

# Towards the mountain: characteristics and implications of the South African UPTTRAIL pilot project

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*In this article Professor van der Vyver, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the UPTTRAIL\* Trust, states in the first place the goal of the UPTTRAIL pilot project, which is to demonstrate convincingly that it can effectively contribute towards addressing the needs outlined by Professor Thembela in the previous article. In the second place he describes the endeavours that preceded and contributed to the inception of the pilot project and of the educational Trust which administers it. In the third place he describes the pilot project, in which a representative sample of KwaZulu teachers were taught English, teaching and thinking skills by means of SALT.*

*In the second part of the article Mrs Beatriz Capdevielle of Project Intelligence, Venezuela, draws attention to the social, economic and political implications of the pilot project. Throughout history only a few people have benefited from the growing corpus of scientific knowledge which permits the development of human intelligence and potential. The UPTTRAIL pilot project endeavours to place the benefits of knowledge in the hands of all people, to achieve total and responsible participation by all members of society, especially the blacks, in the social, economic and political life of South Africa.*

*In hierdie artikel sit professor Van der Vyver, Voorsitter van die Uitvoerende Komitee van die UPTTRAIL Trust, in die eerste plek die doel uiteen van die UPTTRAIL-loodsprojek wat oortuigend moet demonstreeer dat dit kan bydra om in die behoeftes soos deur professor Thembela in die vorige artikel uiteengesit, te voorsien. Tweedens beskryf hy die aanvanklike pogings wat bygedra het tot die ontstaan van die loodsprojek en van die opvoedkundige Trust wat dit administreeer. Derdens beskryf hy die loodsprojek waar 'n verteenwoordigende groep KwaZulu-onderwysers se Engels-, onderrig- en denkvaardighede verbeter is d.m.v. SALT-metodes.*

*In die tweede gedeelte van die artikel vestig mev. Beatriz Capdevielle van die Project Intelligence, Venezuela, die aandag op die sosiale, ekonomiese en politieke implikasies van die loodsprojek. Deur die geskiedenis het net 'n klein groepie mense gebaat by die groeiende korpus wetenskaplike kennis wat die ontwikkeling van menslike intelligensie en potensiaal toelaat. Die UPTTRAIL-loodsprojek poog om die voordele van kennis vir alle mense beskikbaar te stel om sodoende totale en verantwoordelike deelname van alle lede van die gemeenskap, veral van die swartes, moontlik te maak in die sosiale, ekonomiese en politieke lewe van Suid-Afrika.*

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\*Acronym for Upgrading of Thinking/Teaching, Training and Learning.

## **Introduction**

The crying educational needs in black schools in S.A., portrayed so vividly by Professor Alex Thembela in the previous article, have given rise to numerous endeavours, all directed at improving the situation. Among others there are the Molteno project in Transkei and Ciskei, the Anglo-Vaal Project in Natal and the Bophuthatswana elementary Education Upgrading project in Bophuthatswana (vide Odendaal, 1985). In spite of their commendable efforts and notable successes, much remains to be done in view of significant overall improvement in education for blacks.

Attention is focused in this article on a new pilot project, which could contribute significantly towards possible solutions to the problems in black education, viz the UPTTRAIL pilot project.

### **What is the purpose of the pilot project?**

The immediate objective of the UPTTRAIL pilot project is to demonstrate convincingly that the quality of black education in particular can be improved significantly and learning outcomes can be accelerated. The Trust wants to achieve this by trying out a new and unique amalgam of innovative language teaching methods and methods to promote thinking skills in a pilot project. The separate components have been tested locally and abroad, and their successes have been documented in various publications and unpublished, but accessible, dissertations and reports, such as the work of Feuerstein (1979 and 1980), Schuster (1983), Edwards (1983), the Harvard report (1983), a study done by Gassner-Roberts and Brislan (1984), Dhority (1984), Botha (1986), and Odendaal (1987). UPTTRAIL believes that an integrated package of these and other components will deliver even better results than the sum total of its parts. Once positive results of the pilot project are demonstrated to education departments, the community, the private sector and institutions, locally and abroad, favourable decisions regarding the escalation and wider implementation of similar in-service programmes are expected.

### **The needs**

The needs the UPTTRAIL project wants to address have already been clearly and convincingly described by Professor Alex Thembela in the previous article. Further information on the subject is contained in the article by van der Vyver, "SALT in South Africa: Needs and Parameters" in the *SALT Journal*, 10 (3). In summary it can be said that most of the black primary and secondary school teachers, whose mother tongue is not English, are expected to teach pupils for whom English is also a foreign language, through the medium of English. Further, the present poor standard of English as a medium of instruction in black education is self-perpetuating: poor language skills in the primary school affect the quality of education in the high school which in turn impedes the quality of tertiary education. The primary school seems to be the logical point of entry into this vicious circle for any endeavour aimed at upgrading the skills of black primary school teachers as well as those of teacher-trainees.

### **Background, history and the creation of the UPTTRAIL Trust**

An Interuniversity Committee for Language Teaching was formed in 1979 at the University of the North in South Africa (one of the universities with predominantly black students). Today it consists of representatives of the following universities: Bophuthatswana, Fort

Hare, the North, Venda, Stellenbosch, Transkei and Zululand. Six out of the eight predominantly black universities in South Africa are represented on this committee. This Interuniversity Committee defined two priorities in 1979:

- \* To do thorough research into the English language needs and deficiencies of black primary school teachers in a limited, but fairly representative, geographical area in South Africa, and
- \* To search for innovative approaches and/or technologies by means of which training and learning outcomes could be accelerated.

With regard to the first priority, a report, with guidelines for more effective training and in-service training of primary school teachers, was published as Special Issue Nr. 1 of the journal *Per Linguam* in 1985 (Odendaal, 1985). A second report ensued after determining and analyzing the relevant constraints which are prevalent in colleges where training and in-service training of primary school teachers are taking place (Odendaal et al, 1986).

As far as the second priority is concerned, reports about and meta-analyses of suggestopedic/SALT projects were studied, fact-finding missions with a view to learning more about suggestopedic/SALT language teaching were undertaken, SALT conferences were attended from 1983 (vide van der Vyver et al in *INTUS News*, 8 (2), 1984) and various controlled experiments were initiated (vide e.g. Botha, 1986; Odendaal, 1987; Swart, 1987). It became increasingly clear to researchers and teachers that SALT could contribute significantly towards improving conditions in black education and ultimately in education for all South Africans. Furthermore, discussions during the SALT conference of 1986 in Florida with representatives of Project Intelligence in Venezuela, as well as a subsequent study of the Harvard report (1983), led to the idea of developing an integrated package of materials for the in-service training of primary school teachers. It became evident even then that an English language programme, presented by means of SALT into which thinking skills were incorporated in co-operation with leaders in the field of cognitive development, offered an ideal opportunity to prepare people for better and more effective participation, not only in all the subjects of primary and secondary education, but, indeed, in all the processes of society.

It was thus decided that a SALT course would be devised which would deliberately and systematically aim at improving the thinking skills, and more specifically, the problem solving and creative skills of primary school teachers by utilizing elements from Odyssey (1985), from Edward de Bono's CoRT (1986) and from other sources. It was argued that if language and thinking proficiency as well as defective teaching methods could be significantly improved, the entire range of problems in black education could be influenced positively, not merely certain aspects of it. Furthermore, it was sincerely believed that positive results could contribute significantly to improving human relations, to effecting more responsible participation at all levels of society and, subsequently, to stabilizing the crisis situation in the country.

Thus, on behalf of the Interuniversity Committee for Language Teaching, the UPTTRAIL Trust was launched on 27 March 1987 under the Chairmanship of Professor Alex Thembela, Vice-Rector of the University of Zululand, with the support of a number of prominent academics, educationists and businessmen. The reason for creating this Trust

was to get an appropriate mechanism for launching, financing, monitoring and evaluating the envisaged pilot project. A further important task of the Trust would be to conceptualize the future of the project, that is the wider and intensified implementation of the programme after expected successful completion of the pilot project.

### **What does the pilot project comprise?**

Since January 1988 materials had been prepared and didactic strategies had been selected for a three week in-service training programme for black primary school teachers in KwaZulu. These materials had been based in the first place on a thorough study of the school syllabus for English for standard three (grade five) pupils in KwaZulu as well as on a study of the syllabi for the other standard three subjects; furthermore, they had been based on the needs analyses referred to above and on the advice received from de Bono and Capdevielle (Project Intelligence) and other consultants on cognitive development.

After the materials and didactic strategies had been prepared and selected, a statistically representative number of primary school teachers in KwaZulu received in-service training at the University of Zululand in January 1989. These teachers, who represented a universe of about 19 000 teachers from about 1 000 primary schools, underwent an intensive course, aimed at

- improving their English language and cognitive skills;
- improving their teaching skills in all standard three subjects;
- preparing them specifically for
  - \* the teaching of English and thinking skills in an integrated package which had been prepared for this purpose - SALT was used as a method
  - \* the teaching of thinking skills for two periods per week in the mother tongue of the pupils, using elements of SALT.

The effect of the training on the teachers are being evaluated and compared with the effects of a conventional in-service training course on a statistically representative number of teachers in a control group. Progress with regard to self-image, English proficiency and thinking skills will have a positive effect on the quality of their teaching in general and consequently on the quality of the pupils' learning. These teachers are being encouraged to apply at least some of the SALT principles and techniques to the teaching of subjects like mathematics and history. English, however, receives more specific attention. Thinking skills are incorporated in the English course which is being taught by means of SALT.

In the case of the pupils, assessments are being made with regard to their English proficiency skills, cognitive skills, scholastic achievement, pass and failure figures and compared with those of the pupils in the control schools. If it can be demonstrated that a significantly larger number of pupils passed standard three in the experimental schools than in the control schools, the prospects for wider implementation of the course will become favourable indeed.

An independent panel of internationally recognized academics are evaluating the research design, the execution of the pilot project and the research report and will make their findings and recommendations known.

Decision makers will be presented with the final reports and recommendations.

## **Guidelines and principles**

Since the inception of the UPTTRAIL Trust and the pilot project, a number of guidelines and principles have been strictly adhered to:

Involvement and acceptance by the community for which the programmes are intended, are of course essential. Therefore, educationists, administrators, community leaders and parents have been involved in the UPTTRAIL pilot project right from the beginning. UPTTRAIL is therefore not seen as a project by us for them, by the whites for the blacks, by one community for another one, but by us for us, by one community for itself. Obviously the meaning of what has just been written will be (best) understood by people who are knowledgeable about the deep divisions in South African society.

Everything possible is being done to ensure that the eventual wider implementation of the programme in the primary and secondary schools will be as inexpensive as possible. In other words, the quality of education should be improved without making it more expensive.

The whole initiative is ultimately aimed at contributing towards unleashing the potential of every individual human being in South Africa (and maybe even beyond the boundaries of South Africa) and by doing so, at contributing to a healthier society.

Since the whole initiative is ultimately aimed at serving the interests of one South African nation and even of mankind, all endeavours are geared towards making this effort a national one and even an international one in the true sense of the word.

Considering the input, involvement and frequent visits of so many prominent SALT members and associates over the years in what has become UPTTRAIL, there exists at least some justification for the conviction that it has become an international endeavour and that the SALT community are important stakeholders.

## **The social, economic and political implications of the UPTTRAIL pilot project**

Even today only a few men control the destiny of humanity. They often decide for all, and they are the only ones who can determine whether a war will start tomorrow or not, or whether an atomic bomb will explode or not.

But where are the rest of the people? Do they have a say in this? And if so, is what they have to say taken into account? It can firmly be stated here, with full awareness of the significance of the words, that no really democratic system exists in the world. Democracy in the full sense of the word does not exist. At best, there are some governments for the people, but no government by the people exists! Even in the so-called "model democracies", the people are not really ruling over themselves (Machado, 1982). Democracy is the result of the will and intelligence of all the people. To make democracy possible we can also generate within ourselves the faculties needed to live democratically. If democracy is the government by the people, the people's capacities must be developed and must grow continuously.

Throughout history the world has been governed by a few. But even worse is the fact that throughout history only a few have benefited from one of the greatest achievements obtained to date by humanity: the corpus of scientific knowledge which increases day by day and which permits the development of the human intelligence and the human potential. The opportunity to develop intelligence has always been in the hands of a privileged few; major contributions to cultural development have always been made by minorities. The

course followed by mankind has always been in the hands of those who were able to develop their inner capacities, their intelligence to a greater extent.

If Nature or God had decided that, due to genetic reasons, human beings were to be totally different; if it had been previously determined that only some of them would have the capacity to rule and to be creative, what would be the point of a democratic ideal? If Nature or God had created only a few superior human beings, it would have meant and still would mean an injustice in nature which would be almost impossible to overcome (Machado, 1980).

But today we know (and have sufficient and a still growing body of scientific evidence which affirms) that this is not the case; we now have enough scientific knowledge which maintains that for all practical purposes all men are created equal in nature, all normal beings have the same potentiality (Machado, 1980).

Nobody is born intelligent; everybody is born with a potential to become so. Nobody knows how to speak at birth, but is born with the capacity to talk. Genetically, a child is born with the capacity to walk, but he has to learn. Likewise, a child is born with the capacity to think, but again this capacity has to be developed through learning.

If man can indeed develop his cognitive skills, all possible efforts should be made to achieve this goal as soon as possible. It is our duty to accelerate this process. It is a matter of striving, by all the means at our disposal, to place in the hands of the people, with no exception whatsoever, the benefits of modern scientific knowledge about the development of human potential in general and about the development of thinking skills specifically.

Intellectual independence is a necessary condition for achieving economic, social and above all, political independence. The worst of all colonialisms is cultural colonialism. The existing inequalities will not be amended unless the ones that exist between men are first corrected.

The democratization of knowledge is a basic requirement for a true democracy in which all individuals can receive the benefits of knowledge, achieving at the same time an active role in the country's development and in the determination of their own destiny.

Clemenceau once said, "War is too important to be solely left in the hands of generals". Today it can also be said that the corpus of knowledge regarding the development of intelligence is also too important to be left in the hands of scientists, just as politics is too important to be left in the hands of politicians.

The position that each man/woman adopts towards the issue of the development of intelligence substantially determines his/her attitude towards life. By itself, it represents an ideological revolution. By transforming man, making him more intelligent, we will be transforming society.

The UPTTRAIL pilot project is a significant endeavour to place the benefits of knowledge in the hands of all people, beginning with the most underprivileged groups of South Africa. Initially, the idea was to teach English as a second language in an accelerated and efficient way, in order to have more effective teachers teaching through the medium of English and, consequently, to give the blacks in South Africa a better opportunity to participate in the social, economic and political life of the country.

Later it was realized that a one-sided emphasis on language proficiency was not enough. It was not sufficient to speak and understand a language in order to participate in a society. It was necessary to be able to speak and understand the language with a complete

comprehension of what one is being told, and with a clear idea of what one wants to say. Hence, the transcendental decision to include the systematic teaching of thinking skills as a fundamental aspect of the pilot project was taken.

The ultimate goal of the pilot project is the achievement of total and responsible participation by all members of society, especially the blacks, in the social, economic and political life of South Africa.

The UPTTRAIL pilot project is an example of a sound attempt to democratize knowledge as a means of democratizing intelligence. It is a step toward the mountain. A very fundamental step.

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