Introduction: The shifting understandings of skills in South Africa since industrialisation

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During the Mbeki Presidency, skill has come to be a central theme of government concerns with improving social and economic performance and explaining weaknesses in implementation. Whilst not quite reaching the 'spinned' simplicity of Blair's 'education, education, education' in Britain, skill has taken a key role in official accounts about international competitiveness, economic growth and poverty reduction. The issue has been taken up in the development of the 2003 *Immigration Act*, where a new strategy for attracting such skills from outside the country has been developed, as well as forming the core of the 2001 *Human Resources Development Strategy* (DoE and DoL 2001).

This book is an attempt to examine the multiple and shifting meanings that skill has taken on in South Africa. It does so with a view primarily to how skill is being played out in contemporary policies and practices within the country, but it affirms the need to see such debates in both historical and international contexts. The authors share the policy concern with how to facilitate development and the role of skill and skills development in that focus. The authors are particularly interested in unpacking the notion of skill as ways of supporting the national project and suggesting how best to deal with the issue of skill in South Africa.

The nature of this book

A set of core questions

Although this book is an edited collection reflecting the diverse interests of a group of colleagues around a broad theme of education-work relations, it is

clear that there are a set of core questions that the volume, when taken as a whole, is addressing.

First, what role can skill play in building a better future for South Africa? It is clear that skill is a notion that has only limited meaning without reference to knowledge, values and attitudes. It is apparent that policies for skills development interact intimately with broader educational policies; active labour market policies; industrial policies; science and technology policies; and with broader macroeconomic and fiscal policies. It is evident that policies interact with people and practices, as well as being shaped by internal and external economic and ideological forces. It is obvious that all of these contexts are shaped by the multiple and complex historical legacies that are acting upon contemporary debates.

It is taken for granted that the development of skill programmes in South Africa is critical to economic and social growth. In that regard, the focus of government on skill development is not an idle political gesture. But the term 'skills development' needs to be engaged with critically and problematised in terms of its impact and consequences, especially for those denied access to skills training in the past.

Several of the chapters engage explicitly with the current international debate about 'high skill' futures, seeing in this literature an attractive model of how South Africa might hope to build a model of socially inclusive and equitable growth in the context of increasing globalisation. However, they go beyond the ways in which the state appears to have engaged with such notions by asking critical questions about the local adaptation of such a model, and by seeking to make a case for high skills to be understood as higher skills for all, not simply as a model for developing and nurturing 'knowledge workers'. This is crucial as, a number of chapters argue, South Africa has been characterised by skills polarisation and lacks sufficient development of the crucial strata of intermediate skills. Not only is this the area to which most commonplace understandings of skill refer, but it is a central element of the economic successes of Germanic Europe and East Asia.

Second, how can skill play such a positive role in South Africa's future development? The discussion of this is most clearly grounded in a concern with institutions. It is important to be clear that the institutional perspective that infuses much of the book is not that of the 'new institutional economics'

but arises out of an older and more critical political economy perspective about the nature of skills and the evolution of systems for skills development. Third, what is already being done, and will it work? Clearly, this question overlaps with the previous ones. However, it is addressed specifically in a series of chapters that examine key policies since 1994 and the evidence that is available for understanding their impact.

Fourth, why is skill understood in the way that it is now? For many of the authors in this volume, historical perspectives are essential for understanding the present and the possibilities for the future. Particularly in the earlier, historical chapters of the book, this leads to an examination of the historical evolution of commonplace, institutional and policy understandings of skill. These chapters are concerned with the ways in which economic, political and social imperatives shaped such understandings. They are concerned with the ways in which race, and to a lesser extent gender, have played crucial roles in the segmentation of both notions of skill and systems for skills development. They are aware that there has been a powerful agenda of skills for life that has often cut across the more obvious agenda of skills for work. They are interested in how skill became valued for its role in social development and social control as well as in economic development.

Analytical and conceptual foci

In a sense this book should be seen as located somewhere between a collection of essays and a tightly-focused volume arguing a coherent and consistent line. Not all of the above concerns are shared by the contributors or lead them to the same conclusions. Nonetheless, a set of questions as listed above is relatively easy to construct from what is presented here and does reflect considerable coalescence around mutual concerns.

Even in a book attempting synoptic focus, there are inevitably inclusions and exclusions. This is even more the case in a volume like this, reflecting as it does the research concerns of a group of authors with their own, as well as mutual, interests and foci. In the next few paragraphs I will rehearse briefly some of the key areas of focus that are included in this volume, but also some of the issues and vantage points that are absent.

Policy analysis plays an important part in this book. Here, there is a concern with what policies say and with what they might mean. There is a concern

with locating that meaning in economic, political and social contexts and within an understanding of the national and international ideological forces at work in the policy arena. In many of the chapters, there is a strong sense of policy as compromise, but also of the contestations that lurk behind such compromises. In all this concern with policy there is also a strong awareness that policies exist not just as pronouncements but also as practices.

A number of chapters are concerned with the notion of policy coherence. Kraak in particular argues about the advantages of 'joined up policy', suggesting that the real transformation sought by South Africans will not take place unless policies are brought together to achieve 'critical mass'. This concern with coherence is seen in a focus on policies from the Departments of Education (DoE), Labour (DoL) and Trade and Industry (DTI), as well as reference to wider policy trends.

However, the issue of policy coherence is a complex one. Writing on Latin American development experiences in the 1950s and 1960s, Hirschman argued that a country that is capable of delivering in practice on policy coherence is unlikely to have a problem with development (e.g. Hirschman 1958). Put another way, Latin American countries were unlikely to be able to use policy coherence as a development strategy precisely because they were not developed enough. This negative experience can be countered by the clear model of developmental states in East Asian development in the same period. However, it does at least raise the question of what capacities and resources are needed for policy coherence to bear fruits. The experience in South Africa of impressive policymaking followed by poor policy delivery suggests that policy coherence will not be easily attained.

This book seeks to go beyond critical readings of policy, however. The vision of the research programme to which most of the contributors belong (see below) is one in which strong analysis, informed by critical theory, needs to be married with empirical rigour. Both through the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)'s own research agenda, and through the work of the state (especially the DoL), a rich body of empirical data on skill in contemporary South Africa exists. This will be critically analysed in a number of chapters, especially Chapter Six.

Inevitably, some vantage points on the complex relationship between education and work are privileged over others in this book. Several chapters

focus on the role of public providers of vocational education and training. These include technical colleges and schools (primarily rural ones – see Chapter Three) but there is also a lesser focus on the myriad of other providers, such as schools of industry. The book examines the racially-fragmented nature of such public provision of skill before 1994 and the ways in which the state has sought to transform provision since then. It also raises questions about the assumptions regarding forms of knowledge that lie behind such reforms and addresses the new policy imperative of skills development for enterprise development.

Another important lens is that of enterprise-based training. Chapter Two considers the racialised nature of industrial training in the period between 1970 and 1994, whilst much of the latter part of the book is concerned with attempts to reform provision in the post-apartheid era.

The book is clearly influenced, across a number of chapters, by the debates about low skill and high skill that have permeated the northern literature of skill in the last two decades. This is seen most clearly in the contribution of one of the leading British authors in this field, Ashton, in Chapter Four. However, a number of other chapters question whether skills in South Africa are adequate at the individual, enterprise and economy levels in terms of quantity, quality and distribution. Concerns are also evident that this contributes to poverty, unemployment, social inequality and lack of international competitiveness. Moreover, there is a strong undercurrent across many chapters, although most explicitly expressed by Kraak in his chapters, that market solutions are not enough.

A political economy of skill

This interest in debates about low and high skill clearly locates the concerns of the book in the broader international tradition of a political economy of skill. Indeed, the book marks an important South African contribution to this broader tradition. In particular, it emphasises three crucial elements of the political economy perspective.

First, the book highlights the importance of time to such an analysis. Both the historical and contemporary chapters show that systems are not static, whether these be skills development systems or belief systems about the nature of skill. Moreover, the linking of the historical and the contemporary

is intended to bring into clearer focus the point that new meanings, policies and practices are based firmly in readings of the old.

Second, this collection stresses the importance of place. Too much of the current policy language about skill, in South Africa and elsewhere, is acontextual and proposes universal solutions to universal problems. However, one of the strengths of a political economy approach to skill is that it stresses that skills systems arise out of the conjoining of national and international trends, influences and pressures, but always in a way that manifests specific national forms. Moreover, such national forms reflect understandings of the past; present conflict and consensus; and visions of the future. All these also shape societal understandings of skills and are reshaped by them in turn.

Third, this book emphasises the importance of institutions. In saying this, it is important to restress that this is not the institutional analysis made fashionable by the 'new institutional economics' but arises out of an older and more critical political economy tradition.

A social institutionalist perspective

This 'social institutionalist' approach emerged in the late 1980s when scholars sought to explain the high degree of divergence and variability in production systems and economic performance across societies in the advanced economies of the world, otherwise seemingly alike.[1] The key to this diversity, they argued, lay with the differing social foundations and cultural and historical factors underpinning economic development in these countries. The leading contribution to this argument came from the 'societal school'. It argued that the 'social foundations of production' played a critical role in shaping the effectiveness of the market mechanism (Maurice, Sellier & Silvestre 1986). It needed to be viewed as an additional factor of production in the widest sense – alongside land, labour and capital. The social foundations of production can best be understood as the total collection of institutions and regulations that underpin capitalist production.

The social foundations of production vary widely between national economies, thereby differentially altering the way in which the market economy functions in each case. In some countries, the presence of institutional arrangements and governmental legislation that impinge on the functioning of the market mechanism and cede to the state and organised

labour a role in economic development have, in fact, acted as catalysts for growth and global competitiveness.

Brown, Green and Lauder (2001) argue that issues of skill formation and economic performance are socially constructed and experienced within social institutions such as schools, offices, or factories, and can be organised in different ways. These differences not only give rise to variations in productivity and economic performance but also lead to significantly different outcomes for individuals.

These writers stress the point that divergence in skill formation systems is derived from differing processes of socialisation and identity formation. The ways in which workers develop a work ethic, motivation, creativity and trust in the workplace are culturally as well as educationally derived. These affective elements have been accorded increasing importance under globalisation, yet the strategies adopted by countries to deal with the work socialisation challenge diverge greatly, shaped by very different cultural and historical trajectories.

The most important institutional ensemble for the social institutionalists is that which arises out of the distinctive interactions between the labour market and the education and training systems in differing national contexts. Maurice, *et al.* (1986) argue that there is a critical institutional dynamic between the form of labour process organisation and the acquisition of work-based skill, contrasting the conditions in Germany that have given rise to multi-skilling, with those in France, the UK and the USA, where skill formation is more traditionally narrow and task-specific. The senior artisan in the German system plays a distinctive role in combining managerial authority with a fundamental concern with technical expertise. This contrasts with British and American management where financial cost-effectiveness is the first priority and technical expertise is underplayed.

A second important contribution to the focus on 'labour market-education and training' institutional regimes has been the work of labour market theorists. The works of two theoretical schools – the American 'segmented labour markets' school (Edwards 1979; Edwards, Reich & Gordon 1973; Gordon, Edwards & Reich 1982; Gordon, Weiskopf & Bowles 1983) and the Cambridge 'labour market studies' group (Ryan 1981; Rubery, Tarling & Wilkinson 1987; Wilkinson 1981) – have contributed greatly to our under-

standing of key labour market processes such as segmentation, discrimination, inclusion and exclusion.

The significance of both labour market approaches is that they highlight the highly differentiating role the labour market plays in its mediation of the relationship between education and training institutions and the economy. A number of observations common to both schools support this claim. First, there is agreement that differentiation within the labour market arises as a result of the strategies of inclusion and exclusion pursued by state, capital and labour in their struggles to influence the conditions under which employment and skill formation take place. Second, both perspectives agree that further education and training has a highly differentiated relevance across the different labour markets, and as a consequence, differentiated mobility patterns exist in each labour market. Third, changes in the industrial and occupational structure impact in a differential manner in each of these labour markets privileging some workers whilst excluding others from employment and skill formation (Ashton, Maguire & Spilsbury 1987). Lastly, both schools are agreed that labour market differentiation acquires its most acute form when combined with other processes of social discrimination such as race and gender prejudice.

The emphasis on institutions also stresses the key role that is played by social consensus and trust. Moreover, this role is often realised through the working of social institutions that bring different stakeholders together in relationships of cooperation. Such structures and relationships have the positive effect of mediating against the short-termism inherent in competitive, market-oriented relationships, whilst still allowing competitive forces to play a crucial role in the economy.

In being influenced by these accounts it is important to stress the earlier points about time and place. Social institutionalist accounts do not only stress the importance of socio-cultural contexts; they arise from such contexts. Much of the literature is written by authors who were the inheritors of a Western European legacy of the good performance of such institutional approaches, or by British authors looking enviously across the English Channel.

In the period after the Second World War, the political *rapprochement* between France and Germany; the hegemony of Keynesian economics; and the similarities of positive elements of different forms of corporatism from the

Catholic South of Europe and the Germanic countries and the social democractic traditions of Scandinavia, all acted in concert to encourage a social institutional approach to politics and business.

The evidence for the success of this approach seemed to be confirmed by the example of East Asia as the one poorer region where 'development' actually seemed to be taking place. Here it appeared that the challenges of war (for example, Japan and South Korea) and/or military threat (for example, Taiwan); building a new nation (for example, Malaysia and Singapore); and maintaining social cohesion in the face of rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation (across the region) led to a strong model of developmental states in which skills and economic development were seen as inseparable from issues of social coherence.

It is also important to note that the literature on high skills and social institutions arose in a period in which the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries appeared to be losing many of the benefits of the 'Keynesian Golden Era' and in which the rising tide of neo-liberalism threatened the value placed on importance of society and social institutions in the policy arena. Much of the new literature was based in an attempt by elements of the political left to use the notion of post-Fordism as a tool through which to argue for the continued salience of social democratic issues (for example, Hall & Jacques 1991; Mathews 1989). As the 1990s developed, so such notions were broadened to include arguments about the ways in which globalisation and the knowledge economy could be reworked in line with social democratic ideals (King & McGrath 2003).

It is important to be clear that such accounts are part of an attempt to shape reality as well as to reflect on that reality. The stakeholderist vision of much of this literature contrasts with an apparently ever more powerful stockholderist model from the developed anglophone countries. In such cases it appears that economic success is being built on a mass neo-Fordist base as much as on post-Fordism.

A social democratic literature on skills has developed in northern Europe and Australia and continues to be dominated by authors from those places. South African academic and policy literature on skills has been influenced by this literature but several chapters highlight the complexities of adopting this approach in the very different context of South Africa.

Some thoughts on its applicability to South Africa

It is evident that these accounts have spoken powerfully to a range of intellectuals in government, the new bureaucracy, trade unions and academia. Moreover, direct readings of this literature have been augmented by the important presence of Australians in the trade union movement before 1994 and Germans in supporting the DoL since then (King & Carton 1999). The attraction is obvious, as Ashton makes clear in his chapter. Such accounts offer the possibility of simultaneous growth, competitiveness and social inclusion.

However, there are several grounds for caution about the applicability of the model. In the South African business community there has been a far stronger tendency to look to Britain and the US for models. Historically, industrial relations in South Africa have been little short of appalling. Consensus-building and a form of corporatism were given impetus by the post-1994 political settlement but have been hampered by limited stakeholder buy-in and the powerful legacy of racialised suspicion and low levels of societal trust.

South Africa's attempts to follow an institutionalist line take place at a very different point in time from either European or Asian attempts. South Africa's development path has also been very different, skewed as it has been by the dominance of the minerals-energy complex and apartheid-inspired skills polarisation.

Crucially, the capacity of the nation and the state to build and operate the necessary new institutions is uncertain. To date, much energy has been diverted into transforming the highly racialised institutions of the past.

Key absences and silences

There are also inevitable, but significant, absences and silences in this collection. It is not intended to be an encyclopaedic overview of the past, even though some historical perspectives are presented. In Chapters One and Three respectively Badroodien and Paterson present storylines over long historical periods. However, within these they bring key historical turning points into sharp relief, moving more quickly over other periods. For this reason, this introduction will provide a further look at some of the key periodisations, although again in a necessarily selective and synthetic way.

The book does not give equal weight to all supply-side institutions. Schools are only lightly present whilst universities and technikons are almost entirely absent, as is ABET (Adult Basic Education and Training). Private providers, apart from in the guise of enterprise-based training, are also absent.

More could have been made of the range of insights from the field of the sociology of work. In particular, there is not enough consideration of work places as learning places. Given the collaboration in this volume with leading authors in this field (Unwin & Ashton), it is to be hoped that this omission can be addressed in future work.

Experiences of learning, of work and of skill are shaped by a number of characteristics. Race does receive prominence, as does rurality (at least in Chapter Three). However, issues of gender can be found across a number of chapters without ever becoming a central theme. Again, it is our intention to return to this issue with greater focus in subsequent work. The relationship between age and skill is largely absent from the text. It is clear that acquisition and retention of skill vary over individuals' lives, shaped both by their changing capacities but also by external attitudes, practices and policies.

The shifting understandings of skill over time

Clearly understandings of skill have never been monolithic in South Africa. Workers, for instance, have inevitably had different views of their own skills and how to use them than employers. Moreover, as this brief section will show, employers have also had views about workers' skills and potentiality for training that, at times, have been at variance with the official position of the state. In reading this schematic description of some of the key moments in the development of understandings of skill, therefore, it is essential to guard against simplistic and uncontested notions.

Before the South African industrial revolution of the late nineteenth century, black involvement in the white economy was fairly peripheral. The most striking exception to this was amongst the coloured community of the western Cape and by the middle of that century, coloured boys and men were increasingly becoming involved in semi-skilled and craft work in Cape Town and other urban settlements.

The period between the beginning of industrialisation and the First World War saw the emergence of a set of trends in South African attitudes to skill and its development that were to persist for most of the twentieth century, and which still strongly shape the state of skill in South Africa today.

First, much of the early industrialisation was based on the craft skills of white immigrants. The continuing influx of such immigrants over a century was to have a serious distorting effect on official attitudes to skills formation. Crucially, it allowed the state and employers to pay less attention to the role of indigenous skills formation than would have been necessary otherwise.

Second, although there was some development of white artisanal training in parallel to this influx of foreign skilled labour; from very early days the notion of skills development for white South Africans became entwined with social policy. From as early as the 1890s, there was a strong strand of skills training focusing on the poor, 'educationally backward' and the 'delinquent'. Skill thus became infused with notions of social control and of the value of industriousness over notions of skills being about economic development, a notion that came late to South Africa.

Third, the need to protect the place of white semi-skilled labour against the danger of undercutting by cheaper black labour combined with racialised views about aptitudes towards work and skill to constrain skills development for blacks. Although coloureds still had some access to skills development, it was widely held in the white community that Africans should be provided with the necessary skills to remain and survive in rural areas. Here industriousness was clearly linked with becoming Christian and civilised.

Fourth, if Africans were to enter the 'white economy', it was to be primarily on the mines, where the migrant labour system began that was at the heart of South Africa's approach to skills for much of the twentieth century. This system led to the perception amongst employers and government officials that African labour was homogenous and interchangeable. As a result, short-termism and low levels of skill were placed at the heart of thinking about labour.

Fifth, the notion of skill was also clearly gendered. In spite of cultural differences in attitudes to women working, and some variations in female economic participation, there was a degree of commonality across South African males about the undesirability of women working in commerce and

industry. Even where women clearly did play an important role in the workplace, as in nursing (Marks 1994), there was a strong discourse about controlling and 'protecting' them.

There were three periods in the twentieth century where this basic model of a highly polarised, racialised and gendered system of skills came under serious threat. The first of these was during the First World War and its aftermath.

The coming of war, even though it was far away in Europe, shaped the development of skills in South Africa in particular ways. Soon the flow of skilled labour from Europe dried up and employers began to have to recruit newly urbanised and lower skilled Afrikaner workers, including large numbers of women in certain sectors, such as the garment industry (Berger 1992). The newly urbanised, lowly skilled male workers seemed to be less obviously deserving of a 'civilised labour' wage premium than previous immigrants from Europe and so there was a widespread tendency from employers to substitute them with black labour. For women, access to decent wages was an even greater struggle (Berger 1992).

In the period after the First World War, the debate about the role of black labour in the industrial economy became a more important political and economic issue. Some employers and their organisations saw advantages in changing the relative roles of white and African labour. In 1920, the National Recruiting Corporation called for the use of more 'semi-skilled' and permanent African labour on the mines in preference to the existing migrant system. Employer attempts to subvert the notion of a colour bar, under which certain occupations were reserved for whites, reached the Supreme Court with the Hildick-Smith Judgement (1923) where a mine manager was judged to have acted legally in ignoring the 1911 *Mines and Works Act's* regulations on who could be employed in certain occupations by employing an African engine driver underground (Rafel 1987).

However, militant action and political organisation by white workers soon responded to these apparent victories for capital (and, by extension, acted against the emergence of skilled Africans). The 1924 general election returned a coalition government with the mine-worker-dominated Labour Party entering government as a junior partner. Labour legislation in the 1920s saw a growth in control over skilled employment by white male labour. The 1922 *Apprenticeship Act* was added to by a raft of other legislation that firmly

reserved the notion of skill and skilled work for whites and, to a lesser extent, coloureds (McGrath 1996).

The growing white urbanisation and industrial development of the 1920s saw a significant increase in formal skills development for South African whites. The *Apprenticeship Act*, noted above, was complemented by the opening of six technical colleges, to augment the existing two (Chisholm 1992: 7).

At the same time, growing concern about the 'poor white problem' and the threat of African urbanisation led to new pressures on African education. Liberal education in (albeit only some) mission schools came under a concerted attack for its inappropriateness for the rural communities where Africans were expected to remain. Life skills increasingly became stressed over academic skills, with technical skills largely ignored (Hunt Davis 1984; McGrath 1996).

The second moment of questioning of the South African skills regime came with the Second World War. As had happened with the First World War, so war again provided a catalyst for dramatic changes in the South African labour market. This time it was the large number of white combatants leaving the labour market that was the major factor. Unlike in Europe and North America, this did not lead to a major shift towards female employment, as South Africa had a large black male population to draw upon (Berger 1992). The war years saw a major effort to develop black skills quickly and racialised definitions of skilled work and workers were seriously strained. In the mid- to late-1940s, the De Villiers and Fagan Commissions officially accepted the inevitability of African urbanisation and proletarianisation and their implications for skills development, though the government stopped far short either of political enfranchisement or effective education and training strategies.

However, the relative reformism of the 1940s was short-lived as the 1948 elections saw the victory of the National Party and the emergence of 'grand apartheid'. In the area of African education and skills development, Eiselen and Verwoerd reiterated the 1920s policy, seeking to keep Africans either rural or unskilled, or both.

In spite of significant economic growth, white vocational and technical education saw limited development in this period. The immigration of skilled whites and the growing shift of white labour into service and managerial occupations had a depressing effect on the need for new supplies of skilled

white South Africans in the industrial and mining sectors. Although there were minor reforms to the apprenticeship system there was no sense of a need for urgent or radical reform. Trade testing remained optional throughout this period and most artisans qualified through serving their full term of apprenticeship rather than through demonstrating their competency (McGrath 1996).

Part of the explanation for this apparent neglect of what we would now call intermediate skills (then spoken of primarily in terms of the skills possessed by 'skilled' artisanal workers) lies in racial ideology and its construction of what constituted racially-appropriate labour. However, it is also embedded in the way that apartheid encouraged a particular version of an import substitution approach to industrial policy (Kraak 1994).

Import substitution was a common strategy for industrial development across the South during this period. However, in South Africa it became seriously warped by domestic factors. South African import substitution was overlaid by the historical development of the economy towards highly capital intensive economic activities in the 'minerals-energy complex' (Fine & Rustomjee 1996). This in turn was supported by the use of parastatal industries, as well as government service, as a means of solving the poor white problem. Whereas a number of other countries successfully developed their economies through production of low cost consumer durables that, over time, shifted their markets from local to international consumers, apartheid undermined this trajectory through encouraging an excessive focus on the small domestic white market (Gelb 1991). The result was an industrial strategy that produced an unusually bifurcated demand for labour between a high skill segment and a far larger low skill segment (Altman & Meyer 2003). As part of the failure to develop a mature, diversified and inclusive economy, craft skills were neglected.

This neglect of craft skills was reinforced by the way that industrial strategy contributed to the rapid growth of an Afrikaner middle class, which increasingly turned its back on such skills as a route to social and economic betterment.

As the 1960s continued, so concerns from employers emerged about the efficacy of the apartheid labour market settlement. There was a growing discourse of skills shortages (Education Panel 1963 and 1966) and attempts by

some employers to float the colour bar upwards became more intense (James 1992). For such employers, racialised notions of black aptitude for skilled and semi-skilled industrial work became increasingly less important than the economic case for using black labour in more skilled roles. Increasingly, work practices and official skill designations grew apart (McGrath 1996).

This growing questioning within capital of the apartheid skills model developed into the third and decisive period of contestation and reform as renewed African political militancy in both education and the labour market combined with an economic downturn in the early 1970s.

By the late 1970s, growing African resistance; a declining economy; and the costs of fighting a rearguard action against the liberation of the wider southern African region led the National Party to seek to manage a process of reforming the apartheid system, and to focus this attempt most clearly around the education, training and labour market nexus, as a key locus of power.

As Kraak shows in Chapter Two, the late 1970s and early 1980s saw a raft of new legislation that sought to transform education and training provision; urbanisation and economic policy. A unique South African version of neo-liberalism emerged in which market forces were lauded but were shaped profoundly by attempts to maintain racial privilege. Black access to education, training and skilled work all grew significantly but, at the same time, were constrained by continuing inequalities in access and in resources.

The growing abdication of a dominant role in skills development by the state in this period also led to increasing concerns about the attitudes towards training of employers. Successive research reports by the HSRC and the National Training Board (NTB) painted a picture of inattention by employers to systematic skills development.

The evolution of attitudes towards skill; of labour market structures; and of the economy in just over a century of South African industrialisation had, by 1994, resulted in a seriously dysfunctional skills development system. Three principal problems faced the incoming state in this area. First, skill had been profoundly racialised and gendered; black (especially female) South Africans had been denied access to skills development or had received no certification or recognition for their real levels of skills and knowledge learned on the job; and provider institutions and delivery systems were fragmented and dysfunctional. Second, the absence of consensus and co-operation around

skills development was not simply about issues of race. The state had abandoned much of its responsibility for building skills and business seemed incapable of developing a strategic position. The possibility for tripartitism was almost non-existent in one of the most conflictual industrial relations systems in the world. Third, South Africa's apartheid-driven industrial development path had led to an intense polarisation of skill between high skill and low skill elements; with a serious underdevelopment of the intermediate skill segment, which is seen as essential to successful industrialisation and competitiveness internationally.

The book's structure

The first three chapters of the book serve to make the point that historical depth is essential to understanding contemporary issues. In them, Badroodien, Kraak and Paterson look at different aspects and periodisations of the apartheid legacy. In Chapter One, Badroodien examines trends in vocational education and training before 1970. He shows in particular the ways in which race and concerns about delinquency combined to provide a logic of social control, more than economic performance, to skills development for blacks. In his analysis, the notion of an institution takes on a very different sense from the accounts above, owing far more to Foucault's notions of their disciplinary function. Kraak moves the focus forward to the 1970s and the ways in which demand and supply for skilled labour were shaped by a range of diverse factors. He argues that economic crisis and the fears of the white establishment about the implications of the 1973 Durban strikes and the 1976 Soweto Uprising led to changes in the education and training system that were intended both to be profound and, perversely, leave the status quo of white domination in place. He shows crucially how the intended solutions left skills development in a state of crisis and fragmentation by 1994. Paterson takes us back in time to explore the notions of skills embedded in rural education for blacks in the old Cape Province. Although much of his focus is on the early years of South African industrialisation, he valuably zooms his story forward to consider the legacy of this for the education/rural-development interface today.

Our focus then shifts to the last decade. Before moving into a detailed analysis of policies and delivery in the post-1994 period, in Chapter Four Ashton

provides an external perspective on the debates around skill that have come to shape South African discourses in this period. This provides a crucial set of conceptual lenses through which to read much of what follows. Kraak then outlines what has emerged in the *National Skills Development Strategy* (NSDS) to replace the failing system he describes in Chapter Two. This illustrates how much of the language of social institutionalism and high skill has been adapted and adopted by the DoL. Badroodien provides an analysis of progress towards implementation of key elements of this new strategy through a meta-analysis of recent survey findings and of the national reports of the DoL on progress against the NSDS targets.

McGrath and Gamble move the focus over to the education sector. In Chapter Seven, McGrath examines how policy for the newly-named Further Education and Training Colleges (FETCs) is intended to address the problematic legacy outlined by Kraak and Badroodien in their historical chapters. He shows that this focus on institutional transformation has been the primary element of the DoE's strategy to date rather than a concern with issues of labour market insertion and skills development, and points to the serious problems of incoherence that result. Gamble provides a very different perspective, asking whether the new policy creating FETCs is sufficiently grounded in an understanding of the specific forms of knowledge and skill that relate to different occupations. Without such an understanding, she argues, new programmes are likely to fail to prepare individuals adequately for work.

McGrath then turns the focus back to policy, examining whether there is evidence of policy coherence around the increasingly important issue of skills development for enterprise development. His analysis raises questions about the extent to which policy incoherence is a block to delivery and the likelihood of solving the incoherence issue. Kraak returns to the NSDS and its implementation to date to ask what this tells us of the prospects of a social institutionalist approach in South Africa. He makes important suggestions for how the OECD accounts of high skill need to be reworked in a South African context. Finally, Unwin reflects on the South African experience of trying to address skills development in the last decade from the perspective of international experiences. She suggests ways in which these experiences could inform South Africa and how the high skills account needs to be adapted as a result of the South African experience.

Positioning the book

This book is written by members of the Human Resources Development (HRD) research programme of the HSRC, along with two collaborators from the Centre for Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester – a partner institution in a number of projects. The HRD programme has a broad interest in areas of post-compulsory education and training; labour market transitions; and skills formation in the work place. However, several of the chapters also draw heavily from the completed doctoral research of this team.

At a time in South Africa when a 'new' HSRC seeks to critically engage with the education and training project of the national government, it is appropriate to note the previous involvement of the organisation in the field. The HSRC has been involved in a fundamental way in key reform moments in the education and training policy agenda of this country. Both the De Lange Commission of 1980 (HSRC 1981) and the NTB/HSRC reports of the 1980s and early 1990s (NTB/HSRC 1984, 1989 and 1991) were key elements of the reforming apartheid agenda to respond to the inherent flaws in the education and training domain. However, within the broader and contested framework of reformed apartheid, they also served to develop new ways that reinforced the existing inequality in South Africa. In setting a new research agenda, the HSRC needs to be mindful of its past role both in these legitimations of bad policy and in its tendency towards a spurious apoliticism. The HSRC continues to receive a parliamentary grant, although it now comprises less than half of the total budget, and has a duty to the state. However, this duty is increasingly seen as being one of critical engagement. From this standpoint, the organisation supports overall national development priorities but seeks to examine critically whether policies and programmes designed to address these priorities are well-formulated and well-functioning. It is this spirit of critical and rigourous engagement that informs this volume.

Notes

1 This section draws on the work of Andre Kraak, especially Kraak (1994).