 1981 repeal of the racial limitations to apprenticeship and artisanal status that urban colleges for Africans really emerged.

The unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC) and other organisations in 1990 led to a frenetic period of policy conceptualisation, by the Apartheid state, by the democratic movement and by business. The future of the colleges was most explicitly discussed as part of the National Educational Policy Initiative through which academics and organisations within the movement for democracy came together to imagine educational policy futures. Whilst Chisholm (1992) outlined the historical evolution of the technical colleges and Kraak (1992) more implicitly tied their future to notions of Post-Fordism and the need for a wider approach to human resources development, it was the work of Bennell (1992) and Fisher (1992) that most explicitly looked at possible international lessons. Bennell considered the lessons to be learnt from the rest of Africa and other middle and low income countries. However, of more lasting significance was Fisher's critique of proposals that the American community college approach was one that South Africa should be looking to adopt. For Fisher, the American model was neither as successful as its South African proponents alleged nor particularly relevant to the South African context.

However, a focus on colleges was a relatively marginal part of the debates about the future of South African education and training, with questions about both vocationalised schooling and industry training getting more attention from the various constituencies involved. From the government side, there was some interest in vocationalising much of secondary education, with British models receiving attention in the *Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa* (Department of National Education, 1991). However, this was soon eclipsed by an approach that came originally from the trade union movement. This argued for a systemic focus, particularly on the way that a National Qualifications Framework could deliver on both economic and social imperatives for a post-Apartheid era. Here the dominant influences were from Australia and New Zealand (McGrath and Badroodien, 2006). The colleges were essentially invisible in both of these accounts as they were translated into South African positions.

An integrated department of education and labour was proposed by the ANC prior to the 1994 elections but was not realised. Instead, colleges fell under the Department of Education and industry training under the Department of Labour. Moreover, in the new quasi-federal constitutional settlement, colleges were to be a concurrent function of national and provincial departments. Put simply, the national Department of Education was responsible for overall policy direction for the sector, whilst the provincial departments were responsible for operational matters, allocating funds, appointing staff and monitoring performance of the colleges in their province. The whole of education and training was also to be subject to the NQF and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as its responsible agency.

### 2.2. Policymaking 1994–1999

As was noted in the previous paragraph, policy for the colleges fell under the new Department of Education but was shaped by the designation in the *South African Qualifications Authority Act* (Republic of South Africa, 1995) of three bands of education and training. Although the Act made it clear that these bands were for the classification of programmes and were not intended to confine institutions to one band, it became apparent that technical colleges were perceived by the state to fall wholly under the further

education and training band, alongside the senior grades of secondary schooling and intermediate skills training. With the latter falling under the jurisdiction of the Department of Labour, a new vision for the further education and training band was to be developed by a new Further Education and Training (FET) Branch of the Department of Education that was responsible for both high schools and colleges.

After some initial confusion as to what extent common policies could be developed for schools and colleges, a specific policy process for the latter began in 1996 with the establishment of a National Committee on Further Education. As this was chaired by a leading proponent of the American community college option, Silas Zuma of the National Institute for Community Education, there was a widespread perception that this approach had tacit support. However, Glen Fisher, the most prominent critic of community colleges, was also on the committee, as were others (Jane Hofmeyr from the National Business Initiative [NBI], Peliwe Lolwana from the Department of Labour and Carmel Marock from the Congress of South African Trade Unions) who could be expected to balance the need for community responsiveness with industrial skills concerns.

Particularly through the Committee's work on finance and governance, Australian, British and Dutch influences became significant although the funding chapter did include some references to other middle income country experiences and to African examples (e.g., from Ghana and Kenya, drawing on McGrath et al., 1995). In the final report, the new system appeared not to be envisaged as particularly American-influenced but the option of following elements of the British system such as a separate funding council also had failed to gain sufficient support (Department of Education, 1997).

The Committee's report was followed closely by a Green Paper (Department of Education, 1998). Although several individuals were credited as participating in the process, there appear to have been three main actors: Andre Kraak—who had moved to the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC); Glen Fisher—who had moved to NBI; and Bill Hall—an Australian consultant. Indeed, by the time of the final draft of the subsequent White Paper (Republic of South Africa, 1998a), it appears that Fisher and Hall were the principal writers.

In both the White Paper and subsequent *Further Education and Training Act* (Republic of South Africa, 1998b) the focus was clearly primarily on the public college sector rather than schools or private vocational institutions, although both are mentioned. The Act was primarily about the governance of newly termed “public further education and training colleges” and its core intention was to provide a legal framework for the existing technical colleges to undergo a process of transformation from their racially segregated past to a multiracial future. Subsequent to the Act, the 152 technical colleges became 50 FET colleges though a process of merging former black and white colleges.

Although USAID supported the subsequent production of a *National Strategy for Further Education and Training, 1999–2001* (Department of Education, 1999), this document appears to have been stillborn with the Department lacking the capacity to implement its detailed and ambitious plans. Rather, the impetus for change over the next few years shifted to a fascinating tripartite partnership amongst the Department, the NBI and the British Council.

### 2.3. *The Colleges Collaboration Fund and the Tirisano Fellowships*

The NBI has already been mentioned in passing as an influential player in the FET policy process but it is worth introducing it more formally at this point. The NBI's history began in the aftermath of the Soweto Uprising of 1976. Concern about the likelihood of

increasing African urban unrest and about the state's capacity for reform resulted in the formation of the Urban Foundation (UF), led by the pre-eminent “captains of industry” from both the English and Afrikaans-speaking communities: Harry Oppenheimer (Anglo-American Corporation) as Chairman and Anton Rupert (Rembrandt) as Deputy-Chairman. Whilst the UF was treated with considerable suspicion by the left, it became a major force for the upgrading of educational and housing facilities for urban blacks and for business engagement with policy reform (Smit, 1992). In education, the latter strand was the responsibility of the Education Policy and System Change Unit (Edupol), which became part of the new NBI in 1995 (Jansen, 1999).

The NBI thus had an educational track record as the major business-supported thinktank involved in educational policy work and had strengthened its FET policy credibility with the appointment of Glen Fisher as Edupol Director in 1997. Its real breakthrough came in 1999 when the newly established Business Trust, the new non-racial structure for business cooperation with government, announced that it wanted to fund a small number of large-scale initiatives to support government policies.

The same year, the NBI successfully bid for R100 million (£10 million) of this Business Trust money for a five year programme called the College Collaboration Fund (CCF), and a service level agreement was signed with the Department of Education. The CCF's aims were to:

increase college enrolments and the employability of graduates. It was envisaged that this would be achieved by rationalising the sector as a whole, by improving the skills and status of college management teams, and by forging links with industry. In concrete terms, the main targets set were to increase college enrolments from 250 000 to 400 000, to ensure that 65% of college graduates found jobs within six months, and to train 600 senior college managers and 1000 middle managers. (NBI nd: 28)

Alongside the CCF, a further agreement was made between the Department of Education and British Training International, a small British governmental agency, later absorbed into the British Council, for a programme called the Tirisano Fellowships. This project would be funded primarily as part of the CCF activities, with the NBI managing the South African elements and BTI the British side. This programme aimed to take 100 potential future colleges leaders for a three-month attachment to a British college during which time they would be mentored by a senior manager of the host college and would work on research for both sending and host colleges on a particular area of shared concern. Given the dominance of white males in the leadership echelon of the South African college sector, there was an explicit focus on developing black and female staff. Thus, Tirisano can be seen primarily as a capacity building exercise. However, there does seem to have been a genuine desire to ensure that there was some symmetry of learning across the two national college systems. Indeed, it appears that the presence of Tirisano fellows in certain British colleges was seen as helping further internal debates about the racial dynamics of leadership, staff and students.

Additionally, leading figures from the British college sector (principals and officials from the Association of Colleges and the funding agency) were brought out to South Africa to participate in national FET conventions, to provide some mentoring to college principals and to participate in a new wave of policymaking for the colleges as they began to merge.

Whilst the CCF-Tirisano intervention did not achieve all of its ambitious targets, it clearly made a very major difference to the South African college sector. The CCF was able to develop the first decent quantitative overviews of the nature of the sector (Powell

and Hall, 2000, 2002, 2004), which proved invaluable for policy-making, as well as a series of situational analyses of the sector in each province as part of the merger planning process. It highlighted the importance of industry partnerships and facilitated a wide range of management, leadership and governance training for the colleges. The CCF clearly sought to learn actively from the British experience in this regard. They saw the transformation of the British system after colleges were given autonomy as the most relevant international case to study. However, the staffing of CCF was largely South African and the intention was to develop a South African model that translated British experiences for local realities.

The CCF and Tirisano were tightly woven together and it is in the latter that the British role was most explicit. In total 88 fellows went to Britain and many of these have subsequently played management and leadership roles both at the college level and within provincial and national departments. The intention of Tirisano from the South African side was to provide an opportunity for deeper learning about the British case. The fellows were brought together on a monthly basis to share their experiences, facilitated by a joint South African-British team. This team included a South African evaluator, an important signal of the intention for the programme not to be British-dominated. Tirisano also had ministerial support in both countries, Tessa Blackstone launching it in Britain and Kader Asmal visiting one of the host colleges during a visit to London.

One of the most striking elements of Tirisano was the way in which the British role was not through an aid agency but through an agency for public diplomacy. Whilst the British Council undoubtedly wanted to promote British interests, it was also heavily influenced by the need to do so in a diplomatic way. It was particularly important for the Council to maintain Britain's reputation. It was vital to the success of the programme that the key British Council official in South Africa was a black South African returnee from England, Barry Masoga, with strong national credibility and a clear sense both of the British and South African agenda. The interaction was also different from typical aid projects in that the participants in the exchange were a wide range of actors from the college sector in both countries, rather than government officials and international consultants. This contributed to a focus on learning from another country's internal experiences not from its theories of development. However, it is the latter that predominates in the new policy-focused aid modalities in which agency staff are far more likely to come from an international policy research background rather than an earlier career in their domestic education system.

Whilst the British Tirisano partners were well-grounded in their own skills system this, conversely, contributed to problems when the focus of the collaboration shifted to the policy arena. Instead of the largely positive accounts of mutuality that emerged from interviews about the fellowship programme, the recollected mood about the policy encounters was one of mutual frustration at unrealistic expectations on the South African side and a tendency for some British participants to slip into a sales pitch as they sought to offer services in systems reform.

One of the effects of the education and training reforms in Britain in the 1990s had been to set up a range of agencies that were encouraged to seek international sources of funding (e.g., the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority). Taken together with the British Council's own consultancy arm, an increasing international focus from the Association of Colleges and its members, and the existence of longer-standing British exporters of skills services such as City and Guilds, there was a strong British block of organisations that wanted to make money from links such as those with South Africa. This came into tension with a genuine concern by many on the British side to contribute to reconstruction of the South African

skills sector, out of a sense of solidarity with the new South Africa. Often the commercial and the solidaristic impulses were present within a single organisation.

The greatest constraint, however, on the overall CCF-Tirisano intervention was that it struggled to align with the Department of Education's own timetable for college reform and the resourcing made available for this. Rather than being a small contribution to the overall resourcing of a wider programme of college transformation, the CCF remained the major resource available beyond recurrent expenditure. Whilst the merger process did go ahead during the lifespan of CCF, the timing was not synchronised with CCF activities, which were tightly kept to their original plan. This meant that many of the fellows came back to colleges that were paralysed by uncertainty and tension about the future. This prevented many of them from having real impact for the next few years until the merger process had run its course. Moreover, curricular reform and related staff development did not take place until well after CCF was completed and neither did key decisions about self-governance and funding.

#### *2.4. The Danish Support to Education and Skills Development (SESD) Programme*

Whilst there was some official development assistance to the FET sector from the US, Australia and the Netherlands (cf. Hoppers, 2009), and the Germans and Irish were significant partners of the Department of Labour (Bird and Heitmann, 2009), the largest single aid intervention in FET colleges came from the Danish development agency, Danida, in the form of the Support to Education and Skills Development Programme, which began in 2002. Danida had been supporting elements of the wider skills development system from 1994 but had not previously engaged particularly closely with the public college sector, having worked with SAQA, the Department of Labour, a series of Manufacturing Advisory Centres and a consortium of institutions in the Western Cape dedicated to access to further and higher education and training. As part of the new Danish shift towards programme support, elements of all of these apart from the Manufacturing Advisory Centres were rolled into a larger structure that included support to the national Department of Education, three provincial departments and seven colleges. This was essentially a hybrid model, where a sectoral programme combined elements that were intended to provide a coherent systemic approach with other elements that were peripheral to the overall strategic focus. The programme was initially intended to run from 2002 to 2007 but was extended and is due to finally complete in March 2010. Total funding was in the region of R200 million (c. £20 million) of which approximately 90% went to the FET components.

Again, it can be argued that SESD has had a positive impact, particularly at the college and provincial department levels, although two of the provinces were probably already the strongest. Much of its training focus was also on management, leadership and governance and reinforced and deepened the previous CCF interventions. However, the tensions that had been managed in CCF-Tirisano largely through internal South African actors were not so successfully dealt with in SESD, which also lacked the same degree of championing at a senior level with the Department. At the end of three years, the Danish Chief Technical Advisor was replaced and a South African subsequently was appointed.

Although a sectoral programme in name, it was apparent that SESD was more influential at the college and provincial levels as the national level collaboration never really worked as envisaged. My interactions with the programme suggested that the Department had a strong view that SESD was there to serve the Department and that it should focus on supporting the implementation of South African policy rather than seeking to influence

these policies. Although it was the largest donor intervention into the sector, approximately R180m (c. £18m) over eight years, it must also be noted that SEDS was only of the same order of magnitude to NBI projects, and it was dwarfed by the R1.5 billion (c. £150m) allocated from the national budget for the recapitalisation of colleges in 2005. South Africa is by no means as aid dependent as many of its neighbours and its approach here essentially appears to be that of the more proactive countries under the project modality, choosing a partner it considered to be capable of supporting national objectives. Aid “partnerships” are generally critiqued for the dominance of the donors but here it was the country that was in the driving seat (cf. Colclough and De, 2010).

### 2.5. Section summary

A simple but plausible story can be told, therefore, of a South African public further education and training college sector that has developed in ways that closely mirror the evolution of the British system since 1992, after having rejected the American community college alternative early on. It can be argued that the South Africans were largely in charge of this process themselves and that they found the British system to be the most relevant model for them due both to the cultural closeness and to the sense that the British experiences of recent transformation offered a valuable case study of both substance and process. That the Minister of Education, the relevant Deputy-Director General and the British Council Education Director for South Africa were all graduates of British universities should also not be discounted for its importance to the process.

The British Council offered the opportunity to engage in a deeper learning process than would have been typically possible in a traditional aid project and their role as an agency for cultural diplomacy also made them less likely to be in “telling mode” than the Department for International Development (cf. King and McGrath, 2004). Whilst they gained advantage from their key official in country being a black South African, the British Council also benefitted from having a former head of the Association of Colleges, Ruth Gee, as the main British partner. This facilitated the programme in its working closely with the sector and provided a far different knowledge base for the collaboration than would likely have occurred through a policy-oriented modality.

Crucially, most of the funding was South African and most of the decision-making power too. Whilst there were tensions and personality clashes in CCF-Tirisano, they were managed reasonably successfully. Notwithstanding its strengths and impacts, SEDS as the largest aid intervention had far greater problems in relationship management. Depending on one’s perspective on the aims of a bilateral intervention, it may or may not be a sign of failure that the Danish vocational education system, which was awarded the Carl Bertelsmann Prize for the best social policy intervention in 1999, has had little perceptible influence on the shaping of the South African system. Equally, this programme was not a typical sector-wide partnership as favoured by the Danes at this time.

## 3. Unpicking the simple narrative

Whilst this simple narrative is plausible, the story of FET reform in South Africa, and its international dimensions, can be told in multiple different ways. In this section, I will explore some of these other possible accounts through a consideration of certain key theoretical accounts of how education policymaking has taken place according to the South African and international literatures, beginning with the former.

### 3.1. Political economy

A recurrent strand of accounts about South African education policy development is rooted in political economy perspectives. Early attempts to explain the already problematic nature of educational reform in the mid-1990s (e.g., Chisholm and Fuller, 1996; McGrath, 1996) argued that South Africa’s policy choices and technologies were strongly shaped by internal and external political economic dynamics at the time of the new government in 1994, mirroring a wider debate in social sciences about the South African transformation process (e.g., Marais, 1998; Bond, 2000). The incoming government was faced with high levels of official debt; the threat of political violence from Zulu ethno-nationalists and white supremacists; the possibility of white flight; and worries about the potential collapse of the Rand and the repatriation of international capital. Moreover, the demise of the Soviet Union had reduced the possibility of promoting a socialist alternative, whilst the negotiated nature of the new political settlement and the establishment of Government of National Unity (GNU) meant that policy compromises were inevitable.

It is certainly possible to see elements of such a storyline in the FET case, as has been argued for the skills development reforms (McGrath and Badroodien, 2006) and the NQF (Lugg, 2009). Indeed, it would not be fanciful to see the establishment of a model influenced by the English system as the result of such compromises, particularly as the English colleges came under the influence of the “Third Way” from 1997, with its emphasis on blurring the public–private divide and its concerns to advance competitiveness and equity simultaneously.

### 3.2. Institutionalism

Chisholm and Fuller (1996) suggested that the political economy account is best combined with an institutionalist view (see also Greenstein, 1995). They started from the same set of challenges facing the new state but stressed instead the administrative dimension thereof. They argued that the new state was necessarily fragile at its birth and required urgently to develop bureaucratic norms, appoint new officials, merge the old Apartheid departments, etc. All of this was complicated by the need to retain officials from the old bureaucracy due to the “sunset clause” and, in some cases, to have new civil servants answerable to ministers drawn from the old system under the GNU. These dynamics led to a tendency to stress technocratic rationality over the more critical and participatory “struggle” approaches that had dominated the democratic movement for the past decade. Moreover, Chisholm and Fuller argued that the new government was consumed with a belief in modernity and development that led them to stress human capital approaches, coupled with a focus on systems and efficiency.

This account has some convergence with wider social science thinking. For instance, from a public administration perspective, McLennan (2007: 3–4) has argued that the early 1990s also saw the rise of new public management (NPM) thinking in South Africa:

Many . . . academics and activists (recently returned from exile) stressed that a new approach to public administration practice should be development orientated, responsive, efficient, economically innovative and proactive. The New Public Administration Initiative (NPAI), formed in 1991, strongly reflected these sentiments.

The NPAI was comprised of a loose network of universities, technicians, NGOs, practitioners and individual government employees in the field of public and development management. Academics and activists predominated. The main objective of the NPAI was the discussion of an overall strategy for the

professional development of public and development management practices in line with the tasks and challenges of a transformed South Africa. The NPAI led the paradigm shift in the approach to the public administration in South Africa by providing a forum for the exchange of ideas on how to forge forward to the rapid professional development of public administration practice and training in South Africa.

McLennan argued that the NPAI had considerable influence on the new Department of Public Sector Administration and on the introduction of new notions such as performance contracts.

There does appear to be considerable merit in the institutionalist perspective, although the rise of NPM is rather limited, at least in the FET case. Rather, my own experiences and those of many of my informants provide a sense of the partial bureaucratisation of the sector. For FET, the partial retention of old bureaucrats in senior positions and the challenging circumstances and lack of capacity faced by new officials may well have contributed to some of the willingness to look at external examples of college reform.

### 3.3. Political symbolism

Jansen (2002) sought to go beyond the political economy and institutionalist accounts in his theory of “political symbolism as policy craft”. Instead, he argued that the first five years of education policymaking was primarily about “establishing the ideological and political credentials of the new government” (Jansen, 2002: 200). He suggested that due to some of the constraints outlined in the political economy and institutionalist accounts, the state found it more plausible to focus on the symbols of progressivism (cf. Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008) rather than the substance. This meant that the Department of Education was little concerned with actual implementation. Moreover, this freed it to pursue symbolic policies that did not need to be internally consistent, coherent with other policies or capable of implementation. For instance, the NQF appears capable of simultaneously being seen as a solution to equity and competitiveness challenges by very different constituencies.

This argument is similar to that made at the same time by Gilbert (2002) regarding the housing sector. He suggested that in the face of pressures from both right and left, officials delivered policies primarily designed to send balanced messages about transformation/equity and prudence/efficiency.

Jansen argued further that this tendency towards symbolism had roots in the struggle tendency to produce slogans and suggested that the new officials were often involved in a difficult transition to becoming bureaucrats.

Moreover, Jansen suggested that

the symbolic investiture in policy is given credence in the way policy invokes international precedent and participants in the development of the various education policies (Jansen, 2002: 204)

This clearly resonates with the case of official FET policymaking in which the presence of the international looms large.

Jansen's stress on symbolism is very important in the context of the South African transformation. However, it is important to note that, like Chisholm and Fuller, he was focused on the specific era of the Mandela Presidency, the very moment of regime change. It is inevitable that some elements of these accounts are quite time-bound, as well as very specific to the South African case. For instance, it is possible that symbolism is less effective in the long run and that some of the reasons for the failure of the Mbeki Presidency and for the unravelling of elements of the educational

settlement (e.g., the NQF) is that symbols cannot successfully ward off demands for delivery forever. It may also be the case that the FET college sector was never quite so prone to grand symbolism as other parts of the education reform (for instance, the NQF) as the colleges had too little cultural capital embedded in them to make them either an attractive or a pressing site for deploying symbolic resources. Finally, it appears from this case that informants are much more ready to see the core problem as being one of over-ambition rather than symbolic policymaking.

### 3.4. Reluctant reciprocity

King (1999) focused more explicitly on the international dimension of South African education policymaking in the first few post-Apartheid years. He argued that the Department of Education was reluctant to take either aid or policy advice from donors. This mirrors Gilbert's (2002) findings for the Department of Housing. In part, King's account is about the way that the new bureaucracy developed a strategy for dealing with the flood of international visitors that came to South Africa in the mid-1990s. As well as factors already noted in the institutionalist account, he argued that the Apartheid bureaucracy had never developed protocols for dealing with donors, as donors very rarely came to the state before 1994. Equally, he suggested that South Africans did not like to see the country as an aid recipient, whilst many left-leaning new officials were aware of some of the critiques of aid. King also noted the way in which the constitutional settlement, with its division of responsibility for education between the national and provincial levels, also was an obstacle to aid flows as the national department (and the Treasury) sought to limit donor access to provinces and channel all resource flows through Pretoria (cf. Hoppers, 2009).

King argued that South African education was a case of strong national ownership, although he noted that the dominant understandings of education policy had emerged through NGOs' and research centres' historical interactions with certain funders, such as the Swedish International Development Agency.

As with the previous papers discussed, King's is partly time-specific but Hoppers (2009) provides a rather different perspective from his experiences of working at the Royal Netherlands Embassy in South Africa over a longer time period. Nonetheless, a suspicion towards donors was something that I experienced regularly in my own work for the Department and it was a regular theme of my new interviews. The World Bank, in particular, has been treated with great hostility. In FET, there has been a strong sense that the Department (and often the Minister) does not like to refuse donors outright but does not really want them. It is possible to see such tensions in the SEDS case, allied to the reasonable frustration of senior officials that this programme was only working with some colleges and was not sector-wide.

Part of the reason why CCF was the most successful intervention, therefore, is its indigeneity. Even when it did have an international partnership dimension, this was not with an aid agency. However, it is apparent that some of the operational level tensions in the programme did relate to the question of how much ownership the Department was ceding to others, albeit primarily national actors such as NBI, the provincial departments and the colleges. Some of these issues are also hinted at in Hoppers' paper.

This question of strong central ownership is indeed vital to the discussion of the South African FET case. Given the newness of the South African Constitution and early threats to it from the Inkatha Freedom Party, there were sound reasons, at least in the Mandela era, to stress the importance of strong steering from the centre as being a matter of constitutional maintenance. Moreover, in so far as a new culture of performance management was being introduced for senior officials, there were sound tactical reasons

for these officials to try to maximise their control over their environment. These factors were reinforced by elements of the institutionalist argument noted above, but a recurrent theme in my interviews was a sense that certain officials had a powerful psychological drive to assert their authority.

### 3.5. Policy networking

The final account of South African education policymaking that I wish to consider is provided by Fataar (2006) who offered a strongly poststructuralist vision of the role of policy networks. Fataar argued that the South African education policy process could best be understood through looking at how a key network of academics, NGO leaders and officials came to the centre of the policy process during Kader Asmal's tenure as Minister (1999–2004). Thus, his account was analysing the second wave of education policy work, in contrast to the previous theories. His analysis was of how a group of largely white liberal academics were able to exert influence over the revision of the initial post-Apartheid curriculum policies for the school sector. In this account, he highlighted the key role played by the Joint Education Trust as a politically-neutral provider of technical services in education. Like the NBI, JET had been set up in the early 1990s with financial support from the corporate sector. However, it had also had formal support from the ANC, COSATU and other elements of the democratic movement. Increasingly JET moved towards self-sufficiency as a not-for-profit provider of educational services, including the evaluation of the CCF. Fataar argued that the strong theoretical work of key academics was coupled with the practical evidence base of JET to offer a compelling case for curricular revision.

Given that Kader Asmal was replaced as Minister in 2004 by Naledi Pandor, a JET board member, and that her new Deputy-Director General for Further Education and Training (schools and colleges), Penny Vinjevold, was the co-author of JET's most prominent report, it could be surmised that JET's influence had become even greater after this time.

However, JET's direct influence on FET college policy, as opposed to schooling, or of the wider network outlined by Fataar, appears relatively slight. Whilst members of the network were in key positions between 2004 and 2009, the network itself did not have a strong interest in the college sector.

Nor was there a comparable FET network. Neither of the key meso-level players, the NBI and the Human Sciences Research Council (where Andre Kraak, Linda Chisholm and I were based at one time), were able to play the same role as JET. None of the small number of NEPI authors on FET were still in the university sector by 2004 and it was hard to build networks in that direction, with FET largely invisible in the South African education conferences and journals. Nor did the sector itself have strong networks. The merger period saw a major dislocation of middle and senior management structures in colleges and the new cadres needed time to develop new networks.

Nonetheless, Fataar's account is of some salience to the FET case. There is some element of a weaker network around policy that would include several of the names already mentioned in this paper. However, this grouping is loose and is based largely on individuals rather than organisations.

Network arguments are also perhaps salient when it is remembered that the Apartheid era led to large outflows of South African activists and intellectuals. Inevitably, their experiences and networks in countries such as Britain and the US are likely to have shaped the policy terrain on their return to South Africa, as was anticipated by Samoff et al. (1994). Indeed, Ihron Rensburg himself returned from the USA to become a Deputy-Director General, whilst I have also noted the presence of returnees from England at the heart of the FET policy process.

Several informants also spoke of tensions within the college sector at the time of the mergers between the Tirisano Fellows and existing college leaders. This clearly had a racial dimension but a number of respondents recalled how there was also a tension over claims to international knowledge. Many white college leaders already had extensive networks in USA, Australia, Britain and the Netherlands, which bolstered their authority. This was now countered by the CFF-Tirisano provision of similar knowledge to a new grouping. This calls to mind the important role that international study visits by trade unionists played in the conceptualisation of the new industrial training system (cf., McGrath and Badroodien, 2006).

### 3.6. Non-South African accounts

These South African accounts need to be tempered with a reading of certain elements of the far larger policy literature. Over the past 40 years this literature has developed a strong sense of policy as often remedial, fragmented and incremental (Hirschman and Lindblom, 1962). This incrementalism has led some more recent authors to see policy as palimpsest (e.g., Lingard et al., 2003). Equally, there is a well-established tradition of seeing policy as complex and non-linear (e.g., Cohen et al., 1972; Kingdon, 1995). South African policy was perhaps somewhat atypical in this regard in the earliest phase due to the very deliberate attempt to set up a new system. However, it appears that since those initial policies were established, the process has become much more fragmentary and remedial. Whether in Fataar's case of school curriculum or in those of the NQF or college re-curricularisation, subsequent policymaking has sought to avoid abandoning existing policies, and the symbols surrounding them, even when it has become apparent that radical changes are required. In Jansen's terms, this may have added further layers of policy symbolism on top of the initially highly symbolic policies.

Ozga (2009) notes that there has been a "governance turn" in education and this certainly appears to be very pertinent to the debates in South Africa and to the way in which both the CCF and SEDS focused heavily on matters of governance, leadership and management rather than on teaching and learning. Ozga argues that this shift to governance does potentially allow the state to have little internal capacity as it can transfer much of its work to providers and intermediary institutions but she maintains that this necessitates the presence of strong networks and data. South Africa certainly has done little to build state capacity in FET policymaking. However, as was noted above, FET networks are weak. Moreover, with the exception of data collected under CCF, the state of FET data is extremely bad (Akoojee et al., 2008).

Ball (2009) writes about the opening up of new spaces for private involvement in education due to the new culture surrounding New Public Management. He identifies a process of the "reculturing of education" and shows how a body of new private organisations take on an intermediate role between the state and public providers in order to deliver reform.

He also identifies a wider process of policy privatisation:

Education and consultancy businesses are firmly embedded in the complex, intersecting networks of policy-making and policy delivery and various kinds of transaction work (brokerage and contract writing) – much of which is hidden from view. "Statework" is done through multiple relationships and responsibilities in and in relation to educational governance – the businesses act as advisers, evaluators, service deliverers, philanthropists, researchers, reviewers, brokers, "partners", committee members and as consultants and auditors. (Ball, 2009: 89)

There does appear to be some resonance between Ball's account and the South African FET case. In my own experience and from the interview data, it is evident that the state has been very reliant on the NBI in particular for many of these services but has also drawn heavily on the quasi-governmental HSRC, the British Council link and a number of private consultants to do much of its "statework". The focus on governance, leadership and management over learning and teaching may also reflect in part the comparative advantage of the providers of college-level interventions, including sub-contractors such as KPMG. However, the South African case may be somewhat more complicated by the fact that much of the private involvement is by non-profit organisations (e.g., NBI and JET) that have been funded largely from the need for corporate social responsibility as a means of legitimacy building in the post-Apartheid era.

With the exception of the work of King and Hoppers, the above accounts have been grounded in the tradition of national education policy research where the primary focus is on policy processes within a single polity. King and Hoppers, however, represent the tradition within international and comparative education that is concerned with the international processes of policymaking. Comparative education has always been concerned with the cross-national nature of policymaking (e.g., Crossley and Watson, 2003; Crossley et al., 2007). This has led to the adoption of a plethora of (often overlapping) concepts about these processes including lesson drawing (Hulme, 2006), policy borrowing (Phillips and Ochs, 2004) and cross-national attraction (Phillips, 1989). Other approaches suggest that notions such as Di Maggio and Powell's (1983) concept of institutional isomorphism, may be more appropriate: for instance, Whitty and Edwards's (1998) concept of parallel policymaking and Levin's (1998) notion of a "policy epidemic", all of which suggest that there are factors at the institutional and/or discursive level globally that cause policies and practices to converge. Since the late 1990s, a major thrust in this literature has been towards exploring how the global interacts with the local (e.g., Dale, 1999; King and McGrath, 2002; Crossley and Watson, 2003).

Dale's (1999) "typology of mechanisms of external effects on national policies" is particularly useful. In his terms, we can distinguish the South African case from the "imposition" that is widespread in developing country experiences. South Africa did not have to adopt any particular policies due to donor pressures as it was not aid dependent. Rather, the debate comes down to whether the South African case is one of borrowing or learning. For Dale:

the key features of policy borrowing in terms of the variables outlined above are that it is carried out *voluntarily* and *explicitly*, and that its *locus of viability is national*. It involves *particular policies* that one country seeks to *imitate, emulate or copy, bilaterally*, from another. It is the *product of conscious decision making*, and it is *initiated by the recipient*. The nature of its effects on education could be expected to be *direct* and they would tend to be restricted to the sectoral or organizational level, that is to the level of education politics. (Dale, 1999: 9–10 italics in original)

There is a clear sense that South Africa was consciously looking for interesting international models. Indeed, for many of my interviewees, it was the newness and radicalness of the college reform process in Britain that made this an attractive source of learning. However, this statement must be immediately qualified by a realisation that there were also very powerful linguistic, cultural, network and psychological factors, all conditioned by postcoloniality, that made South Africans well disposed to learn from Britain.

If not from Britain, then most South Africans wanted a "first world solution" (cf. Gilbert, 2002 on housing) and there has been a great reluctance throughout to look at the rest of Africa. Indeed, it can be argued that the principal route for even minimal South African discussion of African vocational education and training has been through non-South Africans with a background in African Studies, such as Paul Bennell, Wim Hoppers, Kenneth King and myself.

The line between borrowing and learning is quite a subtle one and appears largely to be in the eye of the beholder. Several interviewees stressed the ways in which South African actors had consciously set out to learn from Britain but only in order to develop a South African solution (cf. McGrath and Badroodien, 2006 on skills development). Others, however, dismissed this as simply borrowing. Even within the first group there were some comments that whilst the intention of those formulating the exercise had been learning, some of the participants had only been capable of borrowing. Thus, a distinction appeared for some between learning and borrowing that was analogous to distinctions between deep and surface learning (cf. Grootings, 2009 on policy learning).

So much for South African learning. It is also worth reflecting on whether and what international partners thought that they were trying to teach South Africa. Whilst there was a very particular post-Apartheid enthusiasm for involvement in South Africa, it must be presumed that international actors also thought that they had something to contribute. In the case of the engagement with the British college sector (and similar but smaller links to American and Dutch institutions) this differed from current aid relationships, however, in that this something had to do with their own systems of vocational education and training rather than what they did in aid projects. As was noted above, it was the major reforms that the British had recently experienced that made their intervention so interesting to South African actors. Equally, as noted before, there appears to have been something particular in the cultural diplomacy mandate of the British Council that aided the effectiveness of this relationship. The Council could not come with the large sums of money of official development assistance; indeed, it largely piggybacked on CCF funds. However, it could bring practitioners together to explore change. This brought with it a far greater mutuality than is typically possible in aid policy relations, where the international expert typically has little grounding in their own country's experience (cf. King and McGrath, 2004).

In thinking about this learning process, however, it is important also to reflect on some of the limitations of both learning and policy development in this case. It appears that there were a number of different learning silos in operation. Policymakers, practitioners, academics, consultants and meso-level organisations (e.g., NBI, HSRC and SAQA) largely learnt independently of each other. Within government, the learning and policy processes of the Departments of Education and Labour were essentially disarticulated (Bird and Heitmann, 2009). In spite of the language of stakeholderism, there was little attention to the learning of the non-governmental stakeholders at national, provincial or local levels and their capacity to impact on the system's direction was very limited.

The final strand I want to explore briefly is that of time. The importance of time has become more visible in social science in recent years, often under the influence of Braudel's (1975) typology of different timescales. In international and comparative education such accounts argue that part of the problem of aid is that different conceptions of time and clashing practical timescales are in operation in projects, programmes and policymaking. This can serve to undermine cherished notions such as ownership and partnership (e.g., Van der Eyken et al., 1995; Crossley and Watson, 2003; Brown, 2006).

The effects of time are very clear in this case. As with the earlier paper by McGrath and Badroodien (2006), it is clear that the study of a 15-year period allows some insights into the punctuation of policy and learning processes caused by the terms of office of Presidents, Ministers and senior civil servants. All of these are located within a complex web of external geopolitical, ideological and discursive times, which introduced such notions as new public management at particular moments in time, and a larger South African chronology of colonialism, Apartheid and democracy. Across these interviews, but also many, many other interactions with South Africans over the years, there was a strong sense of a tension that existed in 1994 between two further temporal conceptions: that transformation had to be achieved immediately, as opposed to the growing realisation that real transformation was a long-term process.

Interviewees reflected on a number of tensions caused by time. Most frequent were their comments about the way that the CCF was driven by a very tightly time-based business plan from which the NBI were unwilling/unable to deviate. This was poorly aligned with the looser focus on time of the Department of Education. Although the DoE did produce its own timescales at certain points, there was no real sense that these had anything more than symbolic value. The disarticulation between NBI (business) time and DoE (government) time meant that the effectiveness of the reforms was undermined as the two processes could not be managed in such a way that CCF training linked to policy reforms. SESD (donor) time also was out of alignment with the Department's timings, although the Danes were notably more flexible than NBI, suggesting that the situation is more complex than a simple dichotomy between national and international time. It is also evident that the Departments of Education and Labour were working to different timescales and were poor at aligning policies in order to maximise coherence. Finally, from a policy and learning perspective, it is also clear that the time scales and rhythms of policy, projects, implementation and research were not in harmony.

#### 4. Conclusions

This paper presents my version of the story of how South African further education and training was shaped by international and national interactions. I suggest that there is a plausible version of this story in which a positive relationship between the government, a business-funded private development agency and the British Council, an official agency for cultural diplomacy, helped to improve the South African college sector. However, it is clear that this story is overstylised in its depiction of how well the relationship worked and how far the sector was transformed. Inevitably, there were tensions in the relationship and, for some, the story is one of policy borrowing more than learning. Equally, it is clear that the transformation remains incomplete. This reflects in part the enormity of the challenge, but also the biases inherent in how the partners prioritised certain elements of the process and the challenges of sequencing the change process.

In the second half of the paper I have suggested that this case can be understood within the existing literature on education policy both in South Africa and internationally. The case neither confirms one major theoretical position nor offers a new grand narrative of education policy processes. Rather, it shows that just as policy itself can be seen as a palimpsest, so too can theory about policy. Policy theory has developed in specific time contexts and the relative salience of different theoretical positions varies according to the time periods to which they are being applied.

In considering the wider significance of this story, it must be acknowledged that it is a very particular one, reflecting South Africa's Apartheid past. However, it is worth stressing that all

national contexts are unique and significant to the telling of the story. Whilst this is an obvious point for the international and comparative tradition within education policy studies, it appears less clearly in much of the metropolitan literature about single country cases. Rather, this literature tends to assume that there is no need to be explicit about context's effects on generalisability.

The paper also makes a contribution to confronting another unspoken assumption that is inherent in much of the education policy literature: that schools equal education. The different contexts of further education and training bring with them different debates, players and institutional logics that contribute to different policy dynamics. However, these dynamics are also part of the broader river of education policy, not simply an overgrown backwater. As the vocational dimension appears to be coming back on to the international policy agenda, it will be crucial that current approaches to educational aid are not simply transferred to cooperation on skills.

In contrast to the drive towards harmonisation of official development assistance, this case illustrates the importance of looking at where a country wants and does not want to learn from. This complements arguments from Ellerman (2005) about the importance of "autonomy-respecting assistance", which builds from where countries are, rather than from grand development plans. In such accounts, local ownership is not simply donor rhetoric, which is often under threat of being undermined by the presence of a united donor block that is able to overpower national voices.

My account points to the need to gaze beyond official development assistance in order to examine the way that dimensions such as cultural diplomacy, commercial interests and solidarity play a role in policy learning. It also draws attention to the often-varied national institutional resources for learning and the complex interplay of individuals, both local and foreign, in the learning process. Finally, it hints that many apparently minor instruments such as exile, study abroad and structured exchange visits may contribute to a far more complex web of policy-related learning than is captured in conventional accounts of policy borrowing/learning that focus on the official level. It may be that a more meaningful discussion of the effectiveness of international cooperation, rather than the more narrow notion of aid, would ensue if such perspectives were taken on board.

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