

### **Educational Equity: Schools in Durban, South Africa**

Edgar Brooks described South African Apartheid education as "the only system in the world designed to restrict the productivity of its pupils to lowly and subservient tasks, to render them non-competitive in that economy, to fix them mentally in a tribal world."<sup>1</sup> When one considers this statement, the challenges that have faced the South African government in the post-Apartheid years take on a greater meaning. After Apartheid, a dual South Africa existed with many citizens living in modern cities, with access to advanced technology and a high per capita income. Yet, a large portion of the population lives in poverty, without access to these things. The legacy of Apartheid contributes to the gross social inequality that exists in South Africa today. In my research project, I am focusing on how the government is implementing national education standards in the face of social extremes. Specifically, I want to focus on the distribution of school funding as it pertains to diminishing the gap between schools in heavily white areas and heavily black areas. I hope to use the education system as a microcosm for the reconciliation and development process as the country moves into what some call the 'second revolution' in its second decade since Apartheid.

In pre-Apartheid South Africa, governmental funding of education covered little more than teacher salaries and building operations. Therefore, education required a significant contribution on the part of the family, and thus, in a nation with serious economic disparities, limited the educational opportunities of the poor- usually concentrated in black communities. The reforms put in place in by the government in 1994, did little to address the funding gap and the detrimental effects of unequal education that had accumulated over years of apartheid. They concentrated reforms on market-based principles of competitive standards and parental choice in schools, which ultimately forced the most under performing schools to close. This resulted in a shift from segregation by race to segregation by class. By not addressing the disparities between provincial and city school funding, the government did not fully compensate the poor for the injustices caused by Apartheid.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, the government is now attempting to implement school reforms at the micro-level, including individual school reforms, but without the redistribution or increase of funding, these changes are mostly symbolic in nature. My research will focus on the effects of these reforms at the individual school level as schools attempt to fit new standards for accountability that the government has enacted. My project will use the individual schools and the inequalities in these schools as to reflect the challenges of development facing the nation.

My methods for research will be to gather empirical information from the Department of Education branch in Durban on the implementation of accountability standards and funding policies of the government. I hope to base my research on schools in KwaZulu-Natal, which is one of the most diverse regions of South Africa. As of 2003, almost 23% of the adult population in this region had received no formal schooling. This has had dramatic effects on the development of industry in the province, as there is a severely limited skilled labor force. I will interview administrators, teachers, and students to gain primary sources of information on the challenges or benefits that individual schools have in regards to funding and achieving equality. My aim is to gather information on how and to where funding is distributed and how this relates back to the larger goal of reconciliation and development.

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<sup>1</sup> \*\*Lemon, Anthony. "Redressing School Inequalities in the Eastern Cape, South Africa," *Journal of South African Studies*, Volume 30, Number 2, June 2004: page 1.

<sup>2</sup> \*Lemon, 10\*

Here at Northwestern, I have taken many classes that will help prepare me for my study abroad. The School and Society class that I have taken will help me greatly in researching school policies and methods of reform. I have also taken a course called Africa Through the Eyes of the West that has given me background knowledge in African history over the years, as well as a better social understanding of African cultures. The Development of the Modern American city and Social Inequalities both addressed issues of inequity in American cities and schools that will be helpful in relating education inequality to the broader inequality in South African cities.

My project will coincide with the Independent Study Project that is a part of my program. Kate De Luna and Professor Henry Binford have both agreed to assist me in structuring my research here at Northwestern and also helping me possibly turn it into a senior thesis. I have also made contact with two Northwestern graduates, Keith Breckinridge and Cathy Burns, now researching at the University of the Eastern Cape in Durban that will be a tremendous help in making contacts researching education at that university. I have also been in extensive contact with a Northwestern graduate student, Lance Meyers, who once worked in the South African school system, and he has agreed to work with me to specify my research topic and prepare my research before going abroad. With their help, and plenty of pre-departure preparation, I hope to create an insightful and intriguing look at educational inequality in South Africa that provides a new understanding to inequality in South African society in general.

#### Preliminary Budget:

\$100-\$150 for rail travel expenses

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