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'It was a sort of soft war that one waged': Teacher education at the University of Cape Town, 1976-1994

Charles Dorn

Bowdoin College

Abstract

Between 1976 and 1994, as schools became important sites in the struggle for liberation in South Africa, members of the University of Cape Town (UCT) Department of Education were compelled to negotiate the tensions that existed between maintaining academic freedom, continuing their work as teacher educators, and advancing the cause of ending educational apartheid. Seeking to direct their occupational pursuits towards fostering a freer and more just society, UCT Department of Education staff members participated in a range of activities that undermined the ideology of apartheid, from developing alternative school curricula to taking part in non-racial teacher organisations. Indeed, oral history interviews conducted for this study reveal that staff members generally conceived of their roles as comprised of multiple threads, including educator, activist, and scholar, and that while these strands played more or less prominent roles in various individuals' work lives they nevertheless comprised a shared identity, what I call the justice-oriented professional. Justice-oriented professionalism, however, also led staff to avoid engaging in the kinds of activities that might have threatened their professional lives. Although frequently undertaking projects that challenged the apartheid educational paradigm, staff members rarely risked their careers in the interest of ending racially segregated schooling in South Africa.

Keywords: academic freedom; activism; alternative curriculum; collective action; educational apartheid; justice-oriented professionalism

Introduction

In September 1985, the University of Cape Town's Department of Education issued an unprecedented 'Consensus Statement' in response to the national government's proc-

lamation of a state of emergency in South Africa – the first declared in the country since the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre. ‘With the changing circumstances of education in South Africa,’ staff members pronounced, ‘we as a University Department of Education feel it is necessary for us to make public our commitment to the attainment of a single, non-racial educational system in our country.’ Asserting that a ‘just system of education’ could never develop under the National Party’s policy of apartheid, the Department of Education insisted that forsaking segregated schooling was ‘a necessary part of the rejection of the apartheid state and a government which lacks broad legitimation’ (Young & Burns 1987: 4-5).

Collective departmental action of this sort was extremely unusual at the University of Cape Town (UCT). A predominantly white, English-language university, UCT had the reputation of being one of the best universities in the country (if not on the continent), a status that afforded it relative autonomy from overt interference by the national government (Kell 1991: 146-147). The institution, moreover, was neither as activist as Johannesburg’s University of the Witwatersrand nor as radical as the University of the Western Cape (established in 1960 to serve South Africa’s ‘coloured’ population). Consequently, although individual UCT scholars may have been actively engaged in anti-apartheid activities, departments rarely acted in unison. Indeed, rather than in solidarity with colleagues, members of the UCT Department of Education almost always acted independently in their capacity as professional teacher educators. What, then, led the UCT Department of Education to issue a Consensus Statement in 1985 and how might that statement have reflected the challenges that South African university-based teacher educators confronted during this era?

For decades prior to the Soweto student uprising in 1976, conflicts over education, especially those involving school curricula and languages of instruction, were common throughout South Africa (Kallaway 1984: 18-19). The national government’s violent response to the Soweto revolt, however, resulting in the death of hundreds of black South Africans, led schools to become important sites in the struggle for liberation. In the Cape Province, home to UCT, black and coloured students attending township schools used boycotts and marches as forms of resistance throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. Members of the UCT Department of Education were drawn into these conflicts, as government crackdowns on township schools, for instance, threatened the safety of UCT teachers-in-training.

The politics of university activism, however, could not be navigated simply by issuing a consensus statement in opposition to educational apartheid, as exceptional as that statement was. With involvement in politically-charged township schools threatening ‘the possibility of increased prescription from government,’ as UCT Education Faculty Dean Michael Ashley observed in 1987, and some members of the Department of Education coming under increasing pressure from radicalised students ‘to conform ideologically’ to the struggle, many staff members found themselves in a quandary (Ashley 1987: 18). As Department Head Douglas Young later recalled of the years

between 1976 and 1994, 'That period was an intensely political one. We were caught in a crossfire' (Young 2013: Interview).

How did members of the UCT Department of Education negotiate the tensions that existed between maintaining academic freedom, continuing their work as teacher educators and advancing the cause of ending apartheid schooling during a period of profound upheaval in South African society? This study reveals that staff members generally conceived of their roles as comprised of multiple threads, including educator, activist and scholar, and that these threads were interwoven in ways that they neither rarely could, nor necessarily wanted to, unravel. It is my contention that while these strands played more or less prominent roles in various individuals' work lives, they nevertheless comprised a shared identity, what I call the justice-oriented professional. Seeking to direct their occupational pursuits towards fostering a freer and more just society, UCT Department of Education staff members participated in a range of activities that undermined the ideology of educational apartheid, from developing alternative school curricula to taking part in non-racial teacher organisations. Indeed, the struggle against apartheid frequently served as the focus of, if not an engine that drove, their professional work.

Justice-oriented professionalism, however, also led staff to avoid engaging in the kinds of activities that might have threatened their professional lives. Although frequently undertaking projects that challenged the apartheid educational paradigm, staff members rarely risked their careers (not to mention their personal safety) in the interest of ending racially segregated schooling in South Africa. As Dean Michael Ashley observed of the era, 'All of us, pretty well, were well-meaning liberal white South Africans who were doing our best to be innovative with our materials, to initiate contact, things like that ... It was resistance, but it was low level. I mean you had a very ruthless and effective police state, in any case, operating where people disappeared and they were locked up and tortured and it was in the papers and everybody knew and nobody particularly wanted to go through that, particularly with no guaranteed outcomes. So, it was a sort of soft war that one waged' (Ashley 2013: Interview).

This essay investigates teacher education at UCT through the use of oral history interviews conducted with Department of Education staff members. Part of a broader study examining the history of teacher education in South Africa, it does not seek to accomplish the interpretive goals of the larger book project. That project, for instance, will compare the work of teacher educators across a variety of higher education institutions and include student perspectives on the role of teacher education in the struggle against apartheid. Instead, this essay reveals how UCT Department of Education staff members understood their professional work and identities on their own terms. Providing a brief overview of the history of educational apartheid, the essay's first part highlights central events in South African educational history, beginning with the implementation of the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and including

the 1976 Soweto uprising, the school boycotts of the 1980s and the development of the People's Education movement, leading to the nation's transition to democracy in 1994. Following this overview, the essay investigates the various components of UCT Department of Education staff members' justice-oriented professionalism, including scholarship and publication, efforts to design and implement alternative school curricula, and responses to restrictions on academic freedom. The essay concludes by examining staff members' general ambivalence towards the collective action they might have taken in opposing apartheid. As with family members who share common core values yet frequently quarrel over a multitude of issues, staff struggled to come to consensus on a collaborative approach to confronting segregated schooling in South Africa, a shortcoming that ultimately undermined their collective capacity as an academic department in an esteemed university to challenge educational apartheid.

'The education time bomb'

On 16 June 1976, students in South Africa's largest township, Soweto, took to the streets in peaceful protest of the government's imposition of a policy that required Afrikaans as the language of instruction in prescribed high schools subjects. By the end of the first day of protest, 15 people, including two schoolchildren, had been killed in violent clashes with the police (Welsh 2009: 161). Scholars have identified the events in Soweto as marking a sea change in the decades-long battle against apartheid. 'A new spirit galvanised blacks,' writes historian David Welsh of Soweto's implications for South Africa, 'and even in the face of fierce repression by the powerful state, resistance would gradually force the leaders of the apartheid government to recognise that suppression of its opponents was no longer a viable long-term strategy.' Soweto was, Welsh concludes in retrospect, 'the beginning of the end of apartheid' (ibid.: 142).

Among the many reasons that the Soweto uprising maintains a privileged place in South African history is that it heralded the beginning of widespread youth involvement in the resistance movement. This is not to say children and youth had not previously and dynamically opposed the national government. Soweto and its aftermath, however, led students to make schools active sites of struggle against apartheid, a development that would have far-reaching implications for parents, teachers, school administrators and teacher educators across the country for the following 20 years.

Although catalysed by the issue of Afrikaans as a language of instruction, student protests in Soweto had been decades in the making. As early as 1953, with the passage of the Bantu Education Act, South Africa's national government had dramatically exacerbated racial inequalities in South African schooling. With the transfer of Native Education from the provincial departments of education to the Department of Native Affairs, and the subsequent establishment of the Bantu Education Department for the specific purpose of treating black education differently from that of other racial

groups, the National Party bureaucratized a school system based upon a racially segregationist ideology. Designed to bring the nation's previously decentralised provision of schooling under state control, and consequently to use schooling as a mechanism to foster separate political, economic and social spheres for different racial groups, the Bantu Education Act sought to reproduce and extend patterns of inequality and oppression in South African society (Christie and Collins 1984: 173-175). Promoted by HF Verwoerd, a leading architect of apartheid and the national government's Minister of Native Affairs, the Act claimed to meet the needs of all students by attending to 'natural' cultural differences between racial groups as well as students' probable life trajectories. In a frequently cited address to Parliament delivered one year following the Act's passage, for instance, Verwoerd declared, 'There is no place for him [the black South African] in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour ... For that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has as its aim absorption in the European community, where he cannot be absorbed. Until now he has been subjected to a school system which drew him away from his own community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he was not allowed to graze. This attitude is not only uneconomic because money is spent for an education which has no specific aim but it is also dishonest to continue it' (ibid.: 173).

As hegemonic as it seemed, however, Bantu Education was never an 'unchanging mechanism of white domination,' as historian Elaine Unterhalter observes (1991: 35). The national government's education policy underwent a variety of revisions and reforms between 1953 and 1976, including significant increases in state school expenditures and especially the expansion of secondary schooling. Yet student enrolments during the period far outstripped increased state allocations, providing one of many reasons for black student discontent (Hyslop 1988: 184-186). With school overcrowding and a shortage of qualified teachers combining with the rise of Black Consciousness and the emergence of organisations such as the South African Students Movement, many schools by 1976, according to Harold Wolpe, 'seethed' with student frustration (1988a: 203).

Even for a nation that had grown somewhat accustomed to state brutality, the Soweto revolt was particularly shocking. Although the exact number of people killed during the uprising and its immediate aftermath will never be known (an official government report put the number of deaths between 16 June 1976 and 28 February 1977 at 575), news of the massacre and the image of a dead 13-year-old Hector Pieterse being carried away from the scene resulted in 'universal black fury,' according to political activist and historian Baruch Hirson. 'In townships throughout the country,' Hirson wrote, 'there were calls to revolt' (1979: 184).

In the Cape Town area, in particular, protests spread and turned violent. Although the national government's Group Areas Act had previously removed blacks and dislocated coloured South Africans from inner-city areas, tens of thousands of children and youth

from these racial communities attended schools in the racially divided suburbs. Ultimately, these schools, which were 'designed to propagate "education for domestication" on the Verwoerdian model,' as historian Peter Kallaway observes, 'turned out to be Trojan horses' (1984: 20). When students returned to class at the beginning of August, they immediately turned schools into sites of struggle. On 11 August, for instance, black students in the Cape townships of Langa, Nyanga and Gugulethu began protests in solidarity with their Soweto peers. Police responded with tear gas, dogs and bullets. In turn, thousands of coloured students in Cape Town began boycotting schools and participating in militant demonstrations (Hyslop 1988: 186; Hirson 1979: chapter 12). Over the next year, students boycotted, marched, set fires and hurled stones at policemen in opposition to the government's apartheid policies and, specifically, segregated schooling.

The national government's continued failure to address the central issues underlying student protests catalysed even greater resistance among blacks, coloureds and liberal whites, with a campaign of mass resistance developing during the mid-1980s (Welsh 2009: 282). 'The education time bomb,' write historians Michael Cross and Linda Chisholm of the period, 'was beginning to explode' (1990: 64). Consequently, in July 1985 the national government declared a state of emergency in 36 of the country's managerial districts. Giving police sweeping powers of search and seizure, arrest and detainment, the declaration also authorised the nation's military, the South African Defence Force, to enter townships. With casspirs (armoured military vehicles) patrolling black and coloured communities, schooling frequently took place, when it took place, 'at gunpoint' (ibid.: 64). Simultaneously, school boycotts and 'stay-aways' began undermining youth resistance. As the government, for instance, responded to boycotts by closing township schools and expanded the state of emergency to areas of the Cape Province, students reacted by calling for 'Liberation Now, Education Later' (Christie 1991: 253-255; Hyslop 1988: 197-199).

In response to students' growing disillusionment with education's role in the struggle for liberation, the Soweto Parents Crisis Committee called a National Education Crisis Conference at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in December 1985 (Wolpe 1988b: 16). Having previously sent a delegation to meet with leaders of the African National Congress in Harare (Zimbabwe) to discuss the crisis, and having received instructions to urge students to end the boycotts and return to school, conference organisers offered an alternative approach to schooling entitled 'People's Education for People's Power' (Christie 1991: 270-271). This approach, which conference members declared would be led by a newly formed National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), sought to unite political and educational leaders, community members, unions, parents, teachers and students in a bloc of resistance that would take control of the administration, teaching, method and content of the school programme (Hartshorne 1987: 4).

Although ultimately suffering from a lack of clarity over its precise goals, the People's

Education movement achieved several of its central objectives, including reclaiming schools that had been closed during the boycotts (Levin 1991: 125-127). Nevertheless, the national government, unable to suppress widespread demonstrations in other areas of national life and unwilling to negotiate in good faith with the NECC, expanded the state of emergency to the entire nation in 1986, 10 years to the month following the Soweto uprising. Detaining NECC leaders on a wide scale, the national government introduced a variety of measures to ban People's Education activities (Hyslop 1988: 204). Students nevertheless returned to classrooms in large enough numbers that they were again able to use schools as sites of resistance. Their fight continued throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, until the transition to democracy in 1994 brought an end to apartheid in South Africa.

'I think most of us shared that view'

In his examination of the University of Cape Town's Department of Education between 1910 and 1976, historian Peter Randall demonstrated a remarkable consistency in what he termed the 'colonial orthodoxy' that structured staff members' approach to the study of education (Randall 1998: 163). Although some staff taught out of the Afrikaans Christian-National tradition, which predominated at conservative Afrikaans-language universities and embraced apartheid through the theory of fundamental pedagogics, the UCT Department of Education subscribed generally to the English liberal tradition, including the study of the Western canon and the 'great educators', including Plato, Erasmus, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori and Dewey (ibid.: 166-167). Consequently, the study of educational history, for instance, failed to incorporate many of the revisionist historical interpretations that American and British scholars produced during the 1960s, while the discipline of sociology made only a slow and extremely-belated appearance in the UCT Department of Education's course of study, beginning in the early 1970s.

The Soweto uprising, however, provided a powerful catalyst for curricular revision. 'The profound crisis that gripped black education in South Africa after the revolt by high school students that began in Soweto on 16 June 1976,' Randall wrote, 'radically affected not only the nature of black education itself, but also the teacher education curriculum in the English-medium universities' (ibid.: 169). At UCT, course offerings provide evidence for the transformation that Randall described. Beginning in the early 1980s, for instance, the Department of Education's academic programme for the first time addressed the subject of 'School and Education for Social Education in a Democratic Society,' while the Department also began offering a course in the 'Political Economy of Education in South Africa' (ibid.: 172). Regarding the latter course, Peter Randall observed, 'The reading list had been purged of all the old titles and now included radical British and other foreign writers, as well as a recently-published collection of papers on the education of black South Africans, edited by a member of the UCT School of Education.' This collection, Randall concluded, 'was a

very significant development in that for the first time black education had been put at the top of the agenda and a radical critique applied to their education, many of the contributors approaching their work within a Marxist paradigm' (ibid.: 172).

Published in 1984, the collection to which Randall referred, entitled *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans*, was edited by historian Peter Kallaway (Kallaway 1984). Arriving at UCT in 1981 after having worked at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) for 10 years, Kallaway conducted a neo-Marxist analysis of schooling in South African society that resulted in a body of work forcefully criticising the national government and its policy of apartheid as well as schools' role in reproducing unequal class relations. Publishing his work through Ravan Press, one of the few publishers in the 1980s printing works aggressively critical of apartheid, Kallaway intentionally aligned his scholarship with the anti-apartheid movement.¹ He also conceived of his role as UCT lecturer in both pedagogical and political terms. Teaching a range of students, some of whom were training to become teachers and others who had been working as teachers for several years and had returned to UCT to receive an advanced qualification, Kallaway sought to engage students in a critical examination of schools and society. When asked whether he conceived of his role as lecturer as one in which he was trying to politically 'convert' his students, for instance, he responded by declaring, 'Absolutely. Oh, absolutely. Or just to get them to think politically. I suppose "convert" might be more appropriate, but yeah, because universally the kind of educational thinking that they had been exposed to was totally ideological. I mean if they had any thoughts about it at all it was probably just that they didn't like Christian National education, but [I wanted them] to be critical of what they, themselves, were doing [as teachers]...' (Kallaway 2013: Interview).

For Kallaway, however, scholarship and teaching were only two elements of the justice-oriented professionalism that he enacted in his work life. Opposed to the racial segregation of contemporary teacher organisations and believing them politically ineffective, Kallaway actively promoted alternative, non-racial teacher organisations. 'I'd been part of the establishment of the first one in Johannesburg, called NEUSA,' Kallaway recalled, 'the National Education Union of South Africa, which we established in about 1980 ... When I came to Cape Town, the same thing was going on, it was called WECTU [Western Cape Teachers Union].' Questioned about WECTU's purpose and his place in the organisation, Kallaway responded, 'What did they do? They ran teacher politics, and I think quite usefully ... It was very exciting political stuff and I just felt that I needed to be there quite often as part of showing that UCT was part of all that.'

1 Peter Randall, who was director of teacher education at the University of the Witwatersrand at the time he published his study of Education at UCT, was one of Ravan's founders. Dedicated to publishing anti-apartheid works, Randall was eventually banned by the national government, which among other restrictions limited his freedom of movement and association.

Kallaway's claim that he participated in WECTU meetings in part to represent UCT revealed the importance he ascribed to the university taking an institutional stance in opposition to segregated schooling. When asked, explicitly, whether he thought his university colleagues should have been 'agents for change' during the apartheid era, Kallaway responded, 'I think it was a matter of trying to be an activist and also be in the university and try to push ... Maybe it was just incredibly naïve to think that universities can get involved in politics like that, but I think most of us shared that view.'

Kallaway's commitment was hardly exceptional. Indeed, he recalled, 'Most of the people in the department in some way or another during this period were involved in trying to engage in change and what it all meant in various kinds of ways.' Mzobz Mboya, for instance, who served as Special Assistant to UCT Vice-Chancellor Stuart Saunders before being appointed to the Department of Education in the field of Educational Psychology, claimed to have shared Kallaway's justice-oriented approach to his professional work. 'I saw myself as a teacher in the struggle for the transformation of education,' Mboya reflected (Mboya 2013: Interview). 'The challenge was in translating participation in the community to the [UCT] classroom.' Estimating that engagement with local schools and teachers comprised 30 to 40 per cent of his work, Mboya observed, 'I saw myself not just as an academic but as part of a transformative agenda that was being pursued by those yearning for democracy and justice.' When asked if his community involvement ever detracted from his university work, Mboya claimed that although his rate of scholarly publication declined, his participation in the struggle catalysed his development as an academic and intellectual. 'My scholarship would suffer. I was attending meetings and was involved, but it was still a part of the learning process. I was learning from people in the community rather than from a book I was reading in a classroom and it was still a learning process.'

Staff member Johannes Esterhuyse, whose field of expertise included socio-linguistics, also approached his work from a justice-oriented perspective, yet his professional activities took a substantially different form from those of Kallaway and Mboya. Prior to arriving at UCT in 1982, Esterhuyse taught high school, which is where he first identified a 'desperate need' to reconstruct the Afrikaans language curriculum. Describing the textbooks in use throughout South African primary and secondary schools as 'written in the apartheid paradigm, a strongly Christian National education matrix,' Esterhuyse sought to 'revolutionise' the country's language textbooks (Esterhuyse 2013: Interview). 'It was a need to actually just free Afrikaans kids who really lived in the kind of thing that you would find in the Bible Belt [in the United States],' he elaborated. 'It was at that level, you know, heavily creationist, heavily racist, heavily supremacist, and heavily sexist, very paternalistic.'

Esterhuyse met the challenge he set for himself by writing a series of 'mother-tongue books' for schools that was, he described, 'in the first place secular, in the second place focused on human values rather than on certain political values, and addressing that

very skewed development of the Afrikaans language within the school context.' Entitling his textbook series *Ruimland*, meaning 'spacious land,' Esterhuysen implied that there was room for all Afrikaans-speakers in South African society, regardless of race or creed (Esterhuysen and Brink 1992). Accompanying this provocative title, one of the book's covers, for instance, included a colourful illustration of children of different races playing together. Esterhuysen wove this progressive theme throughout the text both visually and pedagogically, abandoning the lockstep, grammar-oriented framework of traditional Afrikaans-language texts. As innovative as Esterhuysen's texts were, however, and indeed because of their untraditional approach, Esterhuysen initially had difficulty getting schools to adopt the books for classroom use. At first, South Africa's provincial governments rejected the series, while conservatives in the national parliament threatened to ban the texts (Engelbrecht 2006: 75-77). By the early 1990s, however, as political reform began changing South Africa's educational landscape, the books, according to Esterhuysen, 'found their ways into the schools.'

A number of other staff members also sought to develop alternative, anti-apartheid curricular materials. In 1986, the Department of Education hired Robert Siebörger as a History Methods course lecturer. His appointment coincided with the national government's expansion of the state of emergency to the entire nation. When asked whether the upheaval that occurred in Cape schools following the government's action complicated his new position, Siebörger recalled, 'There was a saying at the time regarding sport, 'No normal sport in an abnormal society,' that kind of thing, and that was certainly my sense for schooling and for education for the whole of this period, that my experience as a university academic was not normal because the situation wasn't normal. And that was manifest in lots of ways, partly just in the fact that attending meetings, coping with the day-to-day reality of disruption or protest or strike or stay-away, that was the norm in a sense, and so it was those kinds of external things that were dictating my diary rather than the normal academic demands that you would expect' (Siebörger 2013: Interview).

As with Johannes Esterhuysen's work in Afrikaans, Siebörger sought to use his History Methods courses to contribute to reconstructing the South African History curriculum. 'They were extremely productive years,' Siebörger remembered, 'in the sense that in departments like history and archaeology and the Centre for African Studies, there was a lot of new knowledge being generated, you could say a new history was being written of South Africa and UCT had an important part to play in that ... For a long time I saw my work as appropriating that academic work and putting it into schools.'

Part instruction manual and part resource guide, the publication *What is Evidence? South Africa During the Years of Apartheid* documents just one of Siebörger's curriculum development projects. Offering what he called 'a skills-based approach to secondary history,' Siebörger and co-authors Gail Weldon and Chris Hinton encouraged teachers to use *What is Evidence?* to instruct students in how to 'do' history, including

‘collecting information, working with different kinds of sources, deciding about evidence, asking questions about the past, identifying bias, and logical argument’ (Siebörger, Wheldon and Hinton 1996: 4). In addition to their pedagogical goal, however, Siebörger and his colleagues provided an explicit statement of the justice-oriented objective they hoped to achieve through the book. In contrast with the traditional history taught in South African schools, which typically involved memorisation of government-approved subject matter, Siebörger meant for students to engage in a critical analysis of apartheid. ‘We believe that apartheid is not something one can feel neutral about,’ the book’s introduction reads. ‘Our own views are clearly reflected in the way in which we have written the book, and what we have included in it ... You will also discover aspects of the history of apartheid which have been hidden in the past and excluded from school history textbooks’ (ibid.: 4). Making these anti-apartheid views explicit, the ‘aspects of the history of apartheid’ to which Siebörger referred included the 1955 Freedom Charter, the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, the 1976 Soweto uprising, and the experiences of prisoners such as Nelson Mandela on Robben Island.

Carohn Cornell similarly developed alternative curricular materials designed to disrupt the traditional, government-approved school curriculum. Hired as a research fellow in 1982, Cornell worked in the UCT Language Education Unit, which the Department of Education established primarily to house its growing collection of alternative teaching materials, including those Cornell produced through her fellowship (University of Cape Town, School of Education, Language Education Unit: Activities 1986. Report to the Faculty of Education Board meeting, 28 August 1987). Cornell’s previous experience teaching English as a second language to students in crowded classrooms with minimal resources led to her interest in developing ‘scripted dramas’ for classrooms use. Writing the scripts along with local teachers, UCT student teachers and high school students, Cornell frequently based the dramas on controversial topics. School students would then read, enact and discuss the scripts as well as complete a variety of associated writing activities.

A brief survey of the topics on which Cornell and others developed their scripts suggests the provocative nature of some of the dramas, including ‘Whose Beach?’, which examined the legal segregation of South African beaches, ‘One Happens Every 30 Seconds,’ which examined the high incidence of rape throughout South Africa, and ‘Rebel Resisters,’ one of a series of ‘resistance history’ scripts.² Regarding this third category, Cornell asserted that the script-writing project was, itself, a form of political resistance as well as ‘a contribution to liberatory education’, as it effectively infused ‘popular’ or ‘people’s’ history into the government-approved English curriculum (Cornell 1989).

Cornell’s work with resistance history led her to publish a collection of scripts in 1985 entitled ‘Cape Town Scenes,’ which the UCT Department of Education made available

2 Copies of scripts in the possession of Carohn Cornell.

to schoolteachers through the Language Education Unit. The first script in the collection, entitled 'Who Built Cape Town?' illustrates how Cornell intended scripted drama to inject the study of social history into the classroom. In the script, a youth chorus poses questions about the founding of the city of Cape Town, with four VIPs (Very Important Persons) – Jan van Riebeeck, Simon van der Stel, Lady Anne Barnard and Cecil Rhodes – answering the students. A crowd of FPs (Forgotten Persons) challenge the VIP's answers, however, offering alternative interpretations of the city's establishment and growth. A migrant mineworker by the name of Bambata Zondi, for instance, comments on Rhodes's answer, while slave mason Philemon Fortune challenges Van der Stel's reply.

According to Cornell, teachers used the script to stimulate conversation among students about the history of Cape Town's founding as well as the way that historical knowledge is formed and either legitimated or rejected by social and political authorities. Cornell also recalled, however, that the script played another, unanticipated role as part of 'awareness programmes' conducted in schools during the mid-1980s. As school boycotts spread throughout the Cape Province in response to the government's expansion of the state of emergency in 1986, school students, teachers and UCT student teachers in coloured and black schools planned and executed a series of awareness programmes that took the place of the approved school programme. Designed to raise awareness of the injustices being perpetrated by the national government, the programmes, according to Cornell, were 'very hard to keep going for weeks.' 'I mean,' she recalled, 'awareness programmes needed all kinds of material. It was relatively easy to find some film and video material – I mean they were amazing what they organised, actually – but 'Who Built Cape Town?,' I probably saw it performed differently in about 20 awareness programmes across schools. You see, student teachers were in schools but they weren't teaching the curriculum, so it was a space for those of them who really wanted to run with all sorts of things, and that ['Who Built Cape Town?'] happened to be a tool' (Cornell 2013: Interview). Ultimately, Cornell's work in scripted drama became a part of the People's Education movement curriculum that circulated throughout schools in the Cape Province.

Cornell's description of her use of scripted drama exercises suggests how involved some UCT Department of Education staff members, such as Wendy Flanagan, became in the challenges that confronted local schools, teachers and students. Flanagan began working as a senior lecturer at UCT in 1982 after spending the first part of her career as a primary school teacher (she would eventually earn a PhD and retire from UCT in 1997 as an associate professor). Hired to direct the Education Department's primary school teacher education programme, Flanagan quickly concluded that UCT students who sought primary school certification would be responsibly prepared only if they practice-taught in multiple school contexts, including black and/or coloured schools. Flanagan therefore began establishing relationships with schools in Cape Town's Gugulethu township, for instance, where she placed UCT students for a four-week

teaching practice session. Consequently, she claimed, ‘The primary [UCT] students, while I was there, got reasonable experience in schooling that they had known nothing about’ (Flanagan 2013: Interview).

When asked whether there were reasons other than programmatic ones for deciding to expand primary school teaching practice into black and coloured schools, Flanagan offered a justice-oriented explanation. ‘We didn’t have to do any of this,’ she said. ‘I am a South African and for me the responsibility was to educate South Africans and when I started to work in those black schools I was appalled at what was happening in those schools ... And so for me it really was, “We can’t have this. We can’t have this ...” As you know from the [United] States, racism is a really insidious thing and people don’t necessarily own up to it, and that’s how this country was, and still is. But I didn’t want that in my country and it seemed that there was a hope that it might not be that way.’ When then asked directly whether she meant for her professional efforts to undermine or challenge apartheid, Flanagan responded, ‘If you’re talking in political terms, then very, very definitely.’

Unlike UCT academic departments that might choose to avoid participating in the struggle against apartheid, the Department of Education, by the nature of its work with and in local schools, was frequently compelled to become involved. Rather than posing a problem, however, Robert Siebörger recalled appreciating this justice-oriented aspect of his professional life. ‘I think the enormous benefit for us,’ he remarked:

was that both through teaching practice and the fact that we had the BEd [Bachelor of Education] part-time teachers coming in to lectures in the afternoons, the concerns of what was happening in the schools and the communities were very real and very immediate ones to us and so you would carry those kinds of concerns with you into all that you did ... It wasn’t possible to, kind of, closet yourself. I imagine that in other departments in the university you could. If you were an engineer and you just wanted to get on with engineering, then you could still do that, whereas for us it wasn’t an option because you would face those students daily in the case of the teachers and we certainly faced it head-on with teaching practice.

Asked to specifically describe the kinds of challenges that Department of Education staff confronted in relation to teaching practice, Siebörger described the problem that school boycotts posed. ‘An extreme version of teaching practice,’ he observed, ‘is that you would go to a school and they’d say, “No, there’s no school today”, and this was before cell phones, so you’d scratch around and try to find your students and find out what was happening and what was going on and then you’d come back the next day just in case there’s school that day and there’d be no school that day.’ When asked whether he felt that events such as school boycotts or, more probably, the protests and violence that broke out in local schools ever risked his personal safety, Siebörger replied that he never felt seriously threatened while serving as a teaching practice supervisor. He then related what he described as his ‘favourite anecdote’ from the time. ‘I was at a high school in Langa [a Black township], Siebörger recalled, ‘and the [UCT] students had had a fairly reasonable opportunity to teach, so I was able to sit in

on lessons. Then, sort of halfway through the morning, the groups of school students, in the way that they used to do by mobilising the rest of the school, some of them came up to me and said – I think I was probably the only white in the school at the time, there might have been one or two white teachers – and they said to me, “We’re going to stone cars now, we think you should go.” So I went!’

Although aligning their professional work with a commitment to justice, and even occasionally exposing themselves to potential violence, staff members rarely identified themselves as the kind of political activists who were in genuine danger of, for instance, being apprehended by state security police. Regarding their identities as teacher educators and scholars, for example, Michael Ashley observed, ‘I came here [UCT] primarily as an academic, not as an activist, but as the momentum developed the university became more and more involved. It was always opposed to apartheid ... and it was resistance but not colourful, heroic kind of resistance, but it was definitely very different from what Afrikaans institutions were practising and propagating and it was definitely opposed to apartheid’ (Ashley 2013: Interview). UCT Educational Psychology lecturer David Donald claimed, ‘I wasn’t a radical in a sense that I went and wore banners, but I tried to do things that I thought were really beneficial, that could make a difference, in an area where I could contribute’ (Donald 2013: Interview). Wendy Flanagan similarly stated, ‘I can’t really say [I was an] activist, but in some ways I felt like an activist ... by being at an education workshop [for instance], but I never went to funerals and if you were an activist you never missed a funeral. I never, ever went to a funeral and I never did marches’ (Flanagan 2013: Interview).

Finally, Johan Muller, who directed the Education Policy Unit at Wits prior to arriving at UCT in July 1990, also claimed to have contributed to the anti-apartheid movement through his work. Yet he, too, emphasised that he never thought of himself as a ‘real activist.’ ‘I should just say, again,’ Muller underscored towards the end of his interview:

I was never out there and I was never really at risk. I don’t think I was ever at risk of getting picked up. My intention was always to contribute from more of an intellectual point of view. And I guess that bona fide activists might have seen that as a kind of a whitey hedging his bets, but I did think about it and I thought, ‘Other people will do that better than me and I can kind of do this better than other people and that’s what I’m going to do.’ And I accepted what came with that. But I do want to say I’m not putting myself forward as an activist or somebody prominent in the struggle. I wasn’t. Those other guys were heroic. I have the greatest admiration for them (Muller 2013: Interview).

Although Muller and other members of the staff rarely, if ever, felt personally threatened as a result of their professional work, they nevertheless shared a commitment to promoting justice in a race-based society. A second experience they shared was the teaching of university courses where, again, staff confronted challenges as not only the national government but UCT students as well frequently sought to impose restraints on intellectual and academic freedom.

‘It was impossible to stop and argue with them’

In January 1987, the Department of Education moved to a new building on UCT’s middle campus and became, administratively, a School of Education (University of Cape Town, School of Education, Annual Report, 1987. To the Board of the Faculty of Education, 25 March 1988). Six months later, staff members met for an all-day workshop led by department head Douglas Young. Meeting minutes reveal that Young provided a number of agenda items for discussion, including the claim that ‘... academic freedom, if it stills exists at UCT and elsewhere in SA [South African] universities, needs to be understood in terms specific to the School of Education.’ Urging staff members to examine this claim in relation to what he argued was the Department’s primary responsibility – teaching students – Young concluded, ‘Our research and community and outside commitments should be both catalysts and content for such teaching and methodology’ (University of Cape Town, School of Education, Working Paper for Discussion at Staff Meeting, Monday 22 June 1987, 9.00 am to 4.00 pm, in Room 4A: 2).

Young’s suggestion that by June 1987 academic freedom might no longer have existed at UCT reflected the pressure that many staff members were under to conform to ideological government objectives. As early as 1959, for instance, and in a blatant attack on academic freedom, the national government had legislated the Extension of Universities Act, restricting university authority to admitting students on the sole basis of academic merit and effectively closing white institutions to black students (Christie and Collins 1984: 172). Consequently, only over time and in small, exceptional numbers was UCT able to enrol black students. Thirty years later, Education Dean Michael Ashley observed that the national government continued to constrain academic freedom at UCT in a variety of ways, including censoring published material and banning staff and students for what it considered subversive behaviour (Ashley 1987: 17). Similarly, Douglas Young recalled, ‘There were all sorts of punitive steps, despite academic freedom, that government could take if the university stepped out of line too much. They were subtle steps, like withholding aspects of the [government’s financial] subsidy ... The pressure was there’ (Young 2013: Interview).

Government restrictions on academic freedom posed difficulties to several Department of Education staff members. Prior to developing his Afrikaans language textbook series, for instance, Johannes Esterhuyse wrote a book entitled *Taalapartheid en Skoolafrikaans* (*Language Apartheid in School Afrikaans*) in which he argued that apartheid influenced the entire Afrikaans linguistic paradigm (Esterhuyse 1986). Describing the book as a ‘political statement’ that caused ‘huge disruptions,’ Esterhuyse claimed to have experienced an immediate backlash upon the book’s publication. ‘Within a week,’ he recalled, ‘I was thrown off every single committee that had anything to do with the government. I just got these little letters, “Your service is not needed anymore. Thank you very much”, and it became quite unpleasant’ (Esterhuyse 2013: Interview). Esterhuyse eventually learned that *Taalapartheid en Skool-*

afrikaans earned him a place on a list of anti-apartheid agitators compiled by the national government's Bureau for State Security.

Stuart Saunders, who served as UCT Vice-Chancellor between 1981 and 1996, has recorded multiple ways in which the national government sought to control higher education institutions, specifically UCT (Saunders 2000). 'In dealing with the state,' Saunders observed, 'there were pressures, of course, and people did try and make us change in various ways' (Saunders 2013: Interview). As an example, Saunders described what he called 'the biggest confrontation' between UCT and the national government in which then Minister of National Education and future President of South Africa FW de Klerk called all heads of universities to a meeting in Parliament and announced that the state would impose financial penalties on any institution that did not prohibit campus protest. In response, Saunders and UCT led an effort to take the national government to court, with the university ultimately winning the right to maintain freedom of expression on campus.

Saunders also noted that in addition to the national government, local police exerted pressure on the university. 'We were, on occasions, harassed by the police,' Saunders recalled. 'Our phones were tapped, and so on, and there were some anonymous phone calls and things like that. The Chairman of Council on one occasion put guards on our house – much to my annoyance – because he thought that the "dirty-tricks brigade" might try and do something.' During this time, Saunders also learned of the presence of plain-clothes, undercover security police on the UCT campus as well as students whom security forces recruited to serve as spies. Consequently, staff often taught with the notion of surveillance in mind. 'You always had to assume that there was an informer in your school class or in your university class,' Carohn Cornell remembered. 'You always had to assume that. It sounds melodramatic. And you also had to assume that your post and your phone were tapped, under surveillance' (Cornell 2013: Interview).

It was not just the national government and local police force that posed a challenge to academic freedom, however. Radicalised proponents of the struggle against apartheid also pressured many universities and their staff to conform politically to the resistance movement. Writing in 1988, for instance, Eric Molobi, an executive member of the National Education Crisis Committee (which guided the People's Education movement), claimed that academic freedom could not be considered 'in isolation from the political struggles of our people' and therefore ceased 'to be the privileged domain of academics and universities alone' (Molobi 1988: 161). 'The idea that speaks of academic freedom as unrelated to broader social freedoms is thus questionable,' Molobi continued. 'Any type of a vague, nebulous and illusory freedom, which can only be enjoyed by academics and institutions of higher learning, and serves only to satisfy individuals who in many instances simply enjoy the public glamour of criticising apartheid from afar, is questionable' (ibid.: 161). Alternatively, Molobi asserted, universities were obliged to become part of the struggle against apartheid by participating in their local communities. 'The NECC believes that universities cannot

remain isolated from the communities they serve,' he wrote. 'In a situation where black schooling is in a shambles, our position is that universities – or at least progressive academics within them – should work with the communities beyond university walls ... Presently, these communities want Bantu education scrapped and replaced with a non-racial democratic People's Education' (ibid.: 158).

Pressure to conform to the opposition movement came from radicalised UCT students as well as from organisations such as the NECC. These students, many of whom formed the vanguard of the university-based anti-apartheid movement, frequently challenged the work that Department of Education staff members undertook as irrelevant (if not an affront) to the struggle against apartheid. During the 1980s, for instance, the Department of Education engaged in an 'outreach' project that involved placing students in an intensive, five-week teaching practice in disadvantaged Black schools in the bantustan homelands of Bophuthatswana and KwaZulu. In 1986, however, when the Department of Education invited a KwaZulu educational planner to address student teachers on conditions in the schools in which they would be placed, a radicalised UCT Student Action Committee prevented the speaker from addressing students because they believed he was a member of the Inkatha Freedom Party, a rival to the popular African National Congress and a group many perceived as collaborating with the national government (Young and Burns 1987: 5). As department head Douglas Young recalled, 'We asked him [the KwaZulu official] to give a seminar and that was boycotted; the student activists came and said, "How dare you bring a collaborator down to the university." Then they got wind of a meeting that I was having with him in my office and they stormed the building, came into the office, crowded the office, and said, "You're a collaborator!"' After students began aggressively threatening the official, Young remembers working to defuse the situation, ultimately leading the students into a peaceful discussion of their demands.

When asked whether student ideology of this kind influenced his work at the university, Nigel Bakker, who arrived at UCT as an English methods course lecturer in 1981 after having taught high school for 10 years, recalled that when he was first employed at UCT, 'Cape Town – the Cape Flats in particular, the coloured community – had had their very fair share of rioting and death in their streets and so I walked into this incredible tension [on the UCT campus], manufactured very generally by the students, who were hugely radicalised ...' (Bakker 2013: Interview). Recalling how this political context affected his courses and teaching, Bakker observed:

Probably a minority of students were seriously radicalised but they were certainly the most vocal ... I had some very radicalised students in my English methods class, which was between 80 and 100 strong; there were a lot of radical students and it was very difficult to teach, well, it was difficult to teach English as you thought English teaching should be taught because they [radicalised students] would demand that your literature was, in quotation marks, 'relevant' and it was impossible to stop and argue with them and say, 'Now, what do you mean by "relevant", let's unpack this word' because then you were a liberal, and that was the worst thing you could be called because then you're: a) spineless, b) wishy-washy, and c) you're not for the struggle. The slogan was 'Either you

are for the struggle or you're against the struggle' and I tried to debate that once and said, 'But surely there are other standpoints?' There was just no way they were going to listen to debate. It was an open and shut case. I believed I was referred to as a 'charismatic fascist,' which I never knew how to take; for me it was a back-handed compliment.

Bakker's experience was shared by Johannes Esterhuysen. In contrast with the national government's reaction to his publishing *Taalapartheid en Skoolafrikaans*, which involved removal from government committee service outside of the university, Esterhuysen believed the government had little direct influence on his work inside the university. 'The government influence on the university hardly penetrated the walls,' he claimed, 'because there was this whole thing about academic freedom, it was *the* rallying cry at the time: "Academic Freedom; stay out of the university".' On the other hand, Esterhuysen observed, radicalised students frequently asserted political pressure inside the university. 'I remember in '85,' he described, 'there was this student riot in the School of Education ... Essentially they [students] said, "We don't think you are that relevant politically."' There were about three, four, five coloured women students who were extremely belligerent and they would simply argue that we simply did not have the license to speak because we were white males. It was a very uncomfortable time.'

Although most staff acknowledged the presence of politicised, if not radicalised, students at UCT, some did not find the pressure these students exerted in their classrooms to be problematic. David Gilmour, for instance, who taught Sociology of Education when appointed to the Department in 1987, recalled enjoying having politically motivated students in his course. 'I loved teaching that group in those days,' he claimed, 'because they were highly politicised and we had big, big groups, up to 300, if not more, I would guess 80% black or coloured. They were coming out of schools where boycotts had been the norm, where teacher radicalisation had been the norm, where oppositional politics had been the norm, and they were wanting to be teachers because they wanted to go back and make a difference, so they were really exciting – challenging for sure, whenever I got nailed it was for being too conservative – so we had many disputes in the class' (Gilmour 2013: Interview). When asked whether he thought such disputes undermined the class dynamic or his capacity to teach, Gilmour observed, 'I don't think so... back then, it [Sociology of Education] was a whole year course, so we had time to develop a relationship, to develop ideas, to work through stuff in various kinds of ways ... so there we could spend a lot of time.'

Although differences clearly existed between staff members regarding the experiences they had in their teaching, in their scholarship and publication, and in other areas of their professional lives, they nevertheless all noted the pressure that various groups attempted to exert on the university to adopt a particular political stance. Conversely, some Education staff members sought for the department to exert its own pressure in response to a specific event or in opposing apartheid more broadly. At those moments, strong disagreements between staff over whether or how best to construct a collective, coordinated response limited the Department's efficacy.

During the 1980s, staff members in UCT's Department of Education seemed aware of the seminal period in which they conducted their professional work as teacher educators. In 1983, 1985 and again in 1987, for instance, the Department deliberated responses to the question, 'What sort of teaching, research and community involvement is feasible, and indeed imperative on us, to secure our relevance and credibility on and off campus in a new South Africa?' (University of Cape Town, School of Education, Working Paper for Discussion at Staff Meeting, Monday 22 June 1987, 9.00 am to 4.00 pm, in Room 4A: 1). The question's reference to a 'new' South Africa and its qualification that certain departmental actions might be 'imperative' suggest the urgency with which staff members considered their work. Yet when asked whether he recalled the department having the capacity to act collaboratively in response to the injustices that accompanied apartheid, Robert Siebörger remembered, 'It wasn't easy to get consensus from the staff on just about anything. There were times when the staff were extremely fractious, big rifts that ran through the department, so I think people would generally have avoided that type of thing' (Siebörger 2013: Interview).

This is not to say that the department never took collective action. On 1 and 2 May 1987, for instance, staff members decided to withdraw students from teaching practice. As department head Douglas Young recalled, 'There was a political protest and a stay-away action called by what was then the UDF [United Democratic Front] ... and they were asking teachers and learners to boycott and stay away from schools – it was May Day, it was a May Day protest – so effectively the schools would be closed that day. We sympathised as academics, certainly in the School of Education, with what the UDF was protesting about ... We had to make a decision, what would we do with our students on that day? Do you say to them – because they were bound to go to school that day and they would go to schools that were empty because there was a boycott – do they simply join in the boycott?'

Believing it inappropriate for some student teachers to continue in their teaching practice as if school conditions throughout the Cape Town area were normal while conditions at other schools prevented UCT students from fulfilling their teaching practice obligations, staff members chose to withdraw all student teachers from all schools – black, coloured and white. 'That was one of the times when we were fairly united,' Siebörger remembered. 'I can't be sure that all staff necessarily supported that policy, but certainly the majority supported it; that we would say that we can't have some students in schools behaving as if everything is normal and other students in a boycott situation where they can't go to school because they are part of the boycott ... So, if we knew that there was going to be a boycott on certain dates then we would have said to students, "Look, nobody's going to school on those dates and you must all come in to lectures" or something like that.' When asked whether the department was criticised for this policy, Siebörger replied, 'From the white schools we did [receive criticism], some schools were really fed up with us for doing that. They didn't like the politics at all.' Douglas Young similarly recalled, 'A lot of the schools [that served

primarily white students] took strong exception to what we'd done, [saying] "You deprived us of students teaching for the day." They then lodged an official complaint with the Provincial Head of the Education Department.'

In addition to decisions such as removing students from teaching practice, staff members acted collectively in 1987 when they agreed to establish the Teaching and Learning Resources Centre (TLRC) in an effort to more closely link departmental resources to local schools (University of Cape Town, School of Education, Memorandum from Doug Young to All Academic Staff, School of Education, regarding Teaching and Learning Resources Centre. Dated 10 February 1987). Unlike the Department's other units, which were also designed to engage with local educators but were subject-specific and directed by individual staff members, such as Douglas Young's Language Education Unit, Peter Spargo's Science Education Unit, Chris Breen's Maths Education Unit and Peter Buckland's Education Policy Unit, the Teaching and Learning Resources Centre was designed to be cross-curricular, having the potential to bring staff members together to collaborate on a variety of projects (University of Cape Town, School of Education, Annual Report, 1987. To the Board of the Faculty of Education, 25 March 1988). In practice, however, the TLRC failed to serve as a space for collaborative work and, initially at least, filled another role completely.

To coordinate the Centre, the department hired Yousuf Gabru, a UCT graduate and former teacher who also served as chairperson of the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU). With many staff members' tacit approval, Gabru used his position in the TLRC to provide facilities and support for WECTU activities. 'From a personal point of view,' Gabru claimed, 'and it needs to be mentioned because everybody knew about it, I was very heavily involved politically and used the space that was created for me to continue my engagement. I think that the whole Department knew that I was the chairperson of the Western Cape Teachers Union and quite frankly used whatever resources there was available at UCT to help with the organisation of the union. We met there and so on. You know, people came there – because there were states of emergencies – often under the pretence of coming to a maths education workshop [for instance], but it was to discuss the politics of education and to have a union meeting, which could not have happened at other places' (Gabru 2013: Interview).

The TLRC did also, in fact, offer curriculum development and teaching methods workshops to local teachers. Between August 1987 and March 1988, for instance, the Centre organised workshops around such alternative education topics as 'The Teaching of African Literature' and 'African Music' as well as mainstream topics, including 'Introduction to Computers' and 'Photography for Teachers' (University of Cape Town, School of Education, Teaching and Learning Resources Centre, Interim Report – August 1987/March 1988). Especially in later years, and under the coordination of Glynis Lloyd, the TLRC provided multiple opportunities for educators to advance their skills and develop alternative teaching materials (University of Cape Town, School of Education, Teaching and Learning Resources Centre, Report for

Period 1 January–31 October 1989). For the most part, however, once the Department of Education established the TLRC, staff members acted primarily in affiliation with it rather than using it to engage in collaborative work.

Conclusion

In short, then, throughout the 1980s the Department continued to resist collective action in opposing apartheid. When asked why he thought staff members struggled to collaborate during this period, David Gilmour recalled, ‘The Dean at the time was a liberal in the true sense of the word, and I respected his position on that, so from that position he was not going to lead a particular approach with which he might fundamentally disagree in any event. There were some who were pushing a radical Marxist line – theoretically totally unsound, we had many disputes about that – and there were others who were apolitical and then there was a group, relatively like-minded, who worked with bodies like the UDF and so on’ (Gilmour 2013: Interview). Gilmour then explained how his perception of the department’s role in South African politics differed from that of his colleagues. ‘I think the department, certainly through my experience, or through my eyes, had as much a political role to play as it did an academic role,’ he claimed. ‘Others would have seen it differently I’m sure, and there was, I think, quite a divide in the staff around how best to locate oneself in that situation.’ When Michael Ashley, the dean to whom Gilmour referred, was similarly asked why he thought the Department only rarely collaborated to oppose apartheid in schooling, he remarked that staff members prioritised their individual responses over collective action. ‘I’m sure you are familiar with the phenomenon of academic individualism,’ Ashley observed. ‘The environment seems to breed that kind of people. People don’t respond well to invitations to sign petitions and conform. They like to do their own thing. And I would say that was a strong current’ (Ashley 2013: Interview).

In addition to staff doing their own thing, Ashley noted that Vice-Chancellor Stuart Saunders specifically requested that academic departments and faculty *not* take collective action. Such action, Ashley recalled, ‘tended to be done at the university level.’ He continued, ‘I think [Vice-Chancellor] Stuart Saunders didn’t encourage faculties and departments to act unilaterally. He liked to keep the whole institution focused. On things like fundraising and statements of position and that kind of thing he wanted to know what was going on, so he didn’t encourage that kind of thing.’ Indeed, at a meeting in June 1989, when Department of Education staff members expressed concern that the Department was not sufficiently responding in public to ‘educational crisis issues’, department head Douglas Young explained, ‘It was general UCT policy not to make individual statements and normally Dr Saunders preferred to make statements on behalf of UCT, but there had been exceptions’ (University of Cape Town, School of Education, School of Education, Minutes of a Staff Committee meeting held on Friday 23 June 1989 in the Staff Room at 2:00 pm).

One of the exceptions to which Young referred was the department's 1985 Consensus Statement, issued in response to the national government's proclamation of a state of emergency in South Africa. Even this statement, however, as central as it seems at first glance to the departmental history of the era, was not widely embraced or shared among staff. Several staff members, for instance, had no recollection of the statement, while the few who did remembered it being issued to placate politicised UCT students rather than providing a clearly articulated departmental policy statement. As Nigel Bakker observed, 'There was no sense of all of us acting together, ever. It was always the case of individuals. It was very much that liberal tradition of you must follow your own ideas and thoughts. We might have made those statements together because I don't think any of us would have disagreed with that at the time ... but I doubt very much whether we would have acted as a unit on anything that was more demanding than just making a consensus statement, and we didn't' (Bakker 2013: Interview).

Ultimately, then, UCT Department of Education staff members failed to leverage their collective influence to challenge educational apartheid in South Africa. On the other hand, justice-oriented professionalism motivated staff members to work, on an individual basis, to actively undermine the national government's racially oppressive state policies. Through their scholarship and publications, design and implementation of alternative school curricula, and responses to restrictions on academic freedom, staff members between 1976 and 1994 challenged the race-based status quo on which the National Party had built the apartheid state, beginning with its rise to power in 1948. Over time, while rarely engaging in the kinds of activities that might have endangered their professional lives and personal safety, Education staff members nonetheless made an important contribution to ending racially segregated schooling in South Africa.

Acknowledgements

For this study, the author sought to contact UCT Department of Education staff members who taught in the department for two or more years between 1976 and 1994, particularly those directly involved in teacher education. These efforts resulted in his conducting 16 approximately one-hour interviews. For future scholarly use, recordings of the interviews have been archived at the University of Cape Town. The author would like to thank all those who agreed to be interviewed for the study and especially Rob Siebörger and Peter Kallaway for their advice, feedback and collegiality. Research for this project was conducted in Cape Town, South Africa, between October 2012 and June 2013 as part of a US State Department Fulbright Scholar Research/Teaching Award to the University of Cape Town.

Interviews conducted

Interview with Michael Ashley conducted by the author on 13 March 2013.

Interview with Nigel Bakker conducted by the author on 11 March 2013.

Interview with Chris Breen conducted by the author on 21 March 2013.

Interview with Carohn Cornell conducted by the author on 8 April 2013.

Interview with David Donald conducted by the author on 10 April 2013.

Interview with Johannes Esterhuyse conducted by the author on 12 March 2013.

- Interview with Wendy Flanagan conducted by the author on 14 June 2013.
 Interview with Yousuf Gabru conducted by the author on 7 May 2013.
 Interview with James David Gilmour conducted by the author on 19 March 2013.
 Interview with Peter Kallaway conducted by the author on 4 March 2013.
 Interview with Mzobz Mboya conducted by the author on 8 May 2013.
 Interview with Johan Muller conducted by the author on 30 April 2013.
 Interview with Stuart Saunders conducted by the author on 30 April 2013.
 Interview with Robert Siebörger conducted by the author on 3 March 2013.
 Interview with Crain Soudien conducted by the author on 15 April 2013.
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