Changing the wheel while the car was moving: restructuring the apartheid education departments[1]

Chika Trevor Sehoole
Department of Educational Management and Policy Studies, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0002 South Africa
mtsehoole@postino.up.ac.za

One of the main weaknesses of the critiques of education policies in post-apartheid South Africa is the tendency to overlook the analysis of the new state and the limitations imposed on it by the Interim Constitution. As such, critiques of policy have been framed in terms of literary or documentary analysis, i.e. by looking at the policy texts that have been released by government since the establishment of the new dispensation. This article represents an attempt to move beyond this narrow analysis of policy and the policy process in the education arena to scrutinise the complex dynamics that have determined or at least conditioned particular directions and made particular policy practices prevail. In particular, it looks at the challenges of restructuring the apartheid education departments, the challenges of the coexistence of the old and the new bureaucracy in the new Department of Education (DoE) and the impact this has had on the establishment of the new institutional memory and culture within the DoE in South Africa.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyse and assess the challenges encountered in the establishment of the new Department of Education (DoE), particularly the new bureaucracy as an organ of state in order, to explain the complexity of the state formation and policy development in post-apartheid South Africa. In its early days in office, the new Ministry of Education was hard-pressed in terms of human resources to cope with the challenges at hand, and therefore had to make certain choices to defer some of the responsibilities until enough capacity was built to deal with the challenges at hand. Policy development should therefore not only be viewed in terms of texts, consultation and participation, but also in terms of the totality of the challenges faced by the Ministry of Education and their responsibilities in getting education functional. This article looks particularly at challenges of restructuring apartheid education departments and employment of new staff.

In explaining the challenges and pressures under which this took place, and the need to formulate new policies, Du Preez, who acted as the Director-General of education during the first four months of the new government, equates the challenges involved with 'changing the wheel of the car whilst the car was moving'(Du Preez, interview). Once the new Department was established, it drove education policies and the restructuring process. The establishment of the new DoE involved interrelated challenges.

These challenges included firstly, the integration and restructuring of the former national department of education; secondly, the integration and restructuring of former provincial education departments; and thirdly, the development of instruments (legislation) to enable the new structures to work. The article argues that the establishment of the DoE was an attempt to shift from impenetrable polity, as represented by the continued existence of the old apartheid education departments and their personnel (until they were disestablished), to accessible polity as represented by the appointment of a Strategic Management Team (SMT) followed by other new appointments. that was aimed at overcoming the constraints of the Interim Constitution. The article deals with the following issues: firstly, Archer's theory of educational change; secondly, the inheritance of the old apartheid education departments and its impact on the creation of the DoE and the new bureaucracy; and thirdly, the challenge of creating the new institutional culture and its impact on policy development and implementation.

Method

This article draws from the larger research that was conducted for a doctoral research project submitted to the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand. It relies on the qualitative research method using interviews and documentary analysis. With respect to the interviews, the article draws from the voices of key government officials who were driving the restructuring process during the early days of the government coming into power. These interviews were carefully selected from over 60 interviews conducted for the doctoral study. These selected interviews present the inner perspectives of the working and thinking within the DoE during the first two years of the new government. They also speak to the contending views within government in terms of what was seen as crucial to the restructuring process. As such, this article represents a unique opportunity to hear the voices of key government officials in terms of how they saw the restructuring process unfolding. Open-ended questions were used during the interviews with the aim of allowing respondents to speak openly about their experiences and perceptions of how the restructuring process was unfolding. Whilst the selection of interviews could have been wider, only a few were deliberately chosen here as the focus is on depth rather than broad coverage. As such, the reliability and validity of the data are not based on how frequently the views expressed are supported, but on seniority and the roles each interviewee played in the restructuring process. Given the political roles the interviewees played within the DoE, their perspectives will obviously be clouded by politics. However, this should not be seen as a weakness, but as providing a perspective on some of the forces influencing policy development and its implementation and, in the context of this article, restructuring in education. The analysis in this article in located within Archer's theory of educational change and its features of impenetrable polity and accessible polity.

Discussion

Archer's theory of educational change

Archer sees change in education systems as the consequence of purposeful action by contending social groups. In other words, education is a site of struggle. She argues that:

> Education has the characteristics it does (at any given time) because of the goals pursued by those who control it ... change occurs because new goals are pursued by those who have the power to modify education's previous structural form, definition of instruction and relationship to society ... education is fundamentally about what people have of it and have been able to do of it (Archer, 1979:1).

She adds that education is rarely, if ever, the practical realisation of an ideal form of instruction as envisaged by a particular group. Instead, the forms education takes are usually the political products of power struggles. They bear the marks of concessions to allies and compromises with opponents (*ibid*:2).

Once a state education system is established, the degree of centralisation and decentralisation becomes of key importance in determining strategies for changing it. In highly centralised education systems, negotiated education change typically occurs in one way — by political manipulation at the national level. All demands have to be channelled through the political system. Nevertheless, the patterns of

change vary depending on the nature of the polity controlling the centralised decision system. Archer distinguishes between three types of polity: impenetrable, semi-permeable and politically accessible (*ibid*:3). This article will only concentrate on features of impenetrable polity and accessible polity.

Features of impenetrable (inaccessible) polity
The following are the features of impenetrable polity:
- In impenetrable (inaccessible) polity, no organised, united, educational opposition emerges, partly owing to the social and ideological heterogeneity in opposition groups and partly as a result of state strategies. When education change is permitted, it is of the 'top-down' variety. Academics and teachers are confined to consultative roles and parents and external groups are deliberately kept peripheral. Teachers will use any freedom of action they achieve to advance their vested professional interests rather than to effect systems change. Where national associations are formed they pursue policies to obstruct the implementation of these changes (*ibid*:236). The social heterogeneity of those who are satisfied with current education discourages the development of strong opposition to official educational policy; simultaneously; the polity actively seeks to prevent the formation of organisations committed to educational reform.
- The contribution of professional and external interest groups to shaping educational policy is at its lowest when an impenetrable polity coincides with the presence of united governing elites. The former cannot even play a systematic negative role by engaging in a concerted policy of obstruction (*ibid*:236).

These features may be related to the apartheid education system where government maintained tight control and would not tolerate any form of dissent. Whilst this might be true of the societies Archer used in developing her theory that in the impenetrable (inaccessible) polity no organised, united, educational opposition emerges, this does not hold true for the South African educational experience under apartheid. Contrary to the assertion that in centrally controlled systems teachers would pursue their professional interests only, teachers moved their struggle beyond professional interests by linking it to broader political struggles that were aimed at transforming the whole education system. In the process a strong opposition to official education policy emerged with the establishment of teacher unions and other education organisations committed to change. In South Africa, educational organisations committed to the eradication of apartheid were organised under the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC). This brought together parents, teachers, students and community education organisations in a formidable opposition. The NECC attempted to shape education policy with the development of people's education curriculum materials. The project was aborted as a result of state repression.

The teachers' struggle for the eradication of apartheid education and the democratisation of the education system received a boost with the establishment of the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), which developed from an amalgamation of different teacher organisations. As Allais and McKay put it, this organisation effected a marked change in teacher politics, which had historically been fragmented. The formation of SADTU intensified and accelerated teacher politics — in particular the wave of 'chalk down' strikes (where teachers refused to teach), protest marches, rallies and pickets by teachers (McKay, 1995). In the university sector, the establishment of the Union of Democratic University Staff Associations (UDUSA) in the late 1980s was to fight for the rights of academics, including the protection of academic freedom under apartheid. The struggle was changed into the transformation agenda in the 1990s prior to the 1994 elections. Archer's theory of educational change as expressed in inaccessible polity fails to take account of these features. However, her theory holds true for the way in which power in the apartheid education system came to be centralised in the hands of a white governing elite.

The dawn of democracy led to the formal dissolution of some of these apartheid education structures but not their disappearance. The dislodging of these structures was what came to characterise the establishment of the new DoE. The challenges of and the struggle for dismantling the apartheid education system for a democratic education social order was simultaneously a struggle for the establishment of an accessible polity that would allow the participation of different stakeholders.

Features of accessible polity
Archer identifies the following as features of accessible polity:
- The existence of accessible polity allows a wide range of education demands to reach the central decision-making arena and many groups may work through the system of parliamentary coalitions in seeking to negotiate their demands.
- The extreme disunity of elite relations in accessible polity prevents the consolidation of stable units for political manipulation (parties, alliances and coalitions) and leads to legislative immobilisation.
- The combination of an accessible polity with heterogeneous governing elites not only encourages the mobilisation of interested groups, but also places a premium on large, well-organised national associations. However, when interest groups themselves are also divided and incapable of cooperation it prevents the formation of stable associations with consistent political sponsorship. The disunity of governing elites and of education interest groups together amplifies the negative effects these have on one another (Archer, 1979:335-356).

The struggle for democracy in South Africa was also a struggle for the participation by the majority of the people in decisions that affected them. Hence the slogan of the Freedom Charter 'the people shall govern'. Given the historical role civil society played in the unfolding of democracy, it became difficult for the new government to ignore it. As a result, the partnership between the liberation movement and civil society continued even after the election of the new government in 1994. In highlighting the importance of the participation of stakeholders in the policy process, Manganyi commented that:

> Public participation is the way the (mass) democratic movement (in South Africa) does things. The struggle was about many things but it was also about public participation in influencing decisions that affect people's lives. Quite apart from the fact that we are a constitutional state, any attempt to operate differently would in a sense be a betrayal of some of the values that have been paramount in the history of the struggle in this country. Apart from formal considerations that relate to the kind of constitution that we have, a parliamentary system that works in a certain way, we have a government that believes in accountability and transparency. How would we become transparent if there was no public participation? (Manganyi, interview).

The principle of public participation laid the basis for the struggle to establish align accessible polity with the features outlined above. This article shows, however, that even though the government of national unity (GNU) arrangement at legislative level appeared to be showing features of accessible polity because of the 'inclusive' way in which it was constituted, at the executive level it showed some elements of impenetrable polity as the apartheid bureaucracy and the institutional culture remained intact. The challenges inherent in the establishment of the new DoE were also about the struggle to dismantle the stranglehold of the apartheid system on the DoE and to establish a new institutional culture and practices in line with accessible polity as defined by Archer.

Institutional memory and institutional culture: problems and challenges
The impenetrable polity of the new DoE not only found expression in the continued operation of the old apartheid structure and the incumbency of the old bureaucracy, but also in the institutional culture of the apartheid system that continued to be the basis on which the daily

business of the Department was carried out. This institutional culture could be referred to as the invisible expression of the closure of the system. The use of the concept of closure of the political system is not only related to the centralisation of power in the hands of a few people, it also has to do with the institutional cultures that characterised the operations of the DoE. It addresses the extent to which these institutional cultures were open to change and had to be transformed. Thus the transformation of this institutional culture to make it more open and, in line with the values and principles of the new government, was one of the challenges facing the new Ministry of Education. Given the nature of these challenges, it had problems in translating the old structures and cultures into what might become levers or organs of state power.

The creation of the new institutional culture was informed by the new vision but also drew from the backgrounds of the individuals and from their individual memories. Thus in drawing from the backgrounds of the individuals that make up the department, one is drawing on their memories, skills and experiences. This process of creating the new culture was not linear but drew on various sources, including the individual memories of the new appointees. In some cases those memories were new to the system and not even integrated, they had not gone through the 'melting pot' process where individual memories would be merged into the new memory of the state.

Institutional culture drew from a number of variants, such as institutional memory and the personalities employed within the department. By institutional memory is meant the background that individuals bring to the context. It has to do with the past and what they can remember. It is an established form of practice and draws from the principles, values and norms that inform it. It influences the way things are done. The challenge is how to draw on this (institutional memory) in a way that shapes the present and future institutional culture. Attaining this transformation required a number of steps. First there was a need to create an institutional culture and to identify the levers of state that needed to be brought under control in order to accelerate the pace of change. Mseleku explains institutional culture as

> How people go about doing things, the systems, the operations, and the procedures for doing basic things, what leads to the development of those systems and what is it that they were actually trying to create, what were their objectives for creating all those things. Without understanding them or without having somebody who understood what this system was meant to do, you weren't able to actually break into it because you need to understand the dynamics of the system in order to know where to change it (Mseleku, interview).

In organisational change, a primary step is to understand the nature of the organisation and the key dimensions in it. Rensburg elaborated on the notion of institutional culture by relating it to

> Policies and laws which are a formal representation of the memory, ideas, vision, mission, values, and frameworks for change, of the strategies for change, objectives, and of the implementation strategies attached to those objectives. And so someone has to write it, or groups of people have to write it (Rensburg, interview).

The challenge was to create an environment that was conducive to the expression of these backgrounds and memories in order to lay a basis for the establishment of an institutional culture that would inform the new institutional practices and new policy development.

There are different levels through which institutional memory mediates new practices and the development of a new institutional culture. The first level is of senior public servants (bureaucrats) who express it through ideas, mediate it through interpretation, give meaning to it and implement it on the basis of their own weaknesses and strengths. The next level of mediation is the institutions themselves, according to their capacity to respond to policy that has been selected from a range of options. The policy process and the implementation itself involve interpreting this memory. The new policies and laws were developed, written, understood and implemented by bureaucrats and the public. They were not just written; they were also mediated.

Institutional culture finds expression in two forms. The first is through ideas expressed by the senior bureaucracy and the institutions that interact with policy. The second form is through official documents of the DoE. These are formal representations of the state in terms of various policy domains. The creation of the new institutional culture in government departments became a contested domain, given the fact that liberation was not attained through a revolution but through negotiations. The GNU arrangement forced members of opposing camps to work together, even though it was difficult for this to happen given the history of adversarial relations among members of the GNU. In reflecting on the impact of coexistence of institutional cultures within the DoE in the writing of the White Paper 1 on Education and Training, Coombe commented that:

> Stakeholder organisations from the past regime were still using the structures and personnel of the old departments as their conduit into the new political dispensation. They were putting their own views across through the officials from the previous departments and likewise those officials who were feeding drafts of the new White Paper through those lobby groups, teacher organisations in order to protect their own familiar base from the previous dispensation. Those structures were by no means dissolved through the process of the election and the formation of the new department. The process within the bureaucracy of the old and incoming was not simply a bureaucratic process at all, given the political context. Just as the SMT members were aware that they had been appointed by Minister Bengu on political grounds, they were drawn from the political formation of the mass democratic movement, and they were expected to drive the mass democratic movement policy agenda and they had a political accountability to the Minister to the democratic movement structures (Coombe, interview).

Another feature of creating a new institutional culture was the recruitment of a new crop of bureaucrats who quickly had to drop unrealistic expectations and face the challenges of state and state power. This required a realistic understanding of the old bureaucracy and how it worked in order either to work against it or imbue it with a new style. Failure to have this sobering kind of experience in order to understand the nature of bureaucracy, and relying only on the fresher values and approaches that might have been inappropriate would not have been relevant for state power. On the other hand, they would have been appropriate for what Mseleku calls 'an anti-state movement', in other words, 'they are good for a revolutionary state because their mobilisation strategy is not necessarily appropriate in a context of a democratic state' (Mseleku, interview).

Primacy of skills versus primacy of politics: debates on the role of the old and the new bureaucracy in the new educational and policy context

Different views have been expressed concerning the usefulness of relying either on the old or the new bureaucracy in the development of policy. Arguments in favour of both views have been advanced, which add to the complexity of creating a new institutional culture. They range from putting primacy on skills (technical grounds) to putting primacy on politics. The former sees the problems of the policies developed in the first five years of the new government as being caused by a reliance on the new, visionary but inexperienced bureaucrats, at the expense of the old and experienced. Morris, one of the proponents of the use of the old bureaucrats, argues that they were not utilised and in the process were sidelined and became alienated. He highlights their unused skills in the new context in the following statement:

> They [old bureaucrats) actually have all the institutional knowledge of how to work something through a system. There are rules that say how to do this, and everybody knows that if you want to do it through the system you do it this way and that way in order to get it through. Those people know all of that; they

have all the implicit knowledge to do it. If they do not participate in the process, then you do not know how to guide things through a particular system. So on the one hand, it's a lack of capacity by new people coming in with the correct ideas of policy formula-tion. On the other hand, people in the institution who don't under-stand what the new policy is about, but understand the institu-tional arrangements about how to get it through. So if you don't create those linkages you have a big problem (Morris, interview).

As a result of their alienation some of the old bureaucrats eventually left the system, thus contributing to the loss of important expertise for the new government.

From the opposite standpoint, those who put primacy on politics believed the skills possessed by the old bureaucrats were not appropriate to the new policy context. Elaborating on this view, Mosala pointed out that:

When you drew them (the old bureaucrats) in, they had no under-standing of the political objectives of the new government. Even where they did understand they had an ideological difference with it. They did not have the technical expertise and capacity that was required to drive the new system. So they were unquali-fied to be there. They were not suited, not as persons, but they were not qualified to run with the new policy intentions of the new government. Their world was just another world. It is not true that they were not brought in, but they were not useful at all. They were robots. They were trained in another type of world. They were used to taking instructions. They refused to think. That is the bureaucracy the new government could never have used (Mosala, interview).

This view of the irrelevance of some of some of the skills of old bureaucrats in the new policy context highlights some points about the nature of the bureaucracy in such centralised and impenetrable polities as prevailed in the apartheid political system. It could be argued that the top-down approach used in these polities required a type of bureaucracy that carried out instructions efficiently for the system to run effectively. The backbone of the old system was an 'efficient' bureaucracy that provided its own sustenance over four decades. It could further be inferred that this type of personnel might have been trained for the sole purpose of carrying out instructions unquestioningly. Whether or not such an inference is valid, the appointment of replacements to build new capacities did not provide instant solutions to the problems described by Mosala. The new appointees were also found to be wanting in terms of the management skills that were required to run the system. In outlining some of the problems Badsha explained that:

We had the challenges of bringing in capacity. At a very basic practical level it was a case of people coming into the Depart-ment who had some experience and some sense of the policy process but now had to deal with being managers in the public service where you had to now manage projects and managed processes in particular. You had to work in different ways with agencies like Education Policy Units (EPUs), Center for Education Policy Development (CEPD) or whoever you had to now draw on to take your work further. So where you were before a researcher yourself, you now had to manage that research process and guide it and lead it. So that posed new challenges for a lot of people. I think another challenge people faced was to be able to find their feet in the bureaucracy. Some people find it more difficult to leave behind some of their activist background. So there was a sense of helping people respond now to issues in a much more realistic way rather than as activists. So it has also been important to recognise skills gaps of colleagues and help them to develop those areas (Badsha, interview).

A third perspective incorporated both views, putting primacy on both politics and skills. It related the use of the old bureaucrats to a certain calibre of leadership. Metcalfe argued that:

In terms of utilising the expertise of experienced officials it re-

quired a particular calibre of leadership in order to effectively use such people. That particular calibre would have been a person with vision, who was able to hold that vision, communicate that vision, and get them to use their skills in a very well-managed way to achieve that vision. That happened infrequently. If you look at the case histories of the particular sections within the new bureaucracy what you would more often find is an alienation between the two with no real leadership in terms of taking people along, marginalisation of the old guard and constant irritation at their display of old attitudes without a meaningful engagement or taking them along. There were relationships which were rooted much more in suspicion and people who were unable to accept the new leadership and vision (Metcalfe, interview).

This highlights the different perceptions, assumptions and positions that prevailed and that posed challenges for the establishment of the new bureaucracy. These inevitably impacted on the creation of the new institutional culture necessary for stability within the DoE. The different perspectives on the role and the use of the old bureaucracy in the new political context highlight two important points concerning the bureaucracy in relation to the relative openness and closure of the system. The first concerns the power the old bureaucracy wielded in terms of knowledge of the system, which could be used to block the transformation agenda and hence ensure the continued closure of the system. The other is related to the relevance of the operational skills within the system which the old bureaucracy possessed but which could be used only on the basis of direction and leadership offered from elsewhere. In this case, the use of these skills had little impact on determining the openness or closure of the system.

Some of the ways in which skills have been spoken of show the heterogeneity required in this context. The views expressed about them entailed inter alia knowledge of the system, the new policy, the political objectives of government, managerial skills, technical skills to drive the new system, thinking skills, leadership, vision and communication of that vision to the bureaucrats.

This article subscribes to the view that for the purpose of continuity within the new bureaucracy, a combination of the old and the new bureaucracy was required in the department. However, this needed to be drawn from people who were committed to the new vision of government and prepared to use their skills or acquire new skills for the benefit of the new government.

Creating a new institutional culture also entailed the management of crisis involved in the transition from the old bureaucratic culture to the new one. According to Mseleku, the new government was faced with an old order that did not want to change, but actually wanted to entrench itself by saying 'we are the institutional memory', and the new order that was saying 'we cannot trust the old at all and therefore it has no reason for claim [sic] to an institutional memory' (Mseleku, interview). The state was faced with contending institutional memories and cultures, one rooted in the old apartheid bureaucratic order, the other in the historical struggle against apartheid. The latter had no history of dealing with formal government bureaucracy. The challenge for the new state was to identify at what point it had to use the old institutional memory and at what point to reject it completely and simply try and create a new institutional culture from scratch. The interface between the two was actually what the managers had to contend with. Some of these difficulties in dealing with the two institutional memories in relation to the notion of democracy and participation are highlighted by the Director-General of Education in the following statement:

You have a situation where participation in democracy is what you want to come with, but the institutional memory that exists tells you that you cannot go and discuss with the structures and the people out there your intentions as government before they have been approved by democratic structures of government. So you are frustrated because you believe that in the policy development stage that the principle of democracy which is participatory is quite critical and crucial. Yet the institutional memory which

exists tells you that 'to do that is to undermine your power as go-vernment because you would actually have sold your position. You cannot do this without losing your authority as government' (Mseleku, interview).

The challenge facing the managers within the DoE was how to deal with these two cultures without abandoning the principle of democracy, and how ultimately to forge the new institutional culture. Mseleku's response here reveals the tension and the struggle that characterised the transition from the closed and impenetrable polity to the open and accessible polity the new government was committed to. The new bureaucracy was made up of people from different backgrounds, political persuasions and ideological orientations. According to Mosala, the coexistence of such diversity did not impact on policy formulation, but on implementation. This could be related to the period in the early days of the establishment of the DoE when it mainly outsourced the development of higher education policy and only senior government officials were involved in the final stages of policy development. This outsourcing could be related to the lack of human resource capacity to deal with the demands being made on the bureaucracy within the DoE. However, it also opened a window of opportunity for the public or stakeholders, other than the bureaucracy, to participate in the policy development process, thereby democratising it and making it more accessible.

The situation of having the old and the new bureaucracy working together in pursuit of the government's new vision for education raises the question of what measures were put in place to prepare or reorient the bureaucracy so as to be able to operate under these new conditions. There does not seem to be any evidence of such support being put in place. Whilst the new bureaucracy was lacking in a full understanding of how large organisations operated and how to change them, the challenge lay in getting the old bureaucrats to understand where government and the new policies were trying to go. Mosala expressed this challenge in conspiratorial terms:

> The language of the new policies was another world to most people and they didn't identify with that world. In fact, at other times I had the distinct impression that those people worked against what we were trying to do, consciously or unconsciously. For example, when we were deciding whether or not we were going to continue to have the Committee of Technikon Principals and the Committee of University Principals as statutory bodies, those people [the old bureaucrats] were working together with technikons and universities to try and force us to maintain the statutory status of those bodies. Many a time they were in cahoots with the sector (higher education) against the Department in trying to push the line of the sector which was predominantly *status quo* traditional white old guard sector at the time (Mosala, interview).

Here expression of the frustrations and contestations entailed in the creation of a new institutional culture reveal part of the struggle involved. It could be mediated only through sophisticated staff recruitment, writing of policies and provision of leadership. Against these were the limitations of appointing too few people within the DoE with the desire or ability to attempt transformation. For the process to succeed, more people were needed who shared the same vision and would be prepared to work in new ways to achieve it.

More broadly than the details of recruitment, creating a new institutional culture would have to entail putting in place a new conception of democracy. Not only would the right human resources have to be found; their effective mobilisation would require matching them with the appropriate responsibilities. This called for the establishment of systems and processes of finance, procurement, workflow and decision making across a range of specialised areas. There was no escaping the fact that some of these skills were found within the old bureaucracy and again this reinforced the notion of their indispensability within many departments, including the DoE. Even though there was a need for change to be effected, it did not mean that everything had to change. The key to creating continuity lay in balancing the bureaucratic skills of the old with a willingness to pass them down to the new.

One illustration of the complexity involved in this balancing act involved a chief education specialist who had served the apartheid DoE for thirteen years and reached retirement age even before 1994. Mr H Davies was retained by the DoE because he was the only person who understood the Technikon funding formula. He continued to serve as consultant for the Department in this field thus maintaining an element of continuity with the old guard. By 1999, a number of other senior officials (old and new) of the DoE who had served in the first five years and left, had been retained as consultants. Even though this practice could be viewed with scepticism, given the cost of using consultants, it does, however, point to a perceived difficulty in substituting experience.

A particularly sinister aspect of the institutional culture of the old bureaucracy of apartheid was the need to guard against enemies. Whether collectively from outside the country, or individually from within, the government was under constant attack. Even, perhaps especially, the ministers were not safe, and ranged amongst their most obstructive opponents were the bureaucrats. What the Director-General colloquially refers to below, as 'covering the Minister or Director-General's back' could be translated formally as loyalty. Or it could reveal something more profound about the culture of apartheid. As Mseleku explained:

> Mainly all the practices here were based on this main principle of covering the Minister or Director General's (DG's) back. How does it translate itself? No one, for example, could speak to the press, could write a letter or anything on behalf of this Department, could do anything without the consent of people who were on top because it was important to cover the Minister's back or the DG's back. And the culture that existed in decision making among the people from the director level was to push paper article upwards. The locus of decision making was centred at the top, (and was) very closed (Mseleku, interview).

To change such a culture of paranoia and subservience and put in a system that was both vertical and horizontal in decision making was something the DoE had to do urgently. It meant no less than putting in place what the Director-General refers to as a new culture of democracy. In Archer's terms it would mean opening up the system. This entailed establishing the new rules and procedures for decision making. In line with the principles of transparency, democracy, and accountability, which the new government had committed itself to, the new culture that was forged in the department was, according to Mseleku, not about protecting the Director-General or the Minister, but about facilitating delivery. What is not clear is whether giving up protection for the Minister also meant giving up loyalty. Would allowing Departmental officials to go out and do their work lead in the process to their making mistakes? Obviously making mistakes was not encouraged but the significance lay in what was intended when the mistakes were made. As Mseleku put it:

> The culture was that the DG would cover your back rather than you covering his. It allowed people to experiment and be creative as long as they operated within the established parameters (Mseleku, interview).

Although past practices discouraged Departmental officials from talking to the public without authorisation, Davies rightly argues that this was still the practice within the new DoE (Davies, interview). Even though it was cultivating a culture of democracy for itself, it did not necessarily mean that any official could go out and say anything on behalf of the Department without authorisation. An incident described by Mosala, in which he was castigated for speaking to the press without formal authorisation, illustrates this point succinctly:

> The new appointees, particularly blacks, that came in, suffered from an inferiority complex of not having worked in government before and fitted into what they found, in an uncritical way, and as the way government works. We were told all the time by the people who were there that 'this is what you do and this is how you do it'. The first problem I had in the Department was I gave

an interview to a newspaper, the Business Day, on the indicative funding figures for higher education. My colleagues who were all white at that time felt that the rule and the tradition was that we don't divulge that information until April the following year after the Minister has made the budget speech (Mosala, interview).

Mosala argued that in his view, universities, technikons and the public were awaiting these figures to help in their planning. Since he knew them and explained that these figures were only indicative and not yet approved by cabinet, he found no problem in divulging them. But, as he explained:

> I got into such trouble about that because these people then told the Minister and the Director-General who then wanted to know who divulged this information. And people were surprised that I did it, and I said 'Why can't I'? And they said 'no, it is not done'. 'But who was saying it is not done?' The old guard. 'But why shouldn't it be done?' I asked (Mosala, interview).

The incident landed Mosala in trouble within the DoE, with the Minister not endorsing his action. The practice was for these figures to be divulged only after planning had been endorsed by parliament. However, in Mosala's view, they were still the figures that were to be worked with. By the time parliament endorsed them in March, major political decisions would already have been made by the councils of higher education institutions. Mosala viewed this veil of secrecy as unhelpful.

Mosala's experience highlights three important features of the DoE at the time. Firstly, it indicates the inadequacies and ineffectiveness of the new bureaucracy in the new context. There seems to have been some inflexibility about allowing new ways of doing things. Secondly, the lack of transformation was similar to the process that had existed in the old days. In Mosala's view, the functioning and workings of the Department should have been completely reconceptualised and redesigned so that the new people could come in with new ideas and that the departments could be made to respond more timeously. Thirdly, it shows the continuation of the old institutional cultural hegemony in a new context. As a final point to be made from the incident, contrary to the view that the Minister or Director-General would cover the staffs' back, Mosala was expected to cover the Department by not divulging funding figures. This demonstrates the closure of the system in terms of decision making and access to information.

This account shows that there was a fresh ethos and, as far as South Africa was concerned, unprecedented democratic practices that the DoE had to forge. They were not to be served up on a plate but contested, negotiated and, in the rhetoric of the time, struggled over. As Mseleku put it, 'democracy is actually people, culture, thinking, approaches, processes, everything that you find in a government Department. That's a democracy' (Mseleku, interview). This definition may appear simplistic and may fail to draw on the insights provided earlier in terms of the different discourses and people coexisting within the Department. To say 'democracy is people' is not enough. The question then for government was what kind of people do you have and what kind of practices do you have in place? Democracy could be defined in terms of the kinds of people, cultures, processes and approaches that were supposedly being established in the Department. However, as pointed out earlier, what might be thought of as democracy by some people may be regarded as a weakness by others.

Conclusion

This article has analysed the creation of the DoE in terms of the challenges entailed. Using the concepts of closure and openness of polity, it has argued that the creation of the DoE was characterised by a struggle to shift from the impenetrable polity which had taken root in the institutional culture and memories of the old bureaucrats held sway during the continued employment of the old civil servants for the first five year of the new government. The goal was an accessible polity that would employ new people and institute new ways of doing things. For a number of reasons enumerated above, including a global move away from the associated ideologies, radical revolution was not an option. Rather, the choice lay in various forms of restructuring old apartheid structures — dismantling some, amalgamating others. To create the new education system envisaged by the African National Congress activists would have required a very different culture within the DoE. Whilst the appointment of new people accompanied by retention of the old gave an element of continuity to government, and therefore arguably some stability to the process of transition, the so-called 'sunset clause' in the Interim Constitution which guaranteed the jobs of old bureacracrts for at least five years, also impeded progress in implementing changes in line with the vision of the new government.

References

Archer M 1979. *Social origins of educational systems.* London: Sage Publications.

McKay V 1995. *A sociology of educating.* Johannesburg: Lexicon Publishers.

Interviews

Trevor Coombe: former Deputy Director-General, 15 and 16 May 2000, Pretoria.

Rolf Du Preez: former Director-General, 21 April 2000, Pretoria.

Irhon Rensburg: Deputy Director-General, 9 and 29 March 2000, Pretoria.

Chabani Manganyi: former Director-General, 13 October 1999 and 6 September 2000, Pretoria.

Thami Mseleku: Director-General, 30 June and 2 August 2000.

M Morris, Professor of Sociology, University of Natal, 10 July 2001.

Itumeleng Mosala: former Head of Higher Education in the Department of Education, 1 September 2000.

Nasima Badsha: Deputy Director General of Education in the Department of Education, 28 July 2000.

Mary Metcalfe: former Member of the Executive of Education, Gauteng Education Department, 14 November 2000.

Hugh Davies: former chief education specialist in the DNE and now consultant to the Department of Education, 17 November, 2000.