



## The IEB, Proudly South African

The IEB is a Proudly South African organisation, with deep roots in the democratic history of our country. Its very existence grew out of a commitment to educational and democratic principles. In the late 1980s when the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB) announced that it would cease to function as an examining authority in South Africa, a number of principals at independent schools that had decided to stop using race as a criteria for admission took the initiative of establishing an organisation that would assume the examining function of the JMB – and hence the IEB was born. This group of principals refused to accept that they would not be able to continue to function as open schools – they would have been forced to become racially restrictive schools as there would be no examining authority in South Africa that was not racially defined, if the JMB closed. In order to continue to function on an open basis, they would have had to run multiple programmes at the schools to accommodate the different racially based examinations. The only other option open to them would have been an international examination.

They believed that such choices were in fact not choices. Running multiple programmes was considered educationally unsound and a waste of precious resources. Furthermore, since the reason for the multiple programmes was motivated by a political position, it was equally as unacceptable as writing an international examination. These schools considered themselves to be South African schools, serving South African learners predominantly and serving the South African nation – they were proud of their South African heritage and their standards of education; their learners coped equally well in overseas universities as they did in South African universities; they were proud of their diverse composition, a statement in defiance of the political order of

the day. The IEB, then, was born as an organisation of civil society, standing in opposition to a system that, at the time, was democratically and educationally unacceptable.

There are those who like to suggest that since the establishment of a democratic South Africa where issues of racially integrated schooling are no longer pertinent, the need for an organisation like the IEB has disappeared. It is useful to recall the words of Franklin Roosevelt when he said: "Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education." This would suggest that the success of a democracy relies on strong civil society and organisations that are able to choose wisely, to uphold sound, ethical values in support of the sector in which they operate. These structures in civil society, just as they did in the late 1980s, still provide the checks and balances required to maintain an effective democratic society.

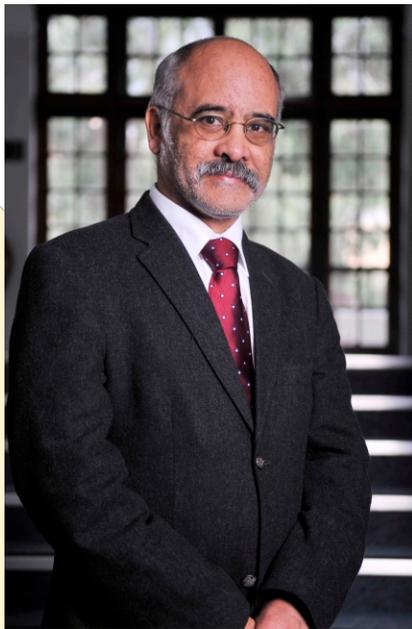
It is wise to realise that in the field of education, it is not enough to acknowledge the principle that education is the safeguard of democracy. It is also essential to consider the educational values that underpin education itself.

Vito Perrone, the American education reformer, commented as follows, in his Letter to Teachers: "There is, it seems, more concern about whether children learn the mechanics of reading and writing than grow to love reading and writing; learn about democracy than have practice in democracy; hear about knowledge ... rather than gain experience in personally constructing knowledge ... see the world narrowly, simple and ordered, rather than broadly, complex and uncertain."

Looking again at our history under apartheid, there were schools, both state and independent, that focussed on developing thinking citizens in defiance of the policies of Christian National Education. These citizens were well equipped to question and challenge the injustices they saw, to lead the citizenry that would bring apartheid to its knees. It is no surprise that the schools of the Historic Schools Restoration Project were the very schools destroyed by the apartheid government – they were recognised as developing the kind of citizen that the government of the day could not afford to have, if it was to successfully uphold its policy of apartheid.

A clear educational principle for a successful democracy is the understanding that the requirements of the curriculum are the starting point, but it is in the learning explorations of students beyond the requirements of the curriculum, where the insights of a wise citizen are born.

In our fledgling democracy, educational institutions have followed two paths in nation building. There are those who have committed themselves fully to working within government and there are those who are working from outside formal government structures, fully supportive of nation-building initiatives. Both approaches provide for an expression of patriotism and dedication to building our country and establishing our nationhood.



Professor Crain Soudien  
IEB Chairman, 2012

Currently South Africa enjoys a vibrant democracy where debate and alternate views are accommodated and, in some cases, welcomed and encouraged. However, there is no guarantee that this situation will prevail for ever. A constant danger to a democracy is the potential for the education system to colonise the minds and then subjugate the souls of its children. While that threat is dormant and seemingly far removed from our society at this point in time, it is wise to reflect on history and be consciously aware that the threat never disappears. History shows many examples of how swiftly a nation can be enslaved by powers of darkness – Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, Red China and closer to home, on our own northern borders.

During apartheid, structures in civil society provided the vehicles through which to challenge a fundamentally flawed society, its philosophies and bastions of illegitimate government. The strength of civil society in protecting the rights, in protecting the minds and soul of a society should never be under-estimated. When our circumstances change, it is essential that we, as a nation, have a strong civil society in order to provide choices and present viable options for debate in our country.