



by Pumulani Ncube

In trying to get an understanding of the problem I started looking at some of the key issues in the development of skills. The chartered accounting (CA) qualification is the most commonly held qualification amongst CEO's in this country. A glimpse of the numbers of qualified CA's reveals some interesting statistics. According to the SAICA (The South African Institute of Chartered Accountants) website in January 2002 there were 259 African CA's, 905 Indian and 18 524 white CA's. The corresponding numbers for September 2005 were 742, 1758 and 22 442 respectively. Based on these numbers it means the accounting profession with all the resources and the intelligensia was only able to produce 483 new African CA's in a little under 5 years (surely in any business that should be a fireable offence). In the same period 853 Indian and an incredible 3918 white CA's were produced. Is this an isolated case in the development of skills or could this be the trend in other professions. I'm reliably informed that the legal profession is faced with similar challenges.

Most specialist skills require that the incumbents should have gone through university. Obtaining the raw numbers of black and white students registered and passing their degrees in the prescribed time proved to be quite a challenge. Instead I looked at

# Black Skills

## – The Crisis is Real

In a space of a week two of the country's weekly financial magazines featured departing

CEO's as their lead stories. Whilst the angle of each story was different what I found consistent was the lack of black CEO's. Of the 22 CEO's who left only 2 of them were replaced by black CEO's. Further, of the over 300 CEO's on the JSE only a handful are black. This a symptom of a general lack of urgency in developing skills of the majority of the population. Very much like the sports in this country, there is always a reason why the BEE numbers have slowly filtered through to the top.

the number of students passing matric and qualifying to go to university. In 2005 out of a total of just over 500 000 students who wrote matric only 86 000 obtained university exemption of the 86 000 approximately 12 000 were black. If you took all the students that got the exemption and enrolled them into accounting degrees and they all passed first time and they all registered to be CA's and they all passed their exams the first time round it would take you at least two years to get to the 22 000 white CA's that we currently have. Obviously this is an impossible task as there are limited spaces in these training institutions.

An analysis of the school system is equally disturbing with kids stabbing each other at schools and parents calling for teachers to control THEIR kids it makes for interesting reading. Private schools and previously white only schools continue to lead in the production of kids going to university. In 2005 private/independent schools had approximately 6 700 students who wrote matric and out of those 5200 obtained university exemption. According to the statistics from the last census only 1.8% of the black population had a university degree compared to 15% of the white population with degrees. Further only 28% of the black population had a matric qualification compared to 45% of the white population. The situation with the people who are tasked to teach our kids does not bode well as there is an annual shortage of approximately 5000 teachers coming into the system. Only 50% and 42% of all teachers teaching mathematics and science have studied these subjects beyond secondary school level, its further worth noting that most of these teachers are a product of the dysfunctional education system and most people take teaching as a last resort.

Seemingly in the above paragraphs I have apportioned blame to everyone other than the parents and the school kids themselves. What role do parents play in the education of their kids? Black parents in particular are notorious for taking a passive role when it comes to education of their kids. I know of parents who go through the whole year without having seen a single work book, nor even bothered to check the attendance of their kids at school. It is a common occurrence to see kids roaming around during school time, in my day any parent would take you to task because you weren't at school. Now parents have convinced themselves that teachers should handle the discipline of their kids (how absurd). If you cannot control your own child how on earth do you expect someone else to do it? A few days ago I attended a high school orientation day for the kids going to high school, the principal mentioned that in a recent survey undertaken by the ministry his school was one of 400 high schools in the country that were deemed functional! That is out of a total of 14 000 high schools in the country. No wonder we have the matric results that we have.

If anyone ever doubted the reasons for affirmative action they

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should look at the number of black skills that are being produced in the country. I hear white people complaining all the time that they are being sidelined for jobs because of AA policies, no one has been able to come up with concrete evidence and numbers showing the amount of skilled white south Africans who are not able to get a job. Certainly in the accounting profession I'm yet to see one. Interestingly, the Sunday Times ran an article about the top four empowerment companies in the country who have white skills running their deal making teams. The truth is that in South Africa there is an abundance of un-skilled labour and a severe shortage of skilled labour. In a recent article by a former economist at Standard Bank, he alluded to the fact that there is a shortage of approximately 300 000 skilled jobs in the public sector. The fact that South Africa chooses to source public sector skills from Iran (or the middle east) as opposed to uplifting the economies of some of the Africa countries by hiring African skills, is better left to be debated on another day.

The current wave of empowerment has been fixated on equity targets, but I think there should be a shift towards building our education system to develop skills. In terms of the latest draft of the BEE codes, companies are required to pay 1% of the turnover into skills development and those targets will be moved to 3% of turnover. I would like to suggest that as long as monetary quantum falls within the 3%, companies should be requested to adopt a school as part of the codes, there are at least 300 companies listed on the JSE and if each one adopted a school and made sure that it was well equipped and they paid for the extra teachers, as is the current policy in independent schools, we would have another 300 functional schools in the country. I have no idea how many private companies are out there but the number is significant. The net result of all the above is that you would have a crop of children coming through all the schools as opposed to the current weighting towards the private schools. Further we should have colleges to develop skills like woodwork, welding and other artisans, people with these skills can be self employed, university is not the be all and end all for our children.

In closing, a colleague of mine sent me the following article from a motivational website, "The U.S. Marine Corps can take an out-of-shape recruit who's never held a weapon before and in just under 90 days turn him or her into the finest fighting 'machine' in the world". We've had 12 years since 1994 to get our education and skills development into place. Jimmy Manyi the current president of the black management forum makes an interesting observation regarding black trainees "they are forever in training and he has known some black trainees who have been trained till they passed on". What can we as individuals do to take us out of this trap that we are in? I have taken it upon myself to donate my Saturday morning to teach a matric class mathematics, accounts and economics to ensure that they pass matric with a university exemption. If anyone wants to join me for the Saturday class or any other day please contact me on my email address. The school is for under-privileged kids and it's located in Blairgowrie. 