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**THE BIOGRAPHY OF "ACCESS " AS AN EXPRESSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN
SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION POLICIES**

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**A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria,
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Pretoria, 2005

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is submitted for a doctoral Degree, at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

T. GAMEDE

-----day of-----2004

DEDICATION

To my mother and my family

With sincere thanks

for their love and encouragement

during the writing of this dissertation

and to the spirit of my late father

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OVERVIEW OF STUDY

This study

In an attempt to promote equal access to education, we in South Africa, have adopted an instrumentalist approach to the debate of the right to education. In other words, we have provided an enabling legal framework and we simply assume that access to education has been granted to every one. We continue to pretend that we understand what exactly the concept of “access to education” means. We also assume that we all have a common understanding of what the Constitution means by the right to education.

On 26 June 1955 the historic Freedom Charter of the African National Congress (ANC) was adopted. This charter declared “the doors of learning and culture shall be opened.” Over the next four decades, the demand for open and equal access to education became central platform in the anti-apartheid struggles that brought an ANC-led government to power in 1994. Yet, ten years later (2004) the problem of access continues to preoccupy education planners and activists against the backdrop of some of the most progressive policy positions including a Constitution that recognizes education as a basic right. The intellectual puzzle that motivates this study is to explain, therefore, why despite its prominence, it continues to be regarded as an intractable problem.

The research strategy adopted in pursuit of this puzzle is to trace the changing meanings of the concept of “access to education” under and after apartheid, and its expression in the practices of two case study schools (comparative case studies).

Data was collected from different sources to trace the concept of access to education in education from the apartheid era to the policies and practices that affirm access to education as a basic human right today. This study hopes to contribute significantly to the dialogue of “access” as a realisation of the basic right to education.

For the conceptual framework Morrow's distinction between epistemological access and physical access was used. Formal access to education refers to enrolment or registration at an education institution, in this case, a school, whereas epistemological access refers to access to knowledge and information that these education institutions hold. I expanded the conceptual framework to include dimensions of epistemological access such as how the topic is taught, who selected the topic, the value and political basis.

I undertook documentary analysis and a series of interviews with individuals who were involved in the struggle either through intellectual contributions in the NEC and NEPI processes or in the National Education Co-ordinating Committee. I also conducted two case studies of schools located in vastly different social and political contexts. At these schools, I collected data through classroom and school observations, semi-structured interviews with principals, history teachers and learners.

Findings:

The first finding of this study is that the ways in which students experience access to knowledge (epistemological access) is strongly dependent on the history and politics of the school context and the institutional culture, rather than the formal prescriptions laid down in the school curriculum

The second finding of this study is that even when students enjoy physical access to schools, they have highly uneven, even unequal, access to knowledge within those schools.

The third finding is that despite the awareness and understanding of what good education entails, without physical access, it is difficult for individuals to entertain discussions about epistemological access.

The fourth finding is that despite claims that the policy promotes increased access to education, it was not possible to find reports that refer to any significant degree of quality outcomes as a result of the implementation of the principle of "equality of access" to education. Increased access to education has not resulted in quality output.

This dissertation contributes to knowledge by its nuanced exploration of the complexities of access to education as a human right. Most importantly it pushes the boundaries of knowledge pertaining to both physical and epistemological access at the time when each of these are crucial points in the education development agenda

Keywords: access to education, epistemological access, physical access, Soweto Uprising, Sharpeville Massacre

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AEM	African Education Movement
ANC	African National Congress
CTA	Common Task Assessment
C2005	Curriculum 2005
DET	Department of Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
LiEP	Language-in-Education Policy
FET	Further Education and Training
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCCRD	National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development
NEC	National Education Conference
NECC	National Education Co-ordinating Committee
NEPA	National Education Policy Act
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
PSE	Post-Secondary Education
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SASA	South African Schools Act
TEFSA	Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa

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