Towards sustainable empowering learning environments: Unmasking apartheid legacies through scholarship of engagement

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Abstract
This article reports, from the insider’s perspective, on a research project comprising fifteen academics in the Faculty of Education Sciences at the North-West University and fifteen senior officials from one of the four Education Districts in the North West Province. This project has as its research theme, hence aim; ‘the creation of sustainable empowering learning environments’ at any site where learning occurs. Through this article I describe how this research project was established and operationalised couched within Boyer’s scholarship of engagement, as the theoretical framework. Information on the project in its quest to unmask factors that hinder the creation of sustainable and empowering learning are also highlighted in the context of the apartheid legacies of the North West Province’s practice of education. Although the study does not generalize its ‘findings’ beyond the researched, it is however believed that important lessons can be learnt from this instance of engaged scholarship.

INTRODUCTION
To initiate the discussion, this article describes very succinctly the context of educational dysfunctionality suffusing the country and the North West Province in particular. I further go on to put special emphasis on our apartheid past as the most significant and plausible predictor of our woes in education currently. My argument is that; in spite of being into the fifteenth year of democracy we are still unable to erase this dysfunctionality which has been deliberately created for over 500 years of colonial apartheid history. I then discuss the efforts by the new democratic government at the levels of legislation and policy towards reversing the effects of this dysfunctionality in education. I finally come to the conclusion that these legislative and policy imperatives have provided an enabling context for the university in particular to collaborate with departments of education (and other instances of civil society) to attempt to operationalise the vision and the intentions of the new dispensation towards a better life for all through universal education.

To achieve the above I invoke Boyer’s scholarship of engagement in describing how some academics from the North-West University (ANWU) have collaborated
in a research project with officials from one of the Education Districts in the North West Province towards creating sustainable empowering learning environments (SELEN), away from the dysfunctionality engendered by our apartheid legacies. By describing some salient features of this SELEN project I come to define what sustainable empowering learning environment is and how this could serve as an antidote to the educational dysfunctionality described above.

BACKGROUND

While 50% or more white children go onto university, only 12% of black children do. Half the children drop out before finishing matric. In former white schools in the Western Cape, 62.5% of grade 3s could read and write at appropriate levels; the corresponding figure in African townships was 0.1%. One in 10 whites get an A-level pass in matric; only one in 1 000 blacks. (Sunday Times 23.08.09)

In line with the above observation, research (Bereng 2007, 1–23; Nkomo 1990, 293) has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that Verwoerd’s prophetic words regarding education for Black people in South Africa have actually materialised. When one looks at the rampant dysfunctionality with regard to educational provision and performance of learners in institutions of learning populated predominantly by black learners throughout South Africa, it becomes very clear what Verwoerd meant when he said

I just want to clarify the Honourable Members of Parliament that if the native in South Africa is being taught to expect that he will lead his adult life under the policy of equal rights, he is making a big mistake. The native must not be subject to a school system which draws him away from his own community, misleading him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze (in Bereng 2007, 23).

The statement above needs to be understood in the context within which the majority of the Black people then lived, which was marked by extremely high levels of poverty and unemployment as well as lack of requisite skills for meaningful contribution to the socio-economic advancement of the country as a whole (Nkomo and Mokate 1990).

Given the above, the impression might be created that the situation Verwoerd was referring to related only to years starting from 1948 when apartheid became official policy of the South African state, however I want to hasten to add that ever since colonialism first put its feet on the South African soil, education for Black people has always been about preparing them for menial manual labour or second class citizenship. The following quotations by the Native Commissioner Theal in 1892 cited in Bereng (2007, 22) attest to this fact:
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... I do not myself see much use in teaching the natives to read and write without teaching them to make use of their hands as well ... . Teach every occupation that a servant is required to do in the Colony ... the present system is not only a waste of money ... but money spent in raising up an army of discontents who sooner or later would become a serious danger to the country.

Without belabouring the point, when the new democratic South African Government installed in 1994 started tackling the neglect of the education for Black people in general, it was bound to be faced with a herculean task dating back at least five centuries of colonial apartheid’s destruction of the lives of Black South Africans in particular.

To clarify this point, Van der Berg at a seminar of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) on May 05, 2009 painted a very grim picture of education in South Africa, and this was fifteen years into the new and democratic dispensation in the country. For example through quantitative data from the much publicized *Trends in the International Mathematics and Sciences Study* (TIMMS), Van der Berg showed that South Africa as a country with majority Black learners came last out of a total of 46 countries of the world. What makes the point more emphatic is that South African learners even performed far below their peers from other African countries with smaller economies compared to that of South Africa. The racial inequality in performance was even more glaring when Van der berg (2009) demonstrated that predominantly White schools within the country out classed the predominantly Black ones significantly on the TIMMS. The same situation was observed with regard to the *Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS)* (Van der Berg 2009, 1–21).

Van der Berg’s analysis, though grim, is not surprising because the whole arsenal of legislative and policy directives on education (for example the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996; the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996; the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act 58 of 2001) and other aspects of the lives of the South Africans (Skills Development Act of 1998, Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa and the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition), since the advent of the new South African government in 1994, have been geared towards addressing this problem. Recently the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr. Nzimande has registered his concern with regard to high levels of unemployment among Black youth and lack of requisite skills among them in particular (News 24 2009, 1) and all these he related directly to the aftermath of the colonial apartheid past.

What continues to be disturbing though is that in spite of the concerted efforts at the level of legislation and policy to address the abovementioned legacies, there is a noted paucity with regard to implementation and practice thereof nationally, provincially, at the education district and at the school to attempt to address this legacy.

To address this paucity significant stakeholders in education have even formulated the Ten Point Programme summarizing and concretizing the intentions...
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of the Education Road Map (DBSA 2008, 48–52). These points tend to emphasise that very practical classroom actions have to be taken, namely, that teachers have to be class in time and to teach when in class, that there should be heightened focus on improving quality of early childhood education and primary schools including the implementation of the Foundations of Learning campaign, that there has to be conducting of external examinations at regular three year intervals to ensure that quality teaching and learning takes place at all schools as well as provide results of these examinations to parents, that it is ensured that all teachers are effectively evaluated on the bases of their learners’ performance, that quality teachers are recruited and developed professionally and academically, that management capacity of districts and schools is enhanced, there is an increase of the use of Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) in schools, that there is improved alignment between national and provincial provision of education and resources, that a social compact for quality is developed which will include the National Consultative Forum to clarify performance targets to all stakeholder, and that poverty combating measures are implemented to improve environments for learning and teaching.

Given the above scenario, it became urgent and necessary that a research team working on the theme titled, the creation of sustainable empowering learning environments (SELEN) focused its attention more on the identified national issues so as to give them the local, provincial and regional content and operationalisation.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY IMPERATIVES

The impetus to put together a team of researchers comprising academics from the Faculty of Education at the North-West University (ANWU) and senior officials from one of the Districts in the North West Education District (ONWED) was given by a number of factors. Firstly, the latter (ONWED) in November 2008 invited the former (ANWU) to participate and facilitate their strategic planning session for the years 2009 to 2014 (NWED 2008, 1–26). This first interaction emphasised to both the need for greater collaboration and working together if learning was to improve to the desired levels. Another point that came out of this initial interaction was that together the ANWU and ONWED were jointly and thoroughly to investigate the root cause of the rampant dysfunctionality in education in their respective province/district which I described earlier in this article so that appropriate and long lasting solutions could be found and implemented in concert.

From the ANWU’s side the call to collaborate was informed by current legislative and policy imperatives like the Higher Education Act (Department of Education (DoE) 2003), the White Paper 3 (DoE 1997), the New Academic Policy (DoE 2002), The National Qualification Framework, The Higher Education Qualification Framework (DoE 2007) and The White Paper on Science and Technology (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology 1996), among others.

Over and above the many issues that the abovementioned legislative and policy directives decree on, there is that emphasis among them all relating to how the higher
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towards empowering learning environments... education sector should work in conjunction with government, civil society and private sector instances, among others, for it to be relevant and responsive to the needs in the community. All the above imperatives tend to deconstruct the traditional notion of an isolated *ivory tower* higher education institution in favour of a more engaged one which derives its strength, motivation and legitimacy to exist from collaborating, responding and being relevant to the needs of the community. To attest to this point, the White Paper on Science and Technology for example, makes the following observation:

Traditional ways of producing knowledge within single disciplines and institutions are being supplemented by knowledge generated within various applied contexts. This is knowledge that is collaboratively created within multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary research programmes directed to specific problems identified within social and economic systems. A national system of innovation benefits from knowledge practitioners being located in multiple knowledge generating sites and institutions such as higher education institutions, government and civil society research organisations, and private sector think tanks and laboratories (DoE 1996, 9).

On the side of the ONWED the legislative and policy imperatives that made collaboration with the ANWU urgent and necessary were the following: the National Education Policy Act 27 1996, South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, South African Council of Educators 31 of 2000 and the National Curriculum Statement of 2003 to mention a few. The one thread that linked all the above legislative and policy directives together was their expectations with regard to the teachers and other educators. For example the National Curriculum Statement when summarising these expectations notes that:

All teachers and educators are key contributors to the transformation of education in South Africa. The National curriculum Statement visualises teachers who are competent, dedicated and caring. They will be able to fulfil the various roles outlined in the Norms and Standards for Educators. These include being mediators of learning, interpreters and designers of programmes and materials, leaders, administrators and managers, scholars, researchers and life long learners, community members, citizens and pastors, assessors and subject specialists. (DoE 2003, 1–5).

The above implies that when finally the fifteen academics from the Faculty of Education Sciences at the North-West University (ANWU) and fifteen officials from one Education District in the North West Province (ONWED) came together to formulate a joint research project it was in furtherance of the aims and objectives of the new democratic dispensation in South Africa as also enshrined in Section 29 of the Constitution which states that ‘Everyone has the right to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible’.
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SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT AS THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conclusion which I am able to make based on the above discussion is that both the ANWU and the ONWED seemed to share the same goals and objectives hence the project was put together. This project enabled us all to look closely at our practices of education (research, teaching and community engagement), on the one hand as academics, and on the other as practitioners. The joint project enabled us to blur the boundaries between ANWU and ONWED.

What is significant about this collaboration was the extent to which it was operationalising Boyer’s Scholarship of Engagement (Boyer 1996; Burrage, Shattell and Habermann 2005, 220–223; Mahlomaholo and Matobako 2006, 203; Van de Ven 2007, 37–40). The four main pillars of this mode of scholarship have been identified as scholarship of discovery, scholarship of integration, scholarship of sharing and scholarship of application.

SCHOLARSHIP OF DISCOVERY

With regard to the aspect of discovery the research project was following the accepted and conventional ways of doing research. For example, the project had as its main research question: finding out what those factors are that make the creation of sustainable and empowering learning difficult in the schools within the identified North West Education District. The intention of this focus being to formulate effective and practicable strategies to ameliorate and/or eradicate them.

In order to investigate this matter we divided ourselves into six sub-teams of about 5 researchers each within the project as a whole, representing both the ANWU and ONWED across the board. The fact that we were employed by different institutions was not easily discernible from how we assigned ourselves to the respective sub-teams. What served as criterion was whether the topic of investigation by the respective sub-team represented what one’s everyday job description entailed and as such whether one had the requisite knowledge and skill to pursue the investigation thereof meaningfully. The ONWED colleagues brought a lot of richness to the project in terms of their experiences from working with practical issues of teaching and learning in schools and the community generally, while the ANWU complemented the former with their expertise in terms of educational theory and research acumen.

I need to emphasise at this stage that the ANWU and the ONWED colleagues were more or less comparable when it came to many of the personal profile particulars like: academic and professional qualifications, work experience, age and gender distribution and so on. Thus the issue of unequal power relationships inherent in situations where the distribution of the abovementioned factors is extremely disparate and skewed was never present or apparent in the project under discussion.

The first sub-team within the project focused on curriculum issues, investigating whether in the creation of sustainable empowering learning environments educators received adequate training in all learning areas, especially in the teaching of Life Orientation (LO), Mathematics, Mathematical Literacy and Languages. The second
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objective was to determine whether these educators successfully implemented curriculum of the abovementioned learning areas/subjects as described in the Curriculum Statement towards the advancement of sustainable learning environments. Over above these, this sub-team looked at whether LO curriculum was implemented such that it created sustainable learning environments for teenage mothers and also provided for issues of morality.

In investigating these issues the team almost immediately came face to face with the legacies of apartheid as described above to the extent that focus was broadened to include finding out how the vestiges of apartheid was presenting problems to the proper implementation of positive curriculum as enshrined in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). The whole project including the abovementioned sub-team understood the NCS as the practical classroom concretisation of the educational intents and purposes of the various legislative and policy imperatives like the National Education Policy Act 27 1996, South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, South African Council of Educators 31 of 2000 which operationalised section 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

The argument for this emphasis was that the sub-team needed to focus on ways of uprooting the problems and not just tinkering with the symptoms for success to be obtained with regard to creating sustainable empowering learning environments. In short, while the objectives were pursued as described above, the historical context of apartheid education and its social engineering impacts became the backdrop against which each research objective was pursued.

The second sub-team clarified their focus by handling this broader historical legacy as the context for their investigation while determining whether school management teams (SMT) were sufficiently capacitated to support educators to play out their roles in their respective subjects/learning areas as prescribed by the Norms and Standards for Educators in the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 and all the other relevant educational legislative and policy imperatives. The third sub-team working on Language of Learning as their focus operationalised the abovementioned approach in investigating whether learners in the General Education and Training Band (Grades 3–4) were adequately prepared for transition from mother tongue to English instruction.

The third sub-team, whose focus centres on analysing the management of the following intervention programmes: the Vacation Camps (VC), the Learning Attainment Improvement Plan (LAIP), and Foundations for Learning (FFL) also operationalised the approach as described above. It is in the research carried out within this sub-team that we had the opportunity to see the long lasting impacts of the apartheid legacies very clearly. The fourth sub-team also operated on the same wavelength as they analysed the extent to which the well being of learners and teachers was taken care of both formally and informally in the schools and at home. All the above were complemented by the focus of the fifth sub-team that was placed on the provision of support for learners with barriers to learning in the schools. This
sub-team investigated whether there was support for learners with barriers to learn, what kind of support was provided if any and the advantages and disadvantage that such could have.

All the five sub-teams have each compiled a research proposal describing processes and procedures followed in pursuance of the abovementioned objectives respectively which themselves lead towards attainment of the research project as a whole, namely, the creation of sustainable empowering learning environments.

SCHOLARSHIP OF INTEGRATION

In keeping with Boyer’s theorisation (Boyer 1990; Boyer 1996) the project represents a seamless integration of efforts from both ANWU and ONWED towards one identified goal. All of us are quite conscious of the rampant impact of apartheid policies on the fabric of lives in South Africa generally and the North West Province in particular, hence our efforts are combined towards identifying the extent to which these continue to bedevil education so that we can design intervention strategies for the resolution of such (SELEN 2009). The goal for all members is the creation of sustainable empowering learning environments away from the legacies of the past.

As described earlier in this article I have noted that the democratic government in South Africa that was installed in 1994 is legitimate as it carries with it the wishes and the aspirations of the South African nation formalised in the Constitution of 1996. This research project thus is an attempt to integrate research effort around provision of quality education for all as enshrined in Section 29 of the abovementioned Constitution (SELEN 2009). This point is proven by the successive legislation and policy imperatives designed and implemented by the abovementioned government since 1994 to create what I consider to be sustainable empowering learning environments at all sites where education takes place.

That the project is problematising the apartheid past as a significant factor in explaining the dysfunctionality in the education of the country, is a deliberate attempt on our part to ensure that the dictates of the Constitution, of all the Schools’ and of Higher Education and Training legislation are thoroughly and meaningfully implemented. The aim is to finally unfasten the hold of apartheid legacies on the future of our youth, hence the country from a dysfunctional education. The legislation (as well as well as the policy directives deriving from the Constitution as discussed earlier in this article) is operationalised in an integrated manner towards achieving the identified aim and objectives of the sub-teams constituting the whole project (SELEN 2009, 1–5).

All of us collectively and individually as members of SELEN, are consciously aware and motivated to conduct our research such that we advance the agenda for equity, social justice, freedom, peace and hope in education (SELEN 2009, 1–5). We are able to achieve this as we are firmly located in those communities which tend to bare the brunt of apartheid legacies the most as evidenced by under performance and rampant dysfunctionality in their schools.
The scholarship of integration which Boyer (1996, 37–39) and Buggae et al. (2005, 220–223) advocates for is actually the pillar of strength for the project because, other than having an integrated goal we also work inter-disciplinarily. For example, within the Curriculum Issues sub-team, the ANWU component consists of: one person having a Ph.D. and specialising in youth problems such as Teenage Pregnancy, the second person is a professor of mathematics education, the third one holds a Ph.D. and works in Counselling and Consulting Psychology. From the NWED’s side the project is led by someone holding a Master’s degree in Values and HIV/AIDS education, the second one holds an M.Sc. qualification in Agricultural Sciences and the last one has a Ph.D. focusing on Life Orientation. The same multi-disciplinarity above occurs across all the sub-teams within the project.

Furthermore, in formulating the objectives, referred to elsewhere in this article, members of each team brought in their specialisms in terms of theory, teaching and community engagement to the table, to the extent that I can safely state that the project is thoroughly integrated from its conception to its operationalisation.

**SCHOLARSHIP OF SHARING**

In arguing for sharing as an aspect of scholarship, Boyer (1996, 148) has this to say:

> Scholarship, we say is a communal act. You never get tenured for research alone. You get tenured for research and publication, which means you have to teach somebody what you have learned. And academics must continue to communicate not only with their peers but also with future scholars in the classroom in order to keep the flame of scholarship alive.

Together as a project we also have sent papers for presentation at national conferences and internationally. We also share our knowledge and findings with our peers in journal and book publications which are currently under review. Most of us who are teaching have begun integrating our findings into our curriculum offerings for our students. There are also a number of M.Ed. and Ph.D. students whom we supervise as a team around issues coming from our research project. We also share as we conduct strategic planning and follow up workshops for practicing teachers and learners in schools and the community generally.

The SELEN project is actually founded on this principle of sharing as evidenced by the fact that the ANWU members share their research skills and academic knowledge while the ONWED also share their practical experiences of what happens in real classrooms in the practice of learning and teaching. The latter also bring in with them that caring approach and serenity described in the Community Service Learning manuals which sometimes as ANWU we tend to overlook. This process involves us preparing ourselves well before we go to do research at schools or anywhere for that matter.

From our ONWED colleagues we have learnt that preparation involves getting the necessary gadgets together in working condition, like: batteries for tape recorders,
questionnaires and so on. However the greatest level of preparation we learnt was about thinking very deeply about what our visit and our research meant to both ourselves and the researched. It is an almost spiritual experience of very intense reflection and being aware at every step of the way of the possibility of harm and/or improvement we may cause and as such keeping us mindful of what we do all the time. This reflection we do individually but most importantly among ourselves as a sub-team and as a project. During our field work we continue sharing ideas and experiences and aspirations with the people among whom we do research as well as among ourselves as SELEN researchers, especially because we want to always act out the principles of respectful research, namely, equity, social justice, freedom, peace and hope. We also share at the end of our research session where we again to evaluate our actions and reflect very intensively again on what we were doing at the sites of research.

**SCHOLARSHIP OF APPLICATION**

Finally Boyer makes the following observation, that ‘... by scholarship of application we mean ... reflective practitioners moving from theory to practice, and from practice to theory, which in fact then makes theory more authentic ...’ (1996, 146). This is yet another strong point of our SELEN project because by the very design of the project we cannot avoid being *reflective practitioners* as we have to communicate and negotiate our research agenda, from its conception to the final report among ourselves especially with those of us who maybe more steeped into theory and others those who may be more steeped into practice. We deliberately achieve what Boyer describes above everyday through this partnering.

Our mission of breaking the cycle of poverty by ensuring that children learn effectively attests to the fact that SELEN is an engaged project informed by real life experiences of people. The SELEN project thus affords us the opportunity to become engaged scholars because we are *there* with the learners and the communities whose social mobility is restricted by a dysfunctional education system. This project has made us aware and sensitive to how educational practices in a typical rural classroom of North West Province for example, are affected by systemic problems due to inadequate provisioning of educational resources like buildings and the whole list of infrastructural requirements for a sustainable learning environment to exist (Mahlomaholo and Hongwane 2009, 1–99). We have also noted how levels of poverty (as shown by the fact that over 80% of the schools occur within quintile three to quintile one) still determine learning and performance in the majority of the schools in the Province and the identified Education District in particular.

Our engagement with apartheid ideology through research as well enables us to be engaged in the plight of the subaltern communities very directly. Our project thus is an attempt to respond to this need to find out more about those factors that hinder optimal learning which constitute the residues of the past. As an example the issue of unequal per capita expenditure per White learner versus a Black learner during
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the apartheid days as described by Verwoerd himself and other luminaries from this ideological perspective (Bereng 2007, 59–71; Cross and Chisholm 1990, 43–60) enjoy attention in the SELEN project.

SELEN project also provides opportunities for us and our students to apply our knowledge of educational research and practice to real life issues. We have the opportunity to become expects at resolving issues that may or may not occur at other sites across the globe. Looking at all the international tests at which we underperformed as a country, it is through projects such as SELEN that we might be able to regain some measure of respectability. SELEN provides the opportunities for ANWU to learn, to be current and to be relevant to cutting edge educational issues. The Faculty/University stands to benefit from this partnership of mutual respect and reciprocal benefit in the same that the Education District is likely to benefit through enhanced research capacity.

Through the SELEN research project we are more likely than not, to be able to inform future education legislative and policy decisions from an informed basis as we get engaged with up to date legislative and policy imperatives. The project also enables us to blur the artificial boundaries between higher education and schools/ basic education into a seamless progression that will benefit all.

The above discussions seem to go in tandem with Boyer’s (1990, 148) view that

At one level, the scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of our university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, and to our cities .... Campus would be viewed by both students and professors not as isolated islands, but as staging grounds for action.

The position that SELEN takes therefore is that higher education achieves its highest purpose and fulfils its mission through being directly involved and engaged through its research, teaching and learning in the solution of social problems. Boyer once again reminds us emphatically that ‘... the academy must become vigorous partner in search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems and must reaffirm its historic moment to what I call scholarship of engagement’ (1990, 143). SELEN project is thus well poised to support the nation towards the operationalisation of the Ten Points of the Education Road Map (among other strategies) which already are inextricably interwoven with its research and intervention agenda.

CONCLUSION

Given the above scenario therefore, sustainable empowering learning environment (SELEN) is understood as the antithesis of the dysfunctionality now rampant in our education system. Such a sustainable and empowering learning environment represents the ideal of what is best for learning, away from the hindrances Verwoerd (Bereng 2007, 1–23; Nkomo 1990, 293) and his ilk put in place to prevent it.

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In describing what this ideal environment for learning is, the SELEN project looks first to issues of poverty eradication in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as restated by the United Nations’ Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon in the following words:

Looking ahead to 2015 and beyond, there is no question that we can achieve the overarching goal: We can put an end to poverty. In almost all instances, experience has demonstrated the validity of earlier agreements on the way forward; in other words, we know what to do. But it requires an unswerving, collective, long-term effort … . Set for the year 2015, the MDGs are an agreed set of goals that can be achieved if all actors work together and do their part. Poor countries have pledged to govern better, and invest in their people through health care and education (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2009, 1).

Through the project we hope to create an environment where learners can optimally exploit their potential and truly become themselves as fully functioning and empowered citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to the economic well being of the country. Such an environment will enable the learners to acquire requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes to function effectively in the rapidly advancing technological setting of the 21st century. This can only happen once the barriers to learning created by our unfortunate history are clearly understood and removed. SELEN is a collaborative attempt to ensure that there is adequate investment in all people irrespective of their station in life. People in whom such an investment has been made, invariably feel and act empowered. Because this empowerment is about knowledge, skills and attitudes it is therefore sustained for a long period of time, that is, as long as these people are alive.

At the national level the project looks to the humane and democratic legislative and policy imperatives as bases for defining sustainable empowering learning environment as that setting where learners are able to identify and solve problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made; work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community; organise and manage oneself and one’s activities responsibly and effectively; collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information; communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation; use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others; demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation. To contribute to the full personal development of each learner, and the social and economic development of the society at large, programmes of learning must make an individual aware of the importance of … . (Bender, Daniels, Lazarus, Naude and Satter 2006, 40–45).
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Based on the above Critical Cross-Field Outcomes (CCFO) nationally, the project then moves on to define SELEN as that setting where the residues of apartheid, those inhumane acts of a character ... committed in the context of an institutionalised regime of systematic oppression and domination by one racial group over any other racial group or groups and committed with the intention of maintaining that regime ... (Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998)

are attended to, tackled and eradicated so that they have no effect on the performance of learners, teachers and all stakeholders in education, at least. Finally, all the above culminate at the regional/provincial level in the collaborative SELEN project pulling available educational research resources together between the ANWU and ONWED in a seamless scholarship of engagement effort. In ensuring that through education all learners perform to their optimal levels

this SELEN research project proposes to create learning environments that do empower all the stakeholders including: learners, teachers, professionals from the North West Education Department, academics from the North-West University, School Governing Bodies and all instances of the civil society with an interest, stake and role in education. In order to achieve this regionally, the project will seek to ensure that all the above mentioned stakeholders are informed, have adequate and relevant knowledge, they are competent and qualified in their roles. These stakeholders will thus have the necessary skills to provide pastoral care necessary for quality teaching and learning, proper leadership thereto, continuously conduct research thereon, and generally provide support as determined by the provincial priorities. It will therefore be important to monitor and evaluate programmes initiated as per provincial priorities so as to ensure accountability and sustainability thereof. (SELEN 2009, 1).

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