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PROGRESSIVE PRIMARY EDUCATION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN
HOMELAND: A REVIEW OF BREAKTHROUGH TO LITERACY
IN BOPHUTHATSWANA

by

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Abstract

The introduction of adapted versions of the British reading scheme Breakthrough to Literacy in South Africa and her "independent" homelands is significant in several ways. Firstly, it refocuses our attention on black education language policy in this region. Secondly, it raises questions about the innovative strength of such a scheme in an area which was not necessarily in the minds of its designers.

Language and language policy have been both political and educational issues in South Africa. Some of the most important political decisions made by the South African government have had language as their underlying factor. A good example is the present homeland policy of this government. The division of black people and their assignment to differing homelands has been based on their linguistic affiliation.

It is therefore common to come across people who believe that the South African government would welcome any effort aimed at improving the status of black languages. This is because of the insistence of the South African government on the recognition and promotion of black languages as being both culturally and educationally important. The introduction of the Breakthrough reading scheme and the subsequent reaction of the education authorities in South Africa clearly belie this belief.

To demonstrate this point, this study looks at the application and effects the scheme has had in one of the South African homelands. It also shows how its introduction coincided with the need to improve primary school education in these homelands. And why the scheme has not been officially recognised and supported by education authorities in South Africa itself despite its unofficial existence in black schools in the townships.

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E.M. Makhele

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I

INTRODUCTION

When the predominantly Afrikaner National Party took over power in South Africa in 1948 it started implementing the policy of apartheid or separate development. This is a policy whereby people are divided according to colour and race. However, the black people of South Africa were further divided according to languages existing among them. The Zulu, Tswana, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Xhosa, Venda, Shangaan, Ndebele and Swazi were all to be regarded as separate linguistic entities. Other racial groups were the Whites, who were not divided according to their linguistic affiliation despite the existence of different languages among them; there were also Indians and the Coloureds, a mixed race group.

The ultimate aim of the policy of separate development was to grant "independence" to these linguistic entities of black South Africans to exist as separate homelands. So far four of them have been granted this "independence". They are Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei and Venda for the following linguistic groups: Xhosa, Batswana, Xhosa again and Venda respectively.

Opponents of the policy of apartheid regard this as a policy of divide et impera on the part of the National Party. They see this as a ploy to weaken unity among existing groups for the sake of its political designs.

Furthermore, black South Africans are divided in as far as the mother-tongue issue is concerned. Those who support the use of African languages as a medium of instruction in schools are regarded by others as supporters of the policy of apartheid or the disliked system of Bantu Education. They are sometimes regarded as protagonists of the homeland policy by most black people who dwell in urban areas.

On the other hand, by insisting on the preservation of cultural and linguistic identity of the black tribes, the National Party government of South Africa can claim to be doing unto others as it is doing unto itself. Earlier the Afrikaner political and cultural movements had used the issue of the Afrikaans language as their rallying point. They used the call for preservation of cultural and linguistic identity as a central point in their struggle for national ideals. However, the situation is not as straightforward as it seems. The issue of language in South Africa has never been a cultural and educational one only. It is also a political one. Moreover, the type of political roles played by languages of white South Africans is diametrically different from the ones played by the African languages. This reversal of political significance of the language issue has compounded the problems of mother-tongue instruction in South Africa and her homelands.

Nevertheless, there have been new developments in the sphere of African language teaching in both South Africa

and the homelands. These are in the form of policy developments and the introduction of a reading scheme called Breakthrough. This scheme has been imported from Britain.

The scheme has received government backing in the homeland of Bophuthatswana but not in South Africa, despite its existence in places like Soweto and even across the national border in Botswana (a country lying north of South Africa whose people speak a language common to the one spoken in the homeland of Bophuthatswana).

The main aim of this study is to review the introduction of this scheme in Bophuthatswana. Since it is a mother-tongue reading scheme we need to know what it is and how it is related to policy. What possible role will it play in the debate on the medium of instruction in this region? Should the proponents of post-apartheid People's Education pay any attention to the scheme? Most importantly, how has it changed the scenery of mother-tongue teaching?

To put the whole issue in proper perspective the second chapter of this study will review the history of language policy in South Africa. This will be to indicate how the significance of language was connected and affected by the competing political perspectives. How the National Party government came to support the view that African languages should be preserved for their cultural significance. A view that can also be logically attributed to the homeland leaders. And how the

generality of the black South Africans came to be ambivalent towards the significance of their mother-tongues.

In the third chapter we will look at the actual background of the scheme in Bophuthatswana. However, this will be preceded by a review of recommendations of the homeland's education commission concerning language policy. These recommendations will be compared to those made by a similar commission in Botswana.

The fourth chapter will be on the scheme per se. We will describe its components and how they are used. Furthermore we will say how it contributes to that particular area of mother-tongue teaching.

The fifth and last chapter of this study will attempt to relate implications of the scheme to the general debate on the medium of instruction in black education. We will try to answer some of the questions we have posed above.

II

THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN SOUTH AFRICA

This chapter focuses on the development of language policy in South Africa. Particular attention is going to be focused on African language policy. Any reference to other languages such as Afrikaans, English or Asian languages of South Africa will be made where it is necessary to highlight a point about African languages of black South Africans.

As explained in the introductory chapter, the goal of this chapter is to give a background picture of the controversy surrounding the issue of the medium of instruction in this country. To try and explain how white and black people of South Africa came to be divided on this issue. Why there is a group of black South Africans which wants to have nothing to do with the idea of mother-tongue instruction for their children. And another which sees some educational benefits for children in the use of mother-tongue instruction. This sort of explanatory discussion is necessary prior to our review of the Breakthrough reading scheme because the latter could be seen as a justification of one of the foregoing views if looked at from a proper perspective.

We will begin this historical account of language policy by giving a statistical picture of language groups existing in South Africa. In doing so we will disregard

the existence of homelands for a while. The first set of statistics is of groups of people who speak the language concerned:¹

TABLE 1:

TOTALS OF PEOPLE WHO SPEAK THE LANGUAGES

Language Speakers	Total Number
Zulu	5,167,000
Xhosa	4,787,000
Afrikaans	4,153,000
Setswana	2,092,000
North Sotho	1,934,000
South Sotho	1,775,000
English	1,744,000
English/Afrikaans	1,490,000
Tsonga	880,000
Swazi	602,000
Venda	444,000

A word or two should be said about these statistics given by Margaret McFerren before we give another set of statistics. As we have already said the statistics depict the number of people who speak a particular language. However, we should be a little careful with these statistics because they are not fully representative. For instance McFerren has not included another language called Ndebele which is of Nguni extract. She has also excluded a number of Asian languages spoken by Indians. Only 20% of the Indian community of South Africa speak English or Afrikaans as a home language.²

To complete this picture of language groups we need to take into consideration what other people say about

them. Therefore we will again provide another set of statistics. This time it is that of those who use the languages as home languages:³

TABLE 2:

PERCENTAGE OF LANGUAGES USED AS HOME LANGUAGES

Home Language	Percentage
Zulu	25
Afrikaans	21
English	13
Xhosa	12
North Sotho	10
South Sotho	8
Setswana	6

These statistics given by K.P. Prinsloo need to be discussed before we leave them. First of all, it should be noted that they are also not fully representative. They exclude more than one language. These are Ndebele, Swazi and Venda in as far as African languages are concerned. Furthermore they also do not give any data about Asian or Indian languages.

Rachel Angogo has given us a set of statistics that is more inclusive.⁴ She says that 53% of white South Africans speak Afrikaans, 37% speak English and the remaining percentage are either Greek, Portuguese, German, etc. And 90% of the Coloureds speak Afrikaans, the remaining English. Tamil, Gujarati, Hindi or Urdu are Indian languages spoken by 80% of the Asian community. Lastly, that African languages belong to two major branches, Nguni and Sotho.

At present English and Afrikaans are the official languages of South Africa.⁵ This has been the case since 1926 when "Afrikaans was recognised as a second language of the country".⁶ In the homelands the situation concerning the official languages is slightly different as we will notice later on in this discussion.

Let us now review the course taken by African languages in their development prior to 1953, the year in which the National Party of South Africa instituted the Bantu Education system. Before the arrival of missionaries, African children received education at their mother's knee which was on rudimentary numeracy, use of utensils and on "introduction to language as an instrument of communication with her, the mother, with father, brothers and sisters and relatives and friends in the home and environs".⁷ Later a small mission school for Africans was set up by Dr Van Der Kemp of the London Missionary Society.⁸ This was the first school of its kind set up particularly for the Batswana tribe in the area of north-western Cape (one of the four provinces making up the present South Africa). After supposedly coming into contact with the Batswana in 1813, the London Missionary Society translated the Bible to Setswana later on. The New Testament, the Psalms and the Pilgrim's Progress were translated and printed in 1848.⁹

This was the beginning of formal instruction in mother-tongue. And it was not to end here. Out of this evolved an informal policy of mother-tongue instruction

whereby African children were taught through the medium of their home language for the first four or five years. Thereafter a gradual change-over was made to English as a medium of instruction in the last two years of primary education.¹⁰ In fact, official languages, i.e. Afrikaans and English, were taught as subjects in the first four years. Thereafter almost all instruction was in English excepting for African languages themselves and Religious Education.¹¹

It is important to note how easily the policy of mother-tongue instruction was introduced and implemented prior to the Nationalist take-over of government in 1948. We hear nothing about opposition to this policy by the then existing African political movements such as the African National Congress which was formed in 1912. In fact, black educationalists such as Professor Z. Matthews, a member of the Fort Hare university staff supported the idea of mother-tongue instruction. In 1934 he wrote an essay in which he supported the idea of mother-tongue instruction.¹² However, it is interesting to note that Professor Matthews later changed his stance in the face of new developments brought about by innovations instituted by the policy of apartheid of the National Party. He is reported to have said that his change of view was because the language issue was not a merely educational one any more, but it was a political question and the political future of the African was tied to it.¹³

What then brought about this turn of events? Before addressing this question we need to come up with more background information to provide a comprehensive picture of the tone of events in South Africa. The rivalry between the Afrikaner and the English, whose ingredients included the language issue, never came to an end until after the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War. In 1926 Afrikaans was recognised as an official language. This was a direct result of the efforts of the Broederbond, an exclusively Afrikaner secret society whose aim was to use the Afrikaans language as a rallying point of the Afrikaner nationalism.¹⁴ However problems besetting the language issue which involved English and Afrikaans were "solved" when the Afrikaners took power in 1948. English and Afrikaans remained official languages. Up to the sixties the medium of instruction was chosen by the parent in the predominantly English province of Natal. In another mostly English province, the Cape, the medium which was used was the one the child knew best up to and including the eighth standard. In the ninth and tenth grades the medium was chosen by the parent. In the predominantly Afrikaner provinces of the Orange Free State and Transvaal, mother-tongue instruction was compulsory up to the eighth standard.¹⁵

Later on mother-tongue instruction became compulsory for the white South Africans in government and government subsidized schools up to and including standard 8. The previous differential options were done away with. One

other issue that is worth noting is that English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking children are educated apart. They are, however, allowed to choose when to introduce English or Afrikaans as a second language.¹⁶

Perhaps the best way to answer the question on African languages we have posed above is to commence by citing Timothy Reagan when he says that: "Language policy decisions are arrived at for a variety of reasons, most of which are clearly extra-linguistic in nature." And that therefore it "is essential that such extra-linguistic factors of language policy be clearly and carefully delineated".²⁸ This observation sums up the events that occurred when the Nationalist government of South Africa passed the 1953 Bantu Education Act. This Act stipulated that the minister of education was to have powers to prescribe the medium of instruction for African schools.¹⁷

Subsequently mother-tongue was made the medium of instruction for the whole seven years of primary education. One official language was to be introduced as a subject during the first year of school and another six months thereafter.

This policy was followed by a storm of protest which has since never really died and which makes any innovation in this area something worth looking at. The first objection to this policy was that it is a means of enforcing the policy of apartheid. It was seen to be an element of the homeland policy which was crystallized in

1959 by means of an act of parliament. We will refer to this again later on. Secondly, the policy was objected to because it was feared that it would restrict the amount of knowledge available to African children; that it was a means of isolating the African population linguistically, socially and culturally within the country and internationally. It was feared that pupils would end up with just a rudimentary knowledge of English and Afrikaans; that teachers would not be able to teach three languages efficiently; and that literature written in African languages was scarce. (African writers wrote in English since, if they wrote in the African languages, their work was not published.)¹⁸

The government's argument was that choice of language policy should be made in the light of the fact that various peoples of South Africa were on the road to political self-realization as distinct entities. Such a policy should be for the upliftment of people as cultural and political entities and it should not seek to Westernize them. Therefore it was right to say that the language policy was connected to the policy of separate development. This link clearly politicised the issue of African language policy.

It should now be clear why black and white South Africans are divided over the issue of mother-tongue instruction. And why any new development in this area would be interesting to us.

Black political movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) and its Congress Youth League were irrevocably against this policy. The ANC preferred English as a medium of instruction because it regarded this language as a means of economic and professional advancement, a view which is still held by many black South Africans. Its deliberations were conducted in English and this was reinforced when Coloureds, Indians and the Whites joined its ranks.

The Congress Youth League rejected the policy as being divisive and called for school boycotts. These had no effect because, when pupils protested, they were either expelled or the police were summoned. Thus in 1959 the policy of mother-tongue instruction was implemented throughout the country.

We have already pointed out how Professor Z. Matthews recanted his previous pro-mother-tongue instruction stance in the face of these new developments. He is also believed to have justified his new view by pointing out that the presence of whites and their dominant culture are reasons enough for this. Some people like Dr Nhlapo, a prominent educationalist and headmaster, were still not yet convinced and thought that a unification of Nguni and Sotho branches of African languages could be a better solution. Some advocated the adoption of Swahili as a lingua franca. This latter suggestion appeared in the Congress Youth League journal of 1954.¹⁹

Furthermore a document called "Education for South Africa, The 1961 Educational Panel First Report" (Johannesburg, 1963) also criticised this policy. It said that any decision concerning the pacing of culture change and its direction should be left to the bearers of the culture alone. It reportedly went on to say that the attempt by Whites to preserve African languages is as much misplaced as would be their attempts to eliminate them; that the decision as to how African languages are to be used as media of instruction should be left to Africans themselves.²⁰

The desire expressed by this panel in the latter statement was not to be implemented until South Africa started granting her homelands "independence". It is this connection that we will pursue in our next chapter. We will briefly describe how the homelands handle this issue. Meanwhile it should be noted that the 1953 Bantu Education Act was put into effect throughout the whole of South Africa, including areas that were designed to be the homelands in the future. This situation continued until 1976 when the first homeland was declared independent - Transkei. Bophuthatswana followed later in 1977.

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III

PRESENT POLICIES AND THE INTRODUCTION OF BREAKTHROUGH TO SETSWANA

As already explained, this chapter is about the homeland language policy. However, the last part of it will be devoted to a brief review of the background of Breakthrough to Setswana in Bophuthatswana.

The policy review will start by looking at what the situation is in as far as official languages are concerned in the homelands and in South Africa. And to get a clearer view of how the language issue was dealt with in Bophuthatswana we will compare the recommendations of the Bophuthatswana National Education Commission (Education for Popagano) to those of the Botswana National Commission of Education (Education for Kagisano).

The homelands that have been declared independent from South Africa are Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Ciskei and Venda. Transkei is for the Xhosa, Bophuthatswana for the Batswana, Ciskei is for the Xhosa again and Venda for the Venda. According to McFerren the official languages of Bophuthatswana are English, Afrikaans and Setswana. Transkei has added Xhosa to her official languages and in Ciskei we have Xhosa and English.

In so far as the policy on medium of instruction in schools is concerned, the homelands have tended to revert back to the situation that existed prior to 1953.¹ It will be remembered that 1953 was the year in which the

Nationalist government of South Africa enacted a law which subsequently resulted in the mother-tongue becoming the medium of instruction for the rest of primary school education, i.e. the first seven years of schooling. By changing this situation, the homelands would be making mother-tongue instruction for the first four years of school compulsory.

Meanwhile in South Africa riots erupted in 1976. These were the well known Soweto riots, sparked off by government attempts to enforce the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in black schools. The riots later grew into a full-blown protest against Bantu Education.

These riots compelled the government to initiate change in the system of Bantu Education later on in 1979. Although superficial, the changes brought about affected the language policy. The 1979 Education and Training Act which changed the name of the Department of Bantu Education to the Department of Education and Training also stipulated that mother-tongue instruction be restricted to the first four years of primary education,² thus making the situation in South Africa conform to that existing in the homelands.

These are the general points about the South African and homeland situation. These points would suffice for a superficial picture of what is happening in this region. However, we shall not content ourselves with this. We need to have a closer look at the situation to understand it properly. Therefore the following section will review

the reports of education commissions of Botswana and Bophuthatswana with a view to highlighting the language policy of the latter.

(a) The Commissions' Reports

The Bophuthatswana National Education Commission was established by a government Proclamation adopted in June 1978. However, organisation of the commission, i.e. invitation of members to come and serve in it, was done as far back as October 1977. The commission was chaired by Professor Ernest Pelaelo Lekhela. Other members of the commission were a mixture of educationists such as Dr Kenneth Brown Hartshorne and Mr Columbus Lekalake, then chief education planner, and teachers such as Mrs G.C. Bodenstein and Miss N.W. Mothlhala, then a primary school principal. All in all, the commission had 15 members.³

According to the proclamation which brought about the commission, the terms of reference for it were as follows:

- to evaluate the education system;
- to make a recommendation regarding medium of instruction;
- to study the Education Act, Act No. 9 of 1973 and make amendments;
- to report its findings and opinions and to submit its recommendations.

The commission submitted its report in August 1978.

On the other hand, the Botswana Commission on Education was appointed in December 1975 and started working in January 1976. It was made up of six members whose chairman was Mr Torsten Husen. Its terms of reference were as follows:

- to review the Botswana education system, its goals and major problems;
- to submit recommendations for improvement in education.

Its reports was tabled in April 1977.⁴

In our review of what the two commissions thought to be important about the medium of instruction issue, we will compare problems they perceived and how they thought they could be solved. Furthermore, in the case of the Bophuthatswana Commission we will look for links between it and the subsequent introduction of the Breakthrough reading scheme.

The Bophuthatswana Commission viewed primary education "as being a major national priority", and regarded it as "the most important long-term investment that Bophuthatswana can make in the development of its human resources".⁵ This tends to be a popular view in many African countries. When identifying major problems in primary education, the commission said nothing about the language issue. It describes the problems as being those of an auxiliary, administrative or logistic nature. It dwells on issues such as teacher-pupil ratio, double sessions, unequal distribution of school facilities,

teacher qualifications, age disparities among pupils and drop-out problems. It further recommends that these problems be solved.

On the other hand the Botswana National Education Commission mentions the language issue when talking about problems in the education system. It deplores the fact that at that time Setswana was a medium of instruction up to the third year of schooling only. It noted that early introduction of English as a medium of instruction created educational and cultural problems. First of all, teachers were found to be not sufficiently proficient in English. Secondly, the commission contested that early introduction of the English medium of instruction left the child without an identity at all. It should be noted that Setswana is the mother-tongue of both Botswana and Bophuthatswana.

However, a comparison of the two reports reveals that the Botswana Commission was relatively more insistent on the importance of Setswana as both a cultural and national issue. The Bophuthatswana Commission was satisfied to note that Setswana is a repository of the child's cultural heritage. It did not emphasize the general and national importance of the language like the Botswana Commission. While the Botswana Commission complained that the then language policy discriminated against Setswana and thus pupils failed to be literate in this language and tended to prefer English, the Bophuthatswana Commission reported that there are "some differences of opinion in the

medium of instruction, especially the stage at which a change-over should be made to English. The Botswana Commission wanted the language to be given prominent treatment and not to be neglected when selecting pupils for the secondary level. It insisted on recognition of the language as an instrument of national identity and saw great advantages in learning a skill in one's mother-tongue and a thorough mastery of it before moving over to use a foreign language.

The difference in emphasis of the relative importance of mother-tongue instruction is of particular interest to us. It is necessary to note that Botswana's indigenous population is comparatively homogeneous. The nation is made up of clans or smaller tribes that all belong to the Batswana. The Bophuthatswana nation is a little heterogeneous. While the Batswana constitute the biggest number of people, there are other people who belong to other tribes such as the Ndebele, Sotho, Xhosa and Tsonga. This difference in the nature of the population of the two countries could be the reason why the Bophuthatswana Commission did not dwell on the national importance of Setswana.

Another reason could be the fact that the identification of language and nationhood in South Africa reminds people of the policy of apartheid. We have already pointed out how this link was forged between African languages and the policy of apartheid. Perhaps

the Bophuthatswana Commission did not want to remind people of this link.

One would expect that, because the Botswana Commission treated the mother-tongue issue comparatively more seriously than the Bophuthatswana Commission, it would make recommendations that differ significantly from those made by the latter. It is interesting to note that this was not to be the case. It will be remembered that the Commission of Botswana described as unfair the policy of having Setswana as the medium of instruction for the first three years only. It seems fair to expect it to recommend the addition of two or three more years to this, mainly because of its sharp criticism of the old policy and its view of Setswana as a national issue. Instead the Commission recommended that one more year of primary education should be added to the existing three years of mother-tongue instruction, i.e. the first four years of primary school were to be the period of mother-tongue instruction.

This recommendation is similar to that which was tabled by the Bophuthatswana Commission. It also recommended that Setswana be the medium of instruction in the first four years of primary education. Perhaps the Botswana Commission, while recognising the national importance of Setswana, like the Bophuthatswana Commission, it nevertheless recognised the importance of English as "an international contact language" and a "window to the outside world".

On English, the Botswana Commission recommended that it should be introduced as a medium of instruction in year five of primary school. The same was the case with the Bophuthatswana Commission. Furthermore, the former insisted that in all respects English and Setswana should be treated equally, especially in the examinations. And, lastly, that English be introduced as a subject from standard one.

Further recommendations from the Bophuthatswana Commission were that English should be given one hour per day in grades I and II, and that Afrikaans should be introduced in year three. Other recommendations made by the Bophuthatswana Commission in which we are interested concern curricular and syllabus restructuring at primary level. These recommendations have a direct bearing on the topics we are going to tackle later on. These concern the background and structure of Breakthrough to Setswana. The Commission recommended that pupils entering grade I should be made to undergo a period of orientation during which school readiness and perceptual skills were to be fostered. That modern approaches to first language teaching, especially reading, should be introduced. These approaches should aim at eliminating "great passivity on the part of pupils", and creating conditions where emphasis would be "on activity, participation, creativity, problem-solving, individual responsibility" and "all those issues that are essential to 'modernisation of mind'".⁶ Concentration was to be on the development of the mental

and intellectual capabilities of children as epitomized by the two concepts of creativity and problem-solving.

Class sizes were to be reduced to make possible application of individual and group teaching techniques. Effective use of teaching aids was to be encouraged. The commission laid particular emphasis on the teaching of reading, both in home language and English and Afrikaans. However, it saw the initial mastery of home language as a condition sine qua non for prospective mastery of foreign languages.

Embodied in the latter recommendations is the desire to renovate the whole primary school system. To do this the homeland educationists would have needed to sit down and rewrite the syllabuses. As it turned out, this did not happen. Instead of rewriting the syllabuses, a whole new reading scheme was introduced at grade I, a scheme which later on changed the whole face of primary school education in the homeland. The next section of this chapter looks at the background of this scheme.

(b) Breakthrough to Setswana: Background

According to Francine de Clerq,⁷ the Elementary Education Upgrading Project (EEUP), whose practical strategy was Breakthrough to Setswana, was conceived in 1979 in Bophuthatswana. The whole project embodied the desire to actualize the homeland's education commission's recommendations on primary education. Inter alia, it

aimed at improving physical classroom provision and introducing pupil-centred teaching approaches (i.e. Breakthrough to Setswana).

De Clerq says that, by the end of 1982, there were 353 primary schools whose grade I classes had been upgraded. This, she says, constituted 44% of the total number of primary schools in the homeland, and it involved more or less 33 385 pupils. In that same period another 14 schools were busy upgrading their grade II, this time involving 14 250 pupils. Financial requirements of the project were met by the community and the Homeland Department of Education on a rand-for-rand basis.⁸

It should be noted that the process of upgrading was not to be confined to grades I and II. It was meant to cover the whole primary education and possibly secondary education. Certain requirements had to be met by the schools for them to be in a position to implement this project. For instance, primary schools wanting to introduce Breakthrough in their grade I classes had to confine their numbers to 50 pupils per grade I teacher. Teacher qualifications had to be improved, and an in-service programme was drawn up to introduce the new approach to teachers and headmasters who were still using the traditional method of teaching, a method where the teacher was the most active member of the classroom. Pupils had to sit quietly in rows and listen to her, responding only to her questions. Most of the time in a chorus.

Dr Clerq states that there were some improvements in teacher quality in primary schools by 1982. She attributes this to the concurrent upgrading of teacher education from a two year diploma with standard 8 to a three year diploma with standard 10. School provision also improved. This occurred in different districts of the homeland. Pupil/teacher ratio fell from 67/1 to 54/1 in one district, and from 58/1 to 52/1 in another. Classroom/teacher ratio also fell from 74/1 to 67/1 in one district, and 78/1 to 56/1 in another.

The strategy adopted to implement all these changes was one which heavily involved primary school teachers and, in some cases, college lecturers. The latter were used to conduct lessons on Breakthrough to Setswana during in-service training of the former. Briefly, several schools were appointed and designated "model schools". This is where the EEUP's (which had changed name to become PEUP, i.e. Primary Education Upgrading Programme) Breakthrough to Setswana was first introduced. The introduction of Breakthrough was undertaken by a team of teachers and former teachers led by Mrs Christel Bodenstein, who was a member of the Homeland Education Commission. Some teachers were designated "team leaders" and it was mostly under their leadership that primary schoolteachers were in-serviced in different districts. Some were sent to Britain to acquaint themselves with the details of the matter because Breakthrough was actually

imported from Britain. We will go into this matter shortly.

At present the upgrading of primary education has reached the last grade, i.e. grade VI. This implies that, in the homeland, provision of primary education has been improved in as far as the physical and curricular requirements are concerned. However, it should be noted that Breakthrough to Setswana is only in grade I. The improvements alluded to in higher grades refer to the provision of better classroom equipment and the adoption of techniques and methods of Breakthrough, and not its content. In other words, the whole primary education of the homeland is conducted the Breakthrough way. Therefore our next discussion centres around the explanation of the origin of the Breakthrough reading scheme.

The teacher's manual⁹ on Breakthrough to Setswana explains in its initial pages that this scheme is an adaptation of the British scheme called Breakthrough to Literacy. The latter scheme was developed in Britain's School Council Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching.

In another manual, which is a 1970 School Council Publication, M.A.K. Halliday¹⁰ writes that Breakthrough to Literacy is in fact the work of the Initial Literacy project. This latter project is itself a part of the Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching at University College London. This was brought about by an independent team led by David Mackay, who is a former

headmaster of the Beatrix Potter Primary School in London. This project was inspired by his ideas and those of his colleague, Brian Thompson. Their aim in developing this project was to come up with "an integrated strategic approach to the learning of mother-tongue at all levels throughout the school"ll

According to Halliday, the Breakthrough to Literacy project has attempted to put together components of language learning and to look at the whole language problem in school. It took account not only of the basic skills of reading and writing and those traditional concerns of the teacher, but also bore in mind the demand made on the child's language potential by the school as a whole, and by the community at large. The whole manual is said to show concern about the child's experience of language, and his linguistic needs.

There are different bodies that apparently contributed in diverse ways to the successful completion of this task. The Nuffield Foundation is said to have provided the grant that started the research. The Department of Education and Science paid the teachers for participating. And this whole exercise saw the coming into being of Stage I (1964-1967) of Breakthrough for Literacy in Britain. The project was then taken over by the Schools Council. And it financed the whole of Stage II (1967-1970). The Communication Research Centre, which received a grant from Longman Group Limited, and which is part of the Department of General Linguistics at

University College London, provided accommodation and office services.¹²

In Southern Africa, Breakthrough to Literacy was adapted to Breakthrough to Setswana by Victor Rodseth of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa (ISEA), Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Republic of South Africa. Rodseth, who is himself a Molteno Fellow, was assisted by another Molteno Fellow called Mrs Mirrian Dakile of Diepkloof, Johannesburg. Others involved were: Mrs M.R. Johnston, Mrs S. Ngambu, Miss A. Mgetyana, Miss N. Motlhala (who was a member of the Bophuthatswana Education Commission) and Miss A. Nama. The project was initiated as a part of the Molteno Project of the ISEA, and the aim was that it should be followed by an English Project of the same body called Bridge to English in the second year of primary education. Both projects owe their existence to the Molteno Brothers Trust. There are other versions of Breakthrough written in other African languages such as Xhosa, Zulu, Southern Sotho, Northern Sotho, Venda and Tsonga. Materials are published by Maskew Miller Longman for the ISEA.

To sum up, the introduction of Breakthrough in Bophuthatswana is a direct result of the homeland's language policy as hammered out by its education commission. Today, Breakthrough is found in both the homeland's and South African primary schools. Historical facts about language policy in South Africa tend to suggest that the Department of Education and Training of

this country would welcome the project. However, this has not been the case. The scheme has not elicited any government support so far. This is a strange situation seeing that Breakthrough is about mother-tongue and the South African policy on own language is well known. The scheme is also being introduced in Botswana. What then is Breakthrough? How does it contribute to the language issue? What part does it play, or will it play, in the medium of instruction debate in this region? What possible implications does it have for the current debate on People's Education in South Africa? How is it influencing the general primary education scheme?

The next two chapters are an attempt to answer these questions. The question on the nature and contribution of Breakthrough will be discussed in the next chapter. The fifth chapter will concentrate on the questions concerning the possible effects of Breakthrough on the medium of instruction and primary education issues.

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IV

BREAKTHROUGH TO SETSWANA

The aim of this chapter is to describe the varied components of the Breakthrough scheme and to point out how they are used in teaching and learning. We will also refer to some of the scheme's shortcomings. Because the scheme was introduced in Bophuthatswana as a result of the recommendations of the education commissions discussed above, it is in this context that this review will be conducted. That is, in the course of discussing the scheme, we will point out how it meets the requirements of the commission's recommendations.

The first issue we are going to look at concerns the materials generated by this scheme. The issue of materials is important because of the scarcity of books in this area. For instance, inquiries about the books used in primary grade I yielded information that only a single book of stories called "Matlhasedi" has been used for years.

It is apparent that Breakthrough to Setswana has made a considerable contribution in as far as materials are concerned. Instead of one reading book, there are now 14 readers a child of grade I must read in one year. These readers contain stories of a varied nature. They are about the home, the school, the farm and the local community. The story books are graded both in language and complexity of the stories in them. For instance, the

difficulty of language and complexity of stories in reader 3 is less than that of reader 12. These readers are used in stages two and three of the three Breakthrough stages. The only drawback of the contents of the story books or readers that could be pointed out is that the stories of most readers are overly written in simple sentences. Only readers 13 and 14 contain a good number of compound or complex sentences.

The next material Breakthrough to Setswana has generated for the teacher, which induces pupil activity desired by the homeland commission of inquiry, is the occupational task book. A Breakthrough class is normally divided into four small groups. This is done by the teacher. At the beginning of the year the groups are called "social groups" because they are determined by mere social affiliations found among children. However, as inroads are made into stage one of the scheme, the teacher divides the groups into ability groups according to the results of the assessment. The tendency is for the teacher to teach according to these groups. Therefore the tasks that are found in the occupational task book are used to occupy other groups while the teacher is busy with one of them. It is clear that this new strategy of teaching represents an innovation which is according to the recommendations of the commission which dealt with pupil activity and pupil centred education. An occupational task book contains occupational tasks of a varied nature, including drawings, cuttings, colourings,

manipulation of shapes, copying of letters and shapes, games such as Scrabble, jigsaw puzzles and comic strip pictures. It also contains instructions to the teacher in connection with how to use all these tasks.

There are also two manuals in the scheme. One is the "Instructor's Manual", and the second is the "Teacher's Manual". The instructor's manual is for use by instructors in colleges of education, organisers of in-service programmes and educationists who want to know something about Breakthrough. The manual contains topics meant to introduce Breakthrough to the reader. They include, inter alia, a lecture on the language experience approach, questions and answers for teachers, a lecture on occupational tasks and some discussion topics. Other contents are: a topic on Breakthrough-to-Literacy in-service course, a quick introduction to Breakthrough and a list of library donations.

The teacher's manual is another important book in this respect. Its contents are more or less similar to those found in the instructor's manual. They include a topic on a general introduction to Breakthrough; secondly, a topic on the Breakthrough materials and equipment; thirdly, main points of the Breakthrough method; fourthly, how to teach Breakthrough; and lastly, a topic on occupational tasks.

The two books are a valuable contribution to the number of books on this language. For the first time in the history of the language, an instructor and the teacher

have books that have been written specifically for teaching this language at grade I. This was never the case in the past. However, there is one disadvantage attending the nature of these books: they are all written in English. This presents a problem, especially to the college instructor who must lecture in Setswana. The implication is he would have to do a lot of translation which might not be similar to that of the other lecturers in different colleges, thus resulting in the lack of a standardized instruction vocabulary.

In addition, the contents of both manuals are most interesting. The teacher's manual presents a teacher with aims of Breakthrough language teaching and objectives children should attain in class. This is a novelty in this language. Never was there anything like this before. Teachers and students alike had no such sources of aims and objectives of teaching and learning Setswana. They all depended on an eclectic study of English and Afrikaans materials which in most cases were not relevant to this language. The aims specified in the manual talk mostly about what to teach and how to teach it. For instance, there is talk about how to teach Setswana orthography and writing; reading and writing; how to make reading and writing purposeful and interesting; how to teach reading and writing in a way that would lead to understanding of sentences; how to teach the physical task of handwriting as a skill separate from composing written language; how

to provide meaningful learning situations for children; and how to encourage original and creative writing.

It is apparent that these aims have more to do with teaching than with learning. And if they were the only ones, they would not be satisfactory in meeting the commission's requirement that education be child-centred. However, they are supplemented by a longer list of objectives that deal specifically with what the child should attain in the course of this scheme. Skills envisaged for attainment by the child include: those of making correct sounds for letters; identifying likenesses and differences in sound between words; building up of words using prefixes and suffixes; reading; completion; listening; substitution of words; dictation; story writing, etc.

The instructor's manual clearly identifies the major principles underpinning this course and its methods and techniques. The two major principles are pupil centredness and the language experience approach. The latter principle takes into consideration the language the child can already speak. This is identified as a stepping stone from which the child must develop his linguistic abilities. Again we should note how this conforms to the recommendations of the Bophuthatswana Education Commission. In fact, the methods and techniques identified in this manual are more akin to these recommendations. They are listed as follows:

- Learning through activity
- Learning through creative activity
- Learning through exploration
- Learning through meaningful activity
- Learning through trial-and-error
- Learning through positive reinforcement
- Learning through generalising
- Learning through individual activity
- Learning through group activity

It will be noticed that most of these techniques and methods refer to the child. In fact only one of them can be described as referring to the teacher's role in the lesson. This is the one on reinforcement, which is an activity to be undertaken by the teacher.

There is also a video cassette on Breakthrough to Literacy containing three films, the duration of which is one hour. The video cassette is obtainable from the ISEA, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Republic of South Africa. It can be obtained free in some cases and is available in both VHS and Betamax type cassettes. The commentary of the films is in English and the films are about the origin of Breakthrough, its method and principles and stages through which children must progress.

Other material includes the teacher's sentence maker with three panels, each with pockets containing words commonly used by children; the teacher's sentence holder used to hold cards in place as the teacher and children build sentences; the pupils' sentence maker; the pupils'

sentence holder; pupils' story book; the word holder intended to hold word cards from pupils' sentence makers. There are also conversation posters for stimulation of discussion among pupils and phonic frieze posters to teach sounds.

All these materials which come along with the scheme make it very attractive and unique in this area of language teaching. There has never been a scheme like this one dealing with mother-tongue in particular. Even at present there is no rival for the Breakthrough scheme when it comes to African language teaching. This point makes the introduction of the scheme in both Bophuthatswana and South Africa an important element of primary school education and medium of instruction issues.

We need to say a word or two about the language content and assessment techniques of this scheme. We will also say a word or two about the stages found in the teaching of Breakthrough to Setswana.

Reference has already been made to home, school, farm and local community as areas of experience from which the vocabulary of the scheme is taken. The choice of these areas of experience is apparently motivated by two reasons. One is the need to keep within the precincts of the principle of language experience. That is, the vocabulary used in the scheme needs to conform to that which the child brings along. Secondly, these milieux are those that are common among the black people of Southern Africa; therefore an average black child will not have to

learn both the language and the new experiences he is confronted with. He only has to learn the language used to depict situations he is familiar with. Therefore this scheme takes both the environmental and linguistic experiences of the child into account.

Words such as mother, father, child, baby, cooking, washing, coming home etc. feature prominently in the vocabulary. Others referring to the farm and school such as cow, rain school, teacher, sheep are also found, and lastly there are names and words referring to places in the local town and to peer activities.

The old way of conducting assessment was random and had a very narrow aim. The aim was to find out if children have the ability to recall what the teacher taught them. This was all there was to it. This way of assessment was changed when Breakthrough was introduced. A five point scheme was adopted and the use of assessment results is thus much broader and better.

For instance, the first assessment results are mostly used to categorize children into smaller teaching groups. Before then they sit according to social groups. Moreover, the results of assessment are used to determine whether to allow the child to go on to the next stage of the scheme. These stages will be discussed below. If a child is not "promoted" to the next stage, the implication is that there needs to be more teaching and assistance from the teacher. This means that the child receives some

remedial teaching. Most of these things were not present in the previous way of assessing pupils.

On the whole, Breakthrough can be explained as a reading and writing scheme where the child is required to recall his experiences, express them in spoken language, turn them into written language and read them. The video films we have referred to give an idea of a typical Breakthrough lesson in Setswana. Most importantly, the films describe the stages through which the lesson goes as it progresses, and what happens in each and every stage. Of course this is accompanied by an explanation of what Breakthrough is and what are its principles and methods.

In the first stage the children learn to read a set of thirteen words from the teacher's sentence maker, seven prefixes and to make sentences with all these words and prefixes. They also learn the sounds of the letters they have used in the words, and do simple occupational tasks such as drawing pictures. Groups called "social groups" each take a turn with the teacher who uses the sentence maker and the conversation poster to teach them. While one "teaching group" is with the teacher, the other groups are busy on occupational tasks. At the end of this stage children are divided into "ability" groups according to the amount of their learning. This stage is supposed to take about three weeks to complete.

Stage 2 is for the children who have passed stage 1. Those who have not satisfied the requirements of stage 1 continue in this stage until they have mastered enough to

proceed to stage 2. In stage 2, each child is given a sentence maker and composes sentences, using his own sentence holder. Personal words that do not occur in the core vocabulary are added by use of blank word cards. Phonics are taught through phonic posters. The children must also read and understand readers 1 to 7. The stage lasts for approximately 17 to 18 weeks.

The last stage is Stage 3. Here the emphasis is on communication, which takes the form of oral communication and creativity in communication. Children tell their own stories and give their own reports. These are called "news reports". Children should be stimulated to write stories in this stage, although some dictation and revision of letters and sounds are also undertaken. Reading is taken further. The stage is supposed to last up to the end of the year.

This, in a nutshell, is what is called Breakthrough to Setswana. The scheme is still the only one in Bophuthatswana and South Africa. In fact, the current feeling is that it should be expanded and not substituted by another scheme. In our next chapter we shall discuss this scheme in view of all that has been said about language and education in Southern Africa. We are going to have a look at the implications of the introduction of this reading scheme in as far as policy matter and the future is concerned.

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BREAKTHROUGH, PRIMARY EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE POLICIES
IN BOPHUTHATSWANA AND SOUTH AFRICA

Seeing that this chapter is about the whole primary school education in both the homeland and South Africa, we need to provide a picture of the current situation in both cases. This will in practice mean that a description of the South African primary situation be outlined and later it should be indicated how the homeland changes the system when it inherited it in 1977.

The South African primary school system is divided into lower and higher primary levels. This refers to the black education system. The lower primary level is made up of the first four years of schooling. There are two substandards, called substandards A and B, and standards I and II, i.e. third and fourth grades. The higher primary level lasts for three years and ranges from standard 3 to 5, grade five to seven.¹

When Bophuthatswana took over its schools, the education commission mentioned in the previous chapters recommended that this system be altered a little. First of all, the admission age was lowered from seven to six years. Secondly, the nomenclature "substandards" was dropped in favour of "grades". This of course does not mean that any substantial change took place as a result of this move. However, real change was made when standard 5 (grade 7) was removed from the primary level and

reclassified as part of the newly created middle school level. The latter included standards 5 to 7. This move reduced primary school education to six years. Another change was brought about when the division between lower and higher primary levels was done away with.² The aim was to accommodate all primary school classes in one school and not separate schools as was the case in the past. Therefore, these are the practical circumstances which prevailed at the inception of the Breakthrough scheme. The six years of primary education explained above were the target of upgrading recommended by the education commission.

We should remember that Breakthrough was in fact a component of the Elementary Education Upgrading Project which later changed name to Primary Education Upgrading Programme (PEUP). Therefore, in the homeland, the effects of Breakthrough should be viewed against the background of the larger aim(s) of the PEUP. The latter programme's aim was not to confine development and renovation to grade I. It aimed at improving the whole primary structure. The improvements as explained earlier on were to be those that concerned curricular matters and provision of facilities.

It is important to note that Breakthrough to Setswana was in fact the single major curricular innovation which was brought about. Its introduction in grade I started a chain reaction which involved other standards. After the successful introduction of Breakthrough in grade I there was a need to preserve and enhance its good effects on the

overall progress of the pupils. The progress talked about here was reflected in both the extent of academic attainments among pupils and the improvement in the classroom atmosphere that pervaded the Breakthrough classes.

Pupils' work improved in both quantity and quality. Unlike products of the previous system, they could write sentences correctly; write letters to friends and parents; and write simple stories and poems. These are unknown attainments in traditional classrooms. Today, when one enters a Breakthrough class of grade I, the pupils eagerly confront one with their drawings, stories, poems and letters.

Another noteworthy improvement found in the new Breakthrough classes pertains to the change in atmosphere apparently brought about by the new methods and techniques. A typical Breakthrough class is one whose walls are full of displayed posters and pupils' work. Each and every item, be it a door or blackboard is nicely labelled to remind the pupils what it is. The classroom has a row of shelves which hold pupils' work books and readers and other teaching aids. In most cases the aids comprise items collected by both the pupils and the teacher. They are used as stimuli for work.

Furthermore, teachers seem to be more relaxed in classes because of the confidence they have gained as a result of mastering Breakthrough. In the past their work was haphazard and uncoordinated. Today they have a

definite idea of what should occur in a typical Breakthrough class and this gives them a lot of confidence and peace of mind. As a bonus to their new found confidence, teachers find themselves treating pupils better. They are comparatively friendlier and more patient. However, because Breakthrough is a little demanding in terms of management of groups and preparation, they often complain of its burdensome nature. The one danger of Breakthrough is that it needs a teacher to be hardworking and vigilant. And one cannot say this about all teachers.

Breakthrough also resulted in the improvement of classroom equipment. In the old classes of grade I, pupils sat in rows facing the teacher. This arrangement was changed and, because of the need to facilitate group work and group teaching, a new type of furniture was introduced in the classrooms. This was made up of individual chairs that could be moved about with ease, and tables that could easily be arranged to form a circle. These are supplied by a local factory and bought on a rand-for-rand basis. In the case of colleges of education, they are supplied free of charge. These colleges use them to simulate a Breakthrough class as found in primary schools and the tendency is to use a group of pupils from a nearby primary school.

All the above-mentioned improvements pertain to the grade I classes. We have already mentioned that there was a need to preserve the good effects of Breakthrough

experienced in grade I. The problem was the fact that there was no similar scheme for the upper grades. It seemed PEUP was going to taper into simple classroom improvements only in higher grades. To counteract this sort of situation the Breakthrough team led by Mrs Bodenstein decided to apply the methods and techniques of the scheme in a higher class and to drop its literature. The literature had to be substituted by relevant materials and the team came up with pamphlets called "Khumisapuo" (literally: Language enrichment). However, these were never sufficient and at present a team of writers has been put together to produce relevant literature for higher classes and even supplementary literature for grade I.

All in all the introduction of Breakthrough has been successfully completed. But the need for more literature is keenly felt and it could deal a death blow to PEUP which has been extended to the last primary school standard in Bophuthatswana.

Another threat to Breakthrough in Bophuthatswana is the exclusion of most colleges from taking an active part in it. There are five colleges of education in the homeland. So far only one of them has been really involved in the scheme. The others are either moderately involved or completely uninvolved. This creates a problem for the Breakthrough team which must now in-service new recruits every year. Whether such a situation can continue indefinitely is still to be seen. Unfortunately this study does not include an assessment of the course

taken in implementing Breakthrough in Botswana. However, a comparison between the two countries would make an interesting research topic.

In South Africa Breakthrough has not been applied in the African townships as vigorously as it has been in Bophuthatswana, apparently because of lack of government support. The lack of enthusiasm for Breakthrough shown by the South African authorities is puzzling. Puzzling because the scheme cannot be said to be clashing with the policy of the Department of Education and Training on African languages. The scheme is on mother-tongue - a policy espoused by the Nationalist government. Again one cannot point at the cost involved in the scheme. If the Bophuthatswana homeland and neighbouring Botswana could risk involving their poor communities in this venture, the wealthy South Africa could easily bear the costs.

Therefore, if policy and finance are not the reasons for lack of interest in the scheme on the part of the South African educational authorities, what then is the reason? We would like to suggest here that the reason lies in the timing and origin of the scheme. By this it is meant that government support of the scheme seen in Bophuthatswana is a result of mere coincidence. The introduction of the scheme in the homeland succeeded and got government backing because it coincided with the desire to improve primary education and to be seen to be doing something about Bantu Education. The reason why the scheme got no backing from the South African government is

because there was no commission report which urged the government to lend a hand to the improvement of primary education. The fact that this was the case in South Africa and the fact that Breakthrough is a brainchild of the Institution for the Study of English in Africa, a body that has no obvious links with the Department of Education and Training where all changes in black education emanate, militated against its reception.

Does this mean that Breakthrough will go down well with current proponents of People's Education in South Africa? People's Education is a new concept of black education which is presently propounded by internal opponents of Bantu Education and apartheid. Bodies such as the National Education Crisis Committee have been associated with this concept. The facts about People's Education are not yet all clear. The proponents of this alternative in black education are still confined to pointing out the general educational and political aims envisaged in this respect. They have not yet laid down the details of the system they propound.

However, one is tempted to say that Breakthrough would find a place in the hearts of these people. Firstly, it should be noted that the problem of medium of instruction in black education is not concerned with whether it should be Setswana or English. The crux of the problem is how far should the children be taught in their mother-tongue. No right thinking person would want black children to be taught in any foreign medium from the onset of primary

education. This idea is contrary to all known principles of learning. Most, if not all, pupils come to school with initial experience they have amassed in their mother-tongue. A drastic reversal of this could prove disastrous.

Another reason to believe that proponents of People's Education could find a place for Breakthrough is the fact that this scheme was not introduced or adopted for its own sake. It was meant to be a stepping stone to another programme called Bridge to English. This fact was mentioned earlier on. Therefore Breakthrough cannot be regarded as a scheme devised to reinforce mother-tongue instruction alone, though it does. It is also a stepping stone to mastery in English.

Finally, it seems though that the future of this scheme in Southern Africa will not only be determined by its desirability and the pedagogical purpose it serves but also by political expediency.

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