

**Mirror of a Nation in Transition:
History Teachers and Students in Cape Town Schools**

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ABSTRACT

How do history classes reflect the ways in which teachers and students in Cape Town schools are dealing with their nation in transition? I ask through this research. To address this question, I developed a methodology based on ethnographic methods in the belief that I could gain a unique perspective by being in the history classrooms and in schools themselves for sustained periods of time. I spent three weeks in each of four schools with different histories: Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High.

I present my representations of these schools, each as a separate case study. Through narratives constructed with excerpts from interviews of teachers and students, with depictions of scenes from the schools, and with accounts of the conversations I listened to and participated in, I examine how history classes reflect how teachers and students are dealing with an education system in transition.

The interim period between moving away from outdated and biased syllabuses and approaches to education and creating a system that meets the needs and aspirations of the new South Africa may be seen as 'wasted' time. No one really knew what or how to teach and uncertainty prevailed. However, a most productive kind of thinking and learning about the potential for education in general, and history in particular, was also taking place in the transition. Teachers in all the schools were trying to figure out for themselves how history should be taught. They were trying to decide what direction to take with their individual classes, what content to cover, and what skills. They were trying to arrive at a concrete purpose for history classes on which they could shape what they taught.

The frustration and uncertainty that all of these history teachers felt about where they were going with their teaching was compounded by the fact that each teacher was trying to figure it out for him- or herself. Absorbed as they were by problems and issues at their own schools, the teachers were, in general, focused inward. To address these experiences of teachers and students in schools, I have created conversations between teachers from different schools. I have used extracts from interviews with teachers and students, moments of classroom lessons and discussions, and descriptions of informal interactions with teachers to explore how they might indeed converse with each other. I have repudiated the closure brought by and certainty of authorial conclusions and instead have used the textual devices of narrative and rhetoric to highlight the situations of teachers and students in schools and to contextualise and to problematise the ways in which they are dealing with an education system in transition. I trace the common threads that ran through history teaching in each school and juxtapose the thoughts and actions of teachers and students in different schools. This conversation seeks to mirror first how teachers and students were dealing with education and history teaching in a time of transition, not only in isolation, but also collectively; and, secondly, to examine what was working, what wasn't, and why. It is an endeavour to provide an always unfinished, yet thought-provoking, discourse about where education and history teaching might go from here.

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NOTES

I. RACIAL TERMINOLOGY

In the past in South Africa, racial terminology has been used to ascribe worth or non-worth to individuals and to groups. In a new, non-racial, and democratic dispensation, such ascription through terminology has been rejected on a large-scale. I have, on occasion, however, described the race of an individual or group in this work. The description is used only in an attempt to understand and to convey the history of inequalities that the individuals or group may have experienced. I have used the racial descriptors which the teachers and students used most often to describe themselves.

II. THE SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

The schools and teachers included in this study, in the order they appear in the text. The names of all schools and teachers have been changed to protect their anonymity.

Peninsula High

Roland Weir
Barbara Davids
Nicole Weld
Suzanne Folger
Liz Fieldings
Amelia Green

Ocean High

Gregory Will

Hoërskool Noord

Henk de Groot
Jennifer Krop

River High

Peter Simpson
Kathryn Higgins

Transkei High

Phumla Mahashe
Zukiswa Fanaphi
Xolani Ndinisa
Andile Ndimma

Longevity High

Siko Cira
Charles Madonono

Khayelitsha High

Sithembele Mawoko
Phumeza Mawoko
Sipho Simani

Masakhane High

Andile Prua
Sheila Mbeki

Plain High

Riaan September
Debbie Bisset
Carole Septoe

Flats High

Ana Lambert

Freeway High

Christine Valentine

District High

Fatima Adams
Luke Duvenage
Elizabeth Wallace

Central High

Simon Brown
Keshia Roberts
Josh Kennish
Zaahir Allie
Caitlin Matthews

Suburb High

Amy Slater
James Walter

Community High

Arthur Wright
Susan Frylinck

Mountain High

Ingrid Worthington
Laura Hofmeyr

EDUCATION IN TRANSITION

South Africans find themselves surrounded by crisis calls in newspapers and on television, by shouts of protest in Parliament and on the streets, and by eloquent and impassioned expressions of the imperilled state of education in this country. In a time of teacher retrenchment and burgeoning class size, in a time of gangsterism and poverty, the words ‘crisis in education’ seem to be on everyone’s lips. The crisis takes on huge proportions: it calls for dramatic and transformative change both to rectify an education system premised on inequality and to create a system replete with the hopes and visions of a non-racial, democratic, and prosperous South Africa. The obstacles are enormous, but change is urgent and essential.

The rhetoric of large-scale change that daily fills the ears and minds of so many South Africans is powerful; it brings to the fore the necessity of doing things differently. But there is little sense of where to go from here. The public debate lacks knowledge of the current state of affairs in diverse schools, of what teachers and students are *trying* to do differently, of how they are attempting to build futures for themselves and their schools in the chaos of this crisis. While debate over the future of education rages in Parliament, in newspapers, and in homes, most of the nation’s children are in school. How are the teachers and students dealing with an education system in transition?

It is with this question that I set off to spend the 1998 academic year in schools in the Cape Town area. From my home in Canada, South Africa seemed the right place for me to be. I had previously conducted research in the province of Québec, examining history teaching in English- and French-language schools as a reflection of how a society recognises the cultural, political, economic, and linguistic diversity of its citizens.¹ South Africa, I reasoned, would provide me with a context in which I could continue to probe this theoretical question while, more importantly, observing and experiencing real and immense debates about the role of education in the development of a nation. History classes, as a way to look at the past and the present as well as to imagine the future, would provide a space for me to examine how teachers and students make sense of the society in which they live.

Every day, teachers and students live the frustrations—and the excitements—of new possibilities in South African state education. In their schools, surrounded by barbed wire fences, I listened to them speak of trying to imagine how education can be the meaning of opportunity in the new South Africa. I observed students sitting three and four to a desk because there was simply no furniture or class sizes had exploded beyond the capacity of a single room. Teachers spoke, in fear, for the future of their jobs. “Good morning, Sir!” I jumped up too as students stood at attention to greet their teacher the minute he walked into the room, and then sat amid the students, often classes little more integrated than they would have been twenty years ago. Other reminders of an old system lingered too; some schools had few and old textbooks and others—which could afford them—had full sets of brand new books.

Despite these many frustrations, I sensed one excitement in schools that seemed to lead to an overall faith in the school system and what it could become: freedom. Government-issued syllabuses had been slow to change and the interim documents that had been issued in the transition phase allowed more space for individual teachers to shape their own curricula. Moreover, teachers no longer faced the threat of government Inspectors telling them what they could and could not do in their classrooms. In the midst of this freedom, and uncertainty,

some teachers felt the need to stick to the syllabus they had been teaching for years, or—with lack of access to resources—were bound to outdated textbooks that reinforced the goals and ideas of the old syllabuses. Nevertheless, every teacher had become free to speak his or her mind in the classroom. Students were free to share their ideas. And both teachers and students were free to innovate.

History teachers have felt this shift perhaps more than other teachers. The public institution of education is one of the most pervasive ways in which children are brought into the society in which they live. And the teaching of history, in particular, often becomes a powerful shared space; through it, students learn to negotiate the world around them and to place themselves, as individuals and as members of any number of groups, into that world. In the past few years in South Africa, the world in which students live—if not physically, at least politically—has changed drastically. The ways in which history teaching will reflect these changes is an on-going process at policy level. It is also an on-going process, daily, in the classrooms of South Africa.

Throughout the history of South Africa, there has been a system of segregated and unequal education.² The National Party (NP) government of 1948 to 1994 perpetuated and accentuated these conditions as it used education to consolidate the overall goals of its apartheid policy. Separate development of the races was clearly manifest in the creation of different departments of education for different population groups. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 controlled education for Africans; the Coloured Person's Education Act created the Department of Coloured Affairs in 1963 to oversee education for so-called coloureds; and the Indian Education Act was passed in 1965 to place Indian education under the Department of Indian Affairs. In 1967, the National Education Policy Act defined the principles of Christian National Education that would govern education for whites.³ Students could only attend schools that accorded with their population groups and funding between the Departments was widely divergent; in 1969-70 (1992-93 figures in parentheses) for every one rand spent on an African child, R4,29 (R1,75) was spent on a so-called coloured child, R4,76 (R2,23) on an Indian child, and R16,59 (R2,63) on a white child.⁴ In 1979, the Education and Training Act was passed, replacing the Bantu Education Act and placing African schools outside the homelands under the control of the Department of Education and Training (DET). In 1983, the tricameral parliament was created and white, so-called coloured, and Indian education were placed under the House of Assembly, House of Representatives, and House of Delegates respectively.⁵

History teaching in South Africa under the NP occupied an important place in the government's apartheid strategies for education. The history taught in schools was ideologically and politically linked to the prevailing regime. It served to explain and legitimise the racial hierarchy of South African society and to teach students of different population groups about their place in that hierarchy. The history of white settlers, specifically the Afrikaners, was glorified while the history of Africans was reduced to a blood-thirsty Shaka who killed thousands and thousands of people. Contrary to the dictates of separate development, there was little difference in the formal school history curriculum between Departments. In all of these schools, the vision that history created was one of legitimate domination by a white minority.⁶

Since the early 1990s, new visions of South African society have been expressed in various forms. Most powerful among them is the constitution, designed to form the legal, as well as philosophic, foundation of the new country. The guiding vision of South Africa has been transformed to take a different shape, based on

democracy and equality, non-racialism and opportunity. As in any society, in order for a vision to take hold, other institutions must also reflect its principles. The system of education, which has the potential to reach so many of a nation's citizens, is key to this endeavour.

Dismantling the old system of education became a cornerstone of creating South African society anew. In September 1990, Mr Piet Clase, Minister of Education and Culture for the House of Assembly, informed all white schools of a governmental decision that each school would have to choose between three new models of school. Model A allowed for the conversion of a state school to a private school with a continued subsidy of forty-five percent to be phased in over three years. Model B allowed the management council of each individual school to determine the admissions policy of that school while maintaining funding at previous levels, provided that a majority of the students remained white. And Model C allowed schools to become state-aided schools with a subsidy covering teachers' salaries only, or approximately eighty-three percent of operating costs. An additional model, Model D, was added in April 1991 whereby underutilised House of Assembly schools could open as fully non-racial schools in 1992. Schools could also decide to remain all white.⁷

Just over half the House of Assembly schools in the country opted to determine their own admissions policies and students of all races could enrol at these schools for the 1991 academic year. In February 1992, the new Minister of Education and Culture, Mr Piet Marais, announced a decision to transfer schools that had chosen to remain all white and Model B schools to Model C status. As Model C schools, they would operate as semi-privatised schools and thus aid in the adaptation to an expected seventeen percent budget cut in white education.⁸ In 1991, Mr Clase had declared that the policies designed to change admission policies in House of Assembly schools would guide the country towards a single education system for all South Africans, a process of amalgamation that continued through the election of the Government of National Unity in 1994.⁹

The *ANC Policy Framework for Education and Training*, released in January 1994, laid out the conditions from which the African National Congress (ANC) believed politicians and educators needed to work in rebuilding the education system. "The curriculum under apartheid has perpetuated race, class, gender, and ethnic divisions," it stated. "It has emphasised division rather than communality and has denied common citizenship and a national identity." To counter the existing situation, the ANC advocated a new curriculum that would promote "unity and the common citizenship and destiny of all South Africans irrespective of race, class, gender or ethnic background."¹⁰ Five years later, many people are still asking what such a curriculum would look like.

It was within an administrative structure of non-racial schooling that the single national (policy making) Department of Education and nine new provincial departments of education began to address the shape and content of education in the new South Africa. In this context, discussions about how to create a flexible, efficient, and accessible system for education and training followed the election. In 1995, a Bill was enacted to create a unified approach to education and training, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF has enabled nationally recognisable qualifications to be gained in a wide range of ways, including both full- and part-time school and college, on-the-job training, and informal learning in communities that takes place at home and at work.¹¹

The National Curriculum Development Committee (NCDC) was also established to work towards the development of a curriculum framework for education and training. In 1996, the Curriculum Development Working Group, a subcommittee of this body, released their report, *Curriculum Framework for General and*

Further Education and Training. This document suggested the disbanding of ‘subjects’ in an overall curriculum in order to replace them with ‘learning areas.’¹² History as a subject would cease to exist; it would be subsumed under the Human and Social Sciences learning area. Learning Area Committees (LACs) were formed to begin the process of creating the specific outcomes that would define each learning area within the proposed Curriculum 2005.

The outcomes for the Human and Social Sciences learning area include, among others, demonstrating a critical understanding of how South Africa has changed and developed; participating actively in promoting a just, democratic, and equitable society; critically understanding the role of technology in social development; and demonstrating an understanding of the interrelationships between society and the natural environment.¹³ These outcomes, however, are the continued subject of criticism and concern. Both observers and participants cite the speed with which these outcomes were developed and question whether they can form the base of a solid and rigorous curriculum. Moreover, it remains unclear what a curriculum based on these outcomes will look like.¹⁴ The curriculum for Grade 1 was implemented during the 1998 academic school year with little training for teachers and few new resources from which to work.¹⁵ The process of implementation of Curriculum 2005 continues, with expected adoption at all Grade levels by the year 2005.

The need to replace the old syllabuses as quickly as possible, before the entirety of a new curriculum could be implemented, prompted the Minister of Education to initiate a review process of the existing curriculum in 1994. Under the auspices of the Curriculum Technical Sub-Committee (CTSC), established by the National Education and Training Forum (NETF), committees comprised of members from eight organisations were created to review the curriculum in each discipline.¹⁶ Each sub-committee, including one for history, was mandated, among other things, to conduct an “evaluation of the existing core syllabus with regard to inaccuracies resulting, *inter alia*, from the new constitutional dispensation, as well as outdated and contentious content.” It was also requested to make “recommendations regarding the adaptation of the above-mentioned syllabuses in the interim period until a fully revised school curriculum is implemented.” The sub-committee was asked to bear in mind, however, that “amendments shall not necessitate new textbooks.”¹⁷

In January 1995, all of the provinces implemented the interim syllabuses for history to address some of the inadequacies of the 1985 syllabus. The five page document that is the interim syllabus lists a choice of topics to be covered in each grade and then leaves it to the individual teachers to choose between the topics and to devise the specific content and methodologies to be used.¹⁸ It is no less specific than previous syllabuses, but the relationship between departments of education and teachers now allows—and even encourages—a flexible interpretation.¹⁹ Teachers have the space to adapt the content and approach to history in the interim syllabus to their own classrooms.

In Grade 8 General History, teachers can choose between the Renaissance, Colonisation, the Industrial Revolution, and the French Revolution. While these topics are similar to those presented in the 1985 syllabus,²⁰ their presentation is geared towards different aims. As this history syllabus seeks “to contribute to an understanding and appreciation of their heritage and that of other peoples and cultures,”²¹ it adds a section on the reactions and resistance to colonisation, for example. In the South African history section, students study the same time period—1806 to 1854—as under the 1985 syllabus, but the combination of events is altered. Instead of studying the Great Trek and the Mfecane/Difaqane in isolation, the interim syllabus suggests that teachers join the two in their study of ‘Movement and Settlement in the Interior.’^{22,23}

In Grade 9, teachers are given the option of choosing three themes in General History. They are presented with the choice of examining nationalism in Europe or in the Middle East, the First or Second World Wars, the development and work of the United Nations, or the history of other African states in the time periods of recent nationalism and independence movements.²⁴ Unlike in previous syllabuses,²⁵ the South African history section now allows teachers a choice of teaching the ‘Road to Democracy,’ including the apartheid era and resistance and the new Constitution and the Bill of Rights.²⁶

As a framework for this content, the interim syllabus presents a rationale for the study of history that is to guide teachers’ implementation of this curriculum in their classrooms.

*History is a systematic study of the past. It is a study based on evidence: a selection of facts and events that are arranged, interpreted and explained. Thus History, in addition to its content, is also a mode of enquiry a way of investigating the past which requires the acquisition and use of skills. The events, communities and peoples of the past are studied in order to develop an appreciation of other times and places, but also because they are interesting in themselves. History develops both the imagination and the understanding of people and communities, while a study of recent History is essential for an understanding of the present, just as an understanding of the present is necessary to understand the past.*²⁷

The philosophy of history teaching is clear and ambitious in the introduction to the interim syllabus for history. Yet it is so while allowing space for individual teachers to bring their own ideas into the classroom and to respond to the necessities of their school situation. It is flexibility that provides the framework for the interim syllabus, says Gail Weldon, Senior Subject Advisor for history in the Western Cape. She explains that this syllabus is intended as “guidelines only, [and] lets the teacher do the rest.”²⁸

The question of dismantling and rebuilding school history in South Africa is a contentious one. Obviously the history that has been taught in schools over the past fifty years must change; the question is how. Attempts to answer this question represent the search for a vision for this country; and that search has been a difficult, and often contested, one. The question of how history *should* be taught in this country is a powerful political question with no easy or clear-cut answers.

*History should prepare children for life, life which will also bring them into contact with other population groups—it is therefore vital that children should learn to view history empathetically, to contrast various perspectives, and to analyse critically. They should learn to experience it as a debate between different values and priorities. They should also learn to examine as objectively as possible the reality of their past existence—they should therefore learn to identify their own prejudices in an attempt to participate in this debate as receptively, rationally and objectively as possible.*²⁹

*History raised sensitive issues and one had to be careful when confronting the past, especially if this invoked extreme racism or ethnocentricity or bitterness in pupils.*³⁰

*We want to know what society is really about, how does it work, what is politics... how do we challenge this society.*³¹

The approach to the past should be inclusive and democratic: it should explore the experiences of ordinary men and women as well as leaders and heroes, and should deal with the political, social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions of human experience. The manner in which history is taught should

*promote democratic values, and democracy should be introduced through the mode of classroom discourse and the experience of students in the classroom.*³²

*In considering commonality and diversity, it is important to recognize that while these may be in tension, they need not stand as curriculum alternatives; both need to be present in the curriculum. A curriculum which prepares students for equal rights of participation in the key decision-making structures of society, would need also, in the South African context, to address rights to difference and procedures for dealing with difference.*³³

*...needing to produce [history curricula] quickly, the government needed to be freed of the idea that it had to produce something officially. 'It just has to open up the floor for discussion, and take that chance and give it to the public and teachers.' There was strong agreement with this view [at a colloquia on School History Textbooks for a Democratic South Africa]. It was not the state's role to produce curriculum materials, the participants believed.*³⁴

As the debate over the future of history teaching continues in the public sphere, so too do history lessons in schools. With an open-ended interim syllabus and the freedom to innovate, individual teachers and history departments have been left to themselves to answer the question of how history *should* be taught. They decide how to handle the isolation or integration of their schools; how to negotiate a balance between content and skills; how to deal with the social conditions of their students; and how to go about creating curricula that meets the needs of those students. It is in this context that I decided to conduct research in schools in the Cape Town area, to examine history classes as a mirror of a nation in transition.

How do history classes reflect the ways in which teachers and students are dealing with their nation in transition? I ask through this research. In addressing this question, I needed to know what was going on in classrooms. I needed to understand the daily innovations and frustrations of today's teachers and students. I needed to know what is working, what is not, and why in this period of transition and what these experiences might mean for the future of schools and history teaching in South Africa. As educational change continues to take place on an institutional level, political, community, and education leaders will also need to know.

I hope that my representations³⁵ of teachers and students in school will inform public debate over the future of education with knowledge of what is going on in classrooms. I hope that the insights and examples of these teachers and their students will help to create a vision of where to go from here.

NOTES

- ¹ Dryden, S. 1997 *Masters in Their Own House: The Teaching of National History in Quebec, 1950 to the present*. Senior Honours Thesis, Harvard University; Dryden, S. 1997 *The Changing History of Quebec: A Report to the CRB Foundation of Montreal*. Commissioned Report, Toronto.
- ² For further discussion of pre-apartheid education, see Behr, A.L. and R.G. Macmillan. 1966 *Education in South Africa*. J.L. Van Schaik, Ltd., Pretoria.
- ³ For further discussion of Christian National Education, see Ashley, M. 1989 *Ideologies and Schooling in South Africa*. South African Teachers' Association, Rondebosch, pp.7-28.
- ⁴ For 1969-70 statistics: Blignaut, S. 1981 *Statistics on Education in South Africa, 1968-79*. South African Institute for Race Relations (SAIRR), Johannesburg as quoted in Christie, P. 1985 *The Right to Learn: The Struggle for Education in South Africa*. Sached Trust/Raven Press, Johannesburg; for 1992-93 statistics: Cooper, C. et al. 1994. *Race Relations Survey 1993/94*. SAIRR, Johannesburg, p.690.
- ⁵ For further discussion of education under apartheid see, among others, Atkinson, N. 1978 *Teaching South Africans: A History of Educational Policy in South Africa*. Faculty of Education, University of Rhodesia, Salisbury; Christie, Pam. 1985 *The Right to Learn: The Struggle for Education in South Africa*. Sached Trust/Ravan Press, Johannesburg; Horrell, M. 1970 *The Education of the Coloured Community in South Africa, 1652-1970*. SAIRR, Johannesburg; Hartshorne, Ken. 1992 *Crisis and Challenge: Black education 1910 to 1990*. Oxford University Press, Cape Town; Kallaway, P. (Ed). 1984 *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans*. Ravan Press, Johannesburg..
- ⁶ For further discussion of history teaching under apartheid, see, among others, Auerbach, F.E. 1965 *The Power of Prejudice in South African Education*. A.A. Balkema, Cape Town; Bam, J. and P. Visser. 1997 *A New History for a New South Africa*. Kagiso Publishers, Cape Town; Boyce, A.N. 1968 *Teaching History in South African Schools*. Juta & Co. Ltd., Cape Town; Du Preez, J.M. (Translated by Hope du Plessis) 1983 *Africana Afrikaner: Master Symbols in South African School textbooks*. Librarius Felicitas Ltd., Alberton; Lamont, R. and S. Lobban. 1985 *A Study of bias in Bantu Education Department school history textbooks*. Faculty of Education, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfillment for a Higher Diploma in Education, Johannesburg; Mulholland, R.B. 1981 *The Evolution of History Teaching in South Africa: A Study of the relationship between the modes of political organisation and the history taught in schools*. Dissertation to the Faculty of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- ⁷ Cooper, C. et al. 1992 *Race Relations Survey 1991/92*. SAIRR, Johannesburg.
- ⁸ Cooper, C. et al. 1994 *Race Relations Survey 1993/94*. SAIRR, Johannesburg, pp.591-594.
- ⁹ Cooper, C. et al. 1992 *Race Relations Survey 1991/92*. SAIRR, Johannesburg.
- ¹⁰ African National Congress. 1994 *A policy framework for education and training*. ANC, Johannesburg.
- ¹¹ Human Sciences Research Council. 1995 *Ways of Seeing the National Qualifications Framework*. Human and Sciences Research Council, Pretoria.
- ¹² Curriculum Development Working Group. 1996 *Draft Document: Curriculum Framework for General and Further Education and Training*. National Department of Education, Pretoria.
- ¹³ Department of Education. 1997 *Senior Phase Policy Document, September 1997*. Department of Education, Pretoria.
- ¹⁴ For further discussion on this topic, see Kros, C. 1997 "Trusting to the Process: reflections on the flaws in the negotiating of the history curriculum in South Africa." *The History Curriculum Research Project*. Cambridge University Press and History Workshop, Johannesburg; Siebörger, R. "How the outcomes came out': A personal account of and reflections on the initial process of development of Curriculum 2005." In Bak, N. (Ed). 1997 *Going for the Gap, Kenton 1997*. Juta & Co, Ltd., Kenwyn.
- ¹⁵ For a discussion of this process, see Edwards, M. May 1998 "Threat to Curriculum." *The Teacher*, p.6; Grey, J. January 1998 "A new point of view." *The Teacher*, p.6; Grey, J. January 1998 "Preparing for OBE." *The Teacher*, p.7.
- ¹⁶ These organisations included the National Education Conference (NEC), the Committee of Heads of Education Departments (CHED), the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), the South African Students Congress (SASCO), the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), the Union of Teachers' Associations of South Africa (UTASA), the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (NAPTOSA), and the Teachers' Federal Council (TFC).
- ¹⁷ From the letter of appointment to all participants from the Director General of the Department of Education, dated 6 September 1994 as quoted in Lowry, S. "A Review of the History Curriculum Process." In Reid, J. and R. Siebörger (Eds). 1995. *Proceedings of the Workshop on School History Textbook Writing: From principles...to Practice*. Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa, Rondebosch.
- ¹⁸ See Appendix I for the complete 1995 Interim Syllabus for History.

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- ¹⁹ Trevor van Louw, Subject Advisor for history. Personal communication. 27 May 1998.
- ²⁰ Cape Education Department. 1985 *Junior Secondary Course: Syllabus for History*. Unpublished document, p.6-7.
- ²¹ Department of Education, Western Cape. January 1995. *Interim Syllabus for History Ordinary Grade, Standards 5, 6 and 7*. Unpublished document, p.7.
- ²² Department of Education, Western Cape. January 1995. *Interim Syllabus for History Ordinary Grade, Standards 5, 6 and 7*. Unpublished document, p.8.
- ²³ Cape Education Department. 1985 *Junior Secondary Course: Syllabus for History*. Unpublished document, p.8.
- ²⁴ Department of Education, Western Cape. January 1995. *Interim Syllabus for History Ordinary Grade, Standards 5, 6 and 7*. Unpublished document, p.9.
- ²⁵ Cape Education Department. 1985 *Junior Secondary Course: Syllabus for History*. Unpublished document, p.11.
- ²⁶ Department of Education, Western Cape. January 1995. *Interim Syllabus for History Ordinary Grade, Standards 5, 6 and 7*. Unpublished document, p.10.
- ²⁷ Department of Education, Western Cape. January 1995. *Interim Syllabus for History Ordinary Grade, Standards 5, 6 and 7*. Unpublished document.
- ²⁸ Gail Weldon, Senior Subject Advisor for History. Interview. June 30 1998.
- ²⁹ Trümpelmann, M.H. "History Teaching in the RSA: A Rationale." In Human Science Research Council. 1992 *The Teaching of History in the RSA, HRSC Education Programme No. 27*. Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, p.22.
- ³⁰ Summary of comment from the floor, from J. Reid and R. Siebörger (Eds). *Proceedings of the Workshop on School History Textbook Writing: From principles...to Practice*. Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa, Rondebosch
- ³¹ As quoted by Trümpelmann, M.H. "History Teaching in the RSA: A Rationale." In Human Science Research Council. 1992 *The Teaching of History in the RSA, HRSC Education Programme No. 27*. Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, p.1. From Van Jaarsveld, F.A. November 1989 *Omstrede Suid-Afrikaanse skoolgeskiedenis*. *Historia*. 34:2:1-21.
- ³² Siebörger, R. (Ed). 1994 *New History Textbooks for South Africa*. Macmillan Boleswa, Manzini, Swaziland.
- ³³ National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC). 1992 *Curriculum: Report of the NEPI Curriculum Research Group*. Oxford University Press: Cape Town, p.24.
- ³⁴ Siebörger, R. "Open Letter: Comments on History sub-committee report material for the interim syllabuses." 10 August 1995.
- ³⁵ See Chapter 2: 'In Schools,' pages 11, 12, 19-21, for a discussion of my construction of these representations.

**IN SCHOOLS:
THE PROCESS OF RESEARCH**

“Miss, Miss, can you tell us why you are here, Miss?”

I can’t help but smile at the question, one that is directed towards me many, many times in every school in which I set foot. A group of girls are leaning on each other, all crowded together at one desk. The one at the centre of this cluster is the spokesperson who has finally mustered the courage to speak the curiosities of the group.

“I want to know what you are learning about in history class and what you think about what you are learning,” I explain, to big eyes and much nodding of heads. “I have heard about the many changes in South Africa in the past number of years, and I want to see how those changes are reflected in how you are learning about your country and the world in history class.”¹

There are many ways in which I could have gone about a study to examine how teachers and students are making sense of their world through history classes during this time of transition in South Africa. I could have made an analysis of the interim syllabus and new textbooks to gauge shifts in the content and methodology of history teaching that might reflect a changing conception of the nation. I could have added to that study interviews with education department officials as well as book publishers to determine the ideas behind these changes. I could have conducted a written survey aimed at history teachers in the Cape Town area to quantify their opinions on various issues, their descriptions of change in their subject and in their classes. I could have interviewed teachers from as many schools as possible, to hear ideas and visions of history teaching in the teachers’ own voices. But wanting to know the stories and experiences of teachers and students—of history classrooms themselves—I decided that I needed to be in schools.

In the following pages, I describe the process of my research. I examine the choice of research methodology and the development of the research question. I probe the benefits and limitations of ethnography and attempt to justify the decisions I have made in adopting this approach. I then turn my attention to the methods of data collection I employed and describe the conduct of research in schools. I delineate the processes of analysis involved in this research and explore the factors to consider both in writing and in reading ethnography.

It was a week after I arrived in South Africa that my methodology began to take shape. Sitting in the cafeteria of the School of Education at the University of Cape Town, Trevor van Louw tried to describe to me what was going on in schools in the Cape Town area.² As a subject advisor for the Western Cape Education Department, Mr van Louw was the liaison between the Department and history teachers in 125 schools.³ Working in education, in various capacities, throughout his life and now spending four days a week with history teachers in schools, Mr van Louw knew better than almost anyone what was going on with history in the Western Cape. Yet he was frustrated with the depth of his knowledge about individual schools and how teachers and students were making sense, daily, of education and history teaching in the chaos of transition.

Mr van Louw told me that his work allowed him a great breadth of understanding of the issues schools were facing in diverse communities of Cape Town. But with so many schools to cover, he could spend only

half a day twice a year in each school. And it was not enough, he said. He explained to me that he didn't really know what was going on in history classrooms. He spoke with the Heads of Department at each school and with the other teachers when possible, but it was only when a teacher invites him to a class that he might observe. Subject advisors still had the stigma of the 'Inspectors' of the apartheid regime, Mr van Louw told me, and teachers were wont to have someone in their classes who they feared might 'inform' on them. Sometimes teachers were afraid to reveal classes with which they themselves were unhappy: classes with lack of direction, chaos, and absenteeism. Especially in schools that were struggling, Mr van Louw said, he had little idea of the complexity of the issues that teachers and students confronted on a daily basis.

I came away from my conversation with Mr van Louw with one idea paramount in my mind: in a search to understand how teachers and students are dealing with an education system in transition, one can gain a unique perspective by being in the history classrooms and in schools themselves for sustained periods of time.

The experiences of ethnographers have shaped this conception of research, and further served to define my choice of methodology. Ethnographic methods, developed first by anthropologists, were designed with the goal of understanding and describing the lives of people in their natural surroundings.⁴ Ethnographers adopt a holistic approach to data collection; in its purest form, the ethnographer begins with no specific hypothesis in mind, focusing on the entire situation and recording as much of it as possible.⁵ Ethnographic research involves observation, description, interaction, and reflective processes of deciphering meaning.⁶ Ethnographers sit and watch; they describe, in writing, what they see and hear in given social setting; they interact with the people who they are studying; they pose questions; and they have discussions. They decipher meaning through conscious processes of reflection on the holistic whole of the ethnographic experience.

Schools, I thought, as social institutions that comprise the behaviours and interactions of many individuals, would lend themselves to this model of research. The methods of ethnography would allow me to access intricacies of school situations that I could not gauge by surveys, questionnaires, or interviews. As LeCompte and Preissle describe it, "[Ethnography] has provided rich, descriptive data about the contexts, activities and beliefs of participants in educational settings. Such data represent educational processes and their results as they naturally occur and in context; they rarely are limited to isolated outcomes."⁷ With these possibilities of ethnography in mind, I decided that the complete and lengthy experience of this method of research alone could reveal to me the daily interactions of students and teachers. They could lead me to an unravelling of values, cultures, and beliefs of the school community and they would allow me to experience daily lessons in classrooms.⁸ Lutz articulates why I believed ethnography would be the most productive approach to deciphering how teachers and students were dealing with an education system in transition. He writes that "Ethnography is a holistic, thick description of the interactive processes involving the discovery of important and recurring variables in the society as they relate to one another, under specified conditions, and as they affect or produce certain results and outcomes in the society."⁹ Over the past three decades, the limits of traditional quantitative research designs in accessing the daily realities of schools have led to an increased use of ethnographic methods in the study of education.¹⁰

Ethnography can provide unique insight into the daily situations of schools, teachers and students. Through reading of the past experience of ethnographers I became aware that it is, nevertheless, a complex task. To put myself in the position to gain the insight and the perspective of an insider in a school would require my

immersion in the setting; and as such, would typically mean becoming a participant observer.¹¹ And yet while ethnography demands long periods of observation and involvement with individuals and groups, it would require me to retain enough distance to refrain from intervening in the social and cultural processes being observed. In seeking to define this relationship, Van Manen makes the distinction between participant observation and ‘close observation. He writes that “Close observation involves an attitude of assuming a relation that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allows us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those situations.”¹² Critics of ethnographic methods, and ethnographers alike, engage in a theoretical and methodological debate about whether such a position is possible. What makes an ethnography credible and valuable? they ask.¹³

This matter cuts to the heart of the discourse about truth and knowledge in qualitative research. Qualitative methods in educational research such as ethnography developed in response to a perceived lack in the quality of knowledge derived from the use of quantitative methods alone.¹⁴ And yet the quality of data produced through ethnographic investigation itself must necessarily be scrutinised.¹⁵ The question of representation is central to the judgement of ethnographic work: while relativist and postmodernist thinkers typically reject the possibility of representation, realists generally believe that the accounts of researchers do indeed correspond to real phenomena. In the quest for meaning and understanding, ethnographies describe—and thus seek to represent—school situations. But, firstly, how is this kind of representation possible; and, secondly, can it produce credible knowledge?¹⁶

A distinction between representation and reproduction is important in seeking to address the first question.¹⁷ While ethnographers do not, and cannot, *reproduce* the dynamics of a classroom lesson in their work, for example, they can and do *represent* them through a description and characterisation of the events and interactions.¹⁸ Atkinson describes the nuances of the task of representation that confronts the ethnographer. He writes that “[w]hen we write of reading and writing an ethnography, there is a danger of implying that there is a social reality—a ‘field’—that exists independently of and prior to the work of the ethnographer. That is not so. The ‘field’ is not an entity ‘out there’ that awaits the discovery and exploration of the intrepid explorer. The field is not merely reported in the texts of the fieldwork: it is constituted by our writing and reading.”¹⁹ The credibility of an ethnography, therefore, should not be judged on the authenticity of a written reproduction of the society in question; instead, it should be assessed on the use of authentic data in the production of readable texts that represent a social world to the reader. LeCompte and Preissle define these criteria when they write that “[a]n ethnographic product is evaluated by the extent to which it recapitulates the cultural scene studied so that readers envision the same scene that was witnessed by the researcher.”²⁰

The accounts of schools that I have produced are my representations of these schools. They are told, they are filtered, ordered, and understood through my consciousness; they are made vivid through my rhetoric and narrative. Richardson comments on the role of narrative; he writes that “[i]f we wish to understand the deepest and most universal of human experiences, if we wish our work to be faithful to the lived experiences of people, if we wish for a union between poetics and science, or if we wish to use our privileges and skills to empower the people we study, then we *should* value the narrative.”²¹ Indeed, rhetoric and narrative act as the persuasion of ethnographers. Atkinson characterises the power of these devices when he writes that “[t]he use of tropes (figures of speech) such as metaphor and synecdoche is not a matter of arbitrary or optional embellishment. Its attempted elimination would rob us of the power to describe social events and action in

intelligible terms. The removal of metaphorical usage would reduce us to the most banal and meaningless of purely behavioral accounts. Metaphorical usage is fundamental to the analytic force of many social-scientific theories and models.”²² As they give meaning to words and action, rhetoric and narrative have allowed me to construct representations of schools and teachers and students, producing the knowledge that is put forward.

In the context of producing such representations, the second question becomes the driving one: how can the credibility of the findings of this type of research be judged? In seeking to respond to this question, Atkinson attempts to dismiss a common criticism of ethnography. He writes that “[c]ritics and skeptics may say to ethnographers that their work is too like that of other writers. ‘How does your work differ from journalism?’ is an oft-heard challenge. Rather than getting hot under the collar about the implied charge, one might more usefully recognize that the ethnographer and the journalist have things in common, and that good work in both trades is recognized by similar criteria: it is based on thorough research, ethnically and conscientiously conducted, with a systematic review of sources and evidence, and conveyed to the reader through coherent written texts.”²³ These processes of designing, conducting, and presenting an ethnographic study are by necessity reflective. Adaptations and adjustments are made at each stage of the research process. As situations unfolded naturally as well as unexpectedly in classroom observation, as conversation veered in new directions in interviews, as I began to build hypotheses out of reams of data, and as I wrote, I needed to reflect both on the ethnographic process and the holistic experience of schools.²⁴ The progression of my work—its reflective nature—has helped to bring the accounts of these schools to the page in the form in which they appear. My representation of reality is shaped and constructed through this process. The way I address and answer the question, What is going on in the classroom?, is the product of intense observation and this critical reflection.

An understanding of the development of this work will thus enable the reader to understand the ways in which I have constructed the social worlds of schools, teachers, and students. In the next few pages, I describe the contexts within which these representations and their meanings were produced. From an understanding of the apparatus of my research and its evolution, the methods of research I have chosen, the rigour with which I have employed them, and the construction of the narrative as it appears in this text, the reader will be able to judge the validity of my representations.²⁵

Representations of four Cape Town high schools—Peninsula High, Plain High, Transkei High, and Central High—fill the pages of this work. These schools provide the principle case studies of the research examining teachers and students in an education system in transition. I have changed the names of the schools, and the people inside them, because the principals, teachers and students involved felt more comfortable that way.²⁶ The schools were selected to represent the diversity of schools in the Cape Town area, not to depict the best or the worst, but to characterise common situations.

Despite the amalgamation of education departments and the creation of new, non-racial, and provincial education regions and districts in 1995, the majority of schools have continued to reflect past legislation that defined neighbourhoods and schooling according to race. In general, the common situations of schools in Cape Town fell into four categories, primarily along the racial lines that once defined life in South Africa: former House of Assembly schools that are predominantly white; former House of Assembly schools that are no longer predominantly white; former House of Representatives schools; and former Department of Education and Training schools.²⁷

Choosing the specific schools within each of these categories was a task I needed to undertake with care. Trying to determine common situations meant talking with people to get a sense of what various schools were like. I acquired a list of all the high schools in the Cape Town area and placed them into the four categories. I then looked at the geographical distribution of schools in each of the categories and decided on a region for each case study school. In consultation with Mr van Louw as well as my supervisor, Rob Siebörger, four schools were decided upon.

Peninsula High is a former House of Assembly school in that remains well-funded through the school fees it collects from its middle-class and almost homogeneously white families. Transkei High is a former Department of Education and Training school drawing its students mostly from sprawling areas of temporary housing around the school; its students and their families, predominantly newcomers to Cape Town, experience high unemployment and extreme poverty. Plain High is a former House of Representatives school opened in 1985 to accommodate the so-called coloured families who were moved to Mitchells Plain and today located in the midst of unemployment and gang violence. Central High represents a type of school that did not exist in the past. It is also a former House of Assembly school, but has become racially integrated in the past six years as it draws students from their homes in all parts of the Cape Town area to its well-maintained building and high academic standards.²⁸

One of the principle factors in choosing schools was my ability to gain access to those schools. As ethnographers so often find, in the absence of a relationship with a key person to serve as a point of entrée to a community, research can prove difficult, if not impossible.²⁹ At each school, I had a contact—in one case the Principal and, in the others, the Head of History. I did not need to approach more than the four schools on which I had decided; each of these schools was amenable to accommodating my research, on the one condition of anonymity.

I also obtained permission to conduct research in schools from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). It was pleased to allow me access to high schools under their jurisdiction, but on certain conditions.³⁰ It was made clear to me that no school, principal, teacher, or student was obliged to assist in my research and it also required the anonymity of all schools, principals, teachers, and students in the presentation of results of the investigation. In addition, a copy of the research findings was to be submitted to the WCED upon completion.

I collected data on Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High in four ways: observation of Grade 8 and 9 history classes, interviews with history teachers, interviews with history students, and informal observations and conversations in the school setting.

The first component of my research involved sitting and watching. I spent three weeks in each of the four case study schools and observed all of the Grade 8 and 9 history classes that took place over that time. Both during and after each Grade 8 and 9 class, I recorded what happened: what historical content was covered, what discussions were about and who said what, the methods that teachers used in their lessons, and how teachers and students related to each other.

21/4 *Grade 8 Class 3* *Keisha Williams* *35 students*

- *Ms Williams puts discipline to the class: "What should I do with him?" after a student comes in late; "After school, Miss," say the students*

- *Student called to the office; “One of [Central High’s] most wanted,” chirps friend; he flashes the West Side sign as he walks out*
- *“Can you draw well?” (Ms Williams to student); “No.”; “Then write out the characteristics.”*
- *They are drawing a map of Africa which shows stages of the development of humans eg. Where fossils of homo erectus were found*
- *Many students do make great free-hand drawings of Africa, esp. South Africa*
- *The students helping each other with the maps*
- *The students speak Xhosa amongst themselves, but English (good English) to the teacher ...³¹*

In each school, teachers asked me why I was not doing a study of ‘matric’ history. Success in school is measured exclusively by the Senior Certificate exam, they argued; wouldn’t it make more sense to see what is going on at that level? The implications of how students learn about their country in history class, I countered, are greatest when everyone is taking history, and less than half of Cape Town students take history through to matric.³² Grade 8 and 9 are the last two years in which all students in the Western Cape are required to take history and it is thus at this level that history reaches the widest population of students. It was for this reason that I decided make Grade 8 and 9 the focus of my study. Yet another factor made the study of these grades particularly exciting: at this stage in the transformation of history teaching, Grade 8 and 9 history is not bound by an external exam. Teachers are therefore free—within the interim syllabus—to create their own history courses. The possibility of this creativity would lead to a richer study, I thought.

The second component of my research was interviews with teachers. I conducted interviews with all of the Grade 8 and 9 history teachers at each school, focusing on specific questions that guided my research.³³ I asked the teachers why they teach history and what they see as their role in teaching the younger grades. I spoke with them about teaching history in the past and what has changed. We talked of the expression of cultural, racial, social, political, and economic identities in history classes, of the role of history in nation-building, and about the future of history teaching in South Africa.³⁴

What do you see as your role as a history teacher, specifically for the younger standards, for your Standard 7 classes?³⁵

Well, for the younger people, I focus mainly on how they should conduct them in every day life. That is the teaching of history to me. Trying to teach them to be disciplined, to be respectful to older people, I encourage them to go to church or go to a mosque and things like that. In that phase where they are, they are easily influenced by drugs, gangsterism, and we as teachers have a role to keep them away from those things we construe as bad. So I don't focus every day on just subject matter, but also teaching them to be better people.³⁶

And how do you feel that they respond to that?³⁷

It's difficult to say how they respond. My teaching won't influence the majority of them. But because we're teaching in a working-class situation it is very, very difficult. They are always in competition with each other. They're in competition maybe with their neighbours.... I think that this school is not playing that important a role anymore as in the old days because now that we have become an open society, there are more things for younger people to look forward to other than school. School has become a problem for some of them because if they can wear their takkies, their American takkies, and their jeans and their sweaters, they will feel

happy. For most of them, school is not very high on their agenda.³⁸

I also let what I had seen in each teacher's class guide individual interviews. I wanted to understand what the teachers thought about their own classes, to hear from them about their intentions in certain activities, and to see what they thought worked well and what didn't.

*You have been teaching about the Defiance Campaign, about Mandela, about the struggle in general. Do you think that history plays a role in nation-building?*³⁹

*It's important. History is important. You must understand what happened for the future.*⁴⁰

*Do you find that idea comes through in the way that you teach?*⁴¹

*Yes. I told them especially about [Plain High's] past in the apartheid struggle and they were enjoying it. They were listening and asking questions and they wanted to know more. Every day when they came, they wanted me to tell them about the history of [Plain High] in the apartheid struggle. Because they didn't experience that. They want to hear about it. Now they understand why it is like this. They were so small when we were in the struggle. And they're asking a lot of questions: 'Miss, why was it like that? Why did we have apartheid?' You have to explain. I think history is important in every country. You must know about your country's past.*⁴²

Interviews with students formed the third component of my research. I wanted to speak to five students in each of Grade 8 and Grade 9. At my first two case study schools, I did individual interviews with each of the ten students and also two group interviews, one with the Grade 8 students and the other with the Grade 9s. I discontinued the individual interviews, however, as it was not feasible to arrange times outside of class to meet with all of the students and I objected to teachers' suggestions that I take students out of class. I then adapted the methodology to use group interviews only, which proved both feasible and productive. I returned to the first two schools to conduct group interviews with new groups of students. The interviewees were selected at random from class lists of all Grade 8 and 9 students, but with an attempt to maintain a gender balance and also to represent the racial and linguistic diversity of the school. I asked these students—with the help of Xhosa- and Afrikaans-speaking translators at Transkei High and Plain High respectively⁴³—what they saw as the purpose of history classes and how it related to their lives outside of school. We discussed the content they were currently studying in class and what they would teach if they were the teachers. I solicited their opinions on what a 'nation' was, on democracy, and on South Africa at present and its prospects for the future. I also listened to them discuss and debate amongst themselves their views on each of these issues.⁴⁴

*Do you think that teachers should teach about apartheid in history class?*⁴⁵

*No I think that's wrong just because that would make people to fight.*⁴⁶

*I feel like it's good that we learn about apartheid especially because it means that we'll be able to know what to do if we're confronting that kind of a situation.*⁴⁷

*No it is not right to learn about apartheid. Because it is a past and now we are in a new nation, so it is not right to our teachers to teach us about apartheid.*⁴⁸

*I think learning about apartheid is wrong, just because we must live peacefully now. And we must be together as one.*⁴⁹

I conducted the interviews with students near to the end of my time at each school in order to ask them about issues specific to their individual history classes and teachers. I wanted to gauge their opinions on the

successes of history classes and where they could see room for improvement, and to compare their perceptions of the class with those of their teachers.

How do you think your teacher would describe the purpose of history class?⁵⁰

Educational.⁵¹

Does that come through in the way she teaches?⁵²

Well, our teacher is Miss Fieldings and she does it in a fun way. She uses her hands and facial expressions and jokes to make it more interesting for us or fun, and it's easier to learn like that. So she makes it educational but fun at the same time. So we like her as a teacher and do actually try hard at history.⁵³

Our teacher sort of just sits there. She is Miss Weld. She just teaches us the work and then gives us homework assignments. There's not much interaction with the class, though. Sometimes she does interact with the class, but not very often.⁵⁴

How do you feel about that?⁵⁵

You've also got to try and make the class interesting so that the class doesn't fall asleep and stuff.⁵⁶

Yes, I think that interaction with the teachers and the children in the class is good as well 'cause then you get other people's ideas and you can think about what they're saying and stuff.⁵⁷

The final component of the methodology was watching and talking with teachers and students wherever and whenever I could. These informal interactions and conversations led me to believe even more strongly in the idea that one can gain unique insights by being there. I learned from the teachers and students in staffrooms and offices, in hallways and on playing fields, in courtyards and empty classrooms.

Mr Makene took me into his office in the back of the school and put on the kettle to make some tea. We had been standing outside on the balcony watching the students mill around the in the streets behind the school.

"Why not come in and sit down?" he says and motions towards the door.

We begin to speak about the changes in schools since 1994.

"How's it going?" I ask.

Mr Makene looks tired.

"I'm not sure if it's better now or before. Obviously I'm not saying it was OK before, but at least the students stood up when the teacher entered the room."⁵⁸

Throughout my time in schools, I peppered the teachers and students with questions about their lives and the things that are important to them. They asked me about myself, about my home in Canada, about what I thought of South Africa. With teachers and students, I debated current issues; I gloried with them in the victories of Bafana Bafana and the Western Stormers;⁵⁹ and I mourned with them when tragedy occurred, when a student fell ill and when the father of a teacher passed away. After school each day, I wrote, at length, about these conversations and experiences.

In schools each day, I sat and watched and talked to people. It might seem simple to some, but it wasn't. It was a negotiated process the whole way, each time I stepped into a classroom, a staffroom, each time I engaged in conversation, each time I asked a probing question. Who was I? And what was I doing here?

I was a presence in these schools, at some more than others as a result of the colour of my skin and the

novelty of having anyone new at school. I was also someone from far away, someone often perceived to have less at stake in what was going on in South African schools, someone who had fewer preconceptions of South African life, and someone who understood nothing about this country. Teachers and students alike wanted to explain things to me, to make me understand the history behind what they live in their schools each day.

Keisha Roberts would seek me out at any free moment, just to talk.

“As history teachers, we feel marginalised,” she says. “There is so little attention to our subject, but there are so many issues we are struggling with at the present time. And, until you came here, no one wanted to speak with us about any of this. It helps so much just to have the chance to think about some of these things with someone else, to think that *somebody* cares what we’re going through.”⁶⁰

I found that both teachers and students often relaxed once I explained what I was doing, once they were sure I was not a spy for the education department, once they were sure I wasn’t there to criticise what they were doing from the start. I even found them to open up to me in ways I had not imagined. I often felt as if teachers and students of all backgrounds spoke to me in a candid way that they might not have been able to duplicate with someone to whom they already ascribed a racial history in this country. I felt lucky to be in that trusted position, but felt it volatile; I needed to respect that position of power and trust the teachers and students to whom I spoke with the same kind of honesty. In writing, I needed to be conscious of the anonymity that they demanded in return.⁶¹

In wanting to look at how young South Africans are growing up learning about their nation, about their society and the world in which they live, I decided to look at history classes. However, what I found—right from the first days in school—was that history classes were situated deeply in the circumstances that surrounded it. Many other factors entered into the history classroom: the environment of a school, the lives students brought to school in the morning and returned to in the afternoon, the relationships between teachers and students, and the overall conditions of teaching and learning. All of these things affected what happened—or didn’t happen—inside history classes.

Two students walked into the history classroom and stopped in front of their teacher, ready to explain why they were late. Their teacher nodded his head.

“Sorry, Sir. The taxis are still on strike.”

“Are they still shooting?” Mr September asks them.

“I think so,” answers one of them.

They take their seats and Mr September gives them a quick explanation of what is being discussed.⁶²

The holistic approach of the ethnographic model that I used allowed me not only to observe what was going on in classrooms, but to talk to teachers and students, to try to make sense of how history fits into their lives and how their lives fit into history.

Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High provided me with rich data about the experiences of teachers and students in the history classrooms and schools of the Cape Town area. However, these four schools alone—while they did represent a great diversity of schools—could not account for the wide spectrum of teachers and students, schools and education that existed in Cape Town. The variation between

schools that fit into any one of the four categories prompted me to expand the study to include three 'breadth' schools for each of the principle case studies.

The intention of this addition was not to establish which school was the most representative within a given category and in that way to use this ethnographic study to create archetypes of schools. Instead, I wanted to inform the principle and in-depth case studies with a broader scope of how teachers and students were experiencing and shaping their schools in this time of transition. Schools in the townships or schools in the southern suburbs, for example, exist for many people in a world separate to the one they inhabit daily. The danger of a situation where the public lacks any experience with what is 'on the other side' was for narratives of teachers and students in one particular school to create an impression of the totality of that particular case study and its generalisability. I wanted to avoid a situation in which my research might prompt me or my readers to think 'This is what all black schools are like' or 'This is what all white schools are like' without a more general basis from which to draw a conclusion. I have used the breadth schools to make this point.

In choosing breadth schools to represent diversity *within* each category, I again enlisted the help of Rob Siebörger and Trevor van Louw. At each of the twelve school selected, I had a contact person who facilitated my entry into the school. I spent two days in each of these twelve breadth schools, following the same methodology as for the principle case studies: I observed all of the Grade 8 and 9 history classes scheduled for those days, conducted interviews with each of the Grade 8 and 9 history teachers, and held group interviews with five students from each of those grades. I also watched and listened to what was going on around the school at all times when I was there and talked to teachers and students whenever I could.

In addition to choosing the methodology that I would employ to explore how teachers and students were dealing with an education system in transition, I also needed to decide how to organise the data that these methods produced. I had kept notes in a journal each day in schools. I had written down my observations of classes and conversations among teachers and students, and often their words, verbatim; I had described what people looked like and how they reacted to one another; I had recalled my conversations with the people I encountered in schools. I had also transcribed the interviews I conducted with teachers and students from tape recordings. I thus had numerous texts as data. Already, these texts were representations: my rendering of 'the field' in my journal as well as my own and an assistant's transference of the spoken words recorded on an audio tape into written words.⁶³

I divided the process of analysis into two parts, the one thematic and the other emphatic. In studying the journals and transcripts, I distinguished a number of themes that ran through the texts. I identified these themes as follows: conception of the school; conception of South Africa; the purpose of history teaching; ideas of cultural, racial, and economic difference; curriculum issues; structural issues; changes in education and history teaching; and the future of education and history teaching. The identification of these themes, however, was problematic. In interviews, I had asked specific questions of teachers and students related to how history classes reflected education in a time of transition. As a result, I played a large role in guiding the themes that ran through interviews. This issue was less apparent in a classroom situation where my presence was a factor, but not a guiding one.

Many important aspects of what teachers and students said and how they said it, through their actions and their words, did not fit into the thematic categories. I therefore employed a second method of analysis.

Reading each piece of text—fieldnotes about one class, an interview with one teacher—I identified the points that teachers and students emphasised. To do so, I examined the rhetoric of teachers and students in various situations and on various topics. I looked at their choice of words, their tones of voice, their body language, and the context in which each situation or conversation unfolded. The topics, feelings, approaches, events, and ideas on which teachers and students placed emphasis became the foci of the individual case studies.

While engaging in this process of analysis, I simultaneously needed to make a decision on how to present my research findings. There are a number of ways in which I could have chosen to do this. As is common in ethnographic writing, I could have chosen to devote a section of the work to a narrative of the social worlds being studied and then, in the rest of the work, provided an analysis of the data aimed either at creating models of the observed phenomenon or at showing its correspondence to an existing theoretical framework.⁶⁴ What I have tried to do, however, is derive a presentation for my research findings organically from the methods that I employed while conducting the research.

The way that I have approached the research is as an apprentice ethnographer. I spent time in schools observing classes, doing interviews, and talking to people. I took in and recorded what was around me, what people said, the way they looked, the way others reacted. I did not try to enter these schools as an expert; I did not want to suggest to teachers or students that I could provide solutions to problems and frustrations that they were experiencing in a time of educational transition.

And yet while ethnography has often been portrayed as a descriptive form of research, a story-telling about the observed world,⁶⁵ it is also a quest for meaning in an attempt to produce useful knowledge.⁶⁶ Critical ethnographers emphasise the nature of this kind of research as directed towards positive social change.^{67,68} As this study of history teaching in Cape Town schools concerns itself with a subject and an institution in upheaval, it demands more than merely a description of school life. It demands the search for explanatory frameworks to address the issues of education and history teaching in transition, the possibilities for teaching and learning, and the potential and direction for change.

I have chosen to meet the demands of this kind of research in an unconventional way. What I have tried to preserve in choosing how to present my work is the sense of exploration that is one of the powers of an ethnographic method of research. I investigated the schools, teachers, and students of this study through conversations and, in the presentation of my research, I have sought to juxtapose ideas and situations in my representations so as to create conversations within the text. While the representations are shaped by my narrative, and analysis is consciously embedded within the text, work of this kind can allow for more than the voice of a single analyst. The juxtapositions of direct extracts from interviews with teachers and students, of moments of classroom monologues as well as debates, of reflective yet informal comments from teachers and students seek to bring many voices to my representations. Through this mechanism, I have wished to emphasise what Paul Atkinson describes as the “precariously provisional nature of mutual understanding.”⁶⁹ These are conversations that cannot be summed up by rigid explanatory frameworks. And they are conversations that can never be finished.

There is yet another conversation that is strongly evoked through this approach to ethnographic work. It is the conversation between the reader and the text. “We have been forced to recognize that reading is an active pursuit,” argues Atkinson. “The reader makes sense of the text, reading into it more than it can state in so many words.... Meaning is not static, but processual and emergent out of the interaction between speaker and

hearer, or between the reader and text.”⁷⁰ Without the voice of a single analyst, the reader is asked, more than in other genres, to decipher the text in an active manner. Seen in this way, an ethnography can be understood as Atkinson describes it, “the product of reading and writing.”⁷¹ In making the reader aware of this task and responsibility, I have sought to make the process of reading a conscious reflection of the complexities of ethnographic writing.⁷²

In the following four chapters, I present my representations of Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High, each as a separate case study. Through narratives constructed with excerpts from interviews of teachers and students, with depictions of scenes from the schools, and with accounts of the conversations I listened to and participated in, I examine (within the length restrictions imposed on the dissertation) how history classes reflect how teachers and students are dealing with an education system in transition. To allow the textual form of my research to align with the data and findings, I have sought to minimise summary interpretations.⁷³ I have repudiated the closure brought by and certainty of authorial conclusions and instead have used the textual devices of narrative and rhetoric to highlight the situations of teachers and students in schools and to contextualise and to problematise the ways in which they are dealing with an education system in transition. It is through the provisional and exploratory nature of the representations that the issues of education and history teaching in transition, the possibilities for teaching and learning, and the potential and direction for change can be understood.

NOTES

¹ Plain High. Personal communication with Grade 8 Class 2 students. 7 September 1998.

² Trevor van Louw, Subject Advisor for history, Western Cape Education Department. Personal communication. 24 March 1998.

³ Trevor van Louw, Subject Advisor for history, Western Cape Education Department. Personal communication. 25 May 1998.

⁴ See, for example, Benedict, R. 1934 *Patterns of culture*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston; Boas, F. 1938 "Living philosophies, II: An anthropologist's credo." *The Nation*. Vol. 147, pp.201-204; Geertz, C. 1973 *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. Basic Books, New York. For a discussion of the development of educational anthropology, see Spindler, G.D. (Ed). 1974 *Education and cultural processes: Toward an anthropology of education*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, New York.

⁵ A theory of research employed as early as 1922 by anthropologist B. Malinowski in his seminal work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: an account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. Routledge, London; for recent theoretical applications to educational ethnography see, for example, Lutz, F.W. 1986 "Ethnography: The Holistic Approach to Understanding Schools." In M. Hammersley. *Controversies in Classroom Research, Second Edition*. Open University Press, Buckingham, pp.107-119. Lutz writes that "the more we limit our ethnographic focus, the more likely we are systematically to limit our ability to discover some extremely important variables affecting the phenomenon which originates outside our narrow focus."

⁶ Anderson, G. 1994 *Fundamentals of Educational Research*. Falmer Press, London.

⁷ LeCompte, M.D. and J. Preissle. 1984 *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, Second Edition. Academic Press, New York, p.8.

⁸ As shown in the research of Burgess, R.G. 1983 *Experiencing Comprehensive Education: A Study of Bishop McGregor School*. Methuen, London; Dalton, T.H. 1988 *The Challenge of Curriculum Innovation: A Study of Ideology and Practice*. Falmer Press, New York; Rogers, D. 1968 *110 Livingstone Street: Politics and bureaucracy in the New York City school system*. Random House, New York.

⁹ Lutz, F.W. 1986 "Ethnography: The Holistic Approach to Understanding Schools." In M. Hammersley. *Controversies in Classroom Research*, Second Edition. Open University Press, Buckingham, p.108.

¹⁰ The beginnings of this shift is described in Eisner, E.W. 1979 "The use of qualitative forms of evaluation for improving educational practice." *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. Vol. 1, No. 6, pp.11-19; more recent commentary is found in Hammersley, M. 1990 *Classroom Ethnography: Empirical and Methodological Essays*. Open University Press, Milton Keynes.

¹¹ For discussions of participant observation, see Jorgensen, D.L. 1989 *Participant observation: A methodology for human studies*. Sage, Newbury Park, California; Spradley, J. 1980 *Participant Observation*. Holt, Reinhart and Winston, New York.

¹² Van Manen, M. 1990 *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. SUNY Press, Buffalo, New York, p.69.

¹³ For works written in an attempt to address this question, see Atkinson, P. 1990 *The Ethnographic Imagination: textual constructions of reality*. Routledge, London; Hammersley, M. 1990 *Classroom Ethnography: Empirical and Methodological Essays*. Open University Press, Milton Keynes.

¹⁴ Eisner, E.W. 1979 "The use of qualitative forms of evaluation for improving educational practice." *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. Vol. 1, No. 6, pp.11-19.

¹⁵ For a thorough discussion on this development and process of this scrutiny, see Hammersley, M. 1992 *What is wrong with ethnography: methodological explorations*. Routledge, London.

¹⁶ For an interesting discussion on this topic, see Muller, J. January 1999 "Reason, reality and public trust: the case of educational research for policy." A paper produced for the President's Educational Initiative, administered by the Joint Education Trust. School of Education, University of Cape Town.

¹⁷ For the import of this distinction, see Hammersley, M. 1998 "Get Real! A Defence of Realism." In see Hodkinson, P. (Ed). *The Nature of Educational Research: Realism, Relativism or Post-Modernism?* Crewe School of Education, The Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester. On page 13 of this work, Hammersley comments: "The first criticism [of realism]...is the argument that any account necessarily differs in character from that which it purports to represent, and it is concluded from this that representation is impossible. Even an exact physical replica of something is different from the original, at the very least in always being in a different spatial location. And the problem is obviously much more severe in the case of linguistic representations. I may claim that a verbal description of events in classroom accurately represents the behaviour of the teacher to which it refers, but it is not the same thing as that behaviour and therefore, it might be argued, inevitably involves distortion."

- ¹⁸ For further discussion on this topic from a range of perspectives, see Hodkinson, P. (Ed). 1998 *“The Nature of Educational Research: Realism, Relativism or Post-Modernism?”* Crewe School of Education, The Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester.
- ¹⁹ Atkinson, P. 1992 *Understanding Ethnographic Texts: Qualitative Research Methods Series 25*. Sage Publications, London, pp. 8- 9.
- ²⁰ M.D. LeCompte and J. Preissle. 1993 *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*. Academic Press, New York, p.3.
- ²¹ Richardson, L. 1990 “Narrative and Sociology.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. Vol. 19, pp.133-4.
- ²² Atkinson, P. 1992 *Understanding Ethnographic Texts: Qualitative Research Methods Series 25*. Sage Publications, London, p. 12.
- ²³ P. Atkinson. 1992 *Understanding Ethnographic Texts: Qualitative Research Methods Series 25*. Sage Publications, London, pp.3-4.
- ²⁴ For a discussion on how the writing and reading of ethnography highlight and emphasise these reflective processes, see Atkinson, P. (1990) *The Ethnographic Imagination: textual constructions of reality*. Routledge, London.
- ²⁵ On this topic, see Smith, L.M. 1978 “An evolving logic of participant observation, educational ethnography, and other case studies.” *Review of Research in Education*. Vol. 6, pp.316-377. For an example of sharing “the stories that accompany the evolution of a researcher’s work,” see Mills, G.E. 1993 “Levels of Abstraction in a Case Study of Educational Change.” In D.J. Flinders and G.E. Mills (Eds). *Theory and Concepts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives from the Field*. Teachers College Press, New York, pp.103-116.
- ²⁶ See Anderson, G. 1990 *Fundamentals of Educational Research*. The Falmer Press, New York. On page 148 of this work, Anderson comments: “While people enter the setting voluntarily and have allowed the researcher to enter, they soon forget why the researcher is there, and they tend to live their professional lives openly without particular regard for the consequences. For this reason, researchers have to be particularly careful to protect confidentiality and the identities of the people they study.” For further discussion and rationales behind maintaining the anonymity of schools, teachers, and students, see Walker, R. 1993 “The Conduct of Educational Case Studies: Ethics, Theory and Procedures.” In M. Hammersley. *Controversies in Classroom Research, Second Edition*. Open University Press, Buckingham.
- ²⁷ There are also three former House of Delegates high schools in the Cape Town area which, as a small percentage of the education system, have not been included in the study.
- ²⁸ See Appendix II for a brief statistical characterisation of the schools based on the following factors: number of teachers, students, and student:teacher ratio; school fees; percentage of students taking history to matric; number of students according to race; home language; age in Grade 8 and 9.
- ²⁹ For discussions of ethnographers experiences with these issues, see MacLeod, J. 1995 *Ain’t No Makin’ It: Aspirations & Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Westview Press, Oxford; Willis, P.E. 1977 *Learning to Labor*. Aldershot, Gower, p.4.
- ³⁰ As specified in a letter dated 18 June 1999 from Hennie Mentz of the Western Cape Education Department in Cape Town.
- ³¹ Central High. Written observations of Grade 8 Class 3. 21 April 1998.
- ³² Generalised from statistics gathered on the schools that formed part of this study. See Appendix II for further information.
- ³³ See Appendix III for a) a complete list of questions used in the teacher interviews; and b) a list of all the teachers interviewed over the length of the study.
- ³⁴ All interviews were recorded on audio tape with the permission of the teacher. These tapes were later transcribed literally both by the researcher and a research assistant. Copies of the transcripts are held by the researcher.
- ³⁵ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. 15 September 1998.
- ³⁶ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ³⁷ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. 15 September 1998.
- ³⁸ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ³⁹ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. 11 November 1998.
- ⁴⁰ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ⁴¹ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. 11 November 1998.
- ⁴² Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ⁴³ Students were informed of the presence of a translator and the translators introduced themselves in the home language of the students. Students were given the option of responding to questions in whatever language they chose.
- ⁴⁴ See Appendix IV for a) a complete list of questions used in the student interviews; and b) a list of all the groups of students interviewed over the length of the study.

- ⁴⁵ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 8 students at Transkei High. 29 July 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Siyabulela Hlahla, Grade 8 student at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ⁴⁷ Mhtobeli Ndima, Grade 8 student at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ⁴⁸ Namonde Qobo, Grade 8 student at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ⁴⁹ Siyabulela Hlahla, Grade 8 student at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ⁵⁰ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Peninsula High. 12 September 1998.
- ⁵¹ Andrew Little, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ⁵² Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Peninsula High. 12 September 1998.
- ⁵³ Susannah Pike, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ⁵⁴ Andrew Little, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ⁵⁵ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Peninsula High. 12 September 1998.
- ⁵⁶ Andrew Little, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ⁵⁷ Amanda Lovejoy, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ⁵⁸ Transkei High. Personal communication with Michael Makene, teacher at Transkei High. 24 July 1998.
- ⁵⁹ The national soccer and provincial rugby teams respectively.
- ⁶⁰ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 28 April 1998.
- ⁶¹ In order to ensure anonymity, I changed the names of the schools, teachers, and students. I have also attempted to make the exact locations of the schools ambiguous. In presenting the schools in writing, however, I did not change anything else about what I observed at school or heard in interviews.
- ⁶² Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 29 May 1998.
- ⁶³ Clifford refers to this process as inscription, where “the flow of action and discourse has been interrupted and turned to writing.” From Clifford, J. 1990 “Notes on (field) notes.” In R. Sanjek (Ed). *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, p.51.
- ⁶⁴ For examples of this approach to ethnography, see MacLeod, J. 1995 *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations & Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Westview Press, Oxford and P.E. Willis 1977 *Learning to Labor*. Aldershot, Gower.
- ⁶⁵ Atkinson, P. 1990 *The Ethnographic Imagination: textual constructions of reality*. Routledge, London.
- ⁶⁶ Many authors comment on the need to produce useful knowledge through any kind of research. As it relates to the specific issues of ethnography, see Hammersley, M. 1990 *Classroom Ethnography: Empirical and Methodological Essays*. Open University Press, Milton Keynes; Lutz, F.W. 1986 “Ethnography: The Holistic Approach to Understanding Schools.” In M. Hammersley. *Controversies in Classroom Research*, Second Edition. Open University Press, Buckingham; Schratz, M. 1993 *Qualitative Voices in Educational Research*. Falmer Press, London; Woods, P. 1985 “Ethnography and Theory Construction in Educational Research.” In R.G. Burgess (Ed). *Field Methods in the Study of Education*. The Falmer Press, East Sussex.
- ⁶⁷ See Carspecken, Phil Francis. 1996 *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. Routledge, New York. Carspecken comments on page 3 of his work: “We [criticalists] are all concerned about social inequalities, and we direct our work toward positive social change. We also share a concern with social theory and some of the basic issues it has struggled with since the nineteenth century. These include the nature of social structure, power, culture, and human agency. We use our research, in fact, to refine social theory rather than to merely describe social life.”
- ⁶⁸ For an interesting discussion of the effects of ethnography on policy in South Africa, see Breier, M. 1996 “Ethnography for Policy? Reflections on a literacy research project.” In Robertson, S-A. (Ed). *In Pursuit of Equality, Kenton 1995*. Juta & Co., Ltd., Kenwyn, pp.156-168.
- ⁶⁹ P. Atkinson. 1992 *Understanding Ethnographic Texts: Qualitative Research Methods Series 25*. Sage Publications, London, p.43.
- ⁷⁰ P. Atkinson. 1992 *Understanding Ethnographic Texts: Qualitative Research Methods Series 25*. Sage Publications, London, p.38.
- ⁷¹ P. Atkinson. 1992 *Understanding Ethnographic Texts: Qualitative Research Methods Series 25*. Sage Publications, London, p.7.
- ⁷² After writing the representations of schools, I furnished each principle case study school with a copy of the chapter that related to it. I asked the teachers in the history department at the school to read the chapter and feedback any factual inaccuracies they encountered. While the scope of the feedback requested was limited to matters of fact, the exercise provided some important informal insights into the interactions between reader and text. All four of the Heads of Department commented to me that they appreciated the chance to engage with the text, not as one who was being told what was going on in schools, but as one who was brought into the process. This is the effect of a continual conversation for which I have striven in my writing.

⁷³ This method of minimising interpretation has been called “post-ethnographic practice” by J.D. Dorst in his 1989 work *The written suburb: An ethnographic dilemma*. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia. As cited in P. Atkinson. 1992 *Understanding Ethnographic Texts: Qualitative Research Methods Series 25*. Sage Publications, London.

PENINSULA HIGH

*In the lovely [Peninsula] valley
Ring'd around with mountains grand,
Stands a proud and noble building
Gracing this our sunny land.
Here in the classrooms bright we labour,
Learn to give and learn to take,
Promise here our best endeavours,
For our own and [Peninsula's] sake.
We are boys and girls of [Peninsula],
We shall strive to bring her fame,
In our sports and in our studies,
We shall bear aloft her name.
Here's to all who bring her Honour,
In their work and in their play.
Gladly, proudly, we shall follow
Comrades who have led the way.
— School Song*

“P-H-S!” The cry comes out elongated, and bellowing from so many throats that it feels like the ground’s shaking.¹

The boys look mean as they run out of the school’s front doors and onto the field. Their hair is tousled, some of them already look bruised, and their mouthguards turn all of their everyday smiles into intimidation factor grimaces. They are the Peninsula High School first rugby side.

“Good ball, honey!” A mother’s voice sounds above the crowd’s roar as the game begins.² I find it hard to believe that the boys on the field, with their already bloody noses, are anybody’s honey. But looking around at the Saturday Derby Day scene of families who have “never missed a game”³ at their community school, it is obvious that these boys are honeys; they are surrounded by their parents, sisters, brothers, teachers, friends, and girlfriends.

A mother and father hurry up to the stands, running lightly, standing on their toes to see if the game has yet begun. They are already clapping their hands, eyes wide and absorbed by the snippets of action they can see on the field. A forty-something woman, still dressed from her morning workout, calls out to them: “Mary, Bill, come sit with us. We saved you a seat!”⁴ Mary rushes over, kisses her friend hello, and jumps into her seat. Bill follows.

Almost any Saturday sees the community of Peninsula High brought together like this. Many students participate in sport in addition to other extracurricular activities such as drama, music, and debating. And many parents participate as spectators and fans, drivers and tuck shop helpers.⁵

Peninsula High draws its students almost entirely from the immediate middle class and predominantly white neighbourhood surrounding it.⁶ As I drive up to the school just before 8 o’clock on any weekday morning, I find the streets in the neighbourhood teeming with students walking and riding their bikes, picking up their friends along the way to school.⁷

Peninsula High has grown along with the Peninsula Village. From an original enrolment of 78 students in 1957,⁸ Peninsula High had a school population of 1120 in 1998.⁹ At one time, this community was a village, separated from Cape Town by mountains, valleys, and forest; and it was a secluded life, tucked away from the

big city. Now, many parents of students at Peninsula High work in Cape Town proper, linking their still idyllic village surroundings to the larger reality of the region.¹⁰ The students' worlds, however, remain for the most part isolated to their small community. Their lives revolve around their school and the many opportunities it affords them.¹¹

The many and varied opportunities available at Peninsula High keep students involved and occupied by their school lives. The philosophy of the school, summarised in its educational policy, is to maintain "a high level of scholarship and academic achievement"¹² while at the same time allowing for the "development of a balanced personality."¹³ Through the possibilities of "involvement in other spheres of school life represented by the wide range of sports and cultural activities, clubs and societies,"¹⁴ the value of and emphasis on educating the whole person is evident; teachers describe the education at Peninsula High as 'holistic.'¹⁵ A student's five years at Peninsula High are a complete experience, "lessons learnt, foundations laid."¹⁶

At [PHS] a good foundation was laid on which to build my life now, thus it is more than just a building with pupils and teachers—it is an establishment which can best equip you for your future: a green house that feeds and nurtures each individual. [PHS] is what you make of it—and it is this quality which allows each individual to achieve in as many or as few spheres as they please.¹⁷

The teachers at Peninsula High take pride in the many achievements that current and past students have made in all of the school's spheres of activity. A 100% matric pass rate in 1996,¹⁸ 23 South African and Springbok representatives and 160 Western Province competitors representing a wide range of sporting activities;¹⁹ Gold Diplomas for the school choirs at the Cape Town Eisteddford for many years.²⁰

We are extremely proud of the vast majority of wholehearted pupils who live up to our highest expectations. Their working conscientiously, their behaving with courtesy and consideration, and their playing with enthusiasm, commitment and sportsmanship will bring great credit to them, to their parents and to their school.²¹

Just as the community feeds the school with its children, the school creates for the community a balanced world full of academics, sports, music, and culture in which these children can learn and grow.

Over the decade that our family has been involved with [Peninsula] High School, many things have changed, but the fundamental academic, cultural, sporting and social values have stayed the same.²²

Since its creation in 1957, Peninsula High has been a community school, thriving on the involvement of families in the education of their children. The values of excellence and of involvement provide the foundation of Peninsula High and represent high expectations of students and of their families. Making a commitment to attend the school means living these values both in the school and in the community.

The community of Peninsula has remained relatively isolated from the changes that took place in South Africa in the 1980s and since the 1994 election. The school, however, has anticipated and accepted political and social changes in the country.

In November of 1990, a major event occurred. The parents of the school voted overwhelmingly (93%) to adopt model B and open the school to pupils of all races. [Peninsula] thus moved forward with the new South Africa.²³

Yet since the momentous and symbolic decision of 1990, Peninsula High has remained mostly secluded from the changes in education that the new South Africa has brought.

“We are a dinosaur,” Peninsula High Headmaster Alex Braude said, with no emotion in his voice. “The school reflects the residential community whose demographics are determined by past legislation and we’re locked into that because we can’t turn away local pupils.”²⁴

Indeed, the local pupils who make up the student body at Peninsula High do not represent the diversity of the new South Africa. There are but a few students of colour in each class and only a handful of African students in the whole school. As the Headmaster said, the school is locked into serving the students it does; with the exception of the former white schools that no longer attract local students and instead draw students from all parts of greater Cape Town, schools like Peninsula remain predominantly white. As is the case in so many communities, disruption of the apartheid demographics for an integration of neighbourhoods is slow to happen. And without this process, schools remain segregated.

Past legislation that designated the Peninsula community and Peninsula High School as whites-only areas also provided education budgets for schools like Peninsula High to create the ‘holistic’ education that remains the cornerstone of its philosophy. Current crises in education, however, do not allow for these same budgets. The shortage of funds in education, for all schools in the Western Cape and in South Africa as a whole, has led to the retrenching of teachers and larger class sizes, and to little—if any—funding for facilities maintenance or extracurricular programs.

Peninsula High nevertheless continues to be successful in maintaining its educational values, using school to provide students with opportunities for growth and discovery. Class size has been kept to an average of 34 students²⁵ and Saturday Derby Days represent the flourishing extracurricular activities that continue to abound. This success results from personal and financial commitments of the parent community of the school. School fees are R2650 per year,²⁶ money used primarily to employ twelve teachers beyond the number for which the Education Department pays. These governing body posts not only decrease the number of students in a class and allow a wider subject choice, but also create space in the timetable for all teachers to have free periods. With the ability to do some of their classroom preparation within school hours, teachers are willing to give of their afterschool time to coaching sport and running various clubs.^{27,28}

Parents, members of the community, and students have money in their pockets and this affluence makes its way to the school through school fees, and also through fundraisers by the Parent-Teacher Association or by the students themselves. The whole school gathers for an assembly at least once a week, with the expressed purpose of having everyone in the school community together to share some time. A few weeks before their dance, the Matrics raised R3000 in one of these twenty-minute assemblies.²⁹ Students paraded on stage and the MC announced their qualities and abilities as if they were in a fashion show. Students in all grades ogled and cheered and then bid on the Matrics, paying money to hire them as slaves for the day.³⁰

“This lovely girl will carry your books for the day!” yelled out the MC. “Do I hear 50 rands? I hear 100!”³¹

The gathered school goes crazy, standing in their seats, hands waving in the air to have their bid heard.

“I hear 250 rands. Sold to the boy right down here.”³²

Peninsula High has benefited from a willingness of the majority of parents to pay the high school fees needed to maintain its extra-curricular programs and its small class size. Some teachers feel, however, that the

school is not a success in many other ways. There is much untapped possibility within the school, they say. This school has yet to meet the real South Africa.

*It hasn't happened here yet.... We're still very sheltered here; we don't have a very integrated staff, we're beginning to get a bit more integrated with our pupil body. Especially from the coloured and Indian backgrounds, but specifically coloured background; but there're very, very few black people in the school. And, you know, because there are only a few of them, they don't tend to express their identity very easily, they tend to hang back, hide in the class. So it doesn't really come out. And the only way they will get changed is with a more affirmative policy, in allowing people in—teachers in particular. And time as well. Because this is still a largely white, privileged area and we draw from this area.*³³

Slow integration of schools means that students have little contact with the diverse realities of South Africa. They continue to live their segregated existence. While teachers see education changing to allow for a more honest portrayal of South African reality in the classroom, the reality that the students experience continues to be shaped by the isolation in which they live.

“Do you notice any racism in South Africa?” I ask a group of Grade 9 students in an interview.³⁴

The students look stunned at my question, like they are not sure what I might mean. I then see some of them relax and start to think about it.

“Yes, the farmers,” one girl answers, telling me that she sees it on television every day.³⁵

No one else says anything.

*[W]hen I teach these folk, so many of them don't know what happened in the 80s. They have absolutely no idea about the state of emergency, the curfews at night, the violence, the protests, people getting detained without trial, people literally disappearing, you know. They have no idea of that. Partly because their parents have sheltered them. [Peninsula] is a very, very sheltered community. For the four years I've been teaching here, the pupils in particular don't really have an idea of what has actually happened. Very, very, sort of island-like, you know, and needs to be brokered from that sort of comfort-zone.*³⁶

To get students away from this comfort-zone, some of the teachers see their role as bringing reality into the classroom. History classes in particular has become a way to immerse students in realities outside of their insular lives. Through history, teachers can open new worlds to students and create empathy for the experiences of others. Roland Weir explains what he tries to do in his classroom.

I think they need to know about the past. And the way I teach it, it tends to be more of a shock therapy type of teaching. You know, when you tell them stories of the past, many of them are quite shocked about that. The story I like to use is one of the 1976 riots, when Hector Petersen got shot. Usually when ... the anniversary day comes up, I usually mention it to them. And you know, especially the young kids, they say, 'Ah, that's terrible,' 'How old was he?' and so on. [However] they don't somehow empathise with that. They can't relate to it somehow. It's not something real to them. Even a shocking, fundamental event like that means very, very little to them until you somehow bring it home to them, I mean the idea that he had to take Afrikaans and he was protesting against taking Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. So you say to them, 'Have you heard the latest news? That, as from next year, in Standard 8, Xhosa is the medium of instruction for three of your six subjects.' And then of course you have pupils going crazy. 'No they can't do that to us!' 'How can they do that?' 'We don't know how to speak Xhosa.' 'We're going to leave.' 'We're going to go to Australia.' ... You know some kids start shouting, 'We're going to, we're going to private schools. It won't happen in private schools.' So I

say, 'No, it's right across the country.' So you pull their leg. But then of course they all get a shock and you see the real feelings coming out. And then, only then, can they empathise with a fellow like Hector Petersen who actually got shot, to such an extent that he went protesting.³⁷

When I ask the students in Mr Weir's Grade 8 class what they think about learning history, they immediately start telling me about the day they learned about Hector Petersen.

"We were scared," one girl says, still sounding a little scared.³⁸

"We didn't know until the end of class that it wasn't true," the boy sitting beside her adds.³⁹

Some people near the back of the class begin to join the conversation.

"I was getting ready to move, to America."⁴⁰

"[Mr Weir] told us that some of us would probably fail and have to repeat," a boy says and the class laughs, as if that might be a danger for this boy anyway.⁴¹

This kind of a lesson does not take place in the course of teaching the regular syllabus. Mr Weir says that he uses this lesson as an aside on Soweto Day, or sometimes earlier in the year if he sees the need as he did with his Grade 8s in 1998. It is these sideline activities and lessons that Mr Weir gets excited about; but he worries that they cannot happen very often.

I think our syllabus is very, very strict, rigid, restrictive. So I try and break away from that ... as much as possible.... I can do anything in my class—closed doors.... But when it comes to preparing stuff in the syllabus and exams and stuff like that, it's far more restrictive. Often you've just got to plug through the work. Especially the way it's set up at the moment, it's pretty restrictive I think.... It's always been done that way. [The students] get a sheet of notes, and that's simply typed material, it's just note after note after note, and they've got to learn it, because that's unfortunately the way that the history department does operate.⁴²

Mr Weir, four years out of his HDE, ⁴³ sees many changes that he could make to Peninsula High's history curricula for Grade 8 and 9 if he had the chance. He sees the need to introduce his students to the world around them, outside of their sheltered communities, by bringing contemporary South African reality into the classroom. He does so when he can, but is also bound to follow the same curriculum as the other teachers at Peninsula High. The other history teachers also emphasise the need to use history in the development of an understanding and appreciation of a wider world. They are less adamant than Mr Weir, however, about what needs to be changed within the history curriculum in order to do so. At Peninsula High, the teachers aim to introduce their Grade 8 students to ancient cultures and diverse ways of thinking and in Grade 9, to conflicts and their resolution in the modern world.

Colonisation is one of the central themes of the Grade 8 curriculum at Peninsula High. Following a unit about the Renaissance, students are asked to see the link between "the spirit of inquiry"⁴⁴ during that time and the drive to exploration that resulted in colonialism in the 15th and 16th centuries. They examine "the Spanish and the Inca in South America and the British colonisation of the east coast of America"⁴⁵ as examples of colonisation all over the world.

They first set out to define colonisation and what it means to different people.

- *Colonisation is the formation of colonies.*

- *This happens when a group of people (colonists) move from their own country to settle permanently in a new country (the colony).*

- *These colonists form a community which is often closely linked to the country from which they come and is often directly ruled by that country.*
- *Some colonies had many colonists, others had few colonists and were controlled by the army of the colonising power.*
- *Contact between the original inhabitants and the colonists often results in conflict.*⁴⁶

In order that their students might understand these conflicts, the teachers at Peninsula spend a number of classes teaching about what society was like for the Incas in South America and the Native Americans in North America before the arrival of colonists. Students draw Inca houses in their notebooks and think about why there was no hole in the roof for smoke to exit; they learn about the llamas that were used for transport and also for wool for the blankets that kept the Inca warm at night; they discuss the Sun and the Moon as gods worshipped by the Inca and look at drawings of the temples built in their honour.⁴⁷ Then came the Spanish. The students sit anxiously, staring at the television that has been wheeled into their classroom, and watch a video about Pizarro and his ‘Conquest of the Incas.’⁴⁸

“What does a voyage of discovery mean?” Barbara Davids asks her students after they have seen this video.

“Well, it is a fleet of ships that sail in a particular direction until they see land. Then they would conquer the land if anyone was living there,” a girl says waving her arms in the air, imagining for the class a huge fleet of ships sailing in front of them.⁴⁹

One of the first tasks that the students in all of the Grade 8 classes must do in their unit on colonisation is to think about Mrs Davids’ question and what it might mean to various people.

*Why do you think many people, especially those in Asia, Africa and South America find the term ‘Voyages of Discovery’ offensive?*⁵⁰

“Let’s think about this from the perspective of the conquered,” Nicole Weld, head of the Peninsula history department, says to her class. “Seventy-five percent of the Indians in that part of the world died in thirty years.”

She looks out at her class and starts to draw lines in the air, down the aisles, dividing the students into two groups.

“That means these twenty-six of you out of the thirty-four would be dead.”

Ms Weld’s students look stunned as they gaze around at each other to see which ones of them would still be alive.

“I don’t understand,” one of the boys earmarked as dead says to Ms Weld.⁵¹

After hearing from Ms Weld in the staffroom about the discussion in her class, Suzanne Folger decides to pick up on some of these same issues in her class the next day.

“Why do you think [the explorers] did what they did then?” Mrs Folger asks her class.

“They had faith in themselves and what they were doing,” a girl responds after sitting in the silence of her class, thinking for some time.⁵²

To try to get his students to think deeper about what it meant to be on the receiving end of the faith that the colonists had in what they were doing, Mr Weir places them in the shoes of the conquered. After they watch a video on Pocahontas and begin to think about these ideas, he gives them an assignment for homework.

Imagine that you are one of the Indians who went to London and got paraded around. Write 2

*paragraphs about what you would have felt like. And write what you would have told people about London when you came back.*⁵³

The students get excited about this assignment. When I ask them why, they get even more excited.

“We get to pretend we’re Pocahontas, Miss! Did you see that movie? Oh, I just loved that movie,” one girl says to me, pre-empting Mr Weir’s next topic for discussion.

“I did see that movie, Colleen,” Mr Weir says to the student I was speaking with. She looked shocked that her teacher had overheard our discussion, but happy that he had seen the movie.

“Did you like it, Sir?”

“Well, let’s compare the two versions of the story, the one we saw today and the Disney one you’re all talking about,” Mr Weir sets the question for discussion.

Mr Weir’s class spends the remainder of the period talking about how in the Disney version the marriage of John Smith and Pocahontas is seen as the end of the hostilities between the races. But the marriage of Rolf—as he is called in the video they watched in class—and Pocahontas is portrayed as the Indians giving in to the conquering force.⁵⁴

This discussion in Mr Weir’s class echoes one held in Mrs Davids’ class a couple of days before. The students in her class turned into storytellers for as long as Mrs Davids would let them; three girls stood in their places and told the story of Pocahontas.

“She lived in paradise, in this forest land...” one of the girls began.

When she had finished, Mrs Davids asked her students to think about other interpretations of the story.

“What we get to see, and what we hear about is a love story, a story by those who believe colonisation is a good thing,” she explains.

One of her students interrupts to answer her question before she can get to it.

“I don’t think it was a love story. I think it was like any normal war, like when the Dutch came to the Cape and were fighting off the Xhosas because they wanted land,” he says outraged, standing up in the middle of his outburst.⁵⁵

This kind of comparison between the history of colonisation that the Grade 8s are studying and the South African history they have done in the past is encouraged by all of the Peninsula High teachers. As Mr Weir explained, these asides are a way to add greater meaning to the ancient and far-away history of the syllabus.

As Mrs Folger introduces the idea of natural resource extraction as the way of colonists making their way in Brazil, she asks her students to think about what they know about South Africa in order to understand this situation.

“We can see the same patterns of colonisation in South Africa as in Brazil,” she tells her class. “Who worked in the mines?”

“Blacks,” a chorus of students calls out.

“Who owned the mines?” Mrs Folger continues.

“Whites,” the same chorus calls out.

“Why didn’t any white people work in the mines?” asks one of the boys who had remained silent through the beginning of the discussion.

“The white people who owned the mines had to find people who had no power and needed money,”

Mrs Folger explains, smiling, happy that her students are asking questions.⁵⁶

Some of the teachers do not leave their discussions of colonial experiences to the past, but ask their students to apply this knowledge to the present day.

After her students had coloured in a map marking the areas that were held by Britain, Spain, Portugal, France and Holland, Mrs Folger asked them to use what they had just learned to tell her why people in Mexico speak Spanish. The students quickly notice the pattern of colours on their maps, seeing the same colour on Spain as on Mexico and most of the rest of South America.

“What languages are spoken in South Africa?” Mrs Folger then asks the class.

Students raise their hands right away.

“English.”

“Afrikaans.”

“Why do we speak those languages?” Mrs Folger asks.

Those students who had been looking at their maps quickly raise their hands and point out that South Africa was colonised by Holland and Britain. Mrs Folger explains how they can see in this example the power of colonialism. She leaves them with a question to think about.

“Why have these languages become dominant when there are so many indigenous languages?”⁵⁷

Throughout this unit, I notice that it is not only the teachers who make comparisons between the colonial experiences of the Inca and the Native Americans and what has taken place in South Africa. The students also do it on their own.

“Do you think history is only a study of the past?” Liz Fieldings looks intently at her class. “Let me tell you a story to make you think about it,” she continues. “In Peru today, there is a discrepancy of wealth. Do you know what that means?”

“Not everyone is equal, Miss,” a boy says after raising his hand.

“Yes, in Peru, the wealthy ones often have Spanish blood and the ones who do the dog’s work have Indian blood.”

“Isn’t that what it was like in South Africa in the non-democratic years?” the boy beside me turns to his friend on the other side to ask. “Yeah, whatever it’s called, apartheid,” he explains a little more to his puzzled-looking friend.

“Maybe,” his friend shrugs his shoulders and they turn their attention back to their teacher and the overhead she has put up.⁵⁸

As the students attempt to make these comparisons, some of the teachers become frustrated that their students do not have the necessary information to do so. This dissatisfaction with the syllabus they follow and its restrictive nature resurfaces as teachers find it difficult to teach their students enough to make the parallels clear and meaningful. Mrs Folger describes the complicated process.

*That’s why I try to draw so many parallels in-between what happened historically and what’s happening now, because a lot of them know the term ‘apartheid,’ but they don’t really know what it was about. So when you’re dealing with the destruction of cultures, I have to keep paralleling the fact with what’s happened in South Africa, digressing, and teaching them a bit of recent history showing the way it’s paralleling what’s happened in previous history. So it’s quite a long-winded process.*⁵⁹

The teachers who have tried so hard with their Grade 8 classes to bring contemporary South African issues into the curriculum do not attempt this process as often with their Grade 9 classes. “As far as the Standard 7 syllabus goes, they’re still quite Euro-centric,” Ms Fieldings explains.⁶⁰ Indeed, the major components of this course are the World Wars. Through this content, students learn about the causes and progressions of battles, and also about what it was like to live during a time of conflict.

The teachers at Peninsula High find that their students are able to contribute much more readily to discussions about Europe than they are about South African topics. Europe is part of the students’ reality as many of them travel with their parents during school vacations.

“The furthest I’ve been from my house is Kimberly,” a girl says quietly, looking around, her eyes tipped down, hoping that no one will hear as she answers her teacher.

Her hopes are dashed when she looks up and sees most of her class staring at her, shocked.

“No, I’ve never been overseas,” she says, defensively.⁶¹

With most students coming from this cultural background, with a close connection to Europe, both teachers and students relate their own families’ lives to World War II.

“We are in a propaganda position that means most of the information we have is from Britain,” Amelia Green explains as she begins a class on the home front. “That’s why we’re studying the home front in Britain.” She feels the need to explain further this situation and reminds her class, “we are all products of where we live.”

Ms Green proceeds to walk around and around the room telling her students about how when she was a child she used to play with the large and heavy curtains her parents hung on their windows during the Blitzkrieg, wrapping herself up in the blackout cloth.⁶²

In Ms Green’s next class, one of her students adds his own story to the discussion of life during the war.

“My grandparents met during the war,” he speaks softly. “Grannie was fixing the plane; Grandad was the pilot.”

“I hope it was one that lasted,” Ms Green responds, emphasising what the class had discussed earlier in the unit, how the war destroyed so many families.

Her student nods his head, and smiles.⁶³

Even though the students relate to this war in Europe, teachers at Peninsula High bring the reality of living during a war still closer to their students by relating the situation of children at this time to something the students can imagine.

“What problems would you have if you were evacuated to a village in the Transkei?” Ms Weld asks her students as she talks about the movement of children from their own homes in cities to stay with families in rural areas for protection during the war. The students had just described these children as “ill-mannered and dirty and their hosts were disgusted,” but they all of a sudden change their minds.

“Oh. We’d have to live with different people,” one girl exclaims.

“I wouldn’t be able to talk to anyone. I don’t speak Xhosa,” another says.

“I couldn’t play on the computer,” a boy thinks out loud.

“You might meet children who have never seen toothbrushes before,” their teacher adds.

There is a rumble of comments in the class, none distinct enough for me to hear.⁶⁴

In her next class, covering the same material, she again tries to get her students to empathise with what

life was like during the war. She asks them to imagine the changes that have happened in their lives since age nine.

“Now if you had spent that period away from home, in America, what would you be?”

She cuts herself off and prevents her students from answering. “Sorry, I digress,” she says and puts up an overhead. Immediately, the lightbulb blows, making students jump out of their seats. Then laughter prevails.

“That’s not the only thing that’s going to blow,” Ms Weld says threateningly, looking at her students with a stare that makes them stop laughing and organise themselves.

Three students walk out with the overhead projector and five minutes later they return with it fixed. Ms Weld turns it on and continues with her lesson. The students copy notes from the overhead for the rest of the class.⁶⁵

Sometimes teachers at Peninsula High ask their students to copy notes, memorise material, or fill in the blanks as they go along in the class. Just as often, they focus on developing skills of analysis and critical thinking by engaging students in class discussions. The students themselves notice this difference. “Sometimes our teacher, she just teaches us the work and then gives us homework assignments. There’s not much interaction with the class,” a Grade 9 student says in an interview and the others around the table nod their heads.⁶⁶ These same students say that sometimes their teacher “does it in a fun way...she uses her hands and facial expressions and jokes in a sense to make it more interesting for us or fun and easier to learn like that. So she makes it educational and fun at the same time.”⁶⁷

This shift to a skills-based approach to history is new to many of the teachers at Peninsula High, and they are finding the need to adjust.

*I know I personally talk a lot still. I must say, I do find it difficult to get a great deal of pupil activity.... And that’s because I think [history teaching’s] changed more from a direct content to more developing the skills that you can get from history, that is analysis and such like. But certainly the content was very much more stressed in the early days; now there is more stress on interpreting. In the early days of my teaching career it was more a case of exploring content in relation to sources, but now perhaps it is the skills from the sources rather than actually the content.*⁶⁸

One of the aims of the history teachers at Peninsula High in developing these skills is to make students comfortable thinking for themselves and coming to their own conclusions. Most of the teachers begin their classes with brainstorming sessions designed to draw out of students what they already know about a given topic and to use that as a foundation for the rest of the class.

As we walk in the door to class, all the students stand.

“Good morning,” they say in unison and stay standing until they are told to sit.

“Good morning, Grade 9s. Come, lend me your brains,” Ms Weld asks her class, trying to engage them in discussion.

“OK, I am sort of awake,” a boy agrees to help her out.

“What do you need to fight a war?”

Students start putting up their hands to answer and some get so excited that they blurt it out.

“They need food and fuel, Miss,” one girl says.

“Ah hah,” Ms Weld says and the class laughs. “But Britain doesn’t produce much food or fuel. What do you think about that?”

“Well, they must need to get it from somewhere else,” a student pipes up.

Ms Weld steers the discussion to the importance of the sea for the war effort. Britain needed to transport goods, she explains, and “Germany’s goal was to stop the flood.” She brings in the idea of submarines, trying again to engage her drifting students. The class laughs when she calls on someone doodling in his notebook and asks him to describe a submarine.

“I don’t know what it is, Miss,” he says, shyly, and turns his face back to his books.

“Don’t be embarrassed about not knowing about a submarine,” Ms Weld says gently. “We all know different things.” She begins to describe a torpedo and a missile, drawing them on the board and asking students to add what they know as she goes along. By the end of the class, students have used what they know, individually and together, to figure out what they didn’t know before.⁶⁹

“What do you see as the purpose of history teaching?” I ask Mr Weir in an interview after we had talked about the relationship between skills and content in his history teaching. He whistles and then begins to speak.⁷⁰

*To show people that there was a past. And things happened in the past that has determined our future. And we’re always concerned about the future, but we need to know the lessons of the past to make sure our future is as rosy as possible, or as smooth as possible. So I think [the purpose] is looking at the past to move beyond... ‘cause many people don’t get that interested in actually looking at the past, but see so much purpose of the here and now.*⁷¹

The Grade 9 students with whom I speak in a group interview aren’t so sure there is a purpose to history classes. After a long silence, the students start to think about what they might be learning from history.

*It’s like, if you go try take over the world now, well, you heard about what happened to Hitler, you were going to take over the Russians now or if you had to try and attack them, you’d take lots and lots of food with you. And you know not to mess with the Americans.*⁷²

Some of the students seated around the table nod their heads in agreement. I can tell one of the other students has something to say, but is a little unsure of himself. I encourage him to speak.

*Maybe sort of the fact that, how war was broke out and you think they’re so stupid, how could they do that. And then you think nowadays, like, you look at war and then you say, ‘Oh my gosh, why am I fighting with this person. It’s just like having a war?’ It’s like, ‘No, I don’t think I should do this.’ You sort of try and come to terms.*⁷³

Mr Weir recognises that many of his students do not share his vision for the purpose of history classes. And he’s trying to do something about it.

*[S]o many people drop out of history going into Grade 10...largely through a lack of interest in history. So I see my role in the junior standards as trying to encourage them to take history, ‘cause it’s a nice and interesting subject.... A lot of them don’t see that. And they’re very concerned with, you know, ‘What can you use it for?’ ... ‘Has it got any practicality? or ‘Will it get me a job?’ No it won’t. ‘Then I’m not taking it.’ So I’d like to think that I can make it interesting for them in Standard 6 and Standard 7 so that they make it their choice subject after that.*⁷⁴

Within the “rigid and restrictive”⁷⁵ syllabus, teachers like Mr Weir are finding it difficult to engage their students in the ways that would make them decide to continue with history in Grade 10. Some of the other

teachers like Ms Fieldings and Mrs Davids express similar concerns with the syllabus and a desire for change, while others like Ms Green and Mrs Folger remain complacent. After teaching history in the same way for many years, change is slow to happen. Ms Weld, head of the history department, explains why.

*The frustrations are... having ideas, but actually not having time to put them into practice, to organise them. And I suppose you should make some time, but I don't know that it's necessary, you know. There does come a time. Perhaps I need the time to sit back and actually reflect, just to get perspective. But there's the constant rush, and that perhaps precludes being able to get the other perspective and to actually plan things and change things. I suppose that's the frustration.*⁷⁶

The difference of opinion over the need for change within the current history syllabus that is evident between teachers at Peninsula High define diverse ways of responding to the freedom within the interim syllabus. Some teachers continue as they have been teaching, uninterrupted, and others see this as an opportunity to bring new ideas, activities, and historical content into the classroom. These differences in philosophy are also apparent between schools. Spending some time at three other former House of Assembly schools that are predominantly white, I found that the conflict between approaches to history had been resolved within each school, but with varying results.

Ocean High, Hoërskool Noord, and River High have similar histories to that of Peninsula High. They all four see themselves as 'dinosaurs' of a previous government, little exposing their students to the racial, cultural, economic, and linguistic diversity that is the reality of South Africa. These schools are insular; they are community schools drawing students from directly adjacent neighbourhoods. Yet isolated as they are, these schools provide quality education to their students. They have outstanding matric results, claim many sporting victories, and give students opportunities to participate in enriching extracurricular activities.

History teachers have approached the isolation of the communities in which they teach and the views that their students hold of their country in two ways. At all three of these schools, history provides students with a sometimes singular link to the outside world. The world that students perceive and come to understand outside of these neighbourhoods, however, depends on the specific historical content chosen by teachers. History teaching at Ocean High, like at Peninsula High, exposes students to a world outside of their sheltered lives by looking overseas; teachers attempt to prepare students for life by fostering an understanding of the broader world. Teachers at River High and Hoërskool Noord, on the other hand, have seen a need to connect their students to the South African reality that lies just outside their doorsteps in an attempt to rekindle a hope in the future of the country.

It is the circumstances, experiences, and backgrounds of their students that have led teachers to decide on their particular approaches to history teaching. One of the driving factors in this decision, teachers explain, is the way that students conceive of the world outside of their neighbourhoods. Overseas is part of life for many of the students at Peninsula High, Ocean High, River High, and, to a lesser extent, Hoërskool Noord. The experience of living or visiting somewhere else shapes the way these students think about their own country. Gregory Will, head of the history department at Ocean High, describes the situation at his school.

[O]ur English-speaking white kids here have a less strong attachment to the country. Certainly because culturally, they think they have one foot in Europe or somewhere else, or American culture maybe. I have a theory about kids that come from this coastal life, kind of literal resort-type area, that they've got their

*backs to the country and they face out to sea. And psychologically I think that is actually how they feel about the country too.*⁷⁷

Responding to what they see as the needs and interests of their students, the teachers at Ocean High have decided to cut South African history completely from the Grade 8 and 9 curricula. “We tend to do a more general kind of, world history really, North Atlantic history really. It’s American and Europe and Mediterranean based,” Mr Will explains.

As I speak with students at the three schools, I see what Mr Will is talking about. The students’ reasons for learning history relate directly to their life experiences of a world beyond South Africa and to the way they see themselves in the future, as citizens of a broader world. At River High, the students think about what they want to know when they go overseas.

*[History will help] when we want to go travelling. If you got kids you can tell them what happened here and when it happened. Otherwise if you don’t know anything, you’ll just go to a country and you won’t know anything. So it’s probably best that you do history and then you can learn about different countries.*⁷⁸

*[L]ike if you go somewhere and there’s a big monument, it won’t necessarily help you; if you don’t know about it and you just see this monument, then it’s not meaningful. But if you know the history, that this is a guy who started a war, or something like that, then it makes the experience a lot more enjoyable and exciting; otherwise it’s just very blah.*⁷⁹

International history has the ability to reach these students who travel overseas with their families. It is exciting and important to them. South African history, in comparison, seems lacking.

*South Africa, well, we have a history, but it’s not as big as overseas.*⁸⁰

*There isn’t as much history in South Africa as in other parts of the world, I mean, we’ve only learned a little now, being in high school. But in primary school we learned about other countries and other countries, I think, have quite a bit more history than what we do.*⁸¹

As Stephanie Bauer, a Grade 8 student at River High, says here, she learned more about other countries in history classes in primary school than she did about South Africa. Her classmate, Andrea Johnson, think she knows why this is the case.

*I don’t think you can say our history’s not as important as other countries or that it’s not as interesting, but it’s a small history, but it’s quite a bad history. Well, not a bad history, but not a very pleasant history, like with apartheid and all of these things. And I just think that people want to just get rid of it, they just want to forget about it. I don’t think it’ll be a very nice moment to hold on to.*⁸²

It is not just the South African past that students at these schools want to forget about. The present doesn’t feel so secure, either, and the future is unknowable, and scary in certain ways. Henk de Groot, history teacher at Hoërskool Noord, explains the particular situation at his school: “The students we’re teaching grew up middle to lower middle class. The change of government has affected them in a negative way, or they perceive it that way.”⁸³

*What do you think of the new South Africa?*⁸⁴

*It sucks.*⁸⁵

*Ja, but Mr de Groot doesn’t likely agree with that. That’s one of the debates we have the most about the new South Africa.*⁸⁶

*What sucks about it?*⁸⁷

*I don't know, it's like some people just get more opportunities than others now. It was like that in the old days too, but they say that we're supposed to be equal now but some people still get more.*⁸⁸

*Ja but that's because they weren't equal at the time. We were more equal. Like [Mr de Groot] explained it, he's explain that we were the whites here and the blacks here, so in order to make us equal we have to give more, and so that's why we feel that it's not so equal. But if you think about it in his way, he is actually right.*⁸⁹

*I don't know, like we were against blacks and now it's all suddenly it's like just turned around and like black people call us boer but we can't call them African. And, I mean, boer is not really such a bad word, but if you, I mean...*⁹⁰

*It's still discrimination.*⁹¹

*...ja it's like saying the bad word for a black man but just in the Afrikaans language. It's not that at all, I don't know it's just...*⁹²

*It's the same meaning, it's the same like if you use a other word to describe a person ...*⁹³

*...Ja, but boer isn't really a bad word, it depends what you mean with it. And their meaning of 'boer' is our meaning of..*⁹⁴

*... 'kaffir.' I don't mean it, but you know what it's like.*⁹⁵

*How do you guys imagine the future that you would wish for South Africa. What would it look like?*⁹⁶

*Everybody would be equal, there is no like denied opportunities and stuff like that. Everybody has a job and houses and no more fights and racism and stuff like that.*⁹⁷

*Ja. And then, because the blacks are having more opportunities now, they're going into the opportunity and to the business or whatever without the qualifications. And so, you can't do something without the knowledge to do it! I mean, they don't have the background. They have only surface knowledge. They don't really have the experience and things....*⁹⁸

*They're still making the same mistakes....So why's there apartheid? They see that it didn't work, but they still do it over again and it's still not working.*⁹⁹

These students feel their own futures threatened by what South Africa is today. As white people, they don't know if they will be able to make places for themselves within this society. It is not only these middle to lower middle class children from Hoërskool Noord who express this insecurity; even students at Ocean High, who come from affluent families not feeling the effects of current unemployment, sense this kind of instability within their country.

*I think our country ... used to be democratic.*¹⁰⁰

*It's not very equal at the moment.*¹⁰¹

*'Cause now like people, people are getting into university with like Es just because of their skin colour, because they have to get equal.*¹⁰²

*And also like jobs...*¹⁰³

*And now you kind of resent almost.*¹⁰⁴

*Now the whole apartheid is like turned around...*¹⁰⁵

*If you go to university, say you want to be doctors, first choice is given to a black man and a black woman and then we only come after that. I think that is racist. It should be the person who has the best qualifications.*¹⁰⁶

*In apartheid they separated everyone and now what we're trying to do in South Africa is bring it all back together. But now, they're all just going opposite again. It's just slowly going against white people.*¹⁰⁷

Uncertainty surrounding the future in South Africa has led many of these students and their families to think of other options. The students at River High speak about how they are looking elsewhere for their own futures.

*I think the future's quite scary and I don't want to look forward to it. We're actually the generation that they're messing with, I guess. Trying to sort things out in South Africa, we're kind of being toyed with.*¹⁰⁸

*This country's desensitized me. Death doesn't really get a reaction any more in this country. And I don't know really where this country is going and that's why I don't really want to live here when I'm older. I mean, it's a dangerous country, the rand is so weak.*¹⁰⁹

*Life here is held so cheap.*¹¹⁰

*This is depressing me. I mean, we're supposed to be the South African future, the future children of the nation.*¹¹¹

*The leaders of Africa.*¹¹²

*Yes, and we're the ones who want to get out. We're the ones who are saying, 'Look at this country, it's going nowhere.'*¹¹³

*I think the ship is going down and it's everyone for himself.*¹¹⁴

*... God, we're a country with major problems, the crime rate.... I'm just going to get out as soon as I finish school, that's my feeling.*¹¹⁵

*People are scared ... No, but I think what resonates is that fact that so many people are leaving. I know so many people, so many of my parents' friends and friends of mine whose parents have immigrated. But they've gone because someone in the ANC said, 'As soon as Mandela's gone we're going to kill all the whites like flies.' I mean, hello! And we're still meant to be happy. I'm like, 'AHHH, I'm getting out.' You know.*¹¹⁶

These cynical and scared notions of what South Africa is for white people and the students' ideas that their futures might not be in South Africa draws these students to a history that is immersion in somewhere else, in overseas. As Mr Will explained, it is for this reason that history teaching at Ocean High focuses on Europe and America. His students identify with this outward-looking worldview.

The students at Hoërskool Noord and at River High also identify with this worldview and express their interest in learning European and American history as opposed to South African history. Their teachers have decided, however, that it is important to teach about South Africa. They aim to change their students' perceptions of the country.

*To me, you know, to me [history's] about giving them hope despite what they may see as a hopeless situation. To give them hope and to make them dream and to let them plan to accomplish those dreams.*¹¹⁷

Mr de Groot continues on to explain to me why teaching his Grade 8 and 9 students about South African history is so important to him.

"I remember seeing coloured people holding hands a few year ago," he says, "and realising for the first time that those people could love like I do."¹¹⁸

Mr de Groot has struggled to rid himself of the blinkers with which he grew up, from his family and from the Christian National Education that shaped his worldview.

[W]e all were products of an education system that they called...Christian National, so everyone was

like the same. You thought the same, they thought the same, the way they taught was the same....But I want to make the pupils see that it's so normal to talk to each other, ... just to play sport together, you know, just to sit in class together; it's so normal to go to one's houses together, to have maybe just a party together.... [O]ur previous system made it abnormal to do it. For instance ... I never see a coloured man or a black man in my folks' house, other than they came to work there or they came to beg, nothing else. And these people, they see the same. So if there is some, say if I invite somebody over to my house and it's a coloured man or a black man, it's abnormal in a way, you know. So I want to change that to being normal, you know.¹¹⁹

Mr de Groot speaks about how the best way to achieve this kind of understanding between races is to have integrated schools. In the absence of that, however, as is the case at Hoërskool Noord, he tries to encourage different ways of thinking and behaving through history classes.

I would want the kids to know their history, the real history of South Africa.... And it's difficult because you can't really say what did happen. You know, with the white and black wars, who were the culprits? From the white side, then the blacks were the culprits and then, from the other side, the whites were the culprits. So I would like to see the real history, which is in a way impossible. But just to—OK, maybe if you can just teach kids that there is not one group that is wrong and the other were right. And maybe the other thing is to teach them that the history was wrong and we want to make it a better place.¹²⁰

As Mr de Groot is the only permanent teacher teaching Grade 8 and 9 history at his school, he has been able to adapt the syllabus as he sees fit; Jennifer Krop, a temporary teacher filling in for only three months, follows Mr de Groot's lead. "I have added a study of the Human Rights to Standard 7 and I put information on apartheid wherever I can. I am making a new syllabus for next year," he tells me as he pulls books off the shelves in his classroom and reads to me passages from authors he thinks his students must read and understand: Alan Paton and Steve Biko.

The teachers at River High have been working with an innovative syllabus that they created for Grade 8 and 9 history for a number of years now, with some of the same goals in mind as Mr de Groot. These teachers are pioneers of the source-based approach in South Africa, having worked with British scholars in the field and published their own materials; they have thus bent the prescribed government syllabus for some time. As Peter Simpson exclaims, "we ignored the whole syllabus for fifteen, sixteen, eighteen years! We devised our curriculum on the basis...of either what we were interested in or on what we thought would be interesting for the kids to do"¹²¹ The teachers at River High still base their courses on these principles.

"We unashamedly try to make it fun in Standards 6 and 7," explains Kathryn Higgins.

With the thought that it is important to teach about local and South African history,¹²² the teachers at River High have to work to fight their students' perceptions of what this history is.

[We] start off by getting them to brainstorm: 'What are the favourite topics that you've ever learned in history and then what are your least favourite topics?' We'd get them to work in groups and then get them to report back and then write on the board with the interesting ones on one side and the least interesting ones on the other. And they all sort of fell into the trap, because when it was the least interesting, you always had the Great Trek and van Riebeeck and the most interesting were the other things. And then you said, 'OK, you see what's happened here?' You see, it always fitted into this same pattern.... And then you'd say, OK, in your groups, work out why these ones were so boring.... And the things that came out at the time were that it was repetitive, that it was too detailed, it was biased, it was just from one point of view. And then get them to talk

about those issues. 'Why was it biased? What made it biased? What is the textbook? Was it the teacher? Was it the material?' So once you sort of unpack that kind of thing, you get them looking at it critically and then you say, 'OK, we're going to try and do some South African history now, but you must watch that we don't do those kind of things.' And get them to think critically, and then in a sense you've opened their minds to viewing it critically and it's not just the same list of facts.¹²³

To do South African history and avoid the boring topics of the past, as the students described them, the teachers at River High have decided to focus on history that is close to the students, both in space and in time.

For the first half of the year in Grade 8, the students look at family history, making family trees and doing interviews with their relatives. They produce books of the stories of their families, some complete with photographs from the 1940s and letters from Grannies to Grandads during the war. One student's book includes the ticket for the ship on which his grandmother had arrived in South Africa, in 1901.¹²⁴

In Grade 9, the students look at local history. As a Grade, they go on a field trip to the Bo-Kaap, the Waterfront, and to Robben Island. They meet with people involved in tourism in Cape Town and discuss how to promote various sites. They then each choose their own topic on which to produce a tourist pamphlet. One of the students, Celia Myers, chose to look at the Liesebek River.

I find it really interesting and stuff learning about the Liesebek River Valley because we live here!... It's like where you come from; you want to find out why Josephine's Mill is there. You sort of look at the piddly little stream which is now the Liesebek River and you realize that boats used to travel up there and you think WOW! That's so amazing and it's interesting to find out about your local stuff.¹²⁵

In 1995, when the interim syllabus came into effect, the head of the history department, Kathryn Higgins, began working for a publishing company on a new textbook that has shaped the second half of the history course for Grade 8 and 9 at River High. The book is what Ms Higgins calls "a source-based approach to modern South African history."¹²⁶

[W]e use that book in Grade 8 and 9. The kids get it in Grade 8 and we do half of it, up to 1948 with the Standard 6s as it were. And then we do the other half with the Standard 7s. So that they only need to have the book once and they keep it for two years. They still don't like South African history. I mean, they still prefer other history. So doing half is enough. Otherwise I think it would kill it for them. But I find using this, that it's changed their attitude a bit towards South African history.... But [doing South African history] is something new, because up until about two years ago, we didn't do any South African history in Grades 8 and 9 because of the anti-South African feeling in those two grades. So we didn't, but now we are doing it. Because I think we should. But [before], there just wasn't anything really available [in terms of teaching materials].¹²⁷

Since the 1980s, the teachers at River High have created many of their own materials for history teaching. "Because I teach here, because I've got the resources, it's very easy for me to say, it's much better just to do your own thing," says Ms Higgins. "... But I'm aware that that doesn't apply to all schools which don't have the resources. Or perhaps the trained staff."¹²⁸ Now, making these materials available to other schools in the form of a textbook, Ms Higgins and her colleagues hope to see a transformation in the way that history has been taught in the past in all schools in South Africa, and the way in which it continues to be taught at schools in similar circumstances, like Peninsula High and Ocean High. Ms Higgins explains how she hopes this new approach to history might work.

[I]f you take something like the 1994 election as a starting point—because that was in a sense such a euphoric time in South Africa and everyone was very optimistic and so on—and you take that as a starting point, and then take that to question the background.... Perhaps studying history [in this way], you can help [students] to understand things so as not to see them in such a pessimistic light.¹²⁹

The privileges of being white under the apartheid system reached most of the families whose children make up the student bodies at Peninsula High, Ocean High, River High, and Hoërskool Noord. The promises of a new South Africa, however, remain distant for the students. These students do not see or experience the diversities of the rainbow nation and, with the continued cutbacks in education, they are uncertain whether the quality of their education will provide them with foundations on which to build a future in their country. They worry about whether they will have a future in the country at all.

Integration of South African society has been slow to happen. De-facto residential segregation that still divides people along economic—and often racial—lines impedes this process and allows, or forces, most South Africans to lead lives removed from the diverse reality of the country. Schools reflect these demographics and will do so for the foreseeable future. Reflecting and responding to the insular communities in which they continue to find themselves, history teaching in former white schools such as Peninsula High, Ocean High, River High, and Hoërskool Noord seems headed in two directions. On the one hand, teachers at Peninsula High and Ocean High, for the most part, continue to teach within the status quo of a Eurocentric history. On the other hand, teachers at Hoërskool Noord and River High are intensely pro-active for a different kind of history teaching in the future. Through both kinds of history, students continue to worry and wonder about what their futures will be like, either inside or outside of South Africa.

NOTES

- ¹ Peninsula High Derby Day. Personal observation. 23 May 1998.
- ² Parent at Peninsula High on Derby Day. Personal observation. 23 May 1998.
- ³ Parent at Peninsula High on Derby Day. Personal communication. 23 May 1998.
- ⁴ Parent at Peninsula High on Derby Day. Personal observation. 23 May 1998.
- ⁵ Personal observation and communication with teachers at Peninsula High. May and June 1998.
- ⁶ Compiled from school data and through personal communication with teachers and staff at Peninsula High. May and June 1998.
- ⁷ Personal observation of Peninsula High. May and June 1998.
- ⁸ "... High School." 1989. School Pamphlet.
- ⁹ ... High School. 30 April 1998. "Annual Survey for Schools for the Western Cape Education Department."
- ¹⁰ Personal communication with teachers at Peninsula High. May and June 1998.
- ¹¹ Personal communication with teachers and students at Peninsula High. May and June 1998.
- ¹² ... High School. 1997. "Educational Policy." Pamphlet.
- ¹³ ... High School. 1997. "Educational Policy." Pamphlet.
- ¹⁴ ... High School. 1997. "Educational Policy." Pamphlet.
- ¹⁵ Personal communication with teachers at Peninsula High. May and June 1998.
- ¹⁶ Head Prefect, 1986. 1997. "When We Were." ... *High School Magazine*.
- ¹⁷ Head Prefect, 1994. 1997. "Recent memories." ... *High School Magazine*.
- ¹⁸ Editorial. 1997. "Achievements: Academic." ... *High School Magazine*.
- ¹⁹ 1990. "Speech for Founders' Day." Unpublished.
- ²⁰ 1990. "Speech for Founders' Day." Unpublished.
- ²¹ Alex Braude. 1997. "... High School enters its Fifth Decade." ... *High School Magazine*.
- ²² Head Prefect, 1986. 1997. "When We Were." ... *High School Magazine*.
- ²³ Editorial. 1997. "... High School enters its Fifth Decade: Achievements, Academic." ... *High School Magazine*.
- ²⁴ Alex Braude, Headmaster at Peninsula High. Personal communication. 5 May 1998.
- ²⁵ ... High School. 30 April 1998. "Annual Survey for Schools for the Western Cape Education Department."
- ²⁶ Nicole Weld, teacher at Peninsula High. Personal communication. 22 September 1998.
- ²⁷ Liz Fieldings, Roland Weir, Barbara Davids, teachers at Peninsula High. Personal communication. May and June 1998.
- ²⁸ In reading a draft of this chapter, Nicole Weld commented in writing that "most of the free periods seem to be spent on organising the sports, clubs and talking to parents."
- ²⁹ In reading a draft of the chapter, Nicole Weld commented in writing on this event. "That auction of senior pupils as slaves for the day. I suspect that it was one of those 'learning experiences.' It got away from the organisers, and ridiculous bids were made—no intentions of paying up. This happened a few years ago with different organisers and a different pupil body. I seem to have memories of the organisers then complaining that they only collected a few rands in spite of the bids. I am trying to track down the organisers to confirm my suspicions. I cannot believe that anything like that sum was raised."
- ³⁰ School assembly at Peninsula High. Personal observation. 11 May 1998.
- ³¹ School assembly at Peninsula High. Personal observation. 11 May 1998.
- ³² School assembly at Peninsula High. Personal observation. 11 May 1998.
- ³³ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ³⁴ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Peninsula High. 22 September 1998.
- ³⁵ Louise Singer, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ³⁶ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ³⁷ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ³⁸ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class B1. 18 May 1998.
- ³⁹ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class B1. 18 May 1998.
- ⁴⁰ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class B1. 18 May 1998.
- ⁴¹ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class B1. 18 May 1998.
- ⁴² Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ⁴³ HDE is a Higher Diploma in Education, a one-year post-graduate initial teaching training.
- ⁴⁴ Nicole Weld, teacher at Peninsula High. Handout to Grade 8 students. April 1998.
- ⁴⁵ Nicole Weld, teacher at Peninsula High. Handout to Grade 8 students. April 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Nicole Weld, teacher at Peninsula High. Handout to Grade 8 students. April 1998.
- ⁴⁷ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class A1. 11 May 1998.

- ⁴⁸ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class B1. 13 May 1998.
- ⁴⁹ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class X. 12 May 1998.
- ⁵⁰ Nicole Weld, teacher at Peninsula High. Handout to Grade 8 students. April 1998.
- ⁵¹ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class B2. 12 May 1998.
- ⁵² Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class A1. 13 May 1998.
- ⁵³ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class B1. 22 May 1998.
- ⁵⁴ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class B1. 22 May 1998.
- ⁵⁵ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class A3. 19 May 1998.
- ⁵⁶ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class A1. 18 May 1998.
- ⁵⁷ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class A1. 11 May 1998.
- ⁵⁸ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class A2. 13 May 1998.
- ⁵⁹ Suzanne Folger, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ⁶⁰ Liz Fieldings, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 25 May 1998.
- ⁶¹ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class A2. 22 May 1998.
- ⁶² Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class A2. 18 May 1998.
- ⁶³ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class A1. 20 May 1998.
- ⁶⁴ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class B2. 20 May 1998.
- ⁶⁵ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class B1. 20 May 1998.
- ⁶⁶ Andrew Bloy, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ⁶⁷ Carolyn Gillespie, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ⁶⁸ Nicole Weld, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 20 May 1998.
- ⁶⁹ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class A3. 11 May 1998.
- ⁷⁰ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. 22 May 1998.
- ⁷¹ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ⁷² Andrew Bloy, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ⁷³ Timothy Little, Grade 9 student at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 September 1998.
- ⁷⁴ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ⁷⁵ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ⁷⁶ Nicole Weld, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 20 May 1998.
- ⁷⁷ Gregory Will, teacher at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ⁷⁸ Megan Young, Grade 8 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ⁷⁹ Andrea Johnson, Grade 8 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ⁸⁰ Andrea Johnson, Grade 8 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ⁸¹ Stephanie Bauer, Grade 8 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ⁸² Andrea Johnson, Grade 8 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ⁸³ Henk de Groot, teacher at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁸⁴ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Hoërskool Noord. 20 October 1998.
- ⁸⁵ Geila Roos, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁸⁶ Glynis Botha, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁸⁷ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Hoërskool Noord. 20 October 1998.
- ⁸⁸ David Boers, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁸⁹ Glynis Botha, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹⁰ Niel Vrede, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹¹ Geila Roos, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹² Niel Vrede, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹³ Glynis Botha, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹⁴ David Boers, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹⁵ Geila Roos, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹⁶ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Hoërskool Noord. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹⁷ Alois Kornmuller, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹⁸ David Boers, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁹⁹ Niel Vrede, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ¹⁰⁰ Steven Carroll, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ¹⁰¹ Cindy Louw, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ¹⁰² Lorna Collin, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ¹⁰³ Cindy Louw, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ¹⁰⁴ Lorna Collin, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ¹⁰⁵ Steven Carroll, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ¹⁰⁶ Lorna Collin, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.

- ¹⁰⁷ Steven Carroll, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ¹⁰⁸ Celia Myers, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹⁰⁹ Dana Jaskolka, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹¹⁰ Graham Osbourne, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹¹¹ Dana Jaskolka, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹¹² Graham Osbourne, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹¹³ Dana Jaskolka, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹¹⁴ Graham Osbourne, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹¹⁵ Dana Jaskolka, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹¹⁶ Celia Myers, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹¹⁷ Henk de Groot, teacher at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ¹¹⁸ Henk de Groot, teacher at Hoërskool Noord. Personal communication. 20 October 1998.
- ¹¹⁹ Henk de Groot, teacher at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ¹²⁰ Henk de Groot, teacher at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ¹²¹ Peter Simpson, teacher at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹²² River High. Personal communication with Kathryn Higgins. 11 June 1998.
- ¹²³ Kathryn Higgins, teacher at River High. Interview. 11 June 1998.
- ¹²⁴ River High. Personal observation of Grade 8 work. 10 June 1998.
- ¹²⁵ Celia Myers, Grade 9 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ¹²⁶ Kathryn Higgins, teacher at River High. Interview. 11 June 1998.
- ¹²⁷ Kathryn Higgins, teacher at River High. Interview. 11 June 1998.
- ¹²⁸ Kathryn Higgins, teacher at River High. Interview. 11 June 1998.
- ¹²⁹ Kathryn Higgins, teacher at River High. Interview. 11 June 1998.

TRANSKEI HIGH

It's 9 o'clock in the morning and the gate to the school is locked. Three male teachers and the Principal are hiding behind the small brick security house that stands by this gate. They are huddled, talking to each other. And they have canes in their hands.

A few minutes later, they walk out from behind the house, canes raised in the air. The two or three hundred students who have arrived at the gate, wanting to come in, jump back in fear from the other side of the locked metal bars. Some of them then begin to walk the other way, towards the informal settlement area where most of them live; some of them just stand there, waiting to see what is going on.

I stand at the end of the parking lot by the red brick wall of the school, watching this sequence of events. I don't understand how it all happens, but somehow it is made clear to these students that in order to come into school, late as they are, they will need to pass by the teachers and the Principal and receive one lashing on the hand. Some of the students dutifully line up by the gate and take their punishment in turn. The first girl through shakes her hand in the air as the cane leaves her skin and she gives it a look as if to wish it were no longer part of her body. And then she runs towards her classroom.

About forty students follow this girl, coming in, taking their lashing, and then they run to their classrooms. When no more students present themselves at the gate to be caned, the teachers and the Principal shrug their shoulders at one another and lock the gate.

Standing on the balcony of the school's upper level an hour later, I am talking with some students. We look out on the overgrown grounds of the school and see students climbing the fence to get to their classrooms. Looking back towards the main gate, we see hundreds of students still standing there, just waiting to come into school.¹

The week before, the gate was locked for a different reason. I was standing outside a Grade 8 class with some students, waiting for their teacher and talking about what they were doing in that class. Finally the period was almost half over, so I asked the students where they thought their teacher might be.

"We don't know where our teacher is now," one of the boys said. The others nodded in agreement.²

We talked for a little longer and then they decided to go to another of the Grade 8 classrooms to hang out with their friends whose teacher was also absent. I wandered back to the staffroom, but was deterred by a commotion in the parking lot. Horns were honking, many all at once. A group of about ten teachers was gathered in a circle, talking angrily amongst themselves.

"What's wrong?" I ask, worried.

"The Principal won't let us out!" one of the teachers exclaims.

I look around to see a line of five cars waiting to get through the gate. Teachers are behind the wheels of their cars, honking their horns, trying to make that gate open. Another five teachers are seated in their cars, in the spots where they had been parked all day. And I am standing with eight other teachers.

"Go get the key!" a teacher shouts from her car to one of her students who is walking by.

The girl turns around and runs into the school to try to find the key.

"No one can find the security guard," one of the other teachers explains to me.

The girl returns empty-handed. She shrugs her shoulders at her teacher and joins her friends who have been waiting for her under the only tree on school grounds.

The security guard appears, looking around at the scene in front of him, and is accosted by the teachers. I see him shrug his shoulders too.

“The Principal gave him instructions not to let anyone out until half past one, our dismissal time,” another of the teachers turns to me to explain once again.

“He’s trying to keep us in our classes. He just doesn’t know there are no students there,” Phumla Mahashe, the Grade 8 history teacher tells me, exasperated. Her students are still waiting in their classroom.

It’s 12:45pm at present. For forty-five minutes, the teachers wait in their cars and around the entrance to the school. Then the gate opens and everybody leaves.³

I turn out of Transkei High and drive into the African township where it is located. I watch children, in all different colours of uniform, making their way home from school. The younger children have already begun their chores, fetching water in buckets—almost as big as themselves—from the communal faucets scattered every couple of hundred metres along the main road. I look up and, in the distance, I can barely see Table Mountain, obscured by the smoke that hangs over the township.

This prevalent smoke is not only from cooking fires, Zukiswa Fanaphi, one of the Grade 9 history teachers, tells me. It is also houses burning, the shacks made of corrugated tin and pieces of wood.

*There’s one girl in Standard 10, I’m doing orals. I couldn’t find her, because they’re cramped where they live, there in section 4, and I understand that their house was burnt down.*⁴

Mrs Fanaphi speaks with me often about the life of students in this community. By the way she talks, I can tell she wants to make me understand the situation in which the school operates. “We have to reissue books all the time,” she says. “They burn with the houses.”⁵ I nod because I have realised that I can tell when the houses are burning. The air is thicker than usual with smoke and the streets are somewhat quiet. One morning, just as I rounded the corner to come into the school, I saw a house that was still smoking, piles of what belongings could be salvaged standing in front of what now looked only like a small bonfire.

Like most of the former Department of Education and Training (DET) schools in the Western Cape, Transkei High was built to cope with the influx of African students from the Eastern Cape. It opened in 1990. Most of the school’s current students arrived in Cape Town at about this same time and the Principal estimates that eighty-five percent of the students are from the rural areas of Transkei.⁶ Almost all of the students and their families live in temporary homes, built where there was space, out of what materials were available. Now, as the election promise of housing comes closer — and *because* it comes closer — their homes are made even more temporary by the risk of fire.

*[Y]ou can see they are trying to build up houses here. They tried to get rid of the squatters Can you believe that this fight now is about those new houses there? People do not take those houses. They say they are very small. Now there are also those who feel they’re sick and tired of living in shacks, because on rainy days everything is wet and all that. Now what’s happening is those who do not want to leave the shacks, kill those who want to go into those houses. They burn their shacks. That is what the fight is about now.*⁷

The kind of violence that dominates life in the township also infiltrates Transkei High. The locked gate can’t even keep the students out, as the teachers and Principal realised when late-coming students jumped the fence in back of the school. “If someone wants to come in, they do,” the Principal explains, exasperated. Mrs Fanaphi recalls an incident from 1997 that still frightens all the teachers; and a number of students tell me about it as they ask me if I’m sure I want to be in their school.

[L]ook at that boy, the one with the checked jacket there. Can you see how beautiful he is? He was shot at ... right in the school premises here. They shot him. It was a fight related to this [township] violence and he was shot at and the police were called.... You can see he is still limping. The bullet is still in him. Yes, he still had the bullet! They were told that they cannot remove that bullet, because if they remove that bullet, he will become paralysed. That is why he walks like that. That's why he limps.⁸

This boy was shot right on the premises of Transkei High. He was with his friends at the back of the school and someone came through the buildings and then shot him. This kind of violence doesn't happen all the time, the teachers assure me, but they also emphasise how circumstances of the community enter into the school constantly in much more subtle ways. "At night they don't sleep," Mrs Fanaphi says quietly as we sit in the sickroom that doubles as her office and try to understand what might be wrong with the student who sleeps on the bed beside us. Sometimes students just don't come to school, she says, and sometimes, like now, they bring the problem with them to school.⁹ Many of the other teachers comment about these same situations with which they are confronted in their classrooms, daily.

[L]et us say a child sleeps in the classroom whilst I am teaching. I cannot just jump in, take his sleeve, 'Hey why are you sleeping?' I have to understand. From the community that we are coming from, you find that sometimes there's a gun battle. Sometimes you find that maybe the kid didn't have the chance to sleep; he or she gets to sleep nearly at 4 or 5 and then at 7 o'clock has to wake up again. How do you expect that child to co-operate well in the classroom? So one has to understand such problems.¹⁰

Despite these circumstances, and frequent feelings of exasperation, during interviews with the history teachers at Transkei High, I sense a kind of hope based on the role they see for education in this context.

That is the kind of community that we work with. Very difficult. But what can we do? We need to help them. Praying that they must have a brighter future, or that their children get a brighter future. And most of them are parentless. They don't have fathers—most of the fathers were killed. Yes! Most of them. You ask them. Just try one day and ask the class, 'How many of you have fathers?' You'll see, maybe out of 50 children only 10 will lift up their hands. Most of them are fatherless and motherless, their mothers were hacked to death. During those fights here.... That's what's happening. So in other words we'll have to try to build up their future. We'll have to try to build up confidence in these children, teach them not to give up. This is not the end of the world. Tomorrow, they'll be parents too. Maybe they'll be educated parents, something that will change the environment in which they lived before. We don't know, but we hope so.¹¹

Many of the teachers say that it is not what their students are learning in school that is so important, but instead simply the fact that they are in school.¹² Mrs Mahashe, on the other hand, who teaches all of the Grade 8 history classes, emphasises the role of history in particular in preparing students to inherit a better future.

What is important is that they must know their roots. That's important because they were not here when these things were happening. Obviously, they will react; some of them will be angry. But they can see now the transition from the apartheid government to this government. They will have nothing to say more than it's thanks that they were born after that time. It's going to be much better.¹³

Mrs Mahashe tells me how her students need to understand "how the black people were treated."¹⁴ They need to know about apartheid in order to know how the transition from the apartheid government to this

government took place. And to know why, in 1998, they live in the situations they do. She sees history as a way to give her students hope for the future.

*They mustn't take history as a past tense, they must take history as a present tense. They must be able to see themselves as the leaders of tomorrow, they must be able to see themselves as the Tutus of tomorrow. Some will say, 'I'll be just like him.' Hence it's very important that they have to know history and they must be able to take history as a present thing, not as a past thing. That motivates them.*¹⁵

Xolani Ndinisa, the most senior history teacher at Transkei High, primarily teaches matric history. But he also teaches Grade 9s in the belief that “the good teachers should at least teach the junior classes... [to] be in the position to develop those kids,... [to] instill in them that history is one of the best subjects.”¹⁶ He echoes some of Mrs Mahashe’s comments about the role of history for students and about how, in order to fulfil these needs, history ought to deal with what’s going on in their lives today.

*I'd also in actual fact teach them about their customs; they should know their customs, and they should have in their mind that one has to respect one's custom or culture. We are a multi-racial society so one does not have to undermine one's culture; they should know that so that they can respect one another.*¹⁷

Mrs Fanaphi joins her colleagues in wanting to teach about history in the present tense. She does not seem as optimistic as Mrs Mahashe and Mr Ndinisa, however, about how to go about doing so. She emphasises the discrepancy between the history that she used to teach in school and what she feels is necessary to teach today.

*[T]he children must know what's happening today, not what's happening in 1870. They're no longer living in those eras. They're living now in another century. They must know what's happening. They must know each and everything that is happening. Like if they're being taught about 1870 when Jan van Riebeeck came to the Cape, that is past. OK, we know history is about the past, the present and the future, but now, this new South Africa. I think they must really teach our children about what they see, what's happening. That's what I think.*¹⁸

The teachers at Transkei High explain how in order to be of service to their students in this way, they need to move away from the restrictions of the current syllabus. Mrs Mahashe expresses her opinion forcefully to me, almost shouting, with a mix of exasperation and defensiveness. “Kids ought to know, even if it’s not in the syllabus!”¹⁹ She explains how her history classroom today is different from the one she herself occupied as a student to show how things have changed, and to make her point.

*[M]y teacher used to teach us what was in the textbook. Nothing else. It's much better [now]. You don't even have to go to the textbook sometimes, you can give a lesson—a history lesson—without even going to the book. Like let us say that I want to teach them about the killing of Amy Biehl;²⁰ she's much more interesting. I can give that as a lesson for a day, and it's something that the kids won't forget. It's something that has happened, here in Cape Town. It's something that they will never forget, and they will be interested if ever those guys appear on the TV, whenever those guys go to court, they will know that those guys were sentenced or those guys have been set free because of the TRC. I mean it's something: you can create a lesson without even going to the textbook.... They will listen to something like a story and something that they are interested in as compared to teaching them about the Renaissance, which happened in the middle of the past years. Something that is happening now, it's much more interesting to them.*²¹

Mrs Fanaphi and Mr Ndinisa agree with Mrs Mahashe. They are eloquent about what they want to teach in their classrooms. But their voices and spirits also come down hard as they speak about the reality of what goes on in their classrooms. Despite strong feelings of needing to teach their students about what is going on around them now, in the new South Africa, they can rarely act on these goals, they say.

Mr Ndinisa looks me straight in the eyes and tells me how he feels that he comes up short. He speaks specifically about what he wishes he could teach his students so that they could make sense of the world around them.

*These young kids, the Standard 6s, they are the ones who are involved in this 'gangsterism' simply because some of them they don't normally think about their culture, they don't value the lives of the people. So they need people like myself who could in actual fact teach them about their culture, about their norms, about their values so that at least the child, at the end of the day, respects another person. But they don't get that knowledge, you know. So hence you find that the vast majority of them are involved in gangsterism.*²²

Mrs Fanaphi believes that the students at Transkei High don't get this knowledge that Mr Ndinisa speaks of because of what teachers feel forced to teach in their classrooms.

*There's no freedom. You can't do anything, really. You have to teach them what is in the syllabus. Because now if you give them the right stuff, their minds will be drawn off from the syllabus. So you go back to that distorted view.*²³

When I ask Mrs Fanaphi about working with the interim syllabus to bring her new ideas into the classroom, she sighs. But she patiently explains to me a situation she has thought much about.

*Even if we are now in the new South Africa, still our history books hasn't changed. We're still using those old books. Those old ideas where there's no truth. So I don't know if time goes on whether they're going to change the history books.... I wish we can meet the subject advisers and ask them, 'When are they going to change the syllabus?' Because the books that we are using are very old books. I think those books were edited in about 1977, the 70s, I think. Imagine: this is 1998 and those were the apartheid years. You could not teach whatever that is outside the syllabus. And it's still happening. You're still teaching apartheid.*²⁴

Mrs Fanaphi pulls a Grade 9 textbook from under the pile of papers on her desk and it falls open to a page she has looked at many times; the spine of the book is broken more in that place than in any other.

"Look at this," she says to me, pointing to a spot on the page and then looking away to let me read it in privacy.

I look down at the page and see that it deals with South African society at the turn of this century. My eyes are drawn to a list with a star pencilled beside its first two items: a list of groups of people who are 'social problems' in South Africa

Social Problems

1. Poor-Whites
2. Black People²⁵

I look back up at Mrs Fanaphi, but this time she won't look at me.²⁶

I sense this same feeling of hurt when I am speaking with a group of Grade 8 students in an interview. I ask them about how they feel history relates to their lives. After some people had spoken, Siyabulela Hlahla bursts out seeming oblivious to the group or the question.

“Sorry, I want to ask a question of what do you think of history,” he says quickly. “Because I think it’s a wrong subject just because I think when you are starting history you learnt that the Xhosas were treated bad by the British. And I would want revenge to you.”²⁷

The other students nod their heads and wait for me to answer.

“Why do you think history is taught in schools?” I ask Siyabulela.²⁸ He doesn’t miss a beat. He doesn’t wait for the translator to translate into Xhosa, and he speaks back to me in English.

“The reason why I think so is because in primary school we learnt that the Xhosas were caught by the British so that they could be slaves. So I think when I learnt that, I will be angry when I hear that, and then when I see you, I’ll think of that and I would want revenge to you,” Siyabulela explains to me why he thinks what he does.²⁹ When I ask him again, he can’t think of any reason why he should learn this history, though.

“I think history is a wrong subject,” he says, “just because I’ve told myself that we must make peace in our land.”³⁰

After hearing the students speak like this, I ask Mrs Fanaphi about using other books or other resources with which she feels more comfortable. She takes me to the school library. It is a huge room. Before I see it, we have to make our way through its heavy door, locked with a metal grid and a big brass lock. After kicking away a pile of trash that has accumulated from tossed chip bags and sweets wrappers, the security guard unlocks the door for us. We walk in. Metal webbing covers all of the windows, with spaces in its meshing barely big enough for a finger to squeeze through. And when the security guard flips the switch, nothing happens; the lights don’t work. It is dark, very dark, but I can make out the outlines of long wooden bookshelves stretching from me the twenty metres to the far end of the room. As I walk around, I see that there is sometimes one, maybe two, no more than ten books on each shelving unit.³¹

The old textbooks that the school has are not even enough to go around. In Mrs Fanaphi’s Grade 9 class, the students tumble over desks, rushing to get a good view of a book. They stand one behind the other to look over sometimes two pairs of shoulders, as many as five students to a book.³² When they come into class the next day, none of them have read Chapter 12 for homework.

“We don’t have books,” the class murmurs in response to Mrs Fanaphi’s admonishing.

Mrs Fanaphi turns to me, as if with proof to confirm what she has been telling me all along. “Give them work to do, they don’t read,” she says.³³

Mrs Mahashe has stopped having her Grade 8 students look at a textbook in class. Instead, she copies the pertinent information from the book onto the board and the students copy it into their notebooks. The moment she walks in the door to the classroom, she begins to write on the board.

Renaissance

What is Renaissance: --

- It is the rebirth.
- It started in Italy during the 1400s.
- It affected the way people thought.

Mrs Mahashe stops writing on the board and turns around to look at her students. “Write these notes in the back of your books,” she says to their blank faces. And she won’t say another word for the rest of the class.

The students scurry to get their books out of their bags and they begin writing.

- But, to know the Renai, you ought to know the Middle Ages (a period before Renai).
- A period whereby feudalism developed.

The students nod their heads up and down, checking the board for spelling of words as they copy the notes. For the whole of the period, they are as silent as their teacher. When the bell rings, Mrs Mahashe walks out of the room, without saying a word. Her students continue to copy her notes off the board while they wait for their next teacher. That teacher never comes.³⁴

During the three weeks that I spent at Transkei High, this fifty minute period was the only Grade 8 history class that took place. Instead of having six periods during two eight-day cycles, as scheduled by the timetable, this class had one. The other two classes of Grade 8 history simply didn't have history at all. There were three Grade 9 classes during this time; Mrs Fanaphi taught two of her 9E classes and Mr Ndinisa taught one of his 9D classes. Out of a total of 36 classes of history that were scheduled for two eight-day cycles, teachers were present for four.³⁵

With so few classes taking place, I spent most of my time at Transkei High talking with teachers in the staffroom and with students hanging around their classrooms.

I often stand with a group of Grade 8 students outside their classroom as we try to find a few bricks that have been heated by the sun to warm our hands from the cold and dank winter classrooms. The students have many questions for me about why I am in South Africa, why I have come to their school. They are particularly interested in my research. A few days after I met him, Mthombeli Mdingi finally asked me a question I could tell he had been thinking about a lot, during our conversations and also when we were not together.

"Don't you think history makes people fight?" he asks me, concern in his eyes and also a little anger.

"Why do say that?" I ask him, gently, trying to have him let me into his thoughts.

"We read about the white people and the Xhosas and the white people take the Xhosas land."

"I think he's right," his friend adds, looking at me defiantly, expecting me to try to prove them wrong.

All of a sudden, Mthombeli is dismissive and tries to close off our conversation. "It makes me angry, so I leave it behind," he says and crosses his arms.

"How do you leave it behind?" I ask him.

"I don't take it this year," he replies.

The students go on to explain to me that they have a choice between taking history and geography or agriculture and accounting. They make their decisions based on what they did in primary school and what they think will help them in the future, they tell me. Whatever subjects they chose now, they will take all the way to matric. Some of the students don't get a choice. Half of the Grade 8s and half of the Grade 9s take history and geography and the other half take agriculture and accounting.

"They just said I will take history," one of the Grade 8 students tells me during this conversation.

History is required by the Education Department for all Grade 8 and 9 students. I decide to ask Andile Ndima, Head of Department for History,³⁶ how the school decides to offer history and geography to half of the students and agriculture and accounting to the other. He just shakes his head at me.

"That is what our timetable says."³⁷

He doesn't offer any more information.

“How is it going today?” I ask the Principal when I see him walking towards the classroom block one afternoon.

Bertram Chabanga doesn't look like he's stopped running all day. But he does stop to speak with me. He tries to catch his breath.

“Still trying to kick through the dust,” he tells me, shaking his head. His eyes look tired, and now that I've stopped him, he looks like he might not be able to remember which direction he was headed.

“Teachers, learners, parents, even officials, have expectations and one is in the middle trying to make things OK, to do things correctly,” he continues without me saying a word. “If one had an alternative to this job, one would opt for it.”³⁸

Mr Chabanga and I have brief conversations like this almost once a day. He is eager to hear what I think about the school and is always asking for my advice on how he might work through some of the problems that plague education at his school.

His own teachers have ideas about changes that could be made.

On the first day back to school after the winter break, the Principal welcomes his staff. He expresses hopes that this term will be a productive one and emphasises the need to get off to a good start.

“We did not finish the marks before we left for break. Let us try to complete the task of entering the marks by Friday so that we can issue reports,” he tells his gathered teachers.

The teachers start whispering among themselves. Mr Petersen leans over to me and says quietly, “He wants to stay in the comfort zone.”

Susan Bloem breaks the silence. “Can we have the word *must* in our vocabulary?” she asks pointedly, staring at the Principal as she awaits a response.

The Principal pauses to formulate his words and then responds. “Let us make a concerted effort to make sure the marks are done by Friday.”

Some of the teachers sigh loudly, roll their eyes, and begin to leave the room.

“Wait,” Lungile Fakashe shouts above the noise created by moving teachers. “We are going to walk out of this room and we have no direction.”

Some of the teachers leave despite this plea. Others stay to continue a discussion on a direction for teachers in these chaotic first days of school.

“Teachers should go to class,” Michael Cekiso says. “Students know that the teachers don't begin teaching, so they do not come to school. We need to break this trend. We need to show the students that they have to be here.”

Mr Chabanga cuts off this discussion to recognise one of the maths teachers who received an award from the University of Cape Town for her outstanding teaching.

“We need to applaud teachers who are doing great things,” he announces.

The Principal then concludes the meeting and the teachers scatter. Some go to enter marks on the school's computer and others leave to go home. Reports are not issued until the following Wednesday.³⁹

“It's been a long time since I walked this way,” Sindy Mtakatya, a maths teacher, says to me the Wednesday that reports are issued, laughing as we walk away from the administrative block towards the

classrooms. Since school started for the third term a week ago, she hasn't left the staffroom once. I watched her arrive each morning, sit down with her group of four friends, and stay there until about noon each day, talking, looking at magazines, and doing her colleague's hair. And then—around noon—she, and most of the other teachers, would leave.

*This is a normal day. At any point, at the beginning, middle, or end of the term you would walk into the staffroom, and any time of the day, and think that it was breacktime.*⁴⁰

I walk behind Mrs Mkatatya into her class and almost bump into her as she wheels around to talk to me.

“You see?” she says.

“How many are there?” she asks accusatorily of the students who are rushing to their seats.

“Seven,” one of the girls says sheepishly. The other six students look down at their desks.

Walking back to the staffroom with Mrs Mkatatya after class, I listen. She doesn't ask me to answer her questions.

“What about the other 43 kids?” she says. “I will have to teach the same lesson again tomorrow to them. Or they will not understand. How can I teach like this? These students do not want to learn.”⁴¹

In response to concerns about student absenteeism and late-coming, the Principal comes up with a plan. He informs his staff of his intentions through a note left on the board in the staffroom. ‘P.L.O.’ it says above his message; Please Leave On.

NOTICE: TEACHERS WITH CARS

LATE-COMING has assumed unacceptable portions. The DC [Disciplinary Committee] has decided to pounce on late-coming learners. After the beginning of the first period, the gate is going to be locked from tomorrow onwards.

Owners of cars who are late must leave their cars outside as learners have a tendency of forcing their way in when the gate is being opened for a car to enter.

To avoid this inconvenience, arrive timeously.

Your co-operation will be appreciated.

Your Principal.⁴²

When Mr Petersen sees this note, he gets angry. “The Principal is going about bringing things into order in the wrong way,” he says. “The teachers need to be in their classes before the students will come. But the Principal gets attacked by the teachers if he attacks the teachers first.”⁴³

I look around the room and see teachers talking animatedly to each other in Xhosa, making gestures and rolling their eyes in the direction of the Principal's office.

For two weeks, I had been waiting to go to one of Mrs Mahashe's Grade 8 history classes. Each morning I make my way to her office and ask her if she has a class that day. I have always gotten the same answer, “There is no class today.”

I get excited one morning when Mrs Mahashe walks in and tells me, “Oh, I do have a class sixth period.” She continues, though, to warn me. “But the children are not there then. It’s Friday.” She shrugs her shoulders, resigned.

Just before the start of sixth period, I go to find Mrs Mahashe in her office, to walk to class with her. I don’t see her there, so I decide to meet her at the room. I wait outside the door for a couple of minutes and then peer inside. She’s not there, but the class is sitting silently, waiting. I sit there for the whole period with the 18 students who came to class. Mrs Mahashe never shows up. When I ask for her in the staffroom after school, another teacher says glibly, “Oh, she left a long time ago, about 10 o’clock.”⁴⁴

“How can one work in conditions like this?” Mr Chabanga asks me when I come into his office to say goodbye one afternoon. His elbow leans on his desk and his forehead rests in his hand. He looks distressed and unsure of what to do next.⁴⁵

Teachers, principals, parents, and students in many schools continuously ask themselves this same question. The answers and approaches to dealing with these circumstances, however, vary from school to school. Spending time in three other former DET schools in the Cape Town area, I was able to get a glimpse of the unique environments which teachers and administrators create within schools in communities similarly faced with poverty, unemployment, and uncertainty with regards to the future. Each school—Transkei High, Longevity High, Khayelitsha High, and Masakhane High—has a different feel.

Longevity High is one of only a few former DET schools that existed in the Cape Town area before the pass laws were abolished in 1986 and Africans began to move in large numbers from the ‘homelands’ to urban areas. Thus located in one of the older Cape Town townships, Longevity High is surrounded by well-established homes made of brick and concrete and by communities held together by long-time residents. Some of the teachers were students here themselves, twenty and thirty years ago; but they don’t send their own children to Longevity High. As many of the children of families living in this area make their way to former House of Representative and former House of Assembly schools in other areas of the city, it is children from other townships and informal settlements who become the students at this school.⁴⁶

*In the places that they stay, some of them do not have adequate time for learning. Sometimes you give them homework to do, or an assignment to do, but when they come at home there is no effort at all. Sometimes because of the situation that’s in the house—they are overcrowded, they don’t have any facilities like electricity and so on. And that may be having an effect on their schoolwork.*⁴⁷

At school, the students trudge through rubbish, scattered over the open quad in the middle of the school that serves as a gathering place for assemblies. When the bell rings to start the day, some make their way to class, others don’t move; I glance over at one group, standing where they are, huddled in a circle of friends, smoking. Those who do end up in their classrooms have to make room for themselves and their books by pushing pieces of balled-up paper from their desks and benches to the floor.⁴⁸

Charles Modonono walks into class nonchalantly and begins to teach. The students whisper among themselves in Xhosa against the background noise of their teacher’s English. One student volunteers to come up and read a passage out of the textbook, but the other students don’t even look up at their teacher’s request for participation. There is no chalk in the classroom when Mr Madonono spins around to begin drawing the content of the passage on the board. He quickly sends a student to the administration block to fetch some. Returning

triumphant, the girl hands her teacher the chalk and does a little spin, sending her uniform skirt swirling around her waist, before she sits down. As Mr Modonono continues his motion to draw on the board, he realises there is no duster either. Facing the board, he shrugs his shoulders to himself and begins to draw a map of the world atop the maths problems that fill the board.⁴⁹

Khayelitsha High was built the year before Transkei High, according to the same blueprint. Three multi-story brick buildings separated from each other with fifteen metres of concrete slab rise out of the dusty ground on the outskirts of Khayelitsha. A metal fence surrounds an area twice as big as the school, filled with weeds and runaway rubbish, blown in from the tight clusters of homes nearby. There are a few cars in the parking lot and several students wander around the back of the school, but other than that, I see no one. When I walk in the front doors, I see light glowing off a plaque to commemorate the renaming of the school in 1995; the school is otherwise dark. I look into the staffroom, just off to the left as I walk in the door, and see clusters of women talking and laughing.⁵⁰ All of a sudden the Principal appears and ushers me into her office. She asks me to have a seat and shows me some drawings she has been looking at.

“The SRC[Student Representative Council] is involved with the running of this school,” she tells me as we look at the drawings together. “They are involved now in a project to make the classrooms more suitable for learning. They are making these designs.”⁵¹

As I walk to class later on that morning, I can see what Mrs Madola, the Principal, was talking about. The windows to the classrooms bang open and shut, open and shut in the wind with no latches to keep them in place; and a few of the classrooms have no doors. The students from the SRC have drawn replacements for these obvious missing elements and have also included colourful posters to stick on the drab brick walls, and brighter lights. While I have to trudge through paper and other rubbish in the classrooms this day, the students’ drawings are of spotless classrooms.⁵²

When I walk into Sithembele Mawoko’s history classroom, I feel like I am disrupting. It is only a few minutes after the bell has rung to start the day and already, the students are seated behind neat rows of desks. Mr Mawoko stands at the front of the room, taking attendance.

“I must take attendance,” Mr Mawoko explains to me later. “I can then show a parent that the child has not been in class and that is why he or she has failed. I can also catch students who may fail before they do; I will notice the pattern of being absent.”⁵³

The teachers at Khayelitsha High have started to crack down on absenteeism and latecoming, Mr Mawoko tells me; it had assumed unacceptable proportions. In a class later in the day, Phumeza Mawoko, his wife, reprimands her students for coming twenty minutes late.

“You will lose class marks if you do not arrive on time,” she tells her class.

As she is speaking, Mrs Mawoko is interrupted by a group of students wandering aimlessly by the gaping doorframe of her classroom. She sighs.⁵⁴

All of the classrooms at Masakhane High have doors on them, beautiful new doors with locks that have not been picked and bent out of shape. The teachers teach with their doors open, though. The soft sounds of class discussions make their way into the empty courtyard as I walk past the carefully arranged flowerbeds on the outskirts of this communal space. I peek into classrooms as I walk by and see them teeming with students, sitting wall to wall, from the back almost up to the chalkboard, and usually three to a bench.⁵⁵

Masakhane High is a new school. This group of teachers and students started together in 1994, at that time sharing a building with a neighbouring school, holding classes from noon until 5 o'clock. In 1996, the building that houses the school now was built.⁵⁶ This building still looks new. When I drive up to the school, I am amazed by the green grass of the school's front lawn. It is so green and stands out so vividly against the browns and greys of the tiny temporary homes built practically one on top of the other and surrounding the school. Little flowers burst from the planted beds right outside the front doors, purple and yellow; I watch girls bend down right to the ground to gently touch them as they make their way into school in the morning.

As I walk in the door, I see a bustle of students and a teacher, debating with each other about a homework assignment. A student walks in ahead of me and is greeted by the Deputy Principal.

"Good morning, Themba," he says.

"Good morning, Sir," the student replies. He smiles and then lowers his eyes and walks to class.⁵⁷

In the middle of the front hall, where the Deputy Principal stands each morning while students come into the school, is a table that everyone in the school seems to revere. It is covered with a tablecloth and graced with a small vase of plastic flowers. But it is really there to hold the school's encyclopedia. The leather bound and gold embossed volumes are dusted each morning. As I stand in the hall one afternoon, reading some newspaper articles about education in the Western Cape that are posted on the walls of the entrance-way, I see a student come into the foyer. She picks up the D volume of the encyclopedia, looks up an entry, and stands there balancing the big book and her notebook, quietly taking notes on the information. She then closes the book, puts it carefully back in its place and returns to class.⁵⁸

It seems that whenever students leave class, they are going to get books, to find information they have not been able to locate in their classrooms. The history department office is stacked with books, piled almost to the ceiling. They are almost all textbooks, supplied at the opening of the school in 1994. At the beginning of class, Andile Prua sends all his students running to this stack of books; they are writing a surprise open-book test in history class. The students clamber back into class, books in hand, and fall into their seats to begin writing. Some students finish quickly, within ten minutes; others plug away methodically, looking intently at their books and copying whole paragraphs onto their test sheets. Near to the end of the period, one boy gets up to turn in his paper. He stops midway to the front of the room, and rapidly tucks in his shirt. He looks around to make sure no one had caught him so dishevelled. He then proceeds to the teachers' desk and hands over his work.⁵⁹

Transkei High, Longevity High, Khayelitsha High, and Masakhane High share the difficult task of educating children in the midst of poverty and instability. In their ways of handling discipline, of caring for school buildings, and of relating to their students, the teachers and administrators at each of these schools have nevertheless found diverse ways of dealing with the difficult conditions in which they find themselves. However what the schools also share are contingents of history teachers with similar beliefs about the power of their subject within these environments of poverty and instability.

Mr Madonono, of Longevity High, emphasises the need for students in these conditions to understand the history behind why they live where they do and to come to grips with how this situation came about.

[F]or the students in Standard 6 and 7 it will be important for them to look at [history], to be able to know what took place, so that they're able also to analyse the future as well as the present. So to them, history's

very much significant in that sense. Because without having a background and know-how of what was taking place in the past, some of them may be lost in terms of knowing the direction of the development that there may be in South Africa and also elsewhere in other countries. So I think it is very important for them at that early age to develop a sense of appreciation of the past as well as a good understanding of what was taking place so that whatever they do becomes well-balanced and they do not engage themselves in activities or decisions that are not well-informed.⁶⁰

Sipho Simani, of Khayelitsha High, believes that history does not only serve as an illustration to students of why conditions are as they are in 1998. He believes that students must learn, through history, how change might come about; his philosophy of history teaching emphasises specifically the role that students can play as individuals in bringing about this change.

*Now I'm teaching history to kids so that they can understand their nationality, their background, their community, what is it that they need for their community so that they can make a contribution to their community. And what is the reason for them to vote, or what is the role of the government to the people, so that they can be aware of basically what [they're] doing in their country. That's difficult for Standard 6 and 7, but I'm trying always to show them that here are the basic needs, what the government should do for the people so that they can have a society that is normal and the people can relate to each other.*⁶¹

Sheila Mbeki, of Masakhane High, is blunt about why her students need to know and understand history in order to deal with their present conditions and to change that situation.

*I thought history needs somebody who's going to explain, to tell the facts and talk to them, make them understand. And also I thought, it's [the students'] right to know what really happened. Why are they now in shacks? Why are we not equal in terms of the education? Why are the whites always privileged? Why? They need to know.... So you need to tell them what happened. I mean how they react, some of them I think they are crazy to know. But I'm not sure what they think now, because we are still struggling. We are not really there yet there. I mean these things happens for decades so we can't just solve them all within four years, five years of this new government. So they need to know that we've been oppressed for a long time so these things can't just change.... [S]o they can look at the future now, what to do. The future generation, the new generation, they need to change their attitudes. I'm telling them that we don't want them to hate the whites because they must know it's not all of them who were like that. It's their grandparents who make it to be like that. Therefore the only thing for them to do is to change the situation. I'm sure they are thinking like that. I don't know. We need to talk to them.*⁶²

Mrs Mbeki talks to her students every day in class. In her Grade 8 history classes, she is teaching about the Defiance Campaign and the Freedom Charter. Just this year, the school received a new set of history books as part of a sponsorship by a large company.⁶³ She has just this year started using the books, *In Search of History*, and each student has a copy; they all have their books open, but they are looking at their teacher and actively answering her questions.

She reads from the Freedom Charter in the book: "That South Africa belongs to all who live in it.' Is it true?" she asks the class. "Is it happening now?"

"I don't think so, Miss."

"Yes," a girl counters her classmate, looking at him intently. "We have a rainbow nation."

"Tell me about your rights?" Mrs Mbeki probes her class.

“I have the right to be educated,” a girl shouts out.

Mrs Mbeki calls on another student. “I have the right to have a name.”

“I have the right to choose my friends.”

“Do we have equal rights?” she asks, and her students put their hands down. They think for a moment. Some then say yes, others say no.

“Do you believe in equal rights?” Mrs Mbeki continues, looking around the room at a sea of hands, ready to answer.

“We were disadvantaged, so we need more rights than the whites,” a boy sandwiched against the wall at the back of the class stands up to say.

Mrs Mbeki goes on. “Are we secure?” she asks.

“No!” the class says, uniformly.

“People are violent, people are stealing from each other. People are killing each other,” a boy says, with force, and passion.⁶⁴

Mrs Mbeki tells me in an interview the next day what she sees as her role as a history teacher. She refers back to this Grade 8 class and tells me what she was trying to do.

*But the way we teach them, we don't have any other alternatives, because we don't have all the equipment and we don't have the funds because of the area. These people are so disadvantaged. The only thing is to make [the students] respond to whatever you're telling them, make them think for themselves, how can they solve these problems that we have now, how to mix with the other languages, culture, not to lose their own culture, their identities but how to mix as we are the rainbow nation now. Then it's just to talk to them. I don't have the other ways.*⁶⁵

Like Mrs Mbeki and the other teachers at Masakhane High, Mr Mawoko—head of the history department at Khayelitsha High—is trying to teach new things. He has recently begun to break from the syllabus he had been teaching for years and has developed a comprehensive plan for skills-development.

Mr Mawoko walks around the room as his students busily write in their notebooks. They each have two notebooks, one for notes and one for exercises. Each day, they do some exercises. Today, they are reviewing their knowledge and understanding of sources, classifying them according to type: oral, visual, or artefact.

I look up at the board and do the exercise along with the students.

- a) a television set
- b) San rock art
- c) someone's photograph
- d) someone's diary
- e) an interview

I see most of the students skip the first one and proceed to quickly answer all the rest. ‘A television set’ stumps them. Mr Mawoko sees their puzzled looks as he makes his way around the classrooms, stepping over desks and chairs, trying to connect with all of his 27 students.

“If you see Mandela, or whoever you admire, talking in the television set, then it's a visual source. What do you think the television set itself is?” he gives them a hint and then asks.

I see a boy near the back of the class smile, nod his head towards his teacher, and then return to scribble his newly-found answer in his notebook.⁶⁶

After class, Mr Mawoko explains to me how he started to see skills as the basis of history teaching, how he realised that this was a way he could prepare his students for the future.

I feel that the Standard 6s need to have some sort of basic foundations in history.... The matrics did not have this kind of advantage and now they are being tested on sources. And I remember in June when I set a paper for them, they did not even understand what the term 'source' meant and all of a sudden they were referred to sources? So with the Standard 6s, I like to share these basics. If you look at their exercises, some of the stuff would look ridiculous to you. It would be like, 'Gee, is this an English class or is this a history class?' They can't write. I don't want to apportion blame to anyone, their primary, junior primary schools or whatever, but if you ask them to write you a paragraph there are things that you would notice. Some can't use punctuation properly, they can't spell properly. I have to be based in the Standard 6s [to teach] and share those kind of basics with them, because if they are to be successful in any history class, they have to understand how to write properly because history's about writing as much as it is about language and sources.⁶⁷

Mr Mawoko goes on to confide in me that he feels like 'a guru' in this kind of skills-based education, even though he knows it is nothing new.

I taught the Standard 6s this year because when I spoke to my team last year, [the skills-based education] is sort of new to them. It was new to me as well, but not so new because I had this kind of basic introduction to this kind of teaching that we're doing now at UCT.... But when I came into the actual practice [after my HDE], [a skills-based approach] was not that accommodated in the syllabus so you sort of like took your fancy ideas and throw them out the window and do what everybody else does.⁶⁸

The history teachers at Longevity High echo Mr Mawoko's concerns about how it has been difficult for them to work for change within history teaching. "The new textbook has not yet been printed," says Siko Cira with a sigh. As a result, students have no books from which to work and teachers have had to be innovative to get around obstacles such as these, he tells me.

[T]here are some progressive history books that I have as my personal property and that we have here in the library, so we use those kinds of materials and our approach is more source-based. We are doing these things, worksheets for the kids to interact with the information and see and appreciate what they are learning about rather than standing there and lecturing people. And they are also using the audio-visual material to reinforce what we have been teaching.⁶⁹

The day before I came to his class, Mr Cira had shown his Grade 9 students a video about Mandela's life.

"Five minutes to reflect on the video," Mr Cira said as his students filed through the classroom door to their seats. The students began to rush to take their places.

"What did you think?" Mr Cira probes.

"It told us things that we did not know," one boy offers.

"That video gave us a chance to look back at our history and see how we were treated by the white people," a girl begins in English and then switches to Xhosa and Mr Cira translates for me.

Mr Cira looks at his watch. "Five minutes are almost up," he says.

"I gained because I did not know why Mandela was arrested," a girl concludes the discussion.⁷⁰

When I ask Mr Madonono how the teachers at Longevity High decide what to teach in their history classes, he gets excited about the interim syllabus he now works from.

*In fact we do have a guideline from the Western Cape Department... it's sort of a prescribed kind of a syllabus from the Department of Education and other stake-holders of course, like representative from the, from SADTU and also some parents perhaps, and students.*⁷¹

Mr Madonono feels like he has the flexibility within this structure to do what he wants to do and thinks is important in his history classes.

*[W]henever I teach, my history becomes—of course I'm teaching what happened in the past—but I'm also dealing with contemporary history. Like I'm always telling them, 'I'm teaching you about something that you know, something that you've seen with your eyes happening.' For example what happened in 1994, when there were democratic elections, and also what is happening now, for example if there's a statement issued by Mandela for example on TV, or maybe in a newspaper. And so on. I bring it to class, we discuss it in class so that they're getting to grips with what is taking place presently in South Africa.*⁷²

History teachers at Transkei High, Longevity High, Khayelitsha High, and Masakhane High express the need to teach about South Africa's recent past, to empower their students with the knowledge to understand what is taking place presently in this country. Some of the students at these schools, however, are not certain their teachers are doing the right thing. One student at Longevity High questions what his teacher is teaching him about history. He's not so sure it will help him to understand the world in the way he wants to understand it.

*Apartheid, no. I don't think we can talk about things because it makes pain for other people and their families. And then the pain comes again. They must put it in the past and plan for the future. We must think for a new civilisation. We can make a new civilisation now. We can make our life really change for a year. We can make our nation for tomorrow. We can stand for our world, our universe. We can stand for many things, like to make our world rich, to make our world have everything for anyone to live with. We can make ourselves rich for make our pain go away. Especially black people, when they suffer, they feel a lot of pain and others committed suicide because they can't stand for life. Because life is a difficult game for them to stand. Because they don't feel they are important to be in the world, so they hated themselves sometime. Sometime they wished they never been born because they see themselves nothing like nothing. They didn't have a chance before, so they don't see a chance even now because they've never seen it before. So it makes them hurting to remember things. Like when the black people remember that we were living under white people, it makes them think that they can't have a chance to make a new life. Even when it comes, they don't see it. Like children of white people are born rich. Black people have a poor family and but a young child of white people have anything they need. If they want something to their mothers, they will give them, but when I want something to my mother, I can't have it because she can't afford it to get it for me. So it gets personal to us. And sometimes we see our mothers crying in her room. So it's a part of a history. It can hurt us when you see your mother crying just because you can't have a lot of things, like a better education.*⁷³

A group of Grade 9 students at Transkei High bubbles over with excitement when I ask them about their school and the education they're getting. They push each other out of the way to come closer to me so they can speak their minds.

“We have the right to educated now,” one boy says to me proudly. He raises his fist in the air.

“We go to school, we get education so we will have jobs. Not like now.” When this girl speaks, everyone around listens. And they nod their heads.

A knot forms in my throat to prevent me from speaking as I look at her smiling face and think about all the teachers sitting in the staffroom from where I just came.⁷⁴ I think about the teachers at Khayelitsha High carefully taking attendance in each class and about the classrooms bursting with students and animated teachers at Masakhane High. And then I turn my attention back to the girl in front of me, standing in the halls at Transkei High during school hours. What education is she getting? And I think back to what a Grade 8 student at Longevity High said. I wonder how long mothers will continue to weep because so many children can't have a lot of things, like a better education.

NOTES

- ¹ Transkei High. Personal observation. 28 July 1998.
- ² Transkei High. Personal communication with Grade 8 students. 22 July 1998.
- ³ Transkei High. Personal observation. 22 July 1998.
- ⁴ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ⁵ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Personal communication. 22 July 1998.
- ⁶ Andile Mawande, principal at Transkei High. Personal communication. 25 May 1998.
- ⁷ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ⁸ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ⁹ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Personal communication. 29 July 1998.
- ¹⁰ Xolani Ndinisa, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 28 July 1998.
- ¹¹ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ¹² Transkei High. Personal communication with teachers. July 1998.
- ¹³ Phumla Mahashe, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 30 July 1998.
- ¹⁴ Phumla Mahasha, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 30 July 1998.
- ¹⁵ Phumla Mahashe, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 30 July 1998.
- ¹⁶ Xolani Ndinisa, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 28 July 1998.
- ¹⁷ Xolanis Ndinisa, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 28 July 1998.
- ¹⁸ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ¹⁹ Phumla Mahashe, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 30 July 1998.
- ²⁰ Amy Biehl, a white American Fulbright Scholar, was killed in Gugulethu on August 25, 1993 by a group of African youths.
- ²¹ Phulma Mahashe, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 30 July 1998.
- ²² Xolani Ndinisa, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 28 July 1998.
- ²³ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ²⁴ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ²⁵ Mocke, H.A. and H.C. Wallis. 1993. *Exploring History 7*, Fifth Edition. Via Afrika, Limited, Pretoria, pp.79-80.
- ²⁶ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Personal communication. 27 July 1998.
- ²⁷ Siyabulela Hlahla, Grade 8 student at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ²⁸ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 8 students at Transkei High. 29 July 1998.
- ²⁹ Siyabulela Hlahla, Grade 8 student at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ³⁰ Siyabulela Hlahla, Grade 8 student at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ³¹ Transkei High. Personal observation of the library. 29 July 1998.
- ³² Transkei High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class E. 27 July 1998.
- ³³ Transkei High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class E. 28 July 1998.
- ³⁴ Transkei High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class E. 27 July 1998.
- ³⁵ Transkei High. Personal observation. July 1998.
- ³⁶ Andile Ndimisa is Head of Department for History and Geography, however, he teaches only Geography.
- ³⁷ Andile Ndimisa, teacher at Transkei High. Personal communication. 27 July 1998.
- ³⁸ Nomvuselelo Chabanga, teacher at Transkei High. Personal communication. 27 July 1998.
- ³⁹ Transkei High. Personal observation of staff meeting. 15 July 1998.
- ⁴⁰ Alex Petersen, teacher at Transkei High. Personal communication. 20 July 1998.
- ⁴¹ Sindy Mkatatya, teacher at Transkei High. Personal communication. 22 July 1998.
- ⁴² Transkei High. Note from the Principal on the board in the staffroom. 29 July 1998.
- ⁴³ Alex Petersen, teacher at Transkei High. Personal communication. 27 July 1998.
- ⁴⁴ Transkei High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class F. 24 July 1998.
- ⁴⁵ Nomvuselelo Chabanga, teacher at Transkei High. Personal communication. 20 July 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Longevity High. Personal communication with teachers. 28 October 1998.
- ⁴⁷ Charles Madonono, teacher at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁴⁸ Longevity High. Personal observation. 28 October 1998.
- ⁴⁹ Longevity High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class F. 28 October 1998.
- ⁵⁰ Khayelitsha High. Personal observation. 21 October 1998.
- ⁵¹ Vuyelwa Madola, teacher at Khayelitsha High. Personal communication. 21 October 1998.
- ⁵² Khayelitsha High. Personal observation. 21 October 1998.
- ⁵³ Khayelitsha High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class E. 21 October 1998.
- ⁵⁴ Khayelitsha High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class B. 21 October 1998.

- ⁵⁵ Masakhane High. Personal observation. 26 October 1998.
- ⁵⁶ Masakhane High. Personal communication with teachers. 26 October 1998.
- ⁵⁷ Masakhane High. Personal observation. 26 October 1998.
- ⁵⁸ Masakhane High. Personal observation. 27 October 1998.
- ⁵⁹ Masakhane High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class B. 26 October 1998.
- ⁶⁰ Charles Madonono, teacher at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁶¹ Sipho Simani, teacher at Khayelitsha High. Interview. 23 October 1998.
- ⁶² Sheila Mbeki, teacher at Masakhane High. Interview. 27 October 1998.
- ⁶³ Masakhane High. Personal communication with the Deputy Principal. 27 October 1998.
- ⁶⁴ Masakhane High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class I. 26 October 1998.
- ⁶⁵ Sheila Mbeki, teacher at Masakhane High. Interview. 27 October 1998.
- ⁶⁶ Khayelitsha High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class E. 21 October 1998.
- ⁶⁷ Sithembele Mawoko, teacher at Khayelitsha High. Interview. 21 October 1998.
- ⁶⁸ Sithembele Mawoko, teacher at Khayelitsha High. Interview. 21 October 1998.
- ⁶⁹ Siko Cira, teacher at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁷⁰ Longevity High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class F. 28 October 1998.
- ⁷¹ Charles Madonono, teacher at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁷² Charles Madonono, teacher at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁷³ John Denga, Grade 8 student at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁷⁴ Transkei High. Personal communication with Grade 9 students. 22 July 1998.

PLAIN HIGH

The day is grand. Teachers and students alike have been anticipating it for weeks. Almost the whole school is outside, crowded close around the field and then stretched back, seated on the rising grass-covered dunes.¹ The Five-on-Five Soccer Tournament is the highlight of the year for many of the teachers and students at Plain High.²

The tournament has been going on for weeks; in people's minds it has been going on for months. First there was the choosing of teams: each class could put forward one entry. Then there were the prelims, class facing off against class each day at lunchtime. Today, there will be three games: a junior final, a girls' final, and a senior final, in that order.

The PT teacher, also a provincial soccer player, blows the whistle to get started with the final game. The senior boys run onto the field from huddles behind their respective nets and the crowd is dazzled. The boys on each of the teams have been fundraising since the week before, when they knew they had made it to the finals. They wanted to look good, like a team. They took donations from their classmates, from their teachers, from their parents, from people in their communities, and then they forked out a lot of money themselves from their part-time jobs to buy bright, new, sparkling, and matching jerseys.³ Both teams look as if they are the best.

I can feel the excitement of the game, as much so off the field as on. The matric girls dance up and down the sidelines in support of their team; the Grade 8 boys quickly and seriously run after out-of-bounds balls to bring them back to their heroes on the field; people hand over money for ice cream and chips without ever taking their eyes off the game. The crowd is never quiet.

Above the special noises and cheers that fill the schoolyard on this day, though, is the familiar sound of gunshots ringing out off the beach below. Target practice. Like those around me, I jump when I hear the shots. Three weeks in this neighbourhood have not accustomed me to the normality of gunfire. The other spectators, who stay in this area, are startled only momentarily; and then they go back to cheering even louder. The teachers look up every once in a while towards the school's security guards, just to make sure that everything is OK. Standing motionless atop the dunes, silhouetted in the hazy sun, the guards look like military men, keeping watch over their camp, making sure the game can go on without interference from the craziness of the outside world.

Chaos takes over the field as the end of the game begins to feel imminent. Fans have linked arms all the way around the sidelines to engulf the field in a ten-deep mass of moving bodies. The referees try to push people back, with their voices and their bodies, to keep the space of the game for soccer. To little avail. The players try to dodge their fans and the new and beautiful moves they pull out to get around them make the crowd even wilder.

The final whistle blows and the winners are hoisted onto the shoulders of students from all grades. The PT teacher looks back up towards the security guards on the hill. And he gives them a relieved thumbs up.⁴

The paradoxes of this soccer game—the play and cheering amid gunshots—have shaped Plain High since its founding in 1983. Education has taken place against, and as a result of, external conditions.

[T]his school played a major part in the liberation struggle of South Africa. We were one of the few schools that was in protest with the Government since 1983 up until 1990. There were times in our history when

*the Department tried to close down this school because of our political activity. The first Principal, he lost his job because he gave a commitment to fight apartheid. And later on he moved to Australia because he was not in the Government's eyes 'suitable' to be a principal of a school and be against their policies of apartheid. So he lost his job, you see, and a few of our teachers were locked up during the apartheid struggle, three of them were locked up. Many of our kids were locked up during the apartheid struggle.*⁵

The liberation struggle at Plain High meant not only joining the fight against the apartheid regime. As Riaan September, history teacher at Plain High, describes, the school had its own agenda to bring to this struggle. Its teachers were determined to use education as a training ground for their liberation ideal of equality: in 1986, this House of Representatives school accepted 250 African students from Soweto.⁶ These politics placed Plain High at odds with the so-called coloured community of which it was a part.⁷

*...[F]or the community in the Western Cape it is difficult to accept that black people are their equal because of apartheid. As most of the activists will tell you, the so-called coloured community that lives in Cape Town are the most racist people in South Africa because of apartheid. We have been taught that white people are the best, then we have coloured people, then we have Indian people, in that order. But you can never trust black people. So we had to change the mindset of the children first, to accept that these children...from Soweto were just children coming here to be educated.*⁸

The racial integration of Plain High, dating to 1986, has shaped the relationship that the school had, and continues to have, with its immediate community. Most of the families who live in the neighbourhood of the school still will not send their children there.⁹ It is only as a fall-back choice that students come to Plain High; it is those students from all areas of Mitchells Plain who are not accepted at other academically more respected schools who then become its students. The integration process also continues, providing for the rest of the student body: three buses, subsidised by the WCED, arrive each day carrying students from Khayelitsha and Nyanga. The buses are usually late and, watching from the staffroom window, I can see the African students running to their classrooms. They integrate the school in a matter of minutes.

The turmoil that now shakes Plain High, daily, relates to the very issues of equality for which the teachers at this school were fighting as they admitted African students to their so-called coloured school in 1986. While at that time equality meant creating equal opportunity for people of all races, the new South Africa has made students at Plain High wonder if such a world is possible. The so-called coloured students of this school do not know where to look for their futures. Their country is now creating a place for Africans, continues to hold a place for whites, but, as they see it, this South Africa does not imagine a place for those in the middle: the so-called coloureds.¹⁰ As a graduate of Plain High explains, students of this school are part of the 'lost generation.'

Although married today I still see myself as part of the 'lost generation,' first not white enough, now not black enough. We voted for the fox to escape the wolf but the fox only created more deplorable social and economic conditions. We are being taught 'The Democracy' of acceptance & tolerance whilst those in power are a lot of opportunistic pigs out for personal gain alone. After matriculation I had to set aside my ideal of furthering my studies toward a law degree, due to financial difficulties. I am now part of that lost generation, referred to as the 'legacy of apartheid' and a 'statistic,' with no platform to express my opinions and with no structures intact to advance my intellectual capability which I gained as a shock troop of our revolution, who

also advanced from stone throwing to the shooting of the AK-47 rifle and the Mikarov hand pistol. Presently I am using those capabilities to survive in the criminal underworld as my daily livelihood & the interest of my family depends on it.¹¹

The communities surrounding Plain High, and the communities from which its students come, are rife with unemployment and poverty; they are full of people who, like this man, believe they have no other options. Crime and violence result, and the turmoil of education in Mitchells Plain, previously embodied in the liberation struggle, takes on its 1998 form.

Looking out over the grounds of Plain High, I have the impression that war has struck. Barbed wire fence surrounds the school and bits of plastic carried in on the wind dangle from the top, trapped there. Huge metal gates are slammed shut across all access doors at the end of the day, and bolted two or three times. And security guards make their rounds, trying to keep the crime and violence outside the school out of education.

But crime and violence do not stay away from education in this area of the city. As I sit in the concrete classrooms, I shiver. Most of the windows are broken, holes in the middle of each pane of glass, sometimes from a ball, often a bullet. The doors of book cabinets dangle from their hinges, the bookshelves ransacked of all but a few textbooks. Walking out of class on our way to the staffroom at breaktime, I pause with the teachers outside their doors while they lock the metal gates with two heavy brass locks.

Locks on classroom doors and security guards perched on the dunes that surround the school aren't enough to keep the gangsters out, though. Now they're trying fences.

*... They've put up fences now so that the gangsters can't come into the school.*¹²

*Do gangsters still come into the school sometimes?*¹³

Yes. Sometimes, maybe they must walk through the schools. The other people [gangsters] are in the school and then they shoot them and try to kill the gangsters and so they hurt innocent people.¹⁴

*Do you feel that gangsters affect the way that you can learn in school?*¹⁵

*Sometimes they have to dismiss the school, we have to go home because of the fights and everything else.*¹⁶

*We are threatened and we can't come to school.*¹⁷

The gangsters and the taxi drivers clashed and then there was shooting so they had to dismiss the school early. And they wait for you when you leave the school and then they mug you. There's nothing they[the security] can really do about that.¹⁸

*And the police?*¹⁹

*Some of the gangsters are friends with the police.*²⁰

*Some gangsters threaten the police.*²¹

The securities round the school, they're almost scared for the gangsters. Like when there's a fight, some of them won't even bother to like break off the fight or whatever because they are scared that the gangsters...²²

...because they must work nights alone, and when you're alone here the gangsters can just come and kill you.²³

With the fences not working to keep the gangsters out either, some students shrug their shoulders,²⁴ and say "I don't know what to do, Miss."²⁵ Others have come to think that the only remaining option is not to care.

Basically,... I don't even worry about [the violence], because that's normal. It's almost normal for me now. I see it every day, so some of the kids take it seriously but I just leave it, just so.²⁶

Not able to leave it as just so, some of the kids *do* take it seriously.

*I found that a girl was raped here [in school]. And one day there was shooting also here over our school and at the back of the school.*²⁷

*How does that make you feel?*²⁸

*Makes me feel like leaving this place.*²⁹

Leaving Plain High to spend time in the world outside its gates, in their home communities, could be worse, though, the students say.

*One day, there where we are, there near the Butcher shop, one day he had friends—the Butcher and a group of pals. Then a car came, a Merk, a Mercedes Benz car, and they came past at gun point. They stripped us naked and look to see if we had 'tjakkies' [gang signs]. If one of us had a sign, then they would shoot us dead there. We had to walk completely naked and they looked to see between the legs where the signs are, under the feet, but there weren't any signs.*³⁰

These students don't have signs on them yet. But they recognise how easy it would be to become one of the gangsters they fear, especially if they didn't have school to keep them busy, and at least off the streets during the day. It's not like they could have a job instead.

*Because the unemployment rate is so high, that puts people in positions to join gangs and rob people.*³¹

After Grade 8 student Ricardo Robyn tells me about the gangsters in the Mercedes Benz, he sits back in his chair and pulls a lunch out of his bag, sandwiches carefully wrapped by his father and tucked into a paper sack. Talking to these twelve- and thirteen-year old kids, I can't imagine that they could be the gangsters of the future. But, even though they try to fight it as they speak with me, they imagine the possibility of this future for themselves.

*If it's going to carry on like this, the future is going to be bad. But if we do something to stop this violence and this crime or whatever, then we'll maybe have a brighter future.*³²

School can't be an oasis from the violence of everyday life in Mitchells Plain. Its effects, and even the violence itself, penetrate the school gates and into the classrooms. Girls leave their classes to go to the toilet, in groups of five or six. Any fewer would mean certain danger; the teachers know that and let whole sections of their classes leave the room at once.³³

For safety's sake, the way things work within the school responds to the crime and violence of the area. For the students' sakes, and for their futures, the principle aim of teaching at Plain High is to respond to the needs of children growing up in this environment.

Walking into the school, it is the first thing I see every morning. It is also what greets every teacher and every student: *Educate to Liberate*. That's the motto of Plain High. At one time, this liberation was against a powerful political regime; in 1998, it is against the pervasive and enveloping nature of crime and violence. In both time periods, for both reasons, education at Plain High has become a means of liberation, a means of trying to create the future anew.

It is history classrooms that have been the focus of this education.

During [the apartheid era] we focused on getting our freedom.... We called it 'education of the

oppressed.' And history formed the bulk of that education—education for liberation.³⁴

Incorporating this kind of education into schools was the principle goal of teaching during this time.³⁵ Doing so in history class, under a tightly controlled syllabus, however, was not easy, as Debbie Bisset, head of the History Department at Plain High, explains.

[I]n the past we had a fixed syllabus and it was difficult. It was very rigid. And it was very, very difficult because we always had somebody watching over our shoulders and checking up on us. We had to send in our question papers to the department.... We had to tow the line, you see. Literally tow the line because they would be watching us all the time, the type of questions, the way we teach. And, we modified that a bit in teaching because, when they were there, we towed the line, but, [when they were not], we did our own things. And therefore we set the trend at Plain High by defying this sort of old rigid system.... We teach the child a more liberal approach to history: discussion and questioning and not so much the syllabus.... OK, say for instance the question paper. Our question papers had to go into the Department, to the subject advisor and he checked it. So what we'd do is just to show him that we covered the syllabus, we put in one or two questions. But in the meantime we'd have done other things, broader things.³⁶

To circumvent the prescribed syllabus, the history teachers at Plain High used that syllabus as a base and then created classes filled with ideas of liberation and emancipation. It was historical events themselves that provided the templates and catalysts for discussions and plans of action.

[T]he French Revolution is part of our syllabus and from that, [the students] thought that if we could get a revolution going in South Africa it would be nice.... There was a whole debate around this: revolution or ... negotiations? And that debate was very interesting during that time and it was very, very easy to teach history [for liberation].³⁷

1998 has students looking at history in this same way, asking about the roots of the problems around them and how they might look at history for solutions.

I would like to know when did they come up with gangsterism and that kind of things. Where did this things start out? We'd like to know that. Where did it start? Otherwise we would have had freedom. So that's why I would like to know how did gangsterism start.³⁸

Just as students see the need to liberate themselves from the gangsterism that surrounds them in their lives, teachers see their role as educators to develop the kind of lifeskills that aid students in dealing with this kind of world.

Well, for the younger people, I focus mainly on how they should conduct them in every day life. That is the teaching of history to me. Trying to teach them to be disciplined, to be respectful to older people, I encourage them to go to church or go to a mosque and things like that. In that phase where they are, they are easily influenced by drugs, gangsterism, and we as teachers have a role to keep them away from those things we that construe as bad. So I don't focus every day on just subject matter, but also teaching them to be better people.³⁹

Despite the dedication of the teachers to this task, teaching students skills to fend for themselves in the world that surrounds them proves difficult. Whereas school was the site of the struggle, and the focus of energies, for students in the 1980s, teachers today find themselves vying for students' attention among competing forces.

I think that this school is not playing that important a role anymore as in the old days because now that

*we have become an open society, there are more things for younger people to look forward to other than school.... For most of them, school is not very high on their agenda.*⁴⁰

Life inside the gates of the school, as students are quick to point out, is better than life on the outside. But, at the same time, these students see many people around them who went to school, who passed their matric, but who still can't find jobs. Does spending time in school have value, or should we cut our losses and enter the job market right away, the students ask?⁴¹

Responding to the realities of their students, history teachers at Plain High see it as their role to give students reasons to stay in school as long as they can while at the same time equipping them with skills to make their way in the new South Africa.

*I don't see history as teaching facts to pupils. I see it as a subject whereby I can teach them skills ... that they can use in their everyday life, like writing skills, going to the library doing some research, but every day skills like how to fend for yourself in life. That's important to me. And I see history in that way.*⁴²

In the way that Mr September describes, history at Plain High is used as a mechanism to try to engage students with the world around them. Combined with learning these skills for everyday life, the teachers have chosen the specific content for history class to empower students with an understanding of South African society, as it exists today, and how it came into being.

The primary way to engage students with history, the teachers at Plain High have found, is to make its study enjoyable.⁴³ Teachers find it difficult to make history come alive in the upper grades where they feel bound by syllabuses that are geared towards the external matric exams; however, the freedom in Grade 8 and 9 provide them the opportunity to engage their students with both content and lifeskills.

*Since 1983 you had to follow the syllabus and the Inspectors would come to check that you follow the rules. But now we have more freedom to do whatever we want to. Like now in Grade 8, for South African history, we don't follow the prescribed syllabus.*⁴⁴

*How do you decide what to teach?*⁴⁵

*The kids they want to know about Mandela. They ask every year, 'Miss when are we going to learn about Mandela, when are we going to learn about the new South Africa?'.... They say, 'We don't want to hear about British settlers and all that. We want to hear about Mandela and apartheid.' And they quite enjoy it. And we can have a debate in the class because some of them are National Party supporters and some are ANC supporters. So it's quite exciting.*⁴⁶

Carole Septoe, who teaches all of the Grade 8 classes at Plain High, has designed the curriculum for this grade according to the interests that her students express. A month-long unit focuses on, "CURRENT HISTORY: The life of NELSON MANDELA." Ms Septoe had been trying for some time to incorporate into her teaching just such a unit, however, it had previously been difficult to access materials.⁴⁷ It was Mr Mandela's 80th birthday in July 1998 that provided the onslaught of articles to make up the backbone of the unit. Ms Septoe saved a copy of everything she could and asked her students to collect any articles they saw.

*It's not possible for our kids and their families to buy a newspaper everyday. But when I tell them that they must buy it on a certain day, most of them will. Or I tell them to give me the money and then I will buy it for them.*⁴⁸

Two months later, as their study of Mr Mandela begins, students' notebooks burst with articles they

have collected. The ragged edges of newspapers peek out from inside their otherwise neat books, other handouts carefully glued down on the day they received them. The students excitedly pull out the articles as I ask what they've been collecting. "Did you see Mr Mandela jiving with his beautiful wife, Miss?" one girl asks me as she thrusts a picture under my nose. "He's 80 and he got married," she says, amazed, and she sighs.⁴⁹

Besides all of these articles her students clipped from their various sources, Ms Septoe asked them specifically to buy *The Cape Argus* on July 18, 1998. In the weekend newspaper, to celebrate the President's birthday, was a supplement called "Mandela—An asset to our country." Instead of delivering information to her students in her usual story-telling format, Ms Septoe decided that this supplement would form the basis of the unit the Grade 8s would do on Mr Mandela.

As Ms Septoe described, her students would be the principle investigators of this unit.⁵⁰ To do so, she designed the study as a research exercise, providing a five-page handout with questions that her students needed to answer in the spaces provided. These questions, and their instructions were to guide the students through their reading of the articles on Mandela's life.

Answer the questions in full.

Read, to understand the questions.

Look at the mark allocation to determine how much you have to answer per question.

Make sure that you read the supplement "Mandela—An asset to our country."

Enjoy reading it as much as I did!⁵¹

In class, Ms Septoe shares with her students this joy in the material they are covering. She walks around the room while a soft hum falls over the class as the students work in groups of two and three to tackle their work. Sometimes she just waits for students to call her over to ask specific questions; sometimes she looks over the shoulders of her students onto their papers. One boy turns up towards her and gives her a big grin. "I don't know everything yet!" he exclaims and then quickly turns back to read his paper, insatiably.⁵²

"We must read the whole thing to find the answer," another boy tells me as I sit down beside him to share his supplement and read along to try to answer the questions myself.⁵³ Some of the questions the students must answer demand specific facts as answers: "When did Madiba wear his first suit?"⁵⁴ They read line by line to find the date. Other questions ask them to make decisions about what they have read: "Write down 6 qualities (words) about Madiba."⁵⁵ Compassionate and caring are given as examples; the students add wise and strong and democratic, among others.⁵⁶ Ms Septoe also asks her students to interpret what they have read by extracting a portion of one article and asking her students to explain it in their own words.

*For future generations of school children, the name Nelson Mandela will loom largest of all characters in the history books, but for us—we have lived in the epoch.*⁵⁷

On their sheets, the students write about how they are living history.⁵⁸

The skills of reading, analysing, and interpreting are some of the most critical to be learned in history, Ms Septoe says.⁵⁹ And she is excited that she can teach them to her students through historical content that they enjoy, and to which they respond. She does not see herself as their only teacher, however; she believes they should learn from all possible sources. In probing her students to understand what Nelson Mandela proudly told the court at the Rivonia Trial, she tells them to read his words—located and copied from the supplement—to their parents and ask them to explain it.⁶⁰

Ms Septoe does not exempt herself from learning from her students either. As they speak about the

place where Mandela was born, her students start to giggle at her Xhosa pronunciation. “How do you say it?” she asks two girls sitting near the back of the class. The expression on these girls’ faces changes as they become patient. “Q, Q, Q, Q,” they repeat the click, “Q-unu!” They work with their teacher for about five minutes until she finally gets it right. “Very good,” they say in their new roles as teachers.⁶¹

In addition to learning in the classroom and learning at home, Ms Septoe also focuses on what students can teach themselves. She emphasises the importance of research through a final exercise about Mandela’s life by asking her students to “Make your own photo album about the life of South Africa’s president.”⁶² Clippings from newspapers, photocopies from books, any pictures they can find of Mr Mandela should be organised chronologically to tell the story of this man’s life. At first, Ms Septoe wasn’t sure how this exercise would be received and what the results would be like.

*[A]t Plain High they are very lazy to go to the library. They don’t want to go to the library. You must actually bring all the books here and then they will work in the class. That’s the problem that we have with this new system [of outcomes based education].*⁶³

On the day that Ms Septoe collected the assignments on Mandela, there was a buzz about the room. Scissors and glue are scattered about many of the desks and students leap up to borrow a friend’s if they are without. The students who have finished their albums call me over, excitedly, to show me what they have created. Pictures of Mandela adorn pages and pages of lined notebook paper. Some are pictures from the newspaper, in colour; one student even drew Mandela while she watched him on television. And many of the students have stuck in black and white photos of Mandela as a young lawyer in Johannesburg, Mandela at the Rivonia Trial, Mandela being released from prison, all copied from books they found at the library.⁶⁴

*I think they’re enjoying [history].*⁶⁵

As the teachers describe it, the Grade 8 history curriculum at Plain High aims to teach students lifeskills and an understanding of the world around them; it aims to engage students in history by focusing on material of their choosing, that is interesting to them. The curriculum for Grade 9 history has the same goals. Its teachers, Ms Septoe and Mr September, have designed it bearing in mind the questions that students ask each year in history class.

*I told them especially about Plain High’s past in the apartheid struggle and they were enjoying it. They were listening and asking questions and they wanted to know more. Every day when they came, they wanted me to tell them about the history of Plain High in the apartheid struggle. Because they didn’t experience that. They want to hear about it. Now they understand why it is like this. They were so small when we were in the struggle. And they’re asking a lot of questions: ‘Miss, why was it like that? Why did we have apartheid?’ You have to explain.*⁶⁶

The Grade 9 history class at Plain High is built around answering students’ questions about things that they did not experience, but want to understand. Although the teachers have created a syllabus for the course, they feel that there should be freedom in class for spontaneity and for students to contribute to the direction of the course. The structure of the class is therefore directed by both teachers and students sharing their experiences and by following these discussions where they lead.

From the starting point of the apartheid era, understanding the laws of the apartheid government and how they came into being, the Grade 9s think about what it was like to live during that time. They hear the

stories of their teachers.

*I was walking on the beach with my wife one evening. We were just enjoying the sunset and the fresh air. A policeman appeared, almost out of the bushes, and he put handcuffs on us. He took us away, he threw us into his car, you know, and drove off. He didn't ask us any questions. But we did know what we had done. We stepped onto the beach reserved for the Whites, 'Slegs Blankes.' We were walking on our beach, but we were enjoying ourselves too much and so we walked too far. We spent that night in jail.*⁶⁷

Hearing Mr September's story about the past allows students a greater understanding of their own past, they say, incidences from their childhoods that they did not make sense of at the time.⁶⁸

*Our parents used to say, 'Don't play if he's black and you're coloured.' They said don't play with the black boy. We weren't allowed to interact.*⁶⁹

Understanding the reasons behind why the past was as it was, and what it was like to live during this time, the students begin to apply their knowledge to the present and to their worldviews.

*Whatever's the past, you inherit it and bring to your future.*⁷⁰

As an assignment for class, to combine the search for specific information with the acquisition of skills of interviewing, Mr September asks his students to speak with someone—a mother, father, uncle, grandparent—about his or her experiences with apartheid.⁷¹ This project also takes up three class sessions, as the students share their relatives' stories. They speak about how there were different toilets for different races, how white people could sit at the front of the bus and black people had to sit at the back. They tell stories of the passes that people needed to carry with them at all times. But what these students marvelled at, and talked about with each other and their teacher for a long time, was the way that their lives are different to their parents' in relation to crime.⁷²

*Back in the past, the gangsters didn't fight with guns, they used to fight with sand, with bricks and knives and things.*⁷³

*When my parents were still young they were able to walk around the neighbourhood until the evening but now you have to be at home by 6 o'clock 'cause it's not that safe anymore. I have a friend who was shot.*⁷⁴

Thinking back to the past both as a better time in terms of crime and a worse time in terms of freedoms, students think about the liberation that has already happened and that which still needs to take place. With the ideas and knowledge they develop through history class of what life was like in the past, the students create their own sense of what life should not be like in the present.

*How can we learn if there are so many teachers who are going away now? And then, at the end of the day, we are 50 or 60 in a class and then we can't learn.*⁷⁵

*You don't get enough attention from the teacher.*⁷⁶

The history that students talk about with their teachers and parents gives them a picture of what education can be like. It shows them that class sizes of 50 or 60 have not always been normal. School shouldn't be this way, the students say.⁷⁷ Mr September emphasises the role that history can play in teaching students what can go wrong in the world and how to avoid the same mistakes in the future.

I believe in the history class, if I could show them of the evils of apartheid, that helps a lot with nation-building. We are busy with the apartheid era and you can see that there is a lot of empathy and sympathy of the so-called coloured students towards what happened in the black areas, and that helps a lot. It helps a lot to teach them the wrongs of the past. And I always tell them that we can never repeat this, we can never repeat

*apartheid in our history.*⁷⁸

At the same time as their study of apartheid demonstrates to the students what their world shouldn't be like, the teachers at Plain High use this content to help students think about what they think their world *should* be like. In this way, Mr September emphasises what kind of a place can be built upon the negative history of South Africa.

*[History] teaches us that because we have a past that we cannot be proud of, we have to build and we have to look for new values within our school system, within our communities and within our country. We have to respect people for what they are, irrespective of colour, irrespective of their religion. We have to build as a nation, if I can put it this way, on our differences. There is common ground in South Africa for everybody. There is common ground. There is common ground.*⁷⁹

In urging students to think about how they might work for the future of South Africa, on common ground, Ms Septoe and Mr September focus on the resistance struggle. They look back to Kliptown and to the Freedom Charter as the roots of a transition to democracy under Nelson Mandela.

"Our Constitution today is based on the principles of the Freedom Charter," Ms Septoe tells her class. "The Ministers used the Freedom Charter as the basis for a non-racial South Africa."

"But what happened when people tried to gather in Kliptown to create the Freedom Charter?" Ms Septoe continues.

"The police set up road blocks," a girl calls out, eager to share her knowledge with the class.

"Why?" Ms Septoe asks a quiet audience.

The students fidget in their seats, and don't say a word. Ms Septoe hands out a copy a sheet on the Freedom Charter to each student and, by the time she has finished, the whole class is reading, silently.

After reading all ten clauses, the class turns to discussion about what this Charter meant in 1955 and today.

"*Clause 3. The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth*, calls for the nationalisation of the mines, banks and industrial monopolies, for trade and industry to be controlled for the benefit of the people, and for all people to have equal economic and job rights."⁸⁰

"That is so important," a boy calls out.

"But it's not true. We don't all have jobs," another boy explains and then looks at his teacher as if for an answer, or a solution.

Ms Septoe continues.

"*Clause 6. All Shall Enjoy Human Rights*, guarantees freedom of speech, worship, and association, and unfettered freedom of movement."⁸¹

"Ja, human rights," many people in the class shout out and look up at posters of Robben Island that they have made for a previous unit and which now decorate the otherwise bare classroom walls.

"We have Human Rights Day now," a girl says, looking proud that she knows what human rights are.

"*Clause 8. The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened*, sets out principles of free, universal, compulsory, and equal education, promises to wipe out illiteracy, and undertakes to remove all cultural, sporting and educational colour bars."⁸²

"Is that what we have today?" Ms Septoe asks her class.

"Kind of, Miss," a so-called coloured student at the back of the class says quietly.

“Ja, Miss, we can go to any school we want now,” an African girl speaks her mind.⁸³

In addition to having these kinds of discussions about the topics they cover in class, Ms Septoe and Mr September put up notes on the board for students to copy into their notebooks. They write down the specifics about the National Convention in 1953 where Z.K. Matthews wanted to make a democratic constitution.⁸⁴ And they copy the definition of democracy: “the government of a country by its people, usually through parliament.”⁸⁵ To evaluate their students on this unit about apartheid, however, Ms Septoe and Mr September use methods similar to the discussion-based approach they use each day in class: they ask students to explain, in their own words, what certain concepts and events mean in a historical context. At the conclusion of the unit on apartheid, Ms Septoe gave her students one period to complete an open-note task on what they had learned. She didn’t tell them about this skills-based task beforehand, though; she was afraid they would get too nervous and not show up at school.⁸⁶

*[K]ids still see teachers as being the person that knows everything and they would prefer the facts-based history than the skills-based history. They prefer that. They would rather go home study, come back tomorrow and write an exam. But by giving them a skills-based thing, they don't like it because they have to go out in the community, do some research, and things like that. They don't want that. They would rather see me giving them stuff, go home and study it, come back tomorrow and write it. That's that.*⁸⁷

The class rustles around as Ms Septoe explains that there will be a task in class. Some of the students look angry, like this kind of test is unfair. Others cross their arms in front of them on the desk and refuse to get out any pens or paper.

“Follow the same rules as for a test, so keep quiet,” Ms Septoe says forcefully and all her students sit down in their seats. “I want it by the end of this period.”

The class groans, but faces turn towards papers as students begin to concentrate on their task. Some students sit reading their notes, searching for answers. One boy stares up at the ceiling as if into the back of his head for what to say. He gets a smile on his face and begins to write.

*Explain the term ‘apartheid’ in your own words.*⁸⁸

*It's when coloureds and blacks are separated from whites and we cannot go to places where we want to.*⁸⁹

With about ten minutes left of the period, one of the students puts up his hand. Ms Septoe makes her way to his desk and he asks her about one of the questions, a lost look on his face.

“Come, it’s in your notes,” Ms Septoe says and then walks away.

The boy looks dejected. He sits for a moment, but then begins to look through his notebook. “YES!” he exclaims, fist pumping the air in victory. And he begins to write furiously.

From across the room, Ms Septoe smiles.⁹⁰

Plain High students swing banners mightily at the NICRO (National Institute for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of Offenders) Anti-Crime Rally on September 16th 1998. Thousands of students, both primary and secondary, mill around, talking to each other and playing on the bouncing castle that has been brought to this big park for the day. The teachers stand atop the hill that rings the grassy space below, and watch. Many of the students are carrying banners, sending messages to gangsters, to each other, and to the press. The slogans on the Plain High banners, written by the teachers, express the ideology of the school to the public.

It's a CRIME not to fight CRIME.

If we don't teach our children, criminals will.

It's a CRIME not to provide quality, public education.⁹¹

In the midst of Mitchells Plain, crime dominates people's lives, but the school has set for itself a mission to do something about it, to provide quality public education. While eradicating crime from its grounds has proven beyond reach, teachers have dedicated themselves to preventative measures: education for liberation, they call it. Through history class, the Grade 8 and 9 students learn skills of analysis, research, and thinking for themselves, skills they can take with them to the rest of their lives. They learn to piece together information to understand why South Africa is—and why their lives are—the way they are today, and to think about how the future might be different. Ms Septoe and Mr September aim to teach their students to fend for themselves, perhaps in a job market, perhaps on the streets, or perhaps both, as the situation might be.

Spending time at three other former House of Representatives schools, I found similar philosophies of education to be prevalent. The three schools, Flats High, Freeway High, and District High are located in diverse areas of the city, and thus have different school populations. Nevertheless, like Plain High, they are highly politicised, dedicated to the continuation of a liberation struggle that is not yet over for the people within the its walls.

Off of dirt roads, twisting and turning amid the small residential streets of older houses, I arrive at Flats High. Students stream into the building from all directions: from the predominantly Christian houses in the immediate community, from the Muslim area across the large grassy expanse behind the school, and from across the tracks in the informal settlements which have recently sprung up around a nearby established African township.⁹² “It's not a nice place to live, Miss,” one boy whispers to me in class. “They kill a lot of people.”⁹³ The school isn't really where its students want to be either: “The other schools, they didn't take us, so we came here.”⁹⁴

With the reputation as the one of the best schools in the Western Cape, Freeway High draws students to its doors from a wide area. The school prides itself on awards it has won for the beautiful gardens students have created on the grounds with their biology teachers, and on the state-of-the-art computer labs that make possible the production of a professional school newspaper. Students comment that they love coming to school because it feels so safe; unlike the areas in which they live on the Cape Flats, there's no crime here, they say.⁹⁵

District High also attracts students from different areas of the city who commute each day to get to school. These students are mostly the children and grandchildren of former students whose families have moved away from the surrounding areas of the school to the Cape Flats; and almost all of the teachers at the school were once its students too. The front foyer of the school is plastered with newspaper articles about the

‘crisis in education,’ about the struggles of South Africa’s fledgling democracy, and about the students from District High who are active on these issues, trying to make a difference in their country.⁹⁶

The education provided at these schools—in history class in particular—is designed to make students politically aware of South Africa’s past so that they might imagine creating a different kind of future for the country. This kind of history is taught mostly through stories, by the teacher sharing his or her experiences of apartheid, of growing up so-called coloured in the Western Cape. Rather than focus on what they see as irrelevant topics contained in the old departmental syllabus,⁹⁷ the history teachers at these schools are using the freedom they have under the new system to educate their students about the world in which they live outside of school. Ana Lambert of Flats High calls it a “talking curriculum.”⁹⁸

*I don't only teach history. I'm sure you've noticed that in most of my classes I spend time talking about life in general. I suppose because I'm a mother, and trying to tell them, 'Be careful of that.' And I mean, I had quite a difficult year this year with a few difficult boys who were stepping out of line and I knew this is going to lead them astray. And you try to bring them in line again. Especially the conditions, the social area that they're growing up into, it does affect them.*⁹⁹

As Mrs Lambert brings herself into the class, she draws in her students.

*Our teacher she talks to us. Not like the other teachers around, they don't want to talk to us.*¹⁰⁰

*She expresses herself.*¹⁰¹

*We first talk about [what we're doing] before we write it in our books and stuff.*¹⁰²

*The explanation that we get, you can understand and it's clear. And, I mean, like the old apartheid, she herself is disgusted what the country was going through before the new government system.*¹⁰³

*Ja, she's like a storyteller to us. She expresses herself nice and we can concentrate on what she's saying.*¹⁰⁴

*We understand. And sometimes if she tells us something, and there's something more to it, we can figure it out by ourselves because of the way she gives it to us and stuff like that.*¹⁰⁵

In addition to basing her curriculum around recent South African history, Mrs Lambert brings new problems that her students face into the classroom. A recent incident in the school involved a Grade 10 girl who became pregnant but who wished to remain in school during the pregnancy.

“They need to learn not to do it again,” one of the girls in Mrs Lambert’s class said loudly, back against the wall and slouching in her desk. Her defiant look gave it away that it was she who had spoken, even as she tried to conceal herself by looking busy with her books.¹⁰⁶

“What about punishment for the boys?” Mrs Lambert pokes at her class, trying to get them to really think about and discuss the issue.¹⁰⁷ Throughout her classes, she adds these discussions to her ‘talking curriculum,’ using them to help her students gain skills of argumentation, analysis, and critical thinking.

Like Mrs Lambert, Christine Valentine, at Freeway High, tries to use history class to give her students skills to help them understand the social conditions in which they are growing up. She knows how the students criticise the new democracy of South Africa, how they see their world as almost as bad as it can get. And while she agrees that so much is not as it should be in the new South Africa, she wants her students to see how things have changed and then let them judge the evolution of the country for themselves.

“People say there is so much crime, education is in an upheaval, and people say apartheid was better. Now we are going to look at how it was and you can decide.”¹⁰⁸

Ms Valentine introduces her Grade 8s to a unit on apartheid in this manner, explaining to them why it is important to study this topic in 1998. She sits at the front of the class, perched on the small table that is her desk, and tells her students stories. By describing the laws that formed the base of this system, she characterises for them what it was like to live under apartheid.

“You all know stories about District Six, about how your parents were moved to Mitchells Plain, Bonteheuwel. They’re not saying there’s nothing for you. They’re just saying there will be different things for you. That’s why some people think it was OK then. But other people think it was very unfair. But I’m not going to decide for you.”

There is a rustle in the class as some of the students start to make their own decisions.

“Ch-a,” I hear echoing from the back corner of the room.

But other than making noises of disapproval, the students say nothing. When they begin to talk about the homelands, though, there is not only a rustle but a rumble in the class.

“Under the homeland system,” Ms Valentine explains, “everyone was governed by their own. Today we read in the papers and see that all Pagad¹⁰⁹ are Muslim, all the gangsters are this and that. Then we say, OK, all Muslim people live in District Six, for example. Wouldn’t that be peaceful?”

Students push their way out of their seats to try to get to the front of the class, to speak first.

“No! No!”

“No, Miss, it doesn’t work that way.”

Before the class gets out of hand, Ms Valentine sets the rules.

“At this stage, I don’t want discussion,” she says, motioning for everyone to sit back down in their seats. To each student she hands out a page of sources called ‘Introducing Apartheid’ and begins to write questions about these sources on the board. The students settle to read the handout.

*At a cost of several thousands of pounds a new subway for railway workers has been built to connect Salt River station with the Salt River workshops. It will enable White workers and non-White workers to arrive at the workshops and leave them through different subways. But having arrived through their different subways, White and non-White workers will continue to work side by side inside the workshop.*¹¹⁰

After they’ve looked at the sources, the students start to move around the room again. One girl carries her sheet with her over to a friend’s desk. She sits down beside her on the narrow bench, and points to this source. They both start to laugh, giggling at first and then nervously, like they’re not sure whether it’s funny or not. They look up at the questions on the board for some indication of what they are supposed to do with this information.

Do you think the sources give us an indication of how people lived during the apartheid years?

The two girls stop giggling, but stay huddled close to each other behind the one desk not saying a word. The bell rings just then, a huge air raid-type warning sounds, and they quickly pack up and rush outside.¹¹¹

I look in their books during the next class to see carefully penned answers to the question these girls had been pondering.

*Yes because you can see the difference in our country. Today everything has changed.*¹¹²

Although many of the students at Freeway High say that they feel lucky not to have had to live through

apartheid, in an interview, they confide that they are not sure that the changes in South Africa are necessarily for the better.

*Well I don't think [the new South Africa is] for the better. It's getting worse, 'cause the crime rate's also high, and all this bombing and everything.*¹¹³

Students who did not speak when their classmates jumped up from their desks to protest Ms Valentine's idea about putting all Muslims in one area to make life more peaceful also opened up during an interview.

"We didn't think it was right, [what Ms Valentine said]," George Faure, a Grade 8 boy states confidently, nodding his head at the other four people sitting around the table.¹¹⁴

"I thought it was right," Lionel Boesak, another boy in the group, speaks up without raising his eyes from the floor.¹¹⁵

"Why?" George asks accusatorily. "For one, you would get sick talking to the same people of the same religion."¹¹⁶

"You want to find out more about other people and their different cultures," Sylvie Viljoen agrees.¹¹⁷

"Were you saying you thought that maybe it was right, though?" I turn back to Lionel.¹¹⁸

"Yes, because like in our road, all of us are Christian. There's not one Muslim so we talk every day and talk about the same things, like food and that," he tries to explain why he feels the way he does, this time looking intently at each of the other people in the room.¹¹⁹

"Wouldn't it be boring to speak about the same thing?" Sylvie asks him.¹²⁰

"No but, but don't you want to find out what other people eat and how other people live? Don't you want to find out different things?" George prods Lionel, staring at him and tapping his fingers on the table.¹²¹

Lionel looks uncomfortable, but he continues. "Yes, I would like to but I think it would keep peace better like that. Like coloureds have, with the Africans there's usually war and that."¹²²

"Arguments," George adds.¹²³

"In between the whites and the non-whites because it's now like all the non-whites gets jobs and the whites don't get jobs," Sylvie explains.¹²⁴

"It's 'cause of the Africans, they get jobs," Lionel looks relieved that his classmates are starting to agree with him.¹²⁵

"It's the Africans that get the advantage now," George nods his head.¹²⁶

"Apartheid is repeating itself again."¹²⁷

"Over again, only it's visa-versa."¹²⁸

"'Cause if you can't speak a certain language, 'Sorry, job?' You won't get a job."¹²⁹

"Because it's no use you studying and then you can't get a new job. Now we study and they say 'No' because of your skin colour."¹³⁰

"It's still the same but they just don't say it straight to your face."¹³¹

"They say 'I'll call you back.'"¹³²

"'Don't call us, we'll call you.' That's the sentence they use."¹³³

Like the teachers at Plain High, Mrs Lambert and Ms Valentine are attempting, through their history classes, to allow students to imagine that they might have a place in the South Africa they grow up to inherit. As they teach their students about apartheid, they illuminate the 1998 world in which their students live and the

problems that they confront in daily life. They hope to create students who will understand the world they live in and will be equipped with skills that will help them to get jobs despite their skin colour.¹³⁴ At District High, a similar emphasis is evident in history teaching. However, the continued struggle for liberation of which its students are a part is even more apparent than at any of the three other schools.

A nostalgia for the way in which their parents used to live before the forced removals of the 1950s guides the way in which students at District High think about the present and imagine the future.

*Well, the way they had fun in District Six is way different from our times and it was safer. You could stand outside late, late at night and nothing will happen to you.*¹³⁵

*And the gangster wasn't like the gangster now. If they see you, you're in trouble or something, they would help you, they would protect you. If you're walking alone at night, they would accompany you to your house.*¹³⁶

The school has been a way for the students and their families to stay closer to the life they lived before they were moved to the Cape Flats.¹³⁷ But now, since the change of government, education has been restructured in a way that alters the school and what it can provide to these students.

*[M]ost of the teachers is getting retrenched.*¹³⁸

*And our school fees are going higher.*¹³⁹

*And higher.*¹⁴⁰

*We're not getting worthwhile education....*¹⁴¹

*... Did you see how much children are in our class?*¹⁴²

*50 children in that little class.*¹⁴³

*... can't get the proper attention from the teacher.*¹⁴⁴

What the teachers try to do through history class is help their students understand why these changes have happened.

*I try to make that link between the past, which they see as something which is dead to what we've got, a new South Africa, this cliché that people speak about—the New South Africa. So for me, it's to show them that the New South Africa is in fact is a legacy of what happened then and how it will actually affect them now. 'Cause they're saying, 'Look, our parents couldn't go to any school they want to, we can go to any school now, we can go to any movie theatre we want to, so why must we bother?' But in fact, it's the fundamentals, the economic issue, you know, the politics and economics that determines where they live. OK, many of them live in townships, but even though they are impoverished themselves, they don't see where that poverty comes from, what caused it.*¹⁴⁵

What the teachers try to do through school as a whole is empower their students to do something about the situation. They try to engage the students in the kind of action-based politics in which they were involved during the struggle years.

*I believe that students should be protest-oriented.*¹⁴⁶

As I look through a Grade 8 student's notebook, I come upon a timeline she has drawn; there are two sides to the timelines, 'Personal' and 'South Africa.' In 1998, she writes on the personal side that it is her first year at District High. On the South Africa side, she writes "We have a crisis in education."¹⁴⁷ Learning about the causes of this crisis through history class, they are then encouraged by their teachers to take this knowledge and understanding and turn it into action. When I walk into the front foyer of the school, my eyes fix on the

many newspaper articles, photocopied and blown up, tacked to the walls. I come closer and see students in District High uniforms in the pictures and I read with interest how they describe to reporters the crisis in education in their school and in their country.

The prevalence of crime in the neighbourhoods where students stay, the quality of education these students feel they are receiving, and their perceptions of possibilities for their own futures provide the catalyst for history curricula at Plain High, Flats High, Freeway High, and District High. To make sense of this kind of world, the teachers at these schools feel that their students must understand the immediate past of which it is a legacy. In teaching them about apartheid, through their own stories and those of parents and relatives, the teachers emphasise the need for struggle and what it can bring.

Through their history classes, the teachers at these four schools teach their students about the value of fighting for liberation from the circumstances in which they find themselves. In so doing, they face fifty and sixty children in a class and a lack of textbooks and resources to create exactly the education for which they are striving, structural barriers of a system from which they themselves are still seeking liberation. Yet, as the students themselves characterise it, the major challenge to education in their schools is how real the promise of liberation through education is.

*History won't help me get a job, Miss.*¹⁴⁸

Liberation from the worlds in which these students live is employment, and it is scarce. Like the students at Plain High say, the possibility that they will grow up to be gangsters is great, even if they fight against it. They don't see how education—especially not history, no matter what they learn—will take them away from this destiny.

NOTES

- ¹ Plain High. Personal observation. 11 September 1998.
- ² Plain High. Personal communication with teachers and students. September 1998.
- ³ Plain High. Personal communication with soccer team members. 11 September 1998.
- ⁴ Plain High. Personal observation of the Five-on-Five Soccer Tournament. 11 September 1998.
- ⁵ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁶ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁷ Plain High. Personal communication with teachers and the Principal. September 1998.
- ⁸ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁹ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 8 September 1998.
- ¹⁰ Plain High. Personal communication with students. September 1998.
- ¹¹ A former student of Plain High who wished to be identified as 'Criminal – Lost Generation.' Personal communication in writing. 12 October 1998.
- ¹² Eban Robertson, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ¹³ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Plain High. 20 October 1998.
- ¹⁴ Eban Robertson, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ¹⁵ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Plain High. 20 October 1998.
- ¹⁶ Shirley Rex, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ¹⁷ Desiree Kingspoort, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ¹⁸ Ross Tucker, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ¹⁹ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 9 students at Plain High. 20 October 1998.
- ²⁰ Ross Tucker, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ²¹ Eban Robertson, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ²² Ross Tucker, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ²³ Eban Robertson, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ²⁴ Grade 8 students at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ²⁵ Ricardo Robyn, Grade 8 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ²⁶ Rolande Davids, Grade 8 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ²⁷ Razaan Rasool, Grade 8 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ²⁸ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 8 students at Plain High. 20 October 1998.
- ²⁹ Razaan Rasool, Grade 8 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ³⁰ Ricardo Robyn, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ³¹ Warren Hoffmeester, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ³² Ross Tucker, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ³³ Plain High. Personal observation. September 1998.
- ³⁴ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ³⁵ Plain High. Personal communication with teachers. September 1998.
- ³⁶ Debbie Bisset, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 17 September 1998.
- ³⁷ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ³⁸ Razaan Rasool, Grade 8 student at Plain High. Interview. 12 October 1998.
- ³⁹ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁴⁰ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁴¹ Plain High. Personal communication with students. September 1998.
- ⁴² Riann September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁴³ Riaan September, Carole Septoe, Debbie Bisset, teachers at Plain High. Personal communication. September 1998.
- ⁴⁴ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ⁴⁵ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. 11 November 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ⁴⁷ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 7 September 1998.
- ⁴⁸ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 7 September 1998.
- ⁴⁹ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 8, Class 2. 7 September 1998.
- ⁵⁰ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 7 September 1998.
- ⁵¹ Carole Septoe. "CURRENT HISTORY: The life of NELSON MANDELA." Classroom materials, Plain High. September 1998.
- ⁵² Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 2. 9 September 1998.
- ⁵³ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 2. 9 September 1998.

- ⁵⁴ Carole Septoe. "CURRENT HISTORY: The life of NELSON MANDELA." Classroom materials, Plain High. September 1998.
- ⁵⁵ Carole Septoe. "CURRENT HISTORY: The life of NELSON MANDELA." Classroom materials, Plain High. September 1998.
- ⁵⁶ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 2. 7 September 1998.
- ⁵⁷ Carole Septoe. "CURRENT HISTORY: The life of NELSON MANDELA." Classroom materials, Plain High. September 1998.
- ⁵⁸ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 2. 7 September 1998.
- ⁵⁹ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 5 September 1998.
- ⁶⁰ Carole Septoe. "CURRENT HISTORY: The life of NELSON MANDELA." Classroom materials, Plain High. September 1998.
- ⁶¹ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 2. 7 September 1998.
- ⁶² Carole Septoe. "CURRENT HISTORY: The life of NELSON MANDELA." Classroom materials, Plain High. September 1998.
- ⁶³ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ⁶⁴ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 1. 14 September 1998.
- ⁶⁵ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ⁶⁶ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ⁶⁷ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Classroom observation. 9 September 1998.
- ⁶⁸ Plain High. Personal communication with students in Grade 9 Class 7. 4 September 1998.
- ⁶⁹ Shirley Rex, Grade 9 student at Plain High via Translator. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁷⁰ Warren Hoffmeester, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁷¹ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class 7. 4 September 1998.
- ⁷² Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class 7. 4 September 1998.
- ⁷³ Eban Robertson, Grade 9 student at Plain High via Translator. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁷⁴ Ross Tucker, Grade 9 student at Plain High via Translator. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁷⁵ Desiree Kingspoort, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁷⁶ Shirely Rex, Grade 9 student at Plain High. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁷⁷ Plain High. Personal communication with students in Grade 9 Class 1. 8 September 1998.
- ⁷⁸ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁷⁹ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁸⁰ Photocopy handed out in class at Plain High. 8 September 1998. From Reader's Digest. 1995. *Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*. The Reader's Digest Association Limited, Cape Town, 388.
- ⁸¹ Photocopy handed out in class at Plain High. 8 September 1998. From Reader's Digest. 1995. *Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*. The Reader's Digest Association Limited, Cape Town, 388.
- ⁸² Photocopy handed out in class at Plain High. 8 September 1998. From Reader's Digest. 1995. *Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*. The Reader's Digest Association Limited, Cape Town, 388.
- ⁸³ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 8 September 1998.
- ⁸⁴ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 8 September 1998.
- ⁸⁵ Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 9 September 1998.
- ⁸⁶ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 9 September 1998.
- ⁸⁷ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁸⁸ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Classroom Task. 9 September 1998.
- ⁸⁹ Grade 9 student at Plain High. Answer to classroom task. 9 September 1998.
- ⁹⁰ Plain High. Classroom observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 9 September 1998.
- ⁹¹ Slogans for NICRO Anti-Crime Rally. Staff memo circulated in staffroom at Plain High. 14 September 1998.
- ⁹² Flats High. Personal observation. 13 October 1998.
- ⁹³ Grade 9 student at Flats High. Personal communication. 13 October 1998.
- ⁹⁴ Alistair Phillips, Grade 8 student at Flats High. Interview. 14 October 1998.
- ⁹⁵ Freeway High, Personal communication with Grade 9 students. 7 October 1998.
- ⁹⁶ Fatima Adams, teacher at District High. Personal communication. 6 October 1998.
- ⁹⁷ District High, Freeway High, Flats High. Personal communication with teachers. October 1998.
- ⁹⁸ Ana Lambert, teacher at Flats High. Personal communication. 14 October 1998.
- ⁹⁹ Ana Lambert, teacher at Flats High. Interview. 14 October 1998.
- ¹⁰⁰ Shilpa Khan, Grade 9 student at Flats High. 14 October 1998.
- ¹⁰¹ Natalie Woods, Grade 9 student at Flats High. 14 October 1998.
- ¹⁰² Ahad Maru, Grade 9 student at Flats High. 14 October 1998.
- ¹⁰³ Natalie Woods, Grade 9 student at Flats High. 14 October 1998.

- ¹⁰⁴ Shilpa Khan, Grade 9 student at Flats High. 14 October 1998.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ahad Maru, Grade 9 student at Flats High. 14 October 1998.
- ¹⁰⁶ Flats High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 13 October 1998.
- ¹⁰⁷ Flats High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 13 October 1998.
- ¹⁰⁸ Freeway High. Personal observation of Grade 6 Class D. 7 October 1998.
- ¹⁰⁹ PAGAD, People Against Drugs and Gangsterism, is a vigilante organisation that is active on the Cape Flats.
- ¹¹⁰ 'Introducing Apartheid.' Handout from Christine Valentine at Freeway High. Source F, Cape Times, 13 December 1960.
- ¹¹¹ Freeway High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class D. 7 October 1998.
- ¹¹² Freeway High. Written communication in Grade 8 student's notebook. 9 October 1998.
- ¹¹³ George Faure, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹¹⁴ George Faure, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹¹⁵ Lionel Boesak, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹¹⁶ George Faure, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹¹⁷ Sylvie Viljoen, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹¹⁸ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Interview with Grade 8 students at Freeway High. 7 October 1998.
- ¹¹⁹ Lionel Boesak, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹²⁰ Sylvie Viljoen, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹²¹ Georger Faure, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹²² Lionel Boesak, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹²³ George Faure, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹²⁴ Sylvie Viljoen, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹²⁵ Lionel Boesak, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
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- ¹²⁷ Sylvie Viljoen, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
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- ¹²⁹ Lionel Boesak, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹³⁰ Sylvie Viljoen, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹³¹ George Faure, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
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- ¹³³ George Faure, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ¹³⁴ Ana Lambert and Christine Valentine, teachers at Flats High and Freeway High respectively. Personal communication. October 1998.
- ¹³⁵ Lisa Waggie, Grade 9 student at District High. Interview. 6 October 1998.
- ¹³⁶ Fahad Hermanto, Grade 9 student at District High. Interview. 6 October 1998.
- ¹³⁷ Fatima Adams, teacher at District High. Personal communication. 6 October 1998.
- ¹³⁸ Crystal Ogier, Grade 9 student at District High. Interview. 6 October 1998.
- ¹³⁹ Azfandi Jakoet, Grade 9 student at District High. Interview. 6 October 1998.
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- ¹⁴² Fahad Hermanto, Grade 9 student at District High. Interview. 6 October 1998.
- ¹⁴³ Lisa Waggie, Grade 9 student at District High. Interview. 6 October 1998.
- ¹⁴⁴ Lisa Waggie, Grade 9 student at District High. Interview. 6 October 1998.
- ¹⁴⁵ Luke Duvenage, teacher at District High. Interview. 5 October 1998.
- ¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Wallace, teacher at District High. Interview. 6 October 1998.
- ¹⁴⁷ District High. Written communication in Grade 8 student's notebook. 6 October 1998.
- ¹⁴⁸ Plain High. Personal communication with Grade 9 student. 15 September 1998.

CENTRAL HIGH

It is almost a fashion statement at Central High, the yellow and black tags that dangle from jackets, from bags. Sometimes sheathed in plastic and surrounded by leather, it's as if the students are displaying their business cards. But these tags are train tickets and they are not well protected for show. They're wrapped up and attached to the students so that these kids don't lose their tickets home. The fuzzy electronic print amid the yellow and black stripes of the tickets reveals familiar names: Gugulethu, Khayelitsha, Heideveld, Mitchell's Plain.

Although Central High is in-town, its students come from all over the greater Cape Town area, travelling many kilometres each morning and evening. Often in class, these students look tired and I ask them jokingly if they're watching too much television at night. "It's not that, Miss," they say. "It takes me an hour and a half to get to school in the morning and I have to wake up early, so early," a Grade 9 boy tells me.¹ Why do you come to Central High then, I ask them?

*It's a good school.*²

*Our education is not the same.*³

*I would get the education I want. I'm not going to have lack of teachers.*⁴

*We're allowed to go to any school now.*⁵

*Here we think when we learn.*⁶

*So we can learn and make our parents proud.*⁷

*It will get me ahead here.*⁸

Coming to Central High is a conscious choice. It is not a matter of walking to the neighbourhood school; instead, it involves making a commitment to travel to and from school each day, and to pay for that transport. To make this decision means that students and parents think that Central High is somehow better than other options. That's what Darrell Robins, a Grade 9 student, and his father think.

I went to the local school in my neighbourhood for primary school. It's safe where I live, but outside, on that main road, Mitchell's Plain can be the dangerous place they say it is. And my Dad said he didn't want me to have to grow up with that, when I didn't have to anymore. So he started saving money, for bus fare, you know, so that I could come here and be safe, and get a good education. And now he's saving money for my sister. She hopes to come here too next year.⁹

Many students and their parents have made the same decision and commitment as Darrell and his family. In fact, in 1998, only five percent of students came from the immediate area of the school.¹⁰ In the span of seven years, Central High has gone from being a local, community school serving the central city to become a commuter school, drawing its students from all over the greater Cape Town area.

"Since it was established in 1897, [Central High] has been rich with the cultures of white South Africa and the rest of the world, with students originating from as far afield as New Zealand, China, and virtually all the European countries. Yet, we have been impoverished by the absence of so much that is South African," wrote the editor of the 1990 school magazine.¹¹ Writing on the eve of a shift in admission policy of the school, this editor and others reflected on the changes that were about to take place at Central High. "We look forward to [Central High] being in the vanguard of these changes as we move towards a just, free, and open society,"

declared Principal Christopher Jacobs.¹² It was in 1991 that the first non-white students were enrolled at Central High.

The school had been involved in a movement towards this new policy of open schools for a number of years prior. In a private poll in 1986, parents voted in favour of opening the school to all; and in the same year, Central High participated in negotiations with the government about opening schools as a founding member of the Open Schools Forum. But it was not until 1989 that this discussion resulted in action as the school attempted to admit a student of colour. Nevertheless, despite a student petition to the then Education Minister PJ Clase, this student was ultimately refused admission to the school.¹³

Then in September of 1990, the Education Department informed all white schools of a governmental decision to allow these schools to choose between four new models of school. Central High decided to opt for Model B status; it would remain a government school with continued state funding at previous levels but would gain the right to decide who should attend the school, provided that the majority of students were white. In a parental poll of 90 percent of eligible voters, 88 percent gave their support to the ‘opening’ of the school.^{14,15}

Feelings about allowing non-white students to enrol at Central High nevertheless were divided. The Principal opened his remarks at a meeting of parents and staff in October 1990 by stating that “many of the things that some of us only dreamed about seem to be on the verge of becoming reality.”¹⁶ He went on to announce the poll that would determine the future direction of the school and, in his campaign for Model B status, he attempted to convince parents that the purpose of voting for this proposal was one of expediency. “The enrolment of many white schools continues to drop dramatically,” he said, “and all over the country, teachers have been made redundant and schools have been closed. [Central High] has been no exception in this trend. The School Management Council has on numerous occasions expressed its view to the parent body as well as the authorities that the only just and fair solution to this problem is for schools to be allowed to accept pupils on the basis of merit and academic ability and not on the grounds of ethnicity.”¹⁷

The problem to which a solution was sought, as Mr Jacobs characterised it, was not that schools were segregated, but that Central High was threatened with closure. Mr Jacobs had a specific constituency which he needed to convince of the merits of the opening of schools and indeed his remarks were directed toward that particular group. Mr Jacobs felt that he must convince the school community that open schools was the right way to go for practical reasons; and he failed to mention any other driving motivations.¹⁸ As we sit talking about the changes in the school, Simon Brown, head of the history department at Central High, describes to me the political climate in the school at the time that necessitated Mr Jacobs’ approach.

*[W]hen the school opened here, it wasn’t just that we all wanted to open. It was also the expedient thing to do. And staff voted for it for a variety of reasons. And I can tell you for a fact that not all of them welcomed that they would be teaching so-called coloured and black brothers and sisters.*¹⁹

In 1998, looking out over the sea of forty faces that is a class at Central High, I have the impression of seeing South Africa in microcosm. It looks almost like a poster for the perfectly integrated school, the racial make-up of a class equal to that of the population of the region. Yet these students are together for only five hours a day. And then they leave their white pillared school and the bright pink bougainvillea that tumbles around the entrance to Central High in springtime. Many of them go home to rooms shared with sometimes three brothers and sisters, to kitchens where food is not always on the table, and to streets where they feel

unsafe.²⁰ *But the de facto residential segregation that continues to exist in Cape Town—and in South Africa as a whole—means that racially diverse schools are created only by drawing these students from their home neighbourhoods to historically white schools and the privileges they bring.*

“I was very scared to come to this school, because it was a white school before. The blacks were always inferiorly treated,” explains Darrell right after speaking about how he wanted so much to go to Central High, to get a ‘good education.’ And he did go anyway, in search of the kind of education he thought he could receive at Central High. The traditional structure and culture of a former House of Assembly school is what draws many of these students from their home neighbourhoods. “Parents choose this school ... because of what they think [it] can do for their kids,” says Mr Brown.²¹

Before I came to this Model C school, I was at one of the [former House of Representatives] government schools in the area.... And seriously, we—or the children at this school—we don’t really know how lucky we are. Having teachers and people that are involved in our future, but we don’t really think about how lucky we are, having teachers that look out for us, that want to prepare us for our future. And at [my old school], I didn’t have a maths teacher, I lost my English teacher because the government, they cut off from the education expenses. They weren’t able to pay teachers wages, so what happened was that they got retrenched.²²

Many of the students at Central High do realise how lucky they are, and they think of themselves as lucky.²³ They describe to me their newly acquired ability to go to any school, to choose the kind of education that they want to receive. “I wouldn’t have been able to come to this school before,” says Grade 8 student Mujahid Halim.²⁴ For the students at Central High, coming to this school is the meaning of opportunity in the new South Africa. In the mornings, as I watch them run into class off of their trains, buses, and taxis and then in the afternoons as I watch them leave just as quickly, I wonder what this school means to these students as their image and microcosm of their new country. What kind of South Africa does Central High promise to the children who will grow up to govern it?

Even before Central High was integrated, the question of how education at this school represented the country was a contentious one. It is a question Mr Brown has thought a lot about.

We had a guy, an Inspector, who came around here and he said that I’d better watch my step, that I was doing certain things, that I was angry. He said they’d be keeping an eye on me. I said, ‘Good, I’d like you to.’ I said, ‘Maybe you can actually open your eyes to why it is that you’re keeping an eye on me, to what’s going on around you.’ I said, ‘You expect me to, I’m an educator and you expect me to present one particular perspective. What am I supposed to do when the children ask me why is there a state of emergency in this country? Why are the people’s homes in Crossroads being bulldozed?’²⁵

Mr Brown has been teaching history at Central High for thirteen and a half years and he has always seen the history classroom as a place to ask these kind of hard questions, to make students think and try to understand the world around them.²⁶ “I’m not too worried about what I teach [now],” says Mr Brown, “[but] back then I was part of an official inquiry into my teaching at [Central] High School, my politicisation of white South African kids.”²⁷ I notice that he is speaking quietly, eyes looking back in his memory to past days at Central High. And slowly at first and then with more and more passion and energy, he begins to describe to me the atmosphere of the school, what it was like to teach history in ‘those days.’

I felt that it was my duty as an educator to make white students in this school—as a history teacher—aware of what other people were going through, the hidden history. I'll never forget when I took a bus-load of kids to Langa and Gugulethu. They were absolutely, absolutely devastated by what they saw. These were members of the Social Issues Group [a club that Mr Brown formed], who were politically aware ... through their family—and I had children whose parents were members of liberal organisations. And at one time, this was the school to send some of those kids, because this was a liberal school and teachers spoke about the real South Africa and the political situation. ...

And so one of the things that we did in the Social Issues Group that was also very, very nice was that I knew teachers in several coloured schools and African schools and we got the kids together across the colour line. We had a debate in Langa. [Central] High School was very proud of them. They attended a cultural youth conference in Gugulethu and we put on a play and the play that they put on was about white ignorance. And they took a family scene, they work-shopped a family scene from their own homes, and they showed the audience where the prejudices [came from] and ... they asked me, 'Can I use the word 'kaffir'?' And I said, 'What are you doing? You are trying to show to the people where you're coming from. And it's obvious that you have thought about things and that you want to help build a new South Africa'....

They weren't trying to paint themselves as great radicals. What they were trying to do was to show the people in Gugulethu that they were under pressure as well, that it was not easy for a white child in that kind of environment to make that transition. [Mr Brown sighs.] The difficulties. And they were tremendously applauded and afterwards we had a social. And I remember, there were about 14 kids, and about 300 African kids and about 100 coloured.... And we were jiving afterwards. And we had to go home. And I said, 'We've got to go home now; I'll take you back home.' It was about 11 o'clock. And they didn't want to go home. And I feel very good that I was involved in something like that.

But when I came back to school, a staff member said, in my hearing, 'Do you know that the bus was in Gugulethu on the weekend? Do you know it could have been stolen in Gugulethu? [Simon] took the bus to Gugulethu—No, the Principal let him.' In earshot of me. Yeah, there were times when it was very difficult.²⁸

Today, students get together across the colour line each day in their classrooms at Central High. The official barriers to the kind of interaction that Mr Brown was attempting to foster in the 1980s have disappeared. But the underlying barriers—the internalised and social barriers—are still evident. At break time students hang out all over the school. Little groups form to sit on the stairs in each hallway, students drape themselves over the banisters to talk to their friends on the other side. If it's a nice day, coats and rucksacks are spread on the stone walkways outside after students have claimed the coveted spots along the concrete wall overlooking the soccer fields. I walk around, sometimes sitting to eat with a group of students, sometimes just to talk. It is hard not to notice how the students segregate themselves according to race.²⁹

To foster an environment where voluntary interaction between groups of people, and individuals, who have been historically separated from each other, is not easy, the staff at Central High say. The impediments of a commuter school make the task even more difficult. Keisha Roberts, history teacher at Central High, says: "I don't think [the students] have enough time to actually be together... to see the other person as a human being and as an individual with feelings and emotions."³⁰ Intercultural existence for these children starts at 8 o'clock and ends at 14:15 each day. The minute the bell tolls the end of the day, students stream through the gates, headed for the trains and taxis and buses that will take them home. In this way, historical separation is not the

only disparate reality for these children; Africans, so-called coloureds, and whites continue to stay in different areas and the students themselves have difficulty readily deriving commonalities from the lives that they live.

[T]hey have difficulties dealing with each other on an individual level and knowing who they are, what they are, and trying to know who they are and what they are in individual space.... For me what is important is that people respect one another and that they learn that you can't move ahead without having that as your basis. And that is what I always teach.... [But] I don't think people seriously think that it's an issue to be considered. I think they think that it's just going to happen by natural osmosis or something. That it's something you'll grow into, because that is what the government is telling us, 'Give it time, it will just grow on you,' you know. And it doesn't just grow on you. You can grow averse to the thing as well; you could dislike it precisely because you don't understand it and it's just forced on you. So, it's not something that is just going to happen like that. You must want it to happen and you need to understand it to happen.³¹

At Central High, the history class in particular has become a space to think about and to discuss being together at school with people of different cultures, races, religions, and economic backgrounds. This focus and approach of history, designed to meet the needs of the students, is a new possibility for teachers at Central High. "The syllabus is no longer a God," Mr Brown, head of the Central High history department, says; "...you can operate within your own framework."³² He has used this freedom not to tailor the interim syllabus around the needs of his students, but instead to create and implement completely new curricula for Grade 8 and 9 at Central High. He has put on the agenda many issues that he believes were neglected in the past and which need to be addressed in the new South Africa. This change has been driven not only by the political positions of the teachers, and the freedom that they now have to express these ideas. Like Ms Roberts said, change can also derive from the situations in which teachers find themselves. Teachers explain how they have had to change the way they teach to respond to the diversity of the students in their classrooms and the reality that this diversity creates at Central High.

[I]t took quite some time to actually adapt to. Suddenly I'm talking now to people who are affected [by what I'm talking about]. And so now you have to change your style, your attitude, your stance. The whole way you approach [history] has to be different.³³

In the midst of the racial, economic, and religious diversity within the school, Mr Brown perceived the need for the new approach to history in the first year of high school to focus on commonality. The freedom of the interim syllabus has allowed him to do so; the Grade 8 curriculum is a study and discovery of the roots that all humans share. The students call this course 'The Human Family.'³⁴

The Broken String, by Luli Callinicos, forms the backbone of the Grade 8 course at Central High. In fact, although Mr Brown describes first using this text as one that he could "build around,"³⁵ adding materials and exercises here and there, he explains that this year he's "stuck mainly to the text...to give [the course] a framework."³⁶

The Broken String, and the Central High course, focuses on the origins of all humans. It asks students to journey back 100,000 years to meet the "first people like ourselves in the world."³⁷ The book in fact begins even earlier than that, introducing the reader to *Australopithecus afarensis* and the way "this creature"³⁸ lived; it then works its way through evolution from 'creatures' to "people"³⁹ and into the present, to *Homo sapiens*

sapiens. *The Broken String* presents this material in an archaeological manner; it describes the way that people lived, the tools that they used, and how family relationships began to develop.

The author of *The Broken String* frequently intersperses the text of the book with activities designed to engage students in the work of historians: the archaeologist, the oral historian, the document researcher, and in the end, the sociologist and political activist. Over the past number of years, Mr Brown has created a series of lesson plans—used by all the teachers at Central High—that adapt many of these activities to the Central High classroom situation.

“The following items were found in the dustbin of the Zotwana family,” reads the type-written sheet that Mr Brown hands to each student. “Chicken bones, carrot peels, the ‘Cape Times,’ empty Coke cans, 24 cigarette butts, empty Jungle Oats box...” the list goes on.⁴⁰

Students giggle to themselves and the members of their groups as they read about the trash of the Zotwana family.

“Hey, I eat Jungle Oats,” one student pipes up from the back of the class to a chorus of laughter from his classmates.⁴¹

“That’s exactly what I’m trying to do,” Mr Brown explains to me later, “trying to get them to see that this could be their dustbin.”⁴²

In class the previous day, Mr Brown had assigned the students to groups of four and then arranged the desks in small clusters to facilitate the process of this class group-work exercise. When the students walk in the door on the day of the exercise, their first task is to spend five minutes deciding on the role of each person in the group. The roles, listed by Mr Brown on the top of the page, are Scribe, Chairperson, Noise-controller, and Time-keeper. With classes of forty and sometimes more students, this kind of group-work needs to be tightly scripted and controlled, or it can quickly lead to chaos, Mr Brown explained to me before class.⁴³

After defining their roles, the students set to work as archaeologists, to figure out the eating habits and other aspects of the Zotwana family behaviour from the contents of their trash. I walk around the room, looking to see what students are deducing about empty Coke cans and the like.

“The first items (the chicken bones) were found at the TOP of the dustbin,” one student reads from her sheet out loud to the other three members of the group. She is the Chairperson.

“Are we being quiet, Miss?” one Noise-controller asks me, worried, as I walk by her group. I smile at her and she looks relieved; the groups know that five out of a total of twenty-five marks for the exercise are based on their “ability to work together to complete a task.”⁴⁴

The eight groups of archaeologists work together until the end of the class. At that point, some groups are still on the first question, having discussed all of their thoughts in so much detail that they never made it to the bulk of the exercise. Others have discovered the menu of what they believe the Zotwanas ate for dinner last night: chicken stew.⁴⁵

“They learn from this,” Mr Brown says aside to me.⁴⁶

In addition to this kind of carefully planned exercise that he designs for the Grade 8 curriculum, Mr Brown also uses his classes to spontaneously put his students into the shoes of historians.

“Can you go somewhere and leave nothing behind?” Mr Brown asks his class in the middle of the lesson on archaeology.

“Sure, we sneak around all the time, Sir,” says Themba who had just walked into class, about ten

minutes late.

“You didn’t sneak by me today, Themba,” laughs Mr Brown. And then he goes over to the desk by the door and starts looking at it up close. “You didn’t sneak by me at all,” he continues. “We would be able to know you had come into this room, and paused to speak with someone; I can see your fingerprints on this desk.”

Themba looks a little guilty, and then shrugs his shoulders.

“How would we know that the rest of you were here today?” Mr Brown asks the class.

“I threw my chewing gum into the rubbish bin when I came in the door,” Rachel says, proud of herself that she’d remembered not to keep chewing in class.

“Somebody carved their initials into this desk. I don’t know when they were here, but it says ‘DB was here!’” piped up James, a quiet boy at the back.⁴⁷

Through history class, the teachers at Central High attempt to place their students in the shoes of other people. They introduce them to the roles of historians and archaeologists to emphasise observation, discovery, and analysis, skills of historical work that students can also take with them to other subjects and future endeavours. Most importantly, however, in the aim of promoting understanding among diverse people, the curriculum and the teachers at Central High focus on empathy. Through their study of the !Kung, the Khoikhoi, the San, and the Basotho, students come to think about the lives, thoughts, and feelings of other people.

I don’t think that [the !Kung] feel happy about moving into a desert where they can still be alone. Because, I mean, it’s worth nothing when you don’t live on the land that your ancestors lived. So then, I think that they feel something that is distant.⁴⁸

Many students at Central High have family experiences of having to leave ancestral land; as Grade 8 student Nadia Petersen does here, they apply these experiences to their study and understanding of the past. In class, Mr Brown emphasises the need for students not only to apply their lives to history, but also to take what they learn about past peoples and use it to consider their own lives.

“If I gave you a pile of rocks and said find the ones with iron and make me a spearhead, could you do it?” Mr Brown challenges his class.

His students look back at him with stunned expressions.

“Of course not,” I hear from a boy sitting beside me. And then silence falls and students look pensive, as if thinking about what it means that they have lost that skill.⁴⁹

[W]hat great influences the nations of the past have on the way we live our lives today. And if it weren’t for them, discovering what they did, would we be here right now?... I don’t think our technology would have been so advanced. I mean just to think, if the Iron Age wasn’t found, or whatever, if people couldn’t find iron, we would have still been in the Stone Age. No cars, nothing. I mean... I don’t think we would be able to live in the Stone Age. And it also teaches us of how many physical skills they had. I mean now all we do is, we push buttons. Ja! Basically we just push buttons and go to shops. But they had to find everything, and how complicated their lifestyles were compared to ours. And actually I think that they’re very bright. Not, OK, if I invent a time-machine, people will think I’m bright.... But if they didn’t, like find out or discover these basic things, and then we wouldn’t be in a stage or the phase that we are right now. So they are quite bright.⁵⁰

Mr Brown’s reasons for choosing The Broken String, and his driving motivations in teaching this course, resound in what Grade 8 student Meegan Lambert states here. “It’s important for students to know where they come from, where we all come from,” he says. “It helps us all to understand what we live today.”⁵¹

In an interview, I see how studying this history not only informs what students live today, but also exposes them to possibilities of how it could be different.

I think that with what people think nowadays, we think that we bright and we scoff at others and laugh at them, people of the past. But what I think is we actually being very stupid, believe it or not we're being stupid. Not because of the scoffing. But what's happening is South Africa has a capitalist economy, so it's basically you have the people that's in the middle and then you have the very rich and then you have the poor and then you have the people that are basically in between. Ja, so we carry on at the rate that we are, no sharing, nothing.⁵²

The way [the !Kung] look after each other, everyone, like cared for each other,... it's like, they were a real community. Today I'm not sure people care that much about each other, look after each other. Like it will be different if you go next door to your neighbour and say, 'Borrow me some sugar.'... In those days that was their way of living every day of their lives, they helped each other, either in a battle or they used to all help like hunting for food, you know, or like eat and have joyous times all like together. And I doubt whether you'll get those days today.⁵³

[T]here's enough resources, sufficient resources for all of us, but I mean if we carry on at the rate that we are, then the middle people are going to get cut out, and we're going to have the very poor and then the very rich. The people that are basically starving and those who have more than enough.... Say, if you take [Nadia] for instance. Say she lives with her mother and father and they don't have a car, they use public transport, right? And then you have say for instance [Karyn] and myself, or [Mujahid] and [Lynn]. We have five cars parking outside in our driveway that we don't even use. I mean we use maybe one or two of them...but it's just there for show, basically to show off. Now what's the point of having all these things to show off and to impress others when there's others that don't have anything? And, I mean that's basically what we're getting at and we think we're so bright. I actually think that we're being stupid.⁵⁴

It is through the skills of empathy and observation, discovery, and analysis that the teachers at Central High attempt to link the history of the human family to a practical world. While the content is integral to developing in the students a sense of common humanity that the teachers feel is so important, Mr Brown identifies this acquisition of these skills as the crucial part of the Grade 8 history curriculum. "You see it's not content that is the main focus of the teaching of history for me," he explains, "it is the skills of historical research."⁵⁵ Above all, students are urged to question and to think for themselves.

I must be honest, I think that [my students] work much harder than I ever worked because there was no real room for the learner to do exploratory work [when I was in school].... I wasn't allowed to question outside of what my page had on its list so I wouldn't be able to question the teacher. Today—though they don't do it—they have the right to question me and tell me, 'You're wrong' if they think that I'm wrong, or they can ask me, 'Why do you say that?' They can actually question my values, my morals, my way of thinking. I know for a fact that we weren't allowed to question 'cause the teacher was the law, and he or she taught from the prescribed text and that was it, you know. You never questioned that kind of authority. Now it's more on a basis of participating, exploring, relating to each other, learning basics and things that are context-bound but also that relate to your life outside, how they fit in. And it was always taught as facts: these things happened, they're the truth, they're indisputable, you don't question them. Now you are told it's a source of reference. It is merely a secondary source, the text. Somebody wrote it because that's how he remembered it. It doesn't

*mean it's accurate. So you are allowed to question a lot.*⁵⁶

This new curriculum, and the critical thinking it represents, is a shift from the static history of the past to a hands-on, interactive, and skills-based approach. Both the teachers and the students are finding that they need to make some adjustments in their teaching, thinking, and learning in order to make this transition.

What I have discovered with my kids now is that they're a little bit confused as to the freedom they have within the learning environment. 'Does that mean that whatever I say is regarded null and void because it's not true in any case, it might not be true?' So they have that as a problem. They don't know whether they should put all their faith in me and whatever I teach them is accurate, or that they should always be suspicious of what I say. And I didn't think that could happen. But it has actually, it did come up where they would ask, 'Now Miss is this really true, or is it just speculation?' you know? And it's good that they question, but they're also confused because they're not sure. They come from primary school where they are still taught [in a rote way]. They get to high school and it's a complete change. I had somebody come to me now. I'm really worried about him passing this year because he's not applying himself. And—it's in my history class—and he said that the reason why he doesn't look like he's doing anything is because he doesn't understand what I'm saying. And I tend to break things down into its simplest form to get them to understand. And he says that he just doesn't know whether what I'm saying is what I'm saying. You know, he's caught between a rock and a hard place. Now that could be an excuse, but it could also be true. And I think that is scary.... They're having difficulty dealing with the shades of grey.⁵⁷

Many students have grown up, going through primary school, in the same way that Ms Roberts described her education. They have thought of their teachers as the ones who knew everything. They have thought of learning for a test as an exercise to make sure you knew the *right* answers. Many of them have never, before coming to Central High, been asked for their opinion. The difficulties that teachers and students are having with this new learning environment of critical thinking are ones to be negotiated; adapting to this new environment is a process that the teachers at Central High have come to realise can only happen with the involvement of everyone.

Each year, Mr Brown gets feedback from the students and the teachers, suggestions for improving it. In addition to this confusion that the teachers and students express over the role of skills and the distinction between fact and opinion, there has also been concern about the accessibility of the content to Grade 8 students.

*[History] doesn't communicate with our outside life.*⁵⁸

*[This history] is the past, but not a past that [the students] can imagine. They must imagine the past, but the past that I'm talking about now, my children cannot imagine. I took them on a trip, I said to them, 'Think back to when you were born. Then think back three hundred years.' And they could do that because that was when European history started. And then they could think back to when Jesus Christ was born. But after that, they couldn't; it's too huge for them to grasp. They can't. And I wish I could change that.*⁵⁹

Students express why it is hard for them to relate to history class: the ancient roots of the human family that they can hardly imagine and cannot see the relevance of in today's life. They also define what it is they feel that they need to know through history. They believe that history is failing them because it does not help them understand the world around them.

What we learn in history, it's not relevant to what we live, 'cause like, we need to go back to the struggle. You know, you're so sick of listening and learning about Jan van Riebeeck, the San. It does matter, but not as much as how people, you know, for the struggle of the country itself.⁶⁰

You don't want to live in a world where you don't know anything. You want to know something about your country, you want to know what it was like living there, what the struggle was for. You don't want to live in a world that people is hiding it from you. 'Cause if someone could ask me, you know, 'What happened during the struggle?' would I be able to tell them? ... You wouldn't want to live in a world that you don't know anything about, especially your own country. That's why history's all for re-discovering.⁶¹

At the end of 1997, the teachers at Central High were faced with a drop in the number of students taking history when it becomes a choice in Grade 10. Students expressed to Mr Brown that they found history boring and irrelevant. They also said they needed to take subjects that would help them with their careers in the future and they couldn't see the place of history. Mr Brown realised that he needed to do something to encourage students to continue taking history once it became an option. Thus, responding to student concerns, he, along with colleagues Josh Kennish and Zaahir Allie, decided to start by creating a new curriculum for the Grade 9 course. Their main objective with this course was to reach the students and engage them in the process of history.

To make history alive and relevant to the students, the teachers at Central High decided to focus their Grade 9 course on the decade of the 1960s. It is a time that the students' parents remember and a period of history that has greatly affected the present. In emphasising this particular period, the three teachers aimed to combine political, economic, and social history in an attempt to create for their students a living picture of the decade of the 1960s.

We are looking at the 1960s and trying to look at ... the advances that we made, change and the impact of events that have shaped our present situation. And also, the 1960s is a common framework on which quite a lot of novels are written, plays, books; people refer to JFK, Marilyn Monroe, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King. These are people who projected a particular image and point of view and people often refer to them. And I think that it is important for young people to have some knowledge of that. I also want to, while I'm busy with that course, to explore areas that some of them are interested in, space and technology and that sort of thing. And I want to show them that history is not just about political events ... but also social and political, economic things. That's why you can't separate politics from economics or politics from society.... They were a little bit alarmed [that I put in that Brazil won the World Cup in 1962], or concerned that that could actually be regarded as history. And I explained to them that we have the World Cup coming up now and I asked them if they were going to watch it. And over half the class were going to watch it. And for them, it's actually going to be an event.... And that is part of your history. And it's part of the social history, the history of how people live, what they do.... And I said to them, today you're listening to something in 1998, but that sound didn't come from nowhere, you can trace the history of that music that you're listening to. You can trace it, somebody didn't just wake up to that. That particular type of music has roots and it goes back in history.⁶²

The students are excited about this kind of history. It allows them to think about their music, about the technology that they surround themselves with. It allows them to understand the world around them in a new, historical way. And it allows them to bring themselves into the classroom.

*It's kind of fun finding out about what happened a few years ago or what happened in another decade.*⁶³

*It's something I can relate to.*⁶⁴

In making history come alive to the students in this way, Mr Brown has steered away from any textbook. Instead, he has prepared course notes that the students receive at regular intervals. Each unit focuses on one year of the decade, pinpointing the major events of that year and providing sources from which to discover the details of the stories. Two central themes of this course come across in the handouts that students receive: first, the changing and delicate balance of power in the world, with a special focus on USA-USSR relations through the study of the Space Race, the Vietnam War, and the Cuban Missile Crisis; and second, the 'winds of change' that swept across Africa in the form of independence movements and across America in the Civil Rights Movement.

The topics covered for each year of the decade relate directly to these central themes. The sheets on 1962, for example, highlight the progress of military actions in a volatile South East Asia and how the "World Steps Back From Nuclear Brink"⁶⁵ in the Cuban Missile Crisis. The students discuss how "nationalism in Africa should be able to reach its ultimate goal which is independence"⁶⁶ as they read about people rejoicing in the streets as the "Algerian flag flies free of France."⁶⁷ They also receive an update on the state of USA-USSR relations regarding the Space Race, and evaluate who is winning in 1962 as they relate it back a Special Focus section where they studied it in detail. To round out their picture of the year 1962, students deal with Brazil's victory in the World Cup and the death of Marilyn Monroe, who Mr Kennish describes as "the person to whom Elton John's song about Diana was first written."⁶⁸

In bringing all these pieces of information together, the teachers have a central aim: to give students a full picture of the 1960s, an idea of how people felt at the time, what they were thinking as the 1960s unfolded before them. Through this history, students think about how people made sense of the world at that time and about how what happened then can help to make sense of their world in 1998.

As the class sits silently reading the articles off this sheet on 1962, a girl fills the room with her question. "What's the point of wars?" she asks.⁶⁹

History had transported her. I can't help but think that she sounds like a child of the 1960s.

The historical content of the 1960s that students study allows them to place themselves in the past. In the 1960s, they can see the roots of their techno music, as Mr Brown reminds them in class.⁷⁰ It also allows students to see themselves as part of a historical continuum. As an assignment to begin the course, students asked their parents about life in the 1960s. As a follow-up, Mr Kennish also placed them into history: "Start thinking about how you will tell your children about the music you listen to now."⁷¹

Although Mr Brown has worked to shift the content and design of the curriculum since he first began teaching at Central High thirteen and a half years ago, he does not focus on that issue. As in the Grade 8 curriculum, his primary goal is the acquisition of skills. He aims for the kind of historical understanding evident above. He hopes that history class will allow students to place themselves in history, both through empathising with people of the past and in seeing their places in a future history. He hopes to create citizens who have the skills to examine the world, critique it, and make it better.

*I look at the years of Grade 8, Grade 9 and Grade 10 as a time when we can look a little bit at the way in which historical knowledge has come to us ... the advances that we make, change and the impact of events that have shaped our current situation.*⁷²

*The material that teachers hand out to students on each of the topics in the 1960s is a collage of newspaper clippings, extracts from a book of sources. As part of the study of each decade, students are asked to answer questions on the various articles, to piece together the story. Through these exercises, Mr Brown says, students learn two important skills: close textual analysis and the use of sources.*⁷³

Students express concern, however, that there is no relationship between developing these skills and succeeding in an overburdened economy.

*"I can't take history next year because it won't help me get a job, my parents said so," Meegan Lambert tells me after our interview.*⁷⁴

*"Will you take history in Grade 10?" I ask the others.*⁷⁵

*"No, I don't need it."*⁷⁶

*Out of ten students, only three will commit to history being important enough to take it.*⁷⁷

This impression of history influences how the students view their study of history in Grade 9. They do not see the importance of mastering the skills that their teachers carefully help them with. They see the constant practice of these skills, with each of the handouts and worksheets, instead as boring; it's repetitive doing the same skills over and over again in the same ways, they say.

*I would teach [history] lively. I would make the children, not every day just say read the paragraph and then explain it to them. I would just make it like ... exciting.*⁷⁸

*Get them more involved in things, give them projects and like, let them work in groups ja, and have them act out activities. Someone act as Martin Luther King and say his speech, part of his speech, to make it more exciting. 'Cause children don't want to sit in class all day and just write down notes. They find it actually boring.*⁷⁹

*Perfecting a new course is indeed not easy, and it is a long process. "Every year I'll try something new," Mr Brown says with a sigh.*⁸⁰

Teachers at three other schools, Suburb High, Community High, and Mountain High, are also trying new things in their history teaching. None of these other teachers have created completely new curricula as have the teachers at Central High, but in order to respond to the needs of their own diverse students populations, they have begun to work creatively within the interim syllabus. At all three schools, teachers have chosen a similar way of weaving the topics suggested by the syllabus to emphasise what each of them deems to be important: the acquisition of skills of respect and recognition of differences and an understanding of the current situation in South Africa. In so doing, they have decided to create links between the General history components of the syllabus and the South African history sections.

Because I think in the South African situation, if you can teach something without the emotion, it helps people to see it with the emotion. So if we start with the Industrial Revolution and we teach them the fundamentals of how society changes and the issues that come to play in that society, then you move it from there into South Africa. You can keep referring back to something that doesn't hold the same level of emotion that the thing that you're teaching holds. Because that clouds people's perception. The moment you move from

general to South Africa, people can't see straight anymore because there's always baggage that comes rushing through. And I think that in that way we've tried to balance it, to balance general history, if I can use that term, with South Africa. And teach trends and then relate it to a South African context and then it becomes less cloudy.... [I]n the Grade 8s we do that with the Industrial Revolution and then into South Africa with the Industrial Revolution. And then we can see labour clearly and how labour can be used and how cheap labour becomes beneficial to the capitalists. And when you start teaching that, when you are talking about Britain, it's not threatening, and then you can see how wrong it was to use child labour. When you transfer it to black labour in South Africa, if you haven't set the premise from something that's non-emotional, it's not always seen as being wrong.⁸¹

Introducing her students to pertinent issues through general history, Amy Slater, Head of History at Suburb High, tries to get her students to set their own personal norms by which to judge South Africa and its history without the interference of having to place themselves in prescribed racial roles within that history. Arthur Wright of Community High uses the same methods to place his students in similar situations, to encourage them to develop the skill of empathy and an incumbent sense of morality that will carry them through life in South Africa.

I believe we play a key role in enabling our young people to come to terms with South Africa's past in an appropriate and positive way. We cannot simply turn our backs, pretend that things never happened as they did, and expect to cope with today. 'Coping with today' is important. We are preparing our students to function positively in our society.... Students will learn empathy, to consider what an experience was like from a different person's point of view. With the conflict currently present in our society, this is another vital lifeskill.⁸²

After concluding month-long units on each of World War II and the Arab-Israeli Crisis, Ingrid Worthington had her students at Mountain High prepare empathy dramas on issues of prejudice, religion, and land ownership. She had them examine why and how people fight and or unite over these issues. After looking at these topics through texts and videos, she wanted them to play the part, to try to put themselves in the various situations. She told them they could set their plays in World War II Germany, the Middle East, or in South Africa. Most of the students chose to bring the international issues they had studied closer to home, to examine prejudice, religion, and land in Cape Town.

The students spent days preparing their dramas and came to school with bulging bags of costumes and props.

The lights go up and the students introduce themselves.

"I am a coloured woman who is pregnant."

"I am an immigrant."

"I am an African man."

"I am a white woman."

All of a sudden the red light comes on in the lift and the pregnant woman braces herself against the wall. The buzzer starts wailing so loud, though, that she releases her hold to cover her ears.

The immigrant man looks about nervously, trying to catch anyone's eye. "What happen?" he finally says, hesitantly and in heavily accented English.

"Ah, another intruder," snaps the white woman.

The immigrant man looks confused, not totally understanding what had been said, but hurt by the woman's tone.

The African man puts a hand on the immigrant's shoulder. "It's not against you, my brother. This harkens back to the days of apartheid. White people feel threatened by us black people; and now they can hardly believe there are more of us coming into this country, from the outside. It's not against you."

The white woman taps her foot, annoyed. "Can't someone get us out of here," she yells, to no one in particular.

The pregnant woman grasps the walls again and lets out a big sigh before she slides to the ground.

"Oh my gosh, she's going into labour," marvels the white woman. And she bends down to take the so-called coloured woman's head in her hands.

The men stand there, shocked, and scared. The white woman looks up, and speaks to them gently. "Could you take her head?" she asks the immigrant.

He moves in beside her and takes the woman's head.

"And why don't you grab her hand?" she prods the African man.

They all sit there, on the floor of the lift, absorbed by the roles they have in bringing this baby into the world.

"Push!" cries the immigrant.

"Push!" the African man squeezes the woman's hand.

"Push!" cries the white woman excitedly.

And a baby boy wiggles its way into the world. All holding him together, the four people in the lift smile at each other.

"What I thought was a crisis has turned into a miracle," the white woman says. "I am happy to be here with you all."⁸³

Weaving together General and South African history, teachers at these three schools aim to have their students make connections between the ways that people relate to each other and handle difference the world over. In so doing, teachers have been able to tailor the interim syllabus to their own situations: they teach students not only the historical skills of analysing trends and understanding cause and result, but also how to take these skills into their own South African lives, inside and outside of school.

Out of necessity, the issue of race and of learning to be together—often for the first time in a newly integrated school—has become one of the cornerstones of history teaching at Central High and also at Suburb High, Community High, and Mountain High, schools in similar situations. A principal goal of history teaching for many of the teachers at these schools is to teach students skills that they can use in life. These teachers argue that one of the most central skills to life in South Africa at present is learning to live together, to imagine the future of the rainbow nation and one's place in it.

In a classroom at Suburb High, students are staring at a cartoon in an absolute way that could mean two things: they are looking hard to search out meaning or they understand it all too well and are deep in thought about what it means to them.

"Of course we'll still have to deal with the question of prevailing attitudes."

The teacher is only reading the caption, but her voice breaks the silence as if were a booming loudspeaker. The students turn to stare at Miss Slater expectantly.

In the cartoon, Mr Hendrick Verwoerd is depicted as a teacher, standing in front of a class filled with rows and rows of identical white children. Looking back out over her own classroom, Miss Slater sees a picture very different from that in the cartoon. Her students do not all look the same and the vibrant discussion that fills her room each day ensures her that they do not all have the same ideas. But even though these Grade 9 students were young, they did all grow up under apartheid. Attitudes prevailed over and around them. Today, through this cartoon and through the history of Mr Verwoerd and his policies, Miss Slater will deal with the question of prevailing attitudes in her classroom.⁸⁴

“Do you think that a black person is equal to you?” Miss Slater’s question comes shooting down to a personal level.

Tania, a so-called coloured girl, sits near the back of the class, turned sideways in her desk to rest comfortably against the wall. Her eyes don’t flicker and her voice doesn’t miss a beat.

“Yes,” she says.

“There’s no difference?” prods Miss Slater.

“No. We’re all people,” Tania responds flatly.

“So you wouldn’t mind being in a relationship with a black man?”

Tania gasps. She looks around the room, uncomfortable, and sits up straight in her desk.

“If I’m in love with him,” she proceeds hesitantly. And the whole class can see her mind spinning, trying to answer honestly, but all of a sudden unsure of what she does think. Her eyes drop, and she speaks again. “No. A coloured boy, maybe.”

Most of the students, realising that Miss Slater is about to include more people in this discussion, turn their faces down towards their desks. Miss Slater asks one of two African students in the class, “What about you, Nwabisa...”

Miss Slater doesn’t even need to finish her question; Nwabisa has been thinking about the question posed to Tania and she knows that she only needs to flip it racially to apply to herself.

“A coloured guy’s OK, but not a white guy,” Nwabisa answers quickly.

“Why?” Miss Slater looks directly into her eyes.

“We just don’t get along.” Nwabisa continues to look at Miss Slater, but doesn’t say another word.

“If you fall in love with someone of another race and marry them, then you have to think about losing your family,” Victoria speaks out without being asked, taking the pressure off Nwabisa.

“And if a black girl comes to your white home, then she’ll feel a bit awkward and the other way around,” Dylan adds.

Everyone has something to say.

“You’re confirming that Mr Verwoerd was more successful than he ever hoped by the prejudices that we still hold,” Miss Slater says quietly.

The other African girl in the class, sitting right in front of Nwabisa, breaks the thoughtful silence. “It’s true what you’re saying, Miss.”⁸⁵

Miss Slater looks exhausted after class. As we sit talking, she starts speaking fast, jumping from topic to topic without an interruption from me, as if she just needs to get things out.

[H]aving integrated schools, ... I've had to review the way I speak about issues, be sensitive to other people's views, let the children participate from where they're at, because some of the things that are issues for me, because of where I'm at, are not issues for them. They're post-apartheid children, many of them in Grades 8 and 9. They don't even know when you teach them about apartheid in Grade 8, they didn't know what it was before that. Because they weren't impacted by it. And then it's just kind of this legacy, but ... they don't realise the impact of it on our lives.⁸⁶

Yet every day, through history class, Miss Slater tries to make her students think about these impacts on their lives and tries to work with them on ways of dealing with them.

I see my role as making pupils aware. And also in trying to interest them in what's happening politically. So...I start with contemporary issues and work backwards to history...[to build] an awareness of what's happening, awareness of what happened in the past, why it happened, how it impacts us now. How we can respond to that, both positively and negatively.⁸⁷

Teaching students to deal with the past, to learn from it, and to take it with them to their lives in the South Africa of today is a principle goal of teachers at Central High, Suburb High, Community High, and Mountain High.

If you can teach them to get inside somebody else, then in their day-to-day relationships they can do that.⁸⁸

We should teach the children what happened fifty years ago and now. And it is still happening. Racism is still very much alive in South Africa. And so just to open the children's eyes and make them think before they do things, before they say things.⁸⁹

Respecting each other's space. Valuing the other person. That is what I try and teach.⁹⁰

The way I'm trying to teach them is to build tolerance in the classroom, within the school, and you can transfer that to the nation as well. History is very important.⁹¹

We must know. Our kids do not know. Not even the brown kids and the black kids; it seems crazy. They must know where they come from. They must know why we have [townships] and why [township] houses are not as good as [suburbs'] houses.⁹²

I think ... [history] can be used more as a learning experience. You say, 'OK, this is what happened, this is where'—you know, kind of admit it, because we did make a mistake, now let's move on from here, how can we rectify that mistake. You know, how can the country move forward from here and basically for [the students] also, how can they take the country forward from here.⁹³

Contemporary political reality in South Africa and the diverse student population of these four schools provides the opportunity for teachers to bring these skills of history into the realm of experience, to make history come alive, and to allow students to learn—from history—about the world around them. Just being at an integrated school has brought some students face to face with history and to a new understanding of the world around them, inside and outside of school.

Well, I think that nobody really hates anybody else. Well, I personally don't. I like everyone in this school. But I think that's because, nowadays, we sort of get to know people better and you can see, this person, because she's black she's not like you were told black people are. You know, because you get to know them. And I think that's what makes the difference. If you get to know people, you can sort of learn that people are people.⁹⁴

I was in an all-white school and then we moved and I realised that we're not the only people in the world. [This school] makes us aware of everything that's happening around us.... I just thought OK, maybe they couldn't afford to go to the school. I don't know. Nothing was really sat down and explained to me and said OK, this is what is happening. OK, I was like small, but I just would have thought, I just thought it was right. I didn't know it was wrong.⁹⁵

I think if people can sit down and talk about it. If you can know that you're human being. If they can all sit down and discuss things like human beings, then you can get rid of that feeling that's inside of you. And then the next person can say, 'OK, I understand that, this is the way I feel, now let's do something about it.'⁹⁶

Being together in the same school and having discussions together in class opens students' eyes to different realities that exist beyond their homes, beyond the stories they grew up with, and beyond the continued segregation of daily life in South Africa. But as Ms Roberts of Central High said, it cannot be assumed that throwing people together will make everything OK.

But then there was this other friend of mine, and they were being nasty with her and she decided to come to be with us and then they said to her, 'But you can't sit with them, they're coloured and you belong with us and how can a white person sit with coloureds.' And they were like actually going on. And it also like me and my friends, it also taught us something. Like if we didn't know what happened in the past, then we couldn't have understood what she was experiencing. I mean, if I had to describe it, I would say that I learned a lot.⁹⁷

The history teachers at Central High, Suburb High, Community High, and Mountain High try to help their students make sense of this new world around them, to guide them through the situation in which they have been thrown together. As Pujah Jacobs eluded above, history class exposes students to a way of understanding what it is that they are experiencing.

History didn't always address the realities of school. But now, teachers have freedom over what goes on in their individual classrooms. Especially in the younger grades, where evaluation is internal to each school, teachers are not bound even to the interim syllabus that does exist. As a result, in creating a curriculum, they can draw on their own experiences, their perceived needs of the students, and their particular visions of what history can bring to these students. Expressing a strong belief in the need for skills to live together in the new South Africa, teachers at these four schools have based their history curricula on the recognition of a common humanity.

Ideas about the future of history teaching at Central High, Suburb High, Community High, and Mountain High are wrapped up with visions for the future of the country. In looking at issues of where they come from through history curricula, teachers ask their students to think about where they are going, as individuals and as a nation. Through the content and methodologies that they use, teachers are attempting to prepare students for life in South Africa.

Schooling creates a template for students as they define their relationships with and in society. At Central High, Suburb High, Community High, and Mountain High the dynamics of the schools as a whole and of individual classrooms are examples for these students of where they, replete with their differences, fit in. What students learn in history class fits into the larger environment of the school and how they feel to be a part of it; these experiences then become part of the way students see, and imagine, their worlds outside of school.

I disagree with what he said, you know, saying that things hasn't changed a lot since apartheid. It has,

*because in those years ... we wouldn't be able to come to this school. I mean, ja, we wouldn't be able to go to schools, a black person was not allowed to work in parliament, you know. Things like that. So what I'm trying to say is that now it's opportunity for everyone. You either take it or you leave it, or you sleep and say that apartheid this, you're always putting apartheid. You've got to step ahead of apartheid and be able to say, 'No I never had my chance, but now I'm taking my chance.'*⁹⁸

These students are taking their chance. By going to any one of these four schools, they are doing something their parents did not have the chance to do. They are at school together with people of all different backgrounds, surrounded by challenges of being at school together for the first time. And the students in this situation are creating and confronting the challenges of diverse existence in South Africa, today and for the future.

NOTES

- ¹ Grade 9 student at Central High. Personal communication. 22 April 1998.
- ² Grade 8 student at Central High. Personal communication. 4 May 1998.
- ³ Meegan Lambert, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁴ Nadia Petersen, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁵ Buyelwa Ndima, Grade 9 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁶ Central High. Personal communication with a Grade 8 student. 22 April 1998.
- ⁷ Central High. Personal communication with a Grade 8 student. 24 April 1998.
- ⁸ Central High. Personal communication with a Grade 9 student. 28 April 1998.
- ⁹ Darrell Robins, Grade 9 student at Central High. Personal communication. 25 September 1998.
- ¹⁰ Compiled from statistics kept by Central High from forms filled out by the students. May 1998.
- ¹¹ Editorial Board. December 1990. "Editorial." *The Magazine of ... High School*, page 2.
- ¹² [The Headmaster]. December 1990. "The Headmaster's Report: The opening road to academic freedom." *The Magazine of ... High School*, page 6.
- ¹³ *The Magazine of ... High School* and personal communication with teachers.
- ¹⁴ Editorial Board. December 1990. "Open Schools: The countdown to an open ... High School." *The Magazine of ... High School*, page 11.
- ¹⁵ In 1992, the government announced that all Model B schools would be converted to semi-privatised Model C schools. See page 3 of this work for further information on the shift.
- ¹⁶ [The Headmaster]. December 1990. "Headmaster's Report: The opening road to academic freedom." *The Magazine of ... High School*, page 3.
- ¹⁷ [The Headmaster]. December 1990. "Headmaster's Report: The opening road to academic freedom." *The Magazine of ... High School*, page 3.
- ¹⁸ [The Headmaster]. December 1990. "Headmaster's Report: The opening road to academic freedom." *The Magazine of ... High School*, page 3.
- ¹⁹ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ²⁰ Central High. Personal communication with students. April and May 1998.
- ²¹ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 28 April 1998.
- ²² Meegan Lambert, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ²³ Central High. Personal communication with students. April and May 1998.
- ²⁴ Mujahid Halim, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ²⁵ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ²⁶ Central High. Personal communication with Simon Brown and personal observation of his classes. April and May 1998.
- ²⁷ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ²⁸ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ²⁹ Central High. Personal observation. April and May 1998.
- ³⁰ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ³¹ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ³² Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ³³ Josh Kennish, teacher at Central High. Interview. 29 April 1998.
- ³⁴ Central High. Personal observation of Grade 8 classes. April and May 1998.
- ³⁵ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ³⁶ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ³⁷ Emilia Potenza. 1992 *The Broken String: An Integrated Approach to southern African History*. Heinemann-Centaur Publishers, Houghton Estate, page vii.
- ³⁸ Luli Callinicos. 1992. "Foreword." *The Broken String: An Integrated Approach to southern African History*. Heinemann-Centaur Publishers, Houghton Estate, page 3.
- ³⁹ Luli Callinicos. 1992. "Foreword." *The Broken String: An Integrated Approach to southern African History*. Heinemann-Centaur Publishers, Houghton Estate, page 5.
- ⁴⁰ Simon Brown. "Assessment 5: Unit 2 Archaeology, Group Work." Grade 8 History, Term Two 1998.
- ⁴¹ Central High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 2. 30 April 1998.
- ⁴² Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 30 April 1998.
- ⁴³ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 30 April 1998.
- ⁴⁴ Simon Brown. "Assessment 5: Unit 2 Archaeology, Group Work." Grade 8 History, Term Two 1998.
- ⁴⁵ Central High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 2. 30 April 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 30 April 1998.

- ⁴⁷ Central High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 1. 20 April 1998.
- ⁴⁸ Nadia Petersen, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁴⁹ Central High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class 1. 22 April 1998.
- ⁵⁰ Meegan Lambert, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁵¹ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 22 April 22 1998.
- ⁵² Meegan Lambert, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁵³ Karyn Wills, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁵⁴ Meegan Lambert, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁵⁵ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 5 May 1998.
- ⁵⁶ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ⁵⁷ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ⁵⁸ Karyn Wills, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁵⁹ Caitlin Mathews, teacher at Central High. Interview. 6 May 1998.
- ⁶⁰ Nadia Petersen, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁶¹ Nadia Petersen, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁶² Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ⁶³ Cindy Manuel, Grade 9 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁶⁴ Tom Haile, Grade 9 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁶⁵ Simon Brown. "Source E: France Proclaims independent Algeria." *Sources for Sourcework Exercises on 1962*.
- ⁶⁶ Central High. Classroom observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 29 April 1998.
- ⁶⁷ Simon Brown. "Sources I and K: World Steps Back from Nuclear Brink." *Sources for Sourcework Exercises on 1962*.
- ⁶⁸ Central High. Classroom observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 20 April 1998.
- ⁶⁹ Central High. Classroom observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 20 April 1998.
- ⁷⁰ Central High. Classroom observation of Grade 9 Class 4. 23 April 1998.
- ⁷¹ Central High. Classroom observation of Grade 9 Class 1. 22 April 1998.
- ⁷² Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ⁷³ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 8 May 1998.
- ⁷⁴ Meegan Lambert, Grade 8 student at Central High. Personal communication. 23 July 1998.
- ⁷⁵ Sarah Dryden, researcher. Question to Grade 8 interviewees on paper. 23 July 1998.
- ⁷⁶ Nadia Petersen, Grade 8 student at Central High. Written communication. 23 July 1998.
- ⁷⁷ Central High. Compiled from written communication by Grade 8 and 9 students. 23 July 1998. However, as recorded in Appendix II, 50% of the Grade 12 class took history in 1998.
- ⁷⁸ Buyelwa Ndima, Grade 9 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁷⁹ Mika Willis, Grade 9 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.
- ⁸⁰ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ⁸¹ Amy Slater, teacher at Suburb High. Interview. 19 June 1998.
- ⁸² [Head of History Department]. 1996. "Introduction." ... *High School History Workbook, Standard 7*.
- ⁸³ Mountain High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class ER. 15 June 1998.
- ⁸⁴ Suburb High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class A. 17 June 1998.
- ⁸⁵ Suburb High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class A. 17 June 1998.
- ⁸⁶ Amy Slater, teacher at Suburb High. Interview. 19 June 1998.
- ⁸⁷ Amy Slater, teacher at Suburb High. Interview. 19 June 1998.
- ⁸⁸ Josh Kennish, teacher at Central High. Interview. 29 April 1998.
- ⁸⁹ Caitlin Mathews, teacher at Central High. Interview. 6 May 1998.
- ⁹⁰ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ⁹¹ Susan Frylinck, teacher at Community High. Interview. 9 June 1998.
- ⁹² Susan Frylinck, teacher at Community High. Interview. 9 June 1998.
- ⁹³ Zaahir Allie, teacher at Central High. Interview. 30 April 1998.
- ⁹⁴ Amanda Rombasch, Grade 9 student at Mountain High. Interview. 15 June 1998.
- ⁹⁵ Caroline Peterson, Grade 9 student at Mountain High. Interview. 15 June 1998.
- ⁹⁶ Pujah Jacobs, Grade 9 student at Mountain High. Interview. 15 June 1998.
- ⁹⁷ Pujah Jacobs, Grade 9 student at Mountain High. Interview. 15 June 1998.
- ⁹⁸ Nadia Petersen, Grade 8 student at Central High. Interview. 23 July 1998.

CONVERSATIONS:
MIRROR OF A NATION IN TRANSITION

“Miss, Miss, can you tell us why you are here, Miss?”¹

This question followed me from school to school. And after I explained to students why I was in their schools—that I wanted to know what they were learning about in history classes and what they thought about what they were learning—the curiosity of kids inevitably overflowed. I was bombarded with more questions.

“Miss, Miss, but *why* do you want to know all this, Miss?” a student burst out just as the teacher signalled that the questioning session was over and students should turn their attention away from me.²

When they could, students continued to ask more questions.

“What are you going *to do* with this information, Miss?” students surrounded me and attempted to peer over my shoulder as I scribbled down copious notes in a school notebook just like the ones they themselves used in class.³

In each school, I attempted to answer the students’ questions. I explained to them that I was there to see how they were learning, through history, about the world and about South Africa. And I wanted to know what they and their teachers thought about what was going on in class, in school, and in South Africa. I wanted to know all this in an attempt to understand how teachers and students were thinking about the society they lived in at the present and also how they were imagining and attempting to create the future. I wanted to see how teachers and students were dealing with a time of transition, in their education system and in their country. In this chapter, I seek to address the students’ third, and most important, question: “What are you going *to do* with this information, Miss?”

The interim period between moving away from outdated and biased syllabuses and approaches to education and creating a system that meets the needs and aspirations of the new South Africa may be seen as ‘wasted’ time. No one really knows what or how to teach and uncertainty can prevail.

“What would you say is the overall purpose of history classes?” I asked Carole Septoe, history teacher at Plain High, in an interview.

“We are just trying to figure that out. I must say, I’m not sure. We at present have very little in the way of guidance from the Department and we are just going along as we can.” Ms Septoe sat for a moment, thinking.

“But can I ask you a question?” she continued, and then paused. “What is going on in other schools? What do other teachers think about these issues?”⁴

While the kind of uncertainty that Ms Septoe expressed prevailed in the schools, a most productive kind of thinking and learning about the potential for education in general, and history in particular, was also taking place in the transition. Teachers in all the schools were trying to figure out for themselves how history should be taught. They were trying to decide what direction to take with their individual classes, what content to cover, and what skills. They were trying to arrive at a concrete purpose for history classes on which they could shape what they taught. Ms Septoe’s question rang out powerfully in the midst of the frustration and uncertainty that all of these history teachers felt about where they were going with their teaching: each teacher was trying to figure it out for him- or herself.

The accounts of Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High revealed teachers and

students thinking about the potential for education and attempting to implement and to live their different ideas. And yet absorbed as they were by problems and issues at their own schools, the teachers were, in general, focused inward. The WCED had recently created a 'cluster' system in which schools from the same geographical area could meet and discuss issues in their teaching,⁵ but few teachers had heard about this programme.⁶ Teachers' centres ran study groups,⁷ but they were not used.^{8,9} In a time of large class sizes and with the demands of increased creativity in teaching an interim syllabus, teachers could only cope with so much. There was therefore little communication from one school to the next, little opportunity to learn from the experiences of others.

After asking what is going on in other schools, Ms Septoe explained why she was asking this question. She spoke quietly.

"I think that we could learn from each other."¹⁰

A time of transition can be a time of change in fast-forward: things need to be done. No particular framework or guiding principles have yet been established, but the process of creating them is on-going. These processes of change necessitate that people learn from each other, actively and constantly; each individual teacher, and the system as a whole, needs the input of ideas and especially of experience from other practitioners who have the opportunity to experiment, to see what works, what doesn't, and why. The research concerned itself specifically with the question of transition and of how teachers and students were dealing with it. To mirror the nature of this period of transition, I have employed the idea of learning from each other as the focus of this concluding chapter. As I stated previously, I have chosen to present my research findings in the form of a conversation. This form mirrors the period of transition, the debates and dialogues, uncertainties and confusions deriving from a country and an education system that are attempting to create a direction of where to go from here.

At the conclusion of my research, I attempted to hold an actual 'conversation' between teachers that centred on Ms Septoe's questions and thoughts about what teachers at different schools could learn from each other.¹¹ In each school where I had conducted research, the teachers had echoed Ms Septoe's thought; they too were interested to learn about what teachers in other schools were doing. Responding to this interest, I invited all of the history teachers from the sixteen schools in which I had worked to come together for an afternoon to discuss what they, as individuals and as history departments, were doing with history in this time of transition. I also believed this kind of interaction could enhance my research, bringing teachers together to observe how they could share ideas and learn from each other. Unfortunately, though teachers at thirteen of the sixteen schools replied positively that they would attend, only seven schools (nine teachers) were represented at the meeting. The meeting began with five teachers, three of them from one school; the other four teachers arrived at various stages of the discussion. As a result, I was not able to record the conversations, as I had planned, nor to use them as part of my study.

I had wanted to use the actual conversation I arranged between teachers to frame this final chapter. Since I have not been able to do so, in this chapter, I have created conversations between teachers from different schools. I have used extracts from interviews with teachers and students, moments of classroom lessons and discussions, and descriptions of informal interactions with teachers to explore how they might indeed converse

with each other. I have focused primarily on Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High, but employed the breadth schools to inform the discussion.

The conversation that I had with Ms Septoe about what was going on in other schools forms the first part of this chapter; it is a summary of my findings. In the second part of the chapter, I trace the common threads that ran through history teaching in each school and juxtapose the thoughts and actions of teachers and students in different schools. This conversation seeks to mirror first how teachers and students were dealing with education and history teaching in a time of transition, not only in isolation, but also collectively; and, secondly, to examine what was working, what wasn't, and why. It is an endeavour to provide an always unfinished, yet thought-provoking, discourse about where education and history teaching might go from here.

I

Plain High was the last of my case study schools and at the end of my time there, Ms Septoe and I sat down and I tried to answer her questions about what I had found to be happening with history teaching in other schools. She listened intently.¹²

I told her first what I had perceived to be going on at her school.

The teachers at Plain High found that in order to keep students interested in history, they needed to make it exciting. Not able to do this with the outdated textbooks to which they have access, they began creating a new curriculum, using whatever resources they could find. A main component of both the Grade 8 and Grade 9 syllabus was learning about the recent past of South Africa. Teachers shared their own stories of life during apartheid to bring history to life for their students. They also used prominent political figures of today to teach about this era. In so doing, they used history to create alternative visions of life for their students. In neighbourhoods plagued by crime and gangsterism, these students saw bleak life prospects in front of them; the teachers attempted to demonstrate what individuals could make of the freedom each person now had in South Africa and, using hero figures such as Mandela, to open new doors for their students. The teachers at Plain High also emphasised the importance of history in developing skills such as analysis, argumentation, respect, creativity, and open-mindedness. They felt that these skills would help students to live in the new South Africa, to cope with the situations in which they found themselves in 1998 and ones they would face in the future.

"That is what we're trying to do," Ms Septoe said when I had finished. "But you talked to the children, what do they think?"

The students at Plain High were excited about what they were studying in history classes. They could hardly believe that they got to read about and think about Mr Mandela in school. They also said that they learned things in history classes that they had never known before. Especially as it related to South Africa and to apartheid, they said history helped them to understand why the new South Africa was as it was today. The overall feeling of the students, however, was a concern about the lack of usefulness of history. While they enjoyed it, they worried that it wouldn't help them in any way in the future; it certainly wouldn't get them jobs, they said.

Ms Septoe nodded her head for me to go on. And I began to tell her about Transkei High.

Like the teachers at Plain High, the history teachers at Transkei High believed in the power of history to help their students live in the new South Africa. They said that children today needed to know how black people were treated in the past so that they could work within the present situation in order to inherit a better future. Yet despite these ideas about the possibilities of history teaching, the students at Transkei High were

learning very little in history classes. While the students waited in their classrooms for history classes to happen, their teachers sat in the staffroom, convinced that not enough students would show up to make class worthwhile. The teachers never checked, though. When history classes did happen, once in three weeks for each class, the teachers wrote notes on the board for the students to copy. There was no discussion. The content of history lessons derived from outdated syllabuses and the textbooks that reflected that material. There were no new materials at the school and the teachers had not looked outside their school for other resources.

Despite having history infrequently, the students at Transkei High had strong opinions on what history teaching should and should not be. Many of them were passionate that history was a ‘wrong subject.’ All they learned in history, they said, was about fighting, usually between white people and black people. Hearing those stories made them want to fight, and it made them think of revenge on white people, they told me. As such, they could not see why learning history could be helpful. They believed that it would be better to forget history and to think instead of the present and the future.

Ms Septoe looked pensive, but she didn’t say anything. She nodded her head again and I continued, this time describing the situation at Peninsula High.

There were two approaches to history teaching at Peninsula High. Some of the teachers saw history as a way to bring diverse South African reality into the lives of their almost homogeneously white students. They tried to relate North and South American experiences of colonialism to South African history, for example, and to probe students to think about issues of inequality that were close to home. The Grade 8 and 9 courses, however, were centred on European and American history. The teachers said that, in many ways, Europe was closer to most of their students than South Africa and students therefore related more to overseas history. Over many years, the teachers have developed a comprehensive curriculum on these topics and their own notes and handouts from diverse sources formed the basis of the courses. In both class discussions and homework tasks, the teachers emphasised the development of historical skills such as analysis, empathy, and research.

“And do the students enjoy this history that they are doing?” Ms Septoe asked.

The students at Peninsula High were quite negative about history in general. They saw it as boring and were not sure how it would be of use in their future lives. The presentation of materials in class was important to them, and it sometimes changed their idea of what history was. They said that they would do things differently if they were the teachers: they would always hold discussions and be animated and excited about the topics. They would never make their students copy notes.

Ms Septoe laughed. “I never thought of asking my students what they would do if they were the teachers!” she exclaimed. “It’s a good idea, though.”

I continued to tell her about the school where I had begun my research: Central High.

The teachers at Central High were dedicated to change. They had been frustrated with the restrictions of past syllabuses and, even before the freedom of the interim syllabus, they had begun to create a completely new curriculum. In 1998, Grade 8 students studied the evolution of humans from an archaeological perspective and the lives of early people such as the KhoiKhoi and the San; for this course, they worked from a book, *The Broken String*. The Grade 9 course focused on the 1960s. The teachers provided students with various sources, such as newspaper articles and films, to help them unravel the political, economic, cultural, and social history of this time. The teachers at Central High described three principles that have guided the development of the curriculum for each grade. They wanted to make history exciting and relevant to students’ lives and they

wanted to promote the acquisition of historical skills, such as document analysis and the presentation of an argument. In addition, the teachers described what they saw as the overall purpose of history teaching at a newly-integrated school such as Central High: to teach the students about respect and recognition of differences.

The students at Central High were excited about doing new things in history classes. That the World Cup and the roots of techno music formed part of history, they could hardly believe. They described their study of the human family as a way to think about how life came to be as it was today. It allowed them to examine the many developments that had happened over the years, but also all the things society had lost. Even amid this excitement, however, the students were unsure about the value of history. They often found it boring, they said, with too many notes and too much analysis of sources. And they didn't see how they would use these skills in later life.

Ms Septoe sat for a moment and thought, then she smiled and began to speak.

"Other teachers are trying so many things," she said. "I really think we *can* learn from each other. Thank you."

II

In the time of transition, within the relative freedom of the interim syllabus, history teachers at Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High all did different things in their classrooms. Some taught about apartheid, some about the World Wars; some held frequent class discussions, some provided students with notes as handouts or to copy from the board. And yet in the midst of this diversity, the approach to education and to the teaching of history in schools of all backgrounds, with varying resources, and in starkly different neighbourhoods reflected similar concerns. The teachers asked themselves what specific content knowledge they should teach their students. In so doing, they were conscious of what the students themselves brought to school—the neighbourhoods in which they lived, their experiences, and ideas about the future. Teachers also brought to their classes perceptions of what South Africa was in 1998 and what it would be in the future; they saw the history classroom as a place to teach their students both the content and skills that would help them to live in this country.

Teachers at Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High—as well as at the breadth schools—approached history teaching by creating visions based on these principles. The application of these similar visions, however, produced different results. In the following pages, I juxtapose thoughts, concerns, ideas, and practices of teachers and students from different schools to create a conversation between them. I employ this narrative mechanism in an attempt to enable the experiences of individual schools, in isolation, to shed light on education and history teaching in a larger context.

History teachers at Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High emphasised the need to reach students. It didn't matter what we taught, they said, if it wasn't relevant and interesting to the students, then they would be bored and they wouldn't learn.

The teachers at Transkei High were outspoken on the need to focus on recent history in order to teach students what they wanted and needed to know. "Children must know what's happening today! They want to know!" Mrs Fanaphi exclaimed. But she quickly went on to describe the old textbooks from which they worked and the outdated 1985 syllabus that had not really changed. She seemed disheartened and unsure of what to do

with her history teaching.¹³ Her colleague Mrs Mahashe, however, was positive about the potential for change. “We can say anything in class now, as compared to before when your mind needed to be straight on the textbook. It’s much better now.”¹⁴ New ideas about what history teaching *could be* abounded at Transkei High. The practice of history teaching, however, revealed nothing in the way of change. Mrs Mashashe did not say anything in her classes; she simply wrote notes on the board for her students to copy. The topic was the Renaissance. It was the first topic in the syllabus, the first topic in the textbook, the first topic they had covered all year. And it was July.¹⁵

Mr Brown at Central High described how the process of putting ideas of change into action at his school had also been difficult. He spoke of how he too struggled with the rigidity of the old syllabus. He couldn’t teach openly what he wanted and yet he felt it was his duty as a history teacher to teach about “the real history.”¹⁶ He needed to find ways of circumventing inspectors’ warnings to watch his step. “I was part of a collective of people working on the ‘What is History?’ books that were banned because of the content,” he said. “I think there was a picture of Mandela in there and you were not allowed to show anybody a picture of Mandela. So I would shut the door to my class and show people: this is what Mandela looks like. And one or two of my more radical people would shout, ‘Viva Mandela!’”¹⁷ Mr Brown was one of a small number of teachers to approach history in this way during the years of apartheid.

James Walter, of Suburb High, remembered how inspectors sometimes informed wayward history teachers, “It is the duty of the history teacher to inculcate loyalty to the state.”¹⁸ Until the early 1990s, the teachers at Suburb High felt that they could not overstep those barriers. “I remember specifically that I couldn’t mention the ANC in class because they were a banned organization and if I did there was a chance that I could be removed from the school,” Amy Slater, Head of the History Department, said. “And we were told when I was doing my HDE at UCT that on every staff there was a government informer. And I had a friend of mine that was removed from a school in the vicinity for putting up posters on Soweto Day in the late 80s, in 1986. And so I was conscious of that dynamic.”¹⁹

Mr Brown spoke excitedly about how ‘that dynamic’ had all but disappeared from education in 1998. “It is much better now” he said and went on to describe why. “The syllabus is no longer a God.”²⁰ Mr Brown admitted that it could be difficult to find a direction in this time of transition, though. There might be no new textbooks and no new syllabus, he said, but what teachers had now was freedom. “There is an interim syllabus,” he said, “but no Inspectors can come around telling us what we can or cannot do.”²¹

History teaching now required teachers to take their minds off the textbooks and to be creative, Mr Brown said. He showed how he had used these methods in an attempt to create a solid and innovative direction for his history teaching. “When we sat down to decide on the [Grade 9] course last year,” he explained, “we decided to try and bring the history closer to [the students’] time period. History is often distant. The First World War and the Second World War, they can be interesting. But now we’re dealing with people that they know: JFK, Marilyn Monroe, Martin Luther King, Cassius Clay. We are looking at where these people that they’ve heard about fit into history.”²² The teachers at Central High produced course notes on the 1960s from various resources, gathered from personal collections and libraries. In class, they showed their students videos about the space race and had them listen for themselves to the changing technology in music recordings.

Working together within their schools, the teachers at Central High produced a curriculum that responded to the needs they perceived in their students. The teachers at River High had also found that creating

a new curriculum for Grade 8 and 9 brought them together. “The way to make a history department work is to let people have a share in developing ideas, not just saying this is the syllabus, teach it, go forth and do it,” said Kathryn Higgins, Head of the History Department. “It’s a case of ‘What do you think? What can we do to improve the grade 8 syllabus next year? What could be a fun thing to introduce?’ We sort of constantly analyze and evaluate. We seem to spend an enormous amount of time in planning meetings.”²³ The result of this experimentation and dialogue was a Grade 8 history course focused on family and local histories where the teachers sent students into the community of the school to conduct their own research. In Grade 8 and 9, they also worked from a newly published book on recent South African history. In approach to history at River High, the teachers used videos, books, music, and fieldtrips as sources through which to bring the subject to life.

The ability to draw on these resources was a luxury not all schools had, the teachers at both River High and Central High recognised. Ms Higgins described how the changes in history in South Africa were taking place on an unlevelled playing field. “Many of the schools from the same kind of educational background as ours do [use these different approaches]. I think the problem in the under-resourced former-DET schools, I don’t think that’s being done. And understandably. To do that kind of stuff, you need to have access to photocopiers and sources and libraries and that has been a problem. It still is a problem.”²⁴ Mrs Fanaphi at Transkei High echoed the concerns of Ms Higgins about the possibilities in under-resourced schools. “Even if we are now in the new South Africa, still our history books hasn’t changed,” she said. “We’re still using those old books. Those old ideas where there’s no truth.... I think those books were edited in about 1977, the 70s, I think. Imagine: this is 1998 and those were the apartheid years.”²⁵ Mrs Mahashe looked at ‘those old books’ on her desk at Transkei High and dismissed them. “You can create a lesson without even going to the textbook,” she asserted.²⁶ She did not demonstrate her belief through her classes, however.

“Many of the people in a situation like this school say it is impossible to make education good,” Mrs Mbeki of Masakhane High said. “At many schools, teachers have lost their hope. They believe our children will fail.”²⁷ Transkei High and Masakhane High were schools in similar situations, situated in the midst of informal settlements and drawing their students from those areas. Mrs Mbeki went on to describe how she dealt with the poverty and difficult conditions. “...[W]e don’t have all the equipment and we don’t have the funds because of the area,” she explained. “These people are so disadvantaged.... Then it’s just to talk to them. I don’t have the other ways.”²⁸ In preparing to ‘talk’ with her students, Mrs Mbeki actively sought out ways to gain access to resources and materials that she could use in class to make history what she believed it could be. In 1998, the school received a new set of history books for Grade 8 and 9 with the financial help of a large corporation.²⁹ While the teachers at Transkei High sat in the staffroom, talking and doing each other’s hair, the teachers at Masakhane High wrote letters to potential sponsors for their school.

“Now we have freedom and we can do whatever we want,” said Ms Septoe at Plain High, echoing Mr Brown and Ms Higgins’ excitement about the possibilities for history teaching under the interim syllabus. “So we don’t follow the prescribed syllabus.... And the subject advisor is satisfied with that. He doesn’t come to check up on us, like the old inspectors. He just helps when we have a problem. So we don’t have a problem, we can do whatever we want.”³⁰ Like the teachers at Transkei High and Masakhane High, however, Ms Septoe ran up against numerous challenges in making the history classroom what she believed it could be. She explained that there were so many things she would have liked to teach about, but she had found it difficult to

gather all the necessary resources to create new curricula. “Like most of the schools in our disadvantaged communities, we still have the old textbooks. You should see them!” she cried. “But I don’t use them.”³¹

Refusing to use the textbooks, Ms Septoe looked for other resources. For her Grade 9 classes, she used books that she gathered from the library to supplement her knowledge of apartheid, but she wanted her students to be able to use resources themselves. She did not know how to get enough books for all of them, though. One solution that she came up with for her Grade 8s was to use newspapers. She created a whole unit on Mandela’s life around an insert from *The Cape Argus* that was published to commemorate the President’s 80th birthday.³² “I want [the students] to enjoy history.... They want to know about Mandela. They ask every year, ‘Miss, when are we going to learn about Mandela? When are we going to learn about the new South Africa?’”³³ Ms Septoe emphasised how history teachers needed to teach students about topics that interested them, even if the task was especially difficult in disadvantaged communities. “They tell you, ‘Miss, it’s a boring subject.’ But we want the kids to do history. So we try to make it alive for them.”³⁴

Making history interesting to the students was also one of the primary goals of the teachers at Peninsula High. “One of the things that I try desperately to counter is the perception that history is boring,” explained Amelia Green. “They think that it’s all South African history and that we’ll do the Great Trek ten times.”³⁵ With these negative perceptions of South African history, teachers at Peninsula High tended to steer clear of national history and focused instead on Europe and America. Liz Fieldings explained that this was the history that was relevant to the community that Peninsula High served; students at this school related closely to overseas history because it resonated with their life experiences.³⁶ The teachers at Ocean High agreed with this philosophy of history teaching. Gregory Will, Head of the History Department, explained why they had chosen to teach history in the way they have. “It tends to be Eurocentric because [the students] have a strong resistance to doing South African history. They have a much closer connection to things like World Wars than the little battles here in South Africa.”³⁷

The same tendencies among students were evident at River High and Hoërskool Noord. The students at River High spoke of the ‘small history’ that South Africa has. One Grade 8 student said, “There isn’t as much history in South Africa as in other parts of the world, I mean, we’ve only learned a little now, being in high school. But in primary school we learned about other countries and other countries, I think, have quite a bit more history than what we do.”³⁸ Henk de Groot at Hoërskool Noord explained that his students’ resistance to South African history derived from different experiences. His students did not want to learn about South Africa’s past because they already felt as if they were being made to live in the past, to take the blame for what their white ancestors did in this country.³⁹ Despite the inclinations of their students, the teachers at River High and Hoërskool Noord wanted to veer away from the Eurocentric history of the World Wars to focus on history that they felt was more applicable to the future lives of their students. This history, they felt, was recent South African history. “They need to understand where they live,” Peter Simpson of River High said.⁴⁰ Mr de Groot was unwavering in his commitment to help his students lose some of their cynicism about the new South Africa. “To me,” he said, “... to me [history’s] about giving them hope despite what they may see as a hopeless situation. To give them hope and to make them dream and to let them plan to accomplish those dreams.”⁴¹

It is the diverse student population that has driven the large shift away from Eurocentric history at Central High. Josh Kennish explained what he called his ‘transformation’ as a history teacher. “It took me a bit of time to actually adapt to talking fairly blasély about apartheid, because before it didn’t affect anybody I was

talking to. And then suddenly you are talking to kids whose parents and maybe grandparents have been through that system and been affected, directly affected by it. And it did take me some time. The first couple of months, maybe even the first couple of years, were a bit of a jolt; you'd get half way in a sentence and think, 'Hang on I'm talking now to people who this matters to.'⁴² Teachers at other newly integrated schools also have found themselves in the midst of the shift in teaching that Mr Kennish described. Laura Hofmeyr at Mountain High explained what had changed for her. "[P]reviously I would have dealt with the Crusades in a very one sided-way, the wicked Muslims sort of thing," she said quite bluntly. "[But] now twenty-five percent of the school here is Muslim. Therefore, you automatically are more sensitive as a teacher to the issues and you, therefore, I think, tend to approach them in a more analytical fashion. There are two sides to the argument, which is exactly what we ought to be doing in history. So I think cultural difference is actually forcing us to do the job better than we did before.... I think it certainly has pulled me up short. It's been sort of, Wow. The approach to the Crusades twenty years ago, you can't use. Because my class is not just a Christian class."⁴³

Issues of racial, cultural, and economic diversity did not surround students at schools such as River High and Hoërskool Noord. They had not experienced an influx of 'cultural difference,' as Dr Hofmeyr described it. In this situation, history provided a space for teachers to expose students to these issues, specifically by dealing with the recent South African past. Some of the teachers at Peninsula High also believed that a shift needed to take place at their relatively homogenous school to bring these issues into the schools and into the students' minds. They would have liked to see movement away from the Eurocentric curriculum that has been followed for years to focus instead on recent South African history. They did not believe that this reality was close to their students—nor was it relevant and interesting by that association—but they believed that it *should* be close to their students. "[Peninsula] is a very, very sheltered community... and needs to be brokered from that sort of comfort-zone," Roland Weir said.⁴⁴

To develop a sense of empathy to the situations of diverse people was one of the principle reasons why teachers like Mr Weir at Peninsula High felt that students needed to be exposed to South African history. "[Our students] have no idea about what happened in this country," he said. "And they need to know. They need to understand what people went through."⁴⁵ Mr Weir inserted one particular lesson on empathy into the existing curriculum. He tried to put his students into Hector Petersen's shoes, to show them what their own reactions would be to his situation in Soweto schools.⁴⁶ Nicole Weld, Head of the History Department at Peninsula High, used empathy in a different historical context. She wrapped her students into the lives of children during the Second World War, asking them how they would feel if they were sent to live in the country with rural people who had very different life experiences.⁴⁷

Developing the skills of empathy was a stepping stone to larger goals of encouraging respect and recognition of differences, said Keisha Roberts at Central High. Unlike at Peninsula High, in her classrooms, students from different backgrounds sat side by side. "They are always clashing in terms of beliefs and understanding and values," she said. "As a teacher, you have to negotiate those differences."⁴⁸ She tried many ways in which to do so effectively. "[I]t starts with simple things," Ms Roberts says, "like how you pronounce words. The African languages have very distinct ways of pronouncing words. Some people will say 'Causa' because it sounds better to them, but it's '!Xhosa.' And I will make sure that I pronounce it right. And I think that is probably why I have a good relationship with most of my black students, because they can see I'm making the effort. I'm not always right or doing it well, but I'll ask 'Now how do I pronounce it?' And it starts

with something as small as that. And I can tell you this, not everybody really tries to reach out and actually show students that they are of value.”⁴⁹

But the development of respect and recognition cannot happen simply by adding small elements to existing curricula to make it more sensitive to the diverse experiences of people, Ms Roberts was adamant. “Children know when something is an aside,” she said. “And we don’t want to make them to feel that they, as people, are an aside.”⁵⁰ The curriculum needed to be redone completely, she asserted, to reflect those goals in everything it did. “At Central High, we have tried to make history about valuing the other person,” said Mr Brown, Head of History. “Especially in our Grade 8s, with the study of the human family, we study how people lived at different times, with different cultures. And we spend a lot of time talking about what we can learn from the San, for example.”⁵¹ Although Ms Roberts appreciated this new curriculum and how it worked to develop skills of empathy, respect, and recognition, she emphasised that it was more than the curriculum that needed to reflect these values. “The country’s going through a lot of changes and we are trying to absorb it. And it’s coming down to how we adults try and take the knowledge and bring it to [the students],” she explained. “Because we need to integrate and be part of that thinking before we can actually sell it to them.... [But] I don’t think we are very good examples.... The kids feel that there are some racial tensions in the staff. I mean, I’ve been asked that, ‘What is it like at the staffroom?’ They suspect that there could be. They might not be wrong.”⁵²

The issues involved with a school in the process of integrating occupied the thoughts of the students at Mountain High. There were lots of things still to be sorted out, they said. They learned about apartheid in their history classes, but they were not sure it was actually the past they were learning about. “In school, you’ll still see that,” a Grade 9 student explained. “I mean, in class, we all sit together and we talk and stuff, but the minute the bell goes... you’ll see that the whites will sit together, coloureds will sit together, and the blacks will sit together. Because they feel more close to each other because they went through the same thing. I mean, and also, the blacks also speak a different language and we, the coloureds, we sort of use an Afrikaans and English mix and sometimes, they don’t understand, so they don’t feel comfortable. But we say, well, people say, ‘It’s over,’ but look at the schools. We’re not sitting in mixed groups are we? I mean, we’re sitting separate from each other. It’s the same as saying this is a white area, this is a coloured area sort of thing.”⁵³

Being together in school with people of different backgrounds could open students’ eyes to the diversity of South Africa, the teachers at Plain High echoed the comments of Ms Roberts at Central High. But, as the student from Mountain High emphasised, just being together was not enough to address the issues that this integration brought to a school. The teachers at Plain High believed that history classes could provide a venue for students to work through some of these issues, of prejudice and racism, of respect and difference. Riaan September explained how empathy entered into his lessons on a daily basis as a result of the content he covered and the racial make-up of his classes. “We are busy with the apartheid era now in history classes, and you can see that there is a lot of empathy of the so-called coloured students towards what they are learning about, what happened in the black areas. And that helps a lot. It helps a lot to teach the wrongs of the past. They see the wrongs done to each other, the people in their school.... They see that where we stay or the colour of skin does not make it so that we are not people.”⁵⁴ Plain High began the process of integration in 1986 when the school accepted some African students from Soweto who had come to Cape Town to be educated. This school had thus been serving a diverse student population for longer than many schools. Mr September

emphasised that the teachers had worked hard to overcome some of the hate and resentment associated with integration and had tried, through history classes, to encourage students to see the value in every person regardless of skin colour.⁵⁵ He also described the strain that this integration had placed on the relationship between the school and its immediate community; most of the families who live in the neighbourhood of the school would not send their children there.⁵⁶

The tension between so-called coloureds and Africans is expressed by students at Freeway High in terms of their own hopes for the future. A Grade 8 student commented that “[a]partheid is repeating itself again.”⁵⁷ Her classmate agreed, specifying that “[i]t’s the Africans that get the advantage now.”⁵⁸ These students perceived favouritism being shown towards Africans in the South Africa in which they were growing up and, as a result, they were not sure how they, as so-called coloureds, would ever get jobs.⁵⁹ Students at District High, another former House of Representatives school, echoed the same concerns. “Blacks were oppressed all the years, but I mean it was also the so-called coloureds all the years too and not only the blacks. And now it’s like the whites and the blacks who get privileged, or that’s the way I see it. And then there’s like no place for the coloureds.”⁶⁰

Students felt similarly uncertain of what their futures would be in South Africa at the predominantly white Hoërskool Noord and Ocean High. “If you go to university, say you want to be doctors, first choice is given to a black man and a black woman and then we only come after that,” a Grade 8 student at Ocean High said. “I think that is racist. It should be the person who has the best qualifications.”⁶¹ Her classmate placed these comments in historical context and then brought them back to what it meant for his present and future. “In apartheid they separated everyone and now what we’re trying to do in South Africa is bring it all back together. But now, they’re all just going opposite again. It’s just slowly going against white people.”⁶² At Hoërskool Noord, students from a less affluent background felt the weight of an uncertain future even more strongly. “I don’t know,” said a Grade 9 student, “it’s like some people just get more opportunities than others now. It was like that in the old days too, but they say that we’re supposed to be equal now but some people still get more.”⁶³

“I’ve never met a white person before,” a Grade 9 student at Transkei High said.⁶⁴ These students only knew white people by the actions they learned about in history classes. When they thought of history, they thought about the fighting between white people and black people in South Africa. That was what history meant to them, they said. When they learned about people who looked different to them, they learned only about the bad things those people did to the Xhosas.⁶⁵ The students said that they were bored by topics such as the Renaissance when they were asked simply to copy notes from the board,⁶⁶ but the only other history the students at Transkei High have been exposed to made them angry. It made them think of revenge on white people, but they didn’t want to think that way, they said.⁶⁷ “I think history is a wrong subject,” a Grade 8 explained, “just because I’ve told myself that we must make peace in our land.”⁶⁸ “I think we must forget history and think of the future,” his classmate agreed.⁶⁹

“Apartheid, no,” a Grade 8 student at Longevity High echoed the concerns of the students at Transkei High. “I don’t think we can talk about things because it makes pain for other people and their families. And

then the pain comes again. They must put it in the past and plan for the future.”⁷⁰ The teachers at Longevity High were unaware that their students had these feelings. They believed that teaching about apartheid and about how black people were treated in the past would allow the students to understand present situations. “[The students] need to know the history of the oppression of the past fifty years to understand why things are like this today. Some of them live in shacks, but they don’t know why,” Siko Cira said.⁷¹ Through this knowledge, the students would be able to put themselves in their parents’ and grandparents’ positions, to empathise with how Africans see the new South Africa, he said.⁷² “It will help them to live in South Africa.”⁷³

“I think it must be terribly difficult for teachers at schools that are still so racially divided to teach about diversity and about the new South Africa,” Caitlin Matthews at Central High said. “Empathy only goes so far,” she sighed. “The new South Africa hasn’t reached those areas yet.”⁷⁴ Central High was a step away from the segregate apartheid system of schooling that continued to prevail at Transkei High and Longevity High. “Our kids are having the chance to experience the diversity of South Africa,” Ms Roberts said. “But we must help them. History can help them to have the discussions they need to have, to understand each other. They must learn to live in the kind of South Africa that is made up of diverse people, who are equal. That’s hard for some of them. But as history teachers, we’re trying.”⁷⁵

“It’s not content that is the main focus of the teaching of history for me, it is the skills of historical research,” Mr Brown said as he explained the vision for history teaching at Central High. “These students need skills to live in South Africa. They need to learn how to live together and they also need to know how to think.... I give them exercises trying to build language skills and comprehension and the selection of information to answer questions in order to understand a particular event. These are skills that they can take with them to any job in the future.”⁷⁶ The teachers at Peninsula High were also concerned about teaching their students skills that would aid them in their future lives. “In the early days of my teaching career, it was more a case of exploring content in relation to sources, but now the emphasis is perhaps the skills one can gain from examining sources, more than the content,” Ms Weld explained. Ms Fieldings agreed: “I try to teach them lifeskills and life situations,” she said. “At [Peninsula] we try to make sure that students can speak well and make an argument and analyse situations and documents. That’s what history needs to be all about these days.”⁷⁷ Some of the teachers at Peninsula High worried, however, about whether their students would be able to cope with life outside of their sheltered school and community. “The new South Africa has not reached [Peninsula],” Mr Weir said. “We are still so isolated in this community. And I’m not sure whether we are history teachers are exercising our role to prepare students for life out there. I think it will come as a real shock.”⁷⁸

The teachers and students at Plain High felt as if their school was not isolated, but simply forgotten in the maze of Mitchells Plain. “This is not the new South Africa,” Ms Septoe said and shook her head. In this area, crime ruled people’s lives and high unemployment rates made people pessimistic about any hope of jobs in the future. “In this situation, teaching about inequalities and racism can be dangerous,” Mr September said. “We have to be careful not to make people hate with the history that we teach them.”⁷⁹ Life in the new South Africa was not going to be easy for these students, the teachers at Plain High said. But from history they could learn that they needed to continue fighting for what they believed in. “The struggle is not over,” Ms Septoe

spoke methodically. “They must learn to make their way between the crime and gangsters. With history, we can teach them skill of coping with these situations. We can teach them values so that they will not end up dead. We need these students to make the new South Africa come to Mitchells Plain.”⁸⁰

“History reaches areas of children’s lives that they don’t talk about in other subjects or in other places,” Mr September said excitedly. “We have a job to do.”⁸¹

While education and history teaching are in flux, confusion and uncertainty can dominate life in schools. But a time of transition can also be a time of deep reflection about the possibilities for teaching and learning and the potential and direction for future change. In Cape Town schools, in 1998, it was a time for teachers to embrace Mr September’s words, “We have a job to do.” As the accounts of Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High demonstrate, the job of teaching was demanding, its practice varied, and the possibilities many and diverse.

“What are you going *to do* with this information, Miss?” the students’ question was never far from my mind.

I turned the question back around to one of the Grade 9 students: “What do you do when you get some information?”

“Well, Miss,” she thought for a minute. “We talk about it.” She smiled at her answer and nodded at me.

“Do you think that’s important?” I asked her.

“You know, Miss, you might laugh at this because everyone does, but I could talk forever, I think,” I smiled at her. “No, really, there is always so much to learn from the other children, and from our teacher. When I talk to them, it makes me think harder.”⁸²

In school, as this Grade 9 student pointed out, exploration through conversation is an indispensable tool for teachers and students as they attempt to make sense of the world around them. In a time of transition, where teachers and students were approaching education and history teaching in the isolation of their individual schools, I felt that discourse could enhance deep reflection and exploration by infusing the experiences of others. It is for this reason that I have chosen to present my research findings in the form of conversations between teachers at Peninsula High, Transkei High, Plain High, and Central High and to inform them with the experiences of the breadth schools. Through these conversations, I have attempted to mirror how teachers and students in Cape Town schools are dealing, through history, with an education system in transition.

A mirror cannot solve problems or even provide defined solutions. What it can do is to multiply fields of vision. Through the conversations that I have created between teachers from different schools, I have attempted to turn the mirror around in many directions. I have endeavoured to reflect education and history teaching from various angles, to provoke the sight and thought of things that previously were not apparent. Mirrors allow observers to look in front, behind, to the side, and they probe them to look within. They cannot predict the future, but they tempt people to imagine it.

NOTES

- ¹ Plain High. Personal communication with Grade 8 Class 2 students. 7 September 1998.
- ² Peninsula High. Personal communication with Grade 9 Class X2 students. 12 May 1998.
- ³ Central High. Personal communication with Grade 9 Class 1 students. 22 April 1998.
- ⁴ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ⁵ Trevor van Louw, Subject Advisor for history, WCED. Personal communication. 27 May 1998.
- ⁶ Personal communication with teachers at all schools. April to November 1998.
- ⁷ The Cape Town Teachers' Centre and the Parow Teachers' Centre run these study groups.
- ⁸ Personal communication with teachers at all schools. April to November 1998.
- ⁹ The WCED conducted workshops for matric history teachers that emphasised the need to work with younger grades on new approaches to history—such as source-based learning—to equip them with skills that they would use throughout their years of school history. Teachers commented on how these workshops were focused on the matric exam, however, and how to prepare their senior students for it.
- ¹⁰ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ¹¹ See Appendix V for a copy of the letter inviting teachers to this meeting and describing the proceedings.
- ¹² Plain High. Personal communication with Carole Septoe. 11 November 1998.
- ¹³ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ¹⁴ Phumla Mahashe, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 30 July 1998.
- ¹⁵ Transkei High. Personal observation of Grade 8 Class E. 27 July 1998.
- ¹⁶ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ¹⁷ Simon Brown, teacher at City High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ¹⁸ James Walter, teacher at Suburb High. Interview. 19 June 1998.
- ¹⁹ Amy Slater, teacher at Suburb High. Interview. 19 June 1998.
- ²⁰ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ²¹ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ²² Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ²³ Kathryn Higgins, teacher at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ²⁴ Kathryn Higgins, teacher at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ²⁵ Zukiswa Fanaphi, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ²⁶ Phumla Mahashe, teacher at Transkei High. Interview. 30 July 1998.
- ²⁷ Sheila Mbeki, teacher at Masakhane High. Personal communication. 27 October 1998.
- ²⁸ Sheila Mbeki, teacher at Masakhane High. Interview. 27 October 1998.
- ²⁹ Masakhane High. Personal communication with the Deputy Principal. 27 October 1998.
- ³⁰ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ³¹ Carole Sepote, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 9 September 1998.
- ³² Plain High. Personal observation of Grade 8 classes. September 1998.
- ³³ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ³⁴ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ³⁵ Amelia Green, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 18 May 1998.
- ³⁶ Liz Fieldings, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 25 May 1998.
- ³⁷ Gregory Will, teacher at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ³⁸ Stephanie Bauer, Grade 8 student at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ³⁹ Henk de Groot, teacher at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁴⁰ Peter Simpson, teacher at River High. Interview. 10 June 1998.
- ⁴¹ Henk de Groot, teacher at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁴² Josh Kennish, teacher at Central High. Interview. 29 April 1998.
- ⁴³ Laura Hofmeyr, teacher at Mountain High. Interview. 12 June 1998.
- ⁴⁴ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ⁴⁵ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Personal communication. 19 May 1998.
- ⁴⁶ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ⁴⁷ Peninsula High. Personal observation of Grade 9 Class B2. 20 May 1998.
- ⁴⁸ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ⁴⁹ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ⁵⁰ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ⁵¹ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 30 April 1998.
- ⁵² Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ⁵³ Lynn Lewis, Grade 9 student at Mountain High. Interview. 15 June 1998.

- ⁵⁴ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁵⁵ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 15 September 1998.
- ⁵⁶ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 8 September 1998.
- ⁵⁷ Sylvie Viljoen, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ⁵⁸ George Faure, Grade 8 student at Freeway High. Interview. 7 October 1998.
- ⁵⁹ Freeway High. Interview with Grade 8 students. 7 October 1998.
- ⁶⁰ Belen Kiewietz, Grade 8 student at District High. 6 October 1998.
- ⁶¹ Lorna Collin, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ⁶² Steven Carroll, Grade 8 student at Ocean High. Interview. 2 November 1998.
- ⁶³ David Boers, Grade 9 student at Hoërskool Noord. Interview. 20 October 1998.
- ⁶⁴ Benny Vukuza, Grade 9 student at Transkei High. Personal communication. 22 July 1998.
- ⁶⁵ Transkei High. Personal communication with Grade 9 students. 22 July 1998.
- ⁶⁶ Transkei High. Personal communication with Grade 8 students. 27 July 1998.
- ⁶⁷ Transkei High. Interview with Grade 8 students. 29 July 1998.
- ⁶⁸ Siyabulela Hlahla, Grade 8 student at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ⁶⁹ Mhtobeli Ndima, Grade 8 student at Transkei High. Interview. 29 July 1998.
- ⁷⁰ John Denga, Grade 8 student at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁷¹ Siko Cira, teacher at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁷² Siko Cira, teacher at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁷³ Siko Cira, teacher at Longevity High. Interview. 30 October 1998.
- ⁷⁴ Caitlin Matthews, teacher at Central High. Personal communication. 8 May 1998.
- ⁷⁵ Keisha Roberts, teacher at Central High. Interview. 28 April 1998.
- ⁷⁶ Simon Brown, teacher at Central High. Interview. 8 May 1998.
- ⁷⁷ Liz Fieldings, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 25 May 1998.
- ⁷⁸ Roland Weir, teacher at Peninsula High. Interview. 22 May 1998.
- ⁷⁹ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 18 September 1998.
- ⁸⁰ Carole Septoe, teacher at Plain High. Interview. 11 November 1998.
- ⁸¹ Riaan September, teacher at Plain High. Personal communication. 18 September 1998.
- ⁸² Central High. Personal communication with Grade 9 Class 1 students. 22 April 1998.

**APPENDIX I:
INTERIM SYLLABUS FOR HISTORY, GRADE 8 AND 9**

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
(WESTERN CAPE)

INTERIM SYLLABUS

FOR

HISTORY

ORDINARY GRADE

STANDARDS 5, 6 AND 7

HISTORY
STANDARDS 5-7

1. AIMS

1.1 History is a systematic study of the past. It is a study based on evidence: a selection of facts and events that are arranged, interpreted and explained. Thus History, in addition to its content, is also a mode of enquiry, a way of investigating the past which requires the acquisition and use of skills. The events, communities and peoples of the past are studied in order to develop an appreciation of other times and places, but also because they are interesting in themselves. History develops both the imagination and the understanding of people and communities, while a study of recent History is essential for an understanding of the present, just as an understanding of the present is necessary to understand the past.

1.2 General aims

Arising from this conception of history, the course of study offered in Standards 5 to 7, in South African and General History has been developed to achieve, inter alia, the following general aims:

- 1.2.1 To contribute to the personal development of pupils.
- 1.2.2 To contribute to the development of a sense of citizenship.
- 1.2.3 To contribute to the development of positive attitudes and values.
- 1.2.4 To contribute to an understanding and appreciation of their heritage and that of other peoples and cultures.
- 1.2.5 To contribute to their understanding of the unique nature of individuals and events.
- 1.2.6 To contribute to their understanding of History as an academic discipline and the intellectual skills and perspectives which such a study involves.

1.3 Specific aims

- 1.3.1 To give pupils a sense of such characteristics of historical knowledge as its time dimension; the importance of placing events in their historical context; the concepts and terminology and the interpretations and perspectives of historical knowledge; the changing state of historical knowledge and the contributions made by related disciplines to historical knowledge.

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- 1.3.2 To give the pupils an understanding and appreciation of such historical skills as the ability to locate evidence, to organise, classify and interpret this evidence in a logical way and to communicate historical ideas.
- 1.3.3 To give the pupils a sense of the positive attitudes and values which arise from a study of the past and of the formative value of History through the development of a sense of the past and an appreciation of the complexity of the human forces which have shaped our past.

2. GENERAL REMARKS

- 2.1 The aims of history teaching can only be realised if the subject matter is presented to the pupils at the appropriate level.
- 2.2 The aims of history teaching can only be realised if the skills of enquiry are presented to the pupil at the appropriate level.
- 2.3 The content and setting of the syllabus is such that pupils will develop a broad understanding and general knowledge.
- 2.4 The syllabus will also ensure that pupils will gain a detailed knowledge and understanding of selected movements influencing the history of South Africa and the rest of the world.
- 2.5 The syllabus is designed to integrate the teaching of content, skills and attitudes.
- 2.6 Because skills and attitudes are less concrete aims, they require more conscious and systematic consideration for the teacher to avoid an approach based purely on content.
- 2.7 Attitudes and values cannot be tested. The aim should be to contribute to the growth and maturing of the pupil.
- 2.8 Each year's syllabus should be taught in such a way that there is a harmony between the learning process (the "how") and the learning product (the "what").
- 2.9 When handling the Standards 5-7 history syllabus, teachers should bear in mind that part of the work concerned has been covered in the Senior Primary Phase (Standards 2-4) and that part of the work will be covered again in the Senior Secondary Phase (Standards 8-10). The history teacher is thus faced with the challenge of developing new perspectives and approaches so that the dangers which repetition encourages can be avoided.

These new perspectives and approaches should emphasise the dramatic human story of the past and by means of graphic details and descriptions, the past should live again in the imagination of the pupils.

These new perspectives and approaches should also emphasise an understanding of the past based on an appreciation of evidence, a grasp of human motivation, a mastery of intellectual skills and an understanding of the significance of the human story.

- 2.10 To help develop such a response to the study of History, it is recommended that a variety of teaching methods be used when handling the Standards 5-7 history syllabus. Project work in connection with local and/or regional history is strongly recommended.

3. EVALUATION

- 3.1 The work in each of the standards (5, 6 and 7) must be completed and evaluated annually.
- 3.2 The same subject matter need not be evaluated repeatedly during the year.
- 3.3 Evaluation can be done by means of testing periodically and/or tasks and/or a formal examination at the end of the year.

STANDARD 6

S Y L L A B U S

SECTION A: GENERAL HISTORY

Events up to the end of the 18th century that contributed to the formation of the modern world.

TWO of these themes must be studied in detail and ONE in broad outline.

1. THE RENAISSANCE

1.1 Concept and general characteristics.

1.2 The Renaissance illustrated by ONE example from each of the following:

- 1.2.1 Literature: Petrarch, Boccaccio, Erasmus, Shakespeare, Vondel;
- 1.2.2 Art: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Albrecht Dürer, Rembrandt;
- 1.2.3 Science: Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Huygens, Harvey, Newton.

1.3 The consequences of the Renaissance inside and outside Europe:

- 1.3.1 Political, social, economic and cultural results;
- 1.3.2 The development of critical thinking and its influence on religion;
- 1.3.3 Results outside Europe.

2. COLONISATION

- 2.1 Concept and general characteristics of colonisation.
- 2.2 A broad outline of Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and English colonisation up to about 1800 (explained by means of mapwork).
- 2.3 The American War of Independence as an example of colonial revolt.
- 2.4 The impact on slavery.
- 2.5 Reactions and resistance to colonisation.

3. THE PERIOD OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

3.1 Concept and general characteristics of an industrial

3.1 Concept and general characteristics of an industrial revolution.

3.2 Briefly, one inventor or innovator in Britain in each of the following fields: textiles, transport and agriculture

3.3 Briefly, the economic and social significance of the Industrial revolution in Britain.

4. THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND ITS AFTERMATH TO 1800

- 4.1 Concept and general characteristics of a political revolution.
- 4.2 The French revolution 1789 to 1795.
- 4.3 The aftermath of the French revolution to 1800.

SECTION B: SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY 1806 - 1854

At least TWO of the following should be studied.

1. THE CAPE

- 1.1 The end of the V.O.C. rule (1795).
- 1.2 The Second British occupation.
- 1.3 The abolition of slavery and its consequences.

2. MOVEMENT AND SETTLEMENT IN THE INTERIOR

- 2.1 Pre-industrial societies existing in the interior (e.g. Khoisan, independent African societies).
- 2.2 Definitions and characteristics of migrations.
- 2.3 The period of the Mfecane / Difaqane and the Great Trek.

3. OWN CHOICE (1806 - 1854)

S Y L L A B U S

SECTION A: GENERAL HISTORY

Important world events since 1800.

Study any THREE of the following themes:

1. NATIONALISM IN THE MODERN WORLD

1.1 Nationalism in Europe: the unification of Italy as an example of unification and liberation.

OR

1.2 Nationalism in the Middle East: Israel and the Arab world.

2. WARS IN THE MODERN WORLD

2.1 Aspects of the First World War:

The armaments race in Europe; primary causes; the development of the war in broad outline; the entry of the USA; the peace conference and the Treaty of Versailles.

OR

2.2 Aspects of the Second World War

The prelude to the war with emphasis on the regional expansion of the Axis powers; the outbreak of war and the grouping of world powers; the course of the war in Europe and the Far East in broad outline.

3. INTERNATIONALISM IN THE MODERN WORLD: THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION

3.1 Origin, aims and composition (in broad outline).

3.2 The work of the United Nations.

4. AFRICAN STATES

A study of an African state this century, with a focus on the rise of nationalism, its movement towards independence and the period thereafter.

A study of ONE of the following:

- 4.1 Kenya;
- 4.2 Malawi;
- 4.3 Mozambique;
- 4.4 Lesotho;
- 4.5 Namibia;
- 4.6 Zimbabwe.

5. CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS 1970 - PRESENT. (Own choice).

SECTION B: SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY 1854 - present

At least THREE of the following should be studied.

1. MINERAL DISCOVERIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

1.1 The discovery of diamonds OR gold.

1.2 The results of mineral discoveries with special reference to the economic and social aspects.

2. THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR / ANGLO-BOER WAR (1899 - 1902)

2.1 The prelude to and the causes of the war.

2.2 The course of the war (in broad outline only). Reference should be made to how it affected all communities.

2.3 The Peace of Vereeniging.

3. FROM UNION TO REPUBLIC

3.1 The establishment of the Union of South Africa.

3.2 Constitutional development until the founding of the Republic of South Africa.

4. THEMES FROM SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY: THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

4.1 A brief overview of South Africa's constitutional history 1910 - present. (if Theme 3 is studied: 1961 - present.)

4.2 The new constitution, including the Bill of Rights; Children's and Women's Charter; the interim constitution and the present process.

4.3 The Apartheid era and resistance (e.g. The formation of resistance movements; the Defiance Campaign; the Freedom Charter; Sharpeville; the Rivonia Trial; the 1976 uprising; 1980s and 1990s.)

5. ANY OTHER TOPIC IN MODERN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY. (Own choice.)

**APPENDIX II:
STATISTICAL PROFILES OF SCHOOLS**

- A. Former House of Assembly schools that are predominantly white;**
- B. Former Department of Education and Training schools;**
- C. Former House of Representatives schools;**
- D. Former House of Assembly schools that are no longer predominantly white;**
- E. A statistical comparison of the principle case study schools.**

**A. STATISTICAL PROFILES OF FORMER HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SCHOOLS THAT HAVE
REMAINED PREDOMINANTLY WHITE**

Peninsula High, Ocean High, Hoërskool Noord, and River High

I. Number of Students, Teachers, and Student: Teacher Ratio

PENINSULA HIGH

Number of Students	1120
Number of Teachers	45
Renumeration paid by State	33
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	12
Student: Teacher Ratios	25:1

OCEAN HIGH

Number of Students	800
Number of Teachers	38
Renumeration paid by State	26
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	12
Student: Teacher Ratios	21:1

HOËRSKOOL NOORD

Number of Students	927
Number of Teachers	35
Renumeration paid by State	31
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	4
Student: Teacher Ratios	26:1

RIVER HIGH

Number of Students	911
Number of Teachers	48
Renumeration paid by State	30
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	18
Student: Teacher Ratios	19:1

II. School Fees

Peninsula High	2650
Ocean High	4350
Hoërskool Noord	1100
River High	4965

III. Percentage of Students Taking History to Matric

Students Taking History to Matric, %

Peninsula High	28
Ocean High	Not available
Hoërskool Noord	18
River High	47

IV. Number of Students According to Race

PENINSULA HIGH

- Peninsula High does not keep statistics on the basis of race

OCEAN HIGH

- Ocean High does not keep statistics on the basis of race

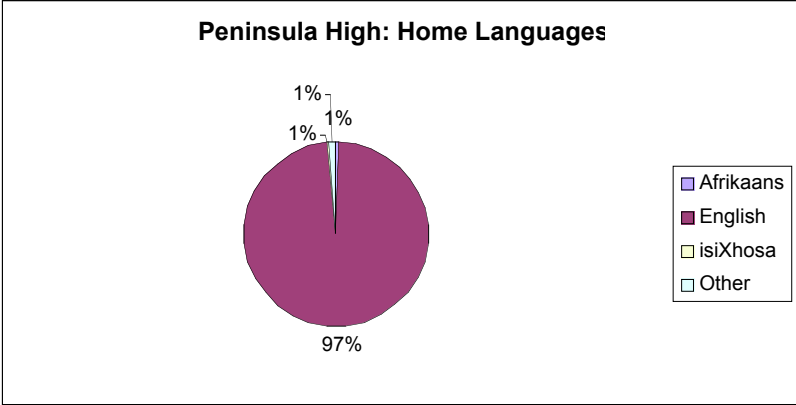
HOËRSKOOL NOORD

- Hoërskool Noord does not keep statistics on the basis of race

RIVER HIGH

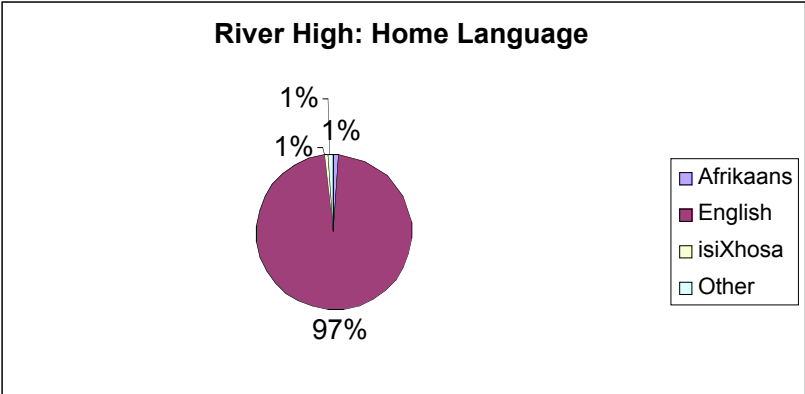
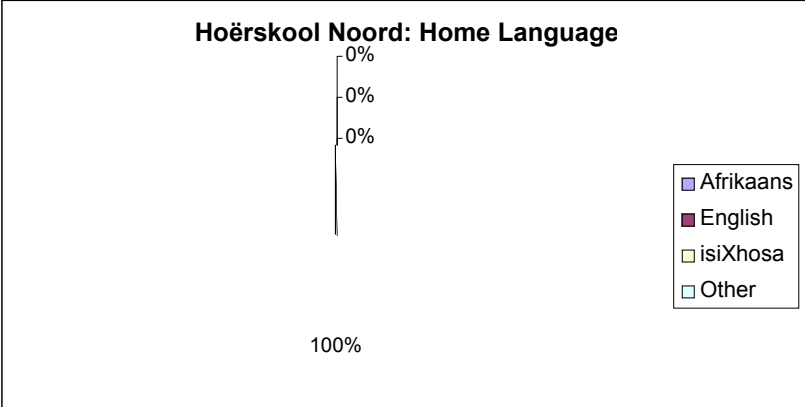
- River High does not keep statistics on the basis of race

V. Home Language

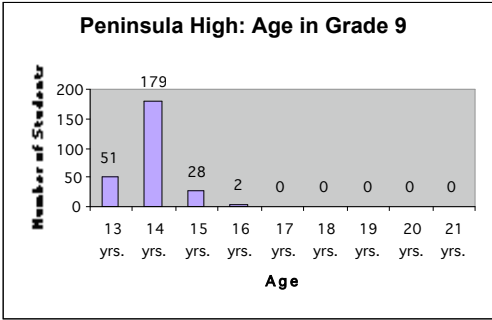
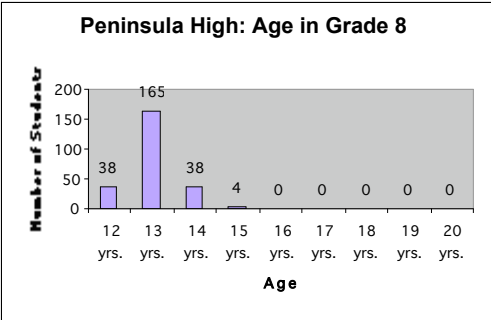


OCEAN HIGH

- Ocean High does not keep statistics on the basis of home language

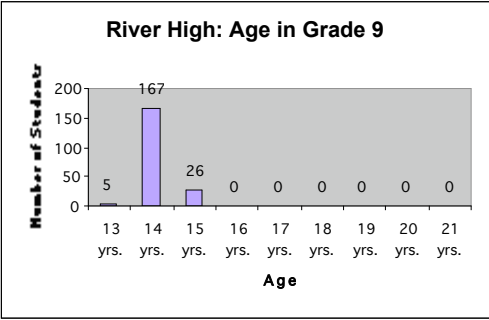
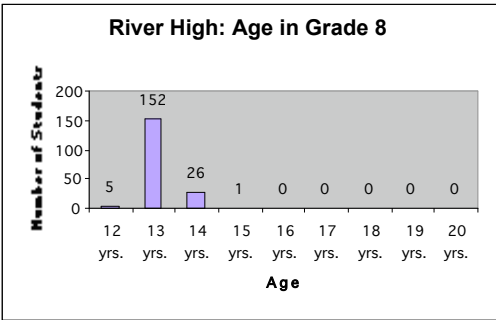
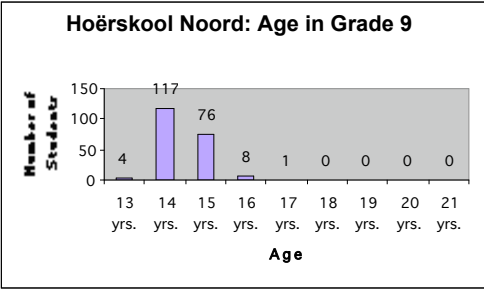
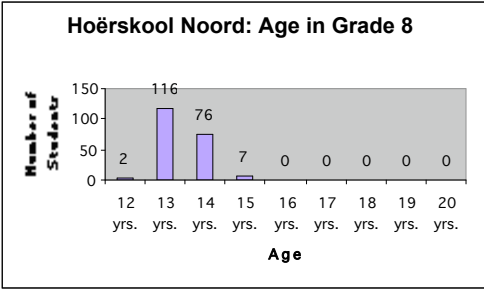


VI. Age in Grades 8 and 9



OCEAN HIGH

- Ocean High does not keep statistics on the basis of age



**B. STATISTICAL PROFILES OF FORMER
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING SCHOOLS
Transkei High, Longevity High, Khayelitsha High, and Masakhane High**

I. Number of Students, Teachers, and Student: Teacher Ratio

TRANSKEI HIGH

Number of Students	1732
Number of Teachers	47
Remuneration paid by State	47
Remuneration paid by Governing Body	0
Student: Teacher Ratios	37:1

LONGEVITY HIGH—Statistics not available

Number of Students	
Number of Teachers	
Remuneration paid by State	
Remuneration paid by Governing Body	
Student: Teacher Ratios	

KHAYELITSHA HIGH—Statistics not available

Number of Students	
Number of Teachers	
Remuneration paid by State	
Remuneration paid by Governing Body	
Student: Teacher Ratios	

MASAKHANE HIGH

Number of Students	1664
Number of Teachers	48
Remuneration paid by State	48
Remuneration paid by Governing Body	0
Student: Teacher Ratios	35:1

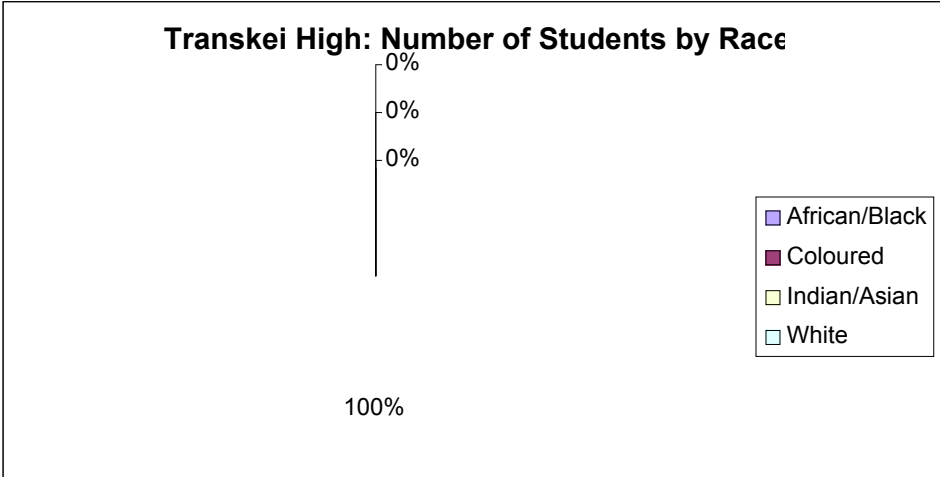
II. School Fees

Transkei High	40
Longevity High	Not available
Khayelitsha High	50
Masakhane High	60

III. Percentage of Students Taking History to Matric

Transkei High	47
Longevity High	Not available
Khayelitsha High	Not available
Masakhane High	53

IV. Number of Students by Race

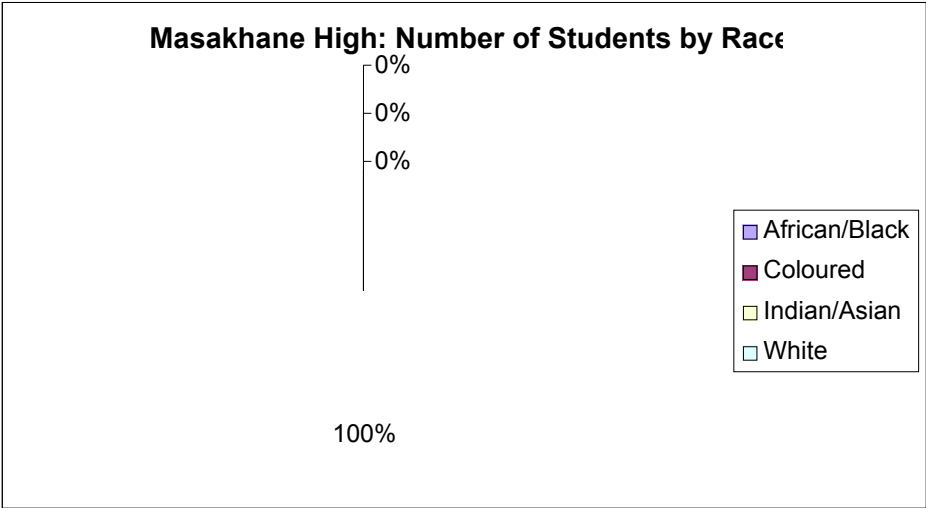


LONGEVITY HIGH

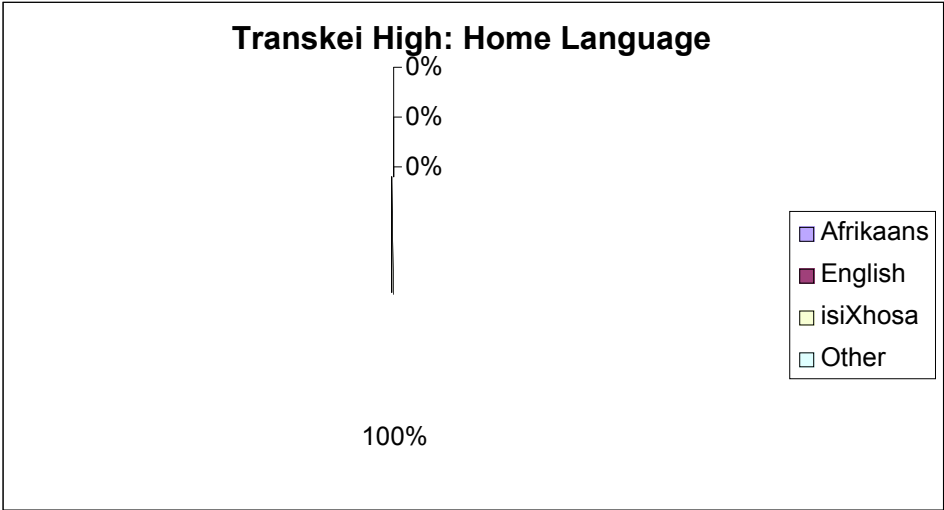
• Statistics not available

KHAYELITSHA HIGH

• Statistics not available



V. Home Language

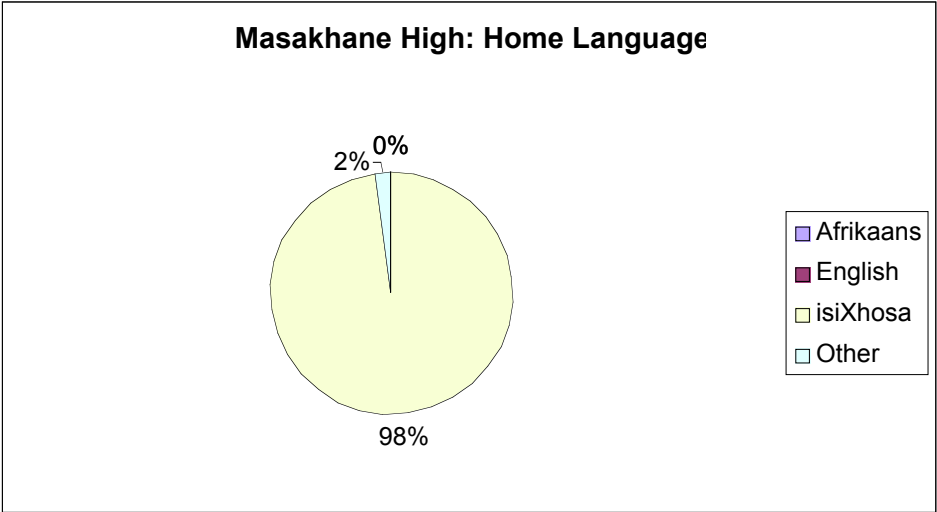


LONGEVITY HIGH

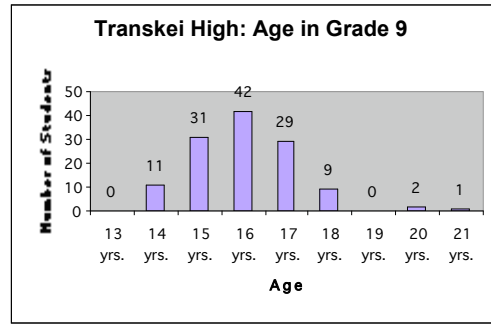
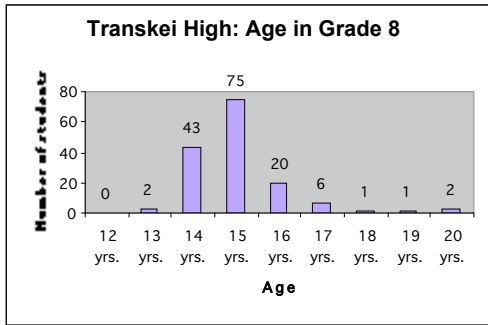
• Statistics not available

KHAYELITSHA HIGH

• Statistics not available



VI. Age in Grades 8 and 9



LONGEVITY HIGH

- Statistics not available

KHAYELITSHA HIGH

- Statistics not available

MASAKHANE HIGH

- Statistics not available

**C. STATISTICAL PROFILES OF
FORMER HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE SCHOOLS
Plain High, Flats High, Freeway High, and District High**

I. Number of Students, Teachers, and Student: Teacher Ratio

PLAIN HIGH

Number of Students	1016
Number of Teachers	35
Renumeration paid by State	35
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	0
Student: Teacher Ratios	29:1

FLATS HIGH

Number of Students	1051
Number of Teachers	38
Renumeration paid by State	38
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	0
Student: Teacher Ratios	28:1

FREEWAY HIGH

Number of Students	1364
Number of Teachers	43
Renumeration paid by State	43
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	0
Student: Teacher Ratios	32:1

DISTRICT HIGH

Number of Students	843
Number of Teachers	29
Renumeration paid by State	1
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	30
Student: Teacher Ratios	28:1

II. School Fees

Plain High	150
Flats High	120
Freeway High	250
District High	300

III. Percentage of Students Taking History to Matric

Students Taking History to Matric, %

Plain High	44
Flats High	30
Freeway High	33
District High	40

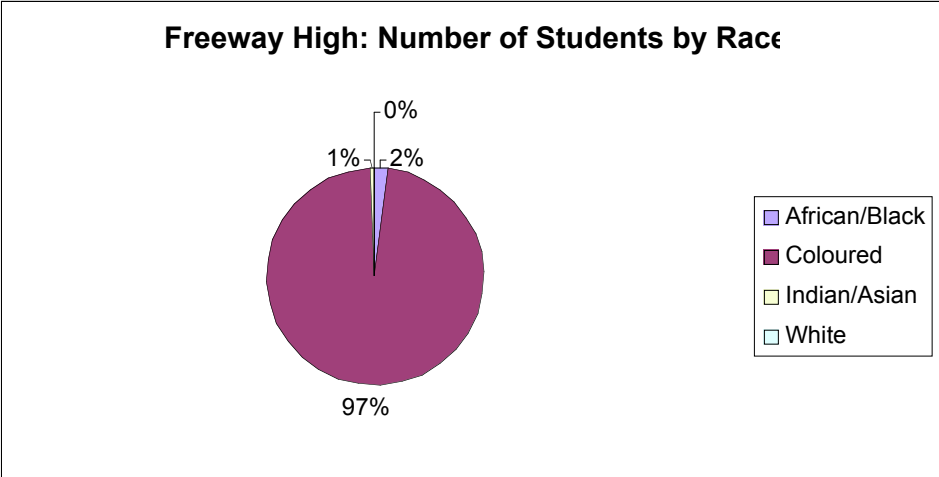
IV. Number of Students by Race

PLAIN HIGH

- Plain High does not keep statistics on the basis of race

FLATS HIGH

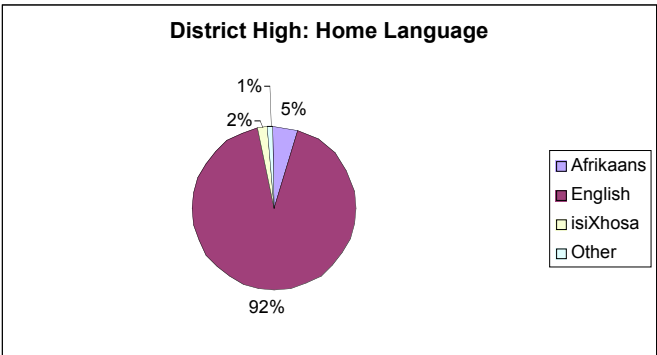
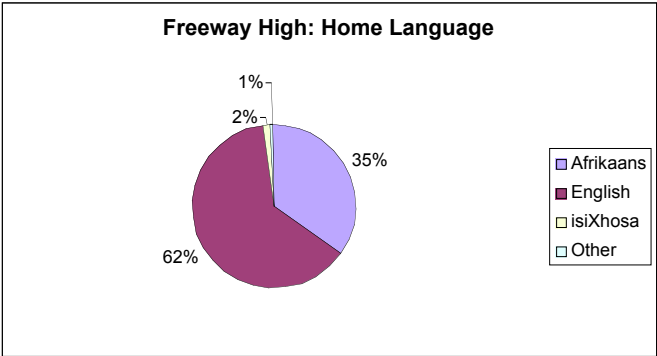
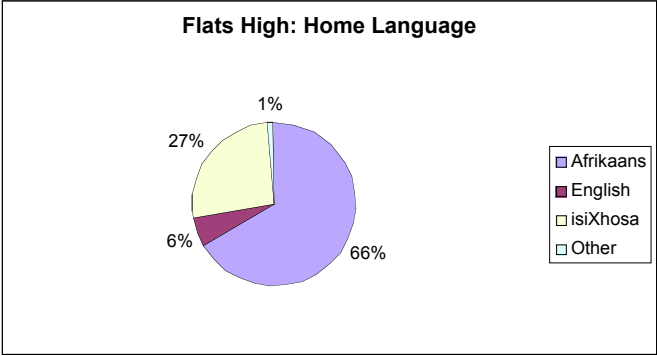
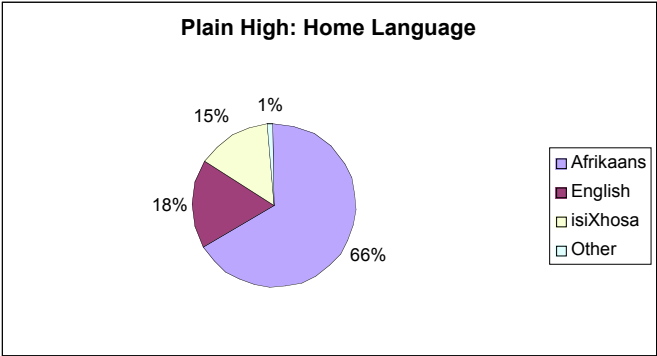
- Flats High does not keep statistics on the basis of race



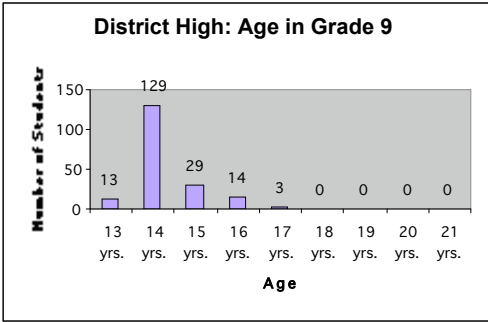
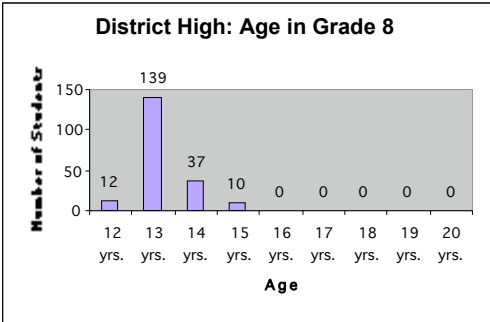
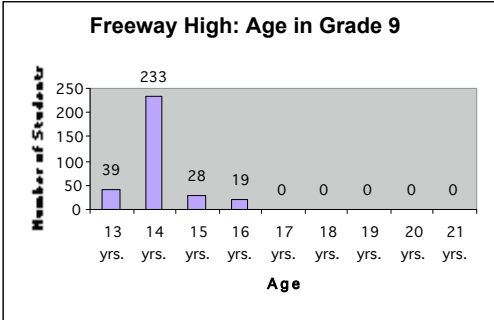
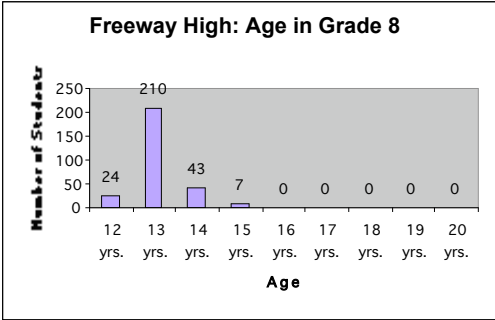
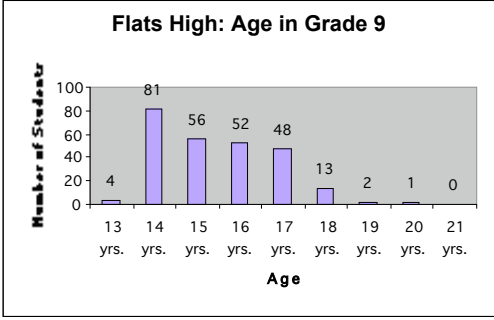
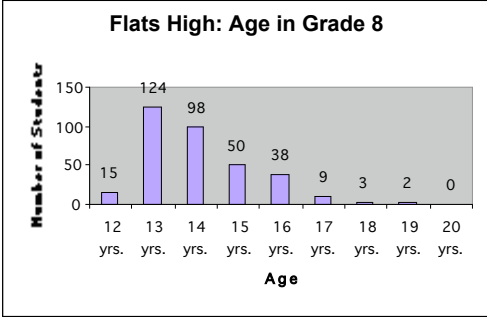
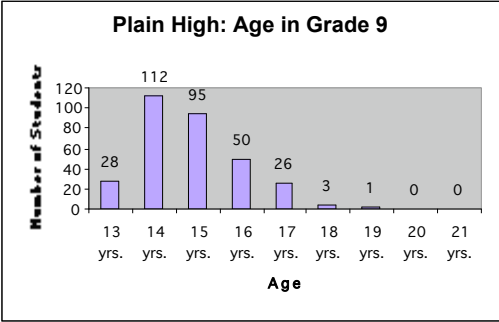
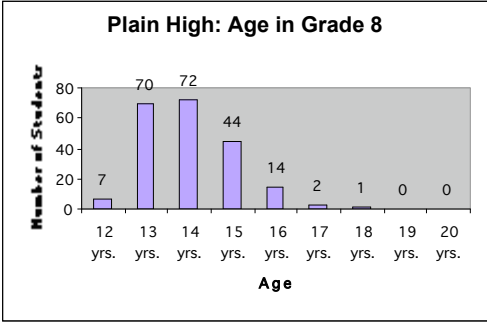
DISTRICT HIGH

- District High does not keep statistics on the basis of race

V. Home Language



VI. Age in Grades 8 and 9



D. STATISTICAL PROFILES OF FORMER HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SCHOOLS THAT ARE NO LONGER PREDOMINANTLY WHITE

Central High, Suburb High, Community High, Mountain High

I. Number of Students, Teachers, and Student: Teacher Ratio

CENTRAL HIGH

Number of Students	679
Number of Teachers	22
Renumeration paid by State	15
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	7
Student: Teacher Ratios	31:1

SUBURB HIGH

Number of Students	1118
Number of Teachers	44
Renumeration paid by State	37
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	7
Student: Teacher Ratios	25:1

COMMUNITY HIGH

Number of Students	1048
Number of Teachers	42
Renumeration paid by State	28
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	14
Student: Teacher Ratios	25:1

MOUNTAIN HIGH

Number of Students	512
Number of Teachers	19
Renumeration paid by State	13
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	6
Student: Teacher Ratios	27:1

II. School Fees

Central High	2000
Suburb High	2400
Community High	2950
Mountain High	3100

VI. Percentage of Students Taking History to Matric

Students Taking History to Matric, %

Central High	50
Suburb High	23
Community High	18
Mountain High	36

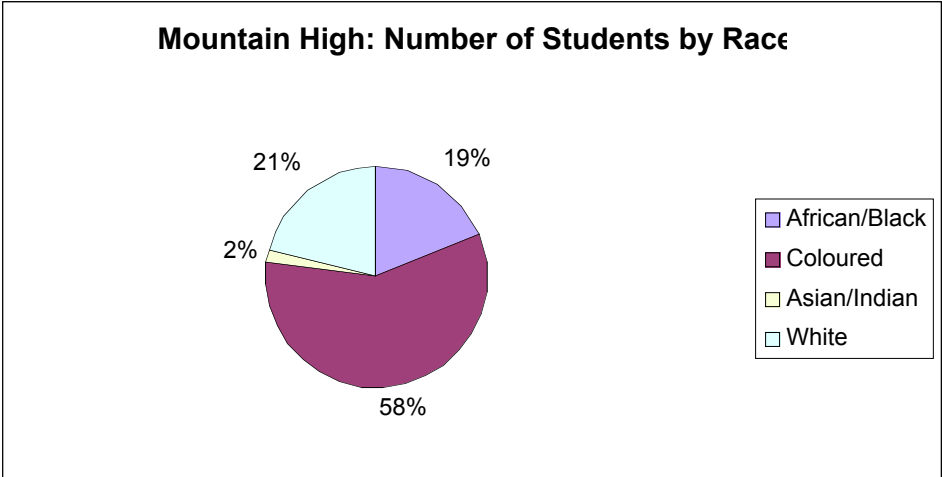
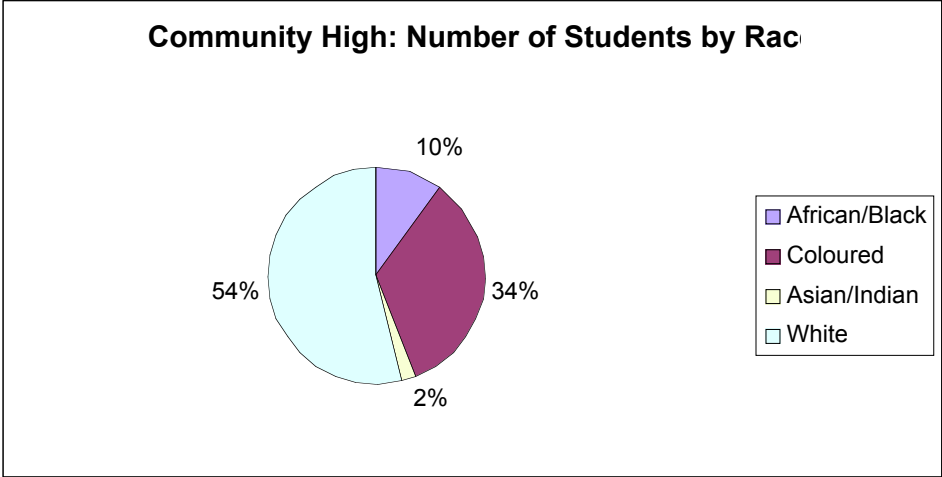
IV. Number of Students by Race

CENTRAL HIGH

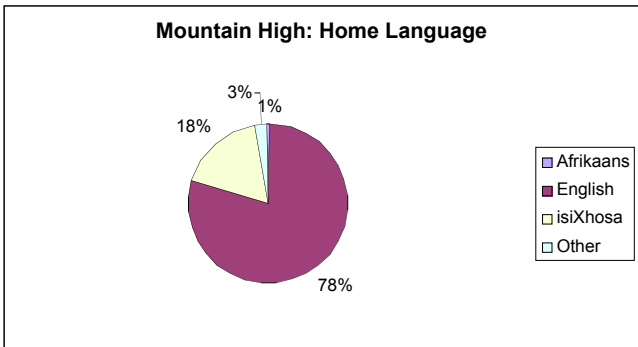
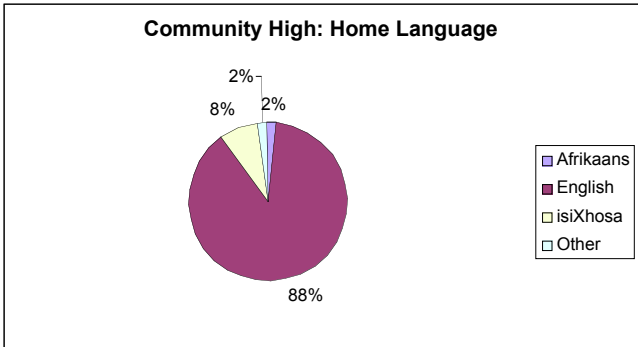
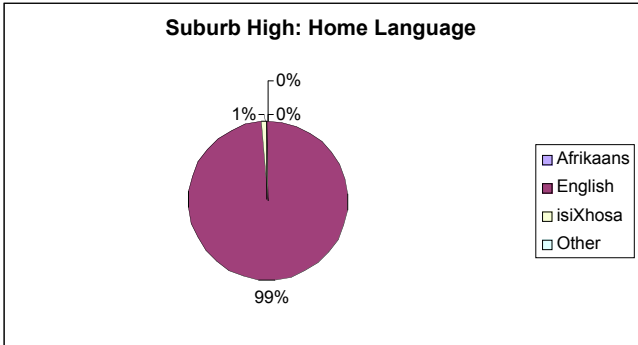
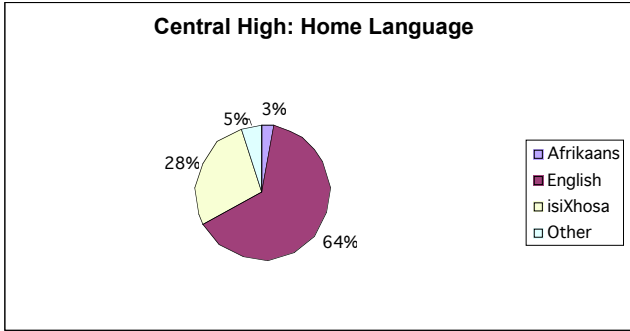
- Central High does not keep statistics on the basis of race

SUBURB HIGH

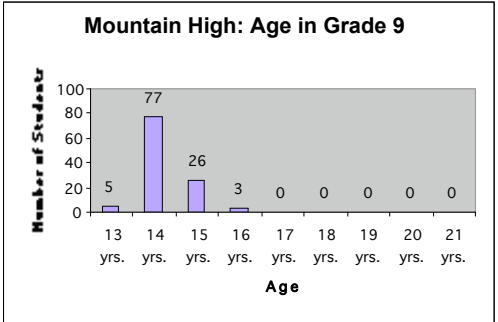
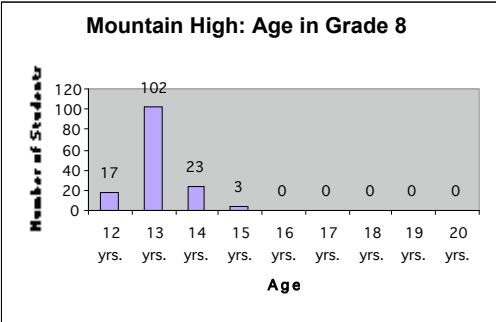
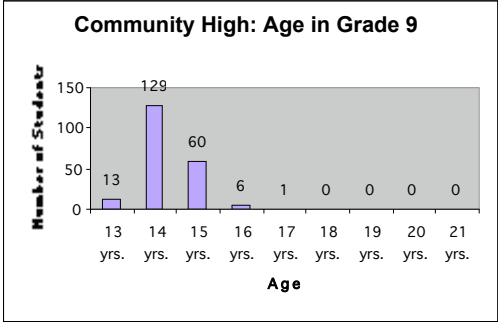
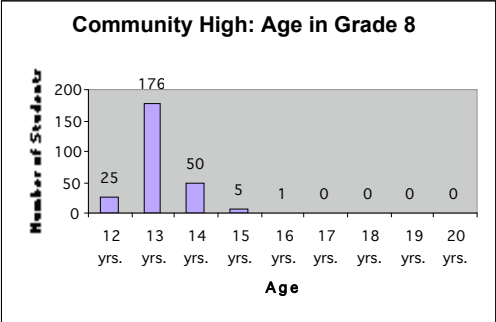
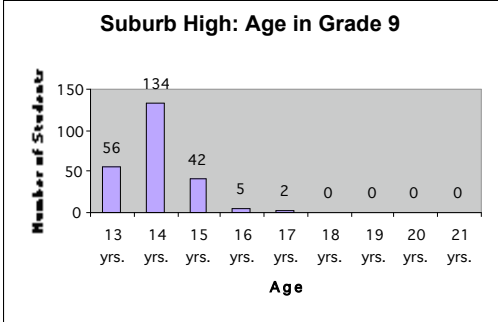
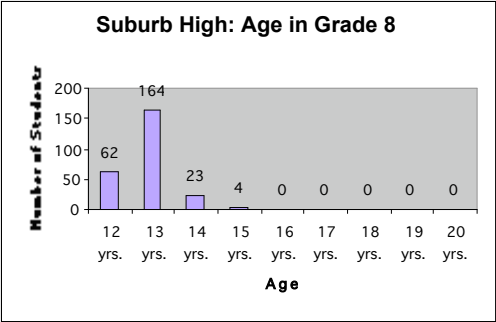
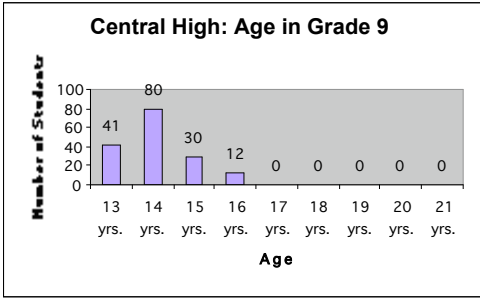
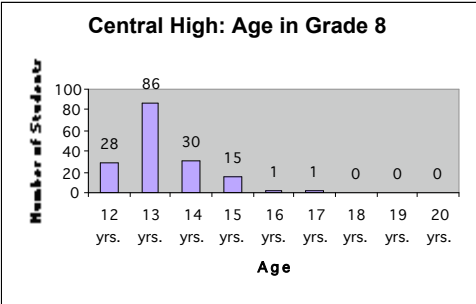
- Suburb High does not keep statistics on the basis of race



VI. Home Language



VII. Age in Grades 8 and 9



**E. A COMPARISON OF STATISTICAL PROFILES OF
THE PRINCIPLE CASE STUDY SCHOOLS:
PENINSULA HIGH, TRANSKEI HIGH, PLAIN HIGH, AND CENTRAL HIGH**

I. Number of Students, Teachers, and Student: Teacher Ratio

PENINSULA HIGH

Number of Students	1120
Number of Teachers	45
Renumeration paid by State	33
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	12
Student: Teacher Ratios	25:1

TRANSKEI HIGH

Number of Students	1732
Number of Teachers	47
Renumeration paid by State	47
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	0
Student: Teacher Ratios	37:1

PLAIN HIGH

Number of Students	1016
Number of Teachers	35
Renumeration paid by State	35
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	0
Student: Teacher Ratios	29:1

CENTRAL HIGH

Number of Students	679
Number of Teachers	22
Renumeration paid by State	15
Renumeration paid by Governing Body	7
Student: Teacher Ratios	31:1

II. School Fees

Peninsula High	2650
Transkei High	40
Plain High	150
Central High	2000

III. Percentage of Students Taking History to Matric

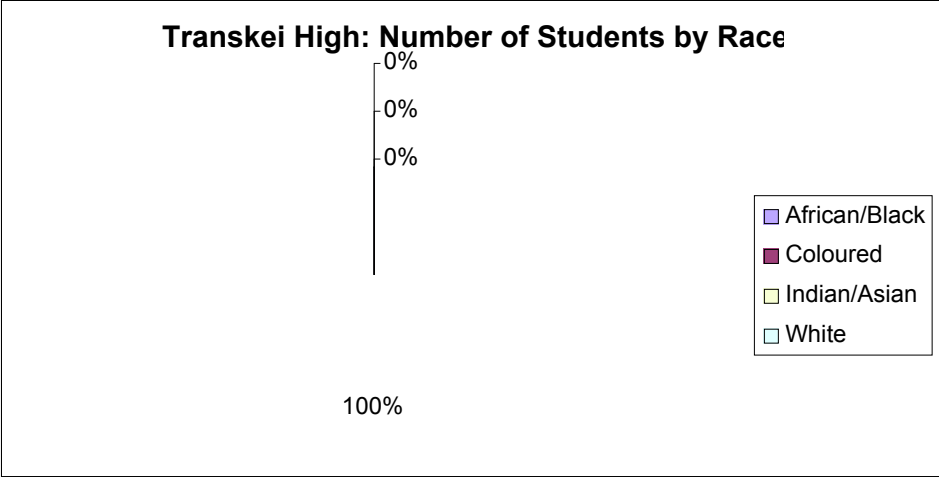
Students Taking History to Matric, %

Peninsula High	28
Transkei High	47
Plain High	44
Central High	50

IV. Number of Students According to Race

PENINSULA HIGH

- Peninsula High does not keep statistics on the basis of race



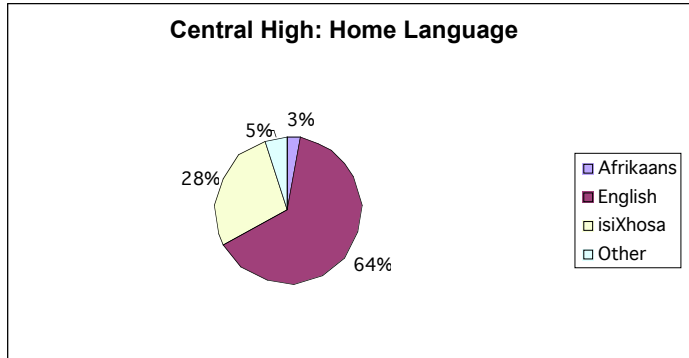
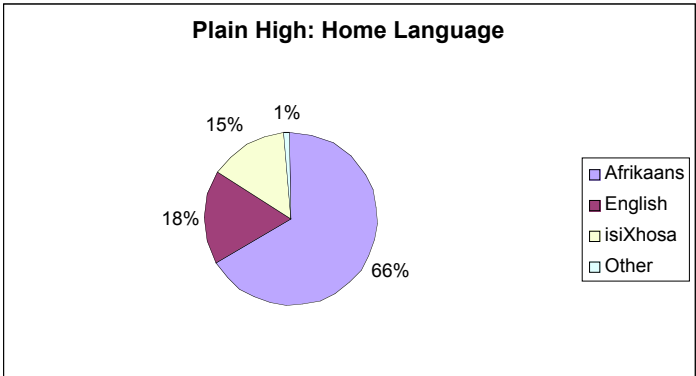
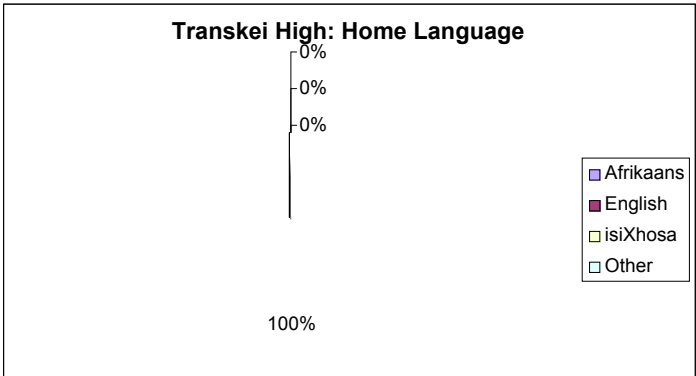
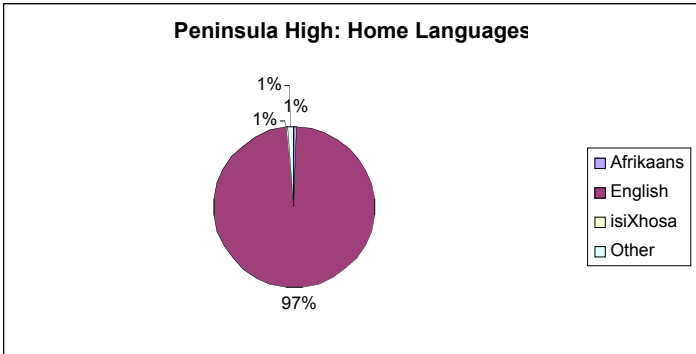
PLAIN HIGH

- Plain High does not keep statistics on the basis of race

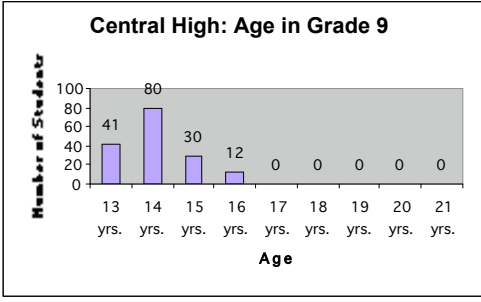
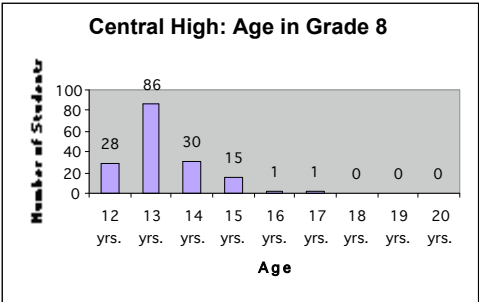
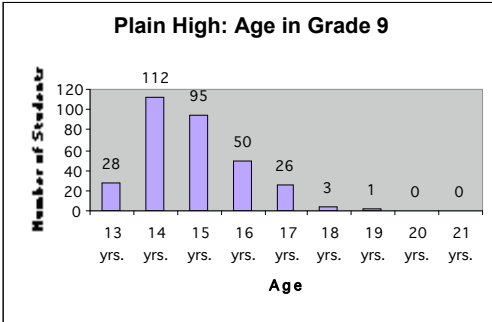
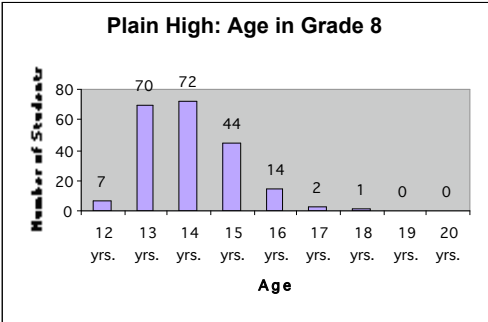
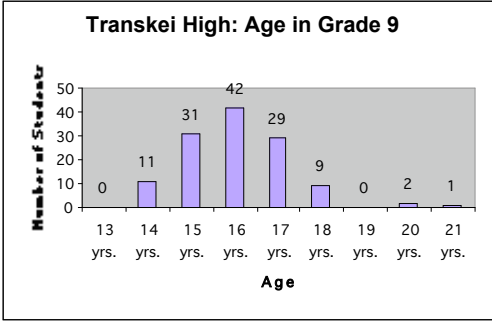
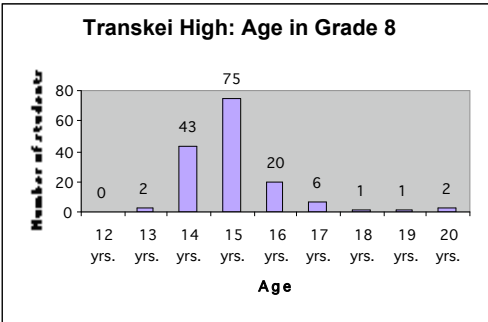
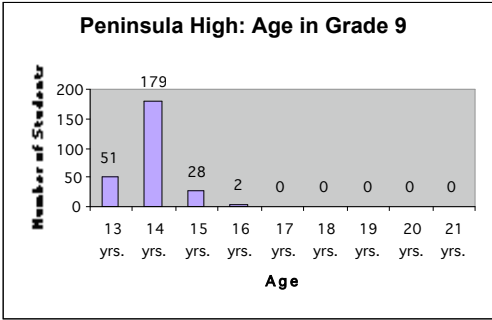
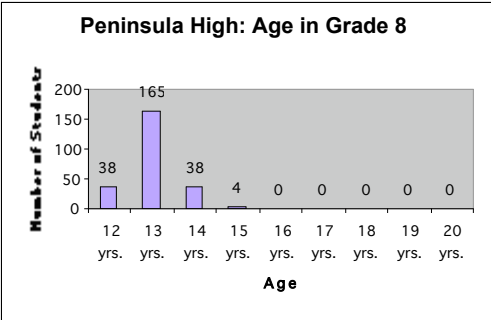
CENTRAL HIGH

- Central High does not keep statistics on the basis of race

V. Home Language



VI. Age in Grades 8 and 9



**APPENDIX III:
TEACHER INTERVIEWS**

TEACHER INTERVIEWS:

METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted with all history teachers in each school. These interviews were held during free periods, before, or after school in teachers' offices, empty classrooms, or other private places. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes.

Interviews were conducted based on the following questions:

- 1) *Why do you teach history?*
- 2) *What do you see as your role as history teacher for students in Grades 8 and 9?*
- 3) *How would you describe the purpose of history class?*
- 4) *Do you feel that the 'identity' of your students—be that racial, cultural, social, religious, economic—enters into history classes?*
 - i) *How do you approach this topic?*
 - ii) *How do you teach about the South African identity?*
 - iii) *How is your teaching about this subject different now than it was under apartheid education?*
- 5) *Does the idea of nation-building enter your history classroom?*
 - i) *How do you approach this topic?*
 - ii) *How do you teach about the South African nation?*
 - iii) *How is your teaching about this subject different now than it was under apartheid education?*
- 6) *How has your teaching of history changed since 1994?*
 - i) *How has the content of history changed?*
 - ii) *How have the methodologies changed?*
 - iii) *What are some of the difficulties you have come up against?*
- 7) *What is the importance of the past for a new South Africa?*
 - i) *What role does history have in reconciliation for individuals and groups?*
 - ii) *What role does history play in the development of democracy?*
- 8) *What do you see as the future of history teaching in South Africa?*

• Additional questions were asked of individual teachers based on classroom observation and other experiences at each school.

All interviews were recorded on audio tape with the permission of the teacher. These tapes were later transcribed literally both by the researcher and a research assistant. Copies of the transcripts are held by the researcher.

**TEACHER INTERVIEWS
LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED**

Former House of Assembly Schools that are predominantly white

PENINSULA HIGH

Nicole Weld, Head of History	20 May 1998
Amelia Green, History Teacher	18 May 1998
Liz Fieldings, History Teacher	25 May 1998
Roland Weir, History Teacher	22 May 1998
Suzanne Folger, History Teacher	22 May 1998
Barbara Davids, History Teacher	20 May 1998

OCEAN HIGH

Gregory Will, Head of History	2 November 1998
William Glober, History Teacher	2 November 1998
Jan van Poorten, History Teacher	2 November 1998

HOËRSKOOL NORTH

Henk de Groot, Head of History	20 October 1998
Jennifer Krop, History Teacher	20 October 1998

RIVER HIGH

Kathryn Higgins, Head of History	10 June 1998
Peter Simpson, History Teacher	10 June 1998
Ethan Chodos, History Teacher	10 June 1998
Omar Siddiqi, History Teacher	10 June 1998

Former Department of Education and Training Schools

TRANSKEI HIGH

Andile Ndimba, Head of History	27 July 1998
Xolani Ndinisa, History Teacher	28 July 1998
Zukiswa Fanaphi, History Teacher	29 July 1998
Phumla Mahashe, History Teacher	30 July 1998

LONGEVITY HIGH

Charles Madonono, History Teacher	30 October 1998
Siko Cira, History Teacher	30 October 1998

KHAYELITSHA HIGH

Sithembele Mawoko, Head of History	21 October 1998
Phumeza Mawoko, History Teacher	23 October 1998
Sipho Simani, History Teacher	23 October 1998

MASAKHANE HIGH

Andile Prua, Head of History	27 October 1998
Sheila Mbeki, History Teacher	27 October 1998
Jeffrey Mzalisi, History Teacher	26 October 1998

Former House of Representatives Schools

PLAIN HIGH

Debbie Bisset, Head of History	17 September 1998
Riaan September, History Teacher	15 September 1998
Carole Septoe, History Teacher	11 November 1998

FLATS HIGH

Ana Lambert, History Teacher	14 October 1998
Erik Martin, History Teacher	14 October 1998

FREEWAY HIGH

Christine Valentine, Head of History	8 October 1998
Anjtie Thiel, History Teacher	9 October 1998

DISTRICT HIGH

Elizabeth Wallace, Head of History	6 October 1998
Fatima Adams, History Teacher	5 October 1998
Natalie Greenwood, History Teacher	6 October 1998
Luke Duvenage, History Teacher	5 October 1998

Former House of Assembly Schools that are no longer predominantly white

CENTRAL HIGH

Simon Brown, Head of History	8 May 1998
Keshia Roberts, History Teacher	28 April 1998
Josh Kennish, History Teacher	29 April 1998
Zaahir Allie, History Teacher	30 April 1998
Caitlin Matthews, History Teacher	6 May 1998
Patrick Wallace, History Teacher	29 April 1998

SUBURB HIGH

Amy Slater, Head of History	19 June 1998
James Walter, History Teacher	17 June 1998
Ken Wallace, History Teacher	19 June 1998

COMMUNITY HIGH

Arthur Wright, Head of History	8 June 1998
Susan Frylinck, History Teacher	9 June 1998
Julia Greenburg, History Teacher	9 June 1998

MOUNTAIN HIGH

Ingrid Worthington, Head of History	12 June 1998
Laura Hofmeyr, History Teacher	15 June 1998

**APPENDIX IV:
STUDENT INTERVIEWS**

STUDENT INTERVIEWS:

METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted with two groups of five students, one group from Grade 8 and one from Grade 9 students. These interviews were held during break or after school in empty classrooms. Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes.

Interviews were conducted based on the following questions:

- 1) *What do you do in history class?*
- 2) *What would you say is the purpose of history class?*
 - i) *Why do you study history?*
 - ii) *Why does your teacher think that history is important to study?*
 - iii) *Do your parents think that history is important to study? Why?*
- 3) *Does the history that you learn in class relate to you? How?*
- 4) *Do you use what you learn in history class outside of school? In what ways?*
- 5) *Do you think it will help you in your life as an adult?*
- 6) *What changes do you notice in school in the past five years?*
- 7) *What do you think of when you think of 'nation'?*
 - i) *What do you think of when you think of the South African nation?*
 - ii) *What do you learn in class about the South African nation?*
 - iii) *If you were the history teacher, how would you teach about the South African nation?*
- 8) *What is the importance of the past for South Africa?*
- 9) *Should teachers teach about apartheid in schools?*
- 10) *What is democracy?*
 - i) *What do you learn about it in history class?*
 - ii) *How does it apply to you in your life?*
- 11) *Imagine yourself when you are twenty-five years old. How you describe the years 1997 and 1998?*

• Additional questions were asked of individual groups of students based on classroom observation and other experiences at each school.

All interviews were recorded on audio tape with the permission of all students involved. These tapes were later transcribed literally both by the researcher and a research assistant. Copies of the transcripts are held by the researcher.

**STUDENT INTERVIEWS
LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED**

I. Former House of Assembly Schools that are predominantly white

PENINSULA HIGH

Grade 8 students 22 September 1998
Grade 9 students 22 September 1998

OCEAN HIGH

Grade 8 students 2 November 1998
Grade 9 students 2 November 1998

HOËRSKOOL NORTH

Grade 8 students 20 October 1998
Grade 9 students 20 October 1998

RIVER HIGH

Grade 8 students 10 June 1998
Grade 9 students 10 June 1998

II. Former Department of Education and Training Schools

TRANSKEI HIGH

Grade 8 students 29 July 1998
Grade 9 students 31 July 1998

LONGEVITY HIGH

Grade 8 students 30 October 1998
Grade 9 students 30 October 1998

KHAYELITSHA HIGH

Grade 8 students 21 October 1998
Grade 9 students 23 October 1998

MASEKHANE HIGH

Grade 8 students 27 October 1998
Grade 9 students 27 October 1998

III. Former House of Representatives Schools

PLAIN HIGH

Grade 8 students 20 October 1998
Grade 9 students 20 October 1998

FLATS HIGH

Grade 8 students 14 October 1998
Grade 9 students 14 October 1998

FREEWAY HIGH

Grade 8 students 7 October 1998
Grade 9 students 7 October 1998

DISTRICT HIGH

Grade 8 students 6 October 1998
Grade 9 students 6 October 1998

IV. Former House of Assembly Schools that are no longer predominantly white

CENTRAL HIGH

Grade 8 students	23 July 1998
Grade 9 students	23 July 1998

SUBURB HIGH

Grade 8 students	19 June 1998
Grade 9 students	19 June 1998

COMMUNITY HIGH

Grade 8 students	9 June 1998
Grade 9 students	9 June 1998

MOUNTAIN HIGH

Grade 8 students	15 June 1998
Grade 9 students	15 June 1998

**APPENDIX V:
LETTER TO TEACHERS**

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



School of Education

Sarah Dryden
Education Building
University of Cape Town, Middle Campus
Private Bag, Rondebosch 7701

Phone: 423 1323; Fax: 650 3489;
E-mail: dryden@iafrica.com

November 4, 1998

Dear History Teachers,

What a wonderful experience it has been for me this year to spend time in schools with you and your students. I have felt fortunate to share some of your challenges and victories; to discuss with you what history means to teachers, students, and to the nation; and most of all, to learn from you. Thank you all for welcoming me into your schools and classrooms and allowing me this opportunity.

It is now my hope to help create a space where you can be in the situation in which I have been able to be, in contact each one of you with the others, to afford the opportunity for you to learn from each other. I am therefore hoping that you will be able to attend a meeting on **Tuesday November 17th at 1:30pm at ... High School**. I have worked in 16 schools in total and all of you have expressed an interest in taking part in these discussions. The purpose of this meeting will be two-fold:

Visions for History Teaching

In the absence of a defined future for the place of history within the curriculum, it remains up to history teachers to create a vision for the subject and how to go about achieving these goals. In meeting with each other, we will have the opportunity to discuss history teaching and the role we believe that it does -- and hope that it can -- play in educating the children of South Africa.

History For The Future, A Partnership and Exchange

So much of sharing challenges and ideas comes from being able to experience each other's situations; as a result, it is so necessary that teachers have the ability to inhabit other schools and other classrooms. Stemming from many requests about the possibility of so doing by setting up an exchange between teachers at different schools, I am proposing the creation of partnerships between history departments. I will facilitate a matching process according to requests that I receive from each school. Each pair of schools will create the template for the functioning of its particular partnership, but in general, this program will allow teachers the opportunity to hold discussions and share ideas as well as to spend teaching days in each other's schools. The meeting on November 17th will give us the opportunity to discuss and plan, as a group, the possibilities for this program and what the specific objectives and outcomes would be. History subject advisor Trevor von Louw will continue this program next year after I return to Canada.

Please let me know by November 13th -- via the phone, fax, or email details above-- which teachers from your school will be in attendance; contact details for your school so that these may be circulated at the meeting; and your request of school for a partnership (see list of schools involved below). I hope to see you all at the meeting.

Thank you and keep well,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Dryden".

Sarah Dryden

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