
CORE CONTENT

for an Adult Basic Education Curriculum for South Africa

This proposal draws on research submitted to COSATU as part of the Participatory Research Project by the following individuals and organisations:

D. Angelos:	Numeracy Competencies for an Adult Basic Education System
CASE:	Analysis of COSATU questionnaire results
ELP:	Communication in English: A framework for provision in ABE National Curriculum
USWE:	Core Content for an Adult Basic Education Curriculum for South Africa

USWE, 12 July 1993

CORE CONTENT FOR AN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR SOUTH AFRICA:

A COSATU PROPOSAL

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CORE CONTENT FOR AN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR SOUTH AFRICA:

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INTRODUCTION

This proposal is framed by concerns for redress and equity, for democratic participation in a non-racial, non-sexist society, and for a "high participation, high-skill" human resource development strategy. In addition, it proposes a curriculum model which is wide and flexible enough to incorporate diverse needs, particularly those of people on the economic periphery who may be forced to enter or are already engaged in the non-formal sector.

The ANC and COSATU have both committed themselves to the notion that education and training are not for the young alone. For instance, the ANC declares that *"All individuals shall have access to lifelong education and training, irrespective of race, class, gender, creed, age, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability"* and COSATU: *"Education and training should continue throughout a worker's life to enable him/her to keep pace with technological change and develop his/her abilities."*

The Alliance is committed to the principle that "education is a basic human right" (NEC) and the need to integrate education and training "within national development aimed at the restructuring of the economy, redistribution and the democratisation of society." (NEC). This proposal is therefore located within a framework for lifelong learning characterised by the integration of academic and vocational skills and by skill portability and articulation.

1. POLICY COMMITMENTS

There are wide-ranging policy commitments on curriculum.

The ANC believes

- "that there should be a national core curriculum which reflects the norms and values of a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society and which is relevant to both the needs of the individual, as well as the social and economic needs of society."
- "that a national, core curriculum should be complemented by a national accreditation and certification system for both formal and non-formal education and training. This would ensure that there is maximum flexibility for horizontal and vertical mobility between different levels of the education and training system, both formal and informal."
- "that a national core curriculum (should) provide a general education based on integrating academic and vocational skills".

COSATU is *"committed to curricula which develop literacy, numeracy and the ability to*

think critically." COSATU is further committed to *"a formal education system which is not purely academic but is geared to providing scientific and technological skills which can contribute to the development of our country"*.

All organisations are concerned that the new curriculum should take account of, and give recognition to, the learning and experience that learners bring to the system.

The NEC stresses that *"there shall be mechanisms to ensure horizontal and vertical mobility and flexibility of access between general formative, technical, industrial and adult education and training in the formal and non-formal sectors"* which clearly has important implications for the curriculum.

A national curriculum framework should:

- be built around the notion of a core curriculum
- empower individuals, individually and collectively, to design their own futures
- integrate academic and vocational/scientific/technological/ industrial skills
- promote critical thinking
- allow for flexibility
- recognise prior learning and experience
- allow for vertical and horizontal mobility
- embrace all learners at all levels and is specifically non-racist and non-sexist

(ANC/COSATU (June 1993) Draft Framework for Lifelong Learning)

2. CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Principles and objectives

The COSATU principles and objectives as stated in the Participatory Research Project document provide a framework for this proposal as they define the orientation and overall aims of the curriculum.

COSATU Principles and how these relate to theoretical concerns for the selection and sequencing of content for the "core".

"Principles" generally refer to underlying values or belief systems which inform the nature of the curriculum. From the list of Cosatu principles and objectives for an ABE curriculum, we can extract the following principles:

An ABE curriculum should:

- promote democratic participation
- promote national unity
- promote non-racism
- promote non-sexism

- promote equity
- provide access for all
- provide redress
- strengthen the cultural heritage and identity of the oppressed
- be linked to social, economic, political and cultural development
- build confidence and self-esteem

Each of these beliefs impacts on every level of the curriculum and implies a wide range of knowledge and skills. If these principles are to be useful as guidelines for the selection, sequencing and assessment of content and its implementation, they need further "unpacking".

Theoretical concerns which "translate" the Cosatu beliefs into recommendations for the selection and sequencing of content for the "core"

Decisions about the content of a curriculum reflect the curriculum developers' views on, among other concerns, the role of education, the nature of "knowledge" and the ways in which adults learn. Because this research is framed by the Cosatu principles, the educational and learning theory which informs decisions on content should reflect and promote these values and beliefs. Insights from these theoretical concerns can inform the selection of content for a curriculum and "translate" the Cosatu beliefs into recommendations for this selection. Some of these concerns include:

- the nature of knowledge
- theories of how adults learn
- research on the development of cognitive skills and concepts
- the role of language in the curriculum
- the transfer of skills and knowledge to new contexts
- approaches to structuring the core of a content curriculum
- the importance of learning and teaching processes
- learner-centred methodologies
- the importance of teacher education and assessment procedures
- the flexibility and adaptability of the curriculum for different contexts of learning

3. KEY COMPETENCIES

Key competencies are a framework for assessment and equivalence across systems. They are "generic" in that they cut across the content areas and prioritise the kinds of knowledge and skills which are important to a general education.

A competency refers to the broad outcome/end-point of the learning process and can be described as having three dimensions:

1. the ability to apply a skill to perform a task
2. a theoretical understanding of the task
3. the ability to transfer knowledge, skills and understanding to other tasks and situations

(Christie, 1993)

TABLE 1 : KEY COMPETENCIES

<p>Overarching Competency: Thinking about Learning</p>	<p>This is the capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> to be aware of the processes and strategies one uses to think and learn e.g. reflect, hypothesise, categorise, integrate, memorise, draw analogies. <input type="checkbox"/> to consciously use these processes and strategies to learn more efficiently and to plan, monitor and evaluate one's performance on any task. <input type="checkbox"/> to consciously use skills, procedures and information learnt or used in one context in another context (transfer).
<p>Competency 1: Solving Problems and Making Decisions</p>	<p>This is the capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> to see a problem as consisting of a number of elements, to generate strategies for arriving at possible solutions, to establish criteria for choosing the most appropriate solution and to evaluate the effectiveness of the chosen solution.
<p>Competency 2: Planning and Organising Activities</p>	<p>This is the capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> to plan and organise one's own activities, including making good use of time and resources, sorting out priorities and monitoring and evaluating one's own performance.
<p>Competency 3: Working with Others</p>	<p>This is the capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> to interact effectively with other people both on a one-to-one basis, in groups and in organisations, including understanding and responding to the needs of others and working effectively as a member of a team/group/organisation/community.
<p>Competency 4: Collecting, Analysing and Organising Information</p>	<p>This is the capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> to locate information, sift, interpret, sort and synthesise information in order to select what is required and present it in a useful way. <input type="checkbox"/> to critically evaluate both the information itself and the sources and methods used to obtain it.
<p>Competency 5: Communicating Ideas and Information</p>	<p>This is the capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> to communicate effectively with others using the range of spoken, written, graphic and other non-verbal means of expression.
<p>Competency 6: Participating in Civil Society & Democratic Processes</p>	<p>This the capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> to contribute to the shaping and maintaining of a democratic society through understanding a range of interlocking systems (legal, economic, political, social) and participating in democratic structures and processes. <input type="checkbox"/> to engage with a range of state and non-governmental institutions (e.g. social, political, legal, educational, health) to obtain access to information and services. <input type="checkbox"/> to exercise and defend one's rights.
<p>Competency 7: Using Technology</p>	<p>This is the capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> to apply scientific and technological ideas (e.g. energy, conservation, germ theory, ecosystems) to enhance control over the environment and to improve the quality of life for oneself and those with whom one shares the environment. <input type="checkbox"/> to critically evaluate the effect of technology in different fields (e.g. health, agriculture, environment, pollution) and contexts (e.g. urban, rural, workplace, home, community).
<p>Competency 8: Using Mathematical Concepts and Tools</p>	<p>This is the capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> to apply mathematical functions (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, etc.), concepts (number, space, etc.) and processes (estimation, problem-solving, etc.) for multiple purposes. <input type="checkbox"/> to use a variety of mathematical tools (calculators, etc.)

Note: The term "capacity" is used in the sense of "the potential to do something". It is broader than "ability" and is not fixed or easily observable. It allows for a range of levels or standards within the curriculum.

4. CORE COMPONENTS OF AN ABE CURRICULUM

4.1 THE NOTION OF CORE

The key competencies are a framework which describe the end-point of the learning process. They are not part of the core.

The core is described as "generic" in that it aims to provide a foundation of concepts, skills and understanding for all other learning. It is assumed that core concepts and skills can be applied or "transferred" to new contexts.

A core for an ABE curriculum would need to articulate with the formal school system as well as training programmes. Achieving this level of integration is a mammoth task. A model of the "core" which could be common to all these different systems (and thus ensure comparability across systems and mobility between systems) needs to be flexible enough to embrace different contexts of learning.

The proposed core for this curriculum model consists of:

1. core skills
2. core subject content
3. core processes

4.2 CORE SKILLS

The proposed model includes the following core skills:

- **THINKING ABOUT LEARNING** (metacognitive skills) i.e. developing an awareness around the nature of knowledge and learning, for example, thinking about the process of learning.
- **COMMUNICATION** skills (especially if the medium of instruction is not the learners' first language).
- **COGNITIVE** (thinking) skills such as analysis, inference, synthesis, and including problem solving and critical thinking skills.
- **LEARNING** skills i.e. developing strategies for learning or "learning how to learn", for example, learning when to skim and when to read for detail. "Learning skills" also include access or procedural skills (i.e. learning how to engage with organisations, institutions, information, etc.)
- **NUMERICAL** skills e.g. mathematical functions (addition, subtraction, division, multiplication, etc.) and their application (e.g. measuring, buying wisely, banks and budgeting, checking payslips)
- **ORGANISATIONAL** skills (e.g. negotiating, resolving conflict, chairing).

Relationship of core skills to key competencies

Each core competency is underpinned by a cluster of skills, for example, Competency 4: Collecting, Analysing and Organising Information might draw on communication, cognitive and numerical skills.

Sequencing of skills

Both within and across each level of ABE, skills are "re-used" or "re-cycled". As the tasks become increasingly complex, a more complex combination of skills is mobilised.

Relationship between core content and core skills

The core content provides the context for development of skills. Both the core content and the core skills are informed by the curriculum goals.

4.3 CORE SUBJECT AREAS/CONTENT

This sub-section explores possible knowledge areas or themes, the integrated approach and the specification of core content in terms of concepts.

Core subject areas

Core Subject Content is the "vehicle" on which the skills and key competencies rest. It can be seen as "the other side of the coin" to the key competencies. Competencies and skills are decontextualised statements of ability. They cannot operate in a vacuum, and the core subject content provides the context for their application and development.

The core subject content needs to lay a foundation for further education and training as well as provide people with a general education. It therefore needs to span a range of subject areas. From our survey of a number of local and international curricula and policy documents on ABE in SA, the following broad areas or themes seem to be core. (They need further detailing).

Language and communication

- first language
- additional language (possibly English)

Numeracy and Mathematics

mathematical functions (addition, subtraction, division, multiplication, percentages, etc.) and their application e.g. measuring, buying wisely, banks and budgeting, checking payslips)

Social Studies (or Understanding your Social Environment)

- history (incl. concepts of community, culture, citizenship, commonality and diversity, etc.)
- political and social issues (including the concepts of family, discrimination (esp. of race and gender), employment, housing, land, resources)
- systems of government
- understanding social institutions (including legal)
- economic issues: both macro systems (e.g. capitalism, socialism) and micro systems (e.g. household and co-op. budgets)
- systems of information (e.g. media)
- development studies

Physical Studies (or Understanding your Physical Environment)

- health
- environment
- geography
- science
- technology
- development studies

These can then be broken down into smaller divisions of subject areas, e.g. Physical Studies consists of:

health	environment
geography	science
technology	development studies

Core concepts

The content matter of each of these sub-divisions can be described in terms of core concepts which are needed to lay a foundation for the study of that area. For example, "environment" includes among others, the following core concepts:

sustainable development	industry
technology	consumerism
recycling	ecosystems
soil erosion	pollution
etc.	

Concepts build a framework of understanding or knowledge with which to understand the world/life/new knowledge. They are linked to "facts" (for example, in order to understand the concept "continent", one needs to know that there are five continents and to have a visual map of what they look like) and the exploration of any concept will therefore involve learning new facts. But the assessment tasks should not test memory of these facts. They should test the learner's understanding and application of those concepts.

Curriculum organisation: a theme-based approach

The above subject areas would detail a broad spectrum of content to be covered by the curriculum. All the content areas could be taught separately or in an integrated fashion. If taught as separate modules, the interdependence of the human and physical systems should be stressed. The links between the two should be made explicit so as to help learners integrate the two "areas" and transfer knowledge from one to the other.

An alternative would be to integrate the core content areas around themes right through the curriculum. For example, the theme "Living Conditions" would draw on concepts from history, politics, economics, geography, environment and sociology. The reason for integrating these more traditional subject areas is to allow learners to view issues from different perspectives, thereby developing a more critical and flexible understanding of them and to help learners to transfer knowledge and skills from one context to another. It also "saves time" in that goals around content (knowledge and understanding) can be achieved while acquiring language and learning skills.

In the first level(s) of ABE, L1 literacy, L2 learning and numeracy could be taught in order to lay a foundation for further study. Thereafter, language learning and advanced literacy skills could be integrated with the study of the content areas or learning themes. This would not only save time (a matter of importance for adult learners), but provide stimulating and useful content for the study of language.

Core procedures (subject-specific)

An integrated approach to content should not lose sight of the **"subject-specific thought processes and procedures"**. For example, "scientific procedures" (e.g. hypothesis, empirical investigation) are different to "historical procedures" (e.g. argument, evidence, interpretation). These should be built into the integrated curriculum, and as learners move up the ABE levels, should become more explicit, so as to prepare them for post-compulsory or specialist courses.

The curriculum can illustrate concepts with materials which reflect both local and international issues. For example, "pollution" can be explored both in global terms (nuclear and toxic wastes) and local terms (polluted rivers). This allows for a degree of flexibility and diversity within the curriculum, but simultaneously ensures that learners gain a broad general education.

The relationship between Key Competencies, core skills and core subject areas and concepts is illustrated in the diagram on the next page.

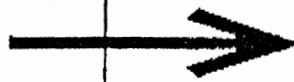
KEY COMPETENCIES:

Thinking about Learning
Solving Problems and Making Decisions
Planning and Organising Activities
Working with Others
Collecting, Analysing and Organising Information
Communicating Ideas and Information
Applying Mathematical Concepts and Tools
Participating in Civil Society
Using Technology



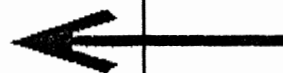
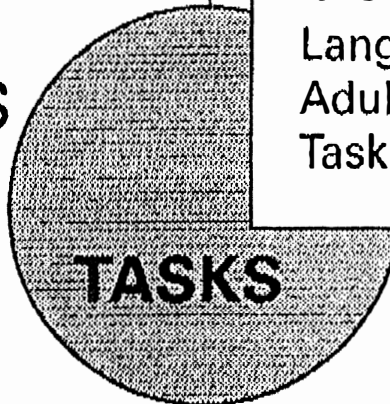
CORE SKILLS

Communication
Cognitive Learning
Numerical
Organisational
Thinking about learning



CORE PROCESSES

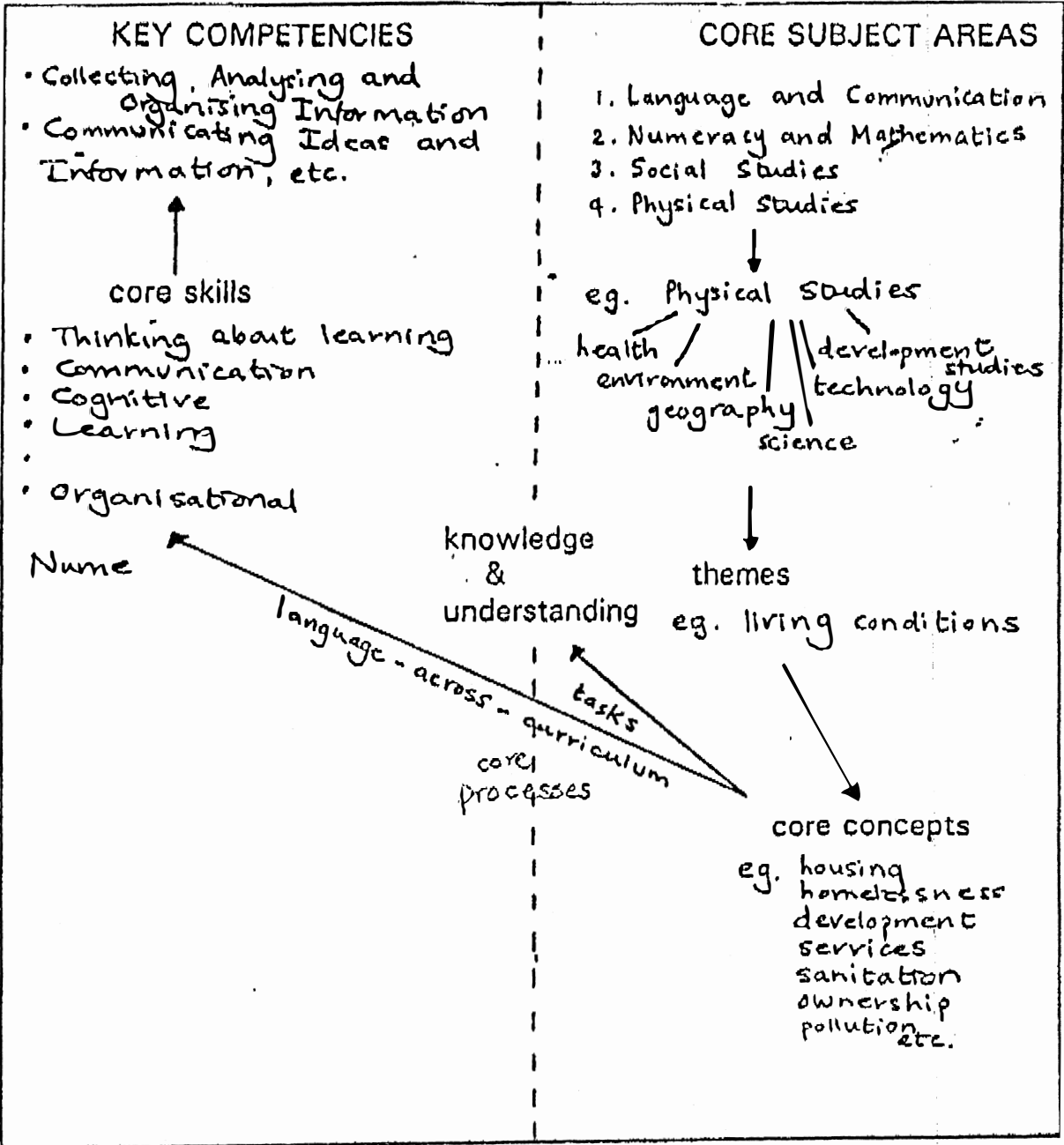
Language-across-curriculum
Adult Learning Principles
Task Based Approach



CORE SUBJECT AREAS

Language & Communication
Numeracy & Mathematics
Physical Studies
Social Studies

CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK



Core concepts, arising from the core subject areas, are explored in tasks which mobilise a range of core skills. Language skills can be simultaneously acquired if a language-across-the-curriculum approach is used. During this process, the core skills and concepts are developed, and progress towards the acquisition of the Key Competencies achieved.

Criteria for the selection of core content

The following criteria might be useful tools for the selection of core content:

Core content should:

- equip people for effective participation in a wide range of contexts.
- be useful and/or relate to people's daily needs.
- be generic to the knowledge, skills and understanding people may need to study further and/or develop employment skills.

These criteria link to the Cosatu principles by promoting the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills for individual development and effective participation in their social, economic, and political environment.

Results of COSATU Participatory Research questionnaire

A questionnaire on the content of a basic general education was given to 160 respondents. The profile is as follows:

77 union members

83 members of other organisations, of which 54 were office-bearers

Gender: 57 women, 81 men

Age: majority between 26-50 years

Home language: all major languages represented

Work: 38 in less skilled or semi-skilled jobs

64 in more skilled jobs

Average of 8 work years

Education: 41 with less than Std 6

92 with Std 6 and higher

A preliminary analysis of the results of this questionnaire shows a wide range of interests within each subject areas and form a useful starting-point for the planning and organisation of themes. Significant findings include great interest in international experiences, in human rights, conflict resolution, the political economy, small business development, science and technology, and environmental issues. Many concerns cross subject areas; this would seem to support a theme-based approach.

4.4 SETTING LEVELS AND STANDARDS

Levels and standards

The key competencies provide a framework for assessing and reporting on learners' work and allow comparability and equivalence across different educational systems (formal, non-formal, industrial, etc.). Levels can be set within each key competency and this framework then sets standards for achievement across the curriculum. In this way flexibility and mobility are possible within the curriculum and different learning contexts and groups of learners can be accommodated.

How levels might be set is illustrated by the example which follows. The end-points of the four Cosatu ABE levels of Competency 4 ("Collecting, Analysing and Organising Information") might look something like the following:

COLLECTING, ANALYSING AND ORGANISING INFORMATION

FOR ALL LEVELS, learners should demonstrate the capacity:

- to state purpose for collecting information
- to identify sources or follow guidelines for collecting information
- to identify strategies for accessing information
- to access, read, critically evaluate, select and record information
- to order and present information for a particular audience
- to evaluate presented information against purpose

Problem-solving tasks could be used to assess the achievement of a competency at any level. Differentiating these tasks into levels would be controlled by variables such as the following:

- the medium of instruction (L1 or L2)
- text type, complexity, length and number of texts or other sources of information (e.g. graphs, charts, broadcasts)
- task complexity (i.e. how cognitively demanding is it?)
- how contextualised the task is
- the concreteness or abstractness of the source of information and task
- the amount of support which is given

Sequencing of the curriculum

The curriculum development process should be informed simultaneously by:

- the broad competency framework
- the theme
- the sequence of tasks to develop the skills, concepts and processes needed to achieve the key competencies

It is important that the broad framework meshes with the development of a coherent curriculum - the sequencing of tasks must be internally consistent. Thus the curriculum development process should be driven by both "bottom-up" concerns (internally coherent task sequence) and "top-down" (key competencies) concerns.

Sequencing is also dependent on decisions around language. Whether the medium of instruction is the L1, L2 or a combination of the two crucially affects the sequencing, pacing, range and complexity of the tasks.

Sequencing should be **cyclical** (not linear) and key competencies, core skills and concepts should be re-presented at different levels but in increasing detail and complexity or in the second language, if the task has only been performed in the L1. The reason for the cyclical approach is that learning is an organic development. Most of the skills and competencies around which the curriculum is structured are needed to perform tasks in Level 1. As learners move through the levels of the curriculum, they gain greater and greater control over these skills and are increasingly able to use them to solve more and more complex problems and to transfer them to new contexts with a decreasing amount of guidance from the teacher.

How tasks are sequenced is a matter of on-going research and curricula need to be piloted and reviewed to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the sequencing for learning.

Differentiation (core and specialisation)

The need for a curriculum which meets the needs of a wide range of learner groups and learning contexts is well recognised. This proposal presents a model for a core which could be common to all curricula but flexible enough to be adapted to local contexts. It does not, however, explore how differentiation could be accommodated, so in this subsection, we briefly consider how options (additional to the core) could be included within the curriculum.

Cosatu, in its PRP document, talks about "core and specialisation modules". Questions around whether the core and specialisation modules are developed nationally or regionally still need to be answered. One option would be for aspects of the national core curriculum to be developed centrally and for regional bodies to design components to reflect local interests and knowledge. Within this, three options are possible:

A. competency framework could be developed nationally and detailed core curricula developed regionally.

B. competency framework developed nationally; aspects of the core could be developed centrally and local components added to the core by regional bodies, e.g. core = national component + local component.

C. competency framework and core modules could be developed nationally and all specialisation modules or options developed regionally to supplement the core.

A national framework needs to be developed first in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. Option A could also be seen as a long-term goal depending on whether the regions were able to develop sufficient resources (money, expertise) to sustain it. In the short term, Option C might be most feasible; specialization modules could include a range of specialist academic and vocational programmes. Option B would also be more demanding on resources than C but would represent an interim position if the decision were taken to move towards A in the long-term.

The model of the core proposed in this document could fit within any of the frameworks suggested by the above 3 options.

4.5 CORE PROCESSES

Further considerations which need to be included in the core of a curriculum are the core processes of mediation (teaching) and assessment. These factors affect every aspect of the core we have discussed up to now. Whether or not appropriate learning/teaching processes operate within this framework is crucially dependent upon the way in which the curriculum is mediated and the kind of assessment procedures that are used. The way in which material is assessed affects the teaching and learning experience at every level (backwash effect). Good assessment procedures can therefore have a very positive effect on teaching and learning practice.

The effectiveness of both the mediation and assessment of the curriculum depends on the nature and quality of the teaching. The importance of a parallel teacher education and training course to accompany this curriculum cannot be stressed enough.

4.6 THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE

Medium of instruction

Decisions around the medium of instruction crucially affect decisions around the selection and sequencing of content. Whether the medium of instruction is the learners' first language (L1), second language (L2) or a combination of the two affects all aspects of the teaching and learning process (e.g. the complexity of the text or information, the speed at which learners can proceed and the amount of teacher support that they require).

In the short-term, a gradual transition model with one medium of instruction gradually giving way to another is proposed, so that learners have the time to become acclimatised to a new language of instruction. English will become more predominant as learners move to more advanced levels.

In the long-term, however, a bilingual model of education might be more able to meet the need for a general education. In such a model key concepts and skills are first taught in the learners' L1 and then extended to the L2. As learners' ability to learn through the L2 increases, both the L1 and the L2 can be used as mediums of instruction. New and difficult skills and concepts can be introduced in the L1 and then transferred to the L2, thereby enabling learners to move more quickly through the curriculum than if they had

had simultaneously to struggle with both the new skills/concepts and the L2. The issue of medium of instruction needs much further discussion and research.

It should be noted that results of the Participatory Research Project indicate a high level of interest in learning through the first language in the 26-35 and 36-50 year age groups, particularly at lower education levels.

Language-across-the-curriculum

This proposal advocates a language-across-the-curriculum or content-based approach. In this approach, the content lesson material is used as language-learning material. By integrating the acquisition of content and skills with learning about an aspect of the language, language learning is given a context which learners understand and hopefully find stimulating. It also saves time as learners learn about content at the same time as they learn the L2.

Choice of language of instruction profoundly affects the curriculum, "as it is a major factor in providing or withholding access to education and consequently to human resource development" (Burroughs).

Implications for the setting of standards

As discussed above, whether the medium of instruction is the L1, L2 or a combination of the two crucially affects the sequencing, pacing, range and complexity of the tasks. This has profound implications for the setting of standards.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Mediation refers to the teaching and learning interactions, the guidance and counselling learners receive on choices of modules and regular and on-going internal assessment through regular meetings and discussions with teachers. **Assessment** may be externally set and administered, or internal, but either way, it will affect what teachers and learners perceive as important and of value in the curriculum.

The recommendations in this proposal stress the need to emphasise process within the curriculum. As this requires well trained teachers who are able to mediate content in a way that takes learner concerns and experiences into account, promotes democratic participation in the learning process, encourages the development of problem-solving and critical thinking skills and assesses learners in a variety of ways, there is a need for a **parallel curriculum for teachers** to assist them develop these skills.

The integrated language/content model has implications for teacher training as well. It means an expanded role for teachers. Teachers need to learn to exploit the content material for its language teaching potential, they need to be familiar with both content and with language teaching, and they need to be sensitised to the language needs of learners for whom English is not a first language. With English gradually taking over as the medium of instruction, teachers also need to be sufficiently fluent in the language to teach it. These issues need to be built into teacher education.

It is important to stress that if the proposed curriculum is to provide a worthwhile learning experience, the training of the teachers is almost more important than the development of curriculum materials.

Other delivery methods, such as distance education and open learning should be investigated. These methods enable learners to progress at their own pace. They are not only cost effective but would contribute to the achievement of some of the objectives of ABE as conceptualised by Cosatu. Independent/distance study offers flexibility, allows learners to choose their own pace and sequence, fosters self-discipline and a sense of responsibility for one's own learning.

Assessment

How the curriculum is assessed will dramatically affect the teaching and learning process. The challenge for curriculum developers is to work creatively with the backwash effect by making sure that it reinforces the kinds of responses that are educationally desirable.

If the curriculum is to achieve its goals, many of which refer to cognitive skills such as critical thinking, and affective issues, such as building learner confidence, then the assessment of the curriculum has to be broad enough to encompass these "immeasurable" outcomes. At the same time, the assessment procedures need to meet the need for national standards. In order to accommodate this range of objectives, assessment procedures need to be both

- * formative (on-going, during a programme),
- * summative (at the end of a programme),
- * informal (subjective, continuous on a day-to-day basis, integral to teaching) and, if necessary,
- * formal (more objective, administered at intervals, often externally devised and produced).

Formalised assessment may be necessary to meet the need for equivalence across systems, but should be complemented by a process approach to assessment. Such an assessment task might be to present learners with a problem which, in order to resolve, they need to use the resources available to them. This would test what they are able to find out for themselves and not what they can memorise.

Other procedures which can be used in a process approach to testing include: self-assessment, negotiated assessment (where learners set their own goals and standards), peer assessment, continuous and on-going assessment and student profiles.

Diversity

There is a variety of learners in South Africa with a wide range of needs (e.g. rural people, women, workers, the unemployed, youth and prisoners). The challenge for curriculum developers is to find the balance between "core" (so as to offer articulation, mobility, equity, etc) and "differentiation" (so as to offer locally relevant and/or more specialised courses).

This Report suggests that the diverse needs of learners can be accommodated by a broad based competency framework consisting of core and specialisation modules or options, and through the inclusion of local content within the core to illustrate the core concepts. However, the development of locally developed modules or materials is dependent on

there being the resources to do so. At present there is a very unequal distribution of skilled course developers and course mediators across the regions. A policy for differentiation in the short term needs to be based on an assessment of the capacity, resources and expertise in the various regions. In the longer term, ways of developing these resources need to be addressed. The need for a system to ensure that diversity (of programmes, materials, teaching methods and assessment) is sustained cannot be stressed strongly enough.

Qualification structure

The qualification structure should include:

- a system of prerequisites at different levels to facilitate articulation
- the recognition of experiential learning as a central component of the entry requirement process
- a fixed exit requirement consisting of a core plus options.

6. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are a number of issues discussed in this proposal which need further research or investigation before an ABE curriculum can be implemented. In many of these areas there is already a great deal of expertise which can be drawn on within the country, as well as work in progress.

Areas which need investigation are:

- issues around adult cognition and conceptual development. The parallels and differences between child and adult development need to be researched, as much of the theory which is currently drawn on pertains to the development of children.
- the relationship between the development of creative skills and achievement in other areas of life.
- the identification of core content - what constitutes the core concepts and themes - needs further investigation, for example, the essential concepts and procedures for the study and application of Geography, History, Technology, the generic or subject-specific nature of these concepts and procedures, etc. These, together with the key competencies and core skills identified in this Report need piloting and reviewing.
- the sequencing of tasks is a matter of on-going research as we discover more about the appropriateness and effectiveness of sequencing for learning through piloting of curricula. How tasks are sequenced is related to the development of skills, concepts and processes which are necessary to achieve the key competencies. Sequencing is also affected by decisions around the language or combination of languages to be used as the medium of instruction.
- the different cognitive skills and concepts that adults already have on entry into different levels of the ABE programme need research as this has implications for the selection and organisation of the content.
- the setting of realistic and achievable levels within the curriculum also needs further research. This may only be possible once the curriculum is written and piloted.

- ABE exit level needs to mesh with the entry levels for further education and training programmes. This will require detailed research of the concepts and skills these programmes assume. Research also needs to happen into how the end point of ABE should be defined (how detailed should the competency statements be) and how it articulates with the end of the compulsory schooling period.
- in terms of numeracy, more systematic work on the mathematical requirements of work and community contexts is needed, as well as on the relationship between prior experience and formal content learning.
- a parallel curriculum for teachers needs to be researched and developed alongside the development of the curriculum.
- distance education methods in the delivery of the curriculum need researching. The curriculum will need to be adapted for this mode.
- appropriate assessment strategies for use within a framework of national standards which accommodate diversity and include process concerns need researching.
- research needs to happen into how the diverse needs of adult learners can be accommodated within the curriculum. What sort of support systems need to be set up to meet these needs?

Lastly, all the recommendations and proposals included in this Report need to be piloted and tested. Perhaps a small pilot project could be set up and evaluated after several years before they are adopted for broader use.