

South Africa's Education Crisis: A review

South Africa's Education Crisis: Views from the Eastern Cape, NISC, 2012

Edited by Laurence Wright

Reviewed by Peter Titlestad

This is a book for all interested in teaching English and for all those more generally interested in education in South Africa. The sub-title indicates focus on the Eastern Cape, but there is nothing that does not have a wider relevance. Much has to do with rural education but this should concern us all, in any case, and what is said generally has wider application. The work is based on research done by the Institute for the Study of English in Africa of Rhodes University which, among other things, has been deeply involved in the teaching and research into the teaching of English for a very long time.

There is one chapter, by the editor himself, about the relation between teaching English and national language policy. It unflinchingly challenges the orthodoxy of equal use of all languages and of multilingualism, and the deploring of the power of English, that has been prominent for the last quarter of a century. This essay marks a welcome freedom and

change in the terms of this debate hitherto and answers the well-meaning though misguided coterie of language planners of the 1990s.

Laurence Wright makes clear the friction between the National Language Policy (NLP) and the Language in Education Policy (LIEP), seeing hope in the latter if properly put into practice, though undermined by the NLP.

What we need is natural language planning, which takes into account the real situation, as opposed to interventionist language planning which refuses to accept the prevailing economic and sociological situation. What was thought "radical" in 1990 is now outmoded and has been overtaken by events. The bogey of colonialism is laid to rest, nettles are firmly grasped, and the absolute necessity for English as a national priority and the need for adequate teaching of English from the earliest stages bluntly stated. This does not imply that the African Languages are consigned to language death. In the debate about language policy that has, it could be said, "ragged" since 1990, this article has a most significant place and, we hope, marks a new phase of discussion.

Other chapters in the book deal most interestingly with the various things that have gone wrong and try to find reasons for these and solutions. The problems range from administrative and political to classroom practice and the need for in-service training for many teachers. There is a chapter on science teaching that stresses the importance of language in science teaching. Science makes specific demands on linguistic competence. In passing, it could be remarked that official utterances on the need for better science teaching as a national necessity usually fail to say that science needs adequate general language control and also makes certain specific demands. An attempt is made to explain the apparent sense of hopelessness and the lack of will to pull things together. Among other things, there are some pertinent

remarks about the malign influence of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), which has caused a dual control to function in education. Departmental control has to deal with a second centre of political power, a divided rule of educators and politicians. Outcomes Based Education was, of course, a catastrophe that wasted years and enormous resources, and undermined the morale of the teaching corps.

The volume concludes with a chapter on 'The Teacher as Hero', a looking forward to what could be and, indeed, has to be.

South Africa's Crisis in Education is published by NISC, and is available in most good bookshops, or from Blue Weaver (the distributor), or direct from the ISEA, Rhodes University (contact n.kelemi@ru.ac.za). **The selling price from Rhodes is R150 (VAT inclusive).**