

## VALUES IN A CHANGING CURRICULUM

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### Abstract

This paper arises from our collaboration on the Nuffield Foundation-funded South African Primary History Programme, a three-year teacher education project in the Western Cape province. Our concern with values in history education is set within the context of rapid political, social and educational change in South Africa. We examine values in the teaching of history in relation to the post-apartheid revised national curriculum, Curriculum 2005.

## THE MACRO-LEVEL: SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION IN TRANSITION

### New frameworks for education

The planning for the pilot phase of the Primary History Programme began in 1994. The first phase of the country's transition following the election of a government of national unity in the first democratic elections that year was marked by the making of new educational policy frameworks, such as the South African Schools Act (1996), and solving the enormous logistical and financial problems involved in creating new non-racial provincial education departments with budgets based on principles of equity. A significant step was taken by the creation of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF), facilitated by a South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in 1995. Its purpose was to create a new basis for planning and organising education at all levels in the country, to bring together education and training (which had previously been stigmatised), and to create an orderly system by instituting national registers of qualifications and of learner achievements.

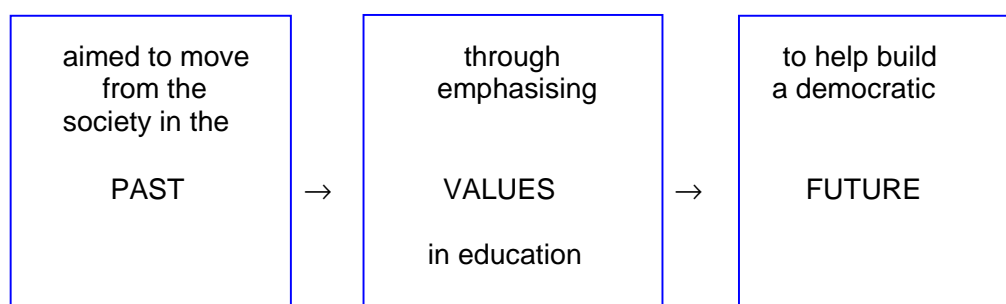


Figure 1: Recent state policy in South Africa.

### The values of the new constitution (1996)

Great store has been set by South Africans by their constitution, often proudly claimed to be one of the most democratic in the world. Government and citizens are now becoming accustomed to its operation to secure and protect individual and societal rights and to act (under the Constitutional Court) as the 'touchstone of national values', in the words of Professor Kader Asmal, present Minister of Education. He argues that from these values 'evolve a new national and democratic mission to education that rests in the first instance on equitable development' (Asmal, 2000:2). As Pam Christie describes it, the government's policies 'shift the values and practices of apartheid education into a democratic, rights-based approach to social and economic development (Christie, 2001:269).

The Bill of Rights guarantees in its clauses, for example, that:

- [all have]  
*'the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. (9)*
- *Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected. (10)*
- *Every child has the right:  
to a name and a nationality from birth; to family care or parental care, or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment; to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services; to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation; to be protected from exploitative labour practices; (28)*
- *Everyone has the right:  
to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible. (29) (RSA 1996)*

### **Values and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

Much less obvious as a source for values in education, but ever present below the surface, has been the prominence of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which stands as a constant reminder of how things were at one time in the country and, through the individual courage and self-sacrifice of those victims, perpetrators and commission members who were involved, as a testimony to what might be. It is perhaps the most definitively 'South African' contribution to values. As Peter Kallaway has pointed out, the TRC was a remarkable attempt to engage with a set of extremely intractable issues in the recent past. 'To my mind', he writes, 'the only way to allow for meaningful educational engagement with these issues in the classrooms of our country is to provide teachers with the tools to explore their own 'common sense' understandings of the social world and the origins of that world' (Kallaway 2000:2). Naledi Pandor is more forthright:

*If we were to spend a few days visiting some schools, would we find that the objectives of learning about non-racism and non-sexism are present in our classrooms? I suspect that we would not. These difficult topics, and discussions about them, appear to be taboo in most of our schools. It seems that our teachers avoid them, perhaps because they have not been provided with the skills for addressing them, leaving learners to cope with new contexts and challenges themselves (Pandor 2001:187).*

### **Human Rights**

The Human Rights Commission has been created as a statutory body to advance and defend human rights. It has a strong interest in education. Human rights education is viewed by the commission as comprising four aspects:

- education for social change and transformation, which includes the crucial issue of educating learners about the way in which the constitution and Bill of Rights impacts upon their lives;
  - values education, focusing on human dignity, equality and respect;
  - education for citizenship; and
- global education (Volmink 2001:5-6).

### **The 'Values in Education' initiative**

Beyond the assertion of rights, which provides for Kader Asmal the 'moral consensus... which governs educational policy' (Asmal, 2000:2), he has perceived a need to affirm the values which define society through education, in order to fill the void felt by many and well-expressed in the words of an anonymous teacher:

*'Apartheid had one good thing. It kept us together. We had a common enemy to fight. We helped each other. When the common enemy went we were suddenly left alone and [now we] can't find the same powerful thing to hold us together. Each one for himself. And this has ruined a sense of community'* (Ministry of Education, 2001:5).

In response, he began a values in education initiative. 'Values cannot simply be asserted; it will require an enormous effort to ensure that the values are internalised by all our people. That is what we fought for. That is what our people deserve' (DoE, 2000:4, Foreword by Asmal). A Working Group was duly appointed, and produced a set of values, which it believed represented not only personal and individual ideals, but also determined the qualities of national character to which the nation aspired. They are equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and social honour (DoE, 2000:5-6). A key aspect identified in 'Tolerance' was strengthening the teaching of history.

### **Values through history and archaeology**

A consequence of the first Values in Education report was the appointment of a History and Archaeology Panel. The report of the History / Archaeology Panel did not lose the opportunity to point out what history contributes to values in the curriculum. Among its observations were that history:

- encourages civic responsibility and critical thinking, which are key values in a democratic society
- contextualises weighty issues and assists constructive debate over them in an informed manner, through the discipline of carefully weighing and evaluating evidence and reading a range of viewpoints
- fosters the invaluable mental powers of discriminating judgement
- is important in the construction of identity. Historical perspective fosters a proper understanding of the growth of multiple and overlapping human identities
- enables us to listen to formerly subjugated voices and to redress the invisibility of the formerly marginalised
- encourages us to examine in concrete terms, through rich examples of narratives of real-life situations, the challenging nature of truth
- provides a critically important perspective on the pathways to economic development and economic growth
- is a vital ingredient in promoting democratic values and a significant instrument for desegregating society
- is deliberately [sic] about the crucial role of memory in society. (Ministry of Education, 2000b:9-10).

### **Values in the Year 1-9 curriculum**

When the National Qualifications Framework was launched in 1996, there was a strong desire within the national education ministry and the Department of Education that the school curriculum should take a lead in curriculum transformation. A reconceptualised curriculum would provide a model for transforming the apartheid curricula of the past. The new curriculum for General Education and Training (Grades 1-9, compulsory schooling) that was consequently developed in great haste in 1996 and 1997 became known as 'Curriculum 2005' (the year 2005 being both the date of its maturity and envisioned revision). Naïve optimism prevailed, driven by very sincere attempts to sweep out the old and usher in the new as speedily and completely as possible, as provincial departments without anything like the human and financial resources necessary claimed to be implementing Curriculum 2005. With the benefit of hindsight it is obvious that the curriculum could not succeed as originally intended (see Siebörger, 2000). After only two years, the Minister of Education announced a review of the curriculum. The review committee reported in May 2000 (Ministry of Education, 2000a). The report resulted in a complete curriculum revision during 2001/2 - called 'streamlining and strengthening' Curriculum 2005 to avoid losing face - with a new emphasis on a National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (DoE, 2002).

It is not surprising that in the wake of a less than successful curriculum initiative, there should be a fresh look at values in education to help interpret the juncture in educational transformation and to provide direction for the future. Linda Chisholm, the chair of the committee overseeing the revision, relates that the vision of the kind of learner emerging from public (i.e. state) schools was foremost in the minds of members of the Cabinet. She was asked pointedly, given that the learners who emerged from the system under apartheid were imbued with notions of racial superiority and inferiority, 'What kind of learner does the curriculum envisage?' (Chisholm, 2002:8)..

The Values in Education initiative provided a focus for the revised National Curriculum Statement. Chisholm, declares that, 'I make no apology for values being in the curriculum. No self-respecting educationist, or teacher, or parent, can claim that the role of education, whether in the family, church or state is value-free' (Chisholm, 2002:8). Two further reasons that she provides for the attention to values in the curriculum are that knowledge cannot be separated from values, and that SAQA has adopted a set of value-laden 'critical outcomes' which are intended to form the basis of all teaching and learning in the NQF. These outcomes are derived in part from the constitution and include, together with pedagogical aims (such as using problem-solving techniques, working effectively with others and displaying a developed sense of curiosity), citizenship, human rights, democratic education, cultural and environmental awareness and skills development.

The National Curriculum Statement makes mention of 16 'strategies for familiarising young South Africans with the values of the Constitution'. They range from curriculum development issues (putting history, Arts and Culture and religion into the curriculum; facilitating multiculturalism; and promoting school sport), to issues of access (race and gender equality; ensuring basic literacy and numeracy), ethical, citizenship and environmental education, and fundamental rights such as a safe learning environment. 'Dealing with HIV/AIDS and nurturing a culture of sexual and social responsibility' is included (DoE, 2002:6). Special provision is also made for suggestions about the 'Values and approach' to the curriculum content in each grade in History and Geography, as the following example from Grade 5 history in the first draft of the NCS illustrates:

- *Focus on the egalitarian values that informed most hunter-gatherer societies. Give attention to the harmony between people and the environment in these societies.*
- *Point out how male-dominated societies and histories have excluded women.*
- *Encourage learners to begin to confront issues such as bias and stereotyping.*
- *Assist learners to make the distinction between fact and opinion.*
- *Promote and encourage questioning as an important educational activity for participating in a democracy.*
- *Explore issues relating to human rights in early civilisations.*
- *Highlight the skill and creativity of human beings in different contexts (eg methods of communication, buildings, technological inventions, works of art).*
- *Ensure that the process of constructing knowledge from sources and evidence is shaped by the values of the Constitution.*
- *Promote an awareness of the need to conserve the environment and respect heritage sites.*
- *Encourage the use of and respect for all languages in South Africa when learners interview people* (DoE, 2001:58).

The introduction to the new NCS contains the following disclaimer: 'The Revised National Curriculum Statement has tried to ensure that all Learning Area Statements reflect the principles and practices of social justice, respect for the environment and human rights as defined in the Constitution. In particular, the curriculum attempts to be sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality, race, gender, age, disability, and such challenges as HIV/AIDS (DoE, 2002:9). That the authors felt it necessary to give this assurance highlights the present political and social sensitivity to these rights.

## THE MICRO-LEVEL: A VALUES-BASED HISTORY PROJECT

Figure 2, below, is identical to Figure 1, as our aims, at the micro-level, have been the same as those of the Government working at the macro-level.

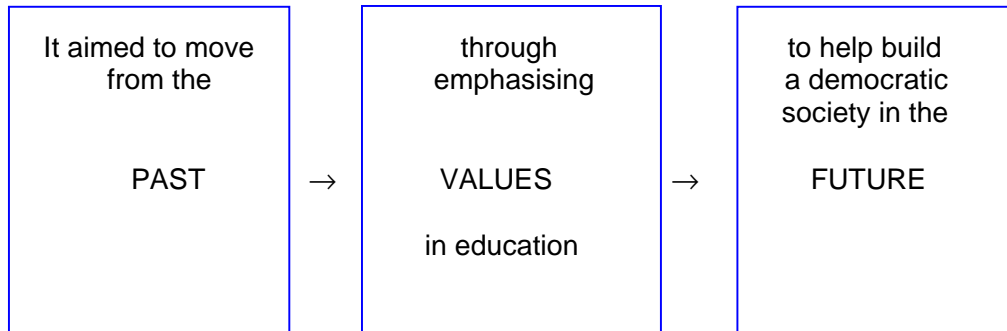


Figure 2: The South African Primary History Programme.

### Programme principles and implementation

The South African Primary History Programme focused on teacher development (knowledge, pedagogic skills, attitudes and values), with the long-term aim of developing, trialling, producing and disseminating excellent materials and teaching approaches to a national audience. Funding from the Nuffield Foundation enabled the Programme to develop relatively intensively in one province of South Africa, and to sustain this effort over four years.

A key principle was that of education for citizenship in a democracy; the Programme represented an attempt to live the espoused values of post-apartheid South Africa in the way it operated. Strategies for this:

- open discussion
- minimal hierarchy: although there was a management team (renamed the 'support team' early on),  
....
- intense, shared experiences, both academic and social
- critical investigation of practice and philosophy.

### Micro-level: context of practice

The South African Primary History Programme operated from the bottom up, working with classroom teachers and advisers, i.e. with those who would be primarily responsible for the implementation of the new curriculum and its values. As such, it represented a deliberate attempt to avoid the pitfalls analysed so cogently by Christie (2001). Crucially, its concern was the implementation of the post-apartheid curriculum, something that had been inadequately thought out and planned for by the policy-makers.

*'Rather than seeing implementation as an integral part of policy formulation, policy makers tend to view it as an add-on. Yet it is in the translation into practice that the appropriacy [sic] and viability of the policy message are tested, and from here that the opportunity to adjust policy in the light of experience arises'* (Dyer, 1999:45).

What the South African Primary History Programme provided was a systematic, recorded and debated implementation process, grounded in developing practice and on-going engagement with issues arising from such practice.

**Experiencing models of good practice:** The South African Primary History Programme aimed to provide participants with a support and educational structure which would introduce them to new models of teaching and learning, while providing education and support for their own development as reflective practitioners and action researchers. It provided alternative models of teaching from those of the past and a focused test-bed for curriculum innovation. It did this through the medium of a structured academic programme, within the context of a supportive environment involving regular meetings, tasks, a Programme 'library' box, discussions, evaluations, feedback loops.

### **Democracy and citizenship**

**Working as a team:** The working together of people from different areas, communities and levels was a powerful principle. The teachers in the team ensured that classroom realities were acknowledged and responded to. The lecturers and advisers gave support and information regarding policy, planning and curriculum. The result was an extended curriculum understanding for all, grounded in interaction between policy and practice, underpinned by mutual respect.

**Intensive shared experiences (personal, social and professional):** One of the great virtues of the South African Primary History Programme is that it has provided a focus, forum, structure for debating, clarifying, practising and extending democratic ideas and practices. A key component has been the common experiences of project members, providing shared points of reference. The social dimension of the Programme played a crucial role in forging links between people historically divided.

### **History as a vehicle for values teaching**

In the NCS for Curriculum 2005, the role of history in teaching democratic values is explicit:

*'Learners develop a strong sense of themselves in the world through a study of personal history in the context of the broader history of South Africa. Through developing a sense of our deliberately divided histories, the notion of a common memory is promoted to assist in ensuring we do not forget the lessons of a painful past. Such a common memory should assist learners to confront and challenge economic and social inequality, including racism and sexism, in order to build a non-racial, democratic present and future.'*

*Debate and critical questioning should assist learners to appreciate and contribute to a culture of openness and should assist them, amongst others, to confront and challenge apartheid myths, which reinforce racism and stereotypes. Through promoting a culture of openness, learners develop civic responsibility and an understanding of tolerance in the context of our Constitution. The promotion of oral history should promote the use of and an appreciation and respect for, all languages in South Africa as a means of accessing the silenced voices of the past'. (DoE 2001, pp. 2-3)*

The academic strand of the South African Primary History Programme required the teachers and advisers in the Programme to carry out action research into their own practice. In most of the action research projects undertaken, values formed an intrinsic strand. For example, teachers investigated, within their history lessons:

- how to correct gender imbalances in children's responsibility-taking and participation
- inclusive strategies for socially-alienated and abused children
- debate and questioning regarding evidence from the past
- discussion, decision-making and responsibility-taking in group tasks
- oral history, to encourage the valuing of the histories of people in the local community.

The advisers, in their in-service work introducing teachers across the province to Curriculum 2005, found apartheid values still firmly in place in many schools, and needed all their skills to ensure that teachers (educators) worked together across the ethnic divide:

*‘When the allocation of issues to the different schools took place, the urge to do it along racial lines became evident. This led to outright protest and condemnation from so-called “coloured educators” who felt that for too long, education for all learners in the area had suffered because of the skin colour of certain learners and educators.*

*This was not an easy situation to manage, but it was a joyous occasion. Educators (especially those from the oppressed communities) were not willing to accept racially based operations anymore. They realised that by acting as a collective they changed the power relationship and were in a position to effect change....*

*After this experience and sensing how relieved educators were that eventually they were able to engage with the social practices that oppressed them instead of emancipating them, I became convinced that no real co-operation and change in our education system would ever take place without serious attempts to address the baggage of our Apartheid past’. (Interviews with Programme team members)*

The Programme did confront this baggage, but could not change some team members’ deeply-entrenched beliefs and values (see Dean, 2000).

### **History as an evidence-based discipline**

A Programme teacher commented:

*‘I am aware that in the case of myself and I know many other educators, we many a time teach just to transmit the knowledge of the specific syllabus content. We do it losing sight of the fundamental principles, skills, attitudes and values that the discipline would like to develop’.*

For most teachers the idea of history as an evidence-based study was a new one. For the Programme it was critical, as it provided a forum to discuss both issues about how we can know and understand what has happened in the past and an opportunity to raise what were sometimes deeply personal questions about where the truth lay in the present. It was invariably over a meal between working sessions that it would all spill over. The sources being used would bring the conversation round to what they meant for members of the project, drawn from different backgrounds, schools and communities. Uniquely, the common endeavour of history teaching based on evidence assisted the deeper process of reconciliation amongst project teachers.

### **Reflective practice / action research**

The Programme was predicated on the belief that only by critical and systematic examination of their own practice by all involved, would deep learning and change be possible. In addition, action research is the most empowering and democratic form of research for practitioners, as it allows them to take control over their own development and become curriculum developers and change agents within a context they understand. As a result, all Programme members, bar the two directors, were enrolled on a diploma programme that had reflective practice and action research at its core.

The Programme was planned on an annual cycle to provide maximum support and planning and feedback loops for Programme members as they identified issues, planned their action research, acquired a theoretical background, implemented the research, collected data and reflected on the process.

At the end of each year, the out-going team presented the process and results of their action research to the new team members. This was a great challenge to many as it meant 'going public' about their teaching. But it was often a very cathartic experience and provided a public platform for change initiatives, a forum for discussion and different models of reform and improvement.

All the team members commented on how valuable the action research had been in their development as thinking teachers. (*'I must say that the action research and reflective practice approach opened up a whole new world to me. The perfect "me" had to admit that I was living under a sense of false consciousness and this also made me reflect critically on my practice. I really think that there should be more programmes like this one because our teachers come to a dead end after a while and they need to look at the theories of other professionals to improve or make their practice interesting.'*) (Interview with a Programme team member).

## CONSEQUENCES

For all:

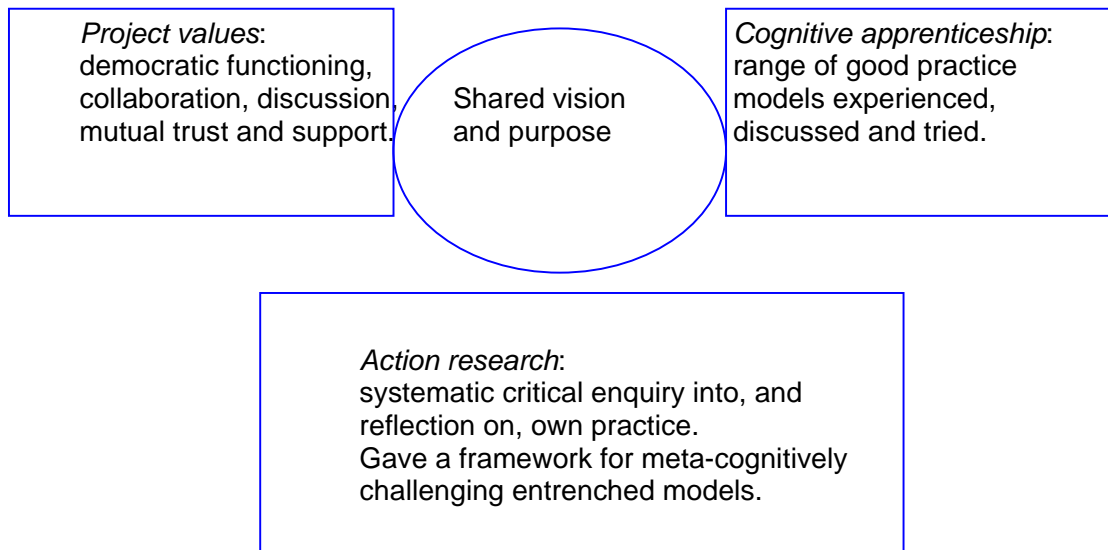
- A hard-won group ethos based on mutual respect and openness
- Grounded conceptualisation of how to implement a values-based curriculum
- Principled leadership and confidence in schools / Education Department developed
- Team members' ability to deal with their pasts 'transformed' (Dean 1998)
- History viewed as enquiry and evidence-based subject
- Learners seen as active and independent enquirers.

For the advisers/lecturers:

- Engagement with, and knowledge of, classroom realities
- Close collaboration with teachers
- A clear, workable framework for in-service developed, sustained by the project action learning group within the Western Cape Education Department
- Their influence, and that of project thinking, was felt nationally, in their input to the revised history curriculum, where three Programme members either led, or were members of, national curriculum committees. Two of these have been appointed to top positions in the South African History Project, a major national initiative by the Minister of Education, in response to the recommendations of the History / Archaeology Panel's report.



Figure 3: Key success factors.



Despite the success of the South African Primary History Programme, its work represents a very small drop in an enormous ocean. And there is no room for complacency. We leave you with the words of a senior Programme member:

*'In this country, we can't expect racism to disappear just because we have an excellent constitution and a new government. We can't throw open schools and expect everything to be fine and not put support structures in place. Just as there is a gap between education policy and practice, there is a gap between a constitution and the lived experiences of the people. Through Human and Social Sciences we may be able to challenge prejudice and racism and develop principles and a discourse of democracy, but it will not necessarily bring about the inner questioning of, and facing up to, our own racism and prejudice and dealing with it.'*

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