

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

Education plays an important part in modern society. Individuals and, hence, communities and nations cannot develop to their full potential without being equipped with quality education. It follows then that the higher the number of educated individuals in a country, the higher the level of its social, economic, political and technological development. It is precisely because of this realisation that the former State President of the Republic of South Africa (RSA), Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela made the following remarks pertaining to education:

"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of a mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another. "

(Mandela, 1994: 194)

However, for many years prior to 1994, successive governments of South Africa did not take full advantage of the role that education is capable of playing in individual, community and national development. Instead of making education readily available and accessible to the majority of the citizens, they

only equipped certain sections of the population, which happened to be in the minority, with quality education and either denied or offered inferior education to millions of others. The type of education that was offered during those years was characterised by three key features. Firstly, it was fragmented along racial and ethnic lines. Secondly, there was lack of access or unequal access to education at all levels, accompanied by vast disparities between Black and White provision. As a result, large numbers of people had little or no access to education and training. Lastly, there was lack of democratic control within the education and training system. Students, teachers, parents and workers were excluded from decision-making processes (African National Congress, 1994: 58).

The fragmented, unequal and undemocratic character of the education system had intense effects on the development of the country's economy and society. This effect is best described by Mulholland (2002: 1) who states that:

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"Seldom in history can a government have faced a more complex challenge than that which the ANC has taken on in government. On the one hand we have an industrialised, high technology, modern element with the capacity to produce wealth at a First World pace. On the other we have apartheid's legacy: a vast, huddled mass, many uneducated and uneducable, unemployed and unemployable, raven with disease and struggling to survive. These sad people are the true legacy of apartheid. ... This is a long-term recipe for disaster. It is our central problem and that we

desperately need leadership which grasps this fundamental truth and devotes itself to dealing with it."

As Mulholland rightly suggests, the leadership of our country is concerned about the state of affairs described above. It is because of this concern that when the current President of the RSA , Mr Thabo Mbeki, after taking office in 1999, stated in parliament that education and training must comprise the decisive drivers in our efforts to build a winning nation. He further emphasised the intention of government to intensify its focus on education so that the country may succeed in producing an educated and skilled population (Asmal, 1999: 1). Similarly, the National Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, clearly articulates his concern for the remediation of this unacceptable state of affairs when he states that:

"As a bridge between general education and higher education or employment, this (Further Education and Training) is a vital sector for young people and adults whose formal education has been cut short. ... It is essential for the FET sector to be as accessible as possible to adult learners who were unable to continue their education because of poverty or lack of opportunity."

(Asmal, 1999: 13)

It is obvious from the above that there are many people in our country who have not received adequate education and therefore need to uplift their level

of education, improve their work-related skills or equip themselves with new skills that will open doors to the world of work. It is also evident that our government is desperately seeking means of redressing educational imbalances of the past, preventing the recurrence thereof and equipping the majority of its citizens, especially adults and out-of-school youth, with marketable skills. The purpose of this study then, as it will be described in more detail later, is concerned with an investigation into one of the means, namely, community colleges, through which vocational-technical education may be provided to school leavers, adults, out-of school youth and others, so as to make such individuals competent to earn their living or continue their education.

1.2 Aims of the Study

Based on the above brief description of the problem equally facing the government and educators in South Africa, there are three major aims for this study. Firstly, the study seeks to evaluate community colleges in order to consider the contribution they can make towards training in the vocational-technical sector with specific reference to the Eastern Free State in the Republic of South Africa. Secondly, the study also aims at determining the necessity for the establishment of community colleges in the Eastern Free State. Lastly, the study aims at providing a framework for the establishment of community colleges in the Eastern Free State.

The area referred to as the Eastern Free State in this study, is that part of the Free State Province constituting the Thabo Mofutsanyana Education District.

It includes nineteen towns namely, Arlington, Bethlehem, Clarens, Clocolan, Ficksburg, Fouriesburg, Harrismith, Kestell, Lindley, Marquard, Memel, Paul Roux, Petrus Styn, Qwaqwa, Reitz, Senekal, Van Reenen, Vrede and Warden (See Appendix 1 for a map of the Free State Province). Although the problem described above affects the whole of South Africa, for practical reasons it would not be feasible to engage in a countrywide study. The Eastern Free State was found to be more convenient since it is already organised into an education district and is the area of residence of the researcher, making it easily accessible to him.

1.3 Circumstances that Gave Rise to the Study

Circumstances that motivated the researcher to undertake this study relate to his experiences at the workplace as well as to his experiences as a citizen of the Republic of South Africa. They are briefly described in the following section.

Firstly, for thirteen years the researcher served as a high school principal in the former Qwaqwa homeland now forming part of the Eastern Free State. During this period he has always been concerned about the high number of learners who dropped out of school before completing grade twelve. One of the major reasons for their leaving school pre-maturely was poverty. It has always been of concern to the researcher whether these learners, some of whom were talented and capable of attaining high educational levels, would ever get a second chance in life. Because of the lack of marketable skills most of them are presently unemployed and are still living in poverty. The level of

poverty in Qwaqwa is so high that President Thabo Mbeki had to declare it a nodal area. The average household income is a mere R1 000. The level of poverty has reached 88% while unemployment is at 57%. (City Press, 10 August 2003: 9). Although other towns in the Eastern Free State have not been declared nodal areas, their situations relating to poverty and unemployment do not differ much from that of Qwaqwa. Singh (1996: 527) believes that American community colleges have the capability of offering not only second, but multiple chances to learners who for some reason could not finish their school education. He states that:

“... pupils emerging from the secondary schools in America have second, third, and fourth chances in a fashion unimaginable in most systems of higher education.”

For this reason the researcher found it worthwhile to conduct an investigation into community colleges as providers of vocational-technical education in the Eastern Free State. It is believed that the investigation will shed some light on the role of community colleges in education and will lead to a more informed choice of a strategy to use in the South African situation.

Secondly, after joining the Qwaqwa Campus of the University of the North (now the University of the Free State) the researcher was appointed Director of the University's Centre for Community Colleges (CCC) in 1998. The CCC was the community outreach arm of the university that was responsible for extending its resources to community members who would otherwise not

qualify to enroll at the University. This task brought the researcher into contact with many community members who had different kinds of educational needs. There were those who have been forced to pre-maturely exit the education system and who wished to continue with their education and others who were employed and wished to improve their skills. This contact resulted in a better understanding of the needs of many of our countrymen who, because of circumstances beyond their control, were denied educational opportunities. This understanding was further enhanced by the findings of the research that had to be engaged in by the CCC into how other countries were dealing with problems associated with the type of student being served by the CCC. All these convinced the researcher of the need for this type of an investigation.

Finally, the level of unemployment in the country as well as the accompanying high crime rate are a cause for concern to all responsible citizens of South Africa. Research has shown that American community colleges have been very useful in the development of a trained workforce and, hence, in the creation of employment in that country (Fidler, 1982: 59; see also, The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 2002(d): 2; Dougherty, 1994: 59 and Parnell, 1993: 6). Thus, this type of study was found worth engaging in with the hope that it will lead to the establishment of community colleges in the Eastern Free State, which will bring to the region the benefits that these educational institutions brought to the United States of America (USA).

1.4 Research Methodology

The achievement of the aims of the study enunciated above will be sought through the use of multiple research methodologies. These comprise a documentary study, an on-site visit and an empirical investigation.

1.4.1 Documentary Study

A study will be made of documents relating to the American community college as well as to the provision of vocational-technical education in South Africa. This study will shed some light on the role that American community colleges are playing in the provision of vocational-technical education to the citizens of the country. The information obtained will help us to determine whether the strategies used by the Americans can be equally successful when applied within the South African context.

In order for us to be in a position to make informed decisions on whether to experiment with the community college in South Africa, it will be necessary for us to have sufficient knowledge regarding the provision of vocational-technical education in South Africa. For this reason, a documentary study of the provision of vocational-technical education in South Africa will also be undertaken.

This documentary study will comprise different types of documents. Among these will be books, magazines, newspapers, journals, Education Resource and Information Center (ERIC) documents, online documents, government documents, community college catalogues and so forth.

1.4.2 On-Site Visit

For the purpose of gaining deeper insight on the functioning of a typical American community college, the study will include a two-week visit to an American community college namely, St. Petersburg College, in the State of Florida. The visit was included in the study for the purpose of conducting an in-depth study thereof. During this period various campuses of the multi-campus community college will be visited, participant observations will be done, interviews conducted with college personnel and students and various college documents will be studied.

1.4.3 Empirical Investigation

One of the aims of this study is to determine the need for the establishment of community colleges in the Eastern Free State. This will be achieved by the conduction of an empirical investigation in the Eastern Free State. The objectives of the investigation are the following:

- To analyse the reaction of the respondents on the availability and adequacy of education opportunities to adults and out-of-school youth of the Eastern Free State.
- To evaluate the opinion of the respondents as to the need for the establishment of community colleges in the Eastern Free State.
- To investigate the impression of the respondents on the services to be rendered by community colleges should they be established in the Eastern Free State.

- To determine the perceptions of the respondents on the type of community college that would best suit the needs of the residents of the Eastern Free State in terms of admission requirements, articulation agreements with other types of educational institutions, accreditation, governance, scheduling and the location of delivery sites.

The findings of the investigation will establish whether there is a need for the introduction of community colleges in the Eastern Free. In addition to this, the findings will also shed some light on the functions community colleges are to perform as well as the conditions under which they are to function.

1.5 Structure of the Research

The research report is organised into six chapters. Each of the chapters deals with a specific aspect of the investigation. They are briefly explained below:

Chapter One is the Orientation Chapter. Its purpose is to give the reader an indication of what to expect in the report. It deals with the purpose of the study, circumstances that led to it, the research methodology the structure of the research as well as the limitations of the study.

Chapter Two concerns itself with the theoretical and conceptual framework for community colleges. It mainly deals with the explication of the concepts of community colleges, vocational education and related terms such as technical education, general education and career education. The chapter is concluded with an exposition of theories that impact on community colleges, namely, the

community development theory, career development theories, systems theory and andragogy.

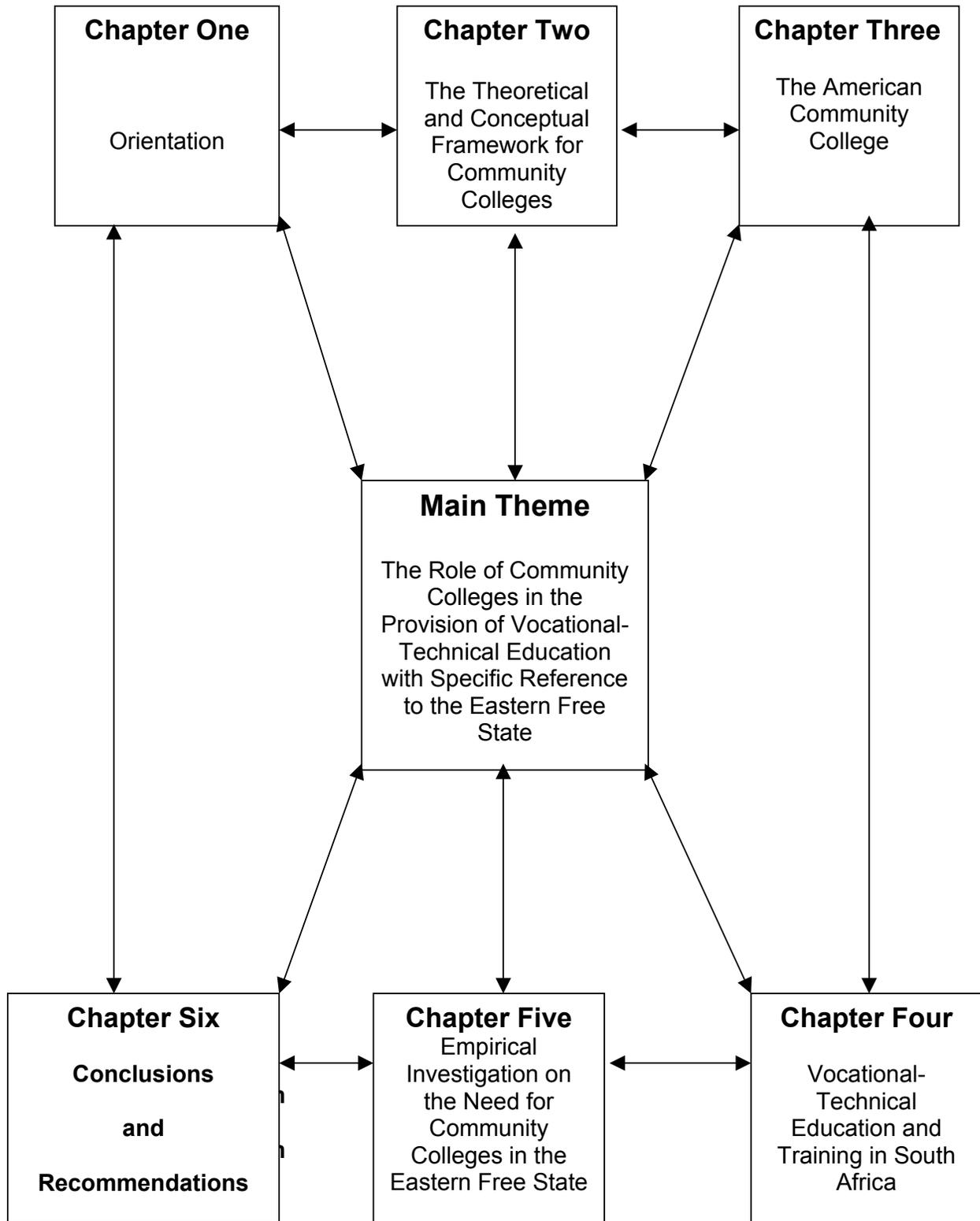
Chapter Three is a follow-up to Chapter Two in that the concepts of community college and vocational education explained in the latter chapter are taken one step further by examining the nature of the American community college and how it operates on a day-to-day basis as well as the impact it has on those who are associated with it. This explication of the nature and functioning of an American community college is reinforced by a report on a case study of a typical American community college that was visited by the researcher for a period of two weeks.

Since the purpose of the study is to evaluate community colleges and to consider their introduction in the Eastern Free State, it was felt that it would be useful to find out whether and how vocational-technical education is being offered in South Africa. This knowledge will assist in deciding whether there is a need for the introduction of community colleges in our region of interest. Chapter Four is concerned with this assessment of the provision of vocational-technical education in South Africa and concludes with community college initiatives in South Africa.

Based on the findings of Chapter Four, Chapter Five comprises an empirical investigation on the need for the establishment of community colleges in the Eastern Free State. It includes a description of the procedures followed in the conduction of the investigation and the presentation of findings.

Chapter Six, which is the last one consists of a brief summary of the research, conclusions drawn from its findings, recommendations and suggestions for further research. The structure of the research described above is schematically represented in Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1: Schematic Representation of the Structure of the Research



1.6 Limitations of the Study

This study has the following limitations that are worth mentioning and taking into consideration:

- The study largely concerns itself with the evaluation of community colleges with the purpose of establishing them in the Eastern Free State. Although for practical reasons it was found necessary to limit the study to this area, its findings may not be generalised to the rest of the Free State nor the country as a whole.
- Most of the questionnaire items used in the empirical investigation reported on in Chapter Five were referring to the concept of community college, which is not such a familiar concept in South Africa. Although all attempts were made to clarify the concept in the covering letter accompanying the questionnaires, there is no guarantee that all the respondents fully understood the concept.
- Some of the respondents, especially the parents from the rural areas do not have well developed reading and writing skills. While arrangements were made for the questionnaire items to be explained to them, there is no guarantee that they understood all the items to which they responded.